

North Georgia News

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Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, May 3, 2023

Karnes, Flemming crowned UCHS Prom Royalty

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On the evening of Saturday, April 29, Union County High School continued the time-honored tradition of hosting a formal prom night experience for soon-to-be-graduating senior students.

For the third consecutive year, the shindig was held at The Barn in Young Harris, chosen for its spacious venue, gorgeous views and indoor-outdoor setting.

Kids began riding in on golf carts around 8 p.m., getting ferried from the green field that served as a parking lot to the barn and its multicolored, fluorescent dancefloor, a sprawling patio, a firepit and a shed under which to play cornhole.

Even local restaurant

Chill and Fill had a food truck parked outside, handing out free snow cones and hotdogs courtesy of sponsorship by the 2023 Union County Yearbook Team.

Overall, it was a magical night, even for chaperones. UCHS Principal CT Hussion was of the opinion that prom gets better every year, and the 2023 season was no different in his mind, as he described the venue as "outstanding" and the gathering as "over the top."

"It's like a fairy tale," he noted, taking a moment to appreciate the surroundings lighting up the night sky. "A lot of our staff members, they put their heart and soul into this, and that's really important."

Emily Cobb, who serves as a counselor for Mountain Education Charter High School and has been a chaperone for at

least 12 years now, said she felt prom was a "rite of passage" for the young folks in attendance.

"People have been doing proms (for a long time)," Cobb said. "My parents went to the prom in the '60s, and you know, other people went to the prom in the '50s, and it's just a ... kind of thing that all kids go through - something common for all of us."

As always, there were two stars of the evening. Crowned Prom King this year was Hunter Flemming, coronated alongside 2023 Prom Queen Caroline Karnes.

The pair have been a couple since middle school, and they both plan on attending Truett McConnell University in Cleveland after graduation.

"It just doesn't seem real," admitted Karnes with a smile. See UCHS Prom, Page 6A



UCHS seniors Caroline Karnes and Hunter Flemming were grateful to have been chosen by the Class of 2023 as Prom Queen and King on Saturday, April 29. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Man who headbutted deputy gets two years in jail

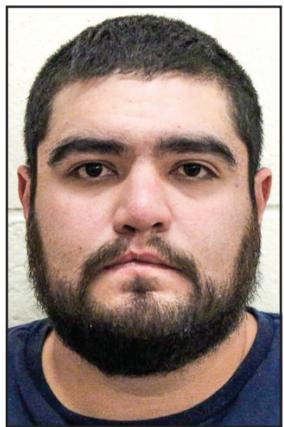
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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A Suches man who was arrested two years ago after threatening employees of Wolf Pen Gap Country Store and headbutting a deputy has been sentenced to 10 years in prison, with two years to serve behind bars, according to court documents.

Tyler Jacob Holloway, 25, received his sentence by way of a negotiated guilty plea entered into the Union County Superior Court on Thursday, April 6.

He pleaded guilty to four felony counts, two for terroristic threats and acts in threatening to kill two store employees, and two for obstruction "by attempting to do violence" to deputies who showed up to arrest him, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said.

Holloway turned himself into the Union County Jail on Wednesday, April 12, to



Tyler Jacob Holloway

begin serving his sentence. As further conditions of the plea, following release from incarceration, he will have to serve the remainder of his time on probation and pay a \$2,500 fine.

As previously reported, the incident that resulted in his sentencing took place around 8 p.m. on April 8, 2021, after Holloway entered the Suches-

based convenience store without wearing a facemask.

Wolf Pen Gap Country Store was requiring customers to wear masks at the time, roughly a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, and when two employees insisted Holloway don a mask per store policy, he reportedly became angry and threatened to kill them and damage one of their cars.

The employees called 911, which dispatched deputies to the disturbance, but Holloway had left by the time law enforcement arrived. "They were given a description, looked at video, and they knew who he was at the store - everybody knows everybody in Suches," UCSO Capt. Daren "Bear" Osborn said at the time.

The deputies traveled to Holloway's residence to make an arrest, and while they were reading him his Miranda rights, "he tried to run, and they had to tackle him," District Attorney

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Paris renews life flight coverage, adopts ordinances

By Shawn Jarrard
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In his April regular meeting, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris renewed the annual agreement with Air Methods Corporation to continue "free" life-saving emergency helicopter services for part-time and full-time county residents.

The county has contracted with Air Methods since 2016 to provide the service at no out-of-pocket cost to residents needing to be airlifted to larger regional hospitals for emergency medical reasons.

Air Methods has a helicopter stationed at Union General Hospital in Blairsville, so the life-flight coverage makes the most of the service for residents.

The amount of the agreement "is not to exceed \$63,802.50," of which the county is only responsible for paying half thanks to a



Commissioner Paris welcomed Marcus Lindsey of Air Methods to his regular meeting last month to talk about the medical helicopter that services the county.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

cost-sharing arrangement with Union General.

And due to Air Methods switching to a pay-as-you-go model in 2019, annual costs have been coming in well under the cap. For example, the current agreement that runs through the end of May is projected to cost

roughly \$23,500 - thousands of dollars under the established maximum.

Marcus Lindsey, who represents Air Methods in this region, attended the April 20 county meeting to relay some local statistics regarding the air

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Cub Scouts, veterans team up to retire Old Glory

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Veterans of Foreign Wars Garrett-Owenby Post 7807 in Hiwassee hosted a unique Flag Retirement Ceremony on Saturday, April 22. For the first time, the event was done in collaboration with the Cub Scouts and American Legion Post 121 of Blairsville.

Post 7807 Cmdr. Mel Halfon recalls speaking with Legion Post 121 Cmdr. Mike Merritt recently, hoping to unite both Towns and Union veterans.

"He wanted to kind of get both of our groups together, since we're both close, and do some joint projects, so he came and spoke to our American Legion group," Halfon said. "During the process, he mentioned that his kids were in Scouts, so my flag went up (to get them involved)."

And it turned out to be a perfect fit, as Eagle Scout and Den Leader Paul Bourbeau said his scouts were used to working with military organizations.

"When the American

See Old Glory, Page 2A



VFW 7807 Cmdr. Mel Halfon and a Blairsville Cub Scout saluting a pile of retired U.S. flags in Hiwassee.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

UCBI makes \$250,000 donation to Union General



United Community Bank and Union General Health System representatives joined with other local stakeholders, including District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter, for a \$250,000 check presentation last Thursday.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
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Staff Writer

Officials with United Community Bank and Union General Health System gathered at the Brackett Community Room in Blairsville last week for a \$250,000 check donation from the bank to the hospital via the Georgia HEART Rural Hospital Tax Credit Program.

The Georgia HEART program provides aid to rural hospitals - defined as being part of a community of 50,000 or less - by awarding

tax credits "to individuals and corporate taxpayers who contribute to qualified rural hospital organizations located in Georgia," per georgiaheart.org.

In other words, rather than the state receiving those funds, they go right back into the community to help hospitals expand and, in a roundabout way, save lives by allowing greater investments in treatments, infrastructure and other health care needs.

Union General Health System Director of

Philanthropic Outreach Lindsey Townsend said recently that the focus of funds this year will be expansion of the hospital's emergency room suite, specifically doubling its current four rooms to eight.

"Part of why we're here today is to honor (the hospital) and the work you guys put into serving and protecting our community," said UCBI Blairsville President Adam Born during the presentation, calling Union General "second to none" in terms of providing

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Holloway Jailed...from Page 1A

Langley said. "They then got control of him and tried to put him in the car," Langley continued. "He was struggling so badly and fighting with them – they were afraid they would injure him, so they called EMS. "He calmed down at some point, and they thought he would cooperate and get in the car. They let go of him, and he ran a second time, so they had to tackle him a second time. Eventually, they

got control of him after he essentially struggled with the officers and headbutted one of them."

Holloway reportedly had "a beer in his hand and smelled of alcohol" when the deputies arrived to arrest him, "but due to him fighting with the officers, there was no kind of field sobriety or blood test done," Langley said.

He bonded out of jail after serving about 19 hours following his initial arrest in

2021, and the case took two years to conclude, culminating in his re-incarceration last month.

Old Glory...from Page 1A

Legion got off the ground in Blairsville, we helped with getting that cleaned up and cleaning up the yard and raking leaves and cleaning up the inside," Bourbeau said. "We've done a few other things like Wreaths Across America ... We try to do as much as we can with (veteran) services."

For her part, Post 121 Senior Vice Cmdr. Kathy Merritt thought it was an excellent idea, noting the similarities between the Scout program and the military. Even though the Cubs are young, they still learn values like camaraderie and discipline, and they receive ranks and operate in "dens" that one could loosely compare to platoons.

As for the ceremony, it was handled with just as much respect and dignity as one would expect to be given to the proper disposal of aged American flags.

Forming up a sharp line with the instruction of Den Leader Bourbeau, each Cub carried a bundle of old flags alongside a veteran who led them to the bonfire where the faded, tattered symbols of freedom would be retired

The Suches resident is facing multiple probation conditions upon release. Among other things, he must seek substance abuse treatment; refrain from using alcohol/drugs and associating with

people who do; and not have contact with the two store employees connected in the case.

"When you get on drugs or alcohol and violate the law, that doesn't make you immune

from prosecution," Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said. "And if you confront these deputies in a violent manner, you're liable to end up going to prison just like this young man did."

Road to have some donuts and orange juice for breakfast.

Halfon ensured Bourbeau received a check for \$200 to help fund more Cub Scout activities and fieldtrips before the controlled chaos of an early-morning sugar rush was released inside the building.

"We try to do as much as we can because, compared to (Boy) Scouts, Cub Scouts is not well-funded, just like I've noticed some VFWs and the American Legion are not well-funded, especially in rural areas," Bourbeau said, establishing a further kinship between Cubs and veterans.

Bourbeau can also relate to the tradition that comes with many military families, seeing as every man in his own family holds a rank in the Scouts.

"We just try to do what we can, get them outside of their normal zones, because a lot of the kids don't get to see things outside of the four walls of their school or their own house," Bourbeau added.

From there, Halfon met

up with Kathy Merritt to discuss the possibility of making the joint Flag Retirement Ceremony – or just collaborating with the Cub Scouts and American Legion for other activities – a regular occurrence.

Due to its success and popularity with at least 14 Cubs and just as many veterans taking part, Halfon suggested that the retirement ceremony take place annually.

Merritt was on board with the idea and said that as long as they had ample time to plan, they would love to meet up again. So, it's safe to say that while last month's ceremony was the first of its kind, it definitely won't be the last.

"I'm just hoping to live long enough for these guys to become veterans," quipped one veteran nicknamed "Joker," who ducked inside for a moment to escape the smoke still billowing outside.

"Yeah," agreed Halfon, watching rambunctious Cubs run across the room. "That would be good."



Towns and Union County veterans recently came together with America's future – community youth from the Cub Scouts – to continue a time-tested tradition of properly retiring worn-out American flags. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

UCBI Donation...from Page 1A

health care.

"None of this could be done without the dedication, work, and determination of all the hospital staff and Board of Directors, and we appreciate you guys for that," Born added.

Meanwhile, Nick Townsend, Union General's Financial Director of nearly seven years, took the time to thank both the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, saying it has definitely added to the local quality of life, as well as United Community Bank.

"I can speak on behalf of the entire hospital organization – thank you guys so much," he said to bank officials. "It's no secret that this community is growing, so we want to maintain that local quality, and it takes this kind of participation

to maintain that, so thank you."

Chamber President Steve Rowe agreed, saying that "you can't grow in a community and remain strong in a community without proper stakeholders and having a good health care system, and our health care system is growing."

Part of that growth includes state-of-the-art imaging equipment in the hospital's new Medical Office Building, which has allowed Union General more room in the form of three special floors dedicated to different types of medicine like cardiology, gynecology and orthopedics.

"We appreciate Union General and the dedicated staff for making our communities a better place to work and live," Born said. "Thank you all for

servicing our community (by) keeping us safe, healthy and active.

"I'm honored to be here today to represent United Community Bank and its employees to present you guys at the hospital a check for \$250,000."

With that, Born presented the check to Townsend and Union General Chief Executive Officer Kevin Bierschenk on behalf of the bank before taking part in a group photo outside and a charcuterie board inside.

To learn more about the Georgia HEART Program, visit www.georgiaheart.org. To find out how to start making contributions with your own tax credits, contact the hospital's Lindsey Townsend at 678-735-1180.

Concert at the Old Courthouse on the Blairsville Square

The Union County Historical Society will host the first concert of the year at the Old Courthouse on the square in Blairsville on Friday, May 5th at 7 PM.

Tommy Townsend and Jim Wood will be performing that evening. Tommy grew up here in Union County and has been a fixture in country music for many years. He has performed all over the country in various venues but always enjoys coming back home to perform in front of his neighbors. As you may know he is also the owner of Granddaddy Mims Distillery here in Blairsville.

Jim Wood also grew up in Union County and attended school in Suches. He has also performed for us many times at the courthouse and at the Community Center as well as the Georgia Mountain Fair. Jim has been really busy of late cutting a new record in Nash-



Tommy Townsend

ville. Hopefully we will get to hear some of the new songs as well as the older ones.

As you may know we recently installed a new sound and video system in the courtroom. The sound system was much needed and is top of the line with all of the new technology. It is also easy to operate. But the new video system will allow us to digitally



Jim Wood

record everything we do and store these events for future reference.

Tommy and Jim are performing at the first concert of 2023 to help us raise funds to finish paying for this new sound and video system.

The concert is free to anyone. But we will take donations and all proceeds will go to paying for the system.

Reece Heritage Farm presents Singer-Songwriter Jim Wood



Jim Wood

Reece Heritage Farm presents Solo Acoustic Singer-Songwriter Jim Wood live! Two hours of original & cover songs. Stories & jokes, too! Performing Friday May 5, 2023, 1-3 PM. Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy music! Free! Donations welcome!

Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer, his books along with other local authors, are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him and his family with exhibits, farm animals, local books and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park. The

farm is also a beautiful venue for your special day with affordable rates.

Farm is open Wednesday through Saturday 10 until 4 with free admission. Donations welcome. 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville GA; FB: Reece Heritage Farm, www.reecefarm.org. NT050328CA



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UCHS Prom...from Page 1A



Class of 2023 seniors and their junior classmates cut loose on the dance floor for a fun-filled Saturday night that everyone will remember.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

giggle. She hopes to go into early childhood education. “I don’t think it’s set in yet; I don’t even know what to think. It caught us off guard,” added Flemming, grinning as he held his queen. He wants to play baseball. “I guess just seeing everyone you’ve grown up with – it’s going to be hard moving away,” Karnes said regarding the bittersweet nature of graduation and going on to bigger and better things after high school.

Her beau agreed, saying, “I’ve been growing up with all these kids since I was in kindergarten, pre-school, and all that. Growing up, spending every year for 12 years and then moving out, probably not

seeing many of them again – that’s probably what I’ll miss the most.”

So for that night, UCHS juniors and seniors danced, sat next to the fire together, played cornhole, and made memories until the senior song was announced. “I Lived” by OneRepublic was voted on by the Class of 2023 to wrap up what Flemming aptly described as 12 years of growth.

Perhaps that’s why Cobb, along with fellow chaperones Mandilyn Moore and Paige Dyer, believes that prom serves as “the beginning of the graduation season,” giving seniors a chance to say goodbye without really even realizing it.

Seniors have a busy schedule coming up, including

a Baccalaureate Service and Awards Ceremony following their May 12 final day of school, and Class of 2023 Commencement Exercises have been set for May 19 at 8 p.m. in Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

This past Saturday was not a time to overly reflect on all that is to come, however, but a chance for seniors to spend some of the final moments they will have together as a class.

“I do like being able to see everyone here,” senior Valarie Nichols said. “Just the whole concept of knowing it’s your last (prom), it does make it a little different . . . I’ve already got a group I know I’m going to (stay in touch with after graduation).”



The Barn in Young Harris provided a picturesque experience for Union County’s 2023 Prom.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

County Meeting...from Page 1A



Fire Chief and 911 Director David Dyer, right, speaking on behalf of his 911 Center staff during a special recognition in the April Commission Meeting.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

ambulance service.

In 2022, Air Methods transported 146 Union County residents for medical emergencies that required the use of the Blairsville-based helicopter or Air Methods choppers stationed in nearby counties.

“Fifty-five percent of those 146 transports we did last year were Medicare recipients,” Lindsey said. “Often, these folks are on a fixed income, and we’re happy to provide this service so that they can have peace of mind knowing they can get the care they need without any additional out-of-pocket.”

Added Lindsey, “All of those individuals (transported) were covered, and we’re very proud to provide the service. We thank you for the great partnership and look forward to continuing it for another year.”

Residents do not need to apply for a membership, as they are automatically covered through residency.

Further, the program guarantees no out-of-pocket expenses for life flights of Union County residents no matter where they are in the county if they are transported by Air Methods, which operates emergency medical helicopters in nearly every state.

Also in the meeting, Paris adopted two ordinances the county has been working to finalize for months: the revised Land Use Ordinance and the expansion of the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals.

As previously reported, revisions to the Land Use Ordinance are aimed at updating standards to ensure new park development – that is, campgrounds, mobile home parks, manufactured home

parks and the like – is both safe and reflective of the longstanding character of the community.

As for the Construction Board, the County Code Ordinance has been revised to expand the purview of the board to hear appeals and variance requests regarding all building-related code sections.

Paris appointed seven board members, most of whom have industry experience, with at least one “regular citizen” not tied to construction: Charles Anderson, Lisa Hagas, John Chitwood, Robert Mawyer and Jason Kelly, with Chris Priebe and Lelani Nickerson to serve as alternates.

These volunteer members were chosen using input from Building Department employees and others, with various terms ranging from one to three years.

In other business, Paris accepted the settlement statement and warranty deed for the Hill Property sale to Hangar One Investors, finalizing the \$750,000 sale of the 3.382-acre River Bend Farm Road property the county purchased in 2020 for the same amount, as previously reported.

Additionally, Paris approved a contract with Colwell Construction Company for the annual asphalt resurfacing of multiple county roads. The contract utilizes \$1.82 million in state Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant funds, typically to include a 20% local match, Paris said.

The contract also includes \$275,539.35 for a project to repave a stretch of Cleveland Street, with the City of Blairsville to reimburse the county for the work done inside city limits, as the county agreed to bid on the project for the city.

“Union County

received two other bids for this year’s LMIG paving,” Paris said, noting that Colwell Construction entered the lowest bid. “The roads that will be paved this summer include: Trackrock Gap Road, 0.88 miles; Spiva Bridge Way, 0.487 miles, that’s the entire road;

“Big Sky Road, 0.963 miles, and that’s the entire road; Owltown Road, 0.689 miles; Poteete Creek Road, 1 mile, which is the entire road; Loving Road, 1.4 miles; Ivylog Road, 1.066 miles; Tomahawk Trail, 0.875 miles, which is the entire road; and Moccasin Road, 1.136 miles.

“These roads and the parts that need paved come to me from the Road Department. It’s not something that we work on together – they pretty much bring us a list and say, ‘These are the worst roads in the county and need to be resurfaced.’

“Our staff takes the amount of money that we have from the state and from the county and do as many of those as we can. Sometimes, later on in the year, if we have some extra funds, we’ll try to do some additional work.”

The commissioner also read five proclamations in the meeting highlighting unique local recognitions: April 2023 as Child Abuse Prevention Month; March 24, 2023, as Sam Ensley Day; April 26, 2023, as Confederate Memorial Day; April 19, 2023, as Patriots’ Day; and April 9-15, 2023, as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Unless otherwise advertised, Paris holds his regular monthly meetings on the third Thursday of each month starting at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse. The public is encouraged to attend.