

# LOCAL & STATE

## BRIEFS

### Temporary closing hours for Athens Title Office

The Athens County Title Office will be closed from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. for lunches starting Nov. 9 and continuing through Nov. 15. The title office will resume regular business hours without closing for lunches on Nov. 16.

### Nelsonville curbside leaf pick-up

The City of Nelsonville Street Department will start curbside leaf pick-up on Monday, Nov. 15 and continue every Monday and Wednesday until Wednesday, Dec. 15. Leaf pick-up will depend on the weather conditions.

Follow these steps for curbside leaf pick-up:

- Rake leaves to curbside; do not include branches, sticks, grass clippings or tall grass. These can clog and damage the equipment and cause delays. City crews will not be raking any leaves.
- Do not rake leaves into the street. This can clog storm drains.
- Do not pile leaves around fire hydrants, street signs or utility poles.
- Do not park in front of leaf piles on pick-up days.
- When your leaves are curbside and ready, schedule curbside leaf pick-up by using Nelsonville's "Text-MyGov." Text "Hi" to 740-265-3858 and a series of texts will guide you through the reporting process, or call 740-753-1314 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

### Athens City-County Health Department closed

Athens City-County Health Department will be closed Thursday, Nov. 11 in honor of Veterans Day. The office will reopen on Friday, Nov. 12.

### Free carbon monoxide detectors

The Athens Fire Department will be distributing free carbon monoxide detectors while supplies last. The detectors, one per household, will be distributed at the main Athens City fire station located at 61 Columbus Road, Monday through Friday, beginning Monday, Nov. 15 from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. while supplies last.

The detectors are not Athens City Code compliant for rentals.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact the Athens Fire Department at 740-592-3301, or if you need help installing your detector call your local fire department.

## THROWBACK THURSDAY

# Robert Falkner: Merlin the Magician

Robert Falkner was a man of many talents and experiences. He was a bomber pilot for the Air Force during World War II and the Korean conflict. During one of his missions, he was shot down behind enemy lines, but managed to find his way back home. Also, at this time, he produced hundreds of television productions for the Air Force. He retired from the service as a Lieutenant Colonel.

Falkner had always had a passion for magic and sleight of hand. He has performed as a magician in every state in the Union and many foreign countries. He was also a sculptor who made folksy figures from walnut. But enough of this background, let's get to this 'Merlin' character.

"Merlin the Magician" was a 15-minute television show, that started airing in 1965. It was produced in Athens at WOUB studios. It starred the war veteran/magician, Robert Falkner as Merlin the Magician. The show was on the air three days a week. The character 'Merlin' spent much of his time in his Secret Room at King Arthur's Court. Merlin usually started the show with a few magic tricks and then moved on to the educational part. Don't worry;

the educational segment was never boring. Merlin managed to make learning about science, nature, history, and even outer space, a fun experience. The role of Merlin was just right for Falkner. He already knew about magic and illusions. He was comfortable both behind and in front of the camera. And he must have liked kids seeing as he had six of his own.

In keeping with the Knights of the Round Table tradition, on the Merlin set was a sword in a stone named Excalibur. Saying the magic word, Merlin was able to pull the sword from its stony sheath. The sword would reveal the secret word of the day on the shiny blade. On one program, the word of the day was "snakes". At this point, Merlin would focus on snakes. He would explain that some snakes are harmless and others are poisonous, making sure to tell viewers to watch out for the one's with vertical pupils.

Though Merlin performed many slight of hand tricks with cards and other small magic tricks, he also performed more elaborate illusions. One of his grandest tricks was the levitation of a beautiful lady. On the same show, Merlin would teach his viewers certain moral qualities, such as honesty,



cleanliness and good behavior. Merlin would ask the kids to do a good deed for their family. When kids would write a letter to Merlin proclaiming a kindly act, they would become members of the Round Table and receive a membership card and a small magic wand in the mail.

To add a little comedy to the show, there was a clumsy apprentice to Merlin. His name was Chauncey. Chauncey was played by Joe Berman (left), who was also the show's director. In later years, Joe became an important part of Ohio University's Telecommunication School and WOUB. Eventually

Berman became Dean of the Honors Tutorial College. That's a pretty good promotion for an awkward apprentice to Merlin.

Now here is the kicker, the show was a big success in Athens County. It was so successful that other stations picked it up. At one point there were 70 TV stations the aired Merlin the Magician, becoming WOUB's first show to be nationally syndicated.

If anyone has any memories or comments about Robert Falkner (Merlin the Magician) or Joe Berman (Chauncey), please drop me a note. I will add it to my files. John Halley jhalley@athensmessenger.com

## COOLVILLE

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"There's no truth in it," Rood said.

Rood resigned as Coolville's mayor in 2017 amid multiple allegations, including misuse of village funds, as The Athens Messenger reported. Rood returned to village council after his election in 2019.

**Ongoing tension**  
Ongoing tension between the former chief of police and the village government spilled into this month's council meeting, held Nov. 9.

**Water meter location**  
Miller interrupted a discussion of the water department's activities to share concerns related to the proposed location of a water meter on one of his properties.

In the village's proposal, the water meter would be located on a different property than the property for which it would produce readings. While Miller currently owns both properties, he said he is attempting to sell the parcel on which the meter would be located. He also said he believes the village's actions would devalue his property.

Chiki said the village has right of way, which Miller said is irrelevant because the properties are separately deeded.

Miller and the village have apparently been at a stalemate over the issue for three months, with equipment sitting idly on Miller's property. Miller said he is working with a lawyer to resolve the issue.

When Miller began to show paperwork to the council, Chiki said, "Nope, nope, nope, nope. Not yet."

"See, that's the power trip we're talking about," Miller said.

"We're not talking power trip," Chiki said. "We're talking our meeting."

**Basketball hoop reimbursement**

Tensions surfaced again as a family sought reimbursement for a basketball hoop which was apparently damaged by accidents involving the village.

Donny Brooks said the basketball hoop, a Christmas gift for his daughter, cost \$300. Family member Tracie Dixon

told the Messenger the basketball hoop was damaged through a series of incidents, including three accidents involving a village maintenance vehicle and an additional incident in which village officials and employees damaged the hoop while trying to move it for the Founder's Day parade.

At the council meeting, Chiki said the family was in violation of a village ordinance for having the hoop in the road and asked whether the family should have been fined.

Dixon told the Messenger the hoop was in a parking spot and that many other families in town have basketball hoops in the street, which council members acknowledged. Dixon also said Chiki previously accepted the location of the hoop implicitly by asking to move the hoop for the parade and subsequently return the hoop to the street.

Chiki said Miller was partially responsible.

"The chief of police at the time was told that it needed to be moved, and he expressed that he would speak to them," Chiki said.

"Wrong," Miller said.

"Now, whether he did or not, I cannot attest to," Chiki said. "That being said, council allowed it to be on the street — because we can go and hand them a letter saying it needs to be moved within a certain amount of time, and that did not happen."

A council member asked Brooks how old the basketball hoop was. After consulting his daughter, Brooks said it was purchased last Christmas.

"Nope," Chiki said. "It was way older than that."

"It was either last Christmas or the Christmas before," Brooks said.

Council members spent several minutes researching basketball hoops on their phones.

While discussing how much the village should reimburse the family, Chiki said, "Well, if you have an old car it depreciates."

Later in the discussion, Brooks' daughter described the damage to the hoop, including damage to the wheel, support bar and rim.

Chiki said, "Those were damaged prior. I will at-

test to that."

"Negative," said Miller.

Another citizen attending the meeting, prompted by Chiki, said part of the plastic on the base was damaged prior to any incidents involving the village.

"That's not the wheel, the support bar or the rim," Miller said.

"But it was damaged prior," Chiki said.

"I said what I said," Miller said.

After several more minutes of discussion, village council members voted on a motion introduced by Village Council Member Charity Boggs to purchase a new basketball hoop for the family and send notices instructing all those with basketball hoops in the street to move them.

Curtis Rood cast the only vote against the motion with other council members voting in favor.

Brooks and Dixon told the Messenger they do not believe the motion would have passed if the press were not present.

"All the way up until tonight every single council member except Charity kept saying no," Dixon said. "She's the only one that kept fighting for it, and it's the right thing to do. It's for a child."

Following discussion of the basketball hoop, the council moved to an executive session.

"If it's about me, you can say it in person," Miller said. "Just making that notice."

**"Falsified" meter readings**

The most direct confrontation between Miller and the village government came at the end of the meeting, during citizen comments.

Miller began his comment by sharing reiterated concerns about the village's proposed location for a water meter on his property.

"The whole community is looking at the council members to start doing the right thing," Miller said. "I think when the entire community called for Roxanna to resign, I think they're right 100%, because it's not her way, it doesn't happen. And that's just not fair anymore."

Council Member Lora Toncray said, "So you're saying, Scott, that you don't think that we as a

council have always done the right thing?"

"No, I don't believe over the past couple months that things have been done correctly," Miller said, before reiterating allegations that Rood falsified water meter readings. "When you sit there and you know that he's falsifying water readings and I brought proof of it and nothing was done, I think it's inappropriate."

Toncray asked what proof Miller was referencing, and he said he showed Toncray and Chiki proof during a meeting on Toncray's porch. Toncray and Miller spoke back and forth multiple times on the subject, with Toncray denying that Miller had produced any proof.

"I showed multiple council members the documents that I had," Miller said.

"But you didn't show that to Roxanna and I," Toncray said.

"Yes I have," Miller said.

Boggs said, "Scott, you haven't shown me any documents."

"You want to see them right after this?" Miller said.

"No," Boggs said.

"See, that's the problem," Miller said.

"I spoke with [Rood], I did what you asked," Boggs said. "I'm doing my part as a council member, and they are. You have gotten rude and meetings in the past when you were standing as the chief and you didn't wait to speak your time as a citizen. So there has been disrespect

on all sides. Everybody here is trying.

"You want champagne on a beer budget in this town, and we've got to work with what we have and try to build up."

After the meeting, Rood told the Messenger he believes Miller is leveling false allegations due to personal grievance about the proposed location for the water meter.

Boggs agreed Miller's grievances seem mostly personal.

"I just feel that a lot of it has been made personal and that's what it comes down to," said Boggs.

**New police chief**

Village council members unanimously voted to welcome Troy Smith, son of Athens County Sheriff Rodney Smith, as Coolville's new police chief.

"I'm just looking forward to serving the community," Smith said.

Miller said he was happy to see Smith take the job.

"Even though he's young, he's got that moral compass. He's got that integrity. He's got that love for Coolville that people talk about. He's going to be a really good cop," Miller said.

Chiki expressed confidence in Smith as well.

"I'm really excited to have a new chief," Chiki said. "I think that he will do an excellent job for the community."

Boggs also said she was optimistic about Smith.

"I'm relieved that we have a new chief, and a good, new beginning," Boggs said.

## The Athens Messenger

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