



Bethlehem resident Rick Gilbert keeps Alexander residents informed from his perch on Main Street in Taylorsville.

Clear the Way! It's the Guy with an Attitude and a Mic...

BY BAILEY SHERRILL

He's the man behind the microphone, behind the screen, behind Cougar Football. His voice reverbs from stadium speakers and through car radios, making it the unofficial-yet-official voice of Alexander County. His name, as infamous as they come. He is the one-and-only, the steroid-free Rick Gilbert.

Sitting down in his office feels as natural as sitting down in a family living room. But then again, the little upstairs office brimming of papers and black electrical cords is, essentially, his residence during prime sleeping hours for most. Over the buzz of scanner static, Rick tells of his 3 a.m. alarm, his arrival to the Station by 3:30, and the mania that follows until his 5 a.m. air time. He describes it all with a puff, nonchalantly waving his hand, like it's nothing.

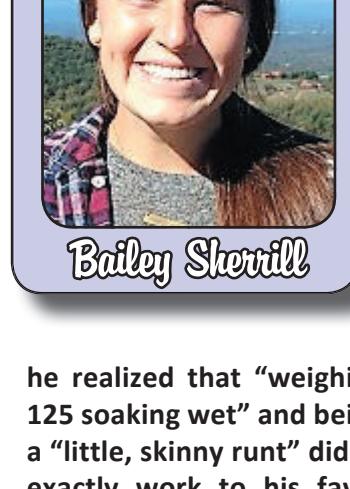
The blue-eyed and bearded broadcaster describes himself as a mix of various titles: "I'm the newsman, the sports guy, the morning man, the local curmudgeon (said with a grin), and webmaster." He does it all. A quick checklist confirms it: he opens up shop, reports the news for the day and the buzz that occurred overnight, harps on unjust court verdicts and rails on inaccurate sports calls, and, on top of all that operates

the Station's daily blog and online newsfeed. The amount of ground that he covers in one morning is like a wide receiver covering a Hail Mary pass.

His seasoned tenure at Apple City Broadcasting began in 1994 as a "part-time gig" covering football games and quickly "morphed into a second full-time job." Prior to, Rick enjoyed a successful career in a supervisory position at CommScope. It was a job chosen from logic and common sense, suited him well, and had given him a comfortable life. However, it was lacking the passion, the red-hot emotion only sports could bring, and the chance to speak his mind.

So, his return to broadcasting – after a decade of dead air – was a homecoming of sorts. See, Rick's love for broadcasting, and sports broadcasting specifically, had begun as a young boy of 7 or 8. Reminiscing on the trips taken with his dad to watch the Atlanta Braves play at Turner Field growing up, Rick recalls knowing "this was what I wanted to do – exactly what I'm doing now."

After reaching high school, Rick's inclination toward the press box grew even stronger. Punching jokes at his younger self with easy-going, self-deprecating humor, Rick says



Bailey Sherrill

he realized that "weighing 125 soaking wet" and being a "little, skinny runt" didn't exactly work to his favor when it came to playing sports. But commentating during them was a different story.

Over the course of his entire life, Rick Gilbert had always been an avid listener to sports talk radio. He loved the speed of it, the intensity that came with the play-by-plays, and the big role played by the central broadcaster. It was a sport itself. So, when he graduated from ACHS and moved onto Wilkes Community College, Rick scoped out the curriculum prospects and found his niche in a certain Radio, TV, & Journalism course. There, he – and that rich, velvety voice of his – thrived.

Over his 24-year span as the voice of WACB, Rick Gilbert has learned the tricks to his trade: he's befriended members of

the community, built a network of reliable informants with first responders, law enforcement, and county officials, and developed a morning routine for covering both big-ticket issues and birthdays. And this thick-skinned broadcaster certainly doesn't mind to "stir up the pot." In fact, he considers it his duty.

Giving a deserved pat on the back to The Taylorsville Times' weekly coverage, Rick notes that his job "covers the day-to-day happenings around the county.... and boy, is there a whole lot of it." Reporting every hot-button issue with zeal to his healthy pack of listeners, Rick communicates that he's "simply scratching the surface of all that's going on."

However, that doesn't mean that he doesn't catch heat for the material he does cover. Citing one instance where he was berated by a woman for posting her husband's mugshot on the Apple City website, Rick laughs as he explains how frequently he gets it – the flack, the complaints, the hate mail. But doesn't just stop there; he also receives countless offers and lucrative bribes to keep things, topics, and people under wraps. As you can imagine, those ploys are not only unattractive but pose even larger red flags for him to investigate. Rick's role in it all – the news, the media, and sports commentary of Alexander County – is simple: he's just the messenger. He takes the air to report our local news with honesty and clarity, holding nothing back – even when you'd

like him to. Trust me, Rick understands that this is a delicate industry. As he poignantly states, "it's all about emotions...and how many good emotion-fueled decisions have you made?" The answer, for many of us, is countable on a single hand.

Fortunately enough for his own sanity, this radio man can walk through fire – whether it comes off the football field, down a grocery store aisle, or at the gas station pump. While the line for compliments always remains short, he takes those he does receive and pins them in his cap. Even when people yell insults (neither included nor appropriate for this writeup) at him over comments he's made on air,

Rick points out that "at least you know they're listening....and a reaction's a reaction." Needless to say, his skin is made of fire-suit grade fire retardant material and he carries an extinguisher around with him, just in case.

While Bethlehem calls dibs on him, Rick Gilbert is a fixture of Alexander County. He grew up on Milstead Road, pedaling his bike "just like Beaver Cleaver" to school, transitioned into an ACHS Cougar, and eventually found his way back into our county's hub located at the corner of Main & Main. While all could pick his voice out over loudspeakers, few know the man behind the mic. Hopefully, this was a shoe-in. A chance to see him at work and hear his story, which isn't all sports talk.



Gilbert's main control board at the downtown Taylorsville station.



The B-86 Studio where Rick Gilbert delivers the area news, weather, and sports across the air waves.