

# RV Explosion...from Page 1A

investigations by the State Fire Investigations Unit, the Union County Fire Department and the Union County Sheriff's Office have indicated "that the propane gas company followed all proper procedures and is not at fault."

"All the authorities involved ask for prayers for the victims and their loved ones," Commissioner King said. "This fatality marks the 61st fire fatality in Georgia this year."

News of the explosion spread via social media, with people asking about the blast on Facebook. One of the people who heard it was Al Sorokin, a neighbor living just down the way from the Rollinses in River's Edge RV Park.

"There was a loud boom that we thought might have been a sonic boom, but it rocked our trailer so bad," Sorokin said. "I know that with the Air Force maneuvers, other parts of town get hit with sonic booms."

"So, I put something on Facebook about, 'Did anybody hear in the Choestoe area any boom?' People later responded after I decided I wanted to go investigate. I took my golf cart

to the other end of the park, and there was a completely blown apart trailer.

"Ambulances, the Fire Department, Sheriff's Office, the power company – everybody was assembling quickly on the scene. I took out my new phone camera and videorecorded a considerable amount of the time while they were trying to put down the flames."

Sorkin's video footage captured a good bit of the fire response at the RV that day, so he took it over to Fire Chief Dyer for potential training purposes.

For his part, Dyer is proud of the response to the explosion, which featured brave efforts from Union County residents as well as first responders who came together to get people to safety and contain the blaze.

"Those bystanders who went in and got those people out of here, they don't want to be called heroes, but they really did do an amazing thing," Dyer said. "People have a choice to make, and they made a choice to go in and help, and that was a great thing."

"The Fire Department, EMS, Sheriff's Office,

everybody that responded – if you really look at it, we had an explosion, a hazmat scene, a structure fire, five injuries at least, with three severe enough to be flown to a trauma center, and we handled that wonderfully."

"Everybody was calm, everybody did their job, and the bystanders helped. I'm proud to see that our folks work that well together. People in Union County need to be aware of that, and they need to be proud that they have such services here."

Rollins will be honored with a Celebration of Life Ceremony on Saturday, Oct. 3, at 1 p.m. at Choestoe Baptist Church, with Mountain View Funeral Home having charge of her funeral arrangements.

"Frances never met a stranger and loved everyone she met," according to her obituary. "Everyone knew her as Granny. She loved cooking and gardening. Frances loved all her grandkids. She was a fashion goddess."

"(She) was preceded in death by her son, John Lamar Rollins Jr., who passed away two months ago. She was a



The violent camper explosion in River's Edge RV Park last Tuesday shook the homes of neighboring residents, causing many to take to social media to inquire about the boom.

Photo by Al Sorokin

member of Choestoe Baptist Church.

"Survivors include her husband John Lamar Rollins Sr.; daughter Pamela Bryans of Canton; five grandkids, Michelle Roberts, Heather Czarneck, Brittany Bryans, Lacey Rollins and Joshua

Rollins; 14 great-grandkids; one great-great-grandchild; and many other friends also survive."

People who would like to help cover some of the medical costs of the hero who rushed in to save Rollins may do so via the Facebook fundraiser page

at <https://www.facebook.com/donate/1041939396238107/>.

The fundraiser can also be found by searching the "Blairsville, Ga" Facebook group for a linked post by George Young, who started the fundraiser.

# Rodeo...from Page 1A



This cowboy and cowgirl got ringside seats Saturday night, where they paid particularly close attention to the exciting bull riding.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

crowd cheering on the cowboys and cowgirls each night of the show.

Saddle Club President Art Miller was happy to see such a great turnout and people helping to perpetuate the annual event.

"It has been a difficult year," Miller said. "We had to change our dates from June to September, but we are still here. We wanted to see if the numbers would flatten out and make this as safe as we possibly could."

"It means a lot for us to have the rodeo, but most importantly, we needed to do it safely. I think we did that. There will be negative responses from certain people about this gathering, but that's okay. We are very happy with the turnout. It rained (Friday night), and tonight it was a great turnout."

For their part, rodeogoeers were thrilled to be there and

cheer on all the competitors – the bull riders, the barrel racers, the calf ropers, the bronc riders, children's rodeo participants and more.

"I have been itching for something to do lately," Mark Manning of Jasper said. "We drove almost an hour just to come here and see this. We were afraid after seeing it postponed that it wouldn't happen, but people are here, and people want to see this."

"You can look around and see that this is an event that we love here in the mountains. If I had to pick a favorite event, I would absolutely say the bull riding. That just screams rodeo, and it is the main event. That's not to discredit the other events; those are just as difficult and still dangerous."

Many people appreciate the rodeo as an extension of America's Wild West history and days gone by, including Jim Shiner of Fannin County.

"The rodeo is American tradition," Shiner said. "I've been watching rodeo since I was a little boy. It is rooted in America, and the cowboy is the representation of our heritage and ideals. Every little boy probably wanted to be a cowboy at some time. It is just amazing to see, and it is a part of our culture."

"Western movies were the thing in my time, and there is a reason for that. Each of these boys and girls performing tonight is doing what they love, and they are doing it in respect for America. You will never go to a rodeo and see people being hateful towards our country. This is what it is all about."

While those attending the rodeo were there in support of the annual competition, a small group of people did stage a protest across the street from the arena, chanting about perceived animal cruelty on display at the event.



Bull riding is one of those high risk, high reward activities – and it sure looks fun.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Local first responders took part in a patriotic display during this year's Blairsville Pro Rodeo.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

# Permit Hearing...from Page 1A

over the city's 2019 decision to treat out-of-county landfill runoff for extra revenue stirred interest in the community, due primarily to the efforts of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association.

LNIA members have been very vocal about the treatment of leachate, voicing concerns over unregulated "forever chemicals" and hazardous manmade substances that go by the acronym "PFAS."

Up until about mid-August, landfill leachate was being hauled in by The Water Authority LLC to be treated alongside local sewage for release into Butternut Creek above Meeks Park. The Water Authority is a private company co-owned by Union County's State Sen. Steve Gooch.

From Butternut Creek, treated wastewater flows into the Nottely River before entering Lake Nottely, which serves as a major source for treated drinking water in Union County – a huge concern for people in the hearing.

Increased awareness about potential health issues and negative publicity prompted the city to stop accepting leachate for treatment earlier this month, though many people who were campaigning for this result have remained skeptical.

Conley has said that leachate will never return to the sewer plant. Regardless, most commenters in the Sept. 23 virtual hearing wanted leachate to be expressly prohibited in a revised draft of the city's treatment permit.

mind leachate treatment as a local revenue source given appropriate monitoring and protocols, to include charcoal filtering and regular testing for unregulated chemicals.

Another point of contention for most commenters was the draft permit inclusion of a potential expanded flow of 1 million gallons per day, or 1 MGD, of treated wastewater. This treatment level is not authorized at this time but reflects the eventual capabilities of the local plant.

Currently, the city is releasing about 250,000 gallons of treated wastewater daily under the allowable permitted level of 400,000 gallons per day, or 0.4 MGD, with the permit being up for renewal.

EPD Wastewater Regulatory Program Manager Audra Dickson opened the hearing, saying the city's permit has included the two limits since first requested in 2008: the 0.4 MGD currently allowed, and the expanded 1 MGD should the city one day meet the requirements to process that much.

The current draft permit is the third iteration to include guidelines for an expanded 1 MGD flow, and new this year is the requirement that the city develop a Watershed Protection Plan prior to receiving authorization to operate at 1 MGD.

Several of the 23 people commenting against the proposed draft asked last week that the 1 MGD limit be removed and replaced with a cap of 0.5 MGD, citing concerns that more than doubling the daily level of effluent released into Butternut Creek would

cause major problems.

Conley has said it will be many years before the city ever has to treat that much sewage, elaborating that the expanded flow in the permit was reflective of the city's planning efforts to accommodate growth.

People took aim at this notion in their public comments, suggesting that the EPD should exclude the potential large flow expansion if the city won't need it anytime soon, especially if such an expanded flow could cause harm to Butternut Creek, as some commenters worried.

Importantly, EPD previously approved the 1 MGD expansion potential based on results of an antidegradation study looking at possible impacts to Butternut Creek, but a commenter pointed out that federal guidelines have changed in the last 12 years and a new study needs to be conducted.

There has been some speculation that the 1 MGD expanded flow has been included to allow for much more leachate to be hauled in for treatment, though the city has expressly denied this.

Speaking for local water quality monitoring organization MountainTrue, Moore applauded new nutrient reduction and other monitoring requirements in the draft permit, and she offered her support for the 1 MGD expansion language.

"When reached, this level of flow will represent a substantial increase in the overall flow of Butternut Creek for the last half mile of its journey to Nottely River," Moore said. "However, there are important natural processes, particularly with regard to nutrients, that occur in flowing

water which do not occur in the reservoir environment.

"We find this option preferable to discharging treated wastewater directly into Lake Nottely, which seems to be the only other realistic option."

Also in the hearing, a couple of commenters wondered about potential damage done to the local drinking water supply over the last year due to the legal processing of

leachate, and a request was made for lake testing to determine such an impact, despite the practice being discontinued.

In his remarks, Conley defended Wastewater Treatment employees, saying that they conducted treatment and testing to state standards, all while under the watchful eye of constant monitoring by the state.

LNIA Member Doy Lively

attended the hearing as well, asking for greater transparency in the permitting process as well as for timeline and other information he believes has been withheld regarding the current draft permit and leachate.

As far as next steps, the EPD will address written comments and comments from the public hearing "once a final determination has been made on permit issuance."