



Merry Christmas!
from the staff of the North Georgia News

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Odom says 'goodbye' in December board meeting

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Dec. 15 regular meeting of the Union County Board of Education was a bittersweet occasion, as Cindy Odom said goodbye as a board member.

"It has been a good eight years," Odom said. "I think it is time for somebody else, and I know my replacement (Julia Barnett) is going to do phenomenal. She is a very good person and is dedicated to our community as well as our school."

Board Chair Tony Hunter offered comments of appreciation for Odom in the meeting, which had to be livestreamed due to precautions over COVID-19.

"Thank you, Mrs. Odom," Hunter said. "This is going to be your last meeting with us via Zoom, and I wish we could have been in person, but I really appreciate all you have done, the effort you have put into this."

Superintendent John Hill also complimented Odom for the work she has put into the development of the schools over the years.

"I would like to echo Mr. Hunter's words," Hill said. "Mrs. Odom, you have really supported this school system and devoted a tremendous amount of time for our community and for our staff."

"It is tremendously commendable; the general public has no idea the amount of time and effort that you

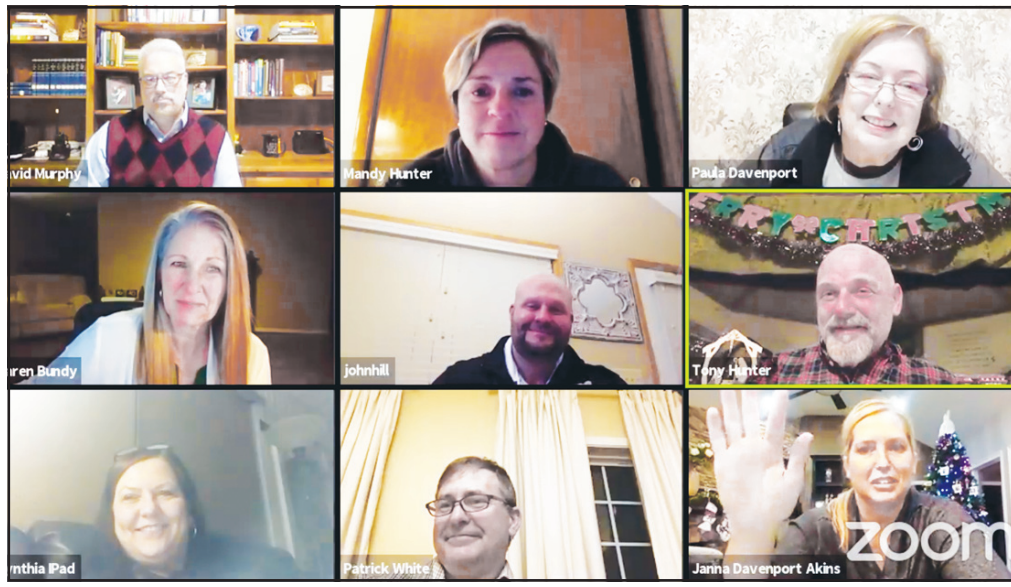
have devoted to our school system."

Hill also updated the board on COVID-19 in the school system and how the efforts of all have helped keep the schools going in person through the pandemic.

"Many districts are currently moving to online learning; many of our neighbors have," Hill said. "However, thanks to our COVID Task Force, thanks to our wonderful staff, and thanks to our custodians, our maintenance, our school nutrition, our teachers and paraprofessionals, our bus drivers, all of our leadership staff – thank the Lord, we are doing very well."

"We have one staff positive and three student

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The members of the Union County Board of Education and board staff wished each other Merry Christmas last week for their last regular meeting of 2020. Photo/Screenshots

Nottely Marina boosts cheer with first Christmas event

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

To lift the community's spirits in a year when so much has been canceled or postponed, for the first time ever, Nottely Marina hosted a very special Blairsville Christmas event for families on Friday, Dec. 18, and Saturday, Dec. 19.

It was the second holiday event put on by the marina in 2020, following the smash success of the Halloween trick-or-treating walkthrough there on Doucette Circle, and organizers were happy to decorate Christmas-style and welcome people back over the weekend.

The Doucettes know a thing or two about community traditions, having hosted for years an annual Fourth of July Boat Parade started by family matriarch Carleen Doucette,



Santa Claus and the Grinch, who attended with PFLAG Blairsville, teamed up for some holiday fun at the Nottely Marina Christmas over the weekend. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

who sadly passed away earlier this year in September.

Marina Manager Moriah Doucette said that, this year especially, it's important to keep small-town Christmas

traditions alive in order to provide a semi-normal holiday season for everyone.

"We were really bummed that the parade was canceled in

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Advanced in-person voting closed Christmas Eve & Day



The first week of early in-person voting was busy for a runoff, which this year features a couple of incredibly high-stakes contests. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
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Early in-person voting for the General and Special Election Runoffs continues this week, though people should keep in mind that voting will not be available Christmas Eve and Day.

Voters are deciding who

will win Georgia's two U.S. Senate seats and, at the state level, who will serve as the next District 4 Public Service Commissioner.

The three weeks of early in-person voting is occurring weekdays at the Union County Courthouse between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in the Jury Assembly

Room on the bottom floor, even during lunchtime.

Just as there will be no in-person voting Christmas Eve and Day, there will also be no voting on New Year's Day, as the courthouse will be closed for those weekday holidays. So, Thursday, Dec. 31, will be

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Local patriots gather for 'Wreaths Across America'

By Jarrett Whitener
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On Saturday, Dec. 19, American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121 and the members of other local veteran service organizations gathered at the Maj. Leon Davenport Veterans Building to commemorate National Wreaths Across America Ceremony.

The purpose of the local ceremony was to honor the departed veterans in the community who put their lives on the line to keep America free with 134 memorial wreaths at two cemeteries.

"Thank you all for your presence with us here today," Post 121 Cmdr. Dan Wickersham said. "Right now, across the country at more than 2,100 memorial sites, we are gathered as one nation to Remember, Honor and Teach."

"We are all proud to be Americans that live in a free society made up of many people from many walks of life. The freedoms we enjoy today have not come without a price.



Wayne Roshaven with the local Marine Corps League saluting a departed veteran during National Wreaths Across America Day Dec. 19. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

The United States of America was founded on the ideals of freedom, justice and equality.

"Our Nation stands as a shining beacon of liberty and freedom to the world. We thank those who gave their lives to keep us free, and we shall not forget you. We shall remember."

Added Wickersham, "We are to keep alive those things that

these women and men warriors gave by sacrificing their time, talent and comfortable lives in order to preserve."

Service wreaths were laid at each flagpole by: Army West Point Cadet Emmi Schakat; Thomas Schell of the Marine Corps; Navy Cmdr. Linda Cacchiola; Air Force Sr. Master Sgt. Ken McBride

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Paris presents 2021 budget; adoption to occur Dec. 28

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held a Dec. 17 public hearing to go over the 2021 Proposed County Budget.

It was a largely uneventful hearing; no one from the public asked any questions about the budget, which was surprising considering the series of contentious tax hearings from earlier in the year concerning the 17% increase in the county's portion of property tax bills.

As with so many things in 2020, the meeting did feature a departure from the norm, as Paris entered in through the back of the usual courtroom meeting place to briefly explain that he'd be holding the bulk of the meeting via teleconference.

Paris said he'd recently experienced a secondary exposure to someone who then tested positive for COVID-19, so to protect the public, he would not be leading the meeting in person.



Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held his first ever teleconferenced budget hearing and regular meeting inside the Union County Courthouse Dec. 17. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

However, Paris said state law requires budget hearings to take place in person, i.e. not with everyone conferenced in via Zoom, and that, in the interest of public health, he would be isolating in his office while

appearing via a laptop-to-TV setup in the courtroom.

Kicking things off, Paris explained that the budget included additional tax revenues from the increased 2020 millage rate. The

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