

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Target range secures 90% federal grant funding

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Union County Sheriff Mack Mason is excited to announce that the Georgia Department of Natural Resources has committed to providing 90% of the funding necessary to build the Union County Target Range off Georgia 180.

The state had previously committed to funding 75% with a 25% local match. A couple of years ago, site plan designers for the range initially estimated it would take about \$2.4 million to build, so Union County Government budgeted \$600,000, or 25%, toward the project.

But materials and other

costs have risen dramatically over the course of the pandemic, creating an untenable situation when the best bid submitted last fall came in at \$3.2 million, putting the local match at \$800,000 for a \$200,000 budget overrun.

Now that DNR has increased the funding, the county will be rebidding the project starting next month, with a goal of having a bid returned and accepted within a 90-day timetable for construction to take place this year.

With its new 10% match amount, the county is virtually guaranteed to stay well under its originally budgeted \$600,000 figure — maybe even only half of that — and the project may yet acquire additional funding through the state and other

sources like shooting sports foundations.

Federal grants for projects like the target range are made available via the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, which enables the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to appropriate funds from excise taxes on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment.

In May 2019, then-President Donald Trump signed into law the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act, upgrading the level of federal grant funding available for such projects from 75% to 90%.

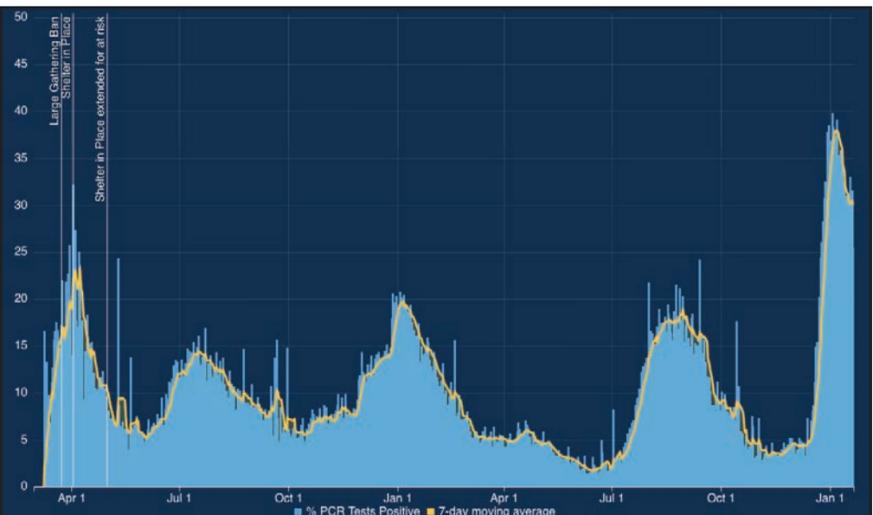
Despite the passing of this new law, progress stalled in securing the 90% funding for the local range project.

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Last week, Sheriff Mack Mason met with Jim Marchman of the Commissioner's Office, State Sen. Steve Gooch, State Rep. Stan Gunter and Chamber President Steve Rowe at the Community Center to look over plans for the Union County Target Range. Photo/Submitted

Local challenges linger as COVID declines in state



A snapshot of percent positivity among Georgia residents tested for COVID-19 over the course of the pandemic shows a marked statewide decline currently. Graph taken from <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>.

By Shawn Jarrard
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Signs are emerging that the current surge of COVID-19 driven by the omicron variant may be abating, as Georgia and

other states in the nation have begun to experience a rapid decline in positivity.

After more than doubling the previous pandemic record for new cases reported in a single day in the first week of January, the statewide seven-

day moving average of newly reported cases has fallen by several thousand over the last couple of weeks.

And while the North Georgia Mountains are facing continued challenges with

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Paris cancels meeting after attendees refuse to mask

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris called off his Jan. 18 regular meeting before it even began after a brief standoff with several members of the public who refused to comply with the judicial mask mandate at the Union County Courthouse.

Citing the "rapid increase in the number of COVID cases and the variants thereof" in the current coronavirus surge, Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Chief Judge Raymond George ordered Jan. 12 that anyone entering the courthouse "must wear a face covering/mask."

The judicial order was posted to the courthouse door, and deputies securing the entrance informed people that they were required to wear masks that evening.

Despite these instructions, half of the dozen or so members of the public were not wearing



Lamar Paris
Sole Commissioner

masks at the scheduled meeting time of 6 p.m., which caused an apparent delay to the start of the meeting as Paris and his staff worked out how to proceed.

Opting not to seek law enforcement removal

of individuals violating the mandate, Paris addressed those gathered about 10 minutes later, citing the judicial order before announcing he would cancel the meeting unless the

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Icy conditions sent motorists into ditches last week

By Shawn Jarrard
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The past week or so has been a bad one for driving conditions, as precipitation moved through the area a couple times last week to create icy roadways that landed multiple motorists in ditches around the county.

This occurred over several days following the Jan. 16 winter storm that saw subfreezing temperatures continue through the next day Monday and into Tuesday morning, with re-freezing causing icy conditions to persist the morning of Wednesday, Jan. 19.

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The area of Georgia 325 was particularly icy Friday morning, causing at least four vehicles to slide off the roadway. Photo/Submitted

Myers, 98, creates beautiful artwork in the mountains

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Blairsville is no stranger to artists, and the mountains of North Georgia have inspired the imaginations of many creative minds. Such is the case also with Betty Myers, the 98-year-old acrylic painter who lives just off Jones Creek.

Myers is somewhat of a local phenomenon, with many of her work having been shared on social media and purchased in the community. She did not become an artist until later in life, after she arrived in the area, but she has taken to the hobby like paint to a canvas.

And while she may not have been born in the

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Local artist Betty Myers poses with her cat Molly for a picture during an interview with the North Georgia News last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

School Board talks COVID, applauds early graduating seniors

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The winter storm from Sunday, Jan. 16, dropped a couple inches of snow in the county and resulted in prolonged icy road conditions due to subfreezing temperatures at the beginning of last week, causing Union County Schools to go virtual Tuesday, Jan. 18, and Wednesday, Jan. 19.

Fortunately, students didn't have to miss class for snow that Monday, which was a federal holiday in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

But road conditions were still bad in many places by the time of last week's regular Union County Board of Education meeting, so the Board Office decided to hold a hybrid virtual/in-person session on Jan. 18.

"We didn't want to make anybody come out tonight, but we also didn't want to exclude anyone who might not have gotten notification, so we did open the board room up," Superintendent John Hill said at the Board Office that Tuesday, with School Board members participating via Zoom.

Also attending in person,

Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Murphy presented the latest COVID-19 statistics for the school system.

"Currently, we are doing pretty well," Murphy said. "We had gotten up late last week to about 90 positives across the district and approximately 140 quarantines. We are about half of that now, so I think it's about 47 positives and 74 quarantines."

In other business, School Board members did some beginning-of-the-year housekeeping, selecting from among themselves officers to

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Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill and Assistant Superintendent David Murphy hosted the in-person aspect of last week's Board of Education meeting, with board members attending via Zoom. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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Target Range...from Page 1A

which to that point had only been approved at the 75% level, with Georgia DNR acting as the passthrough agency for the federal grant monies.

At the request of Sheriff Mason on Friday, District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch reached out to Georgia DNR Deputy Commissioner Walter Rabon, who subsequently agreed to apply the full 90% funding for which the range is eligible.

"As State Senator for Union County, I am proud to help get the funding appropriated for this worthwhile project," Gooch said. "This gun range will be a state-of-the-art facility that both the residents of Union County and surrounding communities will gain experience and training in firearm safety.

"I am especially excited that our youth will benefit from the opportunity to respect guns. I applaud Commissioner Lamar Paris and Sheriff Mack Mason for their determination and patience in pursuing these funds to bring this recreational opportunity to the mountains of North Georgia."

Range operations will be delegated to the members of the Union County Gun Club, with access to be granted to the general public during yet-to-be-determined days and hours each week.

The Gun Club is a fee membership organization consisting of passionate local gun owners who formed the club on July 10, 2017, in an informal meeting held at the request of Sheriff Mason.

It has been a long road for the dedicated group, including countless hours planning for the range and speaking with elected and other government officials.

As the unofficial spokesperson for the club, Sheriff Mason has spent the last several years acting as a political liaison trying to make the range a reality, and he is grateful to the Gun Club Board and the group's many members for their patience and willingness to carry out the project.

"Once I found out during a computer search that Pittman-Robertson had been amended to allow for 90% funding on projects instead of 75%, I was bound and determined to get this additional money," Sheriff Mason said. "Sen. Gooch made that happen on Friday. Thank you, Sen. Gooch!"

When Sheriff Mason

first asked people to join the club in pursuit of a local target range nearly five years ago, he told those gathered that "this wouldn't happen overnight"; indeed, it was a leap of faith for everyone involved.

"The Gun Club Board Members and I are very appreciative of the fact that these people have stuck with us," Mason said.

Currently, the Gun Club has 295 members whose dues are paid up to date, plus 65 members who have not yet paid for this year but have been constant supporters to this point and are expected to renew. That's more than 350 total members who have helped to make the range happen.

And due to the generosity, patience and confidence of its membership, the club has been able to raise \$62,000 to assist in the administration of the range once it is fully operational.

Union County has never had a dedicated target range for residents to practice shooting, so gun owners have had to either shoot on their own property or travel to another community to shoot at a non-local range.

And with the target

range, local law enforcement will no longer have to rely on private property owners donating the use of their land for important shooting practice, as the state requires Peace Officers to requalify with their duty weapons annually.

Prior to this funding announcement, the most crucial step in the process occurred in November 2019 when the U.S. Forest Service agreed to issue a special use permit to the county to build the range on a 14-acre piece of public land off SR 180 between mile markers 18 and 19.

In more good news for the project, the county has received the permit from the Georgia Department of Transportation to install the entry driveway from SR 180 into the proposed target range, as more and more pieces continue to fall into place.

Assisting in making such progress possible has been a steering committee of stakeholders for the range, including representatives from Union County Government, Georgia DNR, the U.S. Forest Service and others. This committee will meet for further discussions on Jan. 28.

Local COVID...from Page 1A

the latest surge, as cases are still piling up locally, Metro Atlanta has been experiencing big drops in positivity in recent weeks, and this area is likely only a week or two behind that trend.

"I think it's still too early to say (if we're headed in the right direction), but it is very encouraging to see the state numbers starting to decline," said Union General Health System Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett.

Other positive conclusions may be drawn from the current surge, which does not seem to be resulting in the same level of severe illness as witnessed in previous surges, especially compared to the fall delta wave.

Though there are "some very sick people and we still have folks that are dying," Barnett said the average length of hospital stay for local COVID inpatients has been shorter than in previous surges, resulting in a smaller number of people needing hospitalization at any given time.

As of Friday morning, Union General had 24 people admitted specifically for COVID. This was down from the current surge record of 25 inpatients, established the previous weekend. Comparatively speaking, this is less than half of the record admissions during delta.

That does not necessarily mean fewer people will have required hospitalization by the end of this surge, as many people are still being admitted; they are just being discharged at an overall faster rate than before, translating to a lower upper bound for the daily hospital census.

"We've had pretty much 20-25 (average daily inpatients) for January," Barnett said. "You have to put that into context, because you're comparing it to the previous two major surges that we've had, but that is a good thing for us.

"Twenty-five is still a lot of COVID patients to have in our hospital, but it's better than (the previous surge records of) 34 or 56.

"It's still been very stressful on the hospital and on the staff because we're really busy anyway and dealing with these patients on top of having a high census with other routine things (at 50 inpatients Friday for our 45-bed hospital).

"We have our usual OB population. We have lots of orthopedic - fractured hips -

and there are just some regular pneumonias out there; there are a lot of respiratory viruses going around that are not COVID. There's no flu admitted right now, but we have admitted some flu."

Most people being admitted for COVID continue to skew toward the elderly, but it is not unheard of for people in their 40s and 50s to require hospitalization. And for the first time during this surge, all five of the hospital's ICU beds were occupied by COVID patients on Friday.

In terms of mortality, the Health System is about a month and a half into the current surge, and by press time, 12 people from around the region had died of COVID at Union General Hospital.

For context, between the 2020-21 winter surge and delta last summer/fall, the Health System only saw three COVID deaths, yet 36 people died locally over the last winter surge and 51 people died during the delta surge that lasted nearly three months.

Of course, Barnett realizes the ongoing nature of the current surge means the situation could worsen at any time, but she reiterated last week that there definitely appears to be differences in how the present surge is playing out.

"I don't want to minimize what it is, but it is less dramatic in that we have managed to not have to open additional units so far," Barnett said. "We have one ready because we've been so close a couple of times, but we have not occupied another unit with COVID patients like we have the past two surges."

COVID-related emergency room visits are high, but presently, more people visiting the ER for COVID infections are being discharged compared with the past two surges, which is another indication that the level of illness associated with this surge is less severe overall.

The trend of unvaccinated patients requiring hospitalization in larger numbers continues to hold true to date, with about 75%-80% of local COVID inpatients having not received one of the three approved vaccines.

This is down from the greater than 90% of inpatients being unvaccinated during the delta surge, likely due to the more infectious omicron variant that has shown to be less susceptible to vaccine immunity,

though vaccination still appears to provide protection against severe illness.

Omicron is the current dominant strain in circulation, though undoubtedly delta is still making the rounds, just to a lesser extent. And while many medical experts believe the latest variant causes less severe illness, it continues to result in infections in the community.

"Our clinics are really busy with outpatient visits for COVID," Barnett said. "So, there are a lot of people who are sick with COVID, but not as many who are requiring hospitalization."

Fortunately, elective procedures are still being conducted at the Health System, pending room availability.

And as for the Union County and Chatuge Regional nursing homes, residents there are highly vaccinated and continue to do well during this surge, though many suffered major illness and loss of life during the first year of the pandemic before vaccines were available.

COVID vaccines can be readily found at the Health Departments, Synergy Health of Hiawassee, and local pharmacies.

Rapid testing is also available at area pharmacies, and free PCR testing is available Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. via the state-run drive-thru site at Union General Hospital in Blairsville.

The drive-thru testing site is utilizing a new company "and now offers a guaranteed two-day turnaround on COVID-19 test results," according to a recent Union General Hospital Facebook post.

"You now register in person - no more pre-registration offered," the post continues. "Therefore, you will need to have a phone with internet access to be able to register in person.

"The new kits are self-administered swab kits. You will drive up, get in line, register, and will be given a swab kit. You will then swab yourself, seal the kit and turn it in.

"No doctor's order required; no appointment time needed; (and) testing results are guaranteed within two days via email or text message."

For more information on the state of COVID in Georgia and its individual counties, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report>.

David W. Payne Camp 1633 introduces 2022 Camp Officers



At the annual Lee-Jackson dinner held January 15th at the Union County Community Center, David W. Payne Camp 1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, introduced its 2022 officers: (L-R): Chaplain John Fusco; Commander Mike Pettus; Lieut.-Commander Jacob Barnes; and Treasurer Pete White. Adjutant Jessie Pinson was unable to attend.

Canceled Meeting...from Page 1A

attendees in question donned masks or left voluntarily.

"What we're going to do tonight - there's about half a dozen here, I guess, that do not have a face covering," Paris said. "We're going to ask you to put one on. If you don't want to put one on and you're not going to put one on, we're going to cancel the meeting right now."

Continuing, "COVID is rampant right now in the community, in the hospital, and in this courthouse. We got three employees today that tested positive that have been in this courthouse, and there's going to be more."

"So, if you care about these other people that took the time to come here and are wearing a mask, then you will either put a mask on or we will cancel the meeting and close it right now. So, it's up to the people that do not have a mask on."

Four people who were not wearing masks prior to Paris' ultimatum proceeded to put their masks on, but three residents continued to go maskless.

"I have health reasons that I can't wear one," said Alexis Moore, a resident who has been vocally critical of Paris and his office in recent county meetings; Moore was ejected by Paris from last month's meeting during an argument between the two.

"I'm sorry, that's not—" started Paris, as Moore asked him to tell her the law stipulating that she "cannot attend my county meeting ... because for me, (wearing a mask) creates a cascade of health problems."

Paris responded that he had communicated the rules regarding the standing mask order, "and that's what the rules are."

"We're not going to throw anybody out," Paris said, "but my suggestion to you, if you care about the rest of these people, you will go on out and find out from them what happened at the meeting if you don't think you can come without wearing a mask."

"But if you don't agree with that, then we're all going to leave and cancel this meeting on your back and on the backs of others that don't want to do what we think is right. Too many people have got COVID to be letting different people

come in here and possibly infect other people.

"We started to cancel the whole meeting tonight (anyway), and we thought, well, nobody's going to come in here and not wear a mask when the judge has ordered it. But we're finding out different. So, it's y'all's choice."

Moore continued to make her case, however, saying, "What is the law? We're just asking what law are we breaking if we don't do it?"

Paris once again referenced the judicial order calling for masking inside the courthouse: "I just read it to you, it's on the board (in the courthouse), it's on the window, here's a copy of it. I don't question the judge."

"We're either going to do the meeting or we're not," Paris continued. "So, if those people that don't have a mask on want to get up and leave, we'll go ahead with the meeting. And if you don't, we're going to cancel the whole meeting right now. We've got 15 seconds - y'all decide what you're going to do."

Moore insisted she was not sick and that wearing a mask "would physically cause me health problems as a single mom. But you implying that I don't care about other people - that means you don't care about me."

"If you cared about the other people in this room," Paris said, "you would be walking out that door and get the information from them instead of trying to make a stand."

She responded that she was not trying to make a stand but was in attendance as a citizen and had every right to be there, but at that point, Paris had heard enough.

"I apologize to the rest of y'all for having to get out and come to the meeting, but at this time, we're going to cancel the county meeting," Paris said.

Two days after the scrapped meeting, Judge George sent a letter clarifying the judicial order to Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, who is ordered by law to secure the courthouse. Copied on the letter were other elected officials who have offices in the courthouse.

"As we discussed on the telephone yesterday, the mask/social distancing order that was

issued requires EVERYONE entering the Union County Courthouse building to wear a face covering/mask anytime they are in a public area of the courthouse," the letter reads. "This order includes ALL employees, visitors, attorneys, case parties, vendors - EVERYONE!"

"Anyone attempting to enter the courthouse building without a mask will be denied entry - NO exceptions. There will be NO exception made as to the purpose of their entry, whether that be public or private meeting, judicial, administrative or social meeting."

"This order applies to the Union County Courthouse regardless of the time of entry, no restrictions. It is NOT exclusive to the normal business hours of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday thru Friday."

"Should anyone be in a public area without a face covering/mask, they shall be asked to replace it. If they fail to comply, they shall be removed from the building forthwith. Hopefully this will clarify any questions that you or your officers may have regarding the order."

The judge declined to comment on an inquiry from the newspaper regarding whether his order allows for medical exemptions against masking, though his letter to the sheriff clearly states, "NO exceptions."

Multiple local judicial orders have been issued during the pandemic pertaining to COVID restrictions, including past mask mandates. The Jan. 12 order was originally scheduled to expire after Jan. 31 but was updated Jan. 20 to extend masking and social distancing through Feb. 28.

The canceled county meeting has been rescheduled for Monday, Jan. 31, at 6 p.m. in the courthouse, and unless the order is lifted, everyone in attendance will be required to wear a mask inside the building - that is, if they want to remain in the courthouse.

In the upcoming meeting, Paris will be accepting several agreements for services, and he will also be holding a SPLOST presentation which he believes will clear up misconceptions by some members of the public about how his office has administered SPLOST funds in Union County.

School Board...from Page 1A

lead the board during meetings. They elected to keep Tony Hunter and Patrick White in their positions as Chair and Vice Chair respectively.

One of the most important items on the agenda, in Hill's opinion, was the discussion of the "Student Petition for Early Graduation." This is a list of students who, through exemplary performance with opportunities for career advancement or an interest in military involvement, will earn their diplomas early.

This year, the 18 students meeting early graduation requirements will have the choice of either attending an in-house graduation or joining their class in walking across the traditional commencement stage.

These students are Dalton Allen, Adrian Breedlove, Autumn Butler, Ivre Cantrell, Gage Conley, Logan Disser, Landen Grey, Charles Hughes, Roger Hunter, Madison Ingram, Samantha Jones, Alice Kirby, Alex Michael-Joseph Lane, Laura McGaha, Kevin Mullins, Emma Pandolph, Julian Santos and Jeremiah Whitworth.

"We're really proud of these kids, first of all, because they've exhibited work ethic, dedication, and drive to be successful young adults," Hill said.

Next up, Hill talked about a recent Education SPLOST V purchase of a four-beamed

heavy equipment lift with customizable dimensions that can fit a variety of vehicles for maintenance purposes.

Board staff ordered the lift from Snap-On in August and received it in November for a cost of \$41,877.87. It will be used at the new larger Operations Facility on Beasley Circle, which is where the schools will be moving maintenance and transportation operations by the end of the summer, primarily to account for a greater need for space.

The four posts on the lift work in unison via Bluetooth, Hill said, noting that it can be used for maintenance on different-sized vehicles, "so you can pick up a tractor, you can pick up your backhoe, you can pick up a school bus - even a semitruck."

Such lifts make it easier for mechanics to work on vehicles, ensuring quicker and more frequent safety checks, which Hill said will save money in the long run

and provide a more secure method of transportation for students.

Additionally, the heavy equipment lift will eliminate the need for potentially unsafe oil pits like the one at the current facility on Hughes Street. The new facility, which used to be a privately-owned metal shop, has gotten new insulated panel doors but requires more work before it is operational.

In his Superintendent's Update, Hill said that Union County Middle School had been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Georgia Department of Education for its art program. The money will be used to purchase a kiln and provide students with more creative outlets and an opportunity to practice clay sculpture and ceramics.

Members of the Union County Board of Education meet on the third Tuesday of each month starting with a work session at 6 p.m. inside the Board Office.

PTO Strawberry Fundraiser

The Blairsville PTO is having their 2nd Annual Strawberry Fundraiser. One Flat of 8 (1)lb. containers is \$25; 1/2 flat of strawberries is \$12.50. The strawberries will be delivered when they are ripe in March. You may place your

order by mailing your check to P.O. Box 1476 Blairsville, GA. 30512, emailing mmckechnie64@gmail.com or calling Michelle at 770-503-4094. Thank you for supporting your local Blairsville Parent/Teacher Organization. NJan26,23CA

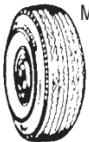
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Myers...from Page 1A



A portrait of Betty Bateman (Myers) in her youth.

Photo/Submitted

mountains, Myers believes her soul was drawn to this place, which is why, nearly two decades ago, she "got smart and came up here" from Clearwater, Florida.

She began her life in Chicago. When she was just 6 years old, her father, a construction worker, was killed in an accident on the job. Because her mother had to work full-time to make ends meet, she was sent to live temporarily with her grandmother, who happened to be the wife of English Titanic victim and Methodist Minister Robert James Bateman.

But before too long, she had to move again.

"My mother inherited some property in Florida, and we went down there and was down there most of the time," Myers said.

A little over two decades ago, the then-septuagenarian received an invite from her children and in-laws to visit them at the Hiwassee Hideaway, where they were camping.

When Myers reached her destination, she thought she had "died and went to Heaven" because of trees that turned gold in the fall and the 19th-century barns that remained standing over a hundred years after their construction.

Not only that, but Myers found the mountains to have the "perfect climate" compared to Florida's heat, and she enjoyed

that it was not too crowded. She knew immediately that she wanted to live here, so she did.

Since moving to Blairsville, Myers has been painting. Her daughter, also a painter, inspired her to pursue the hobby. Despite the casual start, she had the idea to try selling her work at the Farmers Market, and she was pleasantly surprised to find a marked interest in her paintings there.

Her nature scenes were a hit at the Farmers Market, and Commissioner Lamar Paris even hung one outside his office, with many of her pieces also being featured in the newly opened Positive Pathways nonprofit Recovery Community Organization offices near the Union County Library.

"The more I painted, the more I wanted to try this, try that," Myers explained, saying that her own hobby more or less ran away with her.

Acrylic paints are Myers' medium of choice, as she tried pouring art and found it was too messy for her tastes. Right beside the living room is her workspace, where she keeps a cupboard of supplies including photos for inspiration.

"I'm inspired by these artists and these photographers," she said. "I've got an iPad in there that I'm forever looking on for gorgeous photography and what not that I like to see. I mean, some of these photos are just incredible."

Using steady brush strokes and blended colors, Myers often recreates photographs from postcards or images she finds online. When she was able to get out more, she took pictures of some of Union County's most prominent features like Meeks Park and the remains of the first cabin built here, taking them home to use as references.

On the subject of her home, it is a work of art in its own right. The satellite dish has been decorated with a painting of a sunflower, and on nearly every wall is a photo of family, friends, pets, or art that she has created with her own hands.

And the view from her cabin is phenomenal, with

windows surrounding the dining room offering a glimpse into the forest outside. The deck, covered in snow this time of year, is decorated with flowers in the spring. Currently, she keeps a floral arrangement on the coffee table and has in fact transferred the basket of false yellow daisies onto a canvas.

Her biggest muse, however, has been Katie, a 15-year-old Pomeranian whom Myers cared for since finding her as a puppy at a flea market. Around her home, she keeps a collection of photos and paintings of the dog through various stages of her life up until her passing last year. Beside her workspace, she hosts a memorial cabinet so Katie can still give her blessing to each painting.

"She used to like to sit by that window, so I put her memorial there. She was a good little girl," Myers said emotionally. The house, she noted, is much quieter without a dog.

Unfortunately, Katie's passing isn't the only disappointment that Myers has been forced to cope with lately.

Her vision isn't the best these days, and as a result, she has been forced to give up her driver's license. This means she can't go out as much as she'd like, and although she needed a break from the Farmers Market the last time she sold her work, she said she would go back out if she could.

"I'm trying to stay busy all the time; that's why I'm doing so much painting," she said. "I gave it up a couple of years ago because I used to be at the Farmers Market. I sold some paintings down there, but then it just wasn't feeling quite right, you know?"

"And I just sold everything, and then I got so bored that I picked it up again and started. I just have to be busy - I'm not one that just sits around."

Despite the recent hardships, Myers has persevered. When she was ready, she made a trip to the Humane Society and adopted a tailless Manx cat. Molly is as colorful as some of Myers' paintings, with streaks



Betty Myers has gained local renown for her lovingly crafted acrylic nature paintings.

Photo/Submitted

of orange, brown and gray standing out above her white socks. A cat is vastly different than a dog, but Molly provides friendship all the same.

"I'm just a little old lady that paints," Myers humbly said of herself and her work, stroking Molly's back after the cat decided to take up residence in her lap. And to many in the Blairsville-Union County

community, she is that and so much more.

People can find examples of Betty Myers' artwork on her Facebook page, which features posts by her son Harvey, who is

immensely proud of his mother and the attention her work has drawn in the North Georgia Mountains.

Unrelated to her art, Myers was honored in recent years

with a red-carpet rollout during a visit to the Titanic Museum in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, thanks to her grandfather's heroic involvement.

There, she was reunited with his bible, which Rev. Bateman had handed to his sister-in-law before giving up his space in a lifeboat to minister to the passengers and crew trapped aboard the Titanic.

Icy Roads...from Page 1A

Union County Schools held classes virtually that Tuesday and Wednesday because of ice, and it rained the evening of Thursday, Jan. 20, surprising quite a few residents on a chilly Friday morning, with eight vehicles sliding off roadways.

Four accidents occurred in the area of Georgia 325 Friday, and there was one on old Blue Ridge Highway, one on Tate Road, another on Georgia 515 East, and one on Moccasin Road.

Then on Saturday, Jan. 22, a motorist slid on a surface of black ice that had formed atop Georgia 180, sending them skidding into a tree and causing extensive damage to their vehicle.

Agencies that typically respond to such accidents are the Sheriff's Office, Fire Department, Union General EMS, Road Department, Blairsville Police if inside city limits, and Georgia State Patrol. Fortunately, none of the icy road incidents last week resulted in significant injuries.

During bad winter weather, the Union County Road Department and Georgia Department of Transportation team up to treat county and state roadways. Even with treatment, roads cannot be scraped for ice, and driving conditions always depend on type of precipitation and re-freezing.

Residents are generally advised to stay aware of the weather and increased potential for black ice for the remainder of winter. In icy conditions, it is best to stay home until roads are safe enough to resume travel.

People who do decide to venture outside their homes in winter weather can make use of the following travel safety tips by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Driving safely in winter weather can be a challenge for even the most experienced driver," according to the NHTSA. "It's easy to forget after months of mild conditions that snow and ice demand careful driving and special preparation for your vehicle."

"But when 17% of all vehicle crashes occur during winter conditions, it's clear that we could all use a refresher when it comes to making our way through a winter wonderland."

The NHTSA offers a variety of safety suggestions, including getting ready for winter weather "before you even get on the road."

"Regular tune-ups and maintenance are the starting point for safe driving year-



This vehicle sustained quite a bit of damage early Saturday morning after sliding on black ice covering Georgia 180.

Photo/Facebook



Slippery road conditions were widespread across the county on Friday after some precipitation the night before left a nasty surprise for drivers that morning.

Photo/Submitted

round," per the NHTSA. "In winter, pay special attention to your vehicle's battery, wipers, coolant, tires and other systems that can take a beating when the temperature drops."

Continuing, "When you know your vehicle is ready for the road, clear your car of snow, ice or dirt from the windows, forward sensors, headlights, tail lights and backup camera."

"Drive slowly. It's harder to control or stop your vehicle on a slick or snow-covered road. Increase your following distance enough so that you'll have plenty of time to stop for vehicles ahead of you."

"Also remember that every vehicle handles differently; this is particularly true when driving on wet, icy or snowy roads. Take the time to learn how it handles under winter weather driving conditions."

"Before heading out, know the weather and traffic conditions, and plan your route

accordingly. Give yourself more time to get where you're going because you'll be driving more slowly in inclement weather."

Additionally, the administration urges people to always be prepared for an emergency with supplies, just in case.

"Even if you and your vehicle are prepared, crashes happen," per the NHTSA. "Vehicles break down. Any of us can get caught out in the elements, and help might not be just around the corner."

"Make sure your vehicle is stocked to help get you out of trouble or to keep you safe until help arrives. Keep blankets, flashlights, jumper cables, and flares or emergency lights in your vehicle. Even if you don't need them, they can be used to help someone else in need on the road."

For more information, visit <https://www.nhtsa.gov/winter-driving-safety>.