

Opinions

Everybody has one...

The Recruit Class

Union County Fire Department is a combination department meaning that we have both career and volunteer firefighters who respond to emergencies in Union County. Career firefighters must meet National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) as a Firefighter I and be state certified to be employed. Volunteer firefighters have a couple of options when they join the department.

A volunteer may become a Support Firefighter which is the initial firefighter training to support firefighting operations. The training is conducted through in-service training at the volunteer station or through scheduled Support Firefighter Course. A volunteer who wants to be active in fighting fire can become a Suppression Firefighter. Suppression Firefighters must meet the same NPQ Firefighter I requirements as career firefighters however, they do not have to be state certified.

Volunteer firefighters who wish to become a Suppression Firefighter must complete their training during an annual Union County Fire Department recruit class. The class meets all National Professional Qualifications Firefighter I requirements and standards. We try to offer a class each year but there may be times when we do not have enough recruits to begin the class.

The 2018 recruit class is in full swing. The class began January 8th and we have some very dedicated and energetic recruits. They have been learning the basics of fire and firefighting during these last four weeks. The class began with orientation and fire behavior where students were introduced to the science of fire. The class then taught students about personal protective equipment which includes turnout gear and self-contained breathing apparatus. Over the last couple of weeks, the recruits have been learning about fire hoses, fire streams and fire control.

The class includes a great deal of reading and studying that recruits must do on their own time. Almost every class recruits practice the skills they have learned. Recruits are drilled on the use of their personal protective equipment and how to operate various pieces of fire equipment that may be used on the fire scene.

Fighting fire requires a great deal of knowledge and skill. Recruits must be dedicated to the service and be willing to complete

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief



David Dyer

Un-blinded Faith

Did you see that story a few weeks ago about a DeKalb County, Georgia firefighter who caught a child tossed from a third-floor balcony? Capt. Scott Stroup was in the right place, and a helmet camera caught the dramatic rescue. The child was okay, and everyone escaped.

Imagine being the parent of that child, faced with such a decision. Risk falling down the ladder trying to carry the child, or toss him? At that moment, looking down, the parent saw someone and believed he was willing and able to catch the child. It was an informed belief.

The nearly tragic story helps explain the nature of faith. Some think that all faith is "blind faith." That is, if you want something to be true but you have no evidence that it is, you simply connect the dots with faith. That parent had faith in the firefighter, but it wasn't blind.

I've heard it said that religion has unquestionable answers, but philosophy has unanswerable questions. Frankly that sentiment does a great disservice to both, since they both purport to seek and value truth. Hidden in that turn of phrase is the assumption that religion is really just blind faith. Perhaps much that passes as religion is.

What evidence do God-believers have to assure us that we haven't fallen into a blind faith trap? Vince Vitale in "Jesus Among Secular Gods" explains that science gives us evidence of the existence of God. He lists four truths about the universe: it has a beginning; it is knowable; it is regular; and it is finely tuned for life.

Some of the loudest objections to the Big Bang Theory were from scientists who thought it sounded too much like the Bible. It holds that the universe had a beginning, but they thought the universe was eternal.

Science would be pointless if the universe isn't knowable. Einstein said, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible." How could an unknowing, random universe produce comprehending humans by chance? That we can stare at the stars and know the light is from another

See *Fowler*, page 5A

All Things New



Wayne Fowler

Commissioner's Questions

Q. Is it true that people who live outside our county and visit here provide a significant contribution to our SPLOST and ESPLOST sales tax?

A. Below is from a press release the Chamber did in March of 2016.

A yearly report generated by the Georgia Department of Economic Development shows that in 2014 (most current numbers), Union County's tourism industry generated \$24.8 million in direct travel spending. Additionally, the tourism industry supported 245 jobs and generated \$1,600,000 in combined state and local tax revenues. In fact, if it were not for the tourism industry, each of the 14,255 households in Union County would pay an additional \$114 in property taxes. Tourism activity in the County has continually increased each year with more than a 15.5% increase from 2011. This growth has been prompted by increases in both visits and spending per trip. Traveler spending is a significant source of employment and taxes at the county, regional, and state levels. Because the tourism industry is largely comprised of small businesses, travel and hospitality jobs will never be outsourced or exported.

Q. Does having the SPLOST and ESPLOST, both of which allow the county and school to have lower millage rates, positively impact our county?

A. You bet it does. Having low property taxes, outstanding medical services, including Union General Hospital, and all the excellent doctors that are moving their families to Union County, an award-winning school system second to none, our wonderful technical college, outstanding Public Safety, incredible Recreation Department and facilities, and much more, are just a sampling of the value of SPLOST and ESPLOST to Union County. A better county also is inviting for more visitors who help us pay the SPLOST and ESPLOST sales taxes.

Q. You often talk about Union County having some of the lowest property taxes in Georgia. How big a deal is this?

A. As your commissioner, it is a huge deal. My goal, and that of our employees, is to provide you with the best possible

See *Paris*, page 5A

Q & A from Union County Commissioner



Lamar Paris

Drug Free Mountain Life

Do I have protections if I use medical marijuana?

The majority of states now have some form of legalized medical marijuana. The fact that marijuana is now going to be prescribed by physicians raises a lot of questions for employers. If an applicant or employee has a prescription, should the marijuana be considered a medication? And should patients using it be protected?

You might be asking yourself, "What is the harm in that? Why shouldn't medical marijuana users be treated the same as people with other disabilities?" To answer that question, let's look at a few facts and ask some more questions.

Medical marijuana is the ONLY drug on the market that has skipped all FDA testing and approval processes. Do you want a drug that hasn't been FDA tested or approved?

Pharmaceutical companies spend millions upon millions to be sure their products are safe and effective. Every other drug you buy - whether over-the-counter or by prescription - has gone through rigorous safety and quality testing. When you take a medication, it is clearly labeled. You know exactly how much active ingredient it contains, and if you take the time to read the small print, you can even find out what fillers are

See *Drug Free*, page 5A

The DRUG FREE MOUNTAIN LIFE campaign supports an overall safe community by providing information, education and support services to children, families, and community toward prevention of illegal substance abuse.

"Boss, can you believe how many folks called in sick? When I have the flu, I always come in anyway!"



Wildlife Risk Assessment

It's hard to believe after all of the cold, wet weather that we have had for the past month or so that dry times are a'coming and all of the leaves left from the fall are right where they fell around our homes and buildings just waiting for a spark to burst into flames.

When the February and March winds start blowing these leaves will turn into dry fuel that makes March and April two of our most dangerous wildfire months here in the mountains.

We should start making plans now to reduce these risks so when conditions change it won't be too late to protect our homes. It could be as simple as a leaf pile burning when a puff of wind throws an ember into the dry leaves around the base of your house or into the leaf filled gutters. We don't get a "do over" once the smoke starts and we are in the defensive mode trying to stop what we could have prevented with a little planning back in January.

There are three threats or exposures that a building can experience during a wildfire, grass-fire, or brushfire: windborne embers, radiant heat, and direct flame contact. When considering the vulnerability of your home or business to wildfire, you need to evaluate and address all three potential exposures. Ember exposure is considered the most important, because most building ignitions have been attributed to them. Embers can ignite building components and contents directly or ignite vegetation and other combustible items adjacent to or near a building; this then can result in a radiant heat and/or direct flame contact exposure. For example, embers may land on and ignite debris that has accumulated in your gutter. The burning debris then causes direct flame contact on the edge of the roof. Or, embers that ignite nearby vegetation could result in a radiant heat exposure to the side of a building, potentially igniting combustible siding or breaking the glass in a window. The opening from broken glass then would allow embers to enter the building and ignite combustible materials, such as carpeting or furniture.

What to know to better protect your home from wildfire - SLOPE - The slope of the land around your home is a major consideration in assessing wildfire risk. Wildfires burn up a slope faster and more intensely than along flat ground. A steeper slope will result in a faster moving fire, with longer flame lengths. Homes located mid- or top of a slope (without set back) are generally more vulnerable because of increased flame length and intensity of a fire moving up the slope. Depending on the location of your home, defensible space may need to be increased.

See *Riley*, page 5A

RC&D Executive Director



Frank Riley

John's Family

John's wife was Martha Pace who was head strong and did not approve of alcohol. While John was rather fond of the corn in a jar. I have heard many times about John's attendance at a wedding. It seems that he over indulged and became upset at the family of the groom. Wherein he removed his clothing and walked to the front of the church and challenged every man in the building to a friendly brawl.

There were no takers and the wedding was called off until the next day to allow John Cummings to calm down.

This impasse concerning alcohol consumption between John and his wife, Martha, led to a separation and John moved to Missouri with another woman. This event coupled with other events had far reaching impacts upon the Cummings boys. John's boys included Will, Riley, Lum, Lon and Howard. The boys had three sisters.

Immediately after John left his family things began to unravel. First, sometime around 1919 an influenza epidemic swept across the country. Two of my great grandfather's (Lon) sisters died while still in their teenage years. Also, about this time Lon's brother Lum was called into the army and went to fight in Europe during WWI. Just before Lum left the whole family was gathered at the home place for a family meal. By this time the older boys were busy raising their own family and the only children left at home were Uncle Howard and Aunt Tiny. Uncle Howard was only 17 years old. He and a good friend had been out hunting when they found an old pistol. The gun was taken to the house for cleaning and during the process the gun accidentally discharged fatally wounding the youngest of the Cummings boys. The young man ran from the house and around it in a panic falling dead in front of his family. Riley and Will thought their brother's friend was guilty of killing Howard and they swore their vengeance. At 17 years the boy was forced to leave his family and move to Detroit where he worked. Never coming back to Alabama until Riley and Will Cummings had gone on to meet their maker.

These events were too much for my great-grandmother Martha. The loss of her husband, the loss of two of her daughters and the loss of her youngest son caused Martha to have a nervous breakdown from which she never recovered. Uncle Lum went on to serve honorably in WWI. He survived more than 1 mustard gas attack from the Germans and he was one of the last soldiers of the United States to ever ride a horse into battle. He came back home after the war to raise a family and establish a big Hereford Farm in North Alabama.

Lon continued running the saw mill after

See *Cummings*, page 5A

Around The Farm



Mickey Cummings

Letters to the Editor

Lost Without Christ

Dear Editor,

Throughout history many shipwrecks have been recorded, but none more destructive than the Titanic which hit an iceberg in the Atlantic Ocean on April 15, 1912. Number of passengers on board were around 2300 and 1500 died on that voyage making it one of the worst ocean liner tragedies in the world and my first thought when I read about the Titanic story was: I wonder how many folks on board were saved by faith in God and as I look around at what is taking place in America where God has been removed from schools for years and from most of our government buildings. Where abortion rates have risen to over 60 million babies and this is okay in our politically correct society. Where the mention of Jesus Christ is not even allowed in a lot of churches that want to please the people and ignore the Scriptures and the truth of God's Holy Word. Our society is slowly entering into a time of no return where the hearts of people have grown cold and hardened to the Word of God and have set before themselves material possessions over heavenly treasures above.

A society which is slowly pushing every aspect of Christianity out the window and has sealed the window shut forever and dares to laugh in the face of their own Creator, God. In the Bible in chapter 6 verse 6 in the book of Galatians a stern warning from God: Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he reap. I pray for the young men and women who are indulging in free sex, drugs and alcohol. Some of them are already beginning to reap the results of what they have sown. Venereal disease has reached epidemic proportions across our nation and there is an alarming rate in mental disorders. Why? God says you will not get away with your sins. God will not be mocked for there is deep consequences to pay and God is the ultimate judge of life and death.

I have said this before and it is fitting to be printed again: In Mark 8:36—For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, yet lose his own soul. We only have one life to live here on earth. Are you living for Jesus Christ or are you living for yourself? Eternity has two roads. One leads to heaven and the other leads to Hell. Yes, both are very real just like God is.

Amen
Frank F. Combs

2018 Chamber Services

We at the Chamber are making some changes for 2018 to improve our internal efficiency and service(s) to our membership.

In an effort to make us easier to do business with we will soon be able to accept debit cards, credit cards, and PayPal for member dues, events and souvenirs. So members can choose how they wish to make their payments.

We are also upgrading our software system with additional capabilities that will help provide better marketing and web site presence for our members.

We will communicate these changes when they are ready via our weekly newsletter.

Mark your calendars! Our second Monthly Mingle will be held at noon on 2/21.

The next Business After Hours meeting will be on February 1st at North Georgia Technical College from 5:30 to 7PM.

The Evening with the STARS will be held

See *Harper*, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber Interim President



Al Harper

Fruit Trees

Whether you want a sweet apple tree for the grandkids to pick from, or you want a peach or plum tree to make pies from, there are a variety of fruit trees that do well in our area. The major steps to having a productive fruit harvest are the three p's: picking, pollination, and pruning. If you know the basics of these three important characteristics, you will have plenty of fruit for yourself, your family and even your neighbors!

The most common fruit trees I see up here are, of course, apples. A wide variety of apple trees do well in the North Georgia mountains, but red cultivars are the most resistant to diseases such as cedar apple rust. Apples ripen throughout late summer and early fall, and are perfect to pick when their color has peaked and they are easily plucked off the stems. Though it may be tempting to prune your apple trees after the fruit and leaves have dropped, the ideal pruning time is in early February. Remove any diseased or dead wood and any branches that are rubbing against each other. You always want to take back about one third of the tree's volume to allow for air flow and to maintain structural integrity. Finally, always make sure you have multiple apple trees that flower at the same time. If you only have one tree, you will not have any fruit because it will not be pollinated.

Bears are also a common tree grown here. Unlike apples, they need to be picked before they are ripe. A good rule of thumb is to pick them when you can see little brown dots (lenticels) appearing on the skin. Early February is also the best time to prune these trees, and you will definitely need to prune them because their branches grow almost straight up and form narrow crotches. Just like with all trees, you want good air flow through the canopy to prevent disease. Even if a pear may be advertised as "self-fertile", it is good to have at least two that flower at the same time to increase your fruit yield. More pollination always means more tasty fruit!

Despite the fact that North Georgia is not traditionally considered a suitable site for fig trees, I have seen several varieties such as Hardy Chicago, Celeste and some Brown Turkey do well in the area. Figs ripen throughout the warm summer months into fall, depending on environmental conditions. Again, late winter is the ideal time to prune as figs typically yield better when they are kept a little short instead of growing into a large tree. February is also a great time to make cuttings. If you are unsure of what variety to get, the best thing may be to ask a friend or neighbor with a successfully producing fig tree if

See *Mattee*, page 5A

From the Ground Up



Melissa Mattee

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