

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

January 22, 2014

Commissioner Paris to hold Public Hearing Jan. 27 on shotgun park

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Paris has announced a public information hearing for Jan. 27 at 5 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room at the Union County Courthouse to discuss the county's purchase contract of 9.502 acres for use as a shotgun/archery range.

The property, off Georgia 515 near Queens Gap, will be the home shooting range for the Union County 4-H Shotgun, Archery and BB Gun teams, Commissioner Paris said.

It also can be used for public shooting, both archery and shotgun, Commissioner Paris said.

The project is similar to the Horse Arena, where the Saddle Club oversees that facility's operation.

Likewise, Union County 4-H will oversee the shotgun park, Commissioner Paris said.

"We're going to do this right," Paris said. "The pur-



Lamar Paris

chase price of the property is \$150,000, and we're going to put \$150,000 into the development of the range."

The money for the land purchase and range development comes through Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax dollars through the Union County Recreation Department, Commissioner Paris said.

The county has done its due diligence on the property, doing shotgun sound tests, and talking with all neighbors involved around the project.

"Actually, the road noise from Georgia 515 is louder than any of the shotgun shooting," Commissioner Paris said. "All the neighbors involved have been extremely supportive of the project. My hat is off to them."

"Long term, we would be the only place in North Georgia that has this type of a facility," Commissioner Paris said, who added the purchase price for the property was \$150,000. "We think there is a tremendous opportunity for fundraising efforts as far as our 4-H Club is concerned."

"Our biggest endeavor right now is we've got a large group of kids (60) - girls and boys - and we want to give them an opportunity to compete," Commissioner Paris said. "These kids don't play football, basketball or baseball. They're competitive shooters."

"They've been an organized team for 17 years. From the beginning they've had the annual challenge of finding property suitable for shotgun shooting, yet quiet enough not

See 4-H, 2A



The Union County 4-H Shotgun Team at last year's District Shooting event here in Union County. The team is on the verge of realizing a "home, sweet home" on Georgia 515.

UCSO to opt out of Drug Task Force

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Sheriff's Office is opting out of the Appalachian Drug Task Force, Sheriff Mack Mason said.

The program, dependent on state and federal dollars, is scheduled to run out of money in two years, leaving the four counties - Union, Lumpkin, Towns and White - that make up the task force to support the program out of each county's general fund.

The Sheriff's Office will opt out of the drug task force now and expand its Narcotics Division in February as necessary equipment is acquired, Sheriff Mason said.

"Our message to the drug dealers and drug couriers is simple, stay out of Union County," Sheriff Mason said.

Sheriff Mason believes his county is better off opting out of the drug task force considering that his department has two officers who made al-



Sheriff Mack Mason

most as many cases in 2013 as the other three counties in the task force combined.

"We were told that the federal and state grants are continuing to be cut out and the counties would have to bear the whole financial burden themselves in the next couple of years if it (drug task force) was to stay in effect,"

Sheriff Mason said. "Our two narcotics officers know the pushers and users here in Union County and like to handle cases themselves instead of turning them over to the drug task force."

"This in part is the reason our two agents in Union County made about the same number of arrests and seized the same amount of property (dollar-for-dollar) as did the other three counties in the drug task force combined," Sheriff Mason said.

Sheriff Mason has vowed to step up the Union County drug investigations and enforcement of the drug task force and focusing closer on the issues within Union County.

Sheriff Mason has assigned the investigator position, previously used in the drug task force, to the Union County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Division. The new Narcotics Division investigator, who is a highly skilled veteran

See Task Force, 2A

Class of '57 to leave its mark at UCHS stadium

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The first football team in Union County High School history is on the fund-raising trail to raise money for a lasting tribute to the Class of 1957, and the Panther football program.

Members of the 1957 Panthers, the first football team in school history, met last week at Blairsville City Hall for an organizational meeting to determine how to pay for a monument to be erected outside Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, and a life-size bronze sculpture of a Panther to be placed outside the team's field house.

The monument and the panther sculpture are lasting legacies of the school's 57-year-old football program. The 1957 team needs donations to help offset the costs. They will solicit businesses, individuals, and civic organizations to help pay for the almost \$10,000 in costs.

And, Panthers' 1957 Most Valuable Player Jim McAfee said it wouldn't hurt if the team had a new scoreboard.

"That's a different project for another day," he said. "It's possible we could get some corporate sponsorship for that project."

Jim Conley, a mem-



This life-size panther sculpture will become a permanent fixture outside the Union County Panthers' field house.

ber of the 1957 squad, who is mayor of Blairsville, said he felt local businesses and former Panthers would come to the rescue.

"Since 1957, there have been a lot of young men that have pulled on a Panther uniform," he said. "It was an honor to have played for Union County and to have been a member of that first team."

"I have faith those Panthers who have been a part of this program want their legacy documented at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium," he said.

Union County Panther football was founded in 1957.

At the time, only Roy Dyer had ever played football before that time-treasured date. The other 25 members of the team had barely seen a football, much less played the sport.

Under the leadership of Coach Dave Hardin and Assistant Coach R. Neal Collins, the Panthers shut out their first two oppo-

See Panthers, 3A

UCSO gets new car, cash for Shelby GT

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

How much is a 2011 Ford Shelby GT 500 Mustang awarded as a financial seizure in a drug-related bust worth?

Well, more than you would think.

The Union County Sheriff's Office received a new patrol car - approximate value \$26,000, plus \$19,000 in cash from King Ford in Murphy, NC for the vehicle seized in a drug-related bust, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

The case of the Shelby began on June 12, 2013 at about 3:40 p.m., as Union County Sheriff's Deputy Sally Tanner was dispatched to a call for a disabled vehicle along U.S. Highway 76, east of Blairsville.

The information Deputy Tanner received was that it looked like a person was unsteady on their feet, and trying to push the car out of a ditch.

Upon her arrival, she made contact with the person at the scene who was later identified as Tommy Michael Brown age 63 of Norcross.

Brown told Deputy Tanner that his car had stalled and rolled into the ditch.

While Tanner was talking with him, she looked inside the car and observed several smoking devices suspected to



Deputy Sally Tanner and Sheriff Mack Mason pose with the Shelby GT 500 that brought home a new patrol car and \$19,000 in cash.

be drug paraphernalia. During Deputy Tanner's conversation with Brown and her observation of the pipes in plain sight, she notified one of the narcotic investigators who responded to the scene.

While awaiting Deputy Tyler Miller's arrival, Brown told Deputy Tanner that he had some synthetic marijuana in the car.

Based on the drug paraphernalia she observed in plain sight and the admission made about the synthetic marijuana, a search was conducted.

Deputies Miller and Tanner found additional drug paraphernalia and a large quantity of synthetic marijuana in the Shelby.

Brown was placed under arrest for possession of drug related objects and possession of a controlled substance.

Brown's vehicle, a 2011 Ford Shelby GT 500 Mustang was impounded.

The investigation revealed that the car was his, and free and clear of loans or liens.

See Shelby, 3A

Qualifying shifts to March 3-March 7

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Qualifying for local, state and federal offices will be March 3-7 after the Georgia General Assembly swept the legislation to Gov. Nathan Deal who is expected to sign it this week.

Likewise, Georgia's primary elections will be held May 20.

HB 310, which passed both chambers with God's speed, makes state and local candidate elections coincide with federal candidate election dates to avoid holding two separate elections in all of Georgia's 159 counties.

District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, R-Dahlonega, said the vote to merge election dates was critical.

"Georgia is now required to have at least 45



State Sen. Steve Gooch

days of absentee balloting before the date of a runoff or primary election where a federal candidate is on the ballot," he said. "This means qualifying for public office will begin on March 3 and run through

March 7.

"That said, there is pressure to reach Year 40 earlier than previous years because of a shift in election qualifying dates," Sen. Gooch said. "A shorter legislative session saves Georgia taxpayers a substantial amount of money in per diem and temporary workers salary costs."

HB 310 was the first piece of legislation to hit the Senate floor in 2014, Sen. Gooch said.

"House Bill 310 will revise the schedule of state and local candidate elections to correspond with federal candidate election dates," he said. "Maintaining two separate election calendars places a heavy burden on state resources and would likely require a costly update to technology infrastructure. By

See Qualifying, 3A

Vol. 105 No. 4
2 Sections, 18 Pages
Weather
Thu: Clouds Hi 36 Lo 9
Fri: Sunny Hi 31 Lo 17
Sat: Clouds Hi 45 Lo 25

Arrests 6A
Church 9A
Classifieds 3B
Opinion 4A
Legals 4B
Obits 11A
Sports 8A

Daddy Daughter Dance
North Georgia Tech. College Feb 1st
See page 12A

2014 GMREC Event and Seminar Calendar
See page 7A

First Meeting of 2014
Cook's Country Kitchen, Jan 23rd
See page 6A

BASKETBALL:
Tues. Jan 21 @ Rabun Co. 6:30 PM
Fri. Jan 24 vs. Washington-Wilkes 7 PM
Sat. Jan 25 @ Fannin Co. 3 PM

WRESTLING:
Tues. Jan 21 vs. Hayesville, NC 5 PM
Sat. Jan 25 @ Stephens Co. 9 AM