

# Opinions

## Fourth of July

The Fourth of July is coming up and we all want to celebrate the Independence Day of the greatest nation on earth. That celebration usually involves fireworks. Each year Union County Fire Department provides some safety tips and considerations when dealing with fireworks.

As we have said many times, safety is always first. Fireworks are fun and exciting, but they can also be very dangerous. The last thing that we want is to spend our holiday weekend in the emergency room or worse, in a burn center. According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), “In 2024, there were 11 reported fireworks-related deaths, most involving misuse and device misfire/malfunctions. An estimated 14,700 people were injured by fireworks last year – a sharp increase of about 38% in deaths and about 52% in injuries respectively compared to 2023.” People should respect the hazards and dangers of all fireworks.

Here are a few tips and considerations when using fireworks. Never allow young children to handle fireworks, and older children should only use fireworks under close adult supervision. Use fireworks outdoors in a clear area away from flammable materials. Ignite one device at a time and maintain a safe distance after igniting. Never hold fireworks in your hand, and please do not make your own fireworks.

The weather this time of the year has been extremely hot and could dry out leaves and grass. Do not utilize fireworks in areas which are in danger of igniting such as dry grass fields, piled leaves, or dry woodland areas. It is a good idea to have a water hose or gardening tools nearby just in case some of the fireworks do cause a fire.

Another consideration is the laws that apply to fireworks. There are too many elements of the law to be explained here. The laws and ordinances cover things such as the minimum age to purchase fireworks, the time of day/night to ignite fireworks, the location, and the distances from certain areas. It is a good practice to research the laws and to follow them. They are designed for general safety, the wellbeing of the people, and for the consideration of neighbors.

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## Letters to the Editor

### The Wisdom of Andrew Clyde

Dear Editor,

The writer of the letter “What About North Georgia?” was correct in pointing out why North Georgia is fortunate to have a Congressman such as Andrew Clyde representing us. Specifically, he focused on various bills Clyde voted against.

One of those was the Social Security Fairness Act. If passed, this act would have removed provisions designed to prevent individuals from “double-dipping” into Social Security. The bill would have cost \$190 billion, which in effect would have shortened the solvency timeline for Social Security.

Next he noted Clyde voted against HR 5378. This bill would have increased the deficit by nearly \$10 billion dollars. Again, our representative demonstrated his acumen in being fiscally responsible.

See Meier, page 5A

### Road Department

Dear Editor,

I recently reached out to Commissioner Harold Collins regarding a dead pine close to the roadway – very tall. My husband and I as well as the neighbor the tree resided at were very concerned. Not only did our commissioner call me back within the hour but he also sent a road crew inspector out the very same day. It was agreed the tree needed to come down and that it would be removed.

The following day, Christian Edwards and his crew from the Road Department showed up with trucks to remove the dead tree. Not only were they polite and professional but they also went the extra mile and removed another compromised tree next to the dead pine. There is no doubt the Road Department is doing a great job.

See Dalton, page 5A

### Re: “Time to Speak Up”

Dear Editor,

A “Time to Speak Up,” indeed! The writer’s view is often expressed any time the Forest Service attempts to do anything except leave the forest alone. While I believe this attitude is well meaning, I also believe the assumptions set forth by the writer are wholly incorrect.

Firstly, the Forest Service does not exist to “protect or preserve” the nation’s forests and wild lands. It exists TO MANAGE them. You can look up their mission statement for yourself. Secondly, does the editorial writer understand the current state of our beloved forests? Is the writer (are you?) aware that many species of wildlife have either been virtually extirpated or their populations severely reduced due to inaction by our forest managers (See: Bobwhite

See McKeral, page 5A

### Immigration

Dear Editor,

Deporting criminal illegal immigrants is what everyone wanted and is what Trump promised. However, after ICE caught and deported only a small amount, Trump has declared war on all immigrants whether they had visas, green cards, papers awaiting a court hearing, etc. Because of this step up, Farmers don’t have enough workers, factory owners don’t have enough workers and other businesses, too, so Trump ordered that these immigrants aren’t to be touched. Florida farmers were so worried that the legislature was considering passing a law to allow 14- to 16-year-olds to work 14 hours a day for less than minimum wage to make up the difference. There’s always a consequence to every action taken.

Most immigrants are hardworking, tax-paying workers. I read everyday someone that followed the immigration rules, pays taxes, and owns a business with employees is taken by ICE. Now ICE has taken to wearing masks (because of threats, which you can’t blame them) but also are showing up with no identifying ID on their clothes, which has been reported in the news like

See Livesay, page 5A

## A Counter-Revolution

George Washington expressed the hopes and dreams of his fellow citizens when he delivered his first inaugural address in 1789. We have traveled a long road since then. Even so, Washington’s charge is still before us.

In that speech he declared, “The foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality.” To him, government that fosters respect among the nations and happiness among its citizens must be grounded in virtue. “I dwell on this prospect with every satisfaction which an ardent love for my country can inspire, since there is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness.” He also knew the source of virtue. “We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained.”

Washington couldn’t have known it would take another 74 years to purge the national sin of slavery. The Civil War replaced that unhappiness with a tenuous unity. America endured world wars which gave us a common, though external, cause. Then came the cultural upheaval of the 1960’s, including a re-thinking of morality. Since then, America has endured sharp disagreement about virtue and “the eternal rules of order and right.” The resulting chaos has contributed to national unhappiness. For decades, polls have shown that most U.S. citizens think the country is headed in the wrong direction, regardless of political party.

Theologian Andrew Walker cautions that the solution is not found in politics or policy. “The real battle is not over tax rates or regulatory reform but over the nature of family, the dignity of the human person, and virtue itself. We must reclaim the idea that truth exists. This is the true revolution we need – a counter-revolution to the chaos of the last six decades.” If only we could agree on what is true and good.

Billy Graham was a counter-revolutionary in that sense. In a 1970 Independence Day address at the Lincoln Memorial he said, “I call upon Americans to raise your voices in prayer

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## Hidden Depression

A depressive family member may act “normal” and sociable in public places and then home, exhibit the depressive state. This occurs because of societal norms which promote being social in public places. In addition, the depressed individual may be hiding the illness due to embarrassment or the fear of being rejected. Because depression is so powerful, it can quickly change a person’s attitude and behavior from being in public to behind closed doors at home.

Depression remains one of the great unsolved medical mysteries. (Anne Sheffield)

The family becomes stressed out. Even the depressed parent feels stressed because he or she has a tremendous amount of guilt. Home life can become cold, fragile, and anxious. Well-intended friends may try to come to the rescue of a depressed individual with cliches, such as “Just think happy thoughts.” “Give your worries to God.” Unfortunately these simple, easy

See Ashurst, page 5A

## Why America’s Best...

Why America’s Best Is Yet to Come

July is here, and with it, America turns 249 – a stunning milestone for a nation born in defiance and idealism on a sweltering July day in Philadelphia. In 1776, thirteen disparate colonies took a leap of faith, setting aside their differences to issue a declaration that would ripple across history. Even the most visionary among them could not have pictured the country that would grow from their signatures.

What began as a fragile experiment has become a living testament to resilience and transformation. Today, we are fifty states strong – hundreds of millions of people, drawn from every corner of the globe, bound together by a shared commitment to something larger than ourselves. Materially, we have achieved things the founders could never have imagined. We live longer, safer, and healthier lives. Diseases that once decimated communities are now rare or gone. Our children enjoy opportunities in education and technology undreamed of in the days of the Continental Congress. The average American’s standard of living far surpasses anything known even to royalty just a century ago. Yet, as our inventions and discoveries multiply, we are reminded that the true worth of our progress lies in how it uplifts the human spirit.

See Hambourger, page 5A

### Successful Mental Health

Dr. James Ray Ashurst  
PH.D.



### Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



## Ripe Watermelon

Watermelon is almost a necessity for the 4th of July in my opinion. Everybody has a favorite way to eat watermelon. Mine is to put it in the fridge to get it nice and cold, cut it up in slices, and put a little salt on each bite as you eat it. If you don’t have a fridge around a cold creek is a good alternative. But, if you accidentally pick a watermelon that’s not all the way ripe, it might be a bummer once you cut it open. With the 4th of July coming I thought I would talk about how to select a ripe watermelon.

Watermelon requires a lot of heat to be able to grow. That means that watermelon grown in the mountains won’t be ripe in time for the 4th of July. There are smaller varieties that don’t take as long to grow. Typically, watermelon take 70-90 days to be ready to harvest. If you are planting your own watermelon it’s typically easier to start them from transplants, but you can start your own seeds. Watermelon plants will need 8 feet of space on each side.

If you are picking watermelon off the vine you want to look at the curly tendrils that are on the stem closest to where it meets the fruit. When you see that curly tendrils dry up and turn brown the watermelon is ripe and ready to harvest.

If you are looking at watermelon that has already been picked there are a couple of tricks that you can use so that you look will a pro at the grocery store or market. You can thump a watermelon to gauge its ripeness. A ripe watermelon will have more of hollow thud sound to it. An unripe watermelon will have a higher pitched, less hollow sound to it. It’s usually best to thump multiple melons with this approach to really be able to gauge the ripeness. Another approach is to check the ground spot. This is just the spot where the watermelon sat on the ground. If it has a creamy yellow or buttery white color then it is ripe. If the ground spot is plain white then it’s not ripe yet.

As watermelon ripen the green color will start to dull. So, if the watermelon still has a sharp green hue, it’s probably not ripe. If you are picking a striped watermelon this method is particularly useful. Another tip is to pick up two watermelons of similar size. The heavier one is riper. Be careful using this tip because if it is too heavy, then it’s overripe.

A whole watermelon will stay ripe for about 2 weeks if its stored below 60 degrees. At room temperature it will last for about 10 days.

Seedless watermelon is very popular and make up 92% of watermelon sales in the US. Seedless watermelon is not genetically modified.

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## From Your Commissioner

When the weather heats up, the Commissioner’s Office gets questions concerning Georgia’s outdoor burn notification system that was effective July 1, 2021, and also about the burn ban that is currently in effect for 54 Georgia counties. More importantly, Union County residents need to know when to call as well as when a call is not required. Georgia Senate Bill 119 12-6-90 eliminated the need to notify the Georgia Forestry Commission when a person, firm, corporation, or association intends to burn hand-piled vegetation/yard debris. Important fire prevention precautions for burners, however, were added.

People who burn leaves, wood, pine needles, etc., are required to follow Five Safety Standards. 1. The burn location must be no less than 25 feet from any woodlands, forestland, or field that contains brush, grass, or other flammable material; 2. The burn location must be no less than 50 feet from structures, which includes homes, outbuildings, etc.; 3. The burning must take place between sunrise and sunset; 4. The person responsible must attend burning at all times until fire is completely extinguished; and 5. The person responsible must take reasonable and necessary precautions to prevent fire escape or spread from the original location. Only hand-piled leaves or naturally occurring yard debris can be burned. No household garbage or man-made trash can be burned under this provision. Also, debris may not be transported from one location to another for burning. A total of 54 other counties fall under an EPD burn ban that is in effect from May 1 – September 30 each year. This does not apply to Union County, but there may also be local ordinances in other counties that are even more strict.

Weather is very important when it comes to burning. Windy situations should always be avoided. Local current and forecasted weather information is readily available through local media sources and regional and statewide weather forecasting agencies. In addition, the Georgia Forestry Commission provides comprehensive fire weather and fire danger information at : GaTrees.org. Although we did go through a rainy spell, we are now facing very hot temperatures and very dry conditions. Please burn responsibly.

Union County Commissioner

Harold Collins



## Chamber 2025

Excitement is in the air at the Chamber this week! With July 4th festivities kicking off this weekend, the highly anticipated Appalachian Roots Festival to follow, and a number of ribbon cuttings planned to welcome our newest members, there’s something happening every day, and we want you to be part of it all!

One of the biggest highlights this year is our incredible 4th of July raffle, which is shaping up to be our largest and most exciting yet. Thanks to the generous support of our local businesses and community partners, the prize list keeps growing—and so does the excitement! This year’s raffle includes amazing items like a Blackstone Grill, 8-in-1 Air Fryer, Vintage Rolling Cooler, two folding Adirondack chairs, guided hikes and trail rides, several themed gift baskets, and more!

With a total prize value now exceeding \$3,000, this is your chance to win big while supporting our community.

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### Blairsville -Union County Chamber President

Steve Rowe



### UGA extension

Watching and Working

Jacob Williams



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## Cummings...continued from Page 4A

corner. He could not give into Robin in front of all the rest of us boys. Tony would think he was some kind of sissy. His little brother, Danny, was looking to him for leadership. And I was there watching in amazement and wondering how this stalemate would turn out. We had fought snakes, rode hickory trees off a bluff, floated a bathtub down this creek and he was not going to be buffaloed by this girl. But, she was no ordinary person. She was the eldest and in charge. Soon the fear of losing to her began to show in my cousin's eyes.

So, she plunged his head into the cool waters of Little Bear Creek again and again. This happened four times until he popped out of the water and screamed, "UNCLE, UNCLE, UNCLE." He sat there for a moment to catch his breath. Soon he got up and walked over to our dam and began piling rocks. Then we all went swimming and nothing else was ever said about the big fight.

But, I pondered what had happened that day for a long time. My running partner and cousin had been embarrassed by the whole thing. His pride had gotten the best of him. We decided that one day we would set things right. The next summer we were once again at Maw

Maw Adams' house. All of us boys were sitting outside under an old Dogwood tree. Dewayne, Danny, Tony and I were finalizing our plans for the day. Then our eldest cousin came from inside the house and began to boss us around as was usual.

She threatened to tell on us if we slipped off to the creek again without her. She turned her back to me and pulled herself up into a Dogwood Tree. She bent double over the limb and was positioned with her rear end high in the air while her feet and head were low toward the ground. This was a perfect set-up and I couldn't resist. I grabbed her feet and flung them upward with all my might. This action turned her a complete flip and she landed on her rear with a thud.

Dewayne looked at me and never cracked a smile. He almost looked like Clint Eastwood when he said, "Us boys need to stick together." And we did even if it meant a spanking. The best part of which was that none of us were ever buffaloed by the girl again.

I can still hear those Katydids and feel the cool water while wading down Little Bear Creek next to Baker's Rock. The rock, next to our beloved swimming hole, has been used by members of our family for at least five generations. I am not sure why, but, that is comforting to me.

## Livesay...continued from Page 4A

the Gestapo in Germany.

Trump made a big thing about the gang MS-13. During his first term one such member was deported three times and came back and was just arrested for murder this year in New York, and now, because of MS-13's good ties to the President of El Salvador, Trump ordered ICE not to arrest any MS-13 leaders.

I had a friend that was threatened in Cuba, came into this country illegally years ago and now is a hardworking, tax-paying American citizen. Illegals have been coming across our borders for many years. The

so-called border wall that is supposed to stop them, well, during Trump's first term when he was taking kids away from their parents and putting them in a caged compound, the press rushed to the border to report on this, and one reporter was taken by a border officer to see a giant pile of makeshift and store-bought ladders people used to climb over these walls.

Now Trump has asked to increase ICE's quota to 3,000 a day. Did you know Biden deported more immigrants than Trump did in his first term?

Mike Livesay

## McKeral.. continued from Page 4A

Quail, Ruffed Grouse, Wild Turkey, etc.)? The habitat needed for MOST wildlife in our area is a forest in different stages of growth – think patchwork quilt, not monoculture.

Are you aware that EVERY TIME the biologists and forest managers attempt to FOLLOW THE SCIENCE and manage the forest correctly with best practice methods, so-called environmental groups sue the Forest Service at every turn and prevent them from returning our forests to their natural state? Are you further aware that the “natural state” of our forests pre-European contact was VASTLY different from its current makeup of more than 98% closed canopy forest? Contrary to popular belief, sprawling expanses of closed canopy forests are unnatural to this area and detrimental to our wildlife populations.

Are you aware the Forest Service cannot address invasive nonnative flora due to the litigious nature of “environmental groups?” Are you aware that fire was an essential part of opening up the forests to allow open canopy “oak savannahs” to thrive on our south-facing

slopes; and grazing by large fauna (elk, bison, deer) was nature's way of sustaining these open forests and even prairies? Are you further aware that man's intervention is the ONLY remedy to returning our forests back to their former state?

While we cannot turn back the clock to when indigenous peoples set fires and the bison and elk roamed our hills, we CAN and SHOULD use the best tools at our disposal to achieve something as close to a natural system as we can: prescribed fire and timber harvesting. Only by using these tools could we ever hope to restore parts of this continent back to a condition which existed before European contact. Our wildlife is suffering the unintended consequences of the well-meaning yet uninformed masses who encourage forestry neglect out of either ignorance or an attempt at moral superiority brought about by watching too many Disney movies.

If you want healthy forests, you should support any effort to remove the restrictions that prevent forest professionals from doing their job.

Jimmie McKeral

## Hambourger...continued from Page 4A

man spirit and serves our neighbors.

Still, the progress runs deeper. The ideals of liberty and justice, once limited in reach, have become living promises for ever more Americans. Barriers of race, gender, and background that once seemed insurmountable are steadily falling. Each generation has worked – sometimes painfully – to broaden the definition of who belongs, bringing more voices and dreams into the fold. The arc of our story bends toward inclusion and renewal.

This national journey hasn't been easy, and it's far from over. But it's worth remembering how, time and again, Americans have answered the call to improve not just their own lives, but the lives of others. From neighbors rebuilding after natural disasters, to citizens advocating for fairness and reform, to everyday people volunteering in soup kitchens or tutoring children in need – these small acts knit the fabric of our nation even tighter. Our communities are resilient, creative, and full of people who quietly make life better for those around them.

Innovation is woven into our national character, but so too is the quiet, persistent goodness of ordinary Americans. “Righteousness exalts a nation,” as King Solomon teaches in the book of Proverbs, and these everyday acts of decency continue to uplift us all. When crisis strikes, neighbors step up for each other; civic groups, volunteers, and communities spring into action. Sometimes, the best of America unfolds quietly, away from headlines and noise, in small acts of generosity and determination.

## Williams... continued from Page 4A

fied, rather it is how they are bred that makes them seedless. Some watermelon is diploid, which means they have 2 sets of chromosomes. Other watermelons are tetraploid, which means they have 4 sets of their chromosomes. When plant breeders cross pollinate a diploid with a tetraploid it creates a watermelon that produces a seed that are triploid. Those

triploid seeds are planted to make seedless watermelon. Triploid watermelons are sterile. It's a similar concept breeding a mule, which is a cross between a horse and a donkey. These seedless watermelons might still produce a few seeds, but they won't mature and turn black. Seedless watermelon are easy to eat, but I think seeded watermelon tastes better.

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

## Fowler...

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and dedication to God and in recommitment to the ideals and dreams upon which our country was founded. Let's dedicate ourselves to a renewal of faith in God, equality, justice, and peace for all. Let's dedicate ourselves to building rather than burning." He knew the way to national unity.

Were we to be the happy citizens Washington envisioned, it would be that we embrace heavenly virtue and trust in Providence. "We" means you. Stand firm with like-minded citizens declaring, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). That old visionary, George Washington, would be proud.

## Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

These are just a few things to keep in mind during the holiday weekend. Union County Fire Department wants everyone to have an enjoyable holiday, but we also want them to be safe. Have a great Independence Day!!!

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

## Meier...

continued from Page 4A

cally responsible.

The writer then highlighted Clyde's vote against The Affordable Insulin Now Act. This vote, on Clyde's part, illustrates the common sense he uses in making decisions for what is best for North Georgia. This particular bill is a limited solution that doesn't address the root causes of high insulin costs. Plus, price controls remove the incentive of companies to invest in research to produce better drugs for the illnesses in question.

Therefore, we should all join the letter writer in being thankful for what he calls the "wisdom of Andrew Clyde." He is unceasingly working for the common good of his constituents.

Gary W. Meier

Young Harris

## Dalton...

continued from Page 4A

was no debris left when they finished, and let me say they worked in the 90-degree plus heat until the entire job was done.

I can attest to everyone if there is a doubt wondering where our tax dollars are going, let me assure you it's not lining pockets – it's used for the citizens of the county. Thank you from a very relieved and grateful Union County Citizen.

Cathy Dalton

## Ashurst...

continued from Page 4A

answers are like shooting a BB gun at a gorilla, trying to calm it down. Until the family works as a team, the home life will be helter-skelter. On the other hand, when the family coordinate activities, discussions and responsibilities as a team of loving family members, miracles can take place.

## Chamber...

continued from Page 4A

porting local initiatives. Raffle tickets are just \$10 each and will be available for purchase right up until the start of the fireworks show on Friday evening.

Don't miss the Annual Fireworks Display at Meeks Park this Friday, proudly sponsored by the Chamber. This cherished tradition honors our Nation's independence and celebrates the brave men and women who have served to protect our freedoms. Bring your family, your friends, and a blanket or lawn chair—it's going to be a night to remember in Blairsville.

## PTSD Support Groupp Meetings

PTSD Support Group for military veterans & first responders available on the first and third Saturdays of each month at 10 AM, in the conference room of the Major Leon Davenport Building located at 78 Old Blue Ridge Hwy., Blairsville, GA 30512.