

North Georgia News

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'Evening with the Stars' highlights student achievement

By Shawn Jarrard
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The stars shined especially bright on April 15. No, it wasn't an astronomical phenomenon – it was the "Evening with the Stars" banquet featuring some of the most talented and deserving senior students of Union County High School.

Sponsored by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, the annual event welcomed students and their families for a lavish evening of special treatment, complete with a delicious meal by LongHorn Steakhouse, stunning table decorations, community VIPs, and singular attention for their accomplishments.

Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Murphy led the awards presentation at the Community Center that evening, leading off with Taylor Carroll as the recipient

of the "Reaching for the Stars Award."

Carroll received the award for his ability to brighten the lives of those around him daily, bringing "happiness and joy to his teachers and peers."

Next, student Allison Colwell received the "Service Star Award," the recipient of which is specifically selected by their peers for going "above and beyond to serve others."

Murphy lauded Colwell's leadership as editor of the "Mountain Echoes" yearbook, as volunteer trainer for the football team, and as a four-year member on the High School Student Council.

Receiving the "Shining Star Award" was Aliceyn Covington, whom Murphy described as "the epitome of drive, passion and talent."

Highlighted were Covington's prodigious musicianship, her humility in all endeavors, and her dedication

to spearheading "multiple initiatives which improve logistics, communication, and achievement of multiple school programs."

Noah Underwood received the "All Star Panther Award." As a coaches' choice award, the honor spoke to the tremendous esteem in which all Panther coaches hold Underwood as a student-athlete.

A "superior athlete" and "an even better person," Underwood serves as "the embodiment of character, work ethic and discipline," excelling on the field and in the classroom as an all-star Panther.

Also honored were Union County STAR Student Hannah Todd, recognized for her remarkable performance on the SAT test and in the classroom, and her chosen STAR Teacher April Krieger. Both delivered speeches to the delight of those

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L-R: UCHS Seniors Allison Colwell, Aliceyn Covington, Noah Underwood, Hannah Todd and Taylor Carroll showing off their awards from the 2021 "Evening with the Stars." Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Landon Kight unites students, organizations to 'Bless Blairsville'

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County High School Junior Landon Kight took it upon himself to organize students and the community in putting on the first-ever Bless Blairsville event over the weekend. The goal of Bless Blairsville is to undertake a series of community service projects benefitting those in need locally.

The event occurred April 16-17 and included initiatives like establishing an Emergency Clothes Closet for Primary School kids, baking cookies for Healthcare Worker Appreciation, adapting toys for special needs, making trauma dolls for children in stressful situations or environments, and



Mother-son duo Amy and Landon Kight are fellow volunteers, with Landon leading a major local community service initiative known as "Bless Blairsville." Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Saddle Club celebrates 30 years of the Union County Arena

By Jarrett Whitener
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Staff Writer

For 30 years, the Union County Arena has been the home of much excitement brought to residents by the Union County Saddle Club, serving as the location for rodeos, competitions and other community events.

To celebrate these three decades of dedication to the people of the area, the Saddle Club hosted a special ceremony in front of the horse arena on Friday, April 16.

Saddle Club President Art Miller recognized special guests in the meeting, including Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter.

Miller also explained See Saddle Club, Page 2A



Gerald Patterson spoke in the 30th anniversary celebration of the Union County Arena Friday. Patterson is a longtime member and former president of the Saddle Club. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Derrick Whittle Blood Drive still giving back after nine years

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Jim and Sharon Whittle have partnered with Blood Assurance for nine years to host an annual blood drive in honor of their late son Derrick Whittle.

This year's drive took place on what would have been Derrick's 48th birthday on Sunday, April 11, at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center.

Whittle was a deputy with the Union County Sheriff's Office who suffered a fatal accident in 2011 when his vehicle went off a sharp curve



Jim and Sharon Whittle keep the memory of their son, the late UCSO Deputy Derrick Whittle, alive with his namesake scholarship and blood drive. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Vaccination efforts continue as state pauses J&J vaccine

By Shawn Jarrard
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On April 13, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention along with the Food and Drug Administration recommended a pause in the use of the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine.

That same day, the Georgia Department of Public Health announced it would be administering the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines only until further notice. All three vaccines that have been used in the U.S. and Georgia are being administered under emergency use authorizations.

"The FDA and CDC are reporting data involving six reported cases of a rare and severe type of blood clot occurring in women aged 18-48 about a week after vaccination," DPH said last week. "None of the six cases are in

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John "Bud" Gaskins of Suches received his first Pfizer shot from Kaitlyn Odum at the Health Department Saturday clinic. Gaskins attended with his wife Gloria, and they were impressed with the efficiency of the venue. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Farmers Market 'ramping up' for season with Ramp Day

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Union County Farmers Market is ramping up for its regular season return in June with the ever-popular Ramp Day event on May 1.

Running 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. that Saturday, this year's Ramp Day will feature ramp-related door prizes and plenty of regular market vendors selling handmade crafts and locally grown produce.

Ramps are wild onions native to the region, and they pack much more of a wallop than their domesticated counterparts. They only grow at certain elevations, and many people go the entire year between Ramp Days without seeing let alone tasting one.

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Farmers Market Manager Mickey Cummings and Assistant Manager Kristy Penney are ready to take the on-ramp for the regular market season. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Union County resident arrested for molesting sibling pair

By Shawn Jarrard
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A Blairsville man is behind bars after allegedly molesting two siblings under the age of 12, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Kurt Stuart Hanna, 79, of Blue Ridge Street, has been charged with three counts of child molestation, aggravated sexual battery, aggravated child molestation, and enticing a child for indecent purposes – all felonies.

The reported incidents of molestation came to the attention of the Sheriff's Office on Friday, April 9, when the

mother of the siblings contacted authorities, said UCSO Det. Lisa Fooks with the Criminal Investigations Division. Fooks is the lead investigator in the case.

Prior to his arrest, Hanna was a longtime family friend with whom the children were used to spending time alone, and that Friday, the elder sibling broke down before heading to Hanna's residence, Fooks said.

Upon learning of the abuse allegations, investigators wasted no time. They immediately scheduled a forensic interview to determine the extent of the abuse, in which the child described multiple past incidents



Kurt Stuart Hanna and told authorities the younger sibling had also been a victim, Fooks said. See Hanna, Page 3A

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