

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, April 20, 2022

E-911 Center recognized during appreciation week

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week takes place annually during the second week in April, which in 2022 was April 10-16. For Union County, the occasion is always a time to recognize and celebrate the hard work of local Emergency 911 dispatchers.

The annual appreciation was observed locally on Thursday, April 14, attended by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Jill Chastain of the Commissioner's Office, Fire Battalion Chief Richard Jones and Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer – also a major with the Sheriff's Office – plus Leslie Daniel and Julia Barnett of Union General Health System.

Businesses, restaurants, individuals and Union County Government sent Easter baskets and food in recognition of the E-911 dispatchers in attendance: Lt. Millie Baxter, Marlana Bryson, Heidi Morris, Rebecca Holcomb, Holley Kemp, Amanda Hammond, Kasey Rafter, Lynn Powell, Mary King, Ashley Churchill, Logan Hart and Carrie King.

Union County's E-911 dispatchers are an indispensable, special breed of folks whose importance and dedication most people never get to experience firsthand – until, that is, they or their loved ones are involved in a life-threatening situation.

Then, the dispatcher becomes the most important person in the world, that initial first responder without whom ambulances, firemen and peace



L-R: Union County E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter and Dispatchers Marlana Bryson, Heidi Morris, Rebecca Holcomb, Holley Kemp, Amanda Hammond, Kasey Rafter, Lynn Powell, Mary King, Ashley Churchill, Logan Hart and Carrie King. Photo by Mark Smith

County range moves closer to construction with RFP



The overall site plan for the Union County Shooting Range Complex to be built off Georgia 180.

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Starting April 20, the Union County Government is officially re-bidding the

construction project to build the Union County Gun Range, to be located on a 14-acre piece of U.S. Forest Service land off SR 180 between mile markers 18 and 19.

As recently as last

week, the local issuance of a "Request for Proposal" to build the range had been awaiting a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant funding amendment to increase the

See Gun Range, Page 3A

Governmental Finance Corp. to stay open for potential use

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Governmental Finance Corporation Board of Directors met at the courthouse on April 11 to decide whether to shut down or keep open the domestic nonprofit corporation.

Directors emphasized the amount of due diligence and discussion that went into their decision pertaining to the following two options:

Dissolve the corporation in light of the only past order of business having been effectively buttoned up in March when

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Robbie Colwell Weaver and Bo Wright of the Union County Governmental Finance Corporation Board of Directors in their April called meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

City Council talks nuisance properties, sign variances

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Members of the Blairsville City Council met for their monthly meeting at City Hall on April 12 to discuss, among other things, options open to the city regarding cleanup of nuisance properties and sign ordinance variances.

"We average between two and three people every week coming in and talking about that mess up there," said Mayor Jim Conley, referring to the old Greystone Plaza property on Georgia 515 that suffered a structure fire on Sept 28, 2020.

See City Council, Page 2A



In their April 12 regular meeting, Blairsville City Council members discussed the remains of the Greystone Plaza building, which burned more than a year and a half ago. Photo by Mark Smith

Isaiah 117 House captures local hearts in a big way



L-R: Kathy Young, Tina Teater, Leslie Hughes, Kathryn Nelson, State Rep. Stan Gunter, Ronda Paulson, Joseph Goble and Scotty Jarrard at the Isaiah 117 House Fundraiser Luncheon April 12. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, April 12, First United Methodist Church, in conjunction with several other area churches and sponsors, hosted wildly successful luncheon and dinner

events to raise awareness and funds for Isaiah 117 House in Union County.

An estimated 520 people attended to help raise money to build a local Isaiah 117 House facility, and that's not counting the large cadre of volunteers who assisted by seating people,

servicing food and cleaning up.

As of Wednesday morning, April 13, Isaiah 117 House of Blairsville Expansion Coordinator Kathryn Nelson reported raising \$120,769.21, with donations still rolling in. One donation was for \$10,000. See Isaiah 117 House, Page 6A

'View Finders' TV show to feature local natural beauty on GPB

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Stay tuned, residents of Union County, for a new five-part television series called "View Finders" that showcases "the most beautiful areas of Georgia," including sites in the North Georgia Mountains.

The show will premiere at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 23, on the Georgia Public Broadcasting TV station and website. According to https://viewfindersontv.com/, the show "chronicles the adventures of two photographers who are in search of beautiful locations to photograph."

Continuing, "Along the way they talk to experts about what makes each location so unique and so special, providing an educational aspect to the show. However, it is the adventures and the visuals that will draw the audience in, with stunning footage of the locations when the light is the very best. The show is fun, upbeat, laid back and completely unscripted."

"View Finders" was established by friends and colleagues Jason Clemmons, a longtime local landscape photographer, and Chris Greer, also a landscape photographer who works with Georgia College & State University in

Milledgeville.

People will know Clemmons as the proprietor of Sunrise Grocery in Blairsville, an eclectic store at the base of Blood Mountain on Gainesville Highway, about eight miles south of Blairsville, that caters to tourists, hikers, bikers and locals.

Clemmons sells prints of his photographs there and was previously featured in the North Georgia News after his picture of Lake Trahlyta at Vogel State Park was placed in the Interfaith Chapel at the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

"View Finders" follows the co-hosts to different areas

of Georgia as they capture the beauty of nature and all of its wildlife in what could be considered the "best-kept secret" places in the state – from mountains to coastlines and swamps, from remote locations to wildland-urban interfaces.

"We both sort of came up with this idea at the same time, so we bounced around these ideas to each other of, 'Hey, what can we do with this?'" Clemmons said. "Chris had a connection with the general manager of the television station and pitched the idea to him."

"We wanted to present See 'View Finders', Page 2A



Jason Clemmons and Chris Greer will appear on the GPB television show "View Finders" starting Saturday. Photo/Screenshot

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City Council...from Page 1A

The property in question is owned by Blairsville resident Frank Pack, who has made several past bids for elective office at City Hall.

“Now, I know that the last time we had Frank here – I wish he’d have come tonight – we had asked him about it,” Conley said.

Reached by phone on April 15, Pack said he has been dealing with health issues in recent months and has not been able to hire anyone to help him clean up the property.

“There is nobody out there that wants to work,” Pack said. “What has been cleaned up, I have cleaned up personally, by myself, and I intend to continue that.

“But I also have had COVID, and I’ve also had to have stents put in my heart because my heart was 95%

blocked. So, I can only do so much.”

Pack added that he would appreciate it if council members would show up at the property and help him.

Conley said Pack has previously been compelled via citation to clean up one of his other properties in Blairsville and did just the minimum to avoid a fine.

“Every city or county I’ve ever worked for has had this issue about cleaning up dilapidated properties,” City Attorney Marvin Harkins said. “It’s always a problem, it’s always an issue, because, if you think about it, real property rights are basic constitutional rights, second only to individual rights.

“It’s supposed to be hard to affect somebody’s real property. So, it’s not easy by design. But there are a couple of things that we could potentially do.”

Councilman Tony Dyer said the city’s “ultimate goal is not necessarily to punish him or fine him; our ultimate goal is to get (the property) cleaned up.”

Given that a nuisance abatement ordinance is in place, the city does have the option of levying a fine through its police powers. However, depending on which court draws the case, it could be a couple months or as much as two years before the case is heard.

Harkins said he would research the various legal remedies available to the city and report his findings at the next council meeting. However, he said, “There is no quick fix.”

Moving along, River City Bank, which will occupy the former Fatz Restaurant building, applied for a size variance and a numerical variance to the city’s sign ordinance, which specifies that a commercial entity can have one free-standing sign per lot not to exceed 60 square feet in area.

Furthermore, the ordinance restricts the council to a 25% variance in area should they decide to grant one, which in this case would amount to an increase of 15 square feet for a total of 75 square feet. The council may also issue a variance on the number of free-standing signs per lot.

River City wants an 84.4 square foot free-standing, two-part sign – that is, a sign with an electronic message board underneath along the Georgia 515 side of the business, and an additional, smaller free-standing sign along the Young Harris Street side of the lot.

The council voted to



Blairsville City Clerk Kaye McCann and Mayor Jim Conley in the Blairsville City Council meeting last week.

Photo by Mark Smith

deny the size variance for the free-standing sign along Georgia 515 but granted the numerical variance, thereby allowing a second sign along Young Harris Street based on the special “hardship” imposed by the fact that the bank’s lot has two road frontages.

Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook voted nay to the additional sign, and all council members agreed that the sign ordinance was there for a reason and that variances should only be granted under special “hardship” circumstances.

In other business, Chick-fil-A, located next door to the new River City Bank, applied for a consent letter from the mayor authorizing an encroachment of the sewer line easement running next to their property.

Chick-fil-A plans to restructure the area behind the restaurant, which includes a retaining wall that, as presently drawn, will intersect a sewer line. There is a 10-foot easement on either side of the sewer line.

Conley said that once the business adjusts its plans such that the retaining wall will not intersect with the sewer line, he would issue the consent letter to encroach the easement.

Moving along, the council approved the purchase of a dump truck from King Ford for the Water/Sewer Maintenance Department in the amount of \$58,248.

Also approved were invoices for actuator upgrades at the Water Treatment Plant in the amount of \$10,405.32, and Candler Road culvert pipe in the amount of \$12,912.32, plus an estimate for Candler Road culvert pipe in the amount of \$7,621.52.

The dump truck, both invoices and the estimate will all be paid out of SPLOST funds.

As a requirement of the

Sewer Infrastructure Expansion for Congressionally Directed Spending Grant, the city’s financial commitment of \$250,000 was approved. This is a grant of approximately \$12 million for sewer service along the Young Harris Highway.

The council approved the FY 2021-22 amended American Rescue Plan Act budget. This is an accounting exercise to account for roughly \$55,000 of ARPA funds received in 2021 but not spent.

Council members approved the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC amended Outdoor Lighting Service Agreement to replace conventional light bulbs with LED lighting.

Also approved was a resolution to adopt the Blairsville-Union County Comprehensive Plan update. The 10-year plan is updated every five years.

The council approved part-time airport operator Jeff Gordon at the rate of \$15 per hour, as well as a renewal of the Work Detail Agreement with the Georgia Department of Corrections, with no increase in cost.

The Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency 2022-23 renewal, which provides insurance for the City of Blairsville, was approved.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe announced that his organization would be hosting a “Legislative Wrap-up Breakfast” on April 21, featuring Georgia State Sen. Steve Gooch and Georgia State Rep. Stan Gunter as keynote speakers.

For more information on that event, call the chamber at 706-745-5789 or check out www.visitblairsvillega.com.

Mayor Conley and the Blairsville City Council meet the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall.

‘View Finders’...from Page 1A

a landscape photography/educational/travel show. And the whole premise is that we go out and film on these locations, talk to experts, professors and people with local knowledge of the specific areas and do interviews with them.

“We had no guarantees at all. We had to pitch them all episodes and not just a pilot, so we did, and they were very happy with it and decided to give us the green light.”

The exciting new series is slated for five episodes and will feature gorgeous natural footage from around the state,

including Blood Mountain and the Chattahoochee River that starts in Union County.

“We really wanted to show true wonders of nature with scenic, beautiful imagery and slow-motion videos, and it is going to be a really pretty TV show,” Clemmons said. “We could not have done this without the help from our sponsors at REI Co-op, Troncalli Subaru, Explore Georgia, and Terrapin Beer Company of Athens.”

Added Clemmons, “We are truly honored to have our vision come to life and proud that our community

will be featured on such a prestigious, highly respected and longtime staple broadcast station.”

To follow the photographic endeavors of Clemmons and Greer, check out each on Facebook at “JMC Artistic Photography” and “Chris Greer Photography,” respectively.

People may also visit the “View Finders” TV show on Facebook for more information and to watch a preview of the series, which airs at 9 a.m. every Saturday beginning April 23 and at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays in May.

The Blairsville – Union County Memorial Day Parade

The Blairsville – Union County Memorial Day Parade Committee invites you to attend and participate in the parade which will start at 10:30 am on Saturday, May 28, 2022. Grand Marshall and guest speaker for the parade and the following ceremony will be Wade Smith, recently recognized in North Georgia News articles.

Any church, business, civic organization or other group can participate in the parade to support the theme: “Honoring Our Fallen Heroes”. 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.

The parade route will begin at the old gymnasium, past Union County War Memorial Park, turn right on Cleveland St. 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

Memorial Day Parade

Downtown Blairsville

Saturday, May 28 • 10:30 am

“Honoring Our Fallen Heroes”

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 send it to:

Leon Davenport Veterans Center, 78 Blue Ridge Hwy Blairsville, GA 30512 or email to: ga.iraweaver121.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

commemorates U.S. men and women who died while in military service. The committee asks that everyone put aside all political issues 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.

Gun Range...from Page 1A

amount of federal passthrough dollars to be administered by Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

That grant amendment – upping federal funding from 75% to 90% for a 15% reduction in required local match monies – arrived in the county April 12, serving as the last remaining puzzle

piece falling into place for the Commissioner’s Office to re-bid range construction.

“I was sitting on ready for everyone involved to get the RFP out as soon as possible,” Union County Purchasing Agent Pam Hawkins said last week. “The RFP documents, including design drawings and specs, will be on our website

and the Georgia Procurement Registry Wednesday.

“There will be a pre-proposal meeting for interested contractors on May 5 at 2 p.m. Proposals are due to our office by May 24 at 4 p.m. If we get more than one proposal, we could potentially award it to a contractor in the June or July county meeting, then be able to issue a notice to proceed by August.

“So, a contractor should

begin on this project in the fall. We will be giving them 12 months to complete the project.”

The gun range went through an initial round of bidding last fall, and the county received a single bid on the project at higher than projected costs due to inflation and supply chain shortages. Securing increased grant funding has enabled the current re-bidding process.

As background, federal grants for projects like the gun range are made possible by the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, which enables the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to appropriate funds from excise taxes on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment.

Key features of the range, which has been in the works since the founding of the Union County Gun Club in 2017, will include independently operated rifle and pistol ranges, sound abatement, full-size bathrooms, climate-controlled meeting and supply rooms, ample parking and more.

For more information and to examine the Request for Proposal and accompanying documents when everything goes live April 20, visit unioncountyga.gov or head over to the Union County Commissioner’s Office at 65 Courthouse Street inside the courthouse.

Union County Sheriff’s Office investigators attend area training for Officer Involved Shootings

YOUNG HARRIS — Union County Sheriff’s Capt. Daren Osborn, along with Sgt. Marc Pilote and Sgt. Lisa Foos of the Criminal Investigation Division, attended the Georgia Internal Affairs Investigators Association spring conference at Brasstown Valley Resort April 13-15 for 16 hours of P.O.S.T. training.

“This association provides state of the art training for investigators specific to our field, as well as classes that will aid with any case you may encounter,” said Mark Adair, president of the Georgia Internal Affairs Investigators Association.

In addition to the Union County Sheriff’s Office, 80 other Law Enforcement Officers from around the state took part in the training, which dealt with Officer Involved Shootings.

Deputy Director of Investigations Chris Hosey of



UCSO Capt. Daren Osborn, Sgt. Lisa Foos and Sgt. Marc Pilote in last week’s training by the Georgia Internal Affairs Investigators Association

the Georgia Bureau of Investigation led the OIS training, touching on several topics that will enable local investigators to assist the GBI in their investigation of officer involved shootings should it be necessary.

“Thankfully, Union County has not been involved in an OIS, and we pray this doesn’t happen, but this training will help hone our skills in

the event one occurs,” Capt. Osborn said.

To conclude the training, a legal update was provided Dr. Butch Beach from Georgia Command College, which trains law enforcement leaders at Columbus, Georgia.

“Union County Sheriff’s Office strives to keep deputies trained to better serve you, the public,” Capt. Osborn said.

Gold Dome Update: Sine Die, Second Session Concludes

By: Sen. Steve Gooch (R – Dahlonega)

The Second Session of the 156th Georgia General Assembly has officially adjourned Sine Die. After a few relentless weeks of votes, the gavel has fallen for the final time this year and signaled the conclusion of our legislative business for another year. This year proved to be a productive one, with both chambers of the legislature granting final approval to a combined total of nearly 200 bills and resolutions, many of them with overwhelming bipartisan support.

This year, we took on the issues most important to you. We fought for our schools and students by increasing parental involvement in the classroom and eliminating mask mandates. We supported our public safety officials by increasing penalties for the incitement or participation in riots, while strengthening the ability of citizens to protest peacefully. We built on Georgia’s legacy as the best state in the nation to do business, incentivizing apprenticeship programs and supporting the college to career pipeline. We spoke out against censorship by bringing big tech companies to heel and prohibited them from silencing opinions on social media platforms. We brought much needed reform to Georgia’s mental health landscape by passing landmark legislation to bring parity in how these cases are treated. This is just a small sampling of what we have accomplished this year, but represent significant accomplishments that reflect the desires of Georgians.

This year, the General Assembly also passed a monumental bill to further lower the state income tax. Under HB 1437, the maximum income tax rate would gradually reduce on an annual basis from the current 5.75%, starting with a flat rate of 5.49% in 2024 and dropping all the way down to 4.99% by 2029. In order to meet our target goal of 4.99%, several triggers must be met, including maintaining a revenue estimate greater than 3% of the previous year’s esti-

mate, as well as ensuring that the state maintains a healthy Revenue Shortfall Reserve Fund. Additionally, the standard deduction for single filers would increase to \$12,000 and the personal exemption would be removed. As a state that has a demonstrated track record of fiscal conservatism, this is one of several ways the General Assembly has worked to put money back where it belongs - in the pockets of the taxpayer.

Another historic victory for the General Assembly this year was the passage of Constitutional Carry legislation. Essentially, this legislation would allow any individual who is lawfully allowed to carry a firearm in Georgia to do so without the requirement to first obtain a permit. The Constitution is very clear that any lawful individual should be allowed to carry out and exercise their Second Amendment rights without any additional regulations or requirements from the government. This bill would in no way allow unlawful carriers greater access to firearms or grant any individual the ability to carry a firearm in areas that are not currently allowed under law. Rather, it simply removes the permitting and fee process in order to carry a firearm. I am proud that the General Assembly passed this measure and am excited that Gov. Brian Kemp moved quickly to sign this bill into law on Tuesday, April 12.

Over the past week, I carried a number of bills, many of which support our economic development capabilities and ensure our infrastructure remains up to date for new technological advancements. House Bill 1044 would allow for the creation of regional development authorities, to be made up of three to five counties whose local governments approve through a joint resolution between participating governments. These regional development authorities have the potential to bring economic development opportunities by offering tax credits for each quality job for taxpayers who maintain qualified investment



property. Additionally, I carried House Bill 1009, which would allow Georgia to take its first steps in allowing the use of automated delivery devices. Specifically, the bill would outline the weight and speed limits of these devices and grant local governments the ability to regulate the geographic boundaries in which they may operate.

On Monday, April 4th, Governor Brian Kemp officially signed House Bill 1013, the Mental Health Parity Act, into law. This bill was a priority of the General Assembly this year and emphasizes the importance of mental health care in our state and places mental health and physical health on equal footing in how these cases are treated. Essentially, HB 1013 would require that insurance companies who offer mental health coverage cover it in the same fashion as physical health, as well as enact reporting measures to ensure the law is being followed. Many Georgians learned over the course of the pandemic just how critical quality mental health services are and this bill brings Georgia one step closer to closing the gap on how mental health care is treated in our state.

From the final day of the session, Gov. Kemp has 40 days to sign or veto legislation (or allow it to become law without his signature). It is my hope that Gov. Kemp signs these and many other urgently needed pieces of legislation as we lead up to his deadline. While the legislative session may be over, it does not mean that our work as legislators is finished. We are here to serve you year-round and remain available to address and questions or concerns you may have. If there’s anything my office can do for you, please do not hesitate to reach out.

How to celebrate Patriots Day, Tuesday, April 19th, on the Blairsville Square

Join Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter members of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) and jointly members of the Old Unicoi Trail and Archibald D. Murphey Chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution at the Blairsville’s Square on Tuesday, April 19 between the hours of 10 AM and 12 Noon, wave and honk your car horn to show your patriotism.

Stop by and visit with the Compatriots and Daughters whose ancestors fought bravely for the freedom we enjoy today and learn more about the rifles and muskets used in the war.

We will be recognizing “The shot heard around the world” that began the American fight for freedom from England on April 19, 1775, the anniversary of the Battle of Lexington-Concord, in Massachusetts.

Chapter members will be dressed in Revolutionary

War period uniforms, they will be displaying several historical flags and firing flintlock muskets like those used in 1775.

Additionally, they will have a display of revolutionary period artifacts, provide historical information, and answer any questions.

The Sons of the American Revolution conducts various programs to preserve the history of the American Revolution, provide education and promote patriotism throughout the year. The Chapter has faithfully conducted this Patriots Day celebration for the 20 years of the chapter’s existence as well as historic educational presentations to hundreds of elementary school students.

Nationally recognized in the top five chapters of over 600 chapters worldwide, the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter is one of the most active SAR chapters, even though a small membership totaling 38 individuals.

If you are unable to join us. There are many other ways to show your patriotism every day:

1. Salute the American flag when presented
2. Stand for the National Anthem
3. Fly and maintain the American flag the proper way
4. Maintain and do not deface or destroy historical monuments
5. Teach children patriotism
6. Teach children American history
7. Show respect for veterans, first responders and law enforcement personnel

For more information about the Sons of the American Revolution and programs we offer and membership, contact Chapter President Sid Turner at (706) 745-3410. More information on joining either organization can be found on the SAR website at www.sar.org or DAR website at www.dar.org.

E-911 Dispatchers...from Page 1A

officers would be left without physical directions to a scene or knowledge of what situation they are running into.

"This is another exhibit of our wonderful people and wonderful employees that we have and the access that we have to the incredible care that is as good or better than you're going to get in a big city," Paris said. "You can't say enough about your 911 employees because they're the unsung heroes. Nobody sees them and nobody hears them unless you have an emergency.

"We're so proud of them and always have been. And they just continue to get better and better. We appreciate everything they do."

In years past, Union and Towns Counties had only one combined E-911 dispatch center. It was housed at the old Union County jail, which was located on Trackrock Gap Road, just off the Young Harris Highway near the county line.

In 1999, Towns County developed its own E-911 center and split from Union County.

"Everything that was said on the radio, we wrote it down on a piece of paper; we didn't have computers (to rely on)," said Union County 911 Dispatcher Lynn Powell, who has been with the agency over 20 years. Powell said those papers and notes amounted to legal records useable in court.

"We have advanced to the (computer-aided dispatch) system," she said. "We were one of the first in Georgia to get that. We've seen the call volume go from almost nothing in a month to who knows how many calls we get per day now. It's just totally different than it was when I started here.



911 Lt. Millie Baxter with Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris in last week's National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week celebration April 14.

"And we didn't have mapping. We had very little (in the way of) directions. It was like, Mr. So-and-So lives three houses past the red barn. You had to know a lot of landmarks that we used to use."

Lt. Millie Baxter, longtime Union County E-911 Administrator and the only person with more seniority than Powell, said dispatchers used to have paper maps that they would spread out on the floor to get locations and give directions.

However, the CAD system was introduced in 2007, eliminating the need for all of that.

Today, the Union County E-911 Center, with its CAD system, mapping capabilities – assisted by John Pickelsimer in 911 Mapping/Addressing – and digital radios, is an example of modern technology that rivals the emergency centers of any

big metropolis.

But it takes more than technology to make an emergency center top notch. It takes dedicated, intelligent people who can think on their feet and keep cool under the most stressful of situations, because, in an emergency 911 center, anything can happen at any time. And it does.

Residents might want to think about that when they wake up in the middle of the night, are in heavy traffic somewhere, or are all alone; there is a highly trained, competent E-911 dispatcher sitting at his or her desk 24/7/365 ready to make anyone's emergency their emergency.

"I would like to say thank you so much to everybody that has done something for us. We really appreciate everything, and God bless everybody," said E-911 Dispatcher Heidi Morris.

UCGFC...from Page 1A

the board voted to transfer to Union County Government the property the corporation was set up to finance in 2001, namely, the former Bill Elliott property that houses the Health Department, Department of Driver Services and Sports Center facilities.

Or the directors could choose to continue the corporation as an active entity, with no planned business and in keeping with the original purpose of the corporation – to assist the county with securing low-interest financing for future potential property purchases.

Ultimately, board directors voted to keep the corporation active based on their consensus view that, while there is currently no planned use of the corporation as far as they are aware, the corporation may still benefit the county by providing cost-effective financing options in the future, especially given the inability to accurately forecast economic conditions moving forward.

According to the board, the corporation staying open will negate the need to pay thousands of taxpayer dollars to re-establish a similar corporation down the road should any future county commissioner decide that doing so would benefit residents.

Directors compared corporation re-establishment costs with current costs of less than \$100 for annual registration with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office, deciding that the pros of not dissolving outweighed the cons.

The volunteer slate of directors consists of Bo Wright, who serves as vice president of the board and leads the meetings, Robbie Colwell Weaver and Melissa Ekeberg.

These individuals – all working Union County residents – were approached by Commissioner's Office staff at the beginning of the year to compose a new Board of Directors for the purpose of approving the transfer mentioned above.

Each was selected for his or her expertise in the areas of law and/or finance. Wright is the Chief Operations Officer for the Office of Finance & Operations at Young Harris College; Weaver is a local attorney; and Ekeberg is a financial consultant.

Appointed by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris in his regular meeting in January, the trio has replaced the original board, which had not met for years.

April 11 was the new board's second meeting after holding a first meeting March 7 in which the directors transferred to the county the only property ever held by the corporation in its 20-plus year existence.

Last month's board action rectified what has been called an "unfortunate oversight" by the county, as the transfer should have occurred in 2011.

Wright, Weaver and Ekeberg made clear last week that their purpose as a board is to secure financing via lease-purchase agreements on potential county property purchases for which the commissioner chooses to utilize the Governmental Finance Corporation.

As such, the directors said they have no ability to buy property of their own accord or to influence county-level decisions to purchase property, but only to find financing once such decisions are made by the duly elected commissioner on behalf of the county.

Also on the agenda for the April 11 meeting was a discussion of a recent letter to

the editor of the North Georgia News written by Union County resident Mike Sims.

After reading Sims' March 23 letter, Ekeberg said she asked her fellow board director Wright to research the following statement by Sims about what he called the "disaster for the citizens" of keeping the corporation open:

"It takes away the rights of citizens to vote in a referendum on the county going into debt and skirts around State laws on referendums which could lead to all counties in the State doing the same by saying 'why have a referendum when we can go in debt without a referendum.'"

Wright said that, per the section of the Georgia Constitution governing "Limitation on Local Debt," no county "shall incur any new debt without the assent of a majority of the qualified voters of such county ... voting in an election held for that purpose as provided by law."

"Now, while a referendum is required for ordinary debt," Wright said, "there are limited exceptions to the referendum requirement for revenue bonds, tax anticipation notes, lease-purchase agreement obligations and certificates of participation, authority borrowings and certain specialized types of borrowings.

"Any county borrowing must meet the requirements applicable in one of these categories. So, regular, ordinary debt? Correct, there needs to be a referendum, but there are numerous exceptions within (state law) that allow a county to borrow money when it needs to in different ways."

Wright then went on to refute Sims' contention that the Governmental Finance Corporation was enabling the county to "skirt around State laws on referendums."

"This corporation has no power over the law that is already there; this corporation doesn't change that," Wright said. "If this corporation is dissolved, Union County Government can still do the exact same thing and enter into a lease-purchase agreement without the corporation.

"(If dissolved), what you do have is that this corporation will not be here as another layer of approval for that ... That's the way that I understand that."

Added Ekeberg, "The corporation's initial intention, according to what we had read and discovered, was in order to provide better financing options to the county and its taxpayers when it comes to borrowing for land.

"So, if you're a county and need to obtain money for a land purchase, you traditionally would have to issue some kind of bond, and those can sometimes be expensive.

"Well, you can then create a corporation that's a subsidiary of the Union County Government to help you go out and obtain better financing so that it costs the taxpayers less to buy land and borrow funds."

Sims, who was in attendance, answered the board by disagreeing with its conclusions about state law on referendums and borrowing money. As previously reported, Sims has an active "Petition for Declaratory Judgment" filed in the Union County Superior Court Clerk's Office.

Filed Feb. 11, Sims' petition is requesting that a Superior Court judge compel Paris, who serves as a non-voting board director and ex-officio president of the corporation through his role as county commissioner, and

the corporation to turn over the old Bill Elliott property to county ownership, which was accomplished by the corporation's Board of Directors last month.

At issue for Sims is the fact that Paris had failed to live up to multiple past pledges that the corporation would turn this property over to the county after loan repayment, which concluded in 2011.

Despite the central request of his petition having been fulfilled by the county and Governmental Finance Corporation after he filed the petition, Sims is still pursuing his civil action and withholding comment on the matter until after adjudication.

The county has credited Sims' inquiry into the overdue property transfer, which he conducted last year in preparation for his petition, as being what brought the issue to local government attention, thereby resulting in the new board appointments and subsequent transfer last month.

More than 20 residents attended the April 11 meeting, including several members of the community who have been vocally critical of Paris' handling of certain county business, such as the failure to turn over the old Bill Elliott property in a timely manner.

Paris did not attend the meeting.

There was some confusion among attendees over the purpose of the gathering, with pre-meeting speculation having circulated about the possibility of the corporation helping to finance the large acreage owned by Union General Health System that is currently being explored for sale.

The board said it had no business to conduct regarding any purchases whatsoever and, furthermore, had no indication that any potential deal between the county and Health System was in the works. Their main business that day was to decide the fate of the corporation.

Other questions and comments directed at the board demonstrated a high level of distrust for county government, with several members of the public sharing concerns that the corporation might be used to circumvent the will of voters in large, taxpayer-funded property purchases.

Still others expressed support for the corporation and even the current state of the county under Commissioner Paris, offering a counterpoint to those showing skepticism of the county's motives, actions and commitment to transparency.

Opinions were aired on both sides of the issue at hand; several residents spoke out against keeping the corporation open, while a few attendees favored the idea of retaining cheaper potential funding options via the corporation's continued existence.

Director Weaver, a Union County native, lamented the level of "negativism and the fear that I see from people" in the country and in the meeting.

"My purpose here is simply to try to make a difference now," she said. "I'm not here to try to frustrate or pull the wool over anybody's eyes.

"This board is here for one reason, and that's to assist the county, should it be necessary in the future, in order to effectuate the purchase of property. Nothing has been discussed; to my knowledge there is absolutely nothing that is going to be purchased."

It was also decided that afternoon that the board would hold its annual meeting – the only one required to be held according to corporation bylaws – every year in January.

Isaiah 117 House...from Page 1A

from WoodmenLife Insurance Company, consisting of both local and corporate funds.

The next step for Isaiah 117 House of Blairsville – a nationally renowned program that provides transition facilities for children who must be removed from abusive or neglectful homes – will be to secure land so the building process can begin in Blairsville.

Isaiah 117 House didn't just show up in Union County by accident. The organization was invited to come to Blairsville to raise awareness about a situation of which many people are blissfully unaware: the trauma of "removal day" for displaced children.

Many children are removed from the custody of their parents or caregivers for any number of reasons, be it due to a drug bust in the middle of the night, mistreatment, neglect, or something else, and it is usually a very traumatic experience for those children, no matter their age.

So, what happens to the unfortunate children who undergo such disturbing experiences? How does that work?

Every state in the country has some form of a department of family and children's services, or DFCS. Once a child is taken into state custody, he or she is immediately turned over to a DFCS case worker to await placement in a foster home or with a foster family.

And where do those children wait? Most likely at the office of the case worker, wearing whatever clothes they had on at the time of their removal, and usually in need of basic hygiene. The wait can be anywhere from a few hours to weeks or even months.

That is a huge responsibility for a case worker and a woefully horrible predicament for a child that comes on top of the trauma of being removed from what is usually the only home the child has ever known.

Founded by foster parents Ronda and Corey Paulson in 2017, Isaiah 117 House was created to alleviate that ugly reality for both children and case workers.

"Isaiah 117 House truly came out of lived experience," Ronda Paulson said at the gathering last week. "In 2014, I didn't know anything about foster care. But I felt God was calling us to that, my husband and me. And so, we went to take classes to become foster parents.

"And through that process,



Isaiah 117 House founders Corey and Ronda Paulson attended last week's fundraiser aimed at bringing one of the child welfare facilities to Blairsville to serve kids from the area.

(we) learned that there's this gap-time for children – from the moment they're removed until they're placed, there's this window ... where they're just sitting (or sleeping) in an office.

"When we received our first placement in 2015, he came to us with a borrowed outfit and a roach-infested diaper bag," Paulson said of the experience that led to their founding of Isaiah 117 House.

"So, the idea of this home was that we could reduce trauma for children, lighten the load of case workers, and ease the transition for that future placement."

Now, what started out as a project for a single county in Tennessee has blossomed into a national initiative, all by word of mouth; people all over the country are clamoring for an Isaiah 117 House to serve their communities, Paulson said.

"We opened our first doors in 2018," she said. "I thought there was going to be one house. God thought otherwise. So, now we have 30 locations in six states, and we just moved into our seventh and eighth states – and it just keeps going."

Nelson said she heard about Isaiah 117 House by sheer accident while shopping locally at "from me 2 u" in Blairsville. After researching Isaiah 117 House, then visiting the headquarters in Tennessee, Nelson became determined to build one in Union County.

She now heads up the local endeavor, and it was through her volunteer efforts speaking with countless members of the community that awareness of the incredibly successful April 12 fundraiser took shape.

Rather than advertise the event, Nelson spent six months talking to anyone who

would listen, garnering support by word of mouth, the result being that many members of the community sponsored tables for their friends and fellow residents.

At both the luncheon and dinner, several people with experience in the workings of DFCS spoke about various aspects of and firsthand experiences with displaced children in the state legal system.

Those speakers were District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter, a former Superior Court judge; Union/Towns County Director of DFCS Tina Teater; 15-year foster mom Kathy Young; Advanced Digital Cable Director of Human Resources Joseph Goble, himself a foster child; Senior Pastor of Harmony Grove Baptist Church Scotty Jarrard; and Leslie Hughes, who sang a duet of "Abide With Me" with Nelson, who accompanied on guitar.

And, of course, keynote speaker Ronda Paulson spoke at length about her and her husband's experiences in the world of foster parenting and helping displaced children with nowhere to go. Paulson's monologue was, in a word, powerful.

Given that there are regrettably few options for foster care in the Enotah Judicial District of North Georgia, an Isaiah 117 House is direly needed, and not only in Union County, but in surrounding counties as well.

Event sponsors were Jim's Smokin' Que, Chick-fil-A, Sawmill Place, Skillet Restaurant, Rib Country, Cook's Country Kitchen, Christa's Cookies, First United Methodist, Harmony Grove Baptist, Choestoe Baptist, Vertical Church, Jim and Donna Guess, and Michael and Deon Brown.

The organization got its name from Isaiah Chapter 1, Verse 17, in the Christian Bible, which calls on people to "defend the cause of the fatherless."

To learn more information or to donate to Isaiah 117 House in Blairsville-Union County, email Nelson at kathryn.nelson@isaiah117house.com or call 706-781-7284. The website for Isaiah 117 House is https://isaiah117house.com.

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