

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Chaplain Payne humbled by Hall of Fame induction

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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By any measure, Blairsville's own Dan Payne, has lived a life of accomplishment. A retired Army chaplain, he's of course modest about this, but the fact remains that there aren't many men who can lay claim to his singular set of experiences.

To name a few, in his time, Payne has been a: professional fisherman, dedicated fisher of men, National Park Service ranger, cancer survivor, Dan Rather interviewee, husband of 55 years, veteran of 26 years, creator of desert libraries and churches, and now, a bona fide Hall of Famer.

Fearing the latter, Payne is being inducted alongside 27 other decorated veterans into the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame Class of 2021, to occur in May at the National Infantry

Museum and Soldier Center in Columbus near Fort Benning.

Established in 1958, the OCS Hall of Fame is operated by the United States Army Officer Candidate Schools Alumni Association.

Originally, the purpose of the Hall of Fame was to "honor graduates who had distinguished themselves during World War II through Valorous Combat Leadership and subsequent Superior Meritorious Service."

And though the scope remains limited, it has since expanded beyond WWII veterans, such that Payne will be joining the distinguished ranks of around 2,500 other Hall of Fame members out of more than 300,000 OCS graduates dating back to 1941.

"It's humbling," Payne said. "This is something I never in my wildest imagination saw happening. And knowing the quality of the individuals in the

Hall of Fame - it's humbling. I see myself as just a little of 'bitty guy in with a bunch of giants."

Friend and former superior officer retired Army Col. Lawyn C. Edwards nominated Payne for the honor last fall with assistance from retired Lt. Col. Glynn Pope, Payne's old squadron commander, and the Hall of Fame approved his induction in December.

Edwards, Pope and Payne served with each other during Operation Desert Storm in the Middle East, where they experienced the highs and lows all soldiers face when in combat together.

Even though he was deployed to a combat zone, as chaplain, Payne was a noncombatant whose job was to bolster the spirits of his fellow service members by bringing a sense of home and inner peace to Americans in

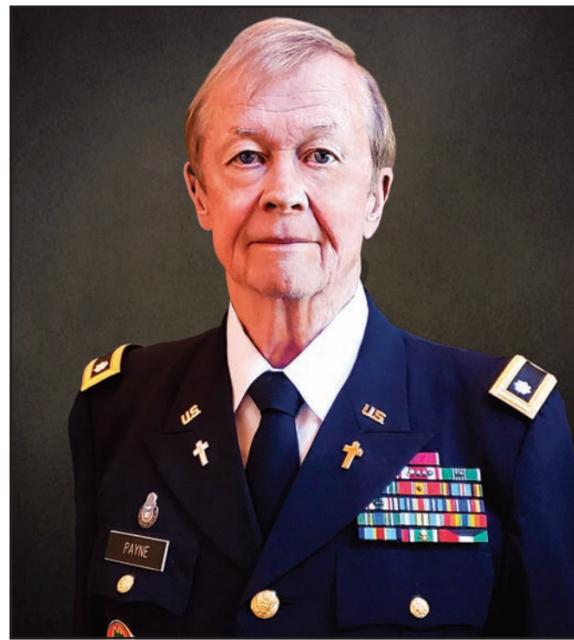
war-torn foreign lands.

Every soldier has certain duties for which he or she is responsible, and Payne is frequently shouldered more than his fair share to make sure others could continue to shoulder their own.

As such, Payne was known for the incredibly high level of attention he paid to those in his care, many of whom he preached to regularly, counseled when needed, and even baptized in the field, all while serving as the sole chaplain for a congregation of at least 1,400 soldiers at one point.

He fostered spirituality among young men in hard situations, building an actual church in the desert - steeple and all - that for a time brought reprieve from the relentless heat and driving winds for religious observances in the same part of the world Moses wandered with

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Dan Payne

## Ottis Franklin retires with 36 years of service to city

By Shawn Jarrard  
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After 36 years of dedicated service as a "jack of all trades" for the City of Blairsville, Ottis Franklin has decided to hang up his tools and retire.

Franklin attended the Feb. 2 Blairsville City Council meeting for a special recognition and plaque presentation to honor his time as Water/Sewer Maintenance Supervisor.

"Ottis started to work Jan. 1, 1985, and his last day of work for the city was Jan. 31, 2021 - needless to say, Ottis has been here for a while," Mayor Jim Conley said, as those in attendance applauded for Franklin.

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Mayor Jim Conley presented Ottis Franklin with an appreciation plaque in front of family and friends during the Feb. 2 regular city meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## High School to proceed with College and Career Academy

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County School District is excited to announce upcoming construction of the College and Career Academy, a \$4.075 million project to be funded primarily with state grant money.

Once built, the academy will help generations of students pursue their career goals by expanding current educational and vocational offerings and opening the door for additional programs to serve specific area needs that arise in the future.

Gov. Brian Kemp and Technical College System of Georgia Commissioner Greg Dozier made the initial announcement in December, revealing that Union would house one of three new College and Career Academies in the state.

Union County is partnering with North Georgia Technical College to form the academy, with official guidance from local businesses, area schools and others in the form of a Governing Board.

"Georgia's workforce is second to none," Kemp said, "thanks in large part to the hard work of Commissioner Dozier



The future Union County College and Career Academy will consist of two buildings; one to be constructed on this grassy lot at the high school; the other, the renovated Vocational Building pictured here in the background. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

and his team at our Technical College System and College and Career Academies.

"Businesses from around the world know when they invest in the Peach State, they will find a readily available workforce to meet their needs. These new College and Career Academies will serve to expand our workforce development efforts in more communities in Georgia and lead to more opportunities for hardworking Georgians and their families."

The Union County College and Career Academy will help keep students local by giving them a post-graduation pipeline to area businesses, and further act as an incentive to attract businesses looking for a new home, all while serving students from other area high schools as space allows.

Josh Davis serves as the Career, Technical and Agricultural Education director for Union County Schools, and he's been working on getting

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## Matheson extradited; shooting survivor continues recovery

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Hiwassee shooting suspect Jason Matheson, 41, of Hayesville, North Carolina, made his first appearance in the Towns County Courthouse shortly before lunchtime on Tuesday, Feb. 2.

Matheson stands accused of attempting to murder his estranged wife in a Jan. 26 shooting at her workplace, the Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation & Wellness Center, after which he fled to his father's in Hayesville where he was arrested later that evening.

He had been in the custody of the Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office since his Jan. 26 arrest, where he was awaiting an extradition hearing after initially refusing transport to Georgia to face charges here.

When Matheson decided

to waive extradition after all, Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson traveled to Clay County that Tuesday morning to pick him up and take him for booking at the Towns County Jail prior to his first Georgia court appearance.

At the courthouse, Towns County Chief Magistrate Judge David Rogers presented Matheson with his felony charges: aggravated assault, aggravated stalking and criminal attempt to commit murder.

Judge Rogers also notified him of his rights and denied him bond, and the case has been referred to the Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court for an ultimate determination on bond conditions.

The maximum penalty for the above charges is 60 years in prison if sentenced consecutively, and it is possible the District Attorney's Office will bring additional charges



Jason Matheson when presenting the case before the Towns County Grand Jury.

Next steps for Matheson include the appointment of an attorney from the Public Defender's Office and a preliminary hearing to determine probable cause to go to trial, though such a hearing

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## Vaccinations continue amid improving COVID-19 numbers

By Shawn Jarrard  
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COVID-19 vaccination continues week after week, and while supply remains limited, the shot is steadily making its way into the arms of eligible individuals.

Eventually, everyone who wants the vaccine will have access to it, but for now, early vaccination efforts remain focused on medical workers, long-term care residents and staff, first responders, and adults age 65 and older as supplies last.

Without question, members of this last demographic, which includes most long-term care residents, have the highest risk of dying or hospitalization with severe COVID-19.

Couple this with the fact that the population of senior citizens in Union County is roughly 2.5 times the state average, and the imperative for local vaccination takes on even greater weight.

Fortunately, alongside ongoing vaccination efforts, the metrics for COVID appear to be declining regionally -



The recently completed Sports Center is the new home of mass COVID-19 vaccinations in Union County, at least for the foreseeable future. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

percent positivity for testing and hospitalizations are down, and the local death rate seems to be on a downward trend as well.

Union General Health System Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said emergency room visits for COVID have dropped to about 20% of total visits, down from a high of 50-60% during the surge early last month.

The previous high for regional COVID inpatients

between Union General and Chatuge Regional was nearly 50 in mid-January, and as of Feb. 7, that number was down to 15 for the two hospitals.

Barnett said the Health System was working on making Chatuge a "clean" facility again, with all COVID inpatients being treated in Union County.

In terms of lives lost, the Health System experienced a record number of deaths in

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## Fugitive in 2017 home invasion case arrested in NC

By Shawn Jarrard  
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A North Carolina man wanted in connection with a 2017 Union County home invasion has been arrested on charges from another home invasion in Lexington, North Carolina.

Alan Shane Hess, 33, of Lexington, was arrested by Winston-Salem Police on Jan. 31, who turned him over to the

Lexington Police Department to face charges of armed robbery, conspiracy to commit armed robbery, first degree burglary, and first- and second-degree kidnapping.

The charges stem from a Jan. 11 home invasion in which two armed men reportedly forced their way into an elderly couple's Lexington home, assaulting them and restraining them with

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Alan Shane Hess

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2/13 VS. BANKS 7:30 PM BOYS

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2/10 @ MACON • GIRLS

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