Opinions

# Swiftwater Rescue Team Update

Last July I introduced the Union County Fire Department Swiftwater Rescue Team and provided some information on the creation and future plans of the team. The members of the team have worked very hard to obtain needed equipment, prepare standard operating guidelines, pre-plan areas of potential emergencies and conduct training.

The Swiftwater Rescue Team | Fire Dept. is a group of dedicated firefighters who have had specialized training in these types of emergencies. Swiftwater emergencies include flash flooding, stranded persons in rising water, or persons trapped in moving water. These



emergencies commonly occur when people attempt to walk or drive through rising or moving water. The people or vehicles can be swept away and can trap people in the middle of the moving water. This has become a more common emergency over the last couple of years. Swiftwater teams are used to gain access to these people and get them to a safe area.

The team has grown due to the addition of several new members. These members have completed the initial training required to be on the team. The initial training involves Swiftwater Rescue Technician Unit I and is conducted through Rescue 3 International. The class was completed over three days and involves lectures, practical skills, and very demanding swimming exercises.

The team has completed several team training exercises over the summer and fall. The exercises include utilizing throw bags to victims; working within rapidly moving water; self-rescue; victim rescue; ropes and rigging; communications and team coordination. The team is also developing support classes for firefighters who will support the team in an emergency. Training and exercises are used to practice skills and to be better familiar with equipment.

Swiftwater rescue uses a combination of water rescue equipment and ropes. Each team member is required to have a set of personal rescue equipment which includes items such as dry suit, helmet, floatation devices, etc. The equipment that was purchased over the last year has provided some of the team members with the needed individual equipment however there are a few team

See Dyer, page 5A

## One in Six Workers has an **Addiction Problem**

Recent data taken from millions of workplace-related drug tests show that the number of U.S. workers testing positive for illicit drug use is now at its highest level in a decade.

According to data from the Na- The mission of the Union tional Survey on Drug County Anti-Drug Coali-Use and Health, 10.6 tion is to support an overall percent of full-time safe community by providemployees and 13.2 ing information, education percent of part-time and support services to employees age 18 or children, families and comolder reported using munity toward prevention illicit drugs within the of illegal substance abuse. past month. Survey re-

spondents who reported past-month drug use said they would be less likely to work for employers that conduct pre-employment or random drug testing. In addition, self-reported drug-use rates are nearly twice as high at companies with

See Drugs, page 5A

### Speck Fishing

One of my favorite enjoyments is what is called "Speck Fishing". Speckled Trout derive their name from the specks that cover their body. In other parts of our country the fish are called "Brook Trout" or "Brookies". The fish generally



# **Grace Under Pressure**

Winning Nobel and Pulitzer prizes for his life's work was inevitable for Ernest Hemingway. He was by all accounts a brilliant scoundrel. He was a master at developing characters with the code hero traits of honor and courage. It was Hemingway that popularized the phrase, "grace under pressure."

Reflecting on his work, he once said that, "No subject is terrible if the story is true, if the prose is clean and honest, and if it affirms courage and grace under pressure.' His work reflected that idea, such as in "The Old Man and the Sea." As he fought the massive fish hooked on his



Everybody has one...

line, the old man "settled comfortably against the wood and took his suffering as it came and the fish swam steadily and the boat moved slowly through the dark water. There was a small sea rising with the wind coming up from the east and at noon the old man's left hand was uncramped. 'Bad news for you, fish,' he said and shifted the line over the sacks that covered his shoulders. He was comfortable but suffering, although he did not admit the suffering at all." The old man courageously endured his suffering, because that was his lot in life.

Though grace under pressure was a useful theme to Hemingway, it precedes him by far. Jesus stood apart from other teachers ("the crowds were amazed at His teaching for He was teaching them as having authority") because he promoted and demonstrated a more profound version of that theme. He said that people persecuted for righteousness are blessed and rewarded. He said to reconcile with someone who has wronged you. He taught to "make friends quickly with your opponent," and "whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.' These teachings recognize the pressure and call for grace. Perhaps the toughest to practice is, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Matt. 5)

Jesus didn't just teach this. He lived and died by it for your eternal benefit. He is the "author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb.

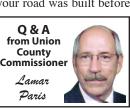
### See Fowler, page 5A

## **Commissioner's Questions**

Q. We live on a gravel road which has about 10 to 12 homes on it. We pay county property taxes and we do not think it is fair that our road is not being accepted and maintained by the county.

A. We get this question a lot. If your road was built before

1991 and is paved or was built before 1989 and is gravel, the county can consider accepting the road if it meets county specifications. However, after those dates, developers had the choice of building roads to county specifications at that time and some chose not to. We appreciate the fact that you are



a tax paying citizen; however, road guidelines were put in place to give people a choice. The majority of all county road work is paid for from Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST). which is paid on most purchases made in the county. Property tax does not support much actual road work. Property tax supports all other services in the county which you have access to whether or not you live on a county road, including Sheriff Department, Recreation, E-911 Emergency Dispatch System, Fire and Rescue Department, Facility Maintenance, and many others

Q. How can you help keep people from making the mistake of buying property on a private road?

A. Unfortunately, I don't have an answer to that but it is not always a mistake. Many want to be on a private road. There are advantages to private roads, the main one being that you can control who comes and goes on the road. This allows you to restrict 4 wheelers, motorcycles or other transportation methods you find objectionable. It even allows you to install a gate so long as those with legal access have a key or code.

#### Q. Are there private roads that have public access which would prevent a gate from being installed?

A. There certainly are. While it is not the case with a lot of roads, there are several cases where the USFS has property located behind private property. It may even be a hunting area which prevents the road from being closed. There are other cases where an old road may have been a county road at one time, or

#### See Paris, page 5A •

## **Chamber Events**

#### The State of Tourism in **Blairsville-Union County: Part 1**

If you remember, in 2015, Union County along with the City of Blairsville, Union County Economic Development, Downtown Development

Authority, and the Blairsville -Blairsville-Union Union County Chamber County Chamber of Commerce procured **Tourism Direct** the professional ser-7obie vices of the Carl Vin-Chandler son Institute of Government to develop a



new Branding position for our community. Through an in-depth process including a full market analysis and public input, it was determined that there are two target markets we are wanting to invite into our area. The first key market segment is Fast Track Families. This is demographic is defined as: Upscale Middle Age with Kids. With their upscale incomes, numerous children, and spacious homes, Fast Track Fami-

See Chandler, page 5A

### **Master Gardener Extension** Volunteer Program

The month of March has a very special holiday. I'm not talking about St. Patrick's Day or the first day of spring. I'm talking about Master Gardener Appreciation Day! This important





"He says he's getting in shape for the time change."

# Letters to the Editor...

#### **Matt Gurtler Dear Editor,**

Leave it to the "Good Old Boy System" in Georgia protecting their nest by attacking Gurtler for voting NO to the Amended 2017 Budget which will increase the size, scope and intrusiveness of government. Gurtler was voted into office by "We The People" to do what was right by us. I would really like to know what skeletons Mr. Riley has in his closet. The most blatant one Mr. Riley has in his closet is his attacking an elected official threatening to withhold funding to Union County, Towns County, Rabun County and some of White County. Not only was that a threat to Gurtler, but is was a direct threat to "We The People" in those counties. Could that be considered to be against the law? At the very least Mr. Riley needs to make a public apology to Gurtler and 'We The People". Then he needs to be reprimanded, fined and fired. If Mr. Riley is not dealt with by those who we elected, then what does that say about them? Exert your power to term limit these incumbents who have been in office for far too long. We got Trump elected to drain the swamp in Washington, now it's time for us, the sleeping giant, to wake up and drain

## Highways

Dear Editor,

Personally, I think something needs to be done regarding the highway going from just outside of Blairsville, to Young Harris. That is the one most dangerous and ungodly stretch of highway perhaps in the whole state. Several accidents and deaths have been along that highway as well as Murphy Highway.

day falls on the third UGA Saturday of March and celebrates some From the of the hardest work-Ground Up ing individuals in our community. If Melissa Mattee you know a Master Gardener Extension Volunteer, please extend your appreciation and gratitude for all they do in the community. For those of you not familiar with these incredible volunteers, let me give you a little background. The program started in Tacoma, Washington in 1972. As county agents were getting overwhelmed with the demands of the growing population, it was clear that they needed help with educating the community. To do this, they recruited as many avid gardeners with a passion for education and volunteerism as they could find and provided them with additional horticultural training. These volunteers were dubbed "Master Gardeners" and mobilized within the community to help answer questions about gardening, plan local programs, and assist extension offices. Eventually, this program spread across the country to nearly every state. Our local Master Gardener chapter consists of both Union and Towns County Volunteers. These individuals have gone through a rigorous ten week training course where they learn plant pathology, insect identification, native plant care, ornamental plant varieties, and so much more. After passing two exams, Master Gardeners then have a fifty hour community service commitment their first year Trainees, and twenty hours for each subsequent year as official Master Gardeners. They attain these hours by planning educational, horticulture-based programs, working in the extension office, preserving demonstration gardens throughout the community, maintaining information booths at local events, and countless other ways. In 2016, we worked with Fannin County to welcome a brand new training class of Master Gardener Trainees. These trainees have worked tirelessly with our veteran Master Gardeners to assist the extension office and educate the local community, contributing over 5,500 hours of volunteer service, which is valued at over \$128,000! Because of their hard work, Master Gardeners in every county are honored for their volunteerism and passion yearly on the third Saturday in March. If you are interested in becoming a Master Gardener or have questions about what the program entails, please contact your extension office. This program is only offered every few years, so if you would like to be notified of when

Georgia's only na-

tive trout. As a matter of fact when John Muir traveled through Trackrock Gap all those years ago he noticed many smaller Trout in the creeks in the area. Later it was determined these minnows were actually Specks. Since that time the territory of our native Speckled Trout has decreased significantly.

The introduction of Rainbow Trout and the development of much of our land have both decreased our water quality and placed extraordinary pressure upon our only native trout. Now to catch this species you must travel into the high coves above waterfalls underneath many of our high mountains. My good friend Patrick Fix loves to Speck fish as much as I and this is a story from his childhood. Patrick, his cousin and his father, Bill Fix, were Speck fishing somewhere around Blue Mountain. Patrick said I can still remember watching Dad walk through the rhododendron thickets. He carried a small fishing rod and on his back was a day pack containing water and a small frying pan. When the trio caught enough fish they would grease up a pan and build a fire. Next, all the fish were rolled in corn meal and fried along with some potatoes. That is a way to spend a day.

Late in the afternoon the trio came to a long cascading waterfall. The falls were not free falling, but, more of a long chute with potholes place intermittently through the 100 foot drop. Actually, the waterfall was in the shape of an scurve much like a water slide you might see at an amusement park. Bill Fix looked at the two young boys and said, "that blue granite is too slick for my liking, so I am going around this fall to the bottom and fish that big hole".

So, Bill and his nephew disappeared around a point while Patrick sat looking at a pothole halfway down the waterfall. I don't think Patrick has ever met anything he is afraid of and the more he looked at the pothole the more he wondered if it contained a record "Speck". So, carefully he crept through the boulders navigating his way down the waterfall to the pothole. At one point he was standing on a flat topped boulder about 3 feet wide and 30 feet tall with nothing but other sharp boulders below him. Finally, he found himself above the pothole. He noticed there was no soil around this waterfall, only the wet blue granite. As he stepped onto the wet rock See Cummings, page 5A

the swamp here in Georgia. My house and many others are fully behind Gurtler. Matt, keep up the good work and hang in there, election time rolls around every 2 to 4 years and we will remember when we go to vote if there is an incumbent next to the name, we'll make the choice to drain the swamp. Sue McGinnis

### - • -**Roadside Littering**

#### Dear Editor,

We live just one "Happy Meal" from town; the distance it takes a buyer to get a fast-food order, then, while driving, gobble down 3000 calories with 50 grams of fat, gulp a 20-ounce soda with 14 spoonsful of sugar and throw cup and packaging onto the roadside. For most of my adult life I have picked up other people's litter and the used diapers and hypodermic syringes/ needles are the worst. Occasionally, a passerby will thank me for doing this, but none ever offer to help.

So, I sympathize with frustrations expressed by Commissioner Paris and Leslie George in recent NGN articles. Despite wishes to "Keep the Mountains Clean" littering continues because: (1) There are more people, and (2) There are no consequences (this is the main reason littering has continued and worsened).

For the past dozen years I have scanned arrest reports in the TCH and NGN and found only one arrest for littering in Towns County and none in Union.

> With determined and sustained efforts, See Gibson, page 5A

And I know several years ago as my husband and I were traveling to Blairsville late one evening, we were merging to our left on the fast lane across the line in front of the BP gas station, and had to lock down, and the people behind us saw what was about to take place and had to even go off the shoulder of the road to keep a pile up from happening.

Some dumb crazy cluck in a white SUV was traveling down that lane, to turn off to his left to the store. That is not even a turning lane at all! We could have hit head on and it would have been his fault too!

I have also been going around curves at a reasonable speed, according to the speed limit, and have had to lock down for vehicles turning off, because there are no turning lanes! Only passing lanes!

And the highways are also the lumpiest and bumpiest with all of that tar patching as well, and many of the crevices and crannies they have filed in are just simply breaking apart again.

I just took my truck to have it aligned from running in to a whole big enough to bury a whole cow in that I couldn't dodge because of on coming traffic either.

I just think other roads and highways needs consideration as well.

And not to mention several 4 way stops and areas in town need more control and some

See Barnes, page 5A •

#### **Planned Parenthood**

#### **Dear Editor**,

I applaud the editor's note regarding Arlene Gray's recent letter, clarifying and correcting her belief that Planned Parenthood provides abortion services.

I would like to answer her question about why there appear to be no charities that "support abortion" to support Planned Parenthood? Planned Parenthood is a 501(c)3 organization (in other words, a "charity" according to the federal tax code) and I, along with millions of others, make a monthly tax-deductible donation to Planned Parenthood.

I personally do not agree that only those who "support abortion" should support Planned Parenthood or organizations that do provide abortion services; I believe that abortion is a personal decision and I support Planned Parenthood because of all the good they do for poor women in this country. Karen Reynolds Gramenz

See Mattee, page 5A

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