

# North Georgia News

4 Sections 20 Pages

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## Union General welcomes First Baby of 2023

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Will and Grace Patterson of Blue Ridge welcomed their son, Henry Allen Patterson, into the world at 6:37 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 2, earning the newborn the crown as Union General Hospital's First Baby of 2023.

With their big day falling on Jan. 2, the Pattersons assumed they had missed the mark to deliver the new year's first local baby. It turned out they still had a chance, as that day, they were the first couple in labor in 2023, at least until later that afternoon when another set of parents arrived.

From there, both families took part in a friendly competition that spread to the waiting room among soon-to-be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other loved ones of the two contenders. Will and Grace's

fathers "got way too into it," but it was all in good fun and things remained civil.

In total, the Pattersons spent nine hours in the delivery room after inducing labor, where they enjoyed a more casual setting, being free to watch television, listen to music, or even exercise to feel more at home.

Fortunately for Grace, giving birth didn't play out the same way it often does in the movies.

"It wasn't bad; as far as labor goes, I cannot complain," admitted first-time mother Grace. "It's painful for a minute, and then it goes away and you're back to normal for a minute."

Lo and behold, Little Henry – or Hank as his parents call him – came into the world at 6:37 that evening, weighing 6 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 19 inches long. Not long after, Hank's "birthday mate" arrived



At 6:37 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 2, Henry "Hank" Allen Patterson became the first baby born in the Union General Hospital Labor & Delivery Unit for 2023. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

at about 7:10.

Regarding the baby's name, "We just liked it," Grace and Will said jointly, with Grace adding that "Allen" had been passed down among the men in her family ever since her grandfather's first name was bestowed upon her own father as a middle name.

Dr. Benjamin Harris attended Grace from the start and monitored the rest of her pregnancy until the day came for the newest member of the Patterson family to arrive, and Harris was present to help bring him into the world.

Luckily, the birth went smoothly with no complications, and the Pattersons were quick to commend the delivery team. They were especially thankful for Hannah, a nurse who stayed at their side for seven hours and remained after the end of her shift to ensure Hank's safe arrival.

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## Blood Assurance saves lives one vein at a time



Blood Assurance Team Lead Daryl Waites monitoring a blood draw by a generous donor inside the Blood Mobile parked at Union General Hospital on Tuesday, Jan. 3.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

As a blood donation organization, Blood Assurance focuses all its attention on saving

lives by promoting generous giving in the communities it serves, with the motto: "One donation can save up to three lives."

And the nonprofit met

its mandate most recently in Blairsville on Tuesday, Jan. 3, with a stop by its Blood Mobile in the parking lot of Union General Hospital for a few hours of collections.

"Blood Assurance is a nonprofit, full-service regional blood center serving health care facilities in Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky and North Carolina," per bloodassurance.org. "More than 540 volunteer blood donors are needed every day in order to adequately supply these hospitals."

"Founded in 1972 ... the mission of Blood Assurance is to provide a safe and adequate supply of blood and blood components in a cost-effective manner to every area patient in need. Currently, there are 15 fixed locations and 19 bloodmobiles to collect lifesaving blood products used by area patients."

Team Lead Daryl Waites, who drove the bus last week, celebrated three years with Blood Assurance in November, and he called his affiliation with

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## Habitat for Humanity continues mission in '23



Construction students at Union County High School getting work started on the "Panther House" in September, to benefit the local Habitat for Humanity. Photo/Facebook

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Towns/Union County Habitat for Humanity ReStore located at 225 Wellborn Street

in Blairsville has been busy over the winter holidays, with every purchase and donation going toward the Habitat mission of providing and improving homes in the community.

Of course, continued donations and patronage at the ReStore help the nonprofit to not only fulfill but expand its mission and the number

See Habitat for Humanity, Page 2A

## Top of GA student speech training starts Jan. 19



Speech trainers for the regional 2023 Top of Georgia Speaking Contest gathered last week for an organizational meeting. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

HIWASSEE – The Planning Committee for the Annual Top of Georgia Speaking Contest met for a workshop session last week to discuss and finalize details for

the upcoming student speech training that will begin next week.

Top of Georgia is unique in that it serves to instruct kids in public speaking – an important skill that will benefit the students throughout their lives – while doubling as a

contest to let the children showcase what they've learned at the end of the training.

The top four speakers in both the High School and Middle School Divisions will have the chance to win cash prizes, with eligibility open to

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## SAR honors county first responders in meeting

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

When it comes to promoting patriotism, preserving American history and teaching founding principles to future generations, the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter of the Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution is one of the most active chapters in the state.

The Blairsville-based volunteer organization enjoys membership in Union, Towns and Fannin counties in Georgia and in Cherokee and Clay in North Carolina, with members regularly taking part in events and presentations at veteran gatherings, school systems and local governments.

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(L-R) Firefighter Lt. Eric McClure, Blue Ridge Mountain SAR President Sid Turner and UGH Paramedic Rusty Fortenberry in the December county meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



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## Blood Assurance...from Page 1A

Blood Assurance “my life’s purpose.”

“After being in a wastewater career for 34 years, I thought that I needed to get back onto medical,” Waites said, briefly noting the irony of his being “terrified of needles.”

“Though I can’t be a hero directly, I enjoy helping others be someone’s hero,” he added. “It feeds my soul to be able to do something in order to help, and once I grasped what I was

doing initially, I said this is what I’ve been looking for all my life.

“Our donations have increased since this summertime, but unfortunately, with the holidays, we have experienced several problems in the Chattanooga area, so Erlanger (Hospital) has had a huge need for Type O-positive/O-negative blood.”

Continued Waites, “Our inventory is low, and we need to get that back up because

we can’t handle many more traumas. It’s the traumas that have hurt us, and O-positive and O-negative are the ones that go first.

“In general, it does seem like more people are coming out to donate (these days). We always do well when we come to the Blue Ridge area, and today has been great. Besides having our scheduled appointments, we have had several walk-ins as well.”

People who donate

with Blood Assurance can accumulate points to exchange for gifts to be sent directly to their home from the nonprofit’s online store and patient portal.

Without question, folks of all blood types are valuable for the world at large and encouraged to donate, so those interested in scheduling appointments or getting involved in any capacity may visit [www.bloodassurance.org](http://www.bloodassurance.org).

## Top of Georgia Speaking Contest...from Page 1A

sixth-12th graders attending public, private or home schools in Towns and Union counties in Georgia, and Clay County in North Carolina.

Training will take place over six Thursdays beginning Jan. 19 through Feb. 23 from 5:30-7 p.m. at the Senior Center in Hiwassee.

“Students will learn to construct a speech and how to deliver it with conviction, poise, and expertise,” according to program literature. “Students will be expected to perform an inspiring four to six-minute speech on the final contest day in March.”

The Planning Committee is comprised of retired physician Gerry Chotiner, retired U.S. Air Force veterans Mike and Kathy Merritt, Enotah District Attorney Jeff Langley, retired educators Marsha Hyer and Helen Seymore, Young Harris College Assistant Athletic Director for External Operations Madison Urquiola, retired educator and school director Betsy Young, and Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority Program Manager Steven Harper.

Everyone involved

is volunteering his or her time, and all are thrilled to be participating in a tradition that has served for years now to strengthen the skillsets and confidence of young people in the North Georgia Mountains.

“I’ve been involved with this program as a mentor for about five or six years and a coordinator for the last two, and every year it’s such a joy to be involved and have a hand in helping our community’s future grow,” Chotiner said at the workshop session on Thursday, Jan. 5.

“I’d like to teach them the art of delivery, because there is a mechanics side of giving a speech, but then there’s the actual art of delivering it, and that’s huge,” Kathy said. “You’ve got to learn how to do that, so that’s what I’m hoping to pass on to these youngsters.”

“I’m just excited about giving back to the community; we’ve only lived here 2.5 years, but I’m all-in,” Seymore said.

“I’m looking forward to helping impact these students in any way and be a part of

the community and have our college helping with more in the community as well,” Urquiola said.

In addition to cash prizes, students will be competing for \$2,000 in total scholarship money for college tuition, so local youths and families have multiple reasons to participate.

Enrollment is free but limited to 40 students, and those interested in signing up or getting involved may call Chotiner at 910-697-6938 or email [togspeakingcontest@gmail.com](mailto:togspeakingcontest@gmail.com).

## Habitat for Humanity...from Page 1A

of recipients benefiting in the community.

“We have a new Panther House being built right now,” said Habitat Executive Director Charlotte Randall. “Union County (High School) has a technical program with juniors and seniors who are constructing it.

“They are about to put the roof on, and it will be moving to the lot in Union County, which is set to be complete in May of 2023.”

Also, Habitat’s Helping Hands Project “has really flourished” in 2022, with progress most recently on its 27th project, and the process to select the next family for a Habitat home build is looking to be underway by February.

“Everything (done by Habitat) in general has been very crucial during and after the COVID pandemic,” Randall said, “because we are able to go in and fix people’s houses who are unable to financially do so.

“And with the rise (in cost) of building materials, we had to take a step back from home building during 2019-2021, so we’re excited that we are able to go back to building, and the cost of building actually comes out to be reasonable for someone to be able to hold a

mortgage.

“There is definitely more need for housing in the area, as in the past three years, the affordable housing waitlist has nearly doubled. But we are seeing that some of the housing is starting to open up more, and the waiting lists are going down.”

Continued Randall, “I see people wanting to give and donate more, and since word-of-mouth spreads when we’re helping somebody, I’ve found that not only have we been getting significantly more (item and monetary) donations in the past six months, but I also have an increase in churches and different groups who want to volunteer to do the projects.

“I’m very blessed to have these wonderful volunteer groups and staff members who work hard to help make all these things happen, and I’m proud to say that we have spent \$25,000 on Helping Hands Projects since July. People can work off some of the repayment through volunteer hours.

“I also want to say a big thank you to the Home Depot Relationship Manager Barbara Lorello for working together with me, as she has submitted the construction materials as a grant through a corporate Home



**Charlotte Randall**  
Habitat Executive Director

Depot grant program for the past five projects, surplusing nearly \$12,000 of material so far this year.

“The Beacon Mission Team of First Baptist Church has also been a huge help for me in completing several projects (in 2022).”

For more information on the programs available through the local Habitat for Humanity, or to learn how to donate, contact staff at 706-745-7101, stop by the ReStore in person or visit [www.townunionhabitat.org/](http://www.townunionhabitat.org/).

## Record setting Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution Flag Certificate presented by Patriot Ron Hill



On November 6, 2022 Patriot Ron Hill, (left) a US Army veteran of the Korean War, Vietnam War and Gulf War, a member of the Chattahoochee Christian Church and a member of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) presents his 142nd Flag Certificate for year 2022, a Georgia Society record, to Chattahoochee Christian Church, Pastor Frank Zimmerman (center) and Dan Johnson accepting for the church. The church was originally established as Chattahoochee Methodist Church in 1860 and recently reformed as the Chattahoochee Christian Church. The SAR Flag Certificate is presented to an individual, organizations and businesses, in recognition of their “Exemplary Patriotism



**Ron Hill, Pastor Frank Zimmerman and Dan Johnson accepting award.**

in displaying the Flag of the United States of America”.

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter was chartered April 1, 2000 as a chapter of the Georgia SAR Society representing Union, Towns, Fannin and Gilmer Counties of Georgia; Clay and Cherokee Counties of North Carolina. The Sons of the American Revolution is a national patriotic, historical and educational

non-profit organization whose members are male lineal descendants of the patriots who fought in, or supported the American Revolution. Anyone with an interest in genealogy and whose patriot ancestor(s) fought or aided in the American Revolution between the years 1774-1783 is encouraged to join us. For more information please call Sid Turner 706-745-3410.

## Friends of Union County Library Membership for 2023



Advocating for Libraries,  
Literacy, and Lifelong Learning

Time to renew your Friends of Union County Library Membership for 2023. This past year we reached our 26-year milestone as an organization and we updated our by-laws, printed new promotional brochures, and elected Heather Welch, Public Services Coordinator, to our Board of Directors as the Mountain Regional Library System (MRLS) representative. Below are other FOUCL 2022 accomplishments.

To support libraries, we made quarterly contributions to Union County Public Library (UCPL) and recognized and supported UCPL staff dur-

ing National Library Worker’s Day in April and with staff Christmas gifts in December. In addition, we gave the library money to purchase microfilm of local papers dating from 1989 to the present to complete the collection dating back to the 1890s.

To support literacy, we supplied volunteer helping hands during well attended UCPL Children’s Summer Reading Programs. We made our annual contribution to Ferst Readers (a nonprofit children’s literacy program which provides free monthly books to registered children from birth to age 5).

In February, we purchased picture books, “Horton Hears a Who,” which were given to library families in celebration of Dr. Seuss’ birthday. In December we purchased “Moo Baa La La La” board books for the youngest library

children and “The Christmas Owl: Based on the True Story of a Little Owl Named Rockefeller” picture books for the slightly older pre-school children.

To support lifelong learning, we hosted a successful travel-themed discussion program in May and a well-received Open Mic: Poetry and Prose Reading event in September.

At our November meeting, 2023 officers were elected. They are Jackie Volk, President; Ken Arrington, Vice President; Jackie Millstone, Recording Secretary; and Debora Quigley, Treasurer. We welcome and thank the new officers for taking on these important responsibilities for FOUCL.

Thank you for your continued support. Together we help make our great community library even better!

# SAR Honorees...from Page 1A



(L-R) Blue Ridge Mountain SAR President Sid Turner, Heather Patton, UCSO Sgt. Alan Patton, Sheriff Mack Mason and Blue Ridge Mountain SAR Treasurer Jared Oden on Dec. 16. Sgt. Patton has been on the force since 2012.

One of the group's many outreach efforts involves recognizing the community-sustaining efforts of individual first responders, most recently in last month's meeting of Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

was Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter SAR President Sid Turner, and he was proud to be honoring first responders nominated by the Union County Fire Department, Union County General Ambulance Service and Union County Sheriff's Office.

First up with Lt. Eric McClure of the Fire Department, who joined Turner at the podium in the Dec. 13 county meeting.

Making the presentations

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the level of 1st Lieutenant," Turner read from McClure's recommendation letter. "He is currently in command of District 3 consisting of Stations 3, 10 and 12.

"Lt. McClure has been a dedicated firefighter since his first day as a volunteer, and he quickly completed his initial fire training and seeks every opportunity to advance his knowledge and skills. He is very active in Search & Rescue response and training, obtaining a SARTECH II certification.

"Lt. McClure's dedication to service and his knowledge are vital to the operations of District 3 as well as the department. His leadership of District 3 has better organized the district and has improved its operations.

"He has helped foster a cooperative culture throughout District 3 and the department, which enables (the Fire Department) to provide excellent service to the people in the community. He is an asset to the department and the community."

With his family watching on from the viewing gallery, McClure graciously accepted the Fire Commendation Safety Award and Medal.

Next, Turner asked for Paramedic Rusty Fortenberry of Union General EMS to join him at the front of the room to receive the EMS Commendation Award and Medal. Fortenberry's family was also in attendance.

"Rusty has been with EMS for over 28 years, and 24 as a paramedic," Turner said. "His experience allows him to deliver consistent quality basic care.

"Rusty has been with the Union General EMS since 2008. He serves as both a field paramedic and maintenance coordinator for the ambulance fleet, which travels well over 200,000 miles each year.

"Rusty's quality patient care and his efforts to ensure the ambulance fleet is ready to respond make him a great candidate for this award."

Before he could sit down, Turner called up resident Kendra King from the audience to make an additional presentation to the paramedic on behalf of the King family.

King presented Fortenberry with the memorial award established in honor of her late husband, Murray King, who was a member of the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter SAR.

Murray suffered a massive heart attack in 2014, and though he did not survive, Kendra was so impressed with the response by Union General

EMS that she asked the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter to establish a memorial award in recognition of local EMS workers.

"It seems that you exemplify a lot of the same qualities that Murray had with his 32 years with BellSouth in Florida," Kendra said to Fortenberry. "So, the family and I are privileged and pleased to present you with the Murray King Award.

"I believe this is the ninth award that we have been privileged to present, and we thank you for your service to the community."

The Murray King Award, offered with a small cash prize, recognizes "outstanding service and dedication to the citizens of Union County by performing Emergency Medical Services to ensure health and to save lives."

Turner met separately with the third award recipient, UCSO Sgt. Alan Patton, on Friday, Dec. 16, at the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Patton was honored to receive the Law Enforcement Commendation Medal that day "in recognition of outstanding achievement and dedication to the maintenance of law and order."

In recommending Patton, Sheriff Mack Mason consulted coworkers and supervisors regarding the sergeant's "work product, performance, leadership and respect." The sheriff also considered community input, noting that Patton "treats the people in the public with compassion."

"He often does things that are not easily recognized by all, but he does a lot of things that we never hear about in his daily activities as a patrol officer,"

Mason said. "An example is he will assist residents when called upon to help shut-ins.

"He has been said to retrieve medication for one person who was unable to get out to get their prescriptions. This is just one example of the things that he does that go unrecognized. His actions show a real compassion for the job and helping people."

Additionally, Mason noted Patton's willingness to come to work on short-shifted days, and without hesitation.

"Often, if he is aware of a need, he will come in without being asked," Mason said. "His actions show that he is a very dedicated deputy sheriff, and he has obviously chosen the right profession where he makes a difference to the people of Union County."

Added Mason, "Sgt. Patton is an excellent example of the quality employee at the Union County Sheriff's Office."

In the Dec. 13 meeting, Commissioner Paris thanked the first responders being honored as well as the folks doing the honoring, crediting all with doing their parts to make Union County "a better place to live, work and play."

The rest of the county meeting consisted of Paris accepting several federal and state grants to assist in providing programs and services at the local level, including for the various "Accountability Courts" of the Enotah Judicial Circuit.

Unless otherwise posted, Commissioner Paris holds his regularly scheduled meetings at 6 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month in the Union County Courthouse, and the public is encouraged to attend.



Paramedic Rusty Fortenberry receiving the Murray King Award from Kendra King in the Dec. 13 Union County Commission meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

# New Year Baby 2023...from Page 1A



Will and Grace Patterson were thrilled to officially meet their son Hank when he was born on Jan. 2.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Hank is Will and Grace's firstborn, and while the Pattersons plan to have more, they're unsure how many. Until then, they care for a small farm at home and manage their own veterinary practice, Cohutta Animal Clinic.

"All of our clients have been so excited," Will said. "(They've been) messaging our Facebook page if Grace has had the baby. It's cool."

In fact, it was during the pursuit of their degrees that the proud parents first met. Both were students at the University of Georgia, and as Grace says, "It was love at first laugh," and the pair was inseparable after immediately clicking.

While Grace was from Charleston, South Carolina, Will was a native of Blue Ridge, and when he came back to North Georgia to get hands-on experience in the field, Grace came with him. For a time, they worked at Lake Chatuge Animal Hospital in Towns County before a lucky opportunity fell into their laps.

"Dr. (Karen) Ortleby was the vet at Cohutta, and I was

friends with her," Will said. "She was retiring and said, 'Hey, we're going to sell the practice. Do you guys want to buy it?' We've always wanted to have our own practice, especially Blue Ridge ... We bought it, and it's been great."

There's no great push for Hank to one day inherit the business, but the new parents agree that if he follows in their footsteps, they wouldn't have a problem in making Cohutta a family practice.

Ultimately, they hope their son will be able to pursue any occupation he's interested in, with both saying that they are "excited" to see how his personality - and indeed, his future - pans out.

Of course, as proud "Dawgs," Hank's parents want to see him graduate from UGA no matter what field he goes into.

Admittedly, he's well-prepared.

Grace said that "a lot of the fun was in getting ready" to bring Baby Hank home, where they put together a dedicated room for him along with "a

little corner in every room of the house." That said, the family even had help from Union General.

For claiming the highly coveted status of New Year Baby, the Pattersons received a gift basket filled with baby supplies and a small bag of books from Ferst Readers to give Hank a good head start with his academic pursuits.

Although first-time parents, the Pattersons have some experience in childcare. With a 2-year-old niece and an 8-week-old nephew, they both have ample know-how in changing diapers and quieting crying, which came in handy when Will changed Hank's first diaper as Grace recovered from labor.

And so far, there have been no complaints, and the future is bright after a complication-free delivery and a healthy baby.

Only a few days old, it's impossible to tell what the future holds for Hank, but he's been largely quiet and calm, and the Pattersons are content for the blessing of watching their son's life unfold.