

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Blairsville Cruisers take 60 local kids shopping for Christmas

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Cruisers, together with the Blairsville Police Department and the Union County Sheriff's Office, met at the local Walmart on Thursday, Dec. 13, to take about 60 small children on a Christmas shopping spree.

The Cruisers are a local group of vintage car enthusiasts who raise money year-round through raffles and other events for the people of Union County who need assistance.

Christmastime, otherwise known as Yuletide, is one of those times of the year when financial hardships can really make life difficult, especially for people of small children.

This year, through their fundraising efforts and the good-hearted folks who donate to the cause, the Cruisers were

able to give each of 60 small children, eighth-grade and below, a \$250 shopping spree.

The children arrived in two school buses from Union County Schools about 9:30 a.m. and were paired up with a Cruiser, a police officer or a sheriff's deputy. The kids were told that they had \$250 to spend on almost anything in the store.

"They don't always just buy stuff for themselves," said Kris Hayek, an auxiliary member of the Cruisers. "Sometimes, they want to buy for their parents or something somebody else needs."

Once they were paired up, the kids were in charge. Many of the Cruisers and officers had two kids, some had three, and off they went.

"We're just chaperoning and making sure they don't go much over \$250," said Charlie Brown, vice president of the

Blairsville Cruisers. "They (Walmart) were real good not charging us tax.

"Last Saturday, I helped with Shop with a Cop. They had about 100 kids, so that's 160 kids that's had a good Christmas."

Added Brown, "And we were fortunate enough this year to have enough money from the sponsors and our raffle car that we raffled off all year long. That helped us make enough money where we could do this.

"We did that last year too, \$250. That's about what we set our goal trying to get every year. We've been real fortunate with people donating money to help out. We do things all year long, not necessarily to help kids out, but to help people out who can't pay their electric bill or if they've had bad luck. We try to help them out all year long and then do this extra for



Blairsville Cruiser Pete Barley, left, with several Walmart employees who were happy to help during the car club's Christmas shopping spree for kids. Photo by Mark Smith

Historical Society names two Preservationists of the Year for 2018

By Jarrett Whitener
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The Union County Historical Society hosted its annual group Christmas party on Tuesday, Dec. 11, at the Union County Community Center.

Every year around this time, the Historical Society takes a look back on the year and admires the progress that has been made toward preserving local history.

"It has been a long hard process to get to where we are today," said Society President Libby Stevens. "Thank you for being here, thank you for all your support, and thank you for the Historical Society, because it definitely means something to Union county.

"It's the glue that kind of holds the city together ... It is appreciative of us, and I have enjoyed my time in the leadership position."

To show appreciation for their hardworking members, the Historical Society presents the Preservationist of the Year Award, with this year having two recipients.



Presley Rich receiving his Preservationist of the Year Award from Union County Historical Society President Libby Stevens on Tuesday, Dec. 11. Carolyn Hutson also received the award that evening. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

The first recipient of the award was Presley Rich for his work with genealogy and working with the newsletter.

"Back three years ago, I met this young man at the Retired Educators meeting, and I suggested that maybe he would like to have some

of the interest that I have," said Stevens. "When Judy Rich became ill and could no longer serve, I was charged with finding somebody that would serve out her term. So, I asked Presley Rich to serve out her term, never dreaming what

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Tennessean earthquake felt throughout North Georgia

By Shawn Jarrard
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Many residents of the North Georgia Mountains experienced the rumbling of an earthquake in the early morning hours of Wednesday, Dec. 12.

The National Earthquake Information Center of the U.S. Geological Survey recorded the 4.4 magnitude quake at 4:14 a.m. some 100 miles away in Decatur, Tennessee, and its effects were felt by folks even in the Atlanta area.

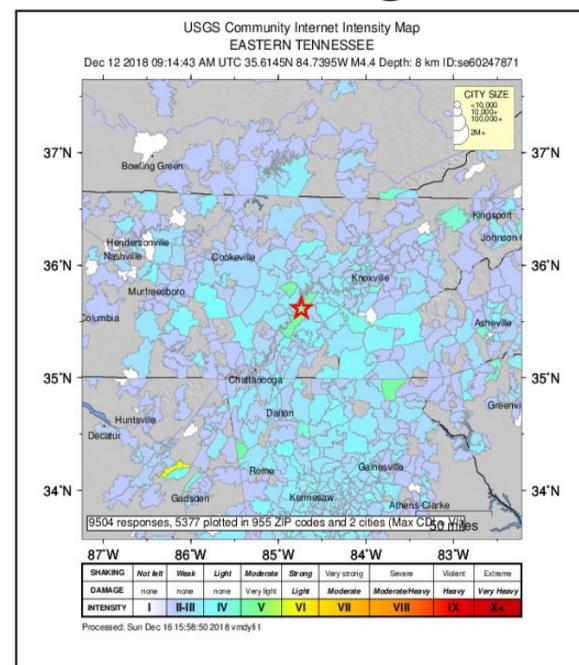
Fortunately, the quake was short-lived and resulted in no injuries or significant property damage.

Those who experienced the quake locally said it was about 10 to 15 seconds of minor shaking that briefly disturbed wall hangings, coupled with a low rumbling sound.

Four people called Union County E-911 Dispatch within 20 minutes of the earthquake to ask about it, with the first call coming in at 4:19 a.m.

"Basically, all they were doing was inquiring, 'Did we have an earthquake?'" said Lt. Millie Baxter of Union County Dispatch. "There were no emergencies associated with it.

"It was more just people wanting information. There was nothing damaged, nobody in danger. It was just a concern



A map produced by the U.S. Geological Survey showing the varying levels of intensity and reach of the Dec. 12 earthquake in Eastern Tennessee.

of, was that?" Dispatchers themselves did not feel the earthquake, but Baxter did. Baxter, who is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the E-911 Center, was at home when the earthquake rumbled through the area.

"I was up and I felt it - I thought, 'What in the world?'"

started Baxter. "My house just started shaking, almost like a helicopter, the way it hovers and just kind of shakes."

With more than 20 years of experience at Union County Dispatch, Baxter said the last time the county experienced an earthquake was probably about

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Forest Service holds live-fire testing at proposed range site



Law enforcement officers and members of the Union County Gun Club joined the U.S. Forest Service for live-fire testing at the proposed shooting range site on Dec. 11. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
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Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, several deputies and about 30 Union County Gun Club members gathered near the proposed site of the Gun Club shooting range for a live-fire sound analysis on Tuesday, Dec. 11.

The proposed site is on Georgia 180, just over five miles from the SR 180/Gainesville Highway intersection, across from Bob Creek Road/Forest Service Road 292.

Present at the sound analysis were several

representatives with the U.S. Forest Service, including District Ranger Andy Baker of the Blue Ridge Ranger District; Public Affairs Officer Steven Bekkerus; Forest Environmental Coordinator Nelson Gonzalez-Sullow; Acting Special Uses Program Manager Jerome Bennett; and Natural Resources Specialist Josh O'Neal.

Krishna Faw of Nutter and Associates, Inc., also attended as an environmental consultant to the Forest Service.

At 11 a.m., the group gathered for a briefing. Five of the club members who

had volunteered to fire their weapons for the sound analysis at the proposed gun range site split off for a briefing with Faw, who coordinated the firing.

Other club members broke up into teams with Sheriff Mason, the deputies, and the Forest Service personnel to distribute a questionnaire, interview nearby residents during and after the live-fire testing, and to listen from predetermined vantage points.

There were people stationed about a mile away on the Appalachian Trail, listening for gunfire at the Trail's nearest

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Heaton expected to face new charges in prescription drug case

By Shawn Jarrard
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Blairsville-based physician Dr. James Heaton could be facing additional charges in his federal prescription drug case following grand jury deliberations that are expected to occur sometime this month, according to court documents.

"The government has indicated that it will supersede the indictment against Dr. Heaton and will be adding substantive counts against which Dr. Heaton must defend," said Donald F. Samuel, Heaton's attorney, in a recent court filing.

A superseding indictment would replace Heaton's original indictment and could include

different and new charges. And according to Samuel, this process was "scheduled to be presented to the grand jury in early December."

Samuel's court filing - specifically, a "Consent Motion to Continue Trial" - was likely a topic of conversation in a pretrial conference that occurred after press time on Dec. 19, featuring discussions between the judge and attorneys involved in the criminal case.

Set to join Heaton for the Dec. 19 pretrial conference at the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville were James Gowder and Dr. David Gowder, with U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story presiding.

Heaton and the Gowder brothers are co-defendants in the federal prescription drug case, which stems from a multi-agency investigation originating out of the Union County Sheriff's Office in 2015.

Essentially, legal counsel for Heaton is using the consent motion to ask the court to postpone Heaton's trial due to a number of conflicts that have arisen since the court, in

October, scheduled a Feb. 11, 2019, jury trial for all three co-defendants.

In the consent motion, Samuel offers a glimpse into the nature of the new charges Heaton could be up against.

"Because there will be no charges involving the prescription of additional controlled substances to people not previously identified, as well as allegations of exchanging sex for money, Dr. Heaton will not be prepared for trial in early February 2019," writes Samuel.

Compounding the issue, Samuel says in the motion, is that he has two other trials that will "likely conflict" with the start and end of Heaton's trial.

One of these conflicting trials is another federal case out of Kentucky that is expected to last longer than initially thought. The other is that of the State of Georgia v. Olsen involving "a police officer charged with murder" that "may be delayed due to Judge (J.P.) Boulee's imminent appointment to the federal bench."

"At the time that case was

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