

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Wednesday, May 5, 2021

Two residents perish in home explosion on Pauline Ln

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Two people perished May 2 in a home explosion at 307 Pauline Ln, the Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner's Office said Monday, with the explosion remaining "under active investigation at this time."

"Ralph Norris Wood, Jr., 78, and Peggy Wood, 77, were home at the time of the fire and tragically passed as a result," Commissioner John F. King said. "This unprecedented blast left several homes in the area damaged. Due to the severity of the explosion, it could be up to several weeks before the cause is determined."

As noted in a May 3 press release, "Commissioner King's Fire Investigations Division assisted the Union County Fire Department, the Union County

Sheriff's Office, and the Union County Coroner. The victims' bodies were transported to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's crime lab in Atlanta for autopsy. This marks the 57th and 58th



Norris and Peggy Wood

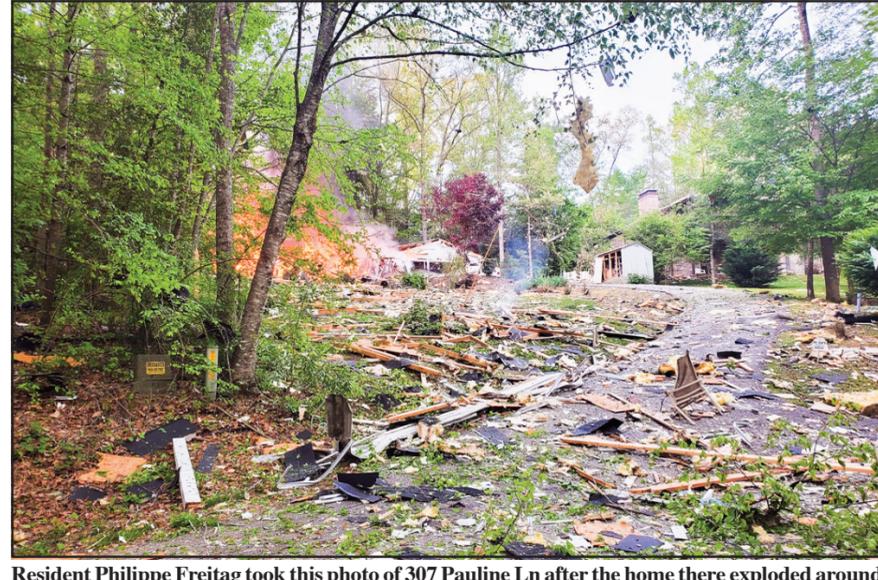
death from a Georgia fire in 2021."

It was around 8 a.m. Sunday when the explosion occurred, causing a roughly 200-foot debris field concentrated around the blast that left only the basement walls still standing of the one-story home.

"The 1,594-square-foot structure was approximately 26 years old and was entirely destroyed by the blast," the Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner's Office said.

Dark smoke could be seen billowing above Lake Nottely immediately following the explosion, and residents living in the area of Pat Colwell Road near its intersection with Murphy Highway witnessed far-flung debris falling from the sky and going into the lake.

On social media, people See *Explosion*, Page 3A



Resident Philippe Freitag took this photo of 307 Pauline Ln after the home there exploded around 8 a.m. Sunday. Photo/Facebook

Martin crowned Prom Queen to Littles' King Saturday

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Prom is a formative event for high school seniors who choose to participate, giving classmates one of their last opportunities to spend time as a group before graduation.

Sadly, the Class of 2020 was not able to enjoy a prom due to COVID-19, and naturally, many members of the Class of 2021 feared their prom would share a similar fate, causing them to miss out on forging those precious memories together.

The Union County School System had a successful year, however, not having to close a single time like so many other schools, so the High School was able to offer students a Senior Prom on Saturday, May 1.

Prom was held at The See *UCHS Prom*, Page 6A



Joanna Martin and JJ Littles were thrilled to be chosen 2021 Prom Queen and King for Union County High School, each receiving a crown to commemorate the occasion Saturday night. Photo/Facebook

UCHS Senior Corton Olver named DAR Good Citizen for '21

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Congratulations to Senior Corton Olver for being named 2020-21 DAR Good Citizen for Union County High School.

Sponsored by the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Good Citizens program encourages and rewards good citizenship in outstanding high school seniors.

"To receive this recognition, Corton has exhibited the qualities of a good citizen in his home, school and community," said Annette Hopgood, Chair of Public Relations and Media for the local Old Unico Trail Chapter DAR.

See *Olver*, Page 2A



UCHS Senior Corton Olver is the embodiment of what a DAR Good Citizen stands for, possessing traits of dependability, service, leadership and patriotism. Here is Olver receiving his award with UCHS Principal C.T. Hussion. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Allegheny Masonic Lodge hosts Low Country Boil to raise funds

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Allegheny Lodge No. 114 F&AM hosted its Second

Annual Low Country Boil & Oyster Roast on Saturday, May 1, at the new Pavilion #3 in Meeks Park.

"This is the second one

we have had, the first being the year before last," Lodge Worshipful Master Muri Tackett said. "It worked out really well

See *Masonic Lodge*, Page 2A



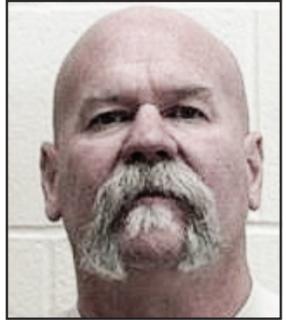
Allegheny Masonic Lodge hosted an incredibly well attended Low Country Boil on Saturday, bringing people from far and wide to support the delicious fundraising effort. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Heaton granted another delay as Gowder reports to prison

By Linda Erbele
North Georgia News

U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story has given former Blairsville physician James Heaton an extra 30 days before beginning his six-year prison term for prescription drug crimes.

The judge has amended Heaton's reporting date to June 8, 2021, in response to Heaton's request for additional time to get the COVID-19 vaccine. This is the second such delay See *Heaton/Gowder*, Page 3A



James Heaton



Mike Gowder

City prepares for lawsuit in Kings Road plane crash

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Blairsville City Council and Mayor Jim Conley held a called meeting on Wednesday, April 28, to discuss next steps in a lawsuit filed by Brittany W. Newton Moore on behalf of Brittany Thomas Whitener and her husband Dennis.

Council members went into executive session that evening to talk through the litigation, agreeing when they emerged to set up a meeting with Attorney Moore to go over next steps in the lawsuit, including the potential venue for a trial should there be one.

Brittany Whitener is the sole survivor of the nighttime plane crash that occurred off Kings Road near the Blairsville Municipal Airport on Dec. 19, 2018.

Whitener sustained major trauma in the crash that left her unable to walk without assistance from spinal and other injuries, and her friends Michelle Seay, Renea Greiner, and pilot Robert Atkinson died in the accident.

Filed April 14 in the Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Clerk's Office, the civil suit is seeking a jury trial in pursuit of monetary damages for both Dennis and Brittany Whitener, alleging that the city's conduct at the airport was a "contributing proximate cause of the crash."

Damages would be for "past and future medical expenses, physical and mental pain and suffering, lost wages, loss of consortium, and all other associated damages resulting from the personal injuries Plaintiff Brittany Whitener suffered as a result of the crash,"



Sydnie Grace Jones and 325. Jones was a close family friend of the Mayfields, having babysat their children and See *Jones*, Page 2A



National Transportation Safety Board

per the suit. For Brittany, total damages being sought are "in excess of \$10 million," and for Dennis, "in excess of \$1 million," according to a letter See *Lawsuit*, Page 3A

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SPORTS TRACK & FIELD STATE SECTIONALS

Saturday, May 8th @ Gordon Central 10 AM

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

National Day of Prayer Observance

May 6 @ 6:30 p.m. in Meeks Park

Rain Location: First Baptist Blairsville

UCS UNION COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL

Students of the Month

See page 2D