

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Seat Belt Use

Working in emergency services for almost 30 years, I have responded to many motor vehicle accidents. Lately, I have been amazed at how many people are not wearing a seat belt. Seat belts have statistically been shown to save lives and reduce injuries. I am never comfortable in an automobile without having my seat belt on. It has become a habit to reach for the seat belt every time.

Seat belt use became Georgia law in the early 1990s. I remember the many accidents and the severity of injuries due to passengers not wearing a seat belt. When seat belt use became required and people began using them, the accidents were the same, but the injuries were less severe. The vehicles today are better designed for safety, but I have witnessed the difference in those who use seat belts and those who haven't.

For those of you who have the habit of wearing a seat belt, do good work and keep it up. There is only a small percentage who doesn't. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the national average of seat belt use during 2017 was 89.7% with Georgia being the highest at 97.1%. Good job Georgia!

For those of you who do not wear a seat belt, here are some statistics for you to consider. According to the NHTSA, in 2017, there were 37,133 people killed in motor vehicle crashes in the U.S. Of those, 47% were not wearing seat belts. In 2017 alone, seat belts saved an estimated 14,955 lives and could have saved an additional 2,549 people if they had been wearing seat belts. In Georgia, 44% of the 1,057 people who died in crashes on Georgia roads were not wearing seat belts.

The consequences of not wearing a seat belt are clear. The seat belt keeps you safe and secure inside your vehicle, whereas not buckling up can result in being totally ejected from the vehicle in a crash, which is almost always deadly.

Another misconception is that if there are airbags in the vehicle, you do not need seat belts. Air bags are not enough to protect you; in fact, the force of an air bag can seriously injure or even kill you if you're not buckled up. Air bags are designed to work with seat belts, not replace them.

Seat Belt use can reduce the likelihood of serious injury or

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



Marginalized No More

She was a prostitute and conveniently offered lodging at her house. Two young men found their way to her place, but they weren't looking for paid favors. They had a job to do. They were spies and staying there would be a convenient cover.

Her name was Rahab. She confided to the men that she knew who they were. She knew God had brought their people out of Egypt and had given them the land. In return for information and secrecy, she asked that she and her family be spared. This woman helped make history and became part of God's providential plan for all mankind. Dr. Amy Orr-Ewing explains, "It is powerful and prophetic that Rahab ends up in the genealogy of Jesus; her son Boaz goes on to marry Ruth. This shows us something profound about the nature of God's love: He works through kings yet also through those at the very margins of society."

The Bible revisits that theme over and over again. Once, there were men working the midnight shift out in a field. Their job was to watch for predators and thieves who might take the livestock in their care. But this was no ordinary night. First one, then a multitude of angels appeared to them with the message that the Savior, Christ the Lord, had been born. After the shepherds found Mary, Joseph, and the Child, "they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:17-18). This news was not given to wealthy businessmen or influential leaders, but to humble and courageous men. They acted on it and told it.

Not many of us can lay claim to prestige or influence. You may not be that person who, when entering a room, all faces turn to you and smile waiting to hear what you have to say. You may be like the unnamed shepherds. You work hard to survive and save what you can. You may be like Rahab, who started off on the wrong road in life. Maybe you endure the lonely consequences of past choices. But you are never alone or unnoticed if one Person knows you. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know me... and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:14).

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All Things New
Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. We see work has started on the Double Gym located on the Glenn Gooch By-Pass. When do you expect it to be complete?

A. Work on the Double Gym is moving right along! The foundation is complete at this point and they are working on getting all the steel beams up. BMK Construction, the company building the gym, is right on schedule to have the gym complete around July of 2020. Now, this of course is subject to change due to weather or other things that could occur between now and then.

Q. Why did we need this gym?

A. Over the years, the number of children participating in Rec Department basketball has grown and new security concerns from the school system have prevented the use of the existing basketball courts as we have been able to do in the past. We have more participants and teams than we have time in the gyms. The kids are not getting enough practice and game time, so having the double gym will help remedy this.

Q. What do you mean by a Double Gym? What will it look like inside?

A. The layout is quite simple and should be very effective. There will be a gym with bleachers on both sides (hence us calling it a double gym) of the facility with the concession stands and bathrooms being located in the center. There will also be minimal office space in the middle area that will be utilized by Union County Recreation Department Staff.

Q. What types of activities will the gym be used for?

A. The gym will be primarily used for Recreation Department Activities but there will be activities for the public also at scheduled times. This means, basketball practices, games and tournaments for the kids will take priority but, they will also be utilized for adult activities such as exercise programs, aerobics, dance classes, and volleyball. People are already requesting to reserve the gyms for activities being put on by private organizations. We are not able to commit to things like this yet. We have to make sure there is enough time for Recreation Department activities once the facility is up and running. Then we will consider options of renting the facility out if there is enough available time.

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris



Drug Free Mountain Life

Marijuana Use and Adolescent Health

Marijuana is addictive. Most teens who enter substance abuse treatment programs report that marijuana is the main or only drug they used. Adolescents who start using marijuana before the age of 14 are four times more likely to become addicted by the time they are adults. Marijuana addiction is more common among teens than adults because their brains are still developing and vulnerable.

The DRUG FREE MOUNTAIN LIFE campaign supports an overall safe community by providing information, education and support services to children, families, and community toward prevention of illegal substance abuse.

Some teens make the mistake of believing that marijuana can help reduce issues with ADHD or anxiety and improve their focus in school. But, in truth, adolescents who use marijuana can have increased difficulty memorizing things; distorted thinking and perception (exaggerated or irrational thoughts); hallucinations; paranoia; anxiety; depression; a permanent de-

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Letters to the Editor

For Posterity's Sake

Dear Editor,
As another year comes to a close, I implore each and every one of us to dig deep down and examine the direction of America that we wish to hand down to our children and grandchildren.

Is it to be one of hate, divisiveness, intolerance and zero accountability as we are seeing today, or is it to be one of compassion, tolerance, rule of law, love for one another, humanitarianism and peace on earth? I vote for the latter. Perhaps we all need to take out a dictionary and revisit the definition of love, hate, racism, compassion, divisiveness, intolerance, accountability, facts, lies, rule of law, equality, etc., and make adjustments as needed so that we all can live in peace and achieve the challenge of becoming our very best selves instead of our very worst selves.

We have one opportunity to live here on earth in the present moment... the here and now... the guaranteed life of plenty. Many hope for a more peaceful "next life"... but, why wait for what the next life may have to offer when we can and do have a wonderful life in the here and now?

Why live with hate in our hearts and pass
See Magee, page 5A

Small Town with a Big Heart

Dear Editor,
Over and over again I am reminded why I chose Blairsville as my adopted home. Recently I was on my way to a hospice patient's home nearly 50 miles away.

I wanted to make one short stop before going there and went to the Post Office for a quick errand to mail some items. Deed done in record time, I returned to my car and discovered - to my horror - that I had locked my keys in the car. In many other communities across this nation, that would have meant that no one would have come to my aid. But, that is not true in Blairsville.

A man pulled up to park next to me and saw the look of consternation on my face, and within moments said he'd drive me back to my home to get a spare key. His wife was in the car, and I noticed her waving a "welcome" wave to me, and as I got in the car she said, "You're Arlene Gray, aren't you?" And, yes I am. She said she recognized me from the back cover of a book I had written many years ago, which she said she had read and enjoyed. Mostly I was shocked that she had recognized me from that old photo!

It was a 10-mile drive each way, and that couple was congenial and cooperative every inch of the way! For anyone wondering if there is any place on earth more endearing than Blairsville, Georgia, wonder no more! And for all my neigh-

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Christmas Tree Fires & Falls

It's that time of year again where we decorate our homes with hot lights and flammable decorations, and we climb on anything available to hang these things around the house. So, here is my annual reminder about the increased risk of home fires and injuries during the Christmas season.

We add additional risk to our homes this time of the year with decorations, so be extra careful and pay attention to the rules about holiday fire safety. If you feel the need to get on the roof for some reason, get your 12-year-old to do it because they bounce better than us old folks when hitting the ground. As we approach the holidays many people are focused on decorating for the season and don't think about the risks that they are exposing their homes and businesses to with the decorations. Modern decorations are safer than they used to be (remember the big hot lights with the fabric covered cord) but still the risk of a structure fire is increased.

The winter holiday season should be a joyous time of year, however, certain types of fires and injuries associated with holiday decorating are much more common during this season. Here are some statistics from the NFPA that should make you think about the old Christmas tree. NFPA estimates that Christmas trees, both natural and artificial, were the first item ignited in an average of 200 reported home structure fires per year during 2013-2017. These fires caused an estimated average of 6 civilian deaths, 16 civilian injuries, and \$14.8 million in direct property damage per year. These estimates are based on data from the U.S. Fire Administration's (USFA's) National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) and the National Fire Protection Association's (NFPA's) annual fire department experience survey. During the same period, holiday lights and other decorative lighting with line voltage were involved in an estimated average of 150 home structure fires per year. These fires caused an average of nine civilian deaths, 16 civilian injuries, and \$8.4 million in direct property damage per year although these fires are not common, when they do occur, they are unusually likely to be serious.

On average, one of every 32 reported home structure Christmas tree fires resulted in a death compared to an average of one death per 143 total reported home structure fires. Similar shares of home Christmas tree structure fires were in December (43%) and January (39%). Christmas tree fires are more likely after Christ-

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RC&D Executive Director
Frank Riley



Christmas Gifts

Christmas brings back many memories to each of us. Christmas brings memories of various gifts of which I have 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 used to give them to me at Christmas. And I remember getting those candied orange slices at Christmas. I also remember getting those peppermint snacks at Christmas each year. Did you know you can still get those candied orange slices and peppermint snacks at Foodland? I also remember getting those Ice Box Fruit Cakes at Christmas each year. My mother made those things, and I would make myself sick eating them. I still have a sweet tooth for those kinds of sweets. Ruby Jones makes a Pecan Pie for me each year at Christmas and it is really good.

Christmas 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. The day after Thanksgiving, my grandmother 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. The group of people would begin the serenade by saying "Christmas Gift," and then the group would sing a Christmas Carol to their neighbor. The neighbors would respond by tossing hard candy to the group after the song.

Just after the turn of the century, my Grandfather's family experienced some hard times. My Grandfather was only about 4 years old when his Uncle joined the Army and went to fight in World War I. Then the influenza epidemic came through North Alabama, and two of my Grandfather's Aunts died while in their teens. Then 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 another woman. All of this was bad and created hard feelings. But, after a year or so, Papa's Uncles and Aunts found out their Daddy had run off with another, younger woman. These two ran off to Missouri and raised another family. The Cummings family in Alabama was extremely bitter.

Some of John's sons never forgave him for the destruction of their family. He came back for a couple of visits, but, a couple of his sons would

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Around The Farm
Mickey Cummings



Chamber of Commerce

Congratulations to the winners of our 2019 Tour of Trees and Gingerbread Village. The Wine Shoppe, Crossing Creek RV Resort & Spa, and Homestead Hospice won People's Choice for favorite wreath, small tree and large tree, respectively. Alexander's Store won Most Traditional and Kinetic by Windstream won Most Creative. Abigail and Kaitlin Willingham and Kim Williams tied for first place with their wonderful gingerbread creations, while another one of Kim Williams' houses also won runner up.

All the trees, wreaths, and gingerbread creations are amazing, and we thank everyone for participating in this wonderful Christmas tradition. If you haven't seen all of it in person yet, swing by the Union County Community Center between now and December 31 and see them for yourself!

If you haven't been around our town square yet, be sure to swing by soon to admire

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President
Steve Rowe



Erosion Control

Georgia, along with much of the southeastern US, doesn't have a positive past with erosion. Repetitive cropping of cotton in the Piedmont resulted in seven inches of topsoil being washed away into the ocean. Soil takes hundreds of years to create, meaning that loss of soil is something that is felt for generations. By the 1950s, new policies and programs began to change Georgia from endless cotton fields to forestland and other uses that are less susceptible to erosion. In the mountains, there is always a threat of erosion if we aren't proactive with protecting our landscape. Let's talk about why we should care about erosion and some things that you can do to make sure that your land isn't eroded away.

Erosion can also lead to water quality issues. Not only does the topsoil muddy up our lakes and rivers, but also the nutrients that the topsoil is carrying can create algal blooms leading to decreased aquatic life. That is bad news for our lakes and the fish that inhabit them. Erosion can also create a hard pan that will repel water and increases surface runoff.

So let's talk about what you can do to reduce erosion. Firstly, construction makes soil very susceptible to erosion. Removing all the vegetation from the top of the soil leaves it open to the rainfall. In construction, surround the project site with hay bales and silt fences, preserve the already existing vegetation, and keep any piles of loose vegetation or gravel covered. Whenever you're clearing land try to leave as much of the existing vegetation as possible. This means you won't need to plant as much back once your project is finished.

Planting permanent vegetation is the long-term goal for erosion control. Mulch can also be used temporarily while you are establishing vegetation. Grasses are really good at intercepting runoff and infiltrating it back into the soil. Shrubs are good at creating cover and habitat for wildlife, and trees are best at blocking noise.

Keep stream banks covered with vegetation and trees. Those plant roots will solidify that stream bank so that the natural erosion process will be slowed down. It will keep the stream from widening. In gardens and around the home use mulch or compost when possible to protect bare soil. This will improve water infiltration into the soil and reduce runoff.

Cleared land is most likely going to need lime and fertilizer before you can replant it with vegetation. A soil test is a great place to start to learn how much lime and fertilizer you need to add.

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Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



North Georgia News

Published since 1909 • Legal Organ of Union County

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Publisher/Owner

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Photographer

Publication No: 001505

Advertising, News deadlines Friday at 4 p.m. • Mail Service for all subscriptions except 30512, 30514 & 30572 - One Year \$40. In county, carrier delivered subscription is \$3. All subscriptions must be paid in advance. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is published weekly by NGN/TCH, Inc., 266 Cleveland Street, Blairsville, Georgia, 30512. Entered as Second Class Matter as of Dec. 10, 1981, at the Post Office in Blairsville. NORTH GEORGIA NEWS is not responsible for errors in advertising beyond the cost of the actual space involved. All advertisements are accepted subject to the Publisher's approval of the copy and to the space being available, and the Publisher reserves the right to refuse any advertisement.

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