

# Opinions

## Everybody has one...

### Your Fire Department

Most people are aware that there is a fire department and that the department will respond to your emergency. But do you really know your department? One of the biggest misconceptions about the fire department is that it has either an unlimited number of paid, career firefighters or that all firefighters are volunteers. Your department is made up of both. We are a combination department; we have a combination of career (employees) and volunteer firefighters.

Out of the 86 members of Union County Fire Department, only 15 are career paid firefighters. Firefighting is their primary job. The administration staff has three people working each week day: a training and Emergency Management Lieutenant; a Battalion Chief/Deputy Emergency Management Director who is over operations and; and the Fire Chief who is also the Emergency Management and 911 Director. The remaining 12 career firefighters and officers are divided up into three shifts (A, B, and C), four firefighters per shift. Each shift lasts for 24 hours.

The job of a firefighter isn't exactly what most people think. Some people think that we just sit at the station and wait on a fire or a call. The truth is we have many jobs and responsibilities that keep us busy most of the shift. They range from responding to calls to performing various firefighting duties.

Your career firefighters report to Station 1 before the shift starts at 8 a.m. They receive a briefing from the previous shift and begin to check off their gear and fire apparatus. Check-offs take about an hour each morning. This is done every day to ensure that the department is ready to respond. Once that's completed, there will be a small shift briefing that sets up the rest of the day.

Your career firefighters have many duties to perform each shift. They include cleaning and maintaining the station, apparatus and emergency equipment. Once that is completed, there are various other duties such as hose testing, hydrant maintenance, pre-incident planning of buildings, smoke alarm installation, training, etc. These tasks are labor intensive and time consuming.

Somewhere in the middle of all this the department responds to emergency calls. These calls can happen at any time, day or night. Some calls are short, only lasting an hour or so. Some, such

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**Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief**  
*David Dyer*



### Meet Your Maker

Gunter Bechly's views evolved, as they say. And it cost him. If you like science and a true story with conflict and drama, do a web search on this distinguished professor.

In 1999, Bechly received a Ph.D. in paleontology and became curator of insect fossils at the State Museum of Natural History in Stuttgart, Germany. The museum asked him to direct the Darwin Day exhibit, so he decided on a design to refute Intelligent Design theory. Being a thorough researcher, he read ID proponent Michael Behe's book, "Darwin's Black Box." Bechly began to discover scientific answers to his quest for a coherent world view. Bechly "came out" as a Darwin skeptic in 2015, and promptly lost his job as curator. To add insult, Wikipedia erased him (temporarily) as no longer notable.

Bechly read Behe's evidence that a series of slight, successive mutations, key to Darwin's theory, cannot produce a living cell. Behe describes the "irreducible complexity" of cellular nanotechnology, i.e. tiny machines that Darwin could not see inside a cell. One example is the flagellar motor with a rotor, stator, drive shaft, bearings, and propeller. It changes direction using a signal transduction circuit that detects sugar gradient as a guide to a food source. The various parts of this nano-machine are junk without complete assembly. Even if it could happen over eons, what is the source of the factory that built a self-building motor?

Bechly observes, "Of the 99% of (Darwinian) biologists, 98% don't work on the underpinnings of the theory, they simply accept it as true. The few theoretical biologists who work on the underpinnings of the theory have mostly become critical of the neo-Darwinian process." At a recent Royal Society conference in London, the opening talk focused on the inability of evolutionary theory to explain evidence. Over 1000 scientists have now signed "A Scientific Dissent from Darwinism." No consensus exists.

If there is a Creator, He wanted us to exist. It is plausible, then, that He would reveal Himself. And indeed, "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (Rom. 1:20). Science led Dr. Bechly to believe in God.

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**All Things New**  
*Wayne Fowler*



### Commissioner's Questions

I get questions all the time regarding how many new homes are being built in Union County. I receive a report each month from the Building Inspection and Development Office on new permits issued. Below are some of the most common questions that I receive, and the answers are based on the most recent data we have available.

**Q. How many new home permits were issued in 2018?**

A. There were a total of 211 permits issued, which included 180 custom homes and 31 spec homes. That is a lot of homes and is a very good indication of economic stability for our mountain area. New homes being built provide jobs for our builders, grading and gravel contractors and all building trades including plumbing, electrical, cabinets, appliances, and landscaping. With everyone having more work available, they have more money to spend, which stimulates the economy.

**Q. Did the number of permits issued for new homes increase from 2017 to 2018?**

A. Yes, the total number of permits issued for 2017 was 170. This number includes 148 custom homes and 22 spec homes. So, from 2017 to 2018 that is an increase of 41 homes.

**Q. So far this year, does it seem like the permits issued are increasing?**

A. It's still early in 2019, so it's hard to answer that for this year. The list below shows the trend in Building Permits issued each year since 2002. It is interesting to see how everything slowed way down during the recession and how things have been steadily increasing since 2012.

2002 - 504	2007 - 279	2012 - 88	2017 - 170
2003 - 531	2008 - 124	2013 - 97	2018 - 211
2004 - 543	2009 - 110	2014 - 89	
2005 - 558	2010 - 68	2015 - 129	
2006 - 487	2011 - 59	2016 - 154	

**Q. Where do I go to get a Building Permit?**

A. The Building Inspection and Development Office is located at 46 Hughes St., Blairsville, GA 30512 which is on the hill across from the Union County Civic Center. Their number is

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**Q & A from Union County Commissioner**  
*Lamar Paris*



### Drug Free Mountain Life

#### Stigma and Shame

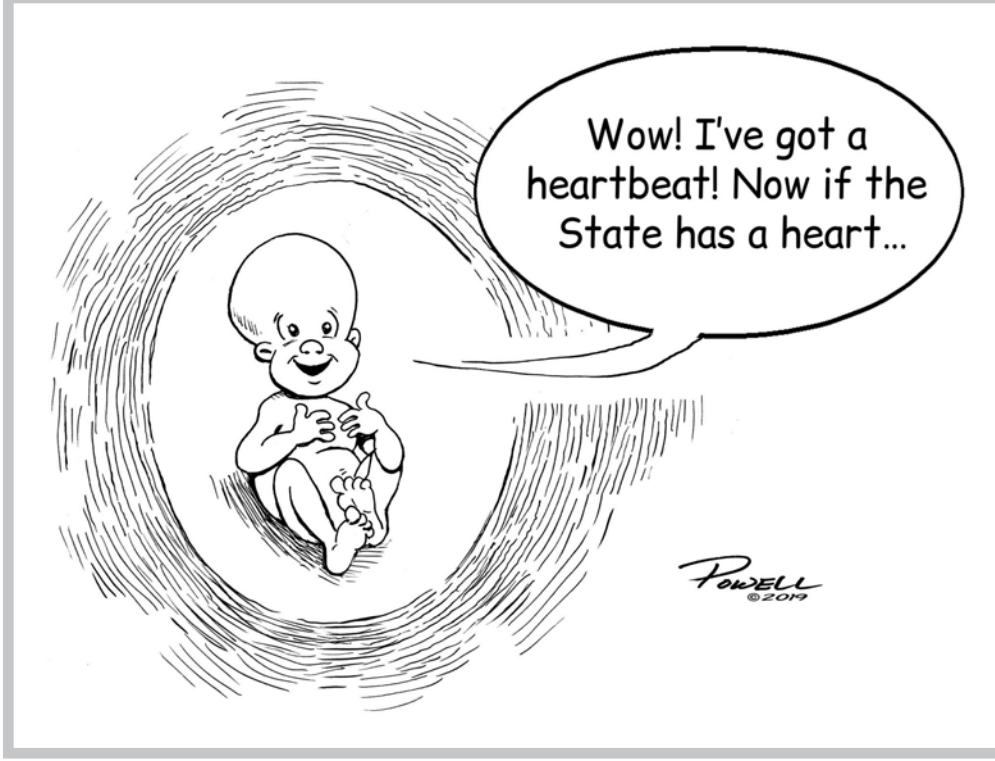
As a community we can eliminate the stigma surrounding addiction, but we first must change the way we believe and respond to those struggling with substance abuse disorders.

Consider your own personal beliefs about "drug addicts". When you think of an addict, what is the image that comes to mind? Do you feel these people are morally bankrupt or just bad people? Do you think all drug addicts are criminals? Now ask yourself, "How do I know what I believe about drug addiction is the truth?" Have you ever researched the biology or psychology of addiction or are all your opinions based on what you believe is morally right or wrong?

Society sends a message to those who use, abuse or are dependent upon a substance that says you are morally wrong. This message creates shame and shame breeds stigma. A stigma

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**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.**



### Letters to the Editor

#### Please Reconsider, Part II

Dear Editor,  
My initial letter regarding Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Cooperative's plan to raise the fixed customer service charge from \$21.37 to between \$38 and \$40 over time appeared in the North Georgia News in the Feb. 6 edition.

Since then, the message that that first letter sent was addressed at a monthly meeting of the co-op by the EMC general manager, who basically indicated they would go forward with their plans because their consultant stated they needed to redesign the EMC's power rate to better cover fixed costs.

Mr. Nelms, general manager, was quoted as saying that "I do not believe there is a strong correlation between income levels and energy usage."

It was also claimed that most households receiving help via charitable organizations experienced power bills in the \$200 to \$300.

This "Please Reconsider, Part II" has been delayed by the need to do a survey of the needy and explore other avenues to achieve the admirable goal of the EMC Board, which they express as the need to keep up with fixed costs such as power poles, power lines, transformers etc. We thank them for doing their job to keep the cooperative solvent so they can continue to do the very good job they do providing electric service year round, even during difficult weather scenarios.

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#### The Future and Climate Change

Dear Editor,  
Recently, efforts have been intensified to explore the possibilities of finding an exoplanet that can support and sustain life as we know it. The search has been going on for years, but with the development of stronger telescopes in the past few years, the search has resulted in more knowledge and more discoveries. There are more planets in the universe than there are stars and at least a quarter of them are earth-size. With a minimum of a billion stars in the Milky Way alone, that means there are at least 25 billion places where life could conceivably take hold. Our galaxy is one in trillions. It would seem the odds are pretty good we are not alone.

So, what if we find a livable atmospheric planet and it ultimately is reachable by future transports? Will it be in time before we have totally destroyed this, our only home? Will we even destroy ourselves by ignoring the many signs of climate change and other calamities facing us? Deniers of these dangers seem to be enablers of our demise. Just a thought.

Charlie Sowers

### Ready-Set-Go

Ready-Set-Go Can Save Your Life! - The wildfire seasons here in the North Georgia are traditionally November, March, and April. The humidity is usually low, winds are up, and the leaves are dry and just waiting for a spark.

We are in the "normal" spring wildfire months now, but don't let your guard down because wildfire seasons are like everything, they are changing all over the world due to many factors. Just because it has been raining more than ever recorded up here in the mountains, all it takes is a few dry days and the March winds to create perfect fire weather when you least expect it. Look at what happened in Towns and Rabun Counties a couple of years ago, a raging wildfire bringing in firefighters from all over the world, air tankers, bulldozers, and many \$\$ for all the tools necessary to protect property from raging wildfires. We were not really prepared, but that should have been a wake-up call for all of us to be prepared for the next round of wildfires in our neighborhood with programs such as Ready-Set-Go.

Ready-Set-Go is a program administered by the International Association of Fire Chiefs and helps prepare first responders and citizens for wildfire. The Ready, Set, Go! Program seeks to develop and improve the dialogue between fire departments and the residents they serve. The program helps fire departments teach individuals who live in high risk wildfire areas - and the Wildland-urban interface how to best prepare themselves and their properties against Wildland fire threats. The program's tenets help residents be Ready with preparedness understanding, be Set with situational awareness when fire threatens, and to Go early when necessary.

The RSG Program works in complementary and collaborative fashion with existing Wildland fire public education efforts, like Firewise, and amplifies their messages to individuals. NFPA's Firewise Communities Program encourages local solutions for wildfire safety by involving homeowners, community leaders, planners, developers, firefighters and others in creating fire-adapted communities - places where people and property are safer from the risk of brush, grass and forest fires. Firewise principles can help individuals and communities accomplish the "Ready" tenet of RSG by providing the proven steps to empower individual homeowners to lower their property's wildfire risk and to work with their neighbors to make their community safer.

Used together, the Ready, Set, Go! and Firewise Communities programs can save lives

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**RC&D Executive Director**  
*Frank Riley*



### Ausborn

A young man came to Lumpkin County to find gold during the Georgia Gold Rush in the early 1830s. He didn't strike it rich, but, he did find the love of his life. And sometime during the year of 1839 Ausborn Rogers Mabry married Elizabeth Fatima York. They spent the next 40 years raising their family in the Dahlonega and Dawsonville area. One of their daughters happened to marry a fellow by the name of Daniel T. Hyde.

He fought with some Georgia volunteers in defense of his state against the Union Army during the Civil War. For some unexplained reason, perhaps it was the Oklahoma Land Rush, Ausborn and Fatima left their home in Lumpkin County and moved to Oklahoma during the 1880s. They never met their grandson, Clifford Hyde, who would later become my great grandfather.

Clifford told my Dad that his ancestors were Cherokee. But, no one has ever been able to prove it. Clifford was raised up around the Dawsonville area and later he migrated to North Alabama. My grandmother told me a story about his search for Cherokee Gold.

Sometime during the 1920s an old Cherokee man showed up at the Hyde House in Phil Campbell. It was late in the evening just before dark. It was beginning to thunder and darkness was coming on the land. The family was just sitting down to a meal of corn bread and fresh vegetables. The family could not afford meat. The children were all bare footed. Clifford dreamt of the day he could afford to buy shoes and new clothes for his kids. Suddenly, there was a knock at the front door. This took everyone by surprise, because they rarely had visitors.

Clifford opened the door and there stood an ancient Cherokee Indian. He asked the family for some food and a place to spend the night. As the old man sat down to eat he began to tell the family his story. He figured his age to be close to 100 and he had walked all the way from Oklahoma. He came back the same way he had traveled as a young boy, on the Trail of Tears. He told Clifford that he wanted to see his home land in North Alabama one more time before he died. Somehow, he also knew that Clifford was Cherokee.

The next morning the family and the old man had a breakfast of eggs, biscuits and fresh blackberry jam. The old man told Clifford he was just a few miles short of his destination and he wanted to get started as quick as possible. But, he wanted to give Clifford something for his hospitality. He stated that 85 years earlier his people knew the soldiers were coming to force

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**Around The Farm**  
*Mickey Cummings*



### Mulch

Mulch is a very important tool in any gardener's toolkit. In addition, it does a lot more than simply make beds look nicer. Mulch serves a variety of different purposes that are beneficial to plants around your house. Let's talk about the different types of mulch that are out there and how they can help you have healthy plants.

There are many different types of mulches out there. Some of the most common kinds of mulches are bark, compost, leaves, newspaper, pine needles, straw, and wood chips. If you are using bark for mulch usually small chunks is going to be better because large chunks are more susceptible to being washed away. Compost can be a very beneficial mulch. What separates compost from the other mulches on this list is that compost is capable of providing nitrogen to plants. Leaves are a good cheap source of mulch for many people. Many times, there's nothing wrong with taking leaves that have fallen and applying them around the base of plants. The only time when applying leaves as a mulch is not a good idea is if the leaves have a disease in them. Those leaves should be removed to prevent the disease from spreading to the next season. It's also good if you can shred the leaves before applying them so that they don't become matted. Newspaper serves as a good undermulch. Placing pine needles or straw on top will keep the newspaper from blowing away. Pine needles look good as mulch. They can make the soil more acidic over time, but that is a slow process. Straw can be an effective mulch, but it's not as long lasting as some of the other mulches described here. Straw will also sometimes contain weed seeds. Wood chips are a long lasting mulch. They can last two years.

One of the benefits of mulch is weed suppression. When it's applied thick enough, mulch creates a barrier that blocks sunlight and creates a physical barrier preventing unwanted plants from growing. Once summer is in full effect mulch can go a long way to make your job of weeding easier. Mulch can help with disease suppression in the case of mummyberry on blueberries. Mulch will bury the disease.

Mulch also benefits moisture retention in the soil. When there are hot dry summers the mulch will serve as insulation against the sun and the wind, reducing the amount of water that is lost. The insulation from mulch also helps moderate soil temperatures. That doesn't mean mulch can keep your soil from freezing, but it can give you a buffer of a few degrees if temperatures are fluctuating.

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**Blairsville - Union County Chamber President**  
*Steve Rowe*



### Chamber of Commerce

#### Health Care in Union County

This week, I'd like to take a few moments to highlight the wonderful health care provided in Union County. Union General Hospital originally opened as a small outpatient clinic in 1959. It's amazing to consider that within a relatively short time span, Union General has gone from serving a small population to currently providing top-notch medical care throughout North Georgia. Additionally, the hospital's reach extends into North Carolina, South Carolina, and even into communities in Tennessee. To date, Union General operates twenty-three affiliated facilities and clinics which employ some of the brightest and best physicians, nurses, and medical staff in our regional area. With the recent retirement of Lewis Kelley, the hospital enters a new era with Kevin Bierschenker stepping into the role of Chief Executive Officer. With extensive experience at several medical facilities, includ-

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