

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Support Firefighter Class

Union County Fire Department, your fire department, is a combination department meaning there are both career and volunteer firefighters who respond to emergencies in Union County. The department is mostly volunteer. These volunteers are a group of dedicated men and women who sacrifice time and effort to complete fire training and to respond to emergencies. All firefighters must complete training and all volunteer firefighters start their firefighting journey by completing the Basic Support Firefighter Course.

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



Basic Support Firefighter is the entry level course for the department. Not all firefighters go into burning buildings. Some operate firetrucks, pull fire hose, provide water supply, or generally support firefighting operations. That is the Support Firefighter's role. Volunteers must complete the Basic Support Firefighter course and pass the Georgia Firefighters Standards and Training Council's Basic Support Firefighter Test. The department has just completed a Basic Support Firefighter course and have graduated several new members of the department.

The class began last month and the students have been very dedicated and energetic during the class. They have been learning the basics of fire and firefighting operations. The class began with orientation and fire behavior where students were introduced to the science of fire. The class then taught students subjects such as communications, personal protective equipment, fire hoses, support functions, and fire ground operations.

Students must also complete a basic hazardous materials course. The course, Hazardous Materials Awareness, is an entry level course that introduces students to hazardous materials. The class includes chemical characteristics, common containers and transport, how to identify hazardous materials, and how to notify supporting agencies to help safely handle a hazardous materials incident. The Hazardous Material Awareness course is part of the basic requirement to be a firefighter.

Both courses include a great deal of reading and studying that recruits must do on their own time. At almost every class, recruits practice the skills they have learned. Recruits are drilled on the use of their personal protective equipment and how to operate

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Who Are You?

His call surprised me, mainly because we were only somewhat acquainted. The pastor wanted me to speak at his church - Maranatha Baptist in Plains, Georgia.

Perhaps you associate it with peanut farming or the toothy grin of their famous Sunday School teacher. I accepted the invite, praying the Lord would speak truth, to me and to the church. Everyone wants to know truth, right?

On the appointed evening, I arrived early and took my place as the festivities began. A few minutes after the opening welcome, the farmer-teacher steps out of the evening darkness into the church, without wife or security shadow. He was one of four fellows the pastor called forward to take the evening collection.

Then I was up. The sermon text was Jesus' eyebrow-raising encounter at Jacob's well with a woman whose lengthy reputation followed her there (John 4). Yet He saw her. He knew her. He shocked her, not just by talking to her but asking for a drink. "If you knew who is speaking to you, you would have asked for water," He said. "He would give you living water." His well is different, far beyond Jacob's.

He wasn't done with her. She wasn't done with Him either. You can tell she wondered, "Who are you?" He said, "The water I give will become a well of water springing up to eternal life." Then He revealed just how well he knew her, mentioning private details. That got her attention. She sought refuge in her religious heritage, then spoke of the promised Messiah. That was his moment. "I who speak to you am He," Jesus said.

That's who He is. The promise fulfilled, the one who sees you, knows your name, and offers you the well of water springing up to eternal life. Jesus offers you a new identity in Him. By faith, that's who you are.

After the service in Plains, he was the first to thank me for the message. He said his name and shook my hand. "I know who you are, Mr. President," I said.

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Many people do not realize that the US Census Bureau administers survey instruments not only every 10 years (Decennial Census), but at different times and for different reasons. The Census Bureau administers, demographic surveys, economic surveys, sponsored surveys, and special topics surveys as they are requested. In looking over the data, it was brought to my attention that results of the 2020 US Census survey might not be readily available to our residents. This week's questions address some of the data that is often requested, and the information comes directly from the United States Census Bureau at census.gov.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Q. What is the current population of Union County, GA? How does the current data compare with data from the 2010 census?

A. According to the Census Bureau, 2020 data shows that Union County, GA has a population of 24,632. This is an increase of 3,276 over the 2010 data reported, which was 21,356. This indicates a 15.3% increase.

Q. We have always thought that the majority of Union County consists of people who came here after retirement. Does the data support that thought?

A. The most recent available estimates show that 33.7% of the Union County population are over the age of 65 years of age.

Q. How does the age of Union County residents compare with other North Georgia counties?

A. The same resources show 65+ age residents in Towns County at 34.9%; Fannin County at 30.6%; Gilmer County at 25.5%; and White County at 23.3%.

Q. It seems reasonable to expect that the total number of houses in Union County increased over the span of time between census/surveys. How much of an increase was reported?

A. The data compares 2010 to 2019, and the 2010 data shows 14,052 housing units in Union County as compared to the 2019 data that shows 14,995 housing units. This is a 7% increase within that span of time. The total number of households in 2010 were reported at 9116, while the total number reported for 2019 was 9743. This is also an increase of 7% within that span of time.

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Habitat for Humanity

On Tuesday, Feb. 1, we held a small announcement ceremony to reveal the decision of the Family Selection Committee regarding our newest Habitat homeowner! Habitat board members, employees and volunteers gathered in the early afternoon at the Habitat ReStore to celebrate. The Family Selection Committee presented Brandy Snow with a symbolic key, and a sentiment, "Your family has touched our hearts, and we are excited to build you and your family a Habitat home." Teresa Colwell spoke on behalf of the Family Selection Committee and the Habitat board.

Habitat Happenings

Madelyn Bailey



Brandy Snow and her two boys, Wyatt and Elijah, were so excited to hear the news. Wyatt and Elijah were already telling us what color they would like their rooms. Brandy stated that she was expecting this because she had been praying for it for so long. God is good! Habitat for Humanity and its members are so happy

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Letters to the Editor

Support ESPLOST

Dear Editor,

I was fortunate enough to grow up in Blairsville and graduate with the Class of 1995. My children will also graduate from Union County Schools, but it is a very different school system now than it was 27 years ago. This difference is attributable to the Education SPLOST and how the system has used this one penny most wisely.

Before the Fine Arts building, performances were held in the gym or cafeteria. There was not a theatre arts program. There was not a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) program for our students to advance and get ahead in their studies, allowing them to graduate early or take college/technical school classes or participate in work-based learning. The CTAE (Career, Technical and Agricultural Education) wing of the high school allows students to advance in nursing before post-secondary education. The Future Farmers of America now have a state-of-the-art Agriscience building that is constantly in use.

I am very proud of this continued sales tax and the advances our school has made with that \$0.01. I hope you vote YES for this tax to continue.

Amy Henson

On SPLOST Misconceptions

Dear Editor,

In the January County Meeting, SPLOST was being address to clear misconceptions by some members of the public. One item addressed in the meeting was, "Union County has not abandoned any SPLOST projects per each approved referendum. Union County has adhered to all SPLOST related statutes as related to the administration of these SPLOST programs."

SPLOST 2 Referendum called for the renovation, expansion, and equipping of an existing courthouse, of an existing E 911 center, the acquisition of fire engines and rescue equipment, the acquisition, construction, and equipping of the Meeks Park Community Pavilion, the renovation, expansion, and equipping of an existing library, the acquisition, construction, and equipping of a new Community/Youth center, and the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, repair, improvement, and installation of roads, streets, and bridges. The county abandoned the Meeks Park Pavilion and the Community/Youth center to name a few. Grant money was given by the state for the Pavilion that was not built. Where did that money go?

The 2008 audit shows a \$5,051,951 deficit, 2009 audit shows a deficit of \$7,668,013,

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Letters to the Editor

Town Hall Meetings

Dear Citizens of Union County,

Our Commissioner is putting more effort into ensuring we are not heard than he is in hearing what we have to say.

In November, three citizens got up to speak on the agenda at the Commissioner Meeting. One spoke on misappropriation of SPLOST fund spending, another spoke on concerning land deals made with taxpayer money, and I spoke on patterns I had seen in the way our Commissioner speaks to our fellow citizens (gaslighting, silencing, villainizing and separating dissenting voices). His response was that we were lying and spreading disinformation, but he was unable to tell us what was said that was true and what was not. He did say that I am a "good person" and that what I said was simply "uncomfortable" (I assure you it's far more uncomfortable to be on the receiving end of the behaviors). A man asked why he was limiting our time allotment for the Q&A section, and the Commissioner had the deputy remove the man from the room. (Videos of this are on the "Voices of Union County, GA" YouTube channel).

The following month, the county attorney opened the meeting by announcing we can now only speak for three minutes instead of five and that we are now limited to only ask questions based on what was spoken about in the agenda. He also had increased the presence of deputies by an intimidating amount. When I asked why he increased the amount of deputies, he responded by giving personal details pertaining to my

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Pro ESPLOST

Dear Editor,

As a Union county resident "of a certain age" - retired and with no children in the school system - I will nevertheless be voting to continue our ESPLOST tax.

I'll be voting in favor of continuing this tax because I care about the education and well-being of our community's students. I want them to have a modern, safe and well-staffed place to attend class. I want this county's school system to continue to be respected for its high educational standards and fiscal responsibility. I want to know that I will have had a tiny part in ensuring that Union County's prosperity will continue long after I'm not around to enjoy it. A well-educated populace is one of the best ways to do this.

Far from being a "disaster for families" as stated in a previous letter to the editor regarding this issue, continuing this tax can only serve to strengthen families, as it allows our school sys-

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Ausborn

A young man came to Lumpkin County to find gold during the Georgia Gold Rush in the early 1830s. He didn't strike it rich, but he did find the love of his life. And sometime during the year of 1839, Ausborn Rogers Mabry married Elizabeth Fatima York. They spent the next 40 years raising their family in the Dahlonega and Dawsonville area. One of their daughters happened to marry a fellow by the name of Daniel T. Hyde.

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



He fought with some Georgia volunteers in defense of his state against the Union Army during the Civil War. For some unexplained reason, perhaps it was the Oklahoma Land Rush, Ausborn and Fatima left their home in Lumpkin County and moved to Oklahoma during the 1880s. They never met their grandson, Clifford Hyde, who would later become my great grandfather.

Clifford told my Dad that his ancestors were Cherokee. But, no one has ever been able to prove it. Clifford was raised up around the Dawsonville area and later migrated to North Alabama. My grandmother told me a story about his search for Cherokee Gold.

Sometime during the 1920s, an old Cherokee man showed up at the Hyde House in Phil Campbell. It was late in the evening, just before dark. It was beginning to thunder, and darkness was coming on the land. The family was just sitting down to a meal of corn bread and fresh vegetables. The family could not afford meat. The children were all barefooted. Clifford dreamt of the day he could afford to buy shoes and new clothes for his kids. Suddenly, there was a knock at the front door. This took everyone by surprise, because they rarely had visitors.

Clifford opened the door, and there stood an ancient Cherokee Indian. He asked the family for some food and a place to spend the night. As the old man sat down to eat, he began to tell the family his story. He figured his age to be close to 100, and he had walked all the way from Oklahoma. He came back the same way he had traveled as a young boy, on the Trail of Tears. He told Clifford that he wanted to see his home land in North Alabama one more time before he died. Somehow, he also knew that Clifford was Cherokee.

The next morning the family and the old man had a breakfast of eggs, biscuits and fresh blackberry jam. The old man told Clifford he was just a few miles short of his destination and wanted to get started as quick as possible. But he wanted to give Clifford something for his hospitality. He stated that 85 years earlier, his people knew the soldiers were coming to force their

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Chamber of Commerce

I want to thank Chris Clark, President of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, for being our speaker at last week's Eggs & Issues. Chris provided the crowd with an informative forecast of what we can expect in 2022 and beyond.

Did you know that many of the hotels and restaurants are having to replace many of their workers with robots because they just can't get enough employees to fill all the open positions? Or that the forecast for business travel is decreasing because businesses have discovered that most of the transactions handled in person can now be handled virtually instead? Being a retired accountant, I understand this from a financial position, but I still think face-to-face is the best way to conduct business.

Good news, Georgia! We are ranked 11th when it comes to infrastructure of the future and, the Governor has allocated additional funds to improve our position. This includes telecommunication, freight and logistics, cybersecurity,

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



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The U.S. Census Bureau defines a household to include all the persons who occupy a housing unit as their USUAL PLACE OF RESIDENCE. This also aligns with what we know about some families who have second homes here in Union County.

Q. How many people live in each home?

A. The data shows that in 2010, there were 2.18 people per household. Persons per household in 2020 was reported at 2.33. This is a 7% increase in people per household.

Q. How many businesses are located in Union County?

A. Per the definition used

by the U.S. Census Bureau, an establishment is a single physical location at which business is conducted or where services or industrial operations are performed. The 2019 data for employer establishments in Union County is reported at 564. Some additional interesting information includes: In 2019, 78.6% of workers in Union County, GA drove alone to work, followed by those who carpoled to work (11.2%) and those who worked at home (7.76%).

As mentioned earlier, this information came from the U.S. Census Bureau. Full definitions and further breakdown can be found online at data/census.gov.

Habitat... continued from Page 4A

to be a part of this incredible home build. Habitat members are humbled to be the hands in bringing about blessings in the lives of our community members. The process is underway for Brandy Snow and her family as we embark on the planning stage for their partnership with us.

Local businesses are already volunteering to help. The Marina Station in Hiawassee will be holding a benefit spaghetti dinner to raise funds for the new Habitat homeowner and family. The event will be on March 2nd, and all the proceeds will go towards the

Habitat home build. Be sure to mark your calendars and be a part of this exciting time in our community by coming out and showing your support.

If you are interested in offering your skills in building their home, or in simply donating, please contact the Habitat for Humanity Restore at 706-745-7101. We have opportunities for you to get involved and be a part of changing lives in our community. We would love to connect with you!

More updates to come on the Habitat home and the new family!

Cummings... continued from Page 4A

departure to Oklahoma. They also knew they would not be allowed to take much with them. Therefore, his family and the other Cherokee families had hidden all their gold nearby.

The old man related the gold had been hidden in a rock face above the Turkey's Foot. This place was called the Turkey's Foot because it was a place where three creeks came together to form one creek. From the top of the rock face the place looked just like the track of a turkey. Clifford and his sons looked for this gold for 40 years without ever finding an ounce of it. Clifford went to his grave longing to find the gold at the Turkey's Foot.

How does this story relate back to Ausborn and Elizabeth Mabry? When this couple migrated to Oklahoma, they settled in a place called Briartown. Ausborn was some kind of minister. We have not determined whether he went to Oklahoma to be with family or did he go to serve the Cherokee on the mission field. Briartown is in Muscogee County and is a part of the reservation of the Western Band of the Cherokee Nation. We still do not know for sure that either Ausborn or Elizabeth were Cherokee.

But, Clifford Hyde told my Dad, "I am a Cherokee Indian, and my ancestors came out of North Carolina." And the old Cherokee that came to the Hyde House in the 1920s told Clifford and his family that he stopped at their house because he knew they were of Cherokee descent. It's a mystery my family has never solved. But, one thing is certain: Clifford never found any gold.

There is still gold in the hills of northern Georgia, northern Alabama, southeastern Tennessee and western North Carolina. You may find it difficult to find just as my Great Grandfather found. However, there are some things here that are more valuable than gold; a sunrise over the Blue Ridge, a fern covered rock face on Hightower Bald, the sound of the wind blowing through a stand of White Pines on Chimney Top Mountain, the smell of a ramp patch on any north facing slope, a hoary frost on the peeling bark of a big Yellow Birch on Sassafras Knob. No, you can't spend these to purchase a new car. But when it comes time to sit around and count memories, you'll find something which money can't buy!

Pittman... continued from Page 4A

and 2010 a \$286,404 deficit for SPLOST 2. SPLOST 3 started in 2009.

The county failed to print a published report required by O.C.G.A. 48-8-122. Had the county followed the law the taxpayers would have been informed that several projects were not started, not complete, the projects were behind schedule, projects were underfunded and there were no excess proceeds listed.

Who establishes the revenue estimate and the project costs specified in the resolution and on the ballot?

The county is responsible for estimating the SPLOST revenues expected to be collected

over the life of the SPLOST, as well as the costs of all projects to be financed. The county should also ensure that the sum of all project costs, including those submitted by municipalities, equals the estimated revenues. Because all approved projects must be funded as provided under the Dickey case, counties should be careful not to overestimate SPLOST revenues, thereby requiring the use of other county funds to make up any shortfalls.

There are no misconceptions by some members of the public but many misconceptions in the county's commissioner's office.

Linda Pittman

Moore... continued from Page 4A

having updated my driver's license two months prior (he had investigated me after my speaking in November), alluding to me only being here for two months despite the fact that I had spoken with him at every meeting since the tax meeting last summer, and said, "Excuse me if I don't care what you have to say." I reminded him I'd been here much longer and that my great-grandfather was a sole commissioner here. His response was, "Your great-grandfather would be ashamed of you just like your family here now is ashamed of you." I said, "Excuse me!!!" and he had the deputy remove me from the room.

This most recent January meeting, he further silenced us by forcing the speaker to stand at a podium in the audience without a microphone and then closed the meeting without allowing the usual Q&A, forcing the packed house of citizens to stand in the hallway wondering why they were not allowed to be heard.

It is now VERY apparent that we are in need of a Town Hall meeting for the citizens to gather, share ideas, ask questions, and discuss our needs as the citizens funding this county. The appropriate venue for this

would be the Civic Center, the Community Center or possibly even the Courthouse. A petition must be made by the citizens to our Commissioner to provide a venue for a Town Hall meeting for the citizens of Union County. In the meantime, anyone willing to provide a venue would be a great help and true patriot! It will be most effective to hold the meetings the first week of the month so that we have two weeks to gather our thoughts and another two weeks to prepare ourselves for the local city and county meetings.

I'm aware we have become complacent in our understanding of what a government For the People, By the People actually looks like, and I'm aware there will be growing pains as we wake up and begin to take back the power of the people's voice. I'm also aware that, no matter how polite we are in standing our ground, it's going to look like a fight. But this isn't a fight. This is what our Constitutions were created to protect, and it's very necessary we do what we can to be heard by those who took an oath to serve us by protecting the Constitutions. Much Love,
Alexis Moore

Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

energy, health care, trade and supply chain, and E-mobility.

One of the challenges that Georgia faces is the "War for Talent." Many of these issues need to be addressed now while the economy is still strong and before inflation does irreparable damage. It is said that some of the solutions are for businesses to provide more benefits and flexible schedules to employees. (But isn't that where we were 40 or 50 years ago?)

There was also a very interesting discussion on what is in the forecast for the use of electric vehicles verses conventional auto in 2030, but we will have to leave that for another time.

Don't forget to check our websites or social media so you don't miss out on our future events.

Stay safe and warm!

Williams...

continued from Page 4A

Each soil test costs \$10. For example, if you have a low lying spot, a steep slope, and a wooded area, each one of these would need a unique soil sample done. When you receive the results from the lab they will have recommendations for you based on the types of plants that you have or plan to have.

Bring soil samples into your County Extension Office. If you have questions regarding the soil sampling or the results you can call your local Extension office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

various pieces of fire equipment that may be used on the fire scene.

Fighting fire requires a great deal of knowledge and skill. Recruits must be dedicated to the service and be willing to complete the multitude of training to become a firefighter. We are very proud of the recruits and their commitment to the training and to the department. If you would like to become a volunteer firefighter, please contact Headquarters/Station 1 at 706-439-6091.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Smith...

continued from Page 4A

tem to expand in response to the accelerating pace of population growth in the county.

Many of these new folks are here specifically because of the good reputation our county schools enjoy. Many other people come to Union county as tourists and part-time residents. Their dollars contribute to ESPLOST revenue, too, effectively increasing the benefit to the local school system.

I'm all too aware of the rising rate of inflation and come away with a healthy case of "sticker shock" every time I drive away from the grocery store or gas station, but the educational needs of our county's children don't go away during challenging financial times. Waiting for a more convenient financial climate would be doing them a disservice.

Nancy Smith
Suches

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



February 2, 2022
In memory of
Harold Gibson
By: The Union County Historical Society

February 13, 2022
In memory of
John & Virginia Meeks
In remembrance of their wedding anniversary
By: Terry & Ginger Meeks

February 14, 2022
In memory of
Frank Shuler
On the occasion of his birthday
By: Betty Jane Shuler

February 18, 2022
In memory of
Alondra Gonzalez
In remembrance on her 20th birthday
By: Giusseppe Arrazzaeta

Bell ringing information at 706-745-5493