

TEN REASONS THAT IT IS GREAT TO BE A GEORGIAN

It never fails. Let me twit some foreign land like the Middle East or Vermont with my keen and well-developed sense of humor, and the natives react with righteous indignation. A reader in Illinois took exception to a recent column about Wrigley's chewing gum factory moving some folks to a "Southern backwater town" (his term, not mine) like Gainesville. Actually, they are moving to Flowery Branch, which is near Gainesville, but I don't think he really cared. He also chided me on my lack of knowledge of his state, refuting my observation that all they grow in Illinois is wheat. He says they don't grow wheat. They grow corn. I am a better person for knowing that.

I understand his frustration. He can't help being irritable, living in Illinois where the wind blows all the time. Not everybody has had the good fortune to be born in Georgia, or the good sense to move here if they weren't. There's no need to lord it over others, but we must remember that we are a blessed people. Here are 10 reasons that it is great to be a Georgian.

REASON ONE: Georgia is the largest state east of the Mississippi. We could put all of New England in any one of our counties and nobody would ever know the transplants were there until they opened their mouths. However, there aren't many counties I know of that would take New England, particularly if Howard "Yaaah" Dean was part of the package.

REASON TWO: In Athens, the Classic City of the South, resides the oldest state-chartered university in the nation: the University of Georgia, founded in 1789. Admittedly, the University of North Carolina was up and running before UGA, but that was because we were too busy squabbling with each other to notice.

REASON THREE: The following people don't live in Georgia and thus can't embarrass those of us who do: Jesse Jackson. Susan Sarandon. Howard "Yaaah" Dean (see Reason One). Benny Hinn. Michael Jackson. In fairness, Ambassador to Outer Space Cynthia McKinney lives here, but I never said we were perfect.

REASON FOUR: The Valdosta Wildcats have won more football games than any high school in history: 821. Probably no one in New Mexico cares, but I think that is pretty impressive.

REASON FIVE: Our governor neutered a dog during the last session of the General Assembly. Let's see Arnold Schwarzenegger top that one.

REASON SIX: Georgia's National Guard 48th Brigade Combat Team, Georgia Army National Guard. This brave group of citizen-soldiers is currently serving with distinction in Iraq. Even goat-headed terrorists who get their jollies killing innocent children should understand that they had best not mess with anybody from Georgia. We are basically good folks, but get us riled and we'll administer a serious fanny-kicking on you.

REASON SEVEN: I've mentioned this before, but it can't be said too often. We have beautiful mountains in North Georgia and pristine beaches on the coast, and you don't have to worry about hurricanes blowing you away. It is the best of both worlds. When you get hot, you go to the mountains. When you get cold, you go to the beach. Just be careful if you stop off in Atlanta on your way. Panhandlers will be on you like white on rice.

REASON EIGHT: The city of Savannah. Style, grace, history and more good restaurants than you can count. Savannah was once the capital of Georgia, but with all the politicians in town it was ruining the city's quality of life, so they decided to give it up. Good choice.

REASON NINE: Georgia is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation. Most of the growth is coming from the North. You can recognize the newcomers. They complain about what a backward state this is, inhabited by a bunch of ignorant rednecks. Be nice and neighborly to these people but remind them that Georgia's roads aren't one-way. They can always move back north and watch it snow 10 months a year.

REASON TEN: The Sweet Vidalia onion. If I have to explain this one, you must be from Illinois, where all they grow is corn.