

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Spread Like Wildfire

Have you heard the expression, "spread like wildfire"? I think we have all heard that at one time or another. It is an expression that implies rapid movement. Wildfire can move very rapidly in normal conditions but in these current drought conditions, wildfire can move with incredible speed. This has been a major concern for all fire services – Union County Fire Department, Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) and US Forestry. There are currently several major fires in North Georgia and North Carolina. We are all on high alert and are preparing for any wildfire that may develop.

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



Besides this being interesting news, these fires are indicators of just how dangerous outside burning and wildfires can be. Union County and the City of Blairsville is under a burn ban which started November 4th. We understand that this can be an inconvenience but we are asking every please adhere to the ban. The burn ban includes any open flame outside burning. We are not sure when the burn ban will be lifted. We must have significant rain over several days in order for it to be safe to burn.

Citizens and visitors of Union County can assist the fire services and protect their homes from wildfire. The best information can be found at Firewise.org. At this site, they provide seven features that make homes Firewise™. First, have a clear space in the Home Ignition Zone. This begins about 30 feet immediately around the home and extends outward. Leaves and other natural combustibles that accumulate around the home should be removed. Second, have lean, clean and green landscaping. Remove any dead or dry landscaping. Third, pay attention to the roof of your home. Insure that you have a fire-resistant roof and remove leaves and other combustibles.

Tips four and five involve the construction of the home. Decks, porches or fences that are made of combustible material may ignite your home if exposed. It is also a good idea to pay attention to the construction materials that make up the home. It's best to have flame resistant materials.

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Letter to Students: No Drug Is Safe

You will undoubtedly hear people tell you that there are certain substances you can take that are completely harmless, drugs that can be used indiscriminately and with no serious risk. Do not believe them.

Every substance you put into your body affects you in some way. Isn't that why we now look down on smoking? Of course it is. If smoking cigarettes is bad for your health, does it not stand to reason that smoking marijuana

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.

See Drugs, page 5B

Letters to the Editor... The Concert We Enjoyed

Dear Editor,
Last Thursday evening we, at St. Francis Church, were privileged to hear and see a most memorable performance. All area churches were invited. There was no admittance fee.

The performance used the classics, with a full brass ensemble to bring a message of hope, beauty and grace to us all.

The music was of Handel, Bach, Brahms and arrangements by Alice Parker and Robert Shaw. Quotes were from Thomas Moore, William Cullen Bryant and several excerpts from Psalms, Arthur Campbell, Edward Everett Hale and Dag Hammarskjöld.

CDs of their former music were available if desired. A "love offering" was taken.

A full brass orchestra opened the concert followed by narrations and singers.

All musical participants were graduate professionals who rerouted their schedules to ride a bus and perform during this six-week schedule.

This year's tour ranged from Indiana, the west to Texas, south to Florida, Georgia, Kentucky and home to St. Louis.

The performers have participated in concerts in Scotland, Ecuador, Kennedy Center, The Metropolitan Opera, Tanglewood, Wales, The Notre Dame and St. Marks Cathedral in Venice.

In the words of the Founder Conductor Bruce Vantine, the purpose is "To awaken our sense of compassion, encourage individuals to live their faith at the highest level of commitment, to challenge and reaffirm our beliefs, and to inspire us to act to build a better world."

Hopefully we may be included in the next Cornerstone Choral.

Perhaps we would be able to schedule a performance in our new Fine Arts Building that would include you all.

Cathy Fiser

Stewardship – the key to hemlock survival

Dear Editor,

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." John Muir

Gratitude is much on our minds as we approach the Thanksgiving season and reflect on our blessings – families, friends, the beautiful part of the country we live in and its bountiful natural resources, our freedom to enjoy them, – and yes, our responsibility and privilege to protect these treasures. But part of this picture is in grave danger.

Millions of our hemlock trees, the magnificent treasures evergreens that provide a unique and critical habitat for many animal and plant species, are being killed by an invasive insect, the hemlock woolly adelgid. Without timely intervention, their loss will have devastating and long-lasting results aesthetically, environmentally, and economically.

There is, however, a way to avert this disaster. Trees on private land can be saved by a

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Hip Hop

Our cities are in trouble. America's pathologies are concentrated in its urban centers, evidenced by murder and mayhem, heartbreak and hopelessness, crime and corruption. Politicians don't seem to be changing anything but I recently heard something that just might.

I was at a conference to hear how Christians can respond to our changing culture. But never in a million years did I expect to hear rap music! Perhaps it is tragically too easy for some of us to look away from a segment of culture that seems like a lost cause.

Emanuel Lambert, from Philadelphia, explained that rap music and the hip hop subculture express the deep frustrations of the inner city. He notes that this culture has many painful and tragic questions that too often become sad headlines and crime statistics. Voicing the questions can build a bridge of understanding, across which can travel some truthful answers that can set a life on a new trajectory.

Mr. Lambert is a rap artist known as "DA' T.R.U.T.H." He is a committed Christian with 20 years in the music industry as an award-winning artist. He is well-connected in the hip hop community and recently formed the entertainment company NXT Sound. He also knows Ravi Zacharias, a Christian apologist and evangelist, and invited the 70-year-old native of India to speak on his recent album, "It's Complicated." Oil and water?

In the selection "Religion," the rapper poses the question, "Are all religions equal, can we even know?" in the voice of the 'hood, and Dr. Zacharias offers answers. In rhythmic cadence he asks, "Did I blindly believe when I got a Bible to read? Then I got down on my knees as the one way to God. Dropped down to plead, a total waif of my time? Is his name a lie, or is his name Allah? Is it really important, the right name or not?"

Then Dr. Zacharias answers, "Pantheism doesn't teach the same thing as theism. Monotheistic beliefs are not all the same. What Islam believes about Allah and what the Christian

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All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. Why is the county instituting a burn ban on outdoor fires?

A. The Union County Fire Chief and others have made this suggestion to me. While it will be a real aggravation to some, I felt to look the other way would be irresponsible. The degree of dryness, the high winds forecast this weekend, the lack of any rain in the forecast, the fact that it is hunting season and vacation time for many, the fact that leaves are falling everywhere and people naturally want to burn them and the brush, we felt the Burn Ban was in the best interest of the county.

Q. If we are careful, why should we not be able to burn at home?

A. The problem is not you, but those who do not read, who are not careful and who's carelessness could cause serious damage to life and property in these unprecedented dry conditions.

Remember that everyone starting a fire is not experienced with outdoor fires. Typically, these are the people that accidentally cause the problems. Many do not understand that if you throw out charcoal embers and the wind subsequently gets up, the problem will increase drastically. When the temperature starts to cool off this week, the urge will be to start fires in the home and in wood furnaces and fireplaces. You eventually have to do something with the coals and putting them outside is another serious danger. What would normally not be a problem, is exaggerated now because we have not seen such dry weather in several years. Please be cautious and careful.

Q. What is a typical day like for the Union County Emergency Response Teams?

A. One day last week, three emergency calls within 3 minutes came in to the 911 dispatch center. Two were related to serious falls and one was a tree limb hitting a minor. They were each in different parts of the county and happened one minute apart. While this is not the norm, neither is it a rare occurrence.

While we do not know the outcome of all of these incidents yet, your county and hospital reacted quickly to all three. Three ambulances were dispatched, with our Fire Department supplement-

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



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We can't say it enough, Vets.

Prepare for an Approaching Wildfire

WARNING: This may sound like a broken record, but I can't say it enough: Pay close attention to what's going on around you here in the mountains of North Georgia right now. If you smell smoke, any smoke, check it out, call it in, and get away from it. We are now in an extremely dangerous weather situation in our area that can lead to events that can change our lives and our community forever. This is the dangerous wildfire conditions that we have been warning you about for years that can quickly create the perfect wildfire storm fueled by the extremely dry weather combined with heavy leaf fall and low humidity with constant winds. This is a recipe for disaster and all it takes to start the chain of events is one small spark.

Many wildfires are started by such simple things as the safety chains on a trailer dragging on the road, a mower hitting a rock, a power tool creating sparks, or many other seemingly harmless events that in normal weather would not be an issue. Now more than ever we need to follow the Ready-Set-Go evacuation guidelines that our Firewise team promotes: Ready – prepare your home and property to resist fire, be Firewise: Set – be aware of changing conditions and be prepared to leave your home: Go – as soon as you suspect something is not right, Go, do not hesitate, get out of harm's (and firetrucks) way and let the emergency folks get in and do their job to protect your life and property. The last thing you want to do is get caught in a traffic jam with flames and smoke blowing over your car which prevents the emergency trucks getting in and you can't get out... not a good situation to be caught in.

Water has for most of recorded history been the method of putting out fires and in many of the areas that we live in getting enough water to fight a fire is difficult. Many of our fire engines can pump 1,000 gallons per minute and only carry 1,500 gallons, so the water can be gone in 1.5 minutes. In cities and towns across the United States, fire departments have had years of experience creating adequate water supplies for fighting structural fires. Networks of fire hydrants and water mains provide quick access to a plentiful supply of municipal water. But what happens if you remove the hydrants and water mains, spread the homes and businesses far apart, add county roads and terrain, and dot the land with other types of structures? This is a more realistic picture of rural areas and the wildland-urban interface, and it is in these areas that water supply and distribution present an urgent challenge. This is all-the-more reason

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Frank Riley

Executive Director of RC&D



Politics and Voting

The word "politics" has become a word with negative meanings during our life time. However, it should not be especially in the United States. Voting is a privilege that we should cherish and protect. We should remember that politics and elections can have profound impacts upon the lives of people for generations. An example of this can be found in my family.

My ancestors were staunch "Jacksonian Democrats". Andrew Jackson was from Tennessee and some of my ancestors fought with him during the Creek Indian Wars. During his election to the Presidency of the United States he received a tremendous amount of support from the common every day person because he was viewed as a representative of the common man. Then an election came to Alabama that changed the course of history.

My ancestors lived in Winston County Alabama. They were pioneers and had no slaves. They believed in the preservation of the Union and therefore voted republican for Abe Lincoln. The people of Winston County sent a representative to the secessionist convention of Alabama. He gave a speech about the importance of the Union at the convention and was thrown in jail. As you know Alabama did secede and the Civil War came to the South. But, because of all this my ancestors voted republican in every election for the next 70 years. Then another great tragedy changed the way my ancestors voted. The Great Depression came to Alabama. A man by the name of Roosevelt ran for office and some of my ancestors voted democrat for the first time in 70 years. Pickens Cummings, my grandfather's brother, admired FDR and was appreciative of his efforts during the Depression and World War II. Uncle Pick also loved politics and decided to run for the School Board and because of his admiration for FDR Uncle Pick ran as a democrat.

This caused a lot of concern in my tight knit family. My great grandfather Lon Cummings told Uncle Pick that he was proud of him and to do what he believed was right. However, my great grand grandfather Clifford Hyde was not so pleased. Uncle Pick asked my dad to go with him to visit Clifford. They drove up into the yard and walked up to the old man. Dad greeted his grandfather. Clifford held up his hand to silence Dad and he began speaking to Pick. "Pick, you know this boy is my favorite. You also know that I am a republican. I know you are a good man. However, I will not vote for you because you are not a republican and I don't like you getting my grandson involved in these politics".

That day Uncle Pick and Clifford came

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Beavers

Most of our wildlife is frantically searching for places to bed down before the impending winter, and beavers are no exception. These rodents, the largest in the country, are incredibly efficient builders and can often frustrate property owners. However, they do serve an important role in the environment, so by understanding their habits, you can be better equipped to prevent beaver damage on your property.

Many are familiar with the beaver's thick, warm fur coat and broad, flat leathery tail. The idea that they use this tail for building is incorrect, though: they use it to warn others of danger by slapping on the water, and for stability both in the water and on land. They live in small familial units called colonies that usually consist of a mated pair, juvenile beaver, and young offspring. They breed from October through March, so you may see an increase in beaver activity right now. They are highly territorial creatures and have special oil-producing glands that aid in territory marking and attraction of mates.

Beavers are herbivores and in the winter, they have a voracious appetite for any woody vegetation available. Some favorite foods are poplar, sweetgum, ash, pines and fruit trees. In the spring and summer, they feast on tender new growth of various plants, and have even been known to eat crops such as corn and use the stalks in their dens. They also make food caches in the late fall as winter approaches. Houses near lakes may have trouble with this as floating caches provide the perfect underwater storage area for freshly chewed limbs and saplings that the beavers can eat throughout the winter. The difference between these caches and normal wood and brush buildup washed in from rivers is that most of the bark on the wood will have been chewed off.

Beavers are known for their lodges, or large pile of sticks, but they only build these if nearby banks are unsuitable for den building. A beaver will often construct many dens because banks tend to flood and destroy much of the construction. Though they are not for shelter, dams are also constantly constructed for several reasons. Dams help to control the water flow around the lodge or dens. They provide a barrier against predators and play an important ecological role by providing habitat for numerous waterfowl and aquatic plants.

Though many consider beavers a nuisance, the ponds they create can actually be quite useful. They are an important source of wetland habitat. Ponds also help to replenish water tables in times of drought. Producers can even use beaver ponds as valuable sources of irrigation for their crops. However, sometimes, beavers can do more harm than good. They can cause flood-

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From the Ground Up

Melissa Mattee



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