

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Winter Driving Tips

The official start date of winter, December 21st, has come and gone. We are in the winter season. That means cold temperatures, wet rain, and possibly winter weather such as snow and ice. That winter weather can bring hazardous road conditions making driving difficult. Those hazardous road conditions can also result in motor vehicle accidents. Union County Fire Department would like to remind everyone of a few driving tips for this winter season.

Before we begin winter driving, we must get prepared. Drivers should ensure that their vehicle is in good working order and has good tires for winter conditions. If your car is not performing well, you may get stranded in these colder temperatures. Tires are extremely important. Worn tires reduce traction and increase the possibility of an accident in rain, snow or ice.

It is also a good idea to be prepared in the event that you are in an accident or stranded for a while in the cold. Drivers should create a Ready Kit with essential supplies that can be stored in the vehicle for such emergencies. These kits should include food, water, first aid kits, flashlight, blankets and other essential equipment. The web site www.ready.gov has tips on winter preparedness and Ready Kits.

If you must drive in winter conditions, there are a few things to keep in mind. Know the weather and the possibility for hazardous conditions. This includes the temperature and possible snow or ice forecast. There may not be snow on the road but the temperature may be below freezing which can produce "black ice" that drivers are unable to see.

Drive slower than usual and do not let other drivers rush you. Keep a greater distance between you and the vehicle in front of you. Stopping distances increase dramatically with snow and ice. Turn your lights on to make your vehicle visible to other drivers. It is good to have a travel plan and let someone know where you are going and how long you may be. The last thing is pay attention. Distracted driving is a major contributor to accidents in good weather much less winter weather.

Driving in winter weather can be very dangerous. Be-

See *Dyer, page 5A*

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



The Wait

When I was a child, it was so hard to wait for the grand reveal of gifts on Christmas morning! Those happy times blended with our family's celebration of the birth of the Savior. When we started singing Christmas carols in church services, I knew the gifts would soon follow.

During Hezekiah's rule, the people had little to anticipate. The brutal Assyrians oppressed them because they had turned away from God. But a gift of hope arrived, the miraculous defeat of the dreaded enemy. Then God told them, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness'...Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together" (Isa. 40:3,5). Chasing King Sennacherib away was one thing; but wait, there's more!

John the Baptist was that voice calling. Like Hezekiah, he understood the need to repent and turn to the Lord. John's message signaled the wait was over for "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The long-awaited One had made a humble entrance in the little town of Bethlehem. He was announced by the angels, sought by shepherds, and worshipped by the Magi. He was the glory of the Lord revealed. God with us, Immanuel, had come to minister to the people!

In the carol, "O Holy Night," you can hear the yearning and waiting, then the realization and response. "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'till He appeared and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born." The destiny of that Child in the manger was Calvary's cross, to deliver you from sin and error by His sacrificial death. Those who receive that gift by faith worship Him as God the Son.

But wait, there's more! Jesus promised that one day people will "see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). In the final chapter of the Bible, He repeats three times, "I am coming quickly." Though we wonder what "quickly" means, His second Advent is as certain and physical as the first.

My childhood understanding of the true meaning of

See *Fowler, page 5A*

All Things New
Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Instead of doing questions and answers this week, I would like to talk a little about our community and the people in it. This year I have been reminded so many times what a great town and county we all get to live in. Not only is it great because of the beautiful mountains and the small-town feeling, it is great because of the people who live here.

If you really sit down and think about it, the people of our community are the ones that make things happen. For example, the Christmas Parade is organized by the Historical Society and the Downtown Development Authority, but the people, churches, and businesses of our community help make it great by participating! The creative floats and all the candy made for a wonderful community event that adults and children were able to enjoy. Then, you have the Blairsville Sorghum Festival that is organized and operated by a group of volunteers. This is a great community event that everyone likes to attend. There is also the Butternut Creek Festival and the Scottish Festival and Highland Games, both of which are organized by volunteers. Next, think about the Farmers Market. While this facility was built and is maintained by the County there would not be a Farmers Market without all the crafters and farmers and the people who shop there every weekend. All of this is because of the people of Union County.

There are so many other things this year that demonstrate the wonderful people who live in our community: there are new stores opening and established businesses moving to newer and better locations; there are non-profits out and about all the time raising money for their organizations to help people; there are often benefits organized for people in our community who need assistance; and people are always volunteering to take on new projects to fill a need within our community.

So, I want to say thank you to all of the Union County citizens for making Union County and Blairsville the best place to live. Your dedication to community and dedication to each other is unsurpassed as far as I am concerned. I want to wish each and every one of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! I am excited about 2020 and the great things that will be happening in our community.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris



Drug Free Mountain Life

Beating the Holiday Blues

You made it through Thanksgiving with a smile. And now comes the holiday doubleheader of Christmas and New Year's when most everyone seems to ooze good cheer and merriment. So what do you do when the world around you is wrapped in red and green and you're feeling blue?

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.

First, recognize that you're not a Scrooge and you're most definitely not alone. The "holiday blues" are real and much more common than you think. Second, be kind to yourself. Try not to chastise yourself for what you are and what you're not feeling. And third, take a few minutes to read about some of the major causes and best remedies for the "holiday blues."

Loneliness is hard. For people without a significant other, who don't have family or who live far from family, the holidays can be especially tough. While longing for company,

See *Drug Free, page 5A*



Chamber of Commerce

Merry Christmas! It's the most wonderful time of the year, and we hope that everyone has a truly blessed day in celebration of Christmas and enjoys their time spent with family and friends. 2020 is just around the corner, and we are looking forward to all the exciting events and opportunities we will be providing for our community.

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President
Steve Rowe



Our Annual Chamber Awards Night will be taking place in the New Year on January 23. This awards presentation and dinner will honor standout leaders from the Blairsville-Union County area and recognize individuals and businesses that represent local economic drivers including hospitality, manufacturing and small business including business of the quarter and year as well as ambassador of the quarter and year. Individual tickets are \$40 and table and event sponsorships are available. Call 706-745-5789 for more information.

We also have an exciting monthly mingle approaching on January 15. Susan Stalcup, with

See *Chamber, page 5A*

Letters to the Editor

Next?

Dear Editor,

What is going to be next... maybe the breakfast President Trump has every morning? If it's not nutritious, the news media should let us know so we could add that to the other attempts to remove him from office.

It is not a secret that the Democratic Party, for the most part, think they were cheated out of the 2016 election and that Hillary Clinton (please) should be in the White House. The attempts will continue along with the cost of them - over \$50 million of taxpayer money has been reported so far. I would surely like to see Congress working together for a change, Democrats and Republicans, to pass laws to help the very people who put them in office. I am not gonna hold my breath that that will happen anytime soon.

See *Moore, page 5A*

Shedding Light on BRMEMC

Dear Editor,

In order to attend a board meeting at Blue Ridge Mountain EMC you have to apply at least 48 hours in advance, and if you wish to speak at the meeting you must do so at least five days in advance. The application process was cumbersome and complicated.

Congratulations! At the request of FAIR members, BRMEMC recently simplified the process to apply to attend the board meeting by creating a basic link request. If you want to speak though, the process is still somewhat cumbersome. In both cases, you still had to wait for approval which will come via a phone call on the same day as the meeting.

BRMEMC needs to take the next step

See *BRMEMC, page 5A*

Get Over It?

Dear Editor,

The attempt to impeach our stalwart president, duly elected by the people who voted for him in 2016, is an insult to his voters. No, not really. It appears the Republicans in Congress either have poor memory, or simply don't care for facts that make Trump look like a Russian plant. I'm sure you remember that Hillary's vote numbers were about three and a half million greater than Trump's. He had to rely on the Electoral College to become president.

And that makes Democrats doubt that the 2020 election could be unreliable. It worked for him once, and now, with his poll figures looking like a skydiver without a parachute, he'll do it again. By using Ukraine this time, he might even

See *Schilling, page 5A*

Volunteer Fire Department

If you live in a metropolitan area and an emergency arises, you call 911 and a fire truck or ambulance will come screaming to your door in a few minutes to help with your emergency. Many people who move away from urban areas to the serenity of the mountains are in for a rude awakening when a fire happens. We are good but not waiting for a call all day. You still call 911 and the firefighters are well trained but will not arrive in force for minutes or more because most of the firefighters up here are volunteers who work jobs and when the alarm goes off they have to get off, drive to the station, get their gear, the appropriate apparatus, and then drive to the emergency. Our Volunteers respond to all emergencies to either fight a fire or assist other emergency responders to take care of the situation and protect citizens from harm.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, 70 percent of firefighters in the United States are volunteers. Volunteer firefighters go through some or all of the same training as career personnel do and varies between jurisdictions. When volunteers join a department, they often sign up for firefighting classes and other certifications that teach them what they need to know to become a volunteer firefighter. The first thing they teach is "I" am the most important person on an incident because if I go down then it takes resources away from the fire to take of me. Examples of these certifications include Firefighter I, Firefighter II, S-130/S-190, Emergency Medical Responder, and Emergency Medical Technician. We take FF I, FF II, NPQ I, NPQ II, First Responder, Hazardous materials, and other classes which make our volunteers equal to paid department personnel in training and qualifications. It takes a commitment to be a volunteer firefighter since each class meets 2 or 3 times a week for 3 or 4 months. The main difference is volunteers don't train every day as some paid personnel have time to do but we are equally qualified.

The Department of Labor (DOL) allows volunteer firefighters to receive benefits such as worker's compensation, health insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, pension plans, length of service awards, and property tax relief. DOL-defined volunteer firefighters may be paid nominal fees on a per call basis, per shift basis, or various service requirements, but may not be compensated based on productivity such as with an hourly wage. They may also volunteer time for training, public education, fund-raising, and other non-emergency department related activities.

See *Riley, page 5A*

RC&D Executive Director
Frank Riley



Memories of Christmas

I have been blessed in my life to experience 53 different Christmas celebrations. As I look back through the years, I can remember many special memories from Christmases past. My first recollection of Christmas was in Chicago. My Daddy lost his job in Alabama and we had moved up North to find work. Our first Christmas there was miserable. I was homeless. I couldn't understand northern talking, and they couldn't understand me. We were constantly referred to as hillbilly people. But, everything was made more bearable by a new pair of cowboy boots sent to me by my Uncle Bud a few days before Christmas in 1962.

In 1965, I was able to spend Christmas Break with my grandparents in Alabama. I went squirrel hunting everyday with Papa. At night, we would sit around the fire and listen to stories told by my grandparents. Granny told me about the bitter winters when my Daddy was little. She said, "In those days, the mail carriers used wagons or horses to carry the mail." One particular day had been brutally cold. So, Granny heated up a big rock by the fireplace and wrapped it in a blanket. She then gave the rock to the mailman when he came by their house. He later said this rock was placed under his feet and it kept his feet from freezing on that cold day in 1940. This story continues to stand out in my memory as one of my favorite Christmas stories given to me by my Granny.

In 1973, Santa Claus brought me an Ithaca .410 gauge shotgun. As usual, the family traveled to Alabama to spend Christmas with our family. I was in heaven that week. We hunted rabbits and squirrels in the day and coons at night. I spent every waking hour in the fields and woods during that Christmas Break. But, I had a feeling gnawing at my gut that told me something was not right with my father. He had been acting different. Normally, he was very outgoing and gregarious. Lately, he had been withdrawn. He acted as if something were worrying him. Prior to 1973, he was known for hitting the bottle. He had a lightning fast temper, and when he thought us kids weren't around, he used profane language. My Dad only went to church a handful of times before that day. That Christmas night of 1973 changed everything in our lives. My father accepted Jesus, and his life style was changed in an instant. The temper, profanity and drinking were gone. We started going to

See *Cummings, page 5A*

Around The Farm
Mickey Cummings



What's going on here?

I often get questions from folks about what's wrong with a plant. I always enjoy answering those kinds of questions because they usually mean that I need to put on my detective hat to figure out what's going on. I'm going to talk through my thought process when someone brings me a plant with something wrong with it.

There are two categories for what could have caused damage to a plant. Abiotic and biotic.

Abiotic damage comes from nonliving sources. It includes things like freeze damage, drought stress, wind damage, insufficient sunlight, soil compaction, not enough nutrients, or even damage from a nearby herbicide spray. To figure out if abiotic factors are playing a role I'm going to need some background information. I may ask questions like, how long has it looked like this, have you fertilized recently, do you know the soil pH, have you sprayed anything in the area? These types of questions will help build a framework and eliminate some possibilities. It is difficult to tell the difference between abiotic and biotic damage. Abiotic factors will often lead to biotic damage, which is damage from a living source. Biotic damage includes insect damage, plant diseases (fungal, bacterial, or viral), and wildlife damage. Biotic damage will leave plants stressed, making them more susceptible and prone to biotic damage. Some pests, like ambrosia beetle, will only attack plants that are stressed or already in decline. When biotic and abiotic factors are both present it can turn into a chicken or the egg type of question. Did beetles feeding on the plant cause it to become stressed so now it has a nutrient deficiency? Or did the plant have a nutrient deficiency which stressed the plant and attracted the beetles? There's not always a clear answer, but usually to fix the problem you'll need to address both sides of the issue.

It helps to know what species of plant we're dealing with, and what the weather has been like recently. For example, earlier this year a lot of Leyland Cypress trees lost some of their needles on the inside of the trees. Leyland Cypress has shallow roots, making it very susceptible to dry spells, like we have had a couple of times this year. Another example is hemlock trees. If someone calls me with a question about their hemlock tree, most of the time the issue is going to be hemlock woolly Adelgid, which is an insect pest of hemlocks. In 2018 we had lots and lots of rainfall. That leads to more fungal diseases because fungi love moisture and need it to spread. Therefore, I got a lot of calls from people with leaf spots on their tomatoes. Most of these

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Watching and Working
Jacob Williams



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Derek Richards
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Todd Forrest
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Mark Smith
Staff Writer

Website: www.nganews.com

Email: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com

Mailing: P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, Georgia 30514

Lowell Nicholson

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Phone: 706-745-6343 Fax: 706-745-1830 * P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, Georgia 30514