

Community means something

If anyone ever wondered what community means in Union County, you only had to be on Ivy Log Lane, Tuesday, Dec. 3 in Ivy Log Estates.

Larry and Lavonne Bennett's home was engulfed in flames, plumes of smoke could be seen from Downtown Blairsville.

The first call for help came at 8:38 a.m. from Lavonne Bennett. The family's two-story garage, attached to the family home, was on fire.

Union County Firefighter Dustin Lee, who lives just a short distance from the Bennett home was headed home from his work shift at Fire Station 1. He was right at the Bennett home when the call was dispatched.

Bart Hood, a neighbor of the Bennetts, was trying to enter the residence, Lee stopped him. Hood told Lee that two people were inside the home. Lee did what any firefighter would have done, he proceeded to enter the home to evacuate the two persons inside.

He encountered Lavonne Bennett first, she had a walker in her hand, and Lee thought it belonged to her. She quickly advised him that her husband Larry was still inside the home, and he would need to save him too.

Lee soon discovered that Larry Bennett was unable to walk under his own power, so, he lowered himself and helped Larry Bennett get to his feet. The walker had belonged to Larry, not Lavonne.

The home was choked with smoke, and likewise, Lee and Larry Bennett were having breathing difficulties from the thick smoke. Vision also was a problem, and Lee had to feel his way back outside the home.

As they were headed outside, something caused the smoke to lift and clear, Lee was able to get Larry Bennett to safety from a burning home that was more than 50 percent involved.

Once Larry Bennett was safe outside, firefighters were arriving with tanker trucks, and firefighting equipment.

Firefighter Dustin Lee was in the right place at the right time as Larry and Lavonne Bennett were now in the safe haven of their community.

Once outside, the Bennetts were greeted by their neighbors, every neighbor. They were hugged, and comforted as their home continued to burn.

The neighbors brought chairs, water, and warm clothing to cover the Bennetts on a cold, blustery day. A light rain fell, as the community pulled together to comfort the Bennetts.

It was a sight to behold, as one-by-one, neighbors asked the Bennetts what they could do for them in their time of need.

Larry Bennett is a 25-year-veteran of the Forsyth County Fire Department. He's retired, and living here in our community with the love of his life, Lavonne Bennett.

Neighbors coming to their aid as their home burned to the ground is what Larry Bennett described as community in action.

I'd like to think that this happens everywhere, and maybe it does. But, there's one thing I know about my hometown, you can count on neighbors in Union County.

It's a warm feeling knowing that neighbors know and love neighbors in our hometown. We wouldn't have it any other way.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



Shopping and Singing

Christmas time is different than any other time of the year. We experience all sorts of mingled feelings. To be honest not all these feelings are positive. Some are very negative. We are frustrated and often depressed at Christmas time. We get caught up in "buying" gifts.

A noted preacher said he asked his wife what she wanted for Christmas and she said, "Surprise me." He did. He woke her up at 3 a.m., shined a light in her face and said, "Boo!" Another Christmas she had requested something to make her beautiful and he bought her an exercise bike. He may be a preacher, but he is not a "wise man."

Sometimes gift-buying and gift-giving does cause some confusion and frustrations. I don't know about you, but some of my greatest joy comes from hearing and singing Christmas carols. When I was a small boy I didn't know all the words to some Christmas carols. I sang but didn't always use the right words. I was like the group who went caroling and they were heard singing, "As Shepherds Washed Their Socks By Night." Or like 4-year-old Janie who went through the house singing her favorite Christmas carol: Slick The Walls With Bowls Of Jelly! Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-la!" You know you have been doing too much shopping and not enough singing when you think the carol says, Hock, The Harold Angels Sing, or I've Heard The Bills On Christmas Day. Shopping will certainly deplete your finances; give you sore feet and tired legs. Shopping does boost the economy. Singing carols will boost your spirit and keep you healthy spiritually and financially.

Someone said there is a reason businesses hang all that mistletoe in their stores, it means you can kiss your money goodbye. One fellow said his wife had charged enough last year that he was sure she had made the Mastercard Hall of Fame. If you are tired of shopping, stop and sing these two verses:

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old, from angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold: "Peace on the earth, good will to men," from heav'n's

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It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



Questions and Answers

Q. We went to the library today and saw a notice on the door that the library is going to close for several days due to unpaid furlough days. Has the county cut their funding for the library?

A. No, we have not. Most of the library funding comes from the state of Georgia, and the state has cut their funding. Donna Howell, director of the Mountain Regional Library System (Towns, Union and Fannin Counties), had an excellent article in a recent issue of the North Georgia News which explains the situation. You can also go to the Mountain Regional Library website, www.mountainregionallibrary.org, and click on Press Release for more information.

Basically, state funding to all Georgia Public Libraries, including the Mountain Regional Library System, has steadily declined over the past several years. The Press Release states that the library system has had no state funds for library materials at all for the past five years and all four of the state-paid librarians in the system have taken a minimum of 12 unpaid furlough days each year - this year, they are taking 26 unpaid days. State funding for the MRL System has decreased from \$413,269 in 2008 to \$281,745 in 2013 - a cut of \$131,524. While it is true that some should and are happy to have a job and appreciate that, see if taking 26 days out of your pay a year would not have some serious impacts.

Q. Can the county do anything to help so the library won't have to be closed so long?

A. The county has already increased funding to the library as much as possible. In fact, the press release states that total funding from all local taxing agencies in all three counties has increased by \$39,750, but even that has not kept pace with actual expense increases and state revenue cuts.

Q. Can the library system do anything to cut expenses?

A. They have already cut as much as possible including cutting five positions at the regional library, not replacing staff in branches when feasible, converting benefits-eligible full-time positions into part-time non-benefits-eligible positions as these positions became vacant, and having state-paid staff take unpaid furloughs. All discretionary spending for supplies, programs, equipment, and other items have been drastically reduced.

Q. Will the passing of the recent SPLOST help with the library funding short-

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Now Is The Time

So many opportunities in life revolve around timing, and this week I present one such opportunity. Each year, the Blairsville-Union County Chamber prints a membership directory as part of our Community Guide. This printed directory is a valuable complimentary addition to your chamber membership, but you must be an active member in good standing on the directory deadline of December 16, 2013. If you or someone you know has been considering chamber membership, let me encourage you to act now so that you will be part of the 2014 Community Guide and Membership Directory.

All businesses, organizations, and individuals who have a vested interest in the prosperity and wellbeing of Blairsville-Union County are invited into the membership of our chamber. For a nominal investment, members gain access to a variety of tools, resources, and people, all of which contribute to the personal and professional success of the member. Through benefits such as special event invitations and marketing and promotional avenues, membership provides opportunities for your growth and development.

Whether you are looking to join the

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Bravo

He's a skinny kid, with a poofy afro and horn rimmed glasses. He has a million dollar smile and he stands out in a sea of other young adults his age. I first saw him a few weeks ago, with a tenor sax at his lips, blowing some mean jazz out of that horn. His name is Cortland Walters, and he's a sophomore majoring in music at Young Harris College.

Last night Cortland played clarinet in the YHC Concert Band and Chorus Christmas Concert. The final musical numbers of the two hour concert combined the talents of over 100 students, from different Georgia counties, several states and maybe a few other countries, in harmony, sharing their talents with the first full-house I've ever sat amongst at Glenn Auditorium. The crowd was more than appreciative of the efforts of these talented students; we were actually "wowed".

Just about a 12 minute ride up the road from downtown Blairsville is an institution of learning that offers this community so many exceptional opportunities, and yet very few of us take advantage of them. Why is that? Most of them are free, so it can't be cost prohibitive. As Young Harris College has blossomed into a four year liberal arts institution, it has brought a maturity to its programs that are quite noteworthy.

There are lectures with world renowned guests. A few years ago I had the privilege of sitting in that same auditorium, listening to Rev. Joseph Lowery, the dean of the civil rights movement, a close friend of Martin Luther King and a Presidential Medal of Freedom honoree. Though nearly 90 years old at the time, he gave a powerful and very entertaining presentation. With age comes wisdom, and boy, did he dispense some exceptional insight that evening.

I've been mesmerized, in the past, by presentations at the O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium. On Dec. 13th, at 8 p.m., take a seat in this dome for a special holiday treat, "Season of Light". This show explores the traditions surrounding the world's most endearing holiday customs.

Farmers Market Moment

JorAnne Leone



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Letters to the Editor ...

Have a nice ride

Dear Editor,

I get a laugh every time I hear the word biker. You may think why would that word be funny. It is funny because people refer to other people who ride motorcycles as bikers. The term biker was used in the old days to describe someone that traveled all over the country or maybe world with just what they had on. When they needed money it meant that they would have to stay in an area for a while until they built their funds back up. They picked up some odd jobs until they could move on. There is only one person that I know that I would consider a biker and his name is Ara Gureghian. I am sure there are more people out there, I just do not know who they are.

Now let's look at who we now call bikers. They will most likely ride Harleys, not all but most. They will also wear chaps and little leather vests, that will not keep you warm or do much good in an accident. They all dress the same. They look like they stepped out of some magazine or watched too much Sons of Anarchy. Let's not forget the tattoos. Without them the designer clothes would not look right. The guys will have to have beards. Most of them will not be able to grow one and they will have fussy patches spread out about their face. So much for the tough guy image. The women will have to have boots most likely with high heels, which really works well in the accident they are going to have and they are going to have one. Most cannot ride and are poorly trained. This goes for the men and women.

Let's move onto their bikes. In the old days a biker's bike would be old. It would not be a \$20,000-dollar bike. It would not

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Time to take notice

Dear Editor,

I want to encourage those that refuse to turn on their headlights when it is raining and when it is foggy.

I almost got hit last week when going to town on one of the very foggy mornings. A grey car with no lights almost got me because he had no lights on and I could not see him until the last second. This is the second time in a month that I almost got hit because of cars with no headlights on.

Also, where is the law? I go through town at 45 MPH and have cars and trucks passing me like I was standing still.

The tanker trucks are terrible; they come through at high speeds (much higher than a speed that they could stop if someone pulled out in front of them).

I would like to see some enforcement on the speeders (before) someone is killed.

Jerry Driskell

Classroom incentive

Dear Editor,

My English teacher was not the only demanding instructor I remember with fondness and respect. My History teacher in high school was also my football coach. He was as demanding in the classroom as he was on the playing field—maybe even more. For him teaching history was not just a side job he had to do in order to coach. He held a Graduate degree in History and took his teaching responsibilities seriously. One of his favorite teaching methods was to give a long reading assignment over the weekend and then question us in class about it on Monday. Any student—boy or girl—who incorrectly answered a question was required to duck walk to the end of the hall and back before returning to class. Those of us who played football not only had to duck walk; we had to run extra wind sprints after practice that day. I studied harder in this high school class than I did in any course throughout my entire college career, including Graduate- and Post Graduate-level courses.

The importance of the academic content I learned from hard-nosed, critical, demanding teachers pales in importance when compared with the life lessons I learned. These tough teachers taught my peers and me responsibility, accountability, how to deal with adversity, that actions have consequences, and perseverance: lessons that are not being taught by touchy-feely teachers who are afraid to hurt a student's feelings. Writing on this subject, syndicated columnist, John Rosemond, said: "The Duke Endowment is giving Davidson, Duke, Johnson C. Smith, and Furman universities \$3.4 million to study why so many of today's college students report high levels of stress and anxiety and to find ways of enhancing their 'resiliency,' which the project defines as the ability to thrive despite adversity and difficult circumstances." Rosemond goes on to say that he "...will tell these institutions for free why today's college students find it difficult to cope: It's because they have never had to deal with high expectations, demands, and high standards that don't waiver because they need encouragement."

Rosemond claims that today's parents would scream bloody murder if a teacher was as critical and demanding in the ways so many of mine were back in the day. He is right which, of course, explains why the public schools have so many touchy-feely teachers who turn out a new crop of emotionally-challenged wimps every year who cannot cope with high expectations or demanding situations. What America needs if it is going to survive in a globally competitive world is more teachers like I had back in the day: Teachers who reject the work of students who fail to do their best on assignments, teachers who take lackluster students to task right in front of their peers. We also need principals, school superintendents and school

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Aunt Euler learns to drive

My mother, Shirley, was about 6 years old and was spending the night with her cousin, Betty Baker. Betty's mother and father were Euler and Rufus. Aunt Euler had told my Maw Maw not to worry about Shirley because somebody would bring her home the next morning.

When morning came Betty and Shirley got up to a fuss. Euler and Rufus were having a lively discussion. She wanted her husband to take Shirley back home. However, he was headed to the logging woods which was the opposite direction from Maw Maw's (Delphia) house and did not have time to go out of the way to get Shirley back home. So, it was up to Euler to get her home. Keep two things in mind. First, Euler's mother was also at the house visiting her daughter. Second, both Euler and her mom were big women. In fact they were so big the young girls could not get in the front of the car with them. Second, Euler could not drive.

Shirley was very excited to get to ride in the rumble seat of that old car. She had not ridden in many cars and this one was pretty and she just knew this would be an adventure. So, they all got in the car and as the car was being started Shirley asked Euler, "When did Uncle Rufus teach you to drive?" She knew that Euler didn't drive. So, she was surprised by Euler's answer. Euler turned to the little girl and said, "No, Rufus has not taught me to drive. Driving can't be that hard."

So, Euler started the car and backed out of the barn. She only hit one tree and ran over a rose bush in the process. She started down the road and even a couple of 6 year old girls knew she wasn't doing a very good job of driving. But, they really weren't scared until she nearly hit Mr. Weeks on his tractor. The girls began screaming as Mr. Weeks jumped from his tractor. Euler swerved to avoid the tractor and thought the girls were screaming with delight. So, she let go of the steering wheel and turned around in the seat. Euler asked, "Are you girls having a good time? Shirley, I told you this driving wasn't hard. Wait 'til your Uncle Rufus sees how good I can drive this car."

Momma said that was the last time she ever rode while Aunt Euler drove. Mom and her cousin always enjoyed spending the night with one another. However, Shirley always asked who would take her home before she would agree to spend the night with Betty again.

We had a great weekend at the Farmers Market and are now in preparation for the

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings

