

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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## Health officials urge patience as vaccine rollout continues

### Hospital employees work around clock

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Local COVID-19 vaccine providers are asking that people remain patient in the days ahead as officials work together to get as many people vaccinated as possible.

As severe illness from COVID-19 continues seemingly unabated everywhere and threatens to overwhelm health care systems across the nation, many Americans have grown frustrated with the vaccine rollout, including right here in North Georgia.

Personal precautions like mask-wearing, social distancing and limiting gatherings are still being recommended by public health professionals, even after vaccination, but the vaccine remains the No. 1 hope for millions of people most at risk

of death and hospitalization with COVID-19.

Vaccines are being allocated via phased distribution as stock becomes available, though it remains a reality that demand is much higher than current supplies, resulting in vaccine lists of eligible people quickly maxing out and signup portals becoming overwhelmed with requests.

Logistically, vaccination efforts have seen delays in distribution of available supplies and in provision of adequate signup opportunities; people are getting vaccinated here, just not at the rate it could be happening, which is exasperating vaccine providers and would-be recipients alike.

Eventually, there will be enough vaccine for everyone who wants it – some medical experts believe much more

vaccine will be available shortly – but until then, health officials are calling for patience as they work to introduce greater efficiency into signup and distribution processes.

Currently, early vaccinations are being focused on medical workers who face greater risk of exposure; on long-term care residents and staff; all Georgians 65 years of age and older; as well as law enforcement, fire personnel, and other first responders.

#### Where to Sign Up

In terms of local providers dispensing vaccine for the general public, the list is limited at this time, with all vaccinations being made available by appointment only and as supplies last at present.

See Vaccine Rollout, Page 2A



Union County Health Department Office Manager Glenda McGill met with Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and others in his office Jan. 15 to discuss hosting a local mass vaccination clinic, to take place Friday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Allison resigns from UCHS for East Forsyth position

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The search is underway for the next head football coach at Union County High School following the resignation of Brian Allison, the program's all-time winningest coach, on Tuesday, Jan. 12.

Allison, who compiled a 121-77 record in 19 seasons at UCHS, departs his alma mater for East Forsyth High School, where he will serve in the same capacity at the first-year program.

Last week's news marks the second time the former Furman University defensive



Longtime Panthers Head Coach Brian Allison will be leaving Union County after this school year. Photo by Todd Forrest

## Glenn Hamby, 82, promoted to baseball's 'field of dreams'

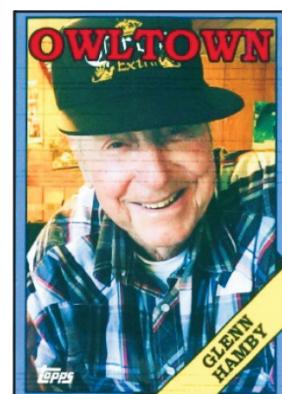
By Shawn Jarrard  
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Local legend Glenn Hamby died on Tuesday, Jan. 12, following an extended illness. The Union County native was 82.

Hamby will be remembered for many things, including his love of sports and competition generally, his commitment to Shady Grove United Methodist Church and local youth, and his enjoyment of the company of others.

He had the gift of gab and was a natural storyteller who could visit for hours, either playing cards or just talking with folks, which he usually did while operating his Owltown Baseball Card Shop off Gainesville Highway that served the area for the last three decades.

Glenn Hamby loved life in spades and got tremendous joy sharing his time with others, and sports in particular acted as a perfect conduit for him to channel his passions



not have worked out in the long run, but he was happy to have taken advantage of an opportunity to come back home for what turned out to be a lengthy career with the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Here, he raised a family with his wife of 58 years JoAnn, all while pursuing baseball in countless other ways at the local level.

He kept up with baseball as a hobby in the late '50s and into the '60s, playing for town teams in Blairsville, Hiawassee and elsewhere. He even played alongside his friend Zell Miller on the Young Harris team.

In 1967, Hamby began his long association with youth baseball, coaching local Dixie Youth teams through 1980 to become the winningest youth baseball coach in the history of the county.

Hamby also umpired all the years he coached and beyond, into the early 2000s, both for youth baseball and as a member of the Georgia High

See Glenn Hamby, Page 6A

## Arby's to open Jan. 25

By Shawn Jarrard  
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It's official – come Jan. 25, the Blairsville "Restaurant in a Box" will "Have The Meats" when it opens for drive-thru service and begins selling its famous roast beef sandwiches.

Of course, there's plenty more to eat at Arby's, like the new Market Fresh Wraps and classic Curly Fries, as well as the \$1 Happy Hour for discounted food items midday, so patrons will want to check out the fast-casual selection starting Monday.

The Blairsville location is actually more than a decade in the making, though it came together quickly in recent months thanks to cooperation between the Union County Development Authority, local city and county governments,



Arby's builder Jim Green and Union County Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs struck up a friendship during construction of the restaurant, which opens Jan. 25 at 10 a.m. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

and corporate development team.

For a little background, Development Authority

Director Mitch Griggs first approached Arby's about 12 years ago hoping to woo them

See Arby's, Page 3A

## John Wilkinson to become NGTC president on Feb. 1

News Special  
North Georgia News

ATLANTA – Technical College System of Georgia Commissioner Greg Dozier has appointed former Georgia State Senator and Career, Technical and Agricultural Education specialist John Wilkinson as the new President of North Georgia Technical College.

The State Board of the Technical College System of Georgia approved the appointment on Thursday, Jan. 14, in Atlanta, and Wilkinson will assume his new role as president on Feb. 1.

"Sen. Wilkinson has spent his professional life advancing and advocating for CTAE here in Georgia," Dozier said Thursday. "He



John Wilkinson

is one of Georgia's leading CTAE experts, and we are excited for him to lead North Georgia Technical College as we serve the needs of business

and industry in the region and across the state.

"I know he will continue the lasting legacy left by Dr. Mark Ivester by providing opportunity for every student that comes through the college's doors."

Wilkinson began serving in Georgia's General Assembly in 2011 as State Senator representing District 50. Sen. Wilkinson served as the Chairman of the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee and as Vice-Chairman of the Education and Youth Committee.

In 2012, he was named "Policy Maker of the Year" by the Georgia Association for Career and Technical

See NGTC President, Page 3A

## Murphy Hwy wreck claims life of passenger Saturday

By Shawn Jarrard  
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A passenger involved in a car crash died at the scene of the accident on Saturday, Jan. 16, about a tenth of a mile south of Stonehenge Senior Living on Murphy Highway.

Georgia State Patrol is investigating the accident, and only preliminary results of the investigation were available by press time, which did not include the name of the deceased.

The wreck occurred around 3:50 p.m. Saturday when a northbound green Ford Explorer with North Carolina

See Murphy Hwy Wreck, Page 2A



The driver of this green Ford Explorer had to be airlifted for medical treatment Saturday, according to Georgia State Patrol, and the passenger died at the scene of the Murphy Highway crash. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Heaton appeals case, requests conviction reversal or new trial

By Linda Erbele  
North Georgia News

Lawyers for former Blairsville physician James Heaton have met a Jan. 12 filing deadline with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, asking that his federal convictions be reversed or that he be granted a new trial.

In October 2019, a federal jury found Heaton and codefendant Mike Gowder guilty on multiple counts involving prescriptions for

controlled substances written "outside the usual course of professional practice or not for a legitimate medical purpose."

As a result, Heaton was sentenced to 72 months in prison and is currently out on bond, due to begin serving his sentence no sooner than May 1, 2021, to give him an opportunity to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Gowder was sentenced to 12 months and a day. He, See Heaton Appeal, Page 3A



James Heaton

Vol. 112 No. 04  
4 Sections 20 Pages  
Weather  
Thurs: Rain Hi 49 Lo 39  
Fri: Showers Hi 49 Lo 32  
Sat: Cloudy Hi 54 Lo 35

Arrests 4D  
Church 2C  
Classifieds 2D  
Opinion 4A  
Legals 2D  
Obits 4C  
Sports 2B

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**SPORTS BASKETBALL**  
1/22 vs. Rabun 7 PM • Sr. Night  
1/23 @ Lumpkin 4 PM  
**WRESTLING**  
1/23 @ Dade Co. 1 PM State Duels

**girl scouts**  
Cookies Available  
**February**  
See page 4D

**Recreation Basketball Season CANCELED**  
See page 3B

**New Georgia Legislative Session Begins**  
See page 6C