

North Georgia News

4 Sections 20 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Wednesday, October 19, 2022

Sons of the Pioneers benefit concert is Sunday

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The legendary Sons of the Pioneers of Western-Country Music fame will perform at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center from 2-5 p.m. this Sunday, Oct. 23, as a benefit concert for Ferst Readers of Union County.

And yes, this is the same group that was started 89 years ago by Leonard "Len" Slye, better known as Roy Rogers.

There are currently six members of the group: Tommie Nallie, Ken Lattimer, John Fullerton, Paul Elliott, Chuck Ervin, and Roy "Dusty" Rogers Jr., Roy Rogers' only natural-born son.

Counting the current

members and Roy Rogers Sr., there have been 47 Sons of the Pioneers over an 89-year period, according to www.sonsofthepioneers.org.

However, though the members of the group have changed, their sound remains the same now as it did in 1933 when Rogers Sr. first assembled the group.

Sons of the Pioneers are famous for cowboy classics such as "Tumbling Tumbleweeds," "Cool Water" and "Don't Fence Me In," with their iconic harmonies, yodeling and driving rhythm.

Local musician John Cochran, whose wife Janice is the Co-Chairwoman of the Ferst Readers of Union County Mountain Action Team, has wanted to bring the Sons of

the Pioneers to North Georgia for years.

"John had been trying to work something out with us for some time out with us for some concert," said John Fullerton, who performs lead/harmony vocals and rhythm guitar for the Sons of the Pioneers, adding that he met Cochran about 10 years ago at a Roy Rogers Movie Festival.

"It took some planning and preparation, and we decided to do (the concert) as a benefit for Ferst Readers," Fullerton continued. "This is very exciting for us to get to come (to North Georgia). This is a part of the great state of Georgia that I don't think the Pioneers have ever been to."

So, have to people.
See Sons of the Pioneers, Page 3A



Sons of the Pioneers

GDOT public meeting on Murphy Hwy project



Murphy Highway's intersections with Blue Ridge Street and Georgia 515 will be getting major improvements once construction finally begins on the projects. Photo/Screenshot

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Georgia Department of Transportation is hosting a Public Information Open House on Thursday, Oct. 20, from 5-7 p.m. at the Union County Sports Center.

Residents will be asked to offer feedback on the proposed

widening and reconstruction of a roughly 9-mile stretch of Murphy Highway ranging from Blue Ridge Street to Ivylog Road/Noddette Dam Road, to feature 62 property displacements along the length of the project.

"Project handouts will be provided to attendees and displays of the proposed improvements will be available

for viewing," GDOT said of the Oct. 20 meeting. "Attendees will be able to ask questions of project staff and submit comments."

GDOT originated the project years ago after studying the roadway and finding a need "to relieve congestion, improve mobility, and to increase safety by reducing the frequency and

See GDOT Meeting, Page 2A

Blairsville native dies in Rabun County crash

By Shawn Jarrard
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The family and friends of Jerry Payne, 75, of Blairsville, are mourning his death after his work truck crashed while he was driving through Clayton in Rabun County last week.

"On Oct. 11, at approximately 11:05 a.m., a Mack dump truck driven by Jerry James Payne ... traveled off the south shoulder of GA 2/Barnyard Rd." according to the Georgia State Patrol. "The vehicle traveled down an embankment and overturned. Mr. Payne was not restrained. He was ejected and found deceased on scene."

It is believed that Payne suffered a heart attack that

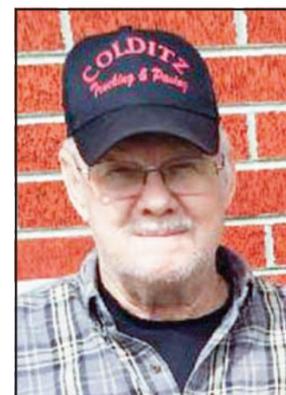
resulted in his truck leaving the roadway and, ultimately, his death.

"He was a native and lifelong resident of Union County," his obituary reads. "At the time of Jerry's death, he was employed with Colditz Trucking."

"He enjoyed hunting and fishing. Jerry was a wonderful husband and loved spending time with his family and grandchildren. He was a friend to so many ... (and) was a member of Rock of Ages Baptist Church."

Following his death, an outpouring of support lit up social media, where he was described as "the most genuine, caring, loving man."

Mountain View Funeral Home had charge of Payne's



Jerry Payne

funeral arrangements, with a ceremony conducted on Friday, Oct. 14. Read his full obituary in this week's edition of the North Georgia News.

Advanced in-person voting continues thru Nov. 4

By Shawn Jarrard
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Three weeks of advanced in-person voting for the Nov. 8 General Election started on Monday in the Jury Assembly Room on the lower floor of the Union County Courthouse located at 65 Courthouse Street.

Early voting will run weekdays between now and Friday, Nov. 4, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime. There will also be two weekend early voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 22, and Saturday, Oct. 29, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the courthouse.

Election Day voting for the General Election will take place Tuesday, Nov. 8, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the 11 pre-assigned precincts of Union County.



Appearing on the ballot will be federal, state and local candidates. At the federal level, people will be deciding the following races:

U.S. Senate, Republican Herschel Walker, Democrat Incumbent Raphael Warnock and Libertarian Chase Oliver.

U.S. House of Representatives for District 9, Republican Incumbent Andrew Clyde and Democrat Michael "Mike" Ford.

At the state level,

voters will be deciding the following:

Governor, Republican Incumbent Brian Kemp, Democrat Stacey Abrams and Libertarian Shane Hazel.

Lt. Governor, Republican Burt Jones, Democrat Charlie Bailey and Libertarian Ryan Graham.

Secretary of State, Republican Incumbent Brad Raffensperger, Democrat Bee Nguyen and Libertarian Ted Metz.

Attorney General, Republican Incumbent Chris Carr, Democrat Jennifer "Jen" Jordan and Libertarian Martin Cowen.

Commissioner of Agriculture, Republican Tyler Harper, Democrat Nikita Hemingway and Libertarian David Raudabaugh.

Commissioner of Education
See Early Voting, Page 3A

UCSO takes thousands of dollars in drugs off streets



UCSO Narcotics Investigators confiscated a substantial amount of drugs, four firearms and thousands in cash during this recent drug bust.

By Shawn Jarrard
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In a drug bust Oct. 3, investigators with the Union County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Division confiscated 9.5 pounds of marijuana, five pounds of THC wax, 51 THC cartridges, an ounce of psychedelic mushrooms, four firearms and over \$5,000 in cash.

That quantity of marijuana alone has a street value of approximately \$47,500 based on estimates available through the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, with the value of the other

confiscated substances being worth thousands more.

The bust came on the tail-end of a two-monthlong investigation that included controlled buys from Christina Marie Waldrup, 44, out of her residence located off Georgia 325 in Blairsville, UCSO Lt. Tyler Miller said.

Following the execution of a search warrant, Waldrup was arrested and charged with six counts of sale of a controlled substance; three counts possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; possession of marijuana with intent to distribute; and possession of a firearm during the commission



Christina Marie Waldrup

of a crime. Lt. Miller said the investigation showed that
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State Tournament @ Home
Oct. 18 and 19
FOOTBALL
Oct. 21 vs. East Jackson 7:30 PM

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Addendum: Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade Overall Winner



The Woody Gap Band of Steel won “Best In Show” for the 2022 Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade in Downtown Blairsville Oct. 8. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

The Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade on Saturday, Oct. 8, was a major community success after returning from a 2021 hiatus due to lingering concerns over the potential spread of COVID-19.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, who was a participant in the parade that Saturday and had a wonderful time

throwing candy to children, was pleased with the spectator turnout and support by parade participants.

Granddaddy Mimm’s Distilling Co. was the overall sponsor for this year’s

Blairsville Sorghum Festival, and the famed moonshine makers, who spearheaded the return of the parade in 2022, named the Woody Gap Band of Steel as “Best In Show” among parade participants.

Roy “Ro” Townsend – grandfather to parade organizer Megan Kimsey of Granddaddy Mimm’s – served as Parade Grand Marshal. Ro is considered by many to be the “Honorary Mayor of Owltown.”

GDOT Meeting...from Page 1A

severity of crashes along the project corridor.”

According to GDOT statistics, between 2017 and 2021, that stretch of Murphy Highway experienced 767 motor vehicle accidents, with rates of crashes, injuries and deaths that were dramatically higher than the state averages for this type of road over a comparable period.

Major improvements are in the works – and have been since preliminary engineering got underway in 2006 – with three distinct projects totaling roughly \$140 million to be constructed sequentially starting in 2028. Costs are subject to revision, per GDOT.

The first project will widen Murphy Highway to four lanes plus a two-way left-turn lane from Georgia 515 to Pat Colwell Road.

From there, the road will be widened from two to three lanes up to Gumlog Road, switching between two lanes plus a two-way left-turn lane and passing lanes as the third lane that will alternate between north and southbound traffic depending on driveway density.

Roundabouts will be installed at the intersections of Pat Haralson Memorial Drive, Pat Colwell/Pleasant Hill Road, and Gumlog Road.

Notably, the intersection at Georgia 515 and Murphy Highway will be undergoing considerable changes, to include the addition of a second left-turn lane and a dedicated right-turn lane just north of the traffic light, and an additional left-turn lane at the south end of the intersection.

Traffic turning right from Georgia 515 onto Murphy Highway will be getting a dedicated lane of travel as well, meaning northbound traffic there will no longer have to wait for motorists turning left

from 515.

The construction start date on the first of the three projects has been slated for sometime in 2028 to last approximately 36 months, with right-of-way acquisition scheduled to begin March 14, 2025.

Project two will see a roundabout built to replace the four-way stop at Blue Ridge Street and Murphy Highway in town, with right-of-way acquisition estimated for 2029, then 12-18 months of construction starting in 2030.

Finally, estimated for 2033 construction, the third project will continue the widening of Murphy Highway north from Gumlog Road, going from two to three lanes up to the Ivylog Road and Nottely Dam Road intersection, with an anticipated construction time of 24-36 months.

“The project will tie into the ends of the existing bridge over Ivy Log Creek and not replace or improve this bridge,” according to GDOT.

Department of Transportation data indicate that the population of Union County increased by 21% from 2011 to 2021, for a current total of 26,329 residents. Interestingly, GDOT is projecting that the county population will be 46,719 by 2051.

GDOT officials believe that, once completed, the enhancements on offer will improve commuter experiences and reduce crashes for years to come, all while “minimizing impacts to properties and environmentally sensitive areas.”

The roundabouts in particular are designed to “improve safety and operations, promote lower speeds and traffic calming, reduce conflict points, reduce crashes by 80% (and) reduce the severity of crashes” when they do occur.

2017 was the last time GDOT held an information open house to solicit feedback on this project. Since then, the plans have been revised to divide the overall project into three parts, and “the formerly proposed four-lane section (north of Pat Colwell Road) has been reduced to a three-lane section.”

“This project is currently in the preliminary design phase,” per GDOT. “The preliminary design phase is the time in which the preferred design alternative is refined and designed sufficiently to establish project impacts.”

An extensive, user-friendly review of the project can be found online at <https://sr-11-widening-union-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/>, where people may comment on the proposed projects until Nov. 4, 2022.

In addition to online feedback and comments submitted in person Oct. 20, people may print a comment card from the website and mail it to: Mr. Eric Duff, State Environmental Administrator, Georgia Department of Transportation, 600 West Peachtree Street, NW – 16th Floor, Atlanta, Georgia 30308.

“All comments will be considered as we develop the plans, and a response will be posted to this site approximately 30 days after the close of the comment period,” per GDOT.

After feedback is assessed, “revisions may occur to the proposed plans initially brought to the public.”

“An additional public hearing open house will occur in the future once design is advanced and before the project environmental documentation is finalized,” per GDOT. “After all right-of-way acquisition occurs, project design is finalized, and environmental clearances obtained, the projects would advance to construction.”

UCSO Drug Bust...from Page 1A

Waldrup, originally from Michigan, allegedly acquired the marijuana and THC products in a “black market” arrangement with a legal supplier in the Wolverine State, where certain levels of possession and use are allowed for people 21 and older.

Authorities believe Waldrup also obtained the “magic mushrooms” from Michigan, where possession and use remain illegal, though a small number of cities, including Detroit, have decriminalized such activities.

Waldrup remained in custody at the Union County Jail at press time, and she is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

An investigation into the cross-state acquisition of the drugs remains ongoing, Lt. Miller said, noting that his

division is continuing to work with out-of-state authorities.

“I would say 90% of any marijuana case we deal with, the drug in hand – whether it’s marijuana, wax, cartridges, edibles – either comes from up North or out West,” Miller said, “whether it be by mail, FedEx, UPS or travel by (personal) vehicle.”

Currently, 38% of states have legalized recreational marijuana, making its purchase much easier for dealers who turn around and sell it in communities where the state has made it illegal to possess for personal use.

The legalization trend appears to be picking up steam, most recently with President Joe Biden’s Oct. 6 announcement that he would be pardoning “all prior Federal offenses of simple possession of marijuana” and

encouraging all governors “to do the same with regard to state offenses.”

The president also remarked that he would be asking the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Attorney General “to initiate the administrative process to review expeditiously how marijuana is scheduled under federal law.”

Per the statement at [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov), Biden added that he believes “limitations on trafficking, marketing, and under-age sales (of marijuana) should stay in place.”

Methamphetamine remains the No. 1 drug problem locally, said Lt. Miller, who went on to warn people who illegally sell and use drugs in Union County that law enforcement would catch up with them eventually.

UCHS to Participate in Skills Challenge

Twenty-five High Schools (including Union County High School) will participate in the 2022 Northeast Georgia Skills Challenge – a skilled trades competition to promote workforce development.

Regional high school students will compete in the Northeast Georgia Skills Challenge hosted by Carroll Daniel Construction in partnership with the Associated General Contractors of Georgia.

Nearly 300 construction students will compete in the following skill categories at this challenge: blueprint

reading, broadcast news production, cabinet making, carpentry, construction career displays, electrical, HVAC, masonry, plumbing, team build and welding. In addition, students with an interest in broadcast news will compete to serve as onsite news reporters and producers covering the latest headlines from the competition. The video these students produce will be used to promote the Skills Challenge the following year.

Along with the competitors in attendance, several hundred more students will be on

site as observers to learn about careers in construction. Local industry companies provide the volunteer judges for each of the skilled trades competitions. This is a highly visible annual event geared towards workforce development in Northeast Georgia.

The Challenge will take place Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2022 at 1855 Calvary Church Road, Gainesville, GA 30507.

Construction students from 25 high schools will face off on October 26, beginning at 8:30 a.m., at Chicopee Woods Agricultural Center.

Sons of the Pioneers...from Page 1A

expect from the Sons of the Pioneers performance?

“You will be blown away by the sound,” Fullerton said. “The sound will sound exactly the same if you’ve been a Pioneer fan all your life. The sound has not changed.”

“We are still singing the same arrangements that we’ve done for all these years, and it will be the familiar cowboy classics that were popular in so many of the Western movies,” said Fullerton, noting that people will hear those signature

three-part harmony vocals and instrumentation.

By every measure, the concert promises to be a memorable event for everyone, held at a state-of-the-art venue.

Adding to the memorable quality of the show, the Pioneers will hold their usual “Shake and Howdy” session afterward where people can meet the members, have their pictures taken with the group, and get autographs. CDs and memorabilia will be available

as well.

This concert is the main fundraiser for the Ferst Readers of Union County, a childhood literacy program that is free to participants, and all proceeds will go toward books for children ages 0 to 5 years old in Union County.

“All books are age-appropriate and of high quality,” said Janice Cochran. The books are morally appropriate, as well, and help to build a solid foundation of literacy for the successful advancement of the

next generation.

“Today, 326 children in Union County are registered and receiving books,” she said. “Union County has had over 40,000 books mailed to 1,100 children in Union County since we began in 2014.”

The cost to send one book per month to one child for one year is \$36, and that is the price of a ticket to see Sons of the Pioneers this Sunday. Of course, children aged 12 and under will be admitted to the concert for free.

For additional concert information and to purchase tickets, visit sonsofthepioneers.eventbrite.com.

The Ferst Readers organization was started in Georgia in 2000 and is named for its founder, Robin Ferst. The Union County Ferst Readers Community Action Team formed in 2013. There are 87 participating counties in Georgia today, per www.ferstreaders.org.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

Insurance, Republican Incumbent John King and Democrat Janice Laws Robinson.

State School Superintendent, Republican Incumbent Richard Woods and Democrat Alisha Thomas Searcy.

Commissioner of Labor, Republican Bruce Thompson, Democrat William “Will” Boddie Jr. and Libertarian Emily Anderson.

State House of Representatives for District 8, Republican Incumbent Stan Gunter and Democrat June Krise.

District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch and Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley, both Republican incumbents, are running unopposed in the Nov. 8 election.

At the county level, voters will be choosing between Republican Incumbent Tony Hunter and Democrat Michelle Maloney for Union County Board of Education District 2. Republicans Jason McCarter and Incumbent Patrick White are running unopposed in their School Board districts.

Incumbent Jennifer Logan is running unopposed for Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor in Union County.

Also appearing on the ballot will be two proposed amendments to the Georgia Constitution, including one calling for pay suspension for elected state officers and

Georgia General Assembly members if such individuals become “suspended from office following indictment for a felony.”

If approved by voters, the second proposed amendment would authorize local governments and school boards to provide temporary tax relief to local properties that are “severely damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster and located within a nationally declared disaster area.”

Additionally, voters will be approving or rejecting two statewide referendums to authorize acts passed recently by the Georgia General Assembly.

The first act would grant certain statewide ad valorem tax exemptions benefiting the timber industry, while the second act would expand ad valorem tax exemptions for family-owned farms.

All voters will need to have an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots, such as a government-issued driver’s license or identification card.

Residents have been able to apply for a mailed absentee ballot since Aug. 22. Absentee ballot requests may be made at the local Registrar’s Office or by accessing the “My Voter Page” at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>.

The deadline to request an absentee ballot is Oct. 28.

Ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, email as an attachment, or in-person to the Registrar’s Office in the courthouse.

Due to the Columbus Day holiday last week, the earliest day for absentee ballots to be mailed to voters was Tuesday, Oct. 11.

People who have voted absentee-by-mail in a past election cycle will need to submit a new application for this cycle if they want to receive an absentee ballot in the mail.

Folks can mail their completed ballots back or utilize the official drop box inside the Jury Assembly Room during early in-person voting hours. Voters may also drop completed absentee ballots off at the Registrar’s Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Voters are encouraged to request and return their absentee ballots early to give their ballot “enough time to travel through the mail and resolve any issues that may arise when voting by absentee ballot,” per georgia.gov.

Mentioned above, the “My Voter Page” website contains much valuable information, such as registration status, precinct information, sample ballots, mailed absentee ballot status and voter participation history.

The last day to register to vote in the General Election and any subsequent runoff election was Oct. 11.

Everything Christmas Sale coming soon to Union County Library



Friends of Union County Library members have been hard at work receiving donations, pricing, and sorting. Even our mascot, Owliver, is getting into the Christmas spirit. Treasurer Sally and President Jackie are shown here in the Friends Room at the library, which is joyfully bursting at the seams.

We thank all those who have already given us Christmas items, especially St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Coosa Methodist Church, and First United Methodist Church of Union County, who gave generous donations of wonderful leftovers from their own fall sales. As you can see in the photo, we have oodles of poinsettias and boxes and boxes of other Christmas items: ornaments CHECK, Christmas villages CHECK, holiday candles CHECK; wrapping paper, santas, snowmen, and angels CHECK, CHECK, CHECK, and CHECK; but we still want more. We will continue to receive donations through the month of October. There is a drop box right outside our room and Friends members are at the library every Monday and Wednesday morning. The sale takes place on Friday, November 4 from 10 AM to 4



Sally Woodworth and Jackie Volk

PM and on Saturday, November 5 from 10 AM to 1 PM.

We are also selling raffle tickets for a chance to win a donated dollhouse plus second, third, and fourth prizes of a Christmas room kit, a papercraft medieval castle, and a 3D puzzle/pencil holder. All profits from this sale are going toward the purchase of STEAM technology learning resources for the children and youth who patronize our library. There is a ticket purchase form on our website (foucl.org), on our bookcase at the library, or buy tickets from Friends at the library on Monday and Wednesday mornings. The drawing will take place the last day of the

Everything Christmas Sale at 1 PM in the Community Room, but you do not have to be present to win. The dollhouse is on display so be sure to see it next time you are at the library.

FOUCL’s next membership meeting, open to all members and those who might be interested in joining, is Wednesday, October 19, beginning at 2 PM in the Community Room at Union County Public Library. FOUCL is proud to have been in existence for over 26 years. We invite you to join us in advocating for libraries, literacy, and lifelong learning. Bonus: Join now and be considered a paid member through 2023.

Friday night concert at Old Union County Courthouse to feature Paige O’Neill and Ken Brammer Oct. 21

Join us this Friday night, October 21 for a concert featuring Paige O’Neill and Ken Brammer.

Paige O’Neill has lived in the Atlanta area since graduating with a degree in Veterinary Technology. She has had successful careers working with animals and teaching tennis for over 30 years. Paige founded the non profit, Mostly Mutts Animal Rescue and retired from it in 2013. She currently rescues and trains dogs out of her home in Douglasville, GA.

Paige has been writing songs since she was in college but started taking it more seriously in the past few years. She currently is working on her second album. Many of her songs are from the perspective of others and she sings their stories. Paige recently founded the non



Paige O’Neill

profit, Musical Charities, and now creates events to support songwriters and musicians and donates the proceeds to the community. She feels incredibly blessed to have lived



Ken Brammer

a life surrounded by her love of animals, tennis and music.

Ken Brammer will be joining Paige on some of her songs. Ken plays both the Banjo and the Dobro.