

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Have a slice of pie

Imagine if you went to the grocery store and paid full price for your favorite pie. However, by the time you got that pie home, you only had a third of it left in the container, and you hadn't even tasted one bite.

That's sort of how Union County Schools feel after the state of Georgia's Quality Basic Education formula sends Union its share of the local \$16 million property tax pie back home.

For starters, the first 5 mills of your property tax money is lopped off to send to the poorer school systems in South Georgia. Write this down, that's almost \$6 million.

Second, the state then cuts off another chunk, almost \$2 million, for what it deems as austerity cuts, cuts initiated by the Perdue administration and cuts that are still in effect.

Still adding? Third, the state stuffs another \$1 million in its pockets for other items it deems should come out of the local property tax distribution.

Whew, finally, we get some funds. When it's all said and done, Union County's property tax collections dwindle from \$16 million to \$7.3 million. And that's the Quality Basic Education formula in a pie shell.

One person at Thursday's ESPLOST Town Hall meeting, sponsored by Union County's Tea Party, asked the board why the state does business the way it does.

"Good question," Assistant Superintendent Jeremy Williams replied.

Actually, it is a good question. In 1995, the state paid for 65.5 percent of local education in Union County. Today, those dollars have dwindled down to 35 percent.

And today, more cuts are imminent as Woody Gap School is threatened by the state's attempt to cut \$2,596,642 from a vital funding program, just to put more money in the state coffers.

Sparsity Grants distributed to 21 school systems, including Woody Gap School and Towns County Schools, are in jeopardy because the state is looking for yet another way to put more local money back in its pockets.

Woody Gap School qualifies for \$246,598 in Sparsity Grant funding because of travel time to bus its students to Union County Schools.

Woody Gap School first began to receive Sparsity Grant funding in 1974, when it was

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Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



Wind Needed

The month of March always brings back boyhood memories. Some of the happiest days of my life were days spent making and flying kites. My brothers and sisters collected string from every source we could find. We would tie the ends together and roll it up on a smooth stick. By the time March rolled around we would have several hundred yards of twine. Mom would save us the large laundry covers from the cleaners. We would select two of the finest young silver maple trees. They would be four to six feet in length and about one-half to three quarter inches in diameter. The longest stick was prepared and laid in a vertical position. The shorter stick was secured horizontally onto the vertical stick, approximately one-fourth the length from the top of the vertical stick. Notches were cut in all four ends of the sticks. String was placed into the notches to give stability and to secure the paper that was cut allowing two inches overlap. The overlap was folded over the string and glue was made from flour and water to seal the paper over the string. A long tail was made from old discarded clothing and attached to the kite. The end of the ball of "cord" (string) was securely tied at the cross point. We were ready to fly our kite. In spite of all of our efforts we could never get that kite airborne without God's wind. We would wait for God to stir the air and when we felt the wind our kite would be tossed into the current. What a beautiful site as it sailed into the heavens above.

The Bible likens the spirit of God to the wind. He told Nicodemus that "the wind bloweth where it wills and you can hear the sound but you cannot tell from whence it cometh nor where it goeth, so is everyone who is born of the spirit of God." (John 3:8) The wind is a mystery and it has its circuits. Since my boyhood days the winds of change have swept across our years. You don't see many kites anymore, especially homemade. I have changed a lot, but you know March has not changed. It still gives to us those winds that signal the end of winter and the coming of spring. God's spirit has not changed one whit. The power of His Presence tells us that He has brought an end to

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It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



Importance of ESPLOST

Q. Is the Education Sales Tax (ESPLOST) a new sales tax?

A. No. This sales tax was first started in 1998 (15 years ago) and has been passed by a large majority for many years.

Q. Why has a sales tax been so successfully passed for so many years?

A. Because it is the best way to fund not only school buildings, but extra classrooms, computer and other technology equipment, school buses, athletic facilities and now, it will also pay for the costly security measures that will be required to upgrade our school buildings after the Sandy Hook shootings.

Q. Will passing an ESPLOST help keep our property taxes low?

A. Absolutely. I do not hear many people speaking to this, but because I am in government, I understand the potential savings. Does it guarantee that property taxes will never increase? No, because the school system is at the mercy of receiving most of their funding from the State Legislature and over the past several years, the Legislature has drastically cut funding for education. Those in power now in Atlanta are trying to hold the current funding level. If they can, we hope if there are any tax increases in the future, they certainly will be modest.

Q. Why don't we just use property taxes to pay for our schools?

A. Because it would be a serious financial burden to our homeowners and business owners and those who have invested in real estate in the mountains. If we use property taxes ONLY to fund these school additions, only those with homes, businesses or real estate will carry the tax burden. That is one very sensible reason I am voting "YES" to ESPLOST. In addition, with a sales tax, EVERYONE helps pay when they make purchases in our county. This includes those working here from out of town, those renting homes or businesses, those who pass through or tourists who visit here, and most importantly, those who come here to shop and eat and visit.

Q. What does it mean for our children to receive a quality well-rounded education?

A. We have one of the best school systems in the state.

Our students consistently test well and the neighboring areas of the state have parents wanting to put their kids in Union County schools because they know we are one of the best. We have some of the best teachers who love and care for their

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Dreaming of Ireland?

I'm going to start this week's column in a way that I never advise anyone to start a column – with the mission statement of our organization. But bear with me, I am going somewhere with this, and you're going to like it. This mission of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce is to positively impact our community and members by facilitating tourism, economic, and cultural development. I repeat tourism, economic, and cultural development. Most people get the tourism and economic part, but what have we done for cultural development and why? I'm glad you asked.

A quick Google search of why cultural development is important to our society will give you a lot more information than I am able to do here, but the point is, by broadening and expanding our horizons, challenging our perspectives, and forcing ourselves outside of our proverbial box, we begin to engage our mind in ways that stretch our imagination and most always reap great rewards. With this belief in mind, the Chamber has just announced our next great cultural development opportunity – Ireland 2013!

Irish Splendor is an upcoming community travel trip offered by the Chamber in partnership with leading tour operator Collette Vacations. The Irish Splendor tour departs October 30, 2013 for eight days. Spend a night in Ashford Castle, stroll along the streets of Dublin and experience old Ireland at its finest. Travelers will explore the Guinness Storehouse, Ireland's number one attraction; travel to Dingle Peninsula, and view one of the world's most beautiful coastal routes; stand in awe of nature's power on the Cliffs of Moher; ex-

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How old will the future "Ole" MacDonald Be?

The passage of ESPLOST will certainly help agriculture!

Nestled in a beautiful cove, on the south side of Union County, is the Dyer Farm. Four years ago, when I was interviewing farmers from our Market, Chandler Dyer met me at the top of the gravel drive sporting a western style felt fedora and the proverbial bib overalls. His handshake was firm, from hands that tug corn off the stalks and whack down cane for a living. We leaned against his 1966 Ford pickup (the first truck he ever owned) and started to talk about his passion for farming. "It's all I ever wanted to do," he tells me. His eyes sparkle, and a warm and contented nature exudes from him as he tells me the stories of this land that his great grandfather purchased in 1933. He had invested everything into this life as a farmer, albeit, a very young life. Chandler Dyer was just 16 years old at the time of our interview.

Dakota Collins wasn't celebrating the last day of school like most 4th graders. He came home, changed into his work clothes and headed to the fields to fertilize the potatoes. That's where I found him and his Dad, Freddie Collins when I drove up to their 10-acre farm in the Track Rock region of Union County at the end of May, 2009. Freddie has been a farmer all his life. This is truly a family operation with his wife, Julie, being the third leg of the workforce tripod. Julie walked down to the fields from the house with Grayson, their second child, just 14 months old (now 5 years old and working with his family every week at the Farmers Market), to join us for the interview. There was an amazing grace that exuded from this hard working family. When I asked young Dakota if he'd rather be doing something else, he assured me not. He loves working the fields. Funny, it was just about the same thing his Dad answered when I asked him the same question a little later.

This county's heritage is steeped in the fields and the multi-generations of farmers who

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Letters to the Editor ...

Help Woody Gap

Dear Editor,

Honorable Sen. Steve Gooch, Thanks so much for all you do. It was great to talk with you at the breakfast in Fannin County last Saturday.

I am still working to find information about the status of Woody Gap School. I have contacted descendants of Ralph Twiggs to see if there might be something in his papers that would help find exactly what happened when the school was declared isolated.

The Union County Superintendent of Schools at that time was Clyde Collins, now 91 years old. He was in office in 1978. Also, I talked

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Remembering Mercy

Dear Editor,

To those who opposed your running *Mercy* the goat's murder story on the front page two weeks in a row, I will ask them why? Do they think burying a story like this makes it less sensational? Do they think Blairsville does not have an ugly side? Do they want to bury their heads in the sand and pretend these things do not happen in our otherwise wonderful and peaceful community? Some people do not think animal abuse and torture is a crime that warrants front page news, but I do and I applaud your making this story front page news two weeks in a row.

I love our community of peaceful, helpful, kind, generous, wonderful people that will go out of their way to help a stranger. People who will rescue a poor helpless animal and help it to find its home or take it to one of our animal rescue shelters. Wonderful people who have taken injured animals to their own Veterinarians and at their own expense, or people who have doctored them back to health themselves. People who donate food, supplies and their time to the local organizations in our community who help lost, abandoned and injured animals find a permanent or a foster home and or at least be cared for in a humane fashion.

Life is as dear to a mute animal as it is to man. They want happiness and fear pain just as we do, and also like us, all creatures want to live and not die. God gave us dominion over animals but he also gave them souls. He watches over and will judge us on how we treat the animals in our care. There are numerous biblical verses that refer to the souls of animals. One as follows: Lev. 24:17, 18:

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The Long and Short of it

Dear Editor,

The next time someone mentions "separation of Church and State," you might wish to acquaint them with the facts behind that oft-misused and misapplied phrase.

Thomas Jefferson believed it unjust – and unwise – to use public funds to support an established church or to link civil rights to religious observance.

He said that such a system always leads to "spiritual tyranny." Jefferson concurred with the Christian tradition that held the church should not depend on state-enforced compulsion.

He wrote, "Our Savior chose not to propagate his religion by temporal punishments or civil incapacitation." Had Jesus chosen to do so, "It was in His almighty Power" to force belief.

Instead, "He chose to...extend it by its influence on reason, thereby showing others how (they) should proceed."

In his notes set down during the writing of and debate concerning religion and The Constitution, Jefferson wrote: Objection: Religion will decline if not supported; Answer: Gates of Hell shall not prevail.

Jefferson was also of the historical perspective that Protestantism was largely about the importance of each and every Believer – not the

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Voting YES On ESPLOST Makes Good Business Sense

Dear Editor,

When you own a business everyone thinks that you make an infinite amount of money and have endless time off, yet nothing could be further from the truth. The backbone of the American economy has always been its small businesses and we have been hit hard during this most recent economic downturn. We can't take much more. Commercial real estate property taxes, federal taxes (FICA), workman's compensation costs, the impacts of the new healthcare bill, etc. are killing us! What are we to do?

Believe it or not, one easy way to ease some of the financial burden is to VOTE YES to continue the 1¢ SPLOST (Special Local Option Sales Tax) on Tuesday, March 19th. In addition to all of the financial obligations that were mentioned above, another expense we are forced to incur in our community pertains to our local schools, and while I know you are sick of hearing about all the money it takes to run Union County Public Schools, the fact is that we must continually improve them if we are to nurture our future workforce and survive as a community. Unfortunately, capital or technological improvements of any sort cost money and quite truthfully, none of us can afford to have much more taken out of our pockets, thus the reason for encouraging you to vote YES for continuation of the 1¢ SPLOST.

You see, that extra penny of sales tax that ALREADY exists generates quite a bit of revenue that can only be used for school-related technology and capital improvement projects (NOT salaries for employees). While the amount collected during the recent recession fell short of the initial expectations and many projects, including the much touted Union County Fine Arts Center, had to be placed on hold in favor of other less expensive projects, a full 40% of the revenue collected from the extra 1¢ sales tax already in place, came from non-resident visitors to our area. This in turn helped lessen the

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Houston, we have a problem

Dear Editor,

I read with great interest the letter from Roger Neal to Steve Gooch in last weeks edition of the N.G.N. I have sent Senator Gooch two e-mails about a matter that is very important to me and my wife.

The only answer I received was telling me I need to contact my local representative, Steve Allison. I have sent Steve Allison three e-mails over the past four weeks with my name, address, e-mail address and both my phone numbers. I have yet to hear back from him.

In Steve Gooch's articles in the paper two weeks ago he was quick to point out that we was the representative for our county as well as Steve Allison.

My wife and I have lived in Union County since 2000 and we have voted in every election. We find it hard to understand why our duly elected representatives cannot seem to find the time to at least talk to us.

We would like to know if anyone else has had this problem and how it can be resolved.

Lattie Harp Blairsville, GA

The Night the Stars Fell in Alabama

The year was 1943, a time when everybody was on edge. WWII was in full swing. German U-Boats had been sighted off the coast of Georgia. It was less than two years since the bombing of Pearl Harbor. There was no Weather Channel or CNN. There were no televisions and few radios. An event occurred that year which we now viewed as funny. But, then it was the scariest moment of my Papa's life. He told me he was more afraid for his family than he was his own life. He said, "I was basically helpless to do anything to help my family".

Late one spring evening Papa went to the outhouse and on his way back he witnessed a meteor shower. This wasn't a typical meteor shower. This was intense. Papa said, "I was familiar with shooting stars, but, this was more like the bombs falling from the sky." Papa ran into the house and got his family out of bed. Granny wrapped her two young sons in a quilt and the family began running across the cotton field to Mr. Wynn's storm cellar. Granny thought the Germans had launched some new kind of weapon on Alabama.

Dad and Uncle Bud were trying to peek out from under the quilt to see the flashes of light falling from the sky. One of them tripped and fell to the ground. So, the whole family lay on the ground for a few seconds. They were in awe of what they saw in the sky. The sky was filled with flames of light falling to earth. Papa was worried the family was going to be struck by one of these objects falling from the sky. So, he got his family up and tried to run back to their house. When they got safely back under their roof Papa and Granny became fearful their house was going to get struck by one of these objects falling from the sky. So, once again the family began running toward Mr. Wynn's storm cellar. Once again the family got halfway across the field and turned back. The family tried two more times to get to the storm cellar at Mr. Wynn's house. They failed every time.

Dad said, "Your Papa and Granny were scared to death of the objects falling from the sky. However, Bud and I just wanted to watch what was going on, we were having fun." The family eventually went into their house and lay under the table until the objects stopped falling from the sky. Later Papa learned they witnessed a very intense meteor shower. But, for a time Papa and Granny just knew they were under attack by Nazi Germany.

Many of you have asked about the Farmers Market Opening as well as the Trash to Treasures Sale. The 2013 Farmers Market will open on June 8, 2013. We will also have some special days this spring including our annual Ramps and Native Plant Sale which will be held April 18.

Presently, we are taking RSVP's for Farmers and Food Processors only at the Farmers Market. If you are a Farmer go to the Commissioner's Office and register for the 2013 season.

The Friday's Trash to Treasures Sale will begin on April 12, 2013. The event will be held each Friday excluding May 31 when the Relay for Life will be held at the Farmers Market.

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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Kenneth West
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Charles Duncan
Editor

Adam Gilreath
Advertising Director

Todd Forrest
Staff Writer

Lowell Nicholson
Photographer

Website: www.nganews.com
E-mail: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com
Mailing: POBox 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514



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Phone: (706) 745-6343 Fax: (706) 745-1830 * P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, GA 30514