

Happy Thanksgiving

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Jin Seon Goddard named System Teacher of Year

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Congratulations to first-grade teacher Elizabeth Jin Seon Goddard, who was announced as the 2023 System Teacher of the Year in the Nov. 15 meeting of the Union County Board of Education.

Goddard has 14 years of experience in education but has only been with the local school system for a year, so it is a tremendous testament to her teaching abilities to have been chosen as both the Primary School and System Teacher of the Year in Union County.

Primary School Principal Debbie Decubellis presented Jin Seon Goddard with the honor, which included public recognition that evening and the awarding of a special certificate

and trophy to display in her classroom.

"Every student deserves a champion, every teacher deserves a champion, and every school deserves to have great champions," Decubellis said. "The Primary School and Union County are pleased to have Mrs. Jin Seon Goddard."

The first-grade teacher is now in the running to be selected as Georgia Teacher of the Year to potentially serve "as an ambassador for education, traveling the state speaking to educators and community groups," according to the Georgia Department of Education.

If selected for the state-level award, she will get the opportunity to compete in the National Teacher of the Year Program to represent Georgia "at national conferences with other State Teachers of the

Year."

Other Union County Teachers of the Year were announced in the October board meeting, to include Charley Cattanauch of the High School, Michael Smith-Foot of the Middle School, Rhonda Colwell of the Elementary School, and Robert Hill of Woody Gap School.

Also Nov. 15, recognition was granted to the Middle School Football Team and its tireless coaches, who collectively worked hard starting with spring football practice back in April, with training continuing every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday over the summer.

Two years ago, the team had 18 students on its roster, and today, there are over 40.

Each coach present lined up at the front of the room to receive honorary certificates.

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Union County Primary School Principal Debbie Decubellis, System Teacher of the Year Elizabeth Jin Seon Goddard, and Assistant Superintendent Tiffany Setzer in the Nov. 15 School Board meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Union County budget up 11.3% for Fiscal Year 2023

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held a public hearing in the Union County Courthouse on Thursday, Nov. 17, to introduce a significantly larger budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

County Finance Director Laura Driskell led the proposed 2023 budget discussion, handing out an informational packet she prepared for the public to augment her presentation by detailing various aspects of the budgeting process, such as breakdowns of revenue and expenditure increases.

"This budget book

See County Budget, Page 2A



County Finance Director Laura Driskell led the Nov. 17 budget discussion, with Commissioner Lamar Paris looking on. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

ALDI to welcome shoppers with Dec. 1 Grand Opening

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

For months, people have been asking when the new ALDI Grocery Store will be opening in Blairsville. Thankfully, the store is almost open, with the store set to open next week at the intersection of Farmers Market Way and Georgia 515.

ALDI will be holding a Grand Opening for the public on Thursday, Dec. 1, starting with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 8:45 a.m.

The Grand Opening will feature free shopping totes while supplies last, and Golden Tickets will be handed out to the first 100 customers of the

See ALDI Opening, Page 6A



The first ALDI opened in Iowa in 1976, and since then, the discount grocer has cultivated fiercely loyal supporters who make up an enthusiastic fanbase. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Early voting for senate runoff starts November 28

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Early in-person voting for the U.S. Senate Runoff Election between Republican Herschel Walker and Democratic Incumbent Raphael Warnock will begin next week, running Monday, Nov. 28, through Friday, Dec. 2.

A runoff is needed because neither Walker nor Warnock cleared the majority hurdle to win outright. Walker earned 48.5% of the vote to Warnock's 49.4%. The election will only feature the top two vote-getters, leaving out Libertarian Chase Oliver, who garnered 2.1% of the vote.

In-person early voting will occur in the Jury Assembly Room of the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, with voting hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Runoff Election Day voting will take place Tuesday, Dec. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the 11 pre-assigned precincts of Union County.

Voters may request mail-in absentee ballots through Monday, Nov. 28. If people checked that they were elderly or disabled on a previous application this year, they should receive a mailed ballot automatically without having to submit another application.

Folks wanting to utilize the official drop box to turn in their absentee ballots can find it in the Jury Assembly Room during early voting hours. Completed absentee ballots may also be dropped off at the Registrar's Office inside the courthouse up to 7 p.m. on Election Day.

By accessing the "My Voter Page" at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>, voters may request an absentee ballot and find their registration status, precinct information, mailed absentee



ballot status, voter participation history and more.

Nov. 7 was the voter registration deadline to be eligible to participate in the federal runoff.

Unlike Warnock's victory in the 2020 Special Election Runoff that secured Democratic control of the U.S. Senate, the Dec. 6 General Election Runoff will result in either a 50-50 or 51-49 split in favor of the Democrats, with U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris potentially serving, once again, as the Democratic tiebreaking vote in legislative decisions.

Friends, colleagues mourn passing of Speaker Ralston

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Following an extended illness, Georgia House Speaker David Ralston passed away on Wednesday, Nov. 16, surrounded by his wife Sheree, their children and other family members.

Ralston of neighboring Blue Ridge was 68 years old. For 19 years, he represented State House District 7, which includes Fannin and Gilmer counties and a portion of Dawson County, and he became speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives in 2010.

"At the time of his passing, Speaker Ralston was the longest currently-serving state house speaker in the country," according to a statement issued through the Georgia General Assembly.

Known for being a conservative leader with a heart



David Ralston

said District 56 State Rep. Mesha Mainor, an Atlanta-based Democrat who called Ralston a friend. "Each year, the holiday reminds us they are gone. Thanksgiving is not different, but I pray the Ralston family can see the loving man they lost was 'thanksgiving' to so many of us."

"The country will continue to send condolences their way during the season of being thankful. So many are grateful we were blessed to know his kindness and even more thankful his family shared him at their sacrifice."

District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter, the Republican legislator representing Union, Towns and parts of White counties, has known fellow attorney Ralston for decades; the two represented several clients together after Gunter opened a private practice as a young lawyer in the 1990s.

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County Budget...from Page 1A

(handout) is something new for (FY2023)," Driskell said. "It's the result of time, effort and increased transparency."

All told, the 2023 General Fund Budget has been balanced to about \$25.5 million, or roughly \$2.6 million more than the current year 2022 budget, with most of the additional expenditures coming from salary and benefit increases as well as inflation.

In terms of personnel costs, the FY23 budget factors in a 15.3% increase that translates to about \$1.6 million in additional pay and benefits for county employees.

Driskell also highlighted recent population growth in Union County, which grew about 6% between 2019 and 2020 – and even more since then – which means the county is responsible for providing services for a larger constituency.

And expenses are up across the board, as the U.S. continues to face record-high levels of inflation.

"The annual inflation rate for the United States is 7.7% for the 12 months ended October 2022, after rising 8.2% previously, according to U.S. Department of Labor data that was published on Nov. 10," Driskell said.

Continuing, "So, this increase in budget for 2023 is to account for the rising inflation rate, as well as to be able to increase salaries and keep up with the demand for workers and higher wages along with our population growth."

Driskell noted that the county is not only competing with other municipal governments in the region to retain highly qualified employees, but also with private businesses that are always looking for similarly qualified workers.

Revenue projections are also up for next year, including about \$313,000 in additional property tax revenues from new growth in the county tax digest, along with about \$780,000 in additional projected Local Option Sales Tax revenues that help offset property taxes.

"The Local Option Sales

Tax is a tax that's set up by the state legislature in order to help each county roll back their millage rate," Driskell said. "So, without this LOST, the county would have to significantly raise property taxes to make up for the loss in that revenue."

Still other revenues have increased, to include roughly \$500,000 in insurance premium taxes, plus increases in motor vehicle and other taxes, licenses and permitting fees, intergovernmental revenues, fines and forfeitures, etc.

The budget goes toward providing mostly mandated county-level services like E-911, Road Maintenance, Sheriff's Office, Detention Center, Fire Department, Coroner's Office, Tax Commissioner, Elections, Superior Court, Library and much more.

Each fiscal year runs Jan. 1-Dec. 31, with the budgeting process for the next fiscal year beginning every June when the finance director opens budget requests to department heads and elected officials.

Multiple county department heads and elected

officials attended the hearing to answer questions about the budget requests they submitted to make up the 2023 General Fund Budget, however, no questions were posed from the public.

Paris is expected to adopt the budget in a Nov. 29 called meeting at 5 p.m. inside the courthouse. The budget is available for inspection by the public at unioncountygga.gov.

The commissioner held his regular monthly meeting after the budget hearing that evening, and coverage for that meeting will appear in the Nov. 30 edition of the North Georgia News.

Items from the Nov. 17 regular meeting included adoption of the Amplified Sound Ordinance and the first reading of the Short-Term Rental Ordinance, a draft of which can be found at <http://www.unioncountygga.gov/government/commissioners-office/>.

"A public hearing will be held on Monday, Dec. 5, 2022, beginning at 5 p.m. to discuss the first draft of Union County's Short-Term Rental Ordinance," the website reads. "Please contact the Commissioner's Office if you need additional information."

David Ralston...from Page 1A

Gunter also called Ralston a friend and a mentor, and he was "shocked" to learn of his passing.

"Speaker Ralston was a good friend to me and a great leader," Gunter said. "He had respect from persons on both sides of the aisle, whether you were a Democrat or a Republican, and not just in the House of Representatives, but all across the state."

Added Gunter, "He's going to be missed. He still had goals to accomplish, like mental health – he got the framework passed this past session (with the Mental Health Parity Act), and there is still more work to do to move that issue along."

"There are many other things during his time as speaker that came through (for Georgians), and he's had a huge impact on our state. You hear us politicians all the time talking about how this state is the No. 1 place to do business, work and raise a family, and he's largely responsible for a lot of that, along with (Gov. Brian Kemp). He was a great leader, and he's going to be missed."

Ralston, who ran unopposed in his district this year, was re-elected to another two-year term on Nov. 8. Next steps for the seat will include a special election to fill the vacancy.

Speaker Pro Tempore Jan Jones will finish his term as house speaker, which

ends in January. Ralston had announced earlier this month he would not be seeking the house leadership position again for the 2023-24 term, saying "a health challenge has arisen that I need to address."

District 159 State Rep. Jon Burns of Newington was nominated Nov. 14 to serve as house speaker for the upcoming term. Burns was elected to the House of Representatives in 2006 and has served as the House Majority Leader.

"I am deeply saddened by the loss of Speaker David Ralston," Burns said. "Georgia has lost a titan of our political world, and, more importantly, I have lost a dear friend."

"As a leader, Speaker Ralston was selfless and brave – always willing to place the good of Georgians ahead of his own personal gain. As a friend, he was fiercely loyal – always willing to provide wise counsel and support. Our state will miss him greatly. I will miss him always."

According to Ralston's official biography published by the Georgia General Assembly, "prior to serving in the House, he served in the Georgia State Senate from 1992 until 1998."

"A champion for job creation and economic development," the biography continues, "Speaker Ralston (was) a driving force behind many legislative accomplishments which have

made Georgia the No. 1 state in the nation for business years after year, such as Georgia's Transportation Funding Act of 2015 and the state's first-ever cut to the income tax rate in 2018.

"Speaker Ralston has also worked with leaders in both parties to move Georgia forward through bipartisan legislation like Georgia's comprehensive adoption reform in 2018 and the state's first ever paid parental leave policy for state employees and teachers in 2021.

"In 2022, Speaker Ralston led the fight for historic reform of mental health care in Georgia. Georgia's Mental Health Parity Act and accompanying funding transforms both access to and delivery of mental health services and treatment options throughout the state.

"Born in Ellijay, Speaker Ralston (was) a graduate of Gilmer County High School. He went on to attend Young Harris College and North Georgia College (now the University of North Georgia) where he earned his bachelor's degree with honors. He later received his law degree from the University of Georgia."

He was a practicing attorney in Blue Ridge at the time of his death, and he previously served as President of the Fannin County Chamber of Commerce and the Blue Ridge Mountains Arts Association.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce presents Tourism Economic Impact Exceeds 1.5 Million Dollars



(L-R): Larry Garrett, Commissioner Lamar Paris, Mayor Jim Conley and Steve Rowe

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce Tourism Department was delighted to present a check for \$1,600,000 to Commissioner Lamar Paris and Mayor Jim Conley to represent the wide-ranging impacts of tourism on Union County and specifically revenue generated from tourism-related expenditures in Union County.

Blairsville-Union County has a diverse economic base including manufacturing & industry, retail, real estate, healthcare and financial services sectors. However, we would like to recognize the role our hospitality & tourism industry plays in our County's economic well-being.

A yearly report generated by the Georgia Department of Economic Development shows that in 2021 (most current numbers), Union County's tourism industry generated \$102 million in direct travel spending. Additionally, the tourism industry supported 818 jobs. In fact, if it were not for the tourism industry, each of the households in Union County would pay an additional \$640 in property taxes.

Tourism activity in the County has continually increased each year with more than a 18.8% increase from 2020. Traveler spending is a significant source of employment and taxes at the county, regional, and state levels. Be-

cause the tourism industry is largely comprised of small businesses, travel and hospitality jobs will never be outsourced or exported.

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce works to increase awareness of Blairsville-Union County as a destination for visitors, to increase overnight stays at our lodging properties, and to positively impact the economic climate for our area.

For more information about the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, stop by the Welcome Center located in the Union County Community Center or online at www.VisitBlairsvilleGa.com.

Give the Gift of Food to a Senior this Holiday Season

Share the gift of a meal with home-bound senior citizens in Union County this holiday season through the Home Delivered Meal Holiday Gift Certificate Program. Donate money for the Union County Home Delivered Meal program and we will send a card from you to a senior in our program.

You can provide a meal for one day or meals for an entire week, month or year. The cost of one meals is \$4.50, one week is \$22.50, one month is

\$99.00, one year is \$1,188.00. All gifts are tax deductible.

Checks should be made payable to Union County Senior Center, Holiday Gift Certificate Program and mailed or delivered to: Union County Senior Center, 95 Senior Center Drive, Blairsville, GA, 30512.

From Thanksgiving until New Year's Day, meals will be delivered to senior citizens with a special certificate/card to wish Happy Holidays from the gift giver. Food is essential to good health for everyone, but especially for seniors who cannot shop or cook for themselves. Our staff and volunteers deliver

meals Monday through Friday and check on the seniors - sometimes we are the only people they see all day. We receive Federal, state and county funding, however, the meal cost goes up each year and there is always a large deficit we must make up through fund raisers and donations from churches, businesses, civic groups and community members like you. The food costs rises each year and the demand for meals has increased. Please assist us in preserving this vital program. Thank you for making a difference in your community! For more information call 706-439-6105.

System Teacher of the Year...from Page 1A



The Union County Middle School Football Team received recognition in the November Board of Education meeting for working hard before and during the 2022 season.

and shortly thereafter, their student-athletes joined them. All were met with a round of applause.

Those coaches included Neil Setzer, James Avery, Gabe Miller, Zach Odom, Ryan Pearce, Parker Daniel and Levi Kendrick.

Honored players included Brandon Lynch, Isaac Milam, Jaden Lee, Hudson Collins, Landon Bell, Chetley Cox, Sir Zion Thompson, Parker Deal, Bentley Rich, Haze Burnette, Kamden Kendrick, Sean Rosa, Mikey Davis, Maddox Baltzell, Dylan Birnbaum, Corbin Combs, Grant Smith, Paxton Leggat, Robert Thompson, Kevin Kilpatrick, Johnathan Duncan, Hunter Brown, Micah Wallace, Preston Banton, Kyler Juracka, Cayden Miller, Eli

Milam, Easton Shumaker, Daniel Wrench, Zach Weaver, Arthur Golindo, Connor Stanford, Gunner Franklin, Alan Godinez, Jaxon Tothorow, Alan Gonzalez, Cade Owens, Sam Quillian, Jasper Kelley, Evan Helbert, Jax Dillinger, and Brayden Tullar.

Because October was a rather packed month for Union County Schools, a slideshow for each school – including Woody Gap – was put together to highlight important recent events and new information.

Announced in the meeting were results from a Union County Fine Arts Center-hosted regional contest for one-act plays, in which Union County High students received a standing ovation and won the titles of Best Overall Actor and

Best Supporting Actor.

In additional news in the realm of the arts was the Fall Chorus Concert, where a packed house listened to six different songs performed in six different languages.

Also, Union County High recently witnessed the Pacesetter Awards, where graduates from the last decade are recognized for outstanding career achievements to inspire current students.

Offering up examples of the nominees, Principal CT Hussion recited a list that included business managers, chiropractors and surgeons along with nurses, veterinarians, computer scientists, engineers, pilots, lawyers, military servicemembers, and police officers, among others.

Woody Gap has brought back the school newspaper with the help of a \$3,000 grant. Before, only high schoolers were published, but now, younger students can participate in submitting articles, and even some kindergarteners are shaping up to be future authors.

While Union County had its Thanksgiving dinner toward the middle of the month, Woody Gap held its own at the beginning of November, and it came to prove that although small, the school enjoys a tight-knit community.

Of note was the fact that the students whose parents were

the last meeting.

Peterson reminded the board that it was legal to record audio and video of the meeting, and that the taping thereof was because “little if any information flows from the board to the public during these meetings.”

Second, Zeb Blanchard took to the podium to “explain why (he complains)” at the board meetings. Blanchard cited his history as a Boy Scout camp counselor, an Assistant Scoutmaster, and an instructor at North Georgia Technical College as his inspiration.

Specifically, Blanchard clarified that he “works with young folks because I think I have something to offer them, and I see they desperately need it and I care.” To that end, he is concerned with a decline in “life skills, work ethic, (and) demeanor.”

Nathan Dean, the third speaker, said that the School Board suffered from an “institutional (lack of) communication” with the people they serve, noting this to be “both dehumanizing to you and to them.” Dean suggested the board open the floor to more public dialogue.

Dean also asked the board to provide local National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, saying, “Knowing our ranking in this admittedly failing state educational system isn’t informative, but knowing the actual academic data for our

local system would be.”

Dr. Mark Stallings was next. He pointed to his humble beginnings as “a simple Georgia country boy,” saying he never would have guessed that, one day, he would work in education and have the opportunity to visit schools around the world to view the models of various cultures.

“Every school system I’ve visited has always had a bright spot,” Stallings said, making a point of adding that most of the schools he had seen didn’t provide that “bright spot” for every student, but Union County did, truly living up to its motto of “Success For All.”

Resident Alexis Moore started her comments by reminding everyone in the room “that we are all human beings children of God, created in His image,” and that “when we stop seeing each other in this way, we create an ‘us versus them’ scenario.”

She brought this up due to her concern for behavior she perceived by various parties at board meetings, including board members and teachers. Moore urged the School Board to apply better judgment and kindness to themselves and to their fellows.

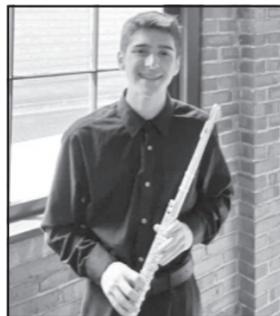
The Union County Board of Education meets on the third Tuesday of every month starting at 6 p.m. at the Board of Education Office located at 124 Hughes Street. The public is encouraged to attend.

Ayden Burnett selected to play the Flute in The Macy’s Day Parade

Ayden Burnett, a Junior at Union County High School, was selected by audition to participate and play the flute as a member of the Macy’s Great American Marching Band in the 96th Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, Thursday, November 24, 2022.

Ayden will travel to New York and practice with students from all over the United States. He will represent his school and his state.

Congratulations Ayden!



Ayden Burnett

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ALDI Opening...from Page 1A



Among other things, ALDI is known for its unique cart system, where customers insert a quarter to borrow one and get their money back upon returning the cart.

day, potentially redeemable for up to \$100 in the form of an ALDI gift card.

People will also receive the opportunity to enter a \$500 ALDI gift card sweepstakes that will run Dec. 1-4, with one lucky winner to be selected.

Those who can't wait until Dec. 1 can get in a day early, as ALDI will open its doors on Wednesday, Nov. 30, for a "Sneak Peak" shopping experience. Once open, store hours will be Monday-Sunday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

"We're new to Blairsville, and we can't wait to meet you," per the website aldi.us. "Right now, we're stocking our shelves with aisle after aisle of products you'll love. We've got everything from fresh produce delivered daily to everyday essentials you can never have enough of."

"So circle the date 12/1/22 and come experience a better way to shop. You can find us at 595 E. Highway 515, Blairsville, GA 30512."

ALDI offers a unique shopping experience that will augment the grocery options already available locally, said Mitch Griggs of the Union County Development Authority, who noted that ALDI is not a super discount store, but it's also not an independent or full-service grocer—all of which are currently represented in Union County.

Instead, ALDI is a discount grocer that has developed a niche of its own, catering to shoppers who wish to save money while also enjoying quality items and a greater frequency of new product availability that changes over time.

"Every ALDI store has a similar, easy-to-navigate layout," said Shaun O'Keefe, Jefferson Division Vice President at ALDI. "A typical store is approximately 12,000 square feet of retail space, making ALDI stores much easier to navigate than traditional grocery stores, and will feature open ceilings, natural lighting and environmentally friendly refrigeration and building materials."

"Customers can also expect a wide product mix at the Blairsville store, including organic meats, fresh produce, gourmet cheeses, sustainable seafood, on-trend items, award-winning baby essentials and so much more, including our limited-time ALDI Finds, all at unbeatable prices."

Continued O'Keefe, "At our core, ALDI is different by design. More than 90% of our store consists of ALDI-exclusive products, and 1 in 3 ALDI-exclusive products is award-winning (as of February 2022, based on a survey of everyday nationally distributed ALDI-exclusive branded products, excluding produce).

"And when it comes

to value, ALDI won't be beat on price—in fact, we're even dropping prices on 50 traditional Thanksgiving staples this year to help our customers enjoy a delicious meal and alleviate some worry about rising food costs.

"We've seen lots of competitors try to follow our lead, but our focus remains on providing shoppers with an outstanding value on quality food and products. We're confident in delivering on that promise."

"We look forward to serving the Blairsville community and providing residents with the best grocery shopping experience."

ALDI keeps prices low in multiple ways, by offering an extensive array of private label items; providing quality products from emerging brands at lower prices; avoiding "non-essential services like banking, pharmacies and check cashing to bring more savings to you"; displaying items "in their original shipping boxes to save on restocking shelves"; trimming costs by not employing grocery baggers or cart attendants; and more.

Known for employing a small staff in each store, ALDI in Blairsville will be diverging a bit from that practice, according to Griggs, who said the store will open with 25 employees while maintaining a goal to eventually bring a total of 40 new jobs to town.

The bulk of the employee base for the local ALDI is likely to come from Union County, though hiring will draw from the entire region to staff the location, with Blairsville being one of "2,000 stores across 36 states with over 25,000 employees."

As to how ALDI came to Blairsville, Griggs said the project has been in the works since around the time Food City closed its doors about five years ago.

"We had a grocery gap, (and I did some cold calling) with the various grocers to see if I could entice a grocer into considering our market," Griggs said. "ALDI is one of the folks I contacted, and I probably contacted every grocer known to man."

At the time, ALDI was not doing small, rural markets, sticking instead with more suburban areas like Gwinnett and Cobb counties, Griggs said.

"So, that was all fine and good, and about once a year I'd call to check in on them," he continued.

While attending a recent International Council of Shopping Centers trade show, Griggs found himself in conversation with a commercial broker who told him that "ALDI is starting to look at smaller markets."

That prompted Griggs to

reach back out to ALDI, which confirmed that it was indeed beginning to consider smaller markets.

"And that's when we began really trying to entice them into this market, started sending them market information and all the usual things I do to recruit a national retailer," Griggs said.

He first got them to look at the empty Food City building, "because that was my first priority, to go ahead and backfill an existing space that was vacant."

Ultimately, ALDI turned down the old Food City location, as it didn't match up with the company's desire for a free-standing store, "and that space was bigger than they normally build as well, so it just wasn't a really good fit for them, and they passed."

Griggs then showed ALDI the roughly 2-acre parcel of land the store now resides on, but at the time, it wasn't an investment the company was ready to make.

However, several local investors teamed up to acquire the parcel "and were able to get it at a price point where suddenly I was able to put that back on the market as a potential site for ALDI."

Griggs and the new property owners jointly approached ALDI, successfully getting a "letter of intent" executed that secured the site while they worked through all the details, and off they went and running."

The last piece of the puzzle fell into place in February when Union County Government sold a 0.51-acre adjoining strip of property to ALDI, which needed the extra space to make the project work. Construction began shortly thereafter, and the rest is history.

"This will be a great addition to the community," Griggs said. "It'll help fill a niche that had been vacant with the closure of (BI-LO/Food City), while being separate from that BI-LO niche and not competing so directly."

"We'll have distinct experiences; we'll have the super discount stuff at Save-A-Lot, and we'll have the discount at the Walmart Supercenter. And then, we'll have the (independent grocer) experience at Foodland, and we'll have the full-service experience at Ingles."

"And we'll have the ALDI experience as well. It's a good fit for the community, and I think folks will be really happy about it."

Be sure to check out weekly "ALDI Finds" that drop every Wednesday, to include "new food items, small kitchen appliances, seasonal decor, outdoor furniture, gardening tools and more that come to our stores, all at the low prices (customers) love."