

Levins...from Page 1A



Judge Levins signing paperwork for one of two oaths of office he took on March 31 when he became the newest judge in the Enotah Judicial Circuit.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the human experience, whereas today, we get to honor a young man who is joining our team."

After pledging to uphold the U.S. and Georgia constitutions, Levins received from George the pen he used to sign the oaths he swore that day, and he was asked to sign one more thing: the locally renowned "Sword of Justice," which is a literal sword Judge George keeps in his office.

"It's a tradition here in the Enotah Judicial Circuit that started (in 2012) when I got to swear in my son (Michael George) as a lawyer," George said, holding up the sword.

"We're going to get Judge Levins to initial and date the sword.

"As you can see, the Superior Court judges of this circuit have had the honor several times of swearing in new lawyers, but this is the first time we've had the distinct honor of swearing in a Superior Court judge."

Added George, "My challenge to you as you sign this sword is, now begins your fight for justice; may it be long and fruitful."

Among his other responsibilities, Levins said he is excited to get to work helping

those in need to navigate the circuit's Accountability Courts dealing with mental health and drug issues.

Moreover, he's generally eager to begin serving the people of Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin counties alongside his many colleagues in the circuit.

"This new undertaking and this new opportunity for service on my behalf is certainly bigger than me," Levins said. "I am in a room with people and practitioners, brothers and sisters at the bar, who have been beacons to me in my career of how to act and

what our job and our pursuit is in the practice of law.

"To have members on both sides of the bar, and our sheriff here with us in Union County, is an honor, and it's special to me."

Added Levins, "I remember Micah 6:8 and that commandment to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly. As I undertake this task, I ask for your continued prayers, for your patience and consideration as I learn and work with you all."

The Enotah Judicial Circuit consists of three Superior Court judges, with Judge Joy Parks rounding out the trio. Parks said Tuesday the circuit is happy to welcome Levins to the team.

"We're excited about the expertise and legal knowledge he's going to bring to the bench," Judge Parks said. "We're ready for him to start working as soon as possible."

Levins, a native of Houston County, moved to Blairsville in 2012 with his wife Jaime to begin his work with the Enotah Judicial Circuit, where he served in the District Attorney's Office until August 2019.

"We've been in Union County going on eight years, and we're excited that he gets to continue serving this area," Jaime Levins said. "I'm just really proud of him."

"I think he has the right experience, skill set, temperament and personality to do the job. I believe he'll

be fair and just, and that he'll uphold the oaths that he took today."

Judge Levins' nomination last year came by way of a defense attorney colleague. As a veteran prosecutor, he described his nomination by someone from across the legal aisle as a great compliment.

Gov. Brian Kemp selected Levins for the appointment from among several highly qualified candidates earlier this year. At the time, Levins was working in the Tallapoosa Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office, where he served from August 2019 until his swearing in as a judge.

Prior to Tallapoosa, Levins served as a senior prosecutor for the Enotah Judicial Circuit; as assistant district attorney for the Alcovy and Atlanta Judicial Circuits; and as an associate attorney at several Georgia practices, to include criminal defense work.

Levins will use his well-rounded legal career and the wisdom he's gleaned from peers across the state to shape his judicial philosophy, which will be centered on impartiality and justice.

"Like so many of my friends and colleagues, I've worked both as a criminal defense attorney and as a prosecutor," Levins said. "I think all of us as litigators want the opportunity to have an open and fair courtroom and have an honest ump who calls fair balls and strikes."

In addition to his new judicial role, Levins said he anticipates being an active member of his community, which makes sense given his past experience with the Rotary Club of Union County and as a

member of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

The office of Superior Court judge is an elected position in Georgia, only filled by appointment when necessary.

Levins is filling the vacancy created when former Chief Judge N. Stanley Gunter decided to retire last year. Gunter started a new term in 2019, so Levins will have the opportunity to continue in his role at least through 2022, after which he will have to run for election to the seat.

Currently, all Georgia courts are under a "Statewide Judicial Emergency," declared by Chief Justice Harold D. Melton of the Supreme Court of Georgia on March 14 in response to the pandemic. As such, courts remain open, but have suspended "all but essential court functions." These functions include "domestic abuse restraining orders, juvenile court delinquency detention hearings and emergency removal matters, mental health commitment hearings," and cases requiring the court's attention to address "an immediate liberty or safety concern."

Editor's Note: The significant other of an attendee of the swearing-in ceremony tested positive for COVID-19 following the event last week. This significant other lives in Lumpkin County and did not attend the ceremony. Out of an abundance of caution, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, who also did not attend the ceremony, closed the courthouse this week to have the building professionally cleaned.

Virus Concerns...from Page 1A

the one positive out of all this; people are learning to do things that they want."

Others are worried about finances and how the community is getting along in this time of confusion and concern over jobs, family and groceries.

"It worries me that people are in need of money now more than ever," said David Gomez, a shopper at Save-a-Lot. "I remember being told that we need to save money in case of a rainy day, and a lot of us were already living paycheck to paycheck."

"I was fortunate enough to have a little put back, but I know some friends and family that just can't afford this situation. People need health care and medicine and food, but they can't get it.

"A good buddy of mine needed to get some prescriptions filled and couldn't afford it because he hasn't been working and hasn't gotten a check from unemployment or anything. A lot of people are suffering, and not just from the virus. That's what I worry about."

While the times currently feature plenty of uncertainty, some people remain optimistic that things will get better and that the community will grow accustomed to the current environment as a necessary means of preventing spread of the virus, at least for the short-term.

"I think that over these next few weeks people will become more familiar with the situation and get used to the shelter in place," said Emily Yarborough, a shopper at

Cabin Coffee. "There is a lot of confusion and a lot of this spreading.

"I'm not really the expert on any of that, but I do know that Union County has done a great job at keeping it at bay. Sure, someone here may get it, but for us to go this long while the rest of the country is in panic seems like we are doing something right.

"I know this is an older community, and they have concerns, but worrying doesn't change anything. We just need to ride it all out."

Given the contagious nature of the virus, many people feel it would have made it to the area regardless of any precautions, but that does not mean folks should stop being safe.

"I live out toward the Fannin County line, and I've seen people passing through

the area that stop and buy what they need, then keep going," Collin Keith said. "I'm not sure what to say to people. The virus made its way to our hospital, which means that it is already here to some extent.

"I'm not much for sugar coating anything, but I truly believe that this shelter in place might be for the better right now. I'm usually against that kind of enforcement, but people here really need to be safe and stay distant for the time being.

"This can hurt a lot of people, even in our community. The best way to stop that from happening is to listen to the doctors and to think about others. We can overcome it if we are smart about it. That means no hoarding and stopping people from getting what they need."

Mental Health...from Page 1A

can be reached at 706-781-6987. The Murphy clinic can be contacted by calling 828-837-5335.

With patients and employees at Blairsville's MedMark center adjusting to counseling sessions by phone and additional safety measures in and around the building, Atkins hailed the resolve of everyone affected.

"This is new territory for all of us, but we're doing all we can to keep everyone safe and healthy," she said. "We've noticed a few patients that work in the restaurant industry who

are struggling a little, but for the most part, everyone is doing well, and we remain confident that we'll get through this."

Meanwhile, Prather advised anyone who is struggling with substance abuse or mental health issues to take advantage of the diverse support network that is currently available.

"Please feel free to reach out to us or any of the resources that are offered," Prather added. "I love being able to get this information out there because people are really going to need it with everything that's happening."

LOCAL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

MONTGOMERY CONCRETE
~ FOR ALL YOUR CONCRETE NEEDS ~
Forming through Finishing, House Slabs, Driveways, Sidewalks, Stamped Colored Concrete. Top Quality Work! Big Jobs and Small Jobs! • Insured
See photos on Facebook under Lee Montgomery
Call 706-781-1806

Randolph Jones Grading

Backhoe, Bobcat, Excavator, Dump Truck, Dirt, Gravel, Septic Tank Repair & Install
Any & All Small Jobs Welcome!
706-897-4909

Tom Taylor
YOUR LICENSED LOCAL AGENT
Medicare Advantage Plans
Supplements, Life, Under 65 Health Plans, Dental

WE DO WHAT OTHERS PROMISE
770-298-9161 ph/text
1-706-400-5754 Fax
tom@tomtaylorinsurancegroup.com

ACS GRADING & EXCAVATING
Grading, Dump Truck, Gravel, Dirt, Driveways, Underbrushing, Lot Clearing, Water Lines, Basements
No Job Too Small - FREE Estimates
Locally Owned & Operated
706-897-0411

TOTAL RECOVERY

PAINT & BODY
(706) 745-9703
391 BLUE RIDGE HWY
ALL INSURANCE ACCEPTED

TURNING 65 and CONFUSED?
LOCAL INDEPENDENT AGENT
Joni Bliss
Specializing in:
MEDICARE PLANS
Call: 706-897-4153
sejhealthcare9@gmail.com

Live Oak Pro. Lawn Care
Let the Pros at Live Oak Pro Take Care of all Your Lawn Care needs, and more!
• Licensed, Bonded & Insured
• References
• Residential & Commercial
CALL NOW FOR A FREE ESTIMATE!
828.557.0612 | 706.400.0033

Southeast Geothermal & Spray Foam

706-745-8685
1442 Blue Ridge Hwy.
www.segeothermal.com
www.sesprayfoam.com

Sugar Magnolia

Home Decor
Forever Flowers
Baby Gifts
Fashion Acces.
Jewelry
Acrylic Dishware
Gifts and Interiors
267 B Cleveland St. Blairsville
Backside of the Nationwide Bldg.
(706)230-9100

Michelin BFG Uniroyal
Specializing In:
Alignment • Computer Balancing
Brakes • Auto Repair
Industrial Foam Fill
Oil Changes
Thomas Tire, Inc.
Auto & Big Truck Service
Oscar Thomas - Owner 76 Shoe Factory Road
(706) 745-0264 Blairsville, Georgia 30512

SOUTHERN HVAC, LLC
HEATING & COOLING SPECIALIST
706-400-2574
LICENSED AND INSURED
SALES, SERVICE, INSTALL

Auto Glass worx
706-897-6981
Blairsville, Ga.
THE TRI-STATE AREA OF WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA, NORTH GEORGIA & EASTERN TENNESSEE
Mobile glass replacement services for windshields, door glass, back glass and sliders and vent glass.
Call or email today to get an **instant quote**
AutoGlassWorxGA@gmail.com
553 BLUE RIDGE STREET
BLAIRSVILLE, GA 30512
"SAME BUILDING AS HOOTER WINDOW TINTING"
BRET BARNES, OWNER

Litton Landscaping, Inc.
1250 Collins Road
Blairsville, GA 30512
706-745-5478
Cell 706-781-4858
Complete Design
Installation
Maintenance
"We go the extra mile"

SHAWN'S HOME FURNISHINGS
Mattresses, Porch Rockers & More!
"From the Front Porch to the Back Door We've Got You Covered!"
568 Blue Ridge St. • Blairsville, GA
FREE DELIVERY!
706-835-1209
Mon-Fri 9am-6pm • Sat 9am-4pm • Closed Sun

MEGA STONE MUSIC
BUY-SELL-TRADE-CONSIGN
✓ VINTAGE, NEW AND USED GUITARS, AMPS, EFFECTS
✓ GUITAR, PIANO, BANJO, BASS UKULELE, DRUM LESSONS
✓ INSTRUMENT REPAIR
✓ PA RENTAL
404.310.9356 - 44B Town Square - Blairsville, GA 30512

Gibson Land Service
Travis Gibson
706-897-8564
Tree Removal
Bucket Truck
Grading
Views
24 Hour Service
Worker's Compensation Insurance

JACKY JONES AUTOMOTIVE GROUP
We Make Buying Easy!
JACKYJONES.NET
Ford • Hayesville, NC • 888.342.2282 • Chevrolet • Murphy, NC • 888.614.8960
Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram • Hayesville, NC • 888.384.3145 & Franklin, NC • 828.369.5003