

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## New Union General CEO Bierschenk ready to lead hospital system

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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Kevin Bierschenk started in his position as the new CEO of Union General Hospital on Feb. 25, and he's eager to meet as many members of the community as possible.

Residents are invited to attend a special welcome reception for Bierschenk on Thursday, March 14, hosted by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

The reception will take place in the upper community room of the Union County Community Center starting at 5 p.m., and everyone is encouraged to bring refreshments to be provided.

Bierschenk arrives at Union General Hospital with many years of experience in the hospital industry, having

served most recently as the CEO of Dodge County Hospital since 2007.

Prior to that, he served as CEO of Southwest Alabama Medical Center, and his experience in other hospitals dates back to 1997.

Bierschenk has stepped into the role of retired Union General CEO Kelley, whose last day was on March 1.

"If you do any research on this hospital, it's known as a top-notch quality hospital with great finances and great leadership," said Bierschenk. "I've worked with Lewis in the past through different associations and have known that he was going to retire, so Lewis knew that I was interested."

The Board of Directors for the General Hospital initiated the search to find

Kelley's replacement after he signaled that he was ready to retire in June 2018, and Bierschenk was excited to learn that he'd made the final cut as Kelley's successor.

"I've been wanting to come up to this area," said Bierschenk. "I'm the chairman-elect for the Georgia Hospital Association, and so I do a lot with Georgia hospitals."

"Any time you talk about premier systems, this system's name is always in the top of the list. This is a great community in which to live, and everybody needs to know that Union General is well known in the hospital circuit."

Added Bierschenk, "And we've got a great board that's invested in the hospital. They're committed to making sure the right things are done, making sure this hospital grows

and succeeds, so it really is a progressive board. That's another reason I came to this hospital."

Originally from Nebraska, Bierschenk is a graduate of the University of South Carolina.

He and his wife Cindy have shared a home in her native Lumpkin County for several years, which definitely played a role in their wanting to move up here full time, and the two are currently in the market for a house in Union or Towns County.

Next steps for Bierschenk are to get settled into his new role at the hospital, and he plans to leave the leadership team developed by Kelley in place to help him continue the good work over the last few years.

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Kevin Bierschenk

## Langley talks budgets, criminal justice reform in local meeting

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

HIAWASSEE – Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley addressed members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, March 1, at the Sundance Grill.

Langley spoke first about how he budgets his office and manages to retain a high caliber staff on a shoestring.

Twenty-six people work under Langley throughout the four-county Enotah Judicial Circuit, with about 25 percent of his staff being paid through federal grant money.

"Those are primarily the people in my office who work



Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley speaking in the March 1 meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers. Photo by Mark Smith

## Schools, GBI invite community to March 14 'sexting' presentation

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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In response to recent shocking news that dozens of kids at Union County High School were involved in exchanging nude images of local students, school administrators have hit the ground running in an attempt to curb the behavior.

Children who engage in activities like "sexting" not only face criminal charges but also very real personal consequences that can follow them for the rest of their lives, as shared images often make their way onto the internet, where they can exist in perpetuity.

To address the issue, Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill

and fellow administrators are examining all of their options to figure out how to positively change the culture behind such risky behaviors.

And Hill is asking the community to help the schools take care of Union County's children.

"We feel that this is a community problem and one that will require everyone's support in combating," said Hill. "I am proud of our school system and our students; however, this is a serious issue that must be addressed."

Already, school officials have met with church leaders and others to solicit feedback and support in teaching students how to make better decisions, and next week, the schools will welcome the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for an



informative presentation.

On March 13, the GBI and the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office will speak to all sixth through eighth-grade students at 9:30 a.m., and at 1:30 p.m., they will address all ninth through 12th-grade students.

In addition, the GBI and District Attorney's Office will hold a community meeting on March 14 at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, which will be open to the public.

"We encourage all

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## Five indicted for murder, conspiracy in McKinney shooting death

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Five people have been indicted on a variety of charges in the Dec. 4, 2018, murder of Justin McKinney and shooting of Anna Franklin, both of Morganton.

Those indicted include Stephan Blake Dickey aka Blake Dye, Hunter Nicholas Hill and Dalton Levi Manuel.

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Dalton Levi Manuel



Hunter Nicholas Hill



Kevin Jack Chamaty



Michael Chase Havard



Stephan Blake Dickey aka Dye

## Potential bomb at Walmart turns out to be confetti popper party favor

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Investigators with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation determined that a "pipe-looking device" that caused a Feb. 28 bomb scare at the Blairsville Walmart was actually just a confetti popper missing its label.

"It was just one single round tube device that had a lot of coloring on it, and at the top, you could see the cardboard and then a pipe with aluminum over the top," said Union County Sheriff's Capt. Doug Loyd. "So, with the naked eye, it would definitely look like something suspicious that is not normal."

It all started when an employee spotted the "suspicious" looking object in one of the toy aisles and brought it up to the front of the store.



This confetti popper missing its label caused a bomb scare at Walmart on Thursday, Feb. 28. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Management then contacted the corporate Emergency Operations Center, which informed the Blairsville Walmart that it needed to evacuate and call 911, which occurred around 7:45 that evening.

More than 100 customers and all employees evacuated the building, and for safety reasons, the Union County

Sheriff's Office had Walmart management send most of its staff home in case they actually were dealing with an explosive device.

Once additional law enforcement officers arrived on the scene, they blocked off the road entrances to Walmart.

After the big-box retailer was determined to be empty, See Walmart, Page 2A

## Hard work pays off for students at Georgia Junior National Livestock Show

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Students of the Union County Future Farmers of America and 4-H Farmers of America on Wednesday, Feb. 20, to attend the 2019 Georgia Junior National Livestock Show in Perry.

The competition tested the skills, progress and preparation the kids undertook this year, with each student having to compete with other schools from around the state.

Students participated in two categories, showing cows and showing pigs, with each main category broken down into classes.

Union County High School senior Bailey Rayfield

competed with her show cow Bandit, winning First Place in the state to earn the designation of Champion Market Steer. The victory came with a \$5,000 prize and bragging rights as the first person in Union County to accomplish such a feat.

"I think everybody placed in their individual classes, and I won the steer show overall," said Rayfield. "There are probably 2,000 to 2,500 heifers and probably 1,000 to 1,200 steers, with them all being broken down by breeds and then classes after that. We were competing against 2,000 to 3,000 to get in the overall drive."

Judges look at the qualities of the animals and how

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Union County students who participated in the 2019 Georgia Junior National Livestock Show in Perry last month. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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