

North Georgia News

3 Sections 26 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, May 8, 2024

Faith takes center stage on National Day of Prayer



As they do every year, local pastors and community leaders led the National Day of Prayer event inside First Baptist Church last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Every year, the National Day of Prayer is officially recognized as the first Thursday in May, and the community once more came together to observe the occasion on May 2 at the First Baptist Church in Blairsville.

The event, organized locally by Jack and Pam Schroeder, is presented as "non-partisan" and "non-denominational." All are welcome to join in prayer and song, and the program was even broadcast over two radio stations and streamed live on the church's Facebook page.

2024 marked the National Day of Prayer's 73rd

year, and the theme was based around 2 Samuel 22:29-31; in short, one must "lift up the Word and light up the world."

"And since His Word is a lamp to our feet, scripture lights the way and shows us His perfect path for us to follow," said Pam Schroeder during the introduction. "Life did come with an instruction manual, contrary to what you may have heard."

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris presented a proclamation on behalf of the county and Mayor Jim Conley to acknowledge the National Day of Prayer, reading it aloud to the audience before handing it over to National Day of Prayer Georgia Coordinator Mark Mirza.

"I've obviously had the opportunity to receive this from Governor (Brian) Kemp, and I've had the opportunity to receive it from mayors all over, but there's something personal and intimate about receiving it in this setting. Thank you; this is good," Mirza said.

Following Dr. Al Haywood's musical rendition of The Lord's Prayer, First Baptist Music Minister Ed Lawrie led those gathered in the hymnal "God So Loved" by We the Kingdom.

New Union Baptist Pastor Justin Jarrett led the Prayer of Thanksgiving, thanking the Lord not just for freeing people from sin but also for providing daily blessings. A murmur of See *Nat'l Day of Prayer, Page 4A*

UCHS seniors honored for choosing military service

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Seven young men of Union County High School have made the decision to serve their country following graduation this month. They were honored on campus for their selfless choices on Tuesday, April 30.

Between friends, family and community peers, there was standing room only by the time the event kicked off at 9:30 a.m.

Retired Army Ranger and School Safety Director Arthur McCann recognized each student individually, and alongside military recruiters, shared information on the specific fields each planned to go into.

Afterward, the seniors received special military coins courtesy of Union County

Schools and personalized plaques from the North Georgia Honor Guard.

Coleson Derreberry will soon join the U.S. Army as an infantryman, where he will, according to Army Recruiter Ryan Massey, learn valuable leadership skills. His enlistment means that if he one day decides to attend college, his tuition will be covered up to a master's degree.

Gabriel Panter has chosen to enlist in the U.S. Navy to specialize in cyber warfare. Navy Recruiter Ariel Ramirez described the program as especially difficult and commended Panter for his diligence. McCann added that Panter would have a particularly important job in the modern world, securing the country's technological integrity.

See *Military Seniors, Page 2A*



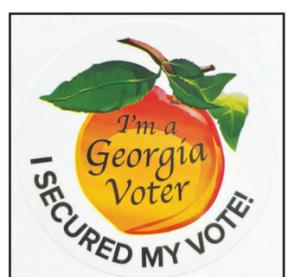
UCHS is proud of its seven seniors who will be joining the military after graduation, pictured here with retired Army Ranger and school employee Art McCann. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Early voting continues in General Primary Election

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

In-person early voting for the General Primary/Nonpartisan Election is now in its second week, giving primary 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 Republican 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, with three weeks of early in-person voting for this See *Early Voting, Page 2A*

Delivery timeline moves up for Fisher Field bridge



County Manager Larry Garrett explaining the bridge replacement at Fisher Field Road to Rep. Stan Gunter last Thursday, with Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The permanent replacement bridge over the Nottely River on Fisher Field Road will be delivered earlier than expected, set to arrive this Thursday, May 9, to begin installation.

Originally, the single-lane prefabricated bridge was supposed to arrive on April 29, but the construction timeline had to be delayed due to a materials shortage reported by the manufacturer, putting the arrival date past the middle of May.

Fortunately, the delay

has been cut short, and Union County Manager Larry Garrett said he's optimistic that the new bridge can begin the installation process this week to have the entire project finished by late June, weather pending, including removal of the temporary crossing.

The temporary crossing was established the first week in April, giving the county and Square Deal Enterprises, the construction company contracted for the project, the green light to demolish and clear the old bridge.

After demolition, Square Deal drove six steel piles into the ground – three on each

side of the river – to pour and establish concrete abutments to support the new bridge, which have been curing for more than a week in anticipation of bridge delivery.

There's a chance that additional curing will need to take place this week, but Garrett is hopeful that the abutments will be ready to begin the installation once the prefabricated bridge makes it to Fisher Field Road on Thursday.

The bridge will be delivered in two pieces, to be set in place either via crane or trackhoe and joined in the middle. When that is complete, See *Fisher Field Bridge, Page 4A*

Georgia Chamber president talks workforce challenges



Georgia Chamber President Chris Clark spoke with local chamber members last month, offering many eye-opening economic perspectives. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Georgia Chamber of Commerce President Chris Clark met with members of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce on April 18 to discuss a variety of issues, notably the rapidly changing dynamics in the Georgia workforce.

Before that, Clark quite literally gave the audience a roadmap as to what business looks like in the state.

In its fifth year of record economic development, Georgia has become a hotspot for tech companies looking to set up shops for electric vehicles;

See *Workforce Challenges, Page 3A*



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Military Seniors...from Page 1A

Andrew Brown will enter the U.S. Air Force to become an aircraft fuel systems mechanic. While an Air Force recruiter could not be present, McCann explained that Brown's knowledge of the "technical" aspects of aircraft will ensure success beyond

his military career if he ever wants to pursue a future in other flight-related occupations.

Nolan Thompson also plans to join the Air Force, with the aim of becoming a crew chief. McCann described the position as "the boss of that airplane," where, one day,

Thompson will ensure that his crew is safe and everything runs smoothly.

Luke Mallette and Derrick Baughman will both be joining the University of North Georgia Corps of Cadets. McCann described UNG as "one of the top military colleges; a lot of great officers come out of that program."

Mallette and Baughman will receive full-ride scholarships to attend school, after which they will graduate to become second lieutenants.

"Most of my family is in the military, and I wanted to make them proud and serve. I've wanted to be in the military since about 5 years old," said Baughman, who began eyeing UNG about five years ago as an option for his future.

Samuel Hegel will attend the Georgia Military College before transferring to the Naval Academy. Recruiter Ramirez returned to explain that Hegel's path will likely lead to officer commissioning. In that role, he will be responsible for the safety of his assigned ship and its crew, including handling navigational duties and security.

"I want to make a difference and an impact and help other people," said Hegel, who was inspired to join the Navy to follow in his father's footsteps.

Following the individual recognition of each student, C.T. Hussion spoke in the place of Superintendent John Hill, who was unable to attend the event due to personal matters.

As the former Union County High School principal, Hussion was "excited and happy and proud;" he had seen each of them come into the

school as freshmen, and now, on their way out, they stand to become part of something greater than themselves.

"I've seen them ... grow and mature, and I know several of them have talked about their goals for a long, long time," said Hussion, prompting the audience to give the young men a round of applause.

Hussion estimates that

over 50 students have been honored for their military commitment in the course of Union County Schools' regular recognition ceremonies. The program has grown so much that organizers are considering looking into other venues, as evidenced by the outstanding attendance of that morning's meeting.

To close out and focus

back on the recipients of that day's celebrations, McCann also chose to look toward the future.

"These gentlemen in front of us have an incredible opportunity in front of them," McCann said. "They can end up being the greatest leaders in our military today – one of them, half of them, or all of them."

Early Voting...from Page 1A

election running weekdays between Monday, April 29, and Friday, May 17.

Early voting also includes two weekend voting opportunities, one that occurred this past Saturday, May 4, and another coming up on Saturday, May 11.

All in-person early voting takes 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/Nonpartisan voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on May 21.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owtown, 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/Nonpartisan Election,

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.

Blairsville's Veterans Commanders Group seeks entries for Annual Memorial Day Parade and Ceremony



The Blairsville – Union County Memorial Day Parade Committee invites you to participate in this annual parade which starts at 10:30 AM on Saturday, May 25, 2024.

The theme this year is "Honoring our Korea Veterans: The forgotten war that never ended." We will be grateful to have two Korean War Veterans, one who survived the 1950 battle at Chosin Reservoir, North Korea (known as the "frozen Chosin"), as Grand Marshals.

Any church, business, civic organization or other group can participate in the parade to support the theme. 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 judges for 1st, 2nd and 3rd place overall.

As in year's past, the parade route will begin at the old gymnasium, past Union County War Memorial Park, turn right on Cleveland Street and wind around the old courthouse onto Blue Ridge Street. It will then turn left at the pub-

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

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.

Honoring Our Korea Veterans



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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 email it to: ga.iraweaver121@gmail.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

Stress: Change Your Perspective

We all live with stress day in and day out, but do we realize that our stress is personal to us and doesn't exist in the bigger picture? We are the ones who generate our daily doses of stress by the way we react to our world. Therefore stress is a choice we make and changing our minds is a good idea.

Not long ago I had quite a few stresses pulling hard, but I prayed and said, 'God I'll let you bite your nails, worry and fret, get sick to your stomach with churning anxiety. I'm going to bed without a care.'

Giving our cares to God is the best place for them. No matter how many concerns we give to God, He certainly has no overwhelm or negative reactions, rather remains as placid as a calm lake in summer.

In reading "HeartMath," by Childre and Martin, the authors suggest a similar strategy: when in a stressful situation, change your perspective as soon as possible. If you gave your stress scenario to anyone else, they wouldn't have your stress, because it isn't personal to them. People die every day, and we all know about it, accepting death as a fact of life, but when someone close to us dies, that's another story.

Knowing we create stress from our own minds is eye opening to us. We think our stress is from the outside world. By first realizing we have a choice in how we react to daily information coming our way, gives a breath of fresh air.

After changing our perspective, the HeartMath authors suggest imagining a time

in our lives when we felt the most loved, or the most peaceful. Right away, changing our stress to an amazing event of our lives, takes the cortisol out of our cells, exchanging tension for bliss.

Only when we recall this peaceful, loving time do we make decisions for the present situation, and the authors suggest making our decisions from our heart and instinct rather than our busied mind.

This week try out this new plan to address the stress in your life, first by changing your perspective. Second, think of a time in your life when you felt the most loved ever. Third, make decisions



Nancy R. Oakes

based on your instinct and heart rather than your head.

Workforce Challenges..from Page 1A

directors hoping to produce the next box office hit; and health care professionals seeking to redefine the limits of modern medicine.

The vast frontier of innovative business moving to the Peach State even includes air taxi services.

Seventy-seven percent of those projects aren't located in Atlanta, and Clark credits Gov. Brian Kemp and the Georgia General Assembly for showing "the value of being in rural communities."

Indeed, on top of small business growth, approximately 2,200 large businesses have moved to the state, and it's estimated they'll spend some \$134 billion over the next three years "just to build their facilities."

"The one piece of bad news is that those 2,200 need to hire about 270,000 in the next couple years," said Clark, adding that about 85% of Georgians are either working or looking for work, including those who are already employed and planning to change jobs.

Clark took a moment to explore that 85%, including ages and values. Younger workers tend to prioritize jobs that promise a stable career path, offering something they can grow with for years to come. And Georgia's current and rising workforce expects more money and flexibility.

Fifty percent of the coveted 25-44 age group, or a third of Georgia's workforce, don't have the skills needed to secure long-term occupations. Luckily, evolving technological knowledge can be easily caught up on, but more pressing issues involve critical thinking and social expertise.

"We've told this whole generation that they need (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, but if you can't communicate with the person sitting beside you, you're not going to be successful and you can't manage," Clark said.

He encouraged the business owners in attendance to work with their employees and either find someone to help them dive into developing problem-solving and communication skills or be willing to do it themselves.

The next six years will, Clark noted, see an exorbitant amount of struggle in Georgia's "workforce issues."

"We're going to go

through four major changes in the economy ... between now and 2030," explained Clark.

The first requires exploring some background data, as Clark described Georgia's younger employees as "the two most diverse generations in history." By 2025, Millennials will make up 41% of the workforce, and Gen Z will account for 31%, for a total 72% of all working Georgians.

Starting next year, 58% of Georgia's workforce will be comprised of females, and Clark suggested, "If you don't fix childcare, you're not going to have them at the level they want to work, and you want them to work."

Meanwhile, African Americans make up 30% of the state's workers, but "the fastest growing part of Georgia's workforce for the next 20-30 years" are the Hispanic-Latino demographic, accounting for 20% and growing.

"My point here (is), 10 years ago, the workforce looked like me ... middle-aged, old white dudes, right? Not anymore," Clark said. "Vastly different, which means you have to manage people differently (and) recruit differently."

That said, while the younger generations age into the workforce, declining birthrates in America have created another problem. In the long term, there will be fewer people to fill the gaps created by the retiring older generations.

Even more concerning is the fact that one of the largest generations, Baby Boomers, is facing retirement and their sunset years, requiring shifts in health care and social work.

"We don't have the pipeline of skilled workers to replace them - 6 million open American jobs if all the Baby Boomers walked out in 2030," Clark said to put that into perspective.

He suggested instead that older Georgians be offered part-time jobs, shared jobs and "gig work" rather than retirement because, "from a health care standpoint, we cannot afford for them all to walk away."

Finally, Clark anticipates "the largest shift in American history in careers" when 12 million jobs are lost to artificial intelligence. Of course, advancing technology opens the doors for new jobs, but low-skill jobs like fast food positions will be replaced by robotics sooner rather than later.

Clark called for "AI-proofing" the future of the audience's children and grandchildren, asking them to focus on teaching them skills currently too difficult to replicate with an advanced technological touch.

This includes trade skills. Clark shared that "almost every economic sector in Georgia will see a double-digit demand growth by 2030," but there's a lack of positions capable of handling heavy workloads in manual labor.

In fact, skilled trade jobs will be so in-demand that it's expected they will earn more than the average white-collar worker by 2040.

"We've spent 20 years telling every kid they need a four-year degree, and there's nobody left to fix your plumbing or build your roof," said Clark, advising that parents stop trying to "shame" their children for not pursuing a four-year degree in higher education.

More pressing than that, however, is the upcoming health care "crisis" anticipated by Clark. By 2030, 101,000 health care jobs will need replacing in Georgia alone, and currently, the average nurse is employed for only five years before leaving the field.

To combat impossible workloads and burnout, Clark hopes that more schools will establish health care pathways to introduce a passion in the field earlier, inspiring more kids to explore internships and eventually become tomorrow's sorely needed professionals.

No matter what, Clark said all students should pursue secondary education. Higher unemployment rate risks correlate with lower education, and those with only a high school education have a 15% chance of experiencing poverty.

In the end, Clark believes that all employers should give their community a chance. Rather than complain about a lack of workers, business owners should approach alternative options and consider hiring those with disabilities and mental health issues, veterans, refugees, senior citizens, addicts and people with criminal records.

"Work with your faith community, work with your nonprofits, work with us - there are people in your community that want to work," Clark said. "We can fill all of those ... jobs I mentioned earlier if we get these people working."

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National Day of Prayer...from Page 1A

agreement rippled through the crowd when Jarrett thanked God for sending “someone who was faithful” to each Christian so that they may be saved.

Fellowship of the Hills Pastor Marty Duncan followed the Silent Prayer with the Prayer for Church, asking for strength in an era when the country itself is “at a precipice of declining faith.” Duncan also asked for wisdom to combat evil with Christ-like love so that congregations – and their leaders – will not be swayed by “the culture or the political climate of the day.”

Calvin Bobo, Pastor of First Baptist Church of Andrews, North Carolina, and former missionary to Ukraine, led the Prayer for World Missions, asking in beautiful metaphor that “this war-torn world be made fertile soil for the seeds of the Gospel message.”

Similarly, First Baptist Church Pastor Ricky Powell covered the Prayer for Israel and the Middle East. First, Powell shared a story about how his father, a carpenter, used to wear a lapel pin boasting that his boss was a Jewish carpenter.

Powell wanted to recognize the Jewish people and the nation of Israel as God’s Chosen, illustrating such with the narrative. Foremost, Powell asked for protection and blessings upon Israel, but he did not forget to consider the safety and salvation of the innocent Palestinians displaced, injured and grieving due to the ongoing war in Gaza.

While administering the Prayer for Family, Dr. Al Haywood of Pathway Christian Counseling said he had seen families stuck in some of the worst states possible, sharing that hope lies in the healing power of Christ and seeking for shattered families to turn to the Lord for guidance.

First Baptist Student Pastor Josh Goza offered the Prayer for Youth. Where Haywood asked that parents teach their children the importance of following the Bible, Goza asked that the



National Day of Prayer Georgia Coordinator Mark S. Mirza accepting a local proclamation from Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris last Thursday.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

world’s youngest generations seek out Jesus.

Fittingly, “The Blessing” was performed following the Prayer for Youth by First Baptist youth members Katelyn Elver, Ryleigh Elver and Ben Goza.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe headed the Prayer for Business, asking that strong faith continue to permeate the local business climate. Citing a hymn, Rowe said, “It’s through God that all our blessings flow,” referencing that no matter how big or small, all businesses need the Lord to prosper.

Dave Wesche, Pastor of All Saints Lutheran, led the Prayer for Government. First, Wesche thanked Union County leaders for their work in ensuring that the community remains strongly intertwined with the church.

On a national level, Wesche asked that God bless the country with “good government, honest industry, truthful education and an honorable way of life.”

The Prayer for Military followed courtesy of Pastor Don Parmely of New Life Family Church. Of course, Parmely asked for the Lord’s protection over those actively serving, but he also wanted to include their families. Not only that, but Parmely asked that

warriors who return home injured and traumatized find succor in salvation.

“It’s kind of ironic that one of the most problematic students in Union County history is now praying for the schools,” Pastor Scotty Jarrard of Harmony Grove Baptist Church teased, but he was very serious when he expressed how thankful he was for teachers.

Leading the Prayer for Education, Jarrard requested the Lord strengthen educators, faculty and even their families, and that He use teachers and their students alike to deliver the Gospel to those most in need.

Finally, Lee Lancaster, President of Legacy Broadcasting of North Georgia, offered the Prayer for Media. Lancaster noted beforehand that Christian radio and other media had risen in popularity due to a “hunger” for truth.

During his prayer, Lancaster asked the Lord to help consumers seek truth and have the wisdom to discern it. As for communicators, Lancaster’s hope is that they “pursue the truth with passion.” Ultimately, Lancaster asked that all followers of God seek the truth in becoming more like Christ.

To close out the ceremony, Lawrie led the congregation in singing “Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us.”



Youth members of First Baptist Church Katelyn and Ryleigh Elver sang onstage during the National Day of Prayer May 2.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Fisher Field Bridge...from Page 1A



All construction to prep the Fisher Field site has been completed, so work can begin this week when the replacement bridge is delivered.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

finishing touches will be added to the bridge, like decking and the shoring up of abutments.

Garrett said that if all goes to plan, the new bridge should be open by the first part of June, after which the temporary crossing will be removed, and the land granted via temporary easements for the crossing will be restored to each property owner’s satisfaction.

The Georgia Department of Transportation will be consulted prior to the new bridge opening to get the final OK on construction and installation, Garrett said.

By all accounts, having the bridgework completed by the end of June would be an incredibly fast turnaround for such a project, as the state informed the county late last summer that the bridge required repairs or replacement, prompting an emergency fix by the Commissioner’s Office.

As far as cost goes, Garrett believes the county will be able to finish the project

for under \$600,000, to be paid for with SPLOST funds, and there’s a possibility that the state will reimburse the county in part or in whole for the project.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris took District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter to the bridge site last week to explain the project and ask for any funding help he might be able to secure at the Georgia State Capitol.

Gunter said that, while he could make no promises, he

would be seeking appropriations via his position in the Georgia General Assembly to assist the county in recouping its losses for the unbudgeted, emergency bridge replacement.

Since GDOT mandated the Fisher Field Bridge fix, the county has been working closely with the state to sort out how to prioritize other local bridges repairs, with the short list of bridges needing solutions consisting of those at Old Bald Mountain Road, Old Birch Bend Court and others.

Blood Assurance: Local Blood and Platelet Mobile Drives Upcoming May/June Dates

May:	5/13/24 ... Walmart-Blairsville (10 AM-3 PM)
	5/25/24 ... Walmart-Blairsville (10 AM-3 PM)
June:	6/09/24 ... Walmart-Blairsville (10 AM-3 PM)
	(Blood Mobile only NO Platelet Mobile)
	6/10/24 ... Union General Hosp. (11:30 AM-4:30 PM)
	6/21/24 ... VA - Blairsville (9 AM-2 PM)

Call to schedule an appointment:
(423) 467-3201 or (423) 756-0966