

# North Georgia News

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## Rudy Tribble named District Teacher of the Year

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Union County School Board members received a mountain of good news in their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, March 18, including multiple presentations highlighting talent and celebrating recent successes in the schools.

The Central Office and school administrators were proud to announce the 2025 Teachers of the Year: Rudy Tribble, Woody Gap School; Lena Weaver, the Primary School; Tina Payne, the Elementary School; Jacquie Tallman, the Middle School; and Mandy Thomas, the High School.

Each Teacher of the Year received a certificate of recognition and a golden apple to display in their classrooms.

"This is one of the best

nights, for sure, because we get to get some of our finest educators up here," School Teaching and Learning Director CT Hussion said. "We have 215 teachers, and each of these folks were voted on by their peers within their school."

After all the school principals had introduced their respective Teachers of the Year, outlining how each one was doing exceptional work in his or her own way, the moment everyone had been waiting for arrived: the announcement of District Teacher of the Year.

"Out of these folks, we had a panel meet – and it was a tough decision because they're all such awesome educators," Hussion said. "I know them all very well and am really proud of every one of them."

"But this person brings 30 years of industry experience into the classroom, making learning meaningful and

engaging with the kids. He teaches K-12 with enthusiasm, inspiring all students to love learning."

"He leads with a positive attitude, uplifting students and colleagues alike, and shows unwavering dedication to student success, making a lasting impact at Woody Gap School. So, this year's UCS District Teacher of the Year is Rudy Tribble."

As noted by Hussion, Tribble is a tremendously versatile educator, teaching all grade levels at Woody Gap. According to his fellow teachers, "he demonstrates remarkable expertise and inspires students at every age and every stage of their educational journey."

Additionally, Tribble was described as "a truly exceptional educator and a cornerstone of the Woody Gap community" while being



2025 Teachers of the Year (L-R): Rudy Tribble, Woody Gap; Lena Weaver, Primary School; Tina Payne, Elementary School; Jacquie Tallman, Middle School; and Mandy Thomas, High School. Tribble has earned 2025 District TOTY.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

lauded for "his ability to foster genuine enthusiasm for learning," which makes his classroom "a highlight for many."

"His positive attitude and kind heart are evident in everything that he does, creating a rippling effect of encouragement and good

energy throughout the school," Woody Gap Principal Wendy Reynolds shared. "He's always willing to go above and beyond." See Teachers of the Year, Page 6A

## Public commenters line up behind Hill, School District



School Custodial Supervisor Mark Hughes delivering public comments in the March 18 Board of Education meeting.

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

During the public comments portion of their March 18 regular meeting, Union County Board of Education members heard from three speakers, all of whom shared glowing remarks about the work being done at Union County Schools under the leadership of Superintendent John Hill.

School Custodial Supervisor Mark Hughes, who is going on 26 years with the district, delivered an impassioned defense of Hill in regard to allegations leveled against the superintendent by parents speaking publicly in

the January and February open School Board meetings.

"Over the last few months, as you know, there's been several people come up here and talking about John Hill and all this stuff about him, and I'm going to tell you tonight what I know about John Hill," Hughes began after greeting the board.

Given his lengthy career in the system, Hughes said he has had the privilege of working with Hill "since he was a teacher, a principal and a superintendent."

"And all the things that's been said about him, I have never seen that side of John Hill," Hughes said. "Never have I seen it, and I've worked

with him hand-in-hand for many years."

"There has been countless amount of kids in the Alternative School where I worked for probably about 15 years of my 25, and because of John Hill, those kids are somebody now that were going to go to jail or go to juvenile."

"And because of John Hill and his love for children, they are somebody today. So, what I've got to say about John Hill is good. He's very passionate about his job and about the children here and about the school, and he has high standards for us as employees."

Hughes said that See Public Comments, Page 7A

## Commissioner announces new Sorghum Fest, UCDA

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Amid a bevy of regular business in the March 20 county meeting, Union County Sole Commissioner Harold Collins made a couple of major announcements: a Sorghum Festival will take place this year, and the Union County Development Authority will be returning soon.

An estimated 150 people filled the Jury Assembly Room at the courthouse to see Collins in action for his third regular meeting, and he started off his Commissioner's Comments by asking residents to be patient with him, as he was only 80 days into his new job as of that evening.

"Most of it's new, but I know a little bit," Collins said of the position. "I'm learning a lot, and I just ask everybody to be patient and don't expect things to get done overnight."

"The Great Wall of China wasn't built in a day, so if there's anything wrong with the county, it can't be straightened out in 80 days."

To that end, the new commissioner said his office was "making good strides" on evaluating departments, employees, operations, efficiency, finances and more, and Collins said that, while he will certainly be keeping people updated, "big, meaningful changes take time."



Sole Commissioner Harold Collins is keeping busy evaluating county operations for budgetary savings. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Speaking of big changes, Collins said he would be partnering with local organizations to host a new Sorghum Festival after the long-running Blairsville Sorghum Festival was permanently shut down by organizers this month following either a disagreement or a misunderstanding – depending on who is asked – about the provision of county services.

"We are going to have a Sorghum Festival," Collins

said. "As far as I'm aware right now, it's not going to be run by the same group. It's going to be a (different) non-profit group going to run it."

"Steps are being took by the Chamber of Commerce, by the Union County Government, by the Historical Society and numerous volunteers from the community, and money will be going back in the community. So, the final word is, we are having a Sorghum Festival."

Specifics are not publicly available currently, as the See County Meeting, Page 2A

## New first responder support group seeking public donations

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Members of the Union County Georgia First Responders Organization officially introduced themselves to the public on Tuesday, March 18. Abbreviated UCGAIR, the new organization saw its start last year, but further planning has really helped it begin to take shape.

"Our first meeting was on Jan. 4, 2024," Organization Secretary Ingrid Engle said. "Then, the process to become incorporated took about six months."

With the legalities and mechanics sorted out, UCGAIR was ready for its debut, which

quietly but proudly took place at the First United Methodist Church of Union County over pastries and coffee last week.

Encompassing the Union County Fire Department, Union County Sheriff's Office, Union County E-911, Union General EMS, Blairsville Police Department and Union County School Resource Officers, the goal of the 501(c)(3) is to offer support for first responders in need.

Although examples of such need include "an illness or life-altering emergency," like a catastrophic injury, in theory, the funds can go toward anything that supports a local first responder or their family See First Responders, Page 12A



The Union County Georgia First Responders Organization officially unveiled the group's noble mission and fundraising goals at First United Methodist last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



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# County Meeting...from Page 1A

process is still in the early planning stages, but Collins said the money raised will be used to fund scholarships

and “anything to help out the community – it’ll be different, it just won’t be one thing.”

## Development Authority

Regarding the Union County Development Authority that he dissolved last month, Collins said he would be recreating it very soon.

“I am moving forward toward re-forming the Union County Development Authority,” Collins said. “I have had multiple meetings with various stakeholders.

“We are in the early stages of planning for a more diverse board and hoping to create a good working relationship with the City of Blairsville and the Downtown Development Authority.

“And we’re working with legal counsel as well as the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission on the procedures to create this board. I hope, before this next meeting, to have this board recreated. It will probably be a nine-member board. So, keep that in mind.”

Toward this end, he opened a separate bank account with United Community Bank “for the purpose of depositing funds from the previously dissolved Union County

Development Authority for the purposes of future economic development.”

## Reece Farm

He also spoke to the county-owned Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center – which serves as a testament to both the farming and intellectual roots of Union County – and said he and County Manager Tony Hughes had a plan “to put it back proper.”

Collins said the Reece Farm operated at a \$70,000 loss for the county last year, but that if his plan works out, “I think we can be alright up there.” The county will be working with the volunteer Byron Herbert Reece Society to enact Collins’ plan.

## Union General Hospital

“I evaluated the county’s agreements in cooperation with the Union General Hospital Authority,” Collins said, switching gears. “We have met with their CEO; the hospital and Union County work very well together.

“They have always been questioned about Union County providing funds to the hospital in any way. I have determined this is not a one-way street for the county providing them a little bit of funding to offset the cost of operation of EMS.”

With transparency in mind, Collins called on new County Finance Director Kay Wilcox to lead a brief presentation outlining the financial relationship between the county and the hospital, which Collins held up as giving “a lot back to the county and its citizens by way of services.”

In terms of offering countywide services to residents, Wilcox said the hospital’s annual financial contributions come to about \$600,000, including: \$15,000 in the 50/50 cost-sharing arrangement with the county for the air ambulance service; a \$582,871 loss on its ambulance service; and \$3,000 in medication and supplies provided to Union County Fire and other first responders.

As far as reciprocity, the county helps to offset these costs – particularly the losses associated with running ambulances – by providing \$300,000 to the hospital.

If the county operated the ambulance service, as is done elsewhere, Wilcox said the loss would be even greater than what Union General is currently experiencing – and come at the expense of taxpayers instead of the hospital.

“The only other option for the EMS is for the county to provide that, and so it seems to be more efficient for the hospital to have that,” Wilcox said before going on to discuss the annual economic impact of Union General on the community.

“When judging economic impact, we’re talking about



**New County Finance Director Kay Wilcox is replacing Laura Driskell, who resigned in February. Wilcox served as interim director until Collins selected her among several candidates. Originally from Habersham, Wilcox is coming to county government with plenty of professional experience, including at Blairsville City Hall.**  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

monies that families in the county gain from employment or other things that are spent that reflect back savings to those residents,” Wilcox continued.

According to the most recently available public data, Wilcox said this impact comes to \$106 million, and she went on to discuss other benefits from Union General Health System.

“They provide a childcare center, which, about 50% of their children there are hospital employees’, and the other 50% are children in the community,” Wilcox said, adding that the hospital also offers a Wellness Center plus uncompensated care in the form of “indigent care, charity care, bad debt incurred and just other free, uncompensated care that they provide.”

## Other Business

Collins also highlighted some savings he’s been able to find, such as dropping a long-standing insurance policy for a crane the county doesn’t have, and he said he terminated a lease agreement for a vehicle driven by the former Development Authority director.

“And we will be holding a Town Hall Meeting April 10 at 6 p.m., and the location will be determined, and the meeting will be advertised in the North Georgia News (soon),” Collins said. “My plans are to invite our Sheriff’s Department, our Fire Department, the School Board, the City of Blairsville, elected officials to have a Town Hall Meeting.”

Additionally, Collins said he and his staff have been examining all county checking accounts with the goal of securing “the best interest rates for our county funds that we can” to provide additional revenue that will benefit taxpayers.

Among regular meeting business, Collins accepted

multiple agreements, including allocation of funds for transit projects through the Georgia Department of Transportation as well as groundwater and methane monitoring services for the Union County Landfill.

He also held second readings and subsequent adoptions for revisions to the Union County Code of Ordinances pertaining to Short-Term Rentals, the Construction Board of Adjustments and Appeals, and Alcoholic Beverages, details of which were previously reported by the newspaper.

To enable residents to attend both county and School Board meetings – several of the latter were rescheduled for 2025, resulting in multiple conflicts for the separate meetings – Collins changed his November and December meetings to the third Tuesday instead of the usual third Thursday.

The commissioner also proclaimed April 2025 as “National Donate Life Month,” encouraging people to “give the gift of life” by signing up for organ and tissue donation.

County Manager Tony Hughes updated folks on a variety of county happenings, including that the Recreation Department had signed up 1,151 children for spring sports. Hughes also announced Saturday, April 12, as the first “Bunny Run” Egg Hunt at 10 a.m. in Meeks Park.

Attendees received multiple chances to ask questions, including on specific agenda items and generally. In response to a question about the struggling Senior Center, Collins said he was in talks with Legacy Link to determine how the county might offer greater assistance there.

The public is encouraged to attend commission meetings, usually the third Thursday of each month starting at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse.



**An estimated 150 people attended the March county meeting, marking the third month in a row that new Commissioner Harold Collins has had to use the large Jury Assembly Room to host meetings.**  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## PTSD Support Group Meeting

There will be a PTSD Support group for veterans and first responders at 10 AM on Saturday, April 5 & 19th at the Major Leon Davenport Building located at 78 Blue Ridge Highway, Blairsville, GA 30512. For more information email: vfw7394@outlook.com. The Veterans Of Foreign Wars, Post 7394 meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 4 PM. All eligible veterans are encouraged to join us - If you wish to be a part of our membership, the annual fee of \$36 is waived. If you have any questions, please contact us at vfw7394@outlook.com.

## Addiction Support

Refuge Recovery Meeting: Tuesdays 6:30 PM, 111 River Street, Hiawassee, GA; 706-970-7754. Sponsored by NMZ Church.

# Teachers of the Year ...from Page 1A

“He consistently supports the students and staff, embodying a spirit of collaboration and dedication. He’s not only an amazing teacher, but he’s also a wonderful role model who always puts the best interests of his students first, encouraging them to reach their full potential.”

“His contributions to Woody Gap make him incredibly deserving of being named Teacher of the Year. And I’m going to tell you a real quick story; he is in the process of building an 8 by 10 building, and working on this building is the kindergartners through the 11th-graders.”

“He had the kindergartners nailing the subfloor down and handing him roof rafters last week, so they are doing just as much as they are able, all the way up to our juniors, who are the ones doing a lot of the (more advanced work), of course.”

“But he is a beacon at Woody Gap, and we are grateful to have him.”

## STAR Recognition

The 2025 STAR Students and Teachers from UCHS were also honored that evening. Each year, the senior with the highest SAT score from one sitting of the test who is also in the Top 10% of his or her class is named STAR Student. And remarkably, there was a tie this year.

STAR Student Gunnar Ingram and STAR Teacher Howard McCombs received certificates of recognition in the meeting. STAR Student Turner West and his chosen STAR Teacher Dixie Conger were unable to attend but received congratulations, nonetheless.

## Board Appreciation

Next, Superintendent John Hill turned the recognitions to the School Board itself in honor of School Board Appreciation Week in Georgia, which ran March 10-14.

“On behalf of all the students and staff of Union County Schools, we are so thankful for our board,” Hill said. “We have the best School Board in the state of Georgia.”

“The reason this School System performs so well is because we have people that actually care and love the

children and love the staff and are dedicated.”

“(Board members) dedicate countless amounts of time to our students to ensure that we have the best of everything for our kids that we can possibly afford to do, within reason. And we are so thankful for everything that each and every one of you do each day.”

For an eye-opening experience, Hill recommended board service to anyone in the community, “because there’s a tremendous amount of work and no money attached to it,” and he said the children surely appreciate what the School Board does, too.

School Board Members Janna Akins, Julia Barnett, Tony Hunter, Jason McCarter and Patrick White stood from their chairs to receive certificates and applause.

## American Legion

American Legion Department of Georgia’s 9th District Cmdr. Mike Merritt, who also commands Blairsville Post 121, and local Sons of the American Legion Cmdr. David Patterson made several presentations in the meeting to recognize the outstanding culture and climate within the schools.

“One of our big projects for the year is Wreaths Across America,” Merritt said. “We can’t do it by ourselves. We have volunteers from the school that help us out every year, and we’d like to recognize some of those folks.”

Merritt and Patterson presented a certificate of appreciation to UCHS Principal Josh Davis for his assistance in providing the School Fine Arts Center as an accommodating venue for the local Wreaths Across America Program in December.

The pair also honored School Safety Director Art McCann, a retired Army Ranger, for facilitating the great partnership between the American Legion, veterans and the School System.

Students received recognition as well, including UCHS Band members for their patriotic musical accompaniment during the annual Wreaths Across America Program.

Band Director Will Stafford was personally thanked for making himself available on



American Legion also presented a certificate and donation to UCHS FFA. (L-R) David Patterson, Mike Merritt, Piper Taylor, Kaitlynn Janes, Ansley Hughes, Emily Brown, Amber Watkins, Mackenzie Baldwin and Katie Rittenhouse. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



Last week, Central Office staff honored School Board Members Janna Akins, Julia Barnett, Tony Hunter, Jason McCarter and Patrick White for School Board Appreciation Week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the spot to perform the National Anthem on saxophone during a moment of need in last year’s program.

Joining Stafford for the recognition was talented senior trumpet player Jeremiah Frizzell, who performed Taps for the American Legion’s recent program.

Last but not least, UCHS Future Farmers of America Advisor Katie Rittenhouse and FFA students Piper Taylor, Kaitlynn Janes, Ansley Hughes, Emily Brown, Amber Watkins and Mackenzie Baldwin joined Merritt and Patterson for another recognition.

FFA students made service wreaths to display on

veterans’ graves as part of the recent Wreaths Across America effort, and when it was time, they helped clear hundreds of wreaths from local cemeteries and repurposed them as fish attractors to help develop fish habitats in Lake Nottely.

“In addition to the certificate, we want to also present them a donation of \$100,” Merritt said, handing a grateful Rittenhouse a check.

Patterson, who serves as Location Coordinator for Wreaths Across America “making sure all those wreaths get sponsored,” expressed gratitude for the community at large, which assisted the American Legion with placing over 700 wreaths on veteran graves in Union County.

“This year’s ceremony will be Dec. 13, and hopefully, we’ll be able to have the program like we have in the past,” Patterson said, with Merritt concluding their presentation by flipping the script as a veteran and thanking the School System “for what you do for us.”

## System Updates

Superintendent Hill said that he and everyone in the district were “really proud of our athletics,” and he

welcomed Athletic Director Mandy Hunter to recount an impressive list of recent student accomplishments across several performative disciplines.

As usual, Hill has been keeping an eye on legislation moving through the Georgia General Assembly, and he and School Accountability and Compliance Director Dr. David Murphy highlighted multiple education-related bills that have traded legislative chambers.

Assistant Facilities Director Derrick Pruitt said that the new Elementary School was on schedule for its Grand Opening on April 24, with move-in scheduled to begin directly after the ribbon cutting to get staff situated well in advance of the 2025-26 school year.

Board Member Akins confirmed with School Finance Director Karen Bundy that Elementary School construction was on track to be paid for entirely with proceeds from E-SPLOST VI, all thanks to the county electorate supporting the massive effort for the betterment of local children.

“If I can speak on behalf of the board, we really appreciate the community’s approval of this ESPLOST VI,” Akins said. “That was

something that was voted on on the ballot, and it enabled us to build this school without debt.”

“We didn’t have to pay bond counsel. Weren’t borrowing money. Weren’t paying interest. We made interest income from the money that we received off of ESPLOST VI, and we are very appreciative of the community’s approval of that ESPLOST; it enabled us to complete this project in the way that we did.”

Board members vocally celebrated the fact that the Union County School District is one of just a few systems in the state to have zero debt – a particularly monumental feat for a district on the verge of opening a brand-new, multimillion-dollar Elementary School.

As part of their personnel recommendations, the board hired Gavin King to serve as the new construction teacher, effective March 19. King is coming over from the Union County Building Department as a replacement for Charley Cattanach, who is now CTAE director for the schools.

The public comments portion of the March 18 regular School Board meeting is covered in a separate article in this week’s newspaper.



(L-R) American Legion Veterans David Patterson and Mike Merritt presented the UCHS Bands with a certificate of appreciation, accepted by Band Director Will Stafford and senior trumpet player Jeremiah Frizzell on March 18. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

# Public Comments...from Page 1A



**Retired Elementary School Principal Trish Cook was a welcome sight in last week's School Board meeting, in which she offered public comments.**  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Hill's passion for students and the schools is why the superintendent has set such high standards for employees, in that "he expects us to be here."

"And if we're not there, we're going to get a butt-chewing," Hughes said. "I've had several of them, and it kept me where I needed to be. And because of John Hill, I'm a better employee, and I've got in the position that I am because of his leadership throughout the years."

"So, I just want the community to know, I want you to know that John Hill is not the person that you have heard from countless other people."

"This man is a blessing to the School System, and I can't say enough about him. He's a good guy, and he's a personal friend of mine. And I'm not up here saying that because he's a personal friend of mine; it's because I have seen what the man has done over my 25 years."

"So, I want you to take that into consideration with all this other garbage you hear, because I consider it garbage, because the man is not the man that's been set out."

"And I know it's probably against the rules," Hughes continued, turning then to point at and address North Georgia News Editor Shawn Jarrard, who was sitting in the audience at the time and authored this article. "But Mr. Newspaper Guy, you have my permission to put everything I said in that newspaper, just because some of it's not in there."

Hughes returned his attention to the School Board to conclude his defense of

and I just wanted to say thank you from the bottom of my heart, and my son appreciates it, too."

Rounding out the public comment period was former Union County Elementary School Principal Trish Cook, who retired in 2018. Cook spoke "in support of the new Elementary School," and she also praised the educational excellence that has continued in her stead and Hill's leadership.

"I want to tell you thank you," Cook said to board members. "I know it's School Board Appreciation Week, and I want to say thank you for all you've done for me, students, faculty. But I've got to tell you a little story."

"I pulled up to the Elementary School a few years ago, and there was this fabulous security fence around the sidewalk. And I just almost cried, because that has been a concern for a long time."

"Thank you for making sure that happened, John Hill. Thank you, Mr. B (UCES Principal Jerry Bavero). Thank you, School Board. That was so needed."

"Well, time rocks on, and I see the blueprints for the new Elementary School – thank you. And I wasn't going to say this, but I feel kind of comfortable, so I'm going to."

"I have a middle child; I don't know if any of you are middle children, but having been a principal of an elementary school, who are the 'middle children' of the School System – when I saw that wonderful new Elementary School in those plans, I was just like, 'Yes!'"

"And I just had to thank God right then. And that happened because you pushed it, and because we as a community voted for the (E-SPLOST funds that Board Member Janna Akins) talked about tonight. Thank you so much for all you do. I really appreciate it."

"There's other things that are done that the community sees that I don't know if anyone ever tells you about. But one thing is that house that the construction (classroom) builds. And we all see that every time we ride by there. That is so totally awesome."

"And the day that house goes to its final destination, the community stops so it can get

down the four-lane. Now that's fabulous. That's because we have a new leader; we have a leader in our system who lets the faculty have creativity in instruction."

"We saw that tonight with everything (Athletic Director Mandy Hunter) told us about, with all these teachers – they've been allowed to be creative in their classrooms. Not every system gets that."

Cook went on to personally thank Superintendent Hill "for all you've done," and as she was about to tell "one more story, about John and

Mark," her three minutes of allotted speaking time ran out.

All three commenters were well received in the meeting, earning applause at the end of their statements, with the loudest response going to career educator Cook, who served 28 years at Union County Schools before she retired.

Two other speakers signed up the required 24 hours in advance of the meeting but were not apparently in attendance: Naveela Philbeck, to speak "in support of inclusivity at UCS"; and Roy

Wright "in support of the positive impact of the Union County School System on his children in a short amount of time."

As previously reported, Philbeck is a parent in the schools who has publicly accused the superintendent of trying to get her fired from her job for reporting alleged teacher discrimination against her young daughters.

Coverage of the School Board's regular meeting business from March 18 appears in a separate article in this week's newspaper.

# First Responders...from Page 1A

in dire straits.

“The sole purpose of this organization is to go out, raise money, collect donations – be able to financially assist first responders in their time of need,” Fire Chief David Dyer said. “This assistance can be for just about anything. It can be for an illness that they may have; it can be for an injury; it can be things such as a car accident or maybe your house caught on fire.”

Operations Manager Magdalie “Maggie” Guerrier shared her story with the audience, painting an image of how her E-911 work team became a supportive family in her time of need. Before moving here, she was employed with Florida’s Palm Beach County Sheriff’s Office.

At age 35, Guerrier was diagnosed with multiple devastating health problems after a heart attack, including congestive heart failure and kidney failure. Her department rallied behind her and some even visited her in the hospital to “hold her hand.”

When she moved to Georgia, she found similar support in Union County, and especially credits E-911 Lt. Millie Baxter with welcoming her and checking in on her “every single day” after she received her kidney transplant.

“When I became a Union County dispatcher, it was lifesaving for me, emotionally and mentally, because I got to go back to doing what I love, which is being a first responder,” said Guerrier, who has been employed with the county for the past two and a

half years.

“What people don’t know,” Guerrier continued, “when we get home after (responding), we deal with a lot of issues from what this job brings to us, and having the backing of your agency, that family, is priceless.”

Fire Lt. David Ueltzen serves as UCGAIR Grant Administrator, and he revealed plans to hold fundraising events throughout each year, including sports matches such as pickleball. Further, the group is pursuing grants that can be used to the same end.

Also included in the planned events is the Union County First Responders’ Yearly Challenge that will name top sponsors annually, to feature a Gold Tier for donations of \$1,000 and more; Silver Tier, \$500 to \$1,000; and Bronze Tier, \$200 to \$500.

In the meeting, Chairman Russell Walker, a Blairsville Police lieutenant, recognized three award-winners for helping UCGAIR find its footing. River City Bank was the first Gold-level sponsor, and Fire Station 4 and Fire Station 2 tied as the first Silver-level sponsors.

“We’re going to take care of our own, and that’s the goal – to take care of our own,” Walker said. “We all have different jobs, but we’re one family, and with y’all’s help and everybody else’s help, we can take care of our own.”

Although the website is still under construction, eventually, additional information will be available at [www.ucga1r.org](http://www.ucga1r.org), including



Last week, David Ueltzen of Fire Station No. 4 and Jimmy Nichols of Fire Station No. 2 accepted appreciation awards for their respective stations’ fundraising efforts for local first responders on behalf of UCGAIR. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

a donation button. Email correspondence can be directed to [ucga1r@gmail.com](mailto:ucga1r@gmail.com), and be sure to visit the new Facebook page.

Checks can be mailed to P.O. Box 244 in Blairsville or deposited at River City Bank.

## Your Patriot Reflection



### If You Can Keep It

Have we passed the apex of freedom in our country? Eric Metaxas, in his book, “If You Can Keep It” states that America is not a nation bounded by ethnic identity or geography, but rather by a radical and unprecedented idea, based upon liberty and freedom for all. He goes on to caution that it is nearly past time that we reconnect to that idea. If we don’t, we may very well lose the very foundation of what made us exceptional in

the first place.

Let me quickly cite just one example of how our freedoms are being compromised. In 2016 former Secretary of State John Kerry made this statement at a commencement address. “Americans must prepare ourselves for a “borderless world.” We will have lost our identity and freedom for what? A world without borders is a world without citizens; a world without citizens is a world without the rights and privileges that attach exclusively to citizenship.

Rights and liberties exist only in separate and independent nations; they are the exclusive preserve of the nation-state, where the just powers of government are derived from the consent of the governed. Does that sound familiar to you? Our founding Fathers had it right, so lets dig in and make the maintaining of our Freedom a high priority.

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by [www.joshuaswarriors.org](http://www.joshuaswarriors.org).

## BINGO

Pat Haralson Civic Center  
165 Wellborn Street  
Blairsville, GA  
Every Wednesday  
Doors Open - 6 PM  
Games Start - 7 PM  
**Benefits**  
**Castoff Pet Rescue**