

North Georgia News

2 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Stubblefield named District Teacher of Year

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Congratulations to Union County Primary School Teacher Stephanie Stubblefield, who has been named District Teacher of the Year by Union County Schools.

The Board Office announced each school's Teacher of the Year in February: Stubblefield at the Primary, Keri Young at the Elementary School, Jennifer Fortenberry at Union County Middle, Cindy Dobbins for Union County High School, and Stacy Olson at Woody Gap School.

After careful deliberations by a committee comprised of principals and district administrators,

Stubblefield was selected to represent all the schools as District Teacher of the Year, and she received special recognition in the March 19 School Board meeting.

"Everyone needs to have a Mrs. Stubblefield in their life," Primary School Principal Debby Decubellis said in the meeting. "She not only loves every child that comes into her classroom, but she sees their worth and helps them to know how special they are."

"We can't say enough how thankful we are to have her in our school. We're so proud."

Currently in her 26th year of teaching, Stubblefield has been at Union County Primary since August of 2002. She taught second grade there

for many years and is now teaching kindergarten.

Stubblefield is no stranger to being named Teacher of the Year, having been selected by her fellow educators for the honor in 2017, and she is grateful for the opportunity to represent the entire district in 2024.

"I still can't believe I was chosen as District Teacher of the Year for Union County Schools," Stubblefield said. "It is truly humbling to have been selected from the vast number of extremely talented teachers. I am so thankful to be able to teach in Union County. We really do have an amazing school system."

After marrying her husband Jay, who hails from

Blairsville, the Blue Ridge native moved away from the area and taught in another county for four years. But the Stubblefields moved back to Blairsville in 2002 "so that our kids could go to school here in Union County."

Stubblefield said she will always be grateful to former Primary School Principal Bobby Kelley for giving her the opportunity to teach Union County's youngest students.

"I decided to go into teaching because I love kids," Stubblefield said. "I enjoy working with them and watching them learn and grow. There are no words to describe how fulfilling it is to watch a young child learn to

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Union County Kindergarten Teacher Stephanie Stubblefield receiving District TOTY accolades from UCPS Principal Debby Decubellis. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Shotgun Team readying for state qualifying shoot

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Union County 4-H Modified Trap Shotgun Team is busy preparing for two big upcoming competitions: the District Qualifier to be hosted locally on April 20, and the State Modified Trap Match at the Rock Eagle 4-H Center in May.

Twenty-one students ranging from sixth grade on up to High School seniors have been meeting with their volunteer coaches multiple times each week to hone their skills, and they're learning more than just how to shoot.

The Modified Trap program is housed under the Georgia 4-H Project SAFE, which stands for "Shooting Awareness, Fun and Education."

Project SAFE uses shooting sports to teach valuable life skills with a primary goal of "safety and the responsible use of firearms and archery equipment," according to <https://georgia4h.org/>.

In addition to firearms training, youth members of the community utilize Project



New to the Shotgun Team this season, Junior 4-H'er Aria Mederos will be ready for District Qualifying this month thanks to the guidance of Head Coach Keith Herbert. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

SAFE as "a place to develop a sense of belonging, learn teamwork in a safe environment and increase concentration skills."

During the April 20 shoot, several counties will be joining the local team in Blairsville to qualify for the State Match.

To qualify for state, 4-H'ers must shoot a minimum number of machine-thrown clay

targets. Juniors – that is, sixth through eighth-graders – have to hit at least 16 of 25 targets, while Seniors – those competing in grades nine through 12 – must hit at least 20 of 25 targets.

Students who qualify in the April 20 event will head to Rock Eagle in Eatonton May 11 for chances to win state titles.

New this season is the addition of sixth graders to the

See Shotgun Team, Page 6A

Great North American Eclipse coming on April 8

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Mark your calendars and ready your safety glasses for this Monday, April 8, as a breathtaking celestial phenomenon returns to the United States for the first time since August 2017.

It's hard to forget the total solar eclipse that turned out the lights in North Georgia that August; and while this area does not fall in the path of totality this time around, residents will still be able to view a partial eclipse if they follow the proper safety protocol.

A solar eclipse takes place when the moon passes between the Earth and the



The solar eclipse on Monday will require certified safety glasses to view. Photo from blogs.nasa.gov/Watch_the_Skies/

sun, blocking out a portion or the entirety of the sun from view. Solar eclipses are pretty common, occurring around two to four times a year. Total solar eclipses

See Eclipse, Page 2A

Law enforcement feels love in 'Coffee with a Cop'



It was a full house at Cabin Coffee for the Chamber of Commerce's law enforcement appreciation event last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce's second Coffee

with a Cop event went off without a hitch on Tuesday, March 26, with an impressive display of appreciation for local law enforcement.

Originally planned for

Jan. 9 to coincide with National Law Enforcement Day, the event was rescheduled due to inclement weather that required the focus of police and deputies

See Coffee with a Cop, Page 2A

Union County Sheriff's Office teams up for big drug bust



This is what multiple kilos of meth look like, seized in a joint drug operation aided by the Union County Sheriff's Office. Photo/Facebook

News Special

On Friday, March 15, the Union County Sheriff's Office, Fannin County Sheriff's Office, Gilmer County Sheriff's Office, GBI Appalachian Drug Enforcement Office, Cherokee Multi Agency Narcotics Squad, and the FBI Conasauga Safe Streets Task Force acted on information from a long-term investigation that started in Fall 2023 that resulted in a traffic

stop in Gilmer County by these agencies.

Approximately 3 kilograms of methamphetamine were seized and three people were arrested.

Kenneth Lee Green, Randy Nathaniel Green and Abigail Owens are all facing serious drug charges. Randy Green and Abigail Owens are of Union County.

Information was also

obtained that led to a search warrant being served at a residence in Pickens County.

During this search, approximately 15 kilograms of methamphetamine, approximately \$20,000 in cash, two firearms, a 2024 Chevrolet 2500 pickup, a 2024 Haulmark enclosed trailer and a Chevrolet Camaro were seized.

While search warrants See Drug Bust, Page 7A

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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The Union County Sheriff's Office is seeking help from the public in locating a fugitive from justice after he allegedly burglarized a home near where he was staying in the Choestoe area.

Billy "Bosco" Chance Schmeltz, 41, of Blairsville, ran from law enforcement on

Wednesday, March 27. The Sheriff's Office brought in its K-9 Bolo to track him, though investigators believe he was able to get a ride out of the area and is possibly staying with friends.

The burglary in question occurred on Sunday, March 24, at a small cabin owned by a part-time resident who was not home at the time, UCSO Capt.

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Billy "Bosco" Schmeltz



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North American Eclipse...from Page 1A

the Earth. This makes viewing a total solar eclipse, even partially, a unique event.

In Blairsville, Young Harris and Hiwassee, the partial eclipse will begin around 1:47 p.m. and reach its most intense phase around 3:06 p.m. The moon will cover roughly 87% of the sun at that point. For optimal viewing, residents should seek a place with open, clear skies.

Those who witnessed the 2017 eclipse may remember that a total eclipse is unique in the sense that viewers are able to remove their safety glasses during totality – the brief moment that the moon completely blocks out the sun. But that will not be possible here during this eclipse.

This year, the eclipse will pass over the South Pacific Ocean and cross Mexico, the

United States and Canada. Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine will be the only U.S. states to experience totality.

For viewers in all other states, including Georgia, it is necessary to wear ISO-certified eclipse safety glasses at all times while viewing the eclipse. While the sun will gradually be covered until only a crescent-shaped sliver is visible, its UV rays can still burn retinas beyond repair.

Professionals suggest purchasing either American Paper Optics or Rainbow Symphony glasses to ensure proper eye safety. Other ISO-certified glasses are available, but to avoid falling victim to unsafe counterfeit varieties

like many viewers did in 2017, they advise sticking to those brands.

The Great North American Eclipse offers a rare opportunity for people from Mexico's Pacific Coast all the way to the Atlantic Coast of Newfoundland, Canada, to view an astronomical sensation from home, so don't miss out!

Another total solar eclipse will not be visible from the contiguous United States until Aug. 23, 2044.

For more information on the eclipse, visit <https://science.nasa.gov/eclipses/future-eclipses/eclipse-2024/where-when/>.

To learn how to spot fake eclipse glasses, check out <https://aas.org/press/american-astronomical-society-warns-counterfeit-fake-eclipse-glasses>.

Coffee with a Cop...from Page 1A

on obstructed roads. Cabin Coffee served as the meeting place when things kicked off bright and early at 8 a.m., and slowly but surely, deputies from the Union County Sheriff's Office and Blairsville Police officers started filing in.

Deputy Chris Jackson has been in Union County for about six years after spending 13 years with the Columbus Police Department. After his son was born, Jackson and his family moved north, and they've never looked back.

"It's an awesome environment to be in law enforcement up here because the community loves us and reaches out all the time," said Jackson, who recalls "not (being) liked" as part of Columbus' police force.

He's not alone in feeling appreciated – a room full of fellow officers readily agreed that they had been shown respect and care by those for whom they work to keep safe.

Bradley Glass said he "couldn't imagine working anywhere else," and Kiefer Sinclair believes "the grass is definitely the greenest on this side of the road."

Shortly after everyone had a chance to make their orders and got cups in-hand, Chamber President Steve Rowe introduced the event, adding that Union County's law enforcement officers do an "amazing job."

"I may be a little prejudiced being the chamber president, but I think we've got a great community," Rowe said, urging the public to show their appreciation for those honored that day. "We just wanted to provide an opportunity to thank our law enforcement officers and first responders."

For his part, Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter thanked community members in turn for their ample support.

"There's not a week or day goes by and somebody is

not thanking us personally or copping a meal for our guys," wagered Baxter. "We can all attest this is a great place to live ... and I think everyone who wears a badge in this county strives to make it a better place."

Finally, Rowe called for a round of applause for Cabin Coffee for donating the drinks and providing such a warm atmosphere.

Of course, the chamber plans on doing the same thing again next year, although if there's one thing they want to add, it's a chance for Union County's youngest residents to speak to local officers.

"We would love for kids to start attending this event, too," noted Crystal Fairless, the Chamber Director of Operations and Marketing.

The North Georgia News would also like to thank local law enforcement – and all other first responders – for their role in keeping this community safe.

Fugitive Wanted...from Page 1A

Daren "Bear" Osborn said.

When the security camera feed at the property was interrupted that Sunday, the property owner drove up the following day from the Atlanta area to see what was going on, only to find that his cabin had been burglarized, Osborn said.

Someone had pried a window loose to gain entry and stolen many items from the cabin, including the security system, a coffee maker, solar power equipment, pillows and more; even pieces of outdoor furniture went missing, Osborn said.

The Sheriff's Office took an initial report on Monday, March 25, and deputies with the Criminal Investigation Division headed out to inspect the scene on Wednesday.

Osborn said they quickly

developed a person of interest in the case, as Schmeltz had prior run-ins with law enforcement and was known to frequent a Twiggs Road residence located about 100 yards from the burglarized property.

When Osborn and Sgt. Rachel Mann pulled into the nearby residence around lunchtime to speak with Schmeltz, they saw him loading items into a vehicle. As soon as he realized that deputies had arrived, Osborn said Schmeltz took off on foot and disappeared into the woods.

There, investigators recovered approximately \$10,000 worth of stolen items, which were verified from photographic records kept by the owner of the cabin, Osborn said. Other items are still missing, some of which are

believed to have been pawned in North Carolina.

Schmeltz is facing felony charges of first-degree burglary and theft by taking as well as misdemeanor obstruction of justice for absconding. At the time, he also had outstanding warrants for failure to appear in court and parole violation.

"If you have any information to the whereabouts of Billy Chance Schmeltz, do not approach him, and please call 911 or 706-439-6066," the Sheriff's Office said in an official "Wanted Person" notice issued last week.

Schmeltz is 6 feet, 1 inch tall and weighs about 180 pounds, with brown hair and blue eyes.

He has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Blairsville's Veterans Commanders seeks entries for Annual Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony



The Blairsville – Union County Memorial Day Parade Committee invites you to participate in this annual parade which starts at 10:30 AM on Saturday, May 25, 2024.

The theme this year is "Honoring our Korea Veterans: The forgotten war that never ended." We will be grateful to have two Korean War Veterans, one who survived the 1950 battle at Chosin Reservoir, North Korea (known as the "frozen Chosin"), as Grand Marshals.

Any church, business, civic organization or other group can participate in the parade to support the theme. Whether it's a decorated float, vehicle, or anything else, participation is key to properly supporting our Veteran community and remembering those that gave the ultimate sacrifice. However, at the minimum, entries are asked to respectively display our American flag. This year all entries will be judged for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place overall.

As in year's past, the parade route will begin at the old gymnasium, past Union County War Memorial Park, turn right on Cleveland Street and wind around the old courthouse onto Blue Ridge Street. It will then

turn left at the public library and head back to the Union County War Memorial Park. Also, please join our Veterans at the park for a Memorial Day ceremony that will begin shortly after the parade.

Even though this is an election year, Memorial Day commemorates U.S. men and women who died while in military service. The committee asks that everyone put aside all political issues

and advertising and honor our fallen heroes with a large turnout showing a sincere display of American patriotism.

For more information on how to participate in the parade fill out the form below and return to the Leon Davenport Veterans Center, 78 Blue Ridge Hwy., Blairsville, GA 30512 or contact the committee at ga.iraweaver121@gmail.com.

Honoring Our Korea Veterans



The forgotten war that never ended

Memorial Day Parade Saturday, May 25 • 10:30 am Downtown Blairsville

Name of Entrant: _____
 Contact name: _____
 Phone: _____ Email: _____
 Please indicate number of the following types of entries:
 _____ Float (Length: _____)
 _____ Vintage Car/Truck (Type of vehicle: _____)
 _____ Other (specify: _____)

Please no throwing of candy or other items along the parade route

If your civic organization, church, business or other group wishes to participate in the Memorial Day Parade, please fill out this entry form and email it to: ga.iraweaver121@gmail.com

Please have your entry checked in between 8:30–9:30 am in front of the old recreation gym at 371 School Circle, Blairsville, GA 30512

Sponsored by all Union County Veterans Organizations

Vietnam Veterans host Commemorative 50th Anniversary of end to Vietnam War



VVA 2024 Officers: Chuck Kittredge, VVA Chapter 1101 former president (foreground) installs the Chapter's 2024 officers (left to right) Kirby Bowran, chaplain; Jim Yohe, secretary; Roger Pilcher, vice president, Malcolm McRaine III, president; and Edd Frizzell, treasurer

Blairsville Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1101 hosted a commemorative 50th Anniversary of the end of the Vietnam war luncheon at The View for more than 30 Vietnam War and Vietnam-era Veterans and their spouses March 29 as part of National Vietnam War Veterans Day.

The event was to thank and honor veterans of the Vietnam War and to highlight the brave and faithful service of the Armed Forces during a very divisive period of American history. Upon returning home, many were mistreated and condemned for the country's involvement in the Vietnam War.

As part of the event Lamar Paris, Union County commissioner, read and presented a Union County proclamation which in part noted "that one of our most fundamental obligations is to show respect and dignity to all who have worn the uniform of the United States, and to honor their sacrifice by serving them as well as they served us."

During the luncheon buffet video of the 1967 Bob Hope Christmas special from Southeast Asia was played and evoked many memories of the time period and Hope's much appreciated visits during the war.

The luncheon also

served to elect the new officers for the Chapter: Malcolm McRaine III remained as president, as did Roger Pilcher as vice president; Jim Yohe accepted the role as secretary and Edd Frizzell remained as treasurer; Kirby Bowran agreed to serve as chaplain to the Chapter.

The Blairsville Chapter holds its monthly membership meeting the third Thursday of each month with the next meeting being April 21 at 1 pm in the Leon Davenport Veterans Center, 78 Blue Ridge Hwy.

Additionally, the Chapter members gather every Wednesday at 11:30 am for

lunch at the Blairsville Restaurant for comradeship and support.

The VVA for is open to Veterans with active duty (for other than training purposes) in Vietnam between November 1, 1955 and May 7, 1975 and Vietnam-era Veterans (August 5, 1964 to May 7, 1975) and seeks to help foster, encourage, and promote the improvement of the condition of the Vietnam-era veteran through a variety of programs and efforts on the national, regional, state and local levels.



Presenting Proclamation: Lamar Paris, Union County commissioner, presents to Malcolm McRaine III, Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1101 president

Correction:

The North Georgia News has learned that certain elements of an article that appeared in the March 27, 2024, edition of the newspaper were incorrect.

Following publication of the article titled "Cash reward being offered in animal abuse incident," Dr. Lynn Stevenson from Nottely

Oaks Animal Hospital reached out to clarify that they do not know what caused the trauma to the dog in question and that neither she nor her business are involved in the investigation of the incident.

The newspaper apologizes for any errors in reporting.

VFW

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

VFW Bingo

The VFW Post 7807 in Hiawassee has Bingo every Sunday afternoon at 2:30 PM. Doors open at 1:30 PM.

We are located on Highway 288, Sunnyside Road, Hiawassee, Ga. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us and have fun! Starting January 16. For more info call 706 896-8387.

VFW Fish Fry

Come join us for the new season of 'Fish Fry' at the VFW post in Hiawassee. We have fish, coleslaw, beans, hushpuppies, fries, and a drink. Remember, No tax and No tip all for \$12 and \$15 for all you can eat. Starting April 12th, 4:30 PM to 7 PM. Every 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month. NT(Apr3,A1)JH

Vulcan grant equips UCFD with search & rescue drone

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Fire Department has new equipment that will assist in search and rescue efforts, and it's all thanks to a grant courtesy of Vulcan Materials Company.

Vulcan provides grant funds to the Fire Department each year, but this year, the company decided to do a little more than a simple grant presentation.

March 26-28, members of the Fire Department received tours of the company's quarry at 365 Rock Road in Blairsville, and firefighters were treated to lunch all three days as part of Vulcan's ongoing efforts to recognize and appreciate the first responders.

"The Vulcan way – doing the right thing the right way at the right time: this is a familiar mantra at Vulcan Materials Company, and one we embrace fully," said Carol Landrum, Vulcan's manager of government and community relations. "In your calling as a fireman, you consistently go above and beyond in your duties to serve our community."

Vulcan is one of the department's community sponsors, and 2024 marks the sixth year UCFD has received the grant. Landrum doesn't see an end to that partnership in sight, especially considering that Fire Station No. 1 and the quarry are just over a mile apart.

"We have provided funding towards CPR equipment, Simulaids adult airway trainer, swiftwater rescue boat, rescue ropes and equipment, plus Milwaukee tools," Landrum said, detailing all the ways Vulcan has aided the department in the past.

This year's grant, with a little help from public donations, went toward purchasing a drone that will aid firefighters in potentially life-saving searches and rescues.

Equipped with various modes of heat vision, the ability to zoom in and out, and capable of reaching speeds of 40 mph, the handy piece of technology comes with other features like speakers and a spotlight to help locate missing persons with greater ease than before.

Many calls come in near the Blood Mountain Shelter regarding hikers who

haven't checked in, usually from concerned parents. One anticipated use of the drone involves flying it over the Appalachian Trail, considering the hikers are usually still on it and only delayed due to taking their time.

March 27 was also when the drone took its first test flight, fittingly buzzing from Fire Station 1 to the quarry just down the road to take images of workers and massive loaders aiding in the production of aggregate.

Fire Lt. Justin Blanchard piloted the device as onlookers, including Vulcan's Blairsville Plant Manager Beau Deatrick, watched the camera and the many abilities the drone was capable of.

Blanchard even tried his hand at landing the drone beside Landrum, who sat in Station 1's parking lot while the former tested out the photography system.

Along with just a little fun, Landrum and Deatrick were impressed by the drone's capabilities, and according to Landrum, "We are proud to support such a worthwhile organization."



UCFD Vulcan Donation24 Front: Vulcan Materials Company joined Union County Firefighters last week for an annual donation, this year going toward the purchase of a drone that will expand the search and rescue capabilities of the department.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Drug Bust...from Page 1A

were being served in other counties, Union County Sheriff's Office Narcotic Detectives secured Green's residence and a search warrant was served in Union County that resulted in a custom

motorcycle being seized as part of the case.

This is still an open and continuing investigation that will result in the arrest of others.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason would like to

congratulate and thank all the agencies that participated in this operation, and he noted that this is the perfect example of how relationships with other agencies and networking abilities produce results that ultimately put major drug dealers out of business.



Kenneth Lee Green, Randy Nathaniel Green and Abigail Owens – the latter two of Union County – are facing charges connected with this meth seizure.

Photo/Facebook