

# 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, May 15, 2024

## Dills receives 'Last Call' as former 911 dispatcher

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

First responders think of themselves as a big family. Yes, they are there to do a job, but the bonds they forge in the crucible of emergency services form a closeness that can only be matched at home.

So, after Denny Dills retired from Union County E-911 Dispatch in 2017, local first responders knew they had lost a tremendous colleague, but their bond remained. And when he died this month, his loss was as real to the public safety community as losing a member of the family.

James Denny Dills, 73, passed away peacefully at his home on Thursday, May 2, after experiencing health issues.

To this day, the Blairsville native is one of the longest serving dispatchers Union County E-911 has ever had, and his 23 years of dedication to the community were recognized in



Denny Dills

a memorial service on Monday, May 6.

In addition to his family and many friends, all of the current dispatchers who worked with Dills attended his memorial at Mountain View Funeral Home, as did other first responders and former co-workers who had received the privilege of knowing him both

professionally and personally.

Blairsville Church of Christ Minister Terry Stuart officiated, with former Sheriff's Deputy Aaron Stanley offering the eulogy. Together, the men honored their friend – to one, a parishioner, and the other, an old colleague and family friend – whom they had gotten to know over the years.

Following the service, Dills was laid to rest at Liberty Hill Church Cemetery, escorted by the E-911 Center, Fire Department, Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police, Union County School Police and Union General EMS. These agencies served as honorary pallbearers.

Ladder 1 Fire Engine flew an American flag on the roadside as the escort made its way to the cemetery, where Dills received graveside honors from the Union County Fire Department Honor Guard, supplemented by dispatchers

See Dills' Last Call, Page 4A



Dills' close friend and former E-911 co-worker Millie Baxter presented a folded American flag to Dills' widow Leeta during his graveside honors last week

## Local leaders talk about 'State of the County'



School Superintendent John Hill, Chamber President Steve Rowe, Hospital CEO Kevin Bierschenk, Commissioner Lamar Paris and Mayor Jim Conley featured in the 2024 State of the County address May 8.

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce hosted a "State of the County Breakfast" at the Community Center on Wednesday, May

8, to let chamber members hear from local leaders about how the county is doing across multiple fronts.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Union General CEO Kevin Bierschenk and

School Superintendent John Hill spoke on their respective areas of governance to offer the promised overview of the "State of the County."

Conley said that the city is currently facing a lot

See State of the County, Page 2A

## Band of Steel to return with 'Pan Rocks' May 18

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

As folks on this side of the equator gear up for the summer, consider enjoying a taste of the Caribbean closer to home with the annual Pan

Rocks Concert on Saturday, May 18, courtesy of the Woody Gap Band of Steel.

Back in 2021, Band Director Doug Roberts wanted to enhance the experience of the students making up the Band of Steel during the unique

challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We could not go out and do trips, so ... I brought the trip to the kids," said Roberts, noting that nine professional pannists from around the country joined

See Band of Steel, Page 2A



Professional Pannist Tracy Thornton on stage with the Woody Gap Band of Steel for the 2022 Pan Rocks Concert.

## UCSO, TCSO join forces for drug investigation

News Special

A monthlong investigation by drug investigators and uniform patrol with the Towns County Sheriff's Office led to a recent traffic stop on Georgia 66 in Young Harris.

Suspected drug dealer Timothy Gavin of Blairsville was a passenger in a car that was stopped by Uniform Patrol Sgt. Justin Osborn the morning of Sunday, May 5.

After probable cause was established, a search of the vehicle resulted in an amount of a controlled substance being located.

Timothy John Gavin, 26, was arrested and charged with felony distribution of a controlled substance, felony



Timothy John Gavin

possession of a controlled substance, and failure to wear a seatbelt.

Towns County drug investigators contacted Union County Sheriff's Maj. Shawn

Dyer that afternoon. A search warrant was obtained by Union County's Narcotics Division and was executed along with Towns County deputies at Gavin's residence in Union County.

An amount of methamphetamine, guns and cash were recovered, and charges are forthcoming by the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Maj. Dyer said UCSO was happy to assist in Towns County's investigation and is always grateful for the chance to coordinate with outside agencies to get dangerous drugs off the streets.

"It's vital that we have a great working relationship with every department that's around

See Drug Investigation, Page 5A

## General Primary early voting finishes on Friday

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

In-person early voting for the General Primary/ Nonpartisan Election ends this Friday as voters take to the polls to select political party nominees to appear on ballots in November.

When early voting closes on Friday, the electorate will have had three full weeks of weekday early voting plus two Saturdays, with the next opportunity to vote falling on Election Day – Tuesday, May 21.

As of May 10 in the afternoon, 2,559 people had cast ballots in person at the Union County Voting Center,



Nearly 3,000 Union Countians had cast ballots heading into the final week of early voting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard



Vol. 115 No. 21

Arrests - 5C Legals - 6C  
Church - 6B Obits - 8B  
Classifieds - 6C Sports - 2C  
Opinion - 6A

Fire Station 4  
Open House  
May 18  
See Page 8C

**NOTICE NOTICE NOTICE**  
Next week's newspaper delivery will be one day late to accommodate May 21 Election Results.



Need a Mortgage?  
Call Kitty in Blairsville!

Kitty Mauzy  
706-439-2185 | NMLS #512515



© 2024 United Community Bank | NMLS #421841 | ucbi.com/mortgage

# State of the County...from Page 1A

of monetary expense, citing water relocation costs of nearly \$3 million associated with the Georgia Department of Transportation's SR 515 widening and relocation project between Blairsville and Young Harris for the growing area.

"I'm just grateful that, because of SPLOST, we can cover that money," the mayor said.

Another upcoming SPLOST initiative is the Gainesville Highway Project inside city limits that will see new paving, guttering and sidewalks from the downtown square to Veterans Memorial Drive, to be concluded this year.

Commissioner Paris began his remarks with a statement of gratitude for the good working relations and partnerships that exist among the various sectors of Union County, from local government to health care, the business community, School District and beyond.

"It takes a lot of work and makes the community work together, and saves the

taxpayers money," Paris said. "And really, that's what it's all about, because our job is to do and provide as much service as we can to the constituents and the citizens at the least, reasonable cost."

Paris noted that the county has one of the lowest property tax rates in the state while being one of the few counties in Georgia with zero debt, and he promoted the Voting Center, Fire Station 13, and the under-construction Multipurpose Gym as projects completed with SPLOST.

"All of it, there's money in the bank to pay for it before it's done," Paris said.

Touching on growth, Paris intimated that, though too much is negative, growth itself is inevitable, and that the goal for the county's community partners is to promote responsible growth – for example, maintaining farmland in development strategies – to maximize public and private offerings for residents while retaining the beauty and character of the area.

"It's hard to hide," Paris said, referencing the increasing desirability of Union County as a destination. "You look right out those windows out there – you can't hide that. And it's not just the town; it's the facilities, it's the people, it's our public safety."

Turning to youth opportunities, Paris said that the Recreation Department is growing at an incredible rate, eclipsing neighboring counties that have historically enjoyed greater youth involvement in public recreation, further showcasing the changing dynamics in Union County.

"The ones that are causing the real problems – don't blame it on the county government; blame it on the hospital and the School System," Paris joked. "They're the ones that are causing everybody to want to be up here."

"When you've got a phenomenal hospital and a School System that just – it's beyond words what they've

done and how they've achieved. We're just so blessed in Union County."

During his turn at the microphone, Union General Health System CEO Kevin Bierschenk talked about the ongoing project to expand the hospital.

The massive crane outside the main building is being used to help demolish antiquated facilities inside the hospital and build out the expansion, to include multiple new operating rooms and other improvements, like new electrical infrastructure to accommodate the expansion.

When Union General originally gained approval for its Certificate of Need to expand the hospital, the project also included the construction of a new tower on the emergency room side of the building.

Due to the prolonged inflationary environment in the overall economy, what started as a \$57 million endeavor has ballooned to about \$120 million, so the project has had to be split into two phases, with the tower to be built in the future.

Expanding the hospital has been a priority for years, again, due to growth in the area. Surgeries and births have almost doubled since 2018, with a considerable uptick in emergency room visits as well. And in 2018, the average daily census of patients was 25; today, that average is 36.

Union General is licensed as a 45-bed facility, and Bierschenk foresees the average potentially exceeding that number in the next year, so expansion is imperative. Phase I construction is expected to be completed by September 2025, with Phase II to begin immediately afterward.

Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill thanked all of the system's community partners for bringing a combined effort to educating students: "It takes a lot of effort to raise up 3,100 kids and make them successful, employable young adults, and

that's the goal of education."

"Success For All – that's not just something we say," Hill said. "That means our kids, our staff and the community. We're extremely blessed to have the community support that we do, but we also have a tremendously supportive School Board that holds us very accountable."

"They ensure fiscal responsibility, and they ensure student success is actually taking place. And we're blessed to have a team of staff members that truly invest in those kids. They're not there just for a job – it's a calling for our staff."

Hill presented a slideshow and videos to spotlight the innovative work being done in the system and the high expectations the schools set regarding everything from reading and math to work ethics, STEM, public safety and health care education, to train the "workforce of the future."

In terms of fiscal responsibility, Hill said that, like the county, the School District has one of the lowest millage rates in the state and is operating with zero debt, including on the new multimillion-dollar Elementary School.

Elementary School construction is on schedule to be ready for students in the 2025-26 school year, which will replace decades-old facilities and enable the system to better accommodate the growth the county is experiencing.

Hill highlighted other E-SPLOST projects undertaken by the system since the tax first passed in 1998, like multiple main school buildings, sporting facilities, the Fine Arts Center, bus upgrades, vocational facilities, the College & Career Academy, the Agriscience Center and more.

Chamber President Steve Rowe made sure to thank the sponsors of the event: Union General Hospital, Keller Williams Mountain Life Team and United Community Bank.

## County Receives Georgia Excellence Award

Union County has been recognized with a 2024 Georgia County Excellence Award for its Recycling Program and Glass Pulverizer. Hosted jointly by the Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) and Georgia Trend magazine, the awards program honors innovative county and cost-effective programs that meet the needs of their citizens while enhancing their quality of life. Union County is one of six 2024 County Excellence Award recipients.

"Each year the Georgia County Excellence Awards program recognizes innovative county programs that meet the specific needs of residents," said Executive Director Dave Wills. "We are grateful to our partner, Georgia Trend, for their continued collaboration in honoring counties for their resourcefulness and efficiency."

Union County has effectively reduced taxpayers' expenses for recycling services by integrating a glass crusher into its primary recycling facility. In 2021, Union County officials were charged with managing operations of the Union County Transfer Station and Recycling Center after the previous operator relinquished its duties. After obtaining ownership of the center, county officials made much-needed safety and aesthetic upgrades to the facility and opted to build an additional facility in the north end of the County. The success of the facilities generated funds to purchase a glass pulverizer that creates sand and pea grav-



Georgia Trend Editor-in-Chief Ben Young with Union County's Pam Hawkins and Lamar Paris

el for the county road department to maintain roads during winter with no additional burden on taxpayers. The sand produced by the glass crusher has found utility in sanding county playgrounds and golf courses, while the pea gravel has been utilized to mulch walkways and flower gardens, enhancing the community's amenities. Learn more about this award-winning project in the upcoming June issue of Georgia Trend magazine.

"I am very proud of Larry Garrett, County Manager, Pam Hawkins, Purchasing Agent, and Matt White, Transfer Station Director for their hard work and commitment to making this project a reality for which the public will be the beneficiary," said Lamar Paris, Union County Commissioner. "I am honored that Union County received this award in recognition of their efforts. I would

also like to thank Pickens County for providing us guidance on how to make our transfer station operate more efficient and for advising us on ways to accept more recyclables and potentially make recycling profitable for the county."

ACCG is Georgia's county association and works on behalf of county officials and their communities by providing public policy and legislative advocacy, leadership development, civic and community engagement initiatives, insurance and retirement programs that specialize in local government needs and other cost-saving programs. Formed in 1914 when county officials came together to help fund the state's first highway department, ACCG today serves as a catalyst for advancing Georgia's counties. For more information, go to [www.accg.org](http://www.accg.org).

## Band of Steel...from Page 1A

Woody Gap students that first year. "It became so beloved with the students and everyone who attended it that they really wanted us to keep doing it."

With professional lighting complete with lasers, the concert also features the talents of internationally renowned steelpan artist Tracy Thornton. A heavy metal drummer turned pannist, Thornton helps the students polish up their act in a three-day clinic before the big night.

As is Pan Rocks tradition, the music medley will be a rock smorgasbord featuring steel covers of bands like Alice in Chains, Styx, Boston and Van Halen.

"We really, really want to try to get as many people out as possible," said Roberts, who hopes to fill at least half of the 900 seats in the Union County Fine Arts Center.

His main goals, he said, are to get students the recognition they deserve and have as many people attend as possible, and while he "won't turn anyone away if they feel like they can't afford it," fundraising is another big driver.

"It costs a lot of money to put on a professional show to the level that we are doing now," Roberts said. "(We're) trying to cover our costs so that we have enough to fund scholarships for our students."

Speaking of graduating seniors, this year will also feature a special dedication ceremony. Paul McCullough will be donating a steelpan to Jennifer Marsh ahead of her graduation and enrollment in Western Carolina University; Marsh plans to continue her pan-playing even after she leaves high school.

"He's giving the pan in

memory of his son, who would have loved this type of music," Roberts said. "It's going to be a special event."

This year, guests can arrive as early as 3 p.m. to nab some dinner with their show. Served by Clayton Reeves of Full Throttle Ministries, barbecue plates will cost \$10 on their own or come with VIP seating for \$18.

Standard tickets are \$10 at the door or can be purchased before hand at Melissa's Custom Cakes. Ticket purchases can be arranged by calling 678-769-5691 or contacting Doug Roberts directly at [droboters@ucschools.org](mailto:droboters@ucschools.org) or 706-897-3769. Physical copies of tickets will be necessary to buy a barbecue plate.

Guests with VIP tickets can get in starting at 5:30 p.m., but the doors open for everyone at 6 p.m., and the concert begins at 6:30 p.m.

# Early Voting to End...from Page 1A

and 130 absentee-by-mail ballots had been returned out of 254 mailed.

There are 22,623 total registered voters in the county, so combining the above in-person and absentee-by-mail voting totals, 11.9% of local voters had already cast ballots in this election by Friday afternoon.

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.

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, Owltown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log.

Monday, April 22, was the registration deadline to vote in this election, and the deadline to request mail-in absentee ballots was Friday, May 10.

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.

Also appearing on General Primary ballots will be state party questions to

help each party set political priorities moving forward, as well as nonpartisan candidates.

State Republican Party Questions are:

1) For future elections, do you want hand marked paper ballots, scanned and verified by hand count on live stream video?

2) Should the legislature enact the FairTax replacing the state income tax and state sales tax with a consumption tax equal to current state funding and taxing no legal citizen or family up to the poverty level of spending?

3) Should the legislature ban registered lobbyists from serving on the State Elections Board?

4) Should the Georgia Republican Primary have a closed primary, meaning that only registered Republicans would be allowed to vote in the Republican Primary?

5) Should public officials who allow illegal migration to occur be held responsible for crimes committed by illegal aliens?

6) Would you support a statewide vote to allow gaming in Georgia so the voters can decide this issue instead of politicians in Atlanta?

7) Currently, hundreds of thousands of hours and dollars are spent every year cleaning up voter rolls. Would you support an amendment to the National Voting Rights Act that would require registered voters to renew their registration every four years?

8) Do you believe unelected and unaccountable international bureaucrats, like the UN controlled World Health Organization (WHO), should have complete control over management of future pandemics in the United States and authority to regulate your healthcare and personal health choices?

State Democrat Party Questions are:

1) Should the United States and the State of Georgia protect Georgians from gun violence by banning assault weapons and large-capacity

magazines, closing background check loopholes, and passing other common-sense gun safety reforms?

2) Should the State of Georgia incentivize clean energy production as part of a climate policy that recognizes the urgent threat that climate change poses to Georgians' health, lives and future?

3) Should the State of Georgia expand voter access by allowing same-day voter registration, removing obstacles to voting by mail, and making secure ballot drop boxes accessible at all times through Election Day?

4) Should the State of Georgia protect reproductive freedom by repealing the current six-week abortion ban, restoring the protections of Roe v. Wade and ensuring access to contraceptives, IVF, abortion and other reproductive health care?

5) Should the State of Georgia stop using taxpayer dollars intended for public education to pay for private school vouchers?

6) Should the State of Georgia raise the minimum wage to a living wage?

7) Should the portion of the Georgia state constitution allowing for involuntary servitude of prisoners and others convicted of offenses be repealed, thus prohibiting all forms of slavery and involuntary servitude statewide?

8) Should the State of Georgia improve access to safe, affordable housing by increasing the affordable housing supply, protecting tenants' rights to habitable living conditions, and cracking down on negligence or abuse by property management companies or landlords?

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 judged 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](mailto:ga.iraweaver121@gmail.com).

### Honoring Our Korea Veterans



The forgotten war that never ended

### Memorial Day Parade Saturday, May 25 • 10:30 am Downtown Blairsville

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](mailto: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

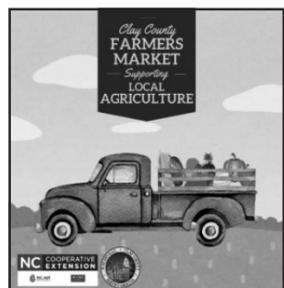
**Sponsored by all Union County Veterans Organizations**

## Clay County Farmers Market seeking Vendors for the 2024 Season

Are you a local producer of agricultural products, value-added goods, or delicious baked treats? If so, you're in luck! The Clay County Farmers Market is gearing up for its grand opening on May 16 and still has space available for vendors like you.

Located at the Clay County Rec Park in front of the Black & Gold building, the

tailgate-style market will be every Thursday through October 31 from 3:30 PM – 6 PM. Whether you're a seasoned vendor or just starting, this is an excellent opportunity to showcase your products to the community and connect with fellow enthusiasts. The best part – there is no vendor fee to participate! Vendors from Clay



County and the surrounding area are invited to apply.

For application and guidelines, visit [go.ncsu.edu/clayfarmersmarket](http://go.ncsu.edu/clayfarmersmarket), visit our office at 25 Riverside Circle, Suite 2, Hayesville, or call Tyler at (828) 389-6305.

The Clay County Farmers Market is aimed at supporting local agriculture while providing the community with locally grown products.

# Dills' Last Call...from Page 1A

with whom he had worked.

E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter presented an American flag folded by Honor Guard firefighters to Dills' wife of 43 years, Leeta, and the Honor Guard played "Amazing Grace" on the bagpipes. Baxter also performed the "Last Call" for Dills – a funerary tradition in public safety.

Usually, the Last Call is toned out to all first responder radios directly from the 911 Center, but when the time came, dispatchers were busy handling an emergency call, so Baxter found herself having to perform the duty from the cemetery.

It was an honor, of course, but the call was an emotionally difficult one for Baxter to make; she had served alongside Dills as his dispatch partner on and off for about 20 years before he retired, adding up to countless 12-hour shifts working emergencies together. In fact, Dills was the

dispatcher who trained Baxter out of the old Towns/Union Dispatch Center near the county line when she started 27 years ago. The two were so close that both the Dills and Baxter joked she was Denny's "work wife."

The Last Call began with a request for Dills to respond to his dispatch number, 702, which has since been retired. There was a pause, then another request, signifying that he was no longer there to answer calls.

"Dispatcher Denny Dills, Badge Number 702, ended his watch on May 2, 2024," Baxter said, delivering the Last Call. "With his mission here completed, his friendship and compassion for others will continue on in all of us."

"Dispatcher Denny Dills, thank you for your 23 years of service to the citizens of Union County. Rest in peace."

Dills worked at Arbor Acres Farm, now known as Aviagen, before entering dispatch. In 1993, he attended

Tri-County Technical College to become an emergency medical tech, and soon after, he joined Union County Fire Station 2, where he fostered his interest in the 911 Center.

He started working at the Towns/Union 911 in February 1994 and retired more than two decades later from the current 911 Center.

Dills will be remembered for his ability to remain calm in any emergency, his warmth, and his ever-present sense of humor – after accidentally sending units to "Victoria's Secret" instead of "Victoria's Attic" years ago, he reportedly said, "Everybody's going to respond to this."

Like other 911 Center employees, Dispatcher Carrie King – who is now a veteran herself with nine years under the headset – received training under Dills. She said that his collected demeanor and 911 know-how helped her to quickly acclimate to the high-



This picture was taken in 2017 when Denny Dills retired after 23 years with Union County E-911. L-R: E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter, 911 Director David Dyer, Dispatcher Denny Dills and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

pressure working environment.

"It would take something major – you'd have to really do something crazy for him to even somewhat get excited," King said. "It was helpful, because then you don't get excited. If your partner's calm, you're calm, so it was awesome."

But the relationships Dills forged in the 911 Center

went beyond the professional, growing into genuine, caring friendships, said King: "He was one of those people that, when you got to know him, then he's just going to be a part of you forever."

"He was a loving and caring husband, father, brother, grandfather, and great-grandfather," according to his

obituary. "He loved spending time with family, playing guitar, and riding motorcycles. Denny had a heart of gold, and his smile was contagious."

The Dills Family has requested that people make donations to the Georgia Transplant Foundation in memory of Denny, who was a liver transplant recipient.

## Fortenberry receives 2024 DAR Grant



The Old Unicoi Trail Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) proudly announces that Daniel Fortenberry of Blairsville and Union County High School is the recipient of the Chapter's 2024 Grant in Aid. The grant is awarded annually to one high school senior from Towns, Union, or Fannin County who has excelled academically, is pursuing a four-year degree, has identified career goals, and who reflects the value they place on "God, Home and County" – DAR's Motto.

Daniel will be entering Kennesaw State University in the Fall with a career goal of becoming an Electrical Engineer. His participation in the Union County High School's STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) program earned him recognition for his academic achievements as did his participation in dual enrollment and advance placement classes.

According to Pam Greene, Chapter Regent, "Daniel's involvement in the



Daniel Fortenberry

Future Farmers of America allowed him to develop leadership skills evidenced by his Greenhand and State FFA degrees and his award-winning public speaking. Daniel enjoys mentoring younger students through FFA. He is active at New Harmony Baptist Church where he gives back to his community through volunteer efforts such as "Goodies from the Heart" - a food program for children." Daniel's proud parents are Angie and Merle Fortenberry.

Daughters invite the

community to join them in congratulating Daniel Fortenberry on the success he has achieved throughout his high school career and in wishing him a bright future.

The DAR promotes historic preservation, education, and patriotism and represents over one million Daughters. A woman 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution is eligible to join. Email [oldunicoitrail@gmail.com](mailto:oldunicoitrail@gmail.com) to attend a meeting or to join.

# The Second Annual Georgia State Fiddlers Convention Returns to Fine Arts Center



We are excited to announce that the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention will return to the Union County Fine Arts Center in Blairsville, GA June 15. Admission is \$5.

The event will begin with registration at 8 AM and competition starting at 9 AM. There is no entry fee for contestants. In addition to junior

and senior fiddler, other categories include banjo, mandolin, flat picking guitar, finger style guitar, old time banjo, bluegrass band, dulcimer, dobro, 12 and under beginning fiddle, and 12 and under beginner musician other than fiddle. Over \$7,000 in prize money will be awarded. We expect many participants from around the southeastern region and the competition to be exciting and entertaining! In addition to the music competition there will also be crafts, silent auction, and food vendors.

The event's purpose is to showcase musical talent and preserve the rich cultural

heritage of the region while providing economic benefit to the community. As a tax exempt 501c3 the event is dependent on sponsorships for prize money and operating expenses. If you would like to make a tax deductible contribution it can be mailed to Georgia State Fiddlers Convention P.O. Box 370 Hiawassee, GA 30546. If you are interested in volunteering email [Georgiastatefiddlersconvention@gmail.com](mailto:Georgiastatefiddlersconvention@gmail.com).

For additional information including rules and judges as well as advance contestant registration visit: <https://georgiastatefiddlersconvention.org>.

# Georgia Majority Leader Gooch applauds signing of Republican priorities into law

Senate Republicans celebrated another successful session as their final priorities were signed into law by Governor Brian P. Kemp.

Reflecting on this achievement, Majority Leader Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) expressed gratitude, stating, "I'd like to thank Governor Kemp for his unwavering support of these initiatives. Additionally, I want to commend my esteemed Senate colleagues who championed this legislation through the rigorous legislative process. Their dedication and leadership have been instrumental in ensuring the passage of these critical measures."

The priorities outlined by the Senate Majority Caucus at the onset of the session have now become tangible achievements. With a commitment to delivering results, Senate Republicans have enacted legislation across key areas, including tax relief, tort reform, education, workforce development, and public safety.

Among the notable legislative victories is the ac-



Majority Leader Steve Gooch R-Dahlonega

celeration of state income tax reduction, building upon previous efforts to provide \$2 billion in tax relief for state income taxpayers and homeowners. Furthermore, significant strides have been made in addressing Georgia's litigation environment through tort reform initiatives, such as the passage of legislation to limit direct-action lawsuits.

Education reform has also been a focal point, with unanimous support for measures aimed at providing school choice for students in underperforming public schools. In the realm of workforce development, initiatives to improve career pathways for veterans and military spouses seeking employment in Georgia's healthcare system have been prioritized.

Notably, Senate Republicans have continued their commitment to public safety by reforming limitations on the setting of bail for violent offenders, a crucial step in keeping dangerous criminals off the streets.

In closing, Majority Leader Gooch reiterated the caucus's dedication to excellence, stating, "These achievements underscore our commitment to 'finish the drill' and uphold Georgia's status as the best place to live, work, and raise a family. We are proud of what we have accomplished together and remain steadfast in our resolve to serve the people of Georgia."

# Drug Investigation...from Page 1A



Drugs, guns and cash confiscated during the search of Timothy John Gavin's residence in Union County. Photo/Facebook

us and even away from us," Dyer said. "I got the call; we jumped on what we needed to do with our drug investigators and made this case complete."

The Union County Narcotics Division has been particularly busy over the last 12 months, filing approximately \$400,000 in civil asset forfeiture, with more than \$350,000 having already come back to the Sheriff's Office.

Items like homes, vehicles and guns involved in criminal activity are seized and either kept or auctioned off for proceeds using the process of civil asset forfeiture, and the Sheriff's Office files against any cash related to crimes as well.

"Ten percent of it goes to the District Attorney's Office, and the rest of it goes toward equipment, cars, and things like that for the Sheriff's Office," Dyer said, noting that such funds offset the need for additional property tax dollars.

"We can't pay any salaries or anything like that out of that money," Dyer continued. "But we can use that money when we need different types of technology and equipment. And we're paying to advertise our scam programs educating the public."

"Educating this community is saving the citizens a lot of money right now, because people are learning about these scams

from us and not participating in them. They're actually calling in to our investigator, and he's giving them advice on what's legit and what's not, and it's working."

Without civil asset forfeiture, Dyer said that the Sheriff's Office might not be able to afford new equipment and vehicles the moment the need arises, and its scam awareness efforts could not be publicized to the same extent.

"This seizure money is good because it helps the taxpayers, No. 1, not have to spend money to supplement our budget, and No. 2, it's saving them money from not participating in these scams," Dyer said.