

# Opinions

Everybody has one...

## Glad to be home

I'm back in the office. I want to thank those of you that came by to see me last week upon my return. It was a joyful feeling to be back at the *North Georgia News* and among the people that I love dearly. I've been on the mend since October 2015. And a lot of changes have happened since that time. First, I'm no longer a smoker. Over the years, a lot of people have told me that they knew I was at work because they saw me outside smoking. That is no longer the case. Second, I've had two open heart surgeries now. I survived both thanks to Dr. Daniel Winston of the Ronnie Green Heart Center at Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville. Those folks are the best in the country. Third, I lost five toes on my right foot. I was just beginning to think that toes were overrated when I was faced with another surgery - the prospect of losing my left leg below the knee. Now, I'm starting to think that having two legs is highly overrated. I'm 80 percent independent with just one and a half. Bottom line, the last 614 days have been long ones. They don't sound that long if you say it real fast, but it is a long time. I've spent that time helping via tele-commute here at the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald*. Most of those days were spent at Northeast Georgia Medical Center, or New Horizons Transitional Care Center.

### Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



It was while at the hospital and rehab center that I decided my fate was to continue working at the newspapers. These two facilities taught me a lot. They taught me not to give up hope, that eventually, the long, hard spiral staircase I was facing - well, it wasn't all uphill. Here I am today, I'm back in Blairsville, and on the mend - again. My current situation includes a lot of hard work at Benchmark Physical Therapy here in Blairsville. It's a top notch outfit filled with certified professionals. It's also stocked with outstanding equipment. My sister, and one of my former home healthcare professionals recommended it to me. I knew I was in the right place as soon as I rolled in the door.

See *Duncan*, page 5A

## Out On A Limb

Dancing on stage in a recital for little girls would frighten most dads. But sometimes a father has to go out on a limb for his child, if for no other reason than to demonstrate his love. Michael and his 10-year-old daughter Lauren decided that they wanted to spend more time together. So they hatched a secret plan for him to not just take her to dance lessons, but to participate. On the day of the recital, Lynne (mom) looked frantically for Michael who was apparently about to miss it. The recital began and Lauren entered the stage dancing. Lynne was stunned and emotional when Michael joined and danced with Lauren, making the memory of a lifetime. (See "The Recital" on YouTube.)

### All Things New

Wayne Fowler



There was another father once who had to go out on a limb. He had to risk his reputation and honor. He was engaged to be married, but he became aware that she was carrying a baby that was not his. In fact the child was no man's but who would believe it? The baby was Jesus, the mother was Mary, and you know the man as Joseph. Despite the honor of serving as step-father to the Messiah, the Bible records no spoken words of his. Apparently he was more a man of action. He was obedient to God, he protected Mary and the Child, and he provided for them by plying his carpenter trade. His role as "Nourisher of the Lord" was celebrated in medieval times during the Feast of Saint Joseph, an early expression of Father's Day.

In his book "God Came Near," Max Lucado considers Joseph's choice between sitting on a branch and climbing out on a limb. "Joseph knew that the only thing worse than a venture into the unknown was the thought of denying his Master. As things turned out, Joseph's fears were justified. Life wasn't as comfortable as it had been. At times that limb must have bounced furiously in the winds. But you can be sure of one thing. He never regretted it. One look in the face of that heavenly toddler and he knew he would do it again in a heartbeat."

Being a father and indeed being a Christian involves some risk-taking, and it is not easy. It seems especially so these days, but that is not a new thing. Climbing out on a limb for God and

See *Fowler*, page 5A

## Commissioner's Questions

*Jail Part IV Continued from last week.*

**Q. The Sheriff has given us a tour of the jail and has shown us the overcrowding in the jail with mattresses on the floors and prisoners crowded in together. There are also apparently additional issues with door locks, tower controls and security cameras. Instead of the county continuing to spend money on "nice" or "fancy" projects and property, why can't the county fix the jail or build a new one?**

The last three weeks I began answering this question and have continued those answers this week. The jail is a complicated issue.

**Q. If it cost more to keep a prisoner incarcerated locally, why not send them all out of county?**

A. Doing this would create a burden for the Sheriff's Department by having to transport prisoners to other locations and the court system for having to plan around their transportation. However, when we are overcrowded and can get by with housing only a few inmates out of the county, it is a reasonable and cost effective alternative.

**Q. So, if we build a new jail, why will it cost more to house the prisoners here locally than it does out of town.**

A. The following rates per day of incarceration were published by the state for 2014: State Prisons \$56.19/day, Integrated Treatment Facilities \$67.76/day, Private Prisons \$50.67/day, Probation Detention Centers \$55.08/day. Typically, because these are larger facilities, the per day cost can be less. Some counties in the U.S. report cost of over \$100/day per prisoners. Juveniles can cost nearly \$200/day to incarcerate. It is almost impossible to narrow down the exact cost except to know that it is significant. So, having to house an inmate out of the county at \$35 to \$40 per day occasionally, is very reasonable and much more cost effective than building and staffing a new jail with 125-150 beds at a \$8 million to \$15 million price tag.

**Q. Does it bother you that the jail is overcrowded and prisoners are sleeping on the floor?**

A. Those in jail made a choice to violate the law. No one forced it on them. Sure, it may have been from drug abuse or some

See *Paris - A*, page 5A

### Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



## Gatlinburg: 6 Months Later

Recently, we took a small vacation to Gatlinburg. It has now been six months and I was curious to see the results of the wildfire which devastated the area on the night of November 28, 2016. The fire consumed over 17,000 acres, destroyed over 2,400 buildings and homes, injured 134, and killed 14 people.

### Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

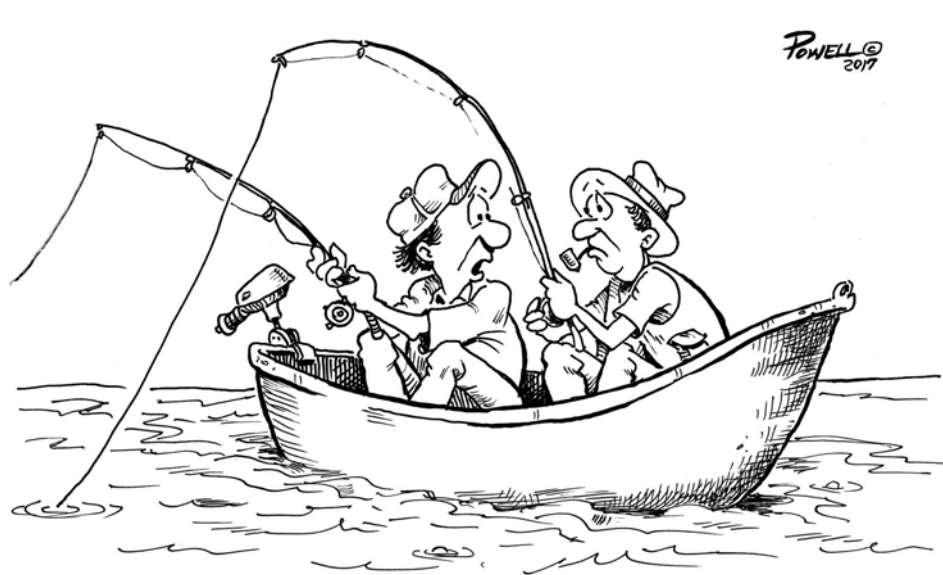
David Dyer



The results of the fire can be seen everywhere. On our way, we saw large areas of wilderness that were scarred from the wildfire. Many trees are dead and some still bear the black charring from the flames. Some of the mountain tops are now covered with nothing but burnt trees.

In the city, you can see the route of the fire and buildings that were destroyed. Some homes and businesses are still intact and operating. However, just across the street from the house where we are staying there is an empty lot where a home once stood. There are homes on the side

See *Dyer*, page 5A



"I'd like a new rod for Father's Day, but my family loves me so much it will probably be exercise equipment."

## Carolyn

My mother's younger sister is not that much older than I. She developed a great relationship with all of us kids because she was basically one of us. She let me drive her car down the road when I was only 11. She helped us kids build a dam across Baker Creek. She would tell us ghost stories late at night and she listened to us complain about how our parents made us do chores and stuff. She loved to tell us jokes and I never remember hearing her complain about anything.

### Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



As a teenager Aunt Carolyn noticed how well tanned all the actors were on the television. So, she decided to get a tan. So, she and Debra, the other sister, decided to lie on top of the tin roofed house of my mother's parents. As they lay on the roof soaking up that early spring sunlight the girls felt so good they soon fell asleep. Well, you can guess the outcome of that situation. Aunt Carolyn and Aunt Debra were in a bad way for a few days. They never made that mistake again.

Aunt Carolyn found her calling as a young girl. Many of my grandmother's brothers and sisters had gathered at the oldest brother's house for a family get together. Uncle Rufus and Aunt Euler lived up the road from my grandparents. Uncle Rufus raised cotton and corn on a nice little farm. He built himself a large catfish pond and the whole family was there to catch a mess of fish for a fish fry later in the day. There must've been 25-30 kids running around all over the place. Most of the men and the older kids were down at the pond catching the evening meal. The ladies were up at the house sitting under a big shade tree talking about latest events in the little community. Uncle Rufus' house sat 4 feet off the ground on pillars of rock. Aunt Carolyn was about 6-7 years old and was playing with her younger cousin, Uncle Rufus and Aunt Euler's daughter who was called "Little Bit". This young lady had beautiful, curly hair. She reminded the family of Shirley Temple.

The girls were playing up next to the house and they began to talk of their dreams about growing up. Carolyn was placing ribbons in her younger cousin's hair and she told the girl of her dreams about being a haircician. Carolyn said, "I bet I can fix your hair like a movie star". The little girl agreed and so the two went into the house and gathered the supplies they would need. The two girls walked under the floor of the house and Carolyn wrapped a towel around the shoulders of her younger cousin and used a pair of scissors to cut the curls from her head while Carolyn told the latest news to her first customer. After Carolyn finished the pair

See *Cummings*, page 5A

## Letters to the Editor...

### You've Got To Be Kidding

Dear Editor,

This letter is in response to the one by Mary Harper entitled "You've Got To Be Kidding". That would be my response back to her! Blairsville is one of the nicest communities I have ever lived in. The people are so genuine, nice, friendly and welcoming. She would not find a better place to live! As to the traffic, I have not witnessed what she did. In fact, it's usually the opposite. When driving, you are more likely to get behind someone who is going too slow, but you just have to be patient and then pass them in the passing zone. I know for a fact that Owen Glen doesn't even have that much traffic, much less speeding cars in there! I think that it is her loss!

Colleen Richardson

### Splish Splash

Dear Editor,

In reference to last week's edition from the letter writer about tailgating or following too close behind your vehicle, I've found that turning on your windshield wipers and spraying water on the windshield will splatter the vehicle behind you and it works very well. Most folks get the idea and back off from being too close.

In reference to the Jail issue, Mr. Paris took office in 2000 with a county population of a little over 10,000. The population exploded and more than doubled in 2010 to over 21,000.

This occurred while our commissioner has been in office. The 2020 census is expected to be

See *Sims*, page 5A

### No last meals

Dear Editor,

Georgia recently provided convicted murderer J.W. Ledford Jr. his requested meal, which consisted of a filet mignon steak wrapped in bacon with pepper jack cheese, a large serving of fries, 10 chicken tenders, a fried pork chop, a Bloomin' Onion, a pecan pie with vanilla ice cream, a portion of sherbet and an ice cold Sprite to wash it all down.

Ledford was convicted of murdering his neighbor, Dr. Harry Buchanan Johnston Jr., in Murray County in 1992. Johnston was killed with a pocketknife. The elderly doctor, who had delivered his attacker into the world, was nearly decapitated by Ledford.

Medical experts at trial said Dr. Johnston probably lived seven or eight minutes after the fatal wounds were inflicted. Ledford then assaulted the doctor's wife, tying her up and robbing her.

I have yet to find any information detail. See *Steverson*, page 5A

### Understanding

Dear Editor,

John Ripma's Letter to the Editor last week regarding the property the county is purchasing on Hwy 515 and bordering the Farmers Market was extremely misleading. I am sure Mr. Ripma did not intend it that way. It is true that the over 13-acre parcel the county will be paying \$678,500 is only assessed from the Tax Assessors office at \$168,000. However, this assessment is based on the property being used as a farm and not commercial property and therefore it is assessed at much lower farm values. To be a part of this program ("conservation use") designated by state law, it requires property to be a minimum of 10 acres and signed up for

See *Paris - B*, page 5A

### Courage Amid Fear

Dear Editor,

In a world of uncertainties where at every corner the devil raises his ugly head to bring fear and disbelief into our midst to cause us to doubt God's Word, we who believe in the Holy Word of our Savior Christ, Jesus need to read from the book of Joshua 1:9 in the Bible.

"Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid for the Lord, Your God, is with you wherever you go."

Wow what an awesome promise from our God, Creator to brother Joshua.

God had told Joshua to take God's Word in one hand and a sword in the other. He is to

See *Combs*, page 5A

### No need to complain

Dear Editor,

I am writing to complain about something. It doesn't really matter what. Maybe the sky is too blue in Blairsville, the trees are too green, the mountains are too beautiful, the people are too nice and friendly. I think everyone should be an old grumpy person like me and complain about everything. This is in response to the two letters in last week's paper complaining about speeders

See *Adams*, page 5A

### What's the deal?

Dear Editor,

I see that others have taken time to voice their concerns about "speeders." Mary Harper's letter is troubling to say the least and I understand her concerns. We moved to Blairsville in 1994 when people were not so hostile and it seemed to start changing for the worse about 10 years ago. I have to wonder how many others

See *Driskell*, page 5A

## Radon Testing

Radon is a colorless, odorless and tasteless gas that is directly linked to increased rates of lung cancer. In fact, it is the second leading cause of lung cancer, after tobacco smoke. It is a common problem in mountainous areas as uranium breaks down into radium, which eventually degrades into radon. Radon can enter the home through well water and the foundation itself. Unlike for carbon monoxide and other harmful gases, there are no detectors for radon levels. The only way to determine if you have high levels of this gas is to test it yourself.

Pickens, Fannin, Union and Towns have some of the highest radon contamination rates in the state. In Union County alone, 47% of the homes tested showed unacceptably high levels of radon gas. If the air in your home tests positive for higher than 4 picocuries per liter, it is recommended that you take steps to reduce the levels of radon. Though you can take many steps yourself, such as increasing circulation and ventilation in basements and crawl spaces, it is highly recommended that you hire a professional radon mitigator.

There are two different tests to determine radon levels in your home: an air test and a water test. Air tests can be purchased from local retailers or from [www.ugaradon.org](http://www.ugaradon.org). Once you purchase your kit, make sure all exterior doors and windows have been closed for at least twelve hours, aside from normal exit and entry. You can run your air conditioning or heat as you would normally. Hang the test kit 2 to 6 feet off the floor on the lowest habitable level of your house that I used regularly. Leave the test kit for a minimum of 3 and maximum of 7 days. Once the required time has elapsed, seal the envelope, record the starting day and time and the ending day and time. Mail the test kit to the designated address in your kit immediately to ensure accurate results.

Radon water tests can be purchased through the extension office for \$40. These tests are different from basic water tests because they require specific containers and collection methods. First, remove any filters and aerators from the faucet. The kitchen faucet is usually the best water source as it is usually the most commonly used in the house. Run cold water for 15 minutes to flush the system, and then reduce the water to a gentle flow and fill a large bowl with it. Submerge the first sample bottle and its lid under the water and allow the bottle to fill. Cap the bottle while it is still in the water and turn it upside down. If there are any air bubbles, empty the

See *Mattee*, page 5A

### From the Ground Up

Melissa Mattee



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