

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Outdoor Burning Reminder

In July, we provided some information about Georgia's new law concerning outdoor burning and the safety standards. These new standards took effect on July 1, 2021. Fall is here and people will begin to burn hand piled leaves and yard debris. It is important that everyone understands the changes that were made and the new safety standards that must be followed.

In the past, if a person wanted to burn leaves and yard debris, they were required to obtain a burn permit through the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC). That involved going online or calling to obtain a burning permit number. Senate Bill 119 changed the law concerning burning. The law no longer requires a burner to inform the GFC online or by phone about their intention to burn leaf piles and yard debris.

The change in the law did incorporate five safety standards that must be followed by persons who are burning. A GFC awareness campaign has been launched by the commission. The main theme is asking people to "Take Five" before the burn and to remember the acronym "S-S-T-A-R" representing the five points of the burning safety standard.

The first "S" represents Space. There must be 25 feet or more between the fire and woodlands. The second "S" also represents Space stating that there must be 50 feet or more between the fire and any structures. The "T" represents Time. Burning can only be conducted from sunrise to sunset. The "A" represents Attendance. A person responsible for the fire must stay onsite with the fire until it is completely extinguished.

The "R" represents Reasonable Precautions. The concept of reasonable precautions is to have tools and measures in place to prevent the fire from escaping. These include things such as a continuous pressurized water source on site; man-made or natural barrier to contain fire; hand tools or fire-containing equipment on site; weather awareness such as red flag warnings, High Fire Danger designation, and other hazardous conditions such as low relative humidity, high winds, etc.

The change in the law may have eliminated the need for a burn permit on certain burns but it did not change what you are allowed to burn. Only hand-piled leaves or naturally occurring

See Dyer, page 5A

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Fair and Just

I followed with great interest the plight of 15,000 Haitian migrants camped under a bridge in Del Rio, Texas. Living in their country for two years, I saw firsthand the wretched economic conditions and the desperation.

Illegal immigration is a political flashpoint, and I'll not take sides here. I don't have all the details, but the part of the story that troubles me is that some Haitians were put on planes back to Haiti while others were put on buses to U.S. cities. Those deported must have felt it wasn't fair that the U.S. allowed the others to remain.

Years ago, a Haitian friend told me he had received a U.S. tourist visa. I challenged him. "Are you really just visiting or do you plan to overstay your visa and get a job?" His answer was humbling. "Wouldn't you do anything you could to offer your children a better life? As an American, I don't think you could ever really understand." That made me realize that human ideas of justice will never be perfect and we may never agree on what is fair.

The yearning for fairness and justice is hard-wired into our humanity. We yearn for wrong things to be set right. Yet even the justice of a holy God doesn't come across as fair to us imperfect humans. Is it fair that we are born into the human condition and inevitably fall under God's judgment? Are the murderer of children and the teller of little white lies equally accountable to God? Is eternal punishment fair?

C. S. Lewis considers the objections to God's justice and writes, "What are you asking God to do? To wipe out their past sins and, at all cost, to give them a fresh start? But He has done so, on Calvary." So yes, we all commit crimes against God, and the impact of some are more horrendous to us than others. But the offer of forgiveness is the same. Jesus told of the vineyard owner who paid all workers the same though some worked less. He said, "Is your eye envious because I am generous?" (Matt. 20).

Here is God's generous justice: "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet. 2:24). Jesus' death procured perfect justice for us but it was not fair to Him. He was innocent of our ugly sin even as he made the cross beautiful to us. He made it

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



See Fowler, page 5A

Commissioner's Questions

Residents of Union County have varying opinions about the adoption of local ordinances. Though we don't encourage a culture for dictating how people use their property, we do find it necessary to consider how one person's decisions impact others.

Q. Why do we have a Billboard ordinance?

A. This ordinance came about as a result of a proliferation of very tall billboards being erected along Hwy 515 several years ago. While it is very understandable that property owners simply want to have the opportunity of collecting rent and the billboard people just want to make a living, we need to consider limits. Here's why: Over time, the general public does not accept the fact that billboards can negatively impact the view for everyone, and state law agrees. Almost every county has some type of billboard ordinance. In Union County, an ordinance was passed limiting the number and locations of billboards so they would have a minimal impact on the beauty of the mountains and of our community in the future. The ordinances still allow an adequate number for advertising.

Q. Why did we adopt an RV Parks ordinance?

A. Similar to the billboard situation, we faced an issue regarding RV parks. RV Parks were being built with little consideration for how they could impact the environment or property values within a neighborhood. Additionally, have you considered how it might impact vehicle safety if an RV tried to pull out onto a busy highway? In response to those concerns, we created an ordinance that regulates where they can be located and how many can be built in a specific area. Again, we are not eliminating RV Parks - but limiting their impact on the general public.

Q. Why did we adopt a Junkyards ordinance?

A. Over time, many people have sold their property to people moving to this area from out of town. When land prices were under \$5,000 per acre, it was not such a big deal if your neighbor put in a junk yard or had a few junk cars. It would impact you, but not a lot of other people. However, now that property values have escalated to well over \$20,000 per acre in many cases, and because the population density is increasing, the impact on a neighborhood is much greater. The public will not continue to accept the deg-

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



See Paris, page 5A

Part 5 - Conclusion

Hello there Musing Mates:

Previously I wrote about a program that my husband and I attended, and I thought that I would take the opportunity to write a parted series about the program, ahead of the game, as my husband and I venture off to Yellowstone.

Picking back up where we left off last week, after four days of intense work of inward self-examination and outward planning, we were asked to craft our answers and responses around group rules and the Veterans Unstoppable Code.

Frankly, the week was exhausting and emotionally wrenching, as the days were long and we were asked to look at parts of ourselves and our pasts that sometimes we would rather forget.

Like any cycle of growth, there exists a teardown, evaluation, and buildup. Friday was our buildup day. We had a social activity and went outside for a fly-fishing excursion.

See Walters-Taylor, page 5A

Military Musings

Janice Walters-Taylor



Letters to the Editor

TSPLOST Still Unnecessary

Dear Editor,
I stand corrected by the letter to the editor in the Sept. 22 edition of the North Georgia News by Ms. Bowen with the ACCG. Traditionally, transportation improvements have been covered by the general budget, and later by a SPLOST tax; but our SPLOST monies in Union County have been spent elsewhere.

I have stated all along that SPLOST dollars should be used to fund road improvements. The TSPLOST tax is another money grab by taxation upon a weary populace on fixed incomes. The more land property owned by government means more taxes on all property owners.

By adding more taxes upon counties with a TSPLOST tax, this frees up monies by the state to allow GDOT to spend monies in more congested areas. Northeast Georgia counties are not considered congested areas.

The TSPLOST is an unnecessary tax upon less fortunate citizens.
Mike Sims

Re: Vaccinations

Dear Editor,
A recent letter writer commenting about vaccinations quoted that in Israel, 85% to 90% of COVID hospitalizations were among fully vaccinated patients and 95% of "severe" patients were vaccinated. I could not find this in my research, however, I read one article in which the author he saw that statistic being thrown out on the internet. This is what I found:

Serious cases among unvaccinated people over 60 were nine times greater than the rate among fully vaccinated patients in the same age bracket. The rate of serious cases for unvaccinated people under 60 was more than double that of vaccinated people in same age group. Those over 60 who were vaccinated, for every one death there were 15 unvaccinated deaths. Seventeen percent who were unvaccinated represented 65% of all serious cases. It was also stated that those over 60 who were hospitalized had underlying conditions such as diabetes, heart problems and other conditions in the Israel study.

Do vaccinations keep you from getting COVID? No, but being vaccinated if you have no underlying conditions will give you a good chance of having mild symptoms, as some people I know have experienced. Friends who have died from COVID were not vaccinated yet were not anti-vaccination - they were waiting on more information on the vaccine. Too bad they did not live long enough to see that the vaccines are not what's killing people.

Vaccinated versus unvaccinated has been
See Livesay, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

A True Professional

Dear Editor,
I just wanted to express my sincere appreciation to the Union County Tax Assessor's Office in helping me make a needed correction to my property record. Throughout the process I had the pleasure of dealing with Ms. Amy Arrowood. She could not have been more patient, kind, helpful or informative. She bent over backwards to help me, sending me copies of items I needed that had been sent to another address, patiently walking me through what I needed to do to have the correction made.

I can only imagine how busy their office has been answering questions and helping people due to the reassessments, appeals and millage change this year. Ms. Atwood never made me feel like a bother or an annoyance but rather like a valued customer. I just wanted to thank her for being a true professional.
Lisa McCormick

Who serves who?

Dear Editor,
In response to Ms. Bowen's Sept. 22 letter to the editor, North Georgia News, ACCG is an organization of County Commissioners representing 159 Georgia counties. The commissioner-members of ACCG are constantly creating ways to tax their residents. ACCG lobbies the Legislature to pass new state laws authorizing the collection of new taxes. I am not surprised that Ms. Bowen is ACCG's Associate Legislative Director, Staff Legislative Advocate. Defending local taxes is her job! ACCG's information on a County Single TSPLOST can be found at <http://www.ciact.net/ul/accg/SingleCountyTSPLOST-Guide.pdf>. Pay attention to item No. 4 - "YES," TSPLOST DOES tax your "food and food ingredients." You DON'T pay state sales tax, but you DO pay LOCAL sales tax on groceries; check your receipts!

Sales and use taxes target the most vulnerable in our communities! These taxes comprise a larger percentage of their income than that of more wealthy residents. It is interesting when you hear a commissioner justify increases in his/her annual budget due to increased costs. What do they think families are experiencing? So, WHO serves WHO here? You and I must vote "NO" Nov. 2 to defeat the proposed NEW Union County sales and use tax.
Ms. Bowen stated only 33 Counties have voted to participate in a Single County TSPLOST. Gilmer County residents recently defeated a TSPLOST referendum. Voters recognized the additional financial burden the 1% TSPLOST tax increase would place on their Gilmer County
See Hopgood, page 5A

Alfred

Recently, I heard a story about my great-grandfather, Alfred West, concerning a chestnut bur. He stated there was an older boy named Alton that moved into his community. Now, this boy thought he knew more than everyone else. Anything you could do, he could do better. If you were plowing, he would tell you that you were plowing wrong. Or if you were fishing a certain way, he would tell you another way of fishing. So, one day the two young men were plowing a field of corn. As usual, the boy began telling the younger West boy how he was plowing wrong. So, during a water break, Alfred found a chestnut bur and slipped it under the collar of the mule Alton was using to plow. A collar was used by farmers to hook mules and horses to plows and wagons. So naturally, it would be bothersome to the animal.

After the water break, Alton pulled on the reins of the mule to turn him back into the field. Immediately the mule began bucking and kicking. Alton let go for a minute and tried again. The mule began to buck and kick again. This went on for 20 minutes until Alfred went to the front of the mule and secretly pulled out the chestnut bur while whispering something into the mule's ear. At first Alton thought his friend was strange because of his whispering to the mule. But, every time he pulled on the reins of the mule it responded and worked just fine. For years Alton thought his friend Alfred was the one man that knew more about mules than anyone else. He went around telling everyone that Alfred West had a special way with mules and horses.

This reputation with horses and mules soon spread to other types of livestock, and my great grandfather soon found himself practicing medicine on animals. He never earned a degree from any college, but he used a lot of horse sense when dealing with sick animals. One day around the turn of the century, a man showed up at the West house asking for Alfred. Understand that West was maybe 5 feet, 7 inches tall and topped the scale at possibly 100 pounds. So, as he walked around the corner of the house, the man sized him up and stated, "You are not what I pictured in my mind. After listening to Alton, I figured you must be 7 feet tall a weighing around 300 pounds. Anyway, he says you're good with critters and I have a sick Jersey Bull."

Alfred hooked up his buggy, and along with his 17-year-old daughter Laura, rode off the Newburgh Mountain to the man's farm in a little community called Mt. Hope. They found the man at the barn with the bull in a stable. This
See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Chamber of Commerce

It is October, and that means leaf season is officially here! We continue to set records for the number of visitors to our area and we believe this will continue through the end of the year and beyond. We are excited that the mural downtown is finally finished and a great addition to our downtown just in time for our visitors. The mural is the creation of an artist with local ties that came highly recommended by numerous Chambers around the State. The mural depicts many of our most popular local attractions from Vogel State Park to Brasstown Bald and also two of our favorite crops including grapes and sorghum.

If you've missed the memo, the Sorghum Festival is back! This year's festival is the 52nd annual and will be held on the 2nd and 3rd weekends in October with the famous biscuit eating contest, food vendors, arts and crafts, kids activities and more.

You may also have noticed several bicy-
See Chamber, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Letters to the Editor

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Paris... continued from Page 4A

radation of their community by this type of business. None of these ordinances prevent billboards, RV parks or junkyards, but they limit where they can be placed and how they should be screened because of the potential negative impact they can have on not just the neighboring property, but on anyone driving by or seeing them from a distance.

A simple test for any of these ordinances is as follows. Imagine a billboard stuck up just across from your home with a light shining in your eyes every night. Imagine an RV Park next door to your home. Finally, imagine a junkyard right next to your yard. While there are a few who may not mind, you will find that the vast majority of the public concurs with these types of ordinances. State law has determined these ordinances are appropriate and legal.

Is limiting the location of where these can be built taking away some of your property rights? Yes, to some extent it is, but whose property rights are more valuable, yours, your neighbors', or the general public? State law says the public's rights are paramount in many instances.

Q. Do you enjoy adopting these ordinances?

Cummings... continued from Page 4A

A fellow opened the door, and as Alfred walked through the door, the man latched the door from the outside. Immediately the bull charged Great Grandpaw West. The man and the bull went round and around in the stable. The bull nearly got the upper hand at one point by butting Alfred and knocking him into the wall of the stable. His body hit the wall hard enough to crack and break one of the rough sawed planks into two pieces.

Alfred nor his 17-year-old daughter ever panicked. Each had a job to do. He eventually worked his long bony fingers into each nostril of the bull and twisted its nose until the bull stopped and began emitting a long, low and pitiful groan from its throat. When the

A. Absolutely NOT!! Adopting ordinances are hard decisions to make and they require hours and hours of research, reading, and legal advice. However, in a growing community, they are occasionally necessary. By instituting some of these special ordinances, we are making every effort to stay away from zoning. If you want to talk about losing property rights, then try to comply with the zoning regulations that many other counties have. I am against outright zoning in Union County. However, to prevent it from being necessary in the future, we must consider that what we do with our property impacts the public – including your neighbor.

Often, the high price of property makes many of these considerations difficult to make and private property ownership MUST maintain its privileges and rights. The public should not take these measures to the extreme and begin to think that they should control other people's property just because they do not like what they are doing with it.

Bottom line: Do only to your neighbor as you would have them do unto you. If this thought process was always followed, we would never need any more ordinances.

bull stopped, Laura opened the door and walked into the stable with her father. She reached into his doctor bag and handed him the instrument he needed to correct the bull's problem. When she and her father finished the job, Alfred let go of the bull and the pair walked out of the stable leaving the bull in a calm and peaceful state. The owner of the bull stared in amazement at the father and daughter team. As the man stared, my great grandfather reached up and punched the man square in the nose, knocking him to the ground. Alfred West left that day with two things: the man's respect and a country cured ham. It all started with a chestnut bur and Alton.

Hopgood... continued from Page 4A

small businesses that would be required to pass on their higher operating costs for heating fuel, electricity, etc., to consumers. Many small businesses would have also suffered when consumers limited their purchasing to only essentials.

As you have learned, 30% of what YOU and I would pay in a new Union TSPLOST sales tax must be used to fund state-wide Georgia DOT priorities. When you look closely at the Union County project cost projections for 2020-2024, pages 326-327, of GA DOT's (STIP) transportation plan, you find these projects are funded by the U.S. and GA DOTs. Are the Commissioner's projects the same as already designated for state and federal funding? The projected out-of-pocket cost to Union County residents for these projects is just over \$227,000. Why then does Union County need a \$10 million bond referendum to advance-fund TSPLOST projects? Has the commissioner been clear on how he is going to spend an estimated \$7 million each year in TSPLOST revenue the next five years? NO, he hasn't. In the past, Commissioner Paris has

publicly stated he uses broad descriptions of projects so he can adjust SPLOST projects as he sees fit. In August 2021, for ONE month only, a 1% Union County sales tax brought in \$595,000 – money out of OUR pockets!

Serious questions continue to exist with conflicting reports and statements from GDOT, ACCG (Ms. Bowen), and Paris concerning GDOT's STIP program and its relationship to any Union County TSPLOST. Why do you think unincorporated Fulton County passed a less than 1% (.75%) TSPLOST? It was so they could by Georgia Law avoid 30% of their local tax money being used to support statewide GA DOT projects. Smart, Fulton! If Union passes TSPLOST, its combined local sales and use tax will exceed that of unincorporated Fulton County!

BTW, have we forgotten that up to 20% of the almost \$600 billion pending federal infrastructure funding will be for roads and bridges? Will Union still be eligible for that?

VOTE TO DEFEAT TSPLOST NOV. 2.
Wesley Hopgood

Georgia's newest license plate supports historic preservation



Atlanta, GA – Drivers with Georgia license plates can now display a new look while supporting the state's Historic Preservation Division. The HPD released its new license plates this week bearing the theme, "Preserve Georgia Downtowns."

The HPD, now a part of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, works with federal agencies to help them comply with historic preservation laws and regulations, administers multiple economic development programs, and collaborates with key stakeholders for planning, conservation, tourism, and site protection.

HPD's Georgia Heritage Grant Program matches the funds raised from the plates. Since 1994, the program has matched more than \$3.5 million.

The new plates cost \$45, of which \$20 goes to the HPD, \$5 is slated for Georgia's General Fund, and the remaining \$20 is the standard license plate fee.

The historic preservation plates may be purchased at any county tag office upon request. The new preservation plates can arrive within seven to 10 business days from the ordering date. Temporary plates are issued at the time of purchase because specialty plates are not normally stocked. Georgia's historic preservation plates can also be purchased with new vehicle by simply requesting the upgraded tag.

For more information about Georgia's Historic Preservation Division visit our webpage: <https://www.dca.ga.gov/georgia-historic-preservation-division>.

Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

clists riding our roads training for the Valley of the Giants Cycling Experience. This is part of the Stuckey's Gravel Roll Series and will include courses for all abilities. The big ride begins on October 10th at Granddaddy Mimm's.

Please remember to thank our health care workers for all they are doing to keep the community healthy and help us to keep life Better in Blairsville!

Williams...

continued from Page 4A

ticides. Make sure you follow the label entirely. Pesticides will only provide brief respite and can lead to more carpet beetles that feed on the dead stinkbugs and then feed on woolens or stored dry goods.

Some homemade traps are quite effective at trapping stinkbugs. One of them uses a foil roasting pan filled with soapy water. Simply point a desk lamp at the pan, and stink bugs will find their way in there and not be able to get out.

If you have questions about stinkbugs, contact your County Extension Office or send me an email at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A

possible for you to be declared blameless.

Those who would travel to the U.S. border seeking illegal entry do not know how laws will be enforced when they arrive. To immigrants and U.S. citizens alike, that is not fair or just. But this is: "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

yard debris can be burned. Household garbage or other man-made materials cannot be burned.

Everyone who burns hand-piled leaves or yard debris should research the new law and burn safety requirements. For more information about outdoor burning and the five safety precautions, please visit www.gatrees.org.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Livesay...

continued from Page 4A

debated over and over, meanwhile COVID has continued to mutate and now has been killing more young people, and I pray it doesn't mutate to be more contagious. I spoke to a young 16-year-old during the beginning of the original COVID outbreak, and he told me he was not concerned, as it only infected old people. I hope he is concerned now.

Mike Livesay

Walters-Taylor...

continued from Page 4A

Saturday was graduation, where we each were presented our plaques and our one-of-a-kind shirts, complete with a denotation of our class number. The upshot to the entire week can be summed up in one question: "If you had to write a letter to your family and friends, based on your life to date, what would it say?"

Some interesting facts and statistics about the VALOR Clinic Foundation's Veterans Unstoppable retreats:

Statistics:
Emotional wounds or PTS injuries can interfere with a Veteran's ability to navigate relationships. Since Sept. 11, 2001, we have lost more active-duty service members to suicide than to combat.

One in 5 Veterans return with some degree of Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS); Recent studies reveal that an average of 22 Veterans commit suicide each day; Divorce and homeless rates are double civilian rates.

Facts Matter:
Veterans Unstoppable has proven to help Veterans heal damaged relationships; Program graduates have lower divorce rates; Lower homelessness rates; Higher employment rates for Veterans Unstoppable graduate Veterans; No Veterans Unstoppable graduate has ever committed suicide

Veterans Unstoppable Helps With: Understanding your past to proactively navigate your future; Identifying and coping with triggers that can interfere with reintegration; Relationship building skills; Gaining closure to traumatic events; Putting purpose and direction back in your life.

And so, I'll leave you with that, and until we muse again, I bid you, "At Ease!"