

North Georgia News

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Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Scott Deyton promoted to School Police Chief

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Schools has welcomed Scott Deyton as the new chief for its Police Department.

A Blairsville native and Union County High Class of 1996 graduate, Chief Deyton has 27 years of law enforcement experience. He is filling the shoes of his brother Chad Deyton, who served as police chief since the district formed the campus police department in 2018.

Chad told the schools last month he would be leaving to fully pursue the lawn care business he has been building on the side. His last day on the job was Friday, and Superintendent John Hill said his leadership will be missed

at the schools.

Scott has been employed with Union County Schools since 2018, starting as a part-time School Resource Officer and fulfilling other duties at Woody Gap School. He transitioned to full-time SRO in 2021, and he's happy to be taking the reins of campus security now.

"I've got a lot of interest in the schools," Deyton said. "I went to school here my whole life. I have kids in the schools, family and friends that work within the School System. I'm just really looking forward to working with everyone to keep it a safe environment for our kids and staff."

The School System announced Scott's promotion on Facebook Friday evening, saying he "brings a wealth of

experience and passion for ensuring the safety and well-being of our students, staff, and overall UCS community."

Deyton began his career with the Union County Sheriff's Office in 1997, working his way up to second-in-command as chief deputy. He left UCSO in 2012 and worked part-time at the Blairsville Police Department and Towns County Sheriff's Office before heading to the schools.

In addition to administrative experience, Chief Deyton's specialized training includes "SWAT and Active Shooter scenarios, further enhancing his ability to protect and serve our overall school community," according to the district.

And he continues to work with the Enotah Judicial

Circuit's Drug Court, STAR Court and Family Treatment programs, doing field surveillance and mentoring participants for the last 10 years.

Moving forward in his new role, Deyton said he will be focusing on continually improving safety throughout the School System, encouraging community involvement, and promoting increased communication among staff within the district.

When the Board Office realized it would be needing to hire a new police chief, Superintendent Hill said he and his staff quickly decided they had the necessary talent in-house to fill the position with then-Officer Scott Deyton.

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Scott Deyton
UCS Police Chief

GDOT sends Phase II of GA 515 project to bid



This layout map shows the proposed twin bridges over Brasstown Creek at the Union/Towns County line.

By Shawn Jarrard
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Phase II of the Georgia 515 construction project is out for bid after gaining approval to proceed for letting in the State Transportation Board's Feb. 15 monthly meeting.

The project has been on the books for about 25 years now, initially consisting of a single construction phase to straighten and widen to four lanes a roughly 8.5-mile stretch of the highway between Blairsville and Young Harris city limits.

After bids came back too high last year, the Georgia Department of Transportation divided the project into three phases to bid out separately, with the same ultimate goal for the roadway.

"The project goal is to

See GDOT GA 515 Project, Page 2A

Band of Steel prepares for annual Gala Fundraiser

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Woody Gap Band of Steel members are gearing up to host their Ninth Annual Gala Fundraiser at the Union County Community Center Ballroom on March 8 and 9. For \$45 a

person, anyone can enjoy the highly anticipated dinner with a show, all while supporting a worthy cause.

The gala raises money to cover the band's yearly expenses, which include equipment upkeep, clinician wages and field trips. More importantly,

however, it gives the student musicians an opportunity to perform in a real-world setting.

After finding their seats from 5:30-6 p.m., guests can look forward to a prime rib and roasted-pepper chicken dinner served with potatoes, Caesar

See Band of Steel, Page 2A



Members of the Woody Gap Band of Steel, led by Band Director Doug Roberts, performing in their annual gala in 2019. They will return to host another gala experience this Friday and Saturday.

Photo by Todd Forrest

Murphy, NC, mom charged with murder of twin sons

News Special
North Georgia News

On Saturday, March 2, the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office and Cherokee County Emergency Services responded to a 911 call at 75 Gooseberry Road in Murphy, North Carolina.

The reporting party was a Cherokee County father who had arrived at the home of his separated wife to exercise custody of his 4-year-old twin sons around 10 a.m. that day. Upon arrival, he discovered his twin sons deceased.

An investigation followed which included Cherokee County Sheriff's Office Deputies and Detectives, Agents of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and Assistant District Attorneys from the Office of Ashley Welch.

Genevieve Ellen Springer, the mother of the deceased twins, was hospitalized in North Georgia and charged with two counts of First Degree Murder by the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office.

Upon release from the hospital on March 2, Springer was arrested in Union County, Georgia. She waived extradition and was transported to the Cherokee County Detention Center on March 3, where she is currently held without bond.

The date and time of death are currently under investigation. Upon information and belief, the last time the Cherokee County father saw his twin sons alive was on Feb. 26, 2024. Accordingly, the date of the offense on the warrants is currently a range of Feb. 26 through March 2. The Cherokee County Sheriff's Office is hopeful that autopsies will narrow down the date and time of the twins' passing.

In the wake of this tragedy, Cherokee County Sheriff Dustin D. Smith is asking for prayers for the victims' family, friends and all the first responders involved.

"Sheriff Smith would like to remind our County that our children are our most precious resource and our hope for the future," the Sheriff's Office said Sunday evening. "We all must



Genevieve Ellen Springer

stand united for their protection and for justice."

A critical incident debriefing will be held for all first responders involved. A critical incident debriefing is a facilitator-led group process conducted soon after a traumatic event with individuals considered to be under stress from trauma exposure.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

In-person early voting comes to a close March 8

By Shawn Jarrard
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In-person early voting for the Presidential Preference Primary ends this Friday as Union Countians take to the polls to select political party candidates for the office of President of the United States.

When early voting closes on Friday, the electorate will have had three full weeks of weekday early voting plus two Saturdays, with the next opportunity to vote falling on Election Day next Tuesday, March 12.

As of Friday afternoon, March 1, 1,774 people had cast ballots in person at the Union County Voting Center, and 100 absentee-by-mail ballots had been returned.

There are 22,456 total registered voters in the county, so combining the above in-person and absentee-by-mail voting totals, 8.3% of local voters had already cast ballots in this election by Friday afternoon.

All in-person early voting takes place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.



It's hard to miss the new early voting location off the Glenn Gooch Bypass, with multiple signs pointing people where to go.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

inside the new Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

Presidential Preference Primary voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast

their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on March 12. Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe.

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2/8 vs. Providence 6 PM

Spring Forward
Sunday
March 10th
Don't forget to
set your clocks

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GDOT GA 515 Project...from Page 1A

provide acceptable traffic levels of service for future traffic demands to reduce traffic, crash frequencies (and) severity along the corridor through Union and Towns County, and to provide better mobility through the additional bike lanes on the corridor and on the bypass,” Project Manager and Transportation Engineer Jeff Middlebrooks said in a local meeting last summer.

Phase I of the project was awarded in 2023, and work has already begun to create a 1-mile, two-lane bypass around Downtown Young Harris to feature roundabouts at each end. This phase is estimated to conclude around Fall 2025.

The second phase that just went to bid will consist of 3.2 miles of widening and reconstruction of Georgia 515 from Swanson Road in Young Harris to Earl Shelton Road east of Blairsville in Union County, with four retaining walls planned.

Once a Phase II bid is awarded, construction will begin and is expected to last about two years, with a start date estimate of Spring/Summer 2024.

“This particular project will have the bridge we’re replacing,” Middlebrooks said

previously. “We’re building a parallel bridge and replacing the existing bridge at the county line.”

To replace the existing bridge, GDOT will first build the parallel bridge, divert traffic to the new bridge, demolish the old bridge, and then build the replacement bridge to form twin bridges at the county line over Brasstown Creek.

Added Middlebrooks, “This section will be the four-lane divided highway with a 32-foot depressed median and a 10-foot shoulder with a 6-foot paved shoulder to accommodate bikes from both directions.”

All told, the 3.2-mile stretch defining Phase II will have about eight detours to tie sideroads back into the highway.

Phase III will go out to bid this year as well, with construction to encompass the 4 miles between Earl Shelton Road to the Home Depot area of Georgia 515 inside Blairsville city limits. Nine retaining walls are planned along this stretch.

Like Phase II, the third phase will feature a divided four-lane highway with a 32-foot depressed median, a 10-foot shoulder and 6-and-a-half-foot paved bike lane. It will include nine detours for sideroads.

According to a timeline estimate provided last year, Phase III construction is expected to last two years as well, though the overall project timeline remains fluid, including construction start dates, per GDOT District 1 Communications Officer Elizabeth Johnson.

“The (bid letting) list is approved by the Georgia Transportation Board, and bids are solicited up to the next month when a new letting is issued,” Johnson said last week. “If there are competitive bids made on the project, they are analyzed and a decision is made to accept, reject or defer the project based on the bids.”

“If no bids were given, there usually is an investigation as to why there were no bids. All this takes time depending

on the number of projects put out for letting.

“Some months have more projects, others do not. That also depends on funding from the federal government, which is constantly having to approve funding of itself and raising the debt ceiling.”

Added Johnson, “Once the contract is awarded, the contractor must sign the contract, have it notarized and send it back to Georgia DOT who reviews it.

“A preconstruction conference is held between GDOT and the contractor to review the contract parameters including full employment, starting dates, and a slew of details encompassing the project including the use of subcontractors and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises.

“Once the contractor has all the supplies he needs and any utilities that are involved in the project are moved and he receives the Notice to Proceed from GDOT, the project can begin. This is a very fluid timeline, and if one thing changes, the entire timeline of the project changes.”

Deyton Promoted...from Page 1A

“Chief Deyton brings a lot of wisdom to our Police Department and a lot of great experience,” Hill said. “He has a tremendous love and enthusiasm for students.

“Quite possibly his greatest attribute is how much he cares for our kids and is excited about mentoring and investing time with students – not just protecting them, but being a good role model for them.

“Scott brings a whole lot of excitement to the department. He is already planning some really cool things, like a youth camp to do a lot of different activities with

the kids during summer.

“It will be something they will enjoy to hopefully get not just some fun but also have some good experiences with a great group of guys that will be positive influences on students. That’s the kind of stuff Scott’s really about.

“He’s going to serve and protect at a very high level. He’ll have a high level of accountability and expectations for his officers. Scott is definitely a guy that leads from the front. He’s going to be involved in everything; he’ll do his share and then some.”

School Resource Officer Chad Berry – another founding

member of the School Police Department – has also resigned his position to pursue other opportunities. His last day was Friday as well, and Hill said the schools “wish him the very best in whatever he does.”

Now, the School System is looking to replace two SRO positions to fill the vacancies created by Berry’s departure and Deyton’s promotion.

In the meantime, new Chief Deyton asks that parents and members of the community contact him at sdeyton@ucschools.org if they have any suggestions for improving the Police Department.

Band of Steel...from Page 1A

salad and dessert by Melissa’s Custom Cakes.

Throughout the night, the Woody Gap Band of Steel will play live music from all genres. Their performance will include several small ensembles and solos featuring familiar favorites by Led Zeppelin, Patsy Cline, Benny Goodman and more.

Additionally, the audience will have opportunities to participate in a fun game of music bingo, strike a pose at the photobooth or hit the dance floor to their favorite songs.

“It’s a wonderful experience for the kids, and it’s a great event for the community as well,” Woody Gap Band of Steel Director Doug Roberts said. “There aren’t many events like this in the Blairsville area where people can go and have a nice dinner with entertainment.”

Roberts hosted the first gala nearly a decade ago and has been persistent in keeping the tradition alive, no matter the daunting preparation process.

Unlike conventional bands, which perform only a

handful of pieces per concert, the Woody Gap Band of Steel prepares around 30 songs for each performance. Because of the unique nature of the steel pan, many students also perfect solos that they can take with them throughout life.

“Once they learn a solo, they keep it in their back pocket where they can pull it out and use it even if they want to go out gigging on the street,” said Roberts, whose diverse history in music education has exposed him to many different instruments.

“No other instrument really guarantees that people (can) go out and make money playing on the street,” Roberts said, “but anybody who has a (steel pan), a list of songs and a backtrak can go out to almost any restaurant and do very well for themselves just playing.

“I always say that it’s like having a vacation in a pan. People instantly de-stress just from hearing that instrument play.”

Because the gala simu-

lates a restaurant-like setting, Roberts feels that it is one of the most important experiences his band gets all year. On top of that, the gala raises money to facilitate even more enriching experiences.

In the past, these funds have sent the band to the Virginia Beach Pan Festival, the International Pan Festival, the main stage at Universal Studios, the beach of Tybee Island, and New York City.

The fundraiser has also helped cover the costs of the band’s annual Pan Rocks concert, coming up this year on May 18. Professional musicians will join the Woody Gap Band of Steel on stage for the performance, which includes a lightshow mimicking the lighting of an actual rock concert.

Both the concert and the gala will give the community an opportunity to hear the unique sounds of the Woody Gap Band of Steel, so be sure to mark your calendars. For additional information and to secure gala tickets, call 678-769-5691.

Sons of Confederate Veterans holds 8th Annual Lee-Jackson Dinner

The David W. Payne Camp 1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, recently held its 8th annual Lee-Jackson dinner at The View Grill in Blairsville. Guest speaker Reverend Brandon Matheson spoke on the religious faith of iconic Generals Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson as well as his own Confederate ancestors. Both Lee and Jackson were born in Virginia; graduated from West Point; and served in the U.S. Army, before joining the fledgling Confederate States of America when their home state was invaded by federal forces in 1861.



Reverend Brandon Matheson

Early Voting...from Page 1A

Owltown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, the deadline to request a ballot for this election was Friday, March 1.

Voters returning absentee ballots can use the official drop box inside the Voting Center during early voting hours; mail them back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or drop them off in person at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Monday, Feb. 12, was the registration deadline to vote in this election.

The 2024 election cycle will be a busy one, with federal, state and local elections up for voting this year.

Candidates for local elections will qualify this

week for the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, with a runoff date of June 18 if necessary.

The big General Election is slated for Tuesday, Nov. 5, with a runoff date set for Dec. 3.

April 22 is the voter registration deadline to participate in the May 21

General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, and Oct. 7 is the deadline to register for the Nov. 5 General Election.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/s/> for voter registration status, mail-in ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

Blood Assurance: Local Blood and Platelet Mobile Drives
March and April Dates

March:	3/07/24 ... North Georgia Technical College
	3/11/24 ... Union General Hospital
	3/13/24 ... Walmart-Blairsville
April:	4/01/24 ... Union General Hospital
	4/18/24 ... Union County Health Department
	4/30/24 ... Walmart-Blairsville

To register please call Blood Assurance at 800-962-0628 to make an appointment