

THE WOODFORD SUN

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Rail Explorers needs to do more to be a real Woodford County neighbor

By KELLIE GRIFFIE

As *The Woodford Sun* reported, on the evening of March 18-19, the Rail Explorers office at the Woodford County Park was vandalized and burglarized. This was an unsettling thing to see, but what was even more troublesome was the fact that even though the crime was in the investigative stage due to the fact that “Get Out” was written on the office white board, the owners, Mary Joy Lu and Alex Catchpoole, placed the blame on neighboring property owners.

In their press release, they stated, “We have gone to great lengths — and great expense — to address concerns raised by a few neighbors, demonstrating our willingness to collaborate in good faith. This attack, however, makes it clear that for some, there was never a real desire to find common ground or move forward together. We encourage this community to hold your neighbors accountable for this unacceptable criminal activity. This is not who Woodford County should be, and we know it’s not who Woodford County is.”

I have never met the Rail Explorers owners, who don’t live in our community, but I have met the majority of my neighbors on Tyrone Pike and Milner Road. They are business owners, professionals, veterans, retirees, farmers, health care workers and tradespeople. They are friendly, helpful and kind; they are not criminals. The issues that the community members have with the rail carts are valid and legitimate.

The summary for the Bluegrass excursion on the Rail Explorers website reads, “On this 10-mile round trip ride, you’ll travel through thoroughbred horse farms & deep limestone cuts to the turnaround on the cliffs above the Kentucky River. . .” What this description doesn’t say is that before reaching the river, the track travels through, in front of or behind, approximately 30 pieces of property owned by people who moved to the country for the beauty, peace and quiet that the area provides.

Two-thirds of these property owners (not a few) have publicly expressed some sort of concern about the Rail Explorers’ operation. For some, there are dangerous crossings on their land, for others, there are noise or privacy issues. In other areas of Woodford County, residents have had the opportunity to voice their opinions and fight against new businesses and developments, but due to the fact that the carts operate from the Bluegrass Railroad Museum property, there were no zone changes or public hearings required. This was not an option for the Tyrone Pike and Milner Road property owners.

Each time the topic of the rail carts comes up in print or on social media, I see these neighbors placed in an unflattering light, accused of being unwelcoming and uncooperative by people who have no real knowledge of the impact that the carts have on the daily lives of those who live next to the tracks. A frequent statement made is, “If they didn’t want to hear rail traffic, they shouldn’t have bought property next to the tracks.” To this point, it is important to understand that the last freight train to cross Young’s high bridge at Tyrone did so 40 years ago in 1985 before the rail line was decommissioned and the tracks crossing the bridge were pulled up.

Shortly thereafter, the Woodford County inside of the tracks was purchased by the Bluegrass Railroad Museum to operate as a heritage railway, which is defined as “a historic railroad that has been preserved to recreate railway scenes of the past.” Since buying the

tracks, the museum has hosted a *maximum of four train rides a weekend*. These excursions occur late morning and early afternoon. With the exception of one open-air car, the riders are enclosed in historic train cars. On these museum-sponsored rides, the only noise is from the train itself.

In contrast to the museum rides, during peak season, Rail Explorers runs excursions seven days a week at two and a half hour intervals with weekend rides starting as early as 7:30 a.m. and ending as late as 9:30 p.m. For neighboring property owners, this means that 40 minutes of every two hours from morning until night there are carts passing by their homes.

As Ms. Lu and Mr. Catchpoole state, they did replace the original cart wheels with rubber-coated ones. What is not as controllable is the noise of the riders themselves. There is still wheel noise, so the riders have to speak loudly to be heard. As the day goes on, the noise level of the riders tends to increase. Riders are allowed to take beverages of any type on the carts, possibly contributing to some of the noise and trash issues that are occurring.

At the meetings held last year, multiple residents near the tracks reported riders calling out to them or their children while they were outside on their property. In response to these complaints, Rail Explorers has posted signs along the tracks alerting riders to the residential zones, and as stated in *The Woodford Sun* article, in their pre-ride speech, they are including additional education for riders to discourage unnecessary noise and throwing trash.

These steps seem like they would be helpful, but as a resident pointed out last year, most of the visitors come in from out of town for a single trip on the track. The Rail Explorers employees can tell riders how to behave and the rules that they should follow, but there are no repercussions if they don’t follow the rules. As I observed on the afternoon of Sunday, March 30, there was approximately a 20-minute span of time between the lead cart of Rail Explorers employees and the rear cart of employees. There is simply no way for those employees to supervise the behavior of all of the riders on the carts.

Some of the additional suggestions and/or requests that have been made to Rail Explorers by neighbors include: shortening the daily hours, having a weekly down or closed day, providing fencing/screening for those located closest to the tracks, and interspersing employee carts among the guest carts for improved supervision/safety. All of these are reasonable suggestions. Yet to my knowledge, none of these have been implemented.

If the Rail Explorers Corporation was as cooperative as they would like everyone to believe, they would have been proactive instead of reactive to community concerns, they would have modified the schedule of their rides (the most frequent request), and they would not have used multiple media outlets to accuse neighboring property owners of committing a crime that has yet to be solved. Someone needs to be held accountable in this situation, but I don’t think that it’s a local property owner.

Kellie Griffie is a lifelong Woodford Countian and a recently retired public school teacher who spent 27 years at Woodford County High School. She lives in the Tyrone Pike area, as does her daughter’s family.



10 Years Ago

May 14, 2015

The city of Midway held a public forum to hear residents’ thoughts on the proposed Fairness Ordinance the council is considering. About 80 people attended the forum held at Northside Elementary School. The meeting was moderated by the Kentucky League of Cities with 26 people speaking, of which 22 were in favor of the ordinance. Supporters who spoke included Midway residents Quita Michel, Steve Osborne, Sandy Gruzesky, Heather McColl, and Versailles resident Melissa Sevier. Four spoke in opposition, including Midway property owner Tony Hardin and Midway resident Jeff Cook.

Fiscal Court approved a request from the Woodford County Economic Authority to apply for a \$400,000 community grant from the State to be used by the new owners of the Old Taylor Distillery on its major renovation of the property. The court also named a garden at the Woodford County Detention Center for the late Deputy Jailor Steve Shryock in honor of his exemplary career and his classes on gardening for inmates.

Jennifer Chandler penned a letter to the editor in support of the proposed Fairness Ordinance being considered by Midway City Council, and said, “I’m hopeful that this will eventually lead to a fairness ordinance being adopted by Woodford County at large.”

Sun columnist John McGary in his weekly column bemoaned the suffix “-gate” being appended to every scandal since the Watergate conspiracy in the 1970s.

The Lady Jackets softball team continued their march for hardware with a win over Lafayette on senior

night, and now stand 27-3-1. The WCHS baseball team meanwhile marches on to ignominy losing to Bates Creek on senior night, falling to 8-18 and 1-5 in District play. The WCHS girls track team finished 5th in the annual CKC meet with the boys team finishing a respectable seventh. WCHS number one tennis player Luke Least advanced to the state tournament’s boys singles with a top-notch showing at the Regional tournament.

25 Years Ago

May 11, 2000

Woodford Fiscal Court magistrates are upset about possible cuts in the City of Versailles budget for programs such as recycling, recreation, and the health department.

The first back payroll checks have been handed out to former employees of Woodford Hospital.

The outgoing principal of Southside Elementary School, Vernell Devine, 44, has been indicted on five counts of felony theft and two counts of misdemeanor theft, totalling \$3,472.49, allegedly occurring in June, October and November of last year.

Dr. John Buckner, currently principal of Lexington Traditional Magnet School, has been employed as Southside’s new principal.

A public hearing will be held June 1 in Harrodsburg on a proposed marina on the Kentucky River in Mercer County across from Cummins Ferry Road in Woodford County.

Heather Allison Ping, 14, of Versailles is a state finalist in the Miss Kentucky American Junior Teen Pageant July 8-9 in Lexington.

Joyce C. Threlkeld, 80, of Versailles, a former home economist and teacher, died May 9.

40 Years Ago

May 9, 1985

Anthony Atwood, a junior at Woodford County High School, won first prize in the district and second in the state in a student art contest sponsored by the Kentucky Federation of Women’s Clubs.

Stony’s Restaurant in the Versailles Center held its ribbon-cutting ceremonies Monday morning.

Stewart Miller, a native of Versailles, is a member of the Lexington-based Metropolitan Blues All-Stars, which will perform at Harrah’s Casino in Lake Tahoe July 29 through Aug. 11.

Pegi Karsner Ivancevich, a native of Versailles now living in Spring, Texas, was the national winner of an essay on “What my DAR Membership Means to Me.” She was honored at the National Society DAR’s Continental Congress in Washington, D.C.

Earl Tilghman, 73, a retired Versailles furniture store owner, died Saturday.

Stephan’s Odyssey, trained by Woody Stephens, formerly of Midway, ran second in the Kentucky Derby Saturday. Chief’s Crown, owned by Star Crown Stable and Three Chimneys Farm of Woodford County, was third. The winner was Spend-A-Buck.

Matt Fisher of Midway will graduate from the University of Kentucky Dental School Saturday.

The WCHS boys’ track team won the CKC meet held here Saturday. The 400-meter relay team, Scott Goodlett, Glen Campbell and Kevin White, set a new school record of 45.5. In girls’ competition, Woodford finished third.

Clippings from our past...

Editor’s Note: We are continuing with excerpts from the Woodford Weekly (WW), which was published in Versailles from sometime in 1869 through 1874. These excerpts are “as is,” warts and all, and will include pejorative terms for not only Black-Americans but other ethnicities and nationalities used at that time by those in power and control of the country’s institutions. Our purpose is to reprint what was happening here at that time, to give contemporary readers as accurate a historical sense as possible. Please bear this in mind when reading this.

The Woodford Weekly

May 13, 1870

Last Friday, the colored people of this and some of the adjoining counties assembled in Versailles to the number of about 800, to rejoice and be merry over the newly added article to the Constitution of the United States — the 15th Amendment. Many expected a vast assembly — some predicting that there would be as many as five thousand. Well, if there was not quite, certainly not exceeding, one-fifth of that number, there were enough, those who remained at home saved their time, which one of their fellow citizens of old said was money. The absentees probably thought there was more thrift in following plow handles than Fifteenth Amendment celebrations. The crowd, after parading about all of the streets, with divers of banners and one or two rather funny emblems and mottoes, repaired to a beautiful blue-grass grove south of town, where a platform had been erected for the numerous home and neighboring and distant orators who had been billed for the occasion, but who did not come at the bidding of those who summoned them. Here also were erected booths and stands for the dispensing of edibles for a consideration. It looked for a time like a dry chance for oratorical display or effort of any kind. The orators named to be present from Lexington, Louisville and other towns, were John Mason Brown, Col. Prall, Hon. Mr. Goodloe, and others — not one of them was present that we could see or

hear. Even Judge Steele was not able to come in time having been called to Lexington on business; though the Judge did make his appearance as soon as he could well do so. The ball as at last opened by Mr. Wasserbocht, a German gentleman of good-natured expression, and — as those who know him say — of considerable mental culture. We were too far from the stand, and the wind was blowing too much of gale for even the best possible English to be heard amid the din of voices around; but we were able to make out that we saw before us the result of history of ten years. We are disposed to think the result augers no food for Mr. W and his race; and the Cincinnati Volksblatt, a German radical organ, appears to be laboring under the same conviction when it says, “Those leaders of the Republican Party commit a great folly who believe that since they have got the negro vote, they no longer need Germans, and in respect to them no longer impose any restraint upon their nativism and hypocrisy.”

Mr. G. T. Keene employed a negro named Alfred in Lexington last Monday to take some horses home for him. The negro, as usual, sold one, turned one loose, and sent one back to Mr. Keene, all of which the darkie no doubt thought was according to the 15th Amendment.

Last week in Bowling Green Court of Common Pleas, an effort was made by the defense to introduce the testimony of negro witnesses, claiming the right under

the new 14th Amendment. Though this construction has been given in other States, it has not been resolved in Kentucky whether Negroes can testify in a court of law. The Judge I Bowling Green rejected the construction and did not allow the witnesses, so it will soon by up to the Kentucky Court of Appeals to decide the matter.

At a meeting of the Democratic Party of Versailles held at the Court House on May 7, and elected Mr. C.R. Greathouse as chair.

W.J. Stitt advertised tickets he was selling in the great Henderson Land Scheme, and directed interested persons to come see him at his Versailles house.

If any of the former denizens of Versailles are inclined to pay a visit to the dear old town, let then hurry up on their coming. The streets are being cleaned, dwellings, outhouses and fences are being painted and whitewashed; the flowers are blooming and nature generally is getting a better appearance. We are disposed to boast on her a little just now. How it will be when the heat and dust of July ensue is yet to be told.

The Kentucky Executive Committee of the Democratic Party named the following as members of the Woodford County Central Committee who will meet next Tuesday in the grand jury room of the courthouse: Abraham Hunter, Warren Viley, J.W. Twyman, C.W. Nuckols, William Darnall, William Stuart, Samuel Shouse, George Robb, A.L. Thornton, B.F. Bobou, and S.H. Wallace.

THE WOODFORD COUNTY WOMAN’S CLUB enjoyed an afternoon touring the Kentucky Aviation Museum for their May meeting. Some of the members are, from left, Carol Gill ,Vicki Scott, Brenda Scott, Brenda Jackson, Judy Tinsley, (guides Hunter Moore and Ed Robie), Jane Pictor, Sue Dozier and Kay Curl. (Photo submitted)