Opinions

Habitat for Humanity

Let's talk about Habitat Homeownership. Here are some of the most-asked questions about our home ownership program Are the houses free? No. Our partner families have a 20-year

mortgage.

How much is the average mortgage? It depends on a variety of factors. The mortgages are based on what it cost to build the house. We rely on donations and vol-

unteers to keep the cost of the houses as low as possible.

What is the average mortgage payment? The average payment is usually between \$650 and \$750. That not only includes the cost of the house, but also the insurance and property taxes.

This number can be affected by many variables, such as the cost of building materials, etc. The percentage rate is 1-3%.

Can Habitat build a house on my land? Yes! We have done this several times. If you are chosen to be a Habitat Partner Family, and already have land in Union or Towns Counties, we can possibly build on the property that you already own, thereby lowering the mortgage cost.

How long does it take from the time I am accepted into the Program, to the time I move into the house? Usually about a year.

Do I need a down payment? Yes. The usual down payment is \$1,500. But this is not due until the house is completed, so you have time to save the money.

Do I need good credit? You need REASONABLE credit. The average acceptable credit score is 640. If your credit score isn't quite that high. You can work with one of our credit counselors, who will help you do the things necessary to raise your score.

Do I have to work on my house? We require that each cho-sen family put in a total of 350 "sweat equity" hours with our program. This can mean that members of your household work on your house, someone else's house, a repair project, or work in the ReStore

Can I choose the floor plan? Yes! We build either three or four-bedroom houses. We have several floor plans to choose from, so you can pick the one that suits you the best. You also get to pick out cabinets, appliances flooring, roof colors, paint colors, and landscaping (from an approved list of choices). We build a house,

See Habitat, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Angels at Foodland

Dear Editor,

This letter is for sincerest gratitude of a year-round Christmas Spirit shown in Union County by a Foodland grocery employee. Three times in the last 30 years I have been in need of human generosity with a show of compassion. Each time a similar action has occurred at Foodland. This past week I was very ill and walked in to obtain some hydration aids on my way to my third MD visit. Recognized in my state of mind this person handed me healing soup basics on my way out. I was absolutely tearful in my car. Sometimes, when you need an angel, you might find one at Foodland. Brenda Haizlip

Not Rocket Science

Dear Editor,

I, too, am a concerned resident of Union County, and I live out on Hwy 325 and completely agree with the concerned citizen who wrote to you about the R-Cut being created at Hwy 515 and Hwy 325. I make a left from 325 to 515 almost daily, and I have been doing it for years. There is plenty of distance to see oncoming traffic with the exception of the right turn lane heading west from 515 to 325, so I wait until all vehicles turning have done so, and then I go. It's not rocket science, it's patience. It never takes very long for traffic to clear in both directions.

Everybody has one...

All Things

New

Wayne

Fowler

She Knew!

In 1984, while developing a Christmas program for his church, Mark Lowery jotted down a poem. Seven years later Buddy Greene wrote a tune, and they recorded "Mary Did You Know" for the first time.

That poem emerged as Lowery pondered Mary's role in the historic moment that fulfilled prophecies and revealed mys-

teries. In a conversation with his mother (also a musician) she said, "If anyone knew for sure that Jesus was virgin born - Mary knew!' That led Lowery to jot down questions he'd like to ask Mary about what she knew. The popular song came from those questions.

Lowery emphasizes that the purely rhetorical questions are intended to express wonder and amazement, which are surely warranted. "I didn't mean to be profound, just pondering the mysteries of God Incarnate," he says, "of God with us, Immanuel! He had to become one of us to take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Lowery imagines exclaiming to Mary, 'Can you believe who is in your lap!'

Lowery as a 26-year-old may not have meant to be profound, but the lyrics certainly are. They talk about the miracles of walking on water, healing the blind, calming the storm, and raising the dead. But those are not nearly as profound as "when you kiss your little baby, you kiss the face of God." Just who is this baby, this Jesus?

The lyrics unpack that question. "Your baby boy is Lord of all creation," who "would one day rule the nations." The final crescendo arrives, "Did you know that your baby boy is Heaven's perfect Lamb? That sleeping child you're holding is the great I Am!" That is the very name of God claimed by Jesus Himself (John 8:58).

During his ministry when Jesus spoke about entering the kingdom of God, his astonished disciples asked, "Who can be saved?" Jesus said, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). That is what the angel Gabriel told Mary when he explained what was happening (Luke 1:37). That's all Mary needed to know. That's what you need to know. God with us. Amazing!

THINK WE'RE

MISSING THE REASON

FOR THE SEASON,

Commissioner's Questions

Very recently, there have been some concerns about old cars and household items being stored outside on personal property. While I am not a fan of an overabundance of county ordinances, we do have to make some effort to regulate and/or protect the property values of Union County residents. This week's questions address some of the concerns I have heard in the past few weeks.

Q. How do I know if my neighbor's junk would be classified as a junkyard?

A. In the ordinance that specifically relates to junkyards, a junkyard is defined as five (5) or more junked vehicles. This means they have no current license plate and are partially



dismantled or unable to be moved in the manner it was originally intended. For example, if your neighbor has two mustangs in his driveway that he is rebuilding, this does not qualify as a junkyard. For more information on how to define a junkyard you can look at the Union County code 38-82 which you can find on our web site at www.unioncountyga.gov.

Q. Does the amount of junk on a piece of property matter?

A. For a yard full of junk materials, such as washers, dryers, and other junk, the junk material has to equal 600 square feet or more for it to be considered a junkyard. For example, this would be an area that would be 30 feet long by 20 feet wide.

Q. Were some of the junkyards grandfathered in when the ordinance was written?

A. Junkyards in existence before August 25, 2005 were grandfathered in. If any changes are made, like new junk being brought in or additional junk cars being added, then these property owners must comply with the ordinance and get a permit for a junkyard.

Q. What exactly do you mean when you say they were grandfathered in?

A. It means that legally, they already had a business established when the ordinance was adopted. Therefore, you cannot go back and change the requirements and possibly cause them harm. Q. Someone in our neighborhood is building a house

and has building materials piled around. Can the county do

See Paris, page 5A

Chamber of Commerce

I would like to thank the Union County Rotary Club for allowing me to come and speak to their club last week. They did an awesome job of stepping up to the plate and hosting the Veterans Day Program. That is truly living up to the Rotary motto "Service Above Self."

What great time to be in Blairsville-Union County right now. We had a great time filming last Friday's What's Up

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President Steve Rowe

Blairsville from Vogel State Park. They have worked so hard to provide everything our visitors need and we are looking forward to seeing their updates that will begin in 2022. Vogel just held the 19th anniversary of their Christmas program and tree lighting and its become another Blairsville tradition that many look forward to taking their family to every year. If you are looking for a location for that last minute family photo or maybe a unique gift, be sure to make the drive and spend some time out there. Thank you to Jack and his team for

See Chamber, page 5A

Armadillo

Armadillos are moving further and further northward and have started showing up in the mountains. I've seen them walking through the woods while hiking here. Let's talk about armadillos, and the damage that they can cause. In Georgia, we only have one species of armadillo. That's **UGA** the nine-banded armadillo. In Central Watching and South America, and Working there are 20 spe-Jacob cies of armadillo, including the giant Williams armadillo that can weigh up to 130 pounds. The ones that we have are about the size of an opossum and weigh 8 to 17 pounds. They are brownish colored with sparse hair. The unique thing about them is the 'shell' that covers them. This shell is made up of bony plates covered by a tough skin layer. The plates overlap giving the armadillo some freedom of movement. Armadillos don't like cold temperatures, which is why they have been slow to establish populations in the mountains. They will dig burrows or use burrows dug by other animals to sleep in. When it's hot outside, they will limit activity to nighttime. However, when it gets cold, they become more active during the day. They don't hibernate, because they aren't capable of storing body reserves of fat. Therefore, they must forage at least every few days. The burrows usually have an entrance that's about a foot wide and 4 feet long. They have poor eyesight, but rely on their sense of smell to find food. Their diet is made up of insects and plant litter. Sometimes, you can see parts of what they've eaten in their droppings. Their droppings are round and about the same size as marbles. Most armadillo foraging is done by digging in the ground. When digging they are looking for grubs. They will eat fireants, and don't mind fireant bites. Armadillos can carry disease, but transmission of disease to humans is very rare. They can carry leprosy, but the only two reported cases of it transmitting to people was in Texas when some people ate undercooked armadillo. In some cultures armadillo is considered a delicacy. The main issue with armadillos is the damage that they cause while foraging or digging burrows. They can tear up a yard looking for grubs. Typically the holes that they dig are a couple of inches deep so they can stick their snout in it. Armadillos are not protected by Georgia wildlife regulations. This means that they may be trapped or hunted year round with no limit. Shooting them is a practical way to get rid of them. Trapping and removal can be effective too. If you are going to trap them, a live trap See Williams, page 5A



See Kusuk, page 5A

No Board of Commissioners Dear Editor,

Responding to a letter writer published in the Nov. 24 edition of the newspaper, it seems that you would like to have a hand in the governing of Union County through your adamant opposition to our current system!

We happen to like our "Dictatorship" commissioner set-up as opposed to the multiple commissioner government of most Georgia counties

This is one man that we can vote out anytime we deem it necessary to do so.

The multiple commissioner type government would make it necessary to vote out several

See Daniel, page 5A

Much to Celebrate

Dear Editor,

Sometimes it's easy to focus on the negative, all that's going wrong in our country, especially when COVID-19 seems to dominate the discussion. But there are a lot of good things in our country that we can celebrate!

In the past calendar year, 5.6 million jobs have been created nationwide. Through the American Rescue Plan, the federal government delivered \$1.9 trillion in COVID-19 relief to Americans who needed it most. This plan will drastically cut the rate of child poverty in our country and could cut the number of impoverished children in half. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Plan invested \$1.2 trillion in fixing America's infrastructure, therefore investing in our future economic success. GDP growth in

See Maloney, page 5A

Truth, Justice & The American Way

Dear Editor,

OK, I cannot keep quiet when I read garbage like this on MSNBC's website, by Zach Stafford, MSNBC Opinion Columnist:

'The Jussie Smollett saga may now be technically over after a Chicago jury found the actor guilty Thursday of five of the six counts he faced. It doesn't matter if the actor, who starred on 'Empire,' really was beaten up by people yelling 'This is MAGA country!' or if he did stage an elaborate hoax, as the jury decided he did by finding him guilty.'

Excuse me, Mr. Stafford! Are you saying that truth doesn't matter in this case? Or are you

See Ripma, page 5A

After reading the letter in last week's paper titled, "Goodbye Blairsville," I want to rebut that very negative impression of our city and county. There are always folks who view the world with a "glass half empty," pessimistic way of thinking. The writer of the letter certainly looks at Blairsville in that vein. His comparison of Blairsville to the suburbs of Atlanta is way off course and contains what I feel are just anecdotal incidents he has witnessed in his own neighborhood.

Letters to the Editor

Re: Goodbye Blairsville

Before moving to Blairsville 18 years ago, I lived in an Atlanta suburb (Smyrna) for over 20 years and inner city Atlanta for another 10 years (Virginia-Highlands). I still travel to

See **Duket**, page 5A

Your Money

Dear Editor.

Dear Editor,

The North Georgia News, in its Dec. 3, 2021, edition, advertised the Sole Commissioner's 2022 Proposed Budget Hearing was scheduled for the next day. How's that for advance public notice? Questions were asked of how the proposed 2022 budget compared to that of 2021. With the 10-page handout of tables and multicolored graphics, no summary of the 2021 proposed budget or actual expenditures or projections were included for year-to-year comparison. Several persons asked for this information but were told "it is very complicated," "see me after the meeting" or "file an open records request." Without that information it was difficult to ask complete or accurate questions. Staff did hastily provide copies of the 2021 proposed budget. This is pretty meaningless, as the Sole Com-

See Smythe, page 5A

Opiate Epidemic

Dear Editor,

As most already know, the opiate epidemic has been worsening, each year claiming more lives than the last. What is less known by the general public is the problem with methamphetamines has been growing over the last several vears as well.

In the most recent data from the 2017 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, it was found an estimated 964,000 people age 12 or older had a methamphetamine use disorder. This large number of methamphetamine use can lead to some very serious problems in communities; higher crime rates, destroyed families, and the many risks to public health.

Methamphetamines are made by combining chemicals that can be explosive in bad cases See Nichols, page 5A

various gifts of which I received through the years. I can remember getting stockings stuffed with all kinds of goodies. For example, I love tangerines to this day because my grandmother

Christmas Gifts

to each of us. Christmas brings memories of

Christmas brings back many memories

used to give them to me at Christmas. Also, I remember getting those candied orange slices and those soft peppermint sticks at Christmas each

year. (Did you know you can still get those candied orange slices and peppermint sticks at Foodland?) Also, my mother made icebox fruitcakes each year at Christmas, and I would make myself sick eating them. I still have a sweet tooth for those kinds of sweets at Christmas.

This time of year has always been a special time for my family. My grandparents celebrated Christmas by decorating Cedar Trees and by answering the phone with a special greeting. Beginning the day after Thanksgiving Granny would greet telephone callers with "Christmas Gift" instead of hello. She told me that as a youngster she would go with large groups of people to serenade their neighbors. These people would begin the serenade by saying "Christmas Gift," and then the group would sing a Christmas Carol. Their neighbors would respond by tossing hard candy to the group after the song.

Just after the turn of the century, Papa's family experienced some very difficult situations. Papa was only about 4 years old when his Uncle Lum joined the Army and went to fight in World War I. He was one of the last soldiers to ride a horse into battle. Then the influenza epidemic came through North Alabama and two of his Aunts died while in their teens. Next Papa's youngest Uncle was accidentally shot while playing with an old pistol.

These problems placed a strain on the marriage of my great-great-grandparents, John and Martha Cummings. I don't know exactly what happened, but, John left his wife of more than 20 years and ran off with a much younger woman. These two ran off to Missouri and raised another family. The Cummings family in Alabama was extremely bitter. Some of Lon's brothers and sisters never forgave their father. His wife suffered a nervous breakdown and never fully recovered.

Uncle Will and Uncle Riley were extremely bitter toward their Daddy for the destruction of their family. Although he came back for a couple of visits, these two sons would have nothing to do with him. But, time See Cummings, page 5A



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Around The Farm Mickey Cummings

71011

Q

Paris... continued from Page 4A

something about this?

A. No. Construction materials do not fall under the junkyard ordinance. Items that are on someone's property for the purpose of repairing the home or completing construction projects are perfectly fine to be there. Also, materials that are being used to operate a business are not considered junk either. These items do not fall under the definition of a junkyard.

Q. I understand household trash in people's yards does not fall under the Junkyard Ordinance, but who do I contact for this problem?

A. Household trash that is left out in the open can be a health hazard and should be directed to the Environmental Health Office at 706-781-3824. Household trash, such as rotten food or food containers could potentially cause disease. Rodents and other pests can get into it, causing other issues. Household trash cannot remain out in the open without being confined or in a secure container

Keeping our county in a neat and clean condition should be important to all citizens. So, if we all do our part, it should be simple. The same can be said for noise issues. We should all be considerate of our neighbors and how our loud sounds could negatively impact them. Please help keep government out of your business where we do not want to be. Thank you.

Habitat... continued from Page 4A

but you make it a home.

I've never owned a house before, I don't know what's involved. We have a "Family Support" committee that helps all our homeowners, even after the house is completed. You will have a person working with you to answer any questions about home maintenance, and help you solve any problems that may arise. You will have a team of cheerleaders

throughout the whole life of the mortgage, helping you have a successful experience.

Where do I start? Stop by the Habitat Office, located inside the ReStore at 225 Wellborn Street, Blairsville, GA. You can pick up an application, fill it out, and bring it back by Jan. 7, 2022. If you have any questions, or need help, just call 706-745-7101, and someone will help you.

Smythe... continued from Page 4A

missioner is only accepting been identified or budgeted, but questions and comments at the 12/3/21 public hearing and not the second reading on Dec. 13, 2021, where he reads, approves and slaps the gavel for his proposed budget without further public comment.

The proposed budget generally shows the expenditures for a number of areas. Curiously, no "Reserve Fund" category was shown. We were informed that it was included somewhere in the "Transfers to Other Funds," a category which constitutes nearly 25% (over \$5 million) of the total County budget. Citizens were told that part of the previous 17% millage increase was to replace reserve funds that were likely used to fund two unbudgeted land purchases (shoe factory and hospital site) and the county's portion of the nearly \$2.5 million semi-private gun range. None of these expenditures had

presumably paid for through the reserve fund within the "Transfers to Other Funds" cache.

Reserve Funds and the expenditures within this fund need to be identified and not become just a giant slush fund to pay for the Sole Commissioner's pet projects without public knowledge or input. Burying 25% of the budget from public scrutiny is not an open and transparent government. After all, it is our money, even though he refers to it as one of his "pots of money." How about some transparency and accountability for the buried 25% of the budget?

On a bright note, the Sole Commissioner did not threaten or eject any Union County citizens from the meeting. That's an improvement over his recent reactions to challenges to his policies and sole decisions. Johnathon Smythe

Nichols... continued from Page 4A

as well as causing long term property damage from toxic chemicals.

Houses where a meth lab was in operation can retain chemicals which are hazardous to those who live in the house afterwards. In fact, even use of the drug within an apartment, home, or trailer can cause neglong-lasting problems may include respiratory irritability, neurological damage, and liver and kidney damage.

In these times it is important that families are aware of both the signs of methamphetamine use and abuse. In addition, community members need to be on the lookout for signs their house was used prior for methamphetamine production or use. To learn more about Methamphetamine effected houses visit https:// www.safewise.com/blog/tellbuying-meth-house/. For more information on signs of methamphetamine abuse, visit our website at https://www.narcononnewliferetreat.org/drug-abuse-information/signs-of-methamphetamine-abuse.html. Luke Nichols

CummingS... continued from Page 4A

has a way of healing many sore spots. As the years went by, John became more and more feeble. He made things right with my great-grandfather. Lon was always close to his father even though he couldn't understand why his Dad had left his mother. So, one Christmas he invited John to come home and spend some time with his family.

The whole family was invited for Christmas dinner. Some came and some refused. There was still much bitterness among some of his sons.

Lon's oldest daughter. Mabel (Papa's sister), had an idea. She bought her Papa a brand new pair of overalls. She asked everyone to bring a gift for the old man. Mabel gathered all the gifts and stuffed them into the overalls.

Next she sewed the leg openings together so the gifts would not fall out. John was so old he had trouble seeing, but, he knew the overalls were

Chamber... continued from Page 4A

all they do!

While you are out that way, you might as well make a pit stop at Sunrise Grocery for their famous boiled peanuts, Jessica's soaps, and some Appalachian gifts. You could make a day of these two places, Vogel State Park and Sunrise Grocery, what an experience!

As of press time we did not have the final tally for the winners of the Tour of Trees and the Gingerbread Contest but tune in to our What's Up, Blairsville Facebook Live on Friday, December 17th or check our website and social media for the winners. Everyone outdid themselves this year. The Tour will continue until after Christmas so bring the family and check out the trees, wreaths, and gingerbread village before they are gone.

It's great to live in Blairsville and I hope you all have a blessed holiday season.

Ripma... continued from Page 4A

saving a criminal should not be held accountable if he commits a crime intended to slander Donald Trump? Or are you saying that the 12 jurors who unanimously found Smollett guilty are racists and bigots? Or, and I think this is your real intent, are you saying that Republican Conservatives who support Trump are emboldened by the guilty verdict to stand for truth justice and the Ameri can Way? To read Stafford's complete article visit: https://www. msnbc.com/opinion/jussiesmollett-being-found-guiltyhoax-will-hurt-lgbtq-folksn1285638. John Ripma

new so he tried to put them on. But, he could not get his leg into them. So, he turned them upside down and reached his arm into the legs and began pulling out his gifts. Old John soon had about 10 gifts lying at his feet.

Papa said the old man had tears running down his face, and yet he was laughing at the same time. The old man got more than he bargained for that Christmas. He received the gifts and the forgiveness of some of his family.

I think that is why Papa loved Christmas. He was able to experience firsthand the true meaning of Christmas.

He watched his grandfather that year and realized it is never too late to receive the love of your family. Is that not the true meaning of Christmas? We give gifts to people to demonstrate our love for them in the same way Christ gave himself for us.

Williams... continued from Page 4A

that opens on both ends is most effective. Place boards at the opening of the trap to create wings that direct armadillos into the trap. Armadillos can be difficult to trap. And there are no baits that have been shown to improve trapping results. This means that when you're trapping you just have to hope that the armadillo stumbles into the trap

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

ative health effects long after the user or producer has moved one.

More and more communities each year deal with this problem and it is an expensive thing to repair, with decontamination costing thousands of dollars to inhabitants and landlords both. These problems are far from victimless with acute health effects that include lack of coordination, chest pains, and burns to skin, eves, nose, and mouth. Possible chronic

Duket... continued from Page 4A

Atlanta several times a year clamoring to move here. to visit friends. I can reassure you that our community in no way resembles the mayhem of Atlanta.

I wake up every day grateful for the peace and serenity of our beautiful city and county. Driving to town several times a week, or to my favorite fishing spots in our national forests, I look at our green pastures, lush forests, rolling hills, cattle grazing in the fields and feel I have been transported back in time to the 1950s of my childhood. I thank God for allowing me the privilege to live in this great area where waving America flags are commonplace. I certainly understand why throngs of people from the northern states or Florida are

Rather than being grumpy about the minor inconveniences cited in the letter (waiting to be served at restaurants or too many cars on Hwy. 129), I take those moments to reflect on the friendliness and courtesy of the people with whom I interact every day. Try finding a driver in the Atlanta suburbs who will stop to let you merge into heavy traffic or wave you into a parking spot on which they also had their eye.

To the writer of the letter, I can only offer this advice. Chill out and be grateful. You'll be a lot happier in the long run. Sincerely, Joe Duket

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission invites public input

The Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) is assisting Union County and the City of Blairsville with the update of their Joint Comprehensive Plan, the State required document that helps shape and coordinate local work programs for the local governments.

The online survey remains accessible through December 31, 2021. Anyone wishing to participate should visit https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C22N8VX or find the link on the web site for each local government.

public forums open to all resi- can contact Adam Hazell at dents, as listed below. Both of the GMRC as listed above.

these events will run from 4-7 PM and are walk-in/walk-out style forums where people are free to come at any time, visit multiple stations to review materials, submit questions or comments, and then leave at their leisure.

Monday, December 20, 2021 in room 101 of the Union County Recreation Center (129 Union County Recreation Road).

Tuesday, January 4, 2022 at the Pat Haralson Memorial Civic Center (165 Wellborn Street).

Any questions about the There will be two more public involvement process

Maloney... continued from Page 4A

2021 is expected to be at least 5%, the strongest annual economic growth in over 40 years. Over 456 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered, and over 70% of American adults are now fully vaccinated. The unemployment rate has dropped 2% since last year, down to 4.6%.

There is a lot to be celebrated as we enjoy the holiday season and look forward to moving forward in a positive way. Happy Holidays everyone!

Michelle Maloney

Kusuk... continued from Page 4A

Seems to me those of us who live out that way should have some say, but to date, that has not happened. I dread the idea of having to make a U-Turn, so I hope the Department of Transportation reads our concerns, and if they put in the turn, I hope there is a good distance for all of us to turn onto a highway with a 65 mph speed limit without having a close call every time we do it. Gayle Kusuk

Daniel... continued from Page 4A

commissioners at a time every time they messed up through

the group-think ideal that you seem to like!

Plus, the added expense of three or five salaries would be added to our county budget. This would surely cause a raise in taxes to cover the extra expense

We have never seen anything work well that is a product of a committee. Thank you,

HH Daniel