

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Letters to the Editor...

Response from Commissioner Paris

Dear Editor,
I would like to respond to a letter to the editor in last week's *North Georgia News* from a Lumpkin County resident regarding Senior property tax exemption. The writer questioned my statement in February in my Q & A column where I stated that Union County property taxes were 60% less than Lumpkin County property taxes "because" of the Senior Property Tax Exemption in Lumpkin County. I probably should have said "mostly because of" as without a lot of study, it is impossible to know exactly why Lumpkin County taxes are so much higher than ours. However, the assumption was that since property taxes began to increase in 2009 when the exemption went into place, that had caused the tax increases.

Our property taxes in Union County are 56% lower than in Lumpkin based on the mil rate of property of equal value. So I rounded that number to 60% when making my statement. All 159 counties in Georgia must set a mil rate for property taxes each year. Prior to 2009 when the senior tax exemption began in Lumpkin County, Union and Lumpkin counties were ranked 2nd and 10th lowest property tax mil rates in Georgia respectively. Last year Union County was still ranked 2nd lowest in the state and Lumpkin was ranked 63rd lowest. That number for Lumpkin County steadily increased since the property tax exemption began in 2009. Union County previously has a 5 mil lower property tax rate than Lumpkin, but we are now 10 mils lower. These numbers include school and county taxes combined. Lumpkin County has a conservative government, so I doubt they have increased their spending significantly over this period of time.

Bottom line, if you exempt 2000 or more households from paying little or no property taxes, then the remaining taxpayers have to make up the difference with higher taxes. Since you have a smaller number of people to collect the same amount of money from for the budgets, the mil rate, and therefore property taxes, must increase significantly to maintain the same revenue. How much this increase is due to senior property tax exemptions and how much is government and school operation in Lumpkin County would be complicated to calculate and I have no idea.

I am proud of our county and the fact that we all work together to make this a great place to live. I am sure Lumpkin County government and schools, like ours, strives to give the best possible services and education at the lowest reasonable cost to the taxpayers. So long as we all contribute, the burden is spread out so that no one has an unfair

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If you can't say something nice...

Dear Editor,
Do they still teach the First Amendment in government schools? If and when they do, do they teach the students that the First Amendment doesn't apply to School Board Members in Georgia? Do they tell students that in order to serve on a school board (an elected position) they must first agree to the abrogation, or revocation, of their First Amendment right of free speech? I wonder if they do.

You see, the School Boards of all 159 counties in Georgia have, by law, a Code of Ethics that School Board members must abide by. Wonderful idea. Everyone is for ethics in government. Can't have too much ethics!

Well, would it surprise you to know that #7 in that Code of Ethics reads: "Express opinions before votes are cast, but after the board vote, abide by and support all majority decisions of the board"? In other words, you may speak your mind before a vote, but afterwards, if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.

Now, to be sure things run a lot smoother when people are not permitted to speak. Democracy can be so messy! All those pesky differing opinions. So much better to vote and then button it up. Maybe Congress and our State Legislature should run this way. You know, more "ethical".

I submit that this is a serious problem. Suppose the board votes to raise taxes. (I know this would never happen, but please indulge me!) Suppose the vote was 3-2. Suppose one of the "NO" votes is running for re-election. Would you perhaps like a little insight into his stand on the issue? Would you maybe like to know WHY he voted "NO"? Too bad. If he criticizes the tax increase he could be charged with an ethics violation, punishable by a fine. Ethics, you know.

When one limits the free speech of an elected representative, the free speech of the people they were elected to represent is by extension limited. When one limits the free speech of elected representatives, quality people who value their rights may choose not to serve. Everyone loses. Our Founders had lived under the tyranny of England. They recognized that without the protection of the First Amendment government would seek to take away that right. Apparently, in this case even the First Amendment is no protection for School Board Members in Georgia.

Are they teaching this in government schools?

Pat Thibodeaux

Mr. Muffy

Dear Editor,
I want to say how sad it was to read about the passing of Rick White, owner of "Muffy's Mountain Burgers & Such." With this said, I send my condolences to his wife and other members of his family. I live only about two-tenths of a mile from his restaurant here in Blairsville. I had no other way of getting in touch with Rick's wife and I just want her to know how sad I feel for her and her family.

I didn't know Rick White's name until I read the announcement in our local newspaper on the obituary page... I always referred to him as "Mr. Muffy." With this said, I will tell you that Rick White made the best hamburgers and hot dogs in all of our area and then some... When I found out that he served hot dogs with chili, I ordered one... the weiner, itself, was 1/4 pound, and he told me that he was from Chicago and he knows about hot dogs... and, boy, oh boy, he proved that to be true.

I'm going to miss this man as he seemed like a very gentle and nice man and for another thing, when I called to place an order, he recognized my voice without me even telling him who I was... I was a "regular," as we say.

His wife, Sara, wrote the announcement for the obituary and she wrote that he was "a dancer, an artist, builder, chef, singer/song writer, guitar player." To me, he was the sweet, Mr. Muffy.

Joan Taber

Terrorist No More

Mrs. Fowler and I attended a weekend conference last month. After locating our assigned table, I enjoyed making the acquaintance of a rather soft-spoken pastor. I was later shocked to learn that there was a time I would not have enjoyed being in the same room, much less sharing a meal with him.

I had met Dr. Tom Tarrants. He is on staff at the C.S. Lewis Institute in Washington D.C. I was interested in his speaking and writing activities, and he was interested to learn that I pastor a house church. He being about ten years my senior, I asked for and received his counsel on a few matters. But that's not the end of it.

The next morning, I met a young man who also works in the DC area. I mentioned my dinner companion, and learned that he knows Dr. Tarrants quite well. Then, I thought jokingly, he said, "So, you had dinner with a terrorist." He wasn't joking.

In 1967, J. Edgar Hoover's FBI had Tarrants on the Ten Most Wanted list. As a member of the White Knights of the KKK, he was known to be involved in multiple bombings and crimes of terror. He was "the most dangerous man in Mississippi." The FBI nearly killed him during his capture in the act of placing a bomb. He earned a prison sentence, but escaped. After his recapture, and during his years of solitary confinement, he read the Bible, and came to know the real Jesus. His demeanor was different, the hatred was gone, and he began to make amends even to the agents that captured him. Many were so moved that they too placed their faith in the One who changes hearts.

Later that morning, I stepped into the meeting room set for 500 people, and saw Dr. Tarrants. I was still wide-eyed at my startling discovery. I asked him if I could present his story to you, dear reader. Giving his reluctant approval, he said, "It's all about God's grace." God can redeem and change even a hate-filled, domestic terrorist. Tarrants has testified, "I found myself knowing I needed the grace of God and the forgiveness of my sins. For the first time, what Jesus did on the cross became really precious and personally important to me."

Tarrants was an angry criminal who needed rescuing. But

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Questions and Answers

Q. The striping on Highway 515 for the turn lane going West in front of the Park and Ride onto the Blue Ridge Highway is almost completely worn out. How do we get that repainted?

A. Hwy 515 is a State of Georgia Highway and we are not allowed to work on state highways. We immediately contacted the local state maintenance barn to let them know of this problem. They will then contact the district maintenance to see when it can be put on the list to be restriped. We hope that will be prior to winter because it is difficult to see now and you are meeting oncoming traffic at that point in a curve as they approach Blairsville from the West, so hopefully it will be repainted soon.

Q. We see several new homes going up in the county. Is there still a lot of building going on?

A. We have had another two busy months. We issued 11 custom and 1 spec house permit in September and 10 custom homes in October. This was the best September since 2007 when we issued 23 (18 custom/5 spec). For the year, we are currently at 107 houses (98 custom/9 spec) which is up 38 over last year's 55 houses (48 custom/7 spec). These are good housing numbers that we are very satisfied with. This is providing a lot of employment for our county and also really helps our sales tax revenue now and will help our property tax revenue in the coming years.

Q. How many calls does your office receive generally?

A. This number varies from day to day. It can depend on the day of the week, the weather, the season, and things that are happening in our community. Mondays and Tuesdays are generally the busiest days because we are closed on the weekends. On average the office will receive 40 to 50 calls per day and the call volume is highest during bad weather and during the tourist season. The courthouse as a whole receives hundreds of calls per day.

Q. What do people usually call the courthouse about?

A. This varies. It can range from just needing to be transferred to another office to having a road issue or wanting to speak to the commissioner. Many people call our office not sure who they need to talk to about their issue and we can help them figure that out.

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Jingle Bell Buys

Need a reason to shop local this Christmas? How about 25 of them? The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce invites you to take part in our Jingle Bell Buys weekend event. Over 25 local merchants are offering discounts on hot Christmas gift items during normal business hours on Thursday, December 3 through Saturday, December 5. For three days only, savvy shoppers can take advantage of a variety of "buy one get one free" deals and featured 50% off items. Whether you are a newcomer to the area ready to discover all that Union County has to offer, or a long time resident who believes in supporting the businesses who make our local economy strong, this event is for you.

The following downtown businesses on the square are co-sponsoring this event and have some amazing deals for you: The Wine Shoppe, From Me 2 U, Michael's Italian Life Caffe, and Cabin Coffee of Blairsville. To receive a full list of this year's coupons, simply call the Chamber of Commerce at 706-745-5789. If you would like to subscribe to future email coupon promotions, and never miss another great sale, go to www.VisitBlairsvilleGA.com, click Newsletter Signup and subscribe to Buy Local Coupons & Events. Coupons will also be available for download from the home page of our Chamber website.

In addition to our sponsors, the following local businesses are currently signed up to participate.

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Honeymoons and High Tea

Last night I entered the Village of Virgil. Not a suburb of the twilight zone, it is the community nestled in the southwest corner of Niagara-On-The-Lake in Canada. The stone wall not only protected the village but was backlit, and thoughts came to mind of my friend, Darren Harper, the very capable orchestrator of the downtown development of Blairsville. Darren has an awesome idea for a new marker as visitors enter the city from the South. I was again reminded how important that first impression is as I entered this lakeside village of our extreme northern neighbors.

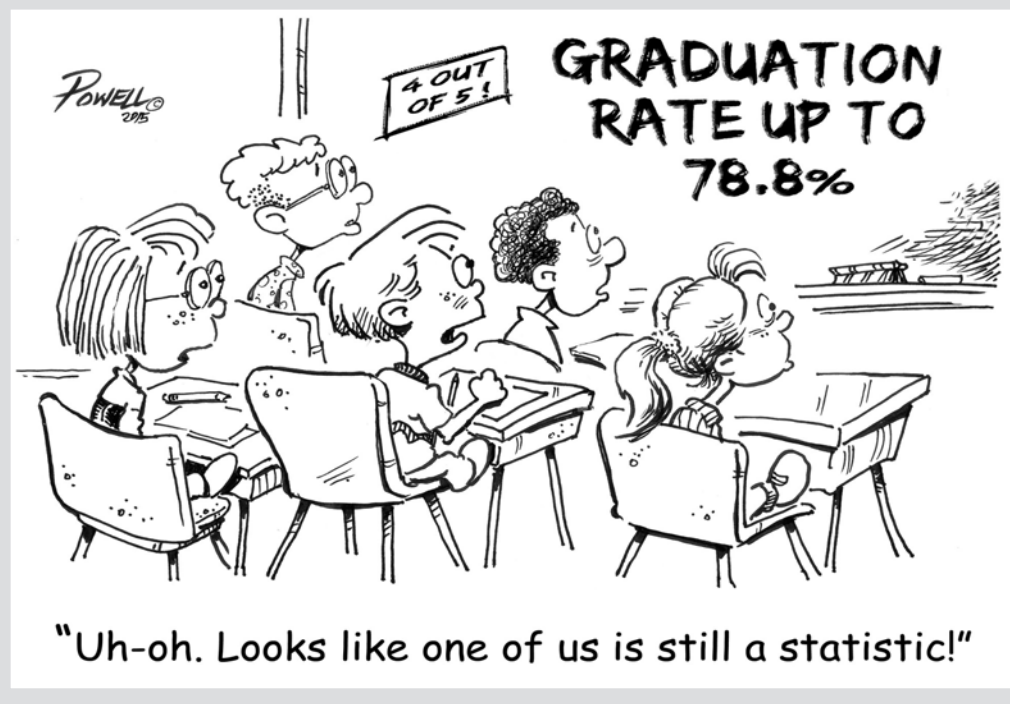
Niagara-On-The-Lake is very similar to our own Union County. One of the smaller populations of the Ontario Providence, it is the only town in Canada that has a Lord Mayor, much like we have our sole commissioner. The two largest economic boosters are tourism and agriculture. Apricot, peach and apple orchards dot the land along the winding roads around the region. Grapes vineyards swaddle the land in wild geometric patterns all along Lake Ontario. Wineries produce millions of liters of fine wines, despite the harsh long winters that play havoc with these tender vines.

The last in the Great Lakes chain, Lake Ontario serves as the outlet to the Atlantic Ocean via the St. Lawrence River. The soil of the land situated along the Lake is so rich due to the deposit of minerals that flow from Lake Ontario, a culmination of all the streams and rivers that flow into all of the Great Lakes, which eventually flow over Niagara Falls and then into Lake Ontario.

The Old Town of Niagara-on-The-Lake is very quaint, with its beautiful parks, historic inns (my friend and I enjoyed High Tea at the Prince of Wales Inn, something one should do at least once in a lifetime), the famous Shaw Theater and many wineries beckoning visitors. But there is no doubt that most tourists who find this very special enclave have happened upon it because they were first visiting Niagara Falls.

Arguably, one of the seven natural wonders of the world (and everyone does argue this designation).

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Keystone Pipeline

Dear Editor,
Those people who are adamantly against the Keystone pipeline believe (or pretend to believe) that denying the construction of the pipeline will result in the oil not being drilled or harvested, resulting in a cleaner environment.

This couldn't be further from the truth. The drilling will continue, the oil will be harvested and transported to the refineries (or shipping points). The only consideration is whether it will be transported underground via pipeline or overland via rail cars.

Which is more likely to be accidentally spilled? (Don't forget the recent train derailment that caused a big oil spill.) Which is more vulnerable to sabotage? Which has the added effect of creating thousands of jobs for Americans and increased tax revenue for the states and the U.S.? Which puts more money in the hands of the billionaires who own the railcars without creating new jobs?

Respectfully,
Carol McKechnie

Giving Thanks

Dear Editor,
In reflecting over the fact that another Thanksgiving holiday is upon us, I thought I would like to share some reasons why I am thankful this time around. Not that I haven't always been thankful for these things, but this time I feel like sharing my thoughts, for whatever benefit they may be to someone.

Space will not allow me to mention each and every thing I'm thankful for, but aside from the usual such as life, health, friends, and family, I am especially thankful for my freedom and the privilege of being born and raised in America.

During this year I've been reading about the "History of Protestantism", by J. A. Wylie. It is a four-volume work, and though the author's style is what some would call "Victorian", it has been a great blessing and source of enlightenment which I wish everyone could experience. It has greatly broadened my understanding, not only of the struggle between truth and error, good and evil, throughout the centuries, particularly since the time of Christ, but also I have been deeply touched and inspired by the stories of valiant men and women who chose to die rather than yield their freedom of conscience and go along with unscriptural practices and teachings imposed upon them by the united efforts of government and church to control them.

From about the middle of the 5th century (450 a.d.) to the late 18th century (1798) people were burned at the stake, beheaded, or imprisoned and tortured for years just because they wanted to read the Scriptures for themselves, or attend a church service where the Scriptures were read to them. We think "political correctness" is something new, and having to be careful what we say and to whom; but it was very common in the "old world", and speaking against the

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Boogers in the Night

Growing up in the country kids were told all types of things about scary boogers or events that happened to other people. I have heard old folks talk about fluorescent green, glowing lights that followed people as they walked down lonely stretches of roads in dark woods during the night. Granny use to tell me about panthers that would try to sneak up on people to stalk and catch them unaware.

I have even heard that my great-great grandmother Baker haints a hill close to her home place in Northwestern Alabama. I guess it is a thousand wonders I didn't have nightmares every night when I was growing up.

Many of these stories were told to me before the TV became the far reaching influence it is today. Back in those days children and adults used their imagination more than we use our imaginations today. Back in the early 1940s Papa bought his first piece of property (80 acres) for \$100/acre. Papa and Granny cleared, farmed and lived on that original 80 acres. They built a small, framed house and carried water from a quarter of a mile away. A few years after the house was built Papa dug a well right next to the house. The well was brand new and didn't even have a well house over it yet when a mishap happened. The only covering over the well was an old 2x12 with a tarp over it. Late one night the family milk cow fell a straddle of that 2x12.

The cow's full weight was resting on the board and she was having trouble getting free of the well and board. She would bellow a deep, mournful, guttural sound resembling a growl from a large animal. The cow could not take in enough air to moo like a regular sounding cow. Also, the well was located right next to the house and each time the cow would swing her head her horns would rake across the siding of the house. The entire family thought a large monster was trying to claw its way into their house. Papa got up to go check on this awful sound and each time he would reach the door the cow would bellow out this sound and rake her horns on the house. Granny would let out a scream of terror and Papa would run back to check on her and his sons. Eventually, Papa gathered enough nerve to go outside and confront the demon. He laughs about it today. But, back in those days he was plenty scared of that awful sound.

A month or so later a mad dog came to Papa's house. Granny said their house was not even finished yet. It was still summer. The walls of the house weren't finished. Papa said, "We didn't even have some of the outside doors up yet". For those of you that don't know today we would say a mad dog was rabid. Granny said this dog was slobbering at the mouth and attacked their dog. Next the dog came for the family. Granny sent the kids up into the loft while Papa fetched the gun. She said, "Papa would run from one side of

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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