

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Snow and Ice

The snow and ice that we received a couple of weeks ago was the first winter storm of the year. It may be something that people want to remember or it may be something that everyone wants to forget. Regardless which side you fall, from a fire department and emergency management perspective, this storm event went fairly well.

We had initial predictions of 3-7 inches of snow and about 1/4 inch of ice. These predictions triggered a great deal of preparation. County departments, organizations, and partners attended weather briefings, gathered information, and prepared resources to respond to the winter event. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was opened on Friday and staffed to coordinate response and keep everyone informed.

The 911 Dispatch Center increased staff to handle any additional call volume. The Sheriff's Office and the Fire Department prepared vehicles, equipment, and personnel to respond to snow incidents as well as the normal call volume. Volunteer firefighters staffed the main fire stations in order to respond quicker to any emergency. The road department prepared vehicles and personnel to do the most demanding job of clearing the county roads. These are just a few departments who were operating to maintain the safety of the citizens of this county.

That Friday, the day of the predicted weather, everyone was ready and prepared. The snow and ice amounts were less than expected, which was extremely helpful. There were limited power outages and the number of emergency calls were less than expected. There were some slick roads and several accidents, however; the accidents were quickly resolved. The road department worked tirelessly to cover as many roads as possible. It was difficult due to the ice and the constant refreezing.

Our response and preparedness for the storm were only a part of the equation. Citizens staying at home and staying off the roads helped tremendously to reduce the amount of accidents. We would like to say "Thank You" to everyone who didn't travel unless it was necessary and for staying home during these few interesting days.

Other counties may wonder how Union County can deal with such an event as we do. It is a combination of many things.

See Dyer, page 5A

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



A Faith Journey

Niall Ferguson is a British academic with ties to Oxford and Harvard Universities. In 2004, Time magazine listed him among the most influential people in the world. He is yet another example of someone who thinks deeply about faith and found himself on a journey.

Ferguson's Scottish parents were non-religious. "I grew up in a household of science-minded religious skeptics," he said. "I didn't go to church and felt quite sure of the wisdom of that when I was young. However, in two phases, I lost my faith in atheism." His career as an academic historian was the genesis of these phases.

His academic publications reflect on civilization, morality, and why the world is the way it is. He came to realize that "no society had been successfully organized on the basis of atheism." That was his first phase. He could see how shared Christian values gave rise to a civilization that respects human dignity and rights. Something transcendentally true must ground such values. He decries the loss of those foundational values and the crumbling of civilization.

During that phase, "I would attend church in a spirit of skepticism and detachment," he said. Nevertheless, it was an important part of his journey. Then came the second phase. He realized that "no individual can in fact be fully formed or ethically secure without religious faith." Now, that's not common Christian parlance, but it points to important worldview questions. What does it mean to be fully human? How do we live in a moral universe?

Ferguson's journey led to the gospel of Jesus Christ. "I have embraced Christianity," he said. He was baptized in 2024. "It was the culmination of a quite protracted process," he said. Now his motivation is different. "I attend church in a spirit of faith. Also, I'm a learner. I learn about Christianity every week. I try to understand it better." A basic understanding is this: to be fully human requires a relationship with God; to live in a moral universe requires forgiveness from God.

Ferguson's two phases explain why he embraced a new faith. His post-conversion journey continues as a learning project.

See Fowler, page 5A

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



From Your Commissioner

We have seen some really cold weather recently. As you might imagine, cold weather – especially snow and ice – impact how the County does business. If there is so much precipitation so as to create unsafe or hazardous conditions, we do close down our offices. This rarely happens, but it does happen occasionally. When it comes to roads, the Union County Road Department only treats county-maintained roads. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) works the state roads.

On average, the Union County Road Department addresses more than 500 miles of road when it comes to ice and snow. Furthermore, when these events last for multiple days, the Road Department often has to scrape and gravel some roads several times. The County and State crews do a heck of a job, and we appreciate that so many of you have recognized this. During a regular snow event, we have 2 large spreader trucks with plows, 5 smaller 1-ton trucks with salt spreader boxes and plows, and 3 F-250 trucks with blades and salt boxes. There are usually two Road Department employees per truck. The GDOT usually has two trucks and sometimes three, so it is possible that we can have 10 or 11 vehicles working all at once in our County.

Here's how it works: We try to scrape/salt all main roads first. We then go to the secondary roads. We do not apply salt on roads that are paved with tar and gravel (surface treatment). The salt will eat the tar out of the road with time and ruin the pavement.

However, we do apply sand and gravel to those roads. After they get everything around town, the smaller trucks go out to each of the precincts, and the 2 big trucks handle the larger roads like Blue Ridge Highway, Loving Road, Pat Colwell Road, Town Creek School Road, etc. It's a big job, but Union County Road Department employees, E911, and all public safety folks work tirelessly around the clock when one of these major weather events happens.

A special thanks goes out to our County Manager, County Road Department, the GDOT, and to the City of Blairsville – all who coordinate and work together to make sure the public has as safe of road conditions as possible.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



Letters to the Editor

Preserving Union County

Dear Editor,

A recent article about Conservation Easements in the North Georgia News sparked my editorial. Many thanks to Frank Riley for his important information.

My husband and I began visiting Union County in 2007; we fell in love with the mountains, the farms, the people and their way of life. It was very similar to the way we grew up in small-town rural Massachusetts. Cape Cod, where we lived, was a summer vacation spot for visitors who came from around the U.S., enjoyed our sun and surf, spent their vacation money and returned home, leaving Cape Cod to its residents after Labor Day.

Then the vacationers moved there in search of the quaint, peaceful, small-town life they enjoyed every summer. People moved there in search of safe streets, good schools and quiet neighborhoods. As the population grew, the pace of life sped up; housing became expensive, and taxes rose to take care of the new residents' needs. The woods and farm fields became housing developments and narrow, ancient roads grew crowded year-round, not just seasonally. Yachts and pleasure boats replaced generational fishing vessels at expensive, overcrowded marinas, and big box stores, chain pharmacies and fast-food joints replaced generational family businesses where proprietors knew their customers.

See Malone, page 5A

Steep Hill, Steep Bill

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much, Union County Sheriff's Office.

To everyone who lives on a steep road, beware of the repercussions that you could face.

My husband was at work the Friday morning before the recent snow arrived. He has to leave at 5:30 in the morning because he works in Murphy, and just FYI, not everyone has a 9-5. They were able to get off early and he was sent home at 1:30. Unfortunately, when he made it to our road (Deer Run), which is located off Dean Gap, it was covered in snow.

Anyone that lives on or around Deer Run knows that there is a steep incline on the road. Needless to say, he was unable to travel up the hill. He parked at the bottom of the road, making sure to park as close to the side of the road as possible. He made sure that if anyone wanted to travel the road and needed to leave their home they would be able to do so.

Monday morning he walked down our slick hill to find his truck missing. After calling

See Henson, page 5A

Paved Bike Trail/Rec Path

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my interest in the Union County Grand Jury Presentments for the January Term 2025 listed in the Jan. 15 edition of the North Georgia News. Specifically, "We the Grand Jury recommend the county measure the public interest and seek location for a paved bike trail/recreation path."

As a recreational bicyclist I was very pleased to read this recommendation. There is a measurable need for the citizens of Union County to have a safe place to ride their bikes. Bicycling is an inexpensive activity and promotes good mental health and physical fitness for all ages. Multiple local areas are dedicated to mountain biking. However, the closest paved biking/multi-use family friendly path is located just over an hour away in Franklin, North Carolina. My husband and I travel frequently to The Little Tennessee River Greenway in Franklin to enjoy this popular trail. On days we aren't up for the 2.5-hour roundtrip drive we will bike around the North Georgia Technical College campus as well as pedal the roads in Meeks Park. Although this gives us a temporary place to ride, it doesn't

See Veney, page 5A



Where Does the Time Go?

"We spend the first half of our lives trying to grow up, and the other half trying to figure out how we got so old." (Actuacola) One of the most frequent rhetorical questions we ask is, "Where does the time go?" This question occurs more frequently as a person enters midlife – whatever age that is nowadays. It seemed like just a few years ago that we were in high school. How can we already be in our thirties? Our minds become bogged at how fast our lives are moving.

Several events may have happened since our high school days that have made time seem to escape us. One of the things is that we have suffered so many back-to-back losses in life that such situations may have robbed our spirit of fun. We no longer feel the excitement that we once did. There are days when we think we aren't going to make it through to suppertime.

Another reason our playful spirits seemingly disappear, which perhaps accounts for the speed of life, is that we are forced to grow up too fast, resulting in our skipping the fun growth years following high school and into our twenties. We were not afforded the precious moments to slow life activities down a notch and to enjoy

See Ashurst, page 5A

Successful Mental Health

Dr. James Ray Ashurst PH.D.



Fred McGhee

Fred McGhee was a coon hunting machine. He hunted 6 or 7 nights a week 52 weeks of every year. Fred was extraordinarily poor, and a large portion of his income came from the hides he captured through coon hunting. Fred had a large family which required a lot of food, and his regular job of logging just would not pay for all the food required by his family. At least that was his excuse for all the time spent in the woods away from his wife and children.

Fred was also described by many in our little community as a "big blow." Fred was adept at making you think that he was better than anyone else at almost anything. He had better dogs, better hunting territory and was more knowledgeable about the woods than anyone else. Even with all that was known about his bragging, Fred was well liked and people enjoyed his company on a hunting trip. My Dad said that he enjoyed hunting with Fred because he was entertaining and fun to listen to.

One night in August Dad set up a hunting trip with Uncle Mack, Uncle Rufus and Fred. They decided to hunt over in the "Section." This area is now a part of the Bankhead National Forest close to Double Springs, Alabama. The area is drained by the Sipsey River which eventually feeds into the Black Warrior River. The topography of the "Section" is comprised by rolling hills with the occasional deep hollow. At one time there were many farms located in the area. But, during the Depression many of these marginal land farms had been abandoned. The federal government came in during the 1930s and bought up all these old farms and created the national forest.

On this particular hot and sultry night in August, these three men and my Dad, who was a teenager, walked far back into the area to the treeing dogs. A treeing dog has spent some time trailing a raccoon to a tree. When the coon climbs the tree the dog comes to the tree and belches out a different type of bark than when the coon is still on the ground. Anyway, when the four people came to their dogs they knew there was a problem. The raccoon had climbed a massive Tulip Poplar. The coon was hiding in the top of the tree amongst all the leaves, and to make matters worse, the trunk of the poplar was covered with gigantic Poison Ivy vines. The men could not find the coon, and normally, Dad would climb the tree to find the animal. However, Dad didn't want to develop a bad rash from the Poison Ivy. So, three of the men began gathering their dogs to leave the scene.

See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Laken Riley's Legacy

The House kicked off the 119th Congress in a big way: Eternalizing Laken Riley's legacy.

As you well know, 22-year-old Laken Riley was brutally murdered last year in Athens by an illegal alien from Venezuela. Her tragic death shook our communities, our State, and our nation.

Laken's murder was 100% avoidable – because her killer should have never been in our country in the first place. Now, lawmakers are working to avert additional avoidable heartbreak.

You see, Laken Riley's murderer had a pattern of criminal history – one that started when he accepted Joe Biden's invitation to illegally cross the southern border. He was then released into our country through the Biden Administration's weaponized parole program. The following year, he was arrested in New York City for acting in a manner to injure a minor and for committing a major vehicle license violation. Just weeks after his encounter with the NYPD, this illegal alien

United States Congressman Representative

Andrew Clyde



See Clyde, page 5A

Chamber 2025

Welcome to 2025. The year has started with a bang from cold weather to snow and ice. Let's keep our first responders, road crews and those that have to be outdoors in your prayers as they have to risk their personal safety to keep us safe.

As a Chamber member you will be receiving several surveys regarding long range planning in Union County and in Downtown Blairsville. Your opinion is important to us so please respond so we can share your views.

The Chamber will continue to support our local businesses and the economy by promoting tourism. The County's unemployment rate is below 3%, there are very few retail or commercial spaces available to rent, and many property owners are updating and/or renovating their units. Thanks to tourism, approximately 25% of the County budget is paid by those visitors. Thanks to all those that work together to make that possible.

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Bird Flu

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), commonly called bird flu, is making rounds again. Let's talk about what it is and steps that you can take to be prepared.

Broadly speaking there are two types of bird flu. Low pathogenic and highly pathogenic. Pathogenic refers to the ability of the virus to spread disease. Low pathogenic strains of bird flu are fairly common and are not a large concern for backyard flocks or the poultry industry. Highly pathogenic strains are a concern and present a threat to backyard flocks and the poultry industry. Therefore, biosecurity should be of utmost importance to any farm involving poultry. Biosecurity is implementing practices to prevent the spread of harmful diseases. Some examples would be restricting who has access to the animals, quarantining new animals, and disinfecting equipment after use.

The current outbreak of HPAI is really a continuation of the outbreak that started in February of 2022. Do you remember the really high egg prices from a couple of years ago? That was partly due to post COVID supply chain issues and inflation, but HPAI wiping out over 40 million egg laying hens in the U.S. played a big role in that too. Eggs also have seasonal ebbs and flows in demand, with November/December holidays and Easter as the high times for demand. Recently, the Georgia Department of Agriculture confirmed HPAI in a backyard flock on January 9th, 2025. This backyard flock was in Clayton County Georgia, which is just south of Atlanta. This backyard flock had 13 chickens and ducks. Most likely this flock had contact with migratory wild birds that introduced the disease as there was a pond nearby. The owner of the flock noticed that the birds were dying very quickly and contacted the Georgia Poultry Lab Network, who confirmed HPAI. After the confirmation Georgia Department of Agriculture euthanized the remaining flock, cleaned, and disinfected the premises to mitigate the spread of the disease.

One thing unique about the HPAI strain that we are fighting right now, is that it has been able to cross over into mammals. In March of last year there was a confirmed case at a cattle dairy. That has instigated additional testing protocols for cow milk. HPAI has not been found in any mammals in Georgia. There have been 67 confirmed cases in humans with 1 human death associated with bird flu since 2024 nationwide, none in Georgia. The vast majority of cases in people has been individuals who work with poultry or dairy cattle.

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Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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Cummings...continued from Page 4A

As Dad was leashing his dog he noticed Fred sitting down and taking off his shoes. Dad looked at Fred as if he were crazy and asked, "You're not climbing that tree are you?" Fred stood up and took off his shirt. He looked at Dad and said, "I am not allergic to this stuff." Then he grabbed a handful of the Ivy leaves and rubbed them all over his chest. He even stuck a few leaves up his nose just for good measure.

Old Fred wrapped his toes and hands around the enormous Poison Ivy vine and shot up that tree like it was a foot stool. He located the coon and poked him out of the tree with a long stick, and after hit-

ting the ground, the old coon was dispatched by the dogs. The long legged old coot then wrapped his arms and legs around the big old Poplar and shinned down the tree like it was a fire house pole. Upon hitting the ground he skinned the coon and wrapped the carcass in newspaper. Nothing on the animal went to waste. Each animal captured that evening went home to Fred's family and was baked with sweet potatoes. And they needed each animal because by Wednesday the next week Fred was in the hospital with the worst case of Poison Ivy rash old Doc Underwood had ever seen. The old man even had the rash up his nose.

Malone... continued from Page 4A

tomers' names.

The heart and soul of Cape Cod has changed, and I fear the same thing is happening here. Growth is vital to the health of a community, but unchecked, thoughtless development will destroy this jewel of a region; once gone, there is no return. Cape Cod didn't need all of those fast-food chains with their ugly cookie-cutter buildings and jobs that offer no future to employees. Cape Cod didn't need another big box store, bank or big chain pharmacy either.

What Union County needs is family-style restaurants that encourage people to

slow down and gather, talk and eat together. We need to attract more industry with career opportunities and pay that will offer a future for young people. Our tax structure and zoning must encourage families to continue farming and encourage people to move here to start their own farm life.

Once forests and fields are covered by houses, there is no turning back. Union County and Blairsville leadership, PLEASE learn from the mistakes other places have made and keep Union County the gem that it is!

Respectfully submitted,
Cheryl Malone

Henson... continued from Page 4A

This job to explain why he would not be able to get to work, he was able to learn his truck had been towed. Why, you ask? The truck was in the way of traffic. What traffic?

Another thing that bothers me is NOBODY tried to inform us this would happen. If our road was able to be driven and we were in the way of traffic, why did the Sheriff's Office not drive to our house to inform us we needed to move the truck? Our house is the second house up the hill. If our road was easily traveled, they could have easily come and knocked on our door.

As for the tow bill... \$465 or \$400 if paid in cash on Monday. Not even 24 hours after they towed the truck, we are being told we have to pay almost his entire pay for a week.

So if it snows, I guess we are supposed to stay home and just let someone else pay our way. You can't park your vehicle at the end of your steep road. If your truck will not drive it, I guess go find someone that owns some horses or donkeys to pull you up the hill.

Or better yet just sit at home and let the government pay your way!
Brandy Henson

Veney... continued from Page 4A

offer the more safe, car-free environment of a dedicated paved trail.

The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy regularly shares funding opportunities for future trail projects in their newsletters. Funding is available each year through our members of Congress, and the Conservancy offers guidance to communities with the application process. It's my understanding that a parcel of land was donated by a citizen in Union County specifically for a paved bike path. It would seem the opportunities are available. To have a family-friendly, handicap-ac-

cessible biking/multi-use path in our community would be a much-welcome asset. May the Union County Grand Jury recommendation come to fruition and our citizens begin to enjoy the many health benefits of bicycling. Those lucky enough to bike as a child can remember the joy and freedom that came with it.

Let's encourage bicycling by making it more accessible, safer and engaging for the children and families of Union County, including many senior citizens like me. Appreciatively,
Amber Jensen-Veney

Clyde... continued from Page 4A

went on to shoplift in Athens, Georgia.

Clearly, the Left's open border policies failed Laken at every turn.

This illegal should have never been allowed to reside in our country illegally, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) should have immediately issued a detainer after he committed these crimes. Ultimately, if ICE had been made aware and properly issued such a detainer, then Laken would still be with us today.

Thankfully, the Laken Riley Act provides a common-sense solution to prevent more of these heartbreaking tragedies from devastating families and communities across the country. In short, this bill requires ICE to issue detainers and take custody of illegal aliens who commit crimes like theft, burglary, and

larceny.

On January 7th – three days before what should have been Laken Riley's 23rd birthday, the House passed this critical legislation bearing her name.

Notably, the Laken Riley Act passed with bipartisan support. However, nearly 160 House Democrats still voted against this lifesaving legislation. Unfortunately, the radical Left continues to put illegals first and Americans last. Despite this shameful opposition, the Senate is poised to pass the Laken Riley Act later this week.

Following its passage in the Senate, the Laken Riley Act will be sent to President Trump's desk – likely becoming the first bill he signs into law. Not only will this action adequately honor Laken's legacy, but it will also save American lives in her memory.

While nothing can truly heal the wounds of Laken's tragic death, I'm hopeful that this effort will deliver justice and comfort to her friends and family. After all, the most formidable way that Congress can offer accountability to the loved ones of Laken – and all Americans harmed by the hands of an illegal alien for that matter – is to enact change to prevent additional avoidable tragedies from victimizing more law-abiding Americans.

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A

ect. This is as it should be. You begin your life of faith by believing that Jesus is God the Son whose death and resurrection secure your eternal life. You continue the journey in cooperation with God. "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29).

Faith is a journey, isn't it? It's a journey of revelation and discovery with an eternal destination. Who are you journeying with? Take a cue from Professor Ferguson and go with God.

Ashurst...

continued from Page 4A

each single day. Everywhere we turned, we saw innumerable responsibilities that were placed upon us. Almost overnight, in our eyes, a decade of years zoomed by.

Another possible reason for the mystery of lost time or the inability to activate our spirit of fun is that we might have had to face mortality long before most individuals do. The unexpected death of a parent or a sibling may have wiped the smile of joy and play off one's face. Because of such, when you gaze into the mirror at the young age of twenty-six, you see a very tired individual looking back. The passage through the corridor of the death of someone close to you leaves you totally fried and lost in never-ending thought patterns about life and death.

Williams...

continued from Page 4A

The primary threat of bird flu is to our poultry in dairy industries. Georgia is the top poultry producer in the country, so HPAI is something that must be taken very seriously. The poultry industry in Georgia has an annual economic impact of more than \$28 billion and employs over 88,000 people. The current outbreak has affected over 133 million birds nationwide, but less than 0.025% of those birds have been in Georgia. That means that Georgia producers have been vigilant with biosecurity measures. If you have a backyard flock stay aware and keep all wild birds away from your flocks.

If you believe that your flock has HPAI call the Georgia Department of Agriculture at 770-766-6850. If you have questions about Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

sible.

Also, as a Chamber member, be sure to check your Chamber Master account for your analytics. This will provide data on how many leads are provided through the Chamber website as well as upcoming events or conferences you may want to attend. Did you know that we have on average 300 to 400 visitors per month that come by the Welcome Center? Be sure to keep your brochures stocked and your information current. Help us help you make Business Better in Blairsville!

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

but the two most prevalent are the experience we have and the cooperation of everyone in the county. The Union County Government, public safety and the citizens all work together to prepare and respond to these significant events. We are proud to be included in that team.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

The Rules of MASONIC ETIQUETTE

The MASONIC TRESTLEBOARD
Whitey White



Use Proper Masonic Names:

When speaking to a Mason in Lodge, use the Brother's proper Masonic title and name when addressing him. Why? It is common courtesy to be accurate in speaking a brother's name, so it is proper Masonic etiquette to address officers, members, and visitors by their correct Masonic titles and addresses. The word "BROTHER"

is a title, just like the term "WORSHIPFUL MASTER" or "GRAND MASTER" is a title. Continued failure to address a Brother Mason, while in Lodge assembled, as "Brother", is a sure and obvious sign of disrespect and a breach of Masonic Etiquette.

This practice dates from time immemorial.

Blairsville Cruisers Elections and Members Meeting Thursday



The first members meeting of 2025 will be held at the clubhouse on Thursday, January 23rd at 6 PM. The clubhouse is located in the old Heritage Propane Bldg. on Hwy 129 North in Blairsville.

In addition to electing officers and board members there will be a discussion on 2025 plans and events. ALL members are encouraged to attend and help plan the direction of the club for the next season. Anyone interested in joining the club is invited to attend. The club is open to all automobile enthusiasts and owning a classic car is not a requirement for membership. All vehicles are welcome at our events.

The Blairsville Cruisers is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corp. that has supported our mountain communities by helping children in need and local veterans who need a helping hand. Since 2007 we have sponsored "Shop with a Cruiser", "Shop with a Cop", "Union County Sheriffs' "Give-a-Gift", Towns County Sheriffs' "Shop with the Sheriff" and Clay County Sheriff's "Shop with a Hero" as well as several other programs that assure that no child goes without at Christmastime.

Your donation for raffle tickets along with our other fund raising events and our wonderful sponsors help raise an average of \$50,000 annually. All of these funds go back to the communities where our club members reside to help children and veterans.

Thank you for your support of the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club.