

On the subject of...

Corporate Retreats—Theirs  
by Viki Eggers Mason



THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

The Aberdeen Advocate

If you've been reading the Aberdeen Advocate for any time at all, you'll not be surprised to learn that I am a planner. Every now and then I must stop dead still and get my bearings. In order to determine where I am in relation to my goals and objectives, I have to take a critical look around.

To that end, on a recent weekend the board of directors of the Aberdeen Advocate went on a corporate retreat - which is to say, my handsome husband and I got into the car and took a drive to Corinth and back. There was a learning component to our retreat as we spent some time at the Civil War Interpretive Center and at Shiloh National Battlefield. Such educational bonuses make a corporate retreat more fun and serve to assist the "retreat-ors" in gaining appropriate historic perspective with regard to the company's successes, its failures, its challenges and its future.

Though Corinth is not nearly as stimulating as the Gulf Coast, from whence our city leaders

recently returned from a "retreat" of their own, it's much less expensive and the steaks are great at Russell's Beef House where, by the way, they actually allow smokers to smoke.

The Advocate's corporate retreat lasted just over 24 hours, an amount of time sufficient to come to terms with several critical issues facing our little company. (Please see related story on page 4.) The annual convention of Mississippi's Municipal League held the last week in June in Biloxi, however, was considerably longer. The events began on Sunday and finished Wednesday afternoon. There were round-table discussions on matters including economic development and municipal law. (I'm quite certain our little band of aldermen were particularly interested in attending these sessions!) Most certainly, of key interest to our aldermen had to have been the USDA Forest Service's session

on rural development. The Forest Service has long offered grants and expert help for transitioning rural economies across the country and I'm sure our representatives were eager to learn about how this program could help Aberdeen. There were seminars on making the municipality "storm ready" as well as several planning and zoning work sessions. There were also important opportunities to get hands-on experience in municipal deep-sea fishing and corporate golfing.

Now, the subject of this convention was tossed about with some relish by bloggers who frequent my website. We gave considerable thought to and commented extensively on the fact that it was very expensive to send all of our five aldermen, the mayor, and the city clerk to the Gulf Coast to represent us. When you pay 48.5 cents per mile for each of our

Continued Page 2

Paw's Two Sons

By Contributing Editor R. T. Mason

Paw and Maw were fine folks. After their marriage in the midst of the Great Depression, they were married for 64 years before Maw's death. Paw followed her across the Great Divide only a few months later.

Together (and that's the key), they faced the world and raised their three children, who were all as different as night and day. My sister, who both my brother and I would agree was the best of the lot, was taken away from us when she was a young mother, leaving our parents with two hard-headed sons. Those two sons were 10 years apart in their

ages, and that age difference, as well as the personalities of the two sons, came to play an important factor in how Paw communicated with each son. Neither son had any doubt that Paw loved us equally, as we did him, but he just communicated differently with each of us.

My brother was always, outwardly, more sentimental than I. His was always a more personable character than I. My brother was always the life of the party, while I've never been a "social butterfly." My brother was, and is, at his

best around people, while I am much more comfortable alone, immersed in thought.

So, while Paw and my brother spent their time together talking about more personal things, such as their health and finances, the conversations between Paw and I were much more philosophical in nature. Paw and I would sit around for hours, discussing some particular passage of Scripture, the best way to build something, or the actions of birds, bees, and butterflies. One particularly long conversation dealt with the fact that a bee will not walk into a shadow.

Continued on Page 3

# Corporate Retreats

## Continued from Page 1

representatives to drive his/her personal vehicles to Biloxi and back, then pay for each attendee (who most likely brought the spouse along) to have his/her own room, then add meals and conference registration fees, the bill adds up.

Our online discussion had become quite lively when Ward 5 alderman Jim Buffington chimed in. In an email message to his constituents, which was subsequently forwarded to me, Buffington announced that he was NOT in Biloxi draining the municipal coffers. He was somewhere in Virginia in pursuit of his own wealth, thank you very much. It was at this point that I became confused.

If this convention was important enough to justify the weighty expense, why weren't all of the aldermen there? If it wasn't important, why were ANY of them there? Thus far nobody has offered an answer, so I suppose I'll have to make one up.

It is right and good that our municipal representatives take advantage of *each and every* educational opportunity which comes their way. That's what we pay them to do – to learn and then to implement. Yes! Each of them should have been in Biloxi and each of them should have had assignments. The conference agenda was available online far in advance of the event at the MML website, <http://www.mmlonline.com/data2/Official%20MML%20Conf%20Program.pdf> and, with just a little planning each of them might have engaged in separate learning opportunities then shared the information later in a follow-up meeting for the edification of the others. Perhaps they could even invite us voters to the debriefing? Alas, I don't see that happening anytime soon.

No, reader friends, I suspect that this junket was just that – it was simply a vacation at taxpayer expense. Does that excuse absent aldermen? Nope.

There is a very important reason we budget

money to send our employees to these sorts of events. Education is the only way to progress! Seminars, workshops and conferences hold a wealth of information, not just from trainers and facilitators, but also from other attendees. The networking possibilities in such forums are equally important. It is critical to meet and learn from our counterparts from other communities. The exchange of ideas, problems and solutions represents incredible potential for forward motion. Such is the fabric of change.

Each of our city employees, then, has an obligation to soak up as much municipal wisdom as he/she possibly can and bring it home to work in our community. The training we fund for all city employees, from electric department to accounting, must bear significant fruit for the taxpayers or our money's been wasted. They should come home invigorated and eager to make new ideas work for Aberdeen. We have a right to expect a return on our investment. If we aren't seeing a return, it simply means we have hired the wrong sort of worker. (Surprise! Surprise!)

I urge you to contact your alderman concerning this important conference. If he didn't attend, ask him why. If he did attend, please ask him which of the learning opportunities listed on the right he attended and what he learned. I'd ask my alderman, but I live in Ward 3. We don't have an alderman.

Finally, please know that Aberdeen's delegation looked stunning in Biloxi! Just before the trip, we taxpayers purchased matching polo shirts for our aldermen and our city clerk, each bearing their embroidered name. Never mind the frivolous expense— and a redundant one, as it turns out, since conference regulation requires that name badges must be worn at all times so that everybody knows everybody. What matters is that we were uniformly cool. I just wish the guys had learned more and sparkled less – the former is essential, the latter merely an unnecessary luxury which demonstrates the topsy-turvy priorities our city fathers espouse.

### Learning opportunities at the recent Mississippi Municipal League Conference:

- \* Municipal Organization
- \* Economic Development
- \* Municipal Law
- \* Community Development
- \* Municipal Land Use
- \* Funding Opportunities
- \* Will Your Planning and Zoning Decisions Survive a Court Challenge?
- \* State Auditor's Office Programs and Services
- \* Agricultural Rural Development
- \* Mississippi Economic Development Council
- \* Planning and Development for Districts and Municipalities
- \* Grants and Low Interest Loans
- \* Municipal Finance
- \* Risk Management—5 Ways to Reduce Claims
- \* Comprehensive Planning
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# Paw's Two Sons

## Continued from Page 1

It would never have occurred to any of us to ask our parents' permission before we went somewhere or did anything. We knew what type of behavior was acceptable and what was not, and those times when we strayed from the path we usually found ourselves on the receiving end of a good walloping. Yet, it wasn't the walloping that made us regret our actions, but rather the fact that we had disappointed Paw. I would rather have walked into a lion's den, stripped naked and laid down on a bed of nails than hear the disappointment in Paw's voice. As we grew up, Paw and Maw taught us right from wrong and they gave us the tools to learn more, yet they never interfered in our lives. That's the way they raised us. If we asked, they would help us in any way they could, but they allowed each of us to find our own way. Their upbringing somehow brought about two entirely different individuals – one personable and the other more philosophical, but the older my brother and I get, the more our relationship with our father shows.

That brings me to the point of this rambling. Since I'm the peon of this organization called *The Aberdeen Advocate*, my normal function is the menial tasks of folding, taping, and applying stamps and address labels. (Yes, I'm the one responsible for all those crooked stamps and labels that our subscribers find on the outside of their copy of this paper every week.) I also get to perform the bookkeeping chores, keeping up with when subscriptions and advertising expire. Since nobody around here gets paid, from time to time, my blushing young bride will print something I write as a gesture for my menial services to the "cause." Of course, everyone knows that I'm not much of a writer, and it isn't difficult to see that my thoughts are not exactly newsworthy, so most of our readers probably consider my comments in this publication to be nothing more than filler. Most of our readers seem to be mainly interested in the antics of our city leaders, and, to be sure, it is important that our readers keep abreast of the goings-on at City Hall.

On the other hand, the purpose of my offerings is to follow the example of my Paw, reminding the reader of principles which you have already learned, and encouraging each of you to put those learned principles into action. My brother, like my wife, might tell you what others are doing to you, which is a more personal approach, but I take a more philosophical approach by reminding you of your own responsibilities and the principles which your own parents taught you. Viki will blame Aberdeen's current situation on our leadership, and rightly so, but I carry the thought a step further. I blame our leadership on each of us. Our leaders didn't assume their lofty thrones by their own decree or their might with a sword. They assumed their positions because we elected them to fill those positions, and since we elected them, their shortcomings reflect our own shortcomings.

There are approximately 6,500 inhabitants of the city of Aberdeen. Since there are about 1,600 students enrolled in our schools - that leaves roughly 5,000 eligible voters. (Give me a break. I'm dealing with rough estimates here.) As I recall, we have about 3,500 registered voters. Of that figure, only about half actually show up and vote. That means that only about 25% of the inhabitants of our fair city select our local leadership. Of that 25%, or about 1,700 people, I would estimate that less than half of them (or 850 people) actually know, and care, about what is happening to this town. To be sure, the remaining 3,300 eligible voters (roughly speaking) are not likely to be reading this paper, but it is important that they learn, and it is important that they develop enough knowledge and caring that they do their part in making necessary changes here in Aberdeen.

The education of those 3,300 people is the responsibility of each of us. If you want changes here in Aberdeen, if you want your property values to increase instead of decrease, if you want good schools for your children and grandchildren, if you want good local jobs to be available, and if you care about a good future for this city, then you can't just sit around reading about the happenings at City Hall. You have got to get out there, talk to as many of those 3,300 as possible and encourage them to be educated and caring enough to make many

changes around here. Not only that, but you also have got to seek out other highly-qualified, resourceful, intelligent and honest people who care enough about our city to serve as its future leaders.

Our city is in a downward spiral toward nothingness, and if we don't start turning it around at the next election, we are doomed. We can't simply make changes at the next election; we've got to make **monumental changes**, and those changes have to be meaningful and concise.

If you have the attitude that there is nothing you can do to help make these changes, then you had best change that attitude, or we are all going to sink. You can no longer sit in the outfield, hoping that nobody hits the ball in your direction. It's the bottom of the ninth, the winning run is on third base, and the ball is in the air headed directly toward you. You know what you have to do, and you know how to do it. You have the responsibility to save this game. Just do it!



### Your Municipal Officials

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**Ward 1 Alderman Alonzo Sykes**

**369-7705**

**Ward 2 Alderman Cloyd Garth**

**369-5734**

**Ward 5's OTHER Alderman Willie Cook**

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**Ward 4 Alderman Brunson Odom**

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**Ward 5 Alderman Jim Buffington**

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# Corporate Retreats—Ours

During our recent corporate retreat, my handsome husband and I grappled for some time over the nickels and dimes of printing this little paper. You should know that when we first undertook this project, we had one sturdy mission, to identify and eliminate government waste in Aberdeen and Monroe County by getting our observations and opinions into as many hands as possible. We also had one hard and fast rule—*The Advocate* could cost us unlimited time and attention but it could not cost us any money. Those principles are still in place.

We had something of a game plan to begin with, and that plan has evolved successfully over time. We intended to accomplish our circulation goal by first printing as many hard copies of *The Advocate* as possible contingent upon our advertising proceeds. We intended to encourage subscriptions and develop an internet version of the paper in order to cultivate a growing number of web-based readers until, ultimately, we had a bit financial wiggle room.

From the outset of this venture, our biggest challenge has been to find advertisers who were brave and stalwart enough in their support of our goals and who would contribute money every month to carry on the fight. We have been blessed to find a sufficient number to keep this paper afloat.

Obviously, the more advertisers we have, the more papers can be printed; the more papers that are printed, the more opportunity there is for folks to read our opinions; the more people who read our opinions, the more people will, then, form their own opinions concerning these matters; consequently, there will be more participation in our government, particularly in the election process. We sincerely appreciate our advertisers, both past and present, because they have stepped up to the plate by providing us support as we attempt to challenge the minds of citizens.

Sometimes, when we offer business owners the opportunity to advertise with us, they tell us that, although they agree with our concept and our ideas, they can't advertise with us because they can't afford to offend anyone. Simply put, they are afraid if they advertise with us they will lose business. Naturally, the very last thing we want is for any of our advertisers to lose business because they support our efforts, so we never pressure anyone to advertise with us.

On the other hand, the only people who can change the direction of our local government are the voters. If those voters don't exercise their opportunity to cause those changes, in a short time, there will be little business left in our local economy. Little by little, younger families are leaving our city, leaving only seniors left. Seniors, like me, are unlikely to be around in another 20 years. As we go, Aberdeen's population is further reduced. Changing this downward spiral of residents will take years — years of hard work under the best of leadership and citizen involvement, and the longer this decline lasts, the less likely we will be to make any significant changes and turn our economy around. We don't profess that any business which doesn't advertise with us is not helping to invoke needed change. There are certainly other ways to support change without advertising with us. However, we do believe that it is the civic responsibility of every business owner to help invoke the needed changes in our local government on every front. To simply take the money of local residents while it lasts without encouraging change for the future development of our economy is shortsighted, at best. At worst, it is a disregard for the futures of those customers upon whom the business depends.

Ten months into our adventure here is where we stand: We have done precisely what we set out to do!

We have nearly 100 subscribers who pay in advance for the printing and mailing of their weekly dose of tough love.


As we hoped, we now also have an *astounding* number of readers who take advantage of their internet connection to read what is written here. *The Advocate* website sees from 4,500 to 6,000 visits each week with the heaviest traffic occurring on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. It is obvious most of you visit the website when I publish *The Advocate* there. To publish on the internet essentially costs us nothing more than the time we spend in writing and preparing the paper for publication.

So, you see, our only little wrinkle seems to be the many hundreds of "Free—Take One" copies we distribute through 25 businesses in and around Aberdeen. If changes in our distribution become necessary in the future, those changes will be reflected in the number of free copies we make available. Naturally, we will continue to print and distribute as many copies of *The Advocate* as we can, but, depending upon the number of advertisers we have, you may discover that hard copies of the paper are occasionally a little more difficult to locate.

From my many conversations with readers, I know this paper gets photocopied and passed around not just in Aberdeen, but all across the country. We encourage this circulation! In the event we must cut down the number of free issues we distribute each week, we will be depending on you readers to keep the thoughts and opinions percolating. Without thoughtful evaluation of the circumstances, we cannot hope to achieve positive change in our community. (Or the communities in Alabama, Florida, Idaho, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana and New York where *The Advocate* is read each week.)


To that end, and with your continued support, we keep on keeping on.

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## We Get Letters! Imagine That!

To the Editor:

Aberdeen, for a small village of 6,400 souls, apparently has a high number of orphans. How very sad! It is a situation to break your heart and bring tears to your eyes should you stop for a moment to give it thought.

Children without mothers to teach them to pick up after themselves are the victims, of course. How can the young ones be blamed as they thoughtlessly toss paper products, cans and bottles everywhere they may be? They do not know better and Mother isn't there to follow them around and pick up after them. Surely they are orphans. How sad. It breaks your heart.

Adults without mothers are apparently even more in need of sympathy and understanding. These poor souls often turn to drink to drown their sorrows. So great is their pain, many have not yet departed

from the liquor store parking lot before they imbibe. Cans and bottles are of necessity tossed from the moving vehicles. How can these persons be blamed when it is our lawmakers who have made it a crime to drink while driving or to have an open liquor container in the vehicle? Tears must fill their eyes with sadness. Our hearts must go out to them. Who is more alone in this world than the person without a mother to guide them and pick up after them?

Debris on Aberdeen streets and gutters go beyond paper, plastic, bottles and cans. The "Trashy Ladies" are a tough act to follow as they pick up trash discarded by motherless souls. However, the "Trashy Ladies" cannot be all places in Aberdeen at all times. It remains for those of us with mothers to assist on an ongoing basis those persons unable or unwilling to pick up after themselves.

My wife and I are making a feeble effort to emulate the "Trashy Ladies." From Monday last through this Friday morning, we have picked up 19 bags of trash, 3 tires, 1 auto wheel, 1 empty 5-gallon tar bucket, 1 house fan and part of a car bumper. It's a start.

Ralph and Geri Saxton, Aberdeen

When I first moved to Aberdeen a long-time resident told me how much she liked the Western United States. She said, in some wonderment, "It's so *clean* there!"

She's right. Here, though, it seems we have failed to instill much pride in our community's appearance. This disregard for the cumulative effect of candy wrappers and soda cans echoes the way we view small bendings of the law in our little town which lead to larger, more costly crises. (We're working on that problem.) Meanwhile, thanks to you, to Gerri and those tireless "Trashy Ladies" for caring!  
VEM

### From Our Email In-Box

#### We hold these truths to be self evident...

Have you ever wondered what happened to the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence?

Five signers were captured by the British as traitors and tortured before they died.

Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned.

Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army; another had two sons captured.

Nine of the 56 fought and died from wounds or hardships of the Revolutionary War.

They signed and they pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor.

What kind of men were they?

Twenty-four were lawyers and jurists.

Eleven were merchants, nine were farmers and large plantation owners; men of means, well educated, but they signed

the Declaration of Independence knowing full well that the penalty would be death if they were captured.

Carter Braxton of Virginia, a wealthy planter and trader, saw his ships swept from the seas by the British Navy. He sold his home and properties to pay his debts and died in rags.

Thomas McKeam was so hounded by the British that he was forced to move his family almost constantly. He served in the Congress without pay, and his family was kept in hiding. His possessions were taken from him and poverty was his reward.

Vandals or soldiers looted the properties of Dillery, Hall, Clymer, Walton, Gwinnett, Heyward, Rutledge and Middleton.

At the battle of Yorktown, Thomas Nelson, Jr., noted that the British General Cornwallis had taken over the Nelson

home for his headquarters. He quietly urged General George Washington to open fire. The home was destroyed, and Nelson died bankrupt.

Francis Lewis had his home and properties destroyed. The enemy jailed his wife, and she died within a few months.

John Hart was driven from his wife's bedside as she was dying. Their 13 children fled for their lives. His fields and his gristmill were laid to waste. For more than a year he lived in forests and caves, returning home to find his wife dead and his children vanished.

These days, with our hectic lives it is easy to forget what others have sacrificed for us. So please, take a few minutes today as you go about the business of living in liberty to silently thank these patriots. It's not much to ask for the price they paid.

Remember: **freedom is never free!**



# The Aberdeen Advocate

## THE TRUTH IN BLACK AND WHITE

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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>Subscribe me!</b></p> <p><b>NAME:</b> _____</p> <p><b>ADDRESS:</b> _____</p> <p><b>PHONE:</b> _____</p>	<p><i>"Only two defining forces have ever offered to die for you: Jesus Christ and the American G.I. One died for your soul, the other for your freedom." ....Author Unknown</i></p>	
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