Opinions

Winter is Here

Winter is upon us. With the unusually high temperatures and little rain over the last few months, we can agree that winter has snuck up on us. We have experienced the colder temperatures and winter conditions over the last week or

so. Some people are happy to see the cooler temperatures and the possibility of snow. Others are not so sure. One of the things that winter brings is hazardous road conditions and motor vehicle accidents. Union County Fire Department would like to remind everyone of a few driving tips for the busy Christmas travel time and the rest of winter.



Before we begin winter driving, we must get prepared. Drivers should ensure that their vehicle is in good working order and has good tires for winter conditions. If your car is not performing well, you may get stranded in these colder temperatures. Worn tires reduce traction and increase the possibility of an accident. It is also a good idea to be prepared in the event that you are in an accident or stranded for a while in the cold. Drivers should create a Ready Kit with essential supplies that can be stored in the trunk for such emergencies. The web site ready.ga.gov has tips on winter driving, Ready Kits and what should be in them.

If you must drive in winter conditions, there are a few things to keep in mind. Know the weather and the possibility for hazardous conditions. This includes the temperature and possible snow or ice forecast. There may not be snow but temperatures below freezing can produce "black ice" that drivers are unable to see. Drive slower than usual and keep a greater distance between you and the vehicle in front of you. Stopping distances increase dramatically with snow and ice. Wear your seatbelt. This may seem like an unnecessary thing to say but there are still a number of people who do not wear seatbelts.

The last thing is pay attention. Distracted driving is a major contributor to accidents in good weather much less winter weather. So, turn down the radio, put down the cell phone and try not to reach in the back seat for one of Grandma's cookies that she gave you.

Driving in winter weather can be very dangerous. Being prepared and taking extra precautions will help keep you and your family safe during this Christmas and winter travel season. Union

See Dyer, page 5B

The mission of the Union

County Anti-Drug Coali-

tion is to support an overall

safe community by provid-

ing information, education

and support services to

children, families and com-

munity toward prevention

of illegal substance abuse.

Bath Salts as Drugs

"Bath salts" have nothing to do with the cosmetic and wellness products that are used for the bath, except the fact that they have a similar appearance. They are consumed because of their ability to induce a positive mood and to increase energy levels. They can be ingested, snorted,

smoked or injected and can trigger extreme effects that are even more dangerous than those caused by the illegal drugs that they are designed to copy. Mixing them with even a small amount of alcohol also significantly enhances the psycho stimulant effects and induces re-

actions such as muscle tension, chest pain, severe headaches and psychosis.

These synthetic drugs, much like illegal drugs, can be addictive. The effects after consumption are not only the desired ones such

See Drugs, page 5B

Letters to the Editor... AMEN

Dear Editor,

I would like to very much say AMEN and thank you to Mr. Brinkworth for saying everything I wanted to say. It is amazing from liberal, peace loving, tolerant, open minded people you hear such hateful, mean, prejudiced, untrue, Nazi calling, racist, and any other "ist" and "isms" ou can think of. I have language and personally I just think they are very poor losers and they need to go to their safe space and chill. Ånne Parks

The Christmas holiday season is a joyous

time of year, but the joy can change quickly to sorrow if we aren't careful with our holiday decorations. Certain types of fires and injuries asso-

ciated with holiday decorating are much more common during this season. Here are some statistics from the NFPA that should make

RC&D Executive Director Frank

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 good ies. For example, I love tangerines to this day because my grandmother used to give them to me

Around **The Farm** Mickey

Commissioner's Questions

Q. What are you proudest about that has happened this past year?

A. I am so proud of all our Public Safety/First Responder employees and volunteer personnel in the county and the roll they have

all played in helping keep our wildfires down to a minimum. Especially, we must congratulate you, the public, for keeping us informed of wildfires and being careful yourselves. But for the grace of God we could have been in a situation similar to Gatlinburg and l am so thankful that we were spared.



Q. Will Santa Clause come to the Courthouse this year?

A. Actually, he seems to go where there are more kids. We have not seen him at the Courthouse although we do have the Manger Scene and Christmas trees out front in case he decides to drop by. We will give him a little credit for the wonderful rain though. If he decides to come by for a visit, we will be glad to see him. As employees of the county, we are all grateful for all of you who own property in the county and willingly pay your property taxes. We feel we are very good stewards of your money, but never the less, without your support of what we do in the county, it would be hard to accomplish all that we do.

Q. How much of our property taxes does it take to operate Union County?

A. Only 50% of our Budget comes from your property taxes and the other 50% comes from fees, fines, forfeitures, grants and other miscellaneous income. We always brag about the fact that we have had the 4th lowest property tax rate in the entire State of Georgia, but this year, we may have dropped down to the 3rd lowest. One reason is that we are so streamlined and we operate our government like a business. We are very careful with our spending of your money and we are very fortunate to have so many employees and volunteers working so hard to make the most of your tax dollars

Q. We have heard it said that other counties do not understand how Union County can have so many good facilities and infrastructure that other similar counties don't have. How

See Paris, page 5B

Merry Christmas

Merry Christmas from the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce! I wanted to take this opportunity thank everyone in the community for coming out to enjoy the Tour of Trees and Holly Jolly Christmas. I wanted to say a special thank you to James Bridges for al-

lowing us to use his train for the Mayor's Train and to First Baptist Church for helping the volunteers to look their best! Thank you to the Currier and Ives



Brass Quintet and Mojo for the beautiful music that filled the building! Thank you again to Union General Hospital, Inc. and Affiliates for sponsoring both the Tour of Trees and Holly Jolly Christmas again this year.

This is such a special time of year. It is fun enjoying all the activities of the season from Tree Lightings, to Caroling on the square, the an-

See Allison, page 5B

Christmas Trees

While some opt for the ease of an artificial tree that can be used year after year and passed down to kids and grandkids, there is just something about a real tree that brightens up the home

at Christmas. If you choose to purchase a cut tree, make sure you follow steps to keep it as healthy as you can for as long



A gift that still shines bright...

Christmas Tree Fires & Falls

We are attracted to heroes, especially real ones. Just this month two policemen in Americus, GA sacrificed their lives protecting their community from a lifelong, violent criminal. It became a national story, with condolences pouring in from around the country. May God strengthen these hero families in their time

All Things

New

Wayne

Fowler

To truly understand the Christmas story, you must see the world from God's perspective. He sees people walking in darkness, living in a dark land, who need light. He sees people going astray like sheep, turning to our own way, who need a shepherd (Is. 9, 53)

Christmas Hero

ful Life," Jimmy Stewart said, "It's amazing that it's become such

a Christmas picture." It should be no surprise since the movie

ends in a heart-warming Christmas scene, and a plot theme is full

bility for the town building and loan business to George. In his

work, he was admired and respected as he protected the town

to his family and friends until he saw what Bedford Falls might

be like had he never been born. How fitting that they honored

George Bailey was a hero. He did not know what he meant

of the Christmas message.

Director Frank Capra's movie

portrays the humble life of George

Bailey. Despite his wanderlust of

anchor chains, plane motors, train

whistles, and his idealistic plans of

changing the world, he stayed home.

His father died and left the responsi-

from the miserly Henry Potter.

their hero at Christmas.

Talking with Johnny Carson in 1987 about "It's a Wonder-

Into such a world a child was born, and "His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6). This child was from above, as "He was in the beginning with God" (Jn. 1:2). He was also from below, as his mother Mary "wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger" (Lk. 2:7). He is God in the flesh, God with us, the God who saves

Jesus is our hero. His mission on earth was to be light, to be a shepherd, to be the way back to our Creator. What would

See Fowler, page 5B

do you do it?

Everybody has one...

of grief and lifelong loss.

Oh, What A Savior

Dear Editor,

Ever since the beginning of Adam and Eve when they sinned in the Garden of Eden and were banished from the garden man has sought his own agenda, his own desires. His own lust and pleasures of the world and deeper and deeper we have fallen into a pattern of self-gratification and sin has ruled the hearts of mankind. But God saw the need for a Savior of the world. One who would come to earth as a baby and make a difference in the hearts of all who would believe in His name, the Name of Jesus Christ.

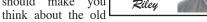
In this Christmas season there is still a crying out from a world that needs a Deliverer. The religion man needs Christ, not a religion. The man of power needs a Savior who has the power to save him. The thinking man needs One who can meet all his mental and spiritual needs. And for sure the wretched man needs to know about a Savior who not only can save him, but build him up so that he can live for God, not himself.

See Combs, page 5B

Water Quality

Dear Editor,

We all have a lot to be thankful for especially our natural resources. We take for granted that clean water is a given. In 2016, over 20 states reported toxic algae blooms this year as a result of excess nitrogen, phosphates, sewage, and runoff, notwithstanding the severe water quality issues which occurred in Michigan and Ohio. Without the vigilance and best practices of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition (HRWC) we too could experience a decline in our water quality. The HRWC is a volunteer, grant and donor driven independent group, currently with 47 volunteers monitoring 55 sites monthly in Clay, Union, and Towns County. The data gathered is submitted monthly to a government website (www.georgiaadoptastream.com) which establishes baseline information. There are no government agencies providing monthly monitoring of our water resources. The HRWC is the "Canary in the coal mine", our only early See Turner, page 5B



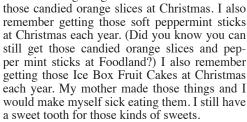
Christmas tree. NFPA estimates that Christmas trees, both natural and artificial, were the item first ignited in an estimated average of 230 reported home structure fires per year during 2010-2014. These fires caused an estimated average of six civilian deaths, 22 civilian injuries, and \$18.3 million in direct property damage per year. These estimates are based on data from the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA's) annual fire department experience survey. During the same period, holiday lights and other decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated average of 150 home structure fires per year. These fires caused an average of nine civilian deaths, 16 civilian injuries, and \$8.4 million in direct property damage per year. Although these fires are not common, when they do occur, they are unusually likely to be serious.

On average, one of every 40 reported home structure Christmas tree fires resulted in a death compared to an average of one death per 142 total reported home structure fires. Similar shares of home Christmas tree structure fires were in December (43%) and January (39%). Christmas tree fires are more likely after Christmas than before. For example, none of the ten dates with the largest shares of home Christmas tree structure fires were before Christmas. Electrical failures or malfunctions were involved in one-third (32%) of the home Christmas tree structure fires. One in six (17%) occurred because some type of heat source was too close to the tree. Decorative lights on line voltage were involved in 12% of these incidents. Candles started seven percent of home Christmas tree fires.

The risk of fire is higher with natural trees than artificial ones. Researchers found that dry natural trees burned easily but trees that had been kept moist are unlikely to catch fire unintentionally. Holiday lights and other decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated average of 150 home structure fires per year in this same period. Fifteen percent of these fires began with Christmas trees. Electrical failures or malfunctions were factors in nearly two-thirds of the fires involving holiday or decorative lights.

In a study of fall-related injuries during the holiday season, it was estimated that an annual average of 5,800 fall injuries related to holiday decorating were treated at hospital See *Riley*, page 5B

at Christmas. And *Cummings* I remember getting



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. Then Papa's 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 years and ran off with another woman. All of this was very difficult on my great great grandmother, Martha, and created hard feelings with other family members. But, after a year or so Papa's uncles and aunts found out their daddy had run off with his sister's daughter. These two ran off to Missouri and raised another family. The Cummings family in Alabama was extremely bitter and eventually their mother, Martha, died from a broken heart.

Some of John's sons never forgave him for the destruction of their family. He came back for a couple of visits, but, two of his sons would have nothing to do with him. Time has a way of healing many wounds. As the years went by John became more and more feeble. He made things right with his son and my great grandfather, Lon. See Cummings, page 5B

as possible. First, decide Mattee

on where is an appropriate place to put the tree. Do you want it to be seen from all sides or would you rather it be against a wall or window? Always make sure that heat sources, such as TVs, fireplaces, radiators and air ducts are nowhere near the tree, and put the tree in an area that doesn't interfere with doors or common foot traffic. Always measure the height and width of the space you have available in the room where you want the tree to go. Nothing is worse than picking and paying for the perfect tree and hauling it home on top of your car or in your truck, only to find it will not fit anywhere in your house. Have a tape measure handy to determine the height of the tree you want, and always bring some extra cord to tie the tree down in case the tree farm does not have any extra.

Many trees sold on retail lots may have come from out of state and been exposed to harsh conditions on the journey to their destination. They may have been cut weeks prior to when they are sold, and they are probably stressed by the time they are sold. It is always good to know whether the trees are delivered once at the beginning of the season or are they delivered at different times during the selling season. The earlier and fresher you can get a tree, the better. Fresh trees have a healthy green appearance with very few browning needles. The needles should be flexible but not fall off if you run them through your hand. You can also raise the tree off the stand a little and let it drop. If a bunch of needles drop off, it might not last as long as you want it to. However, it is totally normal for a few needles to fall off and some near the trunk may be brown. The majority of the tree should always be bright green and fragrant, though. Don't forget to check for little hitchhikers as well! Bagworm moths and scale insects are common on Christmas trees.

When choosing your tree, keep in mind the place you've decided to put your tree and choose a tree that's appropriate. For example, if you want to place your tree against a wall, it is okay if some branches on one side are a little damaged, or there is a bald spot. If you place it in a corner, you may even want more branches to be toward one side or another. This approach can help you save time and money, because it can take a long time to find the perfect tree, and prettier trees are almost always more expensive. Once you've decided on a tree, make sure that

See *Mattee*, page 5B

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