

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Station 13 Update

Union County Fire Department's newest station, Station 13, is under construction. The station is located at the Hidden Harbor entrance on Highway 129 North. Winkler and Winkler broke ground at the site in late September. Construction has been non-stop ever since and is making good progress.

The construction began with layout of the property and building at the site. Next was the ground preparation of the actual building. The water and septic systems were installed along with the groundwater drainage system. The building footers were constructed, which provided the first signs of the building layout on the site.

The truck bays were prepared with the bay drainage system and steel reinforcement, which enables the concrete to handle the weight of the fire apparatus. The latest addition was the pouring of the concrete in the truck bays. As of November 4th, contractors were preparing the plumbing and other underground additions. Once that is completed, the slab for the rest of the building will be poured.

Just a reminder, Station 13, once completed, will be a career station, meaning that there will be career firefighters at the station 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year to respond to calls in that area. These calls range from medical emergencies, motor vehicle accidents, rescues, searches, hazardous materials, all fires, and other various emergencies. Having this station open will reduce fire department response times in that area.

Station 13 is also designed to house an ambulance and crew if the Union General Ambulance Service desires to place an ambulance in that station. We have also included office space and access for the Union County Sheriff's Office for deputies who are working in that area. These designs enable the station to be a public safety station and not just a fire station.

Other advantages include the possible reduction in home and business insurance ratings. This may not reduce everyone's insurance but will assist many in that area due to the ISO (Insurance Services Organization) rating for some homes and businesses.

We at Union County Fire Department are happy and excited

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief David Dyer

True Empathy

Cringeworthy. That's one way to characterize the statements of certain people in the news.

Kanye West (now known as "Ye") is a wealthy rap artist. During the last election he announced a presidential bid, naming Kim Kardashian and Elon Musk as his chief advisors. This month he tweeted he was "going death con 3 on Jewish people." He has publicly disclosed his bipolar disorder, but that doesn't make his statements less cringeworthy.

John Fetterman is clearly not well yet. He is the current Lt. Gov. of Pennsylvania, running for U.S. Senate. Five months after suffering a stroke, he's on the debate stage on live TV despite his auditory processing issues. He opens with, "Hi, goodnight everybody." Despite his previous support of a moratorium on fracking he says, "I do support fracking. And I don't, I don't..." I admire his courage. His doctor says he's fit to serve, but... cringeworthy.

Make no mistake. To cringe at verbal gaffs is not the same as empathy, an emotional competency the world could use more of these days. Empathy figures large in the Christian worldview. "Love your neighbor as yourself," Jesus said. The good news is you can learn empathy.

Empathy is connecting with someone's feelings and thoughts and being willing to intervene. Jesus shows us how it's done. When He encounters the widow from Nain in the funeral procession for her only son, he connects with her grief. He touches the coffin and gives her a reason not to weep (Luke 7:14). You may not raise the dead, but you can raise your awareness of what someone is feeling in the moment. Only then can you know if there is more you can do to intervene. The mistake is to make it about you. "Yeah, I've been there. Here's what happened to me..." is not the best way to connect.

You may be less familiar with cognitive empathy, an awareness of someone's thoughts. It didn't take a miracle for Jesus to know his disciples' thoughts. Each wanted an important role in Jesus' earthly ministry and were openly arguing about it. He calls over a child to make his point. "The one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great" (Luke 9:48). Empathy connects



All Things New Wayne Fowler

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Commissioner's Questions

Many Union County residents do not know that we offer transportation services. The availability of adequate transportation enables older persons to live independently in their communities, helps to prevent isolation and the possible need for long-term care placement. Many older people, who do not drive, must rely on family and friends to provide much of the transportation. But for others, it is necessary to find community resources to provide transportation, as this vital support service may be their only connection to the outside world.

Q. What is the Union County Transportation Services?

A. The local system offers rides for a nominal fee for those who need transportation to and from doctor's appointments, the grocery store, drug stores, and other locations within the Union County limits.

Q. How is this service funded?

A. Partial funding for this service comes from the Federal Department of Transportation through GDOT. A 50/50 grant, Union County is responsible for matching 50% of the funding. Union County spends funds up front for such things as wages for drivers, dispatchers, fuel, maintenance, etc., and GDOT reimburses Union County for eligible expenses. Federal money is given to GDOT and that agency distributes these funds to Georgia counties. There are different types of funding for different types of transportation systems in the State of Georgia. The money that comes to Union County and surrounding counties is from the Section 5311 Program - which is for Rural Transit. Because of the county population, the size of the City of Blairsville, and the distance between transportation stops, funding for rural counties is limited to "on call" trips as opposed to regular bussing routes.

Q. How many vehicles does the Union County Transportation Services operate?

A. Two 8 passenger vans make up the fleet of the Union County Transportation system. The vans are air-conditioned, equipped with hydraulic chair lifts, and they are handicap accessible. When vans are initially purchased, the federal government gives 80% of the cost; the State of Georgia gives 10% of the cost; and county gives 10% of the cost.



Q & A from Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris

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Guest Editorial

Saving Mountain Education Charter High School

This is an open letter to the members of the 2021-22 Georgia General Assembly:

Mountain Education Charter High School began 30 years ago as an alternative to traditional high school. It has catered to, sheltered, encouraged, defended, loved and educated an entire generation of students in North Georgia. We have 18 campuses in 18 counties across North Georgia with an enrollment of more than 2,500 students. For the 2022-23 school year, MECHS had more than 500 new enrollments.

What began as a spark, has blazed into a bonfire, lighting the way for thousands of Georgia students who have been marginalized, ignored or victimized by societal expectations of what high school should be. Our students don't fit the mold set by the past visions of a high school student.

We don't have cheerleaders, unless you count the teachers, administrators and support personnel who have cheered on this group of amazing human beings, while they have defied the odds, graduated with a high school diploma and gone

See MECHS, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Short-Term Rentals

Dear Editor,

We have been closely watching the regulation or lack thereof regarding the use of single-family homes as short-term rentals. As you are aware, these rentals violate single-family neighborhoods by allowing hotel-like businesses to operate there, which bring transient visitors who care more about having a fun and exciting vacation above the peaceful, quiet integrity of single-family neighborhoods.

These types of rentals will absolutely destroy the unique atmosphere of neighborhoods of secluded homes valued by all in Union County. How many really desire to be living next to a hotel-like establishment? Are you aware that Union County has no noise ordinances? Isn't this really an issue of density, which is usually determined by zoning? Therefore, without zoning or noise ordinances, these hotels left unregulated have a likely chance of absolutely changing the character of Union County much for the worse.

We are not so optimistic to believe that this type of activity will be banned in Union County, which in reality would create a more desirable and unique place to live, however, regulation and re-

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The Holy Spirit

Dear Editor,

What was the reason why Jesus Christ told His disciples that when He went back to heaven after His resurrection He would send the Holy Spirit to live inside of them that would be their guide, their counselor, their helper in times of trouble and the wisdom and knowledge they would need to deal with different situations? If the Holy Spirit is not living inside of you, dear friends, then you are as lost as a child in a forest, but the good news is there is hope for the lost if you come like a little child and accept Christ into your life, then confess your sins and repent of them and ask God to forgive you, and He promises He will, then the Holy Spirit comes to live within you, never to leave you until God calls you home.

If you go to a church that doesn't preach and teach God's Holy Word and no mention of the Holy Spirit, then you need to find a church that does, because Satan has infiltrated that church with his evilness, and those who serve him will surely die in their sin. My question is: Do you as a Christian possess the Spirit of God in your heart? If not, you need to get right with your Maker and Redeemer, Christ, Jesus. I have been blessed in the past years to lead folks to the Lord, not on my own power, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. You see, I can't save anyone, just like your pastor, or elder or deacon or even a priest, but if they pos-

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Farm Equipment Safety

The Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council is constantly working on ways to help make our citizens lives better, safer, more prosperous, and to improve our standard of living. One way we try to accomplish this is to remind our citizens of safety hazards and things that can suddenly change the course of their lives in ways of which we don't usually think.

I sometimes drive my tractor for short distances on the highway when it is not practical to load it up on the trailer as do many of my neighbors when they are feeding cows down the road from the barn. I try to pull over as soon as I can to let cars by, but it is not always possible and the driver behind many times gets furious because they have to be delayed for 2 minutes to their important destination. We all have to remember that the feed, fertilizer, seed, or crops that the farmer is hauling today will turn into the food on our table tomorrow, so we all need to work together to help keep them farming.

The Department of Agriculture and the Governor's Office of Highway Safety have worked for the last two years to get this message out to drive safely around slow-moving vehicles, but it's clear there is still more work to do. Statistics from 2020 show that nine deaths resulted from 429 farm-equipment related crashes and 185 people reported injuries. As our farmers are reminded of farmers' increased presence on the roadways.

While traveling, you are urged to be mindful of tractors and other farm equipment sharing the same roadways and to take extra precaution. When sharing the road with other motorists, farmers should have red reflective triangles posted on their equipment to signal to drivers they are operating a slow-moving vehicle. The triangle should be visible and if it is rusted or faded, it should be replaced.

Georgians can improve their yield behind the wheel by following a few simple tips travelling Georgia's rural roadways: For Motorists: When passing a farm vehicle, do not enter an oncoming lane of traffic unless you can see clearly ahead of the vehicle you will pass. Do not assume that a farm vehicle that pulls to the right side of the road is going to turn right or is letting you pass. Due to the size of some farm implements, the farmer must execute wide left turns. If you are unsure, check the operator's hand signals and check the left side of the road for gates, driveways, or any place a farm vehicle might turn.

For Farmers: Georgia law requires operators of slow-moving vehicles to place a reflector on any machine that travels the road slower than 25 MPH. Always point the triangle reflector up-

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RC&D Executive Director Frank Riley

The Great Robbery

I would imagine that a young man moving from Alabama to the Windy City of Chicago felt out of his element while walking among skyscrapers and driving on paved roads. He was a little out of his element and probably on the naive side. The young Paul went to work for a finance company and soon found himself in the management training program. The young man graduated the program and soon found himself the manager of a small office in a suburb of Chicago called Cicero.

Barbara, a young woman from North Carolina, was a part of the staff. The staff also consisted of a lady by the name of Linda and a man named Johnson. One morning as Dad walked into the front door of his office, he met a man walking out the door. Dad looked at the man and asked if his visit had been enjoyable. The trench coat-clad man said, "It was a very enjoyable visit with your staff." Dad smiled and held the door as the man walked through it.

When Dad came in the door, he noticed that Barbara was passed out in her chair. Johnson was lying on the floor with his hands covering the back of his head. Linda was pointing at the door. She finally stammered, "Robbery." Dad turned and ran out the door, screaming "robbery." As he ran through the door, he reached for his trusty pocket knife, and as he pulled the knife from his pocket, he ran into a policeman. What else would the policeman think? He had heard someone scream robbery, and next he was almost knocked down by a young man wearing a suit and tie.

Before he knew what was happening, Dad felt the blow of a Billy stick to his head. It took 5-10 minutes, but, the policeman was finally convinced by Dad's staff that this young man was not the robber. Dad's head throbbed for a day after the incident. And for days the staff was extremely jumpy. Each time a stranger entered the door, Barbara would almost cry. Johnson would immediately hit floor if a door slammed. Finally, the staff began to relax. Then one week to the day of the robbery, it happened again.

A man walked into the office wearing a trench coat and asked to fill out a loan application. While he filled out the form, Johnson asked Dad if he was ready to go through another robbery. Dad laughed and stated, "I am from Alabama and not afraid of anything." It was the custom of the manager to interview the applicant after a loan application was completed. So, after the man turned in the application, Dad called the man into his private office. Dad opened the door

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Around The Farm Mickey Cummings

Leave the Leaves

The ground everywhere you go now seems like it's littered with leaves. However, we shouldn't think of leaves as litter. They are a natural product that is beneficial in a lot of ways. Let's talk about some of the benefits that leaves provide, and why leaving them is good for the environment.

In the fall most, people will get out their rakes and leaf blowers to remove the leaves from their yards. The end result is a yard that looks very tidy and neat, but also a yard that has removed a crucial element of the nutrient cycle and disrupted the life cycle of many beneficial insects. I would argue that there are some places where you should remove the leaves. Like your driveway or walkways because they can create a hazard. I have also raked a small portion of my yard because my daughter loves a good leaf pile, and I'm not going to keep that happiness from her. But in the rest of the yard and the surrounding woods it's beneficial to leave those leaves in place.

Fallen leaves create organic matter for the soil. As the leaves break down they return the nutrients that they are holding back to the soil. This is an important part of the nutrient cycle. In the spring trees will withdraw nutrients from the ground and start to make those leaves. In the fall when the leaves drop, the leaves are still holding the nutrients. Each individual leaf may not have a lot of nutrients, but collectively their nutrient load is important. Allowing those leaves to return their nutrients to the soil completes the nutrient cycle. Leaving the leaves in plant beds around your house is a good thing for the plants. It will also help reduce weeds, since it serves as a mulch layer. A light layer of leaves over grass will benefit the grass too. On grass, if the leaves are too thick, it can damage the grass.

Another great benefit of leaving the leaves is that it helps beneficial insects. Lots of insects will lay their eggs in the leaves. Butterflies and moths will lay eggs in the leaves to emerge next year. Bumblebees, Luna moths, and swallowtail butterflies will over winter just under the soil line. A layer of leaf mulch protects these important pollinators.

Lots of animals rely on the leaves too. Turtles, toads, birds, salamanders, and small mammals use the leaves for food, shelter, and nesting material. All of these critters need a place to spend the winter.

If you have more leaves than you can handle consider putting the extra around trees, ornamental plants, and in garden beds as a natural mulch. It's better to not shred the leaves as this



UGA extension Watching and Working Jacob Williams

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Q. How do I make use of the service?

A. If you want to take advantage of the transportation system, it is best to call at least a day before to make an appointment for the van to pick you up. Call (706) 439-6050; Operates five days per week; 8:00am - 3:30pm. Riders under 12 must be accompanied by an adult 18 or over. Rider must provide a child safety seat for all children under six years of age.

Q. How much does it cost to ride the buses?

A. Fees apply to all riders six and older. Prices listed are for one-way fares.

First Mile – \$3.00; Each Additional Mile – \$.50

Q. Can I get a reduced rate if I am elderly or disabled?

A. Unfortunately, federal programs such as this do not allow discounted rates. Everyone who rides has to pay the same price if Union County is

to continue receiving federal funding.

Q. Will someone come into my home to help me get into the transportation bus?

A. Though we wish we could accommodate these types of requests, it is not possible. The Union County Transit and all 5311 programs are curb to curb service providers. This means that the individual rider must be able to get out of their home by themselves as well as handle their personal off-location errands. In other words, riders must be able to do their own shopping, etc. The drivers can help passengers from their door and into the bus if necessary, and they will help with the wheelchair lift when necessary. If a passenger requires assistance with shopping or getting into stores or doctors' offices, the rider must have an aid with them to help with these items. If the assistance of an aid is necessary, the aid can ride the bus free of charge.

MECHS... continued from Page 4A

on to success in their professional and personal lives. We don't have teams, unless you consider that we are one team with a goal more important than points or rankings. Our goal is graduates: a goal that the staff of this incredible organization has proudly aimed toward for so many worthy young men and women. The 2021-22 school year saw 479 graduates earn their high school diplomas.

What makes MECHS different? Our students are not what you see at "regular" high schools. Students attending MECHS may be older, up to 21 years old. Many have full time jobs, being a breadwinner for their parents and siblings. Several have children. A large number have found that traditional high school is damaging to their hearts and souls. Our students may have dropped out of high school at 16 and found that the world is a harsh place without a high school diploma. Those pupils can come to us at MECHS and continue their high school education, and leave with a HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA, not a GED. Many of our students have received a high school diploma along with an associate degree through dual enrollment.

The staff of Mountain Education Charter High School cares deeply about our kids. After five of our students at different sites committed suicide, MECHS perceived a serious need for the training of all staff to identify the signs of suicide or mental health problems and proper techniques to intervene when a student shows signs of a crisis was a serious need. Each member of the staff is trained in SAFETALK, giving them the tools to recognize when a student is in need as well as how to get them the help required. Additionally, the students of MECHS are shown how to observe the behavior of their friends to know when they should report their concerns to an adult.

Now, as I understand, the Georgia General Assembly has concluded that local school systems need to have services in place for these students. Ooooh-kay? If the local school systems were going to serve the needs of these kids, they would have done so already. Basically, the only way that MECHS can stay open is if the local school systems "authorize" a local campus. Each of the counties in which MECHS has a site has said that there is no way they can afford to do that. None have offered to authorize any sort of provision

Sparrow... continued from Page 4A

restrictions need to be put in place ASAP. Let's look at what these restrictions should include.

Since density and protection of the intent of single-family neighborhoods needs to be maintained, we should limit the number of people renting homes in the short term to two persons per the number of bedrooms. This should be what the Building Department allowed for that home and septic. Thus a three-bedroom home accordingly would accommodate six people -- and no more, no matter how many extra beds are placed in the home. Having 12-16 partying people next door is not the intent of a single-family neighborhood.

And finally, we should regulate the length of stay with a minimum allowed stay of two weeks. This would greatly limit the transience and changing density within our neighborhoods. Is this action fair to homeowners and corporations who are anxious to buy homes to rent short term? Yes, and yes, because they could still rent their homes or sell their homes, however, there would not be the large incentive to purchase homes for this purpose. The

purchase of these homes by corporations highly distorts the values of homes in our neighborhoods by now being priced on what income they generate. Is this a trend that we want to see continue? How long will it be before we have created undesirable neighborhoods where families live?

In conclusion, this trend is not unique to Union County, however, because this county has been a unique and celebrated quiet place to retire or raise a family, we need to act quickly to protect our neighborhoods from the ravages of uncontrolled capitalism. Let's take back our neighborhoods, please.

Dan Sparrow

Dyer...

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to see the progress of this construction. We are confident that the station should be operational in the fall of 2023. Everyone is looking forward to this new chapter of our growing department.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Cummings... continued from Page 4A

and allowed the man to enter. As the man walked into the room, Dad turned and grinned at his staff as he walked into the door, but, before he completed his first step, something poked into his chest. As Dad looked down, he noticed the barrel of a 12-gauge shotgun poking into his belly.

At first the gun did not register with Dad. When he did realize what was happening Dad became angry and tried to knock the gun away. However, the robber used the stock of the gun to knock the breath from Dad, then he was hit across the temple with barrel of the gun. As Dad hit the floor, he heard the words, "Mister, I am going to blow your head off if you get up." So he stayed on the floor. Dad watched as the man walked to Johnson and knocked him to the floor. When Linda seen the gun she went to the floor. When Barbara noticed the gun, she

Williams...

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will destroy any insects or eggs that are in the leaves.

Grass for lawns is the largest irrigated 'crop' in the US at over 40 million acres. That's more than any other irrigated corn or soybean. If everyone made sure that their lawn was a welcome habitat for pollinators and other critters it would make a huge difference. If you have questions about your leaves, contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Fowler...

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thoughts to truth. But first you must understand what someone is thinking. Empathy removes the shade of deception from the light of truth.

Finding something cringeworthy takes no investment of energy. But empathy is personal, and it costs something to care and take action. It certainly cost Jesus to have empathy for you. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). He didn't just cringe at your predicament. He committed the greatest act of love ever recorded in history. To sacrifice for others, friend, is true empathy.

Combs...

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sess the Holy Spirit In them, it is the Holy Spirit that convicts them of their wrong so they can turn away from their sin and follow Christ.

Oh, the awesome power of the Holy Spirit that enables everyone to be what God created them to be, a child of God who will serve faithfully the calling on their heart from a loving heavenly Father who longs for all to live in heaven for eternity. Don't think just because you call yourself a Christian that you are. You can truly call yourself a follower of Christ when you follow the words above that will lead you into all truth. Sadly, a lot of good-meaning folks don't ever open God's word to hear what He has to say to the lost without a Savior.

This article is not to scare you but to inform you of what must take place in order for you to have the Holy Spirit that will safely lead you home to glory.

Frank F. Combs

Riley...

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wards, keep the emblem clean to maximize reflectivity and replace the emblem when it fades, normally every 2-3 years. Mark the edges of tractors and machines with reflective tape and reflectors. Consider installing retrofit lighting on older machinery to increase visibility. Turn on your light but turn off spotlights when going onto the road. Avoid the highway during rush hour and bad weather. Do not drive before sunrise or after sunset. Consider installing mirrors on equipment to enable you to be more aware of motorists around you.

When I am in my tractor on the road, I pull over to be courteous to the impatient, very important people behind me, who are in a terrible hurry and don't want to slow down for anything, but by law, I don't have to. So be patient, let us farm, and we will all get home safely. Remember your food does not just come from Ingles, a farmer grew it!

For more information on the "Improving Georgia's Yield Behind the Wheel" initiative, please visit www.gahighway-safety.org or www.agr.georgia.gov. For more information on farm equipment safety contact: Frank M. Riley, Jr, Executive Director - Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council. email frank.ccrdd@gmail.com.

to the robber's head before they turned back around. Later the man would confess to the crime and identify his partner only after the police threatened to leave the two in a room alone for a few minutes.

Please remember that on Friday, November 11, the Union County Historical Society will honor Leon Davenport, Eric England, Franklin Hunter and D. L. Martin for their service to the American people during their military careers. We will begin this program at 7 p.m. at the Old Union County Courthouse, so please come out and let's pay respect to some real Union County and American Heroes.

Chamber...

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Mayor's Train and the crafts for the Kids).

While the Tour of Trees is sold out, there is still time for you and your family to enter the Gingerbread House contest. Contact Ashley at the Chamber for more information and how to sign up.

Be sure to check the Chamber calendar for all the Christmas events including the Christmas Parade and the lighting of the Christmas tree at Vogel. This is the time of year that the Glory of the Mountains shines through! Remember, it's better in Blairsville!