

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Principals Owenby, Stafford to retire at end of school year

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

When the 2020-21 school year ends, the Union County School District will say goodbye to two stalwart employees in Primary School Principal Millie Owenby and Middle School Principal Gwen Stafford.

It was with heavy hearts that the Union County Board of Education accepted each principal's separate retirement notice in a Tuesday, March 2, called teleconference.

As to why they are retiring, Owenby will be taking advantage of her 30-year retirement eligibility to spend time with her new grandbaby, Cora, born Feb. 1.

"I just really want to stay home and help my daughter and son-in-law so they can go to work, and I can watch the baby," Owenby said.

A Union County High graduate, Owenby came on board as a Primary School employee in 1992, getting her start in a special needs classroom. Two years later, she moved to a kindergarten position, in which she stayed for 15 years before being promoted to assistant principal in 2009.

Owenby advanced once more in 2013 to school principal, and she'll be retiring after eight years in that position, with 29 total years in education plus a year of built-up leave time.

Similarly, Stafford qualifies for full retirement with 29 and a half years come June, and she is saying farewell for the simple reason that she's ready to embrace some non-career goals while making way for fresh ideas in the school system.

"It's time for a change for me," Stafford said. "I want some time to be able to travel, and it's time for someone else to take my place, giving the opportunity for different people to come in."

Added Stafford, "(My husband Walt and I) just want to get out and go, and just have some time for ourselves. This is very time consuming, and doing it this long, it's time for a break, it's time to be able to

go and see our kids whenever we can."

The Gordon County native began her education career in January 1992, teaching science at Winder-Barrow High. She worked there a couple years before taking a teaching job at Fannin High. In 2001, Stafford came to Union and taught science at the Middle and High School.

Then she was promoted to Middle School assistant principal in 2006, and like Owenby, Stafford moved into the principal role at her school in 2013. Coincidentally, now-Superintendent John Hill served as her assistant principal for about a month before becoming High School principal.

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Union County Primary School Principal Millie Owenby and Middle School Principal Gwen Stafford will be missed after retiring this school year. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## SAR honors Blairsville Police; City Council conducts business



L-R: Stephen Weaver, Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter, Jared Ogden, David Cook and Sid Turner gathered March 2 for the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter SAR law enforcement presentation at Blairsville City Hall. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons of the American Revolution continued its mission of honoring local first responders by presenting the Blairsville Police Department with an

appreciation award in the Tuesday, March 2, Blairsville City Council meeting at City Hall.

For years now, the patriotic group has attended governmental meetings and met with local first responder agencies in the area to present awards for group and individual recognition, including to the

Union County Sheriff's Office and the Towns County Fire Department last July.

Instantly recognizable by their Colonial-era garb, SAR is a volunteer organization of those who participated in one or more of the seminal moments regarding the birth of this

See *City Council*, Page 3A

## Michael Perry hired to lead Panther Football in 2021

**By Todd Forrest**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Michael Perry was named the 13th head football coach at Union County High School in a called meeting of the Union County Board of Education on Tuesday, March 2.

Perry takes over the Panthers program following consecutive two-year head coaching stints at East Hall (2019-2020) and Centennial High School (2017-2018).

Before leading Centennial (Roswell) to back-to-back state playoff appearances, Perry served as offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach for five seasons at Gainesville High School (2011-2015).

Under Perry's tutelage,

the Red Elephants and future Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Deshaun Watson won the Class 5A State Championship in 2012.

During Gainesville's title run, Watson became the Georgia High School Association's all-time career leader in touchdown passes and yards passing.

In 2016, Perry served in the same capacity at Coffee County, helping guide the program to its first Elite 8 appearance since 2008.

His reputation as a quarterback whisperer has been well earned over the last decade, having coached six different All-State quarterbacks at each of his three stops between 2012-2018, with East

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Michael Perry UCHS Head Football Coach

## Georgia Senate unanimously approves Miller statue bill

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Georgia Senate voted unanimously March 1 "to provide for placement of a monument in honor of the Honorable Zell Bryan Miller upon the capitol grounds of the state capitol building."

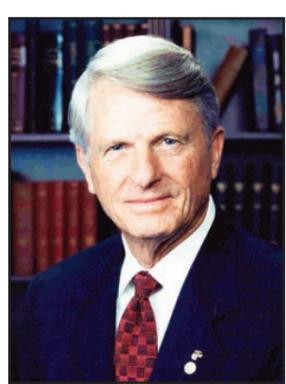
Co-sponsored by 13 Republican and four Democratic state senators, Senate Bill 140 recognizing the late Georgia Governor and U.S. Senator has advanced to the state House of Representatives, with no

set timeline on when it may become law.

"Zell Miller's impact will be felt by Georgians for generations to come," said District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, a bill co-sponsor. "Zell will forever be recognized as the father of the HOPE Scholarship in Georgia."

"It is very fitting we honor him by erecting a statue on the grounds of the state capitol. I am proud to be a sponsor of this effort. (Zell and I) had a lot in common due to

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Zell Miller

## Johnson & Johnson vaccine to make Public Health debut

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

To date, the two-dose Moderna vaccine has been the primary preventive tool for COVID-19 in North Georgia. That's about to change, however, following the Feb. 27 emergency use authorization of the single shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine by the Food & Drug Administration.

Aside from being administered at the Blairsville VA Clinic, the recently approved Johnson & Johnson vaccine has yet to debut for public use in Union or Towns counties, though doses are expected to arrive very soon in District 2 of the Department of Public Health.

"We are receiving small quantities of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in our



Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett administering a COVID shot to Occupational Therapist Mariana Kinney at Chatuge Regional Nursing Home Friday. Photo/Submitted

## Seabees celebrate turning 79 with All Military Ball

**By Jarrett Whitener**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

YOUNGHARRIS—Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3 Georgia and veterans from other military groups came together to celebrate the 79th Anniversary of the U.S. Navy Seabees at the Ridges Resort on Saturday, March 6.

The local Island was founded by Ed Crenshaw, Richard Hoibraten and other "plank members" in 2015, with the intent of honoring the history of the "CBs," or Construction Battalions, dating back to World War II.

"A couple of guys and I got together to start a Seabee Island," Island Cmdr. Crenshaw said. "I needed five to start the Island. Richard was here, and I was here, and we had a fellow that was with us (Mike Ruback),

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Cmdr. Mike Streckert of the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps was the keynote speaker in the March 6 All Military Ball sponsored by the local Navy Seabee Veterans of America. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

## Controlled burn to restore forest at Chapman Ford

**By Jarrett Whitener**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

As part of its Fire Management Program, the U.S. Forest Service performed a 127-acre prescribed burn along Chapman Ford and Gray roads on Thursday, Feb. 25, about 6 miles northwest of Blairsville.

"Fire Management involves both fire suppression and proactively using fire to achieve set goals," according to the Forest Service. "Fire effectively and efficiently reduces the level of hazardous fuels, thus reducing risks and costs."

"After many years of fire exclusion, an ecosystem that needs periodic fire becomes unhealthy. Trees are stressed by overcrowding; fire-dependent species disappear; and flammable fuels build up and become

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A Forest Service fire specialist tends a 127-acre low-intensity controlled burn in Union County last month. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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**SPORTS**

**BASEBALL**

3/15 @ Gilmer 5:30 PM

**SOCCER**

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3/10 @ East Hall 5:30 & 7:30 PM

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