

# Opinions

## Smoke Alarm Program is Working

Union County Emergency Management/Fire Department has a responsibility to prevent, prepare, respond, and recover from various emergencies that occur in Union County. It also has the responsibility to prepare the community through the programs and by providing preparedness information. One of the ultimate goals of the department is to have a resilient community who is prepared for emergencies. A more resilient community saves lives and property. The Union County Fire Department's Smoke Alarms Program plays a significant role in preparing our community and to save lives.

The Smoke Alarm Program offers free smoke alarms to residents of Union County who are in need. This program was the first program of the new Strategic Plan and was started in the fall 2015. The ultimate goal of the program is to have smoke alarms in every home of Union County.

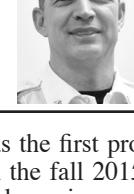
Residents of Union County can call the fire department or complete an online request form to request smoke alarms in their home. The fire department will schedule a time to visit the home and install the free smoke alarms. Firefighters will also discuss escape plans and answer any questions that the residents may have about fire safety. The resident's only obligation will be to answer a few simple survey questions.

It has been proven that working smoke alarms can warn occupants of a fire sooner. The materials in homes today burn much faster and produce more toxic smoke which can overcome occupants in seconds. Early warning gives occupants more time to escape the building thus saving lives. We have had several incidents this year where occupants were warned early and were able to escape before the fire and smoke could overcome them.

The Smoke Alarm Program has been very successful. The department has installed over 500 smoke alarms in three years. In 2017 alone, we have visited 134 homes and installed 298 smoke alarms. If you would like more information on free smoke alarms installed in your home, please contact Station 1 at 706-439-6091 during business hours or visit [tinyurl.com/ucsmoke](http://tinyurl.com/ucsmoke).

**Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~**

**Fire Dept.  
from Union  
County**  
**Fire Chief**  
**David  
Dyer**



## Everybody has one...

### Life

It is a great and sweet joy when young parents announce to their families that a baby is on the way, especially the first grandchild! They all share the concern for safe delivery and a healthy child, and begin to muse on what might become of the child over the course of his or her lifetime.

God knows. That's not fatalistic swearing there, just a reference to Biblical history. Take Abraham and Sarah. Sarah was barren until it was too late, humanly speaking. They both laughed when God's messenger told them what was about to happen. So when the boy was born, they named him "He Laughs" (Isaac). But it wasn't a joke. God had a plan for the child before he was born: "My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year" (Gen. 17:21). Isaac was the one through whom God would pass His everlasting covenant to the generations.

God knew about Samson. His mother (traditionally Hazeleponi), received a visitor who promised she would conceive. She hurried to tell her husband, Manoah, what the "very awesome" fellow said. He then asked the Lord to let him talk to the angel, too. At that meeting, he asked "What shall be the boy's mode of life and his vocation?" Fair question, but his wife had already received the answer. "He shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." (Jud. 13:5). Samson grew up to be a rascal, but God used him mightily as a judge of Israel for 20 years.

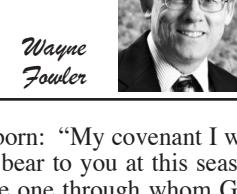
God had something in mind for the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, too. They were barren, and advanced in years. God's messenger approached Zachariah with news of a son to be born, to be named John. God's purpose for him was "to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Somehow this baby leapt for joy in utero on hearing the voice of Mary, mother of Jesus.

Here's what we learn from this historical record. Little people are a blessing from God. Even in the womb, he or she is a distinct, living, and whole human being. God knows them, they have a soul that can know God, and He has a plan for their

*See Fowler, page 5A*

### All Things New

**Wayne  
Fowler**



### Commissioner's Questions

**Q. Last week you gave us the SPLOST sales tax collections for Union County. How does this compare to other counties in our area?**

A. Using the 2017 numbers from the State of Georgia, Lumpkin County with a population estimate of 31,445 had a total SPLOST Sales Tax Collection of \$3,343,027, Rabun County with a population of 16,559 had collections of \$3,279,963, White County with a population of 28,884 had collections of \$4,170,896, Fannin County with a population of 24,900 had collections of \$5,118,918, Gilmer County with a population of 29,733 had collections of \$4,089,832, and Towns County having the smallest population of 11,391 had collections of \$971,046. All the counties above compare to Union County's population of 22,928 and out collections totaling \$4,138,425 for 2017.

**Q. Since you mentioned that the current SPLOST 4 would expire in April of 2021, when will the County start planning for SPLOST 5?**

A. We have already begun the planning phase for SPLOST 5. It is a difficult process that requires a lot of work by staff to begin looking out almost 4 years. Needs can change and the reason to begin now with the planning is to try to anticipate as many future issues and needs as possible from all our county departments and elected officials.

**Q. If SPLOST 5 is passed, will it cause our Sales Taxes to increase?**

A. No! If SPLOST 5 is passed it is just a continuation of the existing sales tax that has been in effect for many years.

**Q. Is there any data on who actually pays the SPLOST sales tax? In other words, how much of it is paid by people that either visit here or live here part time?**

A. It is almost impossible to calculate this number accurately. But, several have suggested that probably 40% is paid by people who do not live here full time.

**Q. Why is it important to know how much of the**

*See Paris, page 5A*

## Anti-Drug Coalition

### Drug Testing Myths

Medical and recreational marijuana use is coming to more and more states, the abuse of methamphetamines and prescription opioids continues to rise, and alcohol is always a possible problem for workplaces. Employers who drug test have been able to reduce the impact well enough that those companies who have never tested for drugs can see the data and are seriously considering a change. Employees who abuse drugs are in a ceaseless hunt for ways to game the system and cheat the tests.

It's easy for both camps to fall for drug-testing myths. Let's shine the bright light of truth on a few of the most popular.

"My company doesn't need to test for drugs — it's a waste of time and money."

You couldn't be more wrong, and that's not just opinion; it's statistically supported fact. Seventy-five percent of all substance abusers are employed, most them full time, so chances are at least a few of them work for you. Check out some of the ways even a handful of such employees can cost you: One in six workplace fatalities involves drugs. Substance abusers cut productivity by up to 30 percent. Employees who abuse drugs are 5 times more likely seek workman's compensation. Substance abusers cost U.S. companies \$80 billion/year.

"If I test for drugs, my employees will think I don't trust them and it will lower workplace morale."

Studies have shown that the opposite is true. When employees understand the dangers of substance abuse in the workplace and the fact that testing is a sign of your concern for their health and safety, trust doesn't become an issue. A program introduced in clear, compassionate terms, including an expressed desire to assist employees with drug problems, will have a positive impact on morale. If it hurts morale at all,

*See Coalition, page 5A*

## Letters to the Editor

### Sold Out

**Dear Editor,**

We hear this phrase a lot when folks have a yard sale and they sold out everything they had on display or perhaps you were going to buy season tickets to a concert, but they were all sold out. How many times have we called the airport for a ticket to a faraway place, but they were all sold out, or even at the food market place where you always brought your favorite vegetables, only to hear they were all sold out. We have all experienced these disappointing moments in our lives even on line when we see something that we just can't live without, again all sold out.

I want to tell you a true story of how I became sold out to Jesus Christ. I was nearing my 52nd year on this earth and I thought my life had been one great adventure after another and that I had lived life to the fullest, yet some-

*See Combs, page 5A*

### Calling All Pastors And Congregants

**Dear Editor,**

I just attended the monthly nationwide Awake America prayer gathering in Blairsville, and as always was touched by the fervent prayer for our Country. Over the past few years, the number of surrounding Counties participating has grown to ten—a most encouraging number.

In looking through the phonebook, however, I note there are 34 churches listed; but not a full representation of churches. So, whether you are a Pastor or a congregant, this is an appeal and an invitation to attend one Thursday a month.

God never intended for there to be "Denominations" or "Divisions" among His people, and this non-denominational gathering of the faithful

*See Gray, page 5A*

## North Georgia News

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**Kenneth West** Owner/Publisher      **Charles Duncan** Editor

Website: [www.nganews.com](http://www.nganews.com)

E-mail: [northgeorgianews@hotmail.com](mailto:northgeorgianews@hotmail.com)

Mailing: P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514

### Letters to the Editor

#### A Molecular Message

**Dear Editor,**

Every solar system in every galaxy is an imprint of a particular cell pattern that will determine what type of life (if any) is within that particular system. Every solar system has electrons and protons (or planets and moons) that orbit a nucleus (or a sun). These follow each their own particular laws of gravity, nature and physics determined by the chemical make-up of each, individually, thus giving some clue as to what type of life may exist there. All of these combine to make up Creation (God). Creation is the sum of all things, everywhere. All galaxy's (or lifeforms), with all of their solar systems (or cells), make what is Creation, which is us and everything we can see and what is microscopic that we cannot see and even things we cannot comprehend. As there are untold billions of galaxies, each with their own untold billions of solar systems; there are untold billions of lifeforms across this cosmos. As a telescope shows the universe is 90% empty space, so shows anything when looked at through a microscope. We, as a whole, are Creation.

The secret of life is not a question to ponder, it is the answer of understanding how we are all connected to this greater whole.

**Thus speaks 'The Preacher'**

### This Bitter Cold

**Dear Editor,**

What Does It Say about Climate Change?

We all have been shivering from the recent bitter cold, as has much of the eastern US. Does this mean there is no global warming? On the contrary, climate experts have been saying for several years that this will happen more often in a warming world. The science is clear on this. The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the earth, and this allows the polar vortex of arctic air to flow further south, causing areas under the vortex-most recently the US- to be much colder, while other areas of the world are much warmer.

We should not confuse weather with climate. Weather refers to short term changes over a certain area, while climate change refers to long term changes over the entire globe. Weather is variable, but climate change continues to show a definite warming trend. The last 4 years have been the warmest in recorded history, and we are now almost 2 degrees Fahrenheit above preindustrial temperatures.

However, we should start this new year on a hopeful note. Prices of wind and solar energy continue to drop, and the conversion to a clean energy economy is increasing. America's grid

*See Dixon, page 5A*

**Derek Richards**

Advertising Director

**Shawn Jarrard**

Staff Writer

**Lowell Nicholson**

Photographer

**Todd Forrest**

Staff Writer

**Lily Avery**

Staff Writer

### Bingo

As you may know one of my favorite friends is Patrick. Together, we have worked on many agricultural projects for close to 25 years. Ten years ago we began working together in the Union County Canning Plant. And yes, we have hunted, fished and camped together a few times. In all the time we have spent together I must say there has never been a dull moment.

If you come by the Canning Plant on any given day after we have slowed down for the day you can find us laughing at one of Patrick's stories, one of which left us in tears after we had processed our last jars of the year at the Canning Plant.

One day a few years ago while working in his garden Patrick watched helplessly as a dog walked in front of a passing vehicle on Skeenah Gap Road. Patrick rushed to find the dog badly injured and yet alive. He gathered the dog in his arms and placed him in the back of his truck. The dog was transported to the local vet's office where he was treated and released to the caring hands of my friend. Patrick didn't even own Bingo; however, he now had a good investment in the dog. Slowly, Bingo recovered and became his old self which was to cause some major problems for Patrick.

Patrick and I met that morning as was our custom at 5:50 AM to turn everything on in preparation of opening the Canning Plant. As usual a little after daylight I went outside to check the propane level in the tank. After checking the propane level I walked back to the entrance of the plant. Before walking in the door I noticed some wires hanging from the back of Patrick's truck. Bingo had crawled under the truck and found that Bingo had chewed up the wiring. The investment in Bingo just went up again.

A short time later Patrick's mother was walking to the mailbox when she was tripped by Bingo causing her to fall to the ground. After a trip to the doctor's office Patrick's mother was found to be okay other than a few bumps and bruises. The investment of Bingo went up again. Bingo has left the playful puppy stage. He is an adolescent now and prone to wander. I suppose he is looking for girlfriends. Over the past couple of months Patrick has made numerous visits to the pound to bail Bingo out of jail. I guess we could call each of these bail out investments.

A few years ago just before Christmas Bingo came up missing yet again. Patrick was told Bingo was over in Fannin County, so, he called the number provided to him. A lady answered the phone and was on her way to the pound with Bingo. She agreed to meet him at a local grocery

*See Cummings, page 5A*

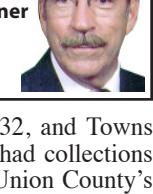
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**Q & A  
from Union  
County  
Commissioner**

**Lamar  
Paris**



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### Treating Winter Injury

We may be able to cuddle up beside the fire with a warm blanket when it's below freezing, but our plants can't. I've spoken a little bit about preventing frost damage to your plants, but winter brings more challenges than just cold temperatures.

Desiccation, or drying out, usually occurs when the ground freezes below the root system. This prevents the plant from getting water to its roots. The greatest risk for water loss is during mild weather with harsh winds, followed by bouts of intensely cold weather. Though we've had a few brief warm periods this winter, we've also had severe cold snaps and windy days that dry out plants. To combat this, make sure that plants are still adequately watered during the winter. By giving plants, especially evergreens, a deep soaking before the ground freezes, and watering on warm days in January, February and March, plants will have an adequate water supply throughout the season.

Freezing damage often goes beyond just burning new growth or new buds. The dramatic temperature changes we have seen over the past few months can greatly contribute to trunks cracking. This is because the water and fluids within the tree expand in warm weather and shrink in cool weather. If temperature fluctuation occurs too quickly, the trunk will crack under the stress and you may see sap ooze out or fungus may establish in these wounds. Sometimes this is called Southwest Injury, because it is often on the southwest side of trees due to the amount of sun received on this side. To prevent this, wrap susceptible trunks with burlap or some other protective material and make sure that trunks remain unwounded throughout the growing season.

Breakage is almost always caused by excessive