

# Greystone Fire...from Page 1A



The Greystone Building took heavy damage last week in a fire that investigators believe was likely accidental, pending a final determination.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

8:30 p.m. that Monday, at which time several Fire Department apparatus responded to the scene, including Ladder 1 that supplied an elevated stream to knock down the blaze.

Station 1 and volunteer firefighters took on the fire, which resulted in massive damage to the interior of the building and the roof, though Union County GOP Chair Dena Gooch said the Republican Party offices sustained minor damage comparatively speaking.

“We were very fortunate,” Gooch said last week. “We lost primarily campaign signs for some of the candidates. Our end had the least amount of damage, and a lot of the T-shirts and things that we had just gotten in that day all seem to be fine; we had to launder them. But really, we came out as well as we could have asked for considering the situation.”

GOP members will continue their free hotdog cookouts every Saturday in October from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Greystone Plaza, and the Union County Republican Party will be moving its headquarters to the Hillcrest Plaza at 294 Hwy 515, next to Sleep USA Mattress.

For more information, visit the “Union County Georgia GOP” Facebook page.

Building owner Frank Pack built Greystone 23 years ago, and he has welcomed many

business owners as tenants over the years. Unfortunately, his four current tenants are all having to find new places to go, and Pack is unsure of what’s next for Greystone.

“The building is totaled,” Pack said Oct. 1. “Next steps are just to wait until they get through with their investigating, and I’ll have to make a decision of building back or what to do.

“As of right now, I plan on building back ... but a 2-by-4 stud is over \$5, and I don’t know how a man can build with prices like that.”

Added Pack, “If it’s feasible, I would love to build it back. I have a lot of blood and sweat and tears in that place. Me and that building have come a long road, and it’s hard to watch it go down.”

Pack learned about the fire after one of his tenants, chiropractor Dr. Floyd Beil, saw something on Facebook about a fire at the building and reached out to Pack’s daughter Brittany to ask if she was aware of the situation.

Shortly thereafter, Brittany’s phone “started blowing up with texts,” and she went to the building with her dad to see how bad things were – both were rendered speechless on the scene.

“We appreciate everyone’s support through this,” Brittany said Thursday. “We’ve had some great tenants, and we hate that they’re having to go through this with us.”

Added Frank, “I am extremely grateful for all the people that have called me and offered help and wished me well. I’d just like to tell them that I thank all of them.”

In terms of commercial fires like the one at Greystone, the local Fire Department will generally call on the Fire Marshal’s Office to help with investigations, so the state’s presence at the Sept. 28 fire was business as usual.

Interestingly, there have been five commercial fires within about a 1-mile radius of Blue Ridge Street in the last 10 and a half months. Chief Dyer has also noted the increased frequency in commercial fires of late, though all but one of the five has been ruled accidental.

These fires have included the Nantahala Village Apartment Complex and Spry Family Dry Cleaners in November 2019, Byers Well Drilling in February 2020, Pet City USA in July 2020, and now Greystone.

Only the Nantahala blaze has been ruled deliberate, and authorities are still offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of the arsonist in the case.

People with knowledge of the apartment fire should call the state’s Fire Investigations Unit at 800-282-5804. Calls are taken 24 hours a day, and callers may remain anonymous.

## Early Voting...from Page 1A

“For decades, the General Assembly has imposed fees for a variety of purposes, only to use the revenue for something else,” according to David Wickert of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. “For example, the state charges for every new tire sold in Georgia, and the money is supposed to be used to clean up illegal dumps and fund other waste management programs.

“But lawmakers have dedicated only a portion of the money for those purposes. Since 2009 they have used more than \$50 million of the revenue for other programs, according to the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

“Under current law, the only way to ensure a tax or fee is used for its intended purpose is for voters to dedicate the revenue through constitutional amendments. Amendment 1 would allow the General Assembly to dedicate fees and taxes for specific purposes.”

Amendment 2, if passed, “would restore citizens’ rights to file lawsuits to overturn unconstitutional laws without the consent of (state and federal) governments,” Wickert wrote.

Statewide Referendum A “establishes a tax exemption for certain real property owned by charities,” according to the ballot.

“The measure would exempt from taxes property owned by charities for the purpose of building or repairing single-family homes to be financed by the charity and sold to individuals using no-interest loans,” Wickert said. “The referendum is aimed at providing a tax break to charities such as Habitat for Humanity. Once the property is sold to an individual, it would be taxed at fair-market value.”

Election Day will be Tuesday, Nov. 3, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. That day, voters should report to one of the 11 pre-assigned Union County voting precincts: Ivy Log, Dooly, Gum Log, Blairsville, Pat Colwell, Trackrock, Coosa, Jones Creek, Owl Town, Choestoe and Suches.

Voters are not required to bring their mailed precinct cards, but they must show a

valid photo ID to vote.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though Oct. 5 was the registration deadline for voters looking to participate in the Nov. 3 election.

Absentee ballots are being automatically mailed to voters who informed the Registrar’s Office they were elderly or disabled on a previous application, though all others need to apply to get their mail-in absentee ballot for the General Election.

People may request mail-in absentee ballots by visiting <https://ballotrequest.sos.ga.gov>, calling the local Registrar’s Office at 706-439-6016, or swinging by the office at 65 Courthouse Street.

Following a request, voters can easily track the progress of their absentee ballot by visiting <https://georgia.ballottrax.net/voter/>.

“BallotTrax is a secure software application that locates ballot envelopes,” according to the service. “The system works with election officials and the Postal Office to send you messages when your ballot is received as well as notifies you if there is a discrepancy (such as verifying a ballot signature).

“By logging into the BallotTrax site, voters can see their mail-in ballot status and sign up for alerts. The signup process is simple. Just sign on, enter contact info, select message method (email, text and voice messages), and note what time works best for messaging.”

People wanting to fill out their absentee ballots/applications and drop them off in person to the Registrar’s Office or exterior drop box at the courthouse can do so up to 7 p.m. on Nov. 3, which is the current deadline for all absentee-by-mail ballots to be returned.

In reporting by AJC’s Mark Niese, a federal appeals court on Friday “reinstated an Election Day deadline for Georgia voters to return their absentee ballots, overriding a judge’s decision that would have given voters three additional days during the

coronavirus pandemic.”

“A three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decided 2-1 to grant a stay of a judge’s ruling to count ballots postmarked by Nov. 3 and received at county election offices by the following Friday,” Niese said. “The decision restored a state law setting Georgia’s absentee ballot deadline at 7 p.m. on Election Day.

“The ruling will likely disqualify thousands of absentee ballots mailed close to Nov. 3 and delivered afterward by the U.S. Postal Service.”

The deadline to request an absentee ballot is Oct. 30. Voters should be aware it could take days for requested ballots to arrive in the mail and potentially several more for completed ballots to be returned for counting when mailed, so it’s best to request one well in advance of the deadline. An absentee ballot application must be submitted by the requesting voter, except for a disabled person, who may have a relative by blood or marriage return his or her absentee ballot/application.

Those who receive an absentee ballot by mail but decide to vote in person will need to have their absentee ballot canceled at time of voting.

Election officials have said double voting is not a concern, as the system will alert poll workers if a voter has, for example, already cast an absentee-by-mail ballot but forgets and shows up at their regular voting precinct on Election Day.

Voters can access the My Voter Page at [mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov) ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

It should be noted that voters are not allowed to display campaign-related materials at polling places where promoted candidates appear on ballots. For example, for the Nov. 3 election, voters will not be allowed to enter polling places wearing clothing promoting Donald Trump or Joe Biden for president.