

Opinions

Fire Department Open Houses

Summertime is right around the corner, and that means it's time for the volunteer stations to have open houses. Each main Union County Fire Department Volunteer District has an open house at their main station each year. It is the perfect opportunity for people to visit the fire station; to ask questions; and learn about their fire department.

Most people drive by their local fire station with its closed bay doors and never think about it being a fire station. They do not realize that there are fire apparatus and a vast amount of equipment in that station ready to respond. More importantly, they do not realize the hard work and dedication of the volunteers who not only respond but operate and maintain that equipment. Each volunteer has a vast amount of training, experience, and equipment to be able to respond to an emergency in their community.

Open house days are the time when the people of the community can come to the station and view all the equipment. Most of the equipment was purchased by the generous donations from the citizens and business owners in that area. Citizens and visitors can come to the open house and see their donation dollars at work. They can also see how the fire apparatus and equipment operates. Most volunteer stations perform demonstrations to show the equipment in operation during a simulated emergency situation.

The open houses create an environment to meet the firefighters and ask questions. When an emergency happens, the situation is chaotic, and there is little time to answer the many questions that a citizen may have. The open house gives people an opportunity to ask questions about the fire department response, what firefighters do, how they use their equipment, and what training they have. The best part of it all is that you get to know the firefighters who are protecting you, your family, and your community.

The open houses are on certain Saturdays during the summer and early fall. Look in the local newspaper, Union County Fire Department Facebook pages, and in the letter drive that you have received to find the dates, times, and stations where the open houses are conducted. There will be free food, displays, and demonstrations for all ages. Come visit your fire stations and see your

See Dyer, page 5A

Can you live without....

Can You Live Without China's Junk?

What does China export to the United States? Items include electronics, machinery, furniture, bedding, clothing, footwear, toys, cars, motorcycles, medical equipment, needles and catheters. There is of course more.

These and other products are a big part of the over \$48.83 billion in exports China sent to the US in December 2024 alone. For the entire year it was over \$600 billion.

To break it down, we imported \$34.2 billion in computers; \$23.2 billion in phones; \$4.3 billion in televisions; semiconductors, \$3.4 billion; industrial machines, \$8.5 billion; printing machinery, \$1.3 billion; textile machines, \$1.2 billion; vaccines, \$1.1 billion; insulin, \$134 million; furniture, \$15.5 billion; footwear, \$5.6 billion. These numbers are based on 2022 trade deals, so the dollar amount is always changing, but it gives us an idea of how dependent we

See Mollette, page 5A

Guest Column

By
Dr. Glenn Mollette

Letters to the Editor

Help the Senior Center

Dear Editor,

In March I read in the local paper that due to budget shortfalls, reductions would be made to the Union County Senior Meals on Wheels Program. This program is not an optional need for those seniors that in many cases may be homebound with health issues. These seniors depend on this nourishment being delivered to them Monday through Friday. I brought this subject up at the March 20th Commissioner's meeting, and the Commissioner indicated he would be meeting with Legacy Link (the agency running the program) to discuss this issue.

The Commissioner met with Legacy Link on March 25. In reviewing the notes provided

See Shirkey, page 5A

As Pages Turn to Chapters

Dear Editor,

Life's chapter books, a manuscript of sorts. Pages randomly scattered out of order as some continue to be rewritten and/or polished throughout the years. Nowadays, I tread lightly, picking up each page as to not distort my memories as a young girl in mind and spirit. Attempting to number words to fit in an orderly fashion is an exercise in futility, as I can only partially kickstart those great moments. Looking at my timeline, there is really no straight line. I see only those random life experiences used to create a larger picture for the reader to follow.

See Kramer page 5A

Really?

Dear Editor,

Legacy Link is a non-profit organization that administers and provides services to senior citizens in 13 north Georgia counties including our Union County Senior Center. These services include providing programs and meals, some delivered by Meals on Wheels. In one respect, Legacy Link is an "outside organization," even if they serve Union County.

Our new Commissioner said that he wants to be careful in providing taxpayer dollars, especially to this "outside organization." It's interesting that the Republican-controlled Federal Government has no problem whatsoever in providing taxpayer dollars to Legacy Link to help senior citizens in Union County. The State of Georgia's conservative Legislature has no problem whatsoever in providing taxpayer dollars to Legacy Link to help Union County Seniors.

So how does our Commissioner want to solve the problem? Through private donations and fundraisers, he said. Really? Does

See Levine, page 5A

Everybody has one...

Ten Promises

I step into the dimly lit room. A reverent hush restrains those gathered there. We all have the same objective – to witness the Dead Sea Scrolls on display at the Reagan Presidential Library.

The focal point of the display is the Ten Commandments – the oldest existing copy. It dates to the years just before Jesus was born. Archeologists discovered this particular fragment in the 1950's. When I step up to the display, I am startled by the awe that sweeps over me. What gripped me wasn't the physical object or the ancient Hebrew script, but the enduring truths conveyed by it through the centuries.

These "ten words" form the basis of God's moral law. As valuable as they are for living the good life today, Jesus showed us their eternal purpose. Speaking to hostile religious leaders He said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me" (John 5:39).

How does God's moral law point to Jesus? It reveals a demand you cannot meet and a debt you cannot pay, even if you try. There are no celestial scales in which you can counterbalance your bad choices by trying harder to keep the Ten Commandments. Paul writes, "By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20).

Jesus intensifies the problem in His Sermon on the Mount. "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). But nobody's perfect, right? Grasping that dilemma, you realize why the Scriptures testify about a perfect Savior who sets you right with God and gives you eternal life. Tim Keller writes, "God's grace does not come to people who morally outperform others, but to those who admit their failure to perform and who acknowledge their need for a Savior."

God's moral law pushes us toward the Jesus solution. "The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). That is the eternal purpose of God's moral law. By faith, Christ reconciles you to God "in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Col. 1:22). When Christ makes you blameless, it is as though you have kept the Ten Commandments perfectly. For

See Fowler, page 5A

All Things New

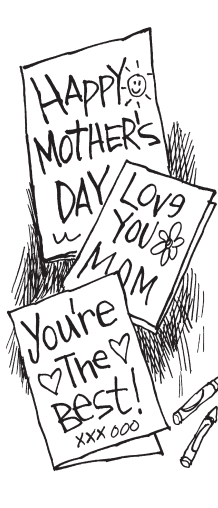
Wayne Fowler



YOUR KIDS MADE
YOU BREAKFAST
AND CARDS ALL
BY HAND.



TO SAY THAT
THEY LOVE YOU
AND THAT
YOU ARE GRAND.



'CAUSE YOU KNOW
THAT WAS SPECIAL
AND IT MUST HAVE
BEEN TOUGH...



TO PUT DOWN
THEIR CELLPHONES
TO MAKE ALL
THAT STUFF.



Letters to the Editor

The Rest of the Story

Dear Editor,

I read with interest a recent letter from a "fact finder" in our community. It made me remember Paul Harvey with his commentary called "The Rest of the Story."

Yes, it is a FACT that a judge was recently arrested by this administration. What the writer omits is that this judge broke the law by allowing (facilitating) a charged defendant to sneak out of the courthouse at the beginning of his trial so that ICE couldn't get him. They did get him after a chase through congested streets, which threatened the public.

And then there is the deportation of a 2-year-old. The FACT is that the mother was an illegal immigrant and was being deported. She chose to take her two-year-old with her, of course.

The writer was correct that the pardoned Jan Sixers included people charged with sexual crimes. The "rest of the story" is that there were nine and the pardon was for misdemeanors committed on Jan. 6 not for their previous crimes.

Budget cuts? Oh, yes, there are many. This President promised to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse in our federal budget. That includes cutting the DOD, about which our fact finder

See McKechnie, page 5A

Why a Board of Commissioners?

Dear Editor,

A Board of Commissioners is a more representative and open form of government. When we have transparency we have accountability. At the state and federal levels of government, we sometimes feel we are not being heard. At the local level, we can have more input and representation. This is a good thing.

A Board spreads representation around at the community level where the needs are different in different areas of the county. For example, the needs of those living in Suches or Ivy Log may be different than those living in Trackrock or Pat Colwell. We need different perspectives for the diverse population emerging in our county.

By electing a Board, we have the opportunity for new, younger leadership that will benefit them and their children's future.

A Board minimizes just one individual's passion or interest and looks at the legitimate needs of the county as a whole.

Let's continue to educate ourselves before we go to vote on the referendum in November of 2026. Keep in mind and remember, if you are for the referendum, vote "yes," and if you are against it, vote "no."

Cindy Vandereedt

Wyatt and John

John Cummings was my great-grandfather, and Wyatt was his father. Wyatt's father had moved the Cummings clan to North Alabama soon after the Creek Indians were defeated at Horseshoe Bend. The battle was a decisive one for Andrew Jackson and his band of Tennesseans.

Wyatt had not been married for very long when South Carolina fired the first shots on Fort Sumter. After this event, states across the South held Secessional Conventions to determine whether to stay in the Union or secede from the Union.

Alabama held their convention in Montgomery. Wyatt Cummings and the other people of Winston County elected a man by the name of Chris Sheets to represent them at the convention. The people of Winston County were settlers and homesteaders in Winston County. There were only a handful of plantations in the county, and most people did not own any slaves. So, in an overwhelming vote the people of the county decided that Chris should vote against secession at the convention. All the people of Winston County wanted was to remain neutral. They empathized with their brothers in the southern part of Alabama. But, the thought of fighting to maintain the right to own slaves was something the people of Winston County didn't understand.

During the first day of the secessional convention Chris Sheets was not allowed to speak. When he tried to speak, he was thrown into jail and beaten for his stance on the subject of secession. Chris was held in the jail in Montgomery during the entire convention and was only turned loose when the convention ended. He went home battered and bruised as well as feeling he had failed. As you know, Alabama did secede from the Union, and the War Between the States began. Many of the planters who had vigorously supported secession and war did not want to fight and began paying others to fight in their place during the war. Soon the state created a Home Guard to help protect the interest of the citizens of Alabama.

One of the objectives of the Home Guard was to encourage the enlistment of young men into the fighting ranks of the Confederate Army. At first the Home Guard was a decent group of people and they protected local interests. But, soon most of the Home Guard became part of the main army. As a result, the Home Guard became infiltrated with rogues and less desirable men. In Winston County the Home Guard began to terrorize the very people they were supposed to protect.

Wyatt's neighbor was a man known only

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



From Your Commissioner

I have been asked by numerous people in different forums about my thoughts on workforce housing. I want young folks who are just starting out to be able to purchase a home in a price range they can afford. What is that price range? I don't know. What is classified as affordable for our area and the average or median income? Different studies show different amounts.

I do know that back in September Union County and the City of Blairsville went through the process of becoming a GICH Community, which is the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing. The main goal of this was to tackle the issue of affordable housing by attending meetings and retreats designed by University of Georgia's GICH Program.

This program better qualifies Union County for the Community Home Investment Program (CHIP). The hope is to get the CHIP application submitted that could potentially help people make repairs to their existing owned home.

The other goal will be to get a housing study done with the assistance of this program as well as get ideas and learn from other communities in Georgia that are in similar positions to Union County related to the housing shortage.

This is not just a Union County issue, this is a statewide issue. I plan on continuing with completing this program, and the first retreat for the housing team, which I attended, was April 15-17. Right now, based on the information submitted in the GICH Application, affordable housing would be defined as \$250,000 to \$350,000.

Do I know if this is 100% accurate, no I don't and I don't know that anyone does. I am hopeful that a housing study and our participation in GICH will provide more information on what our county needs, and then we can take action from there.

Everyone has a different definition of affordable housing. This goes back to the variance process; if I just approve every variance request and developers build 250 new homes in the range of \$450,000 to \$500,000, is that helping the issue of affordable housing? It might, but I doubt it.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



Chamber 2025

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the Union County College and Career Academy's (CCA) ceremony honoring seniors who are graduating and entering the workforce. These students are now applying the skills they developed at the CCA, and several have even earned advanced certificates from North Georgia Technical College through Dual Enrollment. One standout student earned his CDL free of charge by taking advantage of these programs.

For some, this marks the beginning of a dream job. Others may choose to pursue further certifications in fields such as welding or go on to earn degrees in engineering or other disciplines. The important takeaway is that all these students are already making a positive impact in our community. A big thank you to each of them for their hard work and dedication!

Also, congratulations to our DECA team for finishing second at the International Championship!

See Chamber, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Hay Testing

Hay testing is an important part of any livestock management program. If you feed hay, it's important to know the quality of the hay. Without performing a hay test, you don't know the quality of the hay.

Feeding hay that is poor quality can lead to an impaction in the animal's stomach. Essentially, what happens is that the hay fed to cattle has a lot of fiber in it. Lots of fiber in hay without nutrition means that the cattle can't properly digest the forage. Cattle will eat enough forage to be full, but all that indigestible forage creates an impaction in their rumen. The effects of cattle eating low quality hay and getting an impaction can range from calving issues, to diarrhea, to weight loss, and even death.

When cattle start to die because of poor quality hay, usually you will have at least a few cattle go down. Forage quality issues can be made worse if they are combined with supplements that stimulate forage intake, because then cattle are eating more of the low quality hay. The best treatment for low quality forage is to know ahead of time about the quality of your hay. The only way that you can do that is through hay testing.

Body Condition Scoring (BCS...not referring to college football) also shows how important hay quality is. BCS is an index that measures the health of the animal based on how fleshy or boney the animal is. The scale ranges from 1-9. A one is a severely emaciated cow. Bones in the shoulders, back, and ribs are clearly visible. A BCS of one is rarely seen in the field. A BCS of nine is a very obese animal and its mobility is impaired by excessive fat. This score is also rarely seen in the field. In cows, you ideally want a BCS of five to be maintained for calving. If BCS drops to a four then your calving interval will increase. Typically a BCS of five will give you conception rates of >85% and calving every 360-370 days. A BCS of four or lower means calving will be >380 days. Cows will require high quality forage for about 70 days to go from a BCS of 4 to 5.

We have three main tests for hay. The basic one costs \$26 and will tell the moisture, fiber, crude protein, lignin, total digestible nutrients, and give you a relative forage quality (RFQ). The RFQ is an index that will give you a number to give you a reference on the quality of your hay. Dry cows do not need as high of an RFQ compared to gestating cows, or cows with a calf that they are feeding. Above the ba-

See Williams, page 5A

UGA extension watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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Cummings...continued from Page 4A

as Uncle Billy. One day the Home Guard came to his house and told him he needed to enlist in the Confederate Army. Uncle Billy refused. So, the Home Guard hung Uncle Billy and left him for dead. Soon Uncle Billy’s son found him and cut him down. Somehow Uncle Billy lived through the ordeal. A few months later the Home Guard came back and found Uncle Billy still alive and still adamant about not joining the war. Uncle Billy was hung a second time and lived through the hanging again. After the second hanging Uncle Billy lived another 30 years although he always had a crook in his neck.

Uncle Billy became the poster boy for resistance in Winston County. Although the Home Guard was in control, most of the men of Winston County enlisted with the Union. Wyatt and his brother,

Absolem, enlisted with the 2nd Tennessee Mounted Infantry in Savannah, Tennessee. Absolem never came home from the war. He died from dysentery. Wyatt came home to a community torn in half as a result of the war.

The men who hung Uncle Billy were hunted down and killed (in horrid fashion). Other men who sided with the Home Guard were tracked all the way to Oklahoma and killed, and all these killings were without judge or jury.

Wyatt came home and found his wife and young family struggling. When he seen what had happened to his community, he moved his family to western Tennessee where he lived out his days. However, his oldest son John never forgot Winston and Franklin County, and he came home to the mountains of north Alabama in the late 1870’s.

Mollette...continued from Page 4A

have become on China. This of course is not comprehensive as there are various other medicines and items that China exports to us. For example, Tylenol, Advil, Motrin, Amoxicillin, Keflex, blood pressure meds, Hydrochlorothiazide, Metformin, Vitamin C, Aspirin, insulin tablets and more come from China.

Does this scare you? It may because we import so much from China. However, it should make us all mad. How did we get ourselves into this mess? American companies took our jobs to cheap labor places like China where these products are made by people working for slave wages. These products were made cheaply and then sold back to us. The American people were robbed of jobs and opportunities to provide for our children because a lot of our jobs were outsourced somewhere else.

These companies have gotten by with it for over 30 years while our people in America had to go to work for McDonalds, Walmart, Starbucks and pray to God every day that they might make \$12 or \$13 an hour. We allowed our automobile industry to suffer, we buried our energy industry and became dependent on China, Vietnam, Japan and other countries.

Thus, Walmart became American’s store because we can go to Walmart and buy for cheap. Walmart and Dollar General are about the only

stores most Americans can afford. They are no longer the choice just because they are cheaper. They are all most Americans can afford. Hold on, because of the tariffs Walmart will become more expensive.

Can anybody answer the question why we allowed this slow-growing but almost fatal economic cancer to invade our mindset and our country? We did not protect ourselves. We looked out for the world and let our own country suffer. Now we are having to undergo a serious time of economic surgery and treatment.

It’s way, way past time to bring the manufacturing back to America. It will not happen overnight. In the meantime, keep in mind that numerous other countries make medicine. India exports over \$9 billion a year. Ireland over \$8 billion. Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Canada, the UK, Israel and Singapore export billions of dollars of medicine every year. There are other places besides China to buy our medicine.

The same goes for electronics, toys, furniture and shoes. For example, toys. Yes, China exports 85% of our toys, but other countries make toys such as good old Vietnam. They exported \$3.4 billion last year while Indonesia and Thailand both exported over \$4 billion in toys. There are other places for us to buy toys.

We can find a way to live without China. It’s way past time.

Shirkey...continued from Page 4A

by the County of this meeting, it consisted of eight questions. The agency answered the questions, however there was no indication given by the county of how they would respond to support the shortfall.

At the April 17th Commissioner’s meeting, the Meals on Wheels reduction of meals was not on the agenda, therefore I requested an update on how Union County would assist to assure Union County would be supporting the services provided to our seniors. The answer seemed to be the county has provided funds this year and donations can be made to help during the shortfall. At the Town Hall Meeting April 29th, a similar response was made by the Commissioner, despite concerns of residents.

At the Town Hall the Commissioner seemed to indicate some concerns with how the Union County Senior funds have been spent. Certainly if more efficiencies can be identified to help get the most out of the budget dollars that are available, that’s great. In the meantime, Seniors should not have services curtailed that are essential. This is the Union County Senior Center, and the county has a responsibility to

meet the needs that have been identified for our seniors.

As a County we also need to look ahead as to how these programs will be affected when the new budget year begins in July. Federal budget cuts have already resulted in significant layoffs at the Department of Health and Human Services, which handles Senior Centers and Meals on Wheels. Reductions of monies for these programs has been projected to be approximately 35% for the 2025/2026 year.

When we look at the population of our county, approximately 6,000 of our residents are over 60 years old. Union County has many priorities when determining what funds should be spent on what services, however when we can run festivals such as the Sorghum Festival to support our community, we can also support county services for our seniors. Hopefully some of the profits made from the Sorghum Festival – which the Commissioner said will all go back to the community – will help supplement shortfalls to our Senior Center and services such as Meals on Wheels.

Kristie Shirkey

Levine...continued from Page 4A

he expect the new Director of the Senior Center to go to each business in Union County month after month after month to beg for money? Union County senior citizens need the Commissioner to realize that one reason we pay taxes is to help take care of our own people when the need

is severe. And taking care of our Union County senior citizens won’t be done in the long run by donations and doing fundraiser after fundraiser.

We pray the Commissioner reconsiders his lack of action towards our Senior Center.

Richard and Clara Levine

ARFS: Give Your Pain Purpose

If you have lost a dearly loved pet and your heart is grieving, why not “give your pain purpose” by making a donation to Animal Rescue Financial Support (ARFS) in honor of your cherished fur friend.

ARFS will use your donation to provide medical care for an animal that is suffering and has an owner who cannot afford veterinary expenses. Memorials can be made

to ARFS, P.O. Box 972, Hiassee, GA 30546 or on ARFS website (www.arfs-inc.org) by clicking the DONATE button. Please indicate that your donation is a memorial and provide the name of your pet. Memorials will be posted on ARFS’s website, unless you request otherwise.

Let’s not forget that precious pet that gave you so much joy. Let’s give your pain purpose! NT(May 14/22)CA

Kramer... continued from Page 4A

And yet, there are routines to follow daily, with birthday greetings, yearly holidays and social gatherings coming and going in predictable increments. Some earlier years swiftly turn pages while late in life milestones are skimmed. And, just when the routines become monotonous, my life takes a detour. This change in direction forces me stop to reread the chapters. As I look at the letters on each page, there is a new transcript to be written. I start taking chunks out of my past experiences as I continue writing my book. No worries are given to the final chapters which I hope to be ongoing storyline.

A chapter, once dedicated to my carefree, predictable youth, is now sprinkled with acceptance of inevitable change as a responsible adult. These years conjure up a stream of silence as a chapter devoted to the 21st century unfolds before my eyes. Technology eludes me as I write down the steps for a successful communication mode with others. I seesaw back and forth when I recall questions and answers I needed to know during third through sixth grade when letter writing and telephone exchanges were the norm.

And yet, technology has served me well. With a touch of a button or a liturgy of patterns to follow, I am task oriented in all directions. Whether it be connecting with family

and friends here and abroad or, getting my messages heard by the masses, I keep my independence while moving with the times. As the pages turn, I am a part of history in the making. In the long run, I’d say all is good. I am carving out a lifestyle on unpredictability. If all goes well, my flexibility will light an array of never-before-seen pages. This can only lead to exciting life chapters for me. I hope the chapters in your book will be just as exciting.

Lisa Kramer

Williams... continued from Page 4A

sic test is a \$31 test that is the basic test + nitrates. Above that is a \$48 test that is basic + nitrates + minerals.

A single hay test can cover an entire hay lot. A hay lot would be all the hay from a particular field at the same cutting. I have a hay probe in my office and I would be happy to come out and collect the hay sample for you. Once we’ve processed a hay sample, I can help you come up with a balanced ration to get you through the hay feeding months. If you

think you have some good quality hay let me know, and we can submit a sample to the Southeastern Hay Contest. Generally, you want to let the hay it in the hay barn for about 2 weeks before testing it.

Quality forage when grass isn’t growing is a big part of any livestock operation, not matter how big or small. If you have questions about hay testing contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A

the believer, they are essentially ten promises. You live by a new identity – that of Christ. “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17).

A commemorative gift to Reagan is on display at the Library. It bears the inscription, “Good deeds bring a man immortality.” That’s a common misconception. I’ll stick with Jesus, God’s grace, and the ten promises.

Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

onship in Orlando! This competition included students from around the world, but this year, the Second-Place trophy came home to Blairsville. These students are truly working to make the Future Great in Blairsville!

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

firefighters and equipment.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

McKechnie...

continued from Page 4A

wrote.

The only allegation I found that there doesn’t seem to be any “rest of the story” was about the politician who stole money from a fund for a slain police officer and used it for personal purposes. That one confounds me, and I hope the State of Nevada will bring state charges against her and make them stick.

Whenever you hear accusations, wait for the “rest of the story” before making a judgement.

Carol McKechnie

Free GED Classes

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Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



May 2, 2025

In loving memory of
Mary Sue Moon
by the Union County
Historical Society

May 2, 2025

In memory of
Mildred Ensley Haigler
on her birthday
by Honor Allison Lind

May 7, 2025

In memory of
Carroll Brown
on his birthday
by Martha Brown

**Bell ringing information
at 706-745-5493**