

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Employment held back due to failed drug tests - clean up - test again

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. Visit and Like our Facebook page for additional articles and videos.

As the economy rebounds and jobs become more plentiful, some employers continue to complain that they can't find workers to fill open positions, largely because they can't find enough workers who can pass a drug test.

It's a national epidemic based on new data from Quest Diagnostics, which found the percentage of American workers testing positive for illicit drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamines increased for the second year in a row in 2014, following the first increase in more than a decade in 2013. American workers are increasingly testing positive for illicit drug use across almost all workforce categories, which is becoming a drag on employment by shrinking the pool of viable candidates.

An analysis of the Quest Diagnostics Drug Testing Index showed steady increases in positive tests for illicit drugs among U.S. workers. Marijuana continues to be the most commonly detected drug, increasing 14.3 percent from 2013-2014. Positive results for cocaine in urine tests increased by 9.1 in the same year, while heroin use doubled in the general U.S. workforce between 2011 and 2014. The positivity rate for amphetamines is now at its highest levels on record, and methamphetamine detection increased 21.4 percent, and is at its highest level since 2007.

While testing may be necessary, it doesn't necessarily solve the problem. Some companies are forced to try to accommodate talented workers with substance abuse problems who fail drug tests. Skilled tradesmen are just too hard to come by to dismiss on the basis of a failed drug test without giving them a second chance to clean-up and test again.

The lengths to which some employers will go to keep quality workers underscores just how tight the labor market is, but drug testing should remain a necessary condition of employment, especially in industries such as trucking, delivery and manufacturing, where impaired workers pose risks to themselves and others around them.

When a company has a drug-free workplace policy and conducts drug screening, they will naturally have a smaller pool of applicants to work with. Company policies generally apply to all new hires as well as regular employees from senior management down to direct labor. For DOT regulated companies, pre-hire and random drug testing is mandatory, given the nature of the safety-sensitive work and frequently the size of the equipment that's being operated. DOT also requires that those employees and owner-operators belong to a random pool for drug and alcohol testing. There is a cost associated with drug testing, but it's nothing compared to the cost of someone being hurt or causing damage to the machinery.

Letters to the Editor...

God Bless America?

Dear Editor,

As the mother of a career Air Force veteran, I was appalled when I watched a most disturbing video that was captured by someone with enough forethought to recognize its potential warning. Retired Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Oscar Rodriguez, who as a young boy was so touched he teared up when he heard the national anthem sung, joined the military at age 18, where he proudly served for 30 years.

He had participated in dozens of retirement ceremonies for fellow officers, and was invited to recite a traditional flag-folding ceremony for Master Sergeant Charles Roberson, who had listened to tapes of Rodriguez' speech over the years, and thought it would be meaningful to him and his family.

The speech included the meaning of the stars and stripes, what the colors stand for, and a land founded on the unique rights of Americans, including Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Religion among others, and that our flag is a beacon recognized around the world to represent freedom.

The end of the "traditional" speech ended with the words, "It is this one nation under God that we call, with honor, the United States of America. God bless our flag. God bless our troops. God bless America."

The word "traditional" in the paragraph above is italicized, because those were the words that were standard until recently when a "New Tradition" was instituted by the now-politically

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Second Amendment

Dear Editor,

While I agree with Mr. Hall's statement of the need for our Second Constitutional Amendment made in his letter to the NG News of July 6, 2016 entitled "Don't Forget Wounded Knee", there are errors of fact in the letter that should be clarified. And, I do not mean to imply that Wounded Knee was anything less than disastrous.

Mr. Hall states that the massacre of Native Americans at Wounded Knee, South Dakota on December 29, 1890 was the largest shooting in U.S. history. While Wounded Knee may well be the largest shooting, it is not the largest massacre to have occurred in our country.

In 1813 at Ft. Mims, Alabama many settlers and slaves were slaughtered by Creek Indians. While no exact count of the numbers who perished exists, there is general agreement today that between 250 and 400 settlers and slaves, and approximately 200 Creeks were killed.

The sight of an older massacre which does not have a number killed established, but was large enough to earn the name "Blood Mountain", occurred around Neel's Gap south of Blairsville.

Before any American citizen blindly accepts whatever new firearms legislation that may be about to be doled out, they should stop and think about something for just one minute - Evil does exist in our world. It always has and always will. Throughout history evil people have committed evil acts. In the Bible one of the first sto-

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Stand Firm

It was my privilege to speak to one of America's top gun fighter pilots. I heard a podcast program with a recent seminary graduate discussing his doctoral dissertation. A few weeks later, I interviewed the author of that paper, John Marselus, a recipient of the USAF's Top Professional Fighter Pilot award.

Dr. Marselus' dissertation takes up a challenge for which he is uniquely qualified: find inspiration for Christian fathers from the experiences of a fighter pilot. Each chapter of his academic work has an epigraph recounting stories from his fighter pilot career, which illustrates his research and conclusions.

Perhaps the nose art on his A-10 Thunderbolt II in Desert Storm, "Ephesians 6:10-18," inspired his thesis. The verses describe the armor of God and the spiritual enemy we face. To summarize the application of his research, he writes, "Through taking up the roles and responsibilities of a husband and father in leading the family in priority, prayer, provision, protection, and preparation, a father and husband can experience the joy of marriage and the family as God created in the beginning in His grace and mercy. It is time for men to lead as they were designed to lead and as a flight lead would lead his formation into battle."

As we talked, he described his life work. "Ministry is my heart, and flying is my tent-making." Now as Director of Aviation at San Diego Christian College, he trains professional aviators, "but number one is their walk with the Lord." His own walk started young in life as he pondered the loss of his 19-year-old brother. At a Billy Graham meeting in Chicago, he took a stand for the truth of the gospel and placed his faith in Christ. That set the course for his life.

He spoke of his best "wing man," his wife, who is his inspiration. In his acceptance of the Top Gun Award in front of the "kings of the Air Force," he declared, "If I did anything right, all glory and honor goes to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who gives me breath of life and gifts to succeed. And I would not be the man I am without the love and support of my wife. This award goes to them." Those gathered rewarded his courage with sincere, not just polite, applause.

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. I read the report of the county meeting in the NGN about the county awarding a contract on replacing the roof on the Civic Center. I thought the county had to bid out projects like this?

A. Absolutely, we bid out projects like this and down to \$100,000 in this same manner. At one county meeting we announce that we have accepted the best proposal and at the next county meeting we actually award the contract. We have an excellent Purchasing Department that handles all projects. We put out a Request for Proposals on April 12th in the newspaper and on our website. This was to notify companies who were interested that the county was accepting the proposal for this project. We then held a pre-proposal meeting on April 19th at the Civic Center, which had three contractors in attendance. Proposals were received on May 10 and the county received two proposals. These two sealed proposals were reviewed and scored, and the Notice of Award was issued on May 19. The contract was officially accepted at the June 16th county meeting for \$157,425 to Roof Management Inc. out of Doraville, Ga.

Q. Could no one locally bid on this Civic Center roofing project?

A. We did have one local company give a proposal, but unfortunately their bid was about 20% higher than the bid that was accepted. Often it is difficult on larger projects that require certain bond requirements for smaller and local companies to compete. However, projects under \$100,000 while still requiring sealed proposals, they do not require advertisements to the general public, and we make every effort to utilize local contractors where ever possible.

Q. We are having a lot of traffic this summer, which brings up the question, is growth really a good thing for our community?

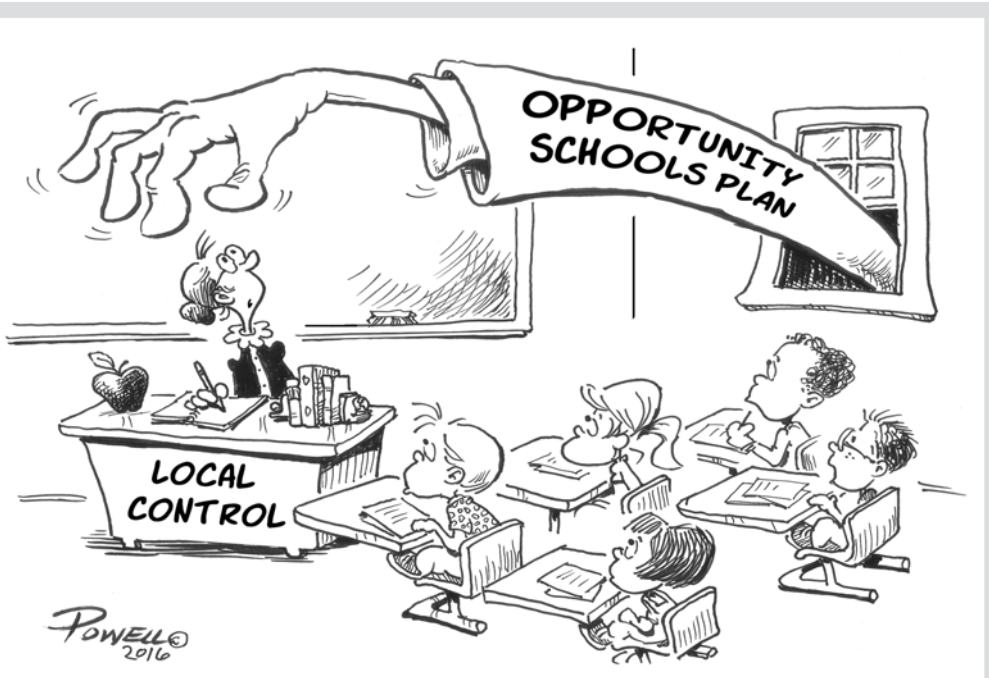
A. There is no question that growth is a double edged sword. How much is good, how much is too much and how do you stop it even if you could? These are all good questions. We have just gone through five years of basically no growth with a bad economy. A lot of people lost their property and homes to foreclosure. Contractors were out of work and many families had very difficult times that still exist today. Banks went under and it was not a fun time. So I think it is fair to say that there is no such thing as staying where you are. You are either going to grow or you are going to go backwards.

Q. How much growth is good and how much is too much?

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Business of the Quarter & Backpack 2 School Bash

I invite you to come and celebrate our next Business After Hours/Business of the Quarter with us on Thursday, July 14th from 5:30 p.m. - 7 p.m.! North Georgia Technical College will be hosting, catering and co-sponsoring the event along with Edwin C. Pound III, MD PC. Thank you NGTC and Dr. Pound for your help and support! This quarter we will be honoring Spa and Deck Creations. Congratulations to Jill Goode and her staff!

Blairsville - Union County Chamber Regina Allison



With summer in full swing, there is so much to enjoy in our community so I wanted to share a few events with you. On Tuesday, July 12th, come and celebrate Cow Appreciation Day at Chick-fil-A. Be sure to come wearing something cow spotted to receive a free entrée! Visit their website at www.CowAppreciationDay.com for information. Contact Chick-fil-A about upcoming Spirit Nights as well. Their next one will be Tuesday, July 19th from 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. for the Dennis Woody ALS Benefit. The 18th annual Butternut Creek Festival will take place on Saturday, July 16th from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. and on Sunday, July 17th from 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. at Meeks Park. There will be free admission and parking. At 7 p.m. Saturday the 16th there will be a free public forum at the civic center hosted by the Lake Nottely Improvement Association. There will be representatives there from TVA, GA DNR, USFS and Union County to discuss issues affecting our community and the lake and

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Japanese Beetles

Once again, the hot summer months have brought those pesky brown and green Japanese beetles that devastate our foliage. These beetles first appeared in the United States in 1916. Like most introduced species, it is not a pest in its native country of Japan, where natural predators keep beetle populations at bay. However, since its first appearance here, populations have continued to skyrocket and devour flowers and leaves.

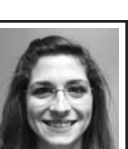
Japanese beetles are about half an inch in length and have coppery backs. Their heads and shoulders are a deep green color, and they have tufts of white hair covering their bodies. Adults emerge from the soil and begin aggressively feeding in June. They typically live for thirty to forty-five days, but populations can continue to cause damage for up to six weeks as young adults continue to emerge. These beetles feed on over 300 species of plants and will eat almost every part of a plant except the stem. Though a single beetle does not eat very much at all, when they swarm, they can easily defoliate entire ornamental plants and vegetables as they feed on the plant tissue between the veins. As the beetles continue to feast, the vegetation they damage release odors that draw even more beetles leading to an infestation.

Japanese beetles are strong flyers and can often travel for miles. Because of this, it is difficult to tell the source of the infestation. Once they have found a suitable area to establish, the females will mate and burrow about two to three inches into the soil to lay their eggs. A single female can lay up to sixty eggs in her lifetime. The larvae (grubs) hatch soon after and grow rapidly throughout the summer months, feeding on turf-grass roots.

Beetles overwinter deep in the soil in the grub phase. They can dig as deep as six inches during the coldest months, and once the soil reaches fifty degrees, they become inactive. In the spring, once soil temperatures climb again, the grubs move back into the root zone. After

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UGA extension FROM THE GROUND UP Melissa Mattee



Swiftwater Team

Extreme weather events can be very dangerous. Union County Emergency Management/Homeland Security Agency (UCEM/MSA) and Union County Fire Department (UCFD) are constantly preparing for such extreme weather emergencies. One weather emergency that has occurred more often in the last couple of years is flash flooding. Although we are currently in a drought, flash flooding can happen any time and can be caused by a passing storm system which can drop heavy rain in a short amount of time. These flash flooding incidents have resulted in several swiftwater emergencies.

Swiftwater emergencies include flash flooding, stranded persons in rising water, or persons trapped in moving water. These emergencies commonly occur when people attempt to walk or drive through rising or moving water. The people or vehicles can be swept away and can trap people in the middle of the moving water. Swiftwater teams are used to gain access to these people and get them to a safe area.

To better prepare for flash flooding and swiftwater rescues, UCEM/MSA and UCFD are developing a swiftwater rescue team to respond to these emergencies and rescue people from dangerous water situations. The department currently has a small number of trained personnel and some equipment to respond to a swiftwater incident. The swiftwater team is in the development stage at this time. It shall include firefighters who have completed specialized training on ropes and swiftwater rescue. The plan is for the team to increase the number of trained personnel and to obtain more equipment for responding to these types of emergencies. Several firefighters from the career staff and volunteers have recently completed swiftwater rescue training last month.

The training class is called Swiftwater Rescue Technician Unit I and is conducted through Rescue 3 International. Rescue 3 describes the course as a course that "provides rescuers with the fundamentals of survival in moving water and is recommended for anyone who may be called upon to effect in-water rescues. Students gain knowledge in hydrology and river classifications, size-up, site control and scene management. Practical skills include self-rescue, swiftwater swimming and the fundamentals of shore, boat and in-water rescues. Additionally students are introduced to the basics of boat handling and the fundamentals of rope rescue including mechanical advantage and anchor systems." The class was completed over three days and involved lectures, practical skills, and very demanding swimming exercises. The training was intense and was described by the firefighters as "eye opening" to the dangers of swiftwater

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Rock House

When I was just a little lad I became enamored by "Rock Houses". You may ask, "What is a rock house?" It is nothing more than a rock overhang large enough for a person or persons to live under. The rock house can provide protection from the wind, rain and the cold weather. My papa once showed me a rock house in the Sipsey Wilderness under which a man named Garrison lived under for a short time after he settled in the area. My mom's great grandmother, Mandy, lived under another rock house after the Indian Removal. It is said she still haunts the area to this day sitting on top of Rock Bridge in a rocking chair in the wee hours of early morning before the sun comes up.

I guess you could say I am still fascinated by such places and I have been fortunate enough to know people which have shown me some Rock Houses in the Union County area. Jerry Dyer took me to the first ones I ever visited in the area. One Sunday afternoon we took our sons to visit a place called the "War Cave". This rock house is located not too far from Bald Mountain. It is said that the name of the place is due to people living under it while trying to avoid serving during the Civil War and WWI. We climbed up the switch backs leading up the ridge and then crawled through Laurel thickets to get to the War Cave.

This is not a cave, but, really it is a huge rock overhang with enough room underneath to sleep 6-8 adults and it had a big fire ring. The roof of the War Cave is covered in black smudge from all the fires and there is other evidence of much use by campers over the years. David and Eddie Dyer told me their dad used to take the family there on overnight camping trips. It is a great place to camp because it's quiet and peaceful. The smell of Pine trees, Hemlock and Mountain Laurel makes the steep climb worth the effort.

Jerry also took me to a place called the Spruce Pine Rock House. This is another beautiful spot in our wonderful mountains. It is more remote than the War Cave. I have heard it was used by people in both wars and during the depression. Both are beautiful places, but, getting to the Spruce Pine Rock House is a long and strenuous walk.

I have heard of another "Rock House" somewhere around Bald Mountain that was used by hobos during depression times. There is supposed to be a soap stone table, soap stone chairs and a nice fire place around this one. So, while sitting around talking about the location of this place a bunch of us decided to attempt to find it. Harold Dyer, Fred Woodward and I tried the first time. We left the parking lot at Bald Mountain one morning around 8:30 and walked out the

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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