

Opinions

Everybody has one...

A Year in Review - Part 2

The new year is off and running. It looks to be another busy one for Union County Fire Department. Last week we reviewed the training that was completed by the members of the department in 2019. This week, we will review the calls and activities of Union County Fire Department.

In 2019, the department responded to 2,441 calls for service with 276 of those calls in the City of Blairsville. There was an increase of 170 responses from 2018. The breakdown of the calls by type hasn't changed very much and is typical for the department's responses.

Of the 2,441 calls in 2019, 56% of them were medical calls where the fire department responded from Station 1 to assist the Union General Ambulance Service on major medical calls. This number does not account for the numerous "First Responder" calls that were ran by the volunteer firefighters who were also assisting the ambulance service.

The remaining 44% is broken down into fires, rescues, motor vehicle accidents, hazardous materials responses, searches, and other activities of the department. Fires and alarms accounted for approximately 9% of the calls. This includes all types of fires ranging from a trash can fire to a structure fire. The department has responded to seven structure fires in the last month.

Rescues of all types accounted for approximately 11% including motor vehicle accidents. Hazardous materials accounted for 4% and there were approximately 8% of the calls where we responded but were cancelled in route. The remaining 12% were miscellaneous calls and service calls which includes smoke alarm installs and public education.

Smoke alarm installations have been a great success for the department and the citizens of Union County. The department visited 182 homes to assess smoke alarms. These assessments involve determining if there are working smoke alarms; are they installed properly; and are they working. Homes that are in need of smoke alarms receive new alarms which are installed by the firefighters. The department installed 310 smoke alarms and 98 CO alarms in Union County homes during 2019.

Public education is another priority for the department. Pub-

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Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief
David Dyer



Renewed

It's resolution time again, isn't it? Or not. I suppose anything is a good time for improving, restarting, or renewing something. My suggestion is that if you are planning a resolution, surround it with lifestyle changes that will make it easier to become a habit.

Perhaps the resolution urge comes from God making us in His image, and He is about restoring, reconciling, and renewing. When He created the earth it was dark, formless, and void. But He renewed it with light and life, and saw that His creation was good.

But we still need renewal because things didn't stay good. While love and beauty abound so does evil, reminding us that this is a fallen world. Actually, that's on us. We collectively ruined things when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Any brokenness you observe or experience has its root in that.

But thankfully, things do not have to stay ruined. God the Son stepped into the world to wipe away the root cause of sin and brokenness. That means rebirth is possible. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). It means renewal is possible. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

God's renewal of creation will continue. John the Apostle saw a vision of a new heaven and a new earth in the future. He heard Jesus saying, "Behold I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5). Knowing that brokenness and ruin are impermanent encourages you to endure the twisting and turning of the world. As a believer, you are an ambassador for Christ and part of His visible work in this world as He renews it one life at a time. Be about your Father's business, as Jesus was.

Smith and Stonestreet in their book "Restoring All Things" list four questions that can help you resolve how to participate in God's renewing work in the world. (1) What is something good that you can promote or protect? (2) What is missing that you can provide? (3) What is evil that you can stop? (4) What is bro-

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All Things New
Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. How do you feel about what Union County government was able to do this year for the public?

A. Excited! It was a great year. With several projects started or completed last year that have been in the planning process for a long time, to see them either begun or all the way through to completion is a very good feeling.

Q. Did the county have to raise property taxes in order to complete these projects?

A. No, that is the exciting part. With all the cost increases the county is dealing with, our revenue has kept pace with the cost, and we are able once again to maintain your property taxes at their current level. That is amazing!

Q. How our property taxes maintained the same ranking statewide?

A. If you combine the Union County School System and Union County government property tax millage together, we have the THIRD lowest property tax rate of all 159 counties in Georgia. That is something to really be proud of for us all and for you, the taxpayers of our county.

Q. What was your favorite project completed this year?

A. While not a project, but an asset, being able to acquire a ladder truck for the Union County Fire Department was very special. This was an item we had needed for years, but because of other priorities, the ladder truck had fallen on the back burner. We had worked out an arrangement with all our surrounding counties to borrow theirs, but obviously, having our own is exciting for all our Fire and Rescue personnel.

Q. How do you rank the new access road into the Union County Farmers Market with other 2019 projects?

A. Anything we could do to enhance and improve the Farmers Market is a high priority. This facility has been incredible with what it has done for our community. Building the covered bridge and the new "Farmers Market Way" to grant easier and safer access to the Market was a major project. It took lots of time and effort with GDOT (Georgia Department of Transportation), but with their financial assistance, this new access road opened last year. It was our busiest year ever at the market.

Q & A from Union County Commissioner
Lamar Paris



Drug Free Mountain Life

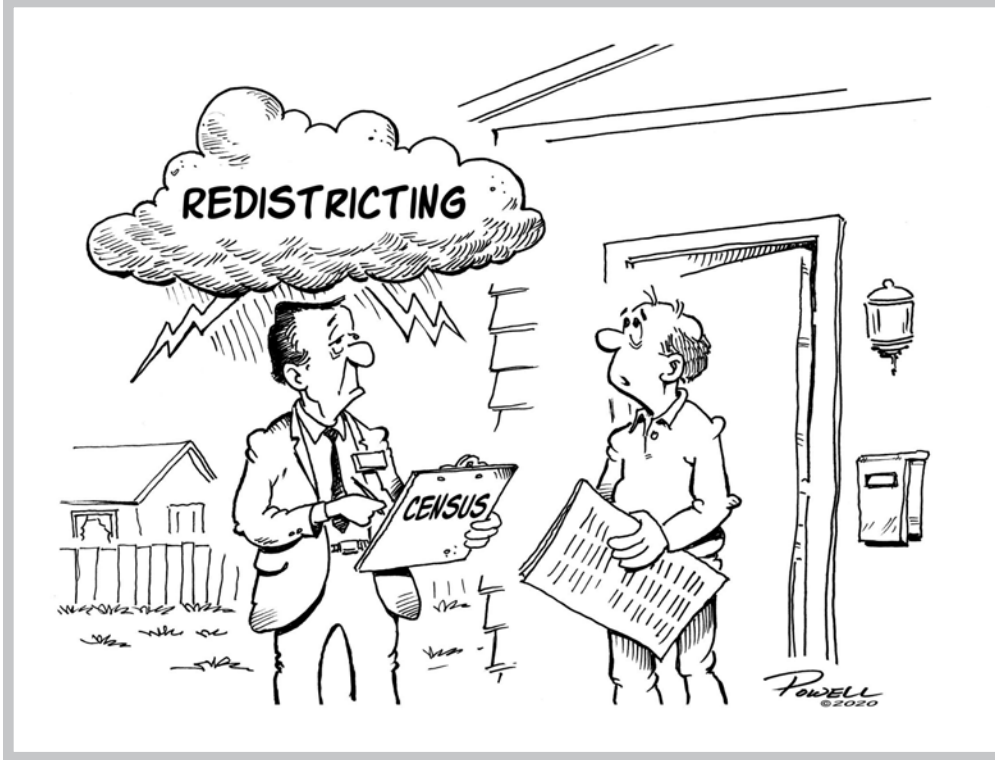
Stigma and Shame

As a community we can eliminate the stigma surrounding addiction, but we first must change the way we believe and respond to those struggling with substance abuse disorders. Consider your own personal beliefs about "drug addicts". When you think of an addict, what is the image that comes to mind? Do you feel these people are morally bankrupt or just bad people? Do you think all drug addicts are criminals? Now ask yourself, "How do I know what I believe about drug addiction is the truth?" Have you ever researched the biology or psychology of addiction or are all your opinions based on what you believe is morally right or wrong?

Society sends a message to those who use, abuse or are dependent upon a substance that you are morally wrong. This message creates shame and shame breeds stigma. A stigma that often

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The DRUG FREE MOUNTAIN LIFE campaign supports an overall safe community by providing information, education and support services to children, families, and community toward prevention of illegal substance abuse.



Letters to the Editor

Thank You Blairsville!

Dear Editor,

My husband and I were traveling in Blairsville on Saturday, December 28th, and found we had a dead battery in our vehicle as we were leaving The Sawmill Place (a wonderful restaurant)! Several people offered to help, but everyone had jumper cables in other vehicles, including us. I went inside to ask if anyone had jumper cables, and Stephanie from The Sawmill Place came out and jumped off our vehicle. We just want you to know how much we appreciated her kindness and willingness to help.

We drove to O'Reilly Auto Parts, where they were also very helpful and patient installing a new battery, and we bought some jumper cables for the vehicle we were driving. I am sorry I did not get the names of the people at O'Reilly. Thank you, Blairsville, for helping some stranded travelers. We'll definitely be returning in the future.

Best Regards,
Janette & Ken Brown
Dalton, GA

New & Old Year

Dear Editor,

As the New Year comes once again with all of its excitement, thrills, challenges, heartaches, disappointments, fond memories, sorrows and regrets, I ponder if this last Christmas could be my last one as I fast approach the ripe old age of 80 in 2020. As I look back at 2019, did I achieve everything I wanted to, or did I just go through the motions feeling my way through life? Regrets, yes, too many to count, but then I ponder on all of my successes I accomplished toward mankind and find more positive ones than negative ones, and I can rejoice and shout Hallelujah, Praise the Lord, for seeing me through every circumstance and bringing me out on the winning side. We all face sorrows, grief and pain more than we care to remember, but the Lord of

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Shared Appreciation

Dear Publisher,

On behalf of the Blairsville Police Department, I would like to personally thank you and all the employees of the North Georgia News for your hard work, generosity and support of the 2019 Shop with a Cop Program. We appreciate the media coverage provided by Shawn and Mark, including during the First Annual Duck Derby. We appreciate the partnership, and may God bless you all.

Sincerely,
Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter
Blairsville Police Department

CCRCDD Partners

Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation & Development Council (CCRCDD) used many partners to facilitate the 70+ programs and events across Georgia in 2019, mainly because there are only 2 of us so we need many local partners to get our programs to the local people who need the information to manage and conserve their natural resources for future generations.

The Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission (GSWCC) is one of CCRCDD's main partners with soil and water conservation programs that we facilitate across the state. GSWCC provides soil and water resource information; education; technical, financial, and planning assistance; and program oversight to locally led soil and water conservation districts, landowners/users, and local, state, and federal governments to maintain, conserve, and wisely use the soil and water resources for all Georgians.

GSWCC Watershed and Water Resources Programs provide research, funding and technical expertise on Georgia's water supplies, dams, and river basins.

To protect and restore the state's water quality, GSWCC analyzes key watersheds and identifies opportunities to assist river basin stakeholders and all of Georgia in water planning processes and policies that improve water management and efficiency.

Georgia has 357 watershed dams that were built by USDA in the 1950s and 60s. Watershed dams provide flood control, water quality, recreation, and water supply benefits to Georgia citizens.

The Watershed Dams Program was initiated to give financial and technical assistance to ensure that the state's dams maintain their structural integrity, operate effectively to continue providing community services, and comply with the Georgia Safe Dams Act. Although there are 357 watershed dams in Georgia, these are only a small percentage of the more than 4,600 dams in the state.

Only four states (Texas, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma) have more dams than Georgia. In Georgia most dams are privately owned, and many people are not aware that they are living either upstream or downstream from a dam.

Using the GSWCC GIS, you can look at a detailed map for any area in Georgia and using the Aerial View, you can see a birds-eye view of an area, including landscapes and structures which might be obscured when you are looking at the area from ground level.

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RC&D Executive Director



Frank Riley

My Curly-Haired Baby

I didn't mind the phrase when I was very young, but, as I grew into my teenage years, I felt embarrassed by my mother's pet name for me, "My curly-haired baby." I remember coming home from a hiking trip with a bunch of boys from church. Mom met us in the parking lot, and while she tussled my hair, she asked, "How is my curly-haired baby?" The boys rode me pretty hard about that for a long time. I don't know exactly how the phrase originated, but, mom still uses that term from time to time. The term may have come from an incident which occurred when I was very young.

My Daddy walked away from a baseball scholarship at Arkansas because he missed my mother. So, he came home and married my mother in 1957. Dad got a job at a textile mill in Hackleburgh, Alabama. They paid him to work part time and play on the mill's traveling baseball team. I was born a little over a year later in 1958. Daddy didn't make much money, probably not much more than a \$1 an hour. The house we lived in was a renter house on my grandfather's farm located about a quarter mile south of my grandparents.

The house was an old clapboard house built by my grandfather's brother. An old coal-fired, potbellied stove was used to heat the house. We did have electricity. The lights of the house were nothing more than screw-in light bulb sockets with hanging down chains used to turn them on and off. The house was not built very tight. The linoleum rug would rise up from the floor when the wind would blow outside. The house had no running water. We had an outhouse and a well where we would retrieve our washing, drinking and cooking water.

During the wintertime, we all slept together to stay warm. I was only 3-4 months old that cold December night. Mom said she awoke to the sound of me crying. She felt for me in the bed and could not find me. She woke up Dad in a panicked voice and said, "Somebody has took our baby." They could hear me crying, and Dad said, "Your voice sounded as if you were going farther away." So, Dad reached for his shotgun and ran outside looking for the kidnapper. You should remember we were located seven miles from the nearest town. Our nearest neighbors were my grandparents, and they were a quarter mile away. Why would anyone come to our house to steal me?

While Dad was running around the house, Mom calmed down enough to logically think about the situation and looked between the bed

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Around The Farm



Mickey Cummings

Radon

Radon is an invisible, odorless gas that causes lung cancer. Every 25 minutes someone dies from radon-induced lung cancer, making it the second leading cause of lung cancer. During Radon Action Month this January, UGA experts are advising you to test your home for radon gas. I'd like to talk about what this dangerous gas is, how you can find out if you have it, and what you can do to reduce the radon in your house to a safe level.

When uranium, which occurs naturally in Georgia soil and rock, breaks down, it produces radon gas. Radon is a heavy gas which seeps into homes from the ground and concentrates in the lower levels of a house. Radon can be present in any home, regardless of the age or type of home. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that about 6.7% of homes nationwide have elevated levels of radon gas; however in some counties the levels are higher. Homes in north Georgia can have high levels of radon. In Union County, between March 2003 and July 2017, about 46.5% of the homes tested had elevated levels of radon. In Towns County it was 33.1%. An elevated level of radon is anything at or above, 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L). Being exposed to a level of 4 pCi/L has similar health effects as smoking 8 cigarettes per day.

The only way to know if your home has a high level of radon is to test for radon. Radon test kits are available from several sources, including local retailers, the Extension Office, and by ordering online at www.UGAradon.org. Purchasing a kit from the Extension office costs \$10.

If the radon level in your home is high, it is fixable. Installing a radon reduction (or radon mitigation) system will reduce high levels of indoor radon to acceptable levels. The system most commonly used is a vent pipe system, which includes a fan that pulls radon from beneath the house and vents it to the outside.

Just because your neighbor has had a negative radon test does not mean that your house isn't affected. Also, if your neighbor has a positive test it doesn't mean that you have radon in your home. It is advisable to test your own home. Experts usually advise that you have your home tested regularly to make sure that radon levels are low.

Radon may also be found in drinking water. This is primarily a concern for individuals whose drinking water comes from private wells. In Georgia, wells drilled into granitic crystalline rock aquifers (pretty common for wells around here), are at risk of naturally occurring radon contamination. This is where the uranium that

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Blairsville - Union County Chamber President
Steve Rowe



Chamber of Commerce

We are officially in a new decade! We hope everyone had a joyous Christmas and happy new year's celebrating with friends and family. Now that the holidays have passed, we can start looking forward to all the great things we have planned for 2020.

Our Annual Chamber Awards Night will be taking place in the New Year on January 23. This awards presentation and dinner

will honor standout leaders from the Blairsville-Union County area and recognize individuals and businesses that represent local economic drivers including hospitality, manufacturing and small business including business of the quarter and year as well as ambassador of the quarter and year. Individual tickets are \$40 and table and event sponsorships are available. Call (706) 745-5789 for more information.

We also have an exciting monthly mingle approaching on January 15. Susan Stalcup, with North Georgia Extreme Boot Camp will be here

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Phone: 706-745-6343 Fax: 706-745-1830 * P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, Georgia 30514

Website: www.nganews.com

Email: northgeorgianews@hotmail.com

Mailing: P.O. Box 2029, Blairsville, Georgia 30514