

Commissioner's Questions & Answers



Lamar Paris
Q & A

Q. We read in the NGN that Union County had a good audit report this year. Is an audit a lot of hard work for the county?

A. It certainly is for our staff, and cost the county over \$40,000. The auditors work in our office almost every day for three months, poring over every bank account, checks written, receipts and also visiting all other offices. I am very pleased that once again, for 11 years in a row, we have received an "unqualified" audit, which in audit terms means an "excellent" audit.

One of the highlights of the audit is that we increased our fund balance by \$ 1.4 million dollars last year while dealing with the worst economy ever and with increasing prices for fuel, diesel, tar, gravel and most all office supplies and equipment. We have one of the lowest debts of any county in our area and our financial position is exceptional with a Standard and Poor's A+ rating. We can all certainly be proud of that!!

Q. How many building permits has the county issued this year compared to last year?

A. The news for this year is very positive. Through September we have issued 74 new home permits as opposed to 49 through September of 2011. We only issued 59 permits for houses for the entire year of 2011 so we are already 25 ahead of all of last year. That is very good news. Some of these are spec houses but primarily they are custom homes. There are currently about 65 homes in some stage of construction in the county from breaking ground to waiting on their final certificate of occupancy. This is encouraging news for those in construction and one reason our unemployment rate is third lowest in our region at 7.3%.

In addition, local realtors report that while home and land sales remain slow, there have still been 293 homes sold this year, and at the same time, foreclosures are slowing down significantly from last year. There are all some very positive signs for our local economy.

Q. Why do you think we have so many new homes being built in these very difficult times?

A. It is about our great quality of life and beautiful county. It begins with the fact we have such caring and generous people, wonderful facilities, very hard working county employees, and excellent cooperation among all governments and utilities. When you combine that with a low property tax rate, an award winning hospital/medical facilities and staff, an outstanding public school system, wonderful public safety, awesome recreation facilities, excellent public health department, senior center and library, superb Veterans Clinic, just to name a few, why would someone not want to move here and live?

Q. We simply do not understand how our county can continue to make so many improvements while keeping our property tax rate so reasonable. Other area counties have not been able to keep up with us either in facilities or low tax rates.

A. Although I manage the county operations, it is a team

effort controlling finances. First, our three person finance department does a tremendous job, second, our employees work very hard providing above average county services to you, and third, ALL of the elected officials are dedicated toward keeping their expenses under control.

Another important reason is the efficiency of a Sole Commissioner form of government. Out of the 7 sole commissioner counties in north Georgia, four are in the top 10 lowest property tax rates out of 159 counties, with Union being the lowest.

Q. Has our new Union County Community Center been an asset for the county?

A. You bet it has. The first impressions have been amazing to watch as people see the facility for the first time. They are amazed that we have such a beautiful facility in such a small county. It is also paying big dividends as our Economic Development Director and Chamber Director are having the opportunity to always make the best "first impressions". Despite the very tough economy, we have had a host of new possible retail and commercial prospects visiting our county on a regular basis, looking for new sites, and they are all very impressed.

Q. Does the Community Center offer any additional advantages to the community?

A. Absolutely. The conference center portion of the facility is central to its long term operation and success. By hosting business conferences and many other special events, we have the opportunity to introduce thousands of new people to Blairsville and Union County. Once they come here for a conference, meeting, or other special event, they want to come back. They stay in our community motels or cabins, eat at our restaurants, visit our shops and stores, and some will come back and either purchase a home or cabin here, or bring their business to our area. It is our economic development future for bringing more jobs to Union County.

I would like to thank everyone for the overwhelming support you have shown me as your commissioner. Whether it was from a simple kind word of encouragement, a hug or pat on the back, talking to your family and friends on my behalf, putting up signs, making donations, or simply giving me a comforting smile, just know it is all very much appreciated. Some of you have already come by and told me you have already voted for me in early voting and I very much appreciate that as well as those who will vote between now and November 6.

We live in an outstanding county and community and it has been my sincere honor to serve as your Commissioner. I would like to ask for your vote to continue that service in the place I am proud to have always called home, Union County.

Lamar Paris
Union County
Commissioner

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Leone...continued from Page 4A

she shared with the chefs of San Francisco during the late seventies and early eighties. Her many stories of conversations at the table with Alice Waters, one of the most admired pioneers of sustainable agriculture, are fascinating.

Each of the three memoirs is brilliantly written in such a way that you experience every nuance, from the rich way she describes the colors of an eggplant, to the unique flavor of an herb that is found only in the remotest areas of China. The reader is hijacked and whisked through an international tour of street

cafes, orchards, culinary schools, famous restaurant kitchens and at her own table, where relationships blossom and sometimes wither. Though all are written with a charismatic narrative, the funniest of the three I found to be Garlic and Sapphires. It is in this tome that she shares with you the many disguises she used to protect her identity while visiting restaurants to review as the celebrated 1990's food critic for the New York Times.

If you love food, a good read and you have no idea what to do with your Saturday mornings until the Farmers

Market opens next June, pick up one or all of this culinary trilogy and enjoy being a literary food junkie. And a special thank you to all of you that

take the opportunity to let me know that you enjoy my sharing of thoughts and my heart here, each week. See you soon.

Collins ...continued from Page 4A

aged to make sure the deer stay healthy and beneficial. If the herds become too large then they can fall prey to disease like "black tongue" which hit the mountains a few years back when hunting numbers had decreased and the deer population had increased. If we don't control the population then it will get too big for the area. Look at what is happening to South Georgia and the pig problem they are having now or at the black bear increase we see in our own area. Hunters and hunting are necessary for game management and the sport is important to our state and local economies. Georgia needs deer hunters. A yearly harvest of 30 percent is necessary to maintain a healthy deer herd.

Many of our youth would love the chance to get out and experience the woods through hunting. The sport has never been easier to ac-

cess and hunting programs are available for kids who want to hunt but don't get a chance to go. You can find these programs online with some simple exploring. Find a kid and sign him/her up for a Hunter Safety Class and then take them to the woods and watch the magic. You will be helping that child and opening up a new world for them.

Hunting is a sport and the meat it provides, venison, is a delicacy in many countries around the world. Get out and go hunting folks, or better yet, get out and take a kid hunting. The rifle season is underway so go to the Georgia DNR Website and get your license. Now, turn the TV off. Go sight in that old deer rifle you haven't used in years. Go scout out a good place to hunt and when the season opens, get in the woods. Good luck and keep your nose in the wind.

Garner...continued from Page 4A

tor by using this technique before closing. Small steps sales techniques are a way of helping the client know your product and ensuring their agreement "in small steps" along the way. Often, clients tune out because it is too much information to readily process. So you ask little questions along the way. For example, "Do you know what I mean?" or "Are you following me?" These tie-downs or small steps should become a natural part of your conversation before you use them in your sales presentation. You should practice in the mirror or on your spouse or friends to help your delivery timing. This technique also

helps to maintain control of the conversation and aids in keeping the customer engaged. You should not try for a big close in each of your sales presentations. You risk losing your customer.

In closing, make solving their problem your number one aim. The Chamber is eager to help our business community with your customer service needs. Our online presence can be viewed at www.VisitBlairsvilleGA.com.

Please visit often to stay informed or phone the chamber at (706) 745-5789 for additional information. I may be reached anytime at Chair@Blairsville-Chamber.com.

Cummings...continued from Page 4A

square. We hadn't been there long when this tall, lanky, young man came running down the street with nothing on but a paper bag over his head. Everyone in town was cheering and clapping their hands. None of us knew that the person under the bag was Bob. Well, most of us didn't know.

As Bob ran through town he ran by the spring to pick up his clothing and made his way back home.

Upon arriving at his house Bob found the Chief of Police sitting in his driveway. By this time Bob was fully clothed so he walked up to the car and asked, "Mr. Steele can I help you?" Mr. Steele looked up at

Bob with a grin and said, "Bob, you are under arrest for indecent exposure." Bob asked the policeman, "How did you know it was me?" "Well Bob, you are the tallest kid in Chickamauga" replied the officer.

I do not want to be secretive about the Canning Plant.

We will open twice more this year. We will open on Monday and Tuesday, Nov. 12 and 13, at 6:30 a.m. each day for Meat Days.

Also, the Farmers Market will open on Nov. 30th from 3 p.m. until 7 p.m. and on Saturday, Dec. 1st, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. Watch the paper for an announcement about sign-up to reserve a spot on these days.