

North Georgia News

3 Sections 26 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, April 24, 2024

Tammy Hughes promoted to principal at UCMS

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Tammy Hughes was announced as the new principal of Union County Middle School in the Monday, April 15, meeting of the Union County Board of Education.

After this school year, current UCMS Principal Pat Donaldson will be transitioning to a half-time teacher position to focus on her family's business, and Superintendent John Hill said her hard work and leadership in administration will be missed.

Hughes comes to the position after a long career with the system; she has been working with Union County Schools in some capacity since

1996. She started as a paraprofessional in kindergarten, then moved on to serving in a special education classroom. All the while, she went to school to earn her teaching certification.

Afterward, she transferred to Union County High School, and later, she taught at Union County Elementary School, particularly among special education students.

"And then I went into general fifth grade, and I was there for the bulk of my career," Hughes said.

For the last six years, Hughes has stepped up in an administrative capacity as Primary School assistant

principal. When the opportunity to apply as the new Middle School principal presented itself, Hughes took it and was excited to make the cut.

"I've got a good handle on what sixth-graders look like, and I know seventh- and eighth-graders are a little bit different, but I also feel like my history with behavioral needs has prepared me well for this opportunity," Hughes said, believing that her additional experience with high school students has helped her grasp "the full picture."

"I've seen the spectrum from the beginning – literally, from the 3-year-olds that come in to the seniors that walk out, so I've tasted a little bit of all of it," Hughes said.

As for the philosophies she will be bringing to her administration, Hughes maintains that she is a strong proponent of the Union County Schools motto, "Success for All." Ultimately, she wants to see students and staff grow into the best versions of themselves.

"We have a very strong Middle School already," Hughes said. "We have a fabulous staff who are hardworking, and I look forward to the opportunity to work with a great group of people and get to know them."

Students of the Distributive Education Clubs of America were honored for their performances at the state-level DECA Competition. All were congratulated before



Superintendent John Hill congratulating Tammy Hughes for being named the new UCMS principal for the 2024-25 school year. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

New E-911 Center, LMIG paving highlight meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris is hopeful that construction bidding on the new E-911 Center will take place in the last quarter of the year to get the facility built and operational in 2025.

In a major step toward that goal, the project received the go-ahead for design work in the April 18 regular county meeting.

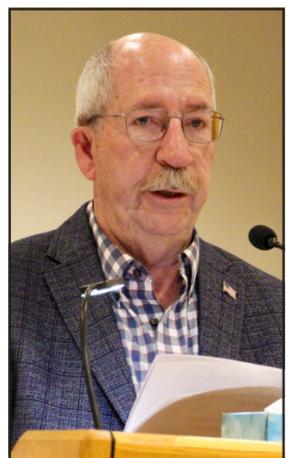
Paris authorized a contract with engineering firm Hussey Gay Bell to work up "schematic designs, design development, construction documents and construction

administration" for the new center. The contract is for \$175,900.

The 911 Center will be moving from the antiquated office building on Hunt-Martin Street, formerly the Union County Nursing Home, to nearby the Union County Fire Station No. 1 on Shoe Factory Road.

And now that the Elections Board and Transit Department have been moved from the old nursing home to more suitable facilities, Paris is wanting to get started doing the same for E-911 to get the important county service "in a more up-to-date facility."

"This new facility will See County Meeting, Page 2A



Lamar Paris
Sole Commissioner

Early voting starts Monday for General Primary

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

In-person early voting for the General Primary Election begins Monday to give active registered voters the chance to select political party nominees to appear on ballots in November.

On the Republican side, there are just three county-level seats featuring primary opposition: Sole Commissioner, Sheriff and District 1 School Board.

Only one Democrat qualified for local office – as Sole Commissioner – and candidates for all other county contests qualified unopposed, though there is primary



opposition in the race for District 8 State Representative.

Also appearing on ballots will be state party questions to help each party set political priorities moving forward, as well as nonpartisan candidates.

Election Day for the upcoming primary is Tuesday,

May 21. There will be three weeks of early voting for this election running weekdays between Monday, April 29, and Friday, May 17.

Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, May 4, and Saturday, May 11.

All in-person early voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the new Union County Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

General Primary voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their See Early Voting, Page 2A

Dispatchers receive thanks, awards in appreciation event

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County E-911 Dispatchers are known for being the calm presence at the center of any emergency. Shoring up their cool professionalism is a tender sense of family filled with love and care for each other and their community.

These sentiments – and plenty of laughter mixed with a few tears – were on full display during the appreciation dinner held in their honor at the 911 Center on Wednesday, April 17, in recognition of the annual National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

"We are a family," said Dispatcher Maggie Guerrier, who has extensive dispatch experience and has been with Union County E-911 going on

two years. "Everybody looks out for each other.

"We work together, we vibe with each other. It's almost like we're one mind; if one of us needs something, the other already has it going. We're here to help and be there for our community."

As the very first responders in many emergencies, dispatchers are indispensable. And while they may not travel to scenes, they coordinate all the people who do.

Between April 1, 2023, and March 31, 2024, that coordination took the form of a staggering 12,583 calls to 911 and 23,325 non-emergency calls in service to the public.

That's why it was so important to local stakeholders See E-911 Dispatchers, Page 5A



Union County E-911 Dispatchers felt the love of the county in their special appreciation dinner at the 911 Center last Wednesday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Patriots' Day observance honors country's founding April 19



The Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution took Blairsville back to the nation's founding for Patriots' Day April 19. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter Sons of the American Revolution – and one Daughter of the American Revolution – celebrated Patriots' Day 18th-century style on the Blairsville Square the morning of April 19.

More than a few folks slowed down to wave or stopped driving altogether to grab a quick video or photo of the patriotic volunteers dressed in their colonial best, while others honked or rolled down their windows to shout approval.

Emil Decker, Ron Willhide, Ted Gaudette, Jared Ogden, Doug Jamison, Sid

Turner and Sandy Bell may have initially appeared out of time and place, but they had some important reasons for being out and about that day.

Alongside celebrating Patriots' Day, which commemorates the battles of Lexington, Concord and Menotomy as the start of the American Revolution, what SAR and DAR really looks for is making connections, whether with people living or confined to the pages of history.

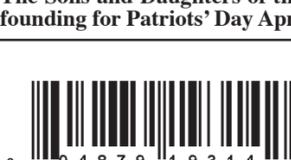
The main inspiration for the annual event is education. All the men spoke fondly about children especially finding an interest in the nation's history by seeing frontiersmen and infantry fighters seemingly

stepping right out of their history books.

To give an idea of the varied backgrounds of America's earliest freedom fighters, Willhide recalled the backgrounds of some of George Washington's most unassuming spies: "One was a farmer, one was a coffee shop owner, another was a printer; they had a woman whom they never figured out who she was."

In fact, many women played pivotal roles in helping to establish independence.

Ogden shared the story of one woman who defended her homestead against British sympathizers who had visited with the intent of killing her See Patriots' Day, Page 4A



Vol. 115 No. 18
Arrests - 3B Legals - 6C
Church - 2C Obits - 3C
Classifieds - 6C Sports - 6B
Opinion - 6A

SOCCER
4/25 Boys
@ Model 7 PM
Sweet 16

Sign Removal for County Mowing See Page 3B
Home & Garden Shows 4/27-28 See Page 1C
National Day of Prayer May 2 See Page 2C



You work hard for your money. Shouldn't it be working hard for you?
BLAIR BURCH | LPL FINANCIAL ADVISOR
BLAIRSVILLE | 177 Highway 515 East | 706-745-0435

United Community Advisors
Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor and broker-dealer (member FINRA/SIPC). Investment and insurance products are not FDIC insured, are not bank guaranteed, and may lose value.

Blairsville City Council approves 14% water rate increase

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In their April regular meeting, Blairsville City Council members voted to implement a 14% rate increase

for city water customers to account for rising costs of treatment. It will be the first water rate increase in over 10 years.

The increase must be made via ordinance, which

will be ready for a first reading in the May regular meeting. Before the new rate goes live, the council will need to hold a second reading and subsequent adoption, expected in June.

Leading the water rate discussion April 9 was Engineering Management, Inc. Vice President Chip McGaughey. EMI contracts with the city on various projects.

Just like other aspects of trade, “the water and sewer world,” as McGaughey called it, has noticed “a tremendous amount of cost increases (and inflation.” And the impact of these additional costs has been measured by examining the city’s debt service coverage ratio.

“One of the gauges we use to assess how well your system is operating ... financially, anyway, is debt service coverage ratio,” McGaughey said. “Now, obviously you want your revenues to exceed your expenses, but debt service coverage is a capitalization that the funding agencies use to gauge (net revenue).

“In very simple terms, they want your net revenue after your expenses to be about, at minimum, 5% higher than your

debt service on the system ... so they call it a 1.05 coverage ratio.”

EMI ran an analysis on the city’s water and sewer systems, and while the latter seemed to be clear from a financial aspect, McGaughey said that debt service coverage for water fell below the optimal 1.05 ratio, and it “has been dropping every year.”

The study projected data from 2024 to 2028, finding that, without a water rate increase, the city’s coverage ratio dipped below levels deemed acceptable by the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority, which provides low-interest loans for city water projects like the well exploration.

McGaughey recommended a 7% increase this year followed by the same in 2025 to pull debt service coverage up to acceptable levels.

Initially, council members were reluctant to go through with the raise and attempted to look at other options. Councilman Robert “Buddy” Moore asked if any other funds could be used for projects, but SPLOST money is already being allocated toward the Georgia 515 expansion.

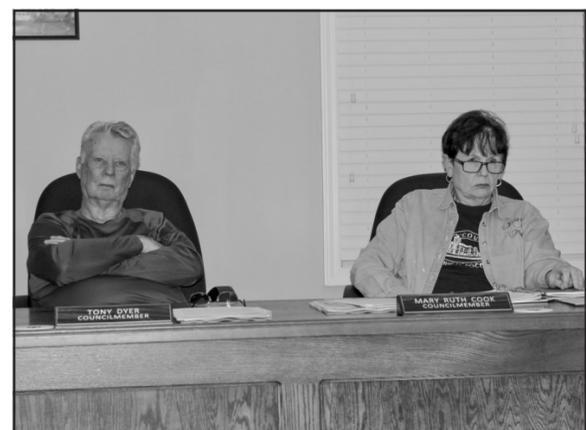
“If you consider you haven’t had a rate increase in over a decade, it’s very good,” McGaughey said.

“Bite the bullet and get it over with,” said Councilman Tony Dyer, suggesting that a 14% increase in one year be adopted rather than introducing year over year raises, with Councilwoman Mary Cook agreeing.

For her part, Councilwoman Rhonda Mahan said that “14% is going to sound like a lot to people.”

“I’d just go ahead and do the (14% increase),” Mayor Jim Conley said in offering his input.

When asked by Moore why she agreed with the 14% increase, Cook responded, “I’d just as soon do 14% and get it



Blairsville City Council Members Tony Dyer and Mary Ruth Cook in their April regular meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

over with.” Ultimately, the council voted unanimously to raise the water rate by 14%, which is estimated to go into effect in June following the proper enactment procedures.

Following the vote, Water Treatment Plant Supervisor Danny Dillard said that federal regulations were the culprit behind some of the higher treatment costs.

McGaughey also discussed the city having received its GEFA funding on the new well location and installation project. Half of the \$700,000 loan will be eligible for forgiveness, and the rest won’t require payments until next year.

Dillard said that the well project was continuing to advance.

Also discussed that evening was the potential of installing more pedestrian crossing lights on the square, particularly regarding the Blue Ridge Street exit that has caused some local safety concerns.

The mayor explained that while a flashing crosswalk was “feasible,” a secondary signal in the form of a flashing light warning oncoming traffic would need to be placed 200 feet away – on the other side of the square.

“I think advertising for it

on the other side of the square is going to be very confusing,” Mahan said.

Dyer recalled when the idea was first brought up that it was suggested there be crosswalks all around the square, but he didn’t believe the idea was practical.

“We need to figure out a way to fit the bill other than the lights – rumble strips or something,” Dyer suggested.

“I think I would be more open to trying to figure out some other way (rather than a flashing crosswalk),” agreed Mahan.

Mayor Conley warned that there would still be a traffic problem, but Dyer disagreed that there was one, and discussion moved to the next agenda item.

Clay Pilgrim of Rushton & Company spoke on the city’s 2023 official audit report.

“I’m pleased to present that for 2023, we have an unmodified opinion on the financial statements. Nothing came to our attention that would prevent us from issuing an unmodified opinion – a clean opinion,” Pilgrim said.

The Blairsville City Council holds regular meetings on the second Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall at 62 Blue Ridge Street. These meetings are open to the public, and residents are encouraged to attend.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

be a two-story building with E-911 operations on the first floor of the building,” Paris said. “The second floor will be a 911 Mapping and additional workplace. Records storage will also be moved into this secure location.

“The facility will be a total of 8,000 square feet and paid for with SPLOST funds.”

In other business, Paris awarded two contracts to Atlas Technical Consultants for \$3,700 each to conduct a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment and a pre-demolition survey for asbestos-containing materials and lead-based paint at the county-owned Old Shoe Factory property.

The county purchased the property in 2020 as an ideal future site for a new Union County Jail. There is no construction timeline for the new jail, which does not currently have funding available, but demolition planning is enabling the county to make progress on the project.

“Both of these agreements ... are for testing necessary for safe demolition of the Old Shoe Factory, and to be able to put out an accurate (request for proposals) for that project,” Paris said. “For example, if asbestos were found during the survey, when the request for proposals was advertised, it could include bid requests for asbestos remediation and removal.

“If this is not included in the RFP and is found by the awardee and the contractor during the demolition, they could potentially charge us whatever they felt necessary. So, this is trying to avoid that.”

Paris accepted the annual agreement with the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce for hotel-motel tax distributions. This year, the county has scaled back from the amount the chamber received in

2023 from 90% to 70%, with the rest destined for the county General Fund.

“Part of that’s made possible because we had higher than normal tax receipts from hotel-motel tax, but those numbers are going down,” Paris said. “What we’re finding is that, during COVID and right after that, we had so many people doing locally – nobody wanted to get on a ship or get on a plane or go where there’s a crowd of people.

“Now, all of a sudden, a lot of people are traveling overseas, and you hear about it when you talk to local folks we know. So, we’ve got more people traveling, and that means less people coming to Union County, so that means the funds will be a little bit lower, too.

“We’ll have to watch and make sure that we’ve still left the chamber with adequate funds. But for right now, this is what we’re going to go with to see how this works.”

Turning to the state-provided Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant funds, County Clerk Jennifer Mahan explained that the county had received an additional \$1.042 million for road paving in 2024, for which the state is not expecting a local match.

That’s why the county has contracted for \$2,276,384.65 to conduct this year’s approved paving, with a local SPLOST contribution of \$392,942 to secure the standard LMIG funding and provide “additional funding to get the roads complete that we wanted to this year.”

Of three bidders, Colditz Trucking came in the most competitive, and so received the contract, Mahan said.

More than 10 miles of road will be paved this year, notably including the entirety of Fisher Field Road, whose residents are in the process of

having their only way in or out – the neighborhood bridge – replaced.

A total of 12 roads are scheduled for paving: Fisher Field Road, Gaddistown Road, Ivy Log Road, Ivy Log Creek Road, Lance Crossing, Loving Road, Old Smokey Road, Spring Creek Road, Weaver Road, Darby Lane, Wilson Mountain Road and Fairview Church Road.

Included in the contract is paving for the second phase of the Cleveland Street project. This paving will cost \$378,868.15, to be reimbursed by the City of Blairsville.

Paris also purchased right-of-way from property owners of four parcels, at \$1 apiece, to enable replacement construction of the Fisher Field Bridge, and he thanked those landowners for working so well with the county.

He also enacted a quitclaim deed on 0.014 acres of land near Fisher Field Road that had no recorded owner, transferring ownership officially to the county.

The demolition of the old Fisher Field Bridge was completed last week, moving the project another step closer to being ready for delivery of the replacement bridge next month.

Among other action items, Paris accepted an agreement to upgrade audio/visual equipment at the Union County Courthouse. The cost will be \$449,999.01, and the county will be completely reimbursed with a Judicial ARPA Grant.

Also in the meeting, Paris signed proclamations declaring April as Child Abuse Prevention Month; March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day; April 14-20 as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week; April 26 as Confederate Memorial Day; and April 19 as Patriots’ Day.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on May 21.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owltown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested at the Voter Registration Office inside the Voting Center now through Friday, May 10. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Voting Center.

Voters returning absentee

ballots can use the official drop box inside the Voting Center during early voting hours; mail them back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or drop them off in person at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Monday, April 22, was the registration deadline to vote in this election.

Candidates qualified in March for the May 21 General Primary, and there is a runoff date of June 18, which may be necessary in the sheriff’s race that has three Republican candidates, as a candidate must receive a majority vote to win. Primary winners will

move on to the big General Election that is slated for Tuesday, Nov. 5. Just one local contest will feature opposition in November – the office of Sole Commissioner – during this presidential election year.

Oct. 7 is the deadline to register for the General Election.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/s/> for voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

Board of Education...from Page 1A



UCHS DECA Club students earned recognition for their state-level accolades during the School Board meeting April 15.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

heading on their trip to the DECA International Career Development Conference in Anaheim, California.

Union County DECA Club students came out on top over some 6,000 competitors from all over the state. The contest involved composing a paper that markets or promotes a local business or their own business idea. All of the students awarded that night won either First or Second Place.

Also, Dr. Crystal Beach and her Teaching as a Profession students were recognized with the Extra Mile Award "for always going above and beyond in everything they do with our little Panthers in the classroom."

"They make me a better person, and everyone around them a better person, too, which is ultimately a tremendous trait of a great leader. And I know wherever the wind will blow

you all, you will continue to do great things," said Beach, addressing the students. "I challenge them every single day to go make someone smile, go be kind, and go do amazing things in the world."

Beach herself was recognized by UCHS Principal Carol Knight, who revealed to those gathered that Beach would soon depart to become the new principal at Towns County Elementary. Knight nevertheless wanted to highlight how much of a difference Beach has made in the system.

"If I tried to list for you all the things that she has done and accomplished, we could be here for quite a long time," Knight said. "On behalf of Union County Schools (and) Union County High School, thank you for all that you've done, and we'll miss you."

School Facilities Manager Mike Patton shared

with the board some crucial information regarding the construction of the new Elementary School.

Despite the installation of a water meter, there is no access to water on-site yet, meaning that construction crews have had to bring a water truck up to use in masonry for the past two months.

"We have the water run to the site, we just haven't been able to get it turned on," said Patton, who wasn't sure why there was a delay in getting water access.

"We've done all we know to do to get water," Patton continued, with Superintendent Hill saying that "the city has been very frustrating" and suggesting that they contact Mayor Jim Conley about the problem.

According to Patton, the rest of the project is moving along as planned and is even ahead of schedule.

Patriots' Day...from Page 1A



This year, a Daughter of the American Revolution joined the Sons for a commemorative musket firing on the Blairsville Square.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

husband, who was luckily out at the time.

Defending home and family, she risked her own safety by inviting them in for a meal and getting them drunk before dispatching them with their own weapons.

As it so happens, kids weren't the only parties interested in learning more about Patriots' Day. Some teenage boys approached the group, pulling out their phones to record one of the hourly musket-firing sessions. A couple from Peru, visiting the area as tourists, stopped for photos.

Any and all willing to lend an ear had the chance to hear fascinating details about the people who helped America win the most critical war in its history, turning an oft-recited story into living history featuring characters complete with motivations and feelings.

"You know, it's unfortunate that they teach so little of (the) American Revolution or that time, because the history is so

intriguing," Gaudette said. "There's so many books with small, minutiae stuff that's really interesting."

There's also something to be said about historical preservation and the passion that fuels it.

Every member of the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution must prove direct relation to an ancestor involved in the Revolutionary War. This can mean a soldier, but applicants can descend from anyone who contributed to U.S. independence – including information brokers.

This is where Gaudette comes in. His ancestor was a French Canadian hailing from Quebec who supported the cause of the American rebels, and Gaudette is currently in the process of unraveling his history as an applicant member of SAR.

Translating old documents written in cursive French is a serious undertaking, but Gaudette has found out that his ancestor served as a spy.

"The Continental Congress tried to figure out how they could enlist the French Canadians, because Britain had just taken over Canada," explained Gaudette, a historical reenactor of 30 years. "My ancestor was a person who was a spy."

"He was actually a captain in their militia, in Quebec, but then he fed information (to the Americans) because he hated the British more than the current government."

From about 10 a.m. to noon on Friday, the group remained on the lawn of the Historic Union County Courthouse, firing muskets every hour and greeting folks as they rounded the square.

While it turned out to be a fun morning, everyone remembered the very important reason why they were able to celebrate in the first place.

"We became Americans when that first blood was shed on April 19, 1775," said an emotional Gaudette. "That's when we became Americans."

A Major New Cooking Festival at the Fairgrounds Saturday, May 18th



A Major New Cooking Festival is coming next month to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds

The Georgia Mountain Fire & Smoke Cooking Festival is coming to the Fairgrounds May 18, 2024 and is taking the place of the GA Mountain Big Green Eggfest which was the largest satellite Eggfest in the country for 10

amazing years. We're making this festival bigger and better by adding 40 Primo Ceramic Grills that will be cooking alongside our Big Green Eggs.

Come and experience this innovative, one-of-a-kind

culinary feast for a day that will be filled with amazing gastronomic adventures and unforgettable memories.

Get your tickets here: <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/id/446>.

E-911 Dispatchers...from Page 1A

to treat dispatchers to a delicious meal, “thank you” goodies by various community partners and grateful members of the public, and an awards ceremony to highlight years of service and exemplary job performance.

E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter served as master of ceremonies, offering a heartfelt introduction for the occasion.

“This is a very special week to me,” said Baxter, in charge of day-to-day 911 operations. “Y’all work all year for one week of recognition, and this year, it has been absolutely amazing.”

“Y’all pour your heart into your job; y’all don’t do this job for the job – you do it because your heart is in it, and it shows. And I appreciate it so much. What y’all do makes my job so much easier, and I appreciate every one of you so much.”

Baxter welcomed Guerrier to recite the “Prayer for Dispatchers,” which asks for God’s help in performing a very difficult job handling stressful, often life-and-death situations.

Several special guests appeared to express in-person gratitude for the often-thankless service performed by dispatchers, starting with Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, whose office also provided gift cards for local businesses to each 911 member.

Paris read a proclamation he signed last week declaring April 14-20 as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week in Union County, noting that dispatchers “are the first and most critical contact our citizens have with emergency services.”



Dispatcher Amanda Hammond was humbled to receive Telecommunicator of the Year during the appreciation event, pictured here with 911 Lt. Millie Baxter. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

“Public Safety Telecommunicators are the single vital link for our police officers and firefighters by monitoring public safety activities by radio, providing them information and ensuring their safety,” Paris said. “(They) have contributed substantially to the apprehension of criminals, suppression of fires, and treatment of patients.”

“Each dispatcher has exhibited compassion, understanding, and professionalism during the performance of their job in the past year.”

The commissioner and Lt. Baxter handed out awards and certificates of appreciation to the 911 employees – a first for the annual celebration – with Dispatcher Amanda Hammond receiving the Telecommunicator of the Year Award.

“This award was voted on by all the dispatchers, and they all had an opportunity to

vote for this award,” Baxter said. “So, this is from our heart and our family ... this person goes above and beyond. Her heart’s in her job. You ask them, they’re there. They want to help; they want to do.”

“There’s never a task that’s too big for this person to tackle. This person means the world to the whole family, and right now, I’d like to award this to Amanda Hammond.”

For her part, though she insisted the award belonged to fellow Dispatcher Guerrier, Hammond was nonetheless grateful for the honor.

“Being a dispatcher is a blessing, it’s rewarding, but it’s very challenging,” Hammond said of the roles they play in public service. “It takes a special human to do this job.”

The Years of Service recognition for 911 staff included: Lynn Powell, 22 years; Holley Kemp, 13 years; Amanda Hammond, 10 years; Carrie King, 10 years; John

Pickelsimer, 10 years; Marlana Bryson, 10 years; Ashley Churchill, seven years; Heidi Morris, seven years; Kasey Rafter, six years; Mary King, five years; Becky Holcombe, five years; Kaitlynn Leird, one year; Maggie Guerrier, one year; and Millie Baxter, 27 years.

Other special guests were Union General’s Julia Barnett, who brought custom cookies and words of appreciation, especially for the lifesaving Telephone CPR program; retired firefighter Art Miller and his wife Debbie, who thanked dispatchers and gifted personalized coffee mugs; and Union County Sheriff’s Maj. Shawn Dyer, who delivered kudos for a job well done.

The meal came courtesy of United Community Bank,

represented by Jimmy Nichols, who also serves as a local volunteer firefighter with plenty of experience working with the dispatchers. He recognized all of them as “unsung superheroes” that evening.

Before breaking bread, the dispatchers turned off the lights for an emotional slideshow of pictures demonstrating all of the holidays, nonprofit events, educational appearances and everyday moments the center’s employees have celebrated together over the past year.

Dispatchers received additional gifts in the event, from UCFD Station No. 4, Safe Pet Project, Gideons International, Union County E-911 leadership, AirLife Georgia, Piedmont Heart, and thank you cards from Union

County Middle School sixth- and seventh-graders.

Fire Chief and E-911 Director David Dyer was away at a conference last week so could not be in attendance, but he, too, made sure dispatchers knew they were appreciated, with Battalion Chief Richard Jones representing the Fire Department.

And dispatchers paid tribute to one of their own that night with a memorial table dedicated to former 911 Center “Mom” Brenda Abercrombie, who ended her watch in 2017 following an extended illness.

Also celebrated were two April birthdays among them for Ashley Churchill and Mary King. Happy Birthday to Ashley and Mary, and thank you to all of Union County’s hard-working dispatchers!



Lt. Millie Baxter with Relationship Manager Jimmy Nichols of United Community, who attended the 911 Appreciation to offer words of thanks and a meal on behalf of the bank.