

North Georgia News

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Talented high school musicians make All State

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Once again, Union County students exhibit exemplary talent and passion in their areas of expertise as two upcoming high school band members make the Georgia Music Educators Association's All State Band.

Among hundreds of students from schools across the state this winter, 10th-grade flutist Ayden Burnett and ninth-grade euphoniumist Ivan Garcia possessed the skills to impress judges conducting over a hundred blind auditions per round for each instrument.

Both boys found their interest in music young.

Burnett said he "never had much interest" in sports, but in seventh grade, he had friends already involved in band whose experiences inspired him to give it a try.

While he initially joined for the year-end trip to Six Flags, Burnett was surprised to find that he "wasn't the worst" with his initial choice, the saxophone. And when Band Teacher Will Stafford voiced the need for a fuller flute section, Burnett decided to give the smaller instrument a try.

Staying in for COVID-19 gave Burnett the extra time he needed to discover that the flute was more his forte. And though Burnett found flute practice more fun, he nonetheless missed performing

with his instructor and peers after the initial onset of the pandemic.

Garcia, on the other hand, said his first taste of band music in fifth grade when a music clinic offered his classmates and him a chance to explore instruments. Garcia said it was the euphonium that truly stole his heart.

"I thought, 'Hey, that looks funny - it's a tiny tuba,'" he said.

Officially, Garcia joined band in middle school because it not only gave him the chance to spend more time with friends, but he also found he loved performing for the simple fact that his music made other people happy.

And that was part of his reasoning as to why he tried out for the All State Band ensemble to begin with.

"If it makes Stafford happy that (we) try out for auditions, then I think it's worth it to keep trying," Garcia said. "To make it into All State, it took a lot of work. Especially during COVID, I did a lot of long tones, and I just practiced constantly because I had nothing else to do."

High School Band Director Will Stafford explained that students can individually practice and audition for a position in the All State ensemble by going to the Georgia Music Educators Association website to check



Ninth-grade euphoniumist Ivan Garcia and 10th-grade flutist Ayden Burnett showcased their musical mastery recently by acing their auditions to join the All State Band in 2022.

Photo/Submitted

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Firefighters work around clock to protect community



Union County Fire Lt. Jeff Fortenberry backing up Station 4 Firefighter Davis Przekop at the Jan. 19 early morning structure fire at Tom Huggins Road and Murphy Highway.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Be it a car accident, medical emergency or fire, when disaster strikes, Union County firefighters are often first on the scene. Helping to make this possible is a network of volunteer firefighters dedicated to serving their fellow residents in the very neighborhoods they live in.

Career firefighters out of Station 1 always respond, and their efforts are augmented by 11 volunteer stations spread out around the county. These volunteer stations are manned primarily by folks with regular day jobs who nevertheless don the uniform to answer calls for assistance.

Sometimes, these calls come when volunteers are sitting down for a family dinner or during a child's ballgame.

Other times, it's the middle of the night, and despite having to work the next morning, these volunteers suit up in hopes of preventing loss of life and property.

It's a noble and necessary calling, one that Fire Chief David Dyer says is being answered less and less these days.

"We need folks, we need firefighters really bad right

See Firefighters, Page 6A

No injuries sustained in visually dramatic crash at Ingles



A driver out of North Carolina and a Union County motorist had a serious run-in at the Ingles intersection on Georgia 515 Sunday. Thankfully, no one was seriously injured.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
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Though no one was hurt in the Sunday afternoon car crash at the entrance to Ingles on Georgia 515, two area motorists, their vehicles, a pedestrian signal pole and the grocery store's big brick sign at the highway all had certainly seen better days.

The accident occurred around 3 p.m. Jan. 30 when a North Carolina driver in a

silver Toyota turned left from 515 to enter Ingles - right into the path of a westbound black Honda with Union County plates, Blairsville Police Lt. Rusty Walker said.

Walker said it appeared as though the Toyota turned on a flashing yellow at the 515 traffic signal, meaning the Honda had the green light, and therefore the right of way.

"The car that was traveling westbound ended up knocking down the pedestrian

pole and proceeded into the brick Ingles sign, and damaged it pretty good," Walker said. "No injuries, thank goodness."

"It looked a lot worse than it was and could have been a lot worse than it was, but everybody was buckled up, airbags deployed, and nobody was transported (for medical treatment)."

"They'll probably feel it in the morning, they'll be a little sore, but hey, we'll take

See Ingles Crash, Page 6A

Top of GA Speaking Contest off to excellent start in '22

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS - After rebounding from the cancellation of last year's contest due to COVID-19, training for the 2022 Public Speaking Contest got under way last week on Thursday, Jan. 27, inside the Goolsby Center at Young Harris College.

Over at least the next five Thursdays, students will be learning the craft of public speaking from a variety of local civic and community leaders who will be mentoring the children in the skill and importance of being able to speak in public settings.

The competition will feature students living in Union

See Speech Contest, Page 2A



Dr. Jennifer Hallett of the Communication Studies Department at Young Harris College believes students will benefit for a lifetime by developing "a combination of good written and speaking skills."

Photo by Jeremy Foster

Be Pro Be Proud Georgia highlights industry trades



L-R: Reggie LaGrone, Shelly Logan, Greg Vitek, Catherine Allen, Danelle Avelar, Josh Davis and Matthew Hutchesson pose for a photo during last week's Be Pro Be Proud campaign at Union County High.

Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The "Be Pro Be Proud Georgia Workforce Workshop"

interactive trailer made a two-day appearance at Union County High School on Monday, Jan. 24, and Tuesday, Jan. 25.

The Workforce Workshop features a "customized,

interactive trailer loaded with information, skills challenges, and (interactive demonstrations)," and it is touring Georgia schools.

See Be Pro Be Proud, Page 6A

January Term 2022 Grand Jury Indictments

The following individuals were indicted during the January Term 2022 of the Union County Grand Jury, which met last week:

Courtney Sharondez McDowell, aka Courtney Sharonez McDowell, aka Courtney S. McDowell, possession of a firearm by a

convicted felon; possession of methamphetamine.

Ruth Cole, aggravated stalking.

James Marty Tanner, possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; possession of a firearm during the commission of a

felony; possession of drug-related objects; driving on suspended, canceled or revoked registration.

Jeremiah Victor Lewis Lloyd, two counts aggravated assault; two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

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All State Band...from Page 1A

out musical selections released each July or August.

“The first round of auditions was in the first week of December, and then the second round of auditions was (on the) first weekend of January, a month later,” Stafford said. “I’ve been trying to encourage kids for a number of years to try out for All State Band because I think it’s a fun experience; I think they have a good time.”

As was the case on many occasions in a world still undergoing a pandemic, the GMEA’s All State events were completely virtual for the 2021-22 school year.

This upcoming year is likely to be different thanks to talks of reintroducing a traditional in-person performance, and Stafford is excited for the chance this will offer students to hone their skills while proving to themselves that it is possible for them to go far with their talent.

“Our kids, they don’t believe they can compete with those kids down there in Metro Atlanta, and it’s not really accurate or true,” Stafford said.

Indeed, students from specialized art academies are often finalists in All State judging rounds, but Stafford just asks, “Why not our kids?”

“Our kids can be successful, too,” Stafford said. “They have to believe in themselves, and as a teacher you have to convince them that they’re good enough to do that, and that’s a hard thing to do.”

This was the case for Burnett, who initially wasn’t even going to try out because he lacked faith in his own skills. When Stafford texted him to confirm that he had been selected to All State, Burnett said he thought it was a prank.

“I just sat there, shocked, because one of my goals before I (left) high school (was) to get into All State, and that I made it in my sophomore year just means a lot to me,” Burnett said.

Garcia, too, was blown away that he made the cut, saying that it “almost shocked

me to tears when I first heard about me making it as a freshman.”

Playing music alone is something Garcia genuinely enjoys, and while he is certainly pleased to have been selected, he “wasn’t really in it for the accomplishment; I was in it for the experience.”

In short, it’s less about preparing for All State tryouts and more about dedication to one’s instrument “in a very special way,” such as Burnett having fun playing the flute or Garcia enjoying making others happy with his music.

Along with anticipating the March 5 All State concert, Burnett and Garcia remain devoted to improving their music generally.

While Burnett says it’s impossible to pin down an exact number of hours, he practices when he can, always shooting for “three good practices out of the week.”

Meanwhile, Garcia says he practices much less than he used to but invariably finds time to play, even with his involvement in track, and especially when he can take the euphonium home on weekends to practice for two to four hours per day.

In line with his students’ practice habits, Stafford believes in the adage of quality over quantity, particularly when it comes to Union County’s All State students.

“I preach to them that it’s not really about how much time you practice, it’s really more about how focused you are and what goals (you set) and trying to accomplish those goals during your practice sessions,” Stafford said. “Those two do a very, very good job of doing that.”

“Obviously, there is a time component to it, but at the end of the day, I think it’s more about the quality rather than the quantity, and these two responses (from the Georgia Music Educators Association) really prove that.”

On his two champion students, Stafford said they are always setting an example for their peers, “and that’s probably the most important thing – it’s

the class and integrity that I see from them.”

“Also, they really embody work ethic and embody the personality of, yes, they work very hard, but they also understand ‘work smarter, not always harder,’” Stafford said. “They understand how to budget their time very well and efficiently, which a lot of kids their age don’t understand, and they are exemplars in that category.”

Stafford estimates that, out of thousands of auditions, there was only a 5% chance for the boys to make it to the final concert. Now that they have been selected, they will have three days to showcase their performance abilities and skills in sight-reading and scales.

Garcia and Burnett will play at separate times, and by press time, there was no word on their official performance schedules. In the meantime, the two All State performers will continue to inspire their classmates.

And perhaps in the years to come, Garcia and Burnett will go on to help their instructor bring to life his ambition of recruiting more students to audition for the elite ensemble.

“These kids have potential, and we’ve just got to help them find it and unlock it,” Stafford said of all his students. “When we do, watch out, because once they realize that, they go a long way, and these two kids are perfect examples of that.”

In terms of next steps after high school, both Garcia and Burnett have plenty of time to figure things out, and neither is crossing out the possibility of keeping music in their futures.

Burnett says he wants to go to a college that specializes in music, and he thinks the flute “should play a role” in his life after graduation.

Garcia is interested in anything he can do to help others find peace, and while he is currently eyeing a major in psychology, he has also begun considering a career as a music teacher, no doubt inspired by Stafford’s encouragement and leadership.

Speech Contest...from Page 1A

and Towns counties in Georgia, and in Clay County, North Carolina. Two divisions will compete, one for middle school-aged children and another for high schoolers, with private and home-schooled students also eligible for entry.

By the time training concludes, students will be expected to deliver an inspiring four to six-minute speech on the final contest day in March, to be announced at a later date.

First Place winners in each division will receive a \$400 cash prize, with Second Place winners receiving \$300, Third Place \$200 and Fourth Place \$100. Additionally, the First Place high school winner will earn a non-cash, renewable \$5,000 scholarship to Young Harris College.

There is still time for students to apply as a speaker in the training and competition by emailing their name, address, phone number, school, and grade level to topofgeorgiastudent@gmail.com.

Charlotte Sleczkowski, chair of the Towns County Democrats and a retired schoolteacher of 40 years, is one of the mentors aiding in the process.

She said the importance of a training program like this is to instruct students “how to speak in public, whether it is a job interview, giving messages or speaking in front of a class or on a stage or whatever the situation may be.”

“It helps people to research more background on their topics and helps them be more confident and convincing when they speak with more poise,” Sleczkowski said.

Retired physician Gerry Chotiner is a mentor as well as a chairperson leading the effort, and he said that, oftentimes, “the students teach us more than we teach the students.”

“Although ways of communicating have changed a lot over the years,” Chotiner said, “we teach these kids how to better communicate in face-to-face interactions by maintaining eye contact, and be able to deliver instructions that are clear, and just be able to have great people skills in general.”

“Public speaking is a two-phase system: first, you have to learn how to build the speech, and then, you have to learn how to perform it.”

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley was another mentor on hand last week to offer his services.

“I have been involved with this speaking contest for a number of years, and I

became involved as a way to provide community service,” Langley said. “The important thing about this speaking contest is that it gives kids the opportunity to overcome their fear of public speaking, which can be scary and common for a lot of people.”

“It can be a waste of talent when someone could be an excellent lawyer, community leader, salesperson, among other things, but is afraid of a career path that would require public speaking, and this contest gives (him or her) a chance to work through that fear.”

Co-chairing the contest is Dr. Jennifer Hallett, a professor and department chair of Communication Studies at Young Harris College, and she led the training session Thursday with a slideshow presentation highlighting principal areas of focus for public speaking.

“I cannot overstate the importance of having good public speaking skills,” Hallett said. “Every industry that I know about uses communication skills as one of the top requirements for incoming employees to be onboarded.”

“A combination of good written and speaking skills go hand in hand, and this program helps guide the students through the process of combining them to teach (kids) how to make their topic interesting and appealing to their audience.”

Local students make Dean’s List at Georgia Tech

The following students have earned the distinction of Dean’s List at the Georgia Institute of Technology for Fall 2021. This designation is awarded to undergraduate students who have earned a 3.0 or higher academic average for the semester.

Students included Vatsal Trivedi and Madison Yost of Blairsville.

The Georgia Institute of Technology, or Georgia Tech, is a top 10 public research university developing leaders who advance technology and improve the human condition.

Indictments...from Page 1A

Seth Davis, two counts aggravated assault.

Scarlet Rose Engler, tampering with evidence; possession of drug-related objects.

Jamie Lee Gilley, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; driving while license suspended; tag light violation.

Joseantonio Mejia Martinez, six counts serious injury by vehicle; driving under the influence (per se); driving under the influence (less safe) (alcohol); reckless driving; improper passing; failure to maintain lane.

Scott Updike, theft by deception; exploitation and intimidation of a disabled adult, elder person or resident.

Jordan Tyler Patterson, fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; possession of methamphetamine; two counts

driving under the influence (controlled substance); driving under the influence (less safe) (combined influence); obstruction of an officer; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; reckless driving; failure to maintain lane; littering.

Heather Leighann Etheridge, three counts exploitation and intimidation of a disabled adult, elder person or resident; possession of a controlled substance; possession of a Schedule II controlled substance.

Jacqueline Wright, three counts exploitation and intimidation of a disabled adult, elder person or resident; possession of methamphetamine; crossing the guard lines with drugs; dangerous drugs - sale, distribution, possession of dangerous drugs.

Scott Woodrow Robinson, exploitation and intimidation of a disabled adult, elder person

or resident; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects.

Steve Cody Shaw Jr., aggravated assault; battery, Family Violence; simple battery, Family Violence; criminal trespass, Family Violence; cruelty to children in the third degree.

Brian Cubbins Wight, two counts aggravated assault.

Jason Eugene Cunningham, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

James Corbett Lee Anderson, possession of methamphetamine; possession of a Schedule III controlled substance; possession of a Schedule IV controlled substance; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects.

Alan Foster Deloach, trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine.

Janie Caroline Clark, possession of methamphetamine.

Jesse James Dockery, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Albert Lewis Lafferty Sr., possession of a Schedule II controlled substance; two counts possession of a Schedule III controlled substance; possession of a Schedule IV controlled substance.

Kevin Michael Ledford, sale of methamphetamine; possession of methamphetamine; possession of a Schedule IV controlled substance; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce.

Robert Joseph Mesa, aggravated assault, Family Violence; two counts terroristic threats; two counts battery, Family Violence; disorderly conduct; cruelty to children in the third degree; obstruction of an officer.

Hillary Wayne McWhirter, cruelty to children in the second degree; battery, Family Violence; simple battery, Family Violence.

Rusty Luke Kerr, possession of methamphetamine; crossing the guard lines with drugs; possession of drug-related objects; reckless driving; failure to maintain lane; no tag; tag

light violation.

Randal Thomas Greenhill, fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; possession of a Schedule II controlled substance; possession of a Schedule III controlled substance; obstruction of an officer; speeding.

James McKinley Bell, aka Jimmy M. Bell, aka Jimmy McKinley Bell, fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; reckless driving.

Dillion Charles Whitman, possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects; driving while license suspended.

Daniel Curtis Beavers, criminal damage to property in the second degree.

Justin Charles Brown, theft by taking.

Zackery Tyler Garland, possession of a Schedule II controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects; three counts violating a Family Violence order.

Taylor Igneri, theft by conversion; theft by taking; theft by deception.

Timothy Igneri, theft by conversion; theft by taking; theft by deception.

Vincent James Scariati, exploitation and intimidation of a disabled adult, elder person or resident; theft by deception.

Susan Kimberly Spears, burglary in the first degree; theft by taking.

Tyron E. King, two counts theft by shoplifting.

Tywon Javon Wyatt, two counts theft by taking; burglary in the second degree.

Justin Hill, two counts theft by taking; burglary in the second degree.

Jordan Wayne Campbel, possession of methamphetamine.

Gary Michael Cochran, possession of methamphetamine.

George Kelly Robinson, possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon; possession of drug-related objects; speeding.

Tiffany Carol Bowen, five counts obstruction of an officer; disorderly conduct.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Blairsville PTO, Inc. sponsoring "Spring Break At The Beach" Raffle

The Blairsville PTO, Inc. is partnering with the UCHS Incubator program to make this fundraiser possible.

"Spring Break At The Beach" Raffle: Accommodations April 2 - April 9, 2022, in Mexico Beach, FL. All proceeds benefit The UCHS Incubator Program. The UCHS Incubator Program is a specially designed program to help young startups innovate

and grow. The program provides workspaces, mentorship, education, and access to investors for startups or sole entrepreneurs.

Text SPRING2022 to 855-202-2100 to get a link to buy experiences or Visit <https://go.rallyup.com/uchsinubator>. The fundraiser ends on January 31, 2022 at midnight. The drawing for the winner is on February 1, 2022, at 8 a.m.

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Firefighters...from Page 1A

now, because the volunteer spirit is kind of dying away," Dyer said. "There's not a lot of people who want to volunteer for things anymore."

"Often, it's not so much that they don't want to, it's just people feel like they're too busy. And they are. They still have to eat, sleep and work. But we really need people who are not only there to help with hoses and fire ground support, but to actually go through the training and know how to fight fire."

"People have this idea that firefighting is not something they can do, that it's too difficult. And really, we'll train you to be able to do it."

"In addition to fighting fire, we have support roles where people can pull the hoses to the doors, get tools, change out air bottles, help with water supply. Those are a lot of support things."

"I always give the example of the Air Force. To get that one guy up there in that F-35, it takes a whole host of people to be able to arm it, fuel it, make sure it works, coordinate it and all that."

With the volume of emergency calls only increasing from year to year due to a growing county, the efforts of Union County Firefighters – career and volunteer – are always needed and always on display, most recently during a rental home fire at Murphy Highway and Tom Huggins Road.

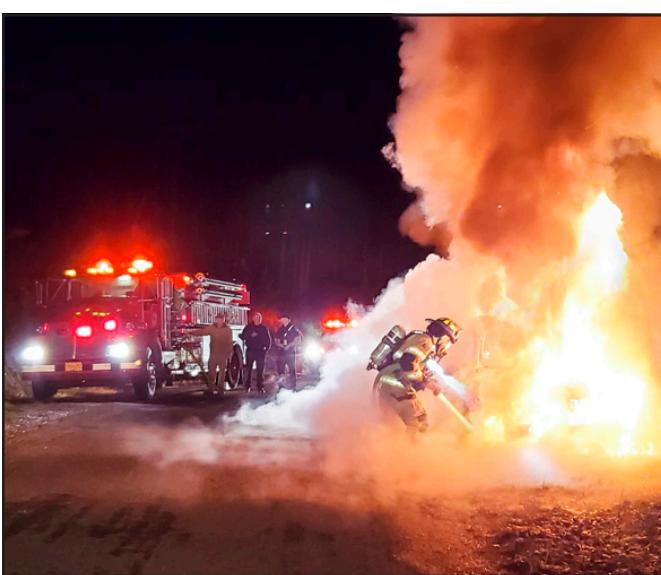
The fire began sometime around 1 a.m. on Jan. 19. Fire Station No. 1 was first to arrive, relaying information that the fire seemed to be isolated to a corner bathroom in the home, and volunteer Stations 2, 3 and 4 promptly showed up to provide a team knockdown.

A rarity in a rural county, the home features a fire hydrant in the front yard, so firefighters were able to quickly connect Engine 13 to a non-exhaustible water source to limit fire damage to about 30% of the home, helped by the fact that the house is made of brick.

"It's a guaranteed water supply," Dyer said. "You've got a good working fire hydrant there, good water pressure; you can just hook up your truck and go to work. And it frees up a lot of support personnel."

"If we don't have a fire hydrant there or even close to where we can just run a hose from the hydrant to the truck, then we have to do a water shuttle operation, which requires people to drive trucks and operate hose lines from truck to truck. So, it frees up a lot of people when we have a fire hydrant right there in the front yard. It's very helpful."

Firefighters spent about three and a half hours at the home making sure the fire was fully extinguished before heading back to their respective



Station 4 Volunteer Firefighter Mark Carr suited up the evening of Jan. 18 to get up close and personal in putting out this Jonica Gap Road car fire.

Photo/Facebook

fire stations to take another hour or so re-setting their trucks and equipment to be ready to respond to the next emergency.

"Fighting fires in the middle of the night, we've only got a few career guys that are going to be there, so we depend heavily on volunteers," Dyer said. "And volunteers have got to eat, sleep and go to work, too, so it's hard on them."

"It's hard for them to come to a fire at 1 o'clock in the morning, work all night, and then get up – if they get to go home and sleep at all – and go to work that next day. But being a firefighter comes with rewards, too."

"You get to help people out. If you weren't there or didn't know what you were doing, somebody's house is going to be destroyed or worse, they could get hurt or killed. So, that's the biggest reward, is being able to help somebody."

"We've been busy, and I'm really proud of everybody that's working with us. Our firefighters are doing a great job – it makes it easy to be proud."

Deputies with the Union County Sheriff's Office worked traffic at the scene on Jan. 19, temporarily re-routing motorists around that stretch of Murphy Highway, and Union General EMS was on standby in case medical assistance was required.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation but is thought to be accidental in nature.

Volunteers stepped up again recently with a Jan. 18 car fire off Jonica Gap Road in the northwest corner of Union at the Fannin County line.

Stations 1 and 4 responded, with the first arriving units discovering a minivan completely involved in fire. Tanker 4 and Rescue 4 extinguished the blaze, and there were no injuries. The cause of the fire remains undetermined.

Modern fuel tanks are

designed not to explode, so there was really no threat of an explosion, though the danger was certainly imminent.

"You will have fuel going everywhere, which means it's going to burn, but it won't explode like you see in the movies, though you do have a lot more fire when you have a fuel tank issue," Dyer said. "The biggest problem with car fires nowadays is that there's so much plastic involved in cars."

"There's so much other fuel besides the gasoline, so car fires can turn into a pretty significant fire in just a few minutes. This was a long ways out from town, so it was a great response from Station 4 and Station 1. It was a pretty routine car fire that those guys did a good job on."

Additionally, Dyer stresses the importance of homes having working smoke detectors – available for residents through a program at the Fire Department – as modern houses are filled with combustible items made from plastics and other synthetic potential fuel sources.

"They did a study a while back," Dyer said. "In the '50s, '60s and '70s, people had couches, chairs and home appliances that were all either metal or natural fibers. Burning took a while, and it didn't build up the heat and smoke as much as the hydrocarbons in the plastics and the manmade fibers that started coming on the market approximately in the 1980s."

"So, with all these modern combustible materials, if your house catches on fire today, not only will it burn faster, but the smoke will build up so quickly that you may not have an opportunity to get out. Having smoke alarms in your home will alert you to a fire sooner."

For more information on the Fire Department and to find a Smoke Alarm Request Form, visit <http://www.unioncountyga.gov/fire-department/>.

Be Pro Be Proud...from Page 1A



Workforce Workshop Tour Manager Reggie LaGrone showing CTAE students around the Be Pro Be Proud interactive trailer at Union County High last week.

Photo by Mark Smith

companies and community events.

Launched in 2020, Be Pro Be Proud Georgia is an initiative by the Cherokee County, Georgia, Office of Economic Development aimed at attracting high schoolers to the trades and changing perceptions that four-year colleges are the only way for students to be successful in life.

There is no question that college programs can lead to success and prestige, but there are other, equally honorable ways for students to achieve successful outcomes. The fact is, college isn't for everybody, and there's no shame in that.

Then there's the false perception that students electing to go directly into the workforce are guaranteed to make less money than college graduates. Sure, successful doctors, lawyers and rocket scientists are handsomely paid, but so are successful computer programmers, builders, and tradesmen and tradeswomen.

Nor should money be the only consideration that goes into choosing a career. Generally, if someone likes what they do, they will be successful because they are interested in and take pride in whatever they produce, which leads to high demand.

And currently, demand for skilled labor and technical expertise is high. According to statistics on [beprobeproudga.org](http://www.beprobeproudga.org), "more than 82% of manufacturers report a moderate or serious shortage in skilled production workers," with existing workers aging fast.

That means a plethora of high-paying jobs are available to young people right now, many right here in North Georgia. And, because of the shortages,

there are some outstanding post-secondary education assistance and apprenticeship programs that are essentially begging to help people.

Union County CTAE Director Josh Davis, who was instrumental in scheduling the Be Pro Be Proud Georgia event last week, was thrilled to observe Workforce Workshop Tour Manager Reggie LaGrone and Workshop Driver Matthew Hutchinsen interacting with students.

"We've got all of our CTAE classes rotating through (over the two days) so I could get as many kids through it as possible," said Davis, adding that students are being introduced to several high-wage, high-demand apprenticeships and jobs available to them after they graduate.

Shelly Logan and Greg Vitek, both partners with Workforce Strategies Group, LLC, of Hall County, were on hand to observe how students interacted with the various stations on the Workforce Workshop trailer under the watchful eyes of LaGrone and Hutchinsen.

Outreach Coordinator Danielle Avelar and Assistant Outreach Coordinator Catherine Allen of WorkSource Georgia Mountains also attended to see how students interfaced with the experience.

Vitek and Avelar explained the rather complicated collaboration between the Technical College System of Georgia, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, WorkSource Georgia Mountains, and Workforce Strategies Group, LLC, all of whom play a part in supporting the Be Pro Be Proud Georgia initiative.

WorkSource Georgia Mountains and Workforce Strategies Group, LLC, represent 12 North Georgia counties: Union, Towns, White, Lumpkin, Stephens, Rabun, Hall, Hart, Habersham, Franklin, Dawson and Banks.

Together, the two organizations team up to realize a skilled workforce in those 12 counties via grant funding that WorkSource Georgia Mountains gets through the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission from the State of Georgia and the federal government.

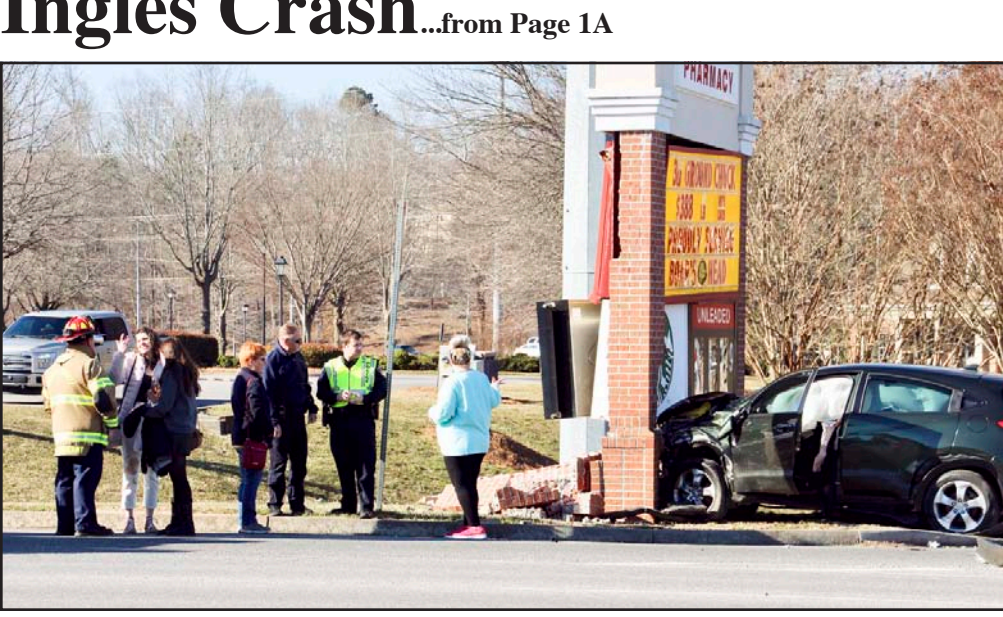
WorkSource Georgia Mountains operates under the leadership of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission and the Technical College System of Georgia, and, in addition to supporting various jobs initiatives, provides funding to individuals for jobs training.

For more information on the above resources, visit www.beprobeproudga.org, www.gmrc.ga.gov, www.gmrc.ga.gov/wsgm, and www.workforcestrategiesgroup.com.

In other local Career, Technical and Agricultural Education news, Davis said the regional College and Career Academy construction project at the high school campus is ahead of schedule and the renovation project on the vocational building will likely start in May.

The CCA building pad is near ready for pouring the foundation, Davis said, and barring any materials delays, the metal for the academy should be delivered by the end of February or the first of March. From that point the building will go up quickly.

Ingles Crash...from Page 1A



The brick Ingles sign at Georgia 515 sustained quite a bit of damage in this Jan. 30 afternoon accident, as did the crosswalk signal that was completely uprooted from the ground.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

that. We stood there and talked about it, and nobody had to go

to a hospital." The Ingles sign is

reinforced with steel girders, so while some of the bricks in the base and backside of the sign fell away in the crash, it was not likely to be in any real danger of toppling over as a result of the damage it sustained.

Responding to the scene were the Blairsville Police Department, Union County Sheriff's Office, Union County Fire Department, Union General EMS and Georgia State Patrol. GSP ended up working the accident, and a citation was expected for the North Carolina driver.

Blairsville Police and the Union County Sheriff's Office worked traffic at the scene, as the pedestrian pole getting taken out caused all the traffic signals at the intersection to blink red. In such situations, motorists are to treat malfunctioning traffic signals as dedicated four-way stops.

The Georgia Department of Transportation sent someone from out of town to repair the lights at the intersection, which resumed normal operations shortly before 6 p.m. Sunday.

At-Home COVID-19 Test Kits can now be ordered online or over the phone

system.

According to the website, every home in the U.S. is eligible to order 4 free at-home tests, tests will ship within 7-12 days.

County Health Departments are not distributing at-home test kits or N95 masks to residents; however, District 2 Public Health will continue operating PCR drive-thru testing locations in Forsyth, Franklin, Hall, Habersham, Lumpkin, Stephens, Rabun and Union counties.

It is important to follow CDC guidelines if you are feeling sick or have been exposed to COVID-19.

For more information about COVID-19, please visit www.cdc.gov.



Ordering at-home COVID test kits has been made easier. There is now a hotline available in addition to the online ordering option.

All U.S. residents can now order free household COVID-19 test kits online at <https://www.covidtests.gov/> or call the ordering hotline at 1-800-232-0233 to place an order with the automated