Opinions

Everybody has one...

A Life Saver: Smoke Alarms

If you are one of the people who regularly read this column, you would notice that we talk about smoke alarms a great deal. The importance of having working smoke alarms in your home cannot be overstated. Having smoke alarms in your home is the greatest contribution to saving lives from a fire in the home.

Union County Fire Department encourages everyone to

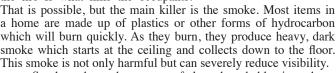
Fire Dept.

from Union

County

install smoke alarms throughout the home. If you have smoke alarms, it is important to ensure that they are working; that they are tested; and that you and your family know what to do when they alarm. A myth about a home fire is that

Fire Chief the fire is what kills the occupants.



Smoke reduces the amount of clean, breathable air, and can fill a room in seconds. Smoke contains harmful substances like carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide. These harmful substances, along with heated gases, irritate the lungs and prevent the body from using what little oxygen is left. The person's body starts to shut down, they pass out, and become a victim of smoke inhalation. Properly working smoke alarms can warn the occupants at the first signs of smoke and give them a chance to get out of the building before they breathe in too much of the harmful smoke.

Another issue is the reduced visibility from smoke. It can block out the lights and make escaping difficult. A person can get disoriented in their own home from the layers of heavy, dark smoke. Smoke alarms can warn occupants and allow them to exit the home before visibility is reduced.

Union County Fire Department offers free smoke alarms to residents of Union County. A person can request the department to come to their home and install the smoke alarms. If you wish to request smoke alarms for your home, complete the request on our web page at www.unioncountyga.gov/fire-department/ and select the Smoke Alarm Request link.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting

The Way Home

Elizabeth Cochrane left New York to prove a point. She was a 25-year-old journalist. It was 1889. It was not the only time she set out to change perceptions about what women could do. This time, her plan was to travel around the world in less than 80 days. And yes, she was inspired by Jules Verne's fictional character, Phileas Fogg.

She endured traveling alone by steam ships and trains. She spoke only English. She carried only one bag. Between Sri Lanka and Hong Kong, her ship nearly foundered in a four-day, gale force storm. Arriving alive, she saw something in Hong Kong on



All Things

the more loyal one becomes.' The day must have contributed to the sensation - the memory of being safely home enjoying Christmas dinner and exchanging gifts with family. There, she is protected from storms and stalkers. There, she sets work aside to enjoy a rest. She went on to complete her journey in 72 days, newly moti-

cap and said: That is the most beautiful flag in the world." She

noticed "the strange fact that the further one goes from home

vated by the thought of home. Christmas has that effect. It beckons you to look closer at your loyalties. It brings the yearnings of the soul to the surface. In a world of trenchant voices, each storming you with their own causes, the soul yearns for peace. In a cultural moment stalked by claims that right is wrong and truth is false, the soul longs for home.

Look closer at what that means. In his poem, "The House of Christmas," Chesterton describes our predicament. "Men are homesick in their homes, and strangers under the sun, and they lay their heads in a foreign land whenever the day is done." He also points to the hope of Bethlehem. "A Child in a foul stable, where beasts feed and foam, only where He was homeless are you and I at home." The home we yearn for, even in this fallen world, is to be where God is. "Immanuel," they

See Fowler, page 5A

Commissioner's Questions

Q. Does Union County Government operate a public

A. No. Coosa Water Authority and Notla Water Authority are independent legislatively enacted entities that are not controlled by Union County or the City of Blairsville. They are governed by their board of directors who are voted on by the water users in their area.

Q. How are the Water Aufrom Union thority service boundaries sepa-County rated/divided? Commissioner

A. Coosa Water Authority mostly covers West of Blairsville along the Blue Ridge Highway and parts of Owltown. They have 1797

Paris water customers. Notla Water Authority mostly covers the Northeastern part of Union County and they have 6474 water customers. The City of Blairsville covers the city and they extend slightly

are commercial accounts. Q. Why don't you leave the Lake Nottely at full pool (full water level) throughout the entire year?

out of town in all directions including near the Airport Industrial

Park and Walmart. They have 1847 customers, and many of those

A. That would be so nice and easy and I could certainly be a local hero. However, Lake Nottely is owned and controlled by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and the county has absolutely no say in the water levels. That is strictly controlled by TVA. They have many priorities they have to balance. Flood control and power generation are two of their top priorities.

Q. Does TVA change the lake levels differently at certain times of the year?

A. Absolutely! During the summer they do a pretty good job of maintaining lake levels at or near full pool for boating and other recreation, but if the rainfall levels are low, lake levels typically fluctuate accordingly. TVA does have a web site (TVA.com) and an app for your phone so you can keep up with lake levels and it shows their normal guide that they try to maintain assuming normal amounts of rainfall.

Q. What are normal lake levels on Lake Nottely?

A. According to their guide, the lake is at the lowest levels in the winter. Generally, it begins to rise in the later part of March

See Paris, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Nitro

Dear Editor,

I wish to publicly acknowledge the thoughtfulness and the sensitivity of Jessie's Pooch Parlor at 1376 Hwy 515 East on the passing of my dog Nitro. I recently received a phone call from them that they had something they wanted me to pick up. It was a Christmas tree ornament with Nitro's name painted on it and with a lock of Nitro's hair, neatly tied with a small ribbon, inside the ornament. I decorated a 9-foot Christmas tree this year with only the Nitro ornament and a lot of lights. It was a relatively simple gift but it had an immense effect on me that will last for the rest of my life.

Thomas G Tornabene

Re: Petition for Commission

Where is the justice and grace from a resident who is meant to have our best interests at heart? This is a frustrating and deeply disappointing chapter for our community.

For years, the residents of Union County worked tirelessly to gather legal signatures from registered voters to request a referendum on the ballot. This referendum would allow us to decide whether we want one commissioner or multiple commissioners to govern our county. We thoroughly reviewed the signatures, excluding those from individuals who had moved away or who had passed on, and amassed an abundance of support from

See Mills, page 5A

Judge Dwain Brackett

Dear Editor,

Judge Dwain Brackett is retiring. I think this county should give him a parting gift to help him remember his time in office: A copy of the Bill of Rights, so he can somehow understand how he betrayed and trampled on thousands of Union County citizens' CONSTITUTIONAL rights by dismissing the petition that requests to have a ballot question on multiple commissioners. The Bill of rights gives the people this right

Thousands of people signed this petition, obtaining more than the required number of signatures. The petition was not a plea to have

See Rice, page 5A

Re: Denial of Petition for a Board of Commissioners

Dear Editor,

After residing in Union County for over 17 years and seeing the unethical practices and vile treatment of citizens by the Commissioner and the Sheriff, it appears the Probate Office has moved in the same direction.

Judge Brackett deprived over 4,200 Union County residents their First Amendment right of free speech to petition the government for a redress of grievances. We attempted on several occasions to get information from the Probate Office on procedures for submitting the petition, but were given vague information and unable to answer questions, stating, "We're not sure... we've never done this before..." Judge Brackett, just a layperson, leaves his office as probate judge with a stain on his record. He was elected by the people but did not represent them as he

See Vandereedt, page 5A

Addressing Rumors Dear Editor,

Kenneth West

Since moving to Blairsville in 2006, I have been involved in one way or another with Humane Society's Mountain Shelter. For the last 10 or so years I have been on the Board of Directors, and now I am that body's Secretary. I am very proud of the Shelter and the work that we do on behalf of the homeless pets of our community.

See Shannon, page 5A

Shawn Jarrard

Publisher/Owner General Manager/Editor Advertising Director Sports Editor

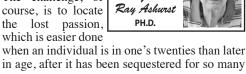


Passion

Whether a person is in his or her twenties or sixties, he or she has a passion within, even if it is covered up. We all have at least one passion that can be a dynamic, driving force, and once it is activated, well, "Look out world! Here we come!" One of our goals as we continue to

grow is to discover once again that passion and ignite it with a blowtorch. The challenge, of course, is to locate the lost passion,

Successful which is easier done



Mental

Health

Dr. James

I believe that people begin to know at an early age, possibly in elementary school, what might possibly turn on their passionate switch or what might be their passionate gut feeling or passionate driving force. If this might be true for you, here is a challenge: Don't be reluctant or afraid to wander back into your early ages to discover and explore what you might once have

See Ashurst, page 5A

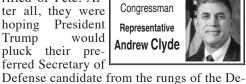
America Needs Pete Hegseth

As I've shared with you before, the Washington Establishment opposes President Trump's Cabinet nominees because these folks are determined to disrupt the Swamp's status quo.

The current target? Pete Hegseth. The past few weeks have proven that

United States

the Uniparty is terrified of Pete. After all, they were hoping President Trump pluck their pre-



partment of Defense's bureaucratic ladder. In reality, President Trump chose an American patriot to dramatically improve

As you may know, Pete Hegseth is a decorated warfighter, a graduate of Harvard and Princeton Universities, and a relentless advocate for America's veterans. He's an Army veteran who courageously served our nation in combat in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Pete's heroism earned him two Bronze Stars and a Combat Infantryman's Badge.

Yet the liberal media and Washington elites would have you believe that Pete Hegseth is unqualified to lead the DOD. In

See Clyde, page 5A

Derek Richards Todd Forrest Lowell Nicholson

Christmas Gifts

Christmas brings back many memories to each of us. Christmas brings memories of various gifts of which I received through the years. I can remember getting stockings stuffed with all kinds of goodies. For example, I love tangerines to this day because my grandmother

used to give them to me at Christmas. And I remember getting those candied orange slices at Christmas. I also remember getting those soft pepper-



mint sticks at Christmas each year. (Did you know you can still get those candied orange slices and peppermint sticks at Foodland?) I also remember getting those Ice Box Fruit Cakes at Christmas each year. My mother made those things, and I would make myself sick eating them. I still have a sweet tooth for those kinds of sweets.

Christmas has always been a special time for my family. My grandparents celebrated Christmas by decorating Cedar Trees and by answering the phone with a special greeting. The day after Thanksgiving my grandmother would greet telephone callers with "Christmas Gift" instead of hello. She told me that as a youngster she would go with large groups of people to serenade their neighbors. The group of people would begin the serenade by saying "Christmas Gift," and then the group would sing a Christmas Carol to their neighbor. The neighbors would respond by tossing hard candy to the group after the song.

Just after the turn of the century my Grandfather's family experienced some hard times. My grandfather was only about 4 years old when his Uncle joined the Army and went to fight in WWI. Then the influenza epidemic came through North Alabama and two of my Grandfather's Aunts died while in their teens. Next, his youngest Uncle was accidentally shot while playing with an old pistol. These problems placed a strain on the marriage of my Great-Great Grandparents, John and Martha Cummings. I don't know exactly what happened, but, John left his wife of more than 20 vears and ran off with another woman. They run off to Missouri and raised another family. All of this was bad and created hard feelings. My Great Grandmother never recovered from

Some of John's sons never forgave him for the destruction of their family. He came back for a couple of visits, but, a couple of his sons would have nothing to do with him. But, time has a way of healing many sore spots, and as the years went by John became more and

See Cummings, page 5A

Chamber 101: Workforce Last week I wrote about the Chamber's

role in tourism and the importance of tourism to our economy. As mentioned, tourism generates an estimated 821 jobs. The Georgia Department of Labor estimates that the labor force of Union County is 12,041 with 11,741 of those individu-

Blairsville als working. With an unemployment rate of 2.5% and only 300 unemployed residents, some may say that everyone that wants to work is working.

County Chambei



Union County is blessed to have such a strong economy from our hospitality and tourism industry to our manufacturing operations. Each year as we sponsor our Leadership Union program, class members are astonished to learn of the various businesses located in Union County. Even those that have grown up here are in awe of the manufacturing facilities located within the County and the variety of products produced. What also makes Union

See Chamber, page 5A

Winter Tree ID

In the winter time, deciduous trees can become much trickier to identify because the trees don't have any leaves on them. However, with practice tree ID is still possible, you just have to learn to look for the right characteristics. Without leaves to go by things like bark, tree struc-

ture, and location are going to be very helpful in figuring out what kind of tree you're looking at. Lets' talk about some of these features and how you can use them to identify trees.



Watching

For starters I should clarify that I am talking about native trees in this column. These are trees that you might see while on a winter hike in the woods. If we added in non-native trees, then ID is more challenging because the options are much wider. One helpful tool to remember for tree ID is MAD BUCK. This acronym stands for Maple. Ash, Dogwood, BUCKeye. If you find a tree that has opposite branching, it is almost guaranteed to be one of these four. Opposite branching is a pattern where the side branches and leaves come out directly across the stem from each other.

Bark comes in various patterns which can be helpful hints. Some trees have bark that forms ravines that travel up the tree. Some hickories and poplar fall into this category. Others have bark that looks like it's peeling off the tree. White oak, sycamore, birch, and shagbark hickory have peely bark. Some bark looks like pieces of a puzzle fit together. Dogwood, persimmon, and sourwood fit in that category. Smooth bark is not as common, but is found in American beech. Some trees will have thorns, like black locust, honey locust, and devil's walking stick,

Looking at the buds on the tree can help with ID. Oaks are the only trees that will have multiple terminal buds. That means at the end of a branch there will be three or more buds popping out. Beech trees have thin, pointy buds. Beech trees will also exhibit marcescence. This is where leaves die but do not fall from the tree until spring when the new leaves grow and force the old leaves off. Some red oaks will also do this when they are young.

Overall tree shape helps with ID if you take a few steps back from the tree and look at it for a few seconds. Poplar trees are going to be very straight and tall. Most sourwood trees grow at an angle. Dogwoods are going to be smaller, and most frequently found along a tree line. Some trees like sycamore, river birch, or maple like to grow in wet soils, so you'll find them along streams. Upland in drier soils you'll find more oak, hickory, or ash. Tree location is more of a guideline for ID.

See Williams, page 5A

Publication No: 001505

Advertising, News deadlines Friday at 4 p.m. • Mail Service for all subscriptions except 30512, 30514 & 30572 (Union County) - One Year \$45 INCLUDING UNION COUNTY CUSTOMER REQUEST MAIL SERVICE. In county,

carrier delivered subscription is \$10. All subscriptions must be paid in advance. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is published weekly by NGN/TCH, Inc., 266 Cleveland Street, Blairsville, Georgia, 30512. Entered as Second Class Matter as of Dec. 24, 1988, at the Post Office in Blairsville. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

Phone: 706-745-6343 Fax: 706-745-1830 • P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, Georgia 30514

Website: www.nganews.com • Email: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com • Mail: P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514 The North Georgia News is an independent and nonpartisan publication. As such, third-party views contained herein are not necessarily the opinions or positions of this newspaper, e.g. advertising, press releases, editorial content, perspectives expressed in articles covering local events, etc.

North Georgia News

Published since 1909 • Legal Organ of Union County

Paris...continued from Page 4A

and continues until full pool by the middle of May and remains at that general level until August or September, if there is adequate rainfall. This data is all shown on the TVA Operating Guide for Lake Nottely. This guide shows the range that TVA attempts to keep the lake levels between. In red, it shows the actual levels of the lake this year.

Q. A couple of years ago, some Lake Nottely property owners approached Union County about leachate and PFAS levels in the lake. Can Union County control what goes in and out of Lake Nottely?

A. While we understand concerns about the quality of the water in Lake

Nottely, the authority for water quality is the Georgia Environmental Protection Department (EPD). According to the EPD, PFAS are widely used, long lasting chemicals, components of which break down very slowly over time. TVA manages the reservoir, and they do some testing; however, the Georgia EPD has the authority to enforce the Federal Clean Water Act controlling what goes into and out of Lake Nottely through "Permitted Discharges."

Union County Government has no authority to control these discharges. Union County does issue permits for grading and construction to help prevent silt from entering our streams.

Clyde...continued from Page 4A

fact, they're so desperate to discredit Pete and tank his nomination process that they're spreading false, anonymous smears about his conduct and character.

What is the Swamp so afraid of? Well, as Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth will: Restore strength to our military; Command respect at home and abroad; Ensure American military might is again feared on the world stage; End woke DEI programs that drain taxpayer dollars and impede readiness; Bring accountability, true leadership, and bold, fresh ideas to the DOD.

Sounds like the perfect man for the job to me.

Meanwhile, some Senate Republicans — who are charged with confirming the President's Cabinet — aren't so sure.

Keep in mind, Joe Biden's Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, received overwhelming bipartisan support. In total, 43 Republican Senators voted to confirm Lloyd Austin and his harmful policies. The majority of these Republicans still serve in the Senate, with many representing

Confirming Pete Hegseth should be a no-brainer.

some of the most conserva-

tive states in the country.

I'm encouraged by President Trump's unwavering support for Pete Hegseth, as well as Pete's resolve amidst the Swamp's malicious lies. Last week, I had the opportunity to meet Pete - and I told him the folks of the Ninth District want him to keep fighting! As a Navy combat veteran, I'm confident that Pete Hegseth is the Secretary of Defense that our servicemembers, the Pentagon, and America desperately need.

Chamber... continued from Page 4A

County unique is that many of our larger producers are locally owned. These industries are strategically placed and recognized growth from 5% to 15% last year in their respective industries. This is great for the economy, but to sustain this growth they must have employees. The Chamber works with our local businesses to address this issue as well as partnering with the Union County School System and our Post Secondary Institutions.

One of the greatest assets with which the County addresses this issue is the Union County College and Career Academy (CCA). The CCA offers pathways includ-

ing Agriculture, Computer Science, Entrepreneurship, Health Science, Transportation and Logistics just to name a few. The CCA continually updates pathways to align with our local business needs and requirements. The Chamber and School System work to assist the County to grow from within and to prepare our local students to enter the workforce in hopes they remain in Union County to keep our economy strong and thriving.

Thank you for supporting the Blairsville-Union County Chamber and the Union County School System as we work to make Life Better in Blairsville.

Vandereedt... continued from Page 4A

should have.

Senator Gooch went on the record to give other options to achieve a board of commissioners other than a petition. Let's hope that he will assist with those options since his job is to represent the people.

I am still perplexed as to why certain people are afraid to allow the citizens to vote on what form of government they want. Lamar Paris went on local radio to say that he felt vindicated that the petition was not allowed to move forward. I feel vindicated that he lost his race for commissioner after his reign of 24 years. His loss is due to voters learning more about who Lamar Paris is and how he has treated citizens. Many didn't even know we had a sole commissioner and that he is a Democrat. I am glad his days of harassment of the citizens is over. Elected officials should not treat the citizens of the county the way I have seen him treat those with which he disagrees.

Union County will have a board of commissioners eventually, and you will have Lamar Paris to thank for that. He has invited in a lot of new people coming from

places who have boards.

Only seven counties are left in the entire United States that don't have boards. We will continue to stand up for the people of this county to have a voice and a choice in the form of government

they want.

I am confident that
Commissioner-elect Harold
Collins will eventually realize the county needs more
than one person making decisions for the people of Union

County.

Cindy Vandereedt

Rice... continued from Page 4A

a Board of five commissioners. The petition is asking that we have the people of Union County vote on whether or not to have a county government with a Sole Commissioner or to have a five-member Board of Commissioners. But Judge Dwain Brackett, before leaving office, dismissed the petition. He decided, in his betrayal of the Constitution, that he knew better – that only the legislature could change our local government. That is not true.

We, the citizens of Union County, can make the decision on how we want to be governed. Judge Brackett, with the stroke of his pen, is denying us that right. He struck down a legally obtained petition, one that meets all requirements and was duly filed. The question lies with the people of our county, not with the legislature. Judge Brackett has no grounds to deny this petition. "We the People" demand to have a say in how we are governed. How is it that ONE person in our county, a retiring Judge Dwain Brack-

ett, gets to solely decide how

we shall be governed? This should not be allowed. Please keep in mind, the petition is not requesting that we have a five-member Board of Commissioners.

The petition is asking that the people be allowed to vote on whether or not we would like to have a five-member Board of Commissioners or a Sole Commissioner. **Lucy Rice**

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A called the Child, "God with

us." Look into His face.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He lived in Nazareth growing up. Capernaum in Galilee was home during his ministry years. But Jesus has another home in mind for you. "I go to prepare a place for you," He said. "You know the way... I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:2-6).

That is the hope revealed to humanity by the Child in that stable. The Light shined in the darkness, showing you the way home.

Cummings...continued from Page 4A

more feeble. He made things right with my Great Grandfather Lon, who was always close to his father even though he couldn't understand why John had left his mother. So, one Christmas Lon invited his elderly father to come home and spend some time with his family.

Lon invited the whole

family for Christmas dinner. Some came and some refused. There was still much bitterness among some of the boys. Lon's oldest daughter, Mabel (Papa's sister), had an idea. She bought her Papa a brand new pair of overalls and asked everyone to bring a

Mills... continued from Page 4A

our community.

In good faith, we submitted our petition to the Probate Court promptly, though we inadvertently omitted the count. We then waited patiently for over a month, anticipating a response regarding when our matter would be placed on the ballot. What transpired, however, was an egregious breach of trust. Judge Dwain Brackett, a fellow community member, reviewed our submission and denied it with no communication to the organizers – his fellow neighbors!

The most troubling aspect of this situation is that Judge Brackett, being part of our community, should have championed our cause, just as the more than 4,200 residents expressed through their signatures. Justice should not be withheld. Judge Bracket had the opportunity to clarify the omission by simply making a phone call to the organizers to confirm the count (or any other issue that would not let the petition move forward). Instead, he opted to deny the petition outright.

Is this how we define fairness in our county? By ignoring the voices of over 4,000 residents who desire a say in their government? This is not just an oversight; it is outrageous behavior that undermines justice in Union County.

We deserve better.

Sincerely, **Jeanne Mills**

Williams... continued from Page 4A

The ability to identify trees can add some interest to a hike or give you an idea what use that tree have. If you have questions about winter tree ID contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob. Williams@uga.edu.

Shonnon

Snannon... continued from Page 4A

The Board is aware that lately there have been some unkind and untrue comments in social media circulated by a small group of individuals whom we believe are influenced by a disgruntled former employee. For those spreading these false rumors, perhaps our community would be better served if instead of making malicious attacks, you volunteered in our organization. Your derogatory comments do not benefit anyone.

The Mountain Shelter Board of Directors is a group of dedicated volunteers whose only concern - and I mean ONLY concern – is the wellbeing of the homeless dogs and cats of Towns and Union County. We do not receive any compensation for our service; on the contrary, we volunteer hundreds of hours of our time to help the animals of these two counties. In addition to the Shelter, we operate two Thrift Stores whose purpose is to raise money to support the Shelter and the animals in our care.

Next year, along with this community, we will celebrate our 40th year of serving Towns and Union Counties. As that anniversary approaches, the Board has been hard at work refining our vision for the future of animal rescue. We have started a major reorganization to ensure we are able to meet the needs of our community now and in the future. We look forward to an outstanding 2025, when we hope to expand the Shelter to better serve our community and the ever-expanding population of homeless animals.

We want to thank our generous community and those who support us. We survive on donations and could not do what we do without your support. Your donations benefit the homeless dogs and cats in our care. Thank you for supporting us and them!

Ruth Shannon

Secretary, Humane Society's Mountain Shelter Board of Directors gift for the old man. She gathered all the gifts and stuffed them into the overalls and then sewed the leg openings together so the gifts would not fall out. John was so old he had trouble seeing, but, he knew the overalls were new, so he tried to put them on, but, he could not get his leg into

So, he turned them upside down and reached his arm into the legs and began pulling out his gifts. The old man soon had about 10 gifts lying at his feet. Papa said he had tears running down his face and he was laughing at the same time. His grandfather got more than he bargained for that Christmas. He received the gifts and the forgiveness of his family. I think that is why Papa loved Christmas. He was able to experience, first-hand, the true meaning of Christmas.

Ashurst... continued from Page 4A

been passionate about. It can be quite an exciting journey of

"If you can't figure out your life purpose, figure out your passion. For your passion will lead you right into your purpose." (Bishop T.D. Jakes)