

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Union County Schools to recognize 2019-2020 Teachers of the Year

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Congratulations are in order for the 2019-2020 Union County Schools Teachers of the Year: Nicole Schuknecht, Jordan Rogers, Danya Nichols, Kimberly Williams and Althea Cantrell.

The Teachers of the Year will receive recognition for their achievements in the Oct. 22 regular meeting of the Union County Board of Education.

Teachers of the Year are determined by faculty vote among fellow educators at each of the schools in the district, after which the process of selecting a System Teacher of the Year begins.

Becoming System



Nicole Schuknecht

Teacher of the Year inverts an external panel conducting candidate interviews and classroom observations before deciding who among the five teacher candidates will receive the honorific.

Whoever is selected as



Jordan Rogers

2019-2020 System Teacher of the Year will go on to compete for the title of Georgia Teacher of the Year, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education.

The Primary School Teacher of the Year is Nicole



Danya Nichols

Schuknecht, who is originally from Warwick, Rhode Island, but has lived in Blairsville most of her life.

She is a graduate of Union County High with prior teaching experience at Blue Ridge Elementary, and she



Kimberly Williams

has taught special education in Union County for two years now.

"Being selected as Teacher of the Year is such an incredible honor," Schuknecht said. "I work with an amazing group of educators, and it takes



Althea Cantrell

a team and a village to help all students learn.

"I am fortunate to have an amazing team to help my students get to where they need to be, from making visuals daily to helping my students learn in

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## 50th Anniversary Sorghum Festival Parade highlights 1969 origins

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The 50th Anniversary Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade rolled through town on Saturday, Oct. 12, featuring a nostalgia-inducing theme of "Back to the Beginning... 1969."

And back to the beginning it went, with plenty of old cars, tractors, fire trucks, buggies, horses, candy throwing and '60s-era costumes.

Hundreds of spectators, mostly families with kids, lined Cleveland Street and all around the Downtown Blairsville Square to watch the parade - families like the Sosebees: Kyle, Sarah and their baby daughter Klair.

"It's a big tradition," said Kyle, who attended Union County High in the early 2000s. "I played in the drumline in high school and graduated in 2006."

The parade also featured Union and Carolyn Bridges, who See Parade, Page 3A



Junior and Carolyn Bridges wearing their 1969 best for the Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade in honor of the 50th anniversary outing. Photo by Mark Smith

## DDA: Important Arby's deadline approaches on Friday, Oct. 18

By Shawn Jarrard  
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The Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board has signaled that it might not be interested in extending the contract for the Arby's Restaurant development if the current contract extension comes to an end Friday without an offer.

Oct. 18 will serve as the "drop-dead date" for what is now the second contract extension agreed to by the DDA, though it would seem that the developer is still interested in purchasing the Haralson Property lot across from the Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen development on Georgia 515.

According to discussions in the Oct. 8 regular DDA Board meeting, the developer has put the project out to bid, which bodes well for the restaurant, especially considering the investment of \$5,000 in



Blairsville DDA Board Member Robert Rogers in the Oct. 8 regular DDA meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

nonrefundable earnest money and tens of thousands of dollars in additional site costs.

As previously reported, another positive sign for the deal came in the form of recent project approval by a corporate real estate committee at Arby's. However, the closing agreement between the DDA and developer was still outstanding at press

time.

Should the contract extension deadline pass without the developer agreeing to close on the lot, the DDA will become free of any obligation in the contract and will be able to walk away from the deal and retain the land, which is something board members said was definitely on the table.

A hitching point in negotiations so far has been the price of the lot, an issue that was complicated a couple months back when soil samples at the site revealed water near the surface of the property.

At the time, the site developer had said fixing the issue could cost as much as \$200,000, and the DDA was asked to cover all or part of that cost.

After further discussion, the board voted on Aug. 12 to offer the developer toward funds of up to \$25,000 matching See Arby's, Page 2A

## Deputy resigns from Sheriff's Office following domestic violence arrest

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Last month, Union County Sheriff's Sgt. Andrew Hammond, 35, resigned from his position after being arrested for an alleged incident of domestic violence, the Sheriff's Office said.

His arrest stemmed from an incident that reportedly occurred in the early morning hours of Sunday, Sept. 22, the Sheriff's Office said.

Deputies responded to Hammond's address after E-911 Dispatch received an emergency call from his wife at 2:53 a.m., the Sheriff's Office said.

Upon arrival, deputies heard shouting coming from the residence, and once they made contact with Hammond and entered the home, they determined that Hammond was intoxicated with alcohol, the

Sheriff's Office said.

In the course of their investigation, deputies determined that Hammond had allegedly been holding his wife to prevent her from leaving the residence, and they discovered bruises on her person consistent with physical restraint, the Sheriff's Office said.

He was booked into the Union County Jail that Sunday morning on a misdemeanor charge of simple battery, Family Violence, and he bonded out the next day on Monday, Sept. 23, the Sheriff's Office said.

Hammond was placed on unpaid administrative leave that Monday pending the results of an internal investigation, and he resigned his position later that day after the Sheriff's Office escorted him to his home to collect his guns, badge and patrol vehicle, the Sheriff's Office said.

As the incident involved one of its own, the Sheriff's



Andrew Hammond

Office immediately contacted the Georgia Bureau of Investigation for an external review of the arrest, the Sheriff's Office said.

The Sheriff's Office is still in the process of conducting an internal investigation into the matter, which upon completion will be forwarded to the Georgia Peace Officer See Hammond, Page 2A

## Early voting for Blairsville City Council elections starts this week

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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The three-week early voting period for the Blairsville Municipal Election began this week on Tuesday, Oct. 15.

Blairsville residents who are registered to vote can do so at City Hall from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. any weekday between now and the last day of early voting on Friday, Nov. 1.

Election Day for the three City Council posts up for election will be Tuesday, Nov. 5, with voting to take place between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. inside City Hall.

Anyone with questions can contact Election Superintendent Kaye McCann at 706-745-2000.

Four candidates qualified in August to fill the three City Council seats, including incumbents Rhonda Mahan,

Betty Easter and Mary Ruth Cook, along with Blairsville resident Frank Pack.

As city election outcomes are determined by plurality vote, the Top Three voters will each win one of the seats up for election in November.

"Terms of office will begin Jan. 1, 2020, and will expire on Dec. 31, 2023," according to a notice from City Hall.

## Historical Society talks renovations, new museum at Farmers Market

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

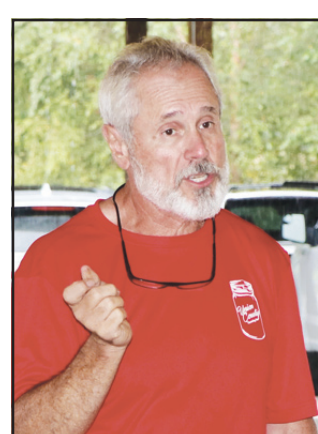
Good news, local history buffs - the summer renovation projects of the Union County Historical Society are nearing completion.

Society President Judy Carpenter made the announcement in the group's monthly board meeting on Oct. 8.

Of concern over the past year has been the many-faceted Old Courthouse project, including the need to fix places in the exterior wall that were causing leaks into the building's interior; sidewalks in need of repair; and the removal of bats that had nested in the belfry.

On top of all that, the shakes on the roof of the Payne Cabin behind the historic 1906 Grapelle-Butt Mock House were in need of replacement, and the Mock House property itself had become overgrown with bamboo, brush and weeds around the perimeter.

Nearly all of that has



Union County Farmers Market Manager Mickey Cummings speaking with fellow members of the Union County Historical Society Board on Oct. 8. Photo by Mark Smith

been addressed over the recent summer months, thanks to grants from the city of Blairsville and Union County, membership dues, and donations of money, time and equipment from society members and concerned residents.

Carpenter said memorial brick sales have risen over the

last month and that income from festivals, various summertime events, and donations from concerts has been a boon for the society, which in turn helps the volunteer historians to preserve and maintain these historical sites and local heritage.

The Historical Society usually holds its board meetings at the Mock House Annex, though board members met at the Union County Farmers Market for their October meeting to hear about a new historical initiative from Market Manager Mickey Cummings.

Also a Historical Society board member, Cummings said that he, County Manager Larry Garrett and Assistant Market Manager Kristy Penney were intending to start a farm museum similar to the one at the Oconaluftee Visitor Center in Cherokee, North Carolina, but on a smaller scale.

The farm museum in Blairsville would be focused around the historic Hunter-England Cabin at the Farmers See Historical Society, Page 7A

## Gowder, Heaton trial delayed again; jury selection still expected this week

By Linda Erbele  
North Georgia News



The official start of the federal prescription drug trial against former hospital CEO Mike Gowder and Blairsville-based physician Dr. James Heaton was once again delayed

last week. As Monday, Oct. 14, was Columbus Day - a federal holiday - court officials indicated on Friday that the trial could begin as early as Tuesday, Oct. 15, after press time.

Jury selection was supposed to begin on Tuesday, Oct. 8, though the court decided to delay after it became apparent that a separate trial involving Heaton's attorney, Don Samuel, would not be ending in time for Samuel to be present at the start of Heaton's trial.

Samuel is currently defending a client in the high-

profile DeKalb County murder trial involving a former cop who shot and killed an unarmed naked man in the line of duty, and the jury in that trial was still deliberating at press time.

In the meantime, the U.S. attorneys prosecuting the case against co-defendants Gowder and Heaton have used the delay to continue their investigation.

On Wednesday, Oct. 9, the government sent a request to the presiding judge in the case, U.S. District Judge

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**VOLLEYBALL**

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**Enotah CASA**

**Open House**

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