

# North Georgia News

2 Sections 22 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, January 10, 2024

## Newborn Sylvi earns 'First Baby' title in '24

By Daysha Pandolph  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, Jan. 2, Union General Hospital welcomed its first baby of 2024 into the world. At 12:26 a.m., Dr. David Breedlove delivered a beautiful baby girl – Sylvi Morgan-Watters – weighing 8 pounds, 10 ounces and measuring 20 3/4 inches long.

“(The name) was in a book that we read by Elsa Beskow, a Swedish author,” said her mother, Kara Watters, “and it just kind of stuck.”

Sylvi’s parents, Watters and Parker Morgan, live just across the state line in Murphy, North Carolina, with their two sons, Titus and Ivar. The boys, who were also born at Union General, are excited to become big brothers to a brand new little girl.

“After the first baby, it’s just kind of a routine,” said Watters, sharing that they hadn’t needed to make a lot of changes at home in preparation for Sylvi’s birth. With a kids’ room already set up for their sons, she and Morgan felt their home was ready for baby No. 3. The family had actually been ready for Sylvi’s arrival for several weeks, and therefore hadn’t expected her to be Union General’s first baby of 2024.

“She was due on Dec. 16, so it was surprising,” said Watters of the achievement.

After passing their due date by nearly three weeks, the family was excited to finally meet baby Sylvi, whom they plan to support in whatever future she pursues.

“(We just want her) to be happy and that’s it,” commented daddy Morgan,

who proudly changed the first diaper.

Although it wasn’t planned, Sylvi’s beginning-of-the-year birth brought a lot of extra attention to her, with the Labor & Delivery Department and River City Bank each putting together a baby gift basket and the latter starting a savings account for the child with \$100.

The first baby of the year is always a big deal for the community and for Union General Labor & Delivery, the staff of which prides itself on providing women and their families across the region with joyful birthing experiences.

They offer care to both the mother and child from highly qualified nurses and doctors, and to make the experience as comfortable as possible, allow patients to

labor, deliver and recover all in the same room.

The new baby also stays in the room around the clock, unlike at many other hospitals; at Union General, parents get plenty of alone time to bond with the newest member of their family.

The Labor & Delivery unit also remains locked at all times to provide families with privacy. Visitors are welcome, but several restrictions – such as a limit to the number of people allowed in the room – keep the environment as calming as possible.

Along with keeping the doors locked, Union General provides security to the family by equipping each newborn with an alarm band that monitors the baby the entire time he or she is in the hospital, See *Happy Birthday Sylvi*, Page 6A



Mother-of-three Kara Watters with her new baby Sylvi on Jan. 2. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

## Local home-schooler Woods achieves major accolades



By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Jenna Woods is an extraordinary local student with an impressive list of accomplishments to her name, including selection to the Top Three universities in Georgia, and it’s clear that the 17-year-old has a bright future ahead of her after she graduates as a home-schooled senior this May.

Woods lives with her mom Tara in Blairsville and will soon finish her secondary education from home with a weighted GPA of 4.62. She has been accepted early action by Emory University, the University of Georgia Morehead Honors College, and the Georgia Institute of Technology.

In deciding between these three excellent post-secondary institutions, Woods has determined that Emory will best enable her to follow

See *Woods Excels*, Page 6A

Local senior Jenna Woods has excelled as a home-school student, earning top grades and gaining acceptance into the best universities in Georgia. Photo/Submitted

## SAR presents awards; Paris talks SPLOST marketing



L-R: Blue Ridge Mountain SAR President Stephen Weaver, UCSO Sheriff Mack Mason, UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer and SAR Vice President Sid Turner. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

In his regular meeting at the Union County Courthouse last month, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris welcomed members of the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter of the Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution to make several awards.

“SAR is the largest male-lineage organization in 50 states across the nation,” Chapter President Stephen

Weaver said. “We trace our ancestry to a patriot that served to establish the nation.”

“Our mission is patriotic, historic and educational, and the Public Service Awards tonight highlight our support for the local Union County Fire, Law Enforcement and EMS ... and with (our mission), we also recognize and cover Towns, Fannin and Gilmer counties.”

Pursuant to its mission to recognize public servants, the Blue Ridge Chapter SAR attends the last commission

meeting of each year to honor local first responders who have gone above and beyond in serving the public.

At the request of the SAR chapter, award recipients are selected by the heads of the various first responder agencies of the county, who in turn submit the reasoning behind their recommendations.

First to be recognized in the Dec. 21 county meeting was Union County Sheriff’s Maj. Shawn Dyer, who also serves

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## GBI, TCSO investigate human skeletal remains in Towns

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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YOUNG HARRIS – The Georgia Bureau of Investigation began a death investigation last week regarding human skeletal remains discovered by the Towns County Sheriff’s Office off Gumlog Road the evening of New Year’s Day.

After securing the area, Sheriff Ken Henderson requested the state’s assistance, and GBI agents traveled to Towns County on Jan. 2 to examine the scene, collect

evidence, and transport the remains to the GBI Medical Examiner’s Office for identification and autopsy.

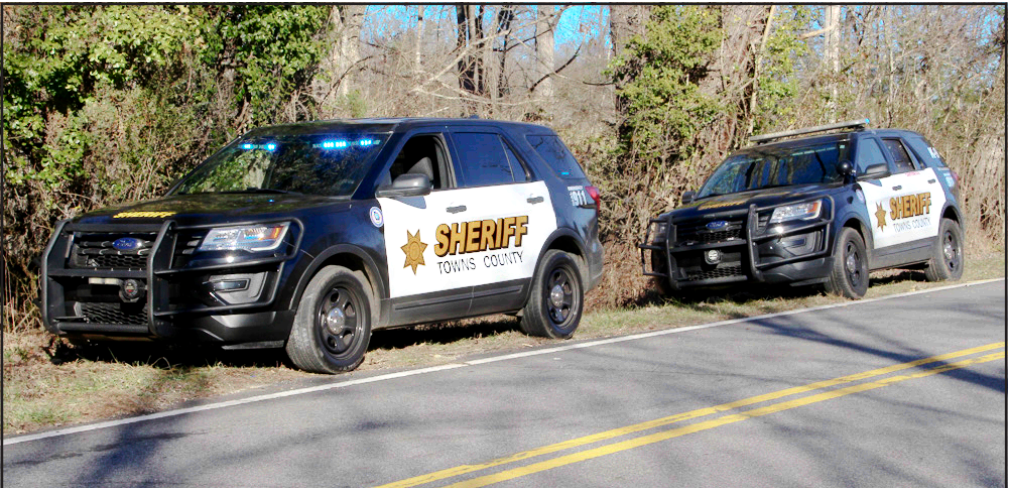
The remains were found outdoors on a property containing a vacant home in the 8000 block of Gumlog Road near the intersection of Barnard Road.

And though the deceased had not been definitively identified by press time, GBI told the Towns County Herald Thursday that “at this time, we have reason to believe the individual is not from the area.”

A public release of case specifics is on hold for now, as the investigation by the GBI and Towns County Sheriff’s Office remains active.

Among the questions remaining to be answered are facts about identity, cause and time of death, how long the deceased lay undiscovered, how the individual came to be there in the first place, and circumstances surrounding the discovery.

The Towns County Herald will update this story as more details become available.



The Towns County Sheriff’s Office secured the scene of a death investigation off Gumlog Road in Young Harris last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

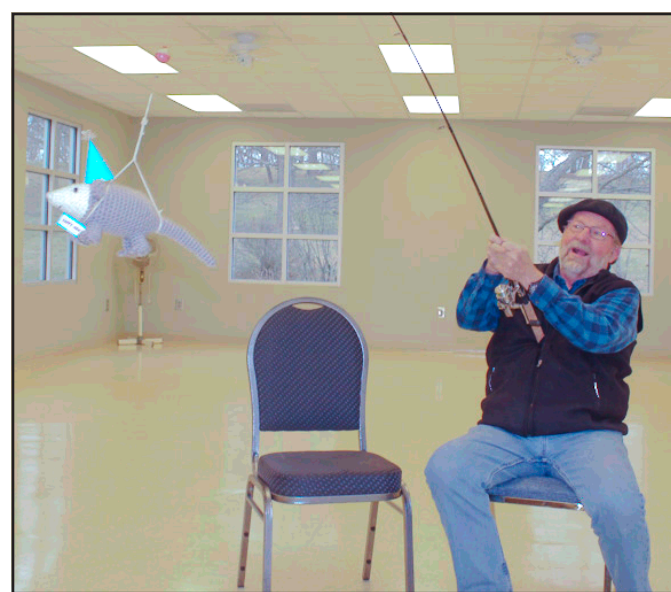
## Union Co. Senior Center drops annual New Year’s Possum

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Every New Year, Union County Senior Center staff and members celebrate their own version of the regionally renowned Possum Drop, and the 2023 sendoff was no different. Familiar faces returned to ring in 2024 – a few days early, albeit – while others adjusted to new roles.

The action started on Dec. 29 after a noon lunch, and it didn’t take long for folks to finish the main course and move on to the celebratory ice cream. Before they savored the sweet treat, however, new Senior Center Director Lee Davis gave a rundown of the event for the newbies.

Along with Davis taking up the leadership mantle at the Senior Center following longtime director Kathy Hill’s retirement last October, there were a couple of changes to the



Phillip McGlamery reprised his role as New Year’s Possum Dropper at the Union County Senior Center on Friday, Dec. 29. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

beloved tradition. For one, the “drop” itself didn’t occur in the dining hall; instead, the exercise room served as the perfect staging ground, and on their way in, the guests received printed copies

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**Revised School Board Meeting Schedule** See page 7B



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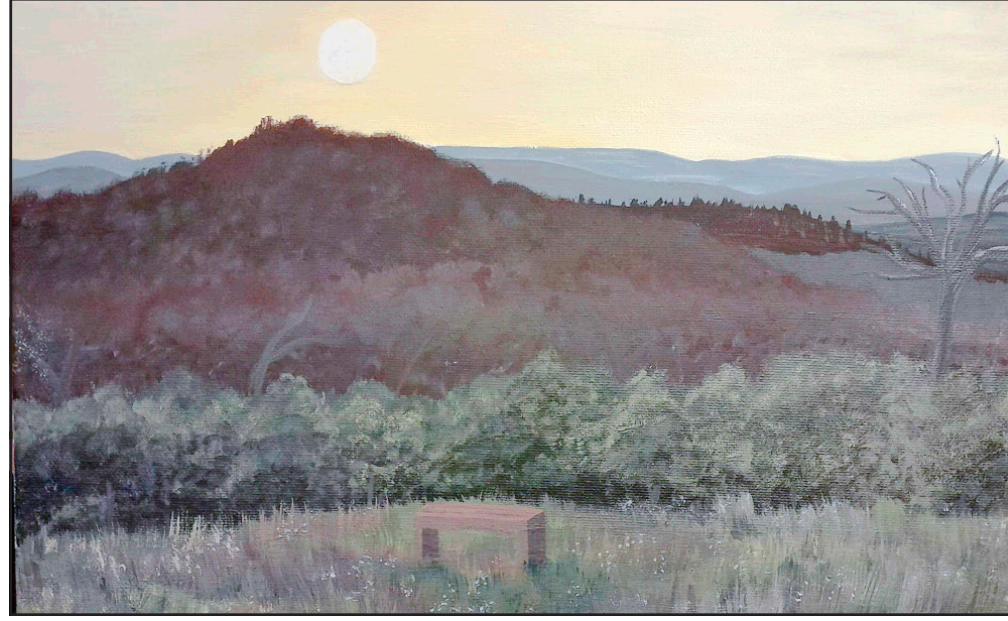
# Happy Birthday Sylvi...from Page 1A



**Adorable Sylvi Morgan-Watters was born just after midnight Jan. 2, granting her membership in the exclusive club of first babies born locally each new year.** Photo by Daysha Pandolph

and keeps track of the child's location. Additionally, the UGH Women's Health Department works closely with Labor & Delivery to provide the best possible care to mothers. With many experienced OBGYNs, expectant mothers can rest assured that their pregnancy is being monitored extremely well. From birthing advice to newborn care, the staff at Union General Labor & Delivery is equipped to provide whatever kind of assistance is needed.

# Woods Excels...from Page 1A



**Oil painting is just one of Jenna Woods' many talents, showcased here in this lovely piece capturing the natural beauty of the North Georgia Mountains.** Photo/Submitted

her dream of becoming either a surgeon or biotech executive, and she'll be getting a full renewable scholarship of more than \$80,000 yearly.

To supplement her goals, Woods plans to attend a dual-degree program through Georgia Tech, majoring in chemistry at Emory and biomedical engineering at Tech, though she understands that her goals may shift after getting a year or two under her belt.

She has also applied to Johns Hopkins University and the University of Pennsylvania, though she won't hear back from those colleges until spring.

Woods' achievements to date serve as proof positive that school choice can bring remarkable success for young people, as her accomplishments came after she permanently transitioned to home-school following the onset of COVID-19.

Despite her fondness for learning, Woods found that public school wasn't always the best match for her. Since the age of 8, she has endured ongoing health challenges requiring multiple procedures and surgeries to address "why she needs ear tubes and why her body rejects them in one ear."

Her mother recalls the "attendance nightmare" that followed her daughter's battle with chronic ear infections, pressure issues and vertigo. So when Woods, as a ninth-grader, thrived during remote learning imposed at the start of the pandemic, home-schooling suddenly seemed like a great choice.

In fact, Woods was so responsive to her new home-learning environment that she quickly discovered she could accelerate her educational pace, leading her mother to enroll her in Acellus Academy, a private online school that allowed her to continue taking honors classes.

While attending Acellus, Woods earned an outstanding composite score of 35 on her ACT, a standardized test used to

## Tara McCann makes Academic Achievement List

Tara McCann, a resident of Blairsville, GA, made the Fall 2023 Academic Achievement List at Georgia Southwestern State University and was among 701 students recognized for scholastic achievement.

To be eligible for the Academic Achievement List, a student must previously earn at least 12 credit hours at GSW, be enrolled in 3 to 11 hours of courses, and earn a 3.5 or higher GPA.

determine a student's eligibility in college admissions – a 36 is the highest a student can earn in individual testing categories, which Woods achieved in writing.

Just like many other seniors across the country, Woods will graduate in May of 2024, but while many of those students earn the standard amount of 26 high school credits, Woods will have 45 to her name upcoming graduation, with 17 credits coming from Advanced Placement courses.

Her aptitude for high-level academics has been no surprise to her family, of course, as by age 15, she had been honored with an AP Scholar with Distinction Award and boasts two other College Board awards.

Thanks to her flexible home-school schedule, Woods has made the most of her time outside of class as well by preparing for future endeavors and helping her community.

She has helped pick up litter, made and delivered dozens of "Chemo Caps" to Northside Hospital in Canton, painted more than 200 bookmarks for Fannin County Library and, during the

pandemic, made and delivered over 400 double-layered facemasks.

Her penchant for giving back doesn't end there. For about a year and a half now, Woods has been shadowing her ear, nose, and throat specialist, Dr. Bryant Conger, following a desire to help other children with health issues like her own.

"He told me that he knows Jenna will be a great doctor," Tara noted proudly.

Woods is a girl of many talents in her spare time, too, with a particular flair for creativity; oil painting and sketching help her stretch the limits of her imagination, and she supplements her quest for knowledge with a passion for reading.

She also plays ukulele, throws axes, practices computer programming, and cares for her many pets that include chickens, ducks and dogs – all from home.

"Watching your child mature in a safe environment while having a loving and supportive network has been invaluable," Tara said, urging other parents to give home schooling a try if they feel it could benefit their child.

**The HISTORY of FREEMASONS Part 5 of 15**

The MASONIC TRESTLEBOARD  
Whitey White



## From the Middle Ages to the Reformation (cont'd):

In 1356, the preamble to regulations governing the Trade of Masons specifically states that, unlike the other trades, no body existed for the regulation of masonry by masons. Finally, in 1376, four representatives of the "mystery" or trade are elected to the Common Council in London. This also seems to be the first use of the word "freemason" in English. It was immediately struck out and replaced with the word "mason". The poem claims that these assemblies were ordained by King Athelstan and that he also linked the wages of a mason to the cost of living.

The Cooke Manuscript, dating from about 1450, set the pattern for what Anderson called the "Gothic Constitutions", the older histories and regulations of the craft. [2] After a brief blessing, these documents describe the seven Liberal Arts, assigning predominance to Geometry, which is equated with Masonry. They then proceed to a history of masonry/geometry, finishing with King Athelstan, or Edwin, his brother or son

depending on source, assembling England's masons to give them their charges. The regulations or charges follow, usually with instructions as to the manner in which a new mason should swear to them.

Also around 1450, the will of a mason from Beverley gives a tantalizing glimpse into the emergence of masonic regalia. An inventory of John Cadeby's possessions mentions several zonae (girdles). Two were silver mounted, and one of these had the letters B and I in the middle, indicating Boaz and Jachin, the twin pillars of Solomon's Temple. He also owned a writing table and six English books, making him comfortably well-off and literate.

The following century and a half produced few new manuscripts. The Dowland manuscript, whose original is now lost, and Grand Lodge No 1, for the first time locate Edwin's assembly of Masons at York. The Lansdowne, originally dated to this period, is now thought to date from the 17th century (cont'd next week).



# County Meeting...from Page 1A



**L-R: Blue Ridge Mountain SAR President Stephen Weaver, Union General Advanced EMT Adrian Stroud, Kendra King and SAR Vice President Sid Turner.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard

as Assistant Police Chief of the Blairsville Police Department.

As part of the process, Sheriff Mack Mason named Dyer "Officer of the Year" for the Sheriff's Office, and Dyer received his award from Blue Ridge Mountain SAR President Weaver and Vice President Sid Turner.

"Maj. Dyer is the most dedicated law enforcement officer I have ever known," Mason shared. "He works two full-time positions in law enforcement in this county and is also a dedicated family man with a tremendous family tree that dates back into the 1830s in Union County."

"Maj. Dyer is a well-rounded professional that has respect and admiration of the Sheriff, the Sheriff's Office staff, and the confidence and capability to be successful in his command position as a Major at the Sheriff's Office."

"Maj. Shawn Dyer is very well connected with the law enforcement community that assists in the Sheriff's Office performing its duties and responsibilities. He also carries the confidence and respect in his role with the residents of Union County."

"There are many times that he successfully closes cases and meets residents' needs in a quick and timely manner. All of our employees call on him day or night in situations that may need special attention or guidance on certain issues."

"As a member of the Sheriff's Office, Major Dyer's competence, capabilities, skills, and professional actions in the field of law enforcement make him an excellent candidate for this esteemed award."

"As Sheriff of Union County, I can see without reservations that I have been blessed to have Maj. Dyer as a leader in this office since I came into office, almost 11 years ago. He has handled an uncountable number of issues, large and small, before they ever get to my attention. For that, I am very grateful."

For his service, Dyer received a Law Enforcement Commendation Medal and certificate that evening.

Weaver and Turner then presented an Emergency Medical Services Commendation Medal and certificate to Union General Ambulance Service Advanced EMT Adrian Stroud.

Union General EMS Director Wesley Rogers made the recommendation and was in attendance for the presentation, as were proud members of Stroud's family.

"Adrian has been an Advanced EMT at Union General EMS for over six years," Turner said. "His patient care, ability, knowledge base and overall performance exceed his years of experience."

"He serves as the B Shift Backup Supervisor and the Supply Manager for the entire department. He ensures crews have everything needed to respond to around 6,000 calls a year."

"Adrian's consistency as an employee, quality of patient

care and hard work to see the ambulance fleet is well supplied make him a worthy candidate for this award."

Every year, the EMS Commendation comes with special recognition by resident Kendra King to present a memorial award established in honor of her late husband Murray S. King, who was a member of the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter SAR.

The Murray King Award, offered with a small cash prize, recognizes "outstanding service and dedication to the citizens of Union County by performing Emergency Medical Services to ensure health and to save lives."

Murray suffered a massive heart attack in 2014, and though he did not survive, Kendra was so impressed with the response by Union General EMS that she asked the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter SAR to establish a memorial award in recognition of local EMS workers.

Kendra thanked Stroud for his dedication to Union County and for "duplicating the standards and priorities of Murray S. King" with his 32 years at BellSouth.

"We applaud you; his friends and family are happy to present you with the 10th annual award tonight," concluded Kendra, who attended the presentation with her daughter Melanie.

The recipient of the Fire Commendation Award could not attend the meeting, so his medal and certificate were set aside to be presented separately.

## Other Business

Also in the meeting, Commissioner Paris accepted an agreement with Geo-Hydro Engineers Inc. "to perform subsurface exploration and a geotechnical engineering evaluation for the bridge replacement on Fisher Field Road in the amount of \$6,750."

For the last few months, Paris has been working to secure contracts to replace the structurally deficient bridge on Fisher Field Road across the Nottely River, which services about 18 households.

It is considered an emergency replacement because, following the Georgia Department of Transportation's most recent biennial inspection, the state alerted the county it would close the bridge if it wasn't replaced, and there's no other way to access those homes.

A new, prefabricated bridge has been ordered and will take about 17 weeks to build, with a tentative schedule to be installed and in use by May 2024. Additional details regarding the emergency bridge replacement will be available in an upcoming edition of the newspaper.

During his Commissioner's Comments, Paris informed people that the new Voting Center off the Glenn Gooch Bypass had finally opened for staff. The center puts the Voter Registration Office and the Elections Board Office in the same building and provides a new venue for early

voting.

The commissioner also touched on the roughly \$60,000 contract with point.dog Digital for marketing services to promote the county's SPLOST program and projects.

"We're doing videos in the county of many of our SPLOST projects," Paris said. "The reason we did this – and people have questioned, 'Why are you spending \$59,500 on videos?' And then somebody even said, 'Are you doing this because you want to campaign?'"

"I said, 'No, this has nothing to do with that.' This is something that's been in the works for a long time. We have a SPLOST designee that works with us on all SPLOST projects; he's the one who came to us and recommended (this), because we have had several people complain."

"Even though we are very open with the SPLOST projects and what we do, there have been some complaints saying, 'We don't understand all of those.' So, we decided and he decided ... let's do a video."

"We're doing a short video of I think 10 to 12 different projects that the county has done, and they'll be playing so that the public can see, very clearly, what the SPLOST projects are and what they're doing. Then, if they've got any questions, we'll certainly be able to answer them."

"So, we're excited about that, and these videos hopefully will be ready in the next 60 days to broadcast."

Paris clarified that the marketing videos will highlight existing SPLOST projects to educate the public on the program and will not be used to campaign for a future SPLOST referendum, the latter of which is prohibited by state law.

"What they're doing is letting the public know what the current SPLOST (projects) are," Paris said. "Having said that, certainly we would hope when and if that vote comes back up – next year or whenever it comes up – that people will realize what's been done."

Without SPLOST, the county "would be in a huge mess," Paris said, noting that property taxes would otherwise have to "go way up to try to cover everything."

"So, we're proud of not only (having no) county debt, but also having the fifth-lowest property tax rate in the state of Georgia," Paris said. "And that comes from a lot of hard work and a lot of people being dedicated."

The currently running SPLOST V began collections in 2021, to continue through March 2027. Paris sent SPLOST V to a vote early, in 2018, more than two years before SPLOST IV finished collecting, and the SPLOST V referendum garnered 63% support that year.

Unless posted otherwise, Paris holds his regular county meetings on the third Thursday of every month at 6 p.m. inside Courtroom A of the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street.



# Possum Drop...from Page 1A



Local senior citizens had a blast during the recent New Year's celebration, held every year at the Senior Center.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

of the lyrics to the New Year's classic "Auld Lang Syne."

With the eye-popping party hats, dazzling crowns and honking noisemakers, the atmosphere was truly festive, and Davis addressed the crowd while Former Administrative Assistant Phillip McGlamery held the stuffed marsupial under control.

"I just want to thank everybody for everything you did for us this year," Davis said. "It's been a transition year, and it's been interesting, to say the least. But it's been such a great – honestly, I can say for the first time, I love getting up and coming to work."

"There's nothing better than coming in and seeing everybody here. It's family. I have family at home, but you're my other family."

Following the touching statement, "Phillip the Entertainer," as he was dubbed for the afternoon, had some

corny opossum-related puns to tickle the crowd.

"What do you call a group of possums? You call it a posse," McGlamery chuckled, before coming back for a second round: "How do you greet an Irish possum? 'Top of the morning to you, Mr. O'possum.'"

Davis "rescued" the crowd to applause and hearty honking before everyone settled back down to take part in the real focus of the gathering.

The crocheted critter, fastened securely to a bobber hooked to a fishing pole, was slowly lowered to the floor, and a chorus of "Auld Lang Syne" prematurely welcomed 2024.

With snow flurries right outside the window, the partygoers began to head home to avoid potentially slippery roads. Davis lingered to clean up, reflecting on 2023 but particularly mindful of the past couple months.

## Library System Board Meetings

The Union County Public Library Board of Trustees will have its regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on Thursday, January 11, 2024, at 5 p.m. at Union County Public Library in Blairsville.

The Towns County Public Libraries Board of Trustees will have its regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on Tuesday, January 16, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. at Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris.

The Fannin County Pub-

lic Library Board of Trustees will have its regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on Thursday, January 18, 2024, at 8:30 a.m. at Fannin County Chamber & Welcome Center in Blue Ridge.

The Mountain Regional Library System Board of Trustees will have its regularly scheduled quarterly meeting on Wednesday, January 24, 2024, at 10 a.m. at Fannin County Chamber & Welcome Center in Blue Ridge.

people don't have anybody at home – we're their family."

In recent weeks especially, Davis said several members have approached her to speak on the deep impact the facility has had on their wellbeing, adding that many are widowed and have found that socialization and quick friendships with fellow elders give them a reason to go on.

One thing Davis really wants to jump on in the new year is a focus on outreach and community feedback, for which she has drawn inspiration from the increasing calls for advice

regarding senior care and local events.

"We want to be able to reach people," Davis said. "We've actually had some people call and ask ... 'I've got a Cricut, and I don't have (any) idea how to use it. Does anybody there teach that?' No, but we do have a lady that would like to, so we're thinking about incorporating some of those things."

Other highly requested programs include yoga and martial arts, and after Davis reached out to newer members, she found younger seniors are

beginning to request different artists for karaoke activities, like the Eagles.

In a similar vein, Davis hopes to one day offer more transportation to and from the Senior Center to pick up folks who may not be able to drive.

"Ultimately, this is theirs – the Senior Center is for them. It's not for me, it's not for what I want," Davis said, emphasizing that the bottom line will always be enriching the lives of seniors. "I hope I never get to the point where I get too busy to talk to them or don't listen to them."