

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Heavy rains cause local flooding, SR 180 closure

GDOT outlines detour past Turner's Corner

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

2020 was the region's wettest year on record, according to the Tennessee Valley Authority. And while 2021 is about 7 inches behind where the region was this time last year, the storms that blanketed the Southeast March 25 dropped more rain here than any calendar day in 2020.

Per monitoring equipment at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center in Blairsville, Union County experienced 4.53 inches of rain last Thursday, resulting in swollen waterways and flooding that, thankfully, only produced minor damage.

At least five people died in north central Alabama from tornadoes that day, and property

damage was much more severe in other places.

Locally, the storm affected about 15 roadways with either downed trees or washed-out culverts, and residents reported several carried-away propane tanks, widespread flooding and some hail.

"So far, we've been lucky," Union County Emergency Management Agency Director David Dyer said. "We didn't have any rescues, which is great. We didn't have any car accidents that I'm aware of as a result of this - nothing major that way. It's just a matter of figuring out how much damage we've got."

Perhaps the worst of the local damage occurred on State Route 180 to Suches, less than a mile from its intersection with

US 129 near Vogel State Park. The heavy rains caused the shoulder to give way under the edge of the road there, creating a dangerous situation in need of remedying.

The Georgia Department of Transportation quickly responded to the scene, setting up a work truck with cones to safely direct people around the dangerous section of road.

On Friday evening, GDOT issued its plans for a repair, which may take a couple days this week pending weather conditions. Emergency vehicles will be allowed to use the road, but it has been closed to all other through traffic until the repair is completed.

GDOT has established a detour for those traveling to and from Suches, utilizing State

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The Georgia Department of Transportation has its work cut out for it repairing this shoulder washout on SR 180 after heavy rains last Thursday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Donaldson, Womack to lead Middle and Primary Schools

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

When the 2021-22 school year rolls around, Union County Middle and Primary School students will be seeing new faces in their respective principals' offices.

Pat Donaldson will be

the new principal at the Middle School, and Shane Womack will be the new principal at the Primary School. Both principals were hired in the March 16 regular School Board meeting and are looking forward to taking on their added responsibilities.

Their ascension to

principalships is a promotion for the educators, with the Board Office deciding to look in-house for qualified applicants to fill the leaderships roles that came open following the retirement announcements for Principals Gwen Stafford and Millie Owenby.

See New Principals, Page 2A

Boeing 737 makes surprise appearance at local airport



This experimental Boeing 737 would have undoubtedly caused runway damage and had problems taking off had it landed in Blairsville last week. Thankfully, that was never in the cards. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

When a Boeing 737-800 commercial jetliner appeared as an incoming flight to the

Blairsville Municipal Airport last week, it caused quite a bit of confusion.

After all, the local airport is not rated to take such large aircraft, in this case, a plane

capable of seating up to 189 passengers.

According to Airport Assistant Manager Dan Firebaugh, the asphalt on the

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Pat Donaldson and Shane Womack can't wait to get to work leading their schools as the new principals of the Middle and Primary School respectively. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

COVID-19 vaccine eligibility expands to all Georgians 16 & up

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Gov. Brian Kemp more than made good on his goal of expanding COVID-19 vaccine eligibility to nearly all Georgians by April, announcing last week that the state had enough supply to begin providing vaccines to everyone 16 and up starting Thursday, March 25.

By now, there are multiple avenues for residents to schedule appointments, including the Office of the Governor's own partnership with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency at https://myvaccinegeorgia.com.

People may also visit http://phdistrict2.org and click on "REGISTER HERE" at the



Alongside welcome news that vaccinations were opening up to most Georgians last week, the Union County Nursing Home alerted families that visitations could begin after a long year of restrictions for residents. Photo/Submitted

top of the page to schedule an appointment at the local Health Department, or by reaching out to the Call Center at 1-888-

426-5073. Public Health's vaccine appointment scheduler, features

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School Board distributes COVID bonuses to local teachers, staff



School Board Members Janna Akins, Julia Barnett and Tony Hunter in their March 25 called meeting. Due to recent remodeling at the Board Office, it was the first meeting there in a while. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Thursday, March 25, the State Board of Education

approved a recommendation by Gov. Brian Kemp and State School Superintendent Richard Woods to give teachers and education support personnel

bonus payments. These funds will come from federal COVID relief monies allotted to Georgia, to allocate a

See Teacher Bonuses, Page 2A

RidgeRunner Takeout celebrates year of success during pandemic

Local food delivery service RidgeRunner Takeout opened for business April 2, 2020, right at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when people were stuck at home and restaurants were closed to dine-in services.

Serving Blairsville, Hiwassee and other North Georgia areas, RidgeRunner delivers food from restaurants that don't have their own

delivery service straight to a customer's door or workplace. And all people need to do is visit RidgeRunnerTakeout.com or download the handy mobile app.

For everyone's favorite area restaurants, RidgeRunner was heaven-sent after getting off the ground, connecting local businesses struggling from shutdown with their lifeblood - hungry customers either quarantined or afraid to get out during the pandemic.

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Positive Pathways aims to aid those suffering from addiction

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Positive Pathways is a new organization in Union County with hopes of tackling substance abuse and working to rehabilitate those who want to get over their addictions.

On Wednesday, March 24, the nonprofit held a Community Listening Session at the Union County Community Center to receive public input from local stakeholders on what is needed in the area.

Positive Pathways Co-Founders Summer Cress and Shawna Harkins hosted a Zoom session to talk about their recovery nonprofit



In addition to an in-person Community Listening Session, Positive Pathways Co-Founders Summer Cress and Shawna Harkins hosted a Zoom session to talk about their recovery nonprofit March 24. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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Happy Easter
from the staff of the
North Georgia News and West Printing Company