

McKinley ...from Page 1A

This meant that, for her first six months, she had to eat using a feeding tube instead of a bottle, which ran from her nose, down her throat and into her tiny stomach.

Open heart surgery at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta at Egleston Hospital in September 2018 changed all that, however.

"Prior to surgery, she was in congestive heart failure, and all the blood was going to her lungs," said Kayla Majors, McKinley's mom. "The doctor put in a pulmonary artery band that limits the amount of blood flow that goes to her lungs, and then put in a shunt that re-routes that blood flow."

Many people in the North Georgia Mountains were moved to show their support for McKinley on the day of her big surgery, using the hashtag #goredformckinley on social media, and thankfully, the surgery was a huge success.

"She's out of heart failure now," said Majors. "After surgery, she was on 24-hour oxygen, and she's off of that now. She was on 17 doses of medication before surgery. Now, the doctor has taken her off of almost all of it."

And while the procedure went a long way toward giving McKinley the chance at a normal childhood, she still faces an uphill battle. Doctors at Children's discovered four other congenital heart defects



McKinley, center, with her parents Jason and Kayla Majors.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

after she was born, and she has another planned surgery on the horizon.

Fortunately, she has four older brothers and a mom and dad who love her very much, and her vivaciousness, apparent even at such a young age, will surely carry her through whatever challenges come her way.

Looking ahead, McKinley will have her next surgery in about two years, so right now, the Majors are simply focusing on catching up on baby milestones and enjoying McKinley's newfound strength and energy.

common birth defect, and it comes as no comfort to parents that, for many forms of CHD, surgery is not a cure.

Moreover, congenital heart defects require specialized care all throughout a person's life, often including additional surgeries and medications with age.

The Majors are trying to raise awareness about the countless other children and adults living with CHD, both right here in this community and all across the globe. They have organized a team to walk in the Greater Atlanta Congenital Heart Walk on April 27 as a way to raise money for CHD research.

"As much as the community has given to us, we feel like we need to give back," said Jason Majors, McKinley's dad, who is thankful for the prayers and support his family has received in the last year.

To help the Majors raise money for CHD research, people can visit McKinley's fundraising page at www.walkforchdresearch.org/Atlanta/McKinley.

For updates on McKinley's progress as she navigates life with CHD, the Majors keep a Facebook page at McKinley's Mended Heart.

And to learn more about CHD and other ways of supporting CHD Awareness, visit mendedhearts.org.

NTSB ...from Page 1A

was lower to the ground than normal.

"The witness heard the airplane impact trees and then the ground. She said the airplane was not going very fast and appeared to be on a normal glidepath to the runway, but it was 'just too low.' The witness went inside her home and called 911."

Furthermore, the Preliminary Report identifies a stand of 60- to 70-foot-tall trees located about a half-mile from the end of the runway as the "initial impact point."

"The airplane's right-wing tip was found at the base of these trees," according to the Preliminary Report. "The airplane continued to impact trees as it descended before it came to rest upright ... about 262 (feet) from the initial impact."

An on-scene examination of the airplane revealed that all major

components of the airplane were located at the accident site and there was no post-impact fire."

Other details in the report indicate that the airplane was up to date on its annual inspections, and that the pilot, unnamed in the report but known to be Robert Atkinson, was properly certified for flight.

"A review of his pilot logbooks revealed that, as of Nov. 11, 2018, he had accrued a total of 822.9 flight hours, of which, 752.5 hours were in the accident airplane," according to the Preliminary Report. "He had a total of 51.4 hours at night. His last logged flight at night was on Aug. 16, 2018, at which time, he logged only one landing."

Visibility was clear the evening of the crash, and "night visual meteorological conditions prevailed," according to the Preliminary Report.

Moving forward, the

investigation will likely take between 12 and 18 months to be completed, at which point the NTSB will release a full report outlining what it believes caused the crash.

The current government re-opening is merely a temporary measure that will last until Feb. 15, as lawmakers and the president continue negotiations to fully fund the government beyond that date.

Should the government shut down again, it's likely that the investigation into the fatal plane crash that took the lives of Atkinson, Michelle Seay and Renea Greiner will grind to a halt once more.

The sole survivor of the plane crash, Brittany Thomas Whitener, suffered a broken neck and back in the accident, and she is currently working to recover from her injuries at Shepherd Center for Spinal Cord & Brain Injury Rehabilitation in Atlanta.

Whitener said that she is doing well at Shepherd and "improving every day." Her discharge date is Feb. 7, but she will remain in Atlanta to continue her progress in Shepherd's day program.

As part of the day program, she'll be living in an apartment instead of at the facility, which will allow her to continue physical and occupational therapies, with the added benefit of being able to travel home on weekends.

As previously reported, Whitener, Seay, Greiner and Atkinson had gone up the evening of the crash to get a bird's-eye view of area Christmas lights.

All three women worked together at RiverStone Medical Campus in Blue Ridge, where Atkinson served as a pharmacist prior to opening Our Hometown Pharmacy in Blairsville.

Kelley ...from Page 1A

Kelley's replacement after he signaled that he was ready to retire in June 2018.

"It's been a privilege to have worked with Union General Hospital, Inc.," said Kelley. "It's an incredible organization with now 1,300-plus incredible employees. We have a tremendous medical staff and offer a variety of medical services often not afforded in a rural community of our size."

"Our equipment has been maintained and upgraded on a regular basis and is as modern as you can find in any facility. The two nursing homes receive great reviews from patients and families and are an important part of our continuing care in our area."

Furthermore, both Union General and Chatuge Regional hospitals achieved Five-Star ratings last year and scored well on patient satisfaction surveys, and Union General has earned Chest-Pain Accreditation for two years in a row.

Other recent accolades include recognition of Union General as: the No. 2 hospital for medium-sized hospitals by Georgia Trend Magazine; a Leapfrog A-Rated hospital

for safety; a Top 100 SafeCare hospital; and a recipient of the Women's Choice Award in Patient Care Satisfaction.

In short, Union General Hospital, Inc. has thrived during Kelley's tenure as CEO, and he's happy with how he is leaving everything.

"The organization has experienced tremendous growth over the last three years and is economically sound," said Kelley. "Fifteen additional physicians and 13 advanced practice providers have been brought into the organization to staff our now 13 clinics that we operate."

"There has been a total growth of 34 percent overall. All we have accomplished is outstanding and remarkable, but what needs to be acknowledged is, these types of results cannot be accomplished without a team effort."

"I give all the credit for these accomplishments and results to our management team, physicians and every employee. Without the efforts of these individuals, this could not have been accomplished."

"As I depart, I will definitely miss the interaction with patients and families,

employees and medical staff, and I am thankful and feel blessed to have been a part of this organization. I want to thank everyone for their support during the time that I've been here."

Along with his professional ties, Kelley has deep roots in the mountains. His dad was local World War II Veteran Jasper Kelley, who served as an Infantry Sergeant in Germany during the war.

After the war, the Kelley family set up shop in Atlanta, only to move back to Union County in the mid-1950s, when Lewis was in the fourth grade.

He would later graduate from Union County High School and complete two years at Young Harris College before being drafted into the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War.

When he got out of the Navy, Kelley attended Georgia College in Milledgeville and earned bachelor's and master's degrees, specializing in administration.

Kelley worked at Central State Hospital while in Milledgeville, but he returned home to Blairsville in the late '70s to help around the family farm after his dad became injured in a tractor accident.

He worked for one year as a counselor and assistant principal at Union County Middle School before going on to start Towns Union Training Center, now called Trackrock Industries.

Next, he would go on to open Branan Lodge of Blairsville in 1980, and he transitioned again in 1990, when he went to work for Towns County Hospital and Nursing Home.

In 1999, Union General acquired the hospital and nursing home in Hiawassee, and from there, Kelley served as the administrator of the renamed Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home until about 2013. That's when he went to work at Union General as chief operating officer for a year and a half prior to heading back to Chatuge Regional.

He retired from Chatuge Regional in 2015, only to return later that year in a limited

capacity, as his professionalism and experience brought him right back into the fold during a time of need at the Nursing Home.

And months later, he became CEO of Union General Hospital, Inc. in February 2016, where he has led a tireless team of medical professionals for the past three years.

Looking back on his career, especially his years spent expanding medical care in the North Georgia Mountains and beyond, Kelley said he hopes his legacy will reflect his desire to have made a real difference in people's lives.

"If you make a difference, that's good enough," said Kelley.

Having just turned 69 this past Thanksgiving, Kelley said he's simply ready to spend more time with his family, including his wife Melissa, his four kids and five grandkids.

"It's going to be difficult for me to pull the plug completely, because I've never not worked other than that little three months that I was away," said Kelley. "But I've got a bunch of grandkids. I need to attend some ballgames, I need to take them fishing, and I need to do things that I haven't been able to do."

2019 American Cancer Society Memorial Service date set



pastor, Memorials Chairperson Sue Upchurch and Barbara Richardson will present "In Memory" plaques to the families or friends of: Wayne Abercrombie, Gollie Easter, Alta Foster, and Bobbie Young.

Friends and families are urged to attend this special service. Brass plaques that are dedicated will be placed on the American Cancer Society's Memorial Board in the lower lobby of Union General Hospital. The brass plaques represent a donation of one hundred dollars to the American Cancer Society. The funds will be used for patient services, education, advocacy, and research.

If you would like to have a plaque dedicated "In Memory" or "In Honor" of a loved one, contact Sue Upchurch at 706-745-6347 for details.

Sunday, March 24th at 2 PM is the Memorial Service which the Union County Chapter of the American Cancer Society holds annual to remember special family members and friends. The service this year will be held at the Brackett Community Room located behind the United Community Bank at 59 Highway 515. Special persons will have brass plaques dedicated that day.

After a devotional by Rev. Bill Burch, Coosa UMC