

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Officials promote vaccination amid national measles outbreak

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Georgia District 2 Public Health Director Dr. Pamela Logan discussed a national measles outbreak at the quarterly Union County Board of Health meeting on Wednesday, July 24.

"As you know, there's a big outbreak of measles across the whole United States," Logan said. "In Georgia, there have been seven cases so far."

"This is an RNA virus and it causes acute viral respiratory illnesses. Back in 2004, we had 37 cases. Since then, those numbers have just continued to grow. In 2014, we were at 667 cases throughout the United States."

Logan said the number of cases today is much higher, though she didn't have an exact number. She stressed the fact that measles is highly contagious.

"Most of our cases in the United States are travel-related because of exposure abroad," Logan said. "There have been large outbreaks in Europe and India, as well as in the Philippines."

"The measles, mumps and rubella vaccine is very effective – 93% effective against measles with one dose, and two doses, you're at 97%, so a very good vaccine."

Logan encouraged local doctors to inoculate patients if they had any doubts about their previous vaccinations.

The state requires children

in childcare or in public schools to have the MMR vaccination, and the Department of Public Health strongly urges parents of unvaccinated children to keep their children at home in the event of viral outbreaks.

Logan also reported 504 confirmed cases of hepatitis A in an outbreak located primarily in the areas of Rome, Augusta and Dalton, with two deaths.

In this particular outbreak, Logan said a lot of the cases have stemmed from drug use and close contact between people who are infected, including people living in homeless shelters, prisons and the like.

The doctor also reported an outbreak of Legionella – the bacterial culprit behind Legionnaires' disease – which seems to be focused on the

Sheraton Atlanta Hotel in downtown Atlanta.

She said there have been nine confirmed cases and that the hotel will be closed until Aug. 11, for possibly longer.

Moving forward, local Health Department Nurse Manager Bethany Barrett reported that the department had purchased a total of 1,460 doses of flu vaccine for the coming flu season, and that they had begun scheduling flu clinics.

As of the July 24 board meeting, there were no reported cases of flu in Union County



Mark Jarrett and Dr. Elizabeth Wiles in the July 24 Union County Board of Health meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

the current flu season. Barrett said that immunization audits of daycares will take place on Aug. 14, and Union County Schools immunization audits

may possibly take place on Sept. 11 but have not been finalized yet.

The Health Department

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Plenty in store for 2019-2020 school year starting August 7



Everyone at the Union County Board of Education Office, including school administrators, is ready for the 2019-2020 school year to begin. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
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In the leadup to students returning to school next week, the Union County School District will be hosting five days of activities for kids, teachers, staff and parents starting Thursday.

On Aug. 1, the schools will put on a breakfast for everyone at 7 a.m. in the high school cafeteria, to be followed by a systemwide meeting at the Fine Arts Center, then individual school faculty meetings.

Then on Friday, Aug. 2, the schools will offer a variety of in-house trainings and a Safe Talk presentation for designated school first responders.

House of Prayer Church will host the annual Backpack 2 School Bash! event on Saturday, Aug. 3, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will be a vaping

presentation by Armando Roche of the Atlanta-Carolina High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program at the Fine Arts Center on Monday, Aug. 5, from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

"Meet Your Teacher" will also be on Aug. 5 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at all the schools, to give students and parents the opportunity to say hello to teachers before the first day of school.

The five-day kickoff will close on Tuesday, Aug. 6, with the traditional employee health fair at the Middle School Media Center, followed by more in-house training sessions to include a first-aid class, plus the annual barbecue.

Classes are set to begin on Wednesday, Aug. 7. There's plenty new for the 2019-2020 school year, with the schools continuing to focus on working together to ensure "Success For All."

Students can expect a systemwide embrace of the GeorgiaBEST Program through the Department of Labor, which promotes future employability by emphasizing soft skills like teamwork, punctuality and communication.

Principal Gwen Stafford said she's looking forward to rolling out GeorgiaBEST at the middle school, which first came to the high school in the spring semester last year.

And Stafford wants to remind students and parents that the Health Department will be providing immunizations – Tdap, meningitis, hepatitis A and HPV – at the middle school during "Meet Your Teacher."

At the high school, Principal C.T. Hussion said he was excited about changes being made to homeroom procedures.

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First responders team up to free man's arm after hay baling accident

By Shawn Jarrard
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At 4:05 p.m. on Thursday, July 25, an emergency call came into the Union County E911 Communications Center about a 60-year-old male with his arm stuck in a hay baler.

Within a minute of receiving the call, dispatchers had help on the way, and the Fire Department and Union General EMS arrived about the same time some 10 minutes later at the residence off Georgia 325.

It was a major injury – the man's arm had gotten pulled into a belt roller of a hay baler, requiring firefighters to extricate him from the machine.

He had lost a lot of blood in the accident, so first responders started the man on IV fluids and applied a tourniquet to his upper arm, all the while working out the safest way to disentangle their patient.

Meanwhile, AirLife



Union County E911 Dispatcher Amanda Craig on a recent shift at the 911 Center. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Georgia 14 had just completed another call when it was alerted to the emergency thanks to a new app in use by the 911 Center, and the medical helicopter was en route to the scene within minutes of the accident.

"He was awake and

talking to us the whole entire time," Fire Chief David Dyer said. "Finally, we were able to get his arm out and free him from the hay baler."

"By the time we got him out and got him onto the

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Vietnam Veterans seek donations for patriotic public mural at Meeks Park



Vietnam Veterans of America Blairsville Chapter 1101 President Chuck Kittredge with concept art outlining the local VVA's plans for a mural in Meeks Park. Photo by Mark Smith

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Staff Writer

Members of the Blairsville Chapter 1101 Vietnam Veterans of America have taken on a new project to honor all American veterans, and they're calling it the Veterans Mural Project.

Many will remember the Blairsville VVA's herculean efforts in bringing the Moving Wall Memorial to Meeks Park in 2015, highlighting the nearly 60,000 names of American Vietnam War casualties.

For their next big project, the local Vietnam Veterans plan to create a painted mural that's 200 feet wide by 10 feet high to honor all veterans of America's past wars and conflicts.

But in order to pay for this massive patriotic undertaking, the veterans involved will need to raise a lot of money – \$150,000 to be exact.

"We're doing the best we can to make it a showpiece and honor all veterans," said Blairsville VVA President Chuck Kittredge. "Once this is built and dedicated and the word gets out, I guarantee you, there's going to be people coming from all over Georgia to see this."

"The three key benefits: one, it honors all veterans; two, the economy is going to prosper – when you bring all these visitors in here to see this, they're going to spend money; three, it leaves a legacy. Everybody will know that the Vietnam Veterans spearheaded this project."

Kittredge said the roots of the project were actually laid down about two and a half years ago, when the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge up Murphy Highway was dedicated in concert with state

and local officials.

The original plan was to have a giant mural painted on the retaining wall north of the Memorial Bridge, but due to the amount of red tape involved with installing a highly visible monument on such a busy thoroughfare, the VVA decided it would be easier to simply find another venue.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris was then petitioned to help the veterans find a new suitable location in Union County, after which he suggested Meeks Park, and it was decided to put the mural where the Moving Wall was displayed just a few years ago.

Local artist Bob Dasher has been commissioned to paint the mural, which will depict milestone American conflicts such as the Revolutionary War.

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New Enotah CASA Executive Director Lago wowed by community support

By Mark Smith
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Della Lago just completed her first 90 days in office as the new executive director of Enotah CASA, and she said she couldn't be happier with her new position.

"I think the biggest surprise, which has meant so much to me, is the way the communities here have embraced CASA and what we do," Lago said. "They're passionate about it, the local businesses support CASA."

"They want to know what's happening with the children in foster care, they want to know how many children are in foster care. Are there enough CASAs to advocate for those children? What can we do to help?"

"If it's supporting Dancing with the Stars, a pickleball tournament, providing food for a training event – that, to me, has been very endearing, to be able to be part of a community that believes in taking care



Della Lago

of the most vulnerable, those children that have already been victimized and traumatized and have been removed from their home and are often forgotten.

"This community believes they are not to be forgotten." Enotah CASA is a nonprofit organization with the goal of ensuring that every child has a safe, permanent

home. They do this by providing specially-trained volunteers known as CASAs, or Court-Appointed Special Advocates.

Because of continued community support, CASAs have been able to serve 100% of the children in foster care in Union, Towns, Lumpkin and White Counties, even though there's been a 7% increase in the number of foster kids coming in since last year.

"That means we need more CASAs, more advocates," Lago said. "Because of the unfortunate growth of children in foster care, that means our program has grown."

In other CASA news, Union/Towns Advocate Supervisor Nicole Lonano was promoted recently to the position of Lead Advocate Supervisor.

Lonano will be responsible for overseeing all other supervisors in the circuit and maintaining the Enotah CASA's various partnerships, such as with the circuit judges and the Division of Family and

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