

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Lodge hosts Civic Awards Night to honor members of community

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Masons of Allegheny Lodge No. 114 F&AM gathered at their lodge building in Downtown Blairsville to show appreciation for six members of the community with a Civic Awards Night Oct. 5.

Awardees included EMA Director David Dyer, Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter, West Printing Office Manager Allison Caldwell, Middle School Agriculture Teacher Katie Rittenhouse, and Jim and Sharon Whittle, parents of the late Whittle's Deputy Derrick Whittle.

Masonic Lodge Worshipful Master Ivy Smith presented the awards, offering a brief background for each recipient to explain how he or she had gone above and beyond in the community.

"This is something that we try to do every year," Smith said. "We feel like, a lot of times, people need to be appreciated, and it is sort of a giving back to the community as the bottom line."

"A lot of people in

different places, sometimes they don't get the recognition they need and that they should get. We try to do that; we try to hit all the major components of the community."

For years now, the lodge has supported the Whittles in honoring the memory of their son Derrick. That's why last week, in an emotional presentation, Smith gave Jim and Sharon Whittle a banner commemorating their most recent memorial blood drive.

"Brethren, if I ask you to do one thing every year, it is to help these people out," Smith said to his fellow Masons. "Our lodge has permanently done it since 2013, but these are great, great people, and they have a heart of gold."

Smith lauded the Whittles for committing themselves to not only helping the people of their community, but also for keeping the memory of their son alive after he suffered a fatal car accident in September 2011 while responding to an emergency call involving a gun.

"In 2012, the Whittles gave away their first See Civic Awards, Page 2A



L-R: Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter, UCMS FFA Advisor Katie Rittenhouse, Jim and Sharon Whittle, Worshipful Master Ivy Smith, West Printing Office Manager Allison Caldwell and EMA Director David Dyer. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Vote early in person now; voter registration up in 2020

By Shawn Jarrard
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Advanced in-person voting for the Nov. 3 General Election is finally here, and so far, all signs are pointing to one of the biggest election turnouts in Union County history.

Voter registration ended last week, giving Union an active registered voter total of more than 19,150 people. That's up by at least 1,000 from the start of the year.

In terms of absentee-by-mail ballots – a popular choice in 2020 due to COVID-19 – through Friday of last week, the Registrar's Office



had processed nearly 4,400 applications and received back about 1,600 ballots.

Early in-person voting began Tuesday, Oct. 13, and runs weekdays through Friday, Oct. 30. People are

encouraged to vote early, as the high expected turnout could potentially translate to longer than usual precinct lines come Election Day.

The three weeks of early voting normally start on a Monday, but the Union County Courthouse where early voting is taking place was closed Oct. 12 in observance of Columbus Day.

All weekday early voting is between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., and people will have the opportunity to vote on Saturday, Oct. 24, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. In-person early voting is happening in the Jury

See Vote Early, Page 3A

Blairsville man charged with kidnapping ex-girlfriend

By Shawn Jarrard
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A Union County man is being held without bond after allegedly kidnapping his ex-girlfriend, Union County Sheriff's Lt. Doug Brackett said.

Robert Curtis Jordan, 31, of Blairsville, has been charged with multiple crimes stemming from two separate arrests involving his ex, Brackett said.

The first arrest occurred Sept. 27 following multiple overnight calls from the woman to 911 alleging Jordan was trying to force his way into her home, Brackett said.

At about 5:30 a.m. that Sunday, Brackett found Jordan apparently sleeping in

his vehicle at the end of the woman's driveway. When the lieutenant approached the car, Jordan looked up and sped away without using headlights. Brackett pursued Jordan but lost him in the darkness.

Brackett knew Jordan from previous run-ins and had a hunch he would turn up at his dad's house, so he went to get warrants for the residence. Fortunately, Brackett reached Jordan's father via cellphone, and together, they convinced him to surrender at the jail.

Jordan was arrested and charged with three misdemeanor traffic charges: fleeing and attempting to elude, reckless driving, and driving without headlights, Brackett said.

As investigators worked to compile evidence in the



Robert Curtis Jordan domestic case against him. Jordan posted bond on his three traffic charges two days after his initial arrest, on Sept. 29, Brackett said. See Kidnapping, Page 3A

City Council adopts millage rate, holds first reading of FY21 budget

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Blairsville City Council unanimously approved the 2020 millage rate of 1.895 in the Tuesday, Oct. 6, regular monthly meeting with Mayor Jim Conley.

Last week's meeting was a return to in-person business for city officials, who have conducted meetings via teleconference since March 3, or roughly two weeks before the onset of the pandemic.

The Oct. 6 meeting was also the first to be held inside the completely renovated council chambers at City Hall, which began construction toward the end of February.

To accommodate social distancing for COVID-19, See City of Blairsville, Page 2A



Blairsville City Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook apologized to Mayor Jim Conley in last week's city meeting for not speaking in the Sept. 23 EPD hearing that featured negative comments directed toward the city. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Tractor Supply hitches business amid Grand Opening celebration

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Tractor Supply Company, the largest rural lifestyle retailer in the United States, hosted a Grand Opening celebration for its new Blairsville location on Saturday, Oct. 10.

Located near Panther Circle at 614 Young Harris Hwy, between Wendy's and Sway, Tractor Supply officially opened for business earlier than expected on Thursday, Oct. 1, and the decision proved a tremendous success.

"We were ahead (of schedule), we were stocked and staffed, so we went ahead See Tractor Supply, Page 6A



Tractor Supply held a multiday Grand Opening celebration over the weekend, which was well attended despite the rainy weather. Photo by Todd Forrest

GFC Air Operations Unit trains at Blairsville Airport

By Jarrett Whitener
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Staff Writer

The Georgia Forestry Commission Air Operations Unit welcomed the Union County Fire Department for a training demonstration at the Blairsville Municipal Airport on Wednesday, Oct. 7.

As part of the training, the Fire Department supplied water for aircraft specializing in aerial firefighting, specifically an airplene and helicopter, which then did passes dropping water at the airport.

GFC Pilot Ben Gleaton

briefed local firefighters before the demonstration, explaining why the Forestry Commission was there that day.

"Our Air Operations Unit is up here to do a little mountain training," Gleaton said. "Y'all had some fires here a few years back, so we figured it would be a good time to come up here and learn the mountainous terrain."

"I'm from Waycross, which is flat land, but our fire season is going to get here before long, so we are trying to kick things off to prepare." Added Gleaton, "One

of the things we rely on is the ability to have water. When we are fighting fires, fire departments are a big help because they have better pumps and more access to the water. It has worked out well a few times. We fought a fire in Covington last year, and it worked out really well."

This type of training is especially important in advance of the upcoming fire season, which is predicted to be dry, Gleaton said.

"We try to train a couple of times a year," Gleaton said. "Our fire season in the state

usually starts within the next few months. We are trying to get ready for that."

"We have been around this area in training and we cover the whole state, but this is our first time here, and this is just a good centralized mountain airport with a runway and facilities."

Added Gleaton, "We are a state agency in charge of fighting wildland fires, which is normally done with bulldozers and those things. Obviously, we need to deliver water, and

See GFC Unit, Page 6A



The Georgia Forestry Commission ran drills with its special firefighting airplane and helicopter at the Blairsville Municipal Airport last Wednesday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Vol. 111 No. 42
4 Sections 24 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Cloudy Hi 74 Lo 49
Fri: Cloudy Hi 57 Lo 34
Sat: Sunny Hi 57 Lo 36

Inside
Arrests 4B
Church 3C
Classifieds 3D
Opinion 4A
Legals 4D
Obits 4C
Sports 2B

SPORTS
SOFTBALL
State Tournament TBA

VOLLEYBALL
State Tournament TBA

NASCAR
Chase Elliott
On A Roll!

See page 2D

Sorghum Festival
Sorghum Family Tradition

See page 6C

245th USMC Birthday Party

See page 6C