

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Proud of Union County

By the time you read this, the Access Explorers will be back in Union County. Their trip to Chicago, IL and back was completed on Tuesday.

However, their journey to the Windy City would not have been possible without the help of our incredible community.

You came to their aid when you learned that they were \$3,800 short of the more than \$13,000 necessary to make their trip of a lifetime happen.

In less than four weeks, the \$3,800 came together with the help of countless locals pitching in to send these children to Chicago.

Access Explorers is a group of Union County High School students with a variety of learning disabilities.

As their teacher, Shannon Hogsdex explained, most of these students have never traveled outside of Union County in their lifetimes. That's why she wanted to take them on a trip of a lifetime, Chicago, IL.

The trip took place April 10-15.

Shannon sent me an e-mail prior to the trip. Here's an excerpt of that correspondence:

"Hey Charles, I just wanted to thank you for ALL the publicity you have given my students over the past few weeks. Thanks to your wonderful articles we have raised enough money for the field trip. We have enough for not only the food, tickets, hotel, and bus expenses, but we have now received enough to buy the students warm clothes and toiletries needed for the trip as well as to give each student a small amount of spending money. I never could have done this without your help.

"You will never know how much it means to have the community support my students. This has truly been a blessing and I just want to thank the Lord for all your kindness, support, and hard work you have put in for my students. None of this would ever be possible without your help.

"I feel it best that we write another article expressing our gratitude for the entire community for supporting such a wonderful cause. Again, I want to thank you for everything you have done for us. I truly appreciate all your help!"

That e-mail alone was enough thanks for me. I don't put this information out to our readers for my benefit. It's all about the community for me. I grew up here, and I know what a newspaper is all about. It's about getting the word out so people will know when a crisis is ongoing, and can be averted. I did that, and this community responded overwhelmingly.

Being able to be a part of a lifetime experience for these young people was incredible. It's always amazing to see a community pull together and help one another without seeking recognition for the good deed.

When that happens, it's called giving from the heart. I can honestly say, this community gave from the heart.

But then again, this community has never let anyone down. When this community learns that a challenge is in front of it, the community remedies the problem.

It's happened several times since I've been back home, in both Union and Towns counties.

I can honestly say that my hometown is the most giving community I've ever known. Somewhere, some how, when there is a thirst, it gets quenched by this community.

On May 1, at 7 p.m. at Blairsville's First Baptist Church, let's join together and pray for this community that continues to bless its own.

Straight Shooting

Charles Duncan



Greatest Bridge Known by Man

Since my childhood days I have loved bridges. In my boyhood days there were numerous wooden bridges and foot logs you could walk across or ride bicycles across. Sometimes a group of boys might get together some discarded boards and build their own bridge to cross a stream. Bridges have been the subject of poems.

Wordsworth did a poem entitled "From Westminster Bridge". Thornton Wilder studied the problem of evil in "The Bridge At San Luis Rey". Kids entertained themselves years ago by playing London Bridge, which kept falling down. Songs have been made about bridges. Movies have been written about bridges (Billy Joe McAllister jumped off the Tallahatchie Bridge). Sadness and death are associated with some bridges.

Years ago I had a beautiful 14-year-old cousin who ended her life by jumping from a bridge on the Toccoa River. Why? No one will ever know in this life. We sing the song "Bridge Over Troubled Waters". We talk about the proverbial "Bridge to Tomorrow", or we "bum our bridges behind us." Covered bridges have always been intriguing to me of which very few are still in existence.

While in seminary in New Orleans, LA I served a church just northwest of the city in Maurepas, LA. To get to the church our family had to cross the Lake Pontchartrain Bridge (Causeway). It is 24 miles (23.87 miles) across. The twin spans of the causeway are made of prestressed panels supported by over 9,000 concrete pilings. The first span with two-way traffic was opened in 1956; the second span, which allowed one-way traffic, was opened in 1969. The spans are 80 feet apart with only seven emergency crossovers in the 24 miles over water. Men have spanned some mighty great gulfs and connected points that were seemingly impossible. The Golden Gate Bridge, which is the symbol of San Francisco, is an engineering marvel. This bridge was largely the result of one man's vision, Joseph Strauss. In spite of enormous opposition, he was convinced that a bridge could be built. It was completed in 1937 with only 12 lives lost during construction. The Bay Bridge, which was being built at the same time, had 24 lives lost. During the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge the unofficial count of loss of life numbered 27. Most of the fatalities occurred from men falling or being dragged by falling equipment. One

See Parris, page 5A

It's On My Mind

Danny Parris



Questions and Answers

Q. What is the current situation regarding litter in Union County?

A. People are still throwing it out and we are still picking it up. Unfortunately, the litter problem is still with us although we don't have as many complaints as we used to. Hopefully, some people may have gotten the message that littering is not cool. We still have county crews and volunteers picking up litter and we still have our litter hotline for reporting people who litter, (706) 439-6025. One day a few weeks ago someone e-mailed us a picture they had taken with their smartphone of a truck that had trash blowing out of the back for several miles on Blue Ridge Highway. The majority of litter on our roadways blows out of the beds of trucks. This is in direct violation of Union County Ordinance O-99-003.

Q. What is the fine for littering?

A. The Union County Ordinance states that violation of the litter law "shall be punishable as a misdemeanor by the imposition of a fine not to exceed \$1,000, by imprisonment in the county jail for a period of time not to exceed 60 days, or by both such fine and imprisonment, or up to the limits of any penalty provided by state law for the violation of such ordinance."

Q. How much does littering cost the county?

A. It is hard to come up with a dollar figure but I'm sure when you count time and labor spent on cleaning up other people's trash that it would be in the tens of thousands per year. The Georgia Department of Transportation spends about \$14 million annually to clean up roadside trash and local governments spend hundreds of thousands more dollars to keep litter off of 96,818 miles of locally maintained roads. The sad thing is that this is just throwing money away on litter that could be better spent other places. Just imagine how much food could be bought to feed hungry people with that \$14 million?

Q. What else can the county do to combat this problem?

A. We have always been serious about litter but we are about to get even tougher on this problem. We will be starting a campaign to crack down on litter and we encourage everyone to help us by being observant and vigilant about reporting people

See Paris, page 5A

MECHS

Congratulations Mountain Education Charter High School.

Last week the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce acknowledged Mountain Education Charter High School (MECHS) as our Business of the Quarter. This program was established by the Chamber as a way to recognize members who are doing great things in our community.

Blairsville - Union County Chamber

Cindy Williams



It is my distinct pleasure to announce MECHS as our latest recipient.

In August of 1993, Wade Smith and the superintendents of Union, Towns, and Fanning school districts opened Mountain Education Center at the Union site in Blairsville.

The purpose of the school was to increase the high school completion rate and promote education as a life-long experience.

It specifically addressed the "at risk" student and those who had dropped out of traditional day school by offering them an evening school where they could progress at their own pace and earn a high school diploma.

Since then, MECHS has grown from one site to 11 sites serving students in 34 counties.

In July of 2007, MECHS was established as a state charter school and this past year changed its name to Mountain Education Charter High School to emphasize its status as an accredited

See Williams, page 5A

The White Bunny Is Mine!

The events of the first 16 years of my life were recorded on standard 8mm film, sans any audio. All indoor shots were recorded with the camera connected to blinding lights that looked like Mickey Mouse ears

on either side of the head of the camera. I estimate that my father recorded an average of five rolls of film a year, times 25 feet, which is an investment of about 45 yards of Kodak film. That yielded approximately 500 minutes of Leone Family silent pictures that were played over and over again, not cold winter nights, when there was nothing to watch on the three television stations we were able to tune in with our high tech rabbit ears antenna.

Of all those cherished moments caught on film, I think my favorite is the Easter I was approaching three years old. I'm sitting on the floor, all dressed to the nines, with my Easter crinoline spread out around me. Seated next to me is my four year old cousin, Jon Gary, who was the most beautiful child, too pretty to be a Gerber baby. That day we were both given rabbits, those with real fur and heartbeats, wiggly noses and puffy white butters, who spit pellets out from under their tails with every hippity-hop. They also ate carrots, rather voraciously as a matter of fact. The film captured Jon and me feeding our respective bunnies. While I was distracted by the blinding lights of the camera, smiling with such joy at my good fortune, the carrot was consumed and the rabbit, unsatisfied with the orange root that started out larger than him, began to eat my finger. My expression was priceless.

Another Easter season my parents gifted my sister and me with a little plastic spaceship with a light bulb under the dome. It held two chicken eggs. It was an incubator. And for days we sat vigil, waiting to see what was going to hatch. Just before Easter, my Mom was giving us our evening baths when she heard a strange noise coming from the living room. With Dad away at work, she was overly concerned the noise might be trouble. She left us with instructions to stay put and don our pajamas while she went to check it out. She came rushing back into the bathroom, elated with the news that the baby chicks were pecking their way out of their shells. The three of us gathered around this tiny birthing center and watch in amazement as we observed each crack of the shell. When they emerged, all wet and bug eyed, we shouted with glee. We were now the proud new mothers of baby chicks. It only took moments for their feathers to dry and evolve into little butterscotch yellow fuzz balls.

Farmers Market Moment

JorAnne Leone



See Leone, page 5A

Letters to the Editor ...

A calling

Dear Editor,

A friend asked me during a very hard time in my life what I would really like to do. The question was in reference to a purpose in life that would also provide for me and my family. Without hesitation, my response was, "I would like to teach." At that time, I wasn't quite sure from where that response came. As the months passed while preparing to completely change the direction of my life, it became increasingly clear that teaching young people was a calling from somewhere higher than my finite desires.

I started college about the same time my young children started school. Three years later, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in middle school education and taught at Union County Middle School from 1988 until May, 1997. It took almost 10 years for my joy to begin to waver. I was beginning to question whether state mandated standards in education were replacing meeting the individual educational needs of the students themselves. In an attempt to revise my calling, I applied for the job of math instructor at the Blairsville Campus of North Georgia Tech when they opened in September 1998 and was hired.

See McGuire, page 5A

Thanks George

Dear Editor,

I wish the North Georgia News had a comics section, but I guess so long as you publish a letter from George Michell every week you don't need one.

Charles Cheves

Shoe Collection for Earth Day

Dear Editor

Keep Union County Beautiful is partnering with the Union County Commissioner to provide boxes for collecting gently worn shoes for reuse.

The collection box will be in place from April 20th through May 15 at the Union County Courthouse. Please only bring paired shoes. We accept men's, women's and children's shoes. Make sure the shoes you bring are shoes that are re-useable and wearable. This means no holes in the soles, wet, mildewed or torn shoes.

We will take athletic shoes, casual shoes, dress shoes, work boots, sandals, heels and flats. We do not accept ski boots, winter boots, roller blades, flip flops, crocs, bedroom slip

See George, page 5A

A new Russia

Dear Editor,

Surely no one can deny that National Public Radio (NPR) slants its news coverage to the left. So, when for the last few years, NPR has ratcheted-up its criticism of all things Russian, one has to look for the reason or reasons.

Russia, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, a purely ethnic Russian who has visions of a new Russia reflecting the glory that once was before the disastrous revolution and the scourge of communism; has steadily and surely moved from the latter towards a form of Russian capitalism. Still, he can do no right in the eyes of the West, the United States in particular.

Who would have thought that Putin and his admirable foreign minister would, in Syria, resurrect the almost dormant art of diplomacy; and in doing so save Barack Obama's shirt (and very likely his presidency itself) and avoiding a debacle that might have led to another Middle East war for the American people. Nonetheless, we Americans managed to sneer through it all.

Putin's longing for a new Russia reflect-

See Ramsey, page 5A

A time honored tradition

Dear Editor

When it comes to today's electronics, I'm riding a tricycle in a jet age world.

I'm glad that our kids and their kids are fluent in today's tech but there are times when I pine for the Good, Old Days when Mom and Dad would make me ready for bed, full belly, bathed and wearing clean 'jammies, snuggled between sheets that had been dried on a clothes line, a feather pillow that molded itself to my head.

"Which story should we read tonight?" Dad would ask, and he'd sit with me on the bed. I'd hold the book, he'd turn the page when I nodded. Sometimes, I'd hold my hand against the page and he'd read it to me again.

As a Graduate student at University, I had access to "the Stacks," the seven upper floors of the library, each floor dedicated to a particular area of study, the shelves crammed with tens of thousands of books.

Some of those books were Special Access Only - they could only be read at an assigned table near the main charge desk.

Those books had a particular odor, a certain sound, a special feeling to them, as I turned their pages. Many were the hours when I'd savor a passage, a photograph, a notation.

I handled them with tender care for I had been allowed to touch a treasure.

I'm glad that today's kids have Kindle. They can access information, poems, stories, biographies at a touch.

But, I've handled a Kindle and, to me, it's cold, lifeless, disconnected. I can tell you that there's something mysterious, something magical,

See Mitchell, page 5A

Mack's Teeth

My mother's two uncles, Mack and Rufus Baker, were two men that everyone loved and respected. I looked up to each one because they were tough and yet kind. They paid extra attention to all of us young boys.

Both men spent a great amount of time in the woods. Each man enjoyed hunting. As young men they especially enjoyed coon hunting the hills and hollows of Ray Mountain. Before my Dad ever dated my mother he was coon hunting with Mack and Rufus.

My Dad had two young dogs about 6 months old and they needed to be trained so my father asked Mack and Rufus if he could go hunting with them. The two men pulled up in the yard and waited with my grandparents as my Daddy fetched his dogs. The men and the young boy walked across the cotton and corn fields to the "James place." The dogs struck a coon and began the trailing just after dark. The raccoon led the dogs up and down Turkey Creek and under bluffs for about an hour. Finally, the old coon went up a Black Gum tree standing on the banks of Turkey Creek.

Uncle Rufus tied the old dogs and told my Dad to let Sam and Lou continue tree barking. Uncle Mack waded out into the middle of Turkey Creek and began to try and squall the coon out of the tree. Basically, Uncle Mack would make a sound that resembled a fighting coon. This squalling sound will entice a raccoon to walk down a tree and jump into the middle of a pack of dogs. This day was no exception. The sound made by Mack worked and the old coon began to make its way down the tree. The coon came to within 10 feet of the ground where the dogs and Uncle Mack could see it. So, Uncle Mack made one more of the squalling sounds and the old coon jumped from the tree into the creek.

But, before the coon hit the water Uncle Mack's false teeth flew from his mouth and hit the water. The sound of the splashing convinced the dogs that the coon was in the water. So, Sam dove into the water right where the false teeth had landed. Almost immediately, the coon landed on the dog's back. So, there was Uncle Mack bending over looking for his teeth and the dog was swimming in circles while howling because the coon was biting his ear. Just when you thought matters couldn't get worse Lou, the other dog, joined the fight. Uncle Mack was hollering, "get the dogs." Sam was howling because the coon was still biting his ear. Lou finally had a good hold on the coon and she was trying to pull it off Sam's back while it was still biting his ear.

In the meantime Rufus and my Dad were lying on the creek bank laughing so hard they were crying. Uncle Mack finally found his teeth and made his way up the bank of the creek. He looked at my Daddy and said, "You have some pretty good

See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



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