

North Georgia News

2 Sections 20 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

URA to consider workforce housing in '24

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

In a called meeting at the Union County Courthouse on Monday, Jan. 29, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris appointed three volunteer members to the Union County Urban Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors: Daniel Davenport, Kitty Mauzy and Brandon Hargrove.

Paris held the called meeting to get the members appointed in time to start terms that will run Feb. 1, 2024, to Jan. 31, 2025.

The Urban Redevelopment Agency, or URA, will be working this year – potentially as early as

the next couple months – to consider financing proposals to establish additional workforce housing, which Paris described as sorely needed in the county.

“We’re trying to come up with a method for workforce housing,” Paris said. “That’s a large problem (here); people just don’t have a place to live. So, we’re trying to come up with a plan, a design or something we can do to help improve workforce housing in the county.”

“It’s a hard process to work on, and we’ve been kind of in the background trying to think about and work with what’s the best thing that we can do to help the citizens of the county.”

“We’ve got schoolteachers, hospital workers – we have so many companies that need places for employees to live, and we don’t have workforce housing. So, we’re trying to figure out a way to where we can help it get done.”

Paris said it was “very possible” that the URA could be used to finance some kind of workforce housing solution, though specifics were not available at press time.

Local attorney Daniel Davenport is returning to the board after receiving his initial appointment in August 2022. The brand-new appointments are Kitty Mauzy of United Community Bank and Brandon Hargrove of Union General

Hospital.

Paris said these volunteers were recommended to him by his “staff or friends of staff,” with all three appointees possessing either legal or financial expertise that will assist the URA in its redevelopment mission.

“These are people who have agreed to serve and help the county going forward,” Paris said.

As background, Georgia law allows county governments to create URAs as public entities “vested with urban redevelopment project powers.”

Essentially, the Union County URA enables local



Lamar Paris
Sole Commissioner

First responders receive thanks at Sports Center



The Rec Department welcomed first responders at a recent recognition, thanking them for being there whenever Union Countians need them – for whatever reason. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Just before the rec basketball game at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 27, the Union County Recreation Department made time to honor local first responders at the Union County Sports Center.

Members of the Union County Sheriff’s Office, Blairsville Police Department, Union County Fire Department, and Union County 911 Dispatch all came out to accept the honor.

It was a brief ceremony, attended by the parents of some of the county’s youngest basketball players and the Rec Department staff to honor the first responders for the emotionally and physically

taxing – sometimes even life-threatening – work they do.

There were no specific names mentioned, but the 17 people who came out to represent their organizations were no less proud of the work they and their peers do.

Speaking first was Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer, who also serves as third-in-command at the Sheriff’s Office. He emphasized that “we all work together as a team” when it comes to keeping the county safe.

“Our employees are probably the most dedicated people I’ve seen anywhere around here,” Dyer said. “Our (services) are top-notch ... I’m really proud of that, and we want to keep it that way, and we

want to continue to improve the services we provide to y’all.”

Next, Commissioner Lamar Paris thanked “all the people that showed up today, that took the time to come out and let us let you all be honored for what you do.”

“Luckily, we don’t need these folks at our ballgames very often, but when we do, they’re there and ready for us,” Paris said before turning the microphone over to E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter.

“I want to say thank you to the community for everything y’all do,” Baxter said to start.

She explained that while an appreciation week may happen once a year at the call

Local man killed in crash on Gainesville Highway

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

A young Union County man’s life was tragically cut short when a DUI driver turned in front of him as he drove his motorcycle south along Gainesville Highway on Saturday, Feb. 3, according to Georgia State Patrol.

Luke Gaddis, 23, died at the scene, and his backseat passenger was transported via medical helicopter for serious injuries sustained in the crash, per GSP.

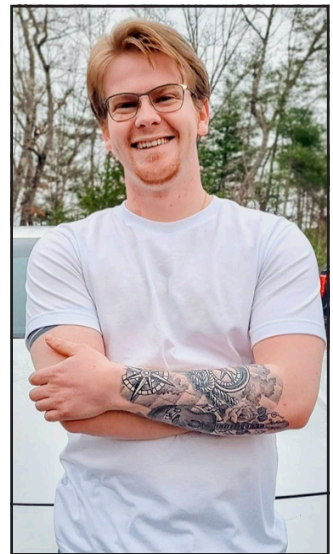
At 1:54 p.m. on Saturday, GSP troopers were dispatched to investigate the two-vehicle crash on Gainesville Highway, aka GA 11, near Spiva Bridge

Way down from Union County Fire Station No. 3.

“Upon arrival it was determined that a Chevrolet V30 was stopped in the northbound lane of GA 11 at its intersection with Spiva Bridge Way,” according to the preliminary crash report. “A Kawasaki EX400 was traveling south on GA 11 approaching the Chevrolet.”

“The Chevrolet failed to yield right of way and turned into the path of the Kawasaki. The Chevrolet struck the front portion of the Kawasaki in the southbound lane of GA 11.

“The driver of the Kawasaki succumbed to injuries on scene, and the



Luke Gaddis

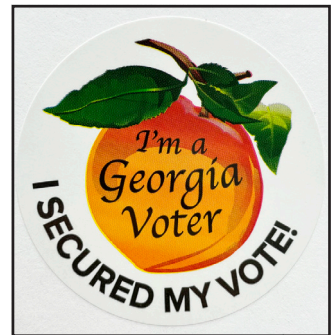
Election season begins with early voting Feb. 19

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

In-person early voting for the Presidential Preference Primary begins this month, kicking off a busy election season with the selection of political party candidates for the office of President of the United States.

Election Day for the upcoming primary is Tuesday, March 12. There will be three weeks of early voting for this election running weekdays between Monday, Feb. 19, and Friday, March 8.

Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, Feb. 24, and Saturday, March 2.



All in-person early voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the new Union County Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

Presidential Preference

Primary voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precinct between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on March 12.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owlton, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested at the Voter Registration Office inside the Voting Center now through Friday, March 1. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person

See *Early Voting*, Page 4A

Jim’s Smokin’ Que makes ‘Top 100 US Restaurants’

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Jim’s Smokin’ Que has etched its name in local history by securing the 88th spot on Yelp’s list of “Top 100 Places to Eat in the U.S. in 2024.”

Because of its quality food and personalized customer service, the hometown icon was able to surpass nearly 652,000 other eateries across the nation to claim its spot as one of only two barbecue restaurants – and the only Georgia restaurant – on the list.

Each year for over a decade, the popular crowd-sourced review website Yelp has analyzed online customer reviews, ratings and the number of visits to each restaurant in the country to compile a list of

the Top 100.

This means that, according to customers, Jim’s Smokin’ Que is in the top 0.01% of restaurants nationwide.

“It’s a huge honor for us to be featured at the top of the country,” said restaurant co-owner Zachary Edmonds. “It’s just kind of a tangible award for the amount of work that goes into what we do both at the restaurant and in the community.”

Edmonds and business partner Chris Cuvillo bought Jim’s in 2020, and they work tirelessly alongside their team to maintain the glowing reputation they inherited. That’s why they focus on keeping the quality of the food consistent with expectations since the restaurant’s establishment.

“A lot of times, when a restaurant gets new ownership, the food quality goes down or a lot of the consistency is gone,” shared Cuvillo, “and that was one of the big things that people were worried about when we took over.”

“But (lots of customers have said that) you can’t even tell that there is new ownership. Everything is still the same, and it’s great.”

Second to carrying on the restaurant’s delicious legacy, the duo prioritizes creating a unique and personalized experience for each customer.

“We really (encourage our team to bond) with the people that come in, not just as a transactional business, but we really get to know the

See *Jim’s Smokin’ Que*, Page 4A



Jim’s Smokin’ Que co-owners Zachary Edmonds and Chris Cuvillo are thrilled with their Top 100 accolade. The restaurant serves up delicious barbecue and heaping helpings of tremendous reputation for their community. Photo by Daysha Pandolph



Vol. 115 No. 07

Arrests - 7B Legals - 8B
Church - 3B Obits - 4B
Classifieds - 8B Sports - 8A
Opinion - 6A

BASKETBALL
2/6 6 PM
@ Fellowship

Georgia Legislative Updates See page 2A

Iwo Jima Remembrance Feb. 19 See page 2A

Girl Scout Cookies On Sale Now See page 10A



Need a Mortgage?
Call Kitty in Blairsville!

Kitty Mauzy | 706-439-2185 | NMLS# 512515



© 2023 United Community Bank
NMLS# 421841 | ucbi.com/mortgage



United Community
Mortgage

Workforce Housing...from Page 1A

redevelopment projects via funding options like grant opportunities and county-backed bond issuances, the latter being an alternative form of financing to the standard means of borrowing money from, say, a federal agency or a bank.

To date, the URA has only considered and bonded for a single project. In fact, the URA was created about 15 years ago to secure money by way of a revenue bond for the construction of the Union County Community Center, which was completed in 2012 and paid off in 2015.

Paris said previously

that using bond funds made the project more affordable by saving "several thousands of dollars in interest cost" and allowing the county to avoid having to comply with guidelines attached to federal monies that increase costs as well.

With the Community Center completed and paid for, the URA sat dormant until 2022, when it came to the county's attention that the deed to the Community Center had not been transferred to the county after the pay-off was completed, as Paris originally planned.

To correct this oversight,

in August 2022, Paris appointed Davenport, Mary Ruth Cook and Jack McKechnie as the first new URA board members in years, their appointments marking the start of the process to transfer the deed to the county, which took place a year ago, on Jan. 30, 2023.

In that 2023 meeting, it was discussed that the URA had no planned future business, but the Board of Directors decided to keep the public agency open to defray the legal costs of re-establishing the URA should the county once again desire to use the agency to fund a project.

The time to potentially

utilize the URA again has apparently come, with Paris saying in last week's meeting that the county would soon be bringing some workforce housing proposals before the board for consideration.

Board members will be tasked with reviewing and considering proposals only – not coming up with development plans – to best help secure financing should the county decide to use the URA to fund workforce housing projects.

Of note, the county has been debt-free since 2021, when the Commissioner's Office made the final payment on a SPLOST-backed general obligation bond the county took out in 2015 to pay off the Community Center revenue bond.

Also in the Jan. 29 meeting, Paris adopted a list of revisions to the county's employee handbook. Revising the handbook is a semi-regular process aimed at updating personnel policies and procedures based on, for example, state-level changes and Human Resources recommendations.

First Responders...from Page 1A

center, the community has "really came out" over the past year to show their support for the often thankless, difficult job.

"We see that console 12 hours a day," she said. "We don't leave that console, so when someone comes by or someone calls and says thank you for the job you do, that

means a lot to me and my dispatchers."

After the presentation, Rec Director Scotty Thompson reiterated the goal of that day's program as being a simple way to show appreciation for the people who too often are only seen during the most frightening moments of residents' lives.

"We were very excited to do the (ceremony) so the community could see how many people it takes to keep us safe," Thompson said.

As for whether similar ceremonies become more commonplace, Thompson said he wouldn't rule it out, but he's unsure of when or where the next recognition might be.

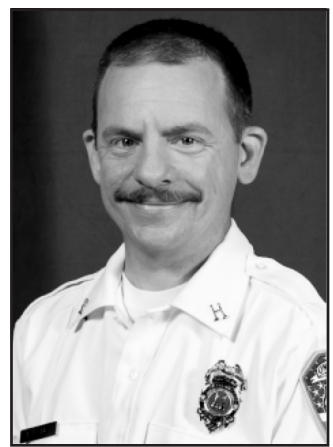
Hood, Long and Fortenberry complete 80 Hour Fire Department Management Course



Capt. Damon Hood

Union County Fire Department would like to congratulate Captain Damon Hood, Captain Brent Long, and Lieutenant Jonathan Fortenberry on their completion of the 80-hour Fire Department Management course.

This course introduced the job requirements of a Company Officer for Fire and Emergency Services. Which included governmental theory, human resource management,



Capt. Brent Long

administrative functions, policy/procedures, fire prevention, risk management, information management, firefighter near-miss case studies, incident operations, and post-incident analysis.

With the completion of this course, Captain Damon Hood, Captain Brent Long, and Lieutenant Jonathan Fortenberry have completed all requirements for their National ProBoard Certifica-



Lt. Jonathan Fortenberry

tion for National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) Fire Officer II.

"Leadership is essential in any organization. We are fortunate to have dedicated officers who are willing to attend these classes in order to provide the needed leadership in our department," said Union County Fire Chief David Dyer.

Union County Fire Department ~Our Family Protecting Your Family~

LOCAL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

MONTGOMERY CONCRETE
 ~ FOR ALL YOUR CONCRETE NEEDS ~
 Forming through Finishing, House Slabs, Driveways, Sidewalks, Stamped Colored Concrete. Top Quality Work! Big Jobs and Small Jobs! • Insured
 See photos on Facebook under Lee Montgomery
Call 706-781-1806

SHAWN'S HOME FURNISHINGS
Mattresses, Porch Rockers & More!
"From the Front Porch to the Back Door We've Got You Covered!"
 568 Blue Ridge St. • Blairsville, GA
706-835-1209
 Mon-Fri 9am-5pm • Sat 9am-4pm • Closed Sun

Southeast Geothermal & Spray Foam
706-745-8685
 1442 Blue Ridge Hwy.
www.segeothermal.com
www.sesprayfoam.com

Specializing In:
 Alignment • Computer Balancing
 Brakes • Auto Repair
 Industrial Foam Fill
 Oil Changes

Thomas Tire, Inc.
 Auto & Big Truck Service

Oscar Thomas - Owner
 76 Shoe Factory Road
 Blairsville, Georgia 30512

Randolph Jones Grading
 Licensed Septic Tank Repair & Install, Driveway Scrape and Repair, Bobcat, Excavator.
 Lot Clearing and Basement, House Site, Haul Dirt or Gravel. Any & All Small Jobs Welcome!
706-897-4909

LICENSED INSURED
GIBSON LAND SERVICE
706-897-8564

TOTAL RECOVERY PAINT & BODY SHOP, INC.
706-745-9703
 ALL INSURANCE ACCEPTED

SAFE PET PROJECT
THRIFT STORE
 MONDAY THROUGH SATURDAY
 10 AM - 4 PM
 307 Cleveland St. Unit O - Blairsville, GA
 (706) 400-7076

BPM Group, LLC
 Invest. Build. Manage.
706-835-6295
 General Contracting
 Property Maintenance
www.mybpmgroup.com

Wiley & Sons
 Licensed Grading Insured
 Lot Clearing, Gravel Driveways, House Sites, Long Arm Mowing, Retaining Walls, Underbrushing, Erosion Control, Water Management
706-897-4065

WHITENER'S ADVANCE CONSTRUCTION, LLC
 GRADING PROPERTY MAINTENANCE
 Lot Clearing Retaining Walls
 Basements Drainage
 Driveways STUMP GRINDING
 SEPTIC SYSTEMS LANDSCAPING
 CALL **706-400-2043**
 Matt licensed & insured

HOME REPAIRS
 Room Remodels
 Interior, Exterior, Baths, Decks, Doors. Painting, Trim, Popcorn Ceiling Removal Floors & Installation
 Professional & Insured
706-970-7641

PLACE YOUR AD HERE!
 Advertise with other Local Business here in the Blairsville area!
 Contact Derek 706-994-8973 or 706-745-6343

Let's Talk Trash
TONY'S GARBAGE
706.897.6066
Weekly Pickup
 Check us out on
 tonysgarbage.com
706-897-6066

ALTITUDES REALTY GROUP
Ann Irons
 Broker
850-625-7447
 ann@annirons.com
 www.annirons.com
 Blairsville, GA
 Certified Luxury Home Specialist • Resort and Second Home Specialist
 Real Estate Negotiation Expert

JACKY JONES AUTOMOTIVE GROUP
 We Make Buying Easy!
JACKYJONES.NET
 Ford — Hayesville, NC, 828.389.6325
 Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram — Hayesville, NC, 888.384.3145

Jim's Smokin' Que...from Page 1A

people," Edmonds said. "We have people from all over the country that visit and return to the restaurant every year. We try to make a point to remember them and remember their visit."

As an example, he introduced "The Honda Group" — a group of bikers from across the state who meet at Jim's Smokin' Que every Thursday to eat.

Some members of the group have been visiting since

the restaurant operated out of Booger Hollow gas station over a decade ago. Edmonds and CuvIELLO know each member personally and know their preferred meals.

"We're not like (corporations) that are in it for the money and the turnover of guests," CuvIELLO said. "We make our money, but we make it because of the people returning — because we give them the service. We talk to them and we know them."

Creating such a welcoming environment takes the entire team at Jim's Smokin' Que. From the employees who have been working there for years to the new recruits, the staff is trained to provide the most exceptional, personal service to customers.

"The team in general is what really led (to this award)," Edmonds said. "We have a fantastic team of people here that work day in and day out. We try to build an atmosphere

that's welcoming to them, accepting of them and safe for them to work in, and we do that (in) different ways.

"Each year we try to instill more and more team activities and team developments into what we do just to keep the group that we have focused on the philosophies of the restaurant."

Edmonds and CuvIELLO have also implemented an extensive catering program at the restaurant, which places three catering teams under the supervision of the Catering and Special Events Manager, Dawn Von Hof.

"We cater a little bit of everything," Edmonds said. "We do charcuterie, steaks, sea food, low country boils, Mexican, Italian, pole hog and (more), so we have the full catering division beyond the restaurant."

"A lot of people don't realize that we do so much catering because the face of it is a barbecue restaurant, but really there's more behind the scenes that goes into it that we offer. We added it when we took the business over, so it's been building up four years to where we are now."

Last year alone, Jim's Smokin' Que catered 200 events mostly due to the demand for destination weddings across the tri-state area. With their Yelp fame expected to bring in even more visitors, that number is sure to go up.

"Blairsville is kind of a tourist destination already," Edmonds said. "The majority of the reviews that we get online from Yelp are from people from out of town, so I



Caiden Arey works as a cook at Jim's Smokin' Que — one of the top restaurants in the entire U.S. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

think that this continues to add to the local economy that is fueled by tourism.

"(The tourists that we attract) are not just going to come here and eat at the restaurant; they are going to go shop at our fantastic shops downtown. They're going to go eat at other restaurants when they stay.

"They're going to go see our state park, they're going to go see Brasstown Bald, and they're going to really contribute tenfold to the local economy just by finding out about Blairsville through this publication."

Other news stations and publications have picked up Jim's Smokin' Que's accomplishment as well. Southern Living featured the restaurant in a recent article, then radio station 94.9 The Bull, and broadcaster Channel 2 News.

Prior to making Yelp's

list, Jim's received several accolades such as Trip Advisor's No. 6 Barbecue in America; a Money magazine feature of their ribs; two years in a row as Georgia Business Journal's "Best Barbecue in Georgia"; a feature in Garden and Gun magazine for best sides at a barbecue restaurant; North Georgia Living's best barbecue in Georgia; and membership in the 100 Plate Club for Georgia.

The restaurant was even declared the Business of the Year by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce in 2023 for its outstanding service and dedication to the community.

For more information on the restaurant that popularized the phrase "You Can Smell Our Butts for Miles," swing by 4971 Gainesville Highway during open hours Thursday through Sunday and visit <https://jimssmokinque.com/>.

Motorcycle Fatality...from Page 1A

passenger of the Kawasaki was airlifted to (Northeast Georgia Medical Center) with serious injuries.

"The driver of the Chevy was determined to be under the influence of drugs which was less safe and arrested for vehicular homicide 1st degree, serious injury by vehicle, DUI less safe, and failure to yield while turning left."

Bobby Brian Dillinger, 50, was the local driver arrested in the accident.

Responding to assist with the crash investigation was the GSP Specialized Collision Reconstruction Team, and next of kin were notified on scene.

Also responding were the Union County Fire Department, Union General EMS and Union County Sheriff's Office, which worked traffic to provide a detour around the scene from

Waldroup Road to Booger Hollow. The road remained closed there for approximately three hours.

News of the tragedy has struck many in the community hard, especially the family of the young man.

"Luke, I'm shattered into a million pieces, you were so special to me," his sister Jody Anderson shared on Facebook Sunday. "You meant the world to me, you were my best friend. You were everything a little brother was supposed to be and more."

"I miss you so much, I just want to hug you and tell you I love you one more time. How am I supposed to do this life without you, how am I going to get through the rest of my life without your silly text messages or our long talks about life? Why did this happen to you, why you?"

"You were good to everyone you met, you would go out of your way to help anyone. You made a big impact on everyone who knew you! I just need my little brother back... my grief is unbearable. I love you so incredibly much. I will see you again!"

Funeral arrangements for Gaddis were not available at press time.

A second, unrelated motorcycle accident occurred on Saturday, about three hours later. An older couple from out of town was driving south on Gainesville Highway, just past Sunrise Grocery, when the driver lost control of the motorcycle and went down.

The driver was airlifted for medical treatment, and the passenger, who went over the embankment, was taken for treatment locally.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

at the Voting Center.

Voters returning absentee ballots can use the official drop box inside the Voting Center during early voting hours, mail them back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day, or drop them off in person at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

There's still time to register to vote in this election for people who have yet to do so, with a deadline of Monday,

Feb. 12.

As noted above, the 2024 election cycle will be a busy one, with federal, state and local elections up for voting this year.

Candidates for local elections will qualify the week of March 4 for the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, with a runoff date of June 18 if necessary.

The big General Election is slated for Tuesday, Nov. 5,

with a runoff date set for Dec. 3.

April 22 is the voter registration deadline to participate in the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, and Oct. 7 is the deadline to register for the Nov. 5 General Election.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/s/> for voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

Union County Health Department Awarded Car Seat Mini Grant

Buckle Up Right, Every Trip, Every Time

Union County Health Department was awarded the 2024 Car Seat Mini-Grant by the Georgia Department of Public Health, Injury Prevention Program. Through the Mini-Grant, Union County Health Department and local Government and Law Enforcement work together to provide car seats and education to financially eligible families in Union County. This program is funded by the Governor's Office of Highway Safety to help ensure Georgia's children are safe while riding in motor vehicles.

And it works! Since 2007, the education, car seats and booster seats provided through the Mini Grant prevented serious injury or death and saved over 437 of Georgia's children who were involved in crashes. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, car seats reduce fatal injuries by 71 percent among infants and by 54 percent among children ages 1 to 4 years in passenger cars. Car seats offer the best protection for children in the event of a crash, and they are most effective when installed and used correctly. Nearly three out of every four car seats are not used properly, placing children at unnecessary risk.

"It's our responsibility to keep our children safe," said Glenda McGill. "The Car Seat Mini-Grant is a great opportunity to help our community



Rear-facing car seats reduce fatal injuries by 71 percent among infants and help protect our children from serious injuries or death in motor vehicle crashes."

In Union County, Union County Health Department staff educate(s) parents and caregivers on how to properly install and use car seats, offer(s) car seat inspections and provide(s) car seats and booster seats to financially eligible families. Through the Car Seat Mini-Grant, agencies supporting more than 113 counties are working to keep Georgia's children safe. These programs help families get their children buckled up right, every trip, every time.

For more information about the Union County Health Department car seat program, contact Glenda Mc-

Gill at, (706) 745-6292. If you would like information regarding other counties involved in the program, please contact the Georgia Department of Public Health's Child Occupant Safety Project via email at injury@dph.ga.gov.

Glenda Gooch House available

The Glenda Gooch House is now available for use by families, from the tri-state area, of patients in Union General Hospital as well as local nursing and assisted living homes.

For more information please contact Leslie Daniel at 706-745-2050, or log on to glendagoochhouse.org.