

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Wednesday, December 4, 2019

Holiday cheer to fill the mountains as Christmas comes to Blairsville

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Blairsville is known for celebrating Christmas in a big way, and with the sustained growth and experienced by Union County each year, the local traditions always seem to be getting bigger and bigger.

Enter Christmas 2019 – the Downtown Development Authority, Union County Historical Society and Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce have teamed up to make this Christmas one to remember.

DDA Program Manager Darren Harper said the idea is to get the big citywide festivities done in early December, because after that, people are busy with family and friends,

Christmas parties, shopping and weaving.

"We've been trying really hard to get with all the different groups that do these events so that we can then help them to better advertise it and coordinate," Harper said.

Christmas in Blairsville will start during the first full week in December leading up to Saturday, Dec. 7, when there will be a myriad of things to do and see, including the annual Christmas Parade.

The Tour of Trees at the Union County Community Center will start things off Dec. 1 and run through Dec. 31.

"What we've got is 35 large trees, wreaths and small trees that decorate the entire Community Center," Chamber President Steve Rowe said.

"And the decorations this year are rowe the top."

Rowe said they have the Grinch Village for people to see, and there will be voting for the many trees on display, including fan favorite, best traditional and most creative Christmas tree categories.

From Dec. 4-6, downtown merchants will be offering "Jingle Bell Buys" in which they have different specials and deals. Some will have open houses, others will have Buy-1-Get-1 deals, and some will offer food, among other things, Harper said.

Thursday, Dec. 5, coincides with the monthly "Shop Late Thursdays," and downtown merchants will be staying open until 8 p.m.

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The Union County High School Marching Band participating in the nighttime 2018 Christmas Parade through downtown Blairsville.

Over 100 local children to benefit from Shop with a Cop on Dec. 14

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Thanks to the generous support of Union County residents and the fundraising efforts of the Blairsville Police Department, over 100 underprivileged kids will have Christmas presents under their family trees this year.

This will be the 19th year that the police department has fostered the Shop with a Cop Program for kids and families in need of a positive break around the holidays.

"The second Saturday of December we'll be taking about a hundred kids, all Union County kids from the school system in Union County," Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said. "We've had a huge success this year with our Duck Derby fundraiser, and we've had a lot of businesses and



The annual Blairsville Shop with a Cop is a collaborative effort wherein the community makes Christmas special for local children. Pictured here: Shop with a Cop 2016.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

individuals alike who've been very generous to us."

One thing that always touches everyone's hearts is the

fact that a lot of the kids use their personal shopping experiences to buy things for siblings and

See Shop with a Cop, Page 2A

Arby's Restaurant expected to be greenlit in corporate meeting Dec. 16

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Pending corporate approval by Arby's, developer GLM Development has tentatively agreed to purchase land for the restaurant from the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority for \$775,000.

The announcement came in a Nov. 19 called meeting of the DDA Board at City Hall, exactly one day after the expiration of the developer's third 30-day contract extension.

Ultimately, the DDA Board granted a fourth contract extension dated retroactively to cover the Nov. 18 "drop-dead date" from the previous extension to allow the developer to present the purchase proposal in the next Arby's corporate board meeting on Dec. 16.

Revealed in the Nov. 19



Blairsville DDA Board Members Tony Dyer and W.C. Nelson studying plans for the proposed Arby's Restaurant development in a Nov. 19 called meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

called meeting was the fact that, at least initially, the store will be a corporate store and not a franchise store, meaning Arby's

will have a more direct stake in the local venture.

This fact, coupled See Arby's, Page 2A

State Rep. Jay Powell remembered for 'benevolent spirit'

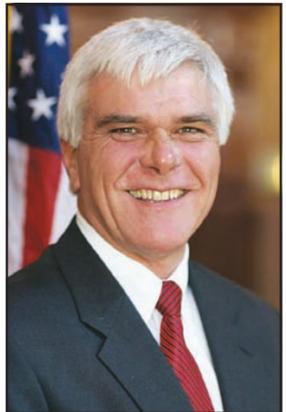
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

YOUNG HARRIS - District 171 State Rep. Jay Powell, 67, passed away during a legislative leaders' retreat at Brasstown Nov. 26.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office requested assistance from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, though no foul play was suspected in his death, according to the GBI.

Georgia House Speaker David Ralston released a statement last week discussing his friend and Republican colleague, who has been an influential state politician since his initial swearing into office on Jan. 12, 2009.

"It is with profound sadness and a broken heart that I write to inform you of the passing of our colleague, dear friend and brother Jay Powell," Ralston said. "Jay collapsed last night at a Caucus leadership retreat and, from all indications, passed immediately.



State Rep. Jay Powell

"At this time of heartbreak, we take solace in the fact that our brother is now with our Lord Jesus Christ. We lift up his wife Deidra and his beloved family. We pray for God's mercies and comfort for them.

"I know this loss touches us all and leaves a hole in our hearts and in the heart of our House family. Jay Powell served with integrity and his leadership truly moved

Georgia forward. We will get through this together, with God's grace.

"If you need anything, please reach out to one of our fellow members. We will support one another as we grieve and celebrate his life together."

Funeral services for Powell were held on Sunday, Dec. 1, in his hometown of Camilla.

According to his obituary, "Jay had a long and distinguished career as a public servant. He served as Mayor of Camilla from 1996 until 2007. He was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2008, where he served until his passing.

"Powell represented House District 171, which includes Mitchell and Decatur counties. As Chairman of the House Rules Committee, Jay oversaw the flow of legislation and determined what bills should be debated and voted on the House floor.

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Ten local churches collaborate to provide Thanksgiving Day feast



L-R: Phil Redditt, Reed Surmian, Erik Giddens and Laurie Redditt. The Redditts brought Union County Jail workers Thanksgiving Day meals last week.

Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Ten Union County churches came together on Thursday, Nov. 28, to prepare 1,030 dinners for people not able to have their own Thanksgiving Day meals.

Union County is home to a caring and compassionate community of people, and it was evident on Thanksgiving Day when pastors and members of the 10 local churches spent their own Thanksgiving holidays helping people.

Those helped included

people far from home and without family, on-duty law enforcement, fire department and emergency 911 personnel, shut-ins, and families in need.

Cal Wolcott, one of the founding members of the Thanksgiving Day Blessing See Thanksgiving, Page 2A

Federal judge denies Mike Gowder's request for new criminal trial

By Linda Erbele
North Georgia News

Last week, a federal judge denied Mike Gowder's request for a new trial following the former hospital CEO's Oct. 24 conviction of more than 100 counts involving dozens of illegal prescriptions.

U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story issued his Nov. 26 denial in response to a motion filed by Gowder's attorney, Stephen Sadow, on Oct. 28, just four days after a federal jury returned a 102-count guilty verdict in the case.

In the motion, Sadow said that Story had made an "error" in previously denying separate trials for Gowder and co-defendant Dr. James Heaton, resulting in Heaton being unable to testify on his former patient's behalf regarding the "medical legitimacy" of the prescriptions in question.

Sadow argued that, had Heaton been a witness in Gowder's standalone trial instead of a co-defendant in a joint trial, a letter Heaton wrote in September 2015 to the Georgia Composite Medical Board describing

Gowder's medical condition could have been entered as evidence.

Story responded that his retrial ruling denying separate trials issued on Sept. 19 was "not error and so a new trial is not warranted," adding that Gowder had failed to show either a need for the letter or that Heaton was likely to testify.

Following seven days of testimony at the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville last month, a federal jury found Gowder guilty of 27 counts of acquiring controlled

substances by fraud and 75 counts of aiding and abetting in the dispensing of prescriptions without a legitimate medical purpose.

Heaton was found guilty of 75 counts of dispensing prescriptions without a legitimate medical purpose and 27 counts of aiding and abetting in the acquiring of those controlled substances by fraud.

The doctor was also found guilty of 27 more counts of dispensing prescriptions without a legitimate medical purpose involving two other

patients.

Gowder and Heaton remain free on bond pending a sentencing hearing, which will take place following a sentencing investigation that could take several months to complete.

Former co-defendant in the case David Gowder, who is Mike's brother, pleaded guilty in March to one count of prescribing oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose. David also remains free on bond as he awaits sentencing.



Mike Gowder

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Dec 6 vs. Towns Co. 7 PM

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UCS

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Dec. 11-19

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Storytime with Santa at the Union County Public Library

Dec. 9

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