

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Teachers, staff receive J&J one-shot COVID vaccines

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Union County Schools welcomed the local Health Department Friday for a COVID-19 vaccination clinic following Gov. Brian Kemp's expansion of eligibility to school faculty and staff effective March 8.

Held inside the Middle School Gym, the clinic featured the vaccination of 165 staff members, with still others having received the vaccine outside of the clinic, bringing total staff vaccination above 50%.

For more than a year, the district has worked hard to find the best approach to COVID-19, transitioning to distance learning at the onset of the pandemic last spring before switching to a hybrid

plan so kids could safely return to the classroom for the 2020-21 school year.

Between online only and in-person learning, most families have opted to return kids to campus, with the district implementing mitigations such as frequent sanitation, social distancing where possible, seating charts for potential quarantine purposes, encouraging mask use, and closing Fridays for additional sanitation.

Vaccination is yet another important mitigation in the district's quest to keep the schools open for children and their families, a quest that Union County has succeeded in managing when many schools around the state and nation chose to close for a substantial part of the year.

Alongside the clinic came

other good news Friday, with district's weekly COVID-19 Update on Facebook showing zero positive cases among school employees and students – the first time the schools have been able to report such favorable numbers since Sept. 18, 2020.

Assisting in the March 12 clinic were the Union County Health Department, District 2 Public Health nurses, nursing students from the University of North Georgia, the nurses of Union County Schools and the district's COVID Response Team.

"We are so thankful to the local Health Department and our school nurses for providing this for our staff," School Superintendent John Hill said.

The clinic utilized the See UCS Vaccinations, Page 6A



Union County Middle School Nurse Jeri Ann King vaccinating High School Ag Teacher and FFA Adviser Haley Sosebee on Friday, March 12. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Vaccines available to categories 'accounting for 92% of deaths'

CDC updates guidelines for vaccinated people

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Last week, Alaska became the first state to expand COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to all residents. And pending supply availability, Gov. Brian Kemp said Georgia may do the same as early as April.

Effective Monday, Kemp expanded vaccine eligibility "to include Georgians aged 55 and older and individuals with disabilities and certain medical conditions," according to a March 10 press release highlighting the announcements.

Included in the expansion are individuals aged 16 and

older with certain medical conditions that increase risk of severe illness from COVID-19.

The state is classifying eligible high-risk conditions to include asthma, cancer, chronic kidney disease, diabetes, hypertension, heart conditions, immunocompromised state, overweight and obesity, pregnancy and more. For a full list, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine>.

People meeting the above eligibility criteria will be joining health care workers, long-term care residents/staff, adults aged 65 and older and their caregivers, first responders, Pre-K and K-12 teachers/staff,



Gov. Brian Kemp

and adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their caregivers.

Pfizer is the only vaccine currently approved for eligible 16 and 17-year-olds. See Vaccine Availability, Page 3A

## Blue Ridge Mountain EMC names Glidewell new GM

News Special  
North Georgia News

YOUNG HARRIS – Directors for the Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation announced in their Tuesday, March 9, Board Meeting that Allan Glidewell has been selected as general manager.

When Glidewell joins the EMC March 22, he will be bringing with him more than 23 years of experience in the utility industry working primarily in electric cooperatives.

He will be taking over from Interim General Manager Erik Brinke, who has led the EMC since former general manager Jeremy Nelms left in September 2020 for Flint

Energies in Warner Robbins.

"Glidewell's knowledge, experience, longevity and leadership within the electric cooperative caught the attention of our Board," Board President Ray Cook said. "Our board and legal counsel spent several weeks interviewing and vetting the candidates, and we feel we have an excellent choice as our general manager who will lead the co-op successfully into the future."

"We look forward to having Mr. Glidewell as a part of the BRMEMC family. On behalf of the board, we want to especially thank Interim General Manager Erik Brinke for his leadership during the search for

See New GM, Page 2A



Allan Glidewell

## 'Frontline hero' comes to town, joins Family Medicine practice

News Special  
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Blairsville has a new addition in town with Dr. Margi Johnson. But she's no ordinary woman – she is truly a "frontline hero."

Board certified in Family Medicine, Dr. Johnson is a new physician with North Georgia Family Medicine.

Her family's move from New Jersey to Blairsville was fueled after her experience treating COVID patients in New York City, one of the country's hardest hit cities during the pandemic.

Dr. Johnson spent endless grueling hours caring for these patients, dedicating her time and energy as a volunteer on the COVID Care Force Team-NY1. During this work, she even once, but twice, after falling



Dr. Margi Johnson, center, with her family at the church where her husband previously served as pastor. Photo/Submitted

See Dr. Johnson, Page 2A

## Matheson recovering, thankful for 'overwhelming' support

By Shawn Jarrard  
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HAYESVILLE, N.C. – More than two dozen volunteers gathered at Catalyst Church Friday, March 12, to box over 700 barbecue plates and 100 hamburger plates for a fundraiser benefiting one of the church's founding members, Crystal Matheson, who survived a shooting in January.

"I'm thankful for everybody that had a hand in it," Matheson said of the effort, which involved plate orders from residents in Cherokee and Clay counties of North Carolina, as well as Union and Towns counties of Georgia.

Matheson attended the fundraiser to visit with members of her church family and to thank her many supporters, heading over to the event after



Shooting survivor Crystal Matheson is grateful for the support of people like Clayton Reeves and the more than two dozen volunteers who made possible the March 12 barbecue fundraiser benefiting her. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

a physical therapy session at Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation & Wellness Center in Hiawassee.

She is not only a patient at the wellness center but works there, too, though she

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## Production Tool & Technology moves business to Blairsville

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Perhaps the easiest way to quantify the scope of Production Tool & Technology is to say the following: if it flies, the company provides tools to build it.

From airliners to helicopters, personal planes, space rockets, stealth fighters, satellites, missiles and beyond, the family-owned tool supply caters to every aspect of the international aerospace industry.

Since Jan. 1, 2021, the formerly Macon-based company has been operating primarily out of Blairsville.

Pro Tool is a master distributor for all major aerospace tool companies, selling new and refurbished

tools to aircraft manufacturers. Should a company require equipment and/or expertise in either drilling or filling holes in an aircraft, Pro Tool makes it happen, and on a global scale.

Additionally, Pro Tool is a comprehensive provider of services and solutions for every tool situation, including custom process engineering, repair work, warranty-backed remanufacturing and project consultation.

Going above and beyond, Pro Tool even supplies loaner tools to manufacturers anywhere in the world to keep them up and running while their own tools are being repaired by Pro Tool.

Of course, it's a serious business making things fly safely, with precision and accuracy being of utmost priority in

aircraft manufacturing. In this regard and others, Pro Tool has made a name for itself among industry giants.

Today, Pro Tool has contracts with big manufacturers like Boeing, Lockheed and Gulfstream, though the company started out modestly enough in Bill and Frieda Jones' basement in Marietta, with help from their son Brian Jones, who heads up the business presently as President/CEO.

It was 1996, and the family, by that point highly experienced in aerospace tooling thanks to decades of employment at companies like Lockheed and Dresser Industries, decided to start their own business.

They quickly outgrew See Production Tool, Page 2A



The crew of Production Tool & Technology met with Union County Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs, right, earlier this month to show him around the facility. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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