

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Commissioner's Questions

Q. Do you have any idea how many restaurants are located in Union County?

A. We are blessed with a lot of restaurants and a lot of excellent restaurants at that. We see more and more people from surrounding areas coming to Blairsville and Union County because of this and it can have a very positive economic impact for our community. While we hope this is accurate, it is difficult to come up with an exact number based on the time of year. Union County and the City of Blairsville have 73 kitchens/

restaurants permitted through our Health Department. When you take out the schools and hospitals there are 65 restaurants/food service establishments. The majority of these restaurants are sit down/dine in establishments. Out of these only 10 are classified as fast food restaurants.

Q. Is there a lot of diverse options for dining out in Union County and Blairsville?

A. Absolutely. Blairsville and Union County have many different types of restaurants from good ole country cooking buffet, to Seafood, Mexican, Italian, Cuban, American, Chinese, BBQ, Café, Delicatessen, Desserts, Fast Foods and Pizza. I believe there should be something here for everyone as far as dining out would go and they are all very good.

Q. Approximately how many people are employed by all the restaurants in Union County and the City of Blairsville?

A. It is an incredible number, but based on the numbers we were able to gather, approximately 730+ full and part time jobs are provided to our community by these restaurants. This number is quite amazing being as this is just the food service industry and does not include the schools or hospital.

Q. Do you know which restaurants employ the most people?

A. As of now, Chick-fil-A employs the most people. They have 79 employees total. This is including full time and part time. Fatz has 70 and McDonalds has 31 employees. This industry provides a lot of opportunity for a huge number of people in our area.

Q. What kind of economic impact can these employees have on our community?

A. While we do not have any specific numbers, there is a huge multiplier effect of these employees being able to live and work

See Paris, page 5

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Fine Tuned Arrangement

Suppose that you were the intended victim of a firing squad and thousands of attempts were made to dispatch you, but instead you walked away unharmed. Wouldn't you be inclined to wonder if something had been arranged on your behalf?

Such is the question raised by astrophysicist Martin Rees. In his book "Just Six Numbers," he describes vital parameters in the universe and how they must be precisely fine-tuned for it to exist. For example, he explains that if the expansion of the universe were too slow, gravity takes over and it collapses; if too fast, it's just a gas with no complex chemistry and no possibility of life. But somehow, it's arranged to be just right.

Astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked, "A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion almost beyond question." Notably, he also admitted that his atheism was shaken.

I can see why. Scientists calculate that the chances that such fine-tuning would happen randomly are 1 in a million billions. These chances are roughly the equivalent of looking for a specific single grain of sand from among all the beaches on the earth. Given that miniscule chance, the elephant-in-the-room question is could the universe arrive at these finely-tuned parameters with no arranging?

If it did, then outspoken atheist Richard Dawkins would be right. He wrote that in a universe without a Maker, "some people are going to be hurt, some will be lucky, and you won't find any reason in it, or any justice. The universe we have is what you would expect if there is no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." Note the absolute hopelessness for the human condition. No arrangements.

Christianity makes sense of the world as we experience it, answering questions raised by science. "Since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes - His eternal power and divine na-

See Fowler, page 5

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Some Details

As you open up the North Georgia News each week, you turn to the section with arrest reports and fire reports and you read down the list of the fire department incidents. You read about medical calls, structure fires, motor vehicle accidents, search and rescues but have you wondered what these calls involve. Here is a breakdown of the calls listed each week.

A medical call is a call to assist Union General Ambulance Service on various types of medical emergencies ranging from major trauma to possible heart attacks. The medical calls take about one hour to complete. The fire department assists the EMTs and Paramedics with assessment, loading and treatment. At times, the firefighters either ride in with the crew or drive the ambulance to the hospital if the patient is more critical. Medical calls make up a majority of our calls.

A structure fire is a major incident and requires a great deal of time and resources. The time can range from two hours to eight hours or longer depending on the fire. The work at a structure fire is very demanding. Firefighters must wear turnout gear and self-contained breathing apparatus weighing up to 50 lbs. During firefighting operations, the turnout gear gets wet which increases the weight. Firefighters must work until all fire is completely extinguished. Once completed, the trucks and equipment must be cleaned, restocked and placed back in service. The post-fire cleanup can add an additional hour of work after the fire.

Motor vehicle accidents (MVA) are common calls for the fire department. A MVA can be simple or very complicated depending on the number of victims and the need for extrication from the damaged vehicle. Firefighters must wear turnout gear and work to free people from the wreckage. They also assist Union General Ambulance in treatment and transport of the patients. Time spent on a motor vehicle accident can range from 30 minutes to hours depending on the severity of the call.

Search and Rescue has become a major category of the department's response. A search and rescue can take a multitude of resources in some challenging terrain, difficult weather and can be spread over very large areas. The time factors range from a few hours to days. Firefighters, law enforcement officers, and various other organizations can be involved.

When these calls are completed, the firefighters must then complete a report which takes about an hour or longer. Nothing is ever done until the paper work is done. The department responds to various other calls. Keep in mind that firefighters must also find time to check-out trucks and equipment, perform hydrant maintenance, test fire hose, test pumpers, perform pre-incident plans, perform training, and yes...the department tries to eat when they can. So when you read the fire department incidents in the

See Dyer, page 5

In the Interim

I think, on one hand, we were all surprised to hear that Cindy Williams would be leaving the Blairsville Union County Chamber. But, on the other hand, I believe we are all happy for her success and her new opportunity at the Cartersville Bartow County Chamber.

Blairsville - Union County Chamber
Patrick Malone



During the transition, the Executive Committee has asked me, and I accepted, to serve as the Interim President/CEO of the Blairsville Union County Chamber of Commerce. During this time, I have only two goals:

1. To provide some continuity in achieving the strategic goals and implementing the program of work that the Board, Cindy and the staff have outlined for 2016 and;
2. To give the Board of Directors enough time to conduct a thorough search for a new President/CEO and make a well-informed, committed decision that is in best interests of the Chamber members and our entire community.

I am fortunate that my current role as Senior Partner with The PAR Group affords me the flexibility to take on this Chamber workload. Additionally, having just completed a three-

See Malone, page 5

Bugged

It was just days into the new millennium, and the start of my second winter in my home on the headwaters of the Nottely River. Every year brings its set of new challenges, so this year wasn't going to be an exception, right from the get go.

Before I proceed, let me clarify something. Having spent nearly two decades in South Florida, I was acquainted with dozens of varieties of bugs. I was well accustomed to them looking for suitable digs inside one's front door. I could only assume that they were escaping the sticky, humid hot air, seeking some relief in the A/C comfort, very much like we human insects. Even this did not prepare me for this North Georgia winter hibernation experience.

That morning, I walked down the steps from my bedroom, expecting a chilly walk with the dogs. I saw a large, dark spot on the ceiling and cursed under my breath. A water leak. Those of you with pets know that no matter what the calamity, it is not going to be even investigated until after that morning visit to the canine outdoor house. When we came back from our walk along the river, I got the boys fed and then decided to get closer to the assumed water mark to see how wet it was. It wasn't wet, it was crawling. It was a mass-literally hundreds, of lady bugs. Then I noticed that in the corner of the room, above the windows, peaking from under the valences were another mass of these little rotund insects. I used to think they were adorable, and loved when ever one landed on me outdoors. My Italian grandmother had taught me to make a wish when this occurred. But now I'm not feeling the love.

I immediately pick up the phone to call my neighbors Angela and Ralph. They would know why I'm under attack. After they get done chuckling, they essentially tell me that this is an Act of God in the form of Mother Nature, one we have few answers as to why this phenom-

See Leone, page 5

Farmers Market Moment
JoAnne Leone



Letters to the Editor...

Conundrum in Burns, OR

Dear Editor,
The protest in Burns, OR is an exercise in civil disobedience, an American thing to do and not unlike sitting in the front of the bus, but with one big difference: the folks in this protest are armed. This condition has prompted organized patriot groups (Oath Keepers, III, etc.) to condemn the protest as cause worthy but ill planned and badly timed. The protest is not supported by organized patriot groups.

The cause is a hundred years old, at least, and stems from government overreach in attempting to control land use in the West. The government "owns" 28% of the land mass of the United States, a real stretch from the ten square miles for DC and areas for military bases that the Constitution allows.

So this is the line in the sand for the protesters in Burns who are actually being led by the Bundys out of Nevada. It is a protest, following other protests over the decades. Have the folks out west exhausted all possible avenue of redress, as our ancestors did in 1776? Certainly rustling of the Bundy livestock by the BLM was not an appropriate response by government to the protest there.

Is this tyranny, perhaps? Is this the issue in Burns, OR, most certainly.

Have we as a nation exhausted all avenues of redress, perhaps? The writ of habeas corpus has been set aside. Citizens no longer have access to their grand juries. The posse comitatus act was ignored during Katrina and now in Burns, OR. Our politicians ignore our pleas and go their merry way, marching to the beat of the K Street lobbyists.

Are we marching towards the Lexington Green, I wonder, but I pray not. But what now is our alternative, where do we go for redress?

Will our duly elected good men and true finally realize reality and act?

Zeb Blanchard

Community of Greed?

Dear Editor,
On Christmas Eve in this town, very few businesses spent a dollar and permitted their lighted holiday decorations to be left on all night. On Christmas Day, only a couple of restaurants opened their doors, allowing persons to step inside and enjoy a meal. What is it, do persons in this area not eat on Christmas Day? I am amazed that the City and County Government has yet created a holiday with decorations, parades and fireworks. This holiday would be titled "The Community of Greed."

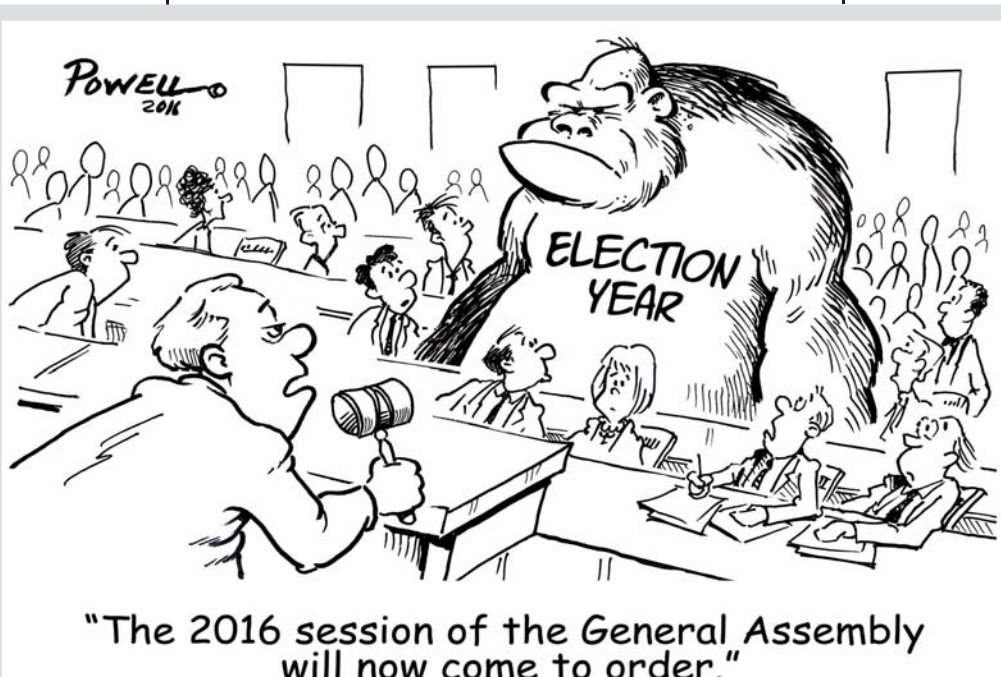
There are 43 verses in the Bible where God speaks about greed and worshipping the dollar. Apparently, these verses have been deleted in this area.

Al Turner

Buy Local

Dear Editor,
We see advertising to buy local and keep the money in our community all the time. This got me thinking about an important decision about to be made in our county. Seeing that the school board is hoping to make a decision on our next superintendent by the end of February, I would like to express an opinion. I think that if possible we need to go with someone who has ties to Union County and is a part of the community. Nothing against our present superintendent, but living and taking part in the community gives a person a better feel for the wishes and thoughts of the people. The last elected Superintendent was in 1992, and the purpose was to get politics out of education. Instead, what I am afraid it has done is put more politics in and now the superintendent only has to please three board members in our county without worrying about the people.

See Hughes, page 5



"The 2016 session of the General Assembly will now come to order."

It's time to get the incentives right on wildfires

Every year we hear about the devastating effects of wildfires, with lives risked and millions of dollars spent defending homes. But something is different this time. People are now asking: Why do we keep building houses in fire-prone areas? A fire marshal in a Wyoming resort community, thinking about the safety of her firefighters, refers to these places as "suicide subdivisions."

Defending homes can lead to tragedy. Firefighter fatalities have doubled in the last 30 years, and in 2013 19 hotshots died defending an Arizona town that had done little to prepare for the inevitability of wildfires. The town had been evacuated, yet the crew was sent in anyway. As a parent of one of the firefighters said, "Brave men died defending empty structures."

The cost trends around wildfire also are troublesome. Since 1990, the number of homes destroyed has tripled. Yet in the last 30 years, 60 percent of new homes in the U.S. were built in the Wildland-urban interface (WUI), the private land next to public forests. Federal firefighting costs average \$3 billion annually; also triple the amount from a decade ago. Research indicates that at least one-third and up to 95 percent of the firefighting bill goes to defend private homes.

In some fires in the Sierra Nevada, agencies can spend \$200,000 to \$400,000 per home. An example of the high costs is the recent King fire, which destroyed 12 homes and burned almost 98,000 acres, and cost more than \$53 million to fight. Half of the Forest Service's budget today is taken over by fire suppression, so fewer dollars are available for things the public enjoys, like campgrounds and hiking trails. Perversely, the agency also "borrows" money internally from funds designated to reduce future fire risks such as fuel reduction. One logical step is to treat wildfires like other natural disasters and fund them through FEMA. This will eliminate "fire borrowing," but we are waiting for Congress to act. Other efforts like voluntary programs to increase the survivability of homes and selective clearing of fuels through prescribed burning or logging, are important, yet not enough, as the trends keep worsening.

What has not yet been tried is altering the pattern of future home development on fire-prone lands. The key is to get the incentives right. Currently, local governments benefit from a federal government subsidy that pays the bulk of firefighting costs and underwrites risky and expensive developments. Passing on more costs to local governments - where home building is permitted - would incentivize better planning.

A portion of the Forest Service's \$2.2 billion fire budget - say 1 percent or \$22 million - could be directed to communities to facilitate land-use planning. Taking a lesson from flood-

See Riley, page 5

RC&D Executive Director

Frank Riley



The Mine

After deer hunting season is finished there is another season I truly enjoy. Walking through the woods during this time of year is wonderful because you can see many things which are hidden by foliage during most times of the year. I like to refer to this time of year as the time of year for "Place Hunting". For example, there are waterfalls to find, old roads and trails to explore, petroglyphs to wonder about, old homesteads to view and caves to find. I like to track down rumors about these places.

Recently, Sheldon Henderson, Harold Dyer and I went looking for an old cave and an old trail on Ivey Log Mountain. Sheldon knew about the cave from his time of growing up in Gum Log. He also knew about this old trail that pre-exists any of the old logging roads in the area. So, we set out in search of these two gems. We had actually searched for the cave a few years ago and never found it. This time we walked right up on the cave and took the required photographs which were placed on my Facebook page.

A friend once told me about an ancient Indian Trail that travels along the side of Ivey Log Mountain. I was told the trail came through a gap and ran along the side of the mountain and down through Little Brasstown Gap to Trackrock Gap on up to Bald Mountain. After talking with Sheldon he told me of a trail he once had found close to an old clear cut on Ivey Log. We found the trail he remembered. It was older than any of the logging roads and much narrower. When the trail came to a lead going off the mountain there were no cuts in the trail. It simply went around the lead and not across it like a modern road would cut across. The trail is old and hard to follow in places. So, it may or may not be a trail made by Cherokee Indians. But, we had fun finding and photographing the trail and the cave.

After I posted the photographs of our day's adventure on Facebook a friend sent me a text with a photograph of him in a Gold Mine with these words, "Ask Patrick about his adventures in this mine"? A few years ago Patrick and his friends found an old mine. Patrick decided to go in and tied a rope to an overhanging limb above the mine shaft. That is where the fun began.

With a flashlight in his mouth Patrick grabbed the rope and lowered himself down 30 feet into a mine shaft. Upon reaching the bottom he found a pile of leaves 6-8 feet deep on the bottom. As he was looking around he found some animal bones and old pieces of wood. All of a sudden he turned and there was one of his friends he was not expecting to see. Patrick was so intent on looking at this mine shaft he hadn't notice his good friend coming down the rope. This set his nerves on edge and after the pair laughed about this sudden appearance they looked around the old mine shaft. The place was a little spooky and

See Cummings, page 5

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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