

Fire on the Mountain - wildfire education

March and April are the spring wildfire months up here in North Georgia which greatly increases the risk for a wildfire for our residents living on these mountains. Wildfire education is a never ending, year-round process and our team works on it at every opportunity. Wildfire education is like riding a bicycle; if you stop pedaling you will slow to a stop and fall off so we have to keep pedaling slowly and steadily to keep wildfire education on our resident's minds.

On May 2 communities all across the U.S. participated in the National Fire Protection Association's second National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day. Citizens all across the country committed their time to positively contribute to reducing their communities' wildfire risk. These efforts raised wildfire awareness, promoted collaboration and brought neighbors together to work on projects that help protect their homes, neighborhoods and entire communities for wildfires.

We do things in a big way here in Towns County so this year on May 2 our Fire Rescue Department along with the USDA Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission, Towns County EMA, Towns County Sheriff's Department, Towns County Red Cross, Towns County 911, Towns County Commissioner's Office, Towns County EMS, local HAM radio, Clay County NC Fire, and the Chest/Chatt RC&D Council held a full-scale wildfire training exercise in the Lake Forest Estates subdivision on Ramey Mountain.

Lake Forest is one of our Firewise Communities and it is situated on very steep ground with narrow roads and only one entrance. The exercise was directed by professional coaches and evaluators who have experience in real wildlife events. This exercise did not just happen over-night, but was carefully planned by representatives from the emergency agencies

over eight months. The first meeting gauged whether there was interest to pursue the training exercise. Over the next few months more meetings were held to iron out details of the plan and on March 12 the group conducted a sand table exercise. The primary goal of the exercise was to test the multi-agency Incident Command System and to have all of the emergency agencies that serve this area work together on one incident to plan and control simulated structure fires and a wildfire.

Another objective was to raise public awareness. The day started early at 07:30 at the Towns County 911 center with a briefing. The actual scenario was kept under wraps until Saturday so the emergency responders would face the uncertainty that they face on any fire. They were able to put their training to the test in a simulated situation instead of having to contend with the confusion, smoke, fire, and panicked residents that accompany the real thing.

At 10 a.m. the call was made to the 911 center for a house fire at 957 Ramey Mountain Road and the exercise was put in motion. When the firefighters arrived the coach handed the Incident Commander the scenario sheet and the IC proceeded to organize his troops as they arrived on the scene. From the initial "fire", ember showers began raining on houses above and wildfires began rapidly moving up the ridge and endangering more structures. Engines were repositioned to set up a defense for the homes in danger. Residents of the neighborhood were enlisted as role players with one playing a heart attack victim and other residents who needed to be evacuated. The EMS transported the heart attack victim to the emergency room and also had to deal with a firefight-

Reece Farm appreciates Educators

The Byron Herbert Reece Farm and Heritage Center would like to show our appreciation to local educators and offer free admission (with teacher ID) during the month of May!

Did you know that we also welcome school or other educational group field trips to the Farm? In fact, local teachers developed lesson plans for trip visits (K-12) that can be accessed on our website.

The Reece Farm and Heritage Center is located on



er down with heat exhaustion, and firefighters who were bitten by a dog. When the house fire turned into a wildfire, the incident commander called in additional resources from the Forest Service for wild fire control on Forest Service lands above and Georgia Forestry Commission for wildfire control in the neighborhood. Then the Forest Service dispatched a helicopter for a real-time look at the fire's progression.

The exercise was called off promptly at noon and participants were invited to the after-action-review and BBQ dinner at The Ridges pavilion on Lake Chatuge. There were 63 participants, coaches, evaluators, and residents. Most comments were very positive with radio communication between the agencies as one of the weaknesses. Questions still exist on how to address this issue. Everyone agreed that the establishment of a unified command that is physically co-located is one of the first steps that must be accomplished on an incident such as this.

We also received positive feedback from the residents who observed and participated in the incident. More exercises such as this will be planned in the future to improve our unified response to wildfires that threaten our residents and community. Chestatee/Chatahoochee RC&D Council is one of the eight original Fire Adapted Community Pilot Hubs. NTMay13.B5/C

US Hwy. 19/129 approximately 9 miles south of Blairsville and 1 mile north of Vogel State Park. We're open from April through November on Thursday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Other arrangements could be made for educational visits.

If you'd like more information, visit our website at <https://byronherbertreesociety.wordpress.com/> or contact the Farm at 706-745-2034. NTMay13.Z2/CA



Most of the Blue Ridge Mountain Jeepers that winter elsewhere are back and now that we are at full strength our events are showing an increasing number of jeeps. We are especially pleased with the work that the Forest Service has completed at Beasley Knob. Our ride leaders have found enough different trails with varying trail ratings that they are now scheduling a weekly ride into Beasley Knob and giving everyone in our group a chance to experience one of the finest and closest tracks in Union County.

Our activities last month included a visit by over 30 of our members and guests to Jim's Smokin' Q for a very competitive game of Putt-Putt Golf. This was followed by a picnic dinner with lots and lots of food since everyone brought a dish to pass and of course some of the finest barbecue in the South East. Our mystery rides always result in a great turnout since the destination is not revealed by the ride leader until the very last moment. The picnic lunches which take place back in the furthest reaches of the Appalachian wilderness are enjoyed by all.

We usually find a campsite with facilities and located beside a mountain stream for just the right setting.

Our schedule for activities in May shows a very busy month. We are planning a forest clean-up day that takes us to Cooper's Creek WMA. This is a bi-annual endeavor where we pick-up litter left along the trails and campsites. Our members agreed this is worthwhile for all involved, as we enjoy the roads through the WMA so spending some time helping keep them clean is the least we can do. We plan to participate in the Blairsville Memorial Day Parade on Saturday, May 23rd. Anyone with a jeep that would like to join us in this year's Memorial Day Parade is welcome. We will be meeting at Steve's Steak House at 8:30 AM. This is always a fun and meaningful activity as we usually are the largest unit in the parade. We will be collecting non-perishable food for the Union County Food Pantry also. This is a rewarding and worthwhile undertaking that we know puts smiles on the faces of local folks in need.

If you have a jeep and would like to take some fun rides with the BRMJ's check our events calendar, pick a date and come join us. Our website is: www.blueridgemountainjeepers.com. In addition, pictures and videos of recent rides and events are posted for your enjoyment. Our Friday pizza nights and dinner dates keep us acquainted with the latest plans and any changes in our schedules. Come by and see our jeeps at the Blairsville Cruisers Block Party Car Show at the Union County Farmers' Market on the first Friday of the month. Our monthly meeting is held every second Tuesday at Steve's Steak House in Blairsville with dinner at 5:30 PM and meeting at 6:30 PM. NMay16.Z12/jgg

Union General Hospital hosts Blood Drive

Union General Hospital in Blairsville, GA will host a blood drive with Blood Assurance on Tuesday, May 26 from 12 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the classroom. Union General Hospital is located at 35 Hospital Road.

Blood Assurance is a non-profit regional blood center solely responsible for supplying blood and blood components to 74 healthcare facilities in 51 counties, including Union General Hospital, Fannin Regional Hospital, Murphy Medical Center and Copper Basin Medical Center. Over 540 blood donors are needed every day in order to adequately supply all the hospitals served by Blood Assurance. Your one donation can save three lives.

To be eligible to donate blood, you must be at least 17 years old (16 years old with parental consent), weigh 110 pounds or more and be in good health. The process usually takes about 30 minutes and includes a complimentary snack. Donors are asked to drink plenty of fluids - avoiding caffeine - and eat a meal that is rich in iron prior to donating. Visitors can register to win a family fun pack of 4 tickets to either Dollywood or Six Flags at the drive. Donors can pick their choice of a yellow cup or a t shirt as a thank you for donating.

To host a blood drive in this area, contact donor recruiter Tim Wilson at 423-322-1556. For more information about Blood Assurance, please call 1-800-962-0628 or go to www.BloodAssurance.org. NMay13.Z19/CA

City Hall...from Page 1A

"The biggest reason is our prep work beforehand, before the audit ever starts, how we're ready for the auditors when they come in, and we have all the information at their disposal that they have requested, and it saves them going back and looking for stuff," said Mayor Conley.

And before the auditors come in to complete their reports, which this year began at the end of March, the city calls in a CPA to check its work, which is just another check and balance to make sure the numbers are square.

Also in the meeting, several businesses from the downtown area spoke with the mayor and city council concerning the sign ordinance, which was passed on Oct. 1, 2013.

The main complaint was a lack of clarity, and the businesses present asked that the council look over the policy to make it more business-friendly.

"Our current ordinance does not allow what we call temporary signs on public property," said Mayor Conley. "It does allow temporary signs on private property, one temporary sign for a 30-day period. And of course, if it's on private property, and there's other shops on that property, then it's left up to the property owner to police it and to decide who is next in line to put their temporary sign out for the next 30 days."

Woman's Enrichment Center Third Annual mega yard sale

The Woman's Enrichment Center of Blairsville and Blue Ridge Third Annual Mega Yard Sale will be held on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, May 14-16 at the Union County Farmers Market from 7 AM - 5 PM. Please bring donations by the Farmers Market on Wednesday the 13th. Sections include: furniture, clothing, household décor, appliances and electronics, books, out-

door furniture, toys, Christmas decorations, and much more. BBQ will be available.

We help women in need with advice and encouragement, baby clothing, diaper bags, baby furniture, child-birth and parenting classes, and ultrasound scans. Please come and help us to help others. For more information call (706)781-4602 or email at ssosc@rocketmail.com.

Most businesses around town that have multiple shops per piece of private property have decided not to allow any temporary signs, since policing the signs would be a hassle, the mayor said.

Downtown Blairsville is an area of special concern, since there is very little private property outside of the buildings owned by individuals and businesses, leaving little room for advertising.

The mayor and city council agreed to take another look at the policy to see what they can do to be more accommodating, though the temporary sign policy is meant to keep the entire city clutter-free as far as temporary signage.

"Our biggest dilemma is right here on the square, and yes, the council, everybody, including myself, we're searching for some way to compromise," said Mayor Conley.

Also in the meeting, Blairsville's Downtown Development Authority Program Manager Darren Harper updated the council on the Haralson Project.

"The Haralson property, we have one of two permits approved from the Georgia Department of Transportation," said Harper. "We expect by next week we should have the plans for the actual off ramp approved. We did get approval for the drainage permit, so that's good."

STAGE YOUR HOME

FOR SALE

By Jeanne Mills, Realtor



The first two weeks

We are entering the busiest season for real estate. It's peak time for success in selling if you are planning to put your home on the market. I am interested in you preparing your home to sell within the first two weeks it's listed. It's not impossible. Actually, it's the most crucial time to capture buyers.

Here are 5 areas of staging and selling I grabbed from the Motley Fool website, to come to grips with this challenge. The most important: being realistic about the price. Talk to your realtor about your ambitious goals for selling. Remember agents would also like you to get a high sale price. But they know the market and what's happening. They can help bring you to a true and reasonable asking price. The next area to focus on is de-cluttering and de-personalizing. This stuff is your worst enemy when selling your home. It's a turn off to see your diplomas, old photos and other personal items. I know it's challenging figuring

out where to put everything. Maybe a really good friend or relative's basement, or just rent a storage unit for a while. It is worth it!

Are listing photos important? More than words. They should only be taken after the property is staged and ready to sell. Check Pinterest photos or magazine photos of living areas. Get an idea of what looks good and what doesn't. Poor lighting, clutter, and stuff on refrigerator won't sell your house. Review the photos for your listing. Photos should make a buyer want to see your property!

I've said it before, first impressions matter! Keep the grass cut. Trim the bushes. Get rid of driveway ruts. Paint the front door. Wash the windows. Buyers make up their minds about seeing a house in the first 10 minutes.

Remember: it's not your home. You're already gone. Let's get this property off your plate for life's next adventure. Call me for a boost: 706-218-4202. NMay13.Z6/CA

Register now for student Red Cross summer scholarship program

This summer, high school and college students can win a scholarship by hosting an American Red Cross blood drive through the Leaders Save Lives program. Registration is now open to host a participating blood drive between June 1 and August 31, 2015.

The Leaders Save Lives program encourages community-minded 16 to 24 year-olds to host blood drives to help maintain the blood supply over the summer months. Students who participate as a blood drive coordinator are eligible to win a scholarship up to \$2,500 for higher education and to earn a gift card.

"The Leaders Save Lives program is a great way for students to learn valuable leadership skills while helping hospital patients in need of

lifesaving blood transfusions," said Sharon Pitt, CEO for the Carolinas Blood Services Region. "Summer can be a challenging time to maintain a sufficient blood supply. With this program, students are helping the community by recruiting their friends and family to donate during this crucial season."

A total of 10 scholarships will be awarded via drawing to students who achieve 100 percent of their blood drive collections goal. All students who achieve the designated blood drive goal will receive an electronic gift card to gift-certificates.com

For more information and to register to host a Leaders Save Lives blood drive, visit redcrossblood.org/leaderssavelifes. NTMay13.Z7/CA

Career Coach coming to Hiawassee

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's Workforce Development Career Coach is visiting the Towns County Public Library on Thursday, May 14th from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. The library is located at 99 South Berrong St., Hiawassee.

We will be helping area residents search and apply for jobs, write resumes and cover letters, and discern their career interests. We will also be providing information about tuition assistance and on-the-job training programs. TMay13.F1/SH

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