

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Speaker Ralston gets his day on the floor with Union students

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Talk about your tough questions. Georgia House Speaker David Ralston shook his head as he stood before students last week at Union County middle and high schools on Wednesday.

Ralston, the 73rd Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives, had never faced a grilling like this on the State House Floor.

He came to talk with students to explain the three different branches of state government and his role as Speaker of the House.

He left feeling like he had just passed his toughest test.

The students asked Speaker Ralston how he felt about charter schools, how much money he made, how he felt about gay rights, how did he feel about companies hiring illegal immigrants, about people paying illegal immigrants under the table, and they asked him why he only voted in tie-breakers.

Speaker Ralston was somewhat stunned by the flurry of questions and depth of each one.

He took the time to answer each student's question individually and respectfully and stayed at least 40 minutes past his scheduled time slot. He didn't want to leave any student's question hanging in the balance.

"When I was your age, nobody cared about anything that happened North of Atlan-

ta," Speaker Ralston said. "Every governor and Lt. Governor was from South Georgia until a man named Zell Miller changed everything. Now our governor is from Gainesville, our Lt. Governor is from Gainesville, and your Speaker of the House is from Blue Ridge."

District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison, (R-Blairsville) who attended the events with Speaker Ralston, joked about the amount of questions tossed at the Speaker. "I'm glad they didn't give him any softball questions," Rep. Allison quipped.

More than anything else, the students learned that Speaker Ralston is a down-to-earth individual.

He told the students how the defining moment of his parent's generation was Pearl Harbor. The defining moment of

his own generation was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and the moment that has defined the current generation took place on Sept. 11, 2001.

"I am honored that you folks would let me come and visit with you," Speaker Ralston said. "Although I almost changed my mind after I saw the Union County and Fannin County football score," he said jokingly.

The Fannin County resident told the students about the changes that he has seen his lifetime and how the Georgia History textbooks from his era are very different from today's version.

"My textbooks didn't talk about Georgia having the world's busiest airport with



Georgia House Speaker David Ralston answers questions on government last week at Union County Middle School. Photo/Todd Forrest

## It's official: the cannery is now open

By Charles Duncan  
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More than 50 people attended the opening ceremonies for the new Union County Canning Plant at the Union County Farmers Market.

Dignitaries came from Washington, D.C., Atlanta and Gainesville to help with the much anticipated opening of the cannery.

The new cannery, which received \$192,000 in grant money for construction, was a vital community project, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said.

Paris said that the Union County Board of Education approached him about the cannery three years ago.

Union County has had a cannery operation since 1947 and it was provided by the school system. The cannery had become run down and underutilized. With all the budget cuts the school system faced, the Board of Education let the county know that it would not be continuing the cannery operation any longer, Paris said.

An institution and fam-

ily tradition for many would be discontinued unless the county could take over the operation and maintenance, Paris said.

"Many community members approached myself and County Agent Mickey Cummings practically begging for the county to make sure that the cannery continue operation," Paris said. "Some families had as many as five generations who had used the cannery through the years."

With the economy in a downward spiral, Paris made the call for the county to operate the cannery for a year just to see how much it was utilized and see if it was a needed service. The same process was followed in determining the necessity of a local Farmers Market.

Word spread that modest improvements had been made to the cannery. Use of the existing facility picked up significantly.

"It was packed with users each time the doors opened," Paris said. "The use continued to expand until last year we had about 250 different people using the cannery."

The Litmus test was complete, the need was there



County Agent Mickey Cummings works the apple sauce at the Union County Canning Plant last week. Photo/Charles Duncan

for a continued local planting operation. The county's Farmers Market was already a huge success. Paris determined that building a cannery on the Farmers Market site could be a huge community asset.

He began to pursue

grants to help offset the construction of a new cannery.

After a commitment of nearly \$200,000 in federal and state grant dollars, Paris checked to see if there would

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## Union County celebrates Sam Ensley Day in style

By Todd Forrest  
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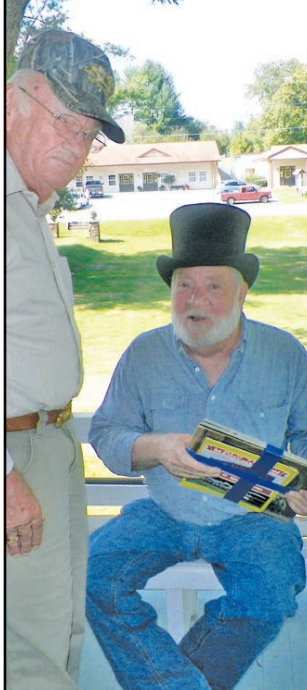
Bluegrass and Gospel music filled the air Saturday as *The Music Man* Sam Ensley was given his own special day in Union County.

That day came after Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, signed a proclamation earlier this month declaring Sept. 15 as Sam Ensley Day.

The Young Cane Lodge, The Mock House, the Union County Historical Society and musicians from all over Union County have been preparing for this day for quite some time.

With a crowd gathered around the listen to the tunes of Alex Tomlinson and his grandmother Cheryl Tomlinson, Alex took a moment

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Sam Ensley celebrates his day with Eric England at The Mock House. Photo/Todd Forrest

## Three added to Ag Hall of Fame

By Charles Duncan  
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The Union County Agricultural Hall of Fame now has three new members.

Union County Extension Agent Mickey Cummings, who also serves as Market Manager at the Union County Farmers Market, announced that Newt Miller, Paul Paris and Bonnell Stone are the 2012 inductees.

Miller, Paris and Stone join John Bailey, Bluford Dyer, Alvin Todd, M.D. Collins, Marion Dyer, and Jim Dobson as members of the Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Newt Miller was store manager for a decade for Gold Kist Cooperative and for 25



Newt Miller, Paul Paris and Bonnell Stone are the three newest members of the Union County Agricultural Hall of Fame. The ceremony was Saturday at The Farmers Market. It brings the number of HOF members to nine.

years, served as assistant manager of the cooperative.

"Newt had the first bulk fertilizer and liquid nitrogen spreader service in the county," Cummings said. "He



supplied bulk feed for poultry; Newt farmed cattle, hogs, corn, sweet corn and soybeans. He was a Charter member of the Jaycees when they started up the Sorghum Festival."



David Miller accepted the award on behalf of his father, who was not able to attend the ceremony on Saturday at the

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## Badge 221 Remembered



Sharon Whittle lights candles during the first Candlelight Vigil in memory of her son Derrick, a Union County Sheriff's deputy who was critically injured on Sept. 15, 2011. He died three days later. See Story Page 3A Photo/Charles Duncan

## Reece Farm receives high honor

By Charles Duncan  
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The Byron Herbert Reece Society celebrated their namesake's 95th birthday on Friday as the Byron Herbert Reece Farm and Heritage Center was literally put on the Southern Literary Trail map.

Likewise, the Farm and Heritage Center could soon put Union County on the map of erstwhile lovers of poetry and fiction, looking to connect with The Mountain Poet for the first time.

Ultimately, the notoriety of Reece's home place



The Reece Farm joins the Southern Literary Trail. Photo/Charles Duncan

## Paris: 'Union in sound shape'

By Charles Duncan  
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If building permits are a sign of increasing economic growth, Union County is on the upswing economically.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris gave his State of the County address last week at the Union County Farmers Market.

The commissioner told the more than 60 persons on hand to hear him speak that the county had issued 11 more building permits through August than it did in all of 2011.

"Sales tax revenues are up, the unemployment rate for



Commissioner Lamar Paris remembers 9/11 during his annual State of the County Address at the Union County Farmers Market.

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**Blood Drive**  
September 19, 2012  
12pm-4:45pm  
at  
Union General Hospital, Inc.  
Sponsored by  
BLOOD ASSURANCE

**UCMS Football**  
Thursday, September 20  
host Copper Basin at Home  
**Lady Panthers Softball**  
Fri. & Sat., September 21-22  
at Brookwood Tournament  
**JV Football**  
Thursday, September 20  
at Gilmer

Run Above The Clouds  
Suches, Georgia  
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**Indian Summer Festival**  
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