

Opinions

Everybody has one...

COVID-19 Response

COVID-19 has had an impact on everything and everyone. For some, it is an occasional conversation topic and inconvenience when they want to go out. For others, it is a constant subject due to them having to deal with restrictions, protective procedures, or even treating the sick every day. From an Emergency Management point of view, this has been the longest and most involved operation that we have seen. We have been performing many operations and tasks over the last year to either prepare for or respond to this pandemic.

Our Emergency Operations Center has officially been open since March 12th. We have been coordinating any effort to prepare for or respond to this event. We have been collecting numbers on various aspects of the virus in our area since April, when we had our first case. These numbers come from several different areas that are available to most people, and some come from local and state organizations.

We have assisted in obtaining personal protective equipment (PPE) for the county government and many other organizations that were in need. Testing became a big issue during the summer and fall. We provided information on how and where to get a test and what to do if positive or exposed. We also serve on several task forces that research and advise organizations on situational awareness and protective procedures.

Another operation that we are undertaking is assisting numerous organizations with the procedures for obtaining FEMA reimbursement. The COVID-19 pandemic was declared a Major Disaster in March of 2020. This allows local and state governments as well as some nonprofit organizations to apply for public assistance to be reimbursed for costs that apply to COVID-19 response. Navigating these procedures can be challenging, and we are assisting these organizations with that process. We are also collecting information to apply for our own assistance to reimburse Union County.

The latest operation is the assistance with vaccinations. We have been working with the local Department of Public Health, Union County Government, Union County Recreation, and many volunteers to administer the vaccinations as they become available. We are limited on the number of vaccinations that we receive. We

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



Nature's God

I have found that the most inspiring use of social media is to enjoy the beauty of creation as posted by friends. They see, they admire, they share. Simple formula. I have done the same.

I have seen the ancient Appalachians framing horses and green pastures. Hikers on high hills marvel at rock formations and unusual flora. Soaring reds and lavenders trail the setting sun promising, "I'll see you on the other side." Today's warmth lays aside for tomorrow's gentle snow. Green holly is bejeweled in red and capped in white. Now do the daffodils awake so soon? The hungry honey bee considers the humble chickweed's purple blossom her royal feast.

I'm no poet, but the Creator is and nature is his scroll. He beckons you to see what he has done, and marvel. The Bible says, "Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). If you look at nature and marvel, then you know enough about God to honor him as God.

George Washington Carver certainly did. He said, "I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in." Carver was born into slavery in Missouri. He became the first black student at Iowa State in 1891, and earned two degrees in agriculture.

As a longtime researcher at Tuskegee Institute, he found alternatives to cotton which was depleting the soil. He developed hundreds of products from peanuts and sweet potatoes. He told of his inspiration. "When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'That knowledge is reserved for me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'Well George, that's more nearly your size.' And he told me."

Carver came to faith as a child. He saw a boy walking to Sunday School. "I asked him what prayer was and what they said. I do not remember what he said; I only remember that as soon as he left I climbed up into the loft, knelt down by the barrel of corn and prayed as best I could. That was my simple conversion."

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All Things New
Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. What is the status of the COVID-19 situation in Union County?

A. At press deadline time (12 noon on Thursday, February 18, 2021) Union County is reported to have had 1,889 cases of COVID-19 with 62 deaths. Most of these deaths are in elderly populations and are split about 50/50 between males and females. Most recently, Union General had their highest number of hospitalized COVID-19 inpatients. During the week of January 15, approximately 38 individuals were being cared for at Union General hospital. The numbers have since gone down significantly, and we are grateful for that.

Q. Who is giving the COVID-19 vaccine in Union County?

A. The Georgia Department of Public Health website provides a link to a document detailing which organizations have requested vaccines. According to this list, these Union County organizations have ordered and have been giving the vaccine: Blairsville Internal Medicine, Ingles Pharmacy, Union County Health Department, and Union General Hospital. Any organization wishing to participate in giving the vaccine can contact the Department of Public Health.

Q. What about Walmart, Walgreens, and CVS? On TV they talk about these companies participating in the vaccine process.

A. According to the maps located on the Georgia Department of Public Health website, these businesses do participate in other towns/cities; however, the Blairsville, GA locations currently do not give COVID-19 vaccines.

Q. Where are we in meeting the demands of those wishing to get the vaccine?

A. The state of Georgia currently has 1,181 providers receiving vaccines, and as of press deadline, a total of 1,958,100 vaccines have been given across the state. According to the Department of Public Health Vaccine Dashboard, Union County has administered 6,754 vaccines. In Union County, a mass vaccination clinic was held last month, and the follow-up second vaccine clinic is planned to occur very soon. Recent freezing weather tem-

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris



Raising the Flag

On Feb. 23, 1945, during the bloody Battle for Iwo Jima, U.S. Marines from the 3rd Platoon, E Company, 2nd Battalion, 28th Regiment, 5th Division took the crest of Mount Suribachi, the island's highest peak and most strategic position, and raised the U.S. flag. Marine photographer Louis Lowery was with them and recorded the event.

American soldiers fighting for control of Suribachi's slopes cheered the raising of the flag, and several hours later more Marines headed up to the crest with a larger flag. Joe Rosenthal, a photographer with the Associated Press, met them along the way and recorded the raising of the second flag along with a motion-picture cameraman. Rosenthal took three photographs atop Suribachi. The first, which showed five Marines and one Navy corpsman struggling to hoist the heavy flagpole, became the most reproduced photograph in history and won for him a Pulitzer Prize. Of the other two photos,

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Military Musings
Janice Walters-Taylor



Letters to the Editor

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Letters to the Editor

Special Needs Scholarship

Dear Editor,
When we single out our elected officials, usually it's to express opposition or to complain. It's equally as important to draw attention to them when they're working hard on policies that help their constituents.

Our state senator, Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega), deserves recognition for leading on an issue that will help thousands of Georgia children with special needs get access to the education they need to grow and thrive.

Gooch has authored legislation that would significantly improve access to the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship - a program that's a lifesaver for families like mine.

My daughter Lucy is on the autism spectrum and has cognitive disabilities. In recent decades, we as a society have come to recognize that children with these special needs can learn and thrive in an educational environment that provides them with the tools they need.

The vast majority of students with special needs in Georgia attend their local public school, where they benefit from dedicated, specialized educators and education plans tailored directly to them.

Lucy attended her public school through the third grade. By then, we knew that she wasn't advancing in math and language skills at the rate she should have been.

I'd heard about the Special Needs Scholarship and began to explore that possibility. We knew she needed a chance to try somewhere different, but frankly, with multiple children, we couldn't afford private school.

We're one of the lucky ones who got the scholarship early in my daughter's school career. In third grade, she enrolled at Mountain Area Christian Academy, and it's made all the difference. We've now been in the scholarship program for nine years, and it's so blessed my daughter and my family that we see as a gift from God. Lucy is a happy, healthy teenager who's achieved enough academically that she's now able to aid the learning of younger students with special needs at her school.

Gooch's legislation, if passed, would result in more families like mine having access to this benefit. Too many students whom the scholarship was intended to help get locked out of the program by bureaucratic barriers. The scholarship served 5,023 students in the 2019-2020 school year, just 2.6% percent of eligible students.

These reforms would make sure that all students with special needs qualify (whereas the current law excludes certain groups of students); that students get the full amount of scholarship they deserve; that students from foster care can

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Rambling Around

My great-great-grandfather was counted twice in the 1850 census. Once was in Union County, Georgia, and the other was in Macon County North, Carolina. Why twice? I am not sure, but, in 1850 Clay County, North Carolina, did not yet exist. Also, Towns County was not created until 1856.

In essence, geographically, things were not as they are today. Macon County, North Carolina, and Union County, Georgia, were very close to each other. So, my 2x great grandfather Hiram lived very close to the state line, probably in present day Towns County, and was counted by two different census takers in 1850. I have yet to track down the exact whereabouts of his residence. However, I have experienced the country in which he lived.

A group of us left Blairsville the other day and drove over to Towns County and on up into Scattaway. Our group of Milton Bradley, Sheldon Henderson, Tom Starrett and myself parked our vehicle at the end of a Forest Service Road and began to climb some 1,900 feet over about 2 1/2 miles before reaching the crest of the Blue Ridge. We weren't cold, however, the higher we climbed the more snow we found. Our journey carried us by numerous waterfalls and some large trees.

I do not know how the 30-inch locust we found survived throughout the years. It was particularly prized by early settlers because its wood is very rot resistant. People have used them for years as fence posts. Locust posts can be found still standing as a testimony to a long-forgotten pasture after the barbed wire has rusted away.

We also found what a lot of old timers call a Spanish Oak. I have heard the term used many times over the years and have always assumed that Spanish Oak is another name for a Southern Red Oak. However, I have learned that many people use the term for any oak other than a White Oak. These Spanish Oaks are a good producer of acorns, while the White Oaks are not as prolific. Last year, these Spanish Oaks produced lots of acorns. The acorns are high in tannic acid, resulting in a bitter taste which delays their consumption by wildlife until late winter when there is not much for animals to eat except buds, twigs and left-over acorns. February and March are hard months for wildlife, and these acorns are needed to help animals survive until April green-up.

As we neared the crest of the Blue Ridge, we entered the Southern Nantahala Wilderness, and then right before the top, our group began to find a tree that is only found at high altitudes

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Around The Farm
Mickey Cummings



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