

# Memorial Parade...from Page 1A

mind the theme “For God and Country, Support Our Troops.”

Those who plan to participate in the parade should show up for check-in around 8 a.m. in front of the old recreation gym off School Circle.

A Memorial Day Ceremony will take place at the Union County War Memorial Park at the close of the parade, and the keynote speaker for the event will be retired U.S. Navy Lt. Ray Williams.

Like Taylor, Williams is a World War II Veteran, having enlisted in the Navy just six months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

Williams again honorably

served his country during the Korean War and as a reservist, and he and his family reside in Blairsville.

The local Department of Veterans Service and the following sponsors make the parade and ceremony possible each year:

American Legion Post 121 and associated Auxiliary, Legion Riders and Sons of the American Legion; Disabled American Veterans Chapter 11; Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783; Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3; North Georgia Honor Guard; Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7394; Vietnam Veterans of America Georgia Chapter 1101; and the United

Community Bank.

As always, residents should remember to display their U.S. flags proudly, and to replace faded or worn flags.

Also taking place over the Memorial Day Weekend is the annual Spring Arts, Crafts & Music Festival on the Square, which begins at 10 a.m. on Saturday, May 25.

The two-day festival is co-hosted by the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority and Union County Historical Society, and it features plenty of artists, food and music.

Always a family-friendly event, the festival begins with the parade and ends at 5 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday.

Folks will also want to attend an outdoor concert on the square featuring the Tom Floyd Band on Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

## 2019 MECHS Graduation

Mountain Education Charter High School will be hosting Graduation on May 25, 2019 at one o'clock in the afternoon. The ceremony will be held at the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega in the Convocation Center. For the first time, MECHS will graduate seniors from all sixteen locations at one time.

Please come out and support the MECHS Graduating Class of 2019. NT(May22,2019)CA

# GDOT...from Page 1A

will be about 19 detours that you're going to see. Not all 19 of those detours are going to happen at the same time. They're going to be staged with construction."

Maps of each detour can be found online by navigating to [www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Public/PublicOutreach](http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Public/PublicOutreach), then scrolling down to a "By County" menu, selecting Union or Towns, and clicking "Go."

A list of projects will appear – click on the link that says "122900 Young Harris Bypass."

Several officials from both Union and Towns counties, including Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, sole commissioners Lamar Paris and Cliff Bradshaw, and fire chiefs David Dyer and Harold Copeland, were present at the open house.

Dyer and Copeland both had some concerns about how the detours might affect emergency operations in their respective counties, and both spent considerable time scrutinizing the detour maps.

"I don't think it's going to be very bad," said Dyer. "There are two entrances to every road, so it will just be an adjustment for us to respond. There may be a little bit longer response times depending on how far we've got to go."

Before a GDOT project can be bid on, GDOT must "let" it, or make it available for bidding. Strickland said the bid letting for this project is currently scheduled for June 2020.

That said, the project will probably start in the fall of 2020 and must be completed within three years.

According to the GDOT

website, the total length of the project is 8.4 miles from Blairsville to Young Harris along the Georgia 515/US 76 corridor. It is projected to cost an estimated \$90,871,024.49.

The scope of the project is to widen and relocate that stretch of Georgia 515, with a purpose of increasing safety and accessibility to this area.

"Crash data reveals that the corridor has experienced higher incidents, rates of crashes, injuries and fatalities in comparing statewide averages for roadways of the same classification," said Strickland. "This is considered a rural, principal arterial."

"So, that says, what can we do to fix it? Is there geometry of the roadway that we need to fix? Is there widening? Is there striping? Is there signage? With this project, we'll be able to go and do a lot of those things when we do new location and widening."

The whole project will make Georgia 515 between Blairsville and Young Harris two lanes in each direction with a 32-foot-wide depressed median.

There will also be a two-lane bypass of Main Street in Young Harris to include a roundabout at each end and two new bridge crossings over Brasstown Creek.

All told, the project will require the displacement of about 30 businesses and 15 residences.

"This number may go up or down, depending on the individual parcels," said Strickland. "Some may be considered consequential displacements, meaning they will be offered the opportunity to move but may choose not to do so."

"As far as which end the construction will start on, it's not something we would know right now. The project won't be awarded to a contractor until June 2020."

"After that, when the contractor has the plans in hand, they would make a coordinated effort to plan the work based on the stages, required subcontractors and environmental restrictions to be able to coordinate their subcontractors in order to deliver the best quality product they can."

Continued Strickland, "We have people that are moving into Georgia. We have a lot of economic development here. We're a very attractive state to a lot of businesses, and we understand that. So, our infrastructure is also leading the way."

"Our mission and vision at Georgia DOT is to be a leader in transportation to encourage economic growth. So, one of the things that we do with these corridors is to make them safer, make them better. Widening them does all those things."

Strickland advised everyone in Towns and Union counties to follow the "Georgia DOT – Northeast" Facebook page for press releases.

"And if you have a question, don't feel like you can't ask us," said Strickland. "We want to be transparent. We want to make this a safer corridor. We want to make this a better corridor."

Strickland strongly encourages residents to submit comments via above-mentioned project link, as the window to submit comments will close by Tuesday, May 28.

# Missing Boy...from Page 1A

Immediately, the Union County Emergency Management Agency activated the Emergency Operations Center at Fire Station No. 1 to coordinate resources and communication efforts, as well as organize search information.

Near the boy's home on Walnut Springs Road, the Union County Sheriff's Office set up a Command Center and, with help from the Union County Fire Department and others, established a half-mile radius and began searching around neighboring homes.

More than a dozen first responder agencies – local, area, state, federal and from North Carolina – aided in the search, which was conducted using special guidelines for lost autistic individuals.

A Georgia State Patrol helicopter circled the area from above using forward-looking infrared cameras.

Two K-9s responded to scene, one from the Woodstock Police Department and Bloodhound Lacey of the Union County Schools Police Department.

Both dogs hit on the boy's scent, which took them to one of at least three nearby ponds, prompting searchers to call on dive teams from Towns County and the Georgia State Patrol.

Thankfully, and to the great relief of searchers, a neighbor and Union County Deputy Josh Bridges spotted the boy just after 7 p.m. in a wooded, hilly area near Burt Nix Road, some three-tenths of a mile from his home.

After being medically evaluated and found to be well with a few scrapes, authorities returned the boy to his home later that evening to the welcoming arms of his overjoyed family.

Incidents involving lost autistic children are rare in this area, with the only other one in recent memory having occurred in March 2012.

The 2012 event was similar to what happened on May 16 in that a young boy had wandered away from his Towns County home into the Chattahoochee National Forest, sparking a manhunt of nearly 100 volunteers from around the area.

All told, last week's search and rescue effort included 85 first responders, with additional nearby agencies having been put on standby should the need have arisen.

And even though this particular scenario is a rare event, Union County Sheriff's Lt. Daren Osborn said search and rescue operations in general are actually pretty common in the North Georgia Mountains, and that first responders were prepared for the task at hand.

"I believe in training for all safety personnel, and our training showed that day," said Osborn. "Every agency that came to that scene, the training showed."

Many residents volunteered to aid in the search, with some showing up near the search perimeter to offer a helping hand, though



First responders set up a perimeter around the search area near Walnut Springs Road on May 16. Photo by Frank Uhler

authorities asked them to remain on standby as well, as too many people in the area might have interfered with the ability of the K-9s to follow the boy's scent.

Throughout the search process, social media became a wellspring of well-wishes and prayers for the boy's safe return, and for that, the searchers were also thankful.

Entities that aided in the May 16 search were: Union County Fire, Sheriff's Office, Road Department, EMA, E-911 Center and government officials; the Blairsville Police Department; the Union County Schools Police Department and Board of Education;

U.S. Forest Service; Georgia Emergency Management Agency; Georgia Bureau of Investigation; the Georgia State Patrol, plus GSP divers and air support; the Department of Natural Resources;

Department of Community Supervision; the Woodstock Police Department K-9 Team; Towns County Dive Team, EMA and Fire

Rescue; and the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office in North Carolina.

All agencies involved responded at a moment's notice to assist a child and a family in need of help.

"We are always happy to assist other jurisdictions," said Towns County Deputy EMA Director Brandon Walls. "Lost children definitely erase jurisdictional boundary lines."

The Missing Child Foundation also aided the effort by calling residents in the area to let them know about the boy and to ask them to look around their homes but to stay indoors during the search.

A targeted message about the search went out to residents of the area who were registered with the Union County Wireless Emergency Notification System, for which people can sign up online at [tinyurl.com/ucwens](http://tinyurl.com/ucwens).

"We pulled out all the stops," said EMA/911 Director David Dyer. "One of the biggest advantages that we had was everybody working together on this."