

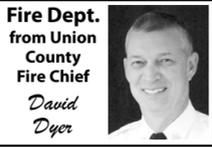
Opinions

Everybody has one...

Fire Department Planning

November is a busy month for the department. We are preparing for the fire season which brings an increase in calls such as structure fires, chimney fires, and brush fires. On the administrative side of the department, we are busy closing out this year and planning for the next.

To be a Fire Chief, you have to be a planner. I look forward to reviewing our strategic plan each year and having an idea of what we need to do, how we are going to do it, and most importantly, why. Not everything goes according to our plan but it provides a guide for us to ensure we are doing all that we can to serve the citizens and visitors of Union County.



Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer

Each November, we sit down and update our five-year strategic plan. We start with a SWOT analysis where we review our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This analysis forces us to look at our present situation and where we may need to make changes. We then review last year's objectives and measure our progress.

Objectives that were completed are expanded upon as needed. Objectives that were not completed during the year are evaluated. They are then either scrapped or moved to the next year based on the ability to complete or the need. As situations change, we change our objectives. Once the review is completed, we look into the future and develop goals for the next five years concentrating mainly on the up-coming year. Objectives for the next year are then created.

Two major elements that branch from the strategic plan are programs and projects. These are created to fulfill our goals and are more detailed as to how to accomplish them. A program is something that is on-going. We have several programs started including Training, Pre-Incident Plans, ISO Reduction, Public Education, and Smoke Alarms. A project is something that has an ending date. Examples may include apparatus purchases or building fire stations. We create goals and objectives for each program or project and evaluate/update them each year along with the strategic plan.

The strategic plan is an all-encompassing, broad view of how we would like to see the department in the future. Does everything go as planned? Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't.

See *Dyer*, page 5A

He Is There

Winsome Sears immigrated to the United States from Jamaica when she was 6 years old. That was in 1963. Her name would not have been in the 2021 headlines except for her ability to survive a searing loss that few among us must endure.

Her grandmother modeled a vibrant Christian faith, which Sears also embraced. When her grandmother died, Sears joined the Marines to learn discipline and leadership. After leaving the Marines, she and her husband moved to Virginia where she earned a college degree and became an elected official.

Sears left electoral politics to focus on her family. She and her husband started a small business, and she directed a homeless shelter. In 2009 she published a book about dealing with doubt titled, "Stop Being a Christian Wimp!" Two years later, tragedy struck. Her daughter and two granddaughters were killed in a car wreck. She recalls receiving the news at 3 a.m. "I just remember saying, 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'" I can't imagine the pain, the questions.

Professor John Lennox wrote, "If Christian faith is worth considering, it needs to be deep enough to cope with our most heart-rending questions." When those questions erupt, it compounds the tragedy if your answer is that a good and loving God does not exist. The pain is real because evil is real, but God is present and has done something about it. The cross and resurrection of Christ Jesus are the divine intervention in human history to overcome the evil that besets us. Those events reveal an eternal reality beyond our present griefs.

God experienced the pain of grief. When his friend Lazarus succumbed to illness, Jesus wept after he told Martha, "Your brother will rise again" (John 11:23). Theirs was the pain of walking "through the valley of the shadow of death." But Jesus was there to embody the great promise, "I fear no evil for You are with me" (Psa. 23:4).

In God's Providence, good can come from pain. C. S. Lewis writes, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." If fears

See *Fowler*, page 5A

Commissioner's Questions

As we see cooler temps and as we prepare our yards and lawns for Winter, there are some related activities that have been identified as dangerous or costly. Union County Road Department spends a great deal of its Winter season scraping roads and clearing roads of debris – in an effort to maintain safe roadways in inclement weather. This week's questions focus on the most frequent situations they see in Winter months.

Q. I have for years had a habit of blowing my leaves into the roadway. It's easy and fast, and it gets the leaves out of my yard. Now I'm being told that I should NOT do this. Why?

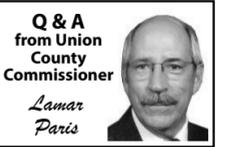
A. Leaf blower etiquette is not always followed, but when it comes to roadways, it's a no-brainer. Blowing yard waste of any kind into the streets can create a very serious safety hazard. Blowing them into the street gets them out of your yard, but they eventually end up somewhere. The reality is that as temperatures decrease, the chances of freezing moisture increases. When dense piles of leaves accumulate thin layers of frozen water in-between, they become very slippery. Motorcycles are the first to notice the slide, but cars and trucks have also found themselves in a ditch due to slippery leaves in the road. As tempting as it might be, please don't do it. There are other options. Leaves can be bagged, or they can be burned with care.

Q. I have the perfect ditch in front of my house. I blow my leaves into the ditch. Is that OK?

A1. No, it is not. Though it seems logical that a ditch would be the perfect spot for fall leaves, there are very good reasons to explain why you should not leave them in the ditch. If you think about the purpose for a ditch, then it makes sense that ditches need to remain clear. Ditches are engineered to move water – especially during heavy rains. The ditches prevent water from backing up into your yard. When you blow or rake leaves into your ditch (especially over a long period of time), the ditches can become obstructed/blocked/sluggish. When water cannot move through the ditch, it can back up and flood your yard or worse – the roadway.

A2. Culverts. When you blow or rake yard debris into the ditch, the debris can travel with rain water – possibly getting stuck

See *Paris*, page 5A



Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris

Habitat for Humanity

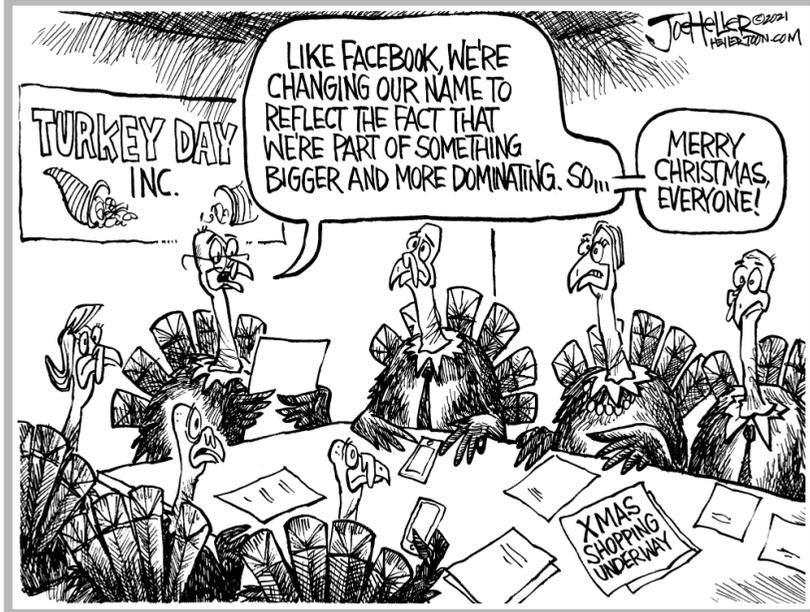
There is so much going on at Habitat for Humanity, Towns/Union Counties, that I hardly know where to start!

First of all, thank you to all who stopped by on Nov. 11 for Veterans Day and signed some Christmas cards. These cards will be sent overseas and distributed to our servicemen and women who are deployed and won't make it home in time to celebrate the Holidays. We have a huge box of cards that is filled with well-wishes ready to go in the mail. If you missed this card-signing event, it's not too late! We won't be mailing our big box until around Thanksgiving. If you would like to get a few Christmas cards and write a line or two thanking our active-duty personnel for their service, you can drop them off at the ReStore before Thanksgiving, and we will be sure to get them included in our mailing. It means a lot to those military people serving overseas that we would think of them during the Holiday Season.



Habitat Happenings
Cathy Wheeler

See *Habitat*, page 5A



Letters to the Editor

Truth & Facts

Dear Editor,
On Saturday, Sept. 6, I had the pleasure of passing through Blairsville on a spirit-lifting drive through the North Georgia Mountains. After enjoying a great lunch including collards (any lunch with good collards is a great lunch) at the Grits and Greens restaurant, I picked up a copy of your fine North Georgia News.

The Nov. 3 issue featured a letter to the editor in which the writer tags MSNBC as being fully in the tank for the liberal Democrats. He is 100% correct! However, he ends his comments by stating, "I'm not saying Foxnews or Newsmax is perfect or unbiased, but they do present a relatively balanced perspective." Well, for the sake of political sanity and the future of the republic, I have to hope that the letter writer is either joking or not paying very close attention to what FOX and Newsmax are actually spouting 24/7. If you want truth and facts, they will not be found on either MSNBC or FOX!

Ben Dooley

Violating the Law

Dear Editor,
In the Oct. 27 edition of the North Georgia News in the Commissioner's Q&A, Mr. Paris violated the law by stating, "I'm voting Yes."

Per Georgia law (O.C.G.A. § 21-5-30.2): Articles in a city newsletter which could be construed as attempts to influence the way citizens vote on an upcoming referendum question can violate this law.

That referendum was the TSPLOST vote which occurred on Nov. 2 and failed. Mr. Paris has been known in the past to state ignorance of the law such as handling voting machines.

Mike Sims

Outpouring of Support

Dear Editor,
My wife and I are retired and work part time at the Mountain Shelter Humane Society Thrift Store in Blairsville. On Sept. 27, I suffered three heart attacks and had to undergo open heart surgery with a triple bypass. I have been home, recovering, ever since. I was in need of a lift chair, as I had problems getting up and down.

Well, Kaiyle Payne, the Thrift Store Assistant Manager, went well above and beyond the call of duty to help me in this time of need. He put out the call for help and immediately got tremendous response from people and organizations, some whom I've never met. He delivered a new lift chair and several hundred dollars from my fellow employees at the thrift store, the Leadership and Members of the Mountain Area

See *Reynolds*, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

TSPLOST

Dear Editor,
Congratulations to Union County voters for a job well done.

The recent TSPLOST referendum lost with 72% of the citizens voting against it. One can only imagine what excuse that loss will result in for the next tax increase justification or budget revision that would be beyond the direct reach and control of the voters.

Those voting against the new tax is roughly the same percentage as Republicans vs. Democrats (80% vs. 20%) in Union County. The Republican Party could use that advantage to get a referendum for a board of county commissioners on the next ballot, as it did several years ago. With a board of commissioners, the party might expect that same 80% to extend to the make-up of the commission and to perhaps more conservative tax and spending policies.

The Union County Republican Party website has a good summary/position on taxes, growth and the sole commission system. It might be worth a read, regardless of an individual's political position. A board of commissioners might better listen to the voters? Regardless of party affiliation, the citizens of Union County deserve better than the sole commissioner system.

D.B. Swaim

SLUSH

Dear Editor,
Union County voters made a wise TSPLOST decision on Nov. 2, 2021. A recent North Georgia News edition had a GREAT article about SPLOST, taxes and spending. It clearly stated, from the mouths of the Sole Commissioner, Purchasing Director and others what we already knew. Money generated from SPLOST (SLUSH) referendums is often not spent on the promoted programs and listed projects. They then went on to defend the shuffling of funds as "legal." They didn't go as far as to argue that it was ethical... No surprise.

The Sole Commissioner often refers to pots of money that he dips into at will, but forgets that the money in the pots comes from the pockets of the taxpayers. SPLOST is just a means of getting more money into the County SLUSH fund to be spent at the whim of the Sole Commissioner. It is not used to supplement the programs, but to supplant the money allocated and move that money to his pet projects. It also allows him to make continual claims of how low our millage rates and property taxes are (until this year). The citizens also have no way to know where the money is actually spent and whether his adopted budget actually reflects what was spent. One can prob-

See *Cooper*, page 5A

One Man's Trash...

As the saying goes, one man's trash is another man's treasure. I have always collected things other folks would throw in the garbage. I have a steel pin used by my great-great-grandfather in the construction of his saw mill. I have a couple of old wagon spokes from my grandfather's Florence Wagon. I have an old maple syrup bucket from a friend's Maple Farm in Vermont. One time while roaming the woods I found an old jar containing moonshine. I have that jar minus the shine on my shelf. I really enjoy finding old home places and things around them. A lot of people call this junk. But, I can look at each item and tell you a story about it. I have had this habit for collecting things for many years.

On a Saturday before Easter in 1969 I found something for my collection. It was a warm day and I was in the woods next to my house when I spotted a garter snake at my feet. I quickly caught the snake and ran home with my new prize. I knew better than to show it to my mother. So, I placed the snake in a jar and punched holes in the lid. Now, I remember the holes were bigger around than the snake's body. But, I didn't know too much about circumference in the fourth grade.

I fully expected to keep the snake until I grew up. So, I placed the snake in the basement where my mother would never find it. The next morning my mother was up early to make sure we got to Easter Services on time. She went downstairs to bring up our freshly washed and pressed clothes. As she started back up the steps she looked down and felt the grip of terrible fear as she observed this giant snake on her steps. Her perception of the snake was very different than mine. Everyone in the house was awakened by the sounds of chopping coming from the basement and a few words I had never heard spoken by my mother.

I will never forget the look on my Dad's face when he saw my mother holding an ax and the four missing steps in the basement stairs. I made sure my mother never found that jar with the holes in it, and my father never questioned that mother had seen a 6-foot-long Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake in our basement. But, I knew better. My treasured snake was nothing but fear to my mother.

When I was 17, my parents went out of town and I was left at home in charge of the house. Dad asked me to clean up the garage while he was gone. I was in the process of cleaning when a truck pulled up in front of the house. A man walked up to me and inquired about pur-

See *Cummings*, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



Composting

Compost is a welcome addition to any garden. It's a popular and effective method to improve the quality of your soil. It can also help you get rid of lawn debris such as grass clippings or leaves as they are beginning to fall. Composting is not difficult to do, but here are some tips so that you can start your own compost pile.

Compost is rich, dark humus that is the end product of the natural decomposition of plants or plant products. Using a compost pile will speed up the natural decomposition of plant material. Compost can improve soil drainage, structure, and help hold water and nutrients. The nutrients in compost will not be enough to replace fertilizing, but they can reduce fertilizing.

You can use just about any organic material for composting. Leaves, grass clippings, twigs, old annual or perennial flowers, old vegetable plants, straw, and sawdust can all be thrown into the compost pile. Try to avoid using insect or disease infested plants to reduce the spread of those plants the following season. You can put things like kitchen peelings and coffee grounds into the compost pile too. Kitchen scraps should be buried into existing compost so that they don't attract too many wild animals. Covering your compost pile will help keep animals out too. Avoid using highly processed foods because these will take longer to break down.

When making a compost pile, it's helpful to have something to contain it. A lot of different materials can be used from wire, fencing, wood pallets or concrete blocks. Leave some open spaces on the sides for ventilation. Good air circulation is important for successful compost. The bottom of the pile needs to be open to the soil to allow good drainage. Construct your pile in an out of the way place in your yard, in full sun.

Once you've constructed your container for the compost pile, start adding organic matter. Smaller pieces will decompose more quickly than large pieces of organic matter. Once you have a layer of organic matter in there add in some garden soil or animal manure. These will add fungi, bacteria, insects, and worms to the pile. They're the critters responsible for breaking down the plant material into the humus that you add to your garden. You'll want to keep the pile moist, but not soggy.

Sometimes a concern with compost piles is that there might be an odor. If you turn the pile with a shovel at least once a month this will reduce the smell. A good functioning compost pile will heat up from the activity of the microbes de-

See *Williams*, page 5A



Watching and Working
Jacob Williams

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Paris... continued from Page 4A

in culverts. When water cannot go through a culvert as it is designed to do, a homeowner can see very serious complications. First, the water can back up into the yard causing flooding. Second, the water can back up to the point of washing out driveways and gravel roads. The worst scenario is that water finding a blocked culvert can undermine asphalt roads and road surfaces. There have been many cases in Union County where culverts have been blocked and entire roads have been washed away from fast-moving waters looking for an unimpeded path. If rainwater cannot follow the path it is designed to follow, it will follow the path of least resistance. Once the water finds itself settling on roadways, we have a totally different problem. In warm months, drivers have to beware of hydroplaning and in the colder months, drivers have to be aware of icy roads. Either way, yard debris should not be permanently placed in ditches. The long-term impact could be costly.

Q. My driveway is steep. During the colder months, I leave a vehicle on the roadside. This ensures that I can get my vehicle out in the case of snow or ice. Why is this a problem?

A1. Although it might seem logical to leave a vehicle on the side of the road during the winter months, there are some obvious and not so obvious reasons why this might not be the best idea. First, by parking on a roadside, you have an increased chance that the vehicle can be damaged. The same reason why you are wanting to park beside the road is also a reason for why many vehicles lose control – snow and ice. If you value your vehicle and it's exterior condition, you might NOT want to park it on a road side.

A2. If the roads are holding snow and ice, you won't be able to go anywhere – no matter where you park. More importantly, if snowplows have to dodge and weave around vehicles on the side of the road, your chances of getting a good road scrape diminish. It is very difficult for snow removal

trucks to clear the roads while trying to maneuver around unattended vehicles.

Q. We have speeders in our neighborhood. I've been told that speed bumps will help prevent speeding on our neighborhood roads.

A. OK, certainly speed bumps are a consideration. However, we strongly encourage neighborhoods to investigate any other option for addressing this problem. Why? When neighborhoods ask the county to install speedbumps on county roads, the speedbumps themselves cause new issues in colder weather. When speedbumps are installed, snowplows are unable to adequately scrape the roads. Additionally, the scraping process often removes a layer of asphalt from the speedbump, making it not so bumpy. When residents ask for speedbumps, we strongly encourage them to consider other avenues for reducing speed in their neighborhood. The Union County Road Department can adequately scrap a road and make it safer when speedbumps are not present.

Q. I've lived here for 30 years and my kids and grandkids have always enjoyed playing basketball and skateboarding on our country roads. How is this now a problem?

A. This is a huge problem in the colder months. First, visibility decreases with the decrease in sunlight in the wintertime. Furthermore, the curves in our road – combined with dense fog and rain – create opportunities for impaired visibility. Our roads are the busiest they have every been. It simply is no longer appropriate for our children to play on or near a paved road.

As a final note, I'd like to caution haulers of any load to consider and re-consider one very important aspect of hauling during the Winter season: Always secure your load. When fellow drivers attempt to dodge items/debris on the roadway, accidents are common. When fellow drivers attempt this dodging action on icy roads, it can lead to disaster. In advance - thank you for giving that extra attention to our roads during the colder months.

Cummings... continued from Page 4A

chasing a bed room suite I had carefully removed from the garage while I was cleaning up. I thought I had done my father a favor. I cleaned the garage and sold an old piece of junk for \$25. My Dad didn't view it that way. My old piece of junk was Dad's treasured antique bed room furniture worth more than \$250. I have never been good at selling stuff. But, I like being around the stuff that is being sold.

But, one year this collecting of old stuff came to a halt. No longer am I allowed to randomly bring old stuff home. It was around Thanksgiving a few years ago and I was in the woods hunting not too far from my home. It had snowed and I was climbing to the top of a ridge when I noticed something odd about the ridge line. I walked up to the odd shape and found it was an old army ammo can. It was half buried with only the top protruding out of the ground. I pulled it up and realized it had been in this location for a number of years. So, I took it home.

I lugged it back to my home located over a mile from where I found the box. When driving home I dropped it on the ground and opened the top.

I found some stuff that looked like brown sugar and some small boxes labeled as blasting caps. I thought I had found some old drugs, so I called the local police.

Upon arrival I showed them the stuff I had found. I was told to get in their car. I was not allowed to use my phone nor could I drive my truck. I thought I was in trouble and nearly was, but, the substance was not drugs. We quickly drove to town and while in route the policeman explained that the substance in the box was explosive and the blasting caps were old and unstable. They could have been activated by the starting of my truck or even a hard jolt.

I told the officer I must've bumped into six or seven trees with that ammo on the way down the mountain. He looked at me with nary a smile and asked, "Do you know what 5 pounds of TNT will do?" The GBI was called to my house to retrieve the ammo can and detonate the stuff inside. So, my wife nor I could go home until they came to get the box. Now, the only things I bring home from the woods are photographs.

Williams... continued from Page 4A

composing organic matter. The heat produced will kill off the odor causing bacteria. If you add manure to your pile there will be some initial odor, but as the pile matures the smell will go away. A well maintained compost pile should not have a strong odor.

Once the compost has a crumbly earth look and you can no longer recognize the plant material it's ready to be added to the garden. If you add the organic material over time

the compost will become ready a little at a time.

If you have questions about creating or maintaining your compost pile contact your county Extension Office or send me an email at Jacob.Williams@uga.edu.

I will have a septic program for homeowners on Thursday, November 18 in the Union County Civic Center Auditorium at 6 pm. If you would like more details call 706-439-6030.

Union County Historical Society extends Brick Walk Sale

The Union County Historical Society has extended their Brick Walk sale through December.

At half price of \$50 bricks purchased in memory or honor of a loved one would make a great gift.

Please call the Historical Society at 706-745-5493 or come by the Old Courthouse on the Square to purchase one of these bricks and check-out other items in the gift shop including our 2022 calendar Historic Hearstones which featured color pictures of many homes in Union County.

We also have books by local authors, a new addition

of black and white framed photos of historic places in Union County and Cemeteries of Union County Books. These items would make great Christmas gifts.

NGTC GED/HiSET Class Information

Prepare for your GED and HiSET exam online at NGTC! Free online classes are available for anyone who is 16 years of age or older. Please contact Stephen Kramer at 706-754-7839 or skramer@northgatech.edu for more information.

Habitat... continued from Page 4A

We have had a great response to our orientation meetings for potential new Habitat Homeowners. There were four sessions, and many families attended to learn what it takes to partner with Habitat for Humanity, to build and purchase a home. Thank you to all of our Habitat Volunteers who helped with these orientation sessions, or helped with publicity by distributing fliers throughout Towns and Union Counties. Habitat hopes to choose a family in January and start construction on their house shortly thereafter.

For those of you with pets, Habitat for Humanity has an exciting Christmas opportunity for you! It's "Christmas Pictures for Santa Paws!" On Saturday, Dec. 11, from 2-5 p.m., you can bring your furry friends to the Habitat Restore at 225 Wellborn Street in Blairsville, across from The Skillet Restaurant. We have a professional photographer who has volunteered to take pictures of your furbabies in front of a Christmas background! You are welcome to be in the picture with your fuzzy friends, or just get pictures of them. Our photog-

rapher will upload all the pictures online, and you can print out as many pictures as you would like. Although it's not required, we are requesting a \$5 donation for this service. If you need to find some "Christmasy" things for your photos, such as collars, leashes, harnesses, bows, bowties, or scarves, be sure and stop by The Farmhouse Co. at 307 Cleveland Street in Blairsville to pick up some great props at some great prices. All money raised from this event will go directly to Habitat for Humanity, Towns/Union Counties, Inc. Donations will be used to help Towns and Union County residents get affordable housing and have repairs done to their homes so they can stay there instead of having to find other places to live.

If you have any questions, or would like to volunteer for our organization, please call the Habitat Office at 706-745-7101.

Chamber... continued from Page 4A

place that attracted you to this community or the community that you knew growing up. It just doesn't get better than life in Blairsville!

Fowler...

continued from Page 4A

help you hear from the One who promises a day of no more tears, then pain is redeemed (Rev. 21:4).

God values your life enough to make traveling this earth your path to know Him. It helps that He chose to walk this path of pain Himself. He is a winsome God, and He invites you walk with Him through your valley of the shadow of death.

Before her recent electoral victory Sears reflected on what her future might hold. She said, "You always know that God is there." The voice of experience.

Cooper...

continued from Page 4A

ably expect another TSPLOST (Trash SPLOST) referendum to clean up that horrible transfer station. Keep an eye out for that one.

Dan Cooper

Dyer...

continued from Page 4A

The environment may change and priorities change with it. However, we are continuously looking into ways that we may improve and better serve the community. Union County Fire Department

~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

Reynolds...

continued from Page 4A

Support Alliance in Blairsville, and the members of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #7394, also in Blairsville.

We are still overwhelmed at this outpouring of love and support from these wonderful folks and the brother and sister veterans. Thank all of you, and may God richly bless you.

Sincerely,
Don and Brenda Reynolds

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



October 27, 2021

in memory of

Kelsey Elizabeth Bowles
on her 30th Birthday
By: Kim, Barry, Abby,
and Brady Bowles

November 17, 2021

In memory of

Alex Lawson
on his birthday "Forever 32"
By: Mannetta Tucker

November 27, 2021

In honor of

Joan Walker Mannheim
on her birthday
By: Shirley Walker

Bell ringing information
at 706-745-5493