

## **Macon's Downtown Tower just can't be overlooked**

*By Rick Maier*

Have you ever focused on one prominent feature on a person's face until it becomes enormous and dominates his or her appearance? Try staring at Bill Clinton's nose and soon it will be the only thing you'll see on his face (it keeps getting longer too).

I'm about to point out such a feature in Macon, and once I do, it will consume you as it has me for years. If you don't want to have your view of Macon ruined, look away. Go do something else.

What is the most prominent feature in the Macon skyline? The beautiful church steeples? No. The flag on the bank? No. Give up? It's that microwave radio tower on Cherry Street. You've seen it - that monstrous steel skeleton with those odd-shaped dishes hanging off it - the Elephant Man of man-made, unmanned monuments.

It's the worst scar on the Macon landscape since a railroad laid tracks through the middle of one of the Indian mounds.

Sorry to have done this to you. All this time you've been able to block it out, and now I have to go and drag it back into your consciousness. The hope is that we can do something about it before our visitors return for next year's CBF.

### **Wouldn't tear it down**

BellSouth leases the land to AT&T, which owns the tower and uses it to transmit long distance calls. Both companies were responsive and professional when I called, but neither would agree over the phone to tear down the tower.

Please don't go mistaking me for some whiney activist. This is the first opinion I've written to the paper. I own stock in telecommunications companies. I've gotten used to power lines and cell antennae along our roads. I don't hug trees and I'm all for widening roads and building the Fall Line Freeway.

I don't mind the transmitters hanging off all the MWA water towers, even though I miss those school slogans kids used to paint on the tanks. I do suspect that all those transmission waves are making our water radioactive.

I just think that Macon is getting far too handsome and cosmopolitan to have some gangly overgrown tomato trellis planted on one of its seven stately hills.

### **Never seen in pictures**

Now you, too, will notice how the magazines and brochures manage to hide the tower from their pictures. Artists ignore it. Photographers conceal it behind something more

attractive, or find a clean angle, or magically “brush” it out. I look for the tower in every picture I see of Macon, like some little kid searching for Waldo.

That rigid rack of red rails might be critical for telephone traffic, or maybe it’s part of our national defense system. I don’t know. But can’t we put it somewhere else? Can we stick some needles on it and declare it a shrine to the loblolly pine, or train kudzu to grow up it?

Why don’t I notice these eyesores sitting in the middle of other cities? I know they exist, they’re just not so prominent.

Maybe this essay will spark a giant demonstration and a mob of thousands will scale the barbed wire fence, climb the tower and tear it down like goalposts after a big game.

Maybe someone will enclose the thing and put a revolving restaurant on top.

How long has that unsightly steel shaft been around? Looks like since the 1960’s. There must be better technologies like fiber out there today, so maybe a little public pressure would help accelerate the move to a less intrusive transmitting system.

### **Could use tax money**

It’s probably going to boil down to money. That titanic frame is just too convenient for hanging stuff off of, and it will cost big bucks to move to an alternative. Fine, let’s deal with it publicly. Use the extra penny sales tax to fund a solution. After all, it’s only a penny.

I’m tired of driving up I-16, dying to get home from the beach or Savannah, and the first view I see of Macon is dominated by that ill-placed erection.

And I don’t like to be proudly showing off Macon to visitors and have them ask if that antenna on steroids is some Yankee engineer’s idea of a practical joke.

Excuse me, I’ve got to go see if my phone still works outside the local calling area. And please, one favor - try not to stare at *my* nose next time you see me.