

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Jones, 19, dies after crash; traffic light petition started

By Shawn Jarrard
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A young Morganton woman's life was cut short Jan. 22 when she succumbed to injuries sustained 10 days earlier in a car wreck at Georgia 515 and SR 325.

Sydney Grace Jones, 19, was in the front passenger seat of a vehicle that turned left from 515 toward 325 and into oncoming traffic, resulting in a T-bone accident and life-threatening injuries for two of the vehicle's three occupants.

Jones and the right rear passenger, Campbell Consentino, 18, of Blue Ridge, were both life-flighted to nearby Northeast Georgia Medical Center on Jan. 12, where Jones later passed

away. Consentino is currently working hard to recover from his injuries, and people can follow his progress at <https://www.caringbridge.org/visit/campbellconsentino>.

The 18-year-old driver received less severe injuries and has been discharged from his hospital stay. Georgia State Patrol has listed this individual as being suspected at fault in the accident, and since the investigation is still ongoing, GSP said it's too early to know if charges will be filed.

Following the crash, local mom Kim Mayfield began speaking out about the dangers of the intersection where the accident occurred, calling on people to join the roughly 7,000

others and counting who have signed a petition to install a traffic light at 515 and 325.

The petition can be found at www.change.org/p/northeast-georgia-community-traffic-signal-for-intersection-at-hwy-515-325-union-county.

Mayfield lives in nearby Thirteen Hundred on Lake Nottely, where the teens were headed to help assemble outdoor play equipment; Jones had become close with the Mayfields after coming on board as the family babysitter two years ago, and she managed Mayfield's Blue Ridge shop, Lavender's Blue Boutique.

Sadly, Jones and her friends never made it to her home that Tuesday, and now Mayfield



Sydney Grace Jones is hoping to turn the tragedy into an opportunity to potentially save lives.

"In light of this tragic accident and many others that have happened at this intersection, we strongly urge you to support this petition to have a traffic signal installed at the Hwy 515/76 and Hwy 325 intersection immediately!" the petition reads.

With the help of friend Jeanne Mills, who also set up the petition, Mayfield has reached out to several agencies about the intersection, including the Georgia Department of Transportation, which she said was not receptive to the idea of a traffic signal there.

Still, Mayfield is hopeful that the petition can garner enough grassroots support to persuade the powers that be to

take another look at the necessity of a light at that intersection, which has seen several wrecks and near misses over the years.

"Our kids go to (Mountain Area Christian Academy), we live in Thirteen Hundred – we go through that intersection every single day," Mayfield, a local realtor, said. "In my profession, I'm in my car all day, so I drive through it multiple times a day."

"And I know that there's teenagers that drive through it every day, families with their kids going to school. Highway 325 is a pretty major road, and if we could get a light there, I think it could save lives and prevent a lot of accidents."

Mayfield is already
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Shooting survivor speaks out, thanks community for help

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation & Wellness Center in Hiawassee was the scene of a nightmare last week, as Charles Jason Matheson reportedly walked into the facility and started firing a 9 mm handgun, according to the Hiawassee Police Department.

Matheson's target? His estranged wife Crystal Matheson, who works there as a rehab technician. In what should have been a normal day on the job, at around 2:15 p.m. on Jan. 26, Crystal found herself being shot eight times at her workplace, after which Matheson fled in his pickup truck.

Fortunately, two experienced nurses employed in the same facility immediately

came to Crystal's aid, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said, and she subsequently made it through emergency surgery and was on a road to recovery by press time.

"I have been overwhelmed by the love that has been directed my way," Crystal said Saturday, addressing supporters on Facebook. "I am blessed beyond measure in the simplest way I know to put it. I have felt your prayers, and please keep them coming, because I need them."

At the time of the shooting, Crystal had been issued a Domestic Violence Protection Order against her husband, who has been charged with felony aggravated stalking for violating that order.

Additionally, Matheson, 41, has been charged with aggravated assault and criminal attempt to commit murder, both



Crystal Matheson
Photo/Facebook

felonies, with other charges likely once the Georgia Bureau of Investigation turns its case over to the Etowah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution.

The shooting sparked a multi-agency manhunt
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Castoff microchips nearly 100 community pets for free

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Castoff Pet Rescue Thrift Store off Cobalt Street in Blairsville hosted a free pet microchip and tag event Saturday, enabling community members to better protect their animals should they run away or go missing.

Three community donors made possible the event, which featured around 100 animals and their grateful owners taking advantage of the opportunity.

"It was a personal dream for me," Castoff Thrift Store Manager Walter Hoth said. "I see so many cats and dogs lost around here. Three years ago, I talked to Castoff, and we offered the first microchip event for free at Meeks Park. The second year, we did it in partnership with Nottely



Castoff Pet Rescue volunteer Jeanne Strack microchips Derek Richards' lovable pooch Cash at the Safe Pet Project community event Jan. 30.
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Oaks. "Since we opened the Thrift Store, we had an opportunity to offer with low cost. We normally do this on
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City Council, DDA resume paved parking, bathrooms talks

By Shawn Jarrard
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The City of Blairsville and Downtown Development Authority decided in a joint meeting at City Hall last week to resume work in earnest on the long-promised paved parking and public bathroom area off Bob Head Street.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and City Council members met with DDA Board members Jan. 26 to decide how best to proceed, choosing as a next step to approach Jason Henson of Blue Ridge Mountain Surveying to draft engineering and design plans for their consideration.

Those in the meeting had hoped to see meaningful movement on the project last year, especially after the successful sale of the Haralson Property
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DDA Board Member Robert Rogers will be working with Surveyor Jason Henson to draw up plans for paved parking and bathrooms behind City Hall. In background: Blairsville Police Officer Seth Dyer.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Ninth District Opportunity assists with lodging, utilities



By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Ninth District Opportunity is anticipating funding coming available in March to help families that may be struggling with rent or utilities.

Ann Sullivan with Ninth District of Union County is grateful for all the support the food pantry enjoys thanks to

efforts by the community and various programs. Sullivan can be reached at 706-745-6596.

"It is the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program," Sullivan said. "Things are going well at the pantry. My pantry has been blessed with donations and with food, but people have gotten a lot of money from food stamps, so they haven't been using us like usual."

"We have not seen a lot of our senior citizens because they are all scared of this COVID stuff. We are here, though, and have programs and things that people can do here to help them out."

Such opportunities as the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program are meant for people to take advantage of and utilize when they find themselves in tight spots financially.

"We can either use it to pay on rent that is past due or past due electric bills, or if their propane tank is empty, we can do a minimum fill on that kind of thing," Sullivan said. "It is

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Volunteers assist COVID vaccination efforts in Towns

By Shawn Jarrard
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YOUNG HARRIS – Synergy Health of Hiawassee and 35 COVID-19 Vaccine Team volunteers partnered with the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center to host a community vaccine clinic on Wednesday, Jan. 27.

Due to ongoing vaccine supply issues, the clinic featured just 100 vaccinations for residents aged 65 or older from Union and Towns counties who had signed up via ngvax.com, though organizers used the occasion as a trial run for a much larger clinic.

Logistically, everything ran smoothly on Wednesday, with patients being vaccinated
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Nearly three dozen volunteers joined the Synergy Health Rec Center last week.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Community members mull stocks, family and COVID-19

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

With another news-filled week of COVID-19 and other national concerns, people in the community have been pondering everything from the bigger picture to the little things.

Fred Ellen of Blue Ridge shared his concern over what's been going on in the stock market recently with all the drama surrounding GameStop reaching high numbers in the past week.

"The only thing I have been hearing about all week are these stocks," Ellen said at Tractor Supply Friday. "People are going nuts over this thing
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Tractor Supply is a pet-friendly business with a convenient on-site animal bathing area.
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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