

# THANK YOU FIRST RESPONDERS

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75¢

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Hospital looks ahead as latest COVID surge ends

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Union General Health System reported last week that its hospitals were "getting back to normal" following the most recent surge of COVID-19 driven by the omicron variant, with current levels of local infection at their lowest since last summer and perhaps since the onset of the pandemic.

Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said the winter wave that started in December '21, peaked in early February, and tapered off by mid-March was now effectively over, much to the relief of Health System staff.

The recent surge ended right around the start of spring, Barnett said, and as of Thursday, March 31, Union General was treating a single COVID inpatient and had not had a new positive case in five days.

Thankfully, beyond a brutal first wave in 2020, the residents of Union County and Chatuge Regional Nursing Homes have experienced no further COVID outbreaks, which Barnett credits to successful ongoing vaccination campaigns.

As to whether the region has experienced its last pandemic surge, Barnett said only time will tell.

And while omicron increased regional levels of illness, hospitalization and death – particularly among the elderly and some middle-aged individuals – the latest wave proved to be milder than the first winter wave of early 2021 and much milder than the delta surge last summer into fall.

Delta, for instance, resulted in 442 hospitalizations and 51 deaths in the regional health system, while omicron brought about half those figures with 222 hospitalizations and 27 deaths in local hospital facilities.

Even though omicron was less devastating overall, See COVID-19, Page 2A



## County enacts new moratorium, accepts federal grant funds

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris adopted an emergency moratorium on certain types of land development in the county during his regular monthly meeting at the courthouse on Tuesday, March 29.

"I hereby adopt an emergency moratorium on applications for development or expansion of campgrounds, mobile home parks, manufactured home parks, recreational vehicle parks, tiny home parks, park model parks, or any other similar development," Paris said.

"The county will be examining what, if any, changes need to be made in any of this



Lamar Paris  
Sole Commissioner

class of permanent or temporary residences to promote public safety and comfort associated with these types of structures.

"(In light of) several inquiries per week regarding the development of different types of parks (recently), we have found it necessary to reassess all sections of the (relevant) ordinance, and also to update the ordinance to include changes in the building industry which have been established.

"Since the ordinance was initially adopted in 2004, it shall not restrict any existing or permanent parks currently under construction or intended for this use prior to this date. What we're trying to do is make sure, going forward, that we're (protecting the county).

"We're in the process of getting with several other counties in the North Georgia area to look at all types of permitting for these and similar

See County Meeting, Page 2A

## Community Easter Egg Hunt to return Saturday, April 9



A frenzied view from the 2015 Easter Egg Hunt in Union County.

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Parks and Recreation Department will be hosting the longstanding annual Community Easter Egg

Hunt this Saturday, April 9, in the upper baseball fields at Meeks Park, returning after a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19.

Egg hunting will begin at 10 a.m., and the fun will continue until all eggs are

found. Following tradition, children will be divided into three age groups – 2 to 4, 5 to 7 and 8 to 10 – to hunt 1,000 eggs per grouping, plus one prize raffle for each age classification.

See Easter Egg Hunt, Page 3A

## UCES Science Night promotes parent-student engagement



Union County Elementary School students had a blast building towers from marshmallows and spaghetti at the recent Science Night. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Folks of all ages had fun learning about science in a myriad of forms during Science Night hosted by Union County Elementary School on March 22.

Elementary students were incentivized to come to the event for extra credit, but it appeared that most were there out of a growing interest in science. What's more, the children were welcome to bring their families along with

them. The building was packed not just with kids but also family members consisting mostly of parents and grandparents, and everyone was invited to try out the experiments put on display in the cafeteria, the Fourth-Grade Hall and the Fifth-Grade Hall.

Teachers, High School Beta Club members and older STEM students directed the controlled chaos, adding to the environment by donning white coats and brightly colored wigs, although there were a few "Einsteins" in the crowd

rocking wild white hair. Every station had something fun and educational to do, as the goal was to offer interactive, scientific experiences for all.

Individual tables showcased activities like making a cup of snow, mimicking a rain cloud and constructing balloon-powered cars, and the "Marshmallow-Spaghetti Towers" were a big hit, highlighting the laws of gravity and physics.

Receiving help from their

See Science Night, Page 6A

## Compass Day Job Fair brings community together at UCHS



UCFD Sgt. Patrick Schmidt talks first responder career opportunities with Union County High School sophomore Talis Queen at the inaugural Compass Day Job Fair. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

An exciting new event left its mark on the community inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center on March 29 – the inaugural Compass Day Community Job Fair.

Roughly 25 businesses

attended from a variety of sectors, ranging from the Union County Sheriff's Office to Snap-on Tools of North Carolina, as well as the University of North Georgia, Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and North Georgia Technical College.

Intended to become an annual event, the job fair grew out of a chamber-affiliated

Leadership Union group that wanted to "point businesses to laborers and students to local opportunities." The group consists of Dana Carver, Rebecca Gilliam, Samantha Marchant and Tucker Loyd.

"Union County Compass Day complements the recently implemented 'Signing Day'

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# COVID-19...from Page 1A

lives lost are lives lost, and three significant waves of illness occurring in the span of a year plus ongoing cases of "long COVID" have affected everyone at home and abroad in countless tragic ways.

Of note, the Health System has seen just one pediatric hospital admission for COVID-19 over the entire pandemic, and that child – a local infant – was quickly discharged, with omicron presenting no more of a danger to area children than earlier variants.

A separate strain of omicron known as BA.2 is spreading in countries that already experienced omicron surges, including in the U.S., and it is possible cases may start to rise again due to the apparently more infectious strain, though that does not appear to be happening yet regionally.

According to data from the Georgia Department of Public Health, as of the end of last week, just 1.9% of tests in Union County and 4.8% of tests in Towns County had come back positive over the

previous two-week period – declining metrics for both counties.

Demand for COVID testing is currently low; however, the Department of Public Health's drive-thru site at Union General Hospital will "continue operating as normal," with "no changes expected at this time" and no timetable as to how long testing will remain available, per DPH.

COVID vaccines are widely available at local pharmacies and Health Departments, and though efficacy against severe illness and death appears to have dropped amid omicron, Barnett

said the vaccines continue to provide protection, with roughly 70%-75% of recent hospitalizations being among the unvaccinated.

The hospital has observed strong immunity from prior infection, but Barnett still urges everyone to get their vaccine if they have not done so already and to receive a booster dose if eligible.

For now, Barnett said the hospital will continue doing what it has always done – serving the medical needs of tri-state area residents.

"We are working on our expansion projects – our new medical office building and our new tower," Barnett said. "And we're excited to be focusing on keeping folks well and treating people for

the usual illnesses as opposed to so much of our focus being sidetracked with COVID specifically.

"We are planning on Chatuge Regional Hospital having a Health Fair in May. We haven't been able to have a Health Fair in a couple of years, so we're excited about, again, getting back to what we want to do in taking care of the community.

"I feel like people have put their wellness aside (from fear of contracting COVID in public and health care settings) and maybe not taken as good care of themselves as they normally would (in terms of diagnostics and elective procedures). So, we want to help people get back on track."

## April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month in Union

On Tuesday, March 29th, Union County Sole Commissioner, Lamar Paris signed a proclamation declaring April Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The proclamation was presented by Support in Abusive Family Emergencies Inc.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month is intended to draw attention to the fact sexual violence is widespread and has public health implications for every community member of Union County.

Rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment impact our community as seen by statistics indicating that one out of every six American women have been the victim of an attempted rape in her lifetime.

We must work together to educate our community about what can be done to prevent sexual assault and how to support survivors.

With leadership, dedication and encouragement, there is compelling evidence that we can be successful in reducing sexual violence in Union County through prevention education, increased awareness, and by holding perpetrators who commit acts



Commissioner Lamar Paris (center) with proclamation declaring April Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

of violence responsible for their actions.

Union County strongly supports the efforts of national, state, and local partners, to actively engage in public and private efforts, including conversations about what sexual violence is, how to prevent it, how to help survivors connect with services, and how every segment of our society can work together to better address

sexual violence.

Support in Abusive Family Emergencies Inc, encourages anyone who is in need of services to contact our 24 hour crisis line at 706-379-3000.

S.A.F.E. Inc. is a 501c3 non-profit Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Child Advocacy program serving Towns and Union counties.

Please visit our website at safeservices.org

## County Meeting...from Page 1A

structures, including VRBO (that is, Vacation Rentals by Owner)."

Union County has never had to deal with these types of developments before, Paris said, noting that there are many things to consider when regulating these parks and structures and that it will take a great deal of time and effort on the part of the county to address.

Just prior to the announcement, Paris approved a resolution adopting the 2022 Comprehensive Plan for Union County and Blairsville, which is a document created largely with input from county and city residents regarding the direction of future county and city growth.

Essentially, the moratorium is Paris' way of slowing down and examining new kinds of property arrangements to determine how to guide such development in ways that will be in the county's best interest.

Moving along, Paris approved an agreement with Don Baker Engineering, LLC for engineering and site plans for Fire Station 13, to be located at the entrance of Hidden Harbor on US 129 N. The cost for the agreement is not to exceed \$13,000.

Relatedly, Paris also approved an agreement with Blue Ridge Mountain Surveying to survey the Fire Station 13 site, with a cost not to exceed \$2,500.

Purchasing Director Pam Hawkins said the county hopes to complete construction of the new fire station by late 2022 or early 2023. Station 13 will allow for an improved ISO rating for that part of the county, which will mean reduced insurance rates for homeowners in the area.

In other business, the commissioner accepted two grant awards from the State of Georgia.

The first was a Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant to Union County for water/sewer infrastructure in the amount of \$1.69 million. Union County applied for this grant on behalf of Notla Water Authority and Coosa Water Authority.

Union County will act as the fiscal agent for both water authorities, and Paris authorized a Memorandum of Understanding between Notla Water, Coosa Water and the county to set the terms and understanding between all three parties to confer the funds.

The effective date of the memorandum was March 28, allowing the county to distribute funds from the grant on behalf of the authorities for eligible water infrastructure projects needed in the community.

The second state grant Paris accepted that evening was a Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant to Union County for broadband expansion in the amount of \$11,162,231. Union County applied for this grant on behalf of Windstream.

Union County also applied for a Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Grant on behalf of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC. Paris said that grant has yet to be approved, but everyone involved remains optimistic it will be.

Per the U.S. Department of the Treasury, such pandemic relief funding is aimed at responding to "the far-reaching public health and negative economic impacts of the pandemic" and investing in "water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure ... to improve access to clean drinking water, to support vital wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, and to expand affordable access to broadband internet."

Paris accepted a third grant award on Tuesday by way of American Rescue Plan Act Funding for the Enotah Judicial Circuit in the amount of \$2 million. This grant was awarded by the Judicial Council of Georgia Ad Hoc Committee.

Union County will act as the fiscal agent for the recipient of this grant as well.

"This is all related to the drug rehab program through the court system," Paris said, before authorizing the opening of checking accounts to receive the abovementioned grant funds.

The commissioner then approved a lease agreement with Nany B. Abercrombie for leasing "0.53 acres, more or less, in Land Lot 303, 9th District, 1st Section," effective from March 1, 2022, through Feb. 29, 2028, in the amount of \$3,000 per year.

There will be no cost for the first year and a \$500 deposit will be required.

"This property will be utilized for some potential off-site housing to assist those with a need for a temporary residence related to drug issues, Paris said.

Paris re-appointed Rick Davenport to the Board of Directors for the Union County Development Authority for a four-year term from Dec. 31, 2021, to Dec. 30, 2025.

Additionally, he re-appointed Scott Carter, Gene Windham and Mike Kiernan to the Board of Directors for the Union County Development Authority for four-year terms from March 5, 2022, to March 4, 2026.

The commissioner proclaimed Arbor Day in Union County to be Feb. 18, 2022, and Child Abuse Prevention Month,

Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and National Donate Life Month in Union County all to be April 2022.

Paris also approved an amendment to the county's "Vehicle Use Policy," stating that county employees must furnish a driving history once a year, no matter what state their driver's license was issued in. Any associated cost will be reimbursable to employees.

Before closing the meeting, Paris addressed questions and comments made by resident Cindy Vandereedt in the December commission meeting regarding the county's use of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax collections.

Vandereedt had been placed on the agenda to speak in the March county meeting; however, she contacted the Commissioner's Office prior to the meeting to say that she would not be able to make it that evening.

The commissioner proceeded to read a letter of response addressing Vandereedt's questions and comments from the December meeting regarding specific uses of SPLOST monies, including for the Union County Sports Center and Byron Herbert Heritage Farm.

Paris implored attendees to hear him out that evening, espousing his belief that incorrect statements continue to be made by some members of the community pertaining to past county SPLOST projects.

"We keep hearing people making statements that are not correct about what we've done, where we've spent (the money), where the money came from," Paris said. "We know what we are doing. We have a consultant that works with us. We work through our auditors."

"So, when you hear words about anything related to SPLOST not being done legal, not being done above board – they've had several words they've even accused me of – I can't imagine that. But I assure you one thing, when we do it, we try to do it right."

Added Paris, "Regarding (Vandereedt's) statement about 'abandoned' SPLOST projects – and we've heard this so much that we're pretty well sick of hearing this term – our office has communicated ad nauseum on this false accusation, and the exact same fact remains true today: there has never been an abandoned SPLOST project as defined by the governing regulations."

While she was unable to attend that evening, Vandereedt has responded to Paris' comments from last week's meeting in a letter to the editor that appears in this edition of the North Georgia News.

# Union County Sheriff's Office to host Job Fair April 9th & 13th at the Union County Courthouse

Sheriff's Office is interested in seeing you. If you have any questions, please call 706-439-6066 for further information. Sheriff Mack Mason and staff members are looking forward to talking with you and other interested applicants.



Union County Sheriff Mack Mason and staff members

The Union County Sheriff's Office is interested in hiring for several positions, male and female, including certified and non-certified Jail Officers starting at \$17 minimum an hour – and more for people with experience – with a path to become a certified Deputy Sheriff.

Both full-time and part-time positions are available, and it doesn't matter if you are from Georgia or from out of state with an interest in working in Union County law en-

forcement.

If you are out of state and certified in another state as a Deputy or Police Officer, or retired with a valid law enforcement certification, the Union County Sheriff's Office can help you become certified in Georgia.

The State of Georgia recently modified its certification standards to make it easier to transition to meet Georgia's certification mandate by removing the three-year maximum period from being active

to simply requiring a valid certification and taking several courses.

And the Union County Sheriff's Office offers very competitive wages, insurance benefits, a 401K retirement plan, along with the Peace Officer Annuity and Benefit State Retirement program.

If you are interested, the Job Fair will be held on Saturday, April 9, from 9-11 a.m., and on Wednesday, April 13, between the hours of 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.

The Job Fair will take

place in the Jury Assembly Room of the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, in the lower level of the courthouse.

Potential candidates must have a High School Diploma or GED, possess a clean driving record, and also not have been arrested for a serious crime that may make you ineligible.

The Union County

## High Country Artisans support Union County Schools Art Programs with donations to offset supply costs



(L-R): Helena Grossmann, Secretary; Tom Chambers, Vice President; Brenda Chambers, Assistant Treasurer; Katie Davis, Middle School Art Teacher; Carol Knight, Principal Woody Gap School; Rachel Spratlin, Elementary School Art Teacher; Paul Grossmann, President; Danny Grojean and Leslie Grojean, Treasurer

The High Country Artisans, Inc., coordinators of the 23rd Annual Butternut Creek Festival, continued with their support of the Union County Schools Art Programs last night at the Elementary School Art Show. Members of our group were able to view the wide variety of projects the children have completed this year.

One of the missions of the High Country Artisans is

to promote and support art projects in the community. As a result of a successful Butternut Creek Festival in 2021, we were able to present Rachel Spratlin – Elementary School, Katie Davis – Middle School, Stephanie Clayton – High School and Carol Knight, Principal of the Woody Gap School with generous checks to offset the cost of supplies for upcoming art

projects and programs.

We look forward to this year's show and the ongoing support from the community as we prepare for the Butternut Creek Festival to be held in Meeks Park on July 16 and 17th. This is a free admission and parking event and its success will help to continue our future donations to the important art programs in our schools.

## Friends of Union County Library Honor Library Workers



Advocating for Libraries, Literacy, and Lifelong Learning

The Friends of Union County Library (FOUCL) advocate for libraries, literacy, and lifelong learning throughout the year; but we emphasize the importance of libraries and library workers every April – when the American Library Association observes National Library Week and National Library Workers Day.

FOUCL acknowledge National Library Workers Day by showing our appreciation to Union County Public Library workers for their expertise, hard work, and dedication. You are invited to join us in writing thank-you notes to them. FOUCL has put up a sign of appreciation on the Friends Room door at the library. This

door is directly to your left as you enter the Union County Public Library. We have provided Post-It notes and pens to use during April for messages that will be shared with the staff at the end of the month. This year's special day to honor library workers is April 12; but you have all month to add a message to our sign

Libraries have existed dating back to as early as 2600 B.C when the first ones consisted of clay tablets. Although libraries have been around for centuries, access to books has not always been easy. The first public library was opened in the United States in 1833. Before that, libraries were owned privately, and patrons paid to become members. Today, free public libraries are an important part of their communities. They provide books from all over the world on many topics while offering a wide range of additional services and resources.

Library workers play a critical role in keeping our libraries running smoothly. Just a few of the tasks library workers perform during their work hours include assisting library patrons in finding research materials, tracking down requested titles, and answering a multitude of questions.

FOUCL is proud to support Union County Public Library and the many programs and services they provide, especially those offered to our children. Laura Bush (a librarian and a teacher) once said, "Libraries allow children to ask questions about the world and find the answers. And the wonderful thing is that once a child learns to use a library, the doors to learning are always open."

Please stop by to fill out a Post-It note with your personalized thanks to our library workers during the month of April.

## Easter Egg Hunt...from Page 1A

There will also be three "Prize Eggs" laid out per age group that children will be competing to find and redeem for Easter baskets containing candy and toys, and the Easter Bunny will be making an appearance for pictures and to give out extra treats; don't worry, kids, no carrots.

Parks and Recreation Senior and Children's Program Director Jennifer Becker, who has taken care of the department for five years, said she could not wait for the return of the cherished local event, which is taking place the weekend before Easter Sunday.

"We are coming back this year after being canceled two years in a row from COVID," Becker said. "We decided to

hold it on April 9 because a lot of people like that three-day weekend and being off Good Friday to be home with their families, whether they are staying here or traveling and visiting other relatives out of town.

"In case of heavy rain before the event, I will have to make the judgment call then to cancel it or not, but if it is sunny or even a little cloudy, then we will be good to go.

"This egg hunt has been going on as far back as the '90s, and I believe the best and most important thing about this is watching the children and looking at their smiles – they are so happy to go out and be with other kids – and seeing them enjoy themselves

again after the past two years' restrictions.

"Since I have been involved here, we have seen the popularity of this event continuously grow more and more each year. One year we had already had everything set up and it started pouring down rain, and those kids stayed and were bound and determined to have fun and find those eggs. So, we know nothing will stop them from enjoying the action."

For more information or to help volunteer with the event, contact Becker at 706-439-6074. She can also be reached throughout the week at the Rec Center located at 519 Industrial Boulevard in Blairsville.

# Compass Day...from Page 1A

at the Union County High School by connecting potential employees with local businesses and raising awareness about the opportunities and benefits our local businesses offer," per program literature.

Indeed, the fair included hours dedicated to high school recruitment before opening to the broader public that Tuesday, with students like sophomore Talis Queen attending. Queen showed a particular interest in the Union County Fire Department.

"This is one of the options I am thinking about doing, because I know I want a career that involves a lot of hands-on work like truck driving or being a mechanic," Queen said. "I am glad the student body had a chance to look at the things that were offered here that could give us the chance to get a head start in life."

Speaking with Queen that day was UCFD Sgt. Patrick Schmidt, who has been with the Fire Department since 2007.

"I am also the Public Safety Education Coordinator here for Union," Schmidt

said. "I love trying to recruit people and showing them all the different aspects of the Fire Department, because someone may not like the fire aspect of it, (for example), but they will like the rescue part, so it is good to have everyone informed on everything that we do."

"We rely heavily on volunteers; we used to only have one person per shift, but since the town has grown, we have progressed to having five people per shift. So, volunteering is the first step into getting your foot in the door here for those interested in making a career out of this, because there is always work to be done."

One jobs booth that stayed busy engaging potential applicants was Advanced Digital Cable, located off Airport Industrial Drive in Blairsville. Joseph Goble is the Business Manager for Advanced Digital Cable and has been with the company for 10 years come September.

"On the youth side of this, these ladies and young men are our future," Goble said.

"So, we have to invest in them right now. And for the general public, this is great because it lets them see just how many jobs are out there for the taking that they may have not known were around here."

"The thing I like most about this fair is that it is not just about ADC – it is about all of our local companies and our job market here being made available to the masses, which creates more choices for everyone."

Added Goble, "There are a lot of choices right now because of the growth. It has been astronomical, and we want everyone to know that our company also gives out scholarships."

"This year, we are giving two scholarships in Union County because we have two students that have exceeded our expectations during their employment with us; one in Towns County; and one in Hayesville, North Carolina."

"And we want to thank the Union County High School for letting us be a part of this to meet and serve the wonderful people of our community."

As mentioned above, the job fair was split between



L-R: Union County Schools CTAE Director Josh Davis with Compass Day-founding Leadership Union team members Tucker Loyd, Samantha Marchant, Dana Carver and Rebecca Gilliam.

early access by students near the end of the school day and a period in the evening for the general public to attend, with coordination at the school system by Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Josh Davis.

"The Leadership Union Team of the (chamber) approached me a while back to see if we were willing and able to put on a job fair for not only the students but for the public as well," Davis said. "And of

course, I said, 'Absolutely.'

"Our vision was to not just make this a job fair to simply view different companies to work for based on personal interests, but to set it up where everyone could directly attain applications and essentially be hired on the spot, which I have already had one student tell me they just got a job."

"The purpose of naming it Compass Day was to basically imply that the people were being set on their direction and

path that they want to go in

"That was our main goal here, to generate community involvement and help people easily find the work that they want to do and make them aware of career interests that they may want to be involved with."

"We were most excited to be involved with this and put this on, because we knew we would be playing an integral part in developing our present into our future."

# Science Night...from Page 1A

parents, students worked on building free-standing "towers" of dry spaghetti noodles, the joints of which were held together and reinforced with marshmallows. Through trial and error, the little builders found out which shapes held up the best.

Another popular exhibit was the "Pop Rocks" station, where kids engaged with cups of the popping candy using all five senses.

After selecting their favorite color candy, students touched the sticky granules, smelled their chosen flavor and tried the Pop Rocks to experience the taste and hear the crackling response. The small scientists then recorded their observations of each reaction on paper set out at every seat.

"It's really interesting, because a lot of kids have never even had Pop Rocks before," third-grade teacher Carissa Owenby said. "So, they're getting the full experience."

And while science was at the forefront of the event, its indispensable cousin, math, was also represented in the STEM-based program, i.e. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, with geoboards and rubber bands illustrating the concepts of perimeters and measurements between set points, and tile mosaics offering a chance for children to play with geometry.

Third-grader Jayce Harkins brought his mother, grandmother and first-grade sister for a fun family night out. He had a head start on the event with a science kit at home, but he leaped at the chance for more hands-on learning. The four of them were at a station on the far end of the cafeteria constructing towers with clothes pins.

"I want to become a forensic scientist," said Harkins before commenting on the usefulness of activities like the clothes pin tower. "(It's) how you learn to build things so maybe you'll want to be a builder when you grow up. They can build buildings the way that they are supposed to so they don't fall down."

His grandmother, Betsy Longwith, also realized the importance of the event: "It's creative and helps the children to expand their ideas (and) imagination ... I feel like a kid myself right now."



L-R: Aaliyah Graig, Kristina Graig, Jayce Harkins and Betsy Longwith during the March 22 Science Night event.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Jayce's mother Kristina Graig said she was pleasantly surprised at how popular the event was that evening.

"This is awesome," she said. "Getting the community together and their kids or even grandkids that don't have an opportunity at home to do STEM experiments like this is really great."

Elsewhere that evening, attendee Alicia Wheeler's son learned about electric connections with the "Makey Makey Circuits" station, and Wheeler said she appreciated that the teachers had gone through the effort of keeping "interesting sciences alive" with interactivity.

Outside at the sign-in table, Family Engagement Coordinator Becky Dyer was happy to answer parent and student questions and supply more information about the event and its purpose.

"It's a way to engage parents in their kids' learning," Dyer said, noting that Science Night falls under the category of a Title I Family Engagement Science-Math Night.

The Georgia Department of Education states that the goal of Parent and Family Engagement events is to "increase student achievement by engaging and empowering parents, and other stakeholders, to become actively involved in their children's education across all grade levels."

Dyer said that Title I events are funded by the government for elementary, middle and high school

students, where funding is linked to the number of low-income families being served in the district to enrich the learning of "children most in need of educational help."

Certainly, one needed only attend to see that such events are a success, with participants both young and old bending over microscopes and learning how to code. In short, engagements like Science Night are meant to be as much a night for parents as they are for children.

Elementary School Assistant Principal Jana Hussion believes these events are a fantastic way for students to see the "real life" applications of classroom curriculums and how they relate to the world around them. Not only that, but the children learn invaluable problem-solving skills, too.

"So, the goal is to use real-world things and apply them to (the experiments) and (learn) why we do this," Hussion said.

And if an experiment does not yield the expected results, students can learn to associate mistakes not with failure, but as being a part of the process of discovery.

Since their establishment in Union County five years ago, Title I events like Science Night are making a comeback after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, with organizers planning to hold two a year moving forward – in the fall and spring – featuring themes from all subjects.

# Increased overdose reports involving drugs with Fentanyl

Atlanta – The Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) Drug Surveillance Unit has received increased reports of overdoses due to drugs mixed with fentanyl, particularly cocaine, methamphetamine, and counterfeit pills. Overdoses have been reported in several areas of the state over the past month.

Between early February and mid-March, at least 66 emergency department visits involved the use of cocaine, methamphetamine, crack, heroin, pain killers and cannabis products that were likely laced with fentanyl. Patients described extreme reactions to drugs – one patient reported taking a Percocet and went unresponsive – or patients were seen for a stimulant overdose but had a positive response to naloxone. Naloxone is administered to reverse the effects of

opioid overdoses.

Fentanyl is a deadly substance that can be made illegally and found in all types of street drugs, not just opioids. It is important to know that it is possible to have an opioid overdose from a stimulant (e.g., cocaine) that is laced with fentanyl.

Symptoms of an opioid overdose include: Unconsciousness, or inability to wake up; Limp body; Falling asleep, extreme drowsiness; Slow, shallow, irregular or no breathing; Pale, blue, cold and/or clammy skin; Choking, snoring, or gurgling sounds; Slow or no heartbeat. Drugs that contain fentanyl cannot be detected by sight or smell, and even a small amount can cause an overdose. If you have a drug that was not prescribed for you, be aware it could contain fentanyl.

Fentanyl-related overdose deaths have been increasing in Georgia since the start of

the COVID-19 pandemic. Between May 1, 2020 and April 30, 2021, fentanyl-involved overdose deaths increased 106.2% compared to the same time period the previous year.

If you suspect a drug overdose, call 911 immediately, provide the location of the overdose and stay with the individual until help arrives. Georgia has a medical amnesty law that protects individuals who may be experiencing an overdose and callers seeking medical attention for drug overdoses. Naloxone reverses the effects of an opioid overdose and can be obtained from pharmacies in Georgia without a prescription under a standing order from the Commissioner.

Drug prevention and recovery are possible with the appropriate support. For access to services and immediate crisis help, the Georgia Crisis & Access Line 1-800-715-4225 is available 24/7.