

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Encountering Emergency Vehicles

When driving down the road, the last thing that you expect to encounter is an emergency vehicle directly behind you with the lights flashing and siren wailing. This is not something that happens every day but it is always good to be prepared for this possibility.

Good driving habits may prevent you from being surprised by an emergency vehicle. Drivers should get into the habit of checking mirrors every 5-10 seconds to be aware of other cars and the possibility of emergency vehicles. Hearing an emergency vehicle has become more difficult with the new vehicles today. They are designed to reduce road noise and unfortunately, they also reduce the ability to hear sirens. The emergency vehicle may be almost directly behind you before you even hear it.

Experts say the first thing to do when encountered with an emergency vehicle behind you is to remain calm. I have always found that amusing because seeing an emergency vehicle pass by can be exciting much less if it's behind you. However, it is best not to do anything rash or abrupt. Slow and steady is best when dealing with this situation.

Once you are aware that an emergency vehicle is behind you, take your foot off the accelerator and slowly apply the brake. Most people's instinct is to stop very abruptly but it's best to slowly stop your vehicle. Your vehicle should be pulled to a safe place on the right side of the road. That is what the driver of the emergency vehicle is expecting. If you pull to the left or move into another direction, the emergency driver has to make some very quick adjustments.

Coming to a complete stop is very important because the driver of the emergency vehicle can gauge where you are and when they can return to the appropriate lane of traffic. Also, be conscious of where you stop. If you stop on a hill or in a curve, the emergency vehicle may not be able to see oncoming traffic.

Once the emergency vehicle has passed by, please check your mirrors, signal and slowly return to driving in your lane. Be cautious of other drivers and the possibility of other emergency vehicles that may be responding as well.

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



The Born-Again President

After I spoke at a service at Maranatha Church in Plains, Georgia some years ago, a familiar figure made his way toward me. He extended his hand saying, "I'm Jimmy Carter." Of course I knew that, but it shows what an unassuming and gracious man he was.

During his presidency, Jimmy Carter caused quite a stir by using the term "born again" to describe his faith. People thought he was making a distinction between different kinds of Christians. Followers of Jesus know what the term means and embrace it.

The Christian faith is misunderstood, sometimes even by those who wear the label. It is not simply an organization to join, some meetings to attend, or a religion to practice. Turning over a new leaf, trying to act better, or helping the less fortunate does not a Christian make. Even acknowledging there is a higher power falls short.

No human performance measures up to God's standard of perfection. We need a life that is beyond anything we might perform or achieve. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). He was talking about new life breathed into a person by the Holy Spirit of God in response to that person's faith in Jesus as Savior. Paul wrote, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature" (2 Cor. 5:17). In short, to be in Christ is to be born again with a new life that is blameless before God.

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel wrote of this, 600 years before Christ. He records God's promise saying, "I will cleanse you... I will give you a new heart... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes" (Eze. 36). Jesus came to fulfill this prophetic utterance. He came to make it personal to you.

This matters. By faith, you are born again into the life of God through His Spirit because of what Jesus did for you on the cross. What a gift, one that Jimmy Carter proclaimed on the world stage. He was 100.

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



From Your Commissioner

As your newly elected Sole County Commissioner, I'm both humbled and energized by the trust you've placed in me. Public service isn't just a job, it's a chance to make real differences in our community's daily lives. From improving our roads to strengthening our emergency services, I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and get to work.

I've spent the past year really thinking about the direction for Union County. I bring to this role not just my local experience, but also my commitment to listening to you, our residents. Your concerns are my concerns. Your hopes for our county are my blueprint for action.

My immediate focus will be on fiscal responsibility and transparent governance—two pillars that will guide every decision I make as your County Commissioner. I'm not talking about cutting services—I'm talking about spending smarter and stretching each dollar further.

Efficiency isn't just about cutting costs or moving faster - it's about delivering better service to citizens while being responsible with taxpayer money.

The goal isn't to squeeze every last drop of productivity out of employees - it's to create systems that work smoothly and serve the public well. But more than anything, I want you to know that my door will always be open.

The best solutions often come from the community itself, and I'm here to be your advocate and partner in building a stronger county for all of us. Let's get started.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



Protect Yourself from Scams

With the upcoming new year, I wanted to reintroduce myself to the Union County Citizens. My name is Sgt. Robert Calamari, I am an Investigator for the Union County Sheriff's Office, Criminal Investigations Division. I was assigned as the Fraud and Financial Crimes Investigator specializing in Scams, Fraud and Financial Crimes in November 2023.

With the new year comes new scams by the bad actors/scammers. I wanted to reinforce and stress the importance of not becoming a victim to a scam and how to protect yourself and your identity. Over the past year, we had an influx of scams to our elderly community. If you have been a victim, please do not feel embarrassed about falling victim to a scam.

These bad actors/scammers are good at what they do and how they do it. They create a situation and at times threaten you into believing if you do not cooperate with them you

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Guest Column

Robert Calamari



Chamber 2025

What a year! 2024 had its ups and downs but Union County and the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce finished the year off strong. The Chamber finished with over 800 members and the County had a record sales tax collection. Some may ask why this is important,

and that is because sales tax helps fund the County, keeping our property taxes some of the lowest in the State. The best part of this funding source is

that a large portion of the sales tax collections are paid by visitors. The economy is strong, and our local businesses are thriving. Whether you are referring to our local retail merchants, destination venues, or manufacturing partners, they all speak highly of 2024. We look forward to working with Commissioner Collins to sustain a vibrant economy while maintaining the small-town culture and charm. The Chamber looks forward to also working with the Union County School System, North Georgia Technical College, Young Harris

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Growing

With so many available activities to participate in, growing through one's life span is feasible, accessible, and encouraged, no matter if a person is in his or her twenties, forties, or eighties.

What are the major roadblocks or detours that have been placed in front of you? Perhaps you feel guilty about taking the time to enjoy life rather than spending the time limit at

your work place? Maybe you don't believe you earned the right to relax in our chaotic, hectically scheduled lives? Or could it be that we don't feel that we are entitled to reward our families or ourselves?

There are times when we feel boxed into our daily schedules. Well, join the crew in that sinking boat. For whatever reasons, this is not an uncommon feeling for the hard working, family-oriented, and retired population that represents most of the American people.

Successful Mental Health

Dr. James Ray Ashurst PH.D.



Letters to the Editor

Better Information in 2025

Dear Editor,

It's great to share different perspectives and facts to the community in editorials.

What has been disappointing is the misinformation and lack of facts included in these articles.

It's especially concerning when our 9th District House of Representative is a regular contributor of the misinformation and lack of facts that are important for our community to know. A good example of this is his recent editorial about his support for Secretary of Defense nomination Pete Hegseth. He discusses his patriotism as a soldier who fought for our country as his key reason we should all support him. I wish everyone that has fought for our country was qualified to be considered for the Secretary of Defense position, however, to manage a budget of \$800 billion and a workforce of 3 million takes an extensive background. In this case what party they represent doesn't matter. It's a matter of having a well-experienced person to keep our country and soldiers safe and secure.

Pete Hegseth has no senior military or national security experience, and instead was Executive Director of two different Veteran charities that spent more funds then were raised. He left both organizations after questions and complaints surfaced about his poor leadership and the toxic work environment he created.

Hopefully with the Congress and President working on Making America Great Again, the communications will be about what is being done for us (the facts), and the rhetoric will stop. Happy New Year to all.

Kristie Shirkey

Narrow and Broad Minded

Dear Editor,

In a world where broad-minded people are the majority and narrow-minded people are the minority, it's no wonder our world is so messed up with wrong thinking that Satan has introduced into the minds that entertain evil thoughts that will end in destruction if not dealt with. Being broad-minded is like a captain on a plane when he announces that the tower said it is OK to land on runway 2 but the captain said to his passengers, "I feel adventurous, so let's land on runway 3 and see what happens." That's not only broad-minded but totally careless on the captain's part to see that his plane lands on the right runway.

Likewise in the Bible Jesus warned the Jewish rulers not to be open minded about the message of salvation, but to come to a saving knowledge with a narrow-minded view; but

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Sirendy

Granny and Aunt Mabel were two similar women. Both were hardworking and stubborn. Both of them could be hot-headed and quick-tempered. At times they loved each other and at times they despised each other. The relationship between my Granny and her sister-in-law (Papa's sister) could be sister-like, adversarial and empathetic. And Granny had different names for her depending upon the situation at hand.

The marriages between Papa and Granny and then Mabel and Uncle Hollis were very close together. The couples were constantly visiting each other and swapping work on each other's farm. Hollis helped Papa clear his farm and Papa helped Hollis clear his farm. Granny and Mabel swapped recipes and helped their mother-in-law with her housework. But, the relationship between the sisters-in-law soon began to cool.

As Granny came to know and understand the individual members of Papa's family she began to realize Mabel dominated the family. Mabel was her Daddy's pet and every one of her siblings knew it. Mabel usually got whatever she wanted from her Daddy and Mother. For example, Papa wanted to buy the home place from his Daddy and Mother. They refused and gave the home place to his youngest brother. Uncle C. L. lost the home place because he couldn't pay the taxes, and once again Papa offered to buy the home place from his parents. They refused and had to go to the courthouse to pay the back taxes to get the home place back in their name. Finally, Aunt Mabel got the home place from her parents.

Sometime after this Granny began calling Aunt Mabel by the name of May Bell when she was aggravated by Mabel's antics. Shortly after Mabel received the home place Papa's father died. Their Daddy owned close to 500 acres of land. Papa paid for the funeral and his father's medical expenses. None of his siblings offered to help pay for anything. The only inheritance he received was an old pocket knife, pocket watch and the family dinner bell. Mabel found out that Papa had received these items and she came to his house and demanded the items. Papa was not at home at the time. So, Granny handled the situation by saying, "May Bell, get out of this house."

The two women had not spoken for 10 or 11 months when the cotton crop demanded attention. Mabel needed Granny's help and Granny needed Mabel's help. So, first Granny helped Mabel get her crop laid by. The next

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Crape Myrtle Pruning

Crape myrtles are a very common tree that many people like to plant in their home landscape or you may see them lining roads in towns. There are couple of reasons why crape myrtles make great landscape trees. The first is that they are very disease and insect resistant, as there are not too many pests that will bother them. Powdery mildew is the most serious disease issue that crape myrtles will usually have, and it rarely kills the tree. Ambrosia beetles will attack crape myrtles, but generally they only attack trees that are already dead, dying, or stressed. Crape myrtles also come with a variety of flower colors, making them very attractive. Finally, crape myrtles come in a variety of sizes. Varieties range from dwarf to semi-dwarf to full size, meaning mature tree heights range from 3 to 30 feet tall.

Pruning is important for crape myrtles, because the blooms only form on new growth. Even more important is selecting the right sized variety for your location. If you select a variety that will grow to a good height for the spot where you're putting it, the pruning will not be difficult, because you won't be as concerned with managing the plant's size.

Now is a good time of year to prune your crape myrtles. Excessive pruning can lead to problems with disease and insects, because the tree is stressed. Bad pruning practices are called CRAPE MURDER. Crape murder generally involves topping the tree, or cutting back all the branches to 3 to 4 feet above the ground. This will result in an oddly shaped tree that produces a lot of suckers.

To properly prune a crape myrtle, start at the base of the tree and work your way up. You're looking for suckers, if you find them prune those off. Once you get to where the branches are, remove crossing branches. Crossing branches will rub against each other when the wind blows and create sites where disease and insects can get in. As the tree grows you can remove branches from the lower third of the tree. Removing those branches will expose the trunk character. Some people like to prune off the old seedheads. I think they're an attractive feature. With new growth in the spring the old seedheads will fall off. On some varieties of crape myrtles, you can prune in the summer after the blooms are spent to create another flush of flowers. A second bloom is difficult to force on varieties that bloom after mid-July.

A common misconception is that crape myrtles have to be pruned to produce flowers. This is not true. Pruning allows to you shape the

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UGA extension

Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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day Mabel's car wouldn't start so Granny went to get her in the old 1957 Chevy step side pick-up. As they drove down the gravel road they rounded a curve which caused Mabel's door to open dumping her out of the truck onto the road. Granny slammed on the brakes and rushed to her side. Granny asked, "Mabel, are you okay?" She looked up at Granny and began to rant and rave. She accused Granny of slinging her out of the truck on purpose on account of what had happened about the pocket knife, bell and watch. Granny said, "May Bell, get up from there, I am taking you home." And the feud continued for a couple more years.

Later on after the feud had subsided, our little country church decided to build a new church. Aunt Mabel and Granny were right in the thick of things. Granny would cook lunch and supper for the workers. But, Aunt Mabel was helping the men build the church. It did not matter to her how difficult the job was. She wanted to be right in the

middle of it. I watched her hang rafters and floor joists. She helped with painting, sheetrock work and electrical. After the building was constructed my great Aunt took it upon herself to paint a mural on the wall above the baptismal pool.

This mural portrayed the ascension of Jesus into heaven. It was beautiful. Everyone was so pleased with the painting. Granny was especially proud of Mabel's efforts. She called us in Georgia and said, "You must come home and see Sirendy's painting."

Granny called Mabel by different names depending on their relationship at the time. Early in their lives she called her Mabel. When she was angry with her she called her May Bell. And toward the end of their lives Granny came to appreciate her sister-in-law because of her many talents. As a result she called her Sirendy.

Looking back I realize how much they loved and depended upon one another.

Calamari... continued from Page 4A

will go to jail or even prison. Several of the scams we have dealt with at the Sheriff's Office have involved your computer locking up and you being instructed to call the telephone number on the screen to fix your computer. Then they convince you to give them access to your computer, and that's when the fun starts. They move money around from your bank accounts and install malware onto your computer, and recently, they have been accessing your cellular telephone and installing an App so they can monitor your every move.

Other scams have been, you missed jury duty and have to pay a fine. Trust me, the Sheriff's Office is not coming after you because you missed jury duty. The person who you would have to answer to is the Clerk of the Court, who in turn, will just reschedule you for another date.

Gift cards: anytime the scammers ask you to pay via gift cards should send a red flag up immediately. The new scam out is that you have an undelivered package at the Post Office with an incorrect zip code and you're instructed to click on the link provided. Again, that's when the fun starts.

There are so many scams where the bad actors/scammers try to steal your hard-earned money that you have worked for your entire

life. I just highlighted only a few scams. Over the past year, I have given approximately 11 scam awareness classes to several organizations, church groups, Senior Center, Bran-an Lodge, etc., making contact with over 600 citizens of Union County. Capt. Daren Osborn and I have even addressed the issue of scams/fraud on the local radio station twice this past year.

The Sheriff's Office has a Facebook page where we present new information on a constant basis of new scams in our area and how to protect yourself. We have had several newspaper articles with the North Georgia News keeping everyone in our county up to date of the newest scams and identifying the bad actors/scammers.

Our goal at the Sheriff's Office under Sheriff Mack Mason and now our newly elected sheriff, Sheriff Shawn Dyer, is to protect you, your family and most of all protect your property.

I wish all citizens of Union County a very Happy New Year, and remember, when in doubt call me or the Sheriff's Office with any questions in preventing you or a family member from becoming a victim.

Hopefully I will see you all at my next scam awareness class, which will be advertised in the local newspaper and on our Facebook page.

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their minds were set on old traditions which came down from their ancestors. They had the Messiah right in front of them, but they were blind-sighted in their ways that they missed the hope of eternal life that walked and talked among them. Even today millions of Jews and Gentiles are still open-minded of their own choosing.

Jesus warned the people in Matthew 7:13-24 - Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to eternal life with Christ, and only a few find it,

because the majority are seeking worldly things, not heavenly things so they miss out on what God has in store for them, but they choose to follow the broad road of destruction which tickles Satan to no end.

Narrow-minded believers in Christ will inherit heaven and all other open-minded people will inherit Hell. Just like the captain on the plane. Stay on the right runway and land safely in the arms of a Savior, Christ, Jesus.

Frank F. Combs

Hambourger.. continued from Page 4A

initiative, they sent scouts into the Land of Israel. These scouts returned with a devastating report that drained the courage from the people. They claimed the land was unconquerable. Their words were filled with despair: "We are unable to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are... we appeared like grasshoppers in our eyes, and that's how we appeared in their eyes."

Despite all they had seen and experienced, the Israelites succumbed to a collective case of low self-esteem. Their fear overshadowed their faith, and their hesitation led to profound consequences. God decreed that their entry into the Promised Land would be delayed by 39 years, ensuring that a new generation - unburdened by their parents' "slave mentality" - would inherit the land.

This delay was not just punishment but a necessary transformation. Faith, courage, and resilience needed time to take root within the people. Without these qualities, they could not fulfill their destiny.

Yet, as soon as the decree was issued, the Israelites experienced a dramatic change of heart. Fear transformed into determination. The very people who had been terrified moments earlier suddenly implored God to allow them to enter the Promised Land. They were ready to move forward, fearless, filled with the courage they had sorely lacked.

What sparked this turnaround? How could a people burdened by doubt one moment discover such determination the next?

The answer lies in awakening their inherent faith. Fear, no matter how overwhelming, is often temporary. It clouds our judgment and obscures the truth, but it cannot erase the courage that resides within us. For the Israelites, recognizing the consequences of their fear helped to reawaken their faith. They remembered who they were: a people chosen for greatness, under divine protection.

This story resonates deeply as we look ahead to the year before us. Fear and doubt will visit us all, especially as we embark on new ventures, face challenges, or strive for goals that feel just out of reach. However, these emotions are not our enemies; they present opportunities to tap into the faith and courage that already lie within us.

Overcoming fear begins with acknowledging it. The Israelites were not condemned for feeling afraid; fear is a natural response to the unknown. The problem arose when they

allowed fear to control their actions and overshadow their faith. In our lives, we can make a different choice. When fear whispers that we are "grass-hoppers" in a world of giants, we must remind ourselves of the truth: we are stronger, braver, and more capable than we realize.

Faith doesn't mean the absence of fear; it means acting in spite of it. It involves trusting in the vision of who we can become and taking steps toward that vision even when the path feels uncertain. Like the Israelites, we may stumble, but we can always rise again. Even in the face of doubt, the courage to move forward turns potential into reality.

So, as we welcome 2025, let us embrace its challenges and opportunities with positivity and let ambition guide our actions and courage steady our hearts with strength. The lessons of the past remind us that greatness is not achieved without struggle, but they also remind us that the seed of triumph lies within every struggle.

Be strong and of good courage. This year is yours to conquer.

Yonatan Hambourger is a rabbi and writer dedicated to serving spiritual seekers of all backgrounds on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer who supports communities throughout the regional South. You can contact them at y@tasteoftorah.org.

Dyer...

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These are a few driving tips when dealing with emergency vehicles. We want to quickly and safely respond to emergencies, and you can help by following these tips.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Williams...

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tree. If you have a spot where the tree can grow and does not need shaping for space concerns, pruning is not necessary. I encourage everyone to do some research on finding the variety that will fit in the space that they have, because that will solve a lot of pruning issues before they arise. Pruning crape myrtles properly allows accentuates the natural beauty that they have.

If you have questions about crape myrtle pruning contact your County Extension Office or email me at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Chamber...

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College, and the University of North Georgia to maintain a well-trained workforce. Our graduates have the opportunity to pursue an advanced degree, earn a certificate, or join the workforce without leaving home. Young Harris College still has great scholarships for local students, and there are a number of master's programs now available. While Union County's current unemployment rate is 2.5%, the Chamber will continue to address the needs of childcare and housing for our graduates, seniors, and families with children so that all those that want to enter the workforce have that opportunity.

Be sure to check out the Chamber website for upcoming events or the current weather on our Resort Cams. The future looks bright for 2025! Come join the Chamber and help us make Life Better in Blairsville.

American Red Cross Volunteers

Make a difference in your community! As a volunteer with the American Red Cross, you can help families recover after a home fire, train individuals in first aid and CPR, support America's military families, or take on any number of other roles that

make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient. Get started at <https://www.redcross.org/local/georgia/volunteer.html> or call your NWGA chapter office to ask about volunteer opportunities 844-536-6226.



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