

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Happy Fourth of July

Mother Nature might not cooperate with Northeast Georgia as Union, Towns and other counties try to celebrate that all important Independence Day observation.

The National Weather Service is calling for a 60 percent chance of rain as the community celebrates the Fourth of July and that's no fun.

Actually, there could be heavy downpours on Thursday as Union County tries to celebrate at Vogel State Park, Lake Nottely Marina, Suches and later, Meeks Park.

One thing is for certain, rain or no rain, our spirits will never be dampened. Freedom is just wonderful, rain or shine.

If the weather permits, the fun begins on the Fourth at 8:30 a.m. at **Vogel State Park**. The second oldest state park in Georgia celebrates our independence with a flag-raising ceremony, bicycle parade, pedal boat races, sandcastle building competition, watermelon eating, sack races, egg tosses and greased pole climbing. Parking is \$5.

At 11 a.m., again, weather permitting, the annual **Independence Day Boat Parade** is scheduled at Lake Nottely Marina. Anyone with a boat is welcome to line up at the Marina beginning at 11 a.m. At 11:30 a.m., boats will pass in review. There is no charge and boats can be decorated in any theme. Visitors can view the parade from areas around the Marina.

At **Meeks Park**, this year's fireworks display is scheduled for Thursday evening, at approximately 9:30 p.m. weather permitting. Fireworks are promoted by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by Woodmen of the World.

In **Suches**, on Thursday evening, the Suches Fire Department will present their annual Independence Day fireworks celebration on the field behind the Woody Gap School.

The Suches tradition will begin at dark, but, the festivities begin earlier, as the Suches community and visitors will gather around 7 p.m. for hot dogs, soft drinks and snacks. It's also a chance to greet friends, old and new, Jim Miner said.

Back again this year is the rubber duck race in the creek that runs behind the school with the winning duck receiving a prize.

The fun keeps going on Friday.

The **Blairsville Cruisers** offer not one, but two more opportunities for celebration with their Friday night "Block Party" and a "Cruise-In" on Saturday.

The "Block Party" will be held Friday, July 26th, from 4 p.m. to dusk in the Blairsville Wal-Mart parking lot.

Patrons will enjoy classic cars, family fun with music, lots of food, and a 50/50 drawing. Raffle tickets also will be for sale for a 2001 Chevrolet Camaro Convertible. All proceeds are used to benefit local children's charities.

If you don't need a car, but still want to help the kids by purchasing a raffle ticket, you will have the unique option of taking a \$2,500 cash prize instead, should you hold the winning ticket.

There's another Cruisers' event on Saturday, "Cruise-In to the Blairsville Restaurant" just off the Courthouse Square on Earnest Street.

Beginning at 4 p.m., the fun begins complete with music, food from restaurants on Earnest Street, a 50/50 drawing and raffle ticket sales for the Chevy Camaro.

We hope that Mother Nature will allow us to catch a break. We look forward to celebrating this magnificent holiday.

If weather permits, enjoy!

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



The Joyful Sound

Many of you recall the by-gone days of bells. Traditionally, we have been a nation that celebrated our freedom with the ringing of bells. We were called to worship by the ringing of church bells. The little church where I attended as a young boy had a rope hanging down in the foyer. That rope was attached to the bell that was housed in the belfry on the roof. Mr. Albert Pruitt seemed to be in charge of ringing the bell. Mr. Pruitt was a fine Christian gentleman. The rope did not hang long enough for boys with short arms to reach, but Mr. Pruitt would lift little boys up in his arms and let them pull the rope to ring the bell. What a thrill!! Of course, if you got to ring the bell you had to get to church long before service was to begin. The church bell has always reminded me of my freedom to worship. That sound has always been precious falling on my ears. When I started first grade at McCaysville Elementary School, bells seemed to be essential to keep order and keep everyone on schedule. The teacher had a small round bell on her desk that she would just tap to restore order to the class. The large board (shaped to fit a rowdy boy's bottom) next to the bell gave additional power to the bell. When recess was over, a teacher, or a student, selected by the teacher, would walk to the middle of the playground and ring a bell that had a long wooden handle to signal playtime had ended. The school bells always reminded me that I had the freedom to pursue knowledge and learning. I haven't forgotten that sound. At Christmas time bells have always been prominent. We sing songs of Christmas bells such as "Jingle Bells" and "Silver Bells". We play hand bells and listen to the Salvation Army bells calling us to remember that we still have the poor among us. The bells of Christmas remind me that I am free from darkness and bondage because the light of God in Christ Jesus has set me free. I refuse to forget those sounds of freedom at Christmas. At funerals we sing songs like "When They Ring Those Golden Bells". At death we are reminded that we have won the ultimate victory. Thank God, we are free at last. Thank God for the sound of those Golden Bells. To every true American the

It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



See Parris, page 5A

UCFD

As I stated in my recent *Q & A column*, we occasionally but not often, have people say they do not think they are receiving any value for the taxes they pay in Union County. So for the next few weeks, I will be talking about the services that the county offers. I will still mix in other questions as we receive them. We will start with our Fire Department.

Q. Does Union County operate the county ambulance service?

A. No. The ambulance service is owned and operated by Union General Hospital. While the county contributes \$500,000 each year to this operation, we do not have any operational control or input. So if you have any compliments or concerns about the ambulance service, you would need to contact Union General Hospital.

Q. When there is an accident or home medical emergency, is this all handled by the Ambulance Service?

A. No. I hope you never have a fire, serious traffic accident, or home medical emergency, but if and when you do, you will not only have an ambulance on scene, you will also have a rescue vehicle from the Union County Fire Department to assist in case of severe injury or need for moving a patient out of a home to a waiting ambulance. Many lives have been saved in Union County because of the excellent caliber of our Fire Department personnel and their cooperation with other agencies, including the Union General Ambulance Service and Hospital.

Q. Does Union County have a full time Fire Department? We came from a rural county and it only has volunteer firemen.

A. Union County is the only non-metro county in North Georgia to have four full-time firemen on each shift, 24-7, for the public's safety and protection. Most rural counties either have none or maybe one.

Q. Are our firefighters well qualified?

A. The firefighters are highly trained and qualified as EMTs and all are "NPQ Firefighter 2" certified. They roll on all fire calls, motor vehicle accidents and ambulance calls with serious medical problems. These highly trained individuals along with our outstanding medical facilities and the hospital ambulance service, and Sheriff's Office, make Union County one of the safest areas in which to live.

Q. Does Union County still have volunteer firemen?

See Paris, page 5A

Happy Fourth of July!

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce would like to extend a warm invitation to you and all of your family and friends to join us at our annual community fireworks display to be held on Thursday, July 4 from Meeks Park.

The show will begin after dark and is certain to be a memorable one.

As in past years, the Chamber will again offer chances to win \$1000 by making a \$10 donation toward the fireworks display. The winner will be drawn on the evening of July 4th, and does not have to be present to win. Tickets are available from Chamber Board Members and at the Chamber office within the Union County Community Center. Additionally you may see volunteers of the Chamber at various local businesses this week as well as in town on the night of the fireworks. Please consider a donation that will ensure the continuation of such a great show in Blairsville.

The Chamber would like to say a special thanks to Woodmen of the World, a not for profit organization offering a variety of insurance and investment options, who is helping sponsor this year's event. We also thank the Union County Commissioner's Office.

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Cafeteria Lunch Circa:1965

The walls of the cafeteria, (aka: gymnasium) were painted the same shade of mint green as the plastic segmented plate before me. Looking down on this lunch travesty, I wonder how they have the gall to charge 33 cents. There was a half of hamburger roll, with a dab of tomato sauce and four shreds of mozzarella cheese in the entrée section of the plate. In the vegetable portion there were green beans straight out of a can. Above the "pizza" was my 4 oz. of whole milk. To the left of that was the cook's favorite dessert, "heavenly hash". It consisted of rice drenched in creamy, glue like substance, mixed with some canned fruit and a hint of cinnamon. No, maybe I just wanted it to have a hint of cinnamon.

There's a fifth section of the plate, but today I don't even see what's there because I'm so disgusted that the recipe for the heavenly hash hasn't been rectified yet. Last month I finally had the chutzpah (For a 10 year old girl in Catholic school, it takes a lot to muster up chutzpah. Not a genetic trait.) to talk to one of the cooks.

I chose to speak to Mrs. Fote, the nicest of the cafeteria ladies. I also thought she showed signs of a flashing light behind her eyelids, and maybe she would see some validity to my frustration. I threw caution to the wind.

"I realize I'm a child, but I think that the rice in the Heavenly Hash should be cooked instead of raw."

I watch Mrs. Fote, in her support hose, white nylon dress that fits her middle age torso like the glaze poured on a Krispy Kreme donut, walks away from me, one finger in the air, as to direct me to stay there for a moment. She goes to the folder that houses the recipes, pulls out a single sheet, and closes the folder, as if to keep the remaining contents top secret.

She returns to show me the culinary instructions of this amazingly wretched dish.

"Here's the ingredients list. Do you see where it says 6 cups of rice?"

See Leone, page 5A

Letters to the Editor ...

Attend the Commission meetings

Dear Editor,

Charles Cheved is correct that something is missing regarding real estate purchases by Union County only it's not what he thinks. Over the last four years every potential County real estate purchase has been mentioned during the Commissioner's comments section of the meeting - prior to actual agreements being executed. Immediately following that, there is time for citizen input and questions on any subject including the aforementioned proposed real estate transactions. Those proposed transactions are usually executed at the next month's commissioner meeting. I know this to be true because I have attended 95 percent of the Commissioner's meetings over the last four years.

Having come from a county where one commissioner resigned to avoid indictment, a second commissioner is currently under indictment, a third commissioner is in a federal correction facility, the fourth commissioner choose not to stand for re-election and the fifth commissioner was recently defeated, I know that the argument that a multiple commissioner board insures honesty is specious.

Citizen involvement in local, county and state government is the best check and balance against potential abuse and that is exactly what is missing. So instead of advocating for bigger government, I would suggest advocating for better government by showing up and getting involved.

Patrick Malone

Gas prices are better

Dear Editor,

Remember your editorial earlier this spring, wherein you blasted Blairsville's gasoline retailers for charging too much?

Maybe another editorial is now due, thanking those same merchants for selling at prices equal to or lower than prices in all the counties surrounding Union, for at least the last four weeks.

Roger Beal

Nothing to hide

Dear Editor,

In the June 26th issue of the NGN, a gentleman complained that the county was purchasing property and he had no way to know the details unless he were to go to my office to file for a copy of the contract.

This is very interesting because the very reason he knew the county had property under contract was because I put it in my weekly *Q & A* column in previous week's paper. In addition, on the front page of this very same issue of the NGN (June 26th), the headline and article on the front page, gives the details of the property purchased including price. So what are we hiding?

His real contention is and always has been that he simply does not like the Sole Commissioner form of government and that is certainly his prerogative. However, I am one of the very few, if not the only Commissioner in the State of Georgia, that prints a column every single week answering questions from the public and providing information to inform the public of what is going on in the county. In addition, my county meeting provides the same information to the public as any other county meeting from any type of county government. So what are we hiding?

The difference in a Sole Commissioner government and a commission board is that we announce what decisions have been made in the past month. In a multi-commissioner meeting, the decision is hashed out among the commissioners at their meeting. Is this better? All the commissioners are part time. The county manager (usually not from the area), presents what he suggests and the board approves or disapproves the idea. Some commissioners may not have done their homework prior to the meeting and some may agree or disagree because a friend does.

In a Sole Commissioner government, I spend many hours first talking to several others to seek opinions. It may be staff and it may be friends or acquaintances, but we come to a consensus. We then determine what a reasonable price should be, either by appraisals, looking at the current market, or consulting professionals. We then negotiate with the property owners and when and if we reach agreement, I enter into a contract. Once we have a contract (option), it is brought up at the county meeting prior to any purchases being made, allowing anyone an opportunity to provide their opinions and feedback. Are we hiding anything?

My job as your commissioner is to make the final decision as to what, if any, property we should purchase and then negotiate the price. What are my credentials to do this? I have been involved in the real estate business in one form or another for the past 41 years.

All purchases are done in public meetings. I am elected to make these decisions on your behalf. Everyone is never going to agree with everything I do, but I will always make decisions I believe to be best for the public. Seldom, if ever, do I make decisions in a vacuum, but always while consulting with people that I respect their opinions.

I have a public county meeting each month and the NGN reports what happens at those meetings. Last week, I had four attendees at the meeting. I would love to have more people come to the meetings and encourage you to attend if you can. Our county meetings are the third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. As always, if you have any questions or comments, please call my office at (706) 439-6000.

Lamar Paris

The Mystery of the Rebel Soldier

Clifford was a distant relative that was many years older than me. Clifford and I had many of the same interests. We loved anything to do with the woods. By the time I was 7, I knew I wanted to be like Clifford. He was a master woodsman by the time he was 15 years old. Clifford was a great turkey hunter and could call any old Tom away from a group of hens. Clifford could catch more fish than anyone I knew. When Clifford was in the mountains he was confident about his skills. However, if you took Clifford out of the woods he was a different person.

As a young boy Clifford was shy and found it extraordinarily difficult to talk with girls. Around girls he lost his self-assurance and confidence. So, naturally Clifford had a hard time when it came time for him to start courting girls. One night in particular caused Clifford great pain and agony. There was one girl in the Shoal Creek settlement around Dawsonville that caught Clifford's eye. A Fourth of July celebration was soon to be held at the courthouse in Dawsonville and a dance was to be part of the celebration. The same day the town was going to dedicate a statue of a rebel soldier on the courthouse lawn. Clifford planned to ask the girl to dance with him that evening.

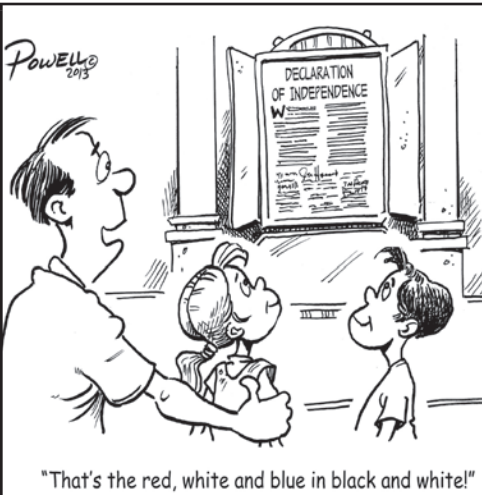
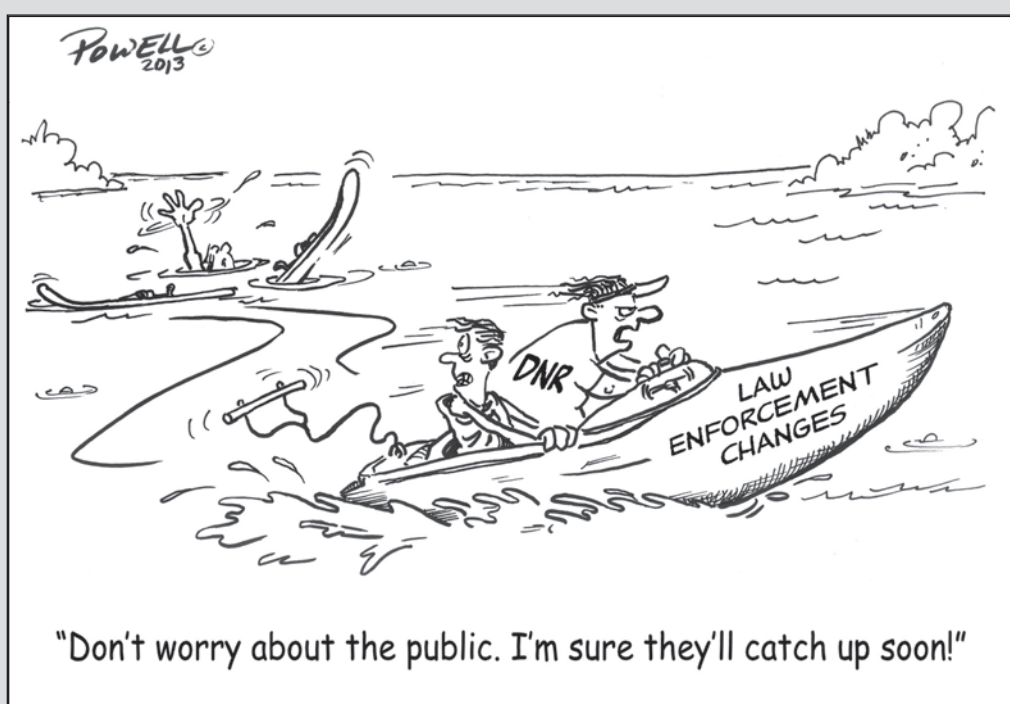
So, Clifford got himself all gussied up for the evening. He even bought himself some tonic water to fix his hair. He went into Dawsonville to the dance and began looking for Martha. Finally, he saw Martha standing by the punch bowl and he walked toward her. But, he never got the chance to talk with her. A large group of boys that lived in town stepped in front of Clifford and began to make fun of the way he looked. The town boys were dressed like dandies and Clifford was a country boy. All he could afford was a pair overalls. After the boys made fun of him, Clifford lost the little bit of self-confidence he had left. All Clifford could do was to go outside and sit on the courthouse lawn.

Somebody offered him a little white lightning and it wasn't long until Clifford became angry. The more he drank, the angrier he became. After a while the dedication of the new statue was held on the lawn. Clifford watched as everyone clapped and applauded. Clifford recognized that everyone in town was very proud of the statue even the town boys. Clifford left the Fourth of July Celebration with a plan. He went back to Shoal Creek and waited until late at night. Clifford went to his Uncle

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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