

North Georgia News

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Native son Ray Rogers, 92, leaves behind a legacy of community giving

By Shawn Jarrard
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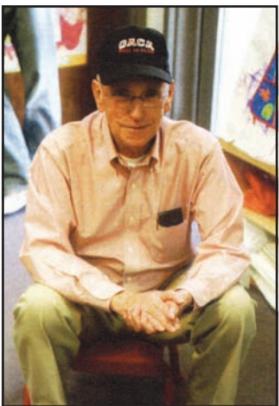
Ray Rogers, 92, passed away on Thursday, May 9, following a long life that included service to his country and his fellow man.

All throughout his days, Rogers served as one of the old-time pillars of the community, supporting Union County and her families for many decades.

He was renowned for his generosity as the owner and operator of the longstanding Rogers Grocery in Downtown Blairsville, which opened its doors in 1946, after he returned home from fighting in World War II.

Rogers was a tremendously successful person with a natural talent for business, though money wasn't his top priority.

For example, if a family needed food but couldn't pay for it, Rogers simply gave it away, referring to help his



Rogers celebrating his 90th birthday party on Feb. 19, 2017.

neighbors rather than see them starve.

He and his family helped folks this way for more than 40 years, though Ray decided to close up shop in the mid to late-1980s after corporate stores began moving into the area.

The Rogers Building stands to this day, however, and continues to shore up the

community by acting as a mini-mall housing several small businesses.

Born just two years shy of the Great Depression on Feb. 19, 1927, Rogers grew up in a time that was already difficult for people living in the mountains of North Georgia, though that didn't stop the enterprising young man from feeling a greater connectedness to the country at large.

When he turned 17, he got his parents' consent to join the U.S. Army so he could fight during World War II, and it was shortly thereafter that Rogers' story very nearly came to an end.

While aboard the ship carrying him and his fellow soldiers to the frontlines, Rogers' appendix burst. After the ship arrived in Europe, Rogers was transported to a hospital for emergency surgery.

As he recovered from his illness, every last one of the soldiers in his platoon died on the battlefield.

Once he regained his health, the Army assigned Rogers to the famous 1st Infantry Division, widely known as "The Big Red One" after the division's shoulder patch, and he fought through to the end of the war in Europe.

The fighting took Rogers to Hitler's famous Eagle's Nest compound, where he and his fellow soldiers took pictures, and Rogers even returned home with a few rocks out of Hitler's fireplace.

When he got back from the service, he used the military paychecks he'd sent home to his mother to take the family's general store to the next level, expanding it to a full-fledged grocery.

Around that time, he also married the love of his life, Mamie Townsend Rogers, and together, they enjoyed 72 years of marriage that resulted in the birth of their two children, Terry and Kay.

Of course, Rogers Grocery wasn't the only way the



Ray Rogers outside the Old Rogers Store Building in 1946. He was 19 years old when this photo was taken and had recently returned home from World War II.

Tag office to offer reduced hours due to software upgrades next week



L-R: Lee Knight, Tawana Aaron, Jennifer Kerr, Mia Crowe and Christine Deyton of the Union County Tax Commissioner's Office.

By Shawn Jarrard
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Due to state-mandated software upgrades, Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight's office will be closing at 2:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 23, and won't reopen until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, May 28.

The biggest inconvenience will be for residents looking to do titles, vehicle registrations and tag renewals while the office is closed, though the downtime includes the May 27 Memorial Day holiday observance, during which time the office would have been closed anyway.

Knight encourages people to get their title/tag business done during regular hours next week, which will be Monday, May 20, through Wednesday, May 22, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Again, the office will be open on Thursday, May 23, but will close early due to software upgrades at 2:30 p.m. that Thursday, followed by closure all day Friday, May 24, and all day Monday, May 27, only to reopen once more at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, May 28.

Georgia will be the third state behind Michigan and Colorado to incorporate the DRIVES software – Driver Record and Integrated Vehicle

Enterprise System – so it has been well-tested, and Knight said he definitely welcomes the Georgia DRIVES upgrade.

"The system we're on is a DOS system," said Knight. "So, the system that the state's been using is an old system, and it's hard for them to update programming with new state laws."

"This new system will be easier for them to reprogram if the law changes and tax rates change, and that type of thing."

Georgia DRIVES is a multi-year effort between the Department of Revenue and the Department of Driver Services.

Boys soccer heads to Final Four; Zoe Sanchez wins big at state track meet

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

As the 2018-2019 school year nears conclusion, it's do-or-die time for the remaining teams and athletes participating in spring sports at Union County High School.

On Tuesday, May 14, in a match that occurred after press time, the boys soccer team made its first final four appearance in program history when they traveled to sixth-

ranked Vidalia in the Class AA State Semifinals.

The Panthers blanked Jeff Davis 4-0 in the quarterfinals behind a hat trick from senior Brian Smith to become the first Union County soccer team – boys or girls – to win a state Elite 8 match.

And while others saw their season come to a close last week, junior Zoe Sanchez was able to go out on a high note, taking home First Place in the 3,200-meter Class AA



Zoe Sanchez

City Council welcomes guests, receives clean audit report in regular meeting

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The regular Blairsville City Council meeting on Tuesday, May 7, was standing-room only, as guests filled the council chambers in support of a local Boy Scout and to hear a downtown business owner talk about sidewalks.

Boy Scout Gracian Sabo of Blairsville Troop 101 attended the meeting to present his Paw Park Project and request that the city set aside land for a fenced in, no-leash dog park within city limits.

Sabo asked the council to consider donating up to an acre for the project.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, who was not sympathetic to Sabo's request, told the young man



Blairsville City Council Members Betty Easter and Tony Dyer in their May 7 regular meeting.

that, unfortunately, there was no city land available for such an endeavor. He also made it clear that, even if there was land available, it would require a sizeable monetary investment.

The mayor suggested that Sabo approach the Union County Tax Commissioner's Office to inquire about tax sales of real estate in Union

Cobb-Vantress celebrates multimillion dollar investment with Grand Re-Opening

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Cobb-Vantress has completed a major new equipment installation amounting to a multimillion dollar reinvestment in Union County, and to celebrate, the hatchery held a Grand Re-Opening on Saturday, May 11.

The Blairsville-site chick hatchery was established in 1998, though it is but one of many in a global company that strives to "make protein available, healthy and affordable worldwide" through innovative research and technology, according to the Cobb-Vantress mission statement.

And 20 years on, the hatchery is still going strong in Blairsville, though the company decided recently to replace the equipment at the site with updated, more modern machinery – hence



The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Grand Re-Opening of Cobb Vantress on May 11.

the multimillion dollar investment.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley attended the May 11 event, along with Cobb-Vantress North America General

Manager Todd Wilson, Director of Hatcheries Ben Green, Technical Services Manager John Broadway and Senior Hatchery Manager Johnny Thomas, among others.

The re-opening featured

Federal judge sets new trial date in Heaton, Gowder prescription drug case

By Shawn Jarrard
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U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story has reset the jury trial date for co-defendants Dr. James Heaton and Mike Gowder to Oct. 8, 2019, at 9:30 a.m., according to court documents.

The two men stand accused of many criminal charges – 213 for Heaton and 150 for Gowder – involving alleged illegal prescription drug activity in at least three states, though both men have pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

This is the second time the trial has been rescheduled in the federal prescription drug case.

Feb. 11, 2019, was to serve as the initial trial date, but in December 2018, Story agreed to reset the trial due to scheduling conflicts with



Dr. James Heaton
Heaton's attorney.

Most recently, the trial was to take place on April 8, but Story decided to postpone the trial again in a March 27 telephone conference with Gowder and Heaton's attorneys, finding that continuing the trial would best serve the ends of justice.



Mike Gowder

or postpone, the April 8 trial came after several motions filed by lawyers of both defendants.

In a joint motion filed on March 26, Gowder and Heaton's legal teams asked the judge to bar evidence introduced by federal prosecutors on March

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