

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Panther sightings

I heard about panther sightings many times when I was a young lad. I'm many moons removed from being a young lad, and I'm hearing about them again.

The trail cam photo from the Copeland family in the Owl-town community last week was our first inkling that a modern day panther was lurking in our county.

From the photograph, the big cat closely resembles what wildlife officials call a Florida panther.

It has a light, tawny brown coat on the back and pale gray coat underneath, and a long, arched tail.

This week, we received a letter from Bill Schalla confirming the critter in the photograph as a "mountain lion."

Mr. Schalla, who lives in the Owltown community, says that other residents in the neighborhood have seen the big cat in the daylight hours. While some may think what folks are seeing is a big bobcat, Mr. Schalla says that they know the difference.

He reiterates that this particular cat is a mountain lion. Last week, I sent the photograph to Union County Sheriff Mack Mason. Sheriff Mason got back with me and said the photograph did not give him enough detail to positively identify the cat as a panther. He also said that it didn't give him enough detail to say that it wasn't a panther.

You see, Sheriff Mason has seen big cats before, including seeing one several years ago on Duncan Ridge in the Coopers Creek Wildlife Management Area while traveling with his father.

I grew up here in Union County hearing about stories of panther sightings. My grandmother told me about one night that my father was out with the fox hounds, she and my mother were at home with the kids.

Mama was pregnant with me at the time, and Granny told me about something walking on the roof of the house. She said that Mama went out on the front porch. Mama heard what sounded like a large cat. She promptly went back in the house.

Now granted, no one saw a large cat, but, the pounding of paws on the rooftop left the occupants inside the house more than a little leary.

See Duncan, page 5A

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



How Awesome

Following the Lord, she set out for Botswana, but ended up in heaven. Sarah Harmening was traveling with Mount Zion Baptist Church of Huntsville, Alabama. On June 8 at 3:30 p.m., the bus crashed in Atlanta and she flew away. She was 17.

Because of the tragedy the world knows now of her abiding faith, and that of her family. She was a prolific journalist, and wrote her final entry shortly before her departure. She notes how moved she was by Peter's letters in the New Testament. "It talked about humbling yourself which I will need to do (and that also means being a little uncomfortable), it talked about the devil prowling about like a lion seeking whom he may devour, and how we need to be alert and of sober mind, and how we get to participate in His divine nature! I mean, how awesome is that? I was just reminded of why I'm here and that God has called me here and He's done so for a reason. So I know He's going to do incredible things."

Her mother, Karen Harmening, thought her daughter was awesome. "Sarah was a gift to us that was given on Dec. 20, 1999. And she loved the Lord with a love that was tangible," she said. Her obituary says that she lived and breathed to know Jesus Christ and to make Him known.

It is too easy to consider this meaningless, something that God should have prevented. Tragedy can make you cynical about God. But remember the Gospel is about God doing something about evil, suffering, and death. In his book "Why Suffering?" Vince Vitale writes, "One day each of us is going to have to deal with the reality of death. When suffering comes, when death comes, who will bear it with us? Who will see us through it? Jesus will, if we ask him to. If we invite Him, then we will never be alone in our suffering, and we can trust that we will spend eternity in a place where suffering will be no more." In this fallen world hard things happen, but the perspective of eternity is that these things do not have the final say.

Last Thursday, God whispered Sarah's name and invited her to leave the land of the dying for the land of the living. I offer you what she found to be so moving that day.

See Fowler, page 5A

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. We heard the County was going to purchase some property near the Farmers Market. Is this correct?

A. Yes, it is correct. By the time you read this, the property should be closed and owned by Union County.

Q. Where is the land located exactly?

A. If you are going out the Young Harris Highway, (U.S. 515), on your right is the Car Wash next to Wendy's. If you will look directly across the highway toward the Farmers Market this is where the new county property is located. It has nearly 800 feet along Highway 515 (76) and it borders the Farmers Market property for nearly 1,700 feet, which is 1/3 of a mile. So, these 13 acres fit nicely with our property plus gives us nearly 800 feet frontage on Highway 515 where we currently have no frontage.

Q. How much will this land cost?

A. The 13 acres will cost \$678,500 or approximately \$52,000 per acre.

Q. Is the property worth this much money to the county?

A. Absolutely. While we have not purchased the property for the commercial value of the frontage, we feel very confident that we received a very fair value on the property. The owners wanted the county to have the property and came off their purchase price as a favor to the county and we appreciate it very much.

Q. Did the county have an appraisal of the property before purchasing it? We saw in the NGN article a couple of weeks ago where the property was assessed in the Tax Assessors Office for only \$168,000.

A. The county had the property appraised at \$42,000 per acre. However, we purchased the property for 15 percent above the appraisal as we felt with good evidence, that the appraisal was low. There have hardly been any commercial sales along the Highway 515 corridor so the appraiser had to use the value paid for other properties that sold. The most recent was a 2015 sale of \$42,000 per acre. However, it was a bank sale and considered to be below market value.

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Anti-Drug Coalition

Close to half a million people received treatment for their heroin addiction in 2012.

Close to 50 percent of young people who use heroin reported abusing painkillers before moving on to heroin.

Approximately 156,000 Americans used heroin for the first time in 2012.

It is one of the most dangerous drugs, and the number of first-time users has nearly doubled over the past decade.

Twenty percent of youths aged 12 to 17 reported that they saw either moderate, slight, or virtually no risk in using heroin.

Some signs that an addiction has formed include having persistent cravings, continuing use despite heroin-related problems, trying and failing to quit or cut down use, and experiencing withdrawal or feeling physically sick when not using.

Needing escalated doses of heroin to

See Coalition, page 5A

The mission of the Union County Anti-Drug Coalition is to support an overall safe community by providing information, education and support services to children, families, and community toward prevention of illegal substance abuse. Visit and Like our Facebook page for additional articles and videos.



Letters to the Editor

What's up, Doug?

Dear Editor,

U.S. Rep., Doug Collins, R-Gainesville, is pushing an increase in poultry processing plants' line speeds to new U.S. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue.

Poultry producers in South America, Asia, Canada and Europe "are safely operating at line speeds that outpace the maximum speeds allowed in American facilities," states a press release from the Congressman's office.

And those practices represent "a significant disadvantage to Northeast Georgia's poultry industry and America's domestic production."

Such a change shouldn't harm consumers or plant workers, Collins said in a recent letter asking Perdue to review "line speed limitations."

See Mitchell, page 5A

Lack of civility

Dear Alex Trippe,

"Baloney, Maloney?"

I haven't heard that since I taught third grade, a long, long time ago. When you make fun of someone's name, you lose credibility.

How can you then expect to be taken seriously? How ironic that the political cartoon above your letter depicted the absence of common civility in our political discourse.

Michelle Maloney, Blairsville

It is a mountain lion

Dear Editor,

Last week's front page had an article about a night time trail cam sighting of a mountain lion in an Owltown backyard.

We live in a subdivision off Owltown Road and some of our residents have also seen this mountain lion during daytime hours.

It was sighted on separate occasions by different individuals and we recognized this big cat as a mountain lion with a long, arched tail.

We also have bobcats in the area, so we know the difference between a bobcat with a 8-10 inch tail and a much larger cat with a much longer, arched tail.

Some residents have seen this mountain lion on more than one occasion.

Thus, what the Copelands saw on their trail cam is exactly what our residents have seen in the daylight.

A good verification to our sightings and our good verification of their trail cam photo.

Bill Schalla, Blairsville

Hydrant Inspections

One of the many non-emergency fire and rescue tasks performed each year by the firefighters of Union County Fire Department is fire hydrant inspections and maintenance.

Currently, there are over 1,000 fire hydrants in Union County and the number continues to grow.

Union County Fire Department must inspect each hydrant to ensure that it is in good working order and that the department will have water in the event of a fire.

Inspecting fire hydrants is also one of the many tasks that we must perform in maintaining our Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating of 4/4y.

Firefighters locate each hydrant and record the GPS location. They then take the caps off and grease them so that they are easier to take off in an emergency.

The hydrant is opened or turned-on to ensure that there is water on the system and that the hydrant is in working order; they are not flushed.

Hydrant inspections begin in the late spring and goes on throughout the summer until completed.

You may see firefighters in various marked vehicles on the side of the road or in your neighborhood performing these inspections.

Please be aware of the move over law if you see fire vehicles with flashing lights on to ensure the safety of the firefighters checking these hydrants.

One thing that homeowners can do to help with this process is to take the time to look at the hydrants on their property.

Fire hydrants that are covered with weeds and brush are not visible or easily accessible in an emergency.

If a hydrant is on your property, please take the time to cut the grass and trim around these hydrants to make them more visible and accessible.

Make sure that these hydrants are not blocked by gates, retaining walls, vehicles, landscaping or shrubbery.

Remember these hydrants are there to protect you and your neighbors and anything that slows down the process of finding and/or accessing these water sources can seriously affect the outcome of a fire.

If you locate a hydrant that looks damaged or is leaking contact your water department or Union County Fire Department.

Fire hydrants are a very important part of the job of firefighting.

See Dyer, page 5A

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Sirendy

Granny and Aunt Mabel were two similar women. Both were hardworking and stubborn. Both of them could be hot headed and quick tempered. At times they loved each other and at times they despised each other. The relationship between my Granny

and her sister-in-law (Papa's sister) could be sister-like, adversarial and empathetic. And Granny had different names for her depending upon the situation at hand. The marriages between Papa and Granny and then Mabel and Uncle Hollis were very close together. The couples were constantly visiting each other and swapping work on each other's farm. Hollis helped Papa clear his farm and Papa helped Hollis clear his farm. Granny and Mabel swapped recipes and helped their mother-in-law with her housework. But, the relationship between the sisters-in-law soon began to cool.

As Granny came to know and understand the individual members of Papa's family she began to realize Mabel dominated the family. Mabel was her daddy's pet and every one of her siblings knew it. Mabel usually got whatever she wanted from her daddy and mother. For example, Papa wanted to buy the home place from his daddy and mother. They refused and gave the home place to his youngest brother, Uncle C. L. lost the home place because he couldn't pay the taxes. Once again Papa offered to buy the home place from his parents. Once again they refused and had to go to the courthouse to pay the back taxes to get the home place back in their name. Finally, Aunt Mabel was given the home place by her parents.

Sometime after this Granny began calling Aunt Mabel by the name of May Bell when she was aggravated by Mabel's antics. Shortly after Mabel received the home place she and Papa's father died. Their daddy owned close to 500 acres of land. Papa paid for the funeral and his father's medical expenses. None of his siblings offered to help pay for anything. The only inheritance Papa received was an old pocket knife, pocket watch and the family dinner bell. Mabel found out that Papa had received these items and she came to his house and demanded the items. Papa was not at home at the time. So, Granny handled the situation by saying, "May Bell, get out of this house".

The two women had not spoken for 10 or 11 months when the cotton crop demanded attention. Mabel needed Granny's help and Granny needed Mabel's help. So, first Granny helped Mabel get her crop laid by. The next day Mabel's car wouldn't start so Granny went to get her in

See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Septoria Leaf Spot

The warm rainy season we've been having lately has definitely helped some of our drought problems. However, it has brought more issues of its own. Though our plants love the extra water, so do fungal diseases. One disease that I've seen repeatedly over the past few weeks is a fungal infection known as Septoria leaf spot. This mainly affects tomatoes and closely related crops and, while hard to avoid in weather such as this, can be managed before it takes over your garden.

Septoria leaf spot is caused by the fungus Septoria lycopersici Speg. It is most commonly seen in periods of warm heavy rainfall, which perfectly describes the May and June that we've had so far. This disease, as its name applies, presents as spots on tomato leaves. These spots first appear on the bottom leaves and gradually move up the plant. They are grayish tan and can also be found on stems. Occasionally, a yellow halo may appear around the spot, but this does not always occur. Eventually, small dark dots may appear in the middle of the lesions. These are called "pycnidia," and are where the spores are produced. Spots on the undersides of leaves may be a deep green color, and entire leaves will eventually turn brown and wither. Though Septoria leaf spot can take out entire plantings, the fruit is very rarely ever affected by the fungus.

With most plant diseases, the best way to manage it is through cultural practices. S. lycopersici overwinters in dead tomato plant debris and other solanaceous weeds such as horsenettle and jimsonweed. These plants are all members of the nightshade family and serve as hosts for the same diseases. If you have a tomato plot that has Septoria, do not plant tomatoes or any other solanaceous crops (peppers, eggplants, potatoes, etc) there again for at least one year. Remove tomato crop debris completely to reduce the presence of the pathogen. Always be sure to stake or trellis tomatoes to improve air circulation and allow the leaves to dry more quickly after irrigation or rain. Mulches and plastic covers should also be used when possible, as these can prevent water, soil and infect plant matter from splashing up on the stems. Try to avoid contact with tomato plots while it is wet. People walking through a planting can easily transmit spores from one plant to another if the pycnidia are fruiting. Always clean pruning tools and other equipment thoroughly after using them on infected or potentially infected plants. Finally, after all of these measures are taken, consider applying fungicides to prevent the spread of the disease.

It is important to know that while fungi-

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From the Ground Up

Melissa Mattee



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