

Your Fire Department Part 2-Volunteers

A couple weeks ago, we presented Part 1 of Your Fire Department. In that column, we explained that the most important asset of a fire department is the firefighter.

Union County Fire Department has a total of 13 stations. Two of these stations are staffed with career firefighters. One station has both career and volunteer (Station 5 in Suches).

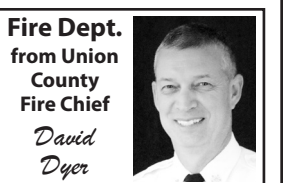
Of the 92 firefighters currently on our roster, 74 of them are volunteer. They make up the majority of your department. They are a group of very dedicated people who volunteer their time to meet the requirements of a firefighter and to respond to the incidents in their community. It requires dedication and sacrifice.

Volunteer firefighters must meet the minimum training requirements set forth by the State of Georgia. The basic minimum level of volunteer firefighter is the Support firefighter level, which is approximately 60 hours of classroom and hands-on training.

Once through initial training, volunteers must attend business meetings at their assigned station and refresher training each year to maintain their status as a volunteer firefighter. The department requires 60 hours of firefighting training each year. These training hours are very important to maintain our ISO rating of 4/4Y.

Volunteers have the option of going beyond the minimum requirements and obtaining as much training as their time allows. Some volunteers have advanced training in firefighting, hazardous materials, emergency medical services, search, rescue, pump op-

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief David Dyer

Near Miss

Jose Felipe thought he booked his trip on a different airline. He never boarded VoePass Flight 2283, which crashed in Brazil leaving no survivors.

A presidential candidate literally dodged a bullet when a would-be assassin's bullet hit his ear. He thanked God and called it a miracle, saying, "Now I'm more of a believer, I think."

These were death-defying near misses. Clarifying moments like these have a way of touching the human soul. To express gratitude for the providence of God is to acknowledge His existence. But this basic belief is only a step into the foyer of a beautiful mansion - more rooms await you. Go further in.

To believe in God means you have a notion of who He is. Is your god the one of popular religion who gives you credit for trying to be a better person, who only helps those who help themselves, or who turns humans into angels when they die? Or do you know Him as He has revealed Himself? God "has spoken to us in His Son... through whom He made the world" (Heb. 1:2). So, what has Jesus, God the Son, spoken to us? Consider two stories.

One evening after sunset, Nicodemus told Jesus, "You have come from God." He knew God existed. But Jesus challenged him to something more, to be "born of the Spirit." Nicodemus kept asking questions. Jesus made it plain. God loves you enough to give His Son, He revealed, "that whoever believes in Him shall... have eternal life."

On another occasion, Jesus set out on a journey. A wealthy young man ran out and knelt down in front of Jesus. Jesus paused to chat. The man was religious and moral. Still he asked, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" In the ensuing exchange, Jesus insisted you simply can't "do" enough. Then he revealed the good news! "With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God." (Mark 10). By God's grace you have eternal life through faith, not from works.

See Fowler, page 5A



All Things New Wayne Fowler

Commissioner's Questions

Q. I hear rumors about a new homestead exemption rule coming down. Is this true?

A. Yes, the Georgia Legislature did pass House Bill 581 that provides an opportunity for additional homestead exemption. It was introduced in February 2023 and passed April 2024. It will appear on this November's ballot in Georgia for public voting because it is a proposed Constitutional Amendment.

Q. What did the Bill do exactly? How will it impact me if it passes?

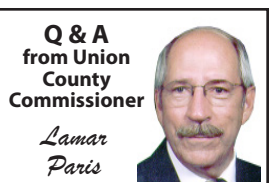
A. As best as we now understand, HB 581 changes several aspects of the process for Tax Assessment, Appeals, and Notices; however, there are three topics found in the bill that Union County residents should pay close attention to: 1) The new single statewide Homestead Exemption, 2) Revisions to the Tax Notice received by Union County property owners, and 3) New requirements for assessment reduction on appeal.

Q. Can you explain these changes?

A. Yes, but first residents should know that any detailed questions should be forwarded to the Union County Tax Assessor's Office (706) 439-6011. These personnel will always have the most current information when it comes to property assessment and any related processes.

The new Single Statewide Homestead Exemption portion of the legislation does cap value increases of homestead property for maintenance and operation ad valorem tax purposes. A base year value will be set (The 2024 property value will be the initial base value). This value will be fixed for as long as an individual owns the property. Assessed value increases will also be capped at the Consumer Price Index rate increases (not to exceed 3% each year).

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris

Letters to the Editor

An Affair to Remember

Dear Editor,

On Saturday, Aug. 24, in Alpharetta, I got a firsthand look at talent from around the world. It was at the Wild Wings Restaurant where an afterparty of the International Singer Songwriter Association was in full swing.

The venue represented those who reminded us that we all have differing abilities to be celebrated. It made me appreciate and humble my life. The spectrum of abilities ran the gamut from autism to blindness, and physical challenges of every sort.

See Kramer, page 5A

Christians for Democrats

Dear Editor,

I read with deep disbelief that someone would use their Christian faith to promote voting for the current set of Democrats. In response to the letter, I forced myself to read the Democrat platform for 2024, and then took some milk of magnesia.

Do you see how the current Democrat party acts toward families of faith, toward women, toward children?

Democrats ridicule traditional family units and celebrate and protect bizarre behaviors. They celebrate the killing of children before they

See Lausier, page 5A

Four More Years?

Dear Editor,

I have to admit I don't watch much of the coverage of political conventions. I especially don't watch conventions of the party that is in the White House at the time. The reason I don't watch these conventions is because they are always the same. Every speaker finishes talking about what the administration has done, and the delegates chant "four more years," "four more years."

At the Democrat National Convention this past month, the delegates did not chant "four more years." The speakers did not reference the accomplishments of the Biden-Harris administration. The theme was we have not been in power for the last three years and nine months. Someone else has caused the issues that we must address.

If you are a Democrat and you can't chant "four more years," why would you vote for Harris to give them four more years?

George Burch

Calling on Congressional Leaders

Dear Editor,

This is an open letter to Sen. John Ossoff, Sen. Raphael Warnock and Rep. Andrew Clyde.

Because of money in politics and unending campaign seasons, the United States political process has reached not only a point of abject ludicrousness, but systemic irrelevance. When presidents can announce on their inauguration day that they are running for the same office five years in the future, just so they can continue hoarding fundraising cash - the original purpose of campaigning is lost.

See St. Lawrence page 5A



Chamber of Commerce

I know that people who are regular readers of this column will think that I am repeating myself, but I can't say it enough that we are truly blessed to be living in the community that we do. Most everyone knows that the key to having a great community is to have good leadership.



Blairsville - Union County Chamber President Steve Rowe

I do want to take time to mention another group that helps make our community what it is today but is also playing a part in what it will be tomorrow. Our teachers and administrators are

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Letters to the Editor

On Progressive Values

Dear Editor,

"Don't ever shy away from our progressive values. One person's socialism is another person's neighborliness." Tim Walz said during a "White Dudes for Harris" Zoom call about two weeks ago.

I try to be understanding of Democrats and their values, but doggone it, since I'm opposed to letting the United States turn into a socialist nation, how should I interpret Tim Walz's remark? Should I cut him some slack and assume he's just pandering to the far left? Should I hope that someone within the DNC campaign taps him on the shoulder and says, "Hey, dude, you need to walk that statement back?" Honestly, I'm not sure how to adjust my strong belief that our nation is headed in the wrong direction when I hear a blatantly leftist remark from a man who could one day become president.

So, I'll take Walz at his word because I'm not sure he's smart enough to know that neighborliness and socialism are entirely different concepts. Neighborliness is happily giving a neighbor a cup of sugar. Socialism is when that same neighbor comes over and says, "Dude, give me some sugar or I'll have you arrested."

His comment is just another in a long line of leftist claims designed to mislead the public

See Ripma, page 5A

Cooperation with People

Dear Editor,

At the core of American values lies a strong sense of cooperation, symbolizing our commitment to collective prosperity and unity. It's empathy and teamwork that keeps our country energetic. Our collective rolling up our sleeves and diving into community actions is what keeps our freedom!

Our nation's basement has not been infested by rabid, messy, mean, unruly raccoons. The true challenge we confront is the elevation of harmful behavior and violence as virtue and righteousness. We must remember the messages we impart to our children and grandchildren, particularly when mockery and disdain for our neighbors have become common.

Our country is strong, and our unity is recognized by our adversaries as our strength. These enemies aim to divide us and undermine our liberties. We are not overwhelmed by chaos, nor are we a nation of victims. In the greatest country, there is no necessity to fix what is not broken. Compassion for one another transcends political correctness or perceived weakness. Donald Trump did not build a wall, boost our economy, or eliminate corruption. Instead, he fa-

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Fresh Vegetables

Fresh Vegetables at the Farmers Market

My grandfather, Bill Adams, loved fresh vegetables from the garden and fresh fruit picked right off the tree. His wife, Delphia, always took us grandchildren berry-picking. Sometimes we even got to visit the Bakers and pick fresh peaches. Each time we picked this fresh fruit, Grandmaw would make fresh peach or blackberry pies. Paw paw Bill loved the springtime because he loved fresh pie and he loved his wife's fresh pies.



Around The Farm Mickey Cummings

Paw paw became a long-haul truck driver when my Mom started the fifth grade. Back in those days it was hard to get fresh fruit from other parts of the world, and he had never seen or even heard of a banana until he made one of his trips for work. He was first introduced to this wonderful delicacy on a trip down to New Orleans. After dropping his load of limestone taken from the hills of Franklin County, he stopped into a place to get himself something to eat and didn't have much money. So, he bought himself some stick bologna, crackers and cheese. At the last moment he spotted some bananas and asked about them. He was told it was a tropical fruit and given one to try. But, he even had to ask for help in peeling the thing. Upon tasting the banana he decided it was the best thing he had ever eaten.

He decided to take some back home to the hills of North Alabama. He thought people would like them as much as he did. So, since he could buy them for a penny and he thought he could sell them for 2 cents to the folks back home, Paw paw just knew he was going to double his investment. I think he ended up with 1,000 pounds of bananas and took them back to Alabama on the back of his old flatbed truck. It was during July, and the only protection he had was a tarp.

My momma told me she was a just a little girl, but she remembered that most of the bananas were rotten by the time he got home. Therefore, they could only sell a few and the family had to eat the rest. The family threw away most of the bananas and then ate banana nut bread, banana pudding and anything else they could make with the really soft and yellow fruits. After this event Paw paw went back to loving peaches and blackberries.

This was the first encounter Bill Adams ever had with this tropical fruit, and I can empathize with this situation because of one of my first encounters. As a little boy I remember my family trips to restaurants were mostly fast food places like the A&W and McDonald's. We never went anywhere fancy. We just could not afford to

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Japanese Stiltgrass

Japanese stiltgrass is a very common and extremely invasive plant in our area. My personal Mount Rushmore (but in a bad way) of invasive species in our area would be wild hogs, hemlock woolly adelgid, Chinese privet, and Japanese stiltgrass. I would give them this notorious designation because of the damage that I see them causing to our natural resources. From these four I think that Japanese stiltgrass is the least well known. Let's get talk about where it came from, the damage that it causes and how to control it.



UGA Extension Watching and Working Jacob Williams

The scientific name for Japanese stiltgrass is Microstegium vimineum. Another common name that you might see for it is Nepalese browntop. Originally this plant was used as packing material for shipping fragile items. In the early 1900s it escaped into the wild. Once in the wild it began to spread. It can now be found throughout the Eastern United States. It is a true grass, in the grass family, poaceae. It grows to up to three feet in height. It can grow in shaded areas and outcompete many native plants. It can grow in places that have been disturbed, or in places that are undisturbed. As an annual it re-seeds itself each year. The leaves on it are alternate, with a faint silver line down the center of the leaf.

Because it grows in the shade and outcompetes native plants, it will often push out plants that are beneficial to wildlife. Japanese stiltgrass is extremely deer resistant. This means that deer will eat down native plants, leaving the Japanese stiltgrass behind to grow and spread. In Georgia it covers the second most acreage. Non-native privets are first by a large margin. But I think that where we live the spread of Japanese stiltgrass is underappreciated in the terms of the damage that it does to the ecosystem.

All hope is not lost because there are some effective ways at controlling it. If you only have a little bit of it you can pull it out by hand. It is very shallow rooted, so hand pulling is not too difficult. You can also mow it down at the end of August or early September. It puts a seed head on in late August to mid-September. So, if you pull it out or cut it down shortly before it does that you can keep it from reseeding itself. Keep in mind that Japanese stiltgrass seed can remain viable for three to five years. So, you should still expect some plants to grow the following years, until the seedbank is depleted. Pre-emergent herbicides like prodiamine or pendimethalin can be used. For those to be effective, they must be applied before the Japanese stiltgrass has germinated. Generally mid-March is when a pre-emer-

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## Paris... continued from Page 4A

any inflationary increase while the lock is in place. In other words, if your assessed value is \$100,000, and if you are locked in, the most increase in assessment value you will see is 3%. If the value of your home goes to \$150,000, that additional \$50,000 is exempted. As we already know, you are only taxed at 40% of the assessed value already. That portion remains the same.

Revisions to the notice to taxpayers will be a great relief to property owners. In the past, the State of GA required that the early tax assessment notices include the previous year's millage rate. This confused property owners and it almost always inflated the estimated total due on the bill. For 2025, the notices will no longer reflect the previous year's millage rate. Instead, it will contain the County roll-back rate. This rate will be a result of calculations involving the Union County Tax Digest and an estimation of the next year's budgetary needs.

Revisions to requirements for assessment reductions on appeal address how property values were "locked" for three years if the property owner appealed the value of their property. In the past, if someone continued their appeal to the Board of Equalization, the assessment value was automatically frozen for three years – whether the owner won the appeal or not. If the new bill passes, property owners will only receive a locked assessment value for 3 years IF they win their appeal for a changed assessment value on their property.

**Q. Are these changes "mandated" if they pass on the November 5th referendum?**

A. Based on the in-

formation we now know, the HB 581 regulations are not mandated for municipalities, counties, or school systems. Each governmental body has an option to "opt out" of the new homestead exemption caps. While we do not know what other governmental bodies plan to do. However, based on the information we have been provided so far, I do not plan to opt out for the County. In other words, I support this move by the State of Georgia because it will ultimately save the primary residents of Union County money. When property assessment rates are frozen as proposed, Union County residents who are homesteaded will ultimately save money in property taxes – especially if the fair market value of their property sees drastic increases.

**Q. I'm confused. If I sell my house, do I have to advertise it for the frozen amount?**

A. Absolutely not! Fair market value drives home sales. If you sell your primary residence in Union County, the new owners will be assessed based on the last assessment value – not your previous reduced value. In other words, properties will be required to be assessed at a minimum of every three years. If you sell your property, the new owners will be locked into the last assessed value (usually the prior year assessment) assuming they apply and qualify for Homestead Exemption. If the new owner does not receive Homestead Exemption, the property would then be taxed on Fair Market Value with no freeze/float. The locked value changes when a property changes hands.

Another reminder: Please address any questions to the Tax Assessor's Office at 706 439-6011.

## St. Lawrence... continued from Page 4A

motely resembling the concept of representative government. U.S. elections are about money, in eight-to-10 figure increments, funneled through legal and illegal means.

I call upon you to propose a clean bill to:

A) make election day a paid national holiday;

B) limit all political campaigning – and all related fundraising – to no more than 90 calendar days prior to the day of the election;

C) abolish the Electoral College that was established to provide "electoral representatives" in a technologically barren time when the majority of Americans could not physically travel great distances to cast votes.

This process works flawlessly, and transparently, in the United Kingdom, Australia,

and dozens of other established democracies around the world.

The current system is broken and is being grossly manipulated and hopelessly corrupted.

Return us to the intent of the Declaration of Independence, in that, "When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

The current system is broken, being grossly manipulated, hopelessly corrupted, and irreparable.

**Gary St. Lawrence**

## Kramer... continued from Page 4A

I promised one artist in particular that I would mention him in my letter. AMARU, his stage name, was going back to Europe the next day and represented the scope of the arts. An independent recording artist, he is also a trained actor, a published author, a filmmaker and model. He was so thrilled that, for the first time in America, his work would be highlighted in the North Georgia News.

The spice of life is alive

and well in our neck of the woods. I heard repeatedly from the artists that love being part of ISSA not only because of the contacts made with others but also because of its inclusiveness. Some talked about their joy at helping others to succeed. Just another reminder to all of us that we are more alike than different, and all have something to offer – no matter what we do.

**Lisa Kramer**

## Barber... continued from Page 4A

avored tax breaks for his family and associates, which resulted in substantial debt for our national treasury.

In America's basement, people are fighting to make ends meet and realize the American dream. Consider supporting a presidential candidate who embodies the spirit of "We the People." Rather than choosing someone who sidelines unity, focuses on self-gain, and fans the flames of disharmony, which only serves to strengthen our foes and jeopard-

dize our freedoms. As Americans, we cherish our freedom and liberties.

**Lamar B Barber**

## Ripma...

**continued from Page 4A**

into believing that socialism is a benevolent economic system focused on equality.

Sorry, Dude, but socialism and neighborliness are mutually exclusive, and one of them is extremely dangerous.

**John Ripma**

## Cummings... continued from Page 4A

go to those places. So, during one spring of my youth I was visiting with my Uncle Ray, and he was going to boil some shrimp. I was asked if I wanted to eat with him, and of course I said yes. The shrimp were cooked and piled into a bowl. I was told to help myself, and I piled some on my plate.

I had never eaten any boiled shrimp. I had tried fried shrimp and liked them. However, I didn't know the shrimp

needed to be peeled and the tails discarded prior to eating the white delicate meat inside the shell. Uncle Ray smiled as he watched me consume the shrimp, and after I had tried a few, he asked me, "How do you like them?" I told him they were good but tough. He began to laugh and then demonstrated how to remove the shell and tail. I must say that I have been a fan of boiled shrimp since that day.

On another occasion I ordered a plate of smoked salmon and sent it back because the salmon was cold. The attendant explained to me that the salmon was cooked but it was served cool at this establishment. I looked her in the eye and thought to myself that if I wanted cold fish I would have ordered a tuna fish sandwich.

## Fowler...

**continued from Page 4A**

God wants you to know He exists and to trust His plan for you. He invites you to saving faith, a born-again faith in God the Son who died on the cross, arose from the dead, and went to prepare a place for you. By His Spirit you live a repentant life, beautiful to Him. To only believe that God exists and sometimes intervenes to help you are nice thoughts. But to trust what He has revealed in Jesus is far more consequential than gratitude for a near miss.

## Chamber...

**continued from Page 4A**

some of the hardest working people I know. They work each day with dozens of children teaching them how to read and write, a little bit about history, social studies and math, but they also teach our kids how to cope in these changing times. The job does not end at 3:30, as there are papers to grade and lesson plans to prepare. Many of them spend their own money to ensure their students have the supplies they need to be successful. Teaching supplies are always in need and donations are appreciated by all of our schools. If you see a teacher, make sure to show them how much they are appreciated in this community.

It takes everyone to make life better in Blairsville.

## Williams...

**continued from Page 4A**

gent would need to be applied. Post-emergent broad-spectrum herbicides can be used, but make sure you are only spraying the target plant. Always read and follow the label when using any pesticide. Controlled burns also kill Japanese Stiltgrass.

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

## Lausier...

**continued from Page 4A**

are born and defend the mutilation of children as young as 8 (gender-affirming care).

Anyone who stands with that group is complicit with the published and spoken stances, so you have to question what are you reading and what are you hearing, what Christian beliefs celebrate this attack on families and children?

Any politician that is not guided by God will be as corrupt as some Republicans and most Democrats.

I encourage you to read a letter from Mr. Combs in the same paper, or from Mr. Huber that says it all very clearly. President Trump is not someone to worship, and he has his set of faults, but he is a leader to help this country, not a communist like Harris.

I also encourage you to read a book called the Bible starting with Matthew and ending with Revelation. You must have missed a few chapters to claim that Christians should consider voting for the current Democrats, the most radical political beliefs and horrific behaviors I have ever seen in my lifetime. Or do you have scales on your eyes, as the Bible says, and are not able to discern the facts?

**Eva Lausier**

## Dyer...

**continued from Page 4A**

erations, and extrication.

Being a volunteer firefighter can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences. Your fire department depends on these strong, dedicated, and talented people. As the saying goes, there is nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

## Parkinson's Support Group

The Parkinson's Support Group meets on the 2nd Tuesday each month at 2 PM at North Georgia Tech, Blairsville. Please call 239-872-7365 for more info.