

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Severe Weather Preparedness Week 2025

Unpredictable weather events such as floods, thunderstorms, and tornadoes can strike Union County at any given moment. That's why Union County Emergency Management Agency (UCEMA) has partnered with the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency to promote active participation in Severe Weather Preparedness Week, on February 3-7. By participating, we can enhance our readiness for any potential severe weather conditions.

Severe Weather Preparedness Week begins with Family Preparedness/NOAA Weather Radio Day on Feb. 5th. Union County households are encouraged to have a conversation with their family about Severe Weather Preparedness. Families should discuss how to protect themselves during a severe weather emergency and what supplies they may need for a severe weather event.

Staying informed about severe weather is also important. We encourage residents to purchase a NOAA Weather Radio, which can warn families of imminent severe weather, day or night. They may also sign up for CodeRED alerts through UCEMA or visit the Union County website at www.unioncountygov.com/codered to sign up online.

The rest of the Severe Weather Preparedness Week dedicates time to practicing response to specific emergency events and going through the procedures to deal with each potential disaster. We urge Union County residents to take this time now to prepare when there's not any severe weather events. Residents can be better prepared if the necessary steps are taken ahead of time. These steps and safety measures can be implemented at home and at work to ensure that people are ready when severe weather strikes.

Each day will focus on a different severe weather threat faced by Georgians. All of the following days focus on a different threat and how to prepare: Monday, Feb. 3 - Family Preparedness/NOAA Weather Radio Day; Tuesday, Feb. 4 - Thunderstorm Safety; Wednesday, Feb. 5 - Tornado Safety and PrepareAthon; Thursday, Feb. 6 - Lightning Safety; and Friday, Feb. 7 - Flood Safety.

On Wednesday, February 5, tornado safety is emphasized. Residents, schools and businesses statewide are encouraged to

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Thinking Christianly

Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist, became popular with his book "12 Rules for Life" (2018). Tom Holland is a British expert in classical and medieval history. His book "Dominion" (2019) traces the Christian roots of Western Civilization. These modern thinkers are talking about Christianity.

Peterson is attracted to Bible stories. His latest book is "We Who Wrestle with God" (2024), a look at the psychology of narratives in the Hebrew Scriptures. He is a student of Jungian psychology, which treats religious beliefs as helpful whether they are true or not. That likely influenced his comment, "Biblical stories make the insistence that the fundamental story is one of unity and also one of voluntary sacrifice."

Unity and sacrifice are helpful psychology topics, but the fundamental Biblical story is about God. The grand narrative arc of the Bible is creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. As to personal faith Peterson offers, "I'm not an atheist anymore... I've taken the idea of God seriously for a very long time. I try to act as though God exists, and that's essentially my definition of belief."

Tom Holland's book "Dominion" has a provocative subtitle: "How the Christian Revolution Remade the World." He links marriage, science, and human dignity to the Biblical worldview. "We are all goldfish and the water in which we are swimming is Christian," he said. "We may not believe that the Lord Jesus Christ rose on the third day but think of Christianity as a way of seeing the world." Regarding faith Holland said, "I've been recalibrating exactly where it is that I morally, ethically, culturally come from and essentially where the whole of Western society comes from... I began to realize that actually, in almost every way, I am Christian."

When Peterson redefines belief and Holland says "almost," one gets the sense something is missing. They talk about Christianity without addressing its undergirding truth claims. Holland specifically sidesteps Jesus' resurrection, the indispensable miracle for Christians. "If Christ has not been raised," Paul writes, "your faith is worthless" (1 Cor. 15:17). Intellectuals talk-

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From Your Commissioner

The Union County Recycle Center located at the Transfer Station on South Farm Road is a huge asset to our community, providing a safe and efficient way to collect and process recyclables. The center's state-of-the-art operations represent modern recycling efficiency. It is a true model for other communities who have visited the facility to learn how the model might be replicated.

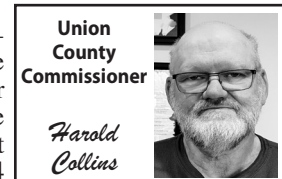
The Union County Transfer Station has been bailing some cardboard and other materials for a while. However, a new and more efficient bailer was purchased last year - allowing the unit to run 4 tons of material at the time. This bailer will be able to bundle plastics numbers 1-7, cardboard, paper, aluminum cans, and steel cans. The baled materials can be loaded onto trucks and transported in larger quantities, reducing the number of trips needed to deliver them to recycling facilities.

Additionally, bailing helps to prevent contamination and to ensure that the materials are in good condition when they reach the recycling facilities - increasing the likelihood that they will be successfully recycled into new products.

Just to give you an idea of what the materials sell for: Cardboard bails can sell for amounts between \$90 - \$200; plastics #1 can sell for amounts between 5¢ and 25¢ per lb.; and aluminum can sell for amounts between 15¢ and 35¢ per lb. If you will remember, one of my big goals is to bring in more money to the general fund so that we can keep County property taxes down as low as possible. This bailer will help us to do that by making Union County more money when selling materials to be processed.

The commercial side of the transfer station is open Monday through Friday, 7 AM - 4 PM and Saturday, 7 AM - 12 noon. The other functions are also open Monday through Friday, 7 AM - 4 PM; and Saturday, 7 AM - 12 noon.

The centers are closed on Sundays and certain observed holidays. For specific questions about the Transfer Station or Recycle Centers, please contact Matt White at transferstation@uniongov.com.



Harold Collins
Union County Commissioner

Your Playful Self

"We are only young once. That is all society can stand."
Coach Bobby Bowden,
Florida State University

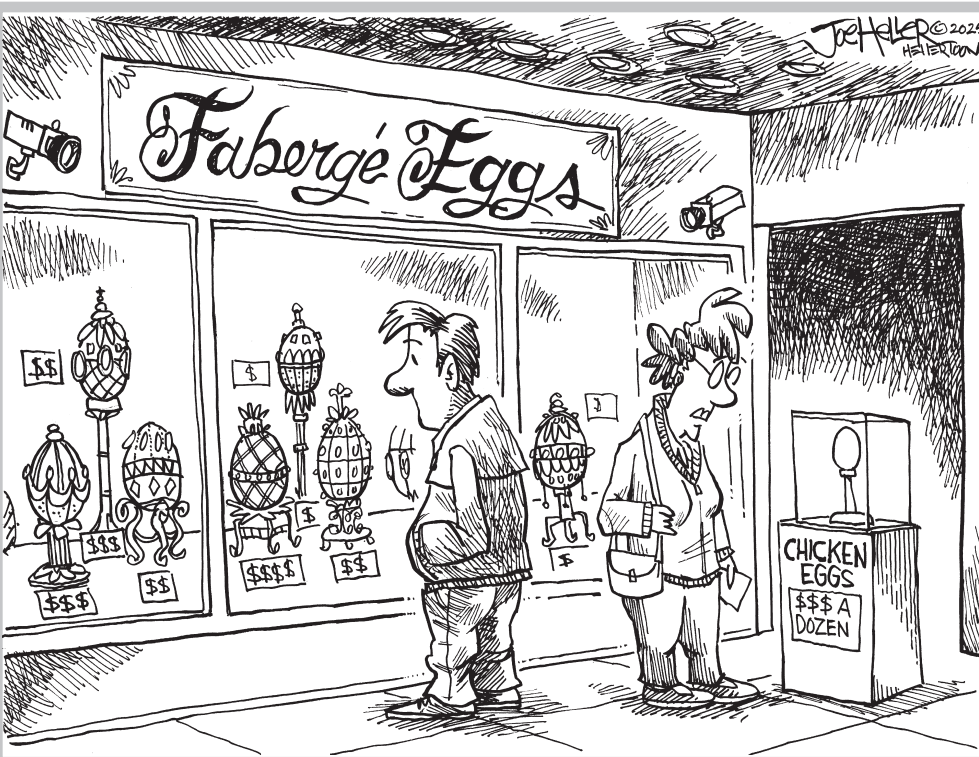
When was the last time your playful self attended a carnival, a rodeo, or a comedy play?

When was the last time your playful self sat on a merry-go-round? Have you risked going paddling in a river or even hiking up your pant legs to wade in a stream on the spur of the moment? When is the last time you danced in a downpour or became a kid again by lying down on the ground, guessing the names of the stars? Each of us needs to wake up from adulthood periodically. Children enjoy watching us take our old adult person off the dusty shelf of life at times. They actually get the giggles when they see us become full-blown kids with them. It is a royal hoot for them!

Successful Mental Health
Dr. James Ray Ashurst
PH.D.



Laughter is a soothing salve to place on
See Ashurst, page 5A



Chamber 2025

I hope everyone made it through the winter weather and survived the icy roads. I must admit, I have never heard of frozen fog before until last week. We had several days below freezing, but thankfully, we are starting to experience warmer weather, and the forecast is looking encouraging. I want to extend a thank you to the Road Department for keeping the roads clear and to anyone else who contributed to the effort.

Blairsville - Union County Chamber
President
Steve Rowe

I would also like to give a big shoutout to the Union County Development Authority and the Downtown Development Authority as they worked together to make a strategic plan for our community. If you get the opportunity to provide them with information, please do so as your input, along with that of other stakeholders, will make life in Union County even better.

Although the registration for An Evening with the STARS Banquet has closed, there is still an opportunity to support our local students by

See Chamber, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Discrimination

Dear Editor,
Simon and Naveela Philbeck spoke at the Union County School Board and declared they have been discriminated against. Even their daughters have had remarks made against them in school.

This should never have happened, especially in this county that claims to be Christian. What happened to ethics? What happened to the love Jesus taught? Is Christianity only an empty word? Does it not teach actions as well as faith? Doesn't James say, "Show me your faith without works, and I'll show you my faith by my works."

See Khoury, page 5A

Working Across the Aisle

Dear Editor,
Andrew Clyde, U.S. Representative for Georgia's 9th Congressional District, continues to use his bully pulpit to sow fear and division among his constituents in the 9th District. In a recent op-ed in this newspaper, he focused on the horrific death of Laken Riley of Athens, Georgia, who was murdered by an illegal alien from Venezuela. He reports that a bipartisan bill, designed to give ICE more authority to detain illegal aliens who commit crimes in this country, is in process of passing Congress. The disturbing part of Clyde's op-ed is his open attempt to further divide by placing unjustified blame on

See Cordier, page 5A

Prayer Service

Dear Editor,
On Tuesday, Jan. 21, President Trump and Vice President Vance, as part of their first full day following inauguration, attended a prayer service at the National Cathedral led by Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde. In her remarks, the reverend said, "In the name of our God, I ask you (President Trump) to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian, and transgender children in Democratic, Re-

See Groza, page 5A

The Christian Thing to Do

Dear Editor,
As I read the article "Parents claim students, mother harassed at school," I can't help but wonder what kind of adult (and I use that word questionably) bully would pick on elementary-aged students. This abuse has been going on for four years? How old were these girls when it started? Since the question of faith is mentioned, I now suspect that the "adult" is a Christian bul-

See Psiaki, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Response to Philbeck Article

Dear Editor,
I read the article about the very disturbing harassment and insensitive remarks made to various members of the Philbeck family.

It is shameful for a "Christian" to condemn a non-believer to hell in such a threatening manner with such an Un-Christlike witness. If they chose to reject Jesus because of that so-called witness (instead of a witness of the agape of Jesus), that "teacher" would be guilty of a grievous sin and they would have blood on their hands. That is a spirit of an antichrist, leading people away from Jesus.

This is not the norm for Blairsville; but for the Christian community here in Blairsville we must condemn such attitudes and go out of our way to share the love of Christ with everyone - we are reminded as it says in scripture, Matthew 5:16, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Sincerely,
Gene Khoury

Kudos to Mrs. Philbeck

Dear Editor,
I understand that the claims of Naveela Philbeck printed in the North Georgia News on Jan. 29 are just that (claims) at this point, but I can't imagine a mother having any reason or agenda to publicly make them, other than a desire to protect her children and hold an arrogant teacher to account.

Four of my children went through Union County Schools, and thankfully we never experienced anything like this.

It is disturbing that a teacher like that is

See Schramke, page 5A

What's The Point?

Dear Editor,
So, what's up with all this suffering that engulfs us daily? What good comes from suffering? What can we learn from it? How can we rejoice during our pain and suffering? God tests our faith by trials. He does not test us with evil. God tests faith by the Word, not by man's words. Why trials? Trials are meaningless, suffering is senseless, and testing is irrational unless there is some good purpose for them. God says there is a reason for them, and it is a good reason. Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

When the external pressure of testing is

See Combs, page 5A

Miss Floss

My Third-Grade Teacher, Mrs. Foote, was the nicest lady you would ever want to meet. But, at the age of 35, in my mind she was ancient. My perspective has now changed. In my opinion, 65 is not old and 70 is not sounding so bad. I have the same opinion in regard to tractors. I have known a lot of tractors in my time, and over the years some of them, because of my sentimentality, developed names.

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Miss Floss was an elderly lady known by my grandfather when he was a boy. She could be cantankerous and stubborn; however, she had a heart of gold. But, the one thing she was known for was being bossy. This lady was Papa's Sunday School Teacher for 10 years. After each Sunday School lesson Papa said she would bark out orders to her class in an effort to get the front of the small church house organized and ready for preaching. Her bossy behavior was accepted by the young people. But, the men of the church took offense when she started on them and so they began poking fun at her by calling her Bossy Flossie.

One particular Sunday Papa told me that Floss showed herself at church. "She took a fit," Papa said. It seems that Floss was overwhelmed by the spirit and began to buck dance, and she laid down on the floor of the church. Somehow she rolled over on her belly while her legs were kicking and her arms were waving. All of this activity caused her dress to roll up over her head, and there for all to see were written across her rear end the words, "Martha's Finest Self-Rising." The word flour was missing. Apparently, Miss Floss had made her underwear from a Martha White Flour sack.

This story was handed down through four generations in my family. The story became intertwined in the actions of my family. For example, when I was a young boy Papa had an old Ayrshire milk cow. This old cow was the boss and she let the other cows on the farm know it. She was always the first to feed, and the other cows would not attempt to eat the feed until old "Floss" was finished. Nobody in the family remembers who the person was that gave the old cow the name of Floss. But, we all agreed the cow reminded us of Papa's old Sunday School Teacher.

In 1963 Papa bought an old Farmall tractor. He used that old red tractor until the late 1960s when he purchased a blue Ford tractor. I learned to plow using that old tractor and it was the first tractor my sons ever rode. It was dependable, even in cold weather. Just like Miss Floss was there for Sunday School, the old Ford tractor

See Cummings, page 5A

Raised Beds Soils

Last week I talked about the different materials that can be used to construct a raised bed. This week I want to talk about what we put in the raised beds. There are many different options out there, some are better than others are, and some are cheaper than others are. So let's talk through some options for soil in your raised garden bed.

Before filling up your raised garden bed figure out how many cubic feet of soil you will need. This is a simple calculation of multiplying length by width by height. Let's use the dimensions 8 feet X 4 feet X 10 inches. In this case, we would multiply 8x4x0.833 because 10 inches is 0.833 feet. The answer is 26.66 cubic feet. If we wanted to convert cubic feet to a cubic yard, we would divide our cubic feet by 27. This means that we have close to one cubic yard of volume.

Now that we have the math out of the way and know how much material we need let's talk about what materials can be used. Obviously, you can use top soil to fill the raised bed. If you have extra top soil nearby this might make sense for you. Otherwise, I don't think that it's a great option. Top soil is not regulated in terms of what is in it. So you might have many chunks of bark that haven't started decomposing. If you don't know the source of top soil, it will also contain weed seeds that will grow and compete with your plants.

Another option would be to go to the store and buy bags of soil that are made for raised beds. This would give you quality soil in the beds. The flip side is that you're going to spend a lot of money doing it. You could easily spend \$\$\$ for soil using the dimensions I talked about earlier. If the money is not a problem, this is a quick and easy solution.

Compost is a great way to fill your raised beds. However, beds shouldn't be 100% compost, they need some soil in their too. Compost that has completely composted will provide many nutrients to the soil. If you have your own compost you can use that, or you can buy compost in bulk. Some companies will deliver or if you have a pickup truck, you can use that. You can also buy compost in bags. A product like Black Kow is an example. Buying bags will be more expensive. One drawback to using compost is that the pH will most likely be high. This can lead to some nutrient shortages. Another thing to keep in mind with compost is that it will continue to decompose. This means that the amount you have will decrease and more will need to be added periodically.

The lasagna method is a popular way to

See Williams, page 5A

UGA extension
Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

Cummings...continued from Page 4A

was always ready to work. Is it any wonder then that the tractor picked up the name, "Miss Floss?"

About 30 years ago Papa called me with some news. The first words from his mouth were, "I baptized Miss Floss yesterday." Papa had taken the old tractor down by the lake to clear out some brush. He set the parking brake and got off the tractor to close a gate he had driven through. Somehow the brake loosened and papa watched helplessly as the old tractor rolled into and disappeared under the waters of Bear Creek Lake. I actually shed a tear for a tractor that day.

As you can see I have always been partial to red milk

cows, Martha White Flour and blue tractors. Papa has been gone for a while now and even Mom and Dad are gone. We no longer have a milk cow around the place, and now we use White Lily Flour to make our biscuits. I now have recently purchased an orange tractor instead of a blue one. But, each time I start it up to do some work around the house my mind is flooded with memories provided to me by all the stories I received from my grandparents. And as I get older my concept of the word "old" keeps changing. Sixty-five is no longer old in my mind.

Seventy does not bother me either. Maybe old is way into the future!

Ashurst... continued from Page 4A

stressors in our lives. It's nature's means to ease our stresses and losses. Furthermore, our laughter can have a tremendous impact on other individuals in our arenas, whether kids or adults. Laughter can release endorphins that are secreted into the brain to ease our stress, perhaps making fun and play possible.

A new real-estate salesman asked his sales manager how to calm the feelings of an angry client who has just discovered his newly purchased lot is in a swamp underwater. "Don't think negatively," the sales manager said. "Whatever you do, don't revoke the sale. Go back and sell him a motor boat." (The Source-

book of Humor)

Besides activating one's spirit of play, the fun can reduce one's level of stress. The whole idea is to play, play, and play once again. If a person wishes to touch one's playful self, it is necessary to do those activities that will enrich one's life – not take away from it.

So, what are you willing to do for yourself today to reinstate your sense of play? Go to a mirror, and look at who is looking back. Your challenge is coming up with one reason why you aren't worthy of giving yourself a gift of a minimum of fifteen minutes each day.

Fowler... continued from Page 4A

ing about Christianity evoke an ancient scene at the Greek Areopagus where Paul held the philosophers' curiosity until he brought up the resurrection. Some scoffed. Some wanted to talk later. But Dionysius and Damaris heard enough to believe (Acts 17).

Academic types are right to think Christianly about culture and history. But it's hard to imagine a religious figure in a

minor Roman province 2000 years ago having such an impact unless the Biblical account is true, especially the resurrection. It's an other-worldly narrative with a personal invitation to you. You can talk about it as psychology, you can enjoy its cultural fruits, or you can believe it and be transformed. May the thinkers of our day join Dionysius, Damaris, and the rest of us, and believe.

Cordier ... continued from Page 4A

one political party. To state that "the murderer ... accepted Joe Biden's invitation to illegally cross the southern border" is pure inflammatory rhetoric. Finger-pointing and name-calling does not solve problems.

Our country is at a crossroads, and it will demand that our leaders act from positions of truth and integrity. Illegal immigration must be confronted as well as "kitchen table" issues such as grocery

prices, housing costs, childcare costs, medical expenses, utility prices, rising insurance rates, women's health care and climate-caused natural disasters. This is a big agenda that will need bipartisan support and action. We must demand that our representatives work across the aisle. They are in Congress to solve problems, which is far more demanding than pointing fingers.

Jennifer Cordier

Schramke... continued from Page 4A

in our school system, and that those little girls had to experience the ugliness of his behavior. Disparaging their culture and religion and then warning a 7-year-old girl that her tongue would grow too big to fit in her mouth if she "tattled" is inexcusable. This threat reminds me of what a child predator might say to silence their victim.

Mrs. Philbeck is an attractive woman, and the teacher in question apparently agrees, calling her "Miss Big Brown Eyes." The level of arrogance and misogyny in that statement alone is outrageous from an educator addressing the parent of a student. Following it up with

"where is your husband?" and "I feel bad for you, you don't have any sons" emphasizes the point.

That our Superintendent of Schools is complicit in protecting this man by trying to make Mrs. Philbeck withdraw her complaint is unconscionable. Using his connections to threaten her employment is a vicious, petty move.

The teacher in question should be fired. Kudos to Mrs. Philbeck for kicking the complaints up the pipeline to higher authorities. Hopefully this will be a wake-up call for our school system.

Margie Schramke

Combs... continued from Page 4A

upon us and we are placed in the fires of adversity and tragedy and suffering, the attitude of faith should be that God has permitted it for a purpose, and He has a high and lofty goal in view. Let me say that this does not mean that we will understand what purpose God has in it. This is a test of our faith, for we walk by faith, not sight. Someone once said, "God nothing does, nor suffers to be done, but what we would ourselves, if we could see through all events of things as well as He."

It is patience which will make us a full-grown Chris-

tian, but how does God produce patience in us? Patience is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. You will never become patient by trying to be patient, but neither will the Holy Spirit place it on a silver platter. Patience comes through suffering and testing. As believers in Christ, we are blessed of God to be able to go through these trials and prayerfully come out on the other side rejoicing that our suffering was not in vain. If you believe that God is in control of all things, seen and unseen, then our faith can shout – Hallelujah – Praise the Lamb of God.

Frank F. Combs

Williams..continued from Page 4A

fill raised beds. You alternate layers of brown and green material. Brown material is dry leaves, shredded newspaper, peat, and pine needles. Green materials are vegetable scraps, garden trimmings, and grass clippings. The green materials contain nitrogen and the brown materials contain carbon. Make the brown layers twice as thick as the green layers and it will compost down into a good material into which you can plant.

If you have beds that are very deep another option is the

put branches in the bottom to fill up space. The branches will break down over time, giving you good material in which to grow. My preference is to use a third native soil, third bagged soil, and a third compost to fill up the raised bed.

If you have questions about filling your raised bed contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

sponsoring the event. Please contact the Chamber if you would like to become a sponsor.

Thanks to everyone who is making Life Better in Blairsville!

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

participate in Ready Georgia's PrepareAthon! for Tornado Safety, a statewide tornado drill at 9 a.m. For more information on drill procedures, visit gema.georgia.gov/tornado-drill-procedures.

We encourage everyone to take the time to research and prepare for these severe weather incidents. For more information about Severe Weather Preparedness, visit www.ready.gov/severe-weather.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Khoury...

continued from Page 4A

I am surprised and disappointed in the people responsible for this deplorable behavior. Let us, the rest of Blairsville, prove to this family that we are grieved that this happened and that we will do all in our power to make this right. We can put pressure on those involved. This is coming too close to being a hate crime. So far, it's only verbal. We only have to look back in history to realize verbal abuse doesn't stop there. Remember the Inquisition and Holocaust. There is persecution in other countries, even in other parts of our country.

We are not prejudiced against race or religion in this county. Let us rise up against this internal discrimination.

Joy Khoury

Groza...

continued from Page 4A

publican, and independent families – some who fear for their lives." She also went on to defend illegal immigration by twisting God's Word in order to justify her remarks.

Neither the President, Vice President, nor the worshippers ever heard a prayer of blessing, a word of encouragement or anything that would draw them closer to God. Rev. Budde is a classic example of what's wrong with many American churches in the U.S. today.

Tim Groza

Psiaki...

continued from Page 4A

ly, and I know all too well that those do exist.

For the School Board in general, and the Superintendent specifically, not addressing these issues raises even more concerns. A parent seeking help for their children being bullied at school then threatened with the possible loss of employment boggles the mind.

I can only imagine the conflicted feelings of despair – this family needs support, not ridicule. That would be the Christian thing to do.

Steve Psiaki

Parkinson's Support Group

The Parkinson's Support Group meets on the 2nd Tuesday each month at 2 PM at North Georgia Tech, Blairsville. Please call 239-872-7365 for more info.

**Bell Ringing Union
County Old Courthouse**



**Bell ringing information
at 706-745-5493**

**The
Rules of
MASONIC
ETIQUETTE**

The
MASONIC
RESTLEBOARD
Whitey White



Entering Lodge After The Meeting Has Begun

Always plan to arrive before the beginning of any Stated or Called Communication. If you are delayed, make sure that you are properly dressed and report to the Tiler; he will attend to your admission into the Lodge Room.

If a brother should enter the Lodge after the opening ceremony is under way, he should go to the Holy Altar to

salute the Master. If he must leave before the meeting is over, the correct Masonic etiquette of his departure is that he should salute the Senior Warden before he departs, as this will not disrupt the Master's agenda for the business of the Lodge. The salute should always be given properly and not in a careless or perfunctory manner. NFeb5Z5CA