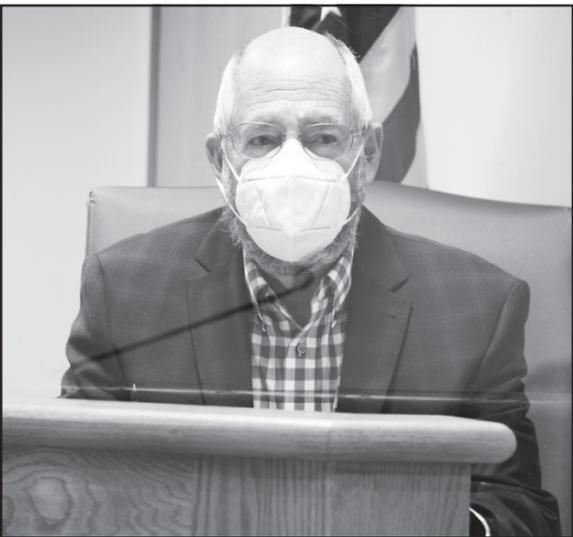


January is Radon Action Month; Feb. 19 proclaimed Arbor Day



Lamar Paris briefly popped into Courtroom A before heading to his office in the courthouse to lead the Dec. 17 county meeting via teleconference. He'd had a secondary COVID exposure but thankfully never developed symptoms. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris has proclaimed January 2021 as Radon Action Month, serving as an important time to raise awareness about the potentially deadly dangers of radon in homes.

“Radon comes from the breakdown of naturally occurring radioactive elements, such as uranium and thorium, in soils and rocks,” according to EPA.gov. “As part of the radioactive decay process, radon gas is produced.

“The gas moves up through the soil to the surface, where it can enter homes, schools and the workplace through cracks and other holes in the foundation. In some cases, radon can enter buildings through well water and come from building materials.

“Any home can have a radon problem – old or new homes, well-sealed or drafty homes, and homes with or without basements.”

And here in the North Georgia Mountains, the prevalence of granite rock that has high levels of uranium explains the need for local residents to pay attention during National Radon Action Month.

“In Union County, about 45% of homes have elevated levels of radon,” local Extension Agent Jacob Williams said. “Over the course of many years, exposure to this gas can cause lung cancer, even in non-

smokers. In fact, radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers.”

Once it seeps out of the soil, the gas rises through crawlspaces, foundations and basements into homes, resulting in about 800 Georgians dying annually from radon-induced lung cancer, Williams said.

Thankfully, there’s a cheap and easy way to test for radon in homes, either through purchasing a \$10 test kit at the local Extension Office or at a hardware/local big box store.

“During the month of January, Georgians can receive \$5 off their online radon test kit order at radon.uga.edu by using the code NRAM2021 at checkout,” Williams said. “If the radon level in your home is high, you can install a radon reduction system ... (which) reduces high levels of indoor radon to acceptable levels.”

Paris made the proclamation in his Dec. 17 county meeting, in which he also proclaimed Nov. 1 “Retired Educators Day” in honor of the men and women who have “touched the lives of generations of young people, prompting them to become responsible, contributing citizens of our city and county.”

Additionally, Paris proclaimed the upcoming Feb. 19, 2021, as Arbor Day in Union County, which will see a special joint observance by the Union County Government, City of Blairsville and Blairsville Garden Club.

“A tree will be planted on Feb. 19, 2021, to commemorate the 149th anniversary of Arbor Day and the 27th year in Union County,” reads the proclamation signed by Paris and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley.

“Trees and native plants are among our most valuable resources,” the proclamation continues. “Trees provide a more livable environment for mankind, providing clean air and removing pollutants from the air.

“Trees provide a cooling effect and prevent global warming. Trees are a source of food for man and animals. Trees constitute a hope for our future and carry out our heritage as they provide for a stable environment.”

Also in the Dec. 17 meeting, Paris accepted a \$478,873 proposal from Ten-8 Fire & Safety Equipment to provide a custom fire engine/pumper to the Union County Fire Department.

“This piece of equipment will be paid for by SPLOST sales tax dollars,” Paris said.

Continuing, he accepted a contract with Winkler & Winkler to expand the seating area of the View Grill inside the Community Center. The contract is worth \$330,370 and will be paid for using SPLOST money.

Another SPLOST project, Paris awarded a \$215,500 contract to Roof Management Incorporated to replace the roof at the Union County Sheriff’s Office and Jail.

Paris also extended the county’s emergency moratorium on applications for multi-family unit developments that has been in place since Aug. 6, 2019. Last extended in April 2020, the re-extension will last up to 190 days from Oct. 8, 2020.

As previously outlined by Paris, a multi-family unit development “is defined as more than one residential dwelling unit per structure.”

“So, this would include townhouses, apartment complexes or similar structures,” Paris said in 2019. “The county has found that there is a need to address standards relating to the development of multi-family units and create standards relating to the redevelopment of these types of properties located within the county.”

Next, Paris accepted the settlement statement and limited warranty deed between the county and Blairsville Motel Properties for the purchase of the 8.972-acre property known as the Old Shoe Factory for \$800,000.

The commissioner purchased the property following discussions with Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, who believed the property would be the best site for a future expanded sheriff’s office and jail facility.

Lastly, Paris approved the 2021 schedule for county meetings, all of which are open to the public the third Thursday every month starting at 6 p.m. inside Courtroom A of the Union County Courthouse.

University of North Georgia confers degrees for fall 2020 graduates

For the fall 2020 semester, the University of North Georgia awarded more than 1,000 degrees and certificates to graduates. Nearly 600 of those graduates walked across the stage of the Convocation Center Dec. 5-6 in 52 mini-ceremonies created to follow social distancing guidelines and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Brittaney Dyer graduated with a/an Master of Science - Criminal Justice; Allison Edwards graduated with a/

a Bachelor of Science - Psychology; Kyle Oliver graduated with a/an Bachelor of Science - Kinesiology/Exercise Science and Associate of Science in Kinesiology/Exercise Science Pathway; Amanda Sirianni graduated with a/an Bachelor of Science - Biology; Amber Sykes graduated with a/an Bachelor of Science - Nursing, all of Blairsville; and Warren Treon of Suches, GA, graduated with a/an Bachelor of Science - Chemistry with Biochemistry Concentration.

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parties and sides and choose to fight for America. We can’t be right about everything; nobody ever is. Let’s just move on with ourselves and stop getting worked up, because it clearly isn’t changing anything.”

Mike Berry of Fannin County took a different tack, comparing the Jan. 6 event to some of the Black Live Matter protests that devolved into rioting in 2020.

“The left got to have all their riots; I don’t see why it makes a difference when we have ours,” Berry said at Clothes Line Laundry Saturday. “They went weeks and months burning cities and hurting people and businesses, and then they get all over us for going to the Capitol and showing what we want in this country.

“I didn’t hear about the right burning cities or anything like that. We only want the votes and the election to be fair. All I want is a fair and proper recount with some people watching it happen. I just don’t get what is so hard about that, and I think that is why those

people did what they did on Wednesday.”

Lewis Parsons of Gwinnett is convinced there was voter fraud in the 2020 election, though he thinks people should take a more civil approach when it comes to making their concerns heard.

“I am a Republican through and through, and I believe that there was voter fraud at this last election,” Parsons said at the Mountain Shelter Thrift Store Jan. 9. “But I cannot believe those people that went and stormed the Capitol like they did. It does not even make sense to do.

“I understand that they are upset and passionate about this, but I don’t know what they expected to change about the election. The media and everyone is already against us. This just makes them more against us, and if we want them to see what we are advocating for, then we need to do it different from the rioting and storming of places.

“It would have been different if they just sat outside

and showed what they were there for, but they didn’t. It went too far, and I think it hurt us more than it benefitted us.”