

# North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, September 27, 2023

## Paris talks new roundabout, campground expansion

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris covered a lot of ground in his Sept. 21 regular meeting, unveiling plans for a roundabout at the intersection of Glenn Gooch Bypass and Gainesville Highway and an expansion of Poteete Creek Campground.

Paris said construction of a roundabout will introduce much-needed safety and flow improvements at that busy intersection, which currently features a stop sign for motorists turning left and right from the bypass onto Gainesville Highway.

The commissioner accepted a \$12,500 agreement

with CHA Consulting to provide a "concept layout" for the intersection.

"GDOT has requested that Union County assist with getting this concept layout done and work with (them) on the funding that we hope they will provide back to us to maybe (recover) some of these funds," Paris said.

Added Paris, "This will allow work to get started quicker, because the intersection needs improving desperately. And the sooner it can be done, the sooner it will be a much better safety situation. GDOT will improve this intersection as soon as our plan is completed."

As an aside, he noted that the plans for the roundabout at

Deep South Farm Road and Pat Haralson Drive at Union General Hospital are "about completed," and the county is looking to "let a contract on that maybe in the next couple of weeks or a month at most."

Turning to Poteete Creek Campground, Paris accepted an agreement with Carter Engineering Consultants, not to exceed \$18,600, for the development of a "campground masterplan" to put in 100 additional sites, build a new boat ramp and potentially create a new beach area.

The Tennessee Valley Authority has provided extra property to expand the county-maintained campground, which stays booked during its April to October season. The

campground currently features 88 camping sites 13 miles north of Blairsville off Nottely Dam Road on Lake Nottely.

Also in the meeting, Paris held a first reading of an Alcohol Ordinance revision to allow for expanded New Year's Eve hours regarding the serving of alcohol by temporary special event license holders, barring laws governing Sunday serving restrictions.

Paris held a first reading of a proposed revision to the Code of Ordinances pertaining to locally regulated Tattoo and Body Piercing Establishments. The revision excludes from the definition of "tattoos" cosmetic procedures by health care professionals to enhance

See County Meeting, Page 2A



Lamar Paris  
Sole Commissioner

## First responders prepare for the worst with disaster tabletop exercise



Union County Schools Police Chief Chad Deyton running his team through last week's tabletop exercise about a school bus accident. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

A room full of behind-the-scenes saviors converged at Union County Fire Station No. 1 on Thursday, Sept. 21, to run through a tabletop exercise

in preparation for potential disasters.

Assembled for the high-stakes exercise were the Union County Emergency Management Agency, Fire Department, Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police, Union

General Hospital, Union County Schools, the 911 Center and Georgia Emergency Management, along with several other organizations and volunteers.

Helming the simulated emergency for the day was

Union County EMA Director, Fire Chief and 911 Director David Dyer, who led the fast-paced 45-minute exercise in which the first responder agencies strategized and worked together to navigate

See Tabletop Exercise, Page 2A

## Property owners to get tax break in city

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Blairsville City Council voted this month to lower the city's property tax rate below the rollback rate that must be calculated each year to offset inflationary increases in property values.

Originally, the 2023 millage rate was advertised at the rollback rate of 1.271, which, incidentally, matched the 2022 millage rate, meaning that property valuations inside city limits did not increase appreciably due to inflation in the real estate market.

Still, the proposed rollback was set to produce an additional \$10,042 in property taxes from slight growth in the city property digest over the last year, and Councilman Buddy Moore asked if the council could roll the millage back even more to produce a revenue neutral rate.

Following Moore's suggestion in the Sept. 12 regular meeting, with verbal



Robert "Buddy" Moore  
Blairsville City Council

agreement by Councilman Tony Dyer, the council unanimously voted to accept a millage rate of 1.17, effectively giving property owners inside city limits a minor tax break in 2023.

City property taxes are collected by Blairsville City See City Property Tax, Page 2A

## Sheriff's Office continues to make drug arrests, seizures

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Division concluded several investigations this month, including the previously reported Sept. 11 drug bust that resulted in the confiscation of more than half a dozen types of drugs.

In the pre-dawn hours of Wednesday, Sept. 13, the Sheriff's Office made two more arrests in a separate drug case, taking into custody the married couple William "Bill" Joseph Lueckert and Teresa Robin Lueckert.

Bill Lueckert, 46, has been charged with trafficking heroin laced with fentanyl, two counts of selling heroin laced with fentanyl, and failure to appear. Teresa Lueckert, 51, has been charged with trafficking and selling heroin laced with fentanyl.

Following a multi-month investigation involving heroin and fentanyl sales in the area, deputies served a search warrant around 2 a.m. that Wednesday at the Lueckerts' Voylestown Road residence in the north end of the county. There, they discovered



William Joseph Lueckert



Teresa Robin Lueckert



Blade Zee Szczepanski



Mark Anthony Roberson

heroin that field-tested positive for fentanyl. The estimated quantity was enough to justify trafficking charges, UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer said.

Union County investigators worked the case alongside the Cherokee County, North Carolina, See Drug Arrests, Page 3A

## Morlock makes hometown proud in FSU win at Clemson

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Sports Editor

CLEMSON, SC - Union County's Kyle Morlock and the fourth-ranked Florida State Seminoles notched their first win over Clemson since 2014 in front of a sold-out Memorial Stadium crowd, including nearly a dozen of Morlock's family and friends on Saturday, Sept. 23.

Following the Seminoles' 31-24 overtime victory, Morlock offered a few words for his fans in Blairsville, where the Garnet and Gold have seen a surge in popularity in recent months thanks to their hometown hero.

"The support from back home has been amazing," he told the North Georgia News during a postgame interview outside the Florida State locker room. "Everybody has shown me so much love with texts and on social media.

"It's been unreal. I'm extremely grateful to represent everyone back in Blairsville on such a big stage like this."

The junior tight end caught two passes for 18 yards in the win as the Seminoles rallied from early 10-0 and 17-7 deficits. Florida State



Blairsville's own Kyle Morlock, FSU No. 84, getting pumped for his appearance against Clemson on Saturday. Photo by Todd Forrest

never led until the second play of overtime, when Keon Coleman pulled down a 24-yard touchdown pass from Jordan Travis.

The Noles' defense sealed the victory moments later when they denied Cade

Klubnik's fourth-and-2 pass attempt, dealing Clemson its first ACC home loss in seven years.

Check out this week's North Georgia News Sports Section for more game coverage.

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**SOFTBALL**  
9/28 5:30 PM  
vs. Providence

**New Elections Board Education Committee** See page 3A  
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**UCHS Theatre Children's Show Sept. 29** See page 6D

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# County Meeting...from Page 1A

eyebrows/lips with dyes.

Earlier this month, Paris imposed a moratorium on the establishment of Commercial Firing Range Facilities to give his office time to draft an ordinance regulating such facilities, and he held a first reading of the new ordinance in his Sept. 21 meeting.

The moratorium and ordinance come after safety concerns lodged by residents who believe that such a commercial establishment may be in the works, though the Commissioner's Office has said it is unaware of any Commercial Firing Range Facilities being planned or constructed.

Still, Paris said he wanted to get something in place to allow the county to enforce nuisance prevention and safety measures in the event of such developments, to include both indoor and outdoor commercial range facilities.

Regulations would include stipulations on lot size, the inclusion of vegetative buffers, proximity and positioning relative to other properties, hours of operation, etc. Violation of the ordinance would potentially result in citations, fines and even arrest.

Proposed in the ordinance are restrictions specifically on Commercial Firing Range Facilities that will not impact First Amendment activities by private citizens or the future operation of the county's public target range that is currently being constructed off Georgia 180.

A copy of the draft ordinance can be obtained at the Commissioner's Office, and residents may offer feedback and suggestions on the ordinance any time prior to its adoption.

The above ordinance and revisions to existing ordinances are set to receive one more reading each before being enacted in upcoming meetings.

Among other business, Paris declared a local state of emergency after the Aug. 29 torrential rains that caused significant damage in the county and City of Blairsville, including to roads and culverts, Meeks Park, and the formation of a massive sinkhole at Murphy Highway and SR 515.

While Paris is hopeful that the local emergency declaration might help the county and city recoup some of their cleanup and repair costs from federal and state agencies, he admitted there was "no

guarantee," as the rainstorm only affected Union County.

The issuance of Short-Term Rental Licenses remains strong, with Paris accepting 28 additional licenses in his September meeting. To date, 528 properties have been registered as short-term rentals in the county since the launch of the new online licensing system in April.

On behalf of the local Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution groups, Paris proclaimed Sept. 17-23, 2023, as Constitution Week and Sept. 17, 2023, as Constitution Day in Union County in recognition of the anniversary and importance of the nation's founding document.

Paris then proclaimed Sept. 11, 2023, as Patriot Day and National Day of Service and Remembrance in honor of the victims and heroes killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He encouraged those gathered to

"Never Forget" what happened that terrible day.

In his Commissioner's Comments, Paris said construction on Fire Station No. 13 in northern Union County would hopefully be finished in a matter of weeks, and that the new Elections Center next to the Sports Complex is "about 30 to 45 days away" from completion.

"The new gymnasium next to the voting precinct, which will be a voting center, as well – the bid has already been let, and it'll be starting as soon as our material gets on site, probably in a couple of weeks," Paris said before adjourning the meeting a taking a few questions from the public.

The commissioner holds his regular monthly meetings on the third Thursday of every month beginning at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse. Residents are always invited to attend.

## Ladies Night Out: Dinner and Annual Quarter Auction!

You and your friends are invited Thursday, October 19, 2023

from 6-8 p.m. to the Banquet Room of the Union County Community Center overlooking the beautiful mountains and Butternut Creek Golf Course.

The evening begins with a scrumptious dinner of goat cheese and spinach stuffed chicken breast, fresh tomato basil sauce, wild rice, steamed broccoli, your choice of apple pie or chocolate mousse, tea/coffee/water.

Then the Quarter Auction fun begins! At press time some of the items up for auction include gifts or gift certificates generously donated by area businesses and individuals: Beautiful Things, Beauty Barn Blue Ridge, Cabin Coffee, Crooked Creek Farms/Foxfire Blends Bath & Body, Eller's Tires Hiawassee, Habitat ReStore, Humane Society Mountain Shelter Thrift Store, The Josephine Boutique, Kelli's Creations, Marina Station Hiawassee, Pampered Chef/Director Emily Biagianni, Paris Nails, Relax Nail Salon & Spa, S & S Smoothies & Supplements, Cyndi Tomlinson/Chocolate Lover's Basket, Fae Herd/ hand sewn quilted Christmas table runner, Haircut by Maxine, Jocelyn Bowers/ Czech crystal handmade bracelet, Resin craft/ Nancy Ellingsworth. More to come!



Linda Cloer

Quarter Auctions are a blast so be sure to bring lots of quarters. At check-in, each guest will receive a numbered paddle and list of auction items. Items will be displayed so you can plan your bidding strategy in advance. Each item will be presented, described, and the required number of quarters needed to bid (1 to a maximum of 8). If you are bidding on an item, place the required number of quarters in the bin provided at each table and raise your numbered paddle. Keep your PADDLE UP until the winning paddle number is drawn. If the person with the winning number did not bid on the item, then another number is drawn until there is a winner. As with last year's Ladies Night Out Quarter Auction, there is much fun and excitement to be enjoyed

so invite a friend, she'll be glad you did!

Did you grow up with that Cinderella story? Sit back and hear Linda Cloer's inspiring version, "Found Life's Answers After The Glass Slipper Shattered." Linda's focus is to challenge women of all ages to become everything they can be. Traveling by land, air and sea, Linda is a speaker for women's groups around the world. Linda, among other endeavors, is a former runway model, a wife, mother, and a VERY proud grandmother.

Please plan to share this special evening with us! The cost is \$25 with pre-paid reservations required by Tuesday, October 10. Mail your check made payable to TCWC, to Judy Teague, 3245 Mulky Gap Road, Blairsville, 30512. If you are paying for other guests, please include their names. To reserve your place contact: Jocelyn at jowabow@aol.com, or phone Jane at 706-838-5599 or text Jane at 706-633-7868.

For more than 35 years, the Tri-County Women's Connection in Blairsville has planned and hosted a variety of events meeting women where they are, as they are. Auction proceeds will benefit TCWC locally and Stonecroft, a 501(c)(3) for women for 85 years.

We look forward to connecting with you!

## Tabletop Exercise...from Page 1A

through a hypothetical school bus crash.

Although the exercise focused on responding to a tragic school bus accident, it served as a versatile blueprint for tackling any unforeseen crisis.

"The reason we picked (a bus accident) is because it could happen, and it takes all of our organizations to take care of an incident like this," Dyer said. "But this is going to be something that can transition to any kind of accident, really."

Dyer announced the elements of the exercise from his podium at the front of the Emergency Operations Center at Station No. 1, with participants discussing

action plans, dispatching important messages to fellow organizations, and mapping out responses on a large whiteboard.

"Our main goal is to find things that we don't have a plan for," Dyer said. "We need to go through this situation and find things that we never considered or never thought about, and we need to say, 'Let's write it down and figure out how we're going to do it next time.'"

"We do it here in this controlled environment so that we don't have to try to learn it on the fly or try to put it together out there when 'the bullets are flying' (so to speak).

"A lot of these folks are all in their own little bubble

– their own organization – and they don't really have an opportunity to see who the dispatchers are, who the Fire Department is, who the sheriff's officers are.

"They get together here so that they're familiar when we have a real emergency."

Last week's exercise was one of many practice scenarios local first responders participate in each year, all of which build up to a full scale drill that, in 2024, will take place in the spring and require participants to run through their action plans.

For more information, visit <http://www.unioncountyga.gov/departments/emergency-management-agency/>.

## City Property Tax...from Page 1A

Hall, and property owners can expect their city tax bills to be mailed no later than Oct. 20 with a due date of Dec. 20.

As previously reported, the county and school portion of property taxes should start being mailed at the end of this month or the first week in October via the Union County Tax Commissioner's Office.

Like the city, property owners will have through Dec. 20 to get their county/school tax bills paid, either in person at the Tax Commissioner's Office in the Union County Courthouse, via mail postmarked on or before Dec. 20, or online at [uniongatax.com](http://uniongatax.com).

Among other business in the Sept. 12 meeting, council members discussed the need to survey the parcels behind City Hall that remain in the hands of the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority.

Formerly known as the Haralson Property, these parcels include the parking lot, greenspace and empty lot across from Cook's Restaurant. Per a prior arrangement, the city will be taking these properties over from the DDA, an entity for which the city exercises fiduciary responsibility.

"We've got to have a

survey done ... for all this property back here, since the bathrooms have been completed, that the DDA will relinquish ownership to the city," Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said, and the council approved the survey.

The council also approved a \$6,131 contract for Iron Mountain Fence to install fencing to "camouflage" the dumpster behind the new downtown bathrooms. The fence will be 6-inch black chain link with privacy slats.

Additionally, council members approved the Georgia Municipal Employee Benefit System Group Insurance Renewal for 2024. Dental and vision rates will remain the same, but the health insurance coverage went up about 4%, with a budgetary increase of \$13,000 for next year.

There are no changes to the coverage itself, which the city pays 100% for employees and 50% for dependents.

At the request of Councilman Moore, City Attorney Marvin Harkins and City Clerk Kaye McCann will be investigating the potential of adding council members to city insurance coverage, with

the option of having council members pay for the coverage themselves.

The Blairsville City Council and Mayor Conley meet on the second Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall in Downtown Blairsville. Members of the public are encouraged to attend.

## Need pecans, order now! from Coosa Methodist

Coosa Methodist Church is now taking orders. The 2023 pecan season is upon us. Start planning your baking projects and gifting ideas.

Orders are being taken now through mid - October. Delivery is set for the second week of November at Coosa Methodist Church at 767 Mulky Gap Road, Blairsville, GA.

Available this year are the following: halves, pieces, amaretto chocolate and praline pecans.

To place your order call: Darlene Bone @ 251-458-4615 or Elaine Moss @ 706-897-8008.

All proceeds benefit missions and ministries of Coosa Methodist Church.

# Union County Elections Board creates Education Committee for public outreach

Submitted by the Union County Board of Elections Education Committee

Last month, the Union County Board of Elections voted to establish an Education Committee. This committee is charged with the task of keeping Union County voters up-to-date with the latest information available on all things related to the election process and dates.

In Union County, we have a Board of Registrars and a separate Board of Elections. The former Board is primarily responsible for registering new voters and maintaining the voter registration list. They are currently located in the new courthouse. The latter Board is primarily responsible for conducting

elections and is located on Hunt Martin Street.

If you have been to the new Sports Complex lately you have noticed a new building under construction on the right side of the complex. That is the new home of both Boards, and we hope to start moving into the building sometime in November. Starting with the Presidential Preference Primary Election on March 12, 2024, this new building will be the location of early advanced voting (2/19/24 - 3/8/24).

If you choose to vote by mail, you can submit your application anytime between December 25, 2023, to March 1, 2024. If you are not registered to vote, you have until February 12, 2024, to submit your

voter application if you want to participate in the Presidential Preference Primary.

There may be up to five elections in 2024. The first is mentioned above on March 12, 2024, followed by the General Primary on May 21, 2024, the General Primary Runoff on June 19, 2024 (if needed), the General Election on November 5, 2024, and the General Runoff on December 3, 2024 (if needed).

In following articles, we will address the issue of election equipment security. The public has a right to be concerned about the security of our elections, ranging from proper voter lists to election equipment properly recording their votes.

On July 10, 2023, we

hosted a representative from the Voting and Elections Data Systems, a division of the Georgia Secretary of State office. This person conducted a random check of all of our physical voting system software to verify that the original software had not been tampered with since the machines were introduced in 2019. We are proud to say that we passed with flying colors. Of course we were not surprised because before every election we conduct Logic and Accuracy testing on every machine. This testing is open to the public and we advertise the dates in this newspaper.

In short, with Logic and Accuracy Testing, each piece of voting equipment is tested to assure each contest is voting properly. We do this by testing every candidate and ballot position on the Ballot Marking Devices (the screen you use to record your choices in the precincts) followed by ensuring all scanners are reading the ballots properly. In short, we know how we vote the machine, can verify the printer has the exact same vote, and can verify that the scanner records the exact same vote.

In the coming days, we are expecting a visit by the Department of Homeland Security. They will closely examine the physical security of the location where we store our voting equipment. They want to ensure that no one has access to the equipment other than the Board of Elections, who serves under oath. We keep all equipment behind multiple locked doors and under camera at all times. We have new equipment on the way that will further enhance physical safety of the ballot marking devices.

The Board of Elections was created in 2001 by Georgia Legislature HB 798. The legislation requires that two appointments be made from each of the two major parties as determined by votes received in a presidential election. The County Commissioner also has one appointment. Board members serve staggered terms.

The five-member Union County Board of Elections consists of Elizabeth "Libby" Stevens, Patricia Christ, James Fitzgerald, Linda Hill and Ricardo Rivas. For more information, visit <http://www.unioncountyga.gov/government/elections-voter-registration/board-of-election/>.

## Drug Arrests...from Page 1A

Sheriff's Office, as the couple was allegedly providing highly dangerous drugs to residents in both counties, Dyer said.

"Getting any amount of fentanyl off the streets is a good lick, because it takes a minute amount to kill somebody," Dyer said. "It's the most dangerous drug out there in my opinion."

Added Narcotics Lt. Tyler Miller, "And locking these individuals up is getting a lot of drugs off the street in Western North Carolina and North Georgia. They were

very, very well known as being 'the dealer' for distribution of heroin and fentanyl."

Given multiple factors such as time of night and suspected criminal activity, the search warrant was served by the UCSO High Risk Warrant Team composed of deputies with specialized training. The team served the warrant safely, and the couple was arrested without incident.

The Union County Sheriff's Office has filed asset forfeiture on the Lueckerts'

property and house.

Bond for the Lueckerts has been denied, and they remain in custody at the Union County Jail.

UCSO investigators also served two separate warrants on individuals who were arrested in Towns County this month.

Blade Zee Szczepanski, 29, of Blairsville, has been arrested for felony sale of marijuana. He was taken into custody here on Wednesday, Sept. 20, days after his release from the Towns County Detention Center on separate drug charges.

Mark Anthony Roberson, 36, of Blairsville, has been charged with the felony sale of methamphetamine.

At press time, Roberson was still in Towns County custody on separate drug charges from a Sept. 14 arrest in the neighboring community. Union County has placed a hold on him for when he makes bond there.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

As always, the Sheriff's Office wants people to know that if they sell drugs in Union County, they will be caught. Anyone may offer an anonymous tip about local drug activity by calling the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066.

## University of N. GA freshman cadets complete FROG Week

One hundred and seventy-eight cadets began their time as University of North Georgia (UNG) cadets with Freshman Recruit Orientation Group (FROG) Week from Aug. 13-19. FROG Week marks the transition from civilian to military life within UNG's Corps of Cadets. These new cadets included: Nelson Daves of Morganton, GA; Damon Wallace and Andrew Young both of Blairsville, GA.

Positioned in the fastest-growing region of the state, the University of North Georgia comprises five campuses united by a single mission fo-

cused on academic excellence and academic and co-curricular programs that develop students into leaders for a diverse and global society.

The University of North Georgia is a University System of Georgia leadership institution and is The Military College of Georgia. With more than 18,000 students, the University of North Georgia is one of the state's largest public universities.

The university offers more than 100 programs of study ranging from certificate and associate degrees to doctoral programs.

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