

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Building a Ready Kit

A couple of weeks ago, we discussed preparing for emergencies and disasters. Some of the topics discussed were considering emergencies, staying informed, and learning a safety skill. A major topic discussed was the need for everyone to be better prepared by building a Ready Kit.

During a large-scale emergency or disaster, power and water could be out for several days or more. Roads may be blocked or there may be a disruption of the supply chain at the local stores. There may be times when public safety is overwhelmed or unable to provide assistance right away. Families may be on their own for several days.

The best way to prepare for these types of emergencies and disasters is to build a Ready Kit. Everyone should consider having three types of Ready Kits. The main Ready Kit should be for the home and it should have supplies to deal with emergencies and to sustain the family for at least three days. This Ready Kit should include nonperishable food, manual can opener, water (at least one gallon per person, per day), flashlights, batteries, NOAA weather radio, and first aid kit.

Other things that you may want to consider are medications, pet food, cash money, and games for the kids. There may be incidents where people are asked to shelter in place such as a hazardous materials incident. These may require items such as plastic sheeting or duct tape.

Everyone should also consider a Ready Kit for evacuations. During some rare incidents such as wildland fires, flash floods, or hazardous materials incidents, it may be necessary for people to quickly evacuate an area and leave their home. Having a To-Go Ready Kit with essential supplies and information can sustain the family during these incidents. The supplies can be the same as home Ready Kits just on a smaller scale. Other items to consider are copies of insurance, cash, maps of the area, blankets, and toiletries.

Ready Kits are also a good idea for your vehicle. Drivers should create a Ready Kit with essential supplies that may be needed for highway or vehicle emergencies. These supplies may also be needed if drivers happen to be stranded in a traffic or weather event.

See Dyer, page 5A

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Keeping Freedom

The recent fireworks and our celebration of Independence Day has me dwelling on the state of affairs in America. Not current events, but the state of our thinking about the underpinnings of our freedoms. Here's my hypothesis: Christianity can exist without freedom, but American freedom cannot exist without Christianity.

Let's dispense with the first part. Christianity is growing rapidly in China which does not allow freedom of speech, association, and religion. Christianity is expanding in the Middle East, a reaction to the more oppressive forms of Islam. The number of Christians in Iran has grown from five hundred to one million since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution. They certainly don't have American-style freedoms.

American freedoms depend on Christian morality. Here are thoughts on that from three non-believers.

Agnostic political scientist Charles Murray believes America needs a religious revival. He says, "Highly secular societies are going to break down. If you could have a resurgence of what used to be known as a religious Great Awakening — we've had three of them at least, maybe four — those had very good effects. Those could change the behavior of the population in very positive ways. And that's going to be great if that happens. If you have a new upper class that joins in a resurgence of the Judeo-Christian traditions, the United States could be great."

Stanford University professor Niall Ferguson says, "I was brought up as an atheist. It is as much a faith as Christianity. I've come to see as a historian that you can't base a society on that. Indeed, atheism, particularly in its militant forms, is really a very dangerous metaphysical framework for a society. I'm a big believer that with the inherited wisdom of a two-millennia old religion, we've got a pretty good framework to work with."

Atheist Richard Dawkins likes to quote Hillaire Belloc's poem for children. "Always keep a-hold of Nurse for fear of finding something worse." Dawkins' point is that an escaping child is to her caregiver what a godless country is to freedom. Both risk losing what they need most. Dawkins wants Christianity not be-

See Fowler, page 5A

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

This week's questions and answers focus on Probate Court. The Probate Judge is an elected position with Dwain Brackett being the elected official, serving since 1997. These questions contain general information and if you have further questions you should call their office at 706-439-6006 or stop by their office located in the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street, Blairsville.

Q. How do I get a Marriage License?

A. The basics for obtaining a Marriage License are that both applicants must appear in person and complete the application, both individuals must be 18 years of age or older and provide a form of picture identification. Applicants can submit an online application but must come to the Probate Office in person within two weeks to complete the process. There are other stipulations if one or the other of the applicants has been married before or widowed and also if both individuals are not residents of the State of Georgia. More detailed information is available on the Probate Court's website at: <http://www.unioncountygga.gov/courts/probate-court/marriage-licenses/>.

Q. How much does a Marriage License cost?

A. The cost is \$26 with a certificate of pre-marriage counseling and \$66 for couples without a certificate of pre-marriage counseling. Fees are payable by cash, local check, money orders, or Visa or MasterCard.

Q. Where do I go to get a Georgia Weapons Carry License?

A. Probate Court handles the issuance of a Georgia Weapons Carry License. You can go to their office between the hours of 8am and 4pm. You have to be over 21 years of age, a Union County Resident, and provide a picture ID with a physical address. Keep in mind if you have a PO Box, you must bring proof of your physical address and the cost is \$78.25. You also have to get a fingerprint based criminal background check, but you must complete your application with Probate Court first. When it is time to renew your Georgia Weapons Carry License every five years you will visit the same office and the renewal fee is only \$30.

Q. How do I get a certified copy of my Birth Certificate?

See Paris, page 5A

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Korean War Veterans

Each year via proclamation by the President of the United States, July 27th is a time to remember the American troops who died in the Korean War conflict, were wounded, or were prisoners of war. Also known as Armistice Day, this day commemorates the signing of the armistice agreement on July 27th, 1953, that brought to an end the fighting in the Korean War — but not the end of the war.

As North Korea often denies the existence of an armistice, South Korea as a strategic partner of the United States participates in many formal observations, both here and in South Korea. Visits to the DMZ, or Demilitarized Zone, an area about 150 miles along the 38th parallel, are among the celebrations. South Korea's "Sunshine Policy" creates an atmosphere more conducive to talks, even if it has been met with mixed results.

More than 5.7 million Americans served during the Korean War, and there are about 2

See Walters-Taylor, page 5A

Military Musings

Janice Walters-Taylor



SALUTING OUR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS...

Chamber of Commerce

We just returned from a great conference sponsored by GACCE. This conference provided an opportunity to learn what other Chambers were doing in their communities and explore how our programs aligned with other communities. One observation was how fortunate we are to have our current Chamber staff and their devotion to our Community. At this time, I would like to take a moment to introduce and thank the Chamber team:

Crystal Wagner — Director of Operations & Marketing: Crystal does a wonderful job with our Marketing and Social Media platforms. We will soon be unveiling our new website that will be easier to navigate when checking our calendar or locating Chamber members; so stay tuned!

Jessica Walker — Membership Services: Jessica is our point of contact for all members and does a great job assisting with marketing. If you have any questions regarding your membership or want to be a part of the Chamber as we

See Chamber, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Letters to the Editor

Reassessing

Dear Editor,
2000 — Purchase price: \$120k, \$400 property taxes.
2020 — Assessed value: \$134,244, slightly less than \$900 property taxes.

2021 — Estimated assessed value: \$237,500, \$1651.10 estimated property taxes.
"Among the lowest property taxes in Georgia." Is that what we're supposed to continue to believe and to passively accept?

George A. Mitchell

On the TSPLOST

Dear Editor,
Many Georgia residents think we are in a particularly low-tax state and county. But it ain't what it used to be.

Stay with me. Sales taxes are percentages of a purchase, and if the price of a product goes up with inflation, the tax haul increases accordingly.

Increasing the sales tax percentage can only be justified if taxpayers are getting something additional for their cash.

You can't blame the increase on inflation, right?

In the early '90s down in high-tax Clayton County, my customers were paying 3.5% taxes (state and county combined).

What additional benefits do you think Clayton County taxpayers are getting at their current 8%?

The proposed "1-cent" Union County tax is actually a 33% increase of the county's current 3% portion of the 7% sales tax (state and county combined).

See Tarter, page 5A

New Property Assessments

Dear Editor,
The new assessments are out, and if you haven't received yours, you will shortly. There will be lots of disagreement here, and it's unfortunate that the timing of the increase is happening when the housing market is seriously and unrealistically overly inflated. I realize this assessment has not been done since 2006, but that's not our fault. It appears that small-town America has jumped on the bandwagon of increases whether we like it or not. After going through a difficult year and the looming increases for just about everything, adding taxes is not easy to accept.

When these assessments are made, no one comes to our property to verify what improvements have been made since we bought the place. They obviously check what homes in your area

See Mackey, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

A Correction & More Input

Dear Editor,
This letter is to issue a correction to my letter to the editor the North Georgia News published last week, and to add more input on taxes.

I stated in my previous letter that, "sadly, there are only four counties in Georgia that do NOT have some type of CAP on the increase of property taxes. Also sadly, Union County is one of those counties."

The statement SHOULD have been, there are four states that do not have some type of CAP on property taxes, and sadly, Georgia is one of them.

I also want to add additional details about our property taxes. According to the Georgia Department of Revenue's online FAQ on property taxes:

"The purpose of a revaluation is not to increase county revenue but to ensure equity and uniformity of assessment. As stated above, each year there are two types of value changes made to a county tax digest. The change may be due to inflation or a result of increases due to new or improved properties.

"When the total digest of taxable property is prepared, Georgia Law requires that a rollback millage rate must be computed that will produce the same total revenue on the current year's new digest that last year's millage rate would have produced had no reassessments occurred. If the county elects to set their millage rate higher than

See Sims, page 5A

Commissioner Tax-N-Spend

Dear Editor,
According to the North Georgia News, Sole Commissioner Tax-N-Spend is proposing a "TSPLOST" referendum to add an additional 1 cent to the county sales tax (to 8%). We currently have an "ESPLOST" and regular SPLOST that we are paying for. How many different SPLOSTs can the citizens of Union County afford? Yes, Commissioner Tax-N-Spend argues that "tourists" and "visitors" will pay the bulk of the tax and it's not really "our money" paying for it. However, this avoids the fact that the 25,000 residents of the county will pay it all of the time.

Commissioner Tax-N-Spend raised the property millage rate by over 17% last year to partially fund the purchase of two land parcels that he didn't need and a semi-private gun range 3 miles from an existing gun range (at an estimated total cost of \$2.4 million). Those who strongly objected to these expenditures and tax increases were threatened with physical ejection.

See Cooper, page 5A

The Cat

Paul and Bud Cummings were just young boys when they first encountered Aunt Mabel's old Tom Cat. These two young boys would follow their father to the barn each morning. Upon reaching the barn, the boys would perform chores that included fetching sweet feed for the cow while she was being milked. The boys didn't milk the cow; that was Papa's job. Dancing Betty would only stand still for Papa while she was being milked. After she was milked, the boys would carry the milk pail to the corn crib to dip out some milk for the cats.

The cats were always fed at the corn crib because the crib was where the rats lived, and it was the job of the cats to keep the rats away. The boys' favorite cat had just had a passel of kittens, and they were enjoying watching the kittens grow up. One morning the boys went to the crib and found all but one of their new kittens dead. They realized the culprit immediately. Aunt Mabel's old Siamese Tom Cat had been visiting the farm on a regular basis. The old Tom Cat had killed every kitten on the Cummings Farm.

The boys were upset and wanted to punish the old cat. So, a plan was hatched. The boys obtained some white liquor from their Uncle Dennis. They spiked the cat milk with this liquor and fed it to old Tom. The cat lapped up most of the bowl of milk and liquor. Much to the amusement of the boys, the cat staggered around all over the barn yard. The boys soon decided they could catch the cat and began to chase it. The cat took off running and tried to run underneath the crib. The unfortunate cat must have been seeing double, because it ran for a small opening in the crib and actually hit a board head on.

By this time the boys were laughing hysterically. But then Bud became serious and pointed to another cat and then another. Now, three of their cats were staggering around the barn yard. The boys knew they would be in trouble if Papa seen these inebriated cats. So, they gathered the drunken cats and hid them in the crib until they could sober up. The boys then walked over to Old Tom. To their amazement, the cat was still alive, but still in a drunken stupor. The boys knew they had to hide the cat from Papa. They looked around, and the only place the cat could be hid from view and protect the one remaining kitten was the mailbox.

So, the cat was placed in the mailbox that sunny morning in October. Throughout the morning the boys would shake the box in hopes of terrorizing the old cat. The idea was to scare the cat so bad that it would never visit the farm

See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Is It Ripe?

Is It Ripe?
One question that people will call me with is how to tell if a fruit or vegetable is ripe or not. Different plants ripen differently. Some will continue to ripen after they've been picked, others need to ripen attached to the plant. Let's talk about what causes plants to ripen and how to tell if some common fruits and vegetables are ripe or not.

Fruits and vegetables are divided into climacteric and non-climacteric. The difference between these groups is their response to the hormone ethylene. Ethylene is a hormone that plants produce to induce ripening. Climacteric fruits and veggies will continue to ripen after they have been picked. Non-climacteric fruits and veggies won't continue to ripen. Instead, they will soften and rot as they age. Some crops are sensitive to ethylene and so shouldn't be stored with climacteric crops that produce ethylene.

Apples, pears, peaches, plums, potatoes, and tomatoes are some examples of climacteric plants. Blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, cherries, cucumbers, eggplant, grapes, strawberries, peppers, squash, and watermelon are all examples of non-climacteric crops. Some examples of plants that are sensitive to ethylene and so shouldn't be stored with climacteric crops are asparagus, broccoli, cucumbers, green beans, leeks, onions, peas, peppers, squash, and watermelon.

Now that we know a little more about the ripening process let's talk about how to tell when the best time to pick some of the most commonly grown crops around here are.

Tomatoes are an easy one to tell when they are ripe because they start to turn red. You can pick tomatoes before they are fully ripe on the vine. Because they are climacteric, they will continue to ripen. I've put tomatoes up in the kitchen windowsill so that they'll ripen. Sometimes it is advantageous to pick something before it's fully ripe so that you make sure critters don't get it before you.

Apples and pears can be a little more challenging to tell when they are ripe. Different varieties will ripen at different times. In addition, the entire tree may not ripen at the same time. If the apple or pear stem breaks away easily from the tree then it's ripe. Turn the fruit sideways to see if it pops off. Depending on the variety, you can use color to tell if the fruit is ripe. If you cut an apple open and the seeds are dark brown, it's ripe.

Blueberries will be plump with a deep blue color. They also have a white powder on the skin.

See Williams, page 5A

Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



North Georgia News

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Paris... continued from Page 4A

A. If you need a certified copy of a Birth Certificate, Death Certificate, or Marriage License (all referred to as Vital Records) this can all be obtained through the Probate Court since this office maintains and records all vital records for Union County. You can request them in person or through the mail. The first copy is \$25, and each additional copy of the same record is \$5.

Q. If I was born in a state other than Georgia, can the Union County Probate Court provide me with a copy of my Birth Certificate?

A. No, they cannot. The Union County Probate Court only has access to Vital Records for births and deaths that occur in the State of Georgia. If you were born in another state, you would want to visit the website <https://www.cdc.nchs/w2w/index.htm>. This website provides you with the office in each state where you can request a copy of a vital record.

Marriage records are available county by county only.

Q. What other things does the Probate Court handle in their office?

A. If you receive a ticket in Union County that is not within the Blairsville City limits you would pay your ticket in the Probate Court Office or appear in court if there is a mandatory court appearance based on the type of violation. This court also handle any fish and game violations and citations that are issued. Court is held monthly so you should contact the Probate Court's Office with questions regarding your violation and court appearances within a timely manner. This office also handles estates, guardianships of minors and adults, mental health issues, fireworks display permits, houses copies of the legal organ of Union County, and many other miscellaneous duties such as certificates of residency and cattle brand registrations.

Cummings... continued from Page 4A

again. They were going to turn the old cat loose eventually, but the boys forgot about one thing: they had shaken and pounded the mailbox so much the cat was in a complete state of terror by the time the mailman arrived. Paul heard the mailman coming down the road, and in a panic, the boys ran and hid. The mailman opened the box and the cat shot out of the box and into the old car. The cat made at least three laps in the car and tore up the mail, the interior of the car and the mailman before

exiting the car. Nobody ever found out how Old Tom got into the Cummings Mailbox. But the boys were remorseful. Later when the weather turned cold, Uncle Bud suggested to Granny, "Why don't we put some big rocks by the fireplace, and when the mailman comes, we can give them to him? He can then place them under his feet to help his feet stay warm."

The mailman was very appreciative, and the boys never saw Old Tom again.

Williams... continued from Page 4A

that keeps them fresh longer. Squash and zucchini should be harvested when they're 4-8 inches long. They'll both grow longer if left on the vine, and you can still eat them if they're big, but they get tougher as they age. You should be able to push your fingernail into the skin.

Sweet corn is ripe when you can puncture a kernel with your fingernail and milky fluid comes out. As soon as corn is picked, it starts to lose flavor. Refrigerate it to retain flavor.

Pick peas when the pods have plumped out. If they start

to wrinkle, they're getting overripe. You can always open a pod to see if the seeds are swollen, but still tender. Beans are ready when you can see the seeds bulging through the sides of the pod.

Pick peppers when they are shiny green. If you let them sit on the bush longer and they start to change to orange or red and they're getting hotter. If that's what you're looking for, let them sit.

If you have questions about when plants are ripe contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Mackey... continued from Page 4A

have sold for without taking into account that the buyer may be escaping a city environment that has deteriorated and they escape to areas like Blairsville, willing to pay more than asking price.

While we all like the value of our investments to increase, the true value is not what that out of town buyer paid. After all is said and done,

very few will challenge the assessments because of the hassle to do so. Common sense and good judgement could have put off this assessment until 2022, allowing at least a full year to fully recover from our virus issues in 2020.

This is just more wood on the pile of increases we will see in the future. Not good.
Thomas Mackey

Sims... continued from Page 4A

the rollback rate, then the law imposes certain requirements. The requirements are to hold three public hearings, place notices of the increase in the paper and issue press releases."

To prevent a rollback, our commissioner has stated previously there would be an increase in property taxes this year. He has stated this in the NGN in previous issues. The quoted paragraph above essentially says that if the commissioner wants to increase the county budget, he must announce and have three public hearings. So far, I believe the commissioner has been putting off those public hearings trying to figure out how to perform this trick. Perhaps his trick is to offload the Road Department budget onto the new TSPLOST tax he has proposed in this week's edition of the newspaper.

With such a huge increase in the property tax as-

sessments, the commissioner can have a tax revenue increase and also reduce the millage rate. Any way you look at it, it's a tax increase.

And to add more coal to the fire, our commissioner now announces he wants to add another 1-cent tax upon Union County citizens to pay for roads. Heck, most all other counties use the SPLOST tax for that. And having the vote in an off year pretty much assures the issue will pass, as fewer voters turn out in an off-year vote. I'm also sure the commissioner knows this. The commissioner does like his tax increases however he can accomplish them.

The county has a huge population of retirees on fixed incomes, and whether you add more property taxes or sales taxes upon them, the effects are the same — less money for their daily living.
Mike Sims

Walters-Taylor... continued from Page 4A

million still alive. Korean war veterans often endured extreme cold, as in the 50 degrees below zero at the Chosin Reservoir; radiation and ionizing attacks; asbestos exposure, often aboard ships; and noise and vibration-related hearing loss. All of these are grouped into three categories: COLD INJURIES, NOISE, AND OCCUPATIONAL.

Organizations that are dedicated to Veterans of the Korean War include but are not limited to: Korean War Veterans Association (Korean War Educator), Silver Star Families of America, Korea-Cold War Families of the Missing (POW/MIA), and the National Veterans Foundation.

As my husband, Robert, was in the Korean War, we are just learning about all the hazards that were there, and the potential for compensation from the VA based on where and when a veteran served in country. There are several "Pre-

sumptive" diseases recognized by the VA; cancer is a big one, often due to chemical exposure as defoliants were widely used. It would be worth the while for any Korean Veteran to check with our local branch representative to see if you are eligible for compensation.

Robert and I often attend the bi-monthly meetings and luncheons of the Ray Davis Atlanta Chapter of the Korean War Veterans Association. If you would like more information or to ride along as our guest, please shout out to 706-745-1854.

Until we muse gain, I bid you, "At Ease!"

S.A.F.E. Board Meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Directors of S.A.F.E. (Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, Inc.) will be July 20, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. Call 706-379-1901 for location.

Cooper... continued from Page 4A

tion from the public hearing by County Deputies. The commissioner wrung his hands and held his head as he bemoaned the need for these increases and went ahead and did it anyway. He then hinted that the millage rate might be lowered in future years as the countywide reassessments took place (wanna buy a bridge in Brooklyn?).

Now the reassessments have taken place and most residents will see valuation increases of about 40% (43% in my case). At the current millage rate of 18.92, you can expect a property tax increase of that 40% (look at the notice that you should have gotten in the mail). Commissioner Tax-N-Spend will likely claim that the millage rate will be reduced to offset the increase in valuation... right! A review of recent millage rates and property tax valuation and resultant revenues illustrate the revenue to

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A

cause he believes it's true, but because nations need a moral underpinning.

America is afflicted these days with unrestrained people who "professing to be wise... became fools" (Rom. 1:22). They cannot see that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov. 14:34). Fortunately, even non-believers recognize foolishness when they see it, and prefer a righteous nation that benefits from its Christian underpinnings. Truth is, America needs Christianity far more than Christianity needs America.

Benjamin Franklin once said America is "a republic, if you can keep it." We keep our republic free by being a moral people, one nation under God.

Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

grow, please call or email Jessica.

Randi Stewart – Events Coordinator: Randi jumped into her Chamber role with both feet and I don't think she has slowed down. Be sure to check the Community Calendar for all the great Chamber Events as well as other events in Blairsville and Union County.

Sheila Freeman – Information Specialist: Sheila is the face of the Chamber, literally. Sheila is the first person you see when you enter our office at the Welcome Center. She is a wealth of information and will be glad to answer your questions.

If you get a chance, stop by and say hello to the Team and let us know what we can do for you! Remember, it's better in Blairsville!

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

Union County Fire/EMA is committed to helping its residents and wants them to be prepared. Having Ready Kits in your home and in your car can better prepare you for emergencies and disasters. Visit www.ready.gov/kit for full list of items and please take the time to build these kits.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Tarter...

continued from Page 4A

The tax increase will hurt lower income residents the most, by the way.

As a former business manager, if I was in there, we'd be saving the hypothetical \$1.5 million a year.

I guarantee it.
J. Murray Tarter

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



July 4, 2021
In Memory of
Earl Warren
on his 90th Birthday
By Mike and Janice Marsh

July 10, 2021
In Memory of
William T. Meeks, Sr.
on the Anniversary
of his Death
By Ginger & Terri Meeks

Bell ringing information at 706-745-5493

the county has continued to increase. The millage rates have remained static or increased, even during the periods that other SPLOST initiatives were SUPPOSED to have reduced property taxes.

He is at it again, trying

to confuse and sell the citizenry of Union County on another tax increase. His tone in the North Georgia News portrays that this is a "done deal" and he is ready to implement it ASAP! Don't fall for it and do not vote for the tax increase. It is the only tax that you can vote for or against. The Sole Com-

missioner, alone, has the sole authority to develop, propose, adopt and implement county budgets (and his own salary too) and the tax requirements to meet them. You can voice your opinion, but he can do as he pleases. VOTE NO ON TSPLOST (A.K.A SLUSH).
Dan Cooper