

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Lucky to live in Union County

I've known most of the public officials in Union County for most of my life.

In my youth, I remember Lamar Paris being the backbone of our youth athletic programs. I remember Mack Mason as an astute and active Georgia State Trooper, who paid no attention to who he pulled over.

I remember Dwain Brackett from my high school home room (we graduated together) and I remember Lee Knight graduating a couple of years ahead of me. Both are lifelong friends.

I've gotten to know Judy Odom and Johnie Garmon since my return home and I'm proud to count them as friends.

I went to school with Gary Davenport and I've come to know Cindy Byers and likewise, I'm proud to count them as friends.

I'm proud to know that these individuals were praying for me as I recovered from triple bypass heart surgery. It was the second time I had gone under the knife for heart surgery, and more than anyone, I know the power of prayer.

I pray for our county on a daily basis. I'm a seventh-generation native of Union County and I'll always pray for my hometown and its leaders.

I can say this for our county leaders, they have done an excellent job under extreme circumstances. It's never easy doing the right thing, but, when in a leadership position, it's the only thing to do.

We are blessed with extremely talented leadership. Sheriff Mason and Commissioner Paris continue to do outstanding work on behalf of Union County residents.

Likewise, Judge Brackett, Judge Garmon, Judy Odom, Tax Commissioner Knight, and the BOE's Davenport and Byers have made supporters proud of their hard work.

As a community, we can be thankful that our leadership remains faithfully in touch with its constituency. I'm proud to live in Union County. No, actually, I'm lucky to live in Union County.

We turn on the Atlanta news each night and we hear the turmoil endured by those who live in the big cities that Georgia has to offer.

We can thank our lucky stars that we live in a community that is safe and sound and overseen by humble leaders who love this community as much as we do.

I'm lucky to be alive. God bless us all.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



Bridge-building

Pope Francis's recent comments in Mexico about walls and bridges caused quite the dust-up. In his follow-up comments, he tried to phrase his thoughts differently. The politics of wall-building and immigration aside, the metaphor of a bridge can help explain the basic truth about our relationship with God.

It is natural to think of bridge building in terms of what is seen: rails, deck, beams, bents, and piers. An engineer can determine how much wood, steel, or concrete is necessary to span a river, and how much load it can bear. Perhaps you've seen the "Load Limit" warning signs. But much remains unseen. If the bridge is too low or short, water can overtop and make it impassable during a storm. If the piers are not deep enough, water scour can undermine the structure. You might say that a successful bridge safely defeats unseen hazards that are predictable by an expert.

An expert has determined that a bridge is needed between people and God. The unseen hazard is the death that comes from sin. God mercifully gave his Law to make us aware of our accountability to Him, and to warn us of the hazard (Rom 3:19-20). Common responses are to either ignore the warning, or to construct a personal bridge relying on church attendance, religious rites, or nice thoughts and deeds. This is amateur bridge-building; it might look right on the surface, but it leaves the user in peril.

This is where the news becomes so good! God "reconciled us to Himself (built a bridge), through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:18-19). So we are saved from the hazard by crossing over the bridge, i.e. believing Jesus who is the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim 2:5), and we have the joyful opportunity to point others to that bridge! We are, in fact, ambassadors of Christ by word and deed.

So who is a Christian? The one who trusts Jesus as the way to the Father. What is our purpose? To make Him known. Jesus is the only bridge, brought to you by the Divine Bridge Builder.

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. Is running Union County actually similar to running a business?

A. Politicians often use this analogy and it is especially being used in this year's Presidential Election. Government most resembles a business at the county and municipal level. Less so at the state level, and I have no idea what the Federal level resembles, but it is certainly not a business.

Q. What makes operating a business and government similar?

A. In running a business, you must have a budget and try to stick to it making sure it balances, or you will be out of business soon. This is also similar to the county government. Like a business, some counties borrow money each year to tide them over until the next tax season, but they are required to have a balanced budget. Similarly, many businesses have a business loan available when needed.

Q. Does Union County borrow money for operation of the county (Tax Anticipation Note) each year?

A. No. We had to do it one year around 2006 or 2007 because of some unforeseen expenses, but since then we are able to balance our budget each year while keeping the property tax mill rate as one of the very lowest in the state of Georgia. We are able to do this because of sound decisions, the cooperation of the elected officials, the dedication of the county employees, and the support of the public on how we operate the county and our SPLOST projects.

Q. What makes operating a business and government different?

A. Well, the obvious is that government is not in the business to make a profit. We are in business to provide as many services and facilities for the public as we can, to make your quality of life as good as it can be, and do it at the least cost. So, while there are certain parts of government that do take in significant amounts of revenue, most services provided do not fully pay for themselves.

Q. Can you give me an idea of what services the county provides to the public?

A. This would be very exhaustive and I really do not have room to put all of it here, but I can lump some of it together in summary form. Public safety, includes the Road Department, Sheriff's Department, Jail, Fire Department, EMA, Animal Control, and the Coroner. The full and partial funding of the court system includes:

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Letters to the Editor...

Individual Income Taxes

Dear Editor,

Hey, Democrats, Progressives, Liberals, Communists and Socialists who are all about making "the wealthy pay their fair share":

An estimated 45.3 percent of American households — roughly 77.5 million — will pay no federal individual income tax, according to data for the 2015 tax year from the Tax Policy Center, a nonpartisan Washington-based

See Mitchell, page 5A

Iwo Jima

Dear Editor,

The 71st Anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima program on February 19 was a beautiful one that tugged at my heart. The program was held at the striking new Iwo Jima memorial at the Towns County Recreation & Conference Center in Young Harris. My husband (a US Marine) and I were honored to meet five survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima, as well as many other distinguished veterans. Each of the Iwo survivors spoke briefly.

The program was particularly meaningful to me, as my dad was a survivor of Iwo. As part of the 5th Marine Division, he went onshore at 9:30 a.m. on February 19, 1945, serving as an 81mm mortarman throughout his 36 days on the hell-hole island. He was wounded, lost a lot of

See Chaussy, page 5A

Roadside Litter

Dear Editor,

Thank you to all of the conscientious residents who are working in many ways to lessen the blight of roadside littering. Many of you are walking along area roads and picking up the trash that thoughtless, inconsiderate persons deliberately throw out of their vehicles or carelessly allow to blow off the back of their trucks. I think we all realize that despite our best efforts we can never totally eliminate this problem.

Unfortunately, there are some among us who were born with trash so embedded in their DNA that they feel obligated to share theirs with all of us and are unable to understand why we have trash cans. The good news is that we are making some progress.

In Union County we open our fire stations on Wednesday mornings to receive recyclable items saving residents the necessity of driving to the Transfer Station in town. Every one of you is invited to bring us your cardboard, paper, aluminum cans and twist-top plastic bottles and we will ensure they are reused to make new products and not dumped into landfills or thrown out onto roadsides.

Please help us to expand our efforts to keep

See Gibson, page 5A

Welcoming Church

Dear Editor,

Present daily news seems to be hectic, erratic and depressing... Both *Readers Digest* and *Woman's Day* are now offering a ray of hope with their columns devoted to what admirable things people are currently offering one another.

May I add one more that is within our scope right here in Blairsville. The First Methodist Church thought to incorporate in their additional building a place to exercise every weekday free of charge to everyone in the community.

The row of square windows on the top floor of the large adjacent building offer a continuous view of our mountains as we rejuvenate ourselves. Words for thought, a counter to track your progress and a gracious welcome greet everyone who comes.

No fee is charged. Many donate from grateful thanks.

How many communities anywhere offer such a cordial invitation?

Thank you all you members of a welcoming church.

Cathy Fiser



Your Fire Department Insurance Services Office PPC

The department talked about the new Insurance Services Office's (ISO) Public Protection Class (PPC™) for Union County back in December. We are continuing to get calls on the new rating and how it will affect people. The main reason that we are presenting this column again is because the new ISO rating takes effect on March 1, 2016 and we want to provide this information to people in case it was missed previously.

Union County was surveyed in August of 2015. Union County Fire Department, Union County Dispatch and the various water companies of the City and County are proud to announce that Union County's PPC™ class was lowered from a 6/9 to a 4/4Y. The PPC™ ranges from class 10 (worst) to class 1 (best).

The lowering of the ISO PPC could mean lower insurance rates for home and business owners. Although there are many factors that make up the insurance rates, the lowering of the PPC™ can contribute to the reduction of the overall insurance premium. Some homes and business may see as much as 10% - 20% reduction. However, it is up to the individual insurance companies to determine premiums and not all will be affected. If a building or home is located within five road miles of a fire station and has a hydrant within 1000 feet, it is a class 4. If a building or home is located within five road miles of a fire station and there is NO hydrant within 1000 feet, it is a class 4Y (formally class 8B). All homes or buildings beyond five road miles of a fire station are classified as class 10.

The PPC™ is one tool that insurers use for underwriting and to calculate premiums for fire insurance. It is based on ISO's Fire Suppression Class Schedule (FSRS). According to ISO, the FSRS "is a manual containing the criteria ISO uses in reviewing the fire prevention and fire suppression capabilities of individual communities or fire protection areas. The schedule measures the major elements of a community's fire protection system and develops a numerical grading called a Public Protection Classification (PPC™)." The major elements that are considered in the FSRS are emergency communications, fire department, and water supply. It also has added a Community Risk Reduction section that recognizes community efforts to reduce losses through fire prevention, public fire safety education, and fire investigation.

Union County is one of 14 counties in the state of Georgia with a class of 4 and the only county in north east Georgia with a 4 class. Union County joins counties such as Hall, Fulton and Gwinnett. All departments involved have

See Dyer, page 5A

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Biscuits In A Well

My grandparents told me the following story years ago. However, I never knew the persons involved or when it occurred. So, recently I was on a Facebook page called "The Forgotten of Alabama" and ran across the story.

Joanna Walden remembered the following events from 1956 in Franklin County, AL. "Leaving Highway 81 near Trapptown and the Union Hill communities near Phil Campbell by turning down a rural dirt road you come to the Coon Cummings Farm and homeplace. I was spending the summer with the WeHunt Family of Mabel, Hollis and their only son Jimmy. This was my home away from home and as a girl of only 6 years I loved these people and their community.

Early one morning, we took a ride over to visit Aunt Glenna and Uncle Coon. These folks were my folks and your folks also if you lived in this community or attended the Union Hill Congregational Methodist Church. Uncle Coon and his family attended the church as well as many people of the small community. Generations of Cummings family members have attended the little church. As a matter of fact Coon's grandfather, Lon, sawed the timber into lumber to build the little church. Anyway generations of Cummings children were raised up around the church and each time I visited the WeHunts we attended the church along with many other children of the community.

I vividly remember this visit with Aunt Glenna and Uncle Coon even though I was only 6 years old. You see I knew that Aunt Glenna kept a platter of her famous biscuits tucked away in the warmer drawer of her wood burning stove that stood in her kitchen. I also knew that I would be treated to one of these homage biscuits along with some home made blackberry jelly and fresh churned butter.

As I walked through the door of the Cummings home I was hugged, squeezed and kissed repeatedly as I walked through the front door. Uncle Coon and his boys were finishing their chores at the barn not too far from their white framed house. Aunt Mable and Aunt Glenna were knee deep in their visit when they suddenly remembered that I needed my treat. Aunt Glenna cut a biscuit and smeared it with butter and jelly. It was a warm day so I walked out the back door into the yard. I looked up into the blue sky and watched the big puffy clouds float by. I soon found myself leaning against the Cummings well and it caught my attention.

I bit into the delicious biscuit and watched the water in the well. I had watched numerous times as Uncle Coon drew water from that well. The water was cold and clear. It had a wonderful taste derived from the minerals of the stone around the walls of the well. This well water was

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



The Fun doesn't stop in Winter

Winter is here in full force! Our mountains have been covered in snow and the temperatures have been brisk. Facebook is covered in posts of people dreaming of warmer weather, but I'm here to give you a few good reasons not to give up on winter just yet.

There is plenty to do in Blairsville-Union County during these cold, snowy months. Being active outdoors is a great way to enjoy the mountains in a whole new way. Not only is it less crowded, but there are no bugs or obscured views. Here are a few ideas to keep you active during our winter months:

- Winter Hiking – Use caution and bundle up, but on a nice winter day, you'll see mountain views and distances that you could never see when all the leaves are on the trees.
- Winter Camping – Build a bonfire, roast some marshmallows, and enjoy a hot cup of cocoa, even if it's in your own backyard.
- Winter Picnic by Helton Creek Falls – Take blankets, sandwiches, and hot soup in a thermos.
- Photo Expedition – Snow, ice, and the crispness that comes with freezing temperatures can add a new dimension to your photos.

Are outside activities not really your speed? No worries. Union County offers several options during the winter season for fun and entertainment.

- Take a donut, lunch, or coffee break - Made from scratch donuts and pastries, farm to table menu selections, and the best coffee in the mountains can be found right here! Call the Chamber and we will be happy to make suggestions.

See Malone, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber

Patrick Malone



Sugarcane aphid

Sorghum holds a special place in the hearts of many as a traditional crop in North Georgia. However, we aren't the only ones who have a fondness for this plant, as the sugarcane aphid (SCA) has swept across the state devastating sorghum yields. This aphid is naturally found on sugarcane, but since its accidental introduction to the United States, it has switched to sorghum. SCA was first found in Beaumont, TX, and over the next year quickly spread to four states and 38 counties. In 2015, it was reported in 17 states, and Georgia was among them.

SCA is a very small insect that is pale yellow with black legs, black antennae, and two black "tailpipes" protruding from the back of its body. They are usually found in large groups on the underside of leaves, and feed on the sap of the plant causing yellow or purple discoloration. Aphids reproduce and form large congregations very fast because the females do not need to mate with males in order to produce offspring. In fact, female aphids are born pregnant. There are several natural predators of SCA, including ladybird beetle larvae, lacewings, and some fly larvae, which are attracted by the sweet, sticky honeydew aphids produce. Often, though, the population of these aphids increases so fast they overwhelm their predators and continue to multiply. As they reproduce, their damage increases, and so does their honeydew, which can be incredibly difficult to clean off of harvesting equipment.

However, there is hope! Entomologists at the University of Georgia have discovered multiple ways to protect your crops against this harmful pest.

1. Plant early. SCA is usually found on sorghum later in the season, so by planting your crop early and staying ahead of it, the chance of these pests establishing in your fields can be greatly reduced.

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From the Ground Up

Melissa Mattee



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