

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, August 7, 2019

McAfee Family honored at Canal Lake Boat Ramp's new floating dock

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The McAfee Family was honored locally on Thursday, Aug. 1, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the family's local contribution to the history and culture of Union County.

Approximately 75 residents attended the ceremony, which took place at the newly installed floating boat dock at the Canal Lake Boat Ramp on Lake Nottely.

Among the local officials in attendance were Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and others, plus representatives with the Tennessee Valley Authority, Georgia Department

of Natural Resources and the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

The VIPs of the day, however, were those folks without whom there would be no boat ramp or dock adding to the recreational enjoyment available in the county: Jim McAfee, Lewis McAfee and Melva Lynn McAfee-Drake, along with others from the family.

Members of the McAfee Family were the gracious donors of the land upon which the boat ramp – and later the boat dock – was originally built.

"A lot of people will have an opportunity to put in and fish here that was not available for years and years," Jim said. "There was no boat ramp on this end of the lake at all, and the

ones that did go in had to shove their boats off of the bank. When this was built, it helped out the whole community."

McAfee said that, initially, they just wanted to have a boat ramp and allow the community to use it to get their boats in the water at Canal Lake, which all came together around the year 1970.

"DNR said that they would build a ramp if they had the land and if somebody would build a road," McAfee said. "There was just a one-lane dirt road down here at that time."

"So, Lewis and Melva Lynn and I decided to donate the land, an acre and a half or an acre and a quarter, to build the boat ramp."

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McAfees in attendance for the Aug. 1 ribbon cutting honoring their family's contributions to the county over the years. Photo by Mark Smith

Fire Department thanks firefighters, names McClure 'Firefighter of the Year'

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Fire Department hosted its annual awards ceremony and appreciation dinner to celebrate its staff on Saturday, Aug. 3, at First United Methodist Church.

The event began with a social hour and dinner, after which Fire Chief David Dyer kicked things off with a talk about what it takes to don the uniform.

"One of the things that you have to do to be a firefighter is accept the lifestyle," Dyer said. "That's exactly what this is. You're not just joining a club or joining an organization or getting a job somewhere, you are accepting the lifestyle. If you become a firefighter, then so does your family, because it's demanding, and we are proud of it."

Added Dyer, "Firefighters sacrifice. You sacrifice your time, you sacrifice your health



Union County Fire Chief David Dyer with 2019 Firefighter of the Year Eric McClure at the Fire Department's annual awards on Aug. 3. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

sometimes, you sacrifice that birthday party you didn't get to stay at, and a lot of things."

Following the remarks by Dyer, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris offered a few words of his own on what

the Fire Department means to Union County.

"From the time I became commissioner and had my first interaction with firefighters, I couldn't believe, No. 1, how

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School employees receive pep talk before classes begin on Aug. 7



Chris Adams and Will Stafford of Union County Schools with Pioneer RESA's Brian Buffington at the Aug. 1 faculty and staff kickoff event at the Fine Arts Center. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
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In anticipation of students returning from summer vacation on Wednesday, Aug. 7, Union County Schools gave an Aug. 1 presentation to all faculty and staff explaining goals and expectations for the 2019-2020 year.

The presentation took place last Thursday in the Fine Arts Center and was preceded by a breakfast for the community, faculty and staff at the high school.

Bank OZK sponsored the breakfast, which was prepared by the Sawmill Restaurant.

"I just want to thank the Sawmill for doing this. They

were up early this morning working to set all of this up," said Jason Karnes, market president at Bank OZK. "I also appreciate my staff for helping with the breakfast. We appreciate this partnership."

"I've been doing this for 22 years now, and we've been doing this breakfast here for a long time, and we appreciate this partnership that we have with the schools."

During the after-breakfast presentation at the Fine Arts Center, Superintendent John Hill made sure to let every school employee know that they were important, no matter their job.

"We are a team, and if one team member doesn't pull their weight, the mission

doesn't get accomplished," Hill said.

One of the main missions of the school system is to provide "Success For All" by benefiting the children, the community and the schools themselves.

"Success for all," Hill said. "That's not success for the wealthy and affluent. That's not success for this group of people or that group of people. That's success for all of our children, all of our employees, and our community. This is a true partnership."

Hill said the system wants to work with parents and the community to make sure that children are prepared for employment after school.

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Young Harris man wanted for burglary in Blairsville arrested in Fannin

By Shawn Jarrard
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William "Rainbow" Jones, 61, of Young Harris, was taken into custody in Fannin County on Sunday, Aug. 4, after being on the run from law enforcement for a week.

As of press time Monday, Jones was being held without bond at the Union County Jail.

Jones became a fugitive from justice shortly after a couple discovered that their home had been burglarized recently, as right away, they suspected it was the hired help, said Lt. Daren Osborn of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The folks were in the process of moving out of state



William "Rainbow" Jones

and had paid Jones to clean up around the Pleasant Grove Road property, Osborn said.

"They said he just showed up one day and said, 'Hey, can I have some of this scrap out here?' He does a lot of scrap metal," Osborn said.

The couple left town

for a brief time prior to finally moving out, which is when Jones allegedly decided to make his move, Osborn said, with the burglary being discovered on Saturday, July 27.

"He knew they were going to be gone for a few days, and he basically came back and entered the house through the back window and took several items from inside the house," Osborn said.

The very next day, on Sunday, July 28, a Union County deputy spotted a vehicle on Murphy Highway matching the description of Jones' truck, Osborn said.

It was the same deputy who'd taken the report at the burgled residence the day before, and he also noticed several items in the back of the

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UCSO makes two marijuana grow busts two days apart last week

By Shawn Jarrard
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Narcotics Division deputies with the Union County Sheriff's Office made two separate marijuana grow busts last week, resulting in two arrests and cooperation with the Governor's Task Force on Drug Suppression.

Investigators arrested Donald Allen Kania, 61, of Blairsville, on Tuesday, July 30, following a three-week investigation that culminated in the seizure of 10 mature marijuana plants growing near his residence.

"After the seizure of



Donald Allen Kania

the marijuana plants, it led us back to a camper, which was his residence that search warrants were executed on," UCSO Lt. Tyler Miller said. "During the search warrant,



William Loren Campbell

harvested marijuana was also recovered."

Kania was arrested without incident and charged

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Heaton, Gowder facing Aug. 8 court proceeding; federal trial two months away

By Shawn Jarrard
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The separate legal teams for Dr. James Heaton and Mike Gowder are set to appear in a pretrial conference before U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story on Thursday, Aug. 8, in Gainesville.

As there are still a number of outstanding motions in the case, it's likely that Story will use the pretrial conference to settle various legal contentions brought by the attorneys for each defendant in anticipation of the Oct. 8, 2019, specially set jury trial.

The two men stand

accused of many criminal charges – 213 for Heaton and 150 for Gowder – involving alleged illegal prescription drug activity in at least three states, though both men have pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

Prior to their 2016 arrests and subsequent charges, Mike Gowder was the CEO of Union General Hospital and Dr. Heaton ran a family practice clinic in Blairsville.

Heaton also served as the director of the Union County Nursing Home and as a member of the hospital's Board of Directors, per court documents.

Last week, on July 29, both defendants once again petitioned the court to bar evidence introduced by federal prosecutors earlier this year, with Heaton's legal team filing a "renewed motion" to bar the evidence, while Gowder's attorney filed a motion to adopt the same.

Prosecutors introduced the evidence on March 25, just two weeks prior to the

then-trial date of April 8, immediately prompting the initial request by Heaton and Gowder's attorneys to bar the evidence that contained new allegations of past criminal activity.

At the time, the legal teams for the accused argued that "virtually all of the evidence relates to crimes or acts of professional misconduct that are outside the scope of the charged offenses in the indictment," and should therefore be considered inadmissible in court.

Both defense teams also took issue with the prosecution's attempt to introduce the evidence so close to the previously established April trial date, saying they didn't have enough time to prepare defenses to the new allegations.

Prosecutors, however, argued that the newly introduced evidence should be allowed in court because much of it was "intrinsically intertwined with the conduct charged," such

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