

Opinions

Everybody has one...

The Winter Storm

The past weather event, with its extremely cold temperatures and small amount of snow, has kept Union County public safety very busy. Winter weather is a common occurrence in our mountain community. However, a winter system with extremely low temperatures is something that we do not experience often.

The winter storm was first presented to Union County Emergency Management Agency (UCEMA) a few days prior to the drop in temperatures. This is the preparation phase of any event where public safety evaluates the potential situation and begins contacting resources that may be used to respond. The presentation focused on the extremely cold temperatures, the wind speeds, the wind chill factors, and the extended amount of time that the area would be below freezing temperatures.

UCEMA, fire department, and E911 Communication Center were communicating with community partners and making preparations. Community partners included local and state government, Georgia Emergency Management, utility companies, private organizations, volunteer organizations, and other public safety agencies on the local and state levels. We were preparing for an increase in call volume, winter operations, and coordination of resources to assist the public as needed. Power outages and the Wind Chill Warnings were our greatest concerns.

The winter storm presented a multitude of issues and emergencies. The fire department responded to six structure fires, six other fires, 21 medical calls, and four water flow/fire alarms from December 22nd to December 26th. The structure fires were significant building fires requiring multiple firefighters and apparatus. There were several homes that caught fire and the others were outbuildings or garages. Most of the alarms were "water flow" alarms on sprinklered buildings. These were, for the most part, burst sprinkler pipes that caused water leaks and the water flow alarms. The burst pipes caused significant water damage.

The utilities were having issues as well. The increase in demand for power throughout the entire Southeast caused TVA to implement power conservation measures. The water companies were experiencing outages and reduced water pressures due

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Best Days Ahead

I recently traveled to Boone, North Carolina. As part of my activities there, I heard Irena Creek tell her story. With an early childhood like hers, it was no small miracle that she came to believe her future would be any better.

She was born in a former Soviet Union country. Her parents were alcoholics. One evening while her father was out drinking, her mother left and never returned. The village placed Irena and her sister in a military-style orphanage. She felt alone, unloved, and abandoned. One day in the midst of despair, a new thought challenged her to stop looking at everything that was wrong. She should look forward with hope. She began to believe her best days lay ahead.

Soon they moved the girls to a more compassionate orphanage. It was there she heard that God knows and loves her. The cross of Christ took on new meaning as she placed her faith in Him. At 10 years old she finally felt secure, unburdened. She realized that it had been God's voice urging her toward hope. And it was God who arranged for a Christian family in America to adopt Irena and her sister. Today, Irena serves with Operation Christmas Child, the same ministry that shared God's love with her as an orphan.

Thinking that your best days are ahead does not require you to believe in the mystical powers of positive thinking. Optimism about tomorrow is well-founded. These three truths show you what I mean.

(1) Every morning you awake to the compassions of God. Even in the context of a book of laments the writer notes, "The Lord's...compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). Awake tomorrow knowing that with God, all things are possible.

(2) God is always at work in your life. "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." You experience this as a "partaker of grace" (Phil. 1:6-7). Tomorrow's work in you brings more love, knowledge, and discernment.

(3) Yesterday's sufferings do not diminish your ongoing

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. What do I need to do if my green address marker is missing or damaged?

A. The green address markers are especially important for aiding public safety personnel in finding your home quickly and efficiently in cases of emergency. Delivery vehicles also find these markers helpful. If your address marker is damaged or missing, please call the Union County 911 Mapping Office at 706-439-6056. They will place it back in the correct spot, and if it is damaged, they will bring a new one and replace the damaged one.

Q. Is it true that our green address number signs tell us how far our driveway entrance is along a particular road?

A. Yes, it is. Every numbering of 1000 equals 1 mile. If your address marker is 1000, it means that your address is 1 mile from the street entrance. If your address is 4725 Blue Ridge Highway, it means that you are located 4.725 miles (4 & 3/4 miles) from where the Blue Ridge Highway starts. So, if your address is 246, that means that you are located 0.246 miles (1/4 mile) from the street entrance. Another way your address is helpful in that even numbered residences are on the right side of the road and odd numbered residences are on the left side of the road. This makes it easy for public safety and delivery personnel to find your home. Once they arrive at your road or street, they instantly know when to start looking for your address marker and they know on which side of the road you are located. These markers serve as one example of the small things that we do for our citizens and residents that can make life a little more pleasant and safe.

Q. Do all counties use the same 911 addressing system that Union County uses?

A. No, we are one of the few rural counties in the State of Georgia to have this. It was something I saw in one of my commissioner classes many years ago as a suggestion. While it is seemingly a small thing that not many people notice, it is something that is particularly important for the safety of the public as well as for vehicles attempting home deliveries. Public safety is always number one for our citizens and this is a large, silent

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Letters to the Editor

Immigration

Dear Editor,

This country is being overwhelmed by the invasion of our southern border. At the present rate, we will have 12 million illegals in this country before the end of the present administration. This is more than the population of several states! This is not sustainable. There are common-sense solutions to this problem if we only had a willing Congress and a willing President.

1. All illegal immigrants, when apprehended, shall be returned to Mexico, regardless of nationality. After all, Mexico is culpable for having enabled, and perhaps encouraged, transit through their country. If Mexico refuses to accept this human contraband, close the border. Mexico needs us more than we need them. Mexico is no friend of the United States.

2. Infiltrate and eliminate, with or without Mexico's consent, the cartels that control Mexico.

3. Anyone age 16 or over, who entered this country illegally, can NEVER vote in a federal election or become a citizen of this country.

4. Finish the wall and use force, if necessary, to control the border.

5. Sanctuary cities should be given an ultimatum. Obey the laws of this country or forfeit all federal monies.

6. The Constitution should be amended to require that any person born in the U.S. must have at least one citizen parent in order to be considered a natural born citizen.

Finally, I am sick and tired of hearing these gutless politicians say we just need comprehensive immigration reform. Bull. Why not enforce existing laws before passing new ones? If you agree with these suggestions, let your Congressman know how you feel. One thing I do know, this issue coupled with over \$30 trillion in debt, is NOT sustainable.

Peter W. White

Being a Christian

Dear Editor,

This article is not to offend anyone but to clarify what it means to be a true and faithful Christian. It is easy to say that you are a Christian, but what duties are required before you can really say you are a Christian? I can go out into my garage and sit there all day, but that doesn't make me a car. When I got saved and gave my heart to the Lord, Jesus, I became a messenger for God, and I have to tell the truth of what is required for one to say that they are a good and faithful Christian.

First order of business is for you to confess to God that you are a sinner and to repent of your sin against God and ask His forgiveness. Secondly, you must accept Jesus Christ into your heart and serve Him in all things. Thirdly, you must be born again which means to turn away from your sin and start a new life of living for God, not yourself.

We all must face the facts that God has strict guidelines that demand all Christians to be loyal and trustworthiness to the cross of Christ. How many times do you pray daily which is a requirement from our heavenly Father, because if we don't pray to Him, how can we keep in touch with what God expects out of us? Now after your heart and soul are right with God, then He will send you the Holy Spirit which is part of God Himself, to help you in your new walk with Him. God wants nothing better than for you to surrender everything over to Him. You can't keep even 10% and give God 90%. He wants you all-in 100%. Our God is a jealous God, and you can't serve two masters. Only God will do.

A lot of folks who read this are going to be very upset, and I could care less if you are upset with me, but the Holy Spirit gives me the words to say to you that being a true born-

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Wildland-Urban Living

Many people are moving out of urban areas into "natural" areas to take advantage of the natural beauty, recreational opportunities, and more affordable living (it's getting crowded out here in the forest!). Once upon a time that made sense, but now people are moving into these new mega subdivisions where you had better have a good relationship with your neighbors, because they are only a short stone's throw away. More than once I have heard "if I want to borrow a cup of sugar, I just open my window and reach across to my neighbor, or if my neighbor's window is open, I can watch their TV."

These are extreme examples, but soon, several counties up here will not have any more farmlands left; it will be covered up with these houses that all look alike. I feel sorry for the old folks who farmed their whole lives on their piece of land and now are forced to sell the land for the next development. Developers are building neighborhoods to accommodate this influx. As a result, fire departments are fighting fires along the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), defined as areas where homes are built near or among lands prone to wildland fire. The increase in the WUI threat has been steep because of continued development and exposure. The WUI is not a place, per se, but a set of conditions that can exist in nearly every community. It can be a major subdivision, or it can be four homes on an open range. According to the National Fire Protection Association, conditions include (but are not limited to): the amount, type, and distribution of vegetation; the flammability of the structures (homes, businesses, outbuildings, decks, fences) in the area, and their proximity to fire-prone vegetation and to other combustible structures; weather patterns and general climate conditions; topography; hydrology; average lot size; and road construction. The WUI exists in every state in the country, and in our North Georgia counties, everyone lives in the WUI since forests are all around us and the danger from wildfire is just as great here as it is out West where they have the spectacular wildfires that can consume 400 homes in an afternoon. We don't normally have conditions like that here, but if we lose one home to a wildfire, it is a tragedy just the same for the folks who live there and are without a home after the fire.

Wind-blown embers are a major cause of concern in the WUI. Most structures within the WUI are not destroyed from direct flame impingement, but rather from embers. Embers may precede the flaming fire front, carried by the winds that distribute burning brands or embers over long

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RC&D Executive Director

Frank Riley



The Chase

Our Country and the world have dealt with COVID for three years, and now we keep hearing reports out of China that the disease is causing havoc in that country. I do not like getting vaccinated and I never have. I always dreaded the day of our polio vaccinations at school. The process didn't hurt. But I was always scared of those needles. My hypothesis is that being scared of those vaccinations was a part of my DNA. My father did not like Doctors, Dentists or even nurses.

When Dad was really young, he had a bad toothache, so, Papa took my Dad to a friend who could pull teeth. This man was not a dentist. He never went to any dentistry schools. But, in the mid 1940s, the closest dentist to Trapptown, Alabama, was in Birmingham. So, the only alternative was a trip to Mon Dye's house. Papa said, Mon had worked on horses' teeth, so, "he knew a little about teeth." Papa and Mr. Dye strapped the young boy to a chair and without any novocaine he pulled one of his teeth. As a result, my father has had a fear of Dentists since he was 7 years old.

After World War II the Health Departments in Alabama began vaccinating school-age children for varied maladies. Some kids went to school and some did not. So, health workers would pick out a community leader's home and go there to give vaccinations to all the kids in that community. The vaccinations were free, and most of the younger generation wanted their kids to receive the vaccinations. But the older generation was not convinced. My great-grandmother, Laura West, was afraid for her grandchildren.

So, upon the arrival of her grandchildren on the vaccination day, Laura ushered them into her home and had them convinced their blood would leak out of their bodies due to the vaccination process. When it was announced the County Nurse had arrived to give the vaccines, Jimmy Wehunt ran for the woods. Wallace and Freda began to squall with extremely high-pitched voices. Dad and Bud ran for Laura's bedroom and dove under the big old bed. All this commotion had a profound effect upon the other kids in the community. Kids were running and screaming for their lives. Papa was the first father to catch his children.

Papa said, "I reached under the bed while my mother was hitting me with the broom handle and grabbed them boys by their

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Radon Awareness

January is National Radon Action Month. Many Georgians spend these cold months huddled inside waiting for a warmer spring. This makes it even more important that we test our homes for radon, a colorless, odorless gas that is the second leading cause of lung cancer.

In Union county, about 46% of homes have elevated levels of the naturally radioactive gas radon. In Towns County, it is 36%. Over the course of many years, exposure to this gas can cause lung cancer even in non-smokers. In fact, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers. Smokers, current and former, exposed to radon gas have an even greater risk of developing lung cancer.

Radon is a naturally occurring gas that comes from the breakdown of uranium in soil and rock. Often granite rock naturally has high levels of uranium, which is part of why radon is such a persistent problem in Georgia, the gas seeps out of the soil and up through crawlspaces, foundations, and basements into a home. About 800 Georgians die annually from radon-induced lung cancer.

Fortunately, testing for radon gas is simple and inexpensive. You hang a short-term radon test in the lowest living level of your home for three to seven days, and then mail it to the laboratory for analysis. In a few days, you will receive the test results. If the radon level in your home is high (4 picocuries per liter or above), you can have a certified radon mitigation professional install a radon reduction system that will reduce the indoor radon level. The system most frequently used is a vent pipe system and fan that pulls radon from beneath the house and vents it to the outside.

A radon test kit can be obtained from the UGA Radon Program (radon.uga.edu) or many hardware stores. You can also purchase a radon test kit at the Union or Towns county Extension office for \$15. Testing for radon is very easy and effective, and I recommend it to anyone that has purchased a home or is living in a home that has not been tested.

Radon may also be found in drinking water. This is primarily a concern with private well water. In Georgia, wells drilled into granitic crystalline rock aquifers, usually in the northern part of the state, are at risk of naturally occurring radon contamination. This is where the uranium that decays to radon can be found at higher levels. To learn more about radon in water in your county visit <https://aesl.ces.uga.edu/water/map/>. If you are interested in radon

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Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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contributor to that. Additionally, Union County is often praised for our 911 Mapping System during 911 Mapping and GIS Conferences.

Q. Who do I notify if my road sign is missing?

A. Road signs are just as important as the green address markers for public safety personnel. If your road sign is missing, immediately report it to the Union County 911 Mapping Office at 706-439-6056. Once it is reported,

a new sign will be made and installed. However, when there is no sign, 911 Dispatch can notify emergency personnel of the missing road sign in the event of an emergency on your road. We seem to have a continual problem with the theft of street signs. If you ever see anyone tampering with a street sign or of you locate a street sign in a ditch or on the side of the road, please contact 911 with location information.

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Professionals. Check out the full calendar at visitblairsvillega.com or come by and talk with a member of our team on how you can become more involved.

Be sure to register for our Annual Banquet to be held on January 20th. This year's theme will be "Blairs-Vegas." So, breakout that cocktail attire and come join us for a fun evening at Casino Night. Also, mark your calendar for February 9th for An Evening with the Stars where

we recognize our local STAR student and teacher. There will also be several checks presented to the Union County High School Scholarship Fund that the school uses to provide local students with scholarships at the end of the year.

Thank you to all the businesses, organizations, and individuals that participated in 2022, and we are hoping everyone has a prosperous 2023.

Remember, Life is better in Blairsville!

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again Christian is a serious matter, and God expects nothing less than your best. If you have trouble with what God has given me to say: Take it up with Him. He is a good listener and has a big heart that loves you so very much. God tells me in His word that if I am ashamed of Him, He will be ashamed of me, and the last thing I want to do is stand in front of Christ one day and

give an account of what I didn't do for Him.

Folks, please examine your heart and see if it is pleasing to God. We only have one life here, so don't blow it, but embrace what God has in store for you, so when the Lord Jesus sees you face to face he can say: Well done good and faithful servant. Welcome home.

Frank F. Combs

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purpose. Paul had considerable trials in his past yet he wrote, "Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). Tomorrow is a better day when you hear the upward call and

continue your mission to love God and neighbor.

The believer has reason to be a joyful optimist! You can see it in Irena's life story. You can see it in your own faith journey. And if no other reason, the promise of eternity is reason enough to rejoice that your best days are ahead.

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in water, test kit contact your County Extension Office.

Radon is a real concern for where we live. Thankfully, more and more people have become aware of the problem that it presents. Mitigating radon in home that has finished construction can be expensive. If you are in the

process of building a home consider installing a mitigation system, as it is cheaper to have the system installed before a house is completed. If you have questions about radon, you can contact your County Extension Office or email me at jacob.williams@uga.edu.

Your Patriot Reflection



great detail to rationally explain the very real existence of a Creator. Our founders agreed with Locke. They considered the existence of the Creator as the most fundamental premise underlying ALL self-evident truth. William Blackstone, in his Commentaries on the Laws of England, propounded the generally accepted idea that when the Supreme Being formed the universe he organized it and then impressed certain principles upon that matter, from which it can never depart, and without which it would cease to be. He called this orderly arrangement of God's universe "The Law of Nature."

Today we have stepped way past the boundaries of God in our country. We have deliberately ignored our God-centered foundations, and have come to the point of believing that we no longer need God; that we are somehow capable of making decisions apart from His Law. If we want to restore the spiritual heritage of our country we must petition God in fervent prayer, both public and private, and plead His intervention in every walk of life.

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by www.joshuaswarriors.org.

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distances, sometimes up to a mile or more depending on the winds. These embers fall or are wind-driven into receptive fuels at structures, often going undetected for some time. As the fire front passes, these small embers may ignite incipient fires that spread to the home and then from home to home in a neighborhood.

The Gatlinburg fires in 2016 were caused by ember showers from the mountains above that rained down on the unprepared city and surrounding areas. These ember showers were caused by the extreme winds and dry conditions that created the perfect storm that consumed a large portion of the city that destroyed more than 2,200 homes and businesses and killed 14 people. I talked to a firefighter from South Dakota who was deployed to Gatlinburg during the fires, and she said that all the homes in the neighborhood they were assigned to protect were threatened by fire and they had to choose to try to save only those that were savable and safe for the crew. The savable ones were the homes where the owners had taken preventative measures to remove fuel on and around the structures or were built with non-combustible materials. The most important thing we learned in Firefighter 101 is that safety for the firefighters comes first, and in Gatlinburg, the crews could not put themselves in jeopardy to try to save a home that was a hazard to them or their equipment. Fire engines cost much more than most houses, and firefighters lives are priceless.

I saw a video recently about a wildfire that swept through a neighborhood where the fire crews were chasing the

fire down the street. They had passed by several houses that seemed to be intact and not on fire. When they returned in a couple of hours, these homes were on the ground. They were burned by embers that were nestled in fuel on the roof and ignited once winds fanned the spark.

The Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS) have conducted a series of beneficial tests at their research center in Richburg, South Carolina, to explore the effects of ember intrusion on differing home constructions. The tests illustrate both the threats and preparedness steps residents can take to prevent ember-caused fires. Fire departments should consider utilizing this informa-

tion in their presentations with residents to help explain the ember threat. You can check the IBHS website to see their videos. They are real eye-openers!

We are going there in a couple of weeks and will report back. For more information on WUI, contact Frank Riley at info@ccred@gmail.com.

Dyer...

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to possible residential leaks and burst water pipes.

Winter weather is something that we must all be aware of and prepared for. Although public safety and utilities respond to these emergencies and issues, it is still everyone's responsibility to be aware of the weather, the potential problems that it may cause, and to prepare themselves, their family, and their homes. For more information, please visit gema.georgia.gov/plan-prepare/ready-georgia.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Cummings...

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ankles. I pulled them from under the bed and carried them by the ankles outside to the nurse. The whole time they sounded like little pigs a squealing." Dad and Bud knew not to run anymore, but they were still scared. As the nurse reached for the arm of Bud, with tears streaming down his face, the 8-year-old looked up at the nurse and said, "Lady, I'll have to kill you if you stick me with that needle." Papa said, "My little boy looked plum pitiful, and all I could do was to hug him during the vaccination." After the vaccination, Bud looked surprised when he realized his blood wasn't leaking out of his body. The vaccinations for the other kids took a while because their Dads all had to chase and catch their children. But, eventually all the kids received their vaccinations and everything calmed down in the little community.

Dad has been scared of health workers since that day in 1948.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

The Union County Commissioner is requesting proposals from Georgia state licensed contractors to construct an elections facility and multi-purpose gym in Blairsville, GA. Contractor must have current contractor's license. The Contractor shall provide all materials and services necessary in the performance of this RFP.

Proposals will be received by the Union County Commissioner, 65 courthouse street, suite 1, Blairsville, Georgia 30512 until 12:00 NOON local time on January 18, 2023. Late proposals will not be considered nor returned. Proposals will be formally accepted and acknowledged at the Union County Commissioner's office by staff personnel.

The Proposal documents and specifications are available for inspection on the Union County website at www.unioncountyga.gov and at the Union County Commissioner's office, 65 courthouse street, suite 1, Blairsville, Georgia 30512; phone 706-439-6000 or fax 706-439-6004.

Proposals may not be withdrawn for ninety (90) days after the time and date set for closing, except as allowed by O.C.G.A. Union County reserves the right to reject any and all proposals and to waive any technicalities.

RFP DOCUMENTS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE UNION COUNTY, GEORGIA WEBSITE: www.unioncountyga.gov/government/commissioners-office/purchasing.