

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

December 28, 2016

Judge Brackett swears in county officials

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Probate Judge Dwain Brackett last week swore in most individuals who were elected or re-elected during the November General Election to serve in public offices to start 2017.

Now entering his sixth term, Judge Brackett was himself sworn in last week by Enotah Judicial Circuit Chief Superior Court Judge Murphy Miller.

Judge Brackett swore in Mack Mason for his second term as Union County Sheriff, as well as Jason Henson as County Surveyor.

Benny Erwin, who won re-election as County Coroner, will likely be sworn in this week once his paperwork arrives from the Secretary of State's office.

The five remaining recently-elected Union County officials participated in a swearing-in ceremony that occurred inside the Union County Courthouse on Friday, Dec. 23.

Administering their individual oaths of office, Judge Brackett swore in Janna Akins as District 1 Board of Education Member, Cary Cox as Chief Magistrate, Lee Knight as Tax Commissioner, Cindy Odom as District 3 Board of Education Member, Judy Odom as Superior Court Clerk and Lamar Paris as Sole Commissioner.

The ceremony set a positive tone for the upcoming year – the oaths were taken seriously, and everyone seemed excited to embrace whatever challenges 2017 has in store.

See Swearing In, Page 1B



L-R: Union County Probate Judge Dwain Brackett, Chief Magistrate Cary Cox, Tax Commissioner Lee Knight, Board of Education Member Janna Akins, Superior Court Clerk Judy Odom, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and BOE Member Cindy Odom.

Manmade wildfires highlight need for caution

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Appalachian Trail was closed from Neel's Gap to Tesnatee Gap, a result of a wildfire started by a car crash two miles south of Neel's Gap,

according to the U.S. Forest Service.

The wildfire was one of two started by car crashes. The first fire began on Richard Russell Scenic Highway (Georgia 348) on Dec. 23, according to USFS.

Approximately 435

acres, mostly leaves and underbrush, were burned. Union County Fire Department fought to contain the blaze along with USFS.

As of Christmas Eve, the Richard Russell fire was contained per U.S. Forest Service and Richard Russell

Highway was reopened. The fire on 129 South in Lumpkin County is being assessed, and Forest Services officials as well as Lumpkin County Fire are on scene. UCFD had not been requested for assistance.

There were no homes or structures in danger at press time. The Appalachian Trail from Neel's Gap to Tesnatee Gap was closed.

On Dec. 23, wildland firefighting crews responded to the "Bad Santa Fire" burning along the Russell-Brasstown Scenic Byway (Hwy 348) north of Tesnatee Gap. That fire, approximately 435 acres with very slow rate of spread, was contained. A section of the highway that was closed Friday has reopened, though travelers have been urged to use great caution and avoid the area altogether if possible.

The Swains Cove Fire, off U.S. 129, a couple miles south of Neel's Gap, posed

See Fires, Page 2A



Union County took part in battling some end of year wildfires last week.

North Enotah Drug court graduates show addiction can be beaten

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Grown men and women shed tears of joy during last week's graduation ceremony of the North Enotah Drug Court, celebrating together the triumph of the human spirit over addiction.

This is the seventh graduation overseen by the program since the summer of 2015, and five individuals from Union and Towns counties held their heads high and shared thanks last Thursday as they witnessed the culmination of more than two years of their own hard work – they had earned new leases on life.

The motto of the program See Drug Court, Page 2A



Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge Stan Gunter oversaw the graduation of five individuals who completed the requirements of the accountability program

UCHS faculty, staff break bread for the holidays

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County High School faculty and staff gathered together in the early hours of the morning in the high school cafeteria to partake in the annual Christmas party on Tuesday, Dec. 20.

Employees were treated to a freshly cooked, buffet style hot breakfast of buttermilk biscuits, sausage, scrambled eggs, fresh fruit, herb and fruit infused water and juice, all prepared specially for the morning event by the UCHS cafeteria team.

UCHS Jazz Band entertained everyone in the See UCHS, Page 3A



UCHS Principal John Hill

High school students share Christmas with youth

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

When it comes to giving, it doesn't get much more heartfelt and inspiring than watching children give to other children, which is exactly what happened when dozens of Union County High School students treated 30 second-graders to a very special day to take part in the sixth year of the annual Shop With A Panther program.

The student-led event took place on Monday, Dec. 19, when the high school students went with the second-graders to Walmart to help them shop.

"Each kid gets \$150 to spend, and we have about 30 kids," said UCHS Principal



Dozens of Union County High School students took a group of second-graders shopping for toys last week as part of their annual Shop With A Panther program. Photo/Lily Avery

Sheriff's office, jail workers gather as one big family

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Sheriff's Office held its annual Christmas party under Sheriff Mack Mason's administration on Tuesday, Dec. 20, inside the Brackett Community Room.

More than 50 sheriff's office and jail employees piled into the community room to take part in an evening of fellowship and celebration of the yuletide season.

Serving as a yearly tradition, UCSO employees enjoyed the good eats from local favorite barbecue restaurant Jim's Smokin' Que, which served as the caterer for the occasion.

See UCSO, Page 4A



Union County Sheriff Mack Mason held his department's annual Christmas gathering on Tuesday, Dec. 20, in the Brackett Community Room

2016, a year to remember, Part 1

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

At the close of each year, the North Georgia News recaps some of the biggest stories to hit the front pages of this newspaper over the course of the year.

Considering the scope of the most important news in 2016, this report will be part one of a two-part article concerning the goings-on of the outgoing year.

While the latter half of 2016 was consumed with news of wildfires and drought, the year opened with a torrent of rain that began in late December 2015.

Firefighters with the Union County Fire Department were rescuing residents from

flash flooding that occurred on Christmas Eve 2015, and the stormy weather continued into 2016.

Ultimately, Union County became part of the federal disaster declaration for the period of storms that raged between Dec. 22, 2015, and Jan. 13, 2016, making the county eligible for both federal and state disaster aid reimbursements for road/culvert damage, debris cleanup, the use of emergency protective services and repairs for riverbank damages in recreational areas.

After all the paperwork had been filed and finalized between March and September, along with a roughly \$20,000

See 2016 Part 1, Page 4A

Vol. 107 No. 51

4 Sections 24 Pages

Weather

Thurs: Showers Hi 52 Lo 28

Fri: Cloudy Hi 39 Lo 25

Sat: Showers Hi 49 Lo 36

Arrests 5A

Church 3C

Classifieds 4D

Opinion 4B

Legals 4D

Obits 5C

Sports 2B

Happy New Year