

Opinions

Everybody has one

Behind the scenes

An act of kindness never goes unnoticed. Case in point, the Blairsville Cruisers. Yes, that same group that looks like they're just having fun on the square from month-to-month.



Charles Duncan

Straight Shooting

Well, they do a whole lot more than have fun on the square. They do a whole lot of good within our community.

On Thursday, they took 20 Union County Middle School students on a Christmas shopping adventure at Walmart. Trust me, they made faces smile.

It's sort of like Shopping With a Cop, and Give-a-Gift Christmas, only it's a whole separate deal.

It's the Cruisers way of giving back. Of course, it's just one way they give back. They're a major contributor to Shop With a Cop, and Give-a-Gift Christmas.

When the dust is settled, it's likely that they've handed out almost \$20,000 each year in Union County. If you see a bright red convertible with 400 Reindeer Power, you can bet there is a Cruiser at the wheel.

My point is, they make a big difference in our community. They also volunteer with Shop With a Cop and Give-a-Gift Christmas.

They're one of the special groups of individuals that give back, and work for the community. We're fortunate to have the Blairsville Cruisers.

Shop With a Cop would be hard pressed without this group of caring individuals. Give-a-Gift Christmas would be in the same shape.

I write all this because I received a heartfelt letter from a struggling mom, who wanted to say thank you to the behind the scenes players. I mentioned many of them last week, but, I left one out.

The Cruisers deserve recognition, but, they don't ask for it. That's what the true meaning of giving is all about.

These individuals don't want their names sprayed all over the paper, they don't even want a pat on the back.

What they do want is for folks to keep giving to their cause, keep buying those raffle tickets for those hot rods they auction off each year and a side donation is always welcomed.

You can't talk about Christmas without giving thanks, and the many folks who have benefited from the programs that help needy kids have a bright Christmas are saying 'thank you.'

The economy might be hard pressed, but their isn't a tighter community when it comes to giving and making the faces of young children light up at Christmas.

It's what makes living here special, whether you're a native, or a move in. And I'm both. I was born in Towns County, raised in Union County, moved away, and moved back.

I know what this community is all about. I've seen it's heart. I know the passion folks living here have for helping others. I've seen it firsthand, as a child, and now as an adult, coming back here after being away for so long.

I'm proud of the many individuals and groups that have carried the torch of kindness in my absence. I'm proud they've continued the tradition for all these years.

I'm proud to call Union County the place where I was raised, and the place where I reside. It's home, and it always will be from now on.

Here's wishing this amazing community a very Merry Christmas. May your stockings runneth over and your miracles come true. I've experienced a miracle in my lifetime and I hope you do to.

School Funding / Property Appraisals (part 3 of 3)

Q. Does the state evaluate (verify) the property values in Union County?

A. Yes, the Department of Revenue does each year. They look at actual sales of property and compare it directly with the appraised values (sales ratio study). This year our Tax Appraisal office received an excellent property tax digest report rating of 39.91% with 40% being perfect, which ranks Union County in the top 10% of the state in having property assessed fairly and accurately.

Q. How does the state evaluate our property values?

A. Each year the State Revenue Dept. does a "Sales Ratio Study" based on sales of all types of property in the county to determine that the state is getting their fair share of the 1/4 mil of property taxes they receive from the county. Should the county fall below the 36% level, then we are subject to significant penalties from the state. When the property values fall significantly below the 40% level, the county also loses some funding from utility companies, so keeping property values current is very important. That is another reason that our 39.91% rating out of 40% is excellent.

Q. If the Union County property values are so accurate, as indicated by the state sales ratio report, why is my vacant lot valued for more than I think it is worth?

A. This is a great question for which I do not have a great answer. But here goes. The state sales ratio study done by the Department of Revenue, shows that overall, Union County has a very accurate appraisal of its properties based on current sales. This does not mean that each of the over 20,000 parcels in the county are all appraised perfectly, as they certainly are not. It does mean that when all sales are totaled together, the vast majority of our sales are in line with the appraisals listed in our Tax Assessor's office in the courthouse.

Q. Does the Sales Ratio Study separate

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Lamar Paris

Q & A



A Birthday Celebration

Christmas is a birthday celebration. However, if you just arrived upon the American scene it might be a little difficult figuring out that Christmas is a birthday celebration. It would probably be even more difficult trying to identify just whose birthday we are celebrating. It has not always been this way.

There was a time in our nation's history that any visitor or stranger would not have had to ask, "Whose birthday is it anyway?" They would have seen and heard Jesus everywhere. Sadly, each year there are more and more voices that demand less and less of Jesus. We may change names, remove symbols and seek to muzzle every believer but that does not change history one iota. God did love the world (in spite of our rebellion and arrogance) and He did send His Son as a babe through the virgin Mary to live a sinless life and die a vicarious death to save us from our sin (Matt. 1:21).

Jesus' birth was natural - He was born of a woman. His birth was unnatural - He had no human father. His birth was supernatural - He was conceived by the Holy Ghost. His birth is the most spectacular event in all history.

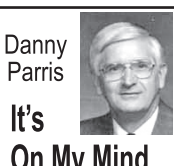
For fifty plus years I have had the privilege to stand before a congregation and by the Holy Word and the Holy Spirit present the message of Christ's birth as if folks were hearing it for the first time.

However, I must confess that I get a little depressed at Christmas. Mind you, this is a different form of depression. I love the sights, sounds, smells and even the spending of Christmas. But I do have a down time. My depression - downtime is a result of the fact that I can't do Christmas justice. As a minister, no matter how much I pray, prepare and proclaim, when I am finished my feeling is that Christmas is so deep, wide and high that I barely pull back the curtain for folks to get just a glimpse. The very best that I can do seems to be too little.

But if a human could fully comprehend and explain this blessed birth then it would not be that momentous. But you see this event is so holy and miraculous that only God can reveal the height and depth of becoming flesh and moving into our neighborhood.

Every year I struggle with my limitations to put into words how much God loves us and what He did to demonstrate that love. Even though I have never felt that I could do Christmas justice, come this Sunday morning, I look forward to the glorious privilege of standing before the people of First Baptist Church of Blue Ridge, Georgia and with this stam-

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Danny Parris

It's On My Mind

Special People

Many of you will remember Mrs. Cummings. She was my 2nd Grade Teacher at Trapptown School. Mrs. Cummings was married to my Papa's first cousin. She taught at least 2 generations of people in our family. So, she was very familiar with my Dad and I as well as our ways of doing things. I could always tell when I was in trouble with Mrs. Cummings because she would call me by both names, "Mickey Paul".

I never received a whipping from Mrs. Cummings. But, if you have ever seen my writing you would swear I have the worst penmanship of anyone you have seen. I owe it all to Mrs. Cummings. When I would get into trouble she would make me write sentences on the blackboard. I usually had to write 250 of these sentences. One day right before Christmas our latest assignment was due. We had to write a paper about the real meaning of Christmas. Each student had to read their paper aloud in front of the class. It came time for me to read my paper so, I made my way to the front of the room.

My route to the front of the room took me by Kathy's desk. Kathy was the prettiest girl in class. But, who notices pretty girls in the 2nd grade. The only thing I knew about girls were that they interfered with fishing and baseball. Anyway, Kathy tried to slip me a note as I walked by her desk. To my horror Mrs. Cummings also noticed that Kathy was trying to hand me a note. Mrs. Cummings told me to bring her the note. I did and she threw it in the trash. I was really worried she would read the note in front of the class. So, when the note hit the trash can I was relieved. But, Stephen also noticed the note and he hollered out at the top of his lungs, "Kathy likes Mickey". Let me remind you that it is not a good thing for a 2nd Grader to get embarrassed.

Before I could think about what to do I realized there was a chalkboard eraser in my hand. The eraser was leaving my hand and I exhibited perfect follow through just like my Dad taught me on the baseball field. The eraser hit Stephen right between the eyes and he let out a howl that reverberated throughout the little school. Before I could feel the satisfaction of a job well done Mrs. Cummings had me writing, 250 times, the following sentence, "I will not throw erasers at Stephen Cummins".

I was very embarrassed and angry. Somebody had to pay for my anguish. All at once I noticed Mrs. Cummings had just refilled her coffee cup. The coffee was almost white due to the excessive amount of cream. So, each time Mrs. Cummings turned her head I placed a little pinch of chalk dust in her coffee cup. She must have turned her head a dozen times. Each time dust went into the cup. The anger finally left Mrs. Cummings and she told me I could sit down. As I walked by her desk I heard

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Mickey Cummings

Around The Farm

Confessions of a (former) mall shopper

I thought I was having a heart attack last week. It was one of those moments where you feel dizzy and lightheaded, you have pain in your chest, and your blood pressure soars. It all happened during a simple conversation with a friend I bumped into in town. Everything was going fine. We were exchanging the usual how are you, what have you been doing, and so forth. And then, out of nowhere, she said those terrible, awful words. You know, the ones that cause Chamber Presidents to feel like they are having a heart attack. Just 12 simple words - "I'm heading to the mall this weekend to do my Christmas shopping."

Now, as a former mall shopper, I can relate to the addiction. All those shiny racks, one after another packed with sparkly tops (that don't wash very well), trendy denim (mostly overpriced), and endless miles of high heel shoes (that I've decided have already given me back problems.) Nonetheless, the mall has its enticements and I'm well aware of them.

The past few years though, I've personally decided to take a different approach. I'm buying in to the buy local concept. Call it a job duty if you want, but I'm here to say that I'm proud of my conversion. Every time I spend a dollar in a local restaurant, local retailer, or any other local business, I hold my head high. I remind myself that not only did I snag a great item, but I also supported my neighbor's job, my neighbor's family, my community's resources, and my own quality of life. I never cease to be amazed at the quality of service, the unique selection, and the overall awesomeness of our local businesses. With all of the added benefits of shopping locally, it's hard to imagine that I ever went anywhere else.

So as of today, I am about 75 percent finished with my Christmas shopping - shopping that included the purchase of a beautiful

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Cindy Williams

Blairsville - Union County Chamber of Commerce

The Gift of Time (Part II)

Growing up, we all had a favorite someone in our lives; a favorite aunt or uncle, our third grade teacher or a cousin that was more like a sibling. When you left home you bonded with a buddy you bonded with in boot camp, a quirky college professor or your first landlady that leased you the little apartment upstairs from her.

If you were to reflect back on the folks that have crossed your path through your lifetime, you most likely would come up with a list of 5 people for each decade that influenced you in a positive way. If you are 50 years old, that's 25 people who every once in a while, come to mind. That thought of them always conjures up warm feelings of the heart, quickly followed by "I wonder what ever happened to..."

Life is more predictable than we sometimes want to believe. For instance, you were probably your favorite uncle's favorite nephew. The chances are great that if you had a favorite professor, you were one of the students whom he always reflected on with much fondness.

Recently I reached out to my high school theater directors (husband and wife team). It started on Facebook - some nice chat back and forth. Last week I picked up the phone and called them. We caught up on the last forty years, reestablished a relationship and I plan to visit them sometime in sunny Florida. All these years I've been wanting to share with them the influence they had on my life. Come to find out, I was just as special to them in ways I couldn't imagine.

In last week's column I spoke of the gift of time, the gift of sharing something so precious as quality time with a special child in your life. The holiday is fast approaching. This week I encourage you to reach out to those that found time for you in the past and gift them with a little time. Google, Facebook and WhitePages.com can assist you in finding almost anyone, anywhere.

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JoAnne Leone

Farmers Market Moment

Letters To the Editor

There is an outage in your area

Dear Editor,

How many times, when you cannot get online with your computer, have you heard the above quote when you call for technical assistance with your Internet Service Provider (ISP)?

Well, don't believe what you hear over the telephone, either by a live person on the other end of the line or by a recorded message. I have heard it many times and finally decided to educate myself a little about how we get our Internet service connection. Being an old retired person I have met many who know far more than I ever did about such things as telephone networks; copper wire systems, fiber optic systems, broadband bandwidth and

See Dampier, page 5A

To use the metaphor of a wagon

Dear Editor,

When America emerged from World War II, there were few people sitting in the national wagon, expecting those who were hitched to the traces, to pull it.

And the people pulling the wagon didn't mind those few who were sitting in the wagon. There were more than enough people hitched to the wagon to easily pull it along.

Beginning in the 1960s, the number of people climbing into the wagon steadily increased until today there are as many people sitting in the wagon as there are trying to pull it.

Then, some of the pullers began to ask themselves, "Why am I breaking my back trying to pull this wagon which is becoming heavier every day? Why don't I just drop the harness I'm hitched to and climb into the wagon like those other people?"

The few, really strong ones, finally realized the folly of their efforts. They simply unbuckled their harnesses and walked away.

That's when the wagon stopped moving forward because it was overflowing with expectant, dependent people and there was no one left to pull it.

George Mitchell

Distress signal warranted

Dear Editor,

I didn't hang my flag upside down after the election, but only because I didn't think of it. I applaud those who did. Yes, it is a distress signal, and clearly our country is in distress! When Obama was elected the first time no one knew who he was or what he stood for. We still don't know much about who he is, but we have learned that he supports progressive socialism and is apparently anti-free enterprise and capitalism. He had control of both parties for two years and accomplished little besides a bulky catch all health plan and obscene increase in debt. The fact that he was reelected is beyond rational understanding and is a sad note about the "gimme" population. Yes, our country is indeed in distress.

Jackie Franklin

Tired of hating

Dear Editor,

I hate that many government officials want to remove all references to God but they want to continue celebrating all the holidays in his name.

I hate that I cannot disagree with the politics of our President without being called a racist.

I hate that as a retired person 40 percent of my income goes to paying taxes.

I hate that the top 1 percent earn 17 percent of the income in this country but pay 39 percent of the taxes.

I hate that 47 percent of people in this country pay 0 percent of the tax but draw 100 percent of the entitlements.

I hate that our elected officials will not even seriously debate a Fair Tax proposal.

I hate the Orwellian new-speak in Washington that calls Tax revenue and calls Social Security benefits an entitlement and legal tax deductions are now loopholes.

I hate that several members of my family and friends paid into Social Security all their lives but died before they collected a cent; And I hate that our government kept all the money they paid into the system all those years.

I hate that the current administration intentionally and falsely demonized a good man

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"A Heartfelt Thank You"

Dear Editor:

I just wanted to take this opportunity to give thanks. I am a single mother raising two children on a fixed income. Although I am from this area, I moved away in 1980 and returned here in 2006 after a failed marriage of 25 years.

Struggling to survive seemed to be the way of life for my children and myself. However, in 2007 I received a phone call from school and was asked if I needed help for Christmas for my children. With no hesitation my reply was yes. I had went to a church and asked for help and to my surprise I never received an answer. I understand the need is great after working in the benevolence of a church since 1993, operating a homeless shelter for several years and feeding and clothing people who were in need. I don't know who all the people are who volunteer and donate to the "Shop With A Cop" program and the "Glenda Gooch Foundation."

I do know however, they are blessed.

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One more chance

Dear Editor,

Recently a gentleman was in the Library and spoke with one of the employees about how he had felt inspired to write a story for children. Friends had encouraged him to have it published, but he thought it might need some editing.

The library employee wrote down his

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