

# OPINION

## Riverkeeper doesn't fit in this suit

Augusta Chronicle Editorial Staff

**T**he fight over the New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam has become so protracted and convoluted that people risk missing the big picture.

So we'll repaint the picture for you, and its message shouldn't be forgotten: The New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam, on our precious Savannah River, helps maintain a water pool at the steady level necessary for the Augusta region's business, industry and recreation to thrive.

So if you're not for the preservation and upkeep of the lock and dam, you're against it.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is against the lock and dam. The Corps has tried desperately for years to advance a project that would tear down the lock and dam - and its human-controlled gates that regulate the pool level. In its place, the Corps wishes to place an immovable rock weir - a huge pile of rocks, essentially - that Corps engineers unconvincingly assert will not plunge the level of the river pool.

The officially-stated primary goal for the weir is to provide easier passage to traditional fish spawning grounds. The huge federal project to deepen the Savannah Harbor at the mouth of the river is said to be disturbing the habitat for two species of sturgeon.

The city of Augusta rightfully wants to keep the lock and dam. So does the city of North Augusta. And Columbia County. And dam near everybody else who will be directly affected by its removal.

The state of South Carolina filed a lawsuit Nov. 4 in U.S. District Court against the Corps to try to stop the

federal government from lowering the river's pool by tearing the lock and dam down. Weeks later, the city of Augusta joined the suit.

Someone else now wants to join the suit.

And under no circumstances should it be allowed to happen.

The Savannah Riverkeeper Inc., led by its attention-seeking leader, Tonya Bonitatibus, filed papers Feb. 14 asking to join the legal fight against the Corps, pointing out that her group "has been heavily involved in all aspects of the Savannah Harbor Deepening Project (SHEP) since its inception in 2001."

She's been heavily involved, all right - in trying to destroy the lock and dam. Her move doesn't indicate a unified alliance with the city but seems to reveal a cynically partisan strategy. In her mission to wipe out the dam, Bonitatibus wants to join forces with the very people trying to save it.

And she was the apparent instigator in getting a federal law change that endangered the lock and dam in the first place.

In 2000, U.S. Rep. Charlie Norwood introduced federal legislation to repair the dam and place it in the care of local governments, who could then control our own destiny. Certain parties, including the Riverkeeper, preferred that it be removed completely. The Norwood bill passed and became law.

That's why Bonitatibus went to Washington, D.C., in 2016 to sway lawmakers to undo the Norwood protections. Her weapons of choice: the endangered short-nosed sturgeon and the federal laws that protect it.

Her wish was granted when her actions resulted in a Corps-drafted bill, without the input of either U.S.

representative for Augusta or North Augusta, that made the \$40,000 was redirected to the Riverkeeper for use in its joint study of river restoration plans with the Corps.

You might think that commissioners would have to approve such a change in allocations and appropriate agreements would be signed. Apparently not. Instead, the go-to department handling this deal for the city was Augusta Utilities, headed by director Tom Wiedmeier. If that name sounds familiar, you might have seen it on Savannah Riverkeeper's website. Until mid-December, he was the organization's secretary, and sat on its board.

In trying to join the lock and dam suit, Bonitatibus is relying on a method used for years - suing to get what she wants.

A significant part of the Riverkeeper organizations' mission apparently involves filing or joining lawsuits with environmental angles, then fighting or negotiating toward a settlement that can keep Riverkeepers sustainable.

That's no secret, either. The original Savannah Riverkeeper and current chairman of the organization's board, Frank Carl, has said as much.

"Using legal fees gained in one case to support another case is a strategy that riverkeeper groups use to clean up rivers," Carl wrote from a Dec. 29, 2001, Augusta Chronicle story about the introduction of more riverkeepers in Georgia.

At a May 9, 2000, Augusta Chronicle guest column in which he advocated for the lock and dam's removal, Carl went so far as to say that "development along the river is the problem, not the solution" in connection with Norwood's proposed law.

Savannah River Clean Water Fund. Somehow that \$40,000 was redirected to the Riverkeeper for use in its joint study of river restoration plans with the Corps.

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Bonitatibus might not even be above suing the city - the city she now wants to join in the dam suit. A likely reason Augusta now has a stormwater fee is because she told commissioners that not addressing stormwater and sewage issues would increase the likelihood of Augusta facing a lawsuit much like Atlanta did against the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper.

In 2013 Bonitatibus sued the Corps and the Georgia Ports Authority to stop the harbor deepening from harming those sturgeon mentioned earlier. Savannah Riverkeeper came away with a settlement of \$12.5 million to be paid to a newly-created board controlled by her and by friendly environmentalists. The money, which is to support her pet river restoration project, is conditioned upon the completion of the harbor dredging.

So now, with millions of dollars at stake, Bonitatibus is being very friendly with both the Corps and the GPA because they share the common desire to make the lock and dam disappear.

Bonitatibus is indeed "in it to win it" for Augusta, and for the vast population that relies on the lock and dam's services.

She's a menace. She's a rock-weir-sized millstone around the city's neck. That's precisely why, for Augusta's own good, she unconditionally should be kept away from Augusta's lock and dam suit.

The city is apparently coming to the same position as the Augusta Commission voted recently to oppose her joining the lawsuit. We applaud them for this action.

Tonya Bonitatibus and Savannah Riverkeeper are absolutely no good for Augusta.

## Leadership lessons from high-performing ORs

By Jeffrey W. Foley

**T**he last thing I remember as I was drifting off to "la-la land" was the big spotlight shining down on me. I was on my back in an operating room at Eisenhower Army Medical Center. I was just about to undergo surgery to repair a torn meniscus in my left knee. When I woke up in the recovery room 90 minutes later, I was greeted by my surgeon who described the results of the successful procedure.

Later at home resting comfortably in relatively no pain, I reflected on what happened that day, as I often do following events like this. I crafted a mental after-action review on the leadership lessons I learn from the performance of the operating room team.

Operating rooms (ORs) and their teams fascinate me in many ways. The principal way lies in the high-performance culture that must exist for the team to be successful. The best OR teams are led by a surgeon who not only possesses exceptional surgical skills but also great leadership skills that inspires all

team members to be the best they can be.

If you want to learn more about how powerful leadership lessons from the OR team can help you regardless of your profession, read on.

Six years ago I was asked to speak at a health care conference on lessons learned from the Army that can help build high-performing teams in the operating room. While I was well-versed from the Army side, I needed to learn more about the operating room environment if I was going to be relevant to my audience. To secure this knowledge I interviewed many OR team members including physicans, nurses, technicians and more. I also observed two major surgeries firsthand to see high-performing OR teams in action.

I have great respect for surgeons who develop these types of teams through their own leadership skills. I also have great admiration for every member of an OR team who works so closely with others to achieve success.

This column only begins to do justice to the magnitude of how an effective

OR team is formed, and prepares for, executes and follows up for a surgical procedure. But there are powerful lessons to be learned, summarized here, that can be put to immediate use to help whether you are a senior executive in a Fortune 500 company or in a leadership role in any other organization.

There exists one single, most important objective. The single objective is a successful surgical outcome for the patient. Every member of the team is focused on this objective first, with their own individual or department objectives second. The single objective provides the purpose of their work and direction for action.

Commitment by the senior leader. There is no question that the surgeon is the leader of this team and must be absolutely committed to the objective. All direction comes from the surgeon who is responsible for everything that happens or falls to happen in the OR.

Teamwork. The surgeon must exercise the leadership skills to inspire the best performance of the team. These skills include planning,

communicating, delegating, enforcing, educating, training, encouraging, thanking and more. Great teams have clarity in who does what. Great teams have members who trust each other and are willing to hold each other accountable. Great teams collaborate on all actions necessary to ensure success. Great teams constantly learn.

Well-defined processes and procedures. The best ORs function like clockwork. Well-defined processes and procedures, on which everyone is trained to standard, create efficiency and effectiveness while reducing the risk of something going wrong. Skilled professionals on the team. There is no substitute for having skilled and talented professionals at every position on the team.

There are many obstacles in the path of achieving high performance in the OR. For example, there are many departments involved who have their own priorities such as surgery, anesthesia and nursing. There are logistic, maintenance, and scheduling challenges that affect facility readiness. There may be trust issues

with members of the team or at title issues or behavior challenges or misplaced loyalties. Any one of these obstacles (and others) can disrupt the effort to achieve a successful surgical outcome.

These same obstacles exist in every organization. Imagine how it would feel if you and your leadership team performed like the high-performing team in an operating room. What would the impact be on the results you are trying to achieve?

Just like the spotlight shined brightly on me in the OR, shine these five lessons on your organization. Recommend yourself to the role of helping your team become more effective, more efficient and ultimately achieve greater results.

I wish you the best in your leadership journey!

*The writer - a retired U.S. Army brigadier general - is a Certified Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered coach, leadership consultant and author. His email address is jfoley@loralmountain.com; his website is loralmountain.com.*

### BIBLE VERSE

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. - Matthew 5:44

### QUOTE OF THE DAY

Don't expect to build up the weak by pulling down the strong. - Calvin Coolidge