

Opinions

Everybody has one

Does Beau really know?

Honestly, it hasn't been a bad winter. In a few weeks, as the insects buzz around our outside porch lights, we'll probably wish we had more cold weather. However, it has been an unpredictable winter season to date. Black ice, floods, snow, high winds and even a tornado to the west of us have left us a bit frustrated with the winter of 2012-13. The weather doesn't appear ready to improve any time soon following Saturday's Groundhog Day prediction. And, as it stands, Georgia's General Beauregard Lee, is the only groundhog of prominence to predict six more weeks of cabin fever, better known as winter.



Charles Duncan
Straight Shooting

Pennsylvania's Punxsatawney Phil didn't see his shadow, neither did the New York Yankee, Staten Island Chuck, or Urban Meyer's Buckeye Chuck in Ohio. Groundhog tradition means that not seeing their shadow signals an early spring. Beauregard saw his shadow in Georgia on Saturday. How, I have no idea. The first significant snowfall of the winter season happened on Saturday. There was no sunshine. It snowed with reckless abandon. Local sporting events were canceled, roads became treacherous and there wasn't a gallon of milk or loaf of bread left in the North Georgia Mountains - at least not for sale. Saturday, the day it snowed, was the traditional Groundhog Day across the country. So, it leaves one to wonder, just how in the heck did Beauregard Lee see his shadow? Come on Beau, we had hazardous winds, floods and snow and ice all in the same week. Couldn't you have given us a break? I make all this fuss about Beauregard, because, he's the Georgia Groundhog. And, you know he's going to be right. He's making the Atlanta meteorologists and The Weather Channel look like a bunch of underclassmen still anxiously awaiting graduation day.

These human forecasters have yet to be able to predict more than a five or 10-day weather forecast. Beauregard is reaching out six weeks. Based on Beauregard's historical accuracy, I'm going to suggest that the Georgia Department of Transportation restock on gravel, brine and road salt. I make that same suggestion to local governments throughout the mountains region. I'll also suggest that local grocery stores throughout the region restock on gallons of milk and loaves of bread. I make these suggestions because Beauregard Lee is a true Southern Gentleman. He's not going to deceive us into thinking that we better get ready for more of this totally crazy and unpredictable weather for the next six weeks without good reason.

No, he wouldn't dare make up this story. After all, we know those lying Yankee groundhogs are just trying to make their home folks feel at ease because, let's face it, their thermometers are staying on the frozen side of zero. And bottom line, Beau knows as we brace for more winter weather, if there's one thing Georgia folks hate more than anything else, it's a lying groundhog.

Part 3: Stream Buffers

The questions below were written last week prior to the flooding last night, Wed. January 30th. I hope it is obvious to most people, that when you get this much rain, there is really nothing that can be done to significantly lessen the impact of flooding. However, you can be assured that if we did not have so much of our county real estate (52 percent) occupied by national forest and Lake Nottely, flooding would have been significantly worse. We are very blessed that the rain stopped when it did this week and the ice stopped when it did last week. We have narrowly dodged two very big weather bullets in the past few days.



Lamar Paris
Q & A

Q. What are stream buffers?
A. The undeveloped area along any stream is considered the stream buffer for that particular stream. The larger (wider) this undisturbed buffer is, the better the water quality of this stream will be.
Q. What purpose do stream buffers play in helping to prevent flooding and in protecting our water quality?
A. Depending on the makeup of the buffer (type of vegetation that is located along the stream) will determine the ability of that stream to withstand basic flooding and maintain water quality.
Q. What type buffers are there on our mountain streams?
A. There are mainly two types of buffers that are deemed "undisturbed." One is pasture land that has been fenced so that the livestock cannot have direct access to a stream. This provides an excellent buffer and allows all rain and storm runoff to be filtered as the water travels across the pasture. The grass slows the speed of the water and filters the water, which also allows more of it to soak into the soil. However, the down side of this type of buffer is that fertilizer and animal waste can also work its way into the stream. Naturally, in the winter time with the grass dormant, this buffer does not have the same positive impact. By far, the best buffer is the one that God gave us. It consists of a forest, which includes the tree canopy that reduces the size and speed of

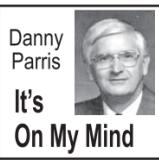
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"Saxby sure stirred things up. I think we're the only ones not running, Rover!"

IF...

IF is one of those big little words that is based on conditions. We use it frequently during our conversations and with all these sayings that begin with IF: If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen. If it ain't broke don't fix it. If worst comes to worst. If the shoe fits, wear it. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. If push comes to shove and a host of other "if" idioms. A friend sent me the following e-mail that I thought should be shared with everyone. Since it did not have a title, I entitled it "IF". I have no idea who the author is but I hope it will speak to your heart.



Danny Parris
It's On My Mind

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the million who won't survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture or the pangs of starvation, you are ahead of 20 million people around the world.

If you attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture or death, you are more blessed than almost three billion people in the world.

If you have food in your refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75 percent of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish some place, you are among the top 8 percent of the world's wealthy.

If your parents are still married and alive, you are very rare, especially in the United States.

If you hold up your head with a smile on your face and are truly thankful, you are blessed because the majority can, but most do not.

If you can hold someone's hand, hug them or even touch them on the shoulder, you are blessed because you can offer God's healing touch.

If you can read this message, you are more blessed than more than two billion people in the world that cannot read anything at all.

You are so blessed in ways you may never even know. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it, most of us are blessed in ways we don't even recognize. One of the greatest things that all of us could do today would be to pause right now and thank Almighty God for His goodness and mercy that is extended to us both night and day. And mercy that is extended to us both night and day.

The 10 Organizational Myths of Chambers of Commerce - Part 3

If you've been following this column the past two weeks, I have addressed 7 of the top 10 organization myths surrounding Chambers of Commerce. This week, I will conclude the series with the following three myths.



Cindy Williams
Blairsville - Union County Chamber of Commerce

Myth 8: The Chamber of Commerce handles disputes between local businesses and consumers.

Reality: There is another entity created for this purpose and it is the Better Business Bureau. The Chamber of Commerce does not offer mediation services or a means to resolve disputes with local businesses. The good news is that studies have found that members of a Chamber of Commerce are more likely to be civic minded, service oriented, and trustworthy. Therefore, consumers can feel more confident in contracting with or purchasing from Chamber members.

Myth 9: The Chamber of Commerce is only beneficial to local business.

Reality: We like to think of ourselves as the local resource for all things Union County. Our Chamber operates the local Welcome Center which means we answer a variety of (and often very interesting) questions. If we don't know the immediate answer, we usually know someone who does. Therefore, the Chamber serves a much larger purpose for the local community. We are glad to share information with local residents and make suggestions as to great places to eat, play, or buy your next gadget. Bring us your "Flat Stanley," come pick up an events calendar, check our website for the latest happenings, send us your visitors who are looking for something to do, or sign up for of email updates and local coupons. There are many ways for non business owners to interact with the Chamber, and we welcome

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Times Have Changed.

My grandfather once told me that his generation had seen more change than any other generation before his time or even after his time. When Papa was little his family's primary mode of transportation had been by wagon or train. As my grandfather grew his family began to use the automobile. A little later he saw his first airplane. When my grandfather was 53 he watched men walk on the moon.



Mickey Cummings
Around The Farm

One of my Papa's earliest memories is riding with his Dad to the cotton gin in a wagon. When they got to town they climbed off of the wagon to tie the mules to a hitching post. My 5-year-old grandfather asked his Dad, "Is that a one-eyed monster?" After his question the object he was pointing at let out a whistle and steam rose from its belly. My grandfather remembers his Dad calming the mules and explaining to him that the one-eyed monster was actually a train. He also remembers running alongside of the first car he'd ever saw as it made its way down a wagon-rutted road in front of his house.

When Papa was 15, a friend came to his house. Russell told Papa, "Coon, we need to go town and visit Mr. Nix at the store. He has a box what you can look at and see the New York Yankees play baseball". Papa didn't believe this wild tale, but, he went with Russell to town anyway. The pair entered the store just as the baseball game was ending. Papa said, "We didn't get to watch the ball game, but, we sat and watched test patterns on that television for two hours. Mr. Nix finally had to ask us to leave the store so he could close it."

Papa told us he saw an airplane for the first time when he was very small. "That plane nearly scared us to death," he explained with a chuckle. But, that was nothing. President Kennedy got the United States involved in the space race during the 1960s. The people of the USA took a great amount of pride in NASA's accomplishments. So, when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, people everywhere were glued to the television sets. Papa was extremely proud that an American made it there before the Russians. But, Granny was more skeptical. She told Papa and I those men were actually in the desert out in Arizona. She didn't believe they were there on the moon. But, Papa thought they were and he was proud to be an American.

When Papa was 15 he met his first County Agent. Papa's Dad, Lon, was well read in Agriculture and was considered to be an innovator. So, the newly appointed County Agent for Franklin County came to visit Lon on his farm in Trapptown, Ala. This County Agent

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The Prognosticator

According to the most recent U.S. Census, there are 11,343 groundhogs residing in Union County. No, that wasn't the Census figure. Maybe it was the Farmers Almanac where I read that. Well, anyway, let your imagination run wild. I always do.



JoAnne Leone
Farmers Market Moment

Groundhogs and woodchucks are the same giant rodent. They usually weigh in at 6-9 lbs. (2011 statistics taken from Weight-Watchers.com) and about 20 inches long, on average. That's a pretty big rat. We generally find them so much more endearing than many other rodents because they have frosted hair and cute tails. They are chubby in all the right places. They are still in the same family as voles. Voles are much smaller and we run from them, screaming.

Other monikers for the groundhog are marmot, grass rat, earth pig, and my favorite appellation, "whistle pig." This affectionate term for the Winnie the Pooh of rodents, derived here in the Appalachian Mountains. When a groundhog senses impending danger (natural predators in the area like wolves, coyote or an 18-wheeler with a tired driver at the wheel) he whistles rather loudly to alert the other 11,342 Union County underground inhabitants that the sky is falling. Well, that's the explanation for the "whistle" part of the label. The word "pig" may infer that if stripped and fried, this rodent tastes like bacon. I'm not likely to ever test that hypothesis.

There's a big movement these days, promoting anything made in America. This past Saturday we had the perfect example of American ingenuity. We celebrated the awakening of a rodent from his hibernating slumber. We name a whole day after this portly guy and Hallmark actually sells greeting cards celebrating whether or not his shadow will be cast.

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Letters

To the Editor

Appalled at Mercy's Murder

Dear Editor,

I am appalled after reading the article regarding the killing of Mercy the goat. There is plenty of evil and suffering in this world we cannot do anything about without tolerating people who could commit such unnecessary heinous and heartless acts as this. I say find the person that committed this crime, show him no mercy and charge anyone who was at this scene who saw it and didn't do anything to stop it. An animal is as defenseless as a child and we have a God given responsibility to treat them with kindness and dignity. If we allow lowlife like this to walk in our midst we will put up with anything. My heart goes out to the Allens. I beg that law enforcement sees this sicko gets what he deserves.
Deidra Gilbert

It's about control

Dear Editor,

I'm old enough to remember how the Soviet NKVD and later the Russian KGB used "mental illness" as the catch-all to restrict the Russian people through fear of disappearing. Following Obama's "logic" regarding "assault weapons" -- which, by the way were outlawed to civilians in 1934 and again in 1968 -- and using the bureaucratic power inherent in the "Affordable Patient Care Act" to keep us "healthy," it wouldn't be too much of a stretch to connect gun ownership with people who should be suspect because they might be unbalanced.

Hence, the broad rubric of "background checks."

Obama has branded gun owners as "clingers" and he has charged the CDC with investigating gun ownership as a disease.

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Mentally ill does not mean violent

Dear Editor,

I am responding to An obligation to warn others published in last week's edition of the paper. Before I even begin, I want to make known I am not deviating from a horrific tragedy, nor do I intend to justify the actions of others; I only wish to offer a different perspective, if not correct many misconceptions regarding the mentally ill.

Having a mental illness does not immediately entail violence, danger, evil, or terrorism. Suffering from an illness or disorder also does not automatically mean the individual cannot function in society, achieve personal success, form and maintain relationships, or live a relatively normal life (I say relatively because I believe normal differs for each of us).

I completely disagree with the notion that mentally ill individuals are basically a hidden plague lurking in our society and that we should fear the fact that they are "unconfined" as Mrs. Ramsey conveys.

Yes -- some afflicted individuals do require hospitalization and do need more care than others.

However, I wish to debase the non-factual idea that because one suffers from an illness, he or she has no rights and simply must be put away where our society of "innocent" citizens can live in perfect harmony because these so called dangerous people are imprisoned.

I will agree with Mrs. Ramsey in saying that state mental health laws do require reform, but not to allow just anyone to commit another person against his or her will.

Many people, devoid of illness, were involuntarily committed in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to California's Lanterman-Petris-Short Act signed into law by Ronald Reagan in 1967.

The act in a nutshell emphasizes prompt

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Ethics Bill

Dear Editor,

While we are all acutely aware of the push for gun control and immigration legislation on the federal level, there is little we can do about either issue. The danger is that while we are preoccupied with the big picture, the fox is in the henhouse. Take for instance, the ethics bill Speaker of the House Ralston's is pushing.

On Tuesday, Ralston announced an ethics bill that will require citizens who wish to lobby the state of Georgia to register. Under his bill, should an ordinary citizen wish to lobby the state for any reason, he or she would be required to register and pay a \$300 fee, just as the professional lobbyist would. The fee is a secondary issue. The danger lies in Ralston's push to muzzle We the People. The right to petition the government is a right granted under the Constitution, and the fact Ralston is pushing a bill to interfere with that right is troubling. In a televised interview on Channel 2 News at Noon yesterday, Ralston said, in his usual arrogant way, "I don't see what the problem is... If you want to lobby (the state), just register."

It is interesting to note that on the 11 p.m. newscast they mentioned the lobbyist fee, but omitted the taped interview where Ralston made his arrogant statement. We can only speculate as to why that part of the story was omitted.

So much of what is occurring in our state, country and around the world is beyond the ability of the average citizen to affect one way or the other, but this is something we can and should act on.

Let us flood our elected state officials from the governor down, with telephone calls and e-mails. Let them know what you think of the high-handed bill Ralston is attempting to ram through the legislature.
Robert K. Honea

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