

North Georgia News

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For county incumbents, it's 'Four More Years' in office

BOE District 3



Dale Spivey

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Qualifying wrapped Friday with a final list of candidates vying for public office at the local, state and federal levels in 2020, and the big news in Union County was the local incumbent qualifiers.

Each of the nine incumbents who qualified for local office did so unopposed this year, meaning none of them will face challengers in either the May 19 General Primary/Nonpartisan General Election, or the Nov. 3 General Election.

The incumbents are Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Superior Court Clerk Judy Odom, County Coroner Benny Erwin, Probate Judge Dwain Brackett, Sheriff Mack Mason, County Surveyor Jason Henson, Tax Commissioner Lee Knight, Magistrate Judge Cary Cox and



Julia Barnett

BOE District 1



Janna Akins (I)

Board of Education District 1 Member Janna Akins.

According to those involved, including longtime Elections Superintendent Libby Stevens, who submitted

Single local contest to be decided May 19



What do Jason Henson, Cary Cox, Judy Odom, Lamar Paris, Mack Mason, Lee Knight, Dwain Brackett, Benny Erwin and Janna Akins have in common? All are local incumbents who qualified unopposed last week for the 2020 election cycle. Akins pictured separately.

qualifying paperwork to the state, there's been no time in recent memory – and perhaps ever – that so many incumbents finished out qualifying week unchallenged.

As such, the only local office requiring voters to decide between candidates will be the District 3 seat of the Union County Board of Education, for which incumbent Cindy Odom

decided not to run again.

And since the two candidates running for that seat – Julia Barnett and Dale Spivey – both qualified on the Republican ticket, the fate of District 3 will be decided in the May 19 General Primary, with the victor going into the November election unchallenged.

Eight of the nine

incumbent qualifiers gathered at the courthouse immediately following the close of qualifying on Friday, March 6, for an impromptu group photograph and celebration of what everyone felt was a ringing endorsement by their constituencies.

"We hope the public feels like we've done a good job," Commissioner Paris said. "I

know everybody in here, and I know everybody works hard to do the job."

All of the incumbents are set to swear into new four-year terms in January 2021, which for Paris will be his sixth term in office.

Looking ahead, Paris said that, in the near term, people can anticipate the completion of
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Local stakeholders take steps to ward off COVID-19, flu



By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Since the novel coronavirus took the world stage in December, right at the height of an already virulent flu season in the U.S., it seems all people can talk about anywhere these days is COVID-19.

Some 450 COVID-19 cases were being reported nationwide over the weekend, including at least five confirmed cases in Georgia, with two more unconfirmed cases under investigation by state health officials Sunday afternoon.

Naturally, people are worried about the still mysterious disease, from the heads of government to parents of individual school systems, which is why the powers that be are having conversations now about local preparedness levels.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said last week that they are taking the threat of coronavirus very seriously, as well as dealing with widespread flu.

They are following the best practices as set forth by the Georgia Department of Public Health based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, which include:

Avoiding close contact with sick people; avoiding

touching eyes, nose and mouth; staying home when sick; covering coughs/sneezes with crook of elbow and/or tissues before discarding in trash; and cleaning/disinfecting frequently touched objects/surfaces like countertops, touchscreens, phones, doorknobs and handles using regular household cleaning sprays or wipes.

Also recommended is frequent handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after using the bathroom, before eating, and after nose-blowing, coughing and/or sneezing.

"If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol," the CDC said. "Always wash hands with soap and water if

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Gov. Kemp appoints Buck Levins to Superior Court Judgeship

News Special
North Georgia News

Gov. Brian P. Kemp announced last week his selection of Buck Levins to fill a vacancy on the Superior Court of the Enotah Judicial Circuit.

"I am humbled to be appointed to the Superior Court for the Enotah Judicial Circuit, and I appreciate Gov. Kemp's confidence in my ability to serve in this role," Levins said. "Most of my career has been in public service, and I look forward to continuing to serve the people of Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin counties."

"I'm committed to making sure the rule of law is upheld and that justice is done in each case that comes before the bench in our Circuit."

Levins, a native of Houston County, Georgia, has served as the Senior Assistant District Attorney for the Tallapoosa Judicial Circuit



Buck Levins

since August 2019.

Prior to that, he served as the Senior Assistant District Attorney for the Enotah Judicial Circuit from October 2012 to August 2019, Assistant District Attorney for the Alcovy and Atlanta Judicial Circuits, and as an associate attorney at several practices throughout Georgia.

The new judge graduated from the University of Georgia

in 2000 with a bachelor's degree in political science. He earned his Juris Doctorate from the University of Georgia School of Law in 2005.

Levins is an active member of the Blairsville community, serving on the board of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and as a member of First Baptist Church, the Rotary Club of Union County, and a graduate of Leadership Union.

In 2019, he was named the Georgia Council of Accountability Court Judges' Prosecutor of the Year.

He and his wife, Jaime, reside in Union County. It is unknown at this time when Levins will swear into his new position.

The vacancy being filled by Levins was created when Chief Judge N. Stanley Gunter decided to retire from his position on the court, effective Oct. 1.

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Area pilot Don Campbell turns 90 with fellow aviators

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Don Campbell celebrated his 90th birthday with friends at the Blairsville's Skillet Café on Tuesday, March 3.

Those familiar with the Blairsville Municipal Airport will certainly know the newly minted nonagenarian, who has been a staple at the airport for years – and still is.

Campbell is one of three brothers, all flyers. He was born and raised between Blue Ridge and Copperhill, Tennessee. Copperhill is just over the Georgia state line, which runs through the town of McCaysville.

The airport in Copperhill of Polk County, Tennessee, is named Martin Campbell Field after Campbell's brother who was killed in World War II, though the airport got its start before Martin died.

"They were flying out of



Pilot Don Campbell had a blast with cake and friends at his birthday party last week.

Photo by Mark Smith

a cow pasture in McCaysville – this was in 1939 in their home-build airplane," Campbell said. "One day, the wind wasn't right, and one of them took off and went under the high-power line instead of over it. And my

dad said, 'Well, that's the end of that.'"

After that near-miss incident, Campbell's father took the Tennessee Copper Company into letting him grade off the top of the hill. So, he borrowed a county bulldozer and graded a 900-foot dirt runway, extending it to 1,200 feet the next year.

"That's the reason the airport is there," Campbell said. "My other brother (Ken) that survived World War II, he did the politicking and got the federal aid airport over there in 1965."

"So, that's how I wound up in the airplane business. I flew for the airlines in my early days. I then left and went with an insurance company in Birmingham (Alabama). Most of my career was corporate flying through the years," he said.

Campbell flew a twin Cessna airplane out of
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Blairsville Garden Club shares history in 80th birthday bash

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Garden Club celebrated its 80th birthday on Saturday, March 7, in the Brackett Community Room of United Community Bank.

Members from the State Garden Club appeared at the celebration to present the group with a certificate honoring its 80 years and many accomplishments thus far.

Club members took the time to talk about the history of the organization, highlighting straightaway the role of Edith Paris in the Garden Club's beginnings.

"Lamar Paris' mother was the first president of the Blairsville Garden Club," said current Garden Club President Margaret Lynch. "She was



Georgia Garden Club President Barbara Borque attended the Blairsville Garden Club's 80th birthday celebration on Saturday, pictured here with local Club President Margaret Lynch.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

president in 1940, and I want to thank all the members of our club. As you can see, they have done a wonderful job in

our community." Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris attended the
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