

North Georgia News

2 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, November 1, 2023

UCHS Senior Ava Sharp advocates for Type 1 diabetics

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Every once in a while, a compassionate gem stands out within the Union County youth and warms the hearts of the community. This November, that gem is 17-year-old Ava Sharp.

Not only has Sharp already dedicated her life to helping others, but she is also spearheading a remarkable service project as a senior of Union County Schools to educate and empower Type 1 diabetic children for Diabetes Awareness Month.

About four years ago, Sharp was plagued with a mysterious ailment, experiencing blurry vision,

fatigue, weight loss, emotional instability and an unquenchable thirst.

After her mother suspected that she may be diabetic, she was taken to the hospital where she received her official diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes, formerly known as "juvenile diabetes."

Following the diagnosis, Sharp's life changed drastically, and while many of the changes were physical, she was also abruptly faced with a whole new mental battle.

Fast forward four years and Sharp has refused to let her condition define her, instead channeling her experiences into something positive for the community.

Her project is intended

to reduce both the emotional and financial burden of Type 1 diabetic students in the school system by collecting and distributing medical supplies through community donations and providing emotional support to children suffering from the autoimmune disease.

To collect supplies, Sharp has created a link to an Amazon wish list that appears on flyers being put up around town, sent home with students, and posted on various social media sites.

Unlike typical donation drives, purchased items will be sent directly to Sharp's home, from which she can redistribute them as needed. Supplies include no-carb snacks, testing strips, juice boxes and more.

Along with stocking each school nurse's station with medical supplies for Type 1 diabetic children, Sharp will be visiting the primary, elementary and middle schools this month with her friend Lily Harkins, who also suffers from the condition. There, they will read age-appropriate books to the students about Type 1 diabetes and offer counseling to those who need it.

"I want them to know that they're not alone," Sharp said. "A lot of times it can feel very lonely, and Type 1 does come with a lot of mental health issues that people don't always see, so I just want them to know that there's support. Even on the days that they feel alone, See *Sharp Service Project*, Page 2A



Senior Ava Sharp of Union County High is dedicated to fighting the stigma around Type 1 diabetes.

Castoff Pet Rescue hosts grand opening at new facility

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Castoff Pet Rescue went to the dogs – and cats – on Saturday, Oct. 28, for the official Open House of their new facilities.

The organization's new location at 240 Patton Place in Blairsville may not be finished yet, but it's coming along nicely and will feature more than just a rescue serving the needs of Union and Towns counties in Georgia, as well as Clay and Cherokee counties in North Carolina.

The weather was gorgeous that day, the air filled with classic rock tunes courtesy of the Cletus Way band, and that's to say nothing of the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club coming out to show their support for the cause.

Folks were welcome to bring their own pets or adopt new furry family members as they explored the grounds and shopped for items from the Castoff Pet Rescue Thrift Store or browsed local handmade



Castoff Pet Rescue made plenty of cuddly critters available on Saturday for the grand opening of its Patton Place facilities. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

jewelry. Castoff Operational Manager Adam Payne sported some snazzy Dalmatian-patterned face paint complete with whiskers, fitting right in with the black and white dogs up for adoption out behind the cat barn. Having volunteered for six months before his official hiring about a year ago, Payne was happy to See *Castoff Pet Rescue*, Page 6A

Paris enacts crypto law, gives substance abuse grants

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris enacted the new Cryptocurrency and Data Mining Ordinance in his regular meeting on Oct. 19, officially enabling local control of such facilities.

The establishment of mining centers had been under a development moratorium for more than a year at the time of enactment, with a first reading of the ordinance in June, a public hearing in July, and a second reading in August.

Prior to enactment, the Commissioner's Office solicited feedback from the public on the mining sites, which was universally negative.

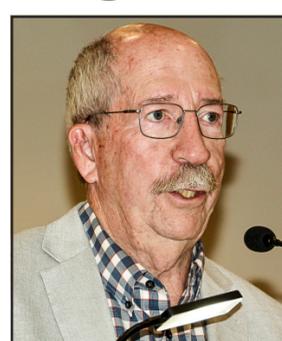
The goal of the process has been to put regulations in place to enable local control of an industry that many residents consider to be a nuisance, as witnessed in neighboring counties that did not have regulations in place prior to their construction. Now, strict standards are

in place to limit the potential for noise and other disturbances associated with the mining process, which comes with myriad externalities that have been noted to negatively impact quality of life for adjacent property owners, farm animals and wildlife.

Operating rows and rows of computers for the mining process uses a lot of electricity that generates a lot of heat, requiring many massive fans to keep the equipment cool.

In turn, these fans produce lots of noise, which can be a disturbance not just to people living near them but also to animals, and many residents have expressed that mining is simply not what they are looking for in the largely serene environs of the North Georgia Mountains.

Issues brought to the county's attention have ranged from health concerns due to round-the-clock noise exposure to the potential strain on local power resources, diminishment of property values, and the greater possibility of cybersecurity threats.



Lamar Paris
Sole Commissioner

The ordinance does not prohibit the development of crypto and data-mining facilities; however, it does restrict locations they can be built to "areas where any potential adverse effects on the community will be minimized."

Once a site plan is approved, crypto and data-mining developers would have to meet exact sound level requirements – that is, be able to contain their noise to a specified geographic reach – and install See *County Meeting*, Page 3A

The Sons of the Pioneers bring Old West to life in concert



Longtime Sons of the Pioneers member Ken Lattimore signing photographs for young fans after the Oct. 22 Ferst Readers Benefit Concert. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The auditorium lights dimmed Sunday, Oct. 22, as the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center transformed into a vast Texas countryside of winding trails, dancing tumbleweeds and yodeling cowboys.

At 2 p.m., the legendary western singing group the Sons of the Pioneers took the stage

to benefit the Ferst Readers of Union County in its mission of promoting childhood literacy.

Just before the show, western music lovers and altruistic community members alike filed into the lobby to pay the \$36 admission fee and give generous donations to the nonprofit child literacy program.

Although the auditorium didn't reach full capacity, concertgoers packed out

the first level of seating and overflowed into the next level.

To introduce the band and describe the purpose of the concert to the audience, John Cochran, a Young Harris resident and longtime fan of the Sons of the Pioneers, made his first on-stage appearance of the afternoon.

Cochran explained that the proceeds of the show would go directly to Ferst Readers See *Sons of the Pioneers* Page 7A

Local family perseveres after disabling vehicle accident

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

If there's one message that Clayton Adams wants to impart upon the world after his parents' life-changing car accident this summer, it's simply that folks should hug their loved ones close.

After all, hugging his loved ones has been something Clayton has had difficulty doing himself, considering his father remains in in-patient physical therapy and his mother was just released from the hospital in August.

Union and Towns counties may recognize the names of Travis and Kathy Adams, especially if they attend Mountain Presbyterian Church or live at Branan Lodge; Travis preached at Mountain Presbyterian for over three decades, and Kathy served as Service Coordinator for Branan Lodge.

Travis retired from Mountain Presbyterian in 2020 but continued preaching part-time in Rabun County, and the couple were on their way there on July 23, 2023, when, through no fault of their own, they were involved in a three-



Travis and Kathy Adams have been enjoying quality time with their grandchildren while Travis undergoes in-patient physical therapy following a bad car wreck July 23. See *Adams Family*, Page 2A

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FOOTBALL

Thursday 11/2 7:00 PM
@ Fellowship Christian

Daylight Saving Time Ends Sunday Fall Back

2023 Veterans Celebrations See pages 6B & 9B

Union County Proposed Budget See page 10A

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Sharp Service Project...from Page 1A

they're really not."

While the project focuses primarily on supporting Type 1 diabetic children through consolation and meeting medical supply needs, Sharp is also making sure to use it as an opportunity to educate the rest of the community, as her mother Rhonda Sharp explained.

"Especially for the

primary and elementary kids, educating their peers and friends (is crucial, because) they hear the alarms going off and they see their friends being pulled aside at recess to sit and have a juice box," Mrs. Sharp said.

Even the little things like having carb-free snacks available to diabetic students while the rest of the class is having something to eat can make a huge difference in their school experience.

With about 20 Type 1 diabetic students across the school system, it is important that peers and teachers understand their condition on an adequate level. For Sharp, that also includes understanding the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes.

"A lot of the time people get those types mixed up because they're not aware that there's multiple types," Sharp said. "Type 2 is what the majority of the population has, and it's all that people talk about."

"That's a big reason why I'm doing this project. I want to get the word out about Type 1 and what it is. It is completely different from Type 2. It's not something that we can control or stop getting, it just happens. It's not preventable."

This misunderstanding often leads to unfair judgment against Type 1 diabetics, due to the reality of Type 2 diabetes, which is mostly associated with obesity, unhealthy eating habits, and harmful actions like smoking or drinking. This is because Type 2 diabetes often develops over time based on an individual's lifestyle.

In contrast, Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease that is independent of lifestyle. With Type 1, the affected person's pancreas doesn't have the beta cells it needs to produce insulin. Without insulin, their blood sugar cannot be controlled naturally.

Because of this, many Type 1 diabetics wear devices to help monitor their sugar levels, which can sometimes feel unnecessarily shameful. Sharp hopes to combat that embarrassment, however, by being open and accepting of her own devices.

"For these younger kids that have the monitor, just to see older girls have these devices and to see that they're driving, they're getting ready to

go to college and are involved in clubs and activities with Type 1 diabetes, will hopefully encourage (them) that they can still live a long, fulfilling life and have a lot of fun," Mrs. Sharp said.

Despite her involvement in more than 10 school clubs and volunteer programs, Sharp is doing this project independently because of how close it is to her heart. The idea for the project initially came to her this past summer.

She is very involved in the community already, volunteering as a certified nursing assistant at the Healing Hands Community Clinic, a nonprofit health care outfit that supports people without health insurance.

However, that didn't feel like enough. She wanted to support the community even more, so with the help of Union County Schools Head Nurse Leigh Ann Hartley, Sharp was able to find just the way to do that.

"I have known Ava for probably about four years," said Hartley, who is equally as proud as she is impressed by Sharp's leadership. "You don't see many teenagers having that much forethought and initiative to do something like this."

Throughout the entire process, Sharp has referred to Hartley as a mentor, and Hartley is proud to pass that title on to her protégé.

"She's such a great mentor," Hartley said. "And with the personal experience she has as a Type 1 diabetic, we thought she would be a great resource to mentor middle school diabetics that are transitioning to high school, especially the ones who have been newly diagnosed."

"They're shy or they feel like it's a stigma, and I think that the more she can come in and they can realize that she lives a normal life and she's cool, it's going to help a lot."

The community couldn't be any luckier to have someone like Sharp advocating for its Type 1 diabetics, as both her mother and Nurse Hartley shared.

"I think Ava just has an empathy for children with Type 1 diabetes because she can resonate with how they feel. It's scary and it's overwhelming," Mrs. Sharp said. "Not only are you trying to get through childhood and being a teenager, you're also always in the back

of your head worrying about your blood sugar.

"So, it's a lot of multitasking that these kids are expected to do at such a young age. And they really need a lot of support and understanding."

Upon graduating high school in the spring, Sharp plans to attend college for biology on a pre-medical track in order to continue bettering her community.

"There's a big lack of health care in rural areas of Georgia, and I want to bring that back here," she said. "Like endocrinology for diabetes and other immune disorders – there's no endocrinologist here, so I have to drive two hours to see my doctor."

"And a lot of people don't have the opportunity to even see their doctor, so their condition worsens or they can't manage it."

Due to her higher education plans, it's unclear whether she'll be able to continue working on this project in the years to come. On the flipside, Nurse Hartley expects other Union County students to step up and fill her shoes while she's away.

"I think we will have students who are Type 1 diabetics who just take up the mantle and continue on this tradition," Hartley said. "They just needed somebody like Ava to give them the courage to do that."

Without a doubt, Ava Sharp is a true gem in the community and an icon for young people striving for positive change.

To donate to the diabetic students of Union County, visit <https://bit.ly/uc-type-1>. There, people will be greeted with a list of items to purchase for Sharp's project and a warm acknowledgment from Ava herself.

"All items purchased will be evenly distributed between the four public schools in Blairsville, Georgia and available to those students with Type 1 Diabetes. Thank you for your support! Love, Ava."

People with questions may email her at avasharp@students.ucschools.org.

For additional support, Sharp points other diabetic children toward Camp Kudzu, a nonprofit summer camp designed specifically to serve Type 1 diabetics ages 8-18, where Sharp is currently training to become a junior counselor.

Adams Family...from Page 1A

car accident on US 76 near Waldroup Road in Hiawassee.

"The gentleman that caused the wreck was driving west toward Young Harris, and a car in front of him was turning left into a private driveway," relayed Clayton Adams, Travis and Kathy's youngest son. "He hit the car in front of him – the car that was turning – and that car then went into the other lane of traffic and struck my parents (head-on)."

All three vehicles' occupants had to be airlifted from the scene and taken to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville.

From that moment, Travis and Kathy had a long road to recovery ahead of them. After enduring a seven-hour surgery for a lower lumbar L4 spinal fracture, Travis will be wheelchair-bound for the rest of his life. Essentially, the nerves in his legs – especially around his feet – are severed.

"He's actually able to move his legs. They're just so badly injured that he will never walk again. He is not considered paralyzed," clarified Clayton. "The nerves are so shot – that is why he will never walk again."

Meanwhile, Kathy has had her own health hurdles to clear. Upon initial examination at the hospital, her only recognized injury was a fractured wrist, but it quickly became clear something was very wrong.

On the evening of July 23, she experienced worsening stomach pain, and an X-ray revealed internal bleeding.

As Travis underwent his own surgery, Kathy was rushed into the operating room "because what they thought was a puncture to the liver was actually a considerable puncture to her small intestine." Doctors believe her injuries were caused by the seatbelt.

"For a moment there, it got pretty scary for my mom just because of the internal bleeding, but she has made a full recovery," Clayton reassured. "She had stomach surgery as well as (surgery for) a fractured wrist."

After a two-week stay in the hospital, Kathy

was released on Aug. 2 and currently lives with Clayton in Athens for the time being. From there, she has made the difficult but necessary decision to retire in order to care for her husband as they adjust to this new normal.

"Life changes so quickly, you know? I mean, here were two people that were headed to church in the morning on a Sunday, and their lives changed forever," Clayton observed, admitting that while "anger would set in at some point" because of the accident's circumstances and his father's lack of mobility, he and the rest of the family are just glad the outcome wasn't even more dire.

"The emotion is, we are so thankful that my parents are alive, and we are so thankful that they will be able to go home and live their life," added Clayton. "They just need all the support. My father, just because he's wheelchair-bound, does not mean that he is incapable of living a life that is worthy. He will be able to have a life in which he gets fulfillment."

On that note, the couple has already seen a phenomenal amount of support manifest in the form of needed changes to their home. The doors and hallways have been widened to accommodate Travis' new wheelchair, and the addition of indoor and outdoor ramps

along with a new toilet and shower have done much to increase accessibility.

According to Clayton, it's likely that Travis will come home sometime at the beginning of November. Until then, he continues to build up his strength and adjust to his new perspective in an in-patient therapy facility in Commerce.

As the family prepares to welcome him home, they ask that the community keep him and Kathy in their prayers.

"My parents are of course firm believers in the power of prayer, and we believe in miracles," Clayton said.

At the time of publication, the Adams' GoFundMe page had raised over \$34,000 of a \$50,000 goal. Medical expenses have, for the most part, been covered by insurance, and most of the house renovations have been completed, yet many expenses remain.

To help cover the costs of car modifications, including hand controls, an electric seat, portable ramps and an outdoor wheelchair, check out www.gofundme.com/f/help-travis-and-kathy-adams to show your love.

If nothing else, open up a line to the Lord and ask that He continue to watch over such beloved members of the community.

Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes



McCConnell Baptist Church will serve as a Samaritan's Purse Drop Off location for Operation Christmas Child during National Collection Week, November 13th through November 20th.

Other area churches or individuals may bring their filled shoeboxes to the covered drive thru portico entrance at the church during the days/hours listed below. Drop Off Center volunteers will prepare these for transport to the regional collection center on Monday, November 20th.

If you would like to volunteer to help with this ministry, please call the church office at 706-896-2281.

Monday-Friday, November 13-17: 3:30-5:30 PM. Saturday & Sunday, November 18 & 19: 12-4 PM. Monday, November 20: 9-11 AM.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

sound barriers should the limits established in the ordinance be violated.

Appropriate sound levels and abatement must be maintained throughout the duration of operations, with enforcement for code violations to include potential warnings and citations, as well as a maximum penalty of up to \$1,000 in fines, imprisonment for 60 days, or both.

With the ordinance in place, potential developers of mining centers will have many hoops to jump through if they want to set up shop in Union County, with code enforcement to keep them in line.

To date, no one has approached the county about developing a mining center.

Resident Marsha Lodes addressed the commissioner about the ordinance in the Oct. 19 meeting, expressing her disappointment that language suggested by another resident, Donna Jimenez, had not been included.

Jimenez had requested the ordinance meet specific Environmental Protection Agency guidelines "to avoid health problems to protect our community." She also asked that "pay to play" taxes be incorporated so that miners "pay for costs they impose on others and the communities."

The Commissioner's Office did, however, include Jimenez' suggestion that the ordinance require "SOC 2 certification" for cybersecurity purposes, though she believes the 13 months for initial compliance built into the ordinance is much too lenient given that a lot can happen in that time.

"I have to feel that (my staff) really spent a lot of time and effort doing this, and I have to feel comfortable that they knew what the ordinance needed to say and said," Paris responded. "It's a tough situation; any way you do it, you can always find other words."

"They couldn't put everything that was brought up in, but they considered everything and how it might be covered in some other part of the ordinance. It maybe didn't sound like it was, but it is. And we feel comfortable that we ended up with a good product."

Offering a counterpoint to the complaint, resident Wesley

Hopgood said, "I thought you guys did a very good job at putting this ordinance together, and I thank you."

People may read the final draft of the ordinance at <https://www.unioncountygga.gov/>.

Substance Abuse Grants

In other business, Paris presented additional Substance Abuse Grants, continuing the process from his Aug. 22 regular meeting in which he presented \$5,000 grants to New Hope Counseling, Positive Pathways Inc., Union County Family Connection, and Freedom Ministries.

"In 2010, the Alcohol Referendum was passed," Paris said previously. "I made the commitment to set aside \$50,000 each year from the alcohol license fees and tax receipts to put back into the community for the purpose of helping to combat the alcohol and drug abuse problems that already existed in Union County."

The grants are awarded in an application process wherein eligible organizations show how the funds will be used in their budgets, and an "anonymous committee that none of us have any direct feedback to" selects the grant recipients.

"Based on the budgets that were presented to the committee, they awarded two organizations the following additional funds, which were provided to the respective organizations on Aug. 30, 2023," Paris said.

Positive Pathways received an additional \$2,500, and Union County Family Connection received \$7,500.

Moving on, Paris presented the "Opioid Remediation Funding Grants" — monies that came to the county after it joined in a national opioid class action lawsuit in 2018 "against some of the pharmaceutical companies that were producing opioids."

Those companies were subsequently found to have been acting "illegally and were responsible for the wrongful distribution of prescription opioids."

The county did not incur any legal or other expenses in joining the lawsuit, which has resulted in multiple settlements being reached and, therefore, a distribution of funds to Union County and other municipalities

around the nation, Paris said.

Settlement funds are restricted in use, with qualifying grant recipients required to provide "drug addiction treatment."

"In the end, Union County received, shockingly, \$90,686.33 in remediation funding for the settlement," Paris said. "Union County dedicated to make a grant available in similar fashion to the Substance Abuse Grant, compensating with an application and the guidelines and restrictions."

"A total of \$40,000 was made available to be split evenly between the organizations that were selected. The Substance Abuse Grant Committee reviewed all the applications and determined the organizations' eligibility."

New Hope Counseling and Freedom Ministries each received \$20,000 from the settlement funds: "We're really excited for both of these groups that have done an outstanding job in Union County in working with drug and alcohol addiction," Paris said.

At the request of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, Paris joined dozens of other counties by adopting a resolution "urging the Governor and General Assembly of Georgia to continue efforts to reform and improve mental health services for the citizens of Georgia."

Additional Business

Also in the meeting, Paris proclaimed Nov. 4, 2023, as "Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame Day" in Union County to recognize the Hall of Fame's annual efforts to honor and induct Georgia's military veterans.

Eric England, the renowned Marine Corps veteran from Blairsville who passed away in 2018, was inducted into the 2017 Class of the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame on Nov. 4, 2017.

In his Commissioner's Comments, Paris noted the "incredible" number of children in county-sponsored youth sports, including 141 football players and 121 cheerleaders, and coming up, about 60 basketball teams, on top of annual volleyball, wrestling, softball and baseball programs.

He also said construction of the Elections Facility next to the Sports Center should be

finished in about a month, and grading has been completed for the adjacent Multipurpose Gym that will double as a specialized voting facility with the potential to accommodate precinct consolidation.

Likewise, work has all but wrapped up at the brand-new Union County Fire Station No. 13, set to open off Murphy Highway Nov. 17. Station 13 will be manned 24/7/365 by full-time firefighters, dramatically increasing response times to fire and medical emergencies in that area.

Offering a statement in the public comment period, "lifetime resident" Michael Plott said he'd known Paris for decades, and that of all the commissioners he can remember over the years, Paris

is "more dedicated to Union County than all of these people put together."

"He's done a fantastic job, and I cannot thank him enough for what he does for us

because his heart is in the right place," Plott concluded to a round of applause.

"I wasn't expecting that — thank you very much," Paris said.

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Castoff Pet Rescue...from Page 1A

give out information on the new property's process – an endeavor that several folks, like Vet Tech Supervisor Brittany Balsamo, refer to as “his baby” for the time and effort he’s put into it.

“I’ve mostly been out there with this new construction project trying to bring this together so we can get all the cats moved out here,” revealed Payne, adding, “We’ve been updating all of our processes just to get modernized with everything.”

Payne also mentioned plans to hire dog trainers certified to work with the public and rescued animals. Behavioral issues, whether rooted in aggression or rowdy behavior, are a common reason Payne has seen dogs given up by owners or continuously brought back to the shelter.

“This is just the first step of what we plan to do out here,” Payne said. “We’re planning to open a private dog park that would be open to the public, and then just do a lot of education on animals out here. We’re going to use this whole property for the most good we can do.”

And that’s not all Castoff has planned. Payne envisions a special fenced-in area for “dog

picnics,” a space that can be rented out for puppy playdates or meet-ups with human and animal buddies alike. He hopes all these additions to the property will be finished within four weeks.

Vet Tech Supervisor Balsamo has been working for Nottely Oaks Animal Hospital since 2018 and specializes in pet physical therapy, especially for dogs. Last Saturday, she was out there with the rest of the Nottely Oaks crew providing reduced vaccination and microchip services.

“It is a really cool cause,” Balsamo said. “We’re supporting one of our favorite rescues in town, Castoff Pet Rescue, just being able to help the community (and) make sure our pets in the community are vaccinated and help preventing disease.”

Nottely Oaks works closely with Castoff, and the hope is that once the facility is fully established, basic veterinary care can be provided at the shelter itself.

Not only would this be ideal for spays and neuters and immunizations, but it would provide an opportunity for the public to have access to more low-cost vaccinations and microchipping.

The process of getting the entire shelter moved out to the new property is a gradual one, but there are already a few key structures standing.

Dogs will have access to special indoor-outdoor kennels, and the support beams of a sheltered run have already been put up and await covering for the day canine companions can exercise in it without having to go out in the rain for walks.

Cats will soon take up residence in the land’s remodeled barn full-time, with room to roam in horse-sized stalls. Eventually, the lodging will include a protected outdoor space not unlike a “catio” so the friendly felines can get a breath of fresh air once in a while.

There were already a few kittens and younger cats in the barn that day awaiting adoption in playpens, carriers and spacious cages. Quadruplet brothers Greyson, Timber, Odie and runt Opie were especially popular. The approximately 8-week-olds were born after their very pregnant mother was found by the husband of volunteer Sherry Williams.

“We named the cat Mama Lacy – that was on July 18. The babies were born on July 24, and they stayed at my house until they got a little age



The Cletus Way band performed live for guests of the Castoff Pet Rescue Grand Opening over the weekend.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

on them, and they’re now in foster care,” Williams said.

Construction has wiped out much of Castoff’s funding, so monetary donations are always appreciated.

That said, for those who feel led to do more, volunteer work is always a possibility. There are animals to be socialized, pens to clean up,

and fosters to take in, among other duties; Castoff will be recruiting volunteers at additional off-site events in the future.

For folks with not a lot of spare time or change, consider stopping by the Castoff Pet Rescue Thrift Store at 19 Cobalt Street, Suite C, in Blairsville, or heading over to

the Haralson Memorial Civic Center on Wednesday nights for Bingo.

“People can come to that – that helps us tremendously,” said Payne, adding that online donations are the best way to provide funding. Just look for Castoff Pet Rescue’s Facebook page and follow the PayPal link to donate.

Early voting for Blairsville General Election ends on Friday



By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Advanced in-person voting for the Blairsville General Election will wrap up on Friday, Nov. 3, after three straight weeks and two Saturdays of early voting.

Today through Friday, all early voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside Blairsville City Hall located at 62 Blue Ridge Street.

Election Day voting is next Tuesday, Nov. 7, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at City Hall.

Four candidates qualified in August for three City Council seats: incumbent Councilwomen Rhonda Mahan, Mary Ruth Cook and Kayla Hemphill, along with Blairsville resident Frank Pack.

Mahan has been on the City Council since January of 2002. By the time her current term expires at the end of December, she will have served five full terms and two years of a special election term for a total of 22 years on the council.

Cook is coming up on the end of her first full term after serving two years and a month of a special election term that started in December 2017, for a total of six years and one month on the council by the end of the year.

Hemphill won a special election in November 2021 to fill an unexpired term and will

have served two years and two months when that term expires after Dec. 31.

Pack has run for municipal office multiple times in the past.

As city election outcomes are determined by plurality vote, the Top 3 vote-getters in the upcoming election will each win one of the open seats in November. Terms of office will begin Jan. 1, 2024, and run through Dec. 31, 2027.

Voting in the municipal election is open to eligible residents of the city. The registration deadline to cast a ballot in the election was

Oct. 10.

Requested absentee ballots started hitting the mail on Oct. 16, and the deadline to request an absentee ballot from City Hall was on Friday, Oct. 27. All absentee ballots must be received at City Hall by the end of Election Day voting.

There is no countywide election in 2023, just the municipal election, so only residents qualified to vote in the City of Blairsville will be able to participate. As such, there is no voting or other election activity inside the Union County Courthouse this year.

Sons of the Pioneers...from Page 1A



Last month, the Sons of the Pioneers returned to Union County to help promote childhood literacy. Pictured here: the Sons of the Pioneers performing with local musician John Cochran at the Fine Arts Center Oct. 22.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

of Union County, a nonprofit program founded in Blairsville in 2013 to provide books for free to local children.

Although Cochran remained humble in his remarks, co-chair of the Ferst Readers Community Action Team Martha Davenport made sure to give him proper recognition for helping put the whole event together.

While the Ferst Readers have hosted several benefit concerts in the past, it wasn't until last year that the Sons of the Pioneers became involved with the nonprofit.

"John was very much a fan of Sons of the Pioneers," Davenport said. "(He) has been a fan of them since he was a little boy, and he suggested that we have them.

"So, we had them last year, and it was very successful. They loved being here in this area, so we just decided to have them come here again this year."

After Cochran's brief introduction, the Sons of the Pioneers stole the spotlight as they led the crowd down a rugged cowboy trail of western favorites. Between songs, they amused the audience and got comfortable with the room through some playful banter.

"We're just like brothers, and we're all a very close-knit family," said John Fullerton, who did most of the talking for the musical group founded in 1934.

Fullerton told the interesting story of how the name "Sons of the Pioneers" came about. Initially, the band was a group of three musicians calling themselves "The Pioneer Trio."

After gaining a fourth member, they booked a show on Warner Brothers Radio Station, where the announcer gave them a new name on the fly: Sons of the Pioneers.

When asked why he changed their name, he claimed that they were too young to be called pioneers and that a group of four is not a trio anyway.

After sharing the band's origin story, Fullerton introduced his fellow band members.

Ken Lattimore, who sings and plays the fiddle, has been with the group for just over 25 years.

Paul Elliott, who is also a fiddling virtuoso, has been with the band for six years.

Bass player Chuck Ervin is the newest member, having joined the group in January of 2019.

And Tommy Nallie, who is both the fourth lead guitarist and the fourth trail boss in 89 years, joined the group in 1983. Nallie also stepped to the mic to give Fullerton a bit of acknowledgement, sharing another amusing tale.

"I met (John) when he was 7 years old," Nallie said. "His grandma brought him out to see the Sons of the Pioneers – and he didn't want to come! But you know what? He liked the music. He fell in love with music.

"So, he went home, got all of grandma's records out, and started singing. He learned all the chords and started memorizing all the words. He's been in western music for a long time, and we're really glad to have him in the Sons of the Pioneers."

After playing two sets divided by a 15-minute

intermission, the Sons of the Pioneers invited John Cochran back onstage to sing alongside them in the final numbers of the show, helping to fulfill a life-long dream of Cochran's.

Following the concert, the band members gathered around their merchandise table to talk to fans and sign autographs, giving the performance a very personal touch and showcasing the support the band has for the child literacy program.

"It's an honor and a privilege to get to support Ferst Readers, and what they stand for is so important: getting good books in the hands of our youth," said Fullerton as he autographed photos and gave fans an up-close look at his personal guitar.

"A lot of us on the Community Action Team are retired educators, and we have seen first-hand how important it is for children to have books in their home and to be read to," Martha Davenport said. "It develops language skills, vocabulary, and it makes the child more likely to be successful in reading when they go to school.

"Since 2013, we have provided over 42,000 books to Union County children."

The program offers support to all families, regardless of income, starting as soon as the birth of their child to age 5. Working with Union General Hospital Labor & Delivery, Ferst Readers gives every Union County child a free book and packet of registration information.

Families interested in the program can visit <https://ferstreaders.org/> to learn more and register their child.



Ira Weaver American Legion supports Wreaths Across America ... and so can you!

WREATHS
across
AMERICA



Arlington National Cemetery

Wreaths Across America is a national campaign to respectfully lay wreaths on Veterans' graves. According to the Wreaths Across America website, their mission is to remember the fallen, honor those who serve, and teach the next generation the value of freedom. Ira Weaver Post 121 has taken up this national program as one of the highlights of their many activities. Wreaths Across America started in 1992 when the owner of a wreath making business had a surplus of wreaths towards the end of the holiday season. This man, Morrill Worcester, remembered a visit he made to Arlington National Cemetery when he was a boy years earlier and this gave him an idea. He contacted his then senator, Olympia Snow of Maine to work with Arlington to arrange a delivery of his excess wreaths. Many of his local neighbors and businesses volunteered to help. It remained a small operation until 2005 when the now iconic picture of wreaths in the snow on veterans' headstones went viral. In 2022, over 2.7 million wreaths were sponsored to adorn the graves of veterans around the world. Every year, a convoy of trucks fan out across the country to deliver wreaths to the over 3,000 locations that support this operation. Blairsville

is one of those places.

The goal for the Ira Weaver Post is 500 wreaths and with your help, we can get there. We lay wreaths at 5 area cemeteries to include Memory Garden and Holy Hill and if we have extra wreaths, they go to the National Cemetery in Canton where they need 30,000 wreaths for 30,000 resting Veterans. To sponsor a wreath go to our post website at <https://legionpost121.org/wreaths-across-america> or www.wreathscrossamerica.org/GA0206P

On December 16, 2023 at 10 AM, the Post will hold a Wreaths Across America ceremony that is open to the entire community. This ceremony will be at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center. We will have participation from the Cub and Boy Scouts, Civil Air Patrol, FFA and the High School band. "There is nothing better than pairing our kids with our Veterans; it's good for both," stated Mike Merritt Post Commander. Last year's ceremony was phenomenal, and this year's will be even better. We'd like to see the whole community come out and join us for this event. After the ceremony or the following day depending on wreath delivery, we will fan out and lay the wreaths. Everyone is encour-

aged to participate in this part of the activity as well. It may be cold out there, but it warms the heart watching this display play out. So don't forget to sponsor a wreath or two.

The American Legion is the largest and one of the oldest and most inclusive of all veterans' organizations worldwide and devotes itself to mutual helpfulness, mentoring youth, advocating patriotic honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to fellow service members and veterans.

All members, and interested veterans, are encouraged to attend our next meeting Nov 21, 2023 at 6:30 PM at the Veteran's Center, 78 Blue Ridge Street. It's a great opportunity to become engaged in the community and to establish strong bonds with fellow Vets. The Post and Auxiliary, for spouses of Veterans, will begin its meeting at 6:30 PM in the same building on the same day. Additionally, the Sons of the American Legion and the Legion Riders will have their joint meeting beginning at 5 PM.

For more information on the meeting or any Post activities email the Post at alpost121@gmail.com or visit the website at legionpost121.org.