

Opinions

Everybody has one...

A new year of blessings

2015 came in with little fan-fare. It could be a year of prosperity, we've got our fingers crossed that this will be the case.

I already know that it will be a year of change. Personally, I've moved to another area of Union County. Hopefully, by the time you read this column again, that move will be complete.

I've already experienced much happiness in 2015. My great nephews, Travis and Trent, and my great nieces helped me move. Of course their parents also helped.

But the joy for me was spending time with the boys and Madison and Megan. Also, getting to spend time with Will and Jennifer was a great personal enjoyment. We enjoyed a family meal together and a family reunion of sorts.

That was a sign that 2015 is going to be a grand year. I've determined that to enjoy a good year, one needs to spend as much time as possible with family and friends. That close bond helps us get through personal hardships, and enjoy the excitement life has to offer.

As I get older, I miss my family more and more. My parents and one sister have gone to their reward in Heaven. It makes the family left behind more invaluable.

We've always been a tight-knit group, or, at least I felt that way. Seeing the younger ones that have been added to the family equation over the past few years means a lot.

I hope to spend much time with Travis and Trent, and Madison and Megan as the years progress. Travis and Trent are outdoorsmen following a family tradition that dates back to the old days before the Duncans arrived here from Buckingham County, VA.

Yes, 2015 is going to be a good year. It's going to be a year when family comes together and becomes even a more tight-knit family.

I love my home, I love Union County and I love my family. The Good Lord has blessed me with the love of my family, because Lord only knows, it takes dedicated people to help you when you move.

2015 has already provided me with a grand blessing.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



All Things New

I'm not big on New Year's resolutions. I doubt I'm alone, especially by the time Valentine's Day arrives. It seems better to think about finishing something, not just trying hard to start something that should have been done a long time ago anyway. Surely you've heard a sage in your life say, 'don't start something unless you can finish it.'

I am a Georgia man, but Auburn educated. Early this football season I enjoyed the high ranking of so many teams from the SEC West, and all the chatter about how dominant our division was. Such power made it easy to explain away the intra-division losses. Commentators crowed about the possibility of two SEC West teams in the new playoff scheme. Problem is, we didn't finish well. Auburn didn't, for sure, unless you count a new defensive coordinator as the highlight of the season.

Finish well. That's not a goal, but a lifestyle, which applies to faith, too. I have observed in over a half century of life and decades as a pastor, there is a caricature of faith that turns away the unbeliever and discourages the believer, so neither finish well. G.K. Chesterton said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried." The past is a graveyard of good intentions slain by the belief that Christianity is just a strict and high moral code to keep.

The Apostle Paul said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." Was it traveling the world, planting churches, shaking off a snake bite, speaking to rulers? Was it keeping all of his New Year's resolutions that led to this self-congratulation? Doubt it. He finished well because he counted "all things to be lost in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

This caricature of faith I mentioned omits the relationship. Authentic faith is about the person of Jesus, God the Son, the One who loves you. It embraces change wrought by God. Consider that "it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Faith in Jesus means a new life lived by a moral code written on the inside.

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Questions and Answers

Part 1 of 3 dealing with senior property tax exemptions.

Q. Do you think that it is a good idea to exempt certain age groups from paying certain property taxes?

A. Any time you exempt one person from paying taxes, then another person will have to pick up their share. I will not weigh in on this answer directly except to say that I work very hard at keeping your county government portion of property taxes as low as possible (currently the THIRD lowest property tax rate in the State of Georgia out of 159 counties). While I have no control what so ever over Union County Schools or their property taxes, I also know that they have the SECOND lowest property tax rate in the entire State of Georgia. This is pretty amazing especially since we both have some of the best facilities and employees anywhere. What else could we do?

Q. Why do you think we are able to maintain our quality of life in Union County?

A. With us all working together, we are able to keep our facilities and services second to none and our education system one of the best in the state. Why do we want to change something that is working so well since Union County was founded?

Q. What happens when we start to exempt certain people or age groups from paying property taxes?

A. You only have to look at Lumpkin County (Dahlonega) where they have a senior school exemption on property taxes and their total property tax rate is over 60 percent higher than Union County. So if you have a home valued \$100,000 in Union County (no exemptions) the taxes are \$707.24. But if you have that same home value in Lumpkin County, your property taxes are \$1,101.12.

Q. Are you trying to scare us in to not wanting any property tax exemptions?

A. No, but I think you should have some of the facts. Actually it is a very complicated issue when you start exempting anyone from any kind of taxes. The issue then becomes at what age do you start the exemption, 60, 65, 70 or 80? What amount of personal income is reasonable to use for the exemption? Who is going to determine the amount of income you have and who will be responsible for keeping up with it when it changes? How much personal information do you want to give the local government about your personal finances? Then there are unlimited options as to whether you exempt \$10,000 of property value, \$25,000, \$50,000, \$100,000, \$200,000 or all of the value. Do you exempt all property or just homestead property (where you declare your residence)? Then how do you calculate how much one exemption will cause the property taxes of those not exempt to go up under all the scenarios above? It is a very complicated issue.

Q. Is it fair to exempt seniors from part of their property taxes?

A. I am not the one to answer that question. It is a society question. I have heard the complaint made by some of the younger taxpayers in other counties that most of the emergency services, social security benefits and Medicare that are enjoyed by the senior population are now paid predominately by the younger people who are currently employed and they feel that more than makes up for the part of school taxes paid by seniors. It is an argument I do not want to get in nor do I want our community to be split over this

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Letters to the Editor ...

I'll loan you my copy

Dear Editor,

In regard to last week's edition of *The North Georgia News*, Opinion Page, December 24, 2014, I was shocked and I must say saddened to learn in our community that if even one person finds something objectionable that their single opinion will effect other people from having the opportunity to read Ms. Arlene Gray's book "An Ordinary Life - Touched by an Extraordinary God." I am proud to say that I have read and re-read this book and each time receive a blessing about God's love.

I don't know if this particular gift shop also sells Bibles but guess if they do that again one individual would have them removed as well because if the single word "God" is offensive imagine an entire book about Him.

I am letting everyone know if anyone would like to read "An Ordinary Life - Touched by an Extraordinary God" to contact me and I will happily loan my copy in order for others to read these most remarkable stories Ms. Gray shares.

Ms. Gray, I have always hoped you would write another book to follow up what God is still doing in your life. Thank you for writing the first one as it was and continues to be a most uplifting book.

Linda Garrett

The bottom line

Dear Editor,

Where might that \$22,000 handed to the two school superintendents by the outgoing school board have been better spent?

The effect on the morale of the teachers was palpable — if that matters. If a teacher is "dedicated," no other consideration is necessary.

Teachers of the Year can look forward to a certificate and a photo session with the Superintendent.

After the current superintendent retires, the Union County school board should not fill the "vacancy" of an Associate Superintendent. Even one is more than is needed.

See Mitchell, page 5A

Consider the source

Dear Editor,

After living in this beautiful slice of heaven of Blairsville for almost two years, I have noticed that about once, sometimes twice a month you will have a letter touting the utopia of the fundamental changes Obama has made to our country. I usually just shake my head but I can't do that this time.

Regarding the survey about FOX News, a survey is just that, someone's opinion and like noses, most everyone has one. The opinion of young, liberal college students who have very little life experiences doesn't hold much sway with me. I would consider the source and make up your own mind.

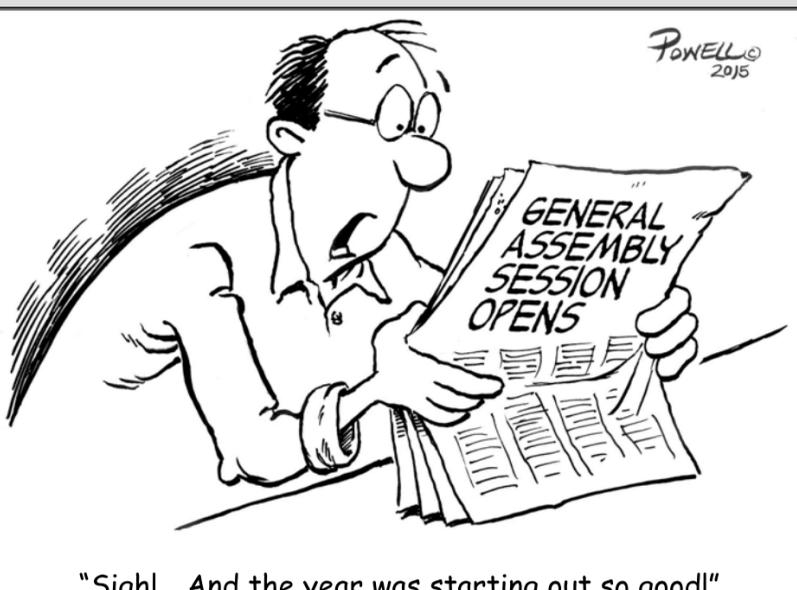
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Due Diligence

Dear Editor,

In response to the Letter "Viewers who watched only FOX News knew less about current events than viewers who watched any other news source." Actually, if one watches only one news channel, and is not discerning enough to wonder what the other channels report, they do only have one piece of the picture. I watch FOX, as well as checking out a few other channels like CNBC, NewsMax, and even Al Jazeera. For the most part, each one gives a certain slant to their news reporting, but if I really want to be informed, I have to read books. Those not willing to invest the time to really delve into a topic,

See Gray, page 5A



How Much Smarter Is Your Phone?

While spending a few days in Atlanta last week, enjoying a wonderful reunion with a college roommate, I made a visit to the Georgia Aquarium. I was taken back by the level of security that was invoked on each person entering the aquarium including checking purses, totes and pockets. Then the husky gentleman with the "wand" wipes you up front and down the back. You then pass over to the photographer who shoots your picture in front of a green screen. Later, they will have a digitally enhanced picture of your party smiling in amongst the aquatic life, which is available for you to purchase as a souvenir. What they actually have done is secured a picture of every person who has entered the facility in case of a security breach. They then support the cost of this effort by selling you the photo. Brilliant.

When we finally enter the main lobby of the facility, there are several ladies and gentlemen, handing out the maps with the day's program, asking if we had been there before and did we have any questions. I noticed that the friendly gent that approached us had a badge that said he was a volunteer. I asked him how he managed to get such a cool gig and he said he found the opportunity online at a site called GiveGab.com. After writing last week's column on volunteering here in the community, I was very intrigued by the use of online solicitation for a non gratis workforce.

See Leone, page 5A

Farmers Market Moment

JoAnne Leone



Uncle Hollis

During the 1930s there were very few funeral homes in the Southern Appalachians. When a person in the community died the local folks would build a coffin and prepare the deceased for burial. Everyone pitched in and helped the bereaved family.

There was a man in my grandfather's community who was a bootlegger. He ended many arguments with his fists. He didn't believe in helping the less fortunate. As a result of this attitude he wasn't very well liked and people were scared of him. As the man aged he tended to let himself go, meaning he didn't shave very often and he wasn't very clean. Eventually, the man died and nobody in our community would volunteer to prepare the man for burial.

My great grandfather, grandfather and Uncle Hollis pitied the family. So, they volunteered to prepare the body for burial. Papa once told me his father probably made more than 300 coffins in his day. He never took any money for building coffins. He thought it was the right thing to do. My great grandfather, Lon, made the coffin while Papa and Hollis prepared the body.

Papa started shaving the man's stubble and Hollis began washing the man's feet. Papa said that about halfway through the process the man had a spasm in his abdomen. Actually, Papa washed the man's face with hot water and turned to the water basin to rinse the towel. When he turned around the man was sitting up as if he were in a chair. Meanwhile Uncle was wash-

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



How To Keep Your New Year's Resolutions in Blairsville

January is the time of year for New Year's Resolutions. Almost all of us have made them at some point in our lives, and probably the same number of us have had trouble keeping them. Not to worry!

The Chamber is here to help you make and keep your New Year's Resolutions while living or visiting Blairsville-Union County.

Resolution #1 - Lose Weight. This is such an easy one for those in Blairsville-Union County. Besides several great fitness centers who offer a variety of indoor equipment and classes, we live in the most perfect area to get out and enjoy the outdoors. Two of my personal favorites are hiking the many wooded trails throughout the county and walking the recreational trails at Meeks Park. No matter what your preference for activity level, Blairsville-Union County offers it all.

Resolution #2 - Save Money. Looking to save money in 2015? The Chamber is happy to help! Saving money begins with shopping local. Not only will you save on gas money, but our members are also always offering great deals. Start by checking out our hot deals on VisitBlairsvilleGA.com. You can sign up to have them sent directly to your email as they are posted. Also consider signing up for our Buy Local Coupons and Events newsletter that will send you information on our annual events that help you save time and money by shopping with our local merchants.

Resolution #3 - Volunteer. Blairsville-Union County is well known for its community minded citizens. If you have not had the opportunity to experience volunteerism in our community, this is the year to start. Local nonprofit organizations serving a variety of interests are ready to put your talents into action for the good of others. These interests include kids, elderly, animals, festivals, and businesses. Contact the Chamber for a list of places who could use your services!

Resolution #4 - Learn Something New. We are blessed with an abundance of talented people in our community who are willing to share their skills with others. Always wanted to learn to crochet or paint? Ready to learn to play guitar? Interested in calligraphy? Whatever new skill you are hoping to learn, we likely have someone who can teach it to you through educational classes right here in our town. Let us help connect you with your future instructor.

Resolution #5 - Join The Chamber. Oh, this is not one of the most common resolutions? Well, it should be! Being a member of the Cham-

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