

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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3 people killed, 1 critically injured in tragic plane crash

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Three Blairsville residents died in a tragic plane crash the evening of Wednesday, Dec. 19: Robert Atkinson, 56, Renea Greiner, 55, and Michelle Seay, 50.

A fourth person, whose name is being withheld for reasons of privacy, survived the crash but sustained severe injuries.

Following extrication from the wrecked plane by first responders, the surviving passenger was airlifted by medical helicopter to a nearby trauma center for treatment.

Authorities were alerted to the accident around 7:36 p.m. that Wednesday, when Union County E-911 received a call about a possible downed

aircraft near the Blairsville Municipal Airport. There was no explosion, no fire, just a report of a possible plane crash.

When authorities searched the area and discovered that a Piper PA-28 aircraft had indeed crashed in an open field adjacent Kings Road and less than one-half nautical mile from the airport.

The field terrain was too rough for emergency vehicles to access initially, so a neighborhood good Samaritan quickly drove his tractor to the scene and bush hogged a path to the accident.

Authorities established a helicopter landing zone in another field across the street from the crash, near the intersection of Kings Road and Brown Road, and life-flighted the lone survivor, who



Michelle Seay



Robert Atkinson



Renea Greiner

was listed in critical yet stable condition at press time.

Thereafter, local authorities secured the scene for the arrival of investigating officials with the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation

Safety Board.

Officials with both agencies arrived the morning after the crash, on Thursday, Dec. 20, at which point the NTSB investigator began to process the scene.

Kings Road between

Kiutwestia Creek Road and Brown Road remained closed during the early stages of the investigation, and local authorities continued to secure the scene prior to the aircraft being moved later that Thursday to an undisclosed location for

further investigation.

"The purpose of our investigator is to generate facts on exactly what happened, so, we don't have that yet, they are generating the facts," said NTSB Spokesperson Eric Weiss. "There will be a preliminary report within about 10 business days on our website that will give some information about what they found on the scene."

As part of the investigation, the NTSB official will be: documenting the wreckage and the accident scene; searching for nonvolatile memory pieces, such as a GPS unit, data recorders, cellphones, and other devices; interviewing witnesses; and reviewing radar data, air traffic control tapes, meteorological data and weather reports, according to Weiss.

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Federal judge resets jury trial for Heaton, Gowder brothers to April 8

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

GAINESVILLE – U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story reset the jury trial in the federal prescription drug case against Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton in a pretrial conference on Wednesday, Dec. 19.

The new specially set trial date is Monday, April 8, 2019, and the trial is expected to last between one and two weeks.

None of the co-defendants in the case were present for the proceedings at the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville last week, though attorneys for all three men attended the discussions.

Initially, the trial had been scheduled for Feb. 11, 2019, but following the establishment of that date, Donald F. Samuel, Heaton's attorney, filed a "Consent Motion to Continue Trial."

In the motion, dated Nov. 16, Samuel asks the judge to reconsider the trial date for two main reasons:

1. The government had



An exterior view of the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville, which was the scene of a Dec. 19 pretrial conference in the federal case against Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

indicated it would be pursuing a superseding indictment with his client would need more time to prepare a defense, and;

2. Scheduling conflicts had arisen with two of Samuel's other cases, one federal and one state.

Regarding the first reason,

Assistant U.S. Attorney William McKinnon said in the Dec. 19 proceedings that the prosecution would be presenting its case for a superseding indictment on Jan. 3, 2019.

If the prosecution is successful, the superseding indictment will replace the

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GBI searches Lake Nottely for evidence in Morganton murder

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Agents with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and other state law enforcement officials spent Monday, Dec. 17, and part of Tuesday, Dec. 18, diving in Lake Nottely for evidence in the Dec. 4 murder of Justin McKinney of Morganton, according to the GBI.

Specifically, officials were searching an area of Lake Nottely known as The Cliffs, though Kim Williams, Special Agent in Charge of GBI Region 8, said she could not divulge any information about the evidence in question, including what it was or if they found it.

"We had a reason to be there, and we were out there looking for evidence as it relates to that case," said Williams.

Four area teens – all juveniles – have been arrested and charged in connection with McKinney's murder, and additional arrests are expected, according to Williams.

As previously reported, the GBI and Fannin County



The Georgia Bureau of Investigation and other state officials staging for a search of Lake Nottely near The Cliffs.

Photo by Mark Smith

Sheriff's Office arrested 15-year-old Blake Dickey, AKA Blake Dye, and Hunter Hill, also 15, on Tuesday, Dec. 4, for the alleged murder of McKinney, 33, of Morganton, according to the GBI.

Dye and Hill were reported by the GBI as being from Blairsville, but the North Georgia News subsequently

learned that the two youths are actually from the Morganton area and attended school in Fannin County.

Two more Morganton youths were arrested in connection with the murder on Dec. 6, just two days after the crime, according to the GBI: Dalton Levi Manuel, 15, and

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Plenty on offer for Union Countians looking to celebrate New Year's



A view from a past New Year's celebration at Brasstown Valley Resort.

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

With the calendar about to kick back over to January once again, many people may

find themselves wondering what they're going to do to celebrate the New Year's 2019.

Fortunately, there are plenty of activities around the county and area for people to

partake in come Dec. 31.

On New Year's Eve, the Union County Saddle Club will host a Barrel Race at the Union

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High schoolers team up with second-graders to go Christmas shopping

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County High School students helped run

the 10th Annual Shop with a Panther event on Monday, Dec. 17, at Blairsville Walmart.

The Shop with a Panther program takes a select group

of around 30 second-grade students on a Christmas shopping extravaganza, which

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Union County High School students took their second-grade counterparts shopping for Christmas on Monday, Dec. 17.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Merry Christmas
from the Staff of the North Georgia News
and West Printing Company

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