

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

## Union County bus drivers highlight love of students

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

There are nearly 40 bus drivers servicing Union County Schools, safely ferrying students to and from Blairsville and Woody Gap campuses. They are unsung heroes in the education system, some of the many cogs in a larger machine that often go unnoticed but are no less important to the whole.

Whether it's the daily schedule of getting kids to class or home on time, or taking them on field trips, bus drivers work hard and inject a plentiful amount of passion and care into their positions.

But what goes into being a bus driver? First, there's the training. To ensure drivers

remember the lesson on keeping their kids safe, training is hosted every year. School Transportation Secretary Angie Rainwater offered some insight into the process.

"There's so much great training that goes on to the drivers at the beginning of every year," she said. "It helps them refresh before they go back out and start all over, because during the summer, you might forget a few things. But we have this state meeting where it's refreshed in everybody's mind, and that's very, very helpful."

That being said, Rainwater mentioned that one of the biggest questions she gets asked is why a school bus lacks seatbelts. For a clear answer, one need only imagine a particularly devastating wreck,



Bus drivers for Union County Schools gathered for an appreciation breakfast on Friday, Feb. 25.

Photo/Submitted

she said.

The driver would potentially have to move through the aisle and unbuckle or cut the belts of dozens of

students, taking up precious time that could be used to escape from a fire or climb out of the wreckage.

Also, the seats of a

school bus are specifically built to protect children in their own cubicle "sections." While three students could fit in each section, Union County

plays it safe by assigning two per seat as the norm, leaving more wiggle room in case of an emergency.

See Bus Drivers, Page 2A

## Blairsville plants Arbor Day tree in new city park



Arbor Day is always a special occasion in Blairsville, with stakeholders gathered here Feb. 18 for the planting of a dogwood.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Due to planting season and climate variations, every state designates a different day to observe the environmentally conscious Arbor Day holiday,

and Georgia's observance falls on the third Friday in February.

As a Tree City USA, this year, Blairsville celebrated its 28th tree planting on the special day, with the tree of choice in 2022 being a dogwood planted on the budding grounds of the

park-to-be in the greenspace next to Blairsville City Hall.

Guests at the Feb. 18 planting included event moderator Kathryn Litton, Bob Ramay and three other members of the Rotary Club of Union County, Commissioner Lamar

See Arbor Day, Page 6A

## School Board welcomes STARs, UCMS artist Kaser

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education welcomed STAR students Emma Thompson of Union County High and Logan Disser of Woody Gap School on Feb. 15 for in-person congratulations on their stellar academic and extracurricular endeavors in their senior years.

"It's interesting to note the parallels between these two very well-rounded young ladies who selected a STAR teacher who was a graduate of the school also," said Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight of the high-scoring SAT testers.

The pair, along with their STAR teachers, received Certificates of Recognition in front of the board, cementing their status as 2022's STARs. April Krieger and Althea Cantrell each celebrated their fourth nomination as STAR teachers this year.

Additionally, Union



UCMS Art Teacher Katie Davis and the School Board honored student Kylie Kaser Feb. 15 for the middle schooler's winning submission in the system's Christmas card design contest.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

County Middle School Art Teacher Katie Davis was recognized for having received a \$10,000 grant that will be used to purchase a new kiln and, on a smaller scale, desktop easels.

The current kiln was "hit or miss" when it came to working properly, so with the new equipment, budding artists can more reliably work on honing their craft, whatever

See School Board, Page 6A

## Paris, Bradshaw attend ATVG meeting in Knoxville

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Association of Tennessee Valley Governments is an advocate program representing nearly 1,000 local governments that reside within the seven-state Tennessee Valley Authority region, including Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Towns and Union counties are members, as is the City of Blairsville, with Towns having just joined in mid-2021. At the end of January, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw attended the first ATVG meeting of 2022 in Knoxville, Tennessee.

See ATVG Meeting, Page 2A



Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris during a January trip to Knoxville, Tennessee, for the first Association of Tennessee Valley Governments quarterly meeting of 2022.

Photo/Submitted

## Iwo Jima Vet Bud Johnson honored in ceremony Feb. 21

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – On Feb. 21, the Towns County Recreation Center hosted the 77th Iwo Jima Memorial Ceremony honoring the sacrifices of the nearly 7,000 American servicemen who perished at the hands of the Imperial Japanese Army in the 36-day Battle of Iwo Jima in February and March of 1945.

Most of the nearly 7,000 soldiers killed and the approximately 13,000 wounded were United States Marines, Leathernecks. Some were from U.S. Army support units attached to the Marines.

And still others were U.S. Navy, who were responsible for getting the Marines from the ships to the beaches of Iwo Jima, and whose corpsmen and doctors took care of the wounded.

One such sailor was the late Clarence "Bud" Johnson, retired Navy Chief Quartermaster, who was serving aboard the USS Silverstein on Feb. 23, 1945, and witnessed the now famous raising of two American flags on Iwo Jima's Mt. Suribachi.

A Towns County resident for many years and constant advocate for veterans, Johnson passed away Jan. 1, 2021, at the age of 98.

He was honored last week for his 33 years of service to his country along with the late Woodrow Sanders, U.S. Army (ret), whose Army artillery unit



Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783 Commandant Alton "Doc" Coleman with Marine Corps League National Commandant Johnny Baker in last week's Iwo Jima Remembrance in Towns County.

Photo by Mark Smith

was attached to the Marines at Iwo Jima. Tributes to both men were given by Scott Drummond, U.S. Coast Guard (ret).

The ceremony was sponsored by the Marine Corps League, Unicoi Detachment 783, representing Towns and Union counties.

In addition to veterans of all American military branches from a variety of campaigns dating to World War II, local dignitaries attending the ceremony were Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales and Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson.

"It's an honor (to be here)," said retired U.S. Marine Corps Command Sgt. Maj. Johnny Baker, National

Commandant of the Marine Corps League. "If you look around this room, there's history in this room."

"Where did we get such men to go out there and give their lives for a cause that they believed in? Many of them were 18, 19, 20-year-old Marines," said Baker, referring to those thousands who died at Iwo Jima.

Baker went on to describe the raising of two flags on Mt. Suribachi on Feb. 23 – a second, larger flag just hours later replacing the first to send "a wave of strength to the battle-weary fighting men below," according to the Naval History and Heritage Command website.

See Iwo Jima, Page 6A

## Qualifying to start next week for 2022 election cycle

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Qualifying for the Union County Board of Education and other elective offices will take place next week ahead of the May 24 General Primary Election.

School Board seats up for election are Districts 2, 4 and 5, and the qualifying fees have been set at \$130. People may access a map of

the School Board districts in the Union County Registrar's Office inside the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street.

Qualifying will run Monday, March 7, through Friday, March 11, inside the courthouse. Hours will be 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and from 9 a.m. to noon on Friday.

Candidate checklists for qualifying and other information can be found

by visiting the Secretary of State's website at <https://sos.ga.gov/candidate-resources>.

Potential candidates will need to visit their respective political party representatives inside the courthouse the week of qualifying to pay their fees and verify their paperwork is in order, after which they must submit their paperwork to the Elections Board.

See Election Qualifying, Page 6A

Vol. 113 No. 10  
4 Sections 24 Pages  
Weather  
Thurs: Sunny Hi 70 Lo 42  
Fri: Cloudy Hi 67 Lo 47  
Sat: Cloudy Hi 70 Lo 55

Arrests 2D  
Church 2C  
Classifieds 3D  
Opinion 4A  
Legals 4D  
Obits 4C  
Sports 2B

**SPORTS**  
BASEBALL  
3/2 vs. Fannin Co. 4:30 PM  
SOCCER  
3/1 vs. Banks Co. 5:30 PM  
3/4 vs. Elbert Co. 5:30 PM

**Super Chef Showdown for Hope House**  
March 12

See page 3A

**Lions Club Trash to Treasure Sale**  
March 5

See page 6C

**Justin Moore Tickets on Sale Now**

See page 6C

## Bus Drivers..from Page 1A

There are only two other types of vehicles, Rainwater said, that are larger than a school bus – trains and 18-wheelers – and Union County doesn't have to worry about train tracks. Still, it doesn't mean that drivers should completely keep the thought out of mind.

Annette Gooch, a veteran bus driver of 20 years who worked at Woody Gap for 11 years and still drives children to and from Suches, is haunted to this day by something she heard about at the beginning of her career.

"I remember the first or second year I was driving, there had been a train wreck in Tennessee," she said. "And what left a lasting impression was the little girl that was killed; her name was Amber, and her daddy was a truck driver. Well, my husband has drove a truck the majority of our married life, and our one and only daughter is named Amber."

Now, every time Gooch crosses train tracks during a field trip, she thinks of the case as a grim reminder. Even in everyday traffic, it sticks in the back of her mind and keeps her careful.

"I count those kids when I see them (waiting at the bus stop)," she said. "I watch and

count them again as they're crossing. I count them as they're getting on. Even though you've watched them get on, you've still got to look and see that they crossed."

Lisa Nelson, who's been driving for about 25 years, said she, like many other drivers, has a system that her passengers follow.

"I don't use hand signals, because to me, that car might think that my hand signal means for them to come," Nelson said. "I use my head whenever I'm signaling my kids, but that's just me. Some people do hand signals, some people don't. My kids are trained that when they see me shake my head, they can cross the road."

Rainwater said, in essence, that the drivers are "trained to train the kids." And while keeping rules in mind is important, it is just as essential to pay attention to the kids themselves.

"I tell everybody my kids are my kids," Nelson said, vocalizing a point of agreement with her fellow drivers. "It doesn't matter if they go home with me and live with me or if they're on my bus – they're my kids. While they're with me, they're mine, and I love them just like they're mine."

Nelson went on to say that she makes a point of telling each child at least once a day that she loves them, whether it's during the morning on the way to school or during the afternoon on the way home.

Being reminded that they are loved isn't the only thing

students get to hear regularly. Every bus has a whiteboard at the front, and every whiteboard has a different greeting or uplifting message on it for kids to glance at on their way on or off the bus.

And Gooch, for example, tries her best to speak to and engage with all her passengers.

"You greet them with a smile. You greet them with an energetic, 'Good morning, how are you?' And then when they get off the bus, I'll tell them one day, 'Have a great day,' and the next day, I'll say, 'Have a fabulous day,' just to see if they pick up on the differences and what kind of day I'm telling them to have, you know?"

"And then they'll come talk to you, and they'll tell you, 'You, too.' So, you know they're listening."

Putting in the effort to make an impact in their students' lives goes a long way, too. While Rainwater is new to Union County, Gooch and Nelson said they frequently recognize former students, whether it be at the grocery store or at the bus stop with their own children.

"When they leave you, they never completely leave your heart," Nelson said. "And whenever you see them, and it's been five years down the road since they've graduated and they still run up to you and grab you and want to hug you, it's like, this is why I do this."

As it so happens, Friday, Feb. 25, was the bus drivers'

appreciation day. They shared a breakfast of donuts, and School Superintendent John Hill seized on the opportunity to take some lovely photos before the rain began to drizzle down.

And it was clear that morning that the garage employees mean just as much to each other as their students do to each individual driver.

"To me, we just seem like we're a family – just one big family," Gooch said. Nelson agreed, adding that "it's nice" to have such a close, reliable group of coworkers who, in her words, "if one hurts, we all hurt."

It's easy to see, then, why Transportation Director Kody Owenby is so proud of his team.

"You really couldn't ask for any better people," Owenby said. "They're really dedicated to what they do. They're up a lot of early mornings, they're always out there through anything – especially with COVID and all that going on. They've still been there every day, doing everything they can do."

While it takes diligence, training, patience and a particularly caring soul to be a bus driver, the garage is always looking for substitute drivers. One way the community can help is by stepping up and giving it a shot. After all, it's a far more rewarding position than many would assume.

As a reminder to Union County residents, for reasons of safety, Georgia law requires all motorists to stop for school buses picking up children.

## ATVG Meeting..from Page 1A

According to the organization's website, the mission of ATVG is "to serve the mutual interests of local governments and their partners in both the public and private sectors in the seven-state Tennessee Valley region."

Continuing, "We advance the interests of our members at the national, regional and state levels. We use our strong, collective voice to work on a nonpartisan basis for solutions to critical issues that affect us all."

Founded in 1981, ATVG is a non-profit 501(c)(4) public interest organization. Executive Director Mike Arms leads the organization.

The Association of Tennessee Valley Governments looks at and works on Tennessee Valley Authority issues, Arms said, essentially making the ATVG an association of the local governments that are served by TVA, the largest public power company in the United States.

"When we meet, our first item is always a TVA update – what's the latest on TVA," Arms said. "Then, we'll have two or three items of interest which are usually interesting to everybody."

"In Knoxville, for instance, we had a session on cybersecurity. TVA's cybersecurity expert came in and talked about different things they're doing for cybersecurity. And we had a local government that had been attacked. We got their IT director to come in and talk about it."

"What I think is of value to ATVG – Knox County (Tennessee) has 480,000 citizens, so the mayor has a chief of staff and an IT director and so forth. A lot of our smaller counties, they don't have all the wherewithal to have bigger staffs (like Knox County)."

"So, a lot of times the mayor or the sole commissioner also has the same local government issues, and many of our smaller counties really don't have the staff to be fully engaged, so we try to offer topics and subjects that will help them learn what's going on throughout the valley."

"When we come back to Brasstown Valley Resort (in 2023), I know we'll be talking about lake levels and tourism and how important the quality of our lakes is to the economy of those counties (with Lake Nottely and Lake Chatuge)."

"One other thing that I think is of value," said Arms, "is local government people get to meet other local government people. We always have networking time. We have a social hour before dinner."

"And it gives a chance for Lamar Paris (for example) to meet a county commissioner from Alabama, a county mayor from Tennessee – in Mississippi they call them supervisors. They all have different names and different local government charters, but they all deal with the same issues, so it's a good cross-pollination of local governments."

In this way, local government leaders can gain exposure to more efficient ways of doing things and find previously unheard-of solutions to their respective problems and issues, and Bradshaw and Paris both agreed that their ATVG memberships are beneficial for their respective counties.

ATVG Memberships are available to city and county governments. Affiliate memberships are available to businesses/corporations, nonprofits and individuals. For more information, visit <https://atvg.org>.



## What It Means to be a Navy Seabee

By Derek Nagel  
of the Seabees Auxiliary

On Wednesday, February the 17, 2022, Union Country's Sole Commissioner, Lamar Paris, signed a proclamation and held a ceremony at the county courthouse honoring the United States Navy Seabees on their 80th anniversary. The ceremony had several Seabee veterans in attendance, including Commander Ed Crenshaw of the NSVA Island X-3 Georgia who received the official proclamation.

Of all the veterans I have had the privilege to know and call 'friends', I've never seen a prouder group than the Seabees. Up until a few years ago, I had never heard of the Seabees, and until recently, wasn't even aware that my great-uncle Frank was one as well. As I started to delve into what exactly these great veterans did, I became more and more impressed with them, mainly due to the fact that they were tasked with not only risking their lives for their country, but also to build the necessary infrastructure that was, and continues to be, critical for every single branch of not only the U.S. military, but several other countries as well.

As we reflect on the 80th birthday of the Seabees, we honor these great veterans of the construction battalions with a look at their amazing history, and how they greatly impacted America's role during times of war and also times of peace, from WWII to the present, all around the globe.

During the War of 1812,

Captain David Porter sailed his ship, the ESSEX, around Cape Horn off the coast of Chile in South America, carrying with them the very first flag of the United States into the Pacific Ocean. Having been at sea for nearly a year and largely being chased by the British, he knew he would need a safe harbor somewhere to resupply and fix any damages that his small fleet of ships would incur. Employing nearly 300 of his most skilled artisans, and with the assistance of 4,000 friendly natives, they constructed and established the very first forward base not located within the continental U.S. or its territories, consisting of shops, a bakery, and a variety of other infrastructure projects that were needed to conduct further missions in the Pacific. This wasn't the first time that men of this caliber had dual roles within their own navies. Even the Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks used their most talented sailors to build ports and docks for their respective navies.

Despite the many friendly people who assisted Captain Porter's squadron of sailors, the newly constructed base came under attack by hostile natives, and the sailors were forced to put down their tools and fight to protect that which they worked so hard to build. Ultimately, the mantra of these sailors used to this day is, "we build, we fight", as well as, "can do". This positive attitude is not only contagious, it is inspirational as much as it is a morale builder for Seabees who are in construction mode

near a theater of battle.

After the destruction of the Navy's base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, a group of highly skilled seaman were tasked with the nearly insurmountable challenge of trying to achieve a victory while rebuilding from the ashes. These sailors who were very good with tools became officially known as the Navy Seabees in 1942, and proudly served and continued to build anything necessary to ensure the success of every mission. The Seabees had a huge presence after WWII in particular, organizing massive public works initiatives in which they were joined by civilian contractors to complete projects such as the construction of the naval training base on the Great Lakes in Illinois. The Seabees were absolutely necessary in the war in Korea, Vietnam, S.E. Asia after the Vietnam conflict, Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Without these fine sailors, there would have certainly been very different outcomes during these tumultuous times.

I am proud to call these men my friends. Every year in March, I always look forward to joining them at The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge for the military ball. It is a special occasion in which to celebrate the many veterans from every military branch who hail throughout the Southeast. The military ball is open to veterans and the public alike, so anyone who would like to attend should contact their local Veterans Service Organization.

# Iwo Jima...from Page 1A

Retired USMC Chief Warrant Officer Jimmy McKeral Jr., who is pastor of Christ For All People Ministries, served as the keynote speaker for the event. He discussed honor, dedication and remembrance in a monologue entitled "The Truth Is."

"Wow! What an awesome thing to pause for a moment and contemplate all the Marines who went before us," McKeral said. "Not just the Marines – soldiers, sailors, airmen, coast guardsmen, national guardsmen, men and women who laid down their will to support and defend

the Constitution of the United States of America. That's an uncommon thing. It deserves great honor; it deserves great respect.

"My friends, my fellow Americans, we need to stay in unity. Look to your left and look to your right and realize those are not your enemies. We're Americans," McKeral said. "We don't need to be ashamed

of the values that (made) this country great, like honoring the men who fought at Iwo Jima.

"And let's not forget the people who were at home, who were praying and sacrificing and rationing, and women going into factories, and Rosie the Riveter, and all these wonderful people who cried out to God, day and night, because the existence of America was at stake.

"We were attacked by Japan. We were attacked by Germany. And if you want to rewrite history, you can try and do it – but it does not change the truth. America was at stake, but we rallied together as Americans.

"Come on, somebody! We rallied together around

a flag that actually means something. I've carried too many boxes with fallen veterans and fallen servicemen to not have respect for the American flag," exclaimed McKeral. "It's OK to be proud of the flag."

In describing the nearly impossible feat the soldiers and sailors accomplished at Iwo Jima at the cost of so many lives, McKeral characterized the moment as "uncommon valor as a common virtue," employing Admiral Chester Nimitz's 1945 comment after the Battle of Iwo Jima.

"We need to realize the truth in America. History is not here for us to love or hate. History is here so we don't repeat it. Hey, let's stand up for America, amen?" McKeral said

to a standing audience and a vigorous round of applause.

And guests continued to stand until McKeral invited them to be seated.

The ceremony ended after a memorial wreath presentation and retiring of the colors. Cake and coffee were served, and most of the audience lingered for a few minutes. A few Marines walked out to the one-of-a-kind Iwo Jima Memorial in the parking lot to visit and contemplate its significance.

As McKeral said, the Iwo Jima Memorial Ceremony is about respect, honor, recognition, and a healthy knowledge of true American history to be accepted and learned from.

# Arbor Day...from Page 1A

Paris, Chamber President Steve Rowe and, of course, Mayor Jim Conley.

Paris and Conley presented a joint proclamation honoring the occasion, with the latter providing an invocation and remarks before the juvenile dogwood was rooted in its new home.

"Trees provide a more livable environment for mankind, providing clean air and removing pollutants from the air," Conley said. "Trees provide a cooling effect and prevent global warming.

"Trees are a source of food for man and animals. Trees constitute a hope for our future and carry out our heritage as they provide for a stable environment."

In order to qualify for the Tree City USA program, a town must meet strict criteria that ensures the community cares for the environment. The tree-planting ceremony itself, along with the proclamation and recognition of its importance, is a part of those requirements.

A city must also appoint a Tree Board whose members ideally help with the other requirements of following the National Arbor Day Foundation guidelines and working with the Georgia Forestry Commission. In the 28 years Blairsville has celebrated Arbor Day, there's been an effort to cut fewer trees despite expansive development. Putting a park in city grounds, with help from local Rotarians, is an excellent way to make sure that just as many trees are planted and have room to grow.

The little dogwood, freshly planted in a modest circle of mulch, already plays an important part in furthering the wellness of Union County's environment.

And 2022's planting was bittersweet. The Blairsville Garden Club, a historic organization that has been established in Union County for 81 years, was disbanded earlier this year due to the rising age and failing health of its remaining members.

"We have not been able to get new members because young people don't want to do community service," Litton said. "And so, we got down to members in their 80s and 90s,



Kathryn Litton and Jim Conley at the Feb. 18 annual observance of Arbor Day in the designated greenspace next to Blairsville City Hall. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

and we couldn't get out and do the hard work anymore, planting flower beds and that sort of thing.

"The Master Gardeners have said that they will take over and carry the banner for Arbor Day, (committing to being) representatives to help the city keep it going, so I'm really proud and amazed at that."

It should be noted that the Towns-Union Master Gardener Association is comprised of volunteers who dedicate their time to the upkeep of a city's gardens and other horticultural life. While it's not dissimilar to the Garden Club, it is not quite the same.

Although the historic Garden Club is regrettably no more, Litton still holds out hope that special care for the environment can still be fostered in Blairsville's community, especially among the younger folks.

Mayor Conley was in agreement, saying that the new park will serve as a lovely reminder that Blairsville and Union County take the conservation of nature seriously.

The park itself was approved by the Blairsville City Council on Jan. 4, and Bob Ramay received a grant from Rotary International to help kickstart maintenance.

In fact, the Rotary Club purchased the dogwood from Jordan Keen at General Supply for use in the Arbor Day celebration, providing a

wonderful start to the collection of greenery that the space hopes to support after continued development of the park.

"We all better be (concerned with the environment)," Ramay said. "You can't look at these mountains and not care about Mother Nature. We all need to stop and think and say, 'What can we do to keep our world as nice as it is and make it a little better?'"

Indeed, it is crucial that the stewards of a land as beautiful as the mountains do their part to care for their home. As discussed at the planting, trees provide for aspects of a community that are not just beneficial but necessary for human survival.

Perhaps one of the most well-known facts is that, from the mightiest oak to the tiniest dogwood sapling, trees filter the air, converting carbon dioxide into oxygen. The fascinating process is not too far removed from humanity's own respiration, albeit in reverse.

Conley mentioned, too, that from the dawn of time, man has relied on trees for everything from food to shelter. Whether it's chopping logs for a cabin, plucking apples from plentiful boughs, or attracting game with enticing fruit, trees have always served a multitude of purposes for the wellbeing of humans.

The least mankind can do is pay back a little bit of that natural altruism in return.



L-R: Towns County Sheriff Kenneth Henderson; MCL Commandant for Georgia Larry Heard; MCL Junior Vice-Commandant for Georgia Rex Delk; MCL Judge Advocate for Georgia Lisa Delk; MCL National Commandant Johnny Baker; MCL National Vice-Commandant for the Southeast Division Jerry Holt; MCL Commandant for South Carolina Jim Stone; Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw; Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales; and local MCL Commandant Alton "Doc" Coleman. Photo by Mark Smith

# Election Qualifying...from Page 1A

All qualifying candidates will be viewable at sos.ga.gov within minutes of qualifying, according to the Elections Board.

Four county-level offices are up for election, including the three partisan Board of Education posts as well as the nonpartisan Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor if petition requirements are met for the latter.

Federal and state candidates will also be qualifying next week, but instead of submitting their paperwork locally, they must do so at the State Capitol Building in Atlanta.

State-level offices up for election in the General Primary are Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney, District 8 State Representative and

District 51 State Senator, plus two Enotah Superior Court judgeships that will appear on the May 24 Nonpartisan Election ballot.

Various other state-level offices will appear in the primary, including Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, Agriculture Commissioner, Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner, State School Superintendent, Labor Commissioner, and Public Service Commissioner District 2.

The Union County electorate will get a chance to vote on two federal-level offices as well: U.S. Representative from the 9th Congressional District of Georgia and a U.S. Senate seat.

April 5 will be the earliest day to register to mail an absentee ballot for the General Primary, and April 25

will be the last day to register to vote in the General Primary/Nonpartisan Election.

Also May 24, voters will be asked to support or reject the continuation of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, a 1-cent sales and use tax to be levied on purchases of local goods in support of the Union County School System.

Should voters approve the measure, the local sales tax will continue at its current 7% rate. ESPLOST is used by schools for the purposes of building new facilities, renovating existing facilities, upgrading HVAC systems, adding to aging bus fleets, updating technology and more.

The 2022 General Election will be held on Nov. 8 and will feature the election of political party candidates who clear the primary round of voting.

# School Board...from Page 1A



The Union County School Board conducting business in their Feb. 15 meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

the medium.

One such artist is Kylie Kaser, whom Davis called up to stand before board members in recognition of her creative talents during last month's meeting.

"A few months ago, we were asked to submit some holiday artwork for a Christmas card for the board," Davis said. "And so, I submitted probably 10 or 12 pieces, and hers was chosen out of the Primary, Elementary, Middle and High School, and Woody Gap, too."

Superintendent John Hill presented Kaser with a framed copy of the winning artwork and some cards to take home with her.

The next order of business was the Superintendent's Update. Hill detailed a recent "water problem" at the Elementary School that was quickly handled by Mike Patton, Mark Hughes, Gerry Bavero, David Murphy and others.

Hill wanted to take a moment to thank the approximately 20 people who showed up after hours to address the issue.

"When people quit work on Friday, it's really hard to find them sometimes, but not here at Union County," Hill said. "We had folks from Mike's department and Mark's department show up alongside great principals and great leaders, and we were able to clear those rooms out, call in a mitigation company to get them

cleaned (and) sanitized and the air quality checked."

Switching gears, Hill noted that the Elementary School's student population is outpacing the teachers.

And while that is a positive that speaks to the development of Union County, the downside is that there are classes of about 27 kindergarteners. This lessens the chance of more personalized experiences between teachers and students – something Union County is known for.

"They're making it work and nobody's complaining," Hill explained, "but the reality is, these folks have some legitimate challenges."

The situation is similar at the High School, but wrangling little children is a far different task than trying to organize older students.

To put things into perspective, it should be noted that enrollment has exceeded the five-year estimate, and though there is no definitive answer on how or when the problem will be rectified, the board is continuing to work with educators on putting a plan together.

In response to growth in recent years, the Primary School is scheduled to undergo renovations. At the current stage, there are plans to remove and store the furniture, although much of it must be replaced.

"There are some things that are okay and some things

that are in really, really, really poor shape from '84 or earlier," Hill said, adding that, in the past, the worn furnishings were usually bought as necessity items from auctions, and the schools "made it work."

Now, with more money in the budget, the school is looking to find higher quality replacements. In total, the project is estimated to cost \$296,997.60 with a state contract. Additionally, the nurse's station needs more cots, although there is no price estimate on this project.

Hill also offered an update on the plans to remodel the floors and paint the High School. While the blueprinting itself is handled by architectural and construction management firms, the Department of Education must approve the construction.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Murphy revealed that he had spoken with the architect that same day, and hopes are high that by the next meeting there will be a solid idea of how to move forward.

Finally, in the superintendent's opinion, the most important thing discussed at the meeting were the multiple SkillsUSA students traveling to Atlanta to catch the eyes of potential employers, with eight students displaying their occupational talents at the World Congress Center after press time.