

North Georgia News

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Third-grader Deklin wins hearts in cancer battle

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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For the most part, Deklin Jones is just like other kids his age. He's happy, loves to learn and play, and has many friends. But Deklin is dealing with something most kids never have to worry about: cancer.

Deklin, 9, was diagnosed right around Christmas break, and he hasn't rejoined his class yet at the Elementary School out of precaution over a weakened immune system.

Further testing revealed that he has osteosarcoma, a bone cancer, which is rare - only about 500 cases are diagnosed in children each year, and he is scheduled for surgery later this month to remove part of his leg where the cancer appears to be isolated.

Thankfully, Deklin



Deklin Jones and supporters, many of whom shaved their heads in solidarity with the young cancer patient, took to the school football field Monday for a group photo before heading off to lead a parade in his honor. #TeamDeklin. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

has the support of his family, friends, school and many members of the community, so he's not alone in his ordeal, and the Union County Schools Police Department is asking the entire community to pitch in to

help the Jones family as they continue his treatments.

All the school resource officers visited Deklin on Wednesday, March 8, to bring the family supplies ahead of his surgery and to lift his spirits by

taking photos and letting him sit in a patrol car and wear a vest. But they wanted to do something more to show their support.

One thing they decided to do was shave their heads to let

Deklin know that he's not alone while simultaneously raising awareness, as the third-grader has lost his hair due to ongoing chemotherapy treatments.

More people joined in shaving their heads last week,

including first responders from the Sheriff's Office, Blairsville PD, Fire Department and EMS, as well as educators and high school students, and they debuted their new cuts at a

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House Bill 87 gives MECHS hope for school's future

By Shawn Jarrard
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A timely new bill making its way through the Georgia General Assembly is poised to save Mountain Education Charter High School from having to close its doors to students next year.

MECHS began in 1993 with a unified site for Union, Towns and Fannin counties, and it has grown tremendously over the last 30 years.

Today, MECHS serves the educational needs of students across 18 sites in 22 North Georgia counties, giving at-risk youths and those at risk

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Recent graduates of Mountain Education Charter High School, a regional learning institution that gives at-risk students a second chance at educational success. Photo/Facebook

Gun Club offers range updates in Annual Meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Union County Gun Club welcomed close to 200 people to its 2023 Annual Membership Meeting, which featured multiple speakers and updates on the Target Range inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center on March 2.

Gun Club President Paul Clark started things off with a prayer before recognizing veterans and any active-duty service members in attendance, and he led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Alongside a picture

See Gun Club Meeting, Page 6A



Sheriff Mack Mason has been a vocal supporter of the Union County Gun Club since Day 1, pictured here speaking in the club's March 2 annual meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Students impart powerful insights with 'Brian the Comet'

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The talented members of the Union County High School Theatre Department recently performed "Brian the Comet," a one-act play by Emily Hageman that examines what it means to maintain hope in the face of looming tragedy.

Directed by Chris Adams and performed at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center March 4-5, the show starred students from each grade of high school with seniors inhabiting the leading roles.

Between stagehands and

actors, students credited with making the show possible were Ryan Barnett, Lainey Boggs, Jaidan Bolton-Davis, Kage Doucette, Jacqueline Flores, Madie Gibson, Karina Henderson, Carly Holloway, Kylie Kaser, Cody Landmichl, Brook LeQuire, Harmony Lindsey, Savannah Love, Brooke Martin, Shea McDaniel, Samantha Moore, Katelynn "Sam" Holemo-Peters, Alanah Rosa, Taylor "Tye" Rydzak, Ollie Silver, Lexi Starling, Ethan Stewart, Madison Teague, Brenna Thornley and Jada Turner.

The play explores themes of anxiety over loss

See Brian the Comet, Page 3A



"Brian the Comet" was a tour de force at the Fine Arts Center this month, featuring a talented crew of students with the UCHS Theatre Department. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

12U Lady Panthers honored for 'blowout season' in 2022-23



The 12U Lady Panther players and coaches received a congratulatory proclamation from Commissioner Paris in his March 9 regular meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Paris and the Rec Department wanted to do something special for the young ladies. So, they invited the team and coaches to receive a proclamation recognizing their "blowout season," and Paris hand-delivered the proclamation to the girls amid a standing ovation in the March 9 regular county meeting as proud parents looked on from the viewing gallery.

These State Champions are Kamryn Brown, Mya Jordan, Elle Munn, Scout Henry, Lyla Price, Hailey Marshall, Miya Totherow, Kinsley Kendrick, Lennon Ellis and Bristol Davis.

After dominating the Georgia Recreation and Park Association Class C State Basketball Tournament March 3-4 to emerge as State Champs, Sole Commissioner Lamar

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MECHS...from Page 1A

of doing so a second chance for success in life.

A Georgia law that went into effect two years ago has threatened the very existence of the school, but thankfully, lawmakers have been working with MECHS to provide a solution, and school officials are optimistic they will be able to carry on without disruption for 2023-24 and beyond.

The solution? House Bill 87, introduced by House Education Committee Chair Chris Erwin at the start of the current legislative session. The bill has crossed over for consideration by Georgia Senators for an expected vote by the last day of the session on Wednesday, March 29.

If HB 87 passes without major changes and Gov. Brian Kemp signs it, the “Nontraditional Special Schools Act” will right a wrong that occurred when the General Assembly attempted in 2021 to correct a funding quirk that saw too much money going to the state-chartered school.

As one of three “State Special Charter Schools” in Georgia – and the first of its kind in the nation – MECHS has been the beneficiary of more money than it needs to operate, enabling the school to build up a sizeable reserve fund close to 95% of a single year’s operating expenses.

“We were being given more per student than what we actually expended, so our fund balance blossomed,” said MECHS Director of Community Outreach Roger Fitzpatrick. “You’ve heard the saying that ‘tall grass gets mowed,’ and because of our fund balance, we got the attention of folks.”

Reacting to the disproportionate funding scheme, Senate Bill 153 – signed into law May 2021 – changed the amount of state funds received per student in the three special charter schools to arrive at a proportionate distribution relative to other schools, and MECHS was fully on board with this reform.

But after SB 153 initially passed out of the senate, House legislators added a requirement that special charter schools be authorized under the local school districts that offer their facilities for use by MECHS, versus authorization coming from the State Charter Schools Commission.

This proved to be unworkable when none of MECHS’ partnering districts signed on as “authorizing local school systems,” meaning that, without a fix, MECHS would lose its charter and have to shutter once the current charter expired after June 30, 2023.

Fitzpatrick said no one blames individual school systems for not wanting to authorize MECHS at the local level. After all, there are many unknowns around what such a relationship would entail.

“If you are a single-county entity and you want to authorize a locally approved alternative charter school as a start-up, that would be a much simpler thing,” Fitzpatrick said. “But we’re currently operating in 18 counties all across North Georgia, so would we have one local approver, or would we have to get all 18 local approvers?”

“Then, there’s the whole money issue and governance issue and who’s responsible – just way too many questions that had yet to be answered.”

And in the two roughly two years since SB 153 passed, those questions have yet to be answered despite behind-the-scenes efforts toward clarity.

Fortunately, legislators have been persuaded to save the day by administrators, educators and community supporters who have written letters to newspapers and communicated directly with state lawmakers, hence the introduction of HB 87, and none too soon.

The new bill passed the House unanimously last month, an important victory for the effort, as it was the House that initially made the changes that would potentially doom MECHS.

Now, Fitzpatrick believes strongly that, as long as key provisions contained in HB 87 survive the senate, MECHS, too, will survive.

Essentially, HB 87 would allow MECHS to reorganize as a “completion special school,” a new category of school that would let MECHS retain its state charter while enabling funding through local school districts.

“The legislature recognizes that we are making an impact in

the lives of so many students,” Fitzpatrick said. “We’ve graduated over 5,000 students in our existence, so that’s 5,000 lives that I would suggest have been changed for the better.”

Currently, all students learning at MECHS are enrolled there, so the school gets money directly from the state for their education.

But if the bill becomes law without substantial changes to the House version, as a compromise with the intent of SB 153, the new House bill would result in students being divided into two categories for funding purposes.

Students over 18 will be considered direct enrollees of MECHS, with funding to come directly from the state; students under 18 will stay enrolled with their local school systems while receiving their education through MECHS as “program students.”

“So, we would function as a program, and we would have to send an invoice to the local school system for those students. In turn, they would have to pay us,” Fitzpatrick said. “It involves local school systems at least in the funding mechanisms for students that we serve that fall into that category of ‘program student.’ And we can make that work.”

Plenty of details will need ironing out locally, but MECHS would have a year to implement all the provisions in HB 87 if the bill proves to be a success.

“As we come across things that maybe were unforeseen, unintended consequences or maybe just difficulties, the main sponsor (of HB 87) has indicated he would be open to hearing suggestions,” Fitzpatrick said. “Not that there’s a guarantee that changes would be

made, but he would at least be open to listening.”

Much is at stake here.

MECHS offers students a unique educational experience based around mastery learning and scheduling flexibility, so pupils who would otherwise drop out are instead afforded the ability to work at their own pace and attend as needed in the evenings to accommodate other obligations such as work or family care.

It is incredibly important for at-risk students to have access to second-chance opportunities like those provided by MECHS, as the attainment of a high school diploma is well established as a key factor in a young person’s success.

There’s even a silver lining to this whole dramatic process having transpired in the first place, as HB 87 contains seed money funding to encourage the establishment of similar second-chance schools around the state.

Ultimately, MECHS could one-day serve as a model for success for the rest of the nation if more Georgia school districts adopt the approach and the benefits become apparent enough to convince neighboring states to similarly expand their own options to help struggling students.

“The big deal here is for every student to have an opportunity at a quality education that really fits their needs,” Fitzpatrick said. “And if the local school system is able to meet the need, then they need to stay there, because the traditional model of school system is the primary vehicle for every student in the state.”

“But I guarantee you, in every community, there are students that need something a little bit different, and that’s where we step in.”

County Meeting...from Page 1A

Against Manchester, the Lady Panthers did not allow a single point for the last three and a half quarters of the game, and their win against Fitzgerald was the closest game they had all season, which for many teams would be considered a comfortable margin of 16 points.

As part of the proclamation, Paris called on “all citizens to recognize and congratulate these talented and dedicated young ladies for their hard work bringing the State Championship home in Union County.”

“It has been so much fun this season,” Head Coach Megan Henry said that evening. “We’ve had a great time, and these girls are so special. I look for so many more things from them in the years to come.”

“We want to thank our community that has been so supportive. The Rec Department’s been great, working us in practices and scheduling gym time. And then the parents – we couldn’t have done it without you guys making sure everybody’s where they’re supposed to be on time.”

But the celebration did not end there. On Saturday, March 11, the Rec Department took the 12U team around the square in an appropriately outfitted float to enjoy some additional well-deserved attention in the community.

Also in the March 9 meeting, Paris adopted the Union County Short-Term Rental Ordinance to go into effect on April 8, which will enable the county to get the online licensing and information portal ready for public use.

The Short-Term Rental Ordinance has been in the works for more than half a year, painstakingly crafted by a volunteer committee with input that came via two public hearings and comments submitted to the Commissioner’s Office over the course of multiple ordinance drafts.

Interested parties may

find the adopted version of the ordinance – its sixth iteration – at <http://www.unioncountygga.gov/>. Paris said that all ordinances are subject to revision should the perceived need ever arise.

Augmenting the ordinance adoption, Paris accepted the Short-Term Rental License Fee Schedule, which sets an annual fee of \$150 to operate such a business in Union County.

The old fee was a one-time cost of \$10, and the new fee will be used to account for the time it will take county employees to make sure regulations are being followed in a previously unregulated market.

Paris also held the second reading of the revised Land Use Ordinance, which looks to update regulations on “parks for recreational vehicles, manufactured homes, tiny homes, mobile homes and alternative habitable structures, including campgrounds.”

The Commissioner’s Office held a public hearing on the ordinance in February, and the latest draft can be found on the county website.

A moratorium on construction related to parks and multiple dwellings on single parcels will remain in place until the ordinance is adopted in an upcoming meeting.

Next up, Paris held a first reading of revisions to Chapter 18, Section 105, of the county Code of Ordinances to expand the purview of the Construction Board of Adjustment and Appeals to hear appeals and variance requests regarding all building-related sections of the Code of Ordinances.

The county will be scheduling a public hearing for the ordinance revisions soon and will announce the date and time as soon as possible.

“Watch the website, and we’ll post that date as soon as we can,” Deputy County Attorney William Mercer said. “And y’all come on down and tell us what we need to do on this board. Or if you want to

volunteer to be on this board, raise your hand, and we’ll get your name and number.”

Paris also extended for an additional 180 days the Emergency Moratorium on Applications for Crypto Currency Mining Sites. His office has been busy working to finalize multiple ordinances recently, and he is hoping to be able to get this ordinance completed in the coming months.

The moratorium and impending regulations are to address the potential development of crypto-mining server farms, which are loud due to the operation of fans needed to cool energy-intensive computer equipment. To date, no one has approached Paris to propose a crypto facility, he said.

In other business, Paris announced he was awarding a \$1.82 million contract for county road paving to Colwell Construction Company.

The Georgia Department of Transportation is providing about \$771,000 in Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant funds toward the project, and the remaining roughly \$1.043 million is coming from LOST and voter-approved SPLOST proceeds.

Colwell Construction was the lowest bidder on the project list of 2023 LMIG-eligible roads. Colwell was also the lowest bidder on a second project to pave Cleveland Street, the funds for which – about \$276,000 – will be reimbursed to the county by the City of Blairsville.

A full list of upcoming LMIG road projects can be obtained from the Commissioner’s Office.

Paris also appointed Andrew Burks to serve on the Board of Directors for the Union County Development Authority for the term of March 9, 2023, to March 9, 2024, to fill a vacant board seat.

The commissioner holds his regular monthly meetings typically the third Thursday of every month at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse.

Tri-County Women’s Luncheon to feature Deedee Dyer, Local Business Owner, on Wednesday, April 19

The Tri-County Women’s Connection kicks off 2023 with a fabulous luncheon on Wednesday, April 19, 12:00 to 1:30pm. The event will be held at the Pat Haralson Memorial Civic Center, 165 Wellborn Street in Blairsville. Join us for a great program, food, friendship and door prizes!

Every woman loves to be pampered, so if you need relaxing “me time”, this luncheon is for YOU! Our Program Feature Guest Deedee Dyer, owner of Relax Nail Salon & Spa, will share the list of services that can begin at your head and finish at your toes! Deedee has been in the cosmetology industry for 10 years, is credentialed as an Advanced Medical Nail Tech in Podiatry and received her Esthetician license three years ago. The Salon has private rooms for all services ensuring the most relaxing experience for both men and women. Located at 266 Shoe Factory Road, Blairsville, their hours of operation are 10am to 5pm, closed Wednesdays and Sundays. Check out the Salon’s list of services on Facebook and

book your appointment on-line or call or text 706-897-1891.

Deedee was raised in Hiwassee, then moved to Blairsville. A lover of horses, she got her first pony at age 4, competed in her first barrel race at age 7. She competed as a professional in the World Championships four times. Deedee is married to Danny and they have 4 sons, 1 daughter and 4 grandchildren.

Our Guest Speaker will be Glenda Smith from Snellville, GA. She will share her story with humor, truth and hope, and also challenge us to move on from past hurts. One may ask, “Is life really a Mission Impossible?” Not for Glenda who has discovered “How it IS Possible to Get Past the Past When it’s Past Overdue”.

Glenda was born in Griffin, GA, and grew up living “out in the country”. She is an original Georgia native who has lived her entire adult life in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Glenda is married to her best friend, Graham, and they have 2 sons and 7 “grands”. Glenda is a former Computer Programmer, Systems Analyst and Consul-

tant to several large Atlanta corporations and has been an active public speaker for over 20 years. She enjoys many hobbies and especially enjoys spending time with those she loves.

Cost is \$18 and includes program, delicious lunch from Longhorn’s, dessert and beverage. Pre-payment by check is appreciated (payable to CWCW), mail to Judy Teague, 3245 Mulkey Gap Road, Blairsville, GA 30512. If you are paying for other guests, please include their names. Cash (correct change please) or checks are accepted at the door.

Please make your reservations by Friday, April 7, email Jocelyn at jowabow@aol.com, or call Jane at 706-838-5599 or text 706-633-7868. Check-in table opens at 11:15 a.m. with program beginning at 12:00 p.m. and ending at 1:30 p.m.

Since the 1980’s, Tri-County Women’s Connection in Blairsville has planned and hosted events for women that provide a positive, upbeat time of fun, food and friendship. We look forward to connecting with you!

Brian the Comet...from Page 1A



UCHS seniors Ethan Stewart, Lexi Starling and Cody Landmichl performed the three lead roles in "Brian the Comet." Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

and unmet expectations, and the subject matter made the play relatable to a wide-ranging audience, with the main character Jude going on a sympathetic journey to find gratitude in a situation with seemingly little room for happiness.

Jude, 16, struggles to balance teenage life with the disappointment of never getting to spend time with her mother, who is an accomplished astronaut living in the International Space Station.

Her unconventional life is uprooted further when her father collapses one night and is diagnosed with lung cancer. From there, Jude practically lives in the hospital while he receives treatments, and she struggles even harder while her mother "studies moon rocks."

One day, while walking through the halls of the facility,

she meets a very sick boy named Brian who has been hospitalized for an extended period, and their subsequent friendship changes her perspective on life.

To the delight of audiences, the student performers – to include an ensemble cast of narrators – deftly navigated the difficult themes of the play, exhibiting a wide array of acting skills to effectively portray moments that ranged from humorous to heartbreaking.

"Life is so short; it's so bright sometimes that it hurts your eyes," Brian tells Jude after another brush with death, while the ensemble compares life itself to the celestial beauty of a comet streaking across the sky. "But it's so good."

After a few moments of silence, Brian says, "Hey, I hope we can be friends forever."

"You don't have to hope for that," Jude responds, signaling her optimistic turn. "You already have it."

Audience members were pleased throughout the play, showing their satisfaction in the end with wild applause and cheers all around, and cast members were proud to see their hard work rewarded.

Ethan Stewart, who portrayed Jude's father, said he viewed the Fine Arts Center as his home and his classmates as his family. In that way, his role was as much a challenge as it came naturally.

"I saw myself as a dad, and I wanted to be a loving character to whoever was in the Jude spot, because I feel like that was a challenge for me as an actor to do," he said, adding that his favorite scene was comforting his friend Lexi Starling, the actress who played Jude.

"I hope that people got to see what we do here as a community in the theatre at UCHS," he said. "We have a family, and we are the strongest family that I have ever seen."

"I love the people here. We all love each other, and we're so supportive of each other, and I find something very peaceful and wonderful about this place when I walk into the Fine Arts building."

Part of why the place is so wonderful is because drama teaches the kids important lessons. Starling and co-star Cody Landmichl, who played Brian, both gleaned valuable insights from the thought-provoking story.

As a result, Starling

has adopted a more flexible thought process in her own life, recalling one of Brian's final lines about how paralyzed with fear everyone would be if they had the ability to peer into the future, with clear implications for the importance of living for today.

"It's a part of life," Starling says. "Figuring it out as you go."

Landmichl concurred. While he plans on attending the University of North Georgia and participating in the Gainesville Theatre Alliance, for now, he's eager to continue learning everything he can before graduation.

"Just playing this character and how upbeat he is, it really just feels like I was able as a person to internalize

that and use it in my daily life because he's been through a lot," Landmichl said. "He's died five times, of course."

"And it's just like, as my life is changing and being

a senior and doing what I love to do, which is on this stage, it's really just helped me make the best decisions for myself and live in the moment."

2023 Officers for SCV Sworn into office at recent meeting



(L-R): Pete White, treasurer; John Fusco, chaplain; Greg White, lieutenant-commander; Jessie Pinson, adjutant; and Mike Pettus, commander.

The David W. Payne Camp 1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, recently swore into office its officers for 2023. Camp 1633 was chartered in 1993 in Blairsville where it meets the second Thursday of every month at the Davenport Veterans' Building at 7PM. The public is always welcome.

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Gun Club Meeting...from Page 1A



Veterans were asked to stand for recognition during the Gun Club annual meeting at the Fine Arts Center earlier this month. Overall attendance was lower than expected, likely due to bad weather that moved in that evening.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

slideshow and plans set out for guests, Clark related the latest range news, letting people know that phone and power lines had been installed at the site, the property had been cleared of trees, and that grading was set to begin the week of March 6.

“While it doesn’t look like it, when you stand on the

property today with the trees gone, from the firing line to the target area there’s a difference of 20 feet (in elevation),” Clark said. “So, they’re going to take the high ground and move it to the low ground (for a dirt-neutral project).”

For the sake of safety, Clark asked that people refrain from visiting the site during

construction to prevent work interruptions. He said to stay tuned via www.unioncountyguncub.com for updates and progress photos.

In new business, Clark announced that the Gun Club will begin conducting Range Safety Classes and issuing member ID cards later this year.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason was the first guest speaker that evening. Mason helped to spearhead the original effort to start the Gun Club, and he has worked from the beginning as the liaison between the Gun Club and state/federal officials to make the Target Range a reality.

He thanked Gun Club Board Members for their steadfastness in leading the club, shared his appreciation for charter members who stepped out in faith to support the club years ago, and he thanked Commissioner Lamar Paris for his unwavering commitment to seeing the range built.

“I envisioned a shed up there to shoot out from under,” Mason said of his initial expectations. But Mason noted that when Paris got involved, “he not only allowed the county to accept this land in a lease transfer from the Forest Service,” but the project’s scope and quality expanded.

Upon completion, people will be able to enjoy a 12-lane pistol range at 25 yards and a 14-lane rifle range at 150 yards, with a Club House Office Building featuring a classroom to host meetings, storage/office space for Gun Club use, and bathrooms with plumbing.

Importantly, the range will assist the Union County Sheriff’s Office, Blairsville Police, and state law enforcement officers with training and mandatory qualification, which to date has required local agencies to rely on people willing to offer the use of private property for such purposes.

Mason introduced Connor Land, a field representative for U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia’s 9th Congressional District.

“I’m sorry that the congressman couldn’t make it, but I appreciate the opportunity to come speak with y’all,” Land said. “As you know, Congressman Clyde is a staunch defender of the Second Amendment.

“When he ran for the first time back in 2020, he promised his constituents that, if he made it to Washington, he would do

whatever it takes to protect our Second Amendment. And that’s just what he’s done over the past two and a half years.”

Land discussed Rep. Clyde’s ongoing efforts to block the U.S. Department of Justice’s enforcement of a recent rule it put out regarding “Stabilizing Braces” for pistols, saying it was a clear example of Executive Branch overreach and hostility toward the Second Amendment.

Further, Land imparted that Clyde believes the rule is part of a broader effort by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives to expand firearm registration, which, he said, “always comes before confiscation.”

Up next, Paris expressed his gratitude for the men and women who keep Union Countians safe year-round. He was also thankful for the good working relationship between his office and the Sheriff’s Office, which has certainly contributed to the success of the Target Range.

“When the project was brought up to me, I kind of thought, ‘Hm, I don’t know about this,’” Paris said. “The thing that encouraged me besides Sheriff Mason was those people out in the

community who came to me and really griped continuously about their neighbors shooting in the yard right next door to them.”

Added Paris, “One of the things that we hope comes out of all this is that people will mostly cease shooting on their own property and realize it’s going to be safer and better for everybody if they come to join the club and shoot at the rifle and pistol range.”

“We are excited for all of you who have stuck with this, and I think it’s going to be exciting for the whole community,” Paris said. “Thank you all for being patient. We’re still going to have to be patient for a few more months.

“We’re hoping in the fall this thing will get done, and hopefully it’s not going to rain every day or every other day like it’s been doing for the last while.”

After the meeting adjourned, the Gun Club held a drawing for the fundraiser raffle prize of a Henry Lever-Action .22S/L/LR Caliber Rifle with a 24-inch Octagon Barrel provided by Alexander’s Store.

For more information, including on how to sign up as a member, visit the Gun Club’s website.



Field Representative Connor Land from U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde’s office spoke with Gun Club members at their annual meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Team Deklin...from Page 1A



UCS PD School Resource Officers paid Deklin a visit at his home last week, and the Elementary School student had fun checking out the equipment in one of the squad trucks.

Photo/Facebook

March 13 parade in Deklin’s honor organized by his teacher, Gina Young.

Deklin himself served as parade grand marshal with multiple emergency vehicles in tow as students cheered him on with handmade posters between the primary and elementary schools, and he got to take a group photo with everyone who shaved their heads in solidarity.

The Joneses are incurring numerous expenses pursuing Deklin’s treatments, with travel costs mounting from multiple trips to and from Atlanta. And according to a GoFundMe campaign started by Deklin’s brother Aiden, the family is out of work as they navigate the situation.

So, to help them pay their bills, Elementary School Resource Officer Christopher Jackson and his fellow SROs have independently recruited multiple local businesses to host special collections jugs to accept monetary donations.

Foodland Grocery donated the jugs, which can be found at Toms Barber Shop,

Cut Loose Beauty Salon, The Reel Barbershop, Salon 8:28, Naavah Hair Studio, Selah Hair Salon, Salon Tru, the Law Office of Michelle Vaughan, Foodland, Pat’s Hallmark, The Wine Shoppe and Blairsville PD.

“If anyone is interested in a jug (to place in their organization), we can get some more made up, because it’s going to be a long road to recovery,” SRO Jackson said. “People can reach me at 706-970-9263.”

Deklin is looking at 29 chemo treatments in addition to tumor surgery and subsequent physical therapy, and it’s going to be tough with several unknowns ahead. But one thing is for certain – Deklin is a bright, spirited young man who is not going to let his illness get the best of him.

“Deklin is strong, and he’s a fighter,” SRO Jackson said. “Even now, he still has the biggest smile on his face. When we pulled up the other day to his house, he smiled from ear to ear and lit up the outside. Just a

tremendous attitude – nothing’s getting him down.

“He was just a super, polite, lovable, friendly third-grader living his best life until this nasty disease chose him. But it definitely chose the wrong one, because Deklin’s a fighter, and he’s got the support of all the students, teachers, staff, administrators in all the schools.

“He’s going to beat it, he’s going to win, and we’re all here for him, too.”

By press time, the Deklin & Family GoFundMe had raised \$4,650 via 61 donations, with a goal of raising at least \$15,000. People may find the fundraiser by visiting <https://www.gofundme.com/f/deklin-his-family>.

The Union County Schools Police Department is comprised of Chief Chad Deyton, Asst. Chief Chad Berry, Ofc. Jeff McConnell, Ofc. Keith Lockwood, Ofc. Christopher Jackson, Ofc. Todd Scott, Officer Scott Deyton and Security Guard Wendell Murphy.



Third-grader Deklin Jones heading out at the start of his parade on Monday, March 13, in a school police truck.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard