

North Georgia News

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School board, county gearing up to set millage rates

By Shawn Jarrard
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About this time each year, the Union County School System and Union County Government work to set their individual millage rates based on the latest assessment of local property values.

Millage rates are used to determine how much money will be collected in property taxes, and both the county and school system determine their individual rates by weighing year-over-year budgetary needs against projected tax revenues based on the total value of property countywide.

Taxes collected this

way are used to support the administration of county government and the public school system; to build, repair and maintain public buildings, bridges and roads; to pay expenses of the courts, county jail and local law enforcement; to provide for fire protection; and to provide for public health and sanitation, according to UnionGATax.com.

Property taxes are collected by Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight, but the process actually starts with the Union County Tax Assessor's Office, led by Chief Appraiser Susie Phillips.

The assessor's office keeps records of each individual parcel of property, including



Lee Knight

the name and address of the owners, and the evaluation of the land and buildings on each parcel, according to qpublic.net/GA/Union.

In turn, Knight uses this information to prepare annual property tax bills, which are usually due by Dec. 20 each year.

"We do have an increase in property values this year," said Knight. "I looked at it, and from 2017 to 2018, the assessed values went up approximately 2 percent for the year."

"So, the taxable amount of property we're going to tax went up from \$1.237 billion to \$1.260 billion. That's how much property we tax in Union County at the 40 percent value."

Property in Georgia is taxed on its assessed value, which is defined as being 40 percent of its fair market

value.

Knight attributes the roughly 2 percent uptick in property values with recent real estate sales activity, which have seen modest gains but are definitely moving in the right direction.

"A lot of people are buying lots again, like in the Thirteen Hundred (on Lake Nottely) and those developments, they're selling lots," said Knight. "So now, we've got those properties on our tax digest, and it's not just one big property we're taxing; now, we're taxing individual lots."

And because people are starting to build houses on these recently developed lots, even more value is being added to

the county's tax digest, said Knight.

"It means that we have more value here in Union County, so that helps our taxes lift," said Knight. "Just leaving the millage rate the same would increase the school and the county's revenue about \$400,000."

Of course, the decision to lower, increase or keep the millage rate the same is up to the rate-setting authorities themselves, as they will have to determine whether revenues will continue to cover expenditures.

Both the Union County Board of Education and Union County Sole Commissioner See Millage, Page 2A

Commissioner Paris signs resolution placing SPLOST V on ballot

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held a called meeting on Tuesday, July 31, to sign a resolution placing the Union County SPLOST.

The resolution effectively places the 2021 SPLOST referendum on the 2018 General Election Ballot this November.

Paris announced his decision to put SPLOST V to an early vote in his July 24 regular monthly meeting, and he stressed on July 31 that the SPLOST would not be a new tax.

By the time the current SPLOST ends in 2021, Union County will have had a continuous SPLOST in place since 1997, and it will continue through March 2027 should



Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris in his July 31 called meeting at the Union County Courthouse.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

SPLOST V pass.

A SPLOST is a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax that amounts to a 1 percent sales tax applied countywide to finance voter-approved capital

outlay projects.

Each SPLOST lasts six years, and the current SPLOST has a little under three years of collections left before expiring

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Car catches fire after wreck on Gainesville Highway



A dramatic blaze engulfed this vehicle after an accident on Gainesville Highway in front of Jim's Smokin' Que on Tuesday, July 31.

Photo by Jim's Smokin' Que.

By Shawn Jarrard
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Five people were transported to Union General Hospital on Tuesday, July 31, after a two-vehicle collision on Gainesville Highway.

Fortunately, everyone was OK with no serious injuries, but the accident took a dramatic turn when one of the vehicles burst into flames on the roadside next to Jim's Smokin' Que.

Dispatchers at the Union County E-911 Center took the call at 12:52 p.m. that Tuesday, concerning "a two-car accident, unsure of injuries, with flames showing in vehicle," said Union County Fire Lt. Damon Hood.

Apparently, one of the vehicles had been pulling out

of the barbecue restaurant into oncoming traffic when the accident occurred, according to the fire department.

The force of the accident sent both vehicles to the side of the road and nearly into the drainage ditch at Jim's Smokin' Que.

An off-duty fireman arrived first on the scene, and he informed dispatch that no extrication was needed, as all occupants had made it to safety, though one of the cars was "totally involved," as in completely on fire.

"The biggest thing is if everybody's out of the vehicles," said Hood. "Everybody was out of the vehicles, so we just went into firefighting mode. It's not really a rescue, it's just extinguishing a fire after that."

Added Hood: "As we were fighting the fire, the ground underneath it was washing away, and the car was slowly easing its way off the embankment. We ended up hooking a winch from the rescue truck to the car that was on fire, just to keep it from going into the (drainage ditch)."

The fire department worked the scene for roughly 40 minutes, which required the blocking of the northbound lane for a short while, but traffic got back on track before too long.

Car fires are rare in Union County, but the fire department does handle them every year.

"That's not a normal thing we do," said Union County Fire Chief David Dyer. "We may get a car wreck and

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'Smooth sailing' for students and faculty on first day back

By Shawn Jarrard
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Students returned to class on Friday, Aug. 3, to officially kick off the 2018-2019 school year for Union County Schools.

From Woody Gap to the schools on the main campus, by all reports, everything went well the first day.

Traffic could have been better that Friday morning, especially on Wellborn Street, which backed up all the way around the square and beyond for a short time.

But several school administrators said traffic always takes a couple days to smooth out, as students, parents and staff get used to the routine.

Other than slight transportation issues, everything else was "smooth sailing," according to Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill.

"We appreciate the parents bearing with us on the volume of traffic, and it will get better," said Hill. "We look forward to, No. 1, being out in the school buildings and seeing the children, and seeing their



Students at the Union County Primary School boarding the bus after a big first day back from summer vacation.

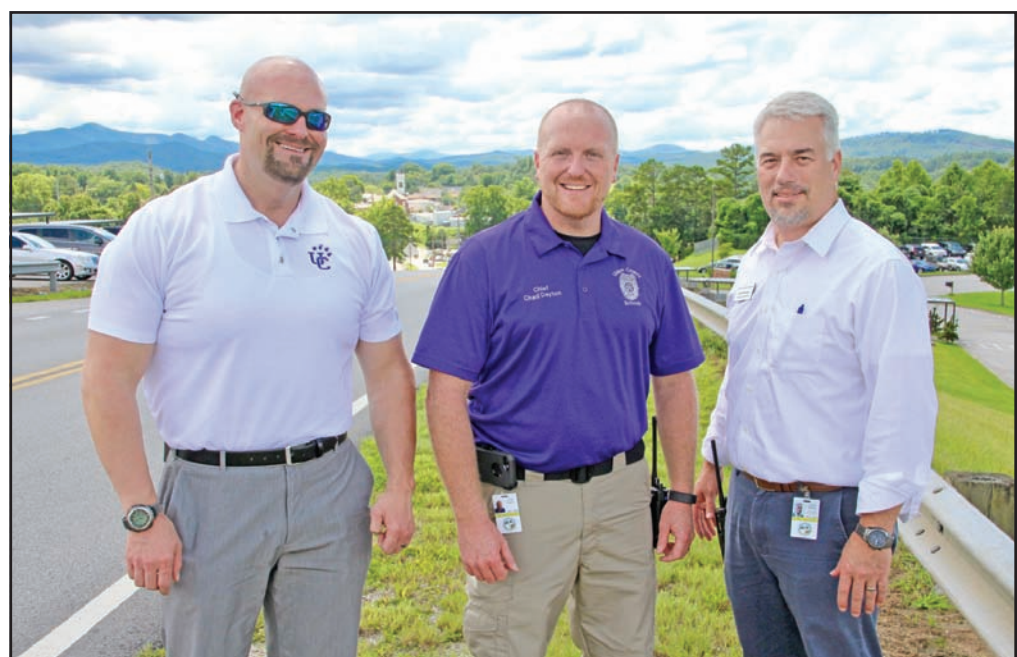
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

progress academically, and all their different clubs and events.

"And I look forward to sharing the results of our strategic planning and, pending the (Union County Board of Education's) adoption, the initiatives that we're going to be focused on for the next five years, including our vision and mission."

"We really want to unite the schools and have our employees work together as one big team of almost 500 players. And I think that the work we do for the kids will get even higher quality than it is now, which is a challenge, because we have wonderful people. So, that's what I'm looking forward to this year."

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Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill, School Police Chief Chad Deyton and Assistant Superintendent David Murphy after school on Aug. 3.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

John Nix to headline 'Maters and Music at Reece Farm'

By Shawn Jarrard
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No one does old-time country music like John Nix, which is why folks won't want to miss the Fifth Annual 'Maters and Music Festival' on Saturday, Aug. 11.

Sponsored by the Byron Herbert Reece Society, 'Maters and Music' is an excellent way to spend a Saturday in the mountains, with a free tomato sandwich lunch surrounded by the beauty of the Reece Heritage Farm.

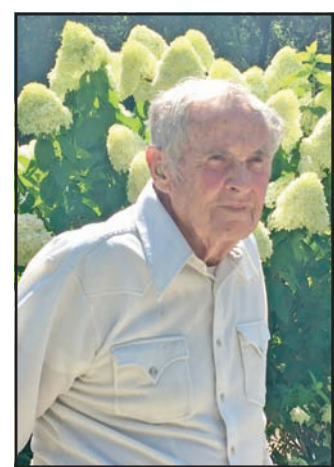
The festival runs from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., with music scheduled throughout. Nix

will perform after the Shady Grove United Methodist Church Bluegrass Band, which performs first.

At 83, Nix is a seasoned musician around these parts, known far and wide for his involvement in the Country Cousins.

He and his Country Cousins band have played music all over the mountain region for nearly seven decades, and they have been the regular house band for the Blairsville Sorghum Festival ever since its founding almost 50 years ago.

When he was 15 years old, Nix started the Country



John Nix at the Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center.

Photo by Jerri Gill

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