

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Receiving Union Alert Messages

We live in the information age. We have an amazing amount of information right at our fingertips. Anything that we want to know can be "searched" on our computers, tablets, or cell phones with immediate results. This can be very convenient and, at times, can be lifesaving when there is an emergency in our area.

These emergencies may include winter weather, floods, tornadoes, hazardous materials, wildland fires, or a number of other significant incidents that can affect us and our community. One of the best ways to prepare for such emergencies is to stay informed. The Union County Emergency Alert Notification System (Union Alert) is one way to stay informed.

Union Alert is an alert system operated in cooperation with Union County Government, Union County Emergency Management (EMA) and the Union County 911 Communications Center. It is designed to instantly reach registered cell phones, landlines, emails, desktops and other devices when an urgent alert needs to be communicated. When there is an emergency or significant event, the 911 Center or Emergency Management may send an alert to these registered devices to provide information on the event.

Receiving Union Alert messages is voluntary. People who wish to receive these alerts must register with the system. There are several ways to register. You may call 706-439-6091 to speak to Jeannie who can register your device over the phone.

You may also register on-line by visiting tinyurl.com/ucwens. Here you will be able to register the devices (cell phone, email, landline, etc.) and choose which alerts that you wish to receive. Entering your address (physical street address) is very important because alerts can be sent to specific locations or geographical areas in the event of an emergency in that specific area. You may also determine at what times you would like to receive or not receive an alert.

Having the alert system can be very useful in the event of an emergency. Notification of severe weather or a major event in your area can help you be prepared or know what to do during these events. Union County EMA uses several forms of communication

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



Seen and Known

The great contradiction of our technological age is that so much information can be gathered about us, yet that does not satisfy our basic need to be known.

The slogan in George Orwell's fictional Oceania is "big brother is watching you." That phrase has become a metaphor for modern surveillance methods and concerns over personal privacy. We are way beyond the days of wiretapping. Facial recognition software and artificial intelligence make all kinds of surveillance frighteningly possible. China has implemented "social credit system" technology that monitors who goes where, and for what purposes. In America, they say TV's are looking back at you and Alexa is always listening. The National Security Agency can intercept phone calls and track web browsing. American politicians rail against spying on ordinary citizens because people do not want everything they do to be known by the government.

Yet we yearn to be known. The lyrics of pop culture captures that sentiment. Back in the day, The Who sang, "Who are you? Who who? Who who? I really want to know." Modern Swedish artist Zara Larsson sings, "Nobody sees, nobody knows. We are a secret can't be exposed. That's how it is, that's how it goes." Culture decries a life lived in secrecy or isolation as a tragic loss for humanity. We are created for community.

It is particularly lonely if you think not even God sees or knows you. Yet, the Bible says, "From His dwelling place He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth. He who fashions the hearts of them all, He who understands all their works" (Psa. 22:14-15). The God who fashioned you, understands you. The context here is that God knows when you are trying to be independent and self-reliant. But He looks for something else. "The eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope for His lovingkindness, to deliver their soul from death" (v.18-19).

Don't caricature God as Santa Claus, who sees you when you're sleeping or awake, and knows if you've been bad or good. God already knows you're bad - "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). He looks into your life to know whether you "exchange the truth of God for a lie" or worship your Creator (Rom. 1:25). When

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All Things New
Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. Too many people in Union County are leaving their poor dogs out in the cold and rain. Some howl and cry all night long. This should be considered animal cruelty and needs to be enforced.

A. We certainly want to remind folks that during this very cold and wet weather, we must look after our pets. However, I also want to caution the public that cold temperatures impact different pets in different ways. We have also had an issue with people complaining to Animal Control about an animal out in the cold, when in fact they are in a dog house that is padded and relatively warm. We also had a complaint just a few years ago about the dogs being outside in the cold. When investigated, not only did the dogs have dog houses, they had electric heating pads in them.

Q. Did the county have a lot of flood damage from the heavy rains this week?

A. While there were a lot of washed out culverts and several places where the creeks got out of their banks, we were very lucky. We had rainfall measurements between 3.1 inches at the Experiment Station, to 4 inches at a home. Had it rained another inch or two Thursday afternoon, we very well could have had some serious flooding throughout the county. Usually the major problems begin when we get 4" to 6" of rainfall and above.

Q. We really have wanted to see some snow fall and wonder when it is more likely to happen?

A. Snow or sleet are impossible to predict because it is usually just a few degrees of temperature that makes the difference. For example, had it been 20 degrees colder Thursday, instead of 3" of rainfall, we could have had a couple of feet of snow and it is impossible to predict very far in advance.

Q. It seems that we have had milder winters recently. Do you think that is a sign of climate change?

A. I try to never get into this discussion because I do not think anyone really knows the future. However, it is true that last winter was the first time in memory of anyone at the Road Department that the county has not had to put any salt on the roadways because of snow or ice (I hope I am not jinxing us). So while the

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris



Drug Free Mountain Life

Substance Abuse and High Risk Behaviors

Research shows that the majority of adults who meet the criteria for having a substance use disorder started using substances during their youth. Adolescent substance use is also associated with sexual risk behaviors that put young people at risk for HIV, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and pregnancy. The 2017 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 29% of high school students are sexually active and 19% of those students admitted to using drugs and / or alcohol before engaging in sexual intercourse.

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.

Substance use and high-risk sexual behaviors have common underlying factors that may predispose the teenage population to these behaviors. The most common traits among teens who engage in high-risk behaviors include lack of positive parental engagement, peers who use

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Letters to the Editor

Rainfall Data

Dear Editor,
As a hobby, I keep unofficial rainfall measurements at our home in the Gumlog Valley in the western part of Towns and Union Counties. In 2019, I measured 76.6 inches for the entire year, with the driest month in September (0.5") and the wettest in February (12.1"). During the 12 years that I have kept records (2008-2019), the yearly average has been 63.34".

Annual measurements were as follows: 2008 (44.2"), 2009 (72.5"), 2010 (47.7"), 2011 (56.4"), 2012 (50.0"), 2013 (87.0"), 2014 (54.3"), 2015 (79.3"), 2016 (43.1"), 2017 (63.5"), 2018 (85.5"), 2019 (76.6).
Wm. Ronald Gibson

Virtue and Self-Worth

Dear Editor,
I, like many of your readers, watched the Super Bowl ads. Two noteworthy ones to me (although I am not a staunch or outwardly demonstrative activist) were about women in space and a woman who is an assistant pro football coach for the 49ers. And yet, then came the widely-viewed halftime show featuring various scantily-clad women, in the presence of lots of young girls on the stage with them, simulating sex movements, and one even doing a pole dance. Hypocritical and shameful!
Our message and that of our society to women and young girls should be to take pride in yourselves and don't let anybody marginalize, disrespect or objectify you, because virtue and self-worth have their own rewards.
Claude Spears

Spreading Virus

Dear Editor,
We have been hearing a lot of information on the spreading of this virus from China. They are doing their very best checking people boarding and departing aircraft at different locations for symptoms of fever, which is a good thing. But what about the people who have been already infected but do not have the symptoms yet?
Even with the flu, I believe there is an incubation period before this happens.
What's to say, after arriving at their destination, a week later their symptoms pop up?
We are not stopping the virus; we are enabling it.
Just think about it.
Charlotte Thompson

GA Agribusiness Council

Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D facilitated and sponsored 72 events in 2019, and since there are only two of us, we needed many partners to make all of these happen. We recently joined forces with a new partner to help spread our ag programs into all parts of the state.

The Georgia Agribusiness Council is the voice of agriculture in Georgia. Officially incorporated on January 17, 1966, the Georgia Agribusiness Council's mission is "To Advance the Business of Agriculture through Economic Development, Environmental Stewardship and Education to Enhance the Quality of Life for All Georgians."

This mission forms the basis for their efforts on behalf of their members and their industry each day. GAC's Mission is carried through a Program of Work which addresses six primary objectives: 1. To represent the agribusiness industry in the legislative arena (lobbying). 2. To provide economic services to members. 3. To promote agribusiness development. 4. To build coalitions within the agricultural community. 5. To educate the public about agribusiness issues. 6. To promote agricultural education through elementary, secondary, college, and adult programs. According to the from the UGA Center for Agribusiness and Economic Development, Georgia's food and fiber production and directly related processing directly and indirectly generated a total economic contribution of \$74.9 billion for the state and accounted for nearly 410,800 jobs in 2018.

In almost two-thirds of Georgia's counties, agribusiness and directly related industries are the largest or second-largest economic engines. This massive, complex business has invested and created for itself a voice in the public arena. This voice is the Georgia Agribusiness Council. GAC is the organization which provides a forum for the entire agricultural industry to share views, develop understanding and work on issues of common concern. They proudly represent over 1,000 member businesses throughout the state. No matter what part of the industry farmers are in, it helps to have a dedicated group of individuals who are standing up for the issues that are important to them daily and keep a watch out for issues and things that could be detrimental to the ag industry. They are the lobbying representative for agriculture in the Georgia legislature.

Georgia Agribusiness Council has several events where members and guests come together to meet and greet each other and hear messages by elected officials and agency representatives about current events that effect their farms and

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RC&D Executive Director



Frank Riley

Ronald

The year of 1975 gave many special memories, not the least of which was a young man by the name of Ronald. Ronald had just become engaged to his future wife Nancy. Ronald came forward one morning to receive Christ and asked my father about being baptized into our church. Ronald and Nancy were baptized and became staunch members of Center Grove Baptist Church. After the two were married, the young couple began teaching our youth Sunday School Class. Every kid in the class loved Ronald and Nancy. They were special people, and all of us looked up to them. After he began teaching our class, I was offered a job of picking tomatoes for him. So, from July to mid-August, I picked tomatoes for Ronald and learned a great deal about hard work that summer.

As time went by, Ronald became more and more involved with our church. He was there each time the door was open. One Sunday morning, Ronald came forward at the end of our service, and with tears streaming down his face, he announced to the congregation his calling to the ministry. So, the church set aside Ronald as a potential minister. During this time, Ronald was counseled and taught the Southern Baptist doctrine. After a time, he was also asked to give his very first sermon as a minister. The church wanted to hear the young man give a sermon.

Before we get to the sermon, please let me remind you of what happens to a young man after he marries a good cook. When Ronald married, he weighed 175 pounds. But, every day his wife made biscuits for breakfast, and by the end of winter, Ronald had gained about 45 pounds. So, by the time of his first sermon at Center Grove Church, he had become quite pudgy. Ronald stood up behind the pulpit and was so nervous he dropped all of his notes at the beginning of his first message. The young minister bent over to pick up his notes, and everyone in church heard the splitting of the seam in his pants. The seam ripped from the front button of the pants down past the zipper, between the legs and up to his back belt loop. The only thing holding his pants together was the belt. There was only one person in the church of 250 people which did not hear the pants ripping. That one person was Ronald.

Nancy was sitting beside of my mother when her husband's pants split. The look on her face was priceless. After the initial shock was over, she began making hand gestures to him. She eventually held up a note with big letters which read, "Your pants are ripped." He looked at his wife, and even though he was on his first

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Around The Farm



Mickey Cummings

Blueberry Pruning

Blueberries grow pretty well in Georgia. Rabbiteye blueberries are native to the southeast, so they're well adapted to our climate. I have talked about blueberries in the past, but this time I want to talk more specifically about pruning blueberries.

Blueberries don't need to be pruned every year to be fruitful. However, if you start doing some cane renewal pruning every year on a mature plant the bushes will be more fruitful and have more longevity. The ideal time to prune blueberries is late winter because the plants are dormant. February is late winter for us in the mountains. Plants in their dormant state are going to be less prone to infection or stress from the pruning.

Blueberry is a multi-stemmed bush. Each one of the stems that comes out of the ground is called a cane. Cane renewal pruning is removing old canes from the plant so that there is space for new canes to grow. Ideally, under cane renewal pruning you'll remove old canes each year so that in five years all the canes on the plant will be completely different. Each year go through the plant and cut out the oldest canes that you find. Also, remove any diseased or dead canes. Ideally, you don't want to remove more than 25% of the canes in a single year. If you have a blueberry bush that hasn't been pruned for a couple of years it may take a couple years to get it back into shape. If you have a blueberry bush that hasn't been pruned for many, many years cane renewal pruning probably isn't going to get the plants back into shape. In that situation, I'd recommend something that may seem very drastic, but is better for the plants in the end. Mow the bushes down to the ground. Mature plants will be able to take this hit, and put up new suckers, that turn into canes. This is going to give you fresh growth, and a new healthier plant. You'll go without blueberries for a couple of years. Therefore, if you have several plants that need to be mowed, you could do a couple a year, until they are all back under control.

New plants should be pruned to have the healthiest plants. Prune back 2/3 of the top growth on bare root plants, and 1/2 of the top growth on potted plants. If the new plant has many canes, prune out all but 1-3 of the best looking ones. You also don't want a first year plant to produce fruit, so pick off any flower buds. If you prune plants like this the first year, the second year won't need much pruning. In the second year pick off flower buds again, and remove any diseased canes. The third year, remove diseased canes, but you can leave the flower buds on vigorous shoots. The

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Chamber of Commerce

We hope everyone managed to stay dry and warm last week during all of the rain and bad weather we experienced. Possibly, we will get a couple of decent days this weekend before the next bout of winter weather arrives.

Despite the poor weather, we celebrated the first three Ribbon Cutting ceremonies of the new decade this last week welcoming Dust Til Gone, Triple R Services Septic, Pumping & Repair, and Beach2Beach as new members of the Chamber of the Commerce. You can learn more about these new businesses by visiting us online. Holding special ribbon cutting ceremonies for our new businesses is just one of the many ways we offer opportunities for Blairsville's new business owners to connect with and meet fellow community members and business entrepreneurs. Keep an eye on the Chamber website event calendar for upcoming ribbon cuttings and come out and support our new businesses!

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President



Steve Rowe

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Watching and Working



Jacob Williams

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