

Opinions

Everybody has one...

A heartfelt letter to the editor

I get a lot of mail. Most are letters seeking publication on our OP-ED page. Some, well, they like to give me advice.

I profess to being a Christian, but, as some confidential letters would have it, I know nothing about the Bible.

Some send letters to me that are not for publication. Some are trying to teach me how to pray. Some are trying to educate me on the Bible.

I appreciate their concerns, I truly do. When I was laying in Intensive Care for 49 days at the Ronnie Green Heart Center in Gainesville, I begged people to put me on their prayer lists. I'd rather have people praying for my soul, than praying for the damnation of my soul.

On Thursday, I got a letter for publication. It referenced Union County Firefighter Dustin Lee.

Dustin is the young firefighter who saved an elderly couple from their burning home in Ivy Log Estates. You see, Larry and Lavonne Bennett were praying for someone to come help save them from the smoke and the flames.

Their prayers were answered when Dustin Lee, who lives nearby, came to their rescue. Without aid of firefighting turnout gear, backup from fellow firefighters, or even a hose line to help lead them out to a safe exit, Dustin Lee did what firefighters are supposed to do.

Risking life and limb, Dustin Lee entered that burning and smoke-filled home. He helped Lavonne Bennett to safety. He went back inside to save her husband, Larry Bennett, who was unable to walk under his own power.

Dustin Lee made sure both got out of the burning home safely. Afterwards, he helped fight the burning blaze to extinguish the roaring fire.

Dustin Lee doesn't consider himself a hero. However, a veteran retired firefighter begs to differ. Ira Bryant sends us a letter to the editor that proclaims Dustin a "Hero's Hero."

We think Mr. Bryant has hit the nail on the head, and, yes, we believe Dustin Lee is a hero.

Not all letters to the editor are finding fault with the system, the community or, the way that I pray.

Some, like the letter from Mr. Bryant come from the heart.

Having had a brush with death myself, I know who my heroes were. My doctors, nurses and anyone who had to help lift me from one gurney to the next, they were my heroes.

Likewise, Dustin Lee is a hero to Larry and Lavonne Bennett. He's also a hero to their daughter Alicia Covington, who, by the way, was Dustin Lee's homeroom teacher in high school.

It's odd sometimes how the world turns. But, it is a very small world that we live in. While we live in such a small world, at the appropriate time, we must honor those who go above and beyond the call of duty.

That happened on Thursday night, and it inspired a heartfelt letter to the editor. I'm so appreciative of both Dustin Lee, and Mr. Bryant's letter. The latter was an appropriate ode to a hero.

Merry Christmas!

Letters to the Editor ...

A Hero's Hero

Dear Editor,

I have served in fire service on and off for the past 51 years. I have been everything from a rookie firefighter to a Fire Chief.

"Normally" when a firefighter attempts to rescue someone in a burning building they are risking their lives to save another person's life. That is what firefighters do on a daily basis and many lives are saved. They could be called heroes. I prefer to think of them as courageous and dedicated individuals risking their lives for others.

Most rescue situations require two firefighters to enter the structure together. In case some problem should occur, they can help protect each other. They have a hose line to help with firefighting. They can use that hose line or a rope to find their way out of the building in case they become disoriented. They usually have a battery operated light to help them see to some degree. They wear a self-contained breathing apparatus so they can breathe in the toxic atmosphere. They have protective clothing such as a helmet, bunker coat, bunker pants, boots, gloves, and a nomex hood over their head. They have an alarm device on their bunker coats that will sound an audible alarm if the firefighters don't move for a period of time for any reason and can be located by the sound. The firefighters inside also know there will be additional firefighters outside of the structure ready with another hose line to enter and rescue the firefighters inside if they get into serious trouble.

Dustin Lee had no such equipment with him. He had no one to come to his aid when he entered the burning and smoke filled home on Ivy Log Creek Lane. Regardless of the lack of "backup" he knew a disabled person was in the home and would have to be rescued to live. As a firefighter he knew very well all the dangers of entering a burning structure under "normal" fire fighting circumstances.

See Bryant, page 5A

Free Speech?

Dear Editor,

I fail to see how you can publish a supposedly "news" article in your paper like the one in the current issue (and others in previous issues) entitled "Tea Party Movie Night."

Most of this article is blatant promotion of tea party propaganda. Even normal conservative people know that it is absurd to consider immigration as "flooding our country with alien people from totalitarian countries around the world who have no idea about, no interest in and no understanding of the substance of what America is."

These statements are not only ridiculous, but show a lack of knowledge of common, responsible journalism. It is a good thing your

See Shofner, page 5A

Send Me A Card

In December of 1969, a woman from the state of Ohio wrote a letter to the postmaster in Nashville, Tenn. Enclosed was 25 cents, and a strange request. It stated, "will someone in Nashville use this quarter to send me a Christmas card?" This lady lived alone in poverty, had never married, and had no relatives. She had been injured physically and was not able to work. She was an avid Country Music fan and chose Nashville to ask someone in that city to please send her a card.

Christmas is certainly a time of joy, love and peace. But it is one of the loneliest times for much of the world's population. Loneliness is very pronounced in the life of the aged who have outlived most of their relatives. Some of these seniors are separated by long distances from their children and grandchildren. Loneliness grips the hearts of portions of our population who live in large cities where people are sometimes cold and suspicious. A lot of people are poor at making friends and feel desperately alone and isolated during the Christmas season. There are multitudes of wives/husbands who look for love, peace and joy, but are so disappointed. They have dysfunctional families and Christmas only intensifies their problems. The saddest segment of our society is children that are lonely because they are neglected and abused.

The world was no different the night that God sent Jesus into this poor lonely world. In fact, Jesus is God's card of Love sent to let us know that we have a friend that will never leave us and will always love us. God is able to take our loneliness and produce a great work through it.

I am reminded of the famous Boston preacher, Phillip Brooks, who had gone to the Holy Land in December 1865. He arrived there very lonely and depressed. His brother had been killed fighting in the Union Army. Phillips had traveled from his pastorate in Philadelphia to the battlefield at Gettysburg where he walked in the aftermath of the carnage trying to minister to the wounded and dying for both the Federal and Confederate Armies. He was disappointed in love and never mar-

See Parris, page 5A

It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



Questions and Answers

Q. We've had a lot of rain this year. Do you have any figures on exactly how much we have had?

A. We checked the Mountain Research and Education Center, the University of Georgia website for rainfall totals and found that from Jan. 1, 2013 through Dec. 15, 2013 we had a total of 71.49 inches of rain. This made a total of 166 rainy days. Compare this to 2012 when we had 47.13 inches of rain and 146 rainy days. I know you can do the math but this is a total of 24.36 more inches of rain! Wow!

Q. Which days had the highest rainfall amounts?

A. Jan 30-4.14; Apr. 17- .86; July 3-4.17; Nov 26-3.84

Q. Do you have any information on whether North Georgia is still in a drought?

A. According to the website, United States Drought Monitor, the drought is over for the Northern half of Georgia although drought conditions still exist for the middle half of Georgia including Atlanta. This information is from the National Drought summary for Dec. 10, 2013. For this same time period in 2010 we were still in "abnormally dry" to "moderate drought" conditions. So although we appear to be in the clear right now as far as a drought, it would only take one or two dry years to put us right back in a drought situation. We should remain conscious of water use and conserve whenever possible.

Q. Is it too late to get a flu shot for this year?

A. According to Glenda McGill at the Health Department they still have flu vaccine and it is not too late for a shot to be effective. The flu season is really just now beginning and it takes about two weeks after vaccination for antibodies to develop in the body and provide protection against influenza virus infection. Most of the time influenza activity peaks in January or later.

Q. Who should get vaccinated this season?

A. Everyone who is at least 6 months of age should get a flu vaccine this season, and it is especially important for some people to get vaccinated.

- People who are at high risk of developing serious complications (like pneumonia) if they get sick with the flu.
- People who have certain medical conditions including asthma, diabetes, and chronic lung disease.
- Pregnant women
- People younger than 5 years (and es-

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Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



A picture lasts longer

Dear Editor,

Taking a photo may seem like the most obvious way to remember a special occasion but it could in fact be causing significant damage to your memory.

Researchers from a Connecticut university asked a group of students to recall what items in a museum looked like.

Those who had taken photos of the artifacts struggled to describe the objects, while those who hadn't, remembered them more clearly.

Dr. Linda Henkel, from Fairfield University, who ran the study, calls this phenomenon "Photo-Taking Impairment Effect."

Dr. Henkel is currently investigating whether the content of a photo, such as whether a person is in it, for example, affects memory.

Researchers from Harvard University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Columbia University in the U.S. recently found that many people now use the Internet in place of a memory.

They claimed that when someone wants to know something they now use the Internet as an 'external memory' just as computers use an external hard drive. The study continued that we are now so reliant on smartphones and laptops, we go into "withdrawal when we can't find out something immediately."

We're becoming so dependent on Spell Check that we don't see the need to know how to spell.

The Natural process of maturation decrees that we must learn to fend for ourselves -- from weaning to walking to feeding and

See Mitchell, page 5A

Spirit of sharing

Dear Editor,

In the spirit of sharing Good News, I would like to report that through Joanne Leone's recent article about her love of reading from early childhood, I, too, was transported back to reminisce about carefree childhood days when a book was a most treasured companion.

I grew up in South Florida, in a small community where trees outnumbered residents, and I could ride my bicycle to the library from the time I was 11 or 12. It was only about a mile and a half, and the traffic wasn't too heavy, and a trip there netted me as many books as my bike-basket could hold, which—depending on the size of the books—meant about 6-8 for two weeks, truly a treasure trove of adventure.

Once back home, I would unload my basket, make my first choice, grab a snack of a peanut butter sandwich, and head to the nearby woods, where my favorite "private" reading room was situated. It was an oak with one fairly low wide-U-shaped limb, which fit my young body like it was made just for me, with my own stairway

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The Serenade

When my mother was a little girl Christmas was a much simpler time. There was not much money to buy gifts and use elaborate decorations. So, the family made do with other things. For gifts a doll might get a rill or wooden car. But, most times Santa Claus brought fresh fruit and candy to children. I am sure you remember those orange candy slices, soft candy canes and chocolate drops. Mother said it was even a treat to get fresh tangerines from Florida.

For decorations Mom and her siblings would use popcorn strung together using sewing thread and real candles on the tree. They would also shoot mistletoe from the top of a tree and decorate inside their home. Instead of caroling like city folks the folks around Trapptown would visit homes and serenade their friends and neighbors with Christmas songs. The people doing the singing would try to conceal their identities by wearing shabby clothing and bags over their heads. The host or the people listening to the songs were supposed to guess the identity of the singers. If the host could not guess the identity of those who were singing they were obliged to feed them sorghum cake, cookies and maybe apple cider or coffee. This feeding would continue until the identities of the singers were determined.

Mother was able to attend her first Christmas serenade at the age of 6 or 7. Mother's Aunt Tudler and her older cousin Athel dressed the young Shirley like a hobo. They covered her head with a burlap sack with holes around her eyes so she could see out. Tudler and Athel dressed in a similar fashion. The ladies and young girl walked a couple of miles to the home of Fat Morgan. Fat just happened to be Tudler's brother and he was married to the best cook around Trapptown. Tudler spoke to her young niece, "Shirley, you must promise not to tell Fat who we are because he will keep feeding us cake and cookies if he can't figure out our names". So, Shirley promised she wouldn't tell.

Aunt Tudler knocked on the door of the house. When Fat opened the door the trio began singing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." After the song Fat invited the trio into his home because it was cold outside. Fat sat down by the stove and shook his head so the trio then sang "Silent Night." After the song Fat said, "I'll swan I just can't figure out who you'ns are." So, Mrs. Morgan brought out some sugar cookies and hot cider. Fat was scratching his head, and stared at the three people in the serenade troop. Fat continued his stare and proclaimed, "I can't figure out you two big'uns, but, I'll wager that wee little one will tell me. Won't you Honey?" As he looked into Shir-

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Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



The Family in the Manger

Merry Christmas!

This special time of year always evokes many magical emotions for me. Feelings of excitement, anticipation, joy, and love top the list. While I typically separate my work life from my personal life, I can't help but blend the two this week.

Why not? It's Christmas!

Christmas is, among many things, about the birth of a child and the start of a family. When I think about the image of the Manger with Mary and Joseph looking at their beautiful baby, I can't help but be inspired by the heavenly gift of a loving family. A gift that was given to me and one that I will never take for granted. My family, specifically my parents Larry and Jennie Williams, are the focus of my thoughts today.

When I think about the gift of my faith and understanding of the true meaning of Christmas, I have them to thank for raising me in the Church. When I think about the many luxuries in life that I have been so fortunate to enjoy, I have them to thank for working hard to provide them for me. When I think of the education that I have received which is a foundation for my success in life, I have them to thank for teaching me and believing in me along the way.

When I think about the dedication it takes

See Williams, page 5A

Temporary Christmas

(This is a repost of an earlier column, and one of my favorite strolls down memory lane. Merry Christmas, everyone!)

It was Thanksgiving of 1975. I was just completing my first quarter of my junior year of college in Ohio. Earlier that fall, my folks had moved from Western NY to Anaheim, California. The college I attended was on 10 week quarters, so my break was actually from Thanksgiving until January 2. I was now spending six weeks in the "land of fruits and nuts", and I had to find a temporary job to earn my spending money for the next two quarters.

There is another important factor in this dilemma I found myself in. I had put on over 100 additional pounds on my young body the first two years of college. No, I wasn't unhappy. I loved my life. I just was eating food completely different than I was used to eating at home—loading up on empty carbs and sweets galore. I was no longer the active teenager, bouncing from one activity to another. I was now going from the cafeteria to the sorority house to the dorm to the cafeteria to the classroom and maybe the library and back to the cafeteria.

So, where does an obese 20 year old find work in Southern California? The classified ad just stuck out like it was wrapped in a twinkling set of tree lights. "Santa Claus School. Men and women train to perform as Santa Claus. Successful candidates are guaranteed a position in area malls and shopping centers." At least that's how I remember the ad. I had been performing on stage, since the age of 5. I had done a great deal of theater in high school and in college. And they said "women" could apply, too. Maybe I could make the most out of this weight situation, instead of wallowing in the misery of it all.

I was a "star". After 3 days I graduated with my stocking cap, my velvet Santa suit and a contract to be the Santa at the Costa Mesa Mall. In those three days I learned the proper way to pick up a child and place them on your lap. I learned what not to promise a child and what I could assure them. I was taught helpful hints like, wear a disposable diaper, attached around your thigh and inside out, to catch the urine

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Farmers Market Moment

JoAnne Leone



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Kenneth West
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Joe Collins
Advertising Director

Charles Duncan
Editor

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