

Downtown Development...from Page 1A

place of fellow Councilman Tony Dyer.

She lauded DDA Program Manager Darren Harper's ability to get businesses involved in downtown activities, and she looks forward to learning more of what goes on behind the scenes. Easter also said she'd like to take a more active stewardship role regarding the downtown area.

"There's nowhere to develop anything on the square," Easter said. "The forefathers didn't look to the future.

"They built everything in the street, they built everything close together – they didn't

think anybody would ever come to Blairsville. And that's the biggest thing that's wrong with trying to do anything in Blairsville.

"It's hard to sit down and try to figure out how to do something; there's nowhere to do it. It's been really tough to work in Blairsville."

McEldowney is replacing Judy Jolley on the board and will serve as the DDA secretary. She is the proud owner of Rustic Mountain Décor in Merchants Walk of Downtown Blairsville.

"I have a real passion to see this downtown area be more developed and attract

more tourists and locals," McEldowney said. "I believe it can be such a great area to have family events, shopping – just make it a whole community atmosphere.

"And I'd really like to see us do more than we're doing, and I always have since we started our business. So, moving to the downtown area was my first answered prayer.

"Now, I'm more passionate because our business is in Downtown Blairsville, and we'd like to promote it just as much as we'd like to promote the whole community."

Sentencing...from Page 1A

on 75 counts of dispensing prescriptions to Mike Gowder without a legitimate medical purpose, and Mike Gowder was found guilty on 75 counts of aiding and abetting those charges.

At the same time, the jury convicted Mike Gowder of 27 counts of acquiring controlled substances by fraud, and jurors found Heaton guilty of aiding and abetting those 27 counts.

Additionally, Heaton was found guilty on 27 counts of dispensing prescriptions without a legitimate medical purpose to two other patients.

All told, Gowder will be sentenced based on 102 counts against him, and Heaton is facing sentencing on a 129-

count conviction.

Originally confronted with dozens of federal charges as a co-defendant in the case, David Gowder pleaded guilty before Judge Story in March 2019 to a single count of prescribing oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose.

His single count comes with a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison and a fine of up to \$1 million, though Assistant U.S. Attorney William McKinnon said last year the prosecution may recommend a downward adjustment of that sentence.

David Gowder was first arrested for prescription fraud in April 2015 in Fannin County. He was arrested

again in February 2016 by the Union County Sheriff's Office, as were Mike Gowder and James Heaton, in connection with other prescription drug charges.

Regarding the state's outstanding charges against the three men, which were brought prior to the April 2018 federal indictment, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said he would make a decision about moving forward with local charges after the federal sentencing.

The Gowders and Heaton initially pleaded not guilty to both their state and federal charges, and all three men have remained free on bond while awaiting sentencing.

Relay For Life...from Page 1A

toward the advancements and looking forward to the year."

Added McGraw, "Our main goal for this year is to keep the focus on the fight against cancer, because we are going into our 26th year. Some folks are getting older and some folks get tired, just like with any organization, but cancer is still on the forefront of most everybody's families, their issues with workplace absences and those kinds of things."

Recent innovations in cancer treatments have helped increase the life expectancy of many cancer patients, thanks in large part to the fundraising efforts of local groups like Union County Relay For Life. "We have had wonderful

advancements in the last few years, and people are living longer and living better," McGraw said. "I think the biggest thing for us is to encourage our survivors and support them with what they had to go through, because it takes a lot out of them.

"We are just going to keep on supporting them, and the most important thing is that we have more survivors. Sometimes, quality of life is still suffering because of complications and things like that, but we want folks to be able to celebrate and celebrate their lives together.

"Some of the communities around us have dropped it, but our cancer

centers in Blairsville have become a kind of focal point for many families because it is more convenient for them."

Community support for Relay has helped the group with its goals, with the organization experiencing continued donations and support year after year.

"It amazes me that all of these years, as economically disadvantaged as our community technically is, when you start looking at U.S. government and that kind of stuff, how much support and help we get from the community," McGraw said. "We are just tickled that people want to be there and they want to join the fight."

Mia Crowe, who heads up Union County Relay For Life, said she's never disappointed with the level of participation she sees every year in Union County, despite some low points during the Great Recession.

"The money, of course, went down in bad times, but we are definitely increasing the money raised now that we use to help fight for the cure to cancer and help these survivors by supporting them with the community," Crowe said. "It's a really good thing that we have right now, and we keep getting new support every year."

Diaz...from Page 1A

direction, and Cox noted their continued suspicious behavior inside the car, Dyer said.

The vehicle, a silver Infiniti, did not match the description of the vehicle they were looking for – a Hyundai – but Cox decided to pull the car over based on her observations of suspicious activity, Dyer said.

"She conducted the traffic stop up on Russell Scenic Highway and Ford Mountain Road," Dyer said. "When she ran the driver's license and dispatch came back with the last name Diaz, I asked dispatch about the first name. They came back and said Reny, and we all went en route to her from town."

The traffic stop occurred several miles outside Blairsville, though Cox was able to secure the men in their vehicle until help could arrive.

"We took him into custody without incident. Now, we're just waiting on Florida to come pick him up," Dyer said, noting that Diaz had been transported to Union County Jail to await extradition.

Thomas Richard Nickerson, 21, of Murphy, North Carolina, was the driver of the silver Infiniti, and he was also arrested at the scene and charged with failure to maintain insurance and driving with an expired tag, Dyer said.

The connection between Nickerson and Diaz was unknown at press time, as were details of Diaz' alleged crime of armed robbery in Florida.

Retired Firefighters Breakfast

The Retired Firefighters Breakfast is held the first Friday of each month, 9 a.m. at Skillet Cafe, Blairsville, GA.



Union County Primary School

Parent Sight Word

Workshop

January 27, 2020

7:30 a.m.- 8 a.m

Learn several ways to make sight word practice with your child fun and enjoyable.