

North Georgia News

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Americans unite to remember 9/11 victims, heroes in Meeks Park

By Shawn Jarrard
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A somber fog settled over Blairsville Friday morning as nearly 100 patriots gathered at Hamby Baseball Field in Meeks Park to commemorate the 19th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

The fog – reminiscent of the smoke that filled the New York City skyline that day, and soon after the dust and debris of collapsed buildings – acted as a fitting backdrop for the Patriot Day observance, with residents and first responders alike in attendance.

Event organizers hoisted two American flags for the occasion, one at half-staff from the ballfield platform in recognition of the 2,977 innocent lives lost 19 years ago, and another from Union County Fire Department Ladder 1 in honor of the 343 firemen who perished in the line of duty on 9/11.

Among the residents attending the memorial event were Chris Coté and his 1-year-old son Carson. The father

and son duo proudly wore Old Glory's colors Friday, and Chris hoisted his boy atop his shoulders so he could get a better view of the ceremony.

The Cotés were new in town, having moved to Blairsville earlier this year, and Chris said they are happy to be living in a community where they can raise their boy among likeminded individuals who take to heart the promise that America will "Never Forget."

"I want my son to learn about our history and be well aware of the things that have happened that have made us who we are," Coté said. "It all comes back to unity."

"9/11 was such a day that unified this nation into one, and it seemed like all the nonsense that divides us has gone, for a couple years, probably. It hurts me to see how divided we are now over nonsense."

"A lot of people have forgotten how great it is to be in this country, to live here and enjoy the freedoms that we have, because it doesn't happen anywhere else like it does here."

Added Coté, "I don't want

us to forget, and I just wanted to be a part of this (event today) – I think it's something special. We just moved here six months ago from south Florida, and it seems like they forgot."

"And to be in a community that remembers and doesn't forget is the place that I want to be. It's a special place to be."

The remembrance ceremony was cosponsored by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, Union County Government and Union County Fire Department, with several guests speaking to the socially distanced, mostly masked crowd.

Chamber President Steve Rowe welcomed people to the event, advising those gathered to "always remember our history" in order to avoid repeating it.

Pastor Derrick Hartley of First Baptist Church Blairsville offered the opening prayer, thanking God for those first responders "who so selflessly ran toward the chaos" 19 years ago, while asking that America always be a country "that never forgets" and stands

up to tyranny.

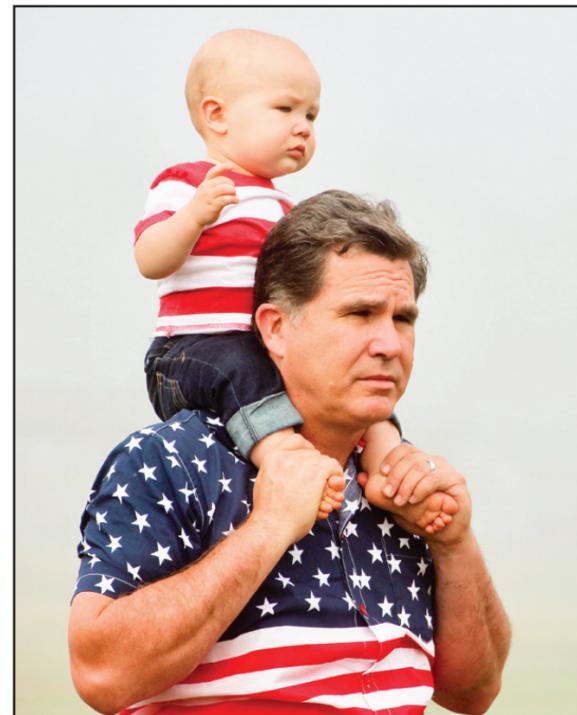
For his part, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris noted how proud he was to be able to share "just a few words today to Sept. 11, 2001, and all who gave that day."

"Also, even though we are here to honor first responders, once an event like 9/11 occurs, there are many people who play a role in our foreign countries, most notably our military heroes," Paris said. "But in the backup of these guys, there are many other civilians serving."

At this point, Paris acknowledged a longtime friend who was in attendance, a man named Mike Stewart who recently became a part-time Union County resident.

Stewart and Paris got to know each other via the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, though Stewart resigned in 2008 "to volunteer for the civilian 'surge' in Iraq to help rebuild the local government structure in Iraq."

From there, he served two years with the U.S. Department See 9/11 Remembrance, Page 6A



Blairsville resident Chris Coté and his 1-year-old son Carson attended the Patriot Day observance on Friday, Sept. 11, in Meeks Park. Coté said it's important that his son learns exactly what happened that fateful day in 2001. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Nursing home outbreak continues; Chatuge Regional sees new cases



By Shawn Jarrard
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Nine residents have died in connection with the COVID-19 outbreak at Union County Nursing Home, with 44 new positive cases being reported there in the last two weeks, according to the latest data from the Department of Community Health.

And positive case numbers have increased at Chatuge Regional Nursing

Home in Towns County over the past two weeks, going from two past positive residents to 12, and from one past positive employee to nine.

Out of these positive resident cases in Towns, seven were initially hospitalized and six are now well enough to be back in the facility. So far, no COVID-related deaths have been reported at the nursing home in Hiwassee.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid

Services, an outbreak is defined as when "any new case arises in (a) facility," meaning Chatuge Regional is also dealing with an outbreak at this time.

Per CMS.gov, "For outbreak testing, all staff and residents should be tested, and all staff and residents that tested negative should be retested every 3-7 days until testing identifies no new cases of COVID-19 infection among staff or residents for a period of at least 14 days since the most recent positive result."

Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said the recently updated federal testing requirements are based on community prevalence, so the nursing homes are testing negative staff at least weekly and residents as any

See Nursing Home, Page 2A

Nurses Jackson, McCann come out of retirement to help schools



L-R: Army Nurses Vickie McCann and Letitia Jackson with School Head Nurse Leigh Ann Hartley. McCann and Jackson came out of retirement to lend their medical expertise to the schools amid COVID-19. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

As part of its extensive COVID-19 mitigation efforts for the 2020-21 school year, the Union County School District has brought in additional nurses and created a special COVID Team to monitor the virus in the schools for staff and student safety.

Two of these nurses,

Letitia Jackson and Vickie McCann, have dedicated their nursing careers to military and government work before coming out of retirement to serve their communities by lending a medical helping hand in the schools.

Jackson hails from a Navy family and works as a substitute nurse whenever she can, and she comes to the job with many years of experience.

"I was born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin, and my father was a Navy pilot in World War II," Jackson said. "I was brought up under that umbrella of loving the Navy and serving your country."

"So, I decided to go to nursing school, and one of my friends that I was in nursing school with wanted to join the Navy. Back then, both of you See Nurses, Page 2A

Allegheny Lodge shows appreciation with first responder breakfast



Allegheny Lodge No. 114 F&AM held its annual Big Breakfast to honor first responders in the county, holding the event at Meeks Park this year for social distancing. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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The freemasons of Allegheny Lodge No. 114 F&AM hosted their annual First Responder Breakfast on Friday, Sept. 11.

And despite the society-wide impacts of COVID-19 on gatherings, this year's outing at Meeks Park was one of the best.

Usually, the event takes place at lodge headquarters in Downtown Blairsville, but for 2020, longtime Allegheny Lodge member Johnie Garmon recommended that his fellow masons hold the breakfast at a pavilion in Meeks Park to

follow COVID best practices and stay safe.

As Grand Master of Masons in Georgia, Garmon is currently serving as the highest ranked mason in the state, and he was glad to lend a hand at the local level in serving the first responders of Union County Friday.

In recognition of those who lost their lives in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Garmon called for two moments of silence, one each for the precise times that civilian airliners loaded with people were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center.

Every first responder agency in the county got

the chance to partake in the breakfast, including members of the local Sheriff's Office, Jail, Corrections, Police Department, Fire Department, E-911 Dispatch, Emergency Medical Service and military.

"This is our way of showing first responders that, hey, we love you, and you're a part of our community," Garmon said, noting that many first responders are themselves masons.

All told, the volunteer brotherhood served up more than 50 meals, with over 40 first responders attending in person and several plates being delivered for folks who wanted See Appreciation Breakfast, Page 3A

Grubbs feeds firefighters, dispatchers; Netflix show debuts September 18

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

James "BBQ" Grubbs with Grub-ba-que Catering and Competition Team delivered barbecue platters to the members of the Union County

Fire Department on Saturday, Sept. 12.

All told, Grubbs fed about 70 firefighters at several of the stations and members of E-911 dispatch to show his appreciation for what they do – and Grubbs should know, since

he once served as a volunteer firefighter at Station 4.

"I just do this because this is my part in helping the community," Grubbs said. "I was a volunteer fireman years ago, and I just think in these See Grubbs, Page 2A



James "BBQ" Grubbs delivered meals to Union County firefighters Saturday. Here he is with volunteer firefighters at his own home station, Station 4. L-R: David Ueltzen, James Grubbs, John Dixon and David Przekop. Photo/Submitted

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