

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Making a difference

Friday morning was just another Friday to most. To Bill Justus, it was a dream come true. The 14-year professional firefighting veteran got his start in fighting fires in the U.S. Air Force. He spent 28 months fighting fires in the U.S. Military. On Friday, Justus arrived at the brand new Fire Station 1 headquarters and was greeted by Union County Fire Chief Charles Worden and given the red carpet treatment.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



It was all a part of a package pulled together by Second Wind Dreams. The Dream Team weaves dreams for Union County Nursing Home folks from the simple to the sublime. Their mission is simple: change the perception of aging by proving that life doesn't end once you become a nursing home resident.

Bill's dream was one that The Team had to enlist the help of Chief Worden. Bill wanted one more ride in a fire truck. Chief Worden and The Team made it happen as Bill took a ride in Engine 1 through Downtown. Yes, the lights were on at the time of Bill's adventure.

Bill climbed into that tanker and his eyes lit up. The dream continued once he returned to Station 1. Chief Worden and Station 1 personnel presented Bill with a UCFD T-shirt, a plaque recognizing June 21st as Bill Justus Firefighter Day in Union County, and an Afghan complete with the Firefighter's Prayer embroidered on it. Later, the entire group of Team volunteers, Justus and firefighters enjoyed a Firehouse Stew.

The Dream Team helps grant the wishes of nursing home residents. They made a big difference in Bill Justus' life. It makes me proud to know that the folks living in the Union County Nursing Home have an advocate's group making their lives more worthwhile. Which brings the newspaper to a point of personal concern.

The Union County Nursing Home is going through a restructuring period. At least 35 nurses and Certified Nursing Assistants are gone from our nursing home. Thirteen didn't leave on their own terms. Twenty-two left out of fear they were about to be laid off.

When a new resident arrives at the nursing home, they don't know what to expect. They quickly become acquainted and dependent on the familiar faces they come to know.

Today, there are fewer familiar faces at the nursing home. These 150 residents experienced change when they first arrived at the nursing home. Change is not good for the elderly. Now that familiar faces are gone, for what appears to be financially motivated purposes, these residents, many of whom are our family members, now face what this newspaper feels are unnecessary changes.

Call it restructuring, call it what you will, it's not fair to the residents to subject them to getting to know a new staff. Some don't have much time left.

It's time to put people over the bottom dollar games. These 150 people aren't just a business, the nursing home is their home. They need professional Registered Nurses, not inexperienced LPNs or CNAs.

The mission of a newspaper is that of a community watchdog. We're watching and we're not sure what we're seeing at the Nursing Home. One thing is for sure, you don't play games with people's lives, employees or nursing home residents.

Did Tigger get fired? Well, like the residents and dismissed employees, he may be the victim of Nursing Home restructuring.

Letters to the Editor ...

Something's missing

Dear Editor, Recently, in his question and answer column in this paper, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris asked himself about several contracts for purchases of real property by Union County. He mentioned four properties: 5 acres next to the farmer's market, 1.4 acres adjacent to Fire Department Station 1, and two other properties which he didn't bother to identify. He stated that the "prices are reasonable." Unless you go to Paris's office and file a request to see these contracts, this is all the information you are ever likely to have about them. They were negotiated by Mr. Paris in private, and he alone made the decision whether the County needed to buy them with your tax money, for what price, and on what terms.

In 150 of Georgia's 159 counties, a county commission would have considered such purchases at a public meeting, with its members discussing and debating the necessity for them, and considering what should be the prices and terms of the contracts. Members of the public could ask questions and express concerns. A majority of the commissioners would decide whether it was in the county's best interest to enter any of the contracts. A local newspaper could report those discussions and the commission's decision, so that even if you didn't attend the meeting you would know all the details.

But you live in Union County, and all you know is that your sole commissioner, in the privacy of his office, has negotiated and signed four contracts to spend an unspecified sum of your tax money. At his sole discretion, he might mention a contract he has negotiated and signed at his brief monthly one man commission "meeting," but its water over the dam by then.

Sure, the sole county commission system is more efficient than government by a multiple member commission, just as a dictatorship is more efficient than a democratic form of government. The elimination of public knowledge, participation and criticism makes it possible for your sole commissioner to do pretty much what he pleases.

Charles Cheves

God Bless Mountain Shelter

Dear Editor, I was happy to read the letter from Jill Robinson in last week's paper about our new Animal control officer Sgt. Mike Lerman. I too have had a personal connection with Mr. Lerman as well as detective Lt. Tim Derflinger recently regarding a lost dog that was connected to a criminal case. They were able to locate the owner and return the dog. Mike also gave me a personal tour of the Animal Control facility, See Adams, page 5A

Lord, Let Me Be a Potato

A young couple serving as missionaries in Pakistan was devastated when their six month old baby died. They were counseled and comforted by an old Punjabi. He said to the couple "a tragedy like this is similar to being plunged into boiling water. If you are an egg, your affliction will make you hard-boiled and unresponsive. If you are a potato, you will emerge soft and pliable, resilient and adaptable." Bitterness is the result of a hurt in one's past that has never been dealt with properly. Bitterness (Pikria, in the Greek) is a "sharp", "piercing" hurt. It is expressed with a bitter spirit and with bitter speech. People, who are angry, who refuse to forgive, and nurse long-standing resentments, eventually develop a malignant disposition. Paul said, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:31-32). A bitter person is often involved in "clamor" or loud talking. They frequently engage in evil speaking and lying. The bitter person is often hostile, sarcastic, cynical, and critical and talks about how they have been mistreated and wronged. They try to justify their anger and win allies with their negative comments. However, they eventually alienate themselves from others which results in loneliness and more bitterness. Bitter people seem to have a chip on their shoulder. They are not happy and in venting their misery, attempt to make others unhappy. Someone has said that some bitter people are well-balanced----"they have a chip on both shoulders." Bitterness is a very serious problem that will rob a person of the joy of life. What can be done to conquer bitterness in one's life? In the book of Ruth, we have the story of a family facing a famine and fled out of fear to find food. They left Bethlehem (house of Bread) and went to the land of Moab. Elimelech, his wife, Naomi and their two sons planned to spend only a short time in Moab. However, tragedy struck. Naomi's husband and both her sons died. Naomi is devastated with grief and struggling with bitterness. Naomi, along with

It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



See Parris, page 5A

GDOT

Q. There was an article in the NGN last week about you knowing some of the GDOT officials that are now in Atlanta. Does this help Union County?

A. Politics, as well as business, and life as far as that goes, is about relationships. So certainly, knowing someone and having a good relationship with them is always important, from the Governor's office on down. I have worked hard at building relationships while I have been in office, which is the advantage of having been around long enough for people to know who you are.

Q. Does building relationships in politics always pay off?

A. Most times it does, but not always. Can I get something from GDOT or any other government agency that another county can not? Not really, but what I can get is the ear of the person who respects my opinion and the information I give them. GDOT as well as most government agencies have their own guidelines they must follow and they are not going to give me something extra just because they like me, unless it is justified. But having the relationship gives me additional credibility when going to them for assistance, and that is where you may have an advantage over someone that they do not know or trust.

Q Do you trust the people at GDOT? During the TSPLOST election a lot of negative things were said about GDOT.

A. I think if you talk to any county officials, they will just about universally tell you that they trust and appreciate GDOT. While they are certainly not perfect, the people in charge are quality people of high character. They are working very hard to win back the trust of the public. Much of that trust was mistakenly taken away by a concerted effort from certain members of a previous administration, who wanted more control of GDOT. However, the law was set up to operate GDOT with a Board to help keep as much politics out of their business as possible, and for the most part, it works very well.

Q. Who is the GDOT Board member from our district?

A. Her name is Emily Dunn from Fanin County. She was voted on by the legislative members of our district which is District 1 and

See Paris, page 5A

Big Things Happening In Tourism

I have great news to share this week for all those who appreciate the impact of tourism on our local economy. We are off to a great start. Lodging tax revenue, which is one of our best gauges of tourism impact, was up in the first quarter of the year. The traffic through the welcome center has increased considerably in the last month, and the Scottish Festival just wrapped up a very successful 10-year anniversary event. The following items are a few additional brag-worthy happenings.

The Chamber is proud to announce that we now have copies of the North Georgia Farm Trail brochure available to our guests.

The North Georgia Farm Trail is a collection of agritourism destinations along the Georgia Mountain Parkway -- a four-county territory along Highway 515 from Ellijay to Hiawassee.

The brochures are packed with agritourism activities including working farms, u-pick orchards, wineries, farmer's markets and farm to table restaurants. Pick up your copy today!

Six travel writers from across the Southeast recently toured the Byron Herbert Reece

See Williams, page 5A

A kid's campaign

I love vegetables. I've always loved vegetables. Yes, even as a toddler, I loved vegetables. So, imagine how stunned I was to read these research statistics released by Ohio State University.

Only 22 percent of children ages 2 to 5 meet government recommendations for vegetable consumption. It only gets worse as children get older: just 16 percent of children ages 6 to 11 meet the government's guidelines, and only 11 percent of those ages 12 to 18.

In the study of more than 6,000 kids and teens, about a third of vegetable consumption was fried potatoes (potato chips, french fries, etc.), and a little more than a third of the fruit consumption was juice -- so if you don't include those, the percentages get even lower.

Last week we celebrated the Kids "under 10 years old" at the Farmers Market, and I dubbed the day "Squash Bud Day." We handed out nearly 100 balloons and some candy suckers, too. I was thrilled to see that many children attend the Market with parents and grandparents, because I think that the experience of the Market is so important for them at that age.

But, after reading the aforementioned research statistics, I have to ask myself, "Where was your head at when you planned this event?" Why didn't I think to have kids play with the veggies? We could have had them draw faces and then used the greens to make crazy hairdos on them. Playing with food is at least a start.

We could have created cool veggie art with plastic, safe tools. I saw this man at the market in Rome, Italy that did this hysterical presentation with crudités tools. (French for "raw vegetables.") Just taking veggies and making marks and slashes, then immersing in cold water will create something fun for them to describe with their imaginations.

When I serve honey - basil carrots at a dinner party, all the adult guests "Ooo and ah."

For kids, we put honey on cereal and we put peanut butter and jelly on bread. On Squash Buds Day, why didn't I think to serve raw zucchini and cucumber sticks that they could dip in a honey peanut butter sauce instead of handing out store bought suckers?

See Leone, page 5A



Did Tigger get fired?

Dear Editor, My heart is broken. The Ambassador for our Union County Nursing Home is no longer there. Administration decided that he was no longer welcome. Several of us sat on one of the porches with his caretaker as she tried to be strong and explain that he would no longer be present to welcome those of us who came to visit; that he would no longer be there to comfort the residents; that he would no longer be there to make our Union County Nursing Home feel more like "home" when it could so easily become an "institution" for those who live there.

We listened as several people came by asking about him. One couple explained how broken-hearted their grandchildren would be when they came to visit their family-member. Others just expressed their sorrow at his absence. Not one person went by without asking about this much-loved creature. And, all were disappointed at the decision to remove him from the premises.

Tigger is a very docile, short-haired, orange-tabby cat. He brought much joy to those residents he visited and comforted. His needs were taken care of by donations and the love of his caretaker and her roommate. But, it wasn't just the residents he affected. He made everyone who visited our Nursing Home welcome and comfortable. He made children who visited know that this place was ok, even though sometimes it's hard for a young child to understand. He comforted residents' families as they endured hard times. His house on this porch where I was sitting was a reminder that God sometimes provides His creatures to calm and comfort us.

We are so blessed to have the quality of care from the professionals at our Union County Nursing Home as well as the tremendous care and support from the community. But, let us never become so "institutionalized" that we forget that this place is a home for many residents as well as their families and friends who visit.

Karen McGuire

The rest of the story

Dear Editor, Yes, your editorial is correct: There are many success stories in the Union County schools.

But, at the expense of being a stick-in-the-mud, what about the consistent and persistent 15 percent drop-out rate?

What about the 55 percent of college-bound Union County High School graduates who, after six years, have yet to complete their four-year degree? The entry percentage is high; the graduation success is abysmal.

How would it be if a Drill Instructor

See Mitchell, page 5A

Taking Care of Our Own

As a little boy my Dad emphasized the importance of taking care of your own family. I never fought with my sister or brother. I was taught that I should look after them. Both my sister, Debbie, and my brother, Stacy, were younger than I. So, I stuck up for them when they needed me. Dad said family members should stick up for one another no matter who was at fault. I am sure this was passed down from each preceding generation in our family.

Family members were precious in the isolated communities of Appalachia which included Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina and Tennessee. Just as our talk is funny sounding to some people our actions are considered strange to some people. But, you must remember there are reasons for these peculiarities. For example, my grandfather uses the word help as a form of help. This word is perfectly good King's English. Do you know this is the same type of language used by Chaucer in his day? The reasoning as to why the word has survived all this time stemmed from the fact that the people which lived in Appalachia were isolated from the rest of the world and many of the old world words survived because of that isolation.

Another example of peculiarities in my family is what some people call clannish. People in my family are clannish. They take care of each other. In other words if you have a problem with one of them then you have a problem with all of us. Charlie Baker was my mother's grandfather. His family was a tightly knit family and was comprised of 10-15 siblings. The family was hard working. Many of them owned sawmills or worked in the logging woods. Charlie's youngest sister married a fellow of questionable reputation called Zed.

The young man, Zed, liked to drink. When Zed drank he became mean and cantankerous. He was easy to get riled and loved to fight. By the time he was 25 Zed was regarded as one of the toughest men around Ray Mountain. When Zed and Sue first married they were hopelessly in love. But, hard work and drinking soured Zed. The farther his attitude sank the more Zed drank. A few weeks after their 4th child was born Zed and Sue quarreled over his drinking. Zed lost his temper and struck Sue in the face and on her head many times. Zed left Sue lying on the floor, unconscious and bleeding. Late that evening her sister came for a visit and found her battered sister still on the floor.

Later that evening word got around to the brothers about what had happened to

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Blairsville - Union County Chamber

Cindy Williams



Farmers Market Moment

JarAnne Leone



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