Opinions

Everybody has one...

Motor Vehicle Accidents

Union County Fire responds to many different emergencies. One of the most common is motor vehicle accidents. These accidents range from minor "fender-benders" to major accidents involving multiple vehicles and injuries. Public safety response to these accidents may include law enforcement, emergency medical service, fire department, Georgia State Patrol, and wrecker services.

These motor vehicle accidents can be tragic for the persons involved but they can also be a danger to public safety personnel who are working on the scene. Union County Fire/EMA would like to provide some tips for drivers who encounter an accident on



When you encounter an accident, the first thing is to slow down. Accidents can be visually graphic due to the damage. There may be severely damaged vehicles, debris in the road, and possibly patients in the road. Whether people admit it or not, everyone wants to see the accident, but as a driver, you must slow down and pay attention to your driving and the road.

If there are no emergency vehicles on scene, find a safe place to pull over and assess the accident. Be cautious of other drivers and traffic. Only assess the accident if it is safe to do so. Call 911 and report the accident. The 911 dispatcher will want to know vital information such as location; if the road is blocked; how many vehicles; number of injured; and if there is any fire involved. This determines the response from public safety. If you are approaching a motor vehicle accident and there are

emergency vehicles already on scene, the best thing to do is to slow down, and be aware of what is happening. The multiple emergency vehicles and their flashing lights may be distracting and disorienting. Driving slow and paying attention to the road is essential. Law enforcement may be directing traffic around the accident. Drivers must pay attention to directions, drive slowly, and watch the officer for instructions. Officers may stop traffic for a few moments to allow other vehicles through or for public safety to perform a critical

Vehicles and public safety personnel may be working at the scene in close proximity to your driving lane. They may have on turnout gear or reflective vests. Be aware of these personnel in the

See Dyer, page 5A

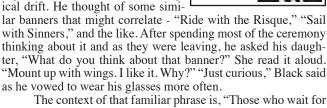
Baxter Black

He was right out of central casting: lanky frame, cowboy hat, and thick mustache. He looked the part as a cowboy poet, writer, humorist, and entertainer.

Baxter Black was a veterinarian before his storytelling wit roped him a new career. For a little fun, look him up on YouTube. I like his bit, "Religious Reflections." He tells it better than I, but here's the plot. He attended a wed-

ding at a little church in the Rocky **All Things** Mountains. He became distracted by a banner on the wall that said, 'Mount Up With Winos."

Black wondered if the message indicated some kind of theological drift. He thought of some simi-



the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary" (Isa. 40:31). The wait is a confident expectation that God is for you. The strength is knowing that you are not alone, and that God has a way of lifting you above the chaos. To connect your life with the Creator's purposes is to tap the source you need to manage yourself and find wisdom amidst adversity. The first step of that connection is to trust Jesus Christ with your Does counting on strength from outside yourself make

religion a crutch? Well, religion may be a crutch, but Almighty God isn't. The difference is relationship. To receive strength from knowing God isn't a crutch. It is truth you can embrace by simple

Black's family wrote in his 2022 obituary, "He lived his life guided by a simple faith in Jesus and his admonishment to love God, practice forgiveness and mercy to all who offend, and to care for the least of these. No one was a stranger to Baxter. Every person he met was a friend." To live a life of love, forgive-

See Fowler, page 5A

Commissioner's Questions

The questions we are addressing this week pertain to the Tax Commissioner's Office. Lee Knight, Union County Tax Commissioner, provided the following information in answer to questions related to his office. We are very proud of the work they do for Union County residents.

Q. What is required for me to register my vehicle in Union County when Î buy a vehicle or if I am moving here from another county or from another state?

County A. First you need a Georgia Commissioner Paris

Driver's License showing Union County as your residence, proof of a Georgia insurance policy, your title or lienholder information, and person who's name the title will be registered in. Union County tax commissioner will register vehicles here if you hold an out of state driver's license and you own a second home in Union County. If you

our office to transfer your registration to Union County. Q. What is the cost to register my vehicle in Union

are moving here from another county in Georgia, you only need to

update the address on your Georgia driver's license and bring it into

A. To title and register a vehicle Georgia has a Title Ad Valorem Tax (TAVT) which is 6.6% of the purchase price from a dealer minus the trade in amount and collected at the time of purchase. If purchased from an individual the TAVT is 6.6% of the NADA clean retail value. The title fee is \$18.00 and \$20.00 for the tag plate. The annual registration is also \$20.00 a year and the renewal is on or before your birthday. When moving here from another state and transferring your vehicles to Georgia the TAVT rate is 3% of the vehicle value per NADA.

Q. How many vehicle transactions and registrations are done annually in your office and how many employees work in the Tax Commissioner's office?

A. Lee Knight is the Union County Tax Commissioner along with five other full-time and very well-qualified employees. Together the office processed over 6428 title applications and provided over 51,170 vehicle registration renewals and transactions for the year 2022. The tax Commissioner's office also processed over 30,000 property tax transactions for 2022.

See Paris, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Proposed STR Ordinance

Dear Editor,

Firstly, we appreciate the county's efforts to maintain Union County's mountain charm and beauty. This pristine mountain feel is why we purchased property in Union County. We wanted our children to have a relaxing and refreshing place to return to as they got older. To enable us to keep the place, we decided to rent it out when we were not staying.

However, the county's proposed shortterm rental (STR) ordinance is not intended to protect the county. It specifically targets STR owners, aiming at severely restricting if not incapacitating STRs. The proposed ordinance has several fundamental flaws. Here are a few ex-The ordinance seeks to empower one

County Agent with unlimited power and discretion to assess violations and punishments; and to arbitrarily inspect STRs. STRs are not medical or food production facilities warranting such inspections. The proposed ordinance should include provisions to protect STR owners from the County Agent's biased actions against STR

- It seeks to create an STR board without any representation from STR owners. - It would give the STR board power to

harass STR owners, calling them under oath for any reason the board "deems necessary."

- It would allow for a 30-day imprisonment of an STR owner if such owner or his agent do not respond to a neighbor's complaint within ONE HOUR; and 60-days imprisonment

See **Potra**, page 5A

Yes, Too Preachy

Dear Editor,

I enjoyed seeing Sharon Hill's opinion in the Jan. 18 edition of the North Georgia News. It was somewhat ironic that immediately below her brief opinion the editor chose to display yet another weekly religious rant by a frequent letter writer, about 10 times as lengthy as her opinion. I share her opinion and know there are many other residents that also agree with her.

For those who do feel the need for preaching, in addition to the many churches in our area, they can also find numerous preachers on TV and online. The endless weekly writings of the same writer are merely his own opinions of religious matters and are of no benefit to normal intelligent people. The newspaper should not be constantly publishing these writings.

Best Wishes, Ed Stanley

Stand Strong

Dear Editor,

As Christians we are commanded of God to stand strong in Him whatever comes our way. This earthly life here is a testing ground for our faith to see if we are worthy of eternal life in heaven after this life is over. We are not to quit or throw our hands up in disguise or throw in the towel just because we feel like enough is enough or we feel disappointed or depressed, even feel down and out. All these "d" words come from Satan, who wants nothing better than to pull you down to his level of stinking thinking and trap you into his web of lies. But the Lord Jesus didn't die on the cross so you could wallow in self-pity and cry the blues because things are not working out the way you thought they would. News flash -- this is not about you, my friend, but all about Jesus Christ. Remember Jesus didn't die on a cross so you could lay back and wait for the Lord's return. He has much for us to do for His kingdom work and expects us to be faithful to the calling He has for us.

Keep in mind the old adage "nothing ventured, nothing gained." It is our responsibility as God's chosen ones to obey God's commands to the letter. Millions of folks are headed out into eternity without anybody telling them about the

See Combs, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Are you READY?

Dear Editor,

Union County - are you "READY" for the transformation from a "small rural county" to a "small rural county that bears all the traits of an urban/suburban tourist destination? The City of Blairsville and Sole County Commissioner's support for national advertising is causing this transition by inviting anyone and everyone to the county, saying "We Have It All" - and believe me, before long we WILL! Read about Gatlinburg's experience in their own words - "... Gatlinburg has evolved from a rural hamlet to a thriving gateway community." Thriving? You want to live there?

A clear signal is the North GA News, 23 Nov 2022, article "Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce presents Tourism Economic Impact Exceeds 1.5 million dollars." The content is designed to deceive us into believing tourism is THE solution for our County - bringing in jobs and keeping down property tax. It is to get us to accept the current trend of change from a "small rural county" to a "tourist destina-tion" solely for economic benefits. It's the economic benefit cited in the article that requires your close examination.

This article is based upon a GA Dept of Economic Development report by Tourism Economics, an Oxford Economics Company - an international company that uses data models. This misleading data is designed to be used by politicians. Let's look at one example - the 818 jobs in Union County reported in the NGA News as being supported by tourism. The model defines a JOB as "one person working at least one hour per week for 52 weeks." That's employment for 52 HOURS a YEAR! Not a job to support a fam-

Next, look at the reported \$6.3 million visitors spent in Union County for "transportation." The report defines transportation as "taxi, limo, bus, train, rental cars, and local share of air.' I'm still looking for the trains and buses! Hard to believe folk fly into Hartsfield just to drive to Blairsville. This amount reported spent on transportation and other fictitious expenses are used by the contractor to state that a household in Union County would pay an additional \$640 in property tax if not for tourism income. This is just WRONG! For further explanation of the report's data, see Union County tables and AP-PENDIX and Glossary – Spending Definitions & Economic Impact Definitions at HTTPS://industry.exploregeorgia.org.

Even if an economic benefit, aren't there human and infrastructure costs associated with increased tourist traffic? Have these costs even been anticipated by our leaders? When tourists

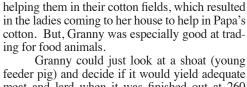
See **Hopgood**, page 5A

Willy the Billy

SCOVERING

My Granny, Glenna Mae Cummings, was quite the horse trader. She didn't trade horses, but, she traded other things. She was good at trading with the local peddler for things needed around the home. Granny carefully managed the hen house so there was always plenty of eggs with

which to barter for popsicles for her Around sons. Granny also **The Farm** traded her time. She had a select group of Mickey friends she trusted, and Granny would Cummings trade her time in



feeder pig) and decide if it would yield adequate meat and lard when it was finished out at 260 pounds. She had an uncanny sixth sense that would tell her if a hog would get sick or remain healthy. She could tell by looking at a heifer whether that female would give adequate milk for her family. She could also tell if the animal would turn out to be mean or cantankerous. Granny was fond of farm animals, and she never got beat in a trade. If she had been born in today's world she probably would have majored in Animal Science and maybe even practiced Veterinary Medicine. Granny and Papa were still living at the

weaning off house next to Lon Cummings when they purchased the farm I grew to love as a little boy. Each day the young family would make the trip to the newly acquired property. Clearing the property of trees was a sun-up to sun-down work load, and the young boys tended to get into things when their parents weren't watching them. One day before they left for the farm a peddler stopped by the house. This peddler had all kinds of things to trade like popsicles, cast iron pots and pans, tin cups and plates. But, he also had something quite exceptional. Behind the main wagon of the peddler was a smaller wagon which was pulled by a big white Billy Goat. The old goat must have weighed 300 pounds. The goat had massive horns which were very intimidating to Granny. However, her two sons were not intimidated. Upon seeing the goat her sons, Paul and Bud, ran to it and began petting and hugging the massive animal.

Granny looked at the old peddler and asked him about trading for the goat and small wagon. Unknown to Granny was the fact the old man wanted to get rid of the goat because it didn't like grown men. The old man looked at Granny and smiled. He traded the goat and wagon to Granny for a couple of setting hens. Granny thought she had got the best of the old peddler. Paul and Bud thought the old goat was the grandest thing they'd

See Cummings, page 5A

Chamber of Commerce

I want to thank everyone that took time to attend the Tourism Roundtable a few weeks ago. We are looking forward to offering a new Roundtable series that includes the Tourism Roundtable, Non-Profit Roundtable, and Young Professional Group. This is an opportunity to get

people with similar interest together and network. While tourism has experienced a growth each year, it was a great opportunity to get

Blairsville - Union County Chamber Steve Rowe

together and discuss how that growth is affect-

new opportunities discussed. The Chamber will continue to listen to our members and explore ways to assist local business to grow and thrive. The Young Professional Roundtable brings together 21-45 year old young professionals with talents and insights that are poised to become an

ing different businesses. There were a number of

integral part of the modern workforce. We look forward to sharing innovative ideas and unique perspectives to create mutual gains. Come join us as we network and build lasting relationships.

See Chamber, page 5A

Blueberry Pruning

Blueberries grow pretty well in Georgia. Rabbiteye blueberries are native to the Southeast, so they're well adapted to our climate. Let's talk specifically about pruning blueberries.

Blueberries don't need to be pruned every year to be fruitful. However, if you start doing

some cane renewal pruning every year on a mature plant the bushes will be more fruitful and have more longevity. The ideal time to prune blueberries is late



winter because the plants are dormant. February is late winter for us in the mountains. Plants in their dormant state are going to be less prone to infection or stress from the pruning.

Blueberry is a multi-stemmed bush. Each one of the stems that comes out of the ground is called a cane. Cane renewal pruning is removing old canes from the plant so that there is space for new canes to grow. Ideally, under cane renewal pruning you'll remove old canes each year so that in five years all the canes on the plant will be completely different. Each year go through the plant and cut out the oldest canes that you find. Also, remove any diseased or dead canes. Ideally, you don't want to remove more that 25% of the canes in a single year. If you have a blueberry bush that hasn't been pruned for a couple of years it may take a couple years to get it back into shape. If you have a blueberry bush that hasn't been pruned for many, many years cane renewal pruning probably isn't going get the plants back into shape. In that situation, I'd recommend something that may seem very drastic. but is better for the plants in the end. Mow the bushes down to the ground. Mature plants will be able to take this hit, and put up new suckers. that turn into canes. This is going to give you fresh growth, and a new healthier plant. You'll go without blueberries for a couple of years. Therefore, if you have several plants that need to be mowed, you could do a couple a year, until they are all back under control. New plants should be pruned to have the

healthiest plants. Prune back 2/3 of the top growth on bare root plants, and ½ of the top growth on potted plants. If the new plant has many canes prune out all but 1-3 of the best looking ones. You also don't want a first year plant to produce fruit, so pick off any flower buds. If you prune plants like this the first year, the second year won't need much pruning. In the second year pick off flower buds again, and remove any diseased canes. The third year, remove diseased canes, but you can leave the flower buds on vigorous shoots. The fourth year, the plant should be able to handle full crop, but if you have some weak

See Williams, page 5A

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Paris... continued from Page 4A Q. How is Union County Tax Commissioner handling delinquent and past due

A. Property taxes that are past due accrue monthly interest on the 21st of each month. The interest rate is based on prime interest rate plus 3%. Also, a 5% penalty applies every 120 days until a maximum penalty equals 20%. If you owe back property taxes, it is best to go into the Tax Commissioner's Office and work out a payment plan. Otherwise, an intent to FiFa – (File a Lien) letter is sent and the taxpayer has 30 days to come in and pay the back taxes or a lien will be placed on your property & a report filed on your credit rating. If the taxes are still not paid, the Tax Commissioner will place a levy on the property and the lien will be sold in a Tax Sale. In this case, the taxpayers lose the property. This is the last thing the Tax Commissioner's Office wants to happen. Our office does accept partial payments on property taxes. Please call 706 439-6017 or use our website at www.uniongatax.com

${f Hopgood}$... continued from Page 4A

come to visit, they use our hospital, doctors, medical and emergency services, water, roads, public recreational facilities, etc. Yes, they may pay sales tax, but only for the short length of their visit – not 365 days a year as we do! One reason we don't have affordable rental property is because it is used for vacation homes. An example of a cost that should not be passed on to residents through taxes is the cost of regulating ever-booming short-term rentals. Shouldn't new development pay impact fees to cover new infrastructure costs they create, like public safety or classrooms? Consider the recent increase in property values; it serves to keep us in line or we'll see a millage rate

Should you be concerned with the relationship between the City of Blairsville, Sole Commissioner, the Economic Development Authority, and the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce related to tourism? The 19 May 2022 Sole Commissioner's meeting minutes record his acceptance of an "intergovernmental agreement" between the County and the Chamber for the Chamber to receive 90% (approx. \$700,000) of funds collected from the Hotel-Motel Excise Tax for the purpose of promoting tourism - May-19-2022-Minutes-1.pdf (unioncountyga.

gov). The Chamber is a private non-profit, tax-exempt, corporation and not a subdivision of Union County government! You would think the Chamber is funded by member dues BUT that is NOT the case.

The agreement raises other questions:

- 1) The 10 May 2022 agreement is retroactive to 1 Jan 2022. Will Chamber activities be funded retroactively under this agreement?
- 2) There are no specific actions required of the Chamber that can be monitored for compliance! Should any Chamber activity be funded with public money, like their recent "casino" night?
- 3) Are there not more pressing needs for these county

Do you as a full time, property-owning, resident have ANY say on whether you want this community to be a tourist destination? Obviously, there will be NO referendum on the question -- not even a public discussion. So, please contact your Mayor and Sole Commissioner and express support for our small rural community to remain as close as possible to what you grew up in or what attracted others to move here. This is why you need a board of commissioners to represent multiple points of view.

Wesley Hopgood

${f Potra}$... continued from Page 4A

for any second violation. This outrageously biased language would give undue power to a few unhappy neighbors to claim false violations of STR owners. Would it be right if the proposed ordinance would include a 30-day imprisonment penalty for a nuisance neighbor who simply dislikes STRs and complains without cause or brings false accusations? The proposed ordinance must include provisions addressing malicious neighbors, along with consequences for unfair accusations from such neigh-

- The STR board would act as both judge and jury, both bringing the accusation against the STR owner, as well as judging and sentencing the STR owner. This would offer no hope of fairness to the STR owner. The proposed board lacks a system of checks and balances to prevent the board or the County Agent from acting with arbitrary unfairness toward STR owners.

I fully agree that STRs should have regulations to protect the community's right to the peaceful enjoyment of their properties. A good STR owner will seek to do so even without regulations. That is because it is in the best interest of the STR owner that the STR is an asset to the community and not a nuisance. Examples of what we did to ensure our STR preserves the good of our neighbors are: our guests must sign a noise agreement in addition to the rental agreement promising to prevent all noise from reaching our neighbors and that all music/noise is turned off by 9 p.m.; we disabled the loud speakers and purchased a small speaker which has to be placed in such a way that the music does not reach our neighbors; we are ensuring our guests follow this rule by having our manager physically verify this every time we have an event; we have numerous signs on the premises reminding our guests to honor our neighbors' right to the quiet enjoyment of their permanent homes in the neighborhood or face steep fines and eviction. We hope all STRs will seek to benefit their community, ensuring their neighbors'

While STR owners have a duty to preserve the good will of the community, the community should also seek to preserve the good will of the STRs. That is because STRs bring large amounts of revenue for the county through the 5% tax on all bookings. Additionally, STRs hire managers, cleaners, maintenance teams, landscaping teams, electricians, construction workers, and a host of other similar businesses. Lastly, STRs generate income to many local businesses: eateries, retail stores, bakeries, and other local attractions. These all work to supplement the economy of the county, enabling many young families to make a living without having to move out of the county.

Implementing sensible regulation of STRs without destroying them would enable the county to streamline the unwanted aspects of the STRs, while allowing this industry to become a positive balance to the county's economy. I urge Union County to reconsider the outrageously biased proposed STR ordinance in favor of fair regulation which would allow for the county's community to benefit from the many positive aspects of STR-generated tourism. If the commissioner truly seeks the best interest of the community, then he will rework the proposed ordinance to include fair, unbiased regulations which help both the STRs as well as protect the community. Kristina Potra

Cummings...continued from Page 4A

ever seen. The old goat must have thought he'd died and gone to heaven. Those two boys were always feeding the goat an apple or fresh green onions. The two young'uns loved the goat. They hugged and petted the goat constantly. They could hitch the wagon to the goat and ride it anywhere. They rode the wagon through the woods to their farm each and every day, and the goat never faltered. He loved pulling the wagon as much as the boys loved riding the wagon.

However, one day Poggy came for a visit. Poggy was my grandfather's fun-loving brother who drank too much. As usual Poggy was drunk when he showed up at the farm, and he decided he wanted to ride the old goat. Without Granny's knowledge Poggy got on the old goat and started spurring the goat's sides. At first the goat complied, but, soon Poggy got too rough. The goat began running full speed, and Poggy was laughing at the top of his lungs when all of the sudden the goat stopped. But, Poggy didn't. He sailed over the head of the goat and into a ditch. Paul said, "Poggy climbed from the ditch and his entire face was bleed-

He told the boys he was going to kill that goat as my Granny walked up to the scene. The boys began crying and Granny walked over to Poggy with her hoe handle extended. He was scared of Granny. All

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A ness, mercy, and care takes en-

during strength from God.

Perhaps he would approve of my few lines offered in his memory: "At the end, he lay down his cowboy frame; And heard Someone familiar call out his name. 'Mount up on eagles wings,' (not on a horse!). To fly to Jesus was his final course." Baxter Black left for the land of the living. He

P.S. Don't forget to wear your glasses more often!

Williams...

continued from Page 4A

looking canes, thin out the buds to prevent over fruiting, which can cause permanent bending of canes from the weight.

Each year after harvest is completed cut plants back so that they don't become too tall. Tall plants are more difficult to harvest for people; bears and birds probably won't have that same problem.

If you have questions about pruning blueberries, contact you County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

area and know that they may inadvertently be close to your moving vehicle. Please help us stay safe on these accident scenes so that we can help the people involved.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Chamber... continued from Page 4A

Keep an eye on the Chamber website to find the dates and times for your next opportunity to network and share with individuals with like interest. If we work together, life will continue to Be Better in Blairsville.

Combs...

continued from Page 4A

love of Christ, and shame on us if we don't use the opportunities that the Lord gives us to witness to those who are lost without any hope of heaven. Not all folks will agree with you; some may think you are crazy in the head, but that should not stop us planting good seeds of salvation. It's like a farmer who sows seeds in his field, not all will come to new growth, but those that do will grow in abundance and a new harvest will be The apostle Paul knew

the value of human life to the point of death, and for that reason he never gave up when the road ahead was full of promised souls that could be won for God's kingdom. I would love to see a revival break out in the Blairsville area in our church folks that would spread like wildfire, but it starts in the heart of every believer that is willing to share their testimony of what God has done for them. Yes, it's easy just to be complacent and lazy about our faith and let someone else do the work. God is well pleased with those who "Go Tell." Frank F. Combs

she did was look at him and he

decided to leave. But, I guess

the goat was still angry. Later in the day Papa drew some water from the well and poured it into a big wash tub so his sons could take a bath. For some reason Papa bent over the wash tub to move it and the old goat noticed the target of Papa's rear end. Without any hesitation and before anyone could stop it, the goat lowered his head and rammed Papa's butt. Papa went head first into that water. He must have been stunned because it took him a minute to recover. When he popped out of the water he turned and pointed his finger at the goat and said, "I will take care of you tomorrow." Paul and Bud knew exactly what that meant.

The next morning Lon Steele showed up at the house to trade a fresh cow for Granny's old milk cow. After they had negotiated, Lon told Granny, "OK, I will trade with you." Granny then told Lon, "OK, now what will you give me for the goat?" Lon was surprised, but, he quickly said, "I will give you \$2 for it." Granny smiled and agreed to the deal. Once again, Granny had used her wiles to save the day. Although Paul and Bud were not happy about giving up their goat, they knew their Daddy would have taken care of the goat when he got home. Besides, each boy had a dollar to spend the next time the peddler came by their