



Photo by Sarah Polak

A young black bear, photographed in the goat pen at WCP, is believed to be the one found there earlier.

A goat's missing, bear's back & sun- flowers are history

By Diana McFarland
Managing editor

A photogenic bear, a missing goat, sunflowers plundered by deer — Windsor Castle Park is evolving into its own peculiar version of Animal Farm.

The black bear is back and apparently not hard to spot. Some say he brought along a friend this time.

While patrolling the perimeter of the goat pen Monday in a noisy pickup truck, the bear casually ambled along a path inside the electric fence. When a woman walked by with her camera phone, he almost seemed to strike a pose.

And that's the problem, said biologist Pete Acker with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Acker rode along with Smithfield Town Council member Wayne Hall on Monday, as Hall has now spotted the bear on several occasions.

Acker said the bear may have returned for some more of those hot dog buns smeared with peanut butter and topped with gooey honey. That was the method used last time to lure

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the bear out of the goat pen.

Acker advised against more food, as that's what bears like. If the bear snatches one of the goats or gets more habituated to humans, he suggested laying a trap and "roughing up" the bear.

That is, give the bear a healthy dose of fear about humans, but not hurt him, said Acker, adding that a trap would be a last resort. If there's two bears, that's another issue.

Hall agreed it's getting to be a problem.

"He's getting used to us," said Hall.

At the same time, one of the goats has gone missing.

The wily herd of goats were hired to eat the English ivy and underbrush in a thicket next to the kayak

Don't feed the bear!

Do not feed the bear, or bears, at Windsor Castle Park under any circumstances, advised biologist Pete Acker with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries. The goal is to get the bear to move on elsewhere, and if it becomes necessary, a trap will be set. If the bear becomes too habituated and a threat to people, the last resort is to destroy it, said Acker. Also, it is illegal to feed bears year-round, he added.

launch. They're kept in check with an electric fence.

It seems the goats' owner, Dave (his last name being kept confidential for fear of more goat business requests, according to Mayor Carter Williams) went into the pen looking for the missing goat. Dave heard a twig snap behind him, turned around and found himself face-to-face with the bear, said Williams, who gleefully told the story to The Smith-

field Times.

The bear, described as a "sub-adult" weighing in at a mere 50-pounds according to an estimate by Acker, reared up.

Dave reared up in response and the bear backed off, said Williams.

So far, no one has found the goat, alive or dead, said Williams.

Acker said it's unlikely the bear killed the goat, given his status as a year-

and-a-half old male recently kicked out by his momma and trying to find a new territory to call his own.

"He's young and dumb like we've all been before," said Acker.

Acker said his youthful lack of knowledge and wisdom is likely what got him stuck at the park in the first place.

Last year, the big attraction at the park was the sunflowers and they drew thousands. This year it's the bear, as photos of the bear have been shared all around town.

Farmer Dean Stallings planted the sunflowers earlier this year, but the fearless herd of deer — now nearly tame enough to pet — chewed the tender little plants to the ground. They didn't have a chance.

Meanwhile, the bear occupation will get worse if the bear, or bears, become more accustomed to people, and worse, if folks toss in a ham sandwich or two, said Acker.

Acker advises people to not feed the bear under any circumstances.

"That's the progression we may be on and that's

what we need to watch," said Acker.

The problem with moving the bear is that there is little area left uninhabited by another bear.

If DGIF moves the bear, he may get eaten by another bear or become a problem elsewhere, said Acker.

"Things won't go well for him," said Acker.

Newest town target is non-profits' signs

By Diana McFarland

Managing editor

Nonprofits are the latest targets in Smithfield's purge — the removal, and sometimes destruction — of temporary signs in the town. This latest round comes after some business owners were shocked to see a town employee taking their feather signs without notice.

Smithfield Mayor Carter Williams admits that the whole sign controversy has devolved into a “sticky wicket,” and the Town Council now plans to formally address the issue this month at the committee level.

Many nonprofits and business owners are simply confused because the town's rules on temporary signs are not well known, nor have they apparently been widely enforced until recently.

The Smithfield Woman's Club became upset because town staff took their event signs and destroyed them without notice, said member Diane Hill.

Hill admits that that signs in Smithfield had gotten out of control, but thinks that town staff could have at least told them

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before taking the signs, said Hill.

“They destroyed our private property. Our signs are made professionally by VA Displays on (South) Church Street and we pay to get them done well,” said Hill in an email.

Hill said the town took its plant sale signs, but the Club was able to keep its A-frame signs.

A few weeks ago, some Smithfield business owners were convinced that a thief was on the loose, as a town staffer drove around and removed their \$300-plus feather signs without notice. One business owner’s daughter — who jumped in her car to chase the unknown sign-taker — ended up in a minor automobile collision with the town staffer in the midst of the confusion.

The feather signs were returned to the business owners. Hill is upset that the Woman’s Club was not afforded the same courtesy.

“They decided they would enforce the ‘codes’ but they could have done

it in a better way. This is a small town and we try to work together and help each other,” said Hill.

“This was quite a learning process. Hope the town manager (Brian Thrower) will be kind enough to give people a heads up when they are breaking the rules. The Woman’s Club of Smithfield tries to do right when we are informed,” she said.

Mary Cole, founder of Sundays at Four, and more recently, the upcoming Ghosts and Saints of Olde Towne Smithfield, dashed out to save her signs when she heard that a purge was underway.

Cole had A-frame signs in front of Taste of Smithfield, as well as Christ Episcopal Church advertising Sundays at Four and Ghosts and Saints of Olde Town Smithfield.

Cole was told by town staff that she had to fill out an application that included signatures from each property owner where she wanted to place a sign, which she did.

The application for an A-frame sign in front of Taste of Smithfield was

rejected, said Cole.

If Cole’s sign was in front of the restaurant, then Taste of Smithfield’s A-frame had to go, according to Smithfield Planning and Zoning Administrator John Settle in an email to Cole.

Only one A-frame sign is allowed per business or property, said Thrower.

In frustration, Cole wrote a letter to Smithfield Mayor Carter Williams.

“These nonprofit signs are usually up about a month, or less, in advance of an event, then they are removed. I agree, that to litter our town with signs is not acceptable. However, the existing rules that are in place are not flexible and do not support these nonprofits, or businesses, which depend daily on signs for their attraction to visitors,” wrote Cole.

Williams agreed that this particular method of enforcing the town’s ordinance wasn’t the best for community relations, but the signs were out of control.

“It looked as tacky as the dickens,” he said, adding that in addition to the feather signs, the town was especially incensed over what it calls “bandit” signs — small signs that advertise gutter cleaning or mulch and just have a phone number.

Those go up under the cover of darkness and are not taken down, said Williams.

Williams said the town was trying to be fair — if it took down the “bandit” signs, it needed to take all of them down.

Williams said this enforcement hurts him too, as he belongs to several organizations, including Benn’s United Methodist Church and VFW Post 8545, which also put up signs.

Those signs are vital to bring in people that, in turn, help the community, he said, adding that the clubs he belongs to have

been “bending his ear.”

VFW Post 8545 puts out signs for its twice-a-month breakfasts, and organizer Howard Hinnant said they are now working with Williams on getting a permit.

Williams said that in the case of the VFW, the signs go up the Monday before the Saturday breakfast and are taken down after it’s over.

Meanwhile, the fence at the VDOT parking lot is covered in banners announcing a variety of events — from a cemetery open house to a tractor pull — and permission to post them seems to vary.

Isle of Wight Fair Committee Chairman Danny Byrum said he gets the permit from VDOT, since that agency owns the property.

Todd Ballance with Historic St. Luke’s said they got their permit from the town.

Jake Browder of Browder’s Fresh Pickins’ checked into it and found out that commercial signs — in his case for strawberries — were not allowed there and he has since removed his banner.

Over at the intersection of Battery Park and Nike Park roads, another hot spot for banners, Optimist President Michael Murphy said they got their permit from the town.

Murphy said the problem stems from people not knowing how all this works and added that more communication is needed.

VDOT does maintain the commuter lot and its permit application must be accompanied by documentation by the locality that all approvals and permissions have been granted, according to VDOT spokesperson Nina Napolitano.

VDOT does not maintain the intersection at Battery Park and Nike Park roads, as that is under the Town of Smithfield’s jurisdiction, said Napolitano.

Williams said the feather sign issue first appeared in the spring 2018 town

newsletter, “The Municipal Mailer.” It was on page four under “Code Compliance Corner,” and included a small, rather vague graphic of three feather signs. The entry did not state that the signs would be removed, only that they are popular and then went on to describe the ordinance.

“... and we look forward to working with you to obtain the required feather flag permits.”

The sign issue did not reappear until the most recent “Mailer,” which came out after the feather sign controversy erupted. In that newsletter, Williams mentioned feather signs in the fifth paragraph in his “Letter from the Mayor,” and apologized for the inconvenience the sweep had caused. The feather flags were again included in the Codes Compliance Corner, but there was no mention of them being taken without notice.

There was also nothing in either newsletter about other types of temporary signs being a problem or that enforcement was imminent.

Williams said the town did not have enough staff to personally notify everyone that their signs could be taken.

“We’re understaffed,” he said.

Williams was reminded that the town has a newspaper to help inform residents, but at that point shifted to talking about the town newsletter as the place that residents get their official town information.

The plan to crack down on temporary signs in the town was hatched during a recent Town Council retreat. However, how that enforcement would be carried out was not discussed, said Town Council members Beth Haywood and Valerie Butler after the first dust-up over the business feather signs.

In the end, it seems that

most folks are unaware of the rules and are generally confused about them.

Browder said the town had gone over all the rules concerning signs and he found them to be confusing and hard to follow.

The ordinance needs some work, he said, adding that most people find their way to his farm from his signs.

The town ordinance on signs is lengthy and covers all types — from permanent business signs to “... all other flutter, spinning, inflatable or similar type signs ...” — the latter of which is under the prohibited category.

In the case of temporary signs and banners, certain types can be put up no more than 14 days prior to the event and must be removed no more than seven days later. Temporary signs can be put up for a maximum of 30 consecutive days and removed for 30 days before being put up again and that’s only for three months of the year.

The \$10 temporary sign fee can be waived for bona fide nonprofits, according to the ordinance.

The sign ordinance isn’t new — it is dated Sept. 1, 1998.

Thrower encourages businesses and civic groups to apply for a sign permit, and that the town will continue to remove those located in the right-of-way without a permit.

“Interested parties may contact John Settle, planning and zoning administrator at 365-4200 should they have questions regarding the temporary sign ordinance. The town appreciates everyone’s assistance and cooperation with this beautification and safety initiative,” said Thrower.

Those wanting to put a banner at the VDOT commuter lot can contact the Franklin Residency at 757-346-3072.

Not us, says McCarty

By Diana McFarland
Managing editor

Isle of Wight County Board of Supervisors Chairman William McCarty appeared concerned that residents may believe the Board has a direct hand in the reassessment process.

McCarty brought up the issue for a second time during a recent work session.

McCarty gave an example of the notion that the Board views the reassessment rates before they are released.

Isle of Wight Commissioner of Revenue Gerald Gwaltney said the last thing the Board needs is to be involved in the reassessment. Virginia state law mandates property reassessments, and the Board’s only role is to approve the third party assessor, said Gwaltney.

In this case, Isle of Wight uses Wampler-Eanes Appraisal Group of Danville, a company it has used for more than 10 years. Gwaltney’s office is responsible for facilitating the process.

The Board is not involved in setting values, nor does it ask that raise values to a certain amount to achieve various goals, he said.

“It’s completely independent,” said Gwaltney.

Hunting down Arthur Smith's DNA

"We really need to know where the founder of the town is buried."

—Mayor Carter Williams

By Frederic Lee
Staff writer

The hunt for the grave of Arthur Smith IV — the man who founded the Town of Smithfield in 1752 — may now include a DNA test from graves at Windsor Castle Park and funding from the town.

Smithfield Mayor Carter Williams briefed Town Council on the ongoing project to locate Smith or possible descendants at a recent town committee meeting, reviving the effort that began several years ago.

"We really need to know where the founder of the town is buried," said Williams in an interview on Nov. 22, adding that the knowledge would enhance the town.

The only way to know definitively is to test the DNA of the grave's contents compared to a living descendent of Smith

through coordination with the Smithsonian Museum, according to Williams.

Smith's great grandfather was the original owner of the Windsor Castle property, and has a line of descendants that were involved in Virginia government and the military in the 17th and 18th centuries, according to a status report on the project provided by Williams.

Prior to 1637, the area was occupied by the Warraskoyack tribe, according to the report.

Williams said that he's been working on the project for several years, and that there's a tombstone that's been found at the park that seems like it "probably" belongs to Smith because of its material.

Jennifer England, director of the Isle of Wight County Museum,



Staff photo by Frederic Lee

The graves of Arthur Smith Whitehead and Richard Godwin, located on the grounds of Windsor Castle Park are thought to be the final resting place for relatives of Arthur Smith IV.

said that the process to scout out potential gravesites at Windsor Castle Park included the use of ground penetrating radar, which was conducted by Tim Horsley, managing director of Horsley Archeological Prospection, LLC.

The preliminary report shows more than 40 possible graves at Windsor Castle Park, with two evident tombstones and one footstone located in an old cemetery at the park.

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Williams said that the cost to complete this project is tentatively estimated at \$35,000, but would depend on what type of deals the Smithsonian Museum has to offer in terms of DNA testing. If the first grave that is exhumed ends up containing the bones of Smith, Williams said that would end the project.

The cemetery is roughly 200 yards northeast of the Windsor Castle manor house, situated on a rise overlooking Cypress Creek and about 1,500 square feet in size.

One of the tombstones bears the name Arthur Smith Whitehead, 1882-1921, and the other, Richard Goodwin, 1830-1870.

England said the Whiteheads were related to the Smiths.

Two unidentified graves also rest at the site, one with a brick vault and covered

on the surface with mortar, and another grave built of slate, according to the report.

Williams thinks that there's a good chance that the slate grave is Smith's, since it's built of expensive material from England that would only be available to the affluent.

A permit from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources is required to excavate a grave, and that permit is based on factors including the disposition of the human remains and family consent, among others, according to the report.

The slate grave was "rediscovered" by the Isle of Wight Historical Society in 2004.

In addition to those four gravesites, the ground penetrating radar report shows 41 other spots at the old cemetery that may be gravesites.

According to a project status report, ground pen-

etrating radar is used in archeological geophysics to detect and map subsurface archeological artifacts, features and patterning.

Williams said that he's been working on this project for about three years and, after coming up short in terms of people who'd like to donate to the effort, he's now planning to ask Town Council to fund the project.

Williams said that there are about \$225,000 in tax credits realized from the Windsor Castle Park restoration project that could be tapped for the project, but added that funding the project and where that funding would come from would be a decision of Town Council.

England will give a presentation on the hunt for Smith's grave at the Dec. 17 Parks and Recreation committee meeting.

A more extensive report from Horsley on the old cemetery is pending.