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Some faculty and staff of Union County Schools volunteered to roleplay the dead and injured during the May 30 active shooter drills. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

expand the training to include supplementary pieces, like evacuation and other elements, that will eventually lead to a full-scale exercise.

"It takes everyone as a team to put this together," said David Dyer, director of the Union County Emergency Management Agency. "It takes the school system, all the staff, all the sheriff's office, the police department, the fire department and EMS to make this work. That's one of our main objectives, is to start working together on that."

Superintendent John Hill said the schools will take part in similar activities more than once a year moving forward, all in the name of preparation to keep both the system and first responders fresh in terms of training.

"We're trying to constantly improve our processes and safety measures to ensure that, No. 1, this type of thing never happens, and No. 2, if it does, that we're prepared to deal with it as efficiently as possible," said Hill.

Representatives with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency were on hand throughout the drills, as GEMA has been working behind the scenes to help the school system update its safety



Seth Dyer with the Blairsville Police Department takes down the shooter - Drew Stewart with the Union County Sheriff's Office - as UCSO Capt. Chad Deyton oversees the drill. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

protocols. "The problem we find in several areas - and it's starting to disappear - is the attitude of, 'It can't happen here,'" said Dave Shanks, Area 1 Coordinator with GEMA Homeland Security. "We've got to get that out of our mindset. This happens all over the United States, and even in our area."

As rare as school shootings are statistically, the statistics are meaningless to

communities affected by these senseless tragedies.

Each time a school shooting happens, it serves as a stark reminder that no one can rest on their laurels when it comes to the safety of a community's children.

Fortunately, Union County's schools and first responders show that they understand this with their proactive insistence on preparing for the worst.

New hiking trails dedicated near Lake Nottely Dam



Kemmy Garrett with TVA, left, with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, right, and members of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, TVA Land Development Officer Kemmy Garrett and several members of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association met at the upper trailhead of a new hiking trail for a dedication ceremony on May 22.

The upper trailhead is located directly across from Union County Fire Station No. 7, aka the Dooley Voting Precinct, on Georgia 325.

The new trail is actually a set of trails running roughly parallel to Georgia 325 between Loving Road and the dam, and trail maps are posted at both the upper and lower trailheads.

One cross trail within the new trail system is marked and leads to an emergency exit.

The two new trails are 0.9 miles and 1.6 miles in length, and range in hiking difficulty from easy to moderate for a total distance of about 2.5 miles.

And this new trail system is not just rabbit trails through the woods - these well-marked trails are approximately six to eight feet wide, are patrolled daily and are well maintained.

Representatives with the Tennessee Valley Authority decided not to put trash cans along the trails or at the trailheads because they were afraid of attracting bears and other critters, though there haven't been any complaints regarding animals since the trails have been open, according to Garrett.

The trails are restricted to hikers and bicycle traffic, and no motorized vehicles of any kind are allowed, with the

exception of folks traveling by way of electric wheelchair.

Pets are also allowed on the trails.

There are at present two forks, one running parallel to and near Georgia 325, and another winding down to Lake Nottely and along the shoreline.

Commissioner Paris said opening the new trails in Union County was originally TVA's idea.

"We were first talking with TVA about expanding down below the dam, so that's where we started," said Paris.

The trail down below the Nottely Dam was completed and dedicated about three years ago. After that, the commissioner and Union County Manager Larry Garrett got the idea to approach Kemmy Garrett about the new trail system up above the dam.

Paris said Kemmy is due all the credit for coming up with

a trail system that ties into the Rock Cliffs area, which is far more than what he and Larry had originally envisioned.

The TVA paid for a contractor to come in initially and cut the trees, said Paris, and the county used primarily detainee labor to clean up the trees and branches and finish up the trails.

This project was good for TVA's mission of getting the public involved on TVA land, and the county was glad to partner up to get it done, said Paris.

"You know me," said Paris. "I think recreation, anyway, because that's one of the most important things for public health."

The actual dedication of the new trails was held at a place on the trail that skirts the lake where the Lake Nottely Improvement Association donated picnic tables for public use.



One of the maps of the Nottely Reservoir Trail. Photo by Mark Smith