

# North Georgia News

2 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Union Co. spared as Helene batters Southeast

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Blue skies peeked out from behind cloud cover in Blairsville midmorning Friday, Sept. 27, a clear indication that Union County had dodged the worst that Tropical Storm Helene had to offer.

Union County E-911 received no reports of injuries or even emergency calls related to the storm, such as medical or rescue situations, and aside from 30-40 trees blocking roadways and taking out powerlines, the county remained largely unscathed.

There was no flooding, either, despite worst-case predictions of upwards of 10

inches of rain and the potential for catastrophic flash flood conditions. The Nottely River and the various creeks and streams that flow into her ran high but remained inside their banks.

Not all areas were as fortunate as Union County. Helene came ashore in Florida as a major Category 4 hurricane late Thursday, bringing with it deadly storm surges, torrential rains and heavy winds.

By the time it reached Georgia, Helene had weakened considerably but remained a powerful storm that ultimately claimed over a hundred lives and wreaked havoc with a long trail of destruction, washing away roads, toppling houses

and leaving millions without power across the Southeast.

Fellow Appalachians in Western North Carolina and Tennessee received the kind of devastation Union County officials were preparing for here, with entire neighborhoods wiped out in places and even cities cut off from communication with the outside world, like Asheville, North Carolina.

As of press time Monday, Ingles Supermarkets were operating on a cash-only basis due to major flooding and damage sustained at their Asheville headquarters, with no known timeline on when cards would be accepted again.

See Helene, Page 2A



County officials kept a close watch over the Byers Road bridge during Tropical Storm Helene. Thankfully, the bridge did not flood as the county continues to work on a solution for those one-way in and out neighborhoods. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Propane leak prompts Woody Gap evacuation



A valve malfunction on a propane truck in Suches last week caused a massive leak, shown here as an ominous white cloud hovering close to the ground.

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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SUCHES – A leaking propane truck resulted in multiple evacuations in the Valley Above the Clouds on Wednesday, Sept. 25, including the entire campus of Woody Gap School and several properties along that stretch of Georgia 60.

No propane was ever detected on campus, and the evacuation was just a precautionary measure to keep students and staff safe, Union County Fire Chief David Dyer said.

Shortly after the leak was reported, students loaded onto a bus bound for Union County High School; once there, they ate some lunch, and the school system arranged transport for their safe return home that afternoon.

The situation unfolded just after 10 a.m. last Wednesday, when Budget Propane owner Patrick White called E-911 to report that one of his trucks had sprung a major leak behind the shop of the business.

Firefighters with Station See Propane Leak, Page 2A

## Indian Summer Fest to return this weekend



The Indian Summer Festival will feature a modified children's play to account for additional local history. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

SUCHES – The beloved Indian Summer Festival will return this weekend to the Valley Above the Clouds for its 47th year, and while organizers warn the field will probably still

be wet from Tropical Storm Helene, they look forward to bringing the community the fall favorite event.

Running Oct. 5-6 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Woody Gap School, folks can enjoy live music, an auction, browse craft vendors, and get a bite to

eat. Whether guests have tastes leaning toward sweet or savory, there'll be plenty of funnel cakes, hotdogs and hamburgers to last a while.

Parking is free, and admission is just \$5 for ages 13 and up, \$3 for ages 7-12. See Indian Summer, Page 3A

## Fire Station No. 2 hosts public, fire safety demos



Children and adults alike had fun with the educational fire extinguisher demonstration at the Sept. 21 Open House. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Sept. 21, Union County Fire Department Volunteer Station No. 2 opened its doors to a whole crowd of people, including the Jones Creek residents it serves.

Engaging with the

community through annual Open House events is a great way for folks to better understand what being a firefighter means, and a clear, warm day at the tail-end of summer allowed visitors of all ages to learn and have fun in equal measures.

Demonstrations of the

proper use of a fire extinguisher were held with contained flames no bigger than the common campfire. Kiddos in particular were amazed by the smoke and foam – even if it made the perfect photo op more difficult for proud parents to capture.

Firefighters Labron See Station 2 Open House, Page 6A

## Early voting starts soon; register to vote by Oct. 7

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Early voting starts this month for the 2024 General Election, and people who haven't registered to vote yet must do so by Monday, Oct. 7.

Local voter registration officials want people to know that they should ignore emails, text messages and mailed flyers

warning them that they are not registered to vote.

Multiple complaints have come in from voters worried about their registration status after receiving unofficial notifications from third parties.

Some of the messages simply tell people they are not registered in an apparent "turn out the vote" effort, while others contain links to enter

personal information, which is potentially a scam. Of course, voters should not use such links.

People curious about their registration status may call Union County Voter Registration at 706-439-6016 to check. They can also visit the official "GA My Voter Page" with the Secretary of State. See Early Voting, Page 6A

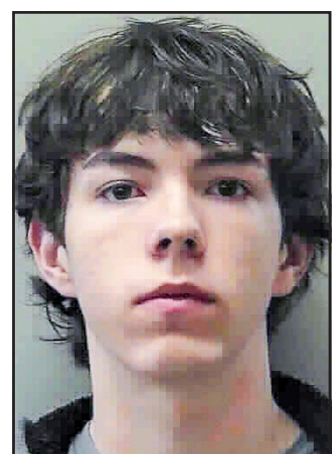
## TCSO makes two arrests for threats against schools

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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Last week, the Towns County Sheriff's Office arrested two area 17-year-olds for making separate threats against local schools. One was a student from Blairsville, and the other youth was out of Murphy, North Carolina, but staying in Hiawassee.

The threats involving the Blairsville student, Abraham Parker Patrick, came on Saturday, Sept. 21, at Brasstown Valley Resort during Union

See School Threats, Page 3A



Abraham Parker Patrick



Jeremiah Andrew Franklin Lloyd



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# Helene...from Page 1A



Local first responders and government stakeholders met three times last week at Fire Station No. 1 for special weather briefings in preparation for Tropical Storm Helene.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

And Saturday, the North Carolina Department of Transportation was telling motorists to consider all roads in Western North Carolina closed: "We cannot say this enough: DO NOT TRAVEL IN OR TO WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA."

In the runup to the storm, the National Weather Service had forecast that Union County could see wind gusts up to 70 mph in addition to the highest level of flood potential based on modeling last Wednesday and Thursday, which showed the storm taking a more westerly path up the state.

Positioning matters because hurricanes and tropical storms are stronger on their right sides, and, initially, it looked like Helene was going to put Blairsville squarely on its eastern flank.

For example, Hurricane Opal, another Category 4 storm that came up northeasterly through Alabama in 1995, exposed North Georgia to the worst side of the storm, snapping more than 600 power poles in the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC service area.

But Helene ended up heading east of Union County early Friday morning, lessening its impact here. This time around, the EMC had to replace just eight broken poles, with 8,850 households suffering power loss throughout the distribution system, though most were quickly back online.

Of course, Union still got plenty of rain, with the tropical storm adding about 2 inches to the amounts dropped Wednesday and Thursday in a separate storm system, giving a three-day rain total over 7 inches by noon Friday, per the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center.

Prolonged drought conditions likely helped prevent flooding by ensuring the rain had somewhere to go, and the biggest wind gust was only 31 mph, measured at the Blairsville Airport around 11 a.m. Friday, so trees remained rooted despite the ground being saturated by three days of rain.

Importantly, local leaders were prepared for the worst.

Out of an abundance of caution, Union County Schools joined other area school systems in canceling on-campus instruction Thursday – Friday had already been scheduled as an online learning day – and Union County Government announced the courthouse would be closed.

The Georgia Department of Transportation decided ahead of the storm's arrival to shut down Georgia 348, a notorious stretch of steep and curvy highway, until after the storm moved out of the state.

Prior to Helene making

landfall, the Union County Emergency Management Agency hosted three special weather briefings by the National Weather Service, with attendance by local first responder agencies, government offices, utility companies and others at Fire Station No. 1.

EMA Director David Dyer partially opened the Emergency Operations Center Thursday morning for planning and monitoring and to coordinate resources should any be needed, but the worst never came to pass, and the EOC was essentially closed by noon Friday.

"There were a lot of trees down, there were some power outages," Dyer said. "Hats off to our Road Department and to the EMC for really getting out there and doing a great job – the EMC was Johnny-on-the-spot putting that power back up."

"We didn't have any flooding, thank God, but we were ready for any of those emergencies."

Dyer credited the people of the community for doing their part, too, in preparing as much as possible before the storm and staying home until it was over, and he advised the public to remain vigilant in future bad weather events.

"People need to prepare themselves for the worst-case scenario," Dyer said. "I know a lot of people had their power out for a while, but there could be a possibility of your power being out for days, and they need to be prepared for that."

"It's a responsibility of the citizen to prepare themselves, not just the emergency services to prepare for everything, too."

Over at the Union County Sheriff's Office, Maj. Shawn Dyer said the entire staff was on call to respond, but UCSO was able to handle the storm response and its aftermath without having to

bring everyone in.

"We were prepared for a major event, and we didn't get it, and we're really thankful for that," Maj. Dyer said. "It saved the county thousands of dollars, and I'm just really pleased that it went the way it did."

"We could be like they are up in Asheville right now. We were expecting what they got, so they weren't expecting that much, I don't think."

Added Maj. Dyer, "And I'm thankful that a lot of the businesses done what they done. Believe it or not, that really helped when they delayed and closed. We knew we weren't going to have to be worrying with all the extra traffic."

"It would have made it a lot easier (if this had been worse), and then, what we did have, it made it easier today. The community helped us out by doing their parts."

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris took to Facebook Friday to express his relief with a big "Whew!"

"The storm could have been so much worse," Paris said, noting that the Road Department worked non-stop to clear trees from county roadways.

Added Paris, "I want to especially thank our Public Safety personnel, from E-911, Fire and EMA, Road Dept., Sheriff Dept., EMS, City of Blairsville, Water Depts. and BRMEMC keeping our power on, and all other employees and volunteers!! THANKS TO ALL!"

Gov. Brian Kemp declared a state of emergency before the storm, as did President Joe Biden. The declarations make state and federal storm damage reimbursements available at the local level, though it was unclear at press time if local damages were severe enough for reimbursement.



Blue Ridge Mountain EMC restored power quickly over the weekend after Tropical Storm Helene, having to replace just eight power poles systemwide.

Photo/Facebook

# Propane Leak...from Page 1A

No. 5 made it on scene within minutes, donning self-contained breathing apparatus to work in and around the fumes, which had formed a large white vapor cloud that settled near the ground.

First responders quickly established a half-mile perimeter around the leak, shutting down Georgia 60 to traffic from Glen Elliott Road to past Woody Gap School.

Despite his protective gear, a fireman who attempted to stop the leak sustained exposure burns to his arms from the extreme cold of the escaping gas. An ambulance took him to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville to be evaluated, and he was doing well later that day.

Propane is heavier than air, so it settles in low-lying places, which is why certain locations with lower elevations were evacuated near Budget Propane – just in case.

Thanks to favorable wind conditions, the gas finally dissipated to undetectable levels around 1:30 p.m., allowing the highway to be opened back up and people to return to their

properties.

White estimated that around 1,500 gallons of propane escaped the truck before the leak finally stopped on its own from low pressure after about 20 minutes.

As for what caused the incident, White said the leak occurred when a tank valve inexplicably malfunctioned while he and an employee were working on a separate pump repair on the truck.

As soon as propane started rushing out of the tank, White and his employee ran to pull the power meters at both Budget Propane and Two Wheels Only, the motorcycle resort just across the highway, before the gas could reach an electric ignition source.

White, who has never experienced a leak like this in more than two decades of working with propane, explained that the road was closed to prevent a vehicle from passing through the dense white propane cloud and potentially igniting it.

A member of the Union County Board of Education, White also said he contacted

the Board Office about the leak, and he concurred that Woody Gap needed to be evacuated out of an abundance of caution.

"Our first thing to do is always to protect the people everywhere," White said.

All in all, White believes everything went as well as it could have given the nature of the accident, and Fire Chief Dyer agreed.

"I think it was handled very well," Dyer said. "Station 5 was on the scene almost immediately. We had a lot of cooperation through the Road Department, the Sheriff's Office, and some local folks around there to help get everybody out of the way, evacuated, and isolated from that area."

Added Dyer, "It's an unusual event. It's a very taxing and stressful event when it first happens, so I think the guys that were there and responded initially did a very good job. It was a success, so I'm very proud of how they responded to that."

"Unfortunately, we did have one injury, but he's doing well, and I'm glad to hear that he's doing well, and I hope him the best."

# Indian Summer...from Page 1A

and ages 6 and under get in free.

Organized by the Woody Gap Sports Club, the Indian Summer Festival serves as the organization's biggest fundraiser, and put bluntly, the Sports Club supplements the education of local students.

Starting in the mid-1970s, the Sports Club started raising money to make sure Woody Gap students had supplies to play sports, to include uniforms, shoes and other necessities.

According to Larry

Wood, an original Sports Club member and organizer of the Indian Summer Festival, there was a realization that the school at large could benefit from the fundraising.

So, the Festival found its start, gathering monetary aid that ensures every graduating senior receives at least some scholarship support, classrooms receive ample supplies, and, as Woody Gap Principal Wendy Reynolds points out, students can receive "wants" like organization shirts alongside

their needs.

"They help with a wide array," Reynolds said of Sports Club volunteers.

Noteworthy this year is that the entertainment will be slightly different. Woody Gap School's kindergarteners have traditionally put on a play themed around Union County's original people, the Cherokee, and while their history does feature in this year's story, there will be some changes.

"It's kind of a combination not only of the Cherokee, but

it's also going to go into the history of Woody Gap School," Reynolds said. "We're going to do more where it's almost narrated and the kids are going to be acting the roles out more."

Reynolds said the changes were prompted by organizers wanting to try something new after covering "The ABCs of the Cherokees." Of course, this just adds another reason why the Festival is important; it continues to teach visitors of all ages about their home's past.

Another change comes in the form of a blood drive being present, and this is the first year Blood Assurance specifically will be at the Indian Summer Festival.

"We've had the bloodmobile there several times in the past," Wood said, explaining that participation dropped off during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now he hopes to inspire more folks to give back – especially since Blood Assurance donations go to local populations.

Other than that, Wood and Reynolds said that the Indian Summer Festival will remain largely unchanged for 2024. The Woody Gap Band of Steel will be performing over the weekend along with Wood's very own granddaughter, Nealy Webster, and other musical offerings.

The Indian Summer Festival is always the first full weekend in October, so people can go ahead and mark their calendars for this weekend and future events.

# School Threats...from Page 1A

County High School's annual Homecoming Dance. Patrick reportedly directed threats toward his school to three juvenile students.

Union County Schools Police learned of the threats on Monday, Sept. 23, from a School Resource Officer at Winder-Barrow High School, which is in the same county as Apalachee High School where a deadly shooting took place last month.

According to the Winder officer, a student there had attended the dance in Young Harris, during which she received a direct personal threat from Patrick. The following Monday, she notified school authorities in Barrow County.

Allegedly, Patrick had threatened to shoot the Winder student and, in the presence of other students, spoke about possessing a bomb and also said he had a gun he was going to use at Union County High, Union County School Resource Officer Josh McCuen said.

UCS Police Chief Scott Deyton said his department was unaware of any explosives or weapons in Patrick's possession.

Upon request, the Towns County Sheriff's Office responded to investigate due to the threat having been made in the neighboring jurisdiction. TCSO investigators interviewed witnesses in Union County and uncovered evidence of threats that were "terroristic in nature."

As a result, Patrick had to turn himself into the Towns County Sheriff's Office on Tuesday, Sept. 24, where he was arrested and charged with felony terroristic threats. He is being held without bond at the Towns County Detention Center.

TCSO shared that its investigation also determined that Patrick did not have access to either explosives or firearms.

As to why some students make these kinds of threats, regardless of intent, the schools say there is no room for jokes about such a serious and potentially deadly subject.

"Students need to think before they speak, because we're not going to take these threats lightly," McCuen said. Likewise, Towns County

Sheriff Ken Henderson said that terroristic threats made against schools, students and staff will be taken seriously and appropriate action will be taken.

Regarding Patrick's status as a student at Union County Schools, Superintendent John Hill said federal privacy regulations in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, prevented him from speaking about individual student discipline.

And while not commenting on this case or disciplinary actions for any specific student due to FERPA, Hill said school discipline can range from short-term suspension up to expulsion from campus.

"In general, Union County Schools takes any threat seriously, and our Code of Conduct is expected to be followed by all students," Hill said. "Disciplinary action has been and will be administered consistently across the board for students who violate our Code of Conduct."

Added Hill, "We do take this very seriously, and all school discipline issues will be taken seriously. I want to reassure parents and citizens of that."

In a separate incident, the Towns County Sheriff's Office started an investigation last month pertaining to a threat rumor against Towns County Schools.

Investigators began monitoring the social media accounts of Jeremiah Andrew Franklin Lloyd, 17, of Murphy, as a suspect in the threat, and they detected a threat against Towns County Schools on Friday, Sept. 20.

Arrest and search warrants were executed for Lloyd, leading investigators to uncover multiple other crimes involving a 14-year-old female victim, the Sheriff's Office said.

Lloyd was arrested at a residence on Konahetah Road, which is immediately adjacent to Towns County Schools. He has been charged with felony terroristic threats, disrupting public school, felony sexual exploitation of children, felony enticing a child for indecent purposes, child molestation and

statutory rape.

During an interview with investigators, Lloyd confessed to all charges and is being held without bond at the Towns County Detention Center.

Like Patrick, Lloyd was not found to be in possession of any weapons and was determined to have not had access to them, the Sheriff's Office said.

Lloyd was the subject of a previous investigation into a rumor of a "possible threat to the school" in August, weeks before the Sept. 4 shooting at Apalachee High School in Winder that kicked off a nationwide uptick in shooting threats.

It was determined at the time there was not enough evidence to make an arrest for a threat, though Lloyd was barred from all properties of Towns County Schools out of an abundance of caution, according to the Sheriff's Office.

A TikTok account that appears to belong to Lloyd features numerous clips advocating for sympathy and understanding for the Apalachee High School shooter, whom the account portrays as a victim of society and mental health struggles.

However, several other recent videos posted to the account – including the day of Lloyd's arrest – depict school shooting scenes, though it was unclear at press time if these videos were related to the threat investigation that led to Lloyd's arrest.

The most recent social media posts that alarmed authorities, as well as those made about the Apalachee High School shooting, took place after the investigation that cleared Lloyd of making threats in August.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends investigators for their quick action and thorough investigation of Lloyd, reiterating that "threats against our schools, students, and faculty will not be tolerated."

"Any and all threats will be investigated thoroughly, and appropriate action taken," Henderson said.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

# Ladies Night Out event to recognize Quilt of Valor Recipients Ingrid Engels and Tammy Holloway

You and your friends are invited to a very special event on Thursday, October 17, 6-8 PM when Tri-County Women's Connection will recognize local Quilt of Valor recipients, Ingrid Engels, Air Force and Dr. Tammy Holloway, US Navy Seabee. From 5 to 5:45, you will have an opportunity to meet our recipients and see their quilts. Our Guest Speaker is Tammy Ortung, a retired Air Force veteran from South Carolina.

TCWC will host this event in the banquet room of the Union County Community Center overlooking the beautiful mountains and Butternut Creek Golf Course, 129 Union County Recreation Road, Blairsville. The check-in desk will open at 5 PM. Between 5 PM and 5:45 PM, there will be a table with information about the original Blairsville QOV group started by Linda Gorman.

As always, we start the evening off with a delicious dinner: roast beef, mashed potatoes, carrots, green beans, bread, dessert, coffee, tea and water. Next comes door prizes!

The Quilt of Valor Foundation, was started in 2003 by Catherine Roberts mission statement: "To



cover Service Members and Veterans touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor." In August 2024, 21,380 QOV's were awarded, with the lifetime QOV's totaling 394,774. Since 2016, Sue Young of Murphy, NC oversees the Quilt of Valor group serving Cherokee & Clay Counties in North Carolina and Fannin, Towns and Union Counties in Georgia.

Tammy Ortung, will share her story, "Dorothy, You're Not In Kansas Anymore". Tammy grew up in Ohio and enlisted in the Air Force in 1986. In her military career, she served as an F-15 Crew Chief; retrained in Computer Maintenance, taught Professional Military Education and ROTC at the University of Washington before retiring at McChord AFB in Tacoma, Washington in 2011. She deployed to Baghdad in 2009, augmenting the Army

Multi-National Forces Manpower Office.

Tammy earned an MFA in Creative Writing in 2020 and has a passion for helping other writers hone their craft. She serves as a nonfiction co-editor for the As You Were—Military Review online journal, providing free editing and coaching services to Vietnam and other Veterans around the world. She also volunteers with several organizations in her local community. Tammy is married to Tim, also a retired Air Force veteran, and they live in South Carolina near family and their five grandchildren.

Please plan to enjoy this special evening with us and invite a friend! The cost is \$25 which includes the program, dinner, dessert, coffee/tea/water. Reservations and payment are due by October 11. For reservations, e-mail Jocelyn at jowabow@aol.com or via text or call Jane at 706-633-7868. Pre-payment by check (payable to TCWC) and mail to Judy Teague 3245 Mulkey Gap Road, Blairsville GA 30512. If you are paying for other guests, please include their names.

We would love to see many women veterans, active or retired, at our event. We invite those ladies who love to quilt to come and learn more about the Quilt of Valor Foundation and how you can be involved.

Since 1981, the Blairsville Tri-County Women's Connection in affiliation with Stonecroft 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.

# UCHS Class of 1980 Reunion set for Saturday, October 12

October 12, 2024, will be here before we know it. We hope you plan on attending our 44th reunion and are looking forward to good food, great music, and a great time with friends! Union County Community Center at 6 PM.

We will be accepting

donations for our meal and venue. Please bring a recent photo of yourself with your name and phone number for our guest book, as well as any memorabilia from our days at UCHS! Contact Lisa at 706-897-5620 with any questions or concerns.

## Station 2 Open House...from Page 1A



UCFD Station 2 volunteer firefighters led hose demonstrations for the public at their annual Open House last month.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Lewicki and Cody King were just some of the helpers who ensured guests didn't get knocked back by approximately 140 psi of pressure while trying their hand at aiming and spraying the hose attached to a fire truck.

"That's usually the hose we use for a (housefire) ... or really any kind. You can put a lot of water quickly through that hose," said Firefighter Christie Brown shortly before Lewicki revealed that most firefighters must move by shuffling on their knees while fighting fires with a hose.

"Right to fight, left to live" is the motto for how much to open the fog nozzle. When turned to the right, the water makes a straight jet good for putting out fires. Opened to the left, the water creates a "defensive shield" – quite literally, if one takes the shape into account – that a firefighter can use to put between themselves and the heat they're trying to quash.

"They should turn those things into jetpacks," suggested young Harlee Brown, daughter of Volunteer Firefighter Brown. "I could be like the Mandalorian (from 'Star Wars')."

Brown particularly enjoyed the bouncy house and had fun running around with

her siblings – even if younger sister Mac got a stomachache from sneaking five sodas.

"I think since we have such a small community, it's kind of like a big family, basically," said Brown, recognizing the importance of holding such events despite her young age.

David and Janice Shields were invited to attend by their neighbor, Volunteer Firefighter Shirley Anderson, who has a long history with firefighting.

Anderson may work at Walmart now, but her career with EMS and firefighting spanned decades, and because of that, she was able to offer insight into the different challenges faced by those in the field today.

"The furniture back in the '70s was made better," Anderson recalls, citing an experiment where a house reconstructed with similar materials as a 1970s-era home was burnt alongside a modern-day building. The latter went up in flames quicker due to all the synthetic materials.

Anderson can also remember a time when firefighters didn't have to wear full gear when responding to vehicular fires. Today's cars contain lithium batteries that give off deadly chemicals and

require the full extent of safety equipment.

"The price of progress, I guess," Anderson remarked with a wry smile.

The Shields also hadn't been aware of how expensive it is to run a firehouse. Up on the welcome board, a tally for the totals of each piece of a proper firefighting uniform was displayed, amounting to an impressive \$9,950.

And that doesn't include wildland gear (\$800) reserved for extreme heat, standard volunteer uniforms (\$200) and two headsets (\$10,000) per truck to cancel out noises and allow for communication between dispatch and firefighters.

"It's our first Open House – we're kind of shy folks, and so it's not easy for us to go out and meet people," Janice Shields said, adding that she considered the event a good opportunity to get to know her neighbors regardless.

The Union County Fire Department welcomes all-comers to its Open Houses at the various Fire Stations throughout the year, and monetary donations are welcome, too, as they supplement the departmental budget to keep the volunteer stations equipped to the highest extent.



Fire Station No. 2 Volunteer Shirley Anderson, Sparky Dog (Station 2 Volunteer Michael Amato), Harlee Brown, and Station 2 Volunteer Christie Brown had a blast at their 2024 Open House.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Early Voting...from Page 1A

State's Office at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov>.

Residents may register with the Registrars' Office at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive in Blairsville, at any public library or at the Department of Driver Services. People may also register online at <http://registertovote.sos.ga.gov/GAOLVR>.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there will be three weeks of early voting running weekdays between Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

All in-person early voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Union County Voting Center, also at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owtown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log. The address of each is available at <https://www.unioncountygga.gov/government/elections-voter-registration/board-of-election/>.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested inside the Voting Center now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Voting Center.



Union County Voting Center

Absentee ballots will start to be mailed Oct. 7 and can be returned using the official Voting Center drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. Election Day.

In addition to voter registration status, residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample

ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there is just one county-level seat up for grabs in the 2024 General Election: the office of Sole Commissioner.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap property assessments at a 3% annual increase.