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nine counties are included in the region.

Solaguren said the Aug. 29 exercises simulated a severe weather event, but that each individual facility could add to the scenario if they so decided.

UGH chose to add a simulated decontamination event, where several victims needed decontamination from a chemical spill.

Ham radio, also known as amateur radio, was used because this simulation included loss of power and internet, cell and landline phone services.

With the advent of more advanced communication technologies like computers, cellphones and satellites, ham

radio is largely considered obsolete by today's standards, regarded by many as mainly a hobby for "old guys."

But ham radio is more than just a hobby.

What many fail to realize is that fire and police services use ham radio, as do aircraft and watercraft, though the frequencies they operate on are not "ham" bands; they are public service, aircraft and marine bands set aside for specific use.

In an emergency involving severe weather, a cyberattack or some other kind of crisis that renders computers, cellphones and possibly even satellite communications inoperable, amateur radio

would be the only reliable form of communication available.

Amateur radio is not dependent on the internet, satellites or phone services, and amateur radio has come a long way over the years, now able to integrate with the internet via computers.

"About a year ago, we started an initiative and got a grant from the State of Georgia to install a (ham radio) base station here and one at Chatuge," said Dan Wickersham, a retired engineer who is also with hospital security. "We're now part of the Georgia Hospital Association network."

With that grant, radio systems covering the full spectrum of ham radio frequencies plus fire and police frequencies were installed, complete with radio antenna masts on their roofs.

These systems were installed and operated on a volunteer basis with the help of local amateur radio clubs, including the North Georgia Tri-State Amateur Radio Club in Blairsville and the Mountain Amateur Radio Club in Hiawassee.

Both Union General and Chatuge Regional spared no expense in the installation of their new ham radio systems, especially the antennas, which

were professionally installed atop each hospital's high-performance roof.

"We have lightning arrestors on every one of those cables between the antenna and where the cable goes down inside the building," said Paul Colombo, a licensed ham operator in Blairsville. "And then, the pedestal base is attached to the building structure, which goes into the ground, so everything is very well-grounded, which is what we want for anything up here on the roof."

Don Fronek, who is also with the radio club in Blairsville and holds a doctorate in electrical engineering, headed up the ham radio base station team for the exercise at Union General Hospital.

Bob Wilton, president of the radio club in Hiawassee, headed up the ham radio base station team for the exercise at Chatuge Regional Hospital.



Dan Wickersham with Union General Hospital Security. Photo by Mark Smith

Council...from Page 1A

"I'm still having the same problem every weekend with folks 70, 80 years old trying to go into my downstairs level with no handicap parking," said Collins. "You can't roll a wheelchair across that rock, you can't walk across with a walker on that rock."

"And I hear from them every single weekend, I've got no handicap spaces back there for my business that's on the lower floor."

A finished parking area must wait for construction to be completed on the proposed retail/housing structure on the Haralson parcel opposite Foodland Grocery, otherwise, the parking lot would be ruined during the construction process.

Collins said he'd heard that it might be as many as nine months before construction of the building on that parcel would begin, and Conley assured him that he would ask the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority to firm up the construction schedule.

In a subsequent interview on Sept. 7, Conley told the North

Georgia News that the city had arrived at a temporary fix for Collins' parking problem, and details will be forthcoming.

In other news, the council voted unanimously to proceed with the annexation of the Union County High School property, which also includes the Department of Driver Services area and the Union County Health Department building and parking lot.

City Attorney David Barrett said that he had spoken with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, and that Paris had issued no objections to the annexation. The council voted unanimously to proceed with the annexation.

Regarding the intersection of Pat Haralson Drive and Bob Head Street/Young Harris Street, Conley said he had received an email from Jonathan Peevy of the Georgia Department of Transportation.

In light of the fact that GDOT has no jurisdiction over that intersection, Peevy recommended that an

engineering study be sought by the city. Councilman Buddy Moore directed the mayor to investigate what such a study would cost.

Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter commented in the meeting that his department had been busy with all the festivals and Labor Day weekend. He also said the "Taste of the Mountains in Blairsville" event was very well managed.

Conley commented that the "Taste" event was a great success, having raised about \$14,000 for scholarships for students of North Georgia Technical College.

Assistant Airport Manager Aaron Mannheim brought a folded and framed American flag from A Company 1-151 Airborne that was donated by Joel Gooch as a gift of appreciation to the Blairsville Municipal Airport.

The council approved hiring Joshua Bergen as a part-time Blairsville Police officer at the rate of \$15 per hour.

Additional speed breakers for Jackson Street and Jones Street were unanimously approved.

Alcohol...from Page 1A

a worker and resident of the store, approached the woman in a sexual manner, according to the Sheriff's Office.

He allegedly reached under her clothing and propositioned her for sex, causing the woman to quickly leave the store, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The woman, who does not live locally, reported the incident several days later, at which point detectives began their investigation, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Investigators initiated contact with Tirmizi by setting up an alcohol sting on Monday, Sept. 3, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Tirmizi failed the sting, and the subsequent investigation led to him being positively identified as the man who had assaulted the woman on Aug. 22, according to the Sheriff's Office.

He was arrested and charged with sexual battery, according to the Sheriff's Office.

All clerks/cashiers who failed alcohol stings last week have been charged with selling alcohol to a minor, and they were issued citations at their stores, according to the Sheriff's Office.

These individuals will lose their alcohol selling

permits and must pay a fine or make an appearance in Union County Magistrate Court, according to Robert Head III, who is the Alcohol Code Enforcement Officer in Union County.

The alcohol licenses for the above locations were suspended upon infraction, and the license holders will receive an initial hearing by the Union County Alcohol Board, followed by an official hearing to determine the fate of their alcohol licenses, according

to Head.

"This is unprecedented," said Head. "I've been doing this for eight years, and up until (last week), we've probably had it happen three times."

Of course, there's an easy way to stay out of trouble when it comes to alcohol sales in both retail and restaurant settings, according to the Sheriff's Office.

"Check IDs, because it is against the law to sell to anyone under 21 years of age, and we are going to randomly check these businesses," said UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn.

Marshall...

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car had wrecked, a one-vehicle accident," said UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn.

Firefighters quickly extinguished the car fire and subsequently discovered Marshall inside the vehicle, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Authorities believe Marshall was driving about 70 mph in the westbound lane of Nottely Dam Road – a 45 mph zone – when she came upon the curve just before Boy Scout Road, according to the Sheriff's Office.

As she attempted to negotiate the curve, authorities believe her vehicle left the road and traveled more than 360 feet before crashing into a row of trees and catching fire, according to the Sheriff's Office.

"It's a sad situation, and we'll be praying for the family," said Lt. Osborn.

Marshall's accident is one of many that has occurred in recent weeks, and Lt. Osborn asks that people slow down and pay more attention on the roadways.