

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Gatlinburg

Most of us have fond memories of trips to the Great Smoky Mountains, Gatlinburg, and Pigeon Forge. I remember going there as a kid and it's nice to get away for a weekend trip. It was shocking and heart-breaking to hear and see the devastating fires that engulfed the area. As of December 1st, the death toll was up to thirteen, several people are still missing and there are over 700 confirmed structure losses. This type of tragedy is unheard of in this area. It has raised some questions and some concerns for everyone.

One of the first questions that most people ask is how something like this could have happened. It's not a secret that we have all been under an extreme drought and the fire danger has been extremely high. These conditions are rare, some may say historic. The fire in the area at the time combined with extremely high winds was too big and moving too fast for firefighters to control it. Situations like these move so fast and the area is so big that the only thing that people can do is try to get out of the area.

Another question that people have asked is why the fire department didn't stop the fires. As stated before, it was too much and too fast. Even if they were able to hold a defensible line, the high winds would pick up the burning leaves and debris and set fires past those lines. The fires were moving at such a fast pace the only thing that could be done was to conduct evacuations of the area. That may sound simple but think about the normal traffic on the highways there and the many visitors on vacation. Considering the large area, the difficult fire conditions, it being night, so many people who were unfamiliar with the area, and the limited roads; it is amazing that they were able to evacuate as many as they did.

Can this happen here? The answer to that question is that this can happen anywhere. Our mountain areas are very similar to the mountain areas in Gatlinburg. The current conditions are very dangerous. We have been trying to notify everyone of the fire danger and to please adhere to applicable burn bans. Although we have had some rain and there is some in the forecast, we are still classified as extreme drought. Fire danger is still high. We are looking at the situation every day and will inform everyone of the current conditions.

See Dyer, page 5B

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief



David Dyer

Cuba

Speaking to Christianity Today, after his escape from Cuba in 2012, Pastor Carlos Lamelas described a life of constant surveillance, attempts at black market entrapment, assaults and beatings, false accusations and imprisonment. Yet world leaders memorialize Fidel Castro as a successful socialist rather than a tyrant. He may be dead, but his intolerance of religious freedom in Cuba lives.

America's founders envisioned a government that answered to the people, who answer to God. Castro wanted the people to answer to him only. He founded an atheistic state, typical of 20th century communism. What it purports to offer comes at the price of freedom, a point today's socialists might consider.

After the fall of the USSR, Cuba ended its official policy of atheism. Churches grew as people looked for answers and found Christ. Since new church buildings are not permitted, a government official suggested home meetings. Castro accepted overtures from the Catholic Church. But the detente turned in 2015, with agents citing a new law to justify repression of churches.

Between 2014 and 2015, the number of religious freedom violations increased tenfold to 2300 cases according to Christian Solidarity Worldwide. In the first half of 2016, authorities targeted 1600 churches including demolition and confiscation of property, and imprisonment of church leaders. Cuba still monitors and controls most aspects of religious life. "Serious religious freedom violations continue in Cuba, despite improvements for government-approved religious groups," according to the U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom (2015).

Despite the oppression, the church in Cuba is growing rapidly. Christians still meet in homes and historic church buildings. When a church outgrows a home, it multiplies to other homes. CBN reports that in the last 20 years, Cubans started more than 16,000 churches. The Baptists helped reinvigorate a failing seminary, which in 2008 graduated 150 pastors from an enrollment of 650. The boot-heel of government does not easily stamp out faith, love, and hope.

The church in Cuba, Iran, and China have something in

All Things New



Wayne Fowler

See Fowler, page 5B

Commissioner's Questions

Q. Did we receive enough rain last week for the Burn Ban to be lifted?

A. During the two days it rained last week we received 2.2 inches of rain, according to the National Weather Service. While this rain was very welcome, it was not enough. It will take multiple days of rain spread out over several weeks to get us out of this drought. Our area is still classified to be in an exceptional drought and the Burn Ban is still in effect. We are not taking any chances and will follow the guidelines and recommendation of the Fire Department and the State and Federal officials that will be advising counties. We would like to cancel it as much as the rest of you.

Q. What is going on along the Blue Ridge Highway in Meeks Park II?

A. As of right now, we are finishing up the new Adult Outdoor Exercise Equipment Area. This will be a great asset for our community and people have already been using it prior to its completion. It is located close to the new Kayak/Canoe Launch area. We are also in the middle of repairing the banks of the Nottley River due to the flooding that occurred during Christmas of 2015. It has taken so long to repair the damage because we had to wait on permits from the state and federal government. The work is nearly complete, but when and if we get enough rain, we have several landscaping projects to do in the area.

Q. Is Meeks Park II the only area in need of repairs due to the 2015 flooding?

A. The flood we had last December was not serious county wide, and was concentrated more in the Nottley River watershed area. Although the rainfall totals were not historic, the damage to the stream banks of the Nottley River were wide spread. Several feet of the bank washed away and has to be repaired in Meeks Park and along Butternut Creek that goes through the Golf Course. So, we anticipate the river banks will stand up much better than before with these new repairs. Could we guarantee that they would never wash out again? No. But the odds are much better that the banks will hold up.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner



Lamar Paris

See Paris, page 5B

Watch FBI Video "Chasing The Dragon"

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has created a documentary that illustrates the toll of opiate addiction that parents might want to find the time to watch. The film, called "Chasing the Dragon," will be distributed to school districts nationwide and can be downloaded for free.

The mission of the Union County Anti-Drug Coalition is to support an overall safe community by providing information, education and support services to children, families and community toward prevention of illegal substance abuse.

High school students are a principal target audience of the film. The documentary is designed to send a message of deterrence to young people thinking of trying drugs, or who are just starting to use them.

The film features several people who either abused opiates or had family members who did so. Those who abused opiates explain how they began with prescription drugs. Some started getting high with their friends using marijuana. They describe how they devoted themselves to trying to maintain the initial high, and how they stole from or lied to friends and family members in order to pay for their addiction. Among

See Drugs, page 5B

Letters to the Editor...

Agriscience Center

Dear Editor,

On November 28th I had the privilege of being in attendance at the Grand Opening of the Union County School Agriculture Center.

As a person who grew up here and went through Agriculture all 4 years of high school, I never thought that we would be able to have such a nice facility to help educate our children who are interested in agriculture. Today most of the emphasis is placed on technology instead of working with your hands. But most everyone who does not live in a downtown apartment will use some type of training that the basics were presented in the Ag. classroom.

But the question I ask is after the long write up in the November 22 paper about the facility and how Mr. Pettit and Mr. Stepp were

See Abernathy, page 5B

Majority Speaks

Dear Editor,

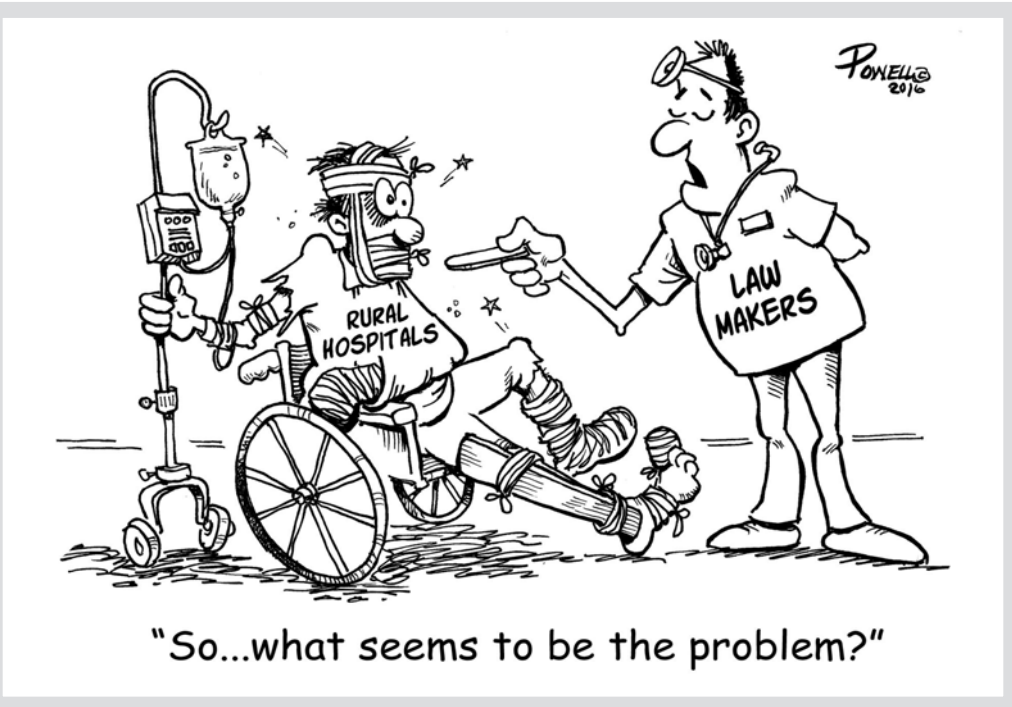
Many politicians and other people were surprised by the results of the recent presidential election. What they do not realize is that many of the agendas of the last fifty years were mostly political policies, and were not the desires of the American populous. Voters finally had an opportunity to vote for what they actually wanted and believed in.

It was not the majority of Americans that wanted the Bible and prayer taken out of schools. Most Americans did not want to legalize abortion, or to allow homosexuality and transgenderism to be socially acceptable. The majority also did not want political correctness, for many of their beliefs to be labeled "hate crimes," to remove the name of Jesus from public prayer, to remove Nativity scenes from public displays, or to take Christianity out of traditional Christian holidays. Most also did not want the anti-Christian philosophy, the promotion of Islam, open borders, not fully supporting our military, allowing and financing immigrants from terrorist nations to infiltrate our country, and no longer supporting our allies, including Israel.

Most of these agendas were forced on the public by elected officials. For many of the politicians, the promotion of these unpopular ideals that were against the majority's desires was to either allow something they were involved in, or to get more votes, so they could get the governmental position they desired.

After years of these ideals being forced

See Brinkworth, page 5B



It finally DID happen here!

I have been telling you for several years that it's not a matter of IF a wildfire will happen in your neighborhood but WHEN! WHEN finally came to our area recently with the Rock Mountain fire near Tate City and in the Upper Hightower Creek area. Even though most of us didn't have wildfire directly around our houses, we could smell and see the smoke from

a big fire right here in Towns County. When conditions are like they were, Firewise (Ready) preparations can help, but Set & Go are our only options to take. In fact, when conditions are like that, GO is our only option. If you are not Ready or Set by then it's too late for planning, so Go somewhere to get out of harm's way. The problem with this is everybody else in the neighborhood is also trying to get out and Go somewhere which creates traffic jams and accidents. Getting trapped in a traffic jam with smoke and fire rushing toward your car is not a good place to be because nobody can rescue you and you are stuck with all the other folks who waited too late to Go. It is very important to choose a pre-determined destination to gather and meet with friends and family so everybody can be accounted for. This will keep rescue personnel from having to go back to your home to look for someone who is somewhere else.

Don't wait for the next fire, get READY now because it will happen again, be Firewise, and be on guard for changing conditions. The recent Rock Mountain fire started in Rabun County and moved around Tate City into the Upper Hightower Creek area and was contained on US Forest Service lands.

Thanks to hard work by the 679 Forest Service firefighters from all over the country, the fire was stopped before it could do damage to private property in Towns County, although Towns County's finest were staged and on alert all during the incident in case it came out of the forest. The fire continued to burn into North Carolina and back to Rabun County.

After heavy downpours in the North Georgia mountains the fires were 63% contained on December 1. The USFS estimates that the fires will be 100% contained on December 15. As of December 1, the fire had torched 24,725 acres with approximately 12,962 acres in Georgia and 11,763 acres in North Carolina that includes 11,111 acres in Rabun County, 1,851 in Towns County, with 3,860 in Clay County and 7,903 in Macon County.

The preliminary cost estimate for suppression is somewhere around \$10 million. The rain helped pause these fires to give the suppression personnel a short break, but without sufficient amounts and timely rainfall for the next few weeks, the drought conditions and fire danger will continue because without significant

See Riley, page 5B

Frank Riley



Executive Director of RC&D

Leman

Leman was an old vegetable grower from over in the mountains of north Alabama. Leman never had much in life except for his family and his land. Leman grew tomatoes, beans and other vegetables. He sold them in front of the courthouse. He never married. I guess he was just too busy taking care of his elderly mother, Jesse. She was very healthy and lived to a ripe old age of 99. She used to beg me to go buy her snuff for her. But, as she aged she became frail and her mind began to wander. So, Leman had to stay close to home to care for her. Jesse never saw the inside of a nursing home or experienced the help of a home nurse.

Those were the days before any home health services. Leman was a man of very few hobbies. He just didn't have the time. But, one of the things Leman could do was dream. So, after a long day in the fields he would pick up his favorite magazine to read, "National Geographic". Leman would read about all the wonderful places he would like to visit. Places like Borneo, Brazil, Congo, Antarctica, and China. When he wasn't reading about exploration in *National Geographic* he would read about Tom Sawyer and Huckberry Finn.

Leman could imagine himself floating on a raft from Alabama all the way to the Ohio then on to the Mississippi and down to New Orleans. He could just imagine catching Catfish and cooking them fresh over a fire while watching the sunset from an island on the river.

Leman thought and dreamed about this for years and decided he would build a raft to float to New Orleans. Then he would walk around the French Quarter and eat some good Cajun food. When he got tired he would catch a ride on a barge back up to Memphis. He figured he could walk home from Memphis in a week. Leman thought about the process for a while and decided to leave in August after his crops were all harvested. He just knew he could be back home before spring planting.

Leman made all the arrangements. First, he called his sister down in Birmingham and asked her to look after their aging mother. She agreed and wished him a safe trip. Next, Leman began to build his raft. He said, "I feel just like Noah except I am not preaching to the lost". The raft was 20 feet long and 10 feet wide. Leman strapped some old whiskey barrels to the bottom of the raft to give it buoyancy. He built a little hut on the raft to protect him from storms. A stove was placed in the center of the raft to provide a source of heat.

I went with Leman to launch the raft on the day he left. The raft was so big we hauled it on his big flatbed truck to the boat launch. It took us all afternoon to unload the raft. But, around 4 PM we had the raft in the water. Before he

See Cummings, page 5B

Around The Farm



Mickey Cummings

Holly Bushes

Though we always see a lot of holly branches decorating the city this time of year, hollies actually make great landscape bushes year round. There are over 400 species of hollies and many of them have several different varieties that suit different landscaping needs. Whether you want a foundation planting, low hedge or trees, there is probably a holly variety for the space you want to fill.

Hollies require well-drained soil that is slightly acidic and has plenty of organic matter. Mulching is a good option to keep weeds down, and it will hold moisture and keep the soil cool. They can grow in part shade, but produce the most flowers and berries when they are planted in full sun. Planting in full sun also helps with maintaining their shape and minimizing pruning because the branches will not become leggy as they try to reach more sunlight. While many hollies are self-fertilizing, some varieties have exclusively male and female plants. Only the females will produce berries, and in order to do so, you will need a male holly nearby.

These plants are hearty, though they do have some problems. If hollies are not producing berries, there could be a pollination issue, high nitrogen levels in the soil, or a late frost that burned flowers that bloomed a little too early. It could also be that the varieties you have are immature and will not produce berries for a few more years, so always make sure to do your research before installing them on your property. Pests can also be a problem. Scale insects, bud moths, red mites and leafminers all feast on holly trees and bushes, and some cultivars are susceptible to root rot.

The American holly is a native plant and typically what inspires our Christmas decorations. It has large spiny leaves and bright red berries. They require a lot of space as they can grow up to fifty feet tall. Some common varieties are Stewart's Silver Crown, Merry Christmas, Jersey Delight and Jersey Princess (these require a Jersey Knight to be pollinated and produce berries). The Yellow Berry American holly also produces bright yellow berries if you are looking for a more unconventional tree. English and Yaupon hollies also grow into evergreen trees. English hollies have very distinctive leaves which have white variegated margins. The native range of the Yaupon holly is from New York to central Florida, and west all the way to Texas. In our area, it typically grows into a small to moderate sized evergreen tree up to fifteen feet tall and as large as ten feet wide. New growth is purple and turns green throughout the summer.

If you are looking for a smaller option, Japanese hollies are shrubs that typically have spineless leaves and black fruit. They average

See Mattee, page 5B

From the Ground Up



Melissa Mattee

North Georgia News

Published since 1909 • Legal Organ of Union County

Kenneth West
Owner/Publisher

Charles Duncan
Editor

Derek Richards
Advertising Director

Todd Forrest
Staff Writer

Shawn Jarrard
Staff Writer

Lily Avery
Staff Writer

Lowell Nicholson
Photographer

Publication No: 001505

Advertising, News deadlines Friday at 4 p.m. • Mail Service for all subscriptions except 30512, 30514 & 30572 - 1 Year \$35.00. In county, carrier delivered subscription is \$3. All subscriptions must be paid in advance. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is published weekly by NGN/TCH, Inc., 266 Cleveland Street, Blairsville, Georgia, 30512. Entered as Second Class Matter as of Dec. 10, 1987 at the Post Office in Blairsville. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

Phone: (706) 745-6343 Fax: (706) 745-1830 * P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514

Website: www.nganews.com
E-mail: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com
Mailing: POBox 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514