

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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First Baby of the New Year born at 1:18 a.m. on 1/1/18



Gabriel Robin Walker of Blairsville

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

Congratulations to Stacie and William Walker of Blairsville, who welcomed their bouncing baby boy, Gabriel Robin Walker, on New Year's Day.

The young Walker has earned the distinction of being Union General Hospital's first baby of 2018.

Fittingly, Gabriel Robin was born at 1:18 a.m. on Jan.

1, 2018.

Walker weighed a healthy 7 pounds 2 ounces at birth, and measured 20.5 inches long.

Congratulations to Stacie and William, and most importantly, to Gabriel Robin Walker himself.

Prior to their departure, the hospital provided the Walkers with a gift basket to enjoy at home.

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William and Stacie Walker with their newborn son, Gabriel Robin Walker, at Union General Hospital.

Jimmy Tallent, UCBI recognized by Georgia Trend Magazine

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

For the last 20 years, the editors of Georgia Trend Magazine have published lists of people they consider to be the most influential and notable Georgians each year.

One name has found its way onto these lists time and time again, recognized chiefly for his contributions to the banking industry in Georgia.

And once again, Jimmy Tallent, the Chairman and CEO of United Community Banks, Inc., has made the cut, as a Notable Georgian in 2018, according to Georgia Trend.

Of course, Tallent is proud of the recognition by Georgia Trend, but he doesn't see it as being about him - he sees it as a reflection on United Community Banks.

"What I take the greatest pride in, and I think has served as somewhat of an example, is the way that we do business," said Tallent. "We operate by the golden rule of banking, treating our customers the way that we would want to be treated."

United Community Bank, Inc. is an \$11.1 billion bank holding company with 29 community banks and 142 offices serving communities throughout Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and South Carolina, according to UCBI.com.

"Our company has grown tremendously over the last 25 years," said Tallent. "Today, we're the third largest financial institution headquartered in Georgia. We operate in four states."

"To have a publicly



Jimmy Tallent, Chairman and CEO of United Community Banks, Inc. traded company on Nasdaq headquartered in Blairsville is quite unique. I don't know how often we will see that in the future."

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Chandler optimistic as ever about Union County in 2018

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

By nearly every metric, 2017 was a banner year for tourism in Union County.

Hotel-Motel Tax collections were up much of the year, and the county enjoyed a nearly 5-percent increase in sales tax revenues over 2016 figures.

Taken together, this bump in tax collections paints a clear picture - year over year, more people are visiting Union County, and they are staying in Blairsville hotels/cabins and spending money in local restaurants, shops and other businesses.

Of course, it should come as no surprise that tourism dollars are on the rise. After all, Tobie Chandler is on the case.

"We have a lot of exciting things coming up in 2018, coming off of an amazing

2017," said Chandler, Tourism Director of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce. "Tourism is up, our Hotel-Motel's up, our SPLOST dollars are up."

"We're very excited for all the promotions that we've done in the last few years, and we want to keep that momentum going strong."

Alongside increases in local tax revenues and direct investment by tourists, Chandler is heading into 2018 with a number of huge 2017 wins under her belt, both for Union County and the region.

From continued successes of long-held festivals, to the massively popular Blairsville Eclipse Experience that garnered more than 15,000 visitors to Union County over two days of events, 2017 showcased Chandler's ability to bring all of her considerable marketing talents to bear in the promotion



Tobie Chandler, Tourism Director of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

of Blairsville-Union County.

Chandler said her job is challenging but rewarding, as she enjoys working year-round to shine a spotlight on the

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Curley awarded 2018 Georgia CASA Volunteer of the Year

By Shawn Jarrard
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Georgia has more than 2,400 active CASA volunteers, and each year, one of them is selected to receive the Karen N. Sibley CASA Volunteer of the Year Award.

The 2018 recipient is none other than Blairsville's own Pam Curley, a longtime CASA volunteer serving children in the Enotah Judicial Circuit.

"To be picked out of 2,400 active CASAs is pretty amazing," Curley said of the announcement. "I was completely surprised. It's the kind of thing that most of us don't really like to even get the recognition for it. We just do it - it's organic, almost, why we do it and how we do it."



Enotah CASA Pam Curley

Enotah CASA is a nonprofit organization with the goal of ensuring that every child has a safe, permanent home. They do this by providing specially trained volunteers known as CASAs,

or Court Appointed Special Advocates.

With the best interests of the children in mind, CASA volunteers advocate for the needs of abused and neglected kids in the custody of the Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and throughout lengthy legal processes in the Enotah Circuit Juvenile Court.

"Truly, while the emphasis during any kind of proceeding like that is always on the parents and their bad choices, it's really the children who suffer the most," said Curley. "The children, No. 1, don't understand what's happened to them."

Continued Curley, speaking for the children: "What happened? How did

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GBI, UCSO asking public to come forward with information

By Shawn Jarrard
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MOULTRIE - The Georgia Bureau of Investigation is asking for the public's help in identifying potential child victims of sexual exploitation by a Moultrie man known to have frequented the area.

"On Thursday, Dec. 28, 2017, Milton Wrenn, age 57, of Moultrie, Georgia, was charged with 14 counts of sexual exploitation of children after images of child pornography were found on his computer," per a GBI news release.

"Wrenn was previously arrested on Oct. 12, 2017,

by the Colquitt County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) for manufacturing marijuana at his home," the release said. "Wrenn's house was searched after a multi-county investigation involving the Union County Sheriff's Office, CCSO, and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Region 15 Office in Sylvester.

"The computer was seized during the investigation. CCSO requested assistance from the GBI's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit after images depicting the sexual exploitation of children were found."

According to the GBI, Wrenn is currently being held at the Colquitt County Jail.

"This investigation is

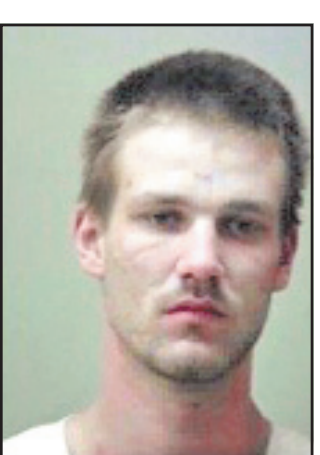


Milton Wrenn

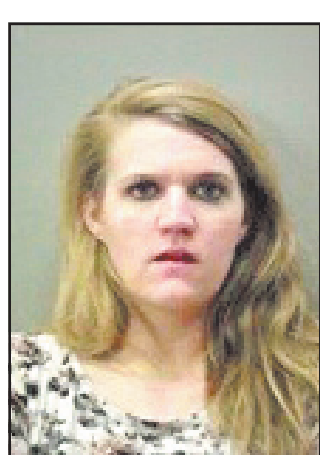
part of the ongoing effort by the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, housed within the GBI's Child

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Blairsville couple arrested for Towns County burglaries



Zachary Patterson



Ashley Patterson

By Shawn Jarrard
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YOUNG HARRIS - A Blairsville couple has been arrested in connection with an ongoing investigation into reported burglaries and thefts in the county, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Zachary Eugene

Patterson, 22, of Blairsville, was arrested on Dec. 28, 2017, and charged with the following: one count burglary in the first degree, one count possession of burglary tools, one count theft by receiving stolen property and one count attempted burglary, per a TCSO news release.

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Sen. Gooch ready for 2018 session of Georgia General Assembly

By Shawn Jarrard
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District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch joined lawmakers from all across the state to begin the 2018 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly on Monday, Jan. 8.

The start of a new session always tends to be a little chaotic for legislators, as they prepare to upend their daily routines back home for a three-month stint at the Georgia State Capitol each year.

"You're scrambling around the last week or so, trying to get loose ends tied up at work and at home," said Sen. Gooch. "At the same time, you're trying to transition into a mindset of, well, what are the issues that are going to be facing us on Day One through Day 40?"

"And what issues do I have in my district that I need to make sure I take care of, as far as local legislation or budget issues, projects that may need some attention?"

"So, it's a game of juggling about six or eight balls at the same time. There's also a lot of excitement in it, so you get a huge adrenaline rush because of all the deadlines and all the exciting things that are going to go on."

Sen. Gooch first won election to the Georgia Senate in 2010, and the 2018 session will be his eighth since taking office for the first time in January 2011, so he's no stranger to the Capitol.

"But I've never been through a year to where it's an election year for the governor and lieutenant governor, the secretary of state and all the other offices that are wide open," said Sen. Gooch. "These are vacant seats that a new person is going to be elected to."

"Before, basically, the people that were there were running for re-election. This year, all of those constitutional offices at the top, those Top 3, are going to be vacated, and so it's going to really change,



District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch

I think, the dynamic of the whole process."

Continued Gooch: "So, it's going to be a little different for me not knowing what to expect on that, but I'm just going to focus on my district and the needs of North Georgia, and not worry too much about the politics of this statewide business that may

rear its ugly head."

Over the last several years, Sen. Gooch has dedicated much of his time to finding a solution to rural broadband issues throughout his district, which includes Fannin, Union, Gilmer, Lumpkin, White, Dawson and parts of Pickens and Forsyth counties.

"We've got some real serious issues around the state, primarily in rural Georgia," said Gooch. "We have incumbent internet providers who are providing, I would call it a substandard service at best in some of those areas."

"And it's because of the rapid change in technology, and the huge, rapid increase in demand for more bandwidth. Every kid in the home now has two or three devices."

"You've got all of these huge six-foot and seven-foot flat screen TVs that pull down a lot of internet bandwidth when they're playing videos and movies. You've got all these Netflix movies being

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