

Opinions

Everybody has one...

Gatlinburg Fire - Part 1

Almost everyone is familiar with the wildland fires that devastated Gatlinburg, TN in the fall of 2016. For most people, it was a shock to have a major wildland fire close to home. These types of fires are thought to be a western U.S. problem. In the fall of 2016, the members of Union County Fire Department knew that the conditions were right for a major fire and we consider ourselves lucky that something similar didn't happen here.

The Gatlinburg fire caused a great deal of destruction and resulted in the loss of 14 lives. As a fire chief, I have often wondered about the details of just how bad it was, what happened, and how the response was handled.

This year at the Annual Georgia Associations of Fire Chiefs Spring Executive Training Session, we were given a first-hand account from the Gatlinburg Fire Chief, Greg Miller.

Chief Miller started out by describing the situation in the fall of 2016. The entire area was in an exceptional drought and there had been several major wildland fires that fall. This particular fire started on November 23rd at a place called the Chimney Tops which is in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The Chief was aware of the several fires in the areas but on November 28th, he and his department noticed a large increase of smoke in the City of Gatlinburg. Upon further investigation, he received information that the fire had intensified and that the weather conditions had changed during the day.

Chief Miller immediately started to gather his command staff and collect information. The decision was made to call for mutual aid to assist. That afternoon, voluntary evacuations began which eventually turned into mandatory evacuations. As the sun started to set, the conditions started to change for the worse. The winds picked up and were moving the fire at incredible speed. Chief Miller explained that the last wind reading that the weather station picked up, before it was destroyed, was over 80 miles per hour.

The movement of the fire was not the only problem. The embers of the fire, called firebrands, were picked up by the wind and traveled great distances. These firebrands were causing spot fires as well as structure fires. The firebrands were igniting leaves, yard shrubs, and debris near homes. In a period from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m.

See Dyer, page 5A

Fire Dept. from Union County Fire Chief

David Dyer



Truth and Deception

Deceptions abound. We were well aware that mass media news outlets abuse and omit truth long before someone uttered the term "fake news." We know Hollywood sends subtle messages to moviegoers who just want a momentary distraction, not a lecture on political correctness. But don't point a finger at those bogeymen because we are perfectly capable of deceiving ourselves.

Daniel Kahneman received a Nobel Prize in Economics as a psychologist. He summarized much of his life's work in *Thinking Fast And Slow*. In this book, he describes the human mind as System 1 (involuntary) and System 2 (focused). He writes, "When System 2 is otherwise engaged, we will believe almost anything. System 1 is gullible and biased to believe, System 2 is in charge of doubting and unbelieving, but System 2 is sometimes busy, and often lazy." The result is that often we believe what we want to, despite facts that would lead to a different conclusion, if we bother to consider them.

That human weakness has always been exploited. In the Garden of Eden, the crafty serpent tempted Eve by questioning what God said, then offered a different viewpoint mixed with just enough truth to make it seem palatable (Gen. 3:1-7). Who was that deceiver? "The serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). The greatest deception questions who God is, and persists to this day masquerading as wisdom. "Though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:21-22). If you are deceived about God, you are deceived about yourself.

Truth is precious and valuable, so much so that the word appears around 200 times in the Bible. The Christian worldview sees Jesus not just as a lens to perceive truth, but as the embodiment of Truth. He came full of grace and truth. John the Baptist testified to that truth. The Hebrew Scriptures point to truth. "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Then His big reveal: "I am the truth." (John 1:14, 5:33, 5:39, 8:32, 14:6) Vince Vitale in *Jesus Among Secular Gods* writes, "Only a Christian can

See Fowler, page 5A

All Things New

Wayne Fowler



Commissioner's Questions

Q. We are continuing to see new homes and developments under construction. Are the numbers verifying the perceived increase?

A. Yes, they are. We have always been very blessed to have several exceptional builders in Union County and the ones that have made it through the long recession are indeed all very busy as demand definitely has picked up. This is very good for the economy of Union County and its citizens.

Q. How many new home permits were issued in 2017?

A. There was a total of 170 new home permits issued, which included 148 custom homes and 22 spec homes. That is a lot of homes and is a very good indication of economic recovery for our mountain area and jobs for our builders, grading and gravel contractors and all building trades including plumbing, electrical, cabinets, appliances, landscaping and much more.

Q. Is this number an increase from 2016?

A. Yes! The total for 2016 was 154 new home permits issued. We had an increase in 2017 of 16 houses (around 10%). We are hopeful that this number will stay relatively steady and increase slowly, as it has been doing since 2011.

This list below will give you a total number of building permits issued by year since 2002. It is very interesting.

2002 - 504	2006 - 487	2010 - 68	2014 - 87
2003 - 531	2007 - 279	2011 - 59	2015 - 129
2004 - 543	2008 - 124	2012 - 88	2016 - 154
2005 - 558	2009 - 110	2013 - 99	2017 - 170

Q. How many new home permits have been issued so far this year?

A. We are having a very good year so far. For the first 3 months of 2018 the Building Permit Office has issued 56 permits including custom homes and spec homes. They have already issued 4 permits for mobile home installations and 10 permits for commercial buildings. Commercial buildings can be anything from new construction to remodeling an existing commercial structure for another commercial purpose. For example, converting an existing restaurant into office space. They have also issued

See Paris, page 5A

Q & A from Union County Commissioner

Lamar Paris



Drug Free Mountain Life

Drug Take Back Day April 28th

For parents, keeping children safe is second nature: car seats, bicycle helmets, vaccinations against disease. It all starts from the day you bring them home.

Like other medical conditions, the disease of addiction can be prevented. There are some risk factors, like genetics, that we can't change. Other factors, like delaying the age of drug and alcohol first use while the adolescent brain is still developing, or limiting access to addictive substances, are factors that we can impact.

Over 21 million Americans suffer from substance use disorders, and 1 in 7 people will struggle with substance use during their lives. In 2016, 63,632 people died of drug overdoses in America — that's 174 people a day, each and every one of them somebody's child. Each night, families across America have a newly empty seat

See Drug Free, page 5A

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.



"You know, the best way to celebrate Earth Day is to get a bit of it on you!"

Chamber Events

As we head toward summer I would like to remind our Chamber members that we have a portal where they can post information about their businesses. We get about 15,000 hits to our website per month and if our member businesses have their information posted there they can be found easily. You can contact Dawn Saraney in our office at 706-745-5789 for more information on how to post your business information.

Our Monthly Mingle is scheduled for April 25 at noon at the Community Center. Our guest speaker is Cindy Reynolds with Costa Creative in Athens, GA. She will be speaking on "Quick Ways to Get Your Phone Ringing" for your business. She has more than 15 years experience in advertising and marketing. You will not want to miss her presentation. This month the Mingle is sponsored by United Community Bank. You can reserve your seat and lunch on our website at www.visitblairsvillega.com.

We had our Business After Hours for the quarter on April 12th at ServePro in Young Har-

See Harper, page 5A

Blairsville - Union County Chamber President

Al Harper



Letters to the Editor

Second Amendment

Dear Editor,
"It is the natural order of things for government to gain ground and liberty to yield." — Thomas Jefferson

Imagine that the Second Amendment were about something other than firearms.

Suppose that Amendment stated, "A well-educated electorate being necessary for the functioning of a free republic, the right of the people to read and write books shall not be infringed."

Does that mean only registered voters may read books? Of course not. The right is guaranteed not to voters, but to people, from whom the Electorate is drawn. Does this imaginary Amendment mean that only trained librarians may read books? Does it mean that only college graduates may write books? Does it mean that the government gets to decide who may read books and which books they may read? Of course not. Does it mean that one can read but not write books? Nope. Both are guaranteed activities.

Most important of all, notice that the right to read and write is not dependent on the well-educated electorate. The reverse is true: The educated electorate depends on the right. The origin and reason for the right are not mentioned at all. It exists independent of the electorate. The introductory phrase, which does not limit the right, is simply the reason why the right "shall not be infringed."

Violations of the guarantee are not allowed. That could not be more explicit: The right "shall not be infringed." And what does "infringe" mean? It means to limit, curb, restrict, undermine, encroach, or diminish. That is clear.

See Mitchell, page 5A

Adversities

Dear Editor,
None of us like to deal with adversities in our life, for life is not always as fair as we think it should be, but if we look closely at one of God's people in the Bible named Saul, who was going around persecuting Christians back in the Roman Empire time, but one day Jesus came to this man and struck him blind and for 3 days he was blinded by the Savior of the world and Jesus transformed Saul into a new man called Paul that could now see the wrong he had been doing to God's people, an apostle and servant of our Most High God. You might say as I did. What does this have to do with you and me? We all have trials and temptation and challenges as well as adversities on a daily basis, but how we deal with them depends on who we are trusting in. If I trust in my own stinking thinking and try as I may to work out those adversities on my own; what does it profit me in the long run? Am I better off

See Combs, page 5A

Letters to the Editor

Climate Change- There Is A Bipartisan Solution

Dear Editor,
Climate change has been a very divisive subject in our country. Why? Opponents fear that it will damage our economy, and they fear government regulations, the growth of big government, and the destruction of our free market economy. There is always the big question of serious doubts that climate change is real. These are very real concerns, and, though I advocate for action on climate change, I too do not want government regulation, and I certainly do not want to hurt our economy. Our free market economy has made America the leading economy in the world, and it should be preserved.

So, what are we to do? Being a fiscal conservative, I have found only one plan that I believe can heal the divide, grow our economy, and actively combat climate change. Simply place a fair price on the production of greenhouse gases from fossil fuels, return the money to all US citizens as a monthly dividend, and then let the free market take over! The price of wind and solar would soon be cheaper than fossil fuels, giving American manufacturers the incentive to invest in Green Energy. American ingenuity would

See Dixon, page 5A

Panda in the Bamboo Trees

Dear Editor,
This letter is to publicly thank the person who put the panda bear up in the stand of bamboo trees on Pat Haralson Road in Blairsville. You have increased my enjoyment of that drive which I make several times a week with your singular and educated sense of humor, refreshing world view, spirit and vivacity to have the incentive to place him in the tree, and playfulness to have conceived and executed the idea. It wasn't easy - I know because I've once trimmed a branch away from the panda's face when it was obscured by new growth a few weeks ago, and immediately discovered that placing him where you did had its problems.

So thank you, unknown person that I appreciate. The world needs more folks like you.

Jane Haddow



Speck Fishing

One of my favorite enjoyments is what is called "Speck Fishing". Speckled Trout derive their name from the specks that cover their body. In other parts of our country the fish are called "Brook Trout" or "Brookies". The fish generally require cold, clean water and they do not tolerate "Rainbow Trout" well. These tend to prey upon the Specks. These little fish are Georgia's only native trout. As a matter of fact when John Muir traveled through Trackrock Gap all those years ago he noticed many smaller Trout in the creeks in the area. Later it was determined these minnows were actually Specks.

Since that time the territory of our native Speckled Trout has decreased significantly.

The introduction of Rainbow Trout and the development of much of our land have both decreased our water quality and placed extraordinary pressure upon our only native trout.

Now to catch this species you must travel into the high coves and above waterfalls underneath many of our high mountains. My good friend Patrick Fix loves to Speck fish as much as I and this is a story from his childhood.

Patrick, his cousin and his father, Bill Fix, were Speck fishing somewhere around Blue Mountain. Patrick said I can still remember watching Dad walk through the rhododendron thickets. He carried a small fishing rod and on his back was a day pack containing water and a small frying pan. When the trio caught enough fish they would grease up a pan and build a fire. Next all the fish were rolled in corn meal and fried along with some potatoes. What a way to spend a day with your son and nephew.

Late in the afternoon the trio came to a long cascading waterfall. The falls were not free falling, but, more of a long chute with potholes placed intermittently through the 100 foot drop. Actually, the waterfall was in the shape of an s-curve much like a water slide you might see at an amusement park. Bill Fix looked at the two young boys and said, "that blue granite is too slick for my liking, so I am going around this fall to the bottom and fish that big hole".

So, Bill and his nephew disappeared around a point while Patrick sat looking at a pothole halfway down the waterfall.

I don't think Patrick has ever met anything he is afraid of and the more he looked at the pothole the more he wondered if it contained a record "Speck". So, carefully he crept through the boulders navigating his way down the waterfall to the pothole. At one point he was standing on a flat topped boulder about 3 feet wide and 30

See Cummings, page 5A

Around The Farm

Mickey Cummings



RC&D

Walter Scott Brown

North Georgia has many true pioneers, but one of Towns County's own is Walter Scott Brown who was born in Waynesville, NC in 1889.

His family moved to Towns County in 1891 and settled on a farm down on the Hiwassee River. It was two days ride for his family by wagon to the nearest market in Gainesville, so they did not make the trip more than a few times a year to get supplies and to sell their produce in the fall. He grew up loving the mountain life while farming, fishing the mountain streams and listening to his favorite fox hounds hunt. The hours he spent in the woods fox hunting gave him time to think and plan for the future.

It was this mountain childhood and pioneer spirit that developed his strong work ethic, leadership skills and common sense approach to life. He possessed a great desire for education, ideas and a better way of life. He saved enough money to enter the University of Georgia in 1913 when he was 24 years old by farming, teaching school and doing odd jobs. He entered college when there was not much encouragement for a person to seek an education but he found education an exciting experience.

During his college years when he came home to visit family, he would ride the train from Athens to Robertstown and walk over the mountain to get home. He graduated from UGA in 1917, and his first employment was serving as the County Agent in Towns County in 1917, just three years after the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service.

He was sought after for this position by the people of Towns County which was an indication of his reputation among those who knew him as a boy. He was promoted to the position of District Agent in the Atlanta district in 1919. In 1921, he was given the challenging assignment of influencing the County Commissioners of forty counties in Southeast Georgia to employ county agents.

All forty counties responded and the Cooperative Extension Service spread throughout the state and became a force for change in those difficult agricultural times of the depression years and beyond. As a result of his love for the youth of Georgia in the Cooperative Extension Service 4-H program, enrollment grew from 61,000 to 117,000 under his leadership, and he was a driving force in the creation of the Rock Eagle 4-H Center. He served as the chairman of the Georgia 4-H Foundation which raised \$2,000,000 in funds for construction of the 4-H center near Eatonton.

Walter became the Director of Extension

See Riley, page 5A

RC&D Executive Director

Frank Riley



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