

## Plan for the Great Escape! and practice family fire drills

The two main wildfire seasons here in the North Georgia mountain are November and March-April. In November the weather is typically dry with leaves falling creating fuel. Adding to the danger, many of our residents flee back to warmer parts in the fall so their homes are left unattended and unprotected.

March and April are the end of Winter when the plants have not turned green, the fall leaves are still piled up on the unprotected homes, and the spring winds are blowing all of which makes for a volatile fuel mixture just waiting for a small spark to start a wildfire in your backyard or worse down the slope coming up to your house. Do you know that fire moves up slope 16 times faster than on a flat surface? Imagine what it would be like trying to get out of the way of an out-of-control wildfire racing up slope towards your house! The local Firewise Citizen's Coalition and the County Fire Rescue want to make sure you know what to do in the event of a wildfire. Do you have an early warning system to alert you of a fire in your home? If your smoke alarm goes off do you know what to do? What if you have a fire in your home? Will you have time to get out? You should have a working smoke detector, a minimum of one on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms. This will give you the time you need to get out. Remember to change your smoke detector batteries twice a year. A good rule of thumb is to change your batteries when you change your clocks, for daylight savings time.

Have a home escape

plan: Know two ways out of every bedroom. Have an escape ladder for bedrooms on the second floor. Plan a special meeting place for family members outside your home; mail box or a large tree. Never go back inside a burning building. Once you're out stay out! Call the fire department from a neighbor's house or cell phone, never call from inside your home; the time it takes for you to call may be the time you need to get out. Know your address to ensure emergency responders can find your home quickly. Make sure address numbers are visible for emergency responders to find your house. Have a family fire drill and practice an escape plan. This will help your family in the event a fire starts in or around your home.

The Firewise Citizen's Coalition works hard to make your community safer from a wildfire by encouraging all residents to reduce the fuel around their homes and by educating them about the risks where they live and the measures they can take to reduce those risks. There are now 21 official Firewise Communities in Towns County out of the total of 93 in all of Georgia.

Soon after the Firewise program started in Towns in 2009 there were 3 Firewise communities in the county, but things changed in 2013 when the Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council received a Fire Adapted Communities grant to develop a pilot project here and since have added 18 communities for a total of 21 recognized Firewise USA communities with more to come. During this time wildfire calls have dropped by 75%. Coincidence, I don't



**Frank Riley**  
Executive Director of RC&D

think so! Residents of these 21 communities have taken actions to reduce the fuel around their homes and are recognized for their efforts by NFPA's Firewise USA program, but most important residents can rest knowing that their homes are safer from wildfires like we had in the Fall of 2016.

During that extreme dry spell a wildfire nearby burned 28,000 acres of National Forest land. Towns only had 1 wildfire during that time which is a credit to our citizens for their efforts to reduce risk. We don't claim that big fire even though it entered Towns County because it started in Rabun County and stayed on the Forest Service.

Members of the Firewise Coalition are available to talk to any group of homeowners who want to join this Firewise USA group and help keep their homes safer from an out of control wildfire. It doesn't have to be a big fire either, a fire in a small leaf pile with a puff of wind can escape and consume your house. Those huge fires in California started small from a match or spark and it can happen here.

Firewise USA is free, easy, and the right thing to do for our county, our community, our homes and even our family's lives! For additional fire prevention information please contact: Towns County Fire Rescue at 706-896-2090 or Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council at 706-894-1591 or visit our website at [www.appcofac.org](http://www.appcofac.org) or [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).

## Retired Firefighters Breakfast

The Retired Firefighters Breakfast is held the first Friday of each month, 9 a.m. at Cook's Country Kitchen, Blairsville, GA.

## AARP Foundation Tax Aide

Free in-person tax preparation. Every Friday February 2 through April 13, 2018 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. First come, first served or now accepting limited appointments, 770-312-2258. Location: St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 7 Ewing Street, Blue Ridge, GA at corner of Ewing and Jones Street by the old Kiwanis fairgrounds.

When you come, please bring the following: Photo ID; Social security cards or statements (SSA-1099) for everyone on the return, including children; last years tax returns, if available; W-2 forms from each employer and

## Enotah CASA & WoodmenLife announce Everyday Hero Awards

Nominate an Everyday Hero today - Enotah CASA and WoodmenLife have joined to establish the Everyday Hero Service Awards for Towns & Union Counties. The awards will be presented on April 7th in conjunction with the Awards Ceremony for the Everyday Hero 5K and 10K Run winners on the Hiwassee Square.

The Everyday Hero awards recognize outstanding leadership and service to our local children/youth. The awards are for everyday heroes going beyond merely performing good deeds of volunteerism and civic duty. These heroes deserve to be recognized and applauded for their contributions. If you know of an Everyday Hero, please nominate them for their consideration of an Everyday Hero Service Award. Nominations are free and should be submitted by March 16, 2018. Applications are available at [www.enotahcasa.org](http://www.enotahcasa.org), the Towns & Union County Chambers of Commerce or by calling 706-864-0300.

Enotah CASA volunteers are trained community

## Free Beginner Computer Classes

Union County Adult Ed is excited to announce that it will be offering its next free

## School Bus...continued from Page 1A

stopped school buses must stop when they see visual signals indicating that buses are picking up or dropping off students.

These visual signals include a stop arm, red flashing lights, and of course, a stopped school bus.

Furthermore, drivers must remain stopped "until the school bus resumes motion or the visual signals are no longer actuated," per state law.

Fines associated with passing a stopped school bus are hefty, at \$300 for the first offense, \$750 for the second offense and \$1,000 for the third offense, per state law.

"The tickets are not cheap, and neither is the life of a child," said UCSO Capt. Doug Loyd.

On top of the fine, each time a driver is convicted for illegally passing a stopped school bus, he or she is assessed six points against their license.

"A driver with 15 points in a 24-month period will be suspended," per DDS.Georgia.gov.

And it takes only four points in any 12-month period to suspend the license of a driver under the age of 18, per state law, meaning that a single stopped school bus ticket will cause a young driver to lose their license.

"The three main areas we are having problems with are in front of United Community Bank (at Ingles), Young Harris Highway and Murphy Highway," said School Transportation Director Stanley Garrett, who has been with the school system for 41 years.

Essentially, some motorists heading the opposite direction of buses haven't been stopping for stopped school buses, which presents major safety issues for the children who get on and off the bus.

Take, for example, the stretch of Georgia 515 between the Glenn Gooch Bypass and Murphy Highway - there's only a turning lane separating directions of traffic, so traffic in all directions must stop for school buses displaying the visual signals.

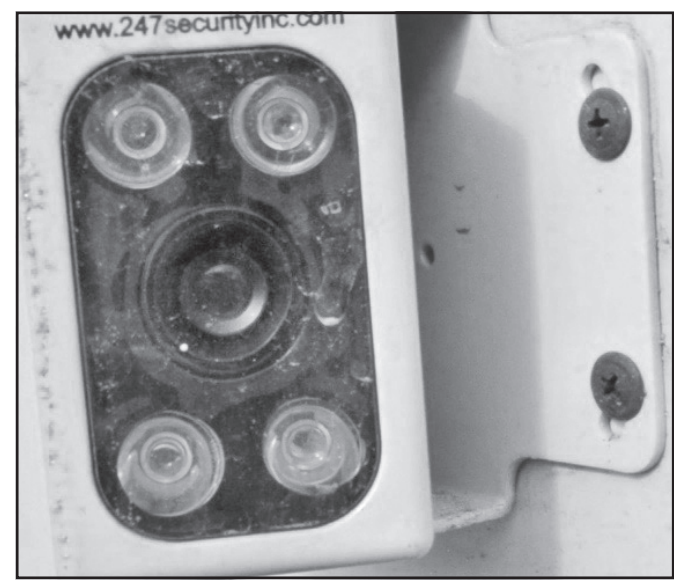


Photo by Mark Novak  
A stop-arm camera affixed to a Union County school bus.

Medians are treated differently than turning lanes. If there's a median, oncoming traffic does not have to stop for a school bus.

"The biggest thing that everyone misunderstands is the median thing," said Capt. Loyd.

Looking at another example, there is a grassy median out past Meeks Park on Georgia 515, and that grassy median counts as a physical barrier separating directions of traffic, so oncoming traffic does not have to stop for a stopped school bus.

However, traffic traveling in the same direction as a school bus must always stop when a bus stops and turns on its visual signals.

School buses pick up most students at their homes on the rural highways and streets of the county, and traffic must stop in all directions on these roads, including roadways that have a passing lane.

Distracted driving plays a big role in many of these infractions, according to the sheriff's office, since the new technology in cars today can keep people from paying attention to the road.

"Be aware ... when school is letting out and buses are stopping, pay attention to where you're supposed to be stopping at, because you never know what a kid is

going to do," said UCSO Lt. Darren Jones, who is a School Resource Officer.

The school buses are equipped with five cameras, three to monitor the inside and two to monitor traffic. While the buses are running, the cameras are always recording. When a motorist is caught on camera not stopping for a school bus, the driver of the motor vehicle can be liable for a civil monetary penalty.

According to OperationStopArm.info:

On a two-lane roadway, when a school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop.

On a two-lane roadway with a center turning lane, when a school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop.

On a four-lane roadway without a median separation, when a school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop.

On a roadway of four lanes or more with a center turning lane, when a school bus stops for passengers, all traffic from both directions must stop.

And on a divided highway of four lanes or more with a median separation, when a school bus stops for passengers, only traffic following the bus must stop.

## February C.I.T. Training Class



(L-R): Twantaa Jennings, Commissioner Lamar Paris, Linda Beaver, Suzanne Moore, Jaysen Thomas.

The Crisis Intervention Team training February 12-16 was attended by 20 participants from Union, Fannin, Towns, and Habersham County Sheriff's Departments, City of Blairsville, Jail employees, and officers from the Department of Natural Resources.

The accredited course included 40 hours of classes presented by area professionals on many mental illnesses. Family members and persons with mental illness spoke on how the illnesses have impacted their lives and families. Visits were made to area treatment and residential facilities. Twantaa Jennings, Jaysen Thomas, and Pat Strode from the Georgia Public Safety Training Center coordinated the program and led classes on officer safety, citizen safety, de-escalation techniques, le-

gal issues, and specific laws concerning pertinent areas of law enforcement.

We thank all that presented helping to equip the law enforcement men and women with tools and information to understand and deal with people in the community dealing with a brain disorder.

Commissioner Paris, who along with Union County Sheriff and Fire Departments, the City of Blairsville Police Department and NAMI Union County, helped make Crisis Intervention Training a reality. Another class will be held again in June, and then on a quarterly basis.

Lamar Paris came by to thank the class for their participation and the GPSTC trainers, and Linda Beaver and Suzanne Moore of the local NAMI affiliate.

## Woody Gap Student Council Yard Sale Is Near!!



The Woody Gap School Student Council is planning their annual yard sale, car wash, and bake sale on **March 9th and 10th.**

**We need your help!** If you have any household items, toys, tools, furniture or anything that you wish to donate for the yard sale, please contact Althea Cantrell at

747-2401 Ext 1632 or

email [acantrell@ucschoools.org](mailto:acantrell@ucschoools.org). All proceeds go to help WG Student Council sponsor school and community projects.

(Veterans Day Ceremony, Back-To-School Bash, etc)

(No clothes please)