

# Opinions

## Everybody has one...

### Volunteer Firefighter Application

Volunteer Firefighter Application Period - Ask a firefighter about their job or about volunteering in the department and most will say that it is the greatest service in the world. The structure, comradery, the sense of belonging, and environment associated with the fire department is so unique and rewarding that you almost have to live it to be able to describe it. As a firefighter, you learn unusual skills, see uncommon events, and be an active participant in resolving incidents.

**Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief**  
*David Dyer*



The best part for me personally is the spontaneity. You never really know what will happen next. It could be a boring day with a few minor calls and then, in the next minute, you may get the most demanding call of your life where you must use all your knowledge, skills, and abilities. You may be pushed to limits that you never knew existed.

Firefighting is a very unique and demanding job. And when I say "job," I am not talking about only career firefighters. I am talking about volunteers as well. Fires, jobs, incidents, calls... however you want to describe them, they are the same for all firefighters, career or volunteer. A fire does not know or care if you are a career or volunteer firefighter. Our department depends on every firefighter to be able to resolve these incidents.

I have always believed that people become firefighters because they have certain characteristics that enable them to do the job. A firefighter is a person who loves three things: 1) to learn new skills and knowledge, 2) to be challenged, and 3) to help people. They are problem solvers, risk takers, and will go out of their way to help people that they do not even know.

Those are the types of people we are seeking. We, as a combination department having both career and volunteer firefighters, are always looking for more members. We are looking for motivated people who are willing to learn, love a challenge, and are willing to help their fellow citizens. The department currently has 66 volunteer firefighters. We want to grow that number to 100.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer firefighter, we want you to sign up and join our family. Applications are open right now and will close in mid-June. Candidates can pick up an application at the Headquarters station located at 507 Shoe Fac-

See Dyer, page 7A

### He Made You

Toward the end of the film "Barbie" (2023), Billie Eilish gives voice to the title character with "What Was I Made For?" which became a hit song. This is far more than the familiar plot of a toy wanting to be real. It is an example of culture expressing and framing one of life's most poignant questions.

It's a regretful question, if you have yet to settle on a satisfactory answer. And if the answer depends on creating your internal self and adapting your morals, values, and even your physical body to it - well, that is a siren call, attractive but dangerous. In another movie, "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" Pete hears the sirens (three women) calling from the river. He and friends are intoxicated by the song ("you and me and the devil make three"). When they awake from their stupor, Pete appears to be turned into a frog! It's a retelling of Homer's "Odyssey." Homer's Odysseus lashed himself to his ship's mast so he would not steer toward danger if he heard the siren call. Pete should have stayed in the Ford Model A. And you do well to seek your answers from a safe place.

Why were you made? The question acknowledges that you did not bring yourself into being and hints at the folly of defining your own existence. A related and haunting question from the depth of the human soul is if the Holy exists. It's related because if true, it says something about you. That is your safe place to look for inspiration, courage, and meaning as you contemplate your brief sojourn on this earth.

An educated man asked Jesus to define the greatest commandment, a way of asking why humans exist. Jesus answered quoting the Hebrew Scriptures. "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:29-31). In His answer, Jesus points to the reality of the Holy, your Creator. Heart, soul, mind, and strength comprise the totality of your identity, created to love God. When you do, you love others like He does. This is not a saccharine love that urges victims toward their siren call. It is a courageous and sacrificial love that invites souls to experience

**All Things New**  
*Wayne Fowler*



See Fowler, page 7A

### Commissioner's Questions

#### Q. What is a tax assessment?

A. An assessment is 40% of the fair market value of real property as stated on the Annual Notice of Assessment as approved by the Board of Assessors. The final assessment amount will be used to calculate the amount of property taxes after the millage rate has been adopted by the taxing authorities.

#### Q. Why does Union County have properties assessed?

A. A lot of people don't know that the State of Georgia holds all counties responsible for making sure that their taxable property values are up to date as compared to similar properties that are sold in the community. If a county's property values are below or above a certain percentage when compared, then the state gives the county two years to get the property values in order or UNION COUNTY WILL BE FINED.

#### Q. How do tax assessors determine the value of property?

A. The intent and purpose of the laws in Georgia are to have all property and subjects of taxation returned at the value that would be realized from the cash sale, but not the forced sale. (OCGA 48-5-1) The tax assessor's office uses a mass appraisal approach to value. "Mass appraisal" means the process of valuing a universe of properties as of a given date (in Georgia, January 1st is the date of valuation) using standard methodology, employing common data and allowing for statistical testing. Typical appraisals employ three approaches to value. The cost, sales comparison, and income approaches are utilized by the appraisal staff.

#### Q. Are all of the computations done manually? What types of computer programs are used to help estimate property value?

A. Most all counties in Georgia utilize a computer-assisted mass appraisal program (CAMA system). The CAMA system houses all the specific details of each property (common data) to be analyzed by a sales ratio study. The sales ratio study compares the CAMA values to the actual sales price to ensure that the value, uniformity, and bias of the values comply with the Georgia Department of Revenues tolerance allowances.

**Q & A from Union County Commissioner**  
*Lamar Paris*



See Paris, page 7A

### Is Religion Relevant Today?

Our modern society likes to proclaim itself to be multicultural and secular, and the direction seems to be a future without old-fashioned religious ballast where science is the tool for constant progress and prosperity, happiness for everything and everyone.

Yes, science has done a lot of good and made material prosperity, better health care, etc., possible. But, and here a giant question mark needs to be painted, at what price? And why isn't man "happier" anyway? Loneliness, mental illness escalates like never before, drugs and crime, acts of violence and vandalism, unsafe school environment, etc. Add to that the environmental destruction and terrorist threats.

According to statistics, approximately 80% of the world's people are still religious. However, in our "modern" country only a few percent of the population are professing Christians. Immigration has brought in other

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#### Guest Editorial

*Peter Kujala*

### Letters to the Editor

#### Mountain Shelter

Dear Editor,

The Humane Society's Mountain Shelter has served Union and Towns Counties for almost 40 years, rescuing homeless cats and dogs. We are a charitable organization and appreciate all the support that we have received from the community over the years.

Like most organizations recently, we have been affected by inflation and rising costs. As local families suffer, we have also had more animals surrendered to us. Soaring veterinary costs and labor expense have forced us to reexamine our operations. These times are challenging but also exciting, as we change and grow to meet the future needs of our community.

As we transform our organization, changes can lead to unfounded complaints by former employees. We are happy to report that, in a recent surprise inspection by the Georgia Department of Agriculture, Mountain Shelter received a 100% rating and was praised for excellent animal care. While it is disappointing to know that unhappy people cause this type of trouble, we could not be more proud of our staff at the

See Medwed, page 7A

#### Think Before Voting

Dear Editor,

Most of us are not knee deep in politics and don't pay much attention to it, but politics touches every part of your life. Like it or not, it affects us from Sheriff to Commissioner.

Please put just a little forethought into your vote, not because you have seen a thousand signs around the county, but look at the person you are voting for. Just because you know the name or went to school with them or are a cousin twice removed on your uncle's second marriage, that does not make them the best choice. Don't vote for someone just on name recognition, or a threat of retaliation from them or that they seemed to have won a debate or a Q&A.

Look to see who has the all-round skills for the job. Not because they are a good person, or one of the good ole boys, but because they have some experience in handling a multi-functional, stressful job.

For a sheriff, you need someone with the physical stamina and mental ability with emotional stability to handle the difficulty of law enforcement for a county of this size. Not just because they are already working there, or because you have known them your whole life. They should have all-round physical, mental and emotionally stable attributes. A sheriff cannot just sit behind a desk and be an adminis-

See Lausier, page 7A

### Letters to the Editor

#### Pray for Stan Gunter

Dear Editor,

Speaking to a crowd of 30 to 35 attendees at the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee, Georgia, on Friday, April 12, at the 8:00 a.m. scheduled meeting, District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter announced he has stage 4 prostate cancer which has metastasized to his left shoulder.

Stan and his family are in need of our prayers as he struggles to prevail and continue as our State Representative District 8 for Union, Towns and White counties.

Jerry O'Connell

#### Elect the Very Best

Dear Editor,

It is obvious that here in north Georgia, as throughout our nation, opinions are strong and deeply entrenched as we move towards another election season. Too often, it seems, our deciding vote is determined by whether the candidate's name is followed by an R or a D, rather than by the policies each candidate is proposing.

History tells us that only one president, George Washington, did not represent a political party. His thought, in what became known as the Farewell Address in 1796 is clear: "The spirit ... of the party serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration.

See Cordier, page 7A

#### A Rebellious Generation

Dear Editor,

What causes a generation to become rebellious in society? Maybe because they had no parental guidance or maybe because their parents didn't care to discipline their children so let them run wild, and many other factors can be involved as well. In Book of Proverbs, Chapter 30: When ungrateful children dishonor their parents and reject God's standards, then this is a generation that curses their fathers and does not bless their mothers. The bedrock and stability of any society is a strong, two-parent family. When a family is united, then wisdom flows to the next generation. When the family breaks down, then dysfunction and rebellion will pervade the entire structure of society.

They are a law unto themselves and are blind to the truth that they are fallen and sinful. They justify themselves no matter how disruptive or disobedient their behavior becomes. They become deaf to logic and reason and are driven by reckless impulse. This is what we are experiencing throughout our nation, and it is running rampant with violence and hatred. They

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### Dynamite...

Dynamite Comes in Small Packages - My great grandmother, Laura Cummings, was a petite woman. But, Daddy described her as being high strung. For those of you that don't understand that terminology, let me explain it with a story.

By the mid-1920s, the road in front of Laura's house was being traveled by one to two automobiles per week. The automobiles usually were driven by traveling salesmen on their way to Phil Campbell or Russellville. So, the entrepreneur in Laura decided to build a little gas station to take advantage of all the traffic traveling toward town. One day a Fuller brush salesman stopped to sell some brushes. He was low on cash and convinced Laura to loan him a few gallons of gasoline. The salesman promised to pay Laura on his next trip.

That evening, Lon (my great-grandfather), came home from working in the logging woods and asked Laura about her day, after which she told him about the traveling salesman. Lon grinned and told her she would never see her money. Laura clinched her teeth, looked Lon in the eye and said, "I bet I do." Lon shook his head and grinned.

A couple of weeks later she got her chance to get her money back. She was in the garden and heard the familiar sound of a car coming down the road. She watched as the car came close to her house, and sure enough, it was the traveling salesman. She was disappointed the car didn't stop. But, she became angry because the man waved and laughed as he drove by the house. Laura looked at my 10-year-old grandfather (Columbus) and told him to hook up her mare to the family surrey.

Columbus hooked up the wagon to the horse and drove it down to the house. Laura had put on a fresh bonnet and retrieved her husband's Long Tom shotgun, which was longer than she was tall. Laura and her son left the house and soon were in Phil Campbell. They found the man's car parked in front of Steele's Pool Hall. Laura had never been in a pool hall, but, there is a fist time for everything. She got out of the wagon and walked into the door. She promptly told the man she wanted her money. He simply laughed at her. She turned on her heel and walked out of the pool room toward the surrey.

When Papa told me the story, he said, "A lot of the people standing around said they felt sorry for Laura because the man was laughing at her. But, I didn't feel sorry for Momma because I knew what was about to happen." Laura went

See Cummings, page 7A

#### Around The Farm

*Mickey Cummings*



### Pollinator Gardening

Let's talk about pollinator gardening, and some of the things to include in a good pollinator garden.

Pollinators play a very important role in our food production and ecology. When we think about pollinators we often think of honeybees and butterflies. They are very important for pollination, but the truth is that there are also tons of other critters that are important pollinators. Bats, hummingbirds, native bees, wasps, moths, and more all play an important role in pollination. Since we have such a diverse group of pollinators, it's important that we have a diverse habitat in our pollinator garden for them.

Most pollinator plants like full sun. Full sun is at least 8 hours of sun each day during the summer. If you don't have full sun in your spot then the plants that you choose will need to reflect that. Many pollinators like to spend some time basking in the sun with some protection from the wind. A soil test is also a good idea before starting a pollinator garden to see if you need to add any lime or fertilizer to the soil. A well-drained soil is also ideal.

Native plants are the best choice for your pollinator garden. They tend to be better adapted to our soils and our native pollinators. It's important to have a diversity of plants in your pollinator garden. Different flower shapes, flower colors, plant size, and plant shape are all important. It's important to have a diversity of plants so that you have blooms for Spring, Summer, and Fall.

There are a ton of different plants that you could put in a pollinator garden, so I can't mention them all here. It is important to make sure that the plants you choose are well suited to your site for sunlight, water drainage, and USDA zone. Here are some plants that I would recommend.

Some good spring blooming plants are wild indigo, Bee balm, lyre leaf sage, bearded tongue, tulip poplar, serviceberry, sweetshrub, eastern redbud, fringe tree, Carolina silverbell and bottlebrush buckeye. Many of these plants are more trees and shrubs. As I mentioned earlier you want a diversity of plant size too.

Summer blooming plants are easier to find that spring blooming. Cosmos, blackeyed Susan, coneflowers, coreopsis, St. John's wort, sweet pepperbush, milkweed, yarrow, passionflower, mountain mint, and sourwood. This list has a mixture of perennial and annual. Many pollinator plants are able to reseed themselves. For some, if you give them a little help dispersing the seed, they do even better.

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#### Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

*Steve Rowe*



### Chamber of Commerce

We want to give a shout-out to all our downtown merchants, especially Sharon Keen of Keen Creations & Co. for all her hard work last weekend with her wonderful Spring Downtown Market. This year's market brought approximately 5,500 people to the downtown area to shop, sightsee and partake of our amazing restaurants. This, along with many other contributions to the downtown, Chamber, and the entire community is why Sharon was our 2023 Rockstar Small Business. We love to see businesses like this get involved and really make the extra effort to make their business grow and thrive, which in turn helps other businesses succeed.

Thanks to Senator Steve Gooch and Representative Stan Gunter for speaking at this year's Legislative Wrap-Up. From the updates we received from both, it sounds like it was an active year at the Capitol, and we know the challenging work will continue from them. Coming soon are

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**Paris... continued from Page 6A**

**Q. What do I do if I think my property has been assessed incorrectly?**

A. You may appeal the annual assessment notice, if you feel there are errors in the valuation or if you feel the value does not reflect fair market value, within 45 days from the mail date.

**Q. Who is the Union County Tax Assessor? Is this an appointed or an elected position?**

A. Except as provided in Code Section 48-5-309 with respect to the election of board members, each county board of tax assessors shall consist of not less than three nor more than five members to be appointed by the county governing authority. In Union County, there are three members appointed by the county commissioner. Chairman: Susie Phillips, Member: Pat Parker and Member: Mary Ann Stephens

**Q. What types of training do the Appraisers under-**

**go to estimate property costs accurately?**

A. No individual shall serve as a member of the county board of tax assessors who: (1) Is less than 21 years of age; (2) Fails to make his or her residence within the county within six months after taking the oath of office as a member of the board; (3) Does not hold a high school diploma or its equivalent; (4) Has not successfully completed 40 hours of training either prior to or within 180 days of appointment as provided in 48-5-291(b); (5) Has not obtained and maintained a certificate issued by the state revenue commissioner; and (6) In addition to the training required in paragraph (4) of the Code section, does not successfully complete an additional 40 hours of approved appraisal courses as provided in the Code section during each two calendar years of tenure as a member of the county board of tax assessors.

**Cordier ... continued from Page 6A**

It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection.” Throughout his political life, and until his death in 1799, George Washington was confident that the country could and should function without the existence of political parties. Looking at the fractured state of our Union, we could surmise that George Washington was a prophet.

We are, however, caught in the clutches of a dysfunctional two-party system that threatens the very foundation of our democracy. The system of checks and balances between our three branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial) has been eroded by party politics while civil discussion and debate are off the table. What are we, the voters, to do? We have two choices: 1) dig deeper into the trenches of party mentality, pointing fingers at the “other side” or 2) carefully examine the platforms of all candidates and vote for those who exhibit the honesty and integrity to uphold our constitution while serving the diverse population that informs our democracy.

I grew up in a Republican household, later leaned towards the Democrats but have always felt like an Independent. Because I value

researched facts, honesty and personal integrity, two of the upcoming races are an easy call for me. Andrew Clyde, representative for Georgia’s Ninth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives, will not get my vote. His weekly fear mongering rants (the government is coming to take your car, etc.), disinformation and constant finger-pointing at the Biden Administration, crosses him off my list. I want a representative who is honest and who can work across party lines. And because I have already experienced four years (2017 - 2021) of government instability and chaos under Donald Trump (who used to call himself a Democrat), he will not get my vote. I want a President who is honest, trustworthy and who can work across party lines.

Down ticket races will take more research. All candidates should have a clear political position with which they can campaign. This gives voters a sense of what the candidates believe in, the issues they think are important, and how – if elected – they will address them. Let us do our best to elect the very best. Our nation and the world are counting on us.

For a complete transcript of Washington’s speech, Google “Washington’s Farewell Address (1796).”  
**Jennifer Cordier**

**Lausier ... continued from Page 6A**

That person needs good judgement, mental acuity and emotional stability with the physical ability to quickly go into the field when needed. Past behaviors should be considered when making your choice for sheriff.

When you pull the lever for commissioner, remember you want a person young enough and mentally agile enough to meet the challenging demands of the job. Someone who has a wide range of

experience that can see the demands of the job and has managed people, budgets and complicated federal and state laws.

This county has changed dramatically in the last 10 years, and the challenges must be handled by someone with a wide range of experiences and skills.

So, think before you vote and vote thoughtfully for a better Union County, and NOT just on name recognition.

**Eva Lausier**

**Kujala... continued from Page 6A**

religions as well, but most do not believe in God. One hundred years ago the situation was the opposite. But, people still want to get married in the church and bury their dead there. Why?

Traditions bring security, you might say, well, but why didn’t 70 years of iron-fisted communism in the Soviet Union wipe out the Christian faith? Why is it estimated that around 100 million Chinese have become Christians in recent decades, in the midst of severe persecution?

The answer is obvious: science cannot meet man’s greatest and deepest need for the meaning of his existence, and there also seems to be a need for “life” that satisfies. To experience inner satisfaction, and now yet another concept that science does not master, namely “peace.” Materially rich and successful celebrities take drugs in search of this peace and life, only to be met with a devastating emptiness. This is precisely where the Christian faith steps in and delivers. The explanation is not scientific, it

is “supernatural,” i.e. above the order of nature or science. Jesus Christ seems to present his heavenly powers, his life in real, astonishingly effective terms.

God as the Almighty Creator does not seem to need to consult science and its researchers but does what is necessary, and on the Cross the divine blood of Jesus really flowed to reconcile, cleanse and forgive man so that the way can be open to this heavenly life, eternal life and a peace “that passeth all understanding” as the Bible itself puts it. Thus, Jesus can be the answer to how we can get meaning and life that satisfies, as he Himself said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” Believe it or not, I am one like those two billion others worldwide that have found “the truth that sets you free.”

*Editor’s Note: Peter Kujala submitted his guest editorial from Sweden to express viewpoints similar to those of many residents in Union County, Georgia, demonstrating that it’s a small world after all.*

**Combs... continued from Page 7A**

disrespect authority and others’ property. They think they are above the law and can tear down, burn, loot and even kill another without any remorse. A sick society that needs a Savior who can heal their sinfulness. Only God can heal a sin-sick soul.

They are quick to condemn anyone who disagrees with them as being “fascist” or “Nazis” or “racist.” What can turn this rebellious genera-

tion around? Jesus Christ has always been the answer to any social issues, but again, one must want to turn from their wicked ways and come to Jesus as 1 John 1:9 says: If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It is the only way to have peace of mind when it is focused on God, the author and finisher of our faith.  
**Frank F. Combs**

**Cummings... continued from Page 6A**

to the surrey and pulled the shotgun from the buckboard. She walked back into the pool room and pointed the shotgun at the traveling salesman. The sight of that little lady trying to balance that shotgun to her shoulder was a strange picture. Laura said, “I want the 75 cents for the three gallons of gasoline I let you have on credit or I am going to shoot you in front of everybody.” The man quit laughing and paid Laura for the gasoline. Laura thanked the man and said, “It was good doing business with you, but, you can’t have any more credit at my store.”

Years later another generation of Cummings’ boys found out about the grit of Laura Cummings. All of her grandsons had come for a visit and were in the yard playing and rough housing. One of the youngest was told by his Grandmother Laura to settle down and quit being so rough, to which he responded that he did not have to listen to her. As she tried to grab him he took off a running around the house and she gave chase. My Dad remembered the story well and asked his grandmother if she wanted him to catch the younger cousin. She shook her head and hid at the farthest corner of the house. All the other cousins stopped and watched. They could hear

their young cousin laughing at his Grandmother while coming around the backside of the house. As he rounded the corner, Laura’s arm came out and the young boy was clothes-lined. His feet went straight out and he landed on his back. The little petite lady reached down and grabbed her grandson by the ear all while pulling him to his feet. She made him break a limb from the peach tree and then wore his rear end out with the same limb.

Laura West Cummings was a stick of dynamite in a small package!

**Williams...**

**continued from Page 6A**

Fall blooming plants are very important as pollinators try to store up that last bit of energy before the frost comes. Goldenrod, asters, joe-pye weed, and ironweed are all some important fall bloomers. Goldenrod, joe-pye weed, and ironweed have beautiful blooms and are often seen along the roadside. These have the misfortune that they are thought of as weeds by some people, but really, they are great pollinator plants.

One challenge with native pollinator plants can be finding seed to plant. Work with other plant lover neighbors to see if they have plants that you like and if they would be willing to share seed with you. If you have questions about a pollinator garden contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

**Fowler...**

**continued from Page 6A**

God’s grace and truth. The lyrics of “What was I made for?” include these lines: “I don’t know how to feel... I forgot how to be happy.” You don’t find happiness by pursuing it. You find it by belonging, by knowing and being known. You do belong to someone – your Creator and Savior. To love Him is to experience why He made you.

**Dyer...**

**continued from Page 6A**

tory Road or can download an application from the Union County Government website.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

**Chamber...**

**continued from Page 6A**

two more exceptional speakers that we know you will enjoy hearing from – May 8th is the State of Union County where we will get an update from the school system, hospital, city, and the county. Next, we will have our monthly Business Builder breakfast and learn more about an important topic for Blairsville – agriculture. Tyler Harper, the Georgia Agriculture Commissioner, will be giving us an update, and we will have representatives from Georgia Grown also available. Whether you own a farm, have products that you personally make here in Georgia, or are just interested in learning more about our agriculture industry, we hope you will join us on May 16th. Please register online to reserve your seat or call us at the Chamber.

Thanks to all the local businesses, state, and regional leadership, and all of those who continue to make life better in Blairsville!

**Medwed...**

**continued from Page 6A**

shelter. We are blessed to be located in the North Georgia mountains and will continue to serve this community, keeping the welfare of animals as our top priority. Please stop by our shelter to see all the wonderful work that we do – lots of happy, furry friends would love to meet you.

Mountain Shelter is a 501(c)(3) organization, located at 129 Bowling Gap Circle, Blairsville.

**Rob Medwed**  
President, Humane Society’s Mountain Shelter

**Bell Ringing Union  
County Old Courthouse**



**May 4, 2024**  
In memory of  
**Grace Moss**  
In celebration of her life  
By Scott and Jessica Moss  
and Tommy Byrd

**Bell ringing information  
at 706-745-5493**