

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Volunteer Firefighters Needed

I have been in the fire department for 31 years, both as a volunteer and career firefighter. In those years, I have seen many things come and go and the ups and downs of the fire service. In all that time, I have not seen the issue that we face today. The number of incidents, calls, and requests for services continues to grow each year but the number of volunteers keeps dwindling. It is not an isolated problem for Union County Fire Department but a problem that persists throughout the entire nation.

It is difficult to truly understand the underlying cause of the declining number of volunteers. Some of that can be attributed to the need for people to support their families. Another reason may be that people do not have the time to commit to required training or to respond to emergencies. Some speculate that there is a reduction in volunteerism in everything today, not just the fire service.

The truth of the matter is that we need more volunteer firefighters. Our department would not be able to provide the level of emergency services without volunteers. We have a small career staff who are highly trained and capable, responding to calls 24-hours a day. They are assisted and supported by a highly trained and capable volunteer force. These dedicated men and women sacrifice their time to learn, train, and respond to emergencies.

There are several rewards for this service to the community. Volunteer firefighters are able to learn a very unique and challenging set of skills. They learn how to deal with emergencies including fires, rescues, searches, motor vehicle accidents, and medical calls. It is not easy but the reward is knowing that you are able to handle these emergencies.

The greatest reward is knowing that you, as a volunteer firefighter, make a difference. The volunteer firefighter is called out to an emergency where someone needs help. That someone may be having the worst day of their life. The knowledge, skills, and actions of that volunteer firefighter can positively change the outcome of that emergency. They make a difference.

Union County Fire Department is currently seeking volunteers. We are looking for dedicated people who are willing and able to take the training and become a firefighter. We need people

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



The Storied Life

Hiroo Onoda was a World War II Japanese army intelligence officer assigned to a clandestine operation in the Philippines. After the war ended, he refused to surrender for 29 years.

Onoda lived in a hut in the mountains, carrying out guerrilla activities. After the war, authorities dropped multiple leaflets with military information and family letters urging him to surrender. It was all propaganda to Onoda. He lived in ignorance of the truth that the war had ended, which excluded him from a peaceful, civil life. After locating him in 1974, the Japanese government sent his former commanding officer to relieve him of duty. "Whatever happens," he had promised Onoda, "we'll come back for you." When he finally did, it meant Onoda was at a crossroad. He surrendered his sword. The Philippines later pardoned Onoda for crimes against their people.

Life is a story, isn't it? "Every man is hanging by a thread or clinging to a precipice," G.K. Chesterton writes. "Existence is a story, which may end up in any way." The rising action and uncertain information thicken the plot. The protagonist embraces the truth and resolves the conflict. The Japanese soldier might never end his war, but he did.

The Christian worldview sees a plot trajectory in all lives. In the rising action, the characters think they have sorted truth from propaganda. Yet, they live "in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God" (Eph. 4:17-18). But the truth leaflets keep dropping and finally someone comes and asks for their swords.

At that moment, the action stops. "All Christianity concentrates on the man at the crossroads," Chesterton writes. Will he see that the "truth is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21)? The Lord Himself has come for him. "Yes, I surrender my sword!" he cries. By faith he accepts the truth and is included in the life of God. He is pardoned for his sin and prior disbelief.

How thrilling to see yourself in that story! It means "you lay aside the old self" and are "renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:22-24).

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

This week's questions and answers focus on the Union County Senior Center. Kathy Hill is the Director and in charge of participation and activities at the Senior Center. These questions are some of the most common questions we receive, and the answers contain general information. If you have further questions, you can call the Union County Senior Center at 706-439-6105.

Q. Where is the Senior Center located?

A. The Union County Senior Center is located at 95 Senior Center Drive. If you are traveling west on Highway 515, you turn right on Meeks Avenue as if you were going to North Georgia Technical College. The first road immediately to your left is Senior Center Drive, and the Senior Center is at the bottom of the hill on the left. The Senior Center is available for Seniors who are 60 years old or older.

Q. Who do I contact about getting an elderly family member signed up for Meals on Wheels?

A. You can call the Senior Center at 706-439-6105 to get your family member signed up for the program or for additional information. The Meals on Wheels program provides home delivered meals to qualified seniors. There is no cost for this program, however everyone is allowed an opportunity to donate toward their meals if they are able to do so.

Q. What type of programs does the Senior Center offer?

A. The Senior Center is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am until 4:00 pm. They offer a wide variety of programs throughout the day which includes various exercise programs, quilting, crafts, Bingo, Wii Bowling, and even line dancing. Each day at 11:30 there is a congregate meal provided at the Senior Center also. This is a great way for seniors to get a hot meal and socialize at the same time.

Q. Are there any activities for senior citizens who have Alzheimer's?

A. On Wednesdays and Fridays from 12:30 to 3:30 the Alzheimer's Respite Program is available. To participate in this program the individual must be approved prior to participation. The Senior Center staff recommends calling and bringing the individual by for a visit to see if the program will be a good fit for them.

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Habitat for Humanity

I am excited for the opportunity to write in this column on behalf of the Habitat for Humanity of Towns/Union Counties. We have so much planned for the year of 2022, building new homes, tackling Helping Hands projects, fun-filled events, and ReStore improvements. We are always working

to bring our community together and rekindle hope in the lives of our neighbors who need it most.

Over the past few weeks, we have asked for your support in raising funds for the Jolley family home rebuild. We are so thankful for all the kind donations we have received from this community. The funds raised are going toward building materials and tools that we need to rebuild. The Jolley family home suffered during one of the massive storms we have recently endured when a tree fell into the structure. We are still accepting funds, at our Habitat for Humanity location in Blairsville, and our Donor Box link on our Facebook group page

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Habitat Happenings

Maddelyn Bailey



Letters to the Editor

Follow the Money

Dear Editor,
I am just so tired of hearing about the government spending billions of dollars to fix this and that, but nothing changes? Homelessness, for example billions and billions have been spent, yet it's worse than ever! Who is getting all this money and what are they doing with it? There must be a way to follow the money. Does anyone know how? People, we are almost \$30 trillion in debt and no one seems to care?!

Tom Bunten

Dissension Stirrers

Dear Editor,
Kudos to recent editorials by Cynthia Rafter, John Scott, and especially Linda King. Everyone is aware we are and have been under a great deal of stress and trying times in the last few years. But, adding to it all, is the venomous and bitter attacks that have been taking place in our local government.

I watched the YouTube videos of county meetings, not just watching but carefully listening. There was such venom and bitterness in the recorder's voice, and profanity with underlying anger. No wonder sheriff's deputies were present! You cannot be too careful nowadays.

While I agree wholeheartedly that we have an awesome responsibility to vote our conscience. I also detest ones who continually complain, whine and stir up dissension in a community. The Bible also speaks to this, in Proverbs 6:19, saying it is one of the things that the Lord "hates," a person who stirs up conflict and dissension.

I have firsthand seen some who find it permissible to slander and attempt to ruin reputation.

See Dean, page 5A

A Special Community

Dear Editor,
In 1873, naturalist John Muir wrote in a letter to his sister, "The mountains are calling." Apparently they still are. On any given day, a smorgasbord of license plates may be observed on our local roadways, suggesting the mountains are indeed sending out a very strong signal inviting others to our community. Someone once remarked to me, "I got here as quick as I could." That's my sentiment as well.

My wife and I love this place. The mountains, the lake, the fairgrounds, the restaurants, the people - what a wonderful place to live. We come from many different places and backgrounds and apparently, we weren't too happy there - hence our relocation. Let's make sure the

See Vickers, page 5A

Fire Awareness Week

On Jan. 14, Gov. Brian Kemp signed a proclamation for Georgia Prescribed Fire Awareness Week, observed Jan. 30 thru Feb. 5. Here is the proclamation.

"WHEREAS: The Georgia Prescribed Burning Act of 1992 declares and protects prescribed burning as a valuable and necessary forest management tool; and

"WHEREAS: Prescribed burning of Georgia's forestland is a valuable land management practice for protecting the forest from devastating wildfires and managing valuable wildlife species; and

"WHEREAS: Professional foresters and other land resource managers use prescribed burning for improving forest health, reducing hazardous forest fuels, and for reforestation; and

"WHEREAS: The Georgia Forestry Commission, partner agencies, and organizations across the state support, promote, educate, and train for the continued use of prescribed burning for public benefit and safety; and

"WHEREAS: The State of Georgia joins in thanking those land managers who protect and maintain Georgia's natural heritage for present and future generations; now

"THEREFORE: I, BRIAN P. KEMP, Governor of the State of Georgia, do hereby proclaim January 30th through February 5th, 2022, as PRESCRIBED FIRE AWARENESS WEEK in Georgia.

"In witness thereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the Executive Department to be affixed this 14th day of January in the year of our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty-Two."

This week is a window of opportunity for citizens and organizations to mobilize burn, fire, and life safety educators to unite in sharing a common interest of preventing wildfires in our communities and managing our forests as nature intended for us to.

Professional foresters like myself (50 years), always promote prescribed fire in our forests, but this week we will concentrate on educating people about the benefits. Frequent fires, set by lightning strikes and Native Americans, have shaped Georgia's ecosystems for thousands of years. Our forest ecosystems evolved with fire and continue to need the strategic application of fire that mimics this natural cycle. The plants and animals of the pine woods are accustomed to frequent fires and depend on these fires for their survival.

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RC&D Executive Director

Frank Riley



The Funeral

My father is and has been a Baptist Preacher for many years. About the time I moved to Athens to attend the University of Georgia, he was called to a church in Buena Vista, Georgia. There was a family in the church which was faithful in their attendance and giving. However, the father was never in attendance.

Dad was told the father of the family had left them years earlier and moved to Florida with another woman.

A number of years later this man died and his family wanted to bring him back home to bury him.

Dad was asked to preach this man's funeral. The day of the funeral my father went to the funeral home before visitation began to meet with the family and the funeral director. The door was locked, so he rang the doorbell which was answered by a fancy-looking man attired as and looking like a butler. The door was opened, and this fellow asked my Dad what he needed. Dad explained that he was here to preach a funeral. The very professional, prim and proper butler invited him into the building and led him down the hall to a private office. Dad and Mom were told to stay in the room until this man returned. As the funeral director left the room, the doorbell rang once more. Quickly, the funeral director walked down the hall to answer the door. My father didn't know it, but, the other family (from Florida) of the dead man was at the door.

Dad said that he waited in the office for 20-30 minutes, all the while he couldn't help to hear a heated discussion going on down the hall. After another 20 minutes Dad walked out of the office and down to the parlor where the dead man's visitation was supposed to take place. Dad looked into room, and this man's other family was in the room and removing the man from his casket. He hurriedly walked back down the hall to find the funeral director going into his office. The funeral director proceeded to scold my father for leaving the office to which he was assigned. Dad said, "Never mind me, you better get down the hall and check on those people who are taking a man out of his casket." At this point the funeral director let out a whimper and ran down the hall to check on this incident.

Dad and Mom followed to watch. The funeral director approached the family which had by this point removed the man from the coffin and were in the process of removing his clothing. The funeral director asked the family why they were removing the dead man's clothing. One of the man's sons said, "Daddy never

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Crape Myrtle Pruning

Crape myrtles are a very common tree that many people like to plant in their home landscape or you may see them lining roads in towns. There are couple of reasons why crape myrtles make great landscape trees. The first is that they are very disease and insect resistant, as there are not

too many pests that will bother them. Powdery mildew is the most serious disease issue that crape myrtles will usually have, and it rarely kills the tree.

Ambrosia beetles will attack crape myrtles, but generally they only attack trees that are already dead, dying, or stressed. Crape myrtles also come with a variety of flower colors, making them very attractive. Finally, crape myrtles come in a variety of sizes. Varieties range from dwarf to semi-dwarf to full size, meaning mature tree heights range from 3 to 30 feet tall.

Pruning is important for crape myrtles, because the blooms only form on new growth. Even more important is selecting the right sized variety for your location. If you select a variety that will grow to a good height for the spot where you're putting it, the pruning will not be difficult, because you won't be as concerned with managing the plant's size.

Now is a good time of year to prune your crape myrtles. Excessive pruning can lead to problems with disease and insects, because the tree is stressed. Bad pruning practices are called CRAPE MURDER. Crape murder generally involves topping the tree, or cutting back all the branches to 3 to 4 feet above the ground. This will result in an oddly shaped tree that produces a lot of suckers.

To properly prune a crape myrtle start at the base of the tree and work your way up. You're looking for suckers, if you find them prune those off. Once you get to where the branches are, remove crossing branches. Crossing branches will rub against each other when the wind blows and create sites where disease and insects can get in. As the tree grows you can remove branches from the lower third of the tree. Removing those branches will expose the trunk character. Some people like to prune off the old seedheads. I think they're an attractive feature. With new growth in the spring the old seedheads will fall off. On some varieties of crape myrtles you can prune in the summer after the blooms are spent to create another flush of flowers. A second bloom is difficult to force on varieties that bloom after mid-July.

A common misconception is that crape myrtles have to be pruned to produce flowers. This is not true. Pruning allows to you shape the

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Chamber of Commerce

"Oh What a Night!" We had a great time at the Awards Banquet which celebrated the 40th Anniversary of the Chamber. United Community Bank, Comfort Keepers, and Enotah CASA went all out, and if there had been a prize for the best outfit or tallest bangs, it would have been a close race.

I would like to thank Judge Hugh Stone for attending. Judge Stone was one of the original incorporators of the Chamber, and it was great to see him out and about. The Chamber finished the year with 692 members, and we welcomed 80 new members during 2021. With the addition of our new Facebook likes, we now reach over 1.04 million people, and we distributed over 6,000 Community Guides to visitors and new residents. I would say that's not a bad return on an investment in a Chamber membership.

Based on our latest numbers, Tourism in Blairsville-Union County was up by 67%, which when talking to our local businesses

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North Georgia News

Published since 1909 • Legal Organ of Union County

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Website: www.nganews.com • Email: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com • Mail: P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514

The North Georgia News is an independent and nonpartisan publication. As such, third-party views contained herein are not necessarily the opinions or positions of this newspaper, e.g. advertising, press releases, editorial content, perspectives expressed in articles covering local events, etc.

Publication No: 001505

Advertising, News deadlines Friday at 4 p.m. • Mail Service for all subscriptions except 30512, 30514 & 30572 - One Year \$40. In county, carrier delivered subscription is \$5. 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. 24, 1988, 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, Georgia 30514

Paris... continued from Page 4A

Once approved, the Alzheimer's patient can be brought on the above days and dropped off to participate in the programs that are tailored to their needs. There are volunteers and employees available to help them with their basic needs and lead the programs. They offer music activities, hand/eye coordination exercises, a flexibility program, and bingo. Refreshments are also served during this time.

Q. Is transportation available to and from the Senior Center?

A. Transportation can be provided to and from the Senior Center. For details concerning the service area contact the Senior Center. On certain days during the week the Senior Center Transportation will also take seniors to do their grocery shopping.

Q. What is the cost for a Senior Citizen to participate

in the activities and benefit from the services provided?

A. There is no fee to join the Senior Center. If you join, you can participate in most of the activities and programs that are offered on a regular basis. If individuals are able to donate or make contributions for their participation or for their use of the services, they are welcome to do so, but there are no required fees.

There are some fee-based programs such as Tai Chi and Yoga. There are fees because these classes are offered from an outside source. If someone has a Silver Sneakers card you can scan the card upon entry and you will not have to pay for the regular exercise classes - even if you are not a member of the center. However, a lot of people do not have the card and joining the center ensures you can take the exercise classes free.

Chamber...continued from Page 4A

was a direct reflect in the amount of business conducted in 2021.

We want to congratulate our 2021 award winners:

Missy Mashburn of Mountain Home Health Services was named Ambassador of the Year.

ENOTAH CASA was named Business of the Year.

Tommy Townsend of Granddaddy Mimms was named the Person of the Year.

What a great year to be in our community!

Several events that are just around the corner are our Eggs & Issues and An Eve-

ning With the STARS.

Please call the Chamber to reserve your seat to hear about the tourism forecast at the Eggs & Issues on Feb. 2 from Chris Clark at the Georgia Chamber. Or join us as we meet and cheer on our STAR Students and Teachers at the Evening With the STARS event on Feb. 10. We have a year full of great events, from the Wedding Expo, our golf tournament, to a fashion show - and everything in between. We have something for everyone, and we hope you will take advantage of some of our events and programs.

Habitat...continued from Page 4A

entitled, "Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties ReStore." The Jolley family home rebuild is an example of what many of our Helping Hands projects consist of. Helping Hands is about helping community members with home repairs. Our employees and volunteers work together to bring about safe and reliable housing for those in need.

We have "Helping Hands" donation boxes at multiple locations in an effort to raise funds for projects like these. Locations currently include: Daniel's Restaurant (Breakfast/Lunch location), Abide Coffee, Cabin Coffee, Skillet Café, Blairsville Grits n' Greens Restaurant, Lucky's, Hole In The Wall, and Teppanyaki Time. Be sure check these locations out in your travels!

I encourage you to continue to stop by our ReStore, where we receive newly donated items every day, with sales varying from 25% off furniture or \$1 days! We are always working to improve our ReStore with new displays and changing arrangements to help you find exactly what you're looking for. Employees and volunteers at the ReStore are always ready to serve you, whether you have questions on how to get involved in our organization, or are interested in buying, or simply browsing.

Follow our Facebook group (Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties ReStore) for updates on daily sales, newly donated items coming through our store, and further information on Helping Hands projects and events!

Riley...continued from Page 4A

Fire is as natural as sunshine, rain and wind in many plant communities including upland pine, pine flatwoods, marshes, and wet prairies. Fire also benefits many of the rare animal species in our state that are declining. Some of these declines are caused almost totally by fire exclusion.

Frequent fires prevent the build-up of flammable fuels in the forest that set the stage for destructive wildfires when ignition does occur. "Prescribed burning means the controlled application of fire to existing vegetative fuels under specific environmental conditions and following appropriate precautionary measures, which causes the fire to be confined to a pre-determined area and accomplishes one or more planned land management objectives, or to mitigate catastrophic wildfires." Georgia Prescribed Burning Act, 1992. Prescribed burning is conducted by experienced, trained, and certified practitioners on both public and private lands throughout Georgia.

These professionals assess forest conditions, determine the type of fire needed, and then write a "prescription" for the application of fire. Prescribed fire managers take great care to minimize any temporary inconveniences created by smoke. Smoke management plans for prescribed burns are designed so that smoke-sensitive areas like roads and residences, are not negatively affected by the burn. Smoke from prescribed fires does not contribute appreciably to air quality issues since the practice typically avoids times of stagnant summer air. However, uncontrolled wildfires usually occur during the summer when there is already a bad urban air quality problem. We can reduce the risk of wildfires and the resulting smoke or air quality problems with well-timed prescribed fires. No other tool can so effectively remove the hazardous buildup of woodland fuels and help maintain our forests.

We will have a North Georgia Prescribed fire workshop in June in Jasper so stay tuned for the announcement. Our goal is to get our forests back into the fire cycle as nature intended. Check the Georgia Prescribed Fire website www.garxfire.com for more information on prescribed fire and registration information.

On Feb. 26 at North Georgia Technical College in Clarksville, we will have a Learn & Burn workshop where participants will attend a half day in the classroom learning about prescribed burning and then we will go out and strike a match and get hand-on to see how prescribed burning is done by forest management professionals. For more information go to www.info.ccrd@gmail.com.

Vickers...

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things we didn't like there don't re-establish themselves here. Big city habits, attitudes and especially driving techniques are not needed here.

Let's keep the North Georgia Mountains as God intended them to be - a beautiful place to live.

Gene Vickers

Dean...

continued from Page 4A

tions. I can speak for myself, it won't work, and will eventually backfire on you, for you will reap what you sow.

My family was not born and bred in these beautiful North Georgia Mountains, but when we came here, we respected everyone here and their ways. We did not try to bring our ways and opinions and force them on anyone. We feel we are blessed to be a part of this beautiful community, and we remember we CHOSE to move and live here.

If, at any time, we don't feel happy and content, we can vote our conscience, or... we can move. The roads go north, south, east and west. Simple.

Scarlett Dean

Cummings...continued from Page 4A

liked wearing his socks or underwear wrong side out. So, we are checking to make sure you put them on right." The funeral director said, "But, you can't..." Then he was interrupted by the son pulling a .44 magnum from his pocket, and after pointing the gun at the funeral director, the young man said, "Yes, I can."

After leaving his first wife, the now dead man had moved to Florida and took up with another woman. They raised a family in the swamps of north Florida. Before the man died he requested that he be buried back home in Georgia. During the funeral, my father read the obituary which listed his family, and of course, everyone was confused. This was especially true when his first wife was mentioned. The same article called the second wife and mother to the second set of siblings as a very good friend of the deceased man.

After the funeral my father walked down the aisle leading the family and the deceased man to the front of the church. Daddy opened the door of the hearse and waited for the casket to be placed inside. At this point, the six sons of the deceased man took the casket away from the pall bearers and placed the coffin in the back of a red pick-up truck. The funeral director approached the young men and said, "You can't..." The young man pulled out the gun, and the funeral director said, "Yes, you can."

The sight of a red Dodge pick-up truck leading a funeral procession while hauling six men and a casket must have been quite the spectacle. The family from north Florida said their Daddy always wanted his body to be hauled to the graveyard in the back of a red truck, and no highfalutin funeral director was going to stop them. To top it all off, the sound system of the truck was blaring a duet of George Jones and Tammy Wynette singing the man's favorite song, "The Race is On and Here Comes a Heartache."

After the funeral was over, one of the sons asked my Dad where he got the information regarding his family. He was told it came from

Fowler...

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That renewal provides you the clarity to resist the propaganda of a culture that is untethered from reality and ultimate truth. You live a righteous and holy life because that's your new identity.

The life of faith is the denouement of the story, the new normal. It is the beginning of an amazing grace story, a story of love, peace, and purpose despite the daily reminders of your former clandestine life. You have a new story because something happened at that crossroads. You surrendered to the Truth. His name is Jesus.

Williams...

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tree. If you have a spot where the tree can grow and does not need shaping for space concerns, pruning is not necessary. I encourage everyone to do some research on finding the variety that will fit in the space that they have, because that will solve a lot of pruning issues before they arise. Pruning crape myrtles properly allows accentuates the natural beauty that they have.

If you have questions about crape myrtle pruning contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Dyer...

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to volunteer for support roles; however, we also need people to volunteer as firefighters who will enter a burning building and fight fire.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter, please contact Union County Fire at 706-439-6091 for more information.

American Red Cross Volunteers

Make a difference in your community! As a volunteer with the American Red Cross, you can help families recover after a home fire, train individuals in first aid and CPR, support America's military families, or take on any number of other roles that make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient.

Get started at <https://www.redcross.org/local/georgia/volunteer.html> or call your NWGA chapter office to ask about volunteer opportunities 844-536-6226.

the obituary given to him by the funeral director. This fellow immediately accosted the director, and before long, both families were embroiled in a testy discussion. Dad and the Funeral Director eased away from the discussion and watched as the families began to argue and then fight. Eventually, the Sheriff was called, and 13 members from both sides were arrested. This man who loved George Jones and Tammy Wynette had quite the send off!