

Community Members...from Page 1A

and talking about how they are going to destroy the rich and the big guy by investing all their money.

"If you ask me, it sounds like a scam, and people are going to lose money from it. I don't see how all these people can afford to invest in things anyway. I have been working two jobs since the pandemic to get by, and I still don't have that kind of money to spend.

"I just think this country loses focus too much on issues in front of us. We just get distracted with each and every thing we can get into instead of jumping on the problem."

Denise May of Union County has been taking the pandemic one day at a time by focusing on her family and on matters relevant to her own life.

"COVID is bad and the world is bad, so why not just focus on what I can control?" May said on a trip to Meeks Park Jan. 30. "I can't change who the president is, and I can't change the regulations caused by the pandemic. I can control what I do with my time and energy.

"The only good thing to come out of COVID was the amount of time I got to spend with (my family), and I count it a blessing to be able to continue doing that.

"Of course, I would like to see this all go away, but I can't see that happening soon, and I just can't do anything to make it happen faster, so I am doing what I can do and appreciating the small things."

While shopping at the Blairsville Walmart on Saturday,

Josephine Stanton of Alabama expressed her frustration over COVID mitigations and vaccine efforts, which she believes need to be carried out much more effectively moving forward.

"COVID is on everybody's mind lately," Stanton said. "I got my vaccine a few weeks ago, and I am hoping this will be the beginning of the end of the thing, but after I got it, I really doubt it.

"I sat in that line for nearly two hours waiting to get my vaccine, and they are saying I have to go get another one. I don't know what it is like up here, but they haven't been vaccinating a whole lot of people, and at this rate, it will be another year before they get to everyone.

"I'm tired of these masks and all this social distancing, just sick of it. I got a vaccine, and I don't even know if it helps."

UC Historical Society's Brick Walk

To show our appreciation for the overwhelming community support for the Union County Historical Society's Brick Walk, we are extending the current price of \$50 per brick. Please call the Historical Society at 706-745-5493 or come by the old courthouse to purchase one in memory or in honor of a loved one. By Shawn Jarrard

Jones...from Page 1A

pursuing the "Signal for Sydnie" beyond the change.org petition by reaching out to local officials and mailing letters to state and federal officeholders, and so far, she's been encouraged by the early reception to the effort.

"If Sydnie's life saves others, she would be so proud," Mayfield said. "She was nothing short of amazing. She was one of a kind."

Understandably, many people are heartbroken over the sudden loss of such a young person in the North Georgia community. A 2020 graduate of Fannin County High, Jones was a college freshman at the time of her death and just getting started in life.

"She attended The Ridge Community Church and was an active member of the First Baptist Church of Blue Ridge youth group," according to her obituary. "She enjoyed skateboarding, shopping at thrift stores, putting thrift store outfits together, spending time with friends, ice cream and candy, collecting shoes, and loved sitting on her rooftop watching sunsets."

The Blue Ridge native is survived by her parents Anthony



Residents recently placed this memorial for Sydnie Jones at the intersection of state routes 515 and 325. Jones was involved in a Jan. 12 car wreck there, and she passed away in the hospital on Jan. 22.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Callihan, Carson Callihan; and extended family in Virginia. Henry-Cochran Funeral Home had charge of her services, which were held on Tuesday, Jan. 26, at The Ridge Community Church, with Pastor Chan Mitchell and Pastor Bob Richardson officiating; music provided by Gina Carmichael; and interment at Crestlawn Cemetery.

COVID Volunteers...from Page 1A

at a rate of 20 people every 15 minutes, and everyone there, from the community volunteers to those receiving the vaccine, was impressed with the seamless operation of the clinic.

Volunteers made the event possible, manning a series of stations designed to welcome people in straight-line fashion from the front door, to check-in, for vaccination, to booster appointment confirmation, and over to the monitoring area to watch for potential vaccine reactions.

Back to front, the event was a huge success, and Dr. Samuel Le Church of Synergy Health feels confident that, as soon as vaccine supplies pick up, his office and volunteers will be able to mobilize on demand to administer 1,000 or more vaccines in one go.

At the end of the clinic, Church gathered his volunteers — many of whom he and his wife Nancy recruited through their church family at McConnell Memorial Baptist — to thank them for a job well done in their collective endeavor to vaccinate and protect as many people as possible.

On top of thanking his volunteers, he commended Nancy's own volunteer work coordinating the event alongside Synergy Health Office Manager Abby Kitchens and Clinical Manager Savannah Kendall.

"The message we want to send to the community is that we are here to help," Dr. Church said, stressing that Wednesday's clinic and all those moving forward are to be considered community efforts that go beyond the abilities of a single person or health practice.

For the volunteers, one of the more rewarding aspects of the clinic was being able to help people feel more secure knowing they were on their way to being vaccinated against a potentially deadly virus.

"There's a lot of fear," volunteer Vicki Turner said. "My sense is these vaccinations are going to help alleviate that fear."

Turner recently retired as a paraprofessional at Towns County Middle School, and she's happy to spend her newfound spare time giving back to her community, with plans to continue volunteering as part of the dedicated COVID-19 Vaccine Team.

Volunteer Amy Markham worked the front door of the Rec Center Wednesday, checking people in and making sure they felt physically well prior to entering for vaccination. She's hopeful the vaccine will enable more normal interactions for residents down the line.

"When we were encouraged to stay home and all of that, I was fortunate; I have my husband and I have my kids, and I wasn't home by myself," Markham said. "But a lot of this older generation, they're home by themselves.

"So, when we were asked to stay home, it was hard for them to communicate with the outside world and not see people face to face. And I just thought about how hard that must have been for people like that.

"I'm just hoping that, through efforts like this, that maybe we can start getting out a little bit more and feel safer being together."

Also assisting at the clinic was Karley Mathews, a recent University of North Georgia graduate who was a finalist for the Fulbright Student Program, which would have seen her teaching English in the Russian-speaking nation of Belarus.

Unfortunately, the



Local resident Larry Dietsch was happy to receive his vaccine on Jan. 27, with assistance from Certified Medical Assistant Brynn Francona of Synergy Health.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

opportunity was postponed, then canceled due to a combination of COVID-19 and the political situation over there. Rolling with the punches, Mathews has applied for an internship at the United Nations and is currently awaiting a determination there.

Not wanting to let her talents go to waste in the meantime, Dr. Church, who knows her as a family friend, asked Mathews to work temporarily at Synergy Health as a patient liaison regarding COVID vaccinations.

"People have a lot of questions, because there's a lot of unanswered questions in general," Mathews said. "For the most part, people are really understanding. They just want to know when they can get their shot and what's happening with it.

"They're scared, because there's a lot of uncertainty, but they're excited by this hope of possibly getting back to normal a little bit (with the vaccine)."

Added Mathews, "I would like to thank the community for bearing with us and being patient as we try to figure out this system. It's been a pleasure, honestly, being a part of this ... and being able to serve people in this way."

Participants in the Jan. 27 clinic will need to return on Feb. 26 to receive their second dose for full vaccination, and aside from gratitude and being impressed with the efficiency of the operation, patients last week expressed relief to have finally gotten access to the vaccine.

Rick and Catherine Caauwe moved to Towns County in May 2020 from the much flatter Glynn County in South Georgia, and they're loving it up here. The couple attended the clinic last week and were excited for the opportunity to get vaccinated.

"Everything you hear on the news about how messed up the whole (vaccine rollout) is, I'm really surprised we got it as early as we did," Rick said. "We were figuring that if we were going to get it, it would probably be sometime around June."

Added Catherine, "It just means now that we are on the road. We've looked it up, and by the time we get our second dose, we've really got another four weeks before we've gotten the maximum amount of protection.

"But that doesn't mean we get to go out and party like hooligans. We've still got to wear our mask, still socially distance, but it might give us an opportunity to meet new people."

Towns County EMS workers were on site in case anyone suffered adverse reactions to the vaccine, which no one did, and Towns County Firefighters helped coordinate parking for the clinic.

"I really think everybody

should get the vaccine," said Fire Chief Harold Copeland, who received his second dose as a first responder that day. "I think it's the only way to get the numbers down across the nation, with all of us working together, especially for the elderly."

Dr. Church wants people to know that, for individuals who sign up for waitlisting at ngvax.com, his office will certainly be reaching out when it comes time to schedule their appointment.

In addition to Synergy Health's vaccination clinics, Church hopes to partner with the local Health Department moving forward.

District 2 Public Health announced two weeks ago that it had temporarily stopped taking new appointments due to limited supplies, which still held true by press time. For updates on vaccine availability through the Health Department, visit phdistrict2.org.

"The vaccine supply for now is limited," District 2 Public Information Officer Dave Palmer said. "All our doses on hand are committed to appointments for first and second doses. As we have vaccine on order, and as vaccine is received, we will open appointments."

Added Palmer, "The latest word is that Georgia will continue to receive the current level of vaccine allotment from the federal government. That is about 120,000 doses per week for the entire state of Georgia."

In the meantime, local Health Departments continue to vaccinate people who managed to sign up for appointments previously.

Union County Government and Emergency Management Agency teamed up with the Health Department for a mass vaccine clinic earlier this month, and stakeholders there aim to hold additional vaccination clinics as more supply comes online.

Be sure to check in regularly with unioncountyga.gov to see when new appointments for locally coordinated vaccine clinics will be available in Union County.

For a regularly updated list of locations receiving vaccine shipments in each county, visit dph.georgia.gov and click on the link for the "Vaccine Orders List." People can also find vaccine providers at <https://dph.georgia.gov/locations/covid-vaccination-site>.

Appointments for free Public Health COVID-19 testing can be made at <https://mako.exchange/splash/GAMakotesting/>. Testing will take place in Hall County at 2500 Allen Creek Drive in Gainesville.