

North Georgia News

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County ensures students 'Never Forget' 9/11

By Shawn Jarrard
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Most of the attendees of the 9/11 Remembrance Ceremony at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center Monday were not yet born when 2,977 people were murdered on Sept. 11, 2001, by radical Islamic terrorists linked to al-Qaida.

That's why it was so important for county leaders to make sure that the students in the school system learn the history of that day in a special commemoration of the 22nd anniversary of the attacks on Monday, Sept. 11, 2023.

Organized by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and hosted by Union County Schools, the assembly featured attendance by all High School students and was livestreamed online and in classrooms at Woody Gap, the Middle School and Elementary School.

The ceremony has historically been held at Meeks Park, but Chamber President Steve Rowe said that they wanted to get the students more involved starting in 2023 to help preserve the legacy of that fateful day.

Students played important roles this year, with Future Farmers of America members welcoming people into the building, the Civil Air Patrol 152nd North Georgia Composite Squadron posting and retiring the colors, and the Symphonic Band performing the National Anthem.

As people made their way into the building, the school media team played an emotional slideshow showcasing images from September 11 – the planes flying into the Twin Towers, the smoke on the skyline, the terrible destruction of that day, and the heroism of first responders.

Union County Fire Chief David Dyer delivered the keynote remarks, walking students through the horrific tragedy as it unfolded 22 years ago that morning and inviting them to "remember and acknowledge the events of Sept. 11, 2001."

He recounted the plight of the people trapped in the buildings and the deaths of 343 firefighters as they attempted rescue, each one knowing that the call they answered that morning might be their last; true heroes, those firefighters

responded anyway.

Further, Dyer noted the attack on the Pentagon as terrorists flew an airplane into yet another American building hundreds of miles away; and the boundless courage of patriots who fought back on United Airlines Flight 93, causing the plane to crash into the ground to save others.

"September 11th will forever be known as a day of devastation and of great loss," Dyer said. "But it will also be known as a day of heroism, a day of unification, and a day of American patriotism."

Expanding on this theme, Dyer spoke of the wider realization by many that day as the second plane flew into the South Tower of the World Trade Center: this was no accident isolated to the New York City skyline – America itself was under attack.

"It's truly difficult to convey the impact and feelings of September 11th," Dyer said. "As Americans, we were confused, we were scared, we were angry, and frankly, we were numb; no one had ever seen anything like this before. The uncertainty of what was going to happen next was palpable."



Members of the Civil Air Patrol 152nd North Georgia Composite Squadron posted and retired the colors at the patriotic 9/11 remembrance inside the Fine Arts Center Monday as first responders and the school district looked on. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Despite this, Americans came together during a truly transformational time: "No matter what race, color, creed, gender, North, South, East or West – no matter where you called home, you were an American. There was no division."

"September 11th

changed the world – the world that you inherited, the world that you live in today," Dyer said to the students. "There were changes to air travel, there was the Patriot Act, the creation of Homeland Security, and many other changes in our government with a sole purpose of preventing such acts from

ever happening to our country again.

"The War on Terror began, sending our military all over the world to bring those responsible to justice and to keep us safe. Our military continues to do that today."

Dyer said it was *See 9/11 Legacy, Page 6A*

Allegheny Lodge thanks first responders with breakfast



Allegheny Masonic Lodge members Johnie M. Garmon and Kerry Rittenhouse with Blairsville Police Officers Seth Dyer and Chris Jackson at the first responder breakfast last week. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Allegheny Lodge #114 F&AM in Downtown Blairsville welcomed first responders of Union County to an appreciation breakfast on Friday, Sept. 8.

The local Masonic Lodge

hosted the free breakfast to honor the men and women heroically serving their community each day, such as firefighters, EMTs, law enforcement, and others who were incredibly grateful in return for the Masons' gratitude.

Allegheny Lodge Worshipful Master Kerry

Rittenhouse shared that it was the seventh annual appreciation breakfast – a yearly tradition to thank those society could not function without.

"For many of them it's a dangerous job, and we all know that they don't get paid as much as they should,"

See Appreciation, Page 6A

Paris adopts rollback millage; county tax rate down 16%

By Shawn Jarrard
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In a called meeting at the Union County Courthouse on Thursday, Sept. 7, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris accepted the rollback millage rate of 4.286 for the county's portion of 2023 property taxes.

This contrasted with the Union County Board of Education, which last month accepted a partial rollback rate resulting in a 9.89% tax increase for the school portion of property taxes to help the school system meet budgetary challenges like \$2.4 million in state funding cuts.

Every year, a rollback rate for each tax-levying authority is calculated to

offset annual changes in the property tax digest that stem from reassessments reflecting recent fair market values.

Since 2020, the gross digest has roughly doubled in value, with state-mandated property reassessments between 2021 and 2023 adding up to a 78% increase from inflation in the real estate market driven by pandemic-era relocations to the area.

But the inflationary increases in the digest have resulted in smaller tax rates in recent years, with both taxing authorities decreasing their millage rates in 2023, so in the view of officials, property tax rates are headed in the right direction.

The combined school



Lamar Paris
Sole Commissioner

and county millage rate is now 11.809 mills, down from the *See County Tax Rate, Page 2A*

Mistaken identity leads to local woman's wrongful arrest



By Shawn Jarrard
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A case of mistaken identity resulted in a local woman being wrongfully booked into the Union County Jail last month.

The arrest came after

an apparent clerical error by an out-of-town law enforcement agency, and the Union County Sheriff's Office immediately released the woman once investigators verified the mistake, UCSO Capt. Daren "Bear" Osborn said, confirming the incident.

But for Heather Nicole Cooper, the woman who was arrested, the ordeal has led to embarrassment in her hometown of Blairsville and in the Alabama community where the incorrect warrant for her arrest originated.

Cooper's name appeared in the arrest report of the Aug. 30 edition of The North Georgia News, with charges listed as pending, and she said

her mugshot was posted by an online news outlet.

For certain, there are no charges pending against Cooper, and she is hoping to clear her name and any misconceptions about her wrongful arrest.

Furthermore, Capt. Osborn said that the Sheriff's Office has already removed all records related to the incident from its system: "She will not have an arrest history with us for this."

The arrest occurred Aug. 25 after the Sheriff's Office was dispatched to a civil matter where Cooper lives. As it turned out, law enforcement was not needed *See Wrongful Arrest, Page 2A*

Veterans Park Committee displays military memorabilia



Families – and especially kids – enjoyed checking out all the cool military vehicles displayed at the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park fundraiser at the Farmers Market Saturday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park Committee held a public fundraiser at the Union

County Farmers Market on Saturday, Sept. 9, resulting in a tremendous patriotic spectacle for market patrons.

Committee members and local veterans service organizations displayed a

variety of military vehicles from various branches of service, including a Vietnam-era helicopter, a 2.5-ton M35 6x6 cargo truck, a commercial utility cargo vehicle, a World *See Veterans Park, Page 3A*

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@ West Hall

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Music Festival @ Vogel Sept. 16 *See page 6D*

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County Tax Rate...from Page 1A

2022 rate of 13.313. That's a 1.504 mill decrease from last year, meaning Union County will continue to have one of the lowest property tax rates in the state.

And Tax Commissioner Lee Knight said that the millage rate is the lowest it has been since 1980, and considerably lower than the early 1970s, when Union Countians were dealing with rates north of 20 mills.

For county taxes, most people will not see an increase due to the full rollback being accepted, and many taxpayers will receive a smaller tax bill than last year despite the school's increase because of the one-time Homestead Property Tax Relief Grant established by Gov. Brian Kemp.

Of course, the countywide digest of property values has experienced actual growth as well with the building of new homes and additions to existing properties, so the net tax revenues to the county, even with the rollback offsetting inflationary growth, will be up 4.23% for 2023.

Additionally, Paris explained that the county millage rate has benefited from a decrease of 3.161 mills due to the longstanding 1%

Local Option Sales Tax, the revenues of which subtract each year from the burden borne by property taxpayers to fund county maintenance and operations.

"That money is used to help roll back the taxes," Paris said of LOST. "(The 2023 rate) is a decrease from last year's millage rate. Last year, it was 5.113; this year, it's going to be 4.286, and that's about a 16% decrease from last year."

Four members of the public attended Paris' Sept. 7 meeting to set the millage rate, plus multiple county employees, including representatives from the Tax Commissioner's Office to field questions about the digest.

Only one person had comments to share at the end of the meeting, a resident named Jennifer who moved here several years ago from Connecticut, where property taxes are considerably higher.

"Commissioner Paris, I feel you can do better," Jennifer said. "I feel the county can do better. I believe it can tighten its belt. I understand things are getting more expensive and it's tough - income is not increasing much."

"The taxes, I'm glad you held the line where you did, but I still feel the county, the school system, the street department - the entire county government can do better."

"I am continuing to form an opinion. I've only lived down here eight years; I moved down here from Connecticut, which has truly become a socialist state. And I do not want Georgia and Union County to become a socialist state. Thank you."

To that last comment, Paris replied, "Thank you, and nor do we."

"We are going to have to really cut everywhere we can to keep within the budget this year," Paris said. "I told (my staff) we were not going to raise taxes this year; even though we had the property (value) increase, we're not going to raise taxes, and that's the purpose to try to keep that millage rate (down)."

"Now, having said that, we're not sure because all the numbers from all the counties are not in, but we feel like we've got the third or fourth lowest millage rate in the entire state of Georgia out of 159 counties."

Added Paris, "We will probably be the second lowest in the state of Georgia when

you combine the school and the county together, because their rate is significantly lower than most schools, and our rate is certainly lower than most."

"The only way we've gotten that and the only way we've been able to keep that is to work very hard, having a great Fire Department, police, sheriff, (Recreation Department) - everybody works together to try to keep their budget as low as possible."

"At the same time, we're going to make improvements that we feel are needed in the county. For example, the new Fire Station (No. 13 off Murphy Highway) ... we look at that as having a quicker way to get to somebody that's dying or in an emergency (in that end of the county)."

Paris said that everyone working together to make Union "one of the best counties" has come with a small downside of inspiring more people to move here who have ideas that aren't always welcomed by longtime residents.

As to next steps for property taxes, Tax Commissioner Knight said that, with the county and school millage rates adopted, he expects to receive approval from the Georgia Department of Revenue by the end of this week to go ahead and collect property taxes for 2023.

Knight will then contact his billing vendor so that property tax bills will start being mailed at the end of September or the first week in October. People will have through Dec. 20 to get those bills paid, either in person at the courthouse, via mail or online at uniongatax.com.

"I appreciate the cooperation of the school and the county and the Tax Assessor, all of us working to get this done," Knight said. "It's a big job, and it's not an easy job."

The City of Blairsville was expected to accept its 2023 rollback millage rate in a meeting that occurred after press time on Tuesday, Sept. 12. In addition to county and school taxes, Blairsville property taxes will need to be paid by people who own property within city limits.

In other county news, on Friday, Sept. 8, Paris held another called meeting to enact an "Emergency Moratorium on the construction of commercial firing range facilities."

Set for 120 days in length effective that evening,

the moratorium comes after multiple residents approached the Commissioner's Office with concerns about the potential safety risks posed by the rumored development of a commercial range on the side of a local highway.

After looking into the matter, the county was unable to find any permits or records related to a proposed commercial range, and the newspaper is unaware of any commercial ranges located in Union County.

In the course of its research, however, the Commissioner's Office discovered there were steps it could take to impose guidelines on future development of commercial ranges, so Deputy County Attorney William Mercer will be working to draft an ordinance during the moratorium.

"The county has found that there is a need to address and create standards relating to the construction and locations of commercial firing range facilities," Mercer read from the moratorium resolution Friday.

Per Mercer, the proposed ordinance will not impact the Second Amendment rights of residents to shoot safely on their own properties but will allow the county to control the operation times and other considerations pertaining to safety for commercial firing ranges should any be developed.

"There is no law - federal or state or county - that you could make to stop a private individual from shooting (safely) on their property," Mercer said. "What you can do is have a commercial firing range ordinance, and this is what this would be."

Added Mercer, "If you're charging to have people shoot at your facility, you're going to be commercial ... This does not affect any private gun right."

The public firing range that is being constructed on U.S. Forest Service land along Georgia 180 is not a commercial firing range, so it will not be subject to the proposed ordinance.

"One of the main reasons for (building our new public gun range) is so people would have a safe place to go so ... they don't bother their neighbors," Paris said. "That was our whole goal in setting up this gun range out on Highway 180 that we hope will be completed in the next three to five months."

Commissioner Paris anticipates a commercial firing range ordinance will be ready quickly, potentially in the next month or so.

Wrongful Arrest...from Page 1A

in the situation, but in the course of responding, a deputy asked those involved for their driver's licenses and other information.

Cooper's driver's license number and date of birth matched an arrest warrant issued out of Henry County, Alabama, for failure to appear in a forgery case. But the first and middle name differed from those on the warrant, as did the Social Security Number, prompting an investigation.

In the meantime, the deputy took Cooper into custody and transported her for booking into the Union County Jail, where she was fingerprinted and made to take a mugshot, Osborn said.

Her fingerprints were used to verify that she did not have an arrest history for forgery, and the arresting deputy reached out to Henry

County law enforcement to supply a photo of the woman tied to the forgery case. The photo was of a different person, Osborn said.

It was at this point that the Sheriff's Office released Cooper and transported her back to her residence on the same day as the arrest.

"They picked me up until they could prove it wasn't me, but then they have my name blasted in the paper under pending charges when I wasn't even charged and shouldn't have been arrested," Cooper told the newspaper last week.

Capt. Osborn remains unsure how Cooper's information got mixed up with another woman's from out of state, and he noted that Cooper should not have appeared in the arrest report given the result of the investigation.

He said the Sheriff's

Office was sorry that the incident took place but contended that the mistake was an honest one born out of attempts by deputies to fulfill their law enforcement duties.

"When we run a driver's license out on the side of the road and it comes back with a warrant, we have to follow through and do our job," Osborn said. "And after we got to the jail and did our investigation, we clarified that it was not the person that we had a warrant on."

"Sometimes, you can't complete an investigation on the side of the road; you have to come to the office and do your work. With the way people steal identities nowadays, we have to follow up with an investigation, and that's what our deputies did. Once we discovered that it wasn't the person, she was released."

Kiwanis Hosts Planetarium Series at Rollins Planetarium

The Kiwanis Club of Blairsville has contracted with the O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium for five shows designed for Kindergarten through fourth grade students.

"The first show entitled 'Magic Treehouse: Space Mission' will be presented Saturday, September 23rd at 10 AM," explained Kiwanis Club President Allyson McGraw. "It's a story about a brother and sister that find a mysterious list of questions in their tree house. With the help of an astronomer, the Internet, an astronaut, books and the writer of the mysterious note, they are taken on a wondrous journey to the planets and far out into the Universe."

The Rollins Planetarium is located in the Maxwell Center of Young Harris College. It first opened in 1979 and has upgraded projection technology several times over the years resulting in their latest version, a Sky-Skan Definiti full-dome digital projector.

"The 40-foot diameter dome creates a gorgeous display," said Allyson. "It's such a joy to hear the children's Oohhs and Aahhs rolling throughout the auditorium. Rollins Planetarium is truly a wonderful and entertaining experience, for both children and adults."

Kiwanis has also contracted for two Halloween shows in October and two Christmas shows in December. Seating for all shows is limited to 100 attendees, so advanced reservations are required.

"Because we want as many chil-



dren to enjoy the shows as possible, admission is free to those under twelve," said Allyson. "We do ask for door donations from adults; whatever they can afford is fine. Reservations for our September 23rd show are now available on our website: www.BlairsvilleKiwanis.club."

The Kiwanis Club of Blairsville is a charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of Union County children and young adults. Net proceeds from all their fundraisers go towards that objective.

Canadian man succumbs to injuries after motorcycle crash

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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SUCHES – A Canadian man driving through the area last week died after crashing his motorcycle on Georgia 60 about a quarter mile from Woody Gap School on Monday, Sept. 4.

At 11:39 a.m. that day, Georgia State Patrol was dispatched to a single-vehicle crash on Highway 60 and Woodside Lane. The driver was Dominic Lemire, 46, of Saint-Sauveur, Quebec, Canada.

“A motorcycle was traveling south on State Route

60,” according to GSP. “The driver failed to negotiate a curve and traveled off the roadway to the right. The motorcycle traveled across Woodside Lane and struck a utility pole, coming to an uncontrolled rest.

“The motorcyclist was flown to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville and was pronounced deceased by hospital staff.”

It was the second fatal motorcycle accident in Union County in two days following the Sept. 2 crash of Blairsville resident Jon McGill on Jones Creek Road.



Dominic Lemire

Veterans Park Fundraiser ...from Page 1A



This Vietnam-era chopper offered terrific photo opportunities for patriotic families visiting the Farmers Market over the weekend.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

War II motorcycle, and others.

Also featured for the public's perusal were many pieces of military memorabilia and artifacts submitted by local veterans group members, with proceeds from donations garnered at the event going toward the construction of the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park inside Meeks Park.

Committee members came out early and set up right beside the bridge, only to become another facet to the bustle of a busy Saturday morning at the Farmers Market.

Past Commander and Secretary of Island X-3 of the Georgia Navy Seabee Veterans Ed Crenshaw said his original idea was to hold the outing at the site of the planned monument, located at the upper ballfield at Meeks Park, but it wouldn't be a very popular site.

At least at the Farmers Market, there was no shortage of visitors, which helped the cause greatly. And nothing the committee did on Saturday required payment; folks were free to wander over and donate as they felt led to.

“Oh, it's been great. Everybody seems to enjoy it, and for the first go around, I'm very pleased with it,” Crenshaw said. “The primary thing for it was a fundraiser for the park. It's not for the individual groups.”

Those groups included the American Legion Auxiliary, Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783, Seabee Veterans Support Alliance and more, including national groups and even non-veteran associations alongside passionate individuals invested in the cause.

And there was a lot to see, what with Committee Member Rob Mawyer demonstrating his singing skills for tips;

Chaplain Richard Hoibraten standing at the front table and offering information on the park project; the American Legion Auxiliary handing out cookies; all the military vehicles to tour and more.

Donation jars were set up around the booths of multiple organizations, such as the Disabled American Veterans. It was there that retired Coast Guard Cmdr. Efren Lopez, George Fischbach and Cmdr. Bruce Anrig sought to give back to some of the veterans helping fund the park.

“Sometimes it's hard – you know, older guys who have been in the service for so many years, it's hard to admit we have issues and injuries and all that because we're just stubborn old guys,” Lopez said. “We'll spend whatever amount of time and do this stuff (to help other veterans).”

Over the course of at least 90 years, more than a million veterans have joined DAV as members and volunteers. According to information being handed out to interested parties, the organization helps veterans return to civilian life, provides free assistance in obtaining government benefits, funds rehabilitation programs and more.

Lopez said there was already a growing amount of interest in the DAV, and several people had signed up that morning to accept help – mostly seeking aid to begin or complete their application process for VA benefits.

“We don't charge anything,” Lopez stated of the DAV. “Everything is free. We volunteer all our time to do this, so it's not like these attorneys and some of these other services that want to charge you thousands upon thousands of dollars.”

Over at the repainted Bell OH-58 Kiowa scout helicopter built in 1970, Rod MacIntyre

explained, “We bought this about two years ago; it was just completely stripped out, there was nothing in it.”

The Vietnam-era chopper never saw combat but still had plenty of miles on it when it was purchased as military surplus.

“It was used here in the United States mostly,” MacIntyre said. “The Army sent it down to Columbia, and the Columbian Army flew it in drug intervention. And that's why it's all painted white, because if they got shot down in the jungle, they could find the wreckage being a white helicopter.”

Now, the airborne vehicle fulfills a new purpose. With kids of all ages clambering up the side and into the cockpit and back seats, the helicopter served as an educational tool Saturday, giving the younger generation a chance to learn about aviation and, more importantly, history.

“Kids don't know anything about Vietnam or anything like that,” MacIntyre said, growing soft watching the little ones pose with their parents for photos. “It's so much fun to see them look at it; they love it.”

County Manager Larry Garrett has already asked the committee to return to the Farmers Market, and while Crenshaw isn't sure they can fulfill the request to set up at season's end next month, he hopes to at least make the fundraiser an annual meeting.

Until then, the committee continues to raise awareness for its cause, and various organizations continue to support veterans on both a local and national level.

People wanting to help fund the park, or those wishing to learn more information and obtain architectural drawings, may visit <http://theveteranspark.org>.

From the home page, there will be an option to purchase raffle tickets either \$10 individually or \$40 for five for a chance to win a professional cornhole set decorated with all branches of the military plus a handy, sturdy carrying case.

The stated purpose of the park is “to remember those who are serving or have served our nation's military.” The tentative opening is May 2024, so keep an eye out for construction and further news.

Appreciation...from Page 1A

Rittenhouse said. "They're often taken for granted, so this is an opportunity for us to let them know that we appreciate them."

Several attending officers shared their love for the camaraderie exhibited between the community and law enforcement in Blairsville – something from which not all towns benefit.

"In a lot of communities, law enforcement is not supported, so we're very fortunate to have the working relationship we have with organizations like this and to have the public backing that we do," said Union County Sheriff's Capt. Craig Davenport.

On top of expressing gratitude, the breakfast gives community members an opportunity to get to know their first responders face to face, helping further the bond between the two groups.

"It's great to connect the officers with the public," UCSCO Deputy Ricky Wilcox said. "There are many members of the public that never have an

opportunity to meet a police officer except on bad terms, so it's great for us to meet the public and let them find out that we're just like they are."

The breakfast, as well as the lodge's other charitable endeavors, is paid for each year by fundraisers such as the annual charity golf tournament, coming up in 2023 on Sept. 23.

Rittenhouse touched on the misconceived mystery surrounding Masonry and explained the lodge as a fraternity for good men who want to become even better men through philanthropy. For example, the organization raises money throughout the year to fund various charitable efforts.

"Freemasonry has given me an opportunity to touch a lot of good folks, to help influence a lot of good things, and to help create a better world," said Wade Smith, a Blairsville local who has had a hand in Masonry for many years.

And though the lodge already has a vast list of charitable missions lined up,



Firefighters lining up for some delicious hot breakfast in the First Responder and Law Enforcement Appreciation Breakfast by Allegheny Lodge #114 on Friday.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

the Masons are more than willing to support other civic groups in need.

"All they have to do is

petition the lodge and write a letter asking for our support," Rittenhouse said.

The historic humanitarian organization continues to grow, with 29,000 Masons and 390 lodges in Georgia. To

anyone interested in joining, Rittenhouse employs the phrase "to be one, ask one," suggesting that any Mason will be glad to help people through the initiation process.

"It's a fraternity not a

sorority," added former Grand Master Johnie Garmon, who explained that the group is only open to men. While there are masonic activities for women, this community does not have any local chapters.

9/11 Legacy...from Page 1A

incumbent upon those who witnessed and lived through the attacks to "keep our promise that we made that day ... to never forget," before issuing a multi-part challenge to the assembled students.

"But what about you?" he said. "The post-9/11 generation, how does this apply to you? What is your role now?"

"First, you must learn. You must know and understand what happened. You must know how they attacked, and you must know who did it. You must know the events of that day, both good and bad.

"Second, you must remember. You are responsible for maintaining the memory of 9/11, not just to honor the dead, but to preserve the character, integrity and bravery displayed by all the heroes of that day. Their actions are timeless examples of the American spirit and what it is to be an American.

"Third, you must teach. You are responsible for teaching the next generations about September 11th and the impacts of that day. Teach them what happened. Teach them about the lives that were lost, the bravery and the sacrifices of the heroes who did all they could to save lives that day.

"Teach the next generation about the bravery and the sacrifices demonstrated by our military and many other Americans in the days that followed.

"But the most important responsibility that you have – the most important – is to make a promise today. You must make the same promise that we made to the dead, to the families and to our nation that you promise that you will Never Forget September 11th, 2001.

"Thank you for being here, thank you for remembering. God bless you, and God Bless America."

Also in the ceremony, UCHS senior and FFA Secretary Haley Baxter read a proclamation by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris declaring Sept. 11, 2023, as Patriot Day in Union County. Baxter is the daughter of local first responders, Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter and E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter.

For his part, Paris remarked on the somber purpose of the event as being "to honor and remember all those who died and suffered unimaginable pain, the loss of family, friends and colleagues."

"It is a reminder of how special and important our public safety officials in



Union County Fire Chief David Dyer issued an important challenge to the hundreds of young people in attendance for Monday's 9/11 ceremony on campus – "Never Forget."

Photo by Shawn Jarrard



At the 9/11 assembly, UCHS senior and FFA Secretary Haley Baxter read a special proclamation by Commissioner Lamar Paris designating the 22nd anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks as Patriot Day in Union County.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Union County and all over the United States of America are to our safety," Paris said, "and how our regular citizens also on that day performed heroically in many situations."

Added Paris, "We must never forget what happened on this fateful day, or it will happen again. We also should remember to be grateful for what we have, and always remember to honor God."

First Baptist Church Pastor Ricky Powell offered the invocation, thanking first responders who "rushed into danger" and praying that God make his presence "felt among us here as we remember, reflect and pay tribute."

"Grant us the strength to continue to stand together as a

community and as a nation," Powell said. "And may the unity we find in this moment remind us of the importance of love, compassion and service to one another."

At the end of the ceremony, UCHS Band Director Will Stafford and Theatre Director Chris Adams performed a moving rendition of "Amazing Grace," with Stafford on the saxophone and Adams playing the keyboard and providing vocals.

Civil Air Patrol Cadets closed things out with a retiring of the colors, at which point students filed out of the Fine Arts Center to resume their classes for the day, hopefully with a newfound resolve to "Never Forget."



First responders seated in the front row of the Fine Arts Center received special recognition in the 9/11 remembrance on Monday, Sept. 11.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard