

North Georgia News

4 Sections 28 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, July 27, 2022

Murphy, NC, man dies in apparent drowning

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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A father of two tragically lost his life on Lake Nottely last week in what investigators believe was a swimming accident.

Michael Jason Kolar, 38, of Murphy, North Carolina, leaves behind a daughter, a son, a girlfriend, both parents and a sister, all of North Carolina.

The apparent drowning occurred on July 20 after Kolar went for an evening swim with his girlfriend at the TVA boat ramp near Nottely Dam. He was near to visit the area and was snorkeling at the time of the accident, Union County Sheriff's Capt. Daren Osborn said.

They were there for about an hour before Kolar went missing in the water. His girlfriend spent about 30 minutes attempting to locate him and then called 911 around 6 p.m. on Wednesday night, Osborn said.

Personnel with the Sheriff's Office, Union County Fire Department and Georgia Department of Natural Resources looked for Kolar until dark the evening of his disappearance, searching nearby banks and using sonar in the lake to mark potential targets to inspect the next day, Osborn said.

The boat ramp was cordoned off for the duration of the search with a deputy stationed at the entrance overnight.



Forsyth County Dive Team members and Georgia DNR running sonar in search of Michael Jason Kolar near the TVA boat ramp on July 21.

Searchers resumed their efforts in earnest the next morning on Thursday, July 21, when there was enough light

to continue, and the Forsyth County Fire Department Dive Team arrived to provide mutual aid support.

Both DNR and Forsyth County utilized sonar imaging to continue marking targets for dive team investigation, and DNR brought in special 3D sonar equipment to rule out objects on the bottom of the lake to minimize the amount of time divers needed to be underwater.

First responders continued the search until dark on July 21 and picked it back up the morning of Friday, July 22.

Shortly before 2 p.m. Friday, Kolar's body surfaced on its own in about 15 feet of water, much closer to the shoreline than searchers anticipated and well inside the buoys for the ramp area, Osborn said.

An autopsy will be performed by medical



Michael Jason Kolar, 38, of Murphy, North Carolina, leaves behind a daughter, a son, a girlfriend, both parents and a sister, all of North Carolina. Examiners with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to determine cause of death. See Kolar Drowning, Page 7A

Moonshine Fest to serve up music and fun July 29-31

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Nowhere in his wildest dreams could Blairsville's own County Music star Tommy Townsend have foreseen the success story that Granddaddy Mimm's Distilling Co. would become when he founded the business in 2012.

Already an established Nashville musician at the time, Townsend began dabbling in spirits and moonshine as a hobby, a way to carry on the local tradition of his grandfather, the legendary moonshiner Jack "Mimm" McClure of Young Harris.

Now, 10 years later, Townsend and Granddaddy Mimm's are commandeering Downtown Blairsville this



Tommy Townsend

weekend as they host the first-ever Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival July 29-31.

"I would have never imagined hosting a festival. See Moonshine Festival, Page 3A

White gets state championship for stellar athleticism

BOE honors Debbie Thomas, Gaddistown Homemakers

By Shawn Jarrard
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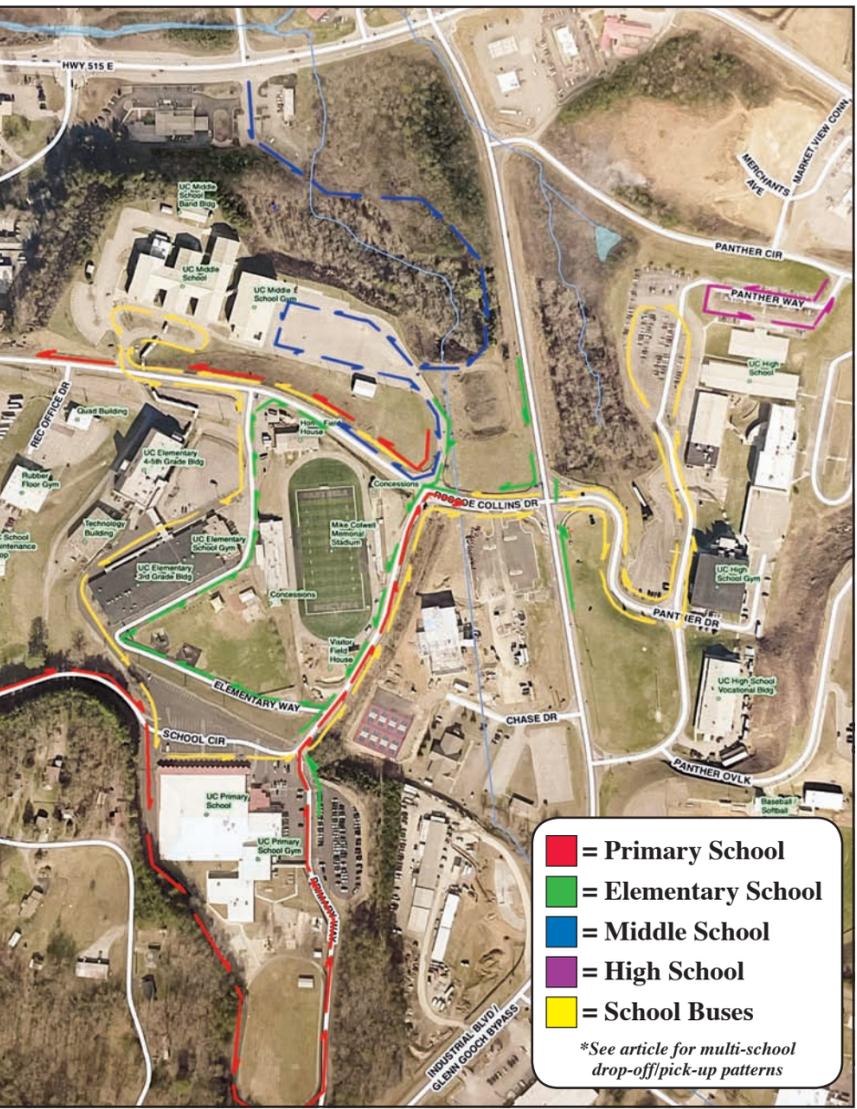
In the July 19 meeting of the Union County Board of Education, UCHS Class of 2022 graduate Hunter White received congratulations and recognition for his record-setting performance in the 2022 Georgia High School Association Class 2A Public State Swim Meet in February.

White became the High School's first two-event state swim champ at the Georgia Tech-based meet, earning one championship in the 100-yard Freestyle – setting a personal best and school record time in the process – and another in the 100-yard Breaststroke, having



Two-time State Swim Champ Hunter White, center, receiving his championship ring from UCHS Principal CT Hussion and his Championship Director Mandy Hunter July 19. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Union County Schools 2022 Traffic Routes



- = Primary School
- = Elementary School
- = Middle School
- = High School
- = School Buses

*See article for multi-school drop-off/pick-up patterns

For details, see School Traffic, Page 7A

Active shooter training boosts safety in community

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In the lead-up to the start of a new school year on Aug. 12, the Union County School District is doing what it can to keep local students safe, especially in a time when tragic school shootings regularly capture the nation's attention.

Statistically speaking, schools are still among the safest places for children to be, but that doesn't mean the schools are willing to take chances.

That's why, in the

See Shooter Training, Page 7A



UCSO deputies participating in the Active Shooter Training by the Union County Schools Police Department on Tuesday, July 19, at the Middle School. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Local bail bondsman arrested for child molestation

News Special
North Georgia News

On Thursday, June 30, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation arrested Leonard Frank Dills, aka "Buck" Dills, 75, of Blairsville, for Sodomy, Incest and Aggravated Child Molestation.

Dills was booked into the Union County Jail on the same date and has since bonded out.

The GBI was requested to conduct an investigation by the Union County Sheriff's Office in March of 2021 to

investigate historic allegations of child molestation.

During the course of the investigation, other victims were identified.

Anyone with information is being asked to contact the GBI by calling 1-800-597-TIPS (8477), online at https://gbi.georgia.gov/submit-tips-online or by downloading the See Something, Send Something mobile application.

Dills has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.



Frank Leonard Dills aka "Buck" Dills



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July Term 2022 Grand Jury Indictments

The following individuals were indicted this month during the July Term 2022 of the Union County Grand Jury:

Kristin Deanne Maze, six counts homicide by vehicle in the first degree; two counts driving under the influence (controlled substance); three counts driving under the influence (less safe) (drugs); driving under the influence (less safe) (combined influence); failure to maintain lane; failure to wear seat safety belt.

Michael Zane Bureson, aka Mark Anthony Griggs, homicide by vehicle in the first degree; serious injury by vehicle; driving under the influence (less safe) (drugs); two counts endangering a child while driving under the influence; failure to maintain lane; two counts child safety restraint; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Charles Bryan Long, aggravated assault; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; discharge of gun near highway or street; reckless conduct.

Joseph Edward Barnes, two counts aggravated assault; criminal damage to property in the second degree; possession of a knife during the commission of a felony; two counts reckless conduct; discharge of gun near highway or street.

Jefferson Guevara Hernandez, criminal damage to property in the second degree; obstruction of an officer; criminal trespass; interference with government property.

Brailin Walker Garner, four counts serious injury by vehicle; two counts reckless driving; two counts defective equipment; failure to stop at stop sign; improper tires; failure to wear seat safety belt.

Jeremy Dalton Hooper, aggravated stalking; stalking.

Qayyim Yah Yah Ali, fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; driving under the influence (less safe) (drugs); driving with expired license; reckless stunt driving; speeding; reckless driving; improper passing; obscuring license plate in order to impede surveillance equipment; expired tag; failure to maintain lane; window tint violation.

Danny Lee Brown, two counts aggravated assault; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; pointing gun or pistol at another.

Rex Ernest Harris, sale of methamphetamine.

Benjamin Darrano Williams, fraud or theft in obtaining controlled substance; criminal attempt to commit a felony.

Ethan Thomas Smith, burglary in the first degree; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Travis Avery Hall, aggravated assault; battery, Family Violence.

Seth Michael Carson, two counts aggravated child molestation; two counts child molestation; two counts incest.

Laura Ann Mowell, exploitation and intimidation of disabled adult, elder person or resident; simple battery, Family Violence.

Joshua Alan Kendrick, aggravated battery, Family Violence; two counts cruelty to children in the second degree; battery, Family Violence; two counts cruelty to children in the third degree; simple battery, Family Violence; eight counts obstruction of an officer.

Marvin Allison Wilder, two counts child molestation.

Donal Wayne Roberts, burglary in the second degree; theft by taking; criminal trespass; three counts obstruction of an officer; driving under the influence (less safe) (alcohol); open container; driving while license suspended.

Carrie Nichole Gladden, making a false statement; obstruction of an officer.

Christopher Michael Scheeler, aka Chris, making a false statement; obstruction of an officer.

Victoria Rose Lingerfelt, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Bobby Earls, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Cody Mac Jarkovsky, two counts theft by taking; two counts theft by deception.

James Carlos Sparks Jr., identity fraud; three counts theft by receiving stolen property; possession of a Schedule II controlled substance.

Colten Dameron Bohannon, aka Colten Damien Dwayne Bohannon, possession of methamphetamine; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce.

Andrew Joseph Hogsed, driving under the influence; driving while license suspended.

David Terry Clark, aka Daniel Terry Clark, aggravated assault; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; terroristic threats; criminal trespass; discharge of a firearm on property of

another; pointing gun or pistol at another.

Shetal Kumar Shah, two counts driving under the influence; obstruction of an officer; improper passing; driving on wrong side of

roadway; failure to maintain lane.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Moonshine Festival...from Page 1A

of this magnitude 10 years ago," Townsend said. "(The company) actually started as sort of a side-hustle business to honor my grandfather by producing a few cases here and there.

"Summing up (Granddaddy Mimm's) past 10 years, all I can say is it just gets busier and busier. But it wouldn't be as successful if it wasn't for the amazing staff we have."

Rain or shine, the three-day event will feature more than 70 artists and vendors, along with a headlining concert Saturday night by Country Music singer-songwriter Keith Anderson, and of course, Townsend will also be performing.

Friday's activities will begin at 3 p.m. and include the Moonshine Market at the Seasons Inn Plaza, featuring games and flea-market style shopping. The Festival Kick-Off event begins at 7 p.m. Friday with live music on the town square.

The free Passport Drink Tour is scheduled for Friday and Saturday on the square. Passports are available at Granddaddy Mimm's and Seasons Inn, and full passports can be redeemed for a free

drink at Granddaddy Mimm's, a short stroll from the square, on Saturday night for 21-and-ups.

A "best moonshiner" costume contest will be held Saturday, with one male and one female crowned the winner. Additional Saturday activities include ax throwing on the square and a car show at the Seasons Inn Plaza from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Guests may also tour the Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery all three days – tours cost \$5 and get underway at the top of every hour – and live music will continue Sunday, July 31, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"We encourage everyone to come out, bring a lawn chair and support Downtown Blairsville," Townsend said. "We would like to thank the businesses for their sponsorships, and the Union County Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Development Authority and the Union County Historical Society for all their hard work."

Darren Harper of the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority touched on the teamwork aspect, discussing what is required to host an event of this magnitude. And despite the

heavy lifting behind the scenes, Harper believes guests will be pleased with the end result.

"This is one of those times where we have multiple organizations working together to promote the area," he said. "Individually, we couldn't have pulled this off. We had to have a 'it takes a village' approach for something of this size."

"But we think this festival is going to have a little something for everybody, so there is a good reason to come downtown this weekend."

Additional musical acts include The Bone Daddy's Band, Heart of Pine, Tommy Townsend, Rick Davenport and the Boys.

As for the headliner, Anderson has produced three Billboard Top-10 songs and has co-written hits for Garth Brooks, George Jones and Big & Rich. The latter resulted in the 2007 No. 1 country hit, "Lost in this Moment."

Tickets for the Saturday night concert at Granddaddy Mimm's are \$25, and admission to the rest of the festival events is free.

For additional festival info and tickets, visit granddaddymimms.com and visitdowntownblairsville.com.



Rotary: People of Action

The Governor's Visit and High Finance

On Thursday, July 21, Union County Rotarians enjoyed a visit from the organization's new District 6910 Governor, Gerry Taylor. He has held almost every local and district position in Rotary, and he comes to the job with a 30-year background working with United Way. His address to the club stressed that by definition, Rotarians are community leaders. Gerry also pointed out that this District is one of the top national regions for fund raising and support of the good work that Rotary does around the world. He explained new Rotary initiatives such as creating '100% Promise' clubs to ensure the funding of Rotary projects for years to come. He also stressed Rotary's commitment to fostering environments that are safe and positive for young people and free from discrimination and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. He encouraged everyone follow through with available youth protection resources since all Rotary clubs participate in youth programs, such as the Georgia Rotary Student Program, GRSP, Interact and RYLA. One of Gerry's personal goals as governor is to realize a 5% increase in membership during his term in office. And of course, he gave a warm pitch for everyone to attend the April 2023 District Conference in Chattanooga.

The previous Thursday, July 14, Cody Ching, the Assistant Vice President/Mortgage Loan officer of the new Blairsville branch of River City Bank. Originally from Portland, Oregon, Cody played baseball at Young Harris College and has worked in

banking in Blairsville since 2015. In February of 2022 he accepted a position with River City Bank in Blairsville which at the time was operating as a loan production office or LPO. In less than two years the LPO had become profitable enough to expand to a full-service bank. River City Bank is headquartered in Rome, GA, the resident CEO is Blairsville native Jamie Talent and the Blairsville team is led by veteran North Georgia banker and RCB Union

County Market President, Scott Nanney. Cody invited everyone to visit the bank, hear what they have to offer and give RCB the opportunity to earn their business. To finish, Cody introduced Branch Manager, Eric Collins, and the two of them fielded questions from the audience.

Consider joining Rotary, a fun, exciting organization that provides networking, fellowship, and vital services on a local, national, and worldwide level. The next regular meeting is Thursday, July 29th at The Skillet in Blairsville.

For more information about the club, call Union County Rotary's membership chair, Scott Carter at (706) 745-7359.



District 6910 Governor, Gerry Taylor, admires the cake with UCRC president, Richard Raborn.



(L-R): Richard Raborn, speaker Cody Ching of River City Bank, and board member, John Day

Kolar Drowning...from Page 1A



Law enforcement officers with Georgia DNR setting up a 3D sonar scanner for use in the search for Kolar last week.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

though authorities discovered no signs of trauma on Kolar and his passing is being considered an accident.

“We have reason to believe alcohol played a role in this incident, and no foul play is suspected at this time,” Osborn said.

Drownings are rare in Union County, with the last known drowning in Lake Nottely having occurred about 10 years ago, according to the Sheriff’s Office.

An outpouring of support for Kolar’s family and loved ones followed the news of his death on Facebook, with hundreds of

prayers and condolences being offered over the Burnsville, Minnesota, native.

The departed’s father, Robert, shared his appreciation for the first responders who worked long hours to locate his son.

“As Michael’s father, I’m trying to deal with this loss, but I would like to thank all those who spent hours trying to find my son,” Robert Kolar said Friday. “These people seem to never get the recognition they deserve.”

“I have been a victim advocate with Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office for 10 years

and have seen a lot and done a lot, but when it comes to be one of your own, it’s still tough.

“Thank you everyone for your comments. I’m happy to see people still care. Thank you.”

Agencies involved in the search were the Union County Sheriff’s Office, Union County Fire Department, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division, Forsyth County Fire Department Dive Team, the Union County Emergency Management Agency and the Georgia Emergency Management Agency.

Active Shooter Training...from Page 1A

spirit of preparedness, the Union County Schools Police Department welcomed local law enforcement and other first responders into the Union County Middle School for two days of Active Shooter Training on Tuesday, July 19, and Thursday, July 21.

The training included multiple active shooter drills with specially marked training pistols for use by officers in pursuit of a mock active shooter, and Union County Firefighters and EMTs were called in to practice treating injured victims in a hostile environment.

Volunteers from among school staff assisted as well, playing dead or wounded and other roles to add a more realistic aspect to each training scenario.

Participating were the Union County Schools Police, Blairsville Police, Union County Sheriff’s Office and Georgia State Patrol, along with the Union County Fire Department Rescue Task Force of paramedics and EMTs and the Union County Emergency Management Agency.

Together, everyone put their all into the two days of role-playing scenarios, engaging in real-life situations of an active shooter in a school.

Tuesday’s training was dedicated to the law enforcement response to an active shooter threat, while Thursday featured firefighters going in under law enforcement protection to treat and evaluate injured patients, with the idea that “once they stop the killing, we stop the dying.”

Multiple first responder officials acted as observers of the training to provide feedback on how to more effectively respond, react and pursue a shooter or shooters in a multi-level school building, and feedback was provided to secondary responders from the Fire Department as well.

“I think it is great that all these agencies are working together for the community,” Union County Sheriff’s Maj. Shawn Dyer said. “We all have a job to do in these situations, but the priority for all of us is to maintain the safety of our community.”

The School District has held similar active shooter training in recent years, and first responders are always happy to get back in there to conduct more multi-agency drills.

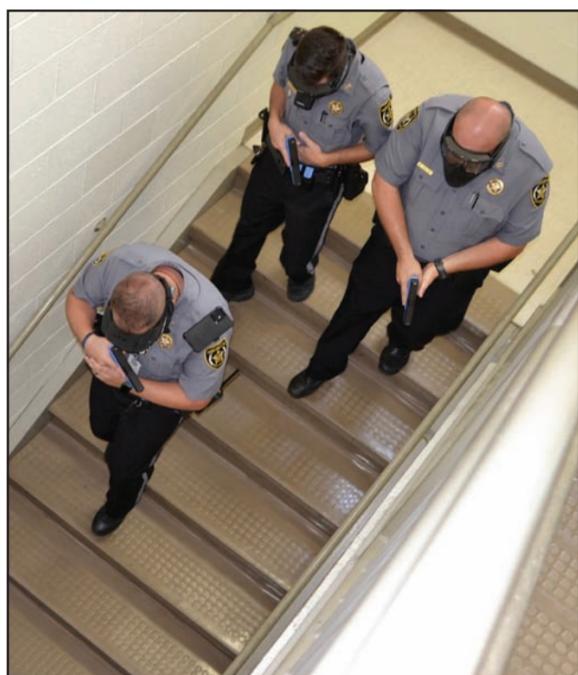
“It changes every time we train because we are always learning new things,” Dyer said, “so it is important to implement the stuff that we learned from other places. We do this to protect everybody, and we want to thank the community for keeping us in their prayers and for the continued support.”

Chad Deyton is the Union County Schools Police Chief, and he coordinated the training and acted largely as an observer, keeping time and watching the officers and their techniques while providing potentially life-saving constructive criticism.

“This is our yearly active shooter training course, and the recent events of Uvalde, Texas, did chime a bell with us as we headed into this,” Deyton said of the May 24 shooting that



Union County Firefighters took part in the second day of Active Shooter Training on Thursday, July 21.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Local law enforcement officers received valuable Active Shooter Training over two days at Union County Middle School last week.
Photo by Jeremy Foster

resulted in 19 kids and two adults dying at the hands of a depraved shooter in the Lone Star State.

“That certainly made us want to prepare more for this and better ourselves for the job that we do serving the community and the children of these schools,” Deyton said. “We believe we can never be ‘too ready.’”

“Time is of the essence in these situations, so the focus is to learn better procedures to eliminate the threat as soon as possible, and each year we absolutely make this training more intense.”

Blairsville Police Lt. Russell Walker was also there to support the cause and his fellow first responders, and he offered his insights on the exercises.

“You can learn a lot sitting in the classroom, but the training that we are doing today is as close to real life as you can get,” Walker said that Tuesday. “By doing the live-action training, this is where they learn from their mistakes today, because you never know if tomorrow might be the real deal against someone who is in there with an AK-47. So, they learn today to make a safer tomorrow.”

Speaking on behalf of the Union County Fire Department and Union County Emergency

Management Agency, Fire Chief David Dyer reiterated the importance of working together with other agencies to prepare for emergencies rather than having to figure responses on the fly.

“Although we coordinate this, practice, work at this, if something were to happen, it’s going to be so chaotic and dynamic that it will never go perfectly according to plan, but that’s why we train – to be as prepared as possible,” Dyer said.

Continuing, “It’s best that we work together to be familiar with the tactics we would use in responding to something like this, because, again, it’s going to be chaotic, and we want to practice as best we can to be prepared if it does happen.”

Union County EMA staff also attended the training. The primary role of EMA in an active shooter event would be to request and coordinate additional resources from both inside and outside the county to respond to such an event.

The North Georgia News would like to give a big thank you to all the first responder agencies of Union County for being on the frontline and working extremely hard to keep this beautiful area and community safe every single day.

School Traffic...from Page 1A

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Traffic patterns for dropping off and picking up Middle, Elementary and Primary School students are changing this year at Union County Schools, effective the first day back from summer break on Aug. 12.

In years past, parents and car-riding students attempting to access the closely clustered campuses often found themselves jockeying for position at intersections and backing up on the Glenn Gooch Bypass, causing many a commuter headache at the start and end of each school day.

Not anymore. For the past several months, the Board Office has been working with local law enforcement and people familiar with traffic patterns to come up with a plan to streamline the car rider experience by establishing one-way routes specific to each school.

A crucial aspect of the system’s new traffic pattern is the recently constructed access road connecting Georgia 515 directly to the Middle School campus.

The new road, located next to the Waffle House, works as a one-way entrance to get inbound traffic for the Middle School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass, thereby enabling dedicated entrance and exit routes for all three schools located west of the bypass.

New drop-off/pick-up routes are as follows:

Vehicles bound for the Primary School will go past the Old Middle School Gym on School Circle to enter the campus. To leave, parents will continue around the Primary School, turning right onto School Circle toward Roscoe Collins Drive to exit onto the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

Elementary School commuters will enter from the bypass onto Roscoe Collins Drive before turning left up School Circle toward Mike Colwell Stadium. From there, they will take Elementary Way, go around to the school, then exit right onto Roscoe Collins to the bypass.

Middle School riders will enter from the Waffle House-area access road, head up to the school, and then exit right onto Roscoe Collins Drive toward the



The gravel is down and paving will commence soon on the new Union County Middle School access road behind the Waffle House off Georgia 515.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Downtown Blairsville Square. Since the High School is located across the bypass from the other three schools, car riders there will follow the same traffic pattern as in years past, taking Panther Circle to turn into the High School at Panther Way before exiting back onto Panther Circle.

Families dropping off and picking up students at multiple schools will follow a set pattern as well.

For cars with Middle and Elementary School students, the route will take them from the new access road at Waffle House around to Roscoe Collins Drive. But instead of exiting onto Roscoe Collins, they will cross directly over to School Circle to get onto the Elementary School route.

Cars with Middle and Primary School students will start on the Middle School route, exiting onto Roscoe Collins toward the square before getting onto the Primary School route to travel past the Old Middle School Gym on the other end of School Circle.

Vehicles containing both Elementary and Primary School students will begin on the Primary School route before turning onto the Elementary School route at Elementary Way, just before the stadium.

The campus school bus route will be changing in the afternoons, going in reverse of its usual order to complement the flow of the new traffic pattern. High School students will load up first, then Middle School students, followed by kids at the Elementary School and Primary School.

As usual, student drivers

will still be entering the High School at either the entrance to the Baseball/Softball Complex or the front-office entrance.

School officials are optimistic that these changes will put more vehicles moving in the same direction from different starting points instead of folks stacking up and having to turn in front of one another, ultimately decreasing the amount of time it takes to drop off and pick up students.

“Before, we had people at intersections going in three different directions, which slows traffic,” Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Murphy said. “Essentially, we’ll have everyone doing right turns only except for the Elementary School, which does have a left turn, and that’s just simply because there is no other option for us on that.”

“We’ve created almost a roundabout scenario so that you keep traffic flowing rather than stopping. There will be very few stops,” Murphy said, noting that officers with the Union County Schools Police Department will be directing traffic at each intersection.

The School District anticipates that, like always, the first couple of weeks will be on the chaotic side for car riders, but officials feel confident that the changes will make life easier for parents, students and schools alike.

“(Traffic when dropping off kids) is hard on parents; most of them are going to work, and they don’t have time to sit in 20 to 30 minutes’ worth of traffic just to get from one school to the next,” Murphy said. “We hope this solves that issue.”

School Board Honors...from Page 1A



UCHS Class of 2022 graduate Hunter White with his family and buddies from UC Swim Boosters during his state championship recognition in last week's School Board meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



Gaddistown Homemakers recognized in the July 19 Union County Board of Education meeting: (L-R) Pat Griffin, Carol Knight, Dena Gooch, Deanna Dalen, Margo Crooks, Tanya Varela, Becky Brown, Kathy Shaw, Sandy Gallogly, Sherry Vaughn and Gayla Blade. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

set a school record in this event during the preliminaries the day before.

School Athletic Director Mandy Hunter and High School Principal CT Hussion joined the accomplished swimmer to present him with a state championship ring purchased by the Union County Swim Team Booster Club and two certificates highlighting each of his winning events.

"Hunter has been a swimmer at Union County High School for four years," Coach Hunter said. "We wanted to congratulate him tonight on a great four years, but definitely (an amazing) senior season."

"Hunter had a great career here at Union County High School. He has been swimming for many, many years, and he has put in very long hours to accomplish what he has done this season."

Added Coach Hunter, "He was also selected to BLITZ Swimmer of the Year ... and it's a big deal to be presented the Swimmer of the Year from all schools and all classifications in (Northeast Georgia)."

Joining White for the ring presentation were proud family members – his parents and grandparents – and fellow booster club friends.

Afterward, White attended a pizza party in his honor at Allegheny Masonic Lodge No. 114 in Downtown Blairsville, where he met up with his North Georgia Rapids Swim Team Coach Barry Gay, who coached him from an early age for 11 years, enabling him to become such a dominant athlete.

Having started swimming at just 8 years old, White attended the University of Georgia Swim Camp for eight consecutive years, and now, he will be embarking for UGA this fall to major in Cellular Biology in hopes of going to Medical School to become a Doctor of Orthopedics and Sports Medicine.

Also in the meeting, former Woody Gap Principal and new Union County High Assistant Principal Carol Knight presented the Gaddistown Homemakers Club of Suches with a Certificate of Appreciation.

They were honored that evening for being a "Partner in Education" benefitting students

living in the Valley Above the Clouds with fundraising during the annual Indian Summer Festival and throughout each year.

"The Gaddistown Homemakers were formed over 30 years ago by eight ladies in the Gaddistown area of Suches," Knight said. "The goal was to not only improve their own individual homes but also the larger community, and they have certainly achieved that goal."

"Over the years, the membership has grown to include members from all around the Suches community. The first fundraiser the club undertook was a cookbook, and to increase interest in the book and its recipes, the members began baking the pie recipes in the cookbook and using them as samples to try during the Indian Summer Festival."

"That was so successful that people began asking for whole pies. Now, the Homemakers will bake approximately 750 pies for each (festival) weekend. It is no secret that many people attend the Indian Summer Festival just for the pies, so they are a major draw and have a larger impact on the festival as a whole, because people do go for the pies."

Added Knight, "In addition, they also do scholarships. Our seniors at Woody Gap School were the first beneficiaries of funds, and they have continued to do that to this day."

"Later, they added the Union County Fire Station No. 5 (to their fundraising efforts), which they would give that donation at their annual Suches Community Center Christmas Tree Lighting."

"And several years ago, they were kind enough to bring the tree-lighting ceremony into Woody Gap School, allowing us to partner with them in community outreach."

In conclusion, Knight said that she and the School System were "very honored to take this opportunity to say thank you to all of you for everything that you have done."

Gaddistown Homemakers accepting the award were Pat Griffin, Dena Gooch, Deanna Dalen, Margo Crooks, Tanya Varela, Becky Brown, Kathy Shaw, Sandy Gallogly, Sherry Vaughn and Gayla

Blade.

Wrapping up the School Board's showing of appreciation that night was a recognition for a very special educator from the Primary School, Debbie Forrest Thomas, who retired after more than two decades at the end of the 2021-22 school year.

Thomas could not be present to receive her "Going the Extra Mile Award" in person, but Assistant Superintendent Tiffany Setzer was all too happy to tell those in attendance why Thomas is so worthy of thanks.

"I always enjoy getting to do these awards because we have such deserving people in our community and in our system that do such wonderful things for our children and for the community," Setzer said. "Tonight, I'd like to recognize Debbie Thomas."

Added Setzer, "To tell you a little bit about Ms. Debbie, if you didn't work with her, you would wish that you did. Debbie dedicated 26-plus years to Union County Schools; she is retired, recently."

"She volunteered numerous evenings to support our athletics. She kept the clock and the book for untold number of basketball games and supported our children in so many ways."

"And if that wasn't enough, she touched the lives of hundreds of children through her role in the Primary School. She was a paraprofessional there and loved children, had a way with children."

"I've talked with several different people that worked with Ms. Debbie, and they've all said the same thing – she's just genuine. She's genuine with our students and can correct them in a way that they know that she cares."

"She connects with all children: special education children, general education children, boys, girls – all of them think the world of Ms. Debbie."

"So, tonight, we would like to recognize her for her loyalty, her support and her dedication that went truly above and beyond the call of duty for over 26 years."

Be sure to pick up a copy of next week's edition of the North Georgia News for a follow-up article discussing additional business from the July 19 School Board meeting.