

Charleston Mercury

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THE NEWSPAPER WITH A COSMOPOLITAN ATTITUDE

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Lowcountry Rambler



“Crazy Matt” and a “Reality TV” Novel

Recalling the sad anniversary of the deaths of the Charleston Nine, we can advise that the events have inspired a novel from a retired Charleston firefighter with the pen name Matt Semko (“Crazy Matt”); it is called *Dragon’s Breath*. The unconventional style is akin to reality television in print. This novel is a raw vision of a man, his family, his heritage, his days at the Citadel, in football games, days off taking care of an elderly J.C. Long, in fires with his band of brothers and his thoughts about those involved with the Sofa Super Store fire of June 18, 2007. This is a tale of how a heartbroken firefighter — brought up respecting authority, heritage and his community — expresses what he views as his betrayal, as he is let down again and again. He tells this story in the way you would hear it while drinking a beer at Big John’s Tavern in the era before Hurricane Hugo. It is a book that will upset many at Charleston City Hall. A Kindle version is available and it will be on Amazon soon.

Hank Holliday: Hero of City Market

On June 26, the Holy City celebrated the grand re-opening of the \$5.5 million, two-phase restoration of the 18,300-square-foot Great Hall in the City Market, which has 20 shops ranging from The Charleston Angler to Food for the Southern Soul. This marks the culmination of an 18-month construction project to revitalize the landmark, four-block long facility that was first established in 1807 and remains Charleston’s number one free visitor attraction. The comprehensive revitalization of the City Market emerges from its renovation 100 percent leased with a waiting list of nearly 100 vendors. Most importantly, local leadership and local businesses are returning to our City Market wherein Hank Holliday and his volunteer team insisted on improving the surroundings to suit visitors AND RESIDENTS alike.

The SPA and the Big Lie about Jobs

What kind of mindless corporate robot is chairing the State Ports Authority? That was EXACTLY the buzz we heard from many after Bill Stern’s comments were published in the *Post and Courier* on June 17. Let’s address one element: “The lawsuit has been directed to Carnival, but it is not a lawsuit about cruise ships. It’s about the narrow interests of a very few people who appear to be quite happy to put an end to the 341-year maritime history of our state’s busiest port.” This is a blatant falsehood; nonetheless, the SPA and its supporters are spewing senseless comments about jobs that will be lost when their critics merely wish — among other things — to see the cruise ships located at the Columbus Street Terminal where they are not so out of scale. Please see Tom Robinson’s article on this page and more cruise ship commentary on pages eight and nine.

Don’t Let This Tune Stick in Your Head

If they are being candid, many on the right have experienced a degree of *schadenfreude* upon hearing of the self-inflicted flop of former representative Anthony Weiner. In endless television appearances, Congressman Weiner took class warfare and scorched earth politics to the GOP with a zeal rarely seen in politics. One wag suggested a parody from the words to “The Little Old Lady from Pasadena”: “And the GOP says that there’s nobody meaner than the Democratic rep named Anthony Weiner ...” The Weiner roast is finally over.



Behemoth cruise ship *Fascination* — barely able to clear Jacksonville’s Dames Point Bridge — would dwarf the historic fishing village of Mayport, site of a proposed new terminal.

PHOTOGRAPH PROVIDED BY AUTHOR

BY TOM ROBINSON

Charleston is not the only city struggling to balance the economic benefits of cruise ship tourism and the downside its lowly toxic bilge and horizon-blotting countenance wreak on fragile environmental and architectural wonders. Rather than persevere the issue in isolation, let’s take a look at what other port cities are doing. In part one of this series, we’ll focus on the Atlantic seacoast ports. Philadelphia, that gave up the ghost. Norfolk, whose entire cache centers around maritime history. Jacksonville, who like Charleston, is a city divided. And sneaky Savannah — the little darling that may be trying to steal the cruise business out from under the noses of those

who hesitate. In part two, we’ll examine more distant ports of call.

One of the oldest ports on the East Coast is Philadelphia. For as long as Charleston has been on the map, the City of Brotherly Love has welcomed cargo and passenger ships to its safe and sheltered port up the Delaware River. Ironically, it was time that killed the business — not pollution or tacky tourists or cost of infrastructure. The death knell for Philly was the extra six hours it takes to navigate from the mouth of Delaware Bay on the Atlantic. Apparently passengers of the hustle-and-bustle 21st century 10 ports-in-10-days mentality are too impatient. Savoring the Liberty Bell, Franklin Institute, Rocky-esque museums and South Philly cheese steak cuisine are better left

respectively,” says Ed Kasuba of the Delaware Port Authority (DRPA). “Since then, as a result of changes in the industry, the six-hour sail up the Delaware River and the introduction of larger ships, the number of cruises sailing from Philadelphia has declined.”

So in 2011, one of the great ports hung up its cleats and said good-bye to cruise ship business altogether. The official cause of death: DRPA’s lease of the cruise terminal building located in the Philadelphia Navy Yard was canceled. The once-proud Port Authority now — in my judgment embarrassingly — boasts that it owns and operates the Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, Commodore Barry and Betsy Ross bridges, PATCO and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



IMAGE COURTESY OF LYONS PRESS

Charleston resident Jason Ryan walks the walk as well as looking the part of an investigative reporter.

Palmetto Pot Runners and the Ever Eager McMaster

Jackpot: High Times, High Seas, and the Sting That Launched the War on Drugs

By Jason Ryan
Hardback 310 pp. \$24.95
(Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2011)

REVIEWED BY
CHARLES W. WARING III

“President Reagan once remarked that ‘a hippie is someone who looks like Tarzan, walks like Jane, and smells like Cheetah.’” — Jason Ryan, *Jackpot*

Public opinions on the War on Drugs fluctuate by year, region and by the reputations of those leading the charge. In the fall of 1986, Arthur Ravenel, Jr. was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives where he began giving speeches about shooting down the planes carrying the drugs — and machine-gunning the survivors. During this same political cycle, 63 percent of South Carolinians voted for Senator Ernest “Fritz” Hollings instead of Henry McMaster, despite having observed

the former U.S. attorney lead Operation Jackpot. Rewind to the late 1970s, when the cat and mouse game began with “gentleman smugglers,” as Jason Ryan tags them in his *Jackpot: High Times, High Seas, and the Sting That Launched the War on Drugs*.

As readers may recall or know by personal experience, the war became anything but genteel; instead, the violence escalated and is often tied to the murders and shootings that make headlines. Drug arrests fill our jails and bog down our courts and cost the taxpayers a bundle. Drug abuse also has many families caught up in addiction issues and/or dealing with jail sentences of loved ones.

However, there was a time when some SC smugglers and their associates did things in a frat boy fantasy manner and even had some modicum of wisdom to avoid turning into

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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PHOTOGRAPH BY AUTHOR
A scenic photograph of shrimp boats at sunset may be a vague memory for coastal natives and lovers in the future.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF WWW.METRO-JACKSONVILLE.COM
Jacksonville is divided over building a new cruise terminal that will decimate what's left of the historic fishing Village of Mayport.

the RiverLink Ferry System. Relying on EZ Pass commuter barcoded window stickers is quite the fall from the grace of the eighteenth century elegance of this once historic port.

Moving south, another old-time port has embraced anything maritime. That includes welcoming passenger ships and orienting its entire appeal to the sea that surrounds it. Norfolk is the anchor of Hampton Roads, a puzzling term for the multitude of rivers (not highways) that converge to form the harbor. Not surprising in a state that created the most

well-known travel brand in the word — Virginia Is for Lovers — Norfolk has packaged its cruise offering exquisitely. The Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center is open for business and welcoming passengers from across the country. The state-of-the-art facility was designed to be much more than just another terminal, and boasts one of the nation's largest privately-owned ocean liner collections as well as 400-year-old artifacts from historic Jamestown.

Next door is Nauticus, a maritime center on underwater steroids. It is an interac-

tive science and technology center that explores the naval, economic and nautical power of the sea. Home of the Battleship *Wisconsin*, Nauticus features *Wisconsin*-related exhibits, hands-on exhibits, national-caliber traveling exhibits, HD films on a giant screen, sharks and the Hampton Roads Naval Museum. If that's not enough for cruisers, they can head up the James River to Jamestown, Williamsburg and Richmond for a dose of dry-land history.

South of Charleston we find sister Savannah. According to a feasibility study by BEA Architects of Miami, Georgia could reap \$89 million in direct spending and create a thousand new jobs if Savannah builds a cruise ship terminal. That was the good news. The bad news is that the city would need to use an existing cargo terminal downstream from the famed historic district that is the draw for cruisers. And the cost to build the interim terminal is \$18 million; a permanent one in the historic district would be another \$50 million. So why the keen interest?

Rivalry with its Florida neighbor. Jacksonville's port life is complicated by a num-

ber of factors unique to the area. Yet a similar debate about building a new cruise ship pier is resonant of Savannah's and our Holy City's.

The St. Johns River is home to a naval base. Sometimes that's good when it means the feds might pay for dredging. Sometimes it's bad, as when the proposed modifications to accommodate a nuclear powered carrier set off a firestorm of environmental concerns. JAX-PORT is also a major inter-modal cargo center. Indeed, the current cruise ship terminal is actually on a site promised to Korean mega container shipper Hanjin.

The temporary facility is home port for Carnival's *Fascination*. The behemoth ship had to make modifications to its communications array to squeak under the Dame's Point Bridge, even at low tide. The proposed new terminal would be a mile away on the seaward side of the bridge and ostensibly in the middle of nowhere tourist-wise.

As with other port cities, there is much consternation about water and air pollution. Jacksonville's city council is divided over spending the millions to build a permanent terminal. Where Jacksonville's problems differ from Charleston's is the lack of a direct link to the host city's tourism business. Jacksonville is the country's largest city in land area. It has a downtown, but not a historical or cultural treasure like Savannah or our own. Its primary draws: the beaches, golf and ecotourism are spread far and wide ... from St. Augustine, Sawgrass and Ponte Vedra Beach to the south to the three beach

Cruise Ships, *continued from page 1*



IMAGE BY CITYBOI757 AT: HTTP://WWW.CITY-DATA.COM/FORUM/CITY-VS-CITY/798307-CITIES-W-BEST-CRUISE-SHIP-TERMINALS.
Norfolk, Virginia bundled its Half Moone Cruise and Celebration Center with the Nauticus science and technology center, Battleship Wisconsin and a museum of 400-year-old artifacts from Jamestown into a maritime-themed tourist mecca.

communities to the east to the posh Amelia Island Plantation to the north. The Jacksonville tourism bureau tries (VisitJacksonville) to coordinate regional appeals, but is sustained by the city's bed taxes. Each regional county, town, tourism bureau or CVB has its own source of revenue and self-interests. Cooperation is therefore diluted.

Where Jacksonville's problem compares to Charleston's is the threat to the historic village of Mayport. It was founded in 1562 by explorer Jean Ribault. Mayport has over the years been settled by French, Portuguese and Minorcans. Residents were mostly fishermen who took advantage of the proximity to the Continental Shelf and vast fishing grounds. Mayport was also a well known resort town during the 1800s, gaining a bold reputation with its hotels, prize fighters and taverns. Tourists from Jacksonville would cruise down the St. Johns River for a scenic ride along the Mayport coast. Boats would then dock and

the passengers would dine or stay overnight.

Mayport has declined drastically. The romance of the fishing village is more a function of nostalgia than aesthetics. However, the spunk of the remaining residents — shrimpers and fishermen — has combined with the zeal of environmentalists and anti-development forces to put up a valiant fight against the port authority. The Web site home page (www.savemayportvillage.net) of the local resistance, headed by "Diver Dan" Turner, features prominently two videos and a lead article on the fight raging in Charleston.

With disjointed cruise ship support in Jacksonville, Savannah may be able to pick off *Fascination* and offer her a home port next to one of the country's loveliest and most enjoyable cities. Perhaps Savannah might want to home port another Carnival ship currently sailing from her Lowcountry big sister's Union Pier at the end of Market Street.

To be continued ...

The General Counsel A Hero Remembered

BY ROBERT W. PEARCE, JR.

My uncle died 14 years before I, his nephew, was even born. But he died a hero, one of many, many thousands of heroes from our Greatest Generation who lost their lives fighting Hitler and Japan.

My uncle's name was Dixon F. Pearce, Jr. He was killed flying a bomber over the English Channel on the way to make a bombing raid over Germany.

He was only 21 years old. His story is about a too-young hero who gave his life so that we could live free. His is a true American story about sacrifice and doing what you know is right, and not just what you want to do.

Recently, my nephew Alton Phillips, who is visiting Europe, sent us a few pictures and information about Dixon's final resting place located in the Lowcountry of Europe. The circle of life continues, brother to brother, father to son, mother to daughter, uncle to nephew to nephew.

The Netherlands American Cemetery is located in the village of Margraten. There is a tall memorial tower with a reflecting pond and a statue of a mother grieving for her lost son. As she stands there mourning, she grieves for all of us.

Dixon was a first lieutenant in the 94th Bomber Group, Heavy, and was killed on 4 November 1944. His brothers, including my father, and my grandparents received

his Purple Heart and Air Medal with 3 Oak Leaf Clusters, awarded posthumously.

As our country continues to face challenges and threats each and every day, we need to remember to keep perspective in our lives. When we complain about all of our day-to-day problems, we need to remember that most of us have no idea what a real problem really is. Hitler was a "real" problem and millions of lives were lost by all countries involved because of his lunacy and savagery and the fight needed to stop his desires of domination.

Remember that life isn't supposed to be easy with every day being put there to provide us with a good time. Life is tough and includes tough choices and sometimes horrible results. But, as some

solace and consolation at least to our family, my uncle Dixon's choices helped, some how, some way, turn the tide against Nazism and Hitler. He helped save us all and for that we can be thankful.

Each of us has only one lifetime in which to serve others and make the world a better place. Dixon's ultimate sacrifice doesn't necessarily mean we should sign up and serve in the military but it does mean that there are bigger things in life to think about and big things to try and accomplish each day.

Keep this in mind and keep this selfless and unselfish perspective as you choose how you lead your life every minute of every day.

And remember to say a prayer of thanks for Dixon F. Pearce, Jr. and for all those who have made the ultimate

sacrifice for our freedom, whether it was in World War II or in another time and place.

Please, Lord, don't ever let us forget him or the others who sacrificed. For our family at least, Dixon was a hero to remember.

Robert W. ("Bobby") Pearce, Jr. is a business attorney with Smith Moore Leatherwood LLP and he acts as general counsel for several regional businesses. He is also on the board of several Lowcountry and statewide organizations.

Editorial Extra Mainstream Media and the Culture War

We must thank Geoffrey Dickens of the Media Research Center for digging up an important nugget. He alerted the world via Drudge that Chris Matthews finds "people in the rural areas of this country who are Christian conservative culturally" are "backward" in the way they are repulsed by the actions of former Congressman Anthony Weiner.

This is important because it clearly shows that the host of *Hardball* has more than a tingle running down his leg for President Obama. Indeed, Chris Matthews has demonstrated that he has a problem with a large

portion of the 76 percent of the nation who call themselves Christians. The mainstream media has not taken Matthews to task for his commentary or asked for his removal.

Since this report, NBC edited out "under God" and "indivisible" from a TV clip of the Pledge of Allegiance during the U.S. Open; once the omissions were noticed, NBC apologized. The key point is that citizens should never forget that cultural skirmishes for the soul of the nation are part of a "shooting war." Readers, the door is wide open for you to make a positive contribution to the spiritual culture of your community by

pledging allegiance to the values you hold dear.

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