

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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## Target Range receives go-ahead from U.S. Forest Service

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The U.S. Forest Service has approved the issuance of a special use permit for a Union County Target Range, paving the way for a standalone shooting facility southeast of Blairsville, though it's still too early to declare a timeline for the project.

Officials with the Forest Service signaled their approval of the target range in mid-November, when Blue Ridge District Ranger Andy Baker issued a Final Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact.

Baker's finding served as one of the very last steps in the permitting process that took more than a year to complete.

"This decision consists of authorizing Union County

Government to construct a target range on National Forest land," Baker said in his report.

Continuing, the report states that the county will be "the special use permit holder and will assume the responsibility of funding, maintenance and operation of the target range."

As previously reported, the range will be situated on a 14-acre piece of land off SR 180, between mile markers 18 and 19. It will feature a 200-yard rifle range, a shorter pistol range, and a clubhouse.

Union County has never had a range for residents to practice shooting, meaning gun owners have had to either shoot on their own property or travel to another community to shoot at a non-local range.

And with the target

range, local law enforcement will no longer have to rely on private property owners donating the use of their land for important shooting practice, as the state requires peace officers to requalify with their duty weapons annually.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said operation of the target range will be delegated to the Union County Gun Club, a fee membership organization consisting of passionate local gun owners who formed the club on July 10, 2017, in an informal meeting held by Sheriff Mack Mason.

"Sheriff Mason came to us with the idea and the property location (about two and a half years ago)," Paris said. "Prior to that, for the last four or five years, we'd been looking for a site anywhere and everywhere

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Local stakeholders meeting with federal and state officials on March 9, 2018, to walk the future site of the Union County Target Range off SR 180. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## One year after plane crash, Whitener thankful for second chance

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Not a day goes by that Brittany Thomas Whitener doesn't think about the plane crash.

Upon waking in the morning and before sleeping every night, she sees those flashlights bobbing through the woods, hears her rescuers calling out as she cries for help from within the wreckage.

Whitener suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder following her ordeal. Being the only one of four friends to make it out alive in the tragic accident off Kings Road in Blairsville on Dec. 19, 2018, she experiences survivor's guilt, too.

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Brittany Thomas Whitener

## Nearly 100 children participate in 'Shop with a Cop' for Christmas

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

As it has been every year for the last 19 years, Shop with a Cop was a big deal to local youth on Saturday, Dec. 14, when the Blairsville Walmart hosted 99 Union County school kids for a Christmas shopping spree.

Shop with a Cop is a coordinated effort in which the Blairsville Police Department, Union County Sheriff's Office, Georgia State Patrol, Union General Hospital Security and Union County Schools Police all come together to give back to the community.

The Blairsville Cruisers, Union County Family Connection, Union County Schools, Fellowship of the Hills Church and the Blairsville Walmart also coordinate and help with the endeavor.

None of this could happen, though, without the fundraising efforts of Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter and his officers, who give all the credit to the community for



The Blairsville Police Department works with other local law enforcement agencies to take kids Christmas shopping every year. Pictured here: BPD Officer Chris Jackson. Photo by Mark Smith

providing generous donations throughout the year.

Fundraising this year included the inaugural Rubber Duck Derby over the summer, which greatly contributed to the amount each youngster could spend, and it also enabled the Police Department to give the more than 60 families of these

kids a gift certificate to Save A Lot grocery store.

And to top it all off, each family was treated to a "Bucket of Love" - a 5-gallon bucket of food, lovingly filled and delivered by members of Fellowship of the Hills Church.

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## Gaddistown Homemakers, Woody Gap School spread Christmas cheer

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

SUCHES - The Gaddistown Homemakers Club teamed up with Woody Gap School again this year to host a community Christmas event on Sunday, Dec. 8, for children and adults alike.

Christmastime in Suches is special and personal, as evidenced by the combined Gaddistown Christmas Tree Lighting and Woody Gap Open House event.

The Gaddistown Homemakers Club is essentially a local service organization that formed in the early 1980s. It is made up of "women of the Suches area who support families and youth, spread cheer, and propagate good in the local community," according to gaddistownhomemakers.com.



Fire Station No. 5 Lt. Ernie Pruitt accepting a donation for the station from Dena Gooch of the Gaddistown Homemakers on Dec. 8.

"They are also interested in preserving the noble traditions and natural beauty of the north Georgia mountains," the website continues.

In 1987, the Homemakers decided to recognize the 200th

anniversary of the United States Constitution at Christmastime with the planting of a Christmas tree outside of what was then the Suches Clinic.

Club President Dena

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## Historical Society continues annual Christmas Dinner tradition

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Historical Society held its 43rd Annual Christmas Dinner at the Union County Community Center on Tuesday, Dec. 10.

Society President Judy Carpenter opened the event with a warm Christmas welcome, followed by recognition of Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and wife Dinah, and introductions of fellow Society Officers Bill Collins, Betty Jane Shuler and Betty Noe.

"Our Memorial Candle tonight is lit in memory of John Burkhardt, Billy Decker, Bob Head and Carol Head," Carpenter said. "Our life members are Lester Deaver, Maurice Farabee, Garry Harkins and Elmer Hogue."

Following an invocation by following member Bud Akins, a dinner of baked ham, baked chicken with orange sauce, sweet potato casserole, green beans and a vegetable medley was served, with red velvet cake and coffee for dessert.

In her address, Carpenter mentioned the Historical Society's highlights of 2019, including the Arts & Crafts Festival, the Green Bean Festival, the Heritage Memorial, the Society Picnic, the Memorial Day Parade float, Christmas on the Square and the Christmas Parade.



Sam Ensley and Judy Carpenter of the Union County Historical Society performed Christmas music to the delight of everyone in attendance for the group's Dec. 10 meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

## Joy Team hosts 7th Annual Adopt-a-Grandparent for Christmas

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Adopt-a-Grandparent for Christmas was held on Thursday, Dec. 12, thanks to the efforts of the Joy Team, a group of individuals with a desire to give back to their community by serving the residents of Union County Nursing Home.

This year, the Joy Team consisted of Roberta Ford, Sarah Gazzara, Kristy Wallace, and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

Together, they visited with residents and made them feel extra special by presenting them gifts that included lotions

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Sarah Gazzara, Roberta Ford, Kristy Wallace and Commissioner Lamar Paris traveled to the Union County Nursing Home on Dec. 12 for the annual Adopt-a-Grandparent for Christmas program. Photo by Jarrett Whitener



Historical Society President Judy Carpenter presenting Darren Harper of Visit Downtown Blairsville with a certificate of appreciation from the society.

There were several big restoration accomplishments in 2019, Carpenter said, including a new HVAC system for the Old Courthouse, completion of

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Weather

Thurs: Sunny Hi 52 Lo 27

Fri: Cloudy Hi 51 Lo 32

Sat: Showers Hi 54 Lo 32

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Churches 3B

Classifieds 3D

Opinion 4A

Legals 4D

Obits 5B

Sports 2C

**SPORTS**

**BASKETBALL**

Dec. 17 @ Social Circle 5 PM

Dec. 21 vs. Gilmer Co. 6 PM

Union County Called Meeting

Friday Dec. 27th 4:30 p.m.

See page 2B

North GA Dance Arts presents "The Nutcracker"

Dec. 22nd

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Christmas Edition

Early Deadline

Thursday Dec. 19th at NOON