

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Another New Beginning

Each new year offers us opportunities for reflection, both internal and external. Such reflections usually result in expressions of gratitude and hope every January as we celebrate new beginnings with family and friends. We also ring in the New Year as countrymen, attending public gatherings filled with jubilant strangers sharing one thing in common: we're all Americans.

Last New Year's started this way, with an optimistic readiness for the days ahead. It wasn't long, however, before our collective outlook took a turn for the worse, as calamity seemingly arrived alongside a highly contagious virus that wreaked havoc by exploiting our social nature.

In hindsight, one might say 2020 was haunted by the year before, with the emergence of Coronavirus Disease 2019 ushering in widespread illness and death. More than 340,000 Americans died of or with COVID-19 last year, yet this outsized number of lives lost is but one metric of sorrow holding over from 2020. Between economic hardships and increased overdoses; mental health deterioration, isolation and progression of other diseases; the list is long.

And COVID-19 left us with many questions in 2020. Where did this virus come from? How does it spread? Who should be tested? When do we quarantine? For how long? How can we best protect ourselves and others? Why is this happening? This last may never be answered. Still, I am thankful that, despite the innumerable unknowns causing fear and anxiety at home and abroad, Union County succeeded time and again amid the pandemic.

Volunteer organizations found ways to continue serving residents and veterans. Businesses maintained safe operations. First responders and local government kept services running. Our schools returned children to classrooms. Local health professionals consistently shined. And though too many events were canceled, community members repeatedly came together to ensure, for instance, that our children had something to do on Halloween and for Christmas.

Now, we find ourselves at another new beginning. We have a new year, and with it, promising vaccines and much experience combatting COVID. This is our opportunity to remember, as a community and as a nation, the importance of reflection, of gratitude and hope. Happy New Year, fellow Union Counties! Let's marshal our optimism by refusing to let 2020 haunt 2021.

From the Editor's Desk

Shaun Jarrard



No More Time

Each December when World Magazine recaps the year, I turn to the list of deaths. Reading what people did or how they died reminds me I still have time. It also raises questions about the finite human experience.

I noticed a few entries on the list. NBA All-Star Kobe Bryant died in a helicopter crash. Actor Robert Conrad did his own stunts. Kenny Rogers is "The Gambler" no more. Ken Osmond played Eddie Haskell on "Leave It to Beaver." John Lewis marched with Martin Luther King Jr. Herman Cain died with COVID. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was known by her initials. Eddie Van Halen was a Rock and Roll guitarist.

The passing of time and people increases the stream of probing thoughts that demand some bandwidth. I'll borrow the questions that Leo Tolstoy said nearly drove him to suicide. "What will become of what I do today or tomorrow? Why do I live? Why do I wish for nothing or do anything? Is there any meaning in my life that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death?"

An awareness of the passing of time is a defining and sometimes alarming feature of the human experience. The year changes. A life passes. The mirror startles. An intrusive thought emerges that time never stops ticking along. You can't stop it or even slow it down. What you can do is make the most of your appointed time, however uncertain its boundaries may be. How? The One through whom all things came into being, the One who is life and light (John 1:4) is the source of transcendent and timeless human meaning. God created humans to know and glorify him. That has unique meaning for your life.

After his Resurrection, Jesus walked with two friends toward Emmaus. They didn't recognize him. As they approached the village, "they urged him, saying, 'Stay with us, for it is getting toward evening and the day is now nearly over.' So he went in to stay with them" (Luke 24:29). While with them he revealed truth in a life-changing way. He infused their lives with clarity, meaning, and destiny because they had seen the One who died yet lives, the One who made time yet releases you from its re-

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



See Fowler, page 5A

Commissioner's Questions

Q. How have the Union County employees held up during this very tough year?

A. It has been a very challenging year for us all. I am so proud of our county employees who have done their very best to serve all the residents and visitors of Union County. They work tirelessly and have had the additional burden of dealing with all the negative issues related to COVID-19. I hope you will join me in thanking all of our full and part time employees - including the election employees who have all worked under very difficult and stressful situations and conditions.

Q. When can we expect to be finished with COVID-19?

A. Welcome to 2021!! We can only hope that the memories of COVID-19 will soon be just a part of our past, but oh what a large part of 2020 it became. We are hoping and praying that by May or June, which is still six months away, assuming the vaccinations are successful, that we will be in a much safer condition.

Q. What are the numbers of our COVID-19 hospital stays in Union County?

A. As of Dec. 30, 2020, our total number of hospitalizations of Union County residents since COVID-19 began is 136 patients. However, Union General Hospital has had a total of 325 patients including local and out of town. We are sad to report that we were at one of our highest hospitalization rates since COVID-19 began, with 25 COVID-19 diagnosed patients in hospital care as of last week's report. The hospital is seeing quite an increase.

We have lost a lot of good people, friends, and family to the pandemic (41 deaths), and we suffered a lot of sick people. The important part to remember is that it is not yet over. We must continue to be cautious through the next few months. As we mentioned, the hospital recently had the highest hospitalization numbers by double of their previously reported high month. This should be of concern to all of the county.

Finally, if you are following the numbers, we have previously reported a monthly cross-section of COVID-19 confirmed inpatient information. Our cross-section data includes the following: July - 11 inpatients, August - 9 inpatients, September - 6 in-

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



See Paris, page 5A

Generator Safety

Winter is here and that means the possibility of snow, ice and various other weather events. These winter weather events can result in the occasional power outage. Some people have purchased portable electric generators to provide power during these rare outages. Having a power generator can be convenient but it can also be dangerous to homeowners, utility workers, and public safety if they are not used properly. Union County Fire Department would like to remind owners of portable electric generators of some safety tips to keep everyone safe.

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



When you first purchase a portable generator, read the owner's manual to understand the operations, safety features, and limitations. People may rarely use their portable generator so it would be a good idea to review the safety tips and operating procedures before you need it.

Owners should also be familiar with how to properly maintain and refuel the unit. It is a

See Dyer, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Improving a Broken System

Rev. Frank Wilson's comments regarding the miserable failure of the American prison system were insightful and compassionate. Hopefully his remarks will stimulate others to consider how we might improve that broken system.

Lloyd Horton

Climate Agenda?

The "Doctor" is at it again. More hysteria. More bogus information. But it all falls apart with the statement that "tides will rise 2-6 feet in 2020" (this year?). Uber guru of all weather science (Al Gore) told us that there would be a 20-foot rise in tides "in the near future" back in 2008. But wasn't that "science" based on computer modeling? Engineers call this the magic numbers game, whereby the results are predetermined and the modeling data set to produce those results.

If the "Doctor" does, in fact, hold a doctorate degree, then he should know better than to promote more hysteria through threats of weather disaster. Isn't the political malpractice involving COVID enough?

Inquiring minds want to know what the "Doctor's" actual agenda is?

Zeb Blanchard

A Better Day

The Bible says God shows no partiality. Trials and tribulations will happen to the just and the unjust. Again, it comes down to making a choice of whom you want to serve, God or Satan.

I proudly serve my Creator, my heavenly Father, and I'll tell you why: God has never let me down. All others have. God always keeps His word. He promises that one day I shall live with Him in heaven for eternity. I believe that with all of my heart and soul. God's word is faithful, pure and Holy, and that, my friend, is like gold in the bank.

God says in His word that in heaven He will supply all of our needs forevermore. Folks, that's a long time. No more worries or stress about a mortgage payment or college tuitions for the kids. No concerns about whether your kid will be shot for believing in Jesus Christ. No more going to Walmart to buy groceries, waiting in long lines or paying high prices for gas. No more doctors, praise God, or hospitals will be needed for the sick, because there will be no

See Combs, page 5A

Appalachian Region Fires

Fire History of the Appalachian Region - A hundred years ago, forests were being logged in every corner of Appalachia and fires burned widely through the cutover lands, threatening forest recovery. Logging technologies had developed rapidly with industrialization, beginning in the Northeast, where the timber was largely exhausted by about 1860.

Industrial logging then spread to the Great Lakes region, accelerating as new technologies emerged, and by 1900 the Great Lakes timber was depleted. From there logging moved to the South, including the southern Appalachian Mountains, where it peaked in 1909 and was virtually complete by 1930. The logging operations left slash strewn over the landscape, providing fuel for catastrophic wildfires. Ignition sources were abundant. Lightning undoubtedly ignited some fires, but most were apparently set by humans. Log trains threw out sparks, and residents fired the cutover lands to promote pasture grasses and blueberry production, or to reduce populations of snakes, ticks, and chiggers.

Concerned that forests would fail to regenerate under the incessant burning, the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and State foresters sought to deter fire through a campaign of prevention and suppression. These efforts often provoked local resistance, including incendiaryism, but wildfire detection and suppression were largely succeeding by the early to middle 20th century. Through labor- and capital-intensive campaigns against wildfire, the incidence of fire plummeted. Forest vegetation rebounded in Appalachia and throughout eastern North America, and today the region contains the largest area of temperate forest remaining on Earth.

White settlement began at different times in different areas of Appalachia. The lower (northern) Shenandoah Valley, for example, saw settlement in the early 18th century, but for much of the region beyond the major valleys, settlement did not begin until around 1800, and marginal lands on mountainous terrain were never populated to any large extent. Even fairly remote areas were probably touched by anthropogenic fires, however, at least on occasion.

Many Appalachian settlers were of rural English or Scotch-Irish descent, a background that included a heritage of burning to facilitate hunting and open-range livestock herding. These burning traditions were perpetuated in the New World, with the result that a culture of extensive burning emerged in Appalachia and the South. This woods-burning tradition remained intact

RC&D Executive Director

Frank Riley



See Riley, page 5A

Doc Underwood & Clifford

I have told you many times about my Great Grandfather Clifford Hyde, who was from Dawson County, Georgia. His mother was a full-blooded Cherokee, and both Clifford's father and grandfather had fought with a group of Georgia Volunteers during the "War of Northern Aggression," as he liked to call it. As a young man, Clifford was working down around Cumming when he got into trouble.

He was sowing some "wild oats," as many young people are prone to do. He loved the taste of moonshine, and one evening, he'd consumed too much. Moonshine can make you believe you are stronger than you actually are, and on this night, the moonshine made Clifford think he could whip anybody. He and another man were involved in a brawl. The other man was left on the floor bleeding and presumed dead. So, my Great Grandfather fled Atlanta and traveled to North Alabama. Later in life, he found out the other man had lived, but, he had already married and was raising a family in the little town of Phil Campbell, Alabama.

His favorite hobby was Turkey hunting. Clifford used one of the wing bones to make a call, and up into his 80s he was able to call up and shoot gobblers. Dad told me that he would drive him over to the James Place, where the old man would wobble down to Turkey Creek. He would sit with his back against a rock bluff and pull out the wing bone caller. Usually within about an hour, Dad would hear the note of the old "Long Tom" shotgun. Dad would walk to where the old man was sitting, whereupon he would receive instructions to the location of the dead bird. Dad said, "Clifford never failed to get a bird until he could no longer make the walk to Turkey Creek."

Clifford was also a bee charmer. He would place a Coca-Cola cap containing honey on the ground and watch until a bee found it. The old man would observe the direction in which the bee flew after leaving the bottle cap, and then he would walk in that direction for a couple of hundred yards. He would sit down and place another honey-filled bottle cap on the ground. He would repeat this process until the bee tree was located. He would carve a large X into the bark of the tree to let others know the bee tree was his. Later, he and his sons would chop down and take the honey out of the tree. It is astonishing that Clifford never wore any protective gear during the robbing process yet was never stung.

Later in life, after he had slowed down, Clifford became good friends with Doc Under-

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



See Cummings, page 5A

New Year's Resolutions

At the start of the New Year people are usually optimistic and looking forward to what is to come. Some people will make goals and write them down. People come up with all kinds of resolutions for the New Year. Some of the most common ones are exercising more, getting organized, saving money, or to read more. As the agriculture and natural resources agent, those kinds of resolutions do not fall under my expertise. However, there are some other types of resolutions that I can help you with. Let's talk about what those are so that we can make 2021 a successful year.

Do you have a garden or farm? Are you thinking about starting one? A large part of my job is to help people troubleshoot agriculture and natural resource related issues. Are you having challenges with insects or diseases? We can talk on the phone, in my office, by email, or by a site visit. One of the best places to start for new or veteran gardeners and farmers is with a soil test. A soil test will tell you what the pH of your soil is, and how much lime or sulfur needs to be added to correct it. It will also have a recommendation for how much fertilizer to apply and when to apply it. I can also do plant tissue samples. Plant tissue samples will tell you how much of different nutrients are in a plant. If compare healthy plant samples with one that looks nutrient deficient we can determine what nutrients are lacking.

Maybe you have livestock, either a herd of cattle that you raise and sell or some animals for personal use. If you cutting hay for them, I can help you by doing a hay sample to determine the nutritional quality of the hay. Alternatively, maybe you need recommendations for weed control, or are looking at some new pasture and don't know where to start. Give me a call and let's talk about it. I also have some cyanesmo paper that can be used to detect cyanide in forages. I also work with the Blue Ridge Mountain Cattleman's Association. We have educational monthly meetings. If you are interested in joining because you have cattle or are interested in cattle, let me know and I will help you get started.

Well water testing is another way that I can help people. I offer a variety of different tests. If you are interested in testing your well water because you have a new home, new well, or your water tastes or smells different I can help you with that too.

We also sell radon test kits. Radon is a gas that can cause lung cancer after extended exposure. Radon is fairly common in our area.

If you have questions about how I could

See Williams, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



Chamber of Commerce

There's nothing quite like turning the page on the past and looking forward to a fresh start. Certainly 2020 was a year fraught with challenges for our community but here we are on a fresh page.

2021 has arrived, and with it, a vaccine which will hopefully provide protection and renew a sense of normalcy for many. For that we can be thankful. As we at the Chamber plan for this upcoming year, we had to allow for variables and unknowns. We hold each event with hope for success and understanding that it may have to be adapted and tweaked as we continue to navigate uncharted waters. There will be Ribbon Cuttings crawls, and Facebook lives, which are a great way to spotlight local businesses and to keep everyone updated on events in our Community.

We do want you to save the date of March 14 for our North Georgia Wedding Expo. Blairsville-Union County is becoming more and more

See Chamber, page 5A

Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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