

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Voters say 'yes' to SPLOST referendum

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

"Thank you." That was the sentiment expressed by Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris to the voters of Union County for an overwhelming vote of confidence in extending the 1-cent Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax.

Union County voters supported SPLOST IV by a 70.31 percent clip. Supporters cast 1,767 votes in favor of the referendum. Naysayers cast 746 votes against an extension of the 1-cent SPLOST collections.

"I want to first thank everyone who supported this SPLOST vote," Commissioner Paris said. "It is huge for the continued progress of this county and should help insure that our property tax rate re-

mains as one of the lowest in the state of Georgia."

All totaled, 2,519 registered voters cast ballots, or 19.25 percent. Early voting accounted for 1,113 votes, with 834 supporting the referendum, and 279 in opposition.

"For SPLOST IV, we have used a conservative projection of \$19 million total collections in the six-year period from 2015-2021," Paris said. "We have entered into an inter-governmental agreement with the City of Blairsville, where they will receive 7.89 percent of collections, or an estimated \$1.5 million."

Collections for SPLOST IV will begin in April 2015, meaning no lapse in sales tax collections, Paris said.

"Through continuation of the SPLOST, a portion of the money collected by this tax is from patrons of other counties and states that either shop in or

travel through Union County," Paris said. "The revenues generated from non-county residents help fund capital projects that otherwise would be funded by Union County residents or would not be possible at all."

"The necessity for many of these services and facilities will not go away," he said. "The easiest way to pay for them is through continuing the SPLOST, with visitors and residents alike helping to make the improvements possible. Without the continuation of SPLOST, the burden would be on taxpayers by the necessity to increase the property tax rate to be able to meet the needs of our county."

Paris pointed out that the 1-cent tax is not a new SPLOST sales tax.

"It is only a continuation of the current sales tax - 1 penny out of the 7 pennies we pay on a dollar," Paris said.

The \$17.5 million collected from SPLOST IV will go for multiple county projects, Paris said.

"First and foremost, we will work on roads and bridges," Paris said. "This is ongoing, all the time, every month, for the duration of the SPLOST. We are proud that we have some of the best-maintained roads of any county around, and we definitely want to keep it that way. This will take about 30-35 percent of the sales tax revenue."

SPLOST IV also will go toward completing the payoff of the Union County Community Center, Paris said.

"It will be our intention to pay this debt off during the SPLOST IV, but that will depend on actual collections," Paris said. "This will take about 25 percent to 30 percent

See SPLOST, 2A

Mayor Conley receives vote of confidence for third term

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The voters have spoken in the Blairsville mayor's race.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley returns to office after he defeated challenger Tom Payton with almost 75 percent of the citywide vote.

He'll get back to work today at City Hall.

After 62 of the 83 ballots were cast in his favor, Mayor Conley and the Blairsville City Council will hold its first post-election Council Meeting less than 24 hours later.

"The voters have spoken and they have spoken loudly," Mayor Conley said. "We've got a lot of things that we need to get back to work on and our work never ends."

You can bet that there won't be much adieu about the



Mayor Jim Conley

election, other than a few congratulatory handshakes. Mayor Conley has been backed by the City Council from the get-go, one of the main reasons the election swung so heavily in the Mayor's favor.

"Knowing that the council has your back means a lot," Mayor Conley said. "I want to thank everyone of the council members who helped

See Mayor, 2A

Veterans Day ceremony Nov. 11th

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Monday, Nov. 11th, veterans from throughout Union County will gather at the Union County Community Center to honor veterans with a Veterans Day program and luncheon.

Beginning at 11 a.m., American Legion Ira T. Weaver Post 121, Disabled American Veterans Woodrow Wilson Chapter 11, and Brown-Davis-Woody Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7394 will host the program at the Union County Community Center.

The program's guest speaker will be U.S. Army retired Master Sgt. Charles (Bill) W. Honaker Sr.

The program will include a Missing Man Table and Honors Nation's and country's missing and beloved comrades.

It also includes recogni-



The 2013 Veterans Day ceremony is scheduled at Union County Community Center. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

tion of attending Prisoners of War, or, their widows, a recap of the great service provided by the North Georgia Honor Guard, and presentation of the Commander's Award.

The Commander's Award is presented annually to recognize a worthy veteran for outstanding contributions to the community and veterans organizations throughout the year.

The program runs concurrently with the luncheon and is scheduled to conclude by 1 p.m.

Lunch is \$6 per person and is being catered by Matt Leonard and Huddle House. Everyone is welcome, but seating is limited.

Call rspaulding@vs.state.ga.us to let us know you want to attend.

A crowd welcomes dedication of Choestoe Community Center

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Choestoe - Ethelene Dyer Jones was her usual loquacious self last week as she spoke to a crowd during the dedication ceremony for the new Choestoe Voting Precinct and Community Center.

After all, she spent many a day at the building better known for education from 1936 to 1954.

Jones was one of the last teachers at the Choestoe Schoolhouse. Her son, Keith Jones, donated the land, on which the historic schoolhouse now sits.

She told the crowd of the accomplishments of M.D. Collins, retired State School Superintendent, who grew up in Choestoe.

One of the biggest, if not the biggest accomplishment, was bringing the school systems, from the one teacher, one schoolhouse to consolidation of county school systems.



Union County now has a new voting precinct in Choestoe, as well as a new community center. Keith Jones, Ethelene Dyer Jones and Commissioner Paris do the honors last week.

"He got free textbooks so that the parents wouldn't have to pay for their child's textbooks," Ethelene Dyer Jones said. "He started the teacher retirement system of Georgia, so that teachers like me wouldn't have to worry

after retirement. He started vocational school training. I could go on and on."

More than 50 people attended last week's dedication ceremony, as Commissioner

See Choestoe, 6A

Board of Education votes for Charter System

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education will apply for Charter School status from the Georgia Board of Education.

Last week the BOE voted unanimously to apply for charter school status during a called meeting at Union County Elementary School.

Moving to Charter status was supported by Chair Gary Davenport, and board members Julie Barton, Cindy Byers, Tony Hunter and John Strickland.

The vote came following a meeting with around 25 faculty and staff members of the Union County Schools. The School Board, Schools Superintendent Gary Stepp, and Assistant Superintendent



Gary Davenport

Dr. Jeremy Williams were on hand to field questions and put to rest any concerns of Union County's educators.

"I feel that the meeting was a success and we were able to remove a lot of concerns that teachers had about these changes," Assistant Superintendent Dr. Williams said. "One of the

questions we heard a lot was in regards to changing the salaries, since a lot of charter schools do that, however, our district will not be adjusting the salaries at all. Overall, I think that most of the teachers feel like this is going in a positive direction."

While some changes will be noticeable, it will be business as usual for Union County Schools, while improving the quality of education, without any drastic adjustments to teaching methods.

"As a district, we will remain a public school system, but we will enter into an agreement with the State Board of Education on specific goals for the next five years," Dr. Williams said. "The four major areas of focus

See Charter, 3A

Blairsville man charged in drug bust

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Narcotics Division has been busy - again.

On Oct. 29th the Division executed a search warrant at a home at 80 Wilson Way, owned by David Gerald Hinnenkamp, 46, of Blairsville, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Union County Narcotics Division Detectives executed the search warrant and Hinnenkamp was arrested and charged with possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, illegal possession of controlled substance, distribution of a controlled substance, and possession of marijuana.

Hinnenkamp is being held without bond, Union County Jail records show.

Also arrested and



David Hinnenkamp

Mason said.

According to the Union County Jail report, Hinnenkamp is charged with possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, illegal possession of controlled substance, distribution of a controlled substance, and possession of marijuana.

Hinnenkamp is being held without bond, Union County Jail records show.

Also arrested and

charged during the Oct. 29th arrest of Hinnenkamp was 20-year-old Christopher James Anderson, of Blue Ridge, Sheriff Mason said.

Anderson was charged with possession of marijuana, illegal possession of a controlled substance, and possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, Union County Jail records show.

Hinnenkamp was arrested earlier this year in a separate incident, also involving alleged illegal drug activity, Union County Sheriff's reports show.

On June 13th, Union County Narcotics Division detectives executed a search warrant at Hinnenkamp's home and he was arrested and charged with two counts distribution of methamphetamine, Sheriff Mason said.

Union General Hospital receives high honor



Mike Gowder

North Georgia News
News Special

Union General Hospital has been named the 2013 Women's Choice Award for being voted one of America's Best Hospitals for Patient Experience by women.

This distinction identifies the country's best healthcare institutions based on criteria that consider female patient satisfaction and what women say they want from a hospital including quality physician communications, responsiveness of nurses and support staff, cleanliness and trusted referrals from other women.

Hospitals qualify for the annual list of America's Best Hospitals for Patient Experience based on an in-depth proprietary scoring process. The scoring incorporates a national, standardized survey of patients' perspectives of hospital care reported by the



Union General Hospital has been named the 2013 Women's Choice Award winner for being one of America's Best Hospitals for patient experience by women.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and an analysis that weighs criteria identified as the most important to women for a patient satisfaction.

Hospitals named as American's Best are then invited to join an elite network of brands, across multiple industries, which carry the Women's Choice Award, symbolizing their commitment to women.

"Winning this award is further proof that Union General Hospital remains one of North Georgia's best healthcare facilities," said Michael Gowder, CEO, Union General Hospital, Inc.

"Congratulations are due to the physicians and staff of Union General for their outstanding contributions to patient care," Dr. Gowder added.

Women make or influence more than 90 percent of healthcare decisions for themselves and their families, according to a study published by the American Academy of Family Physicians. The Award signals that a hospital meets high standards regarding a woman's preferences, and the distinction allows women to make informed decisions about where to go for care for themselves or their family.

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Your help is needed!
see page 10A for details

Woody Gap School Construction Class Fruit Fundraiser
Last day to order is November 15th!
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Annual Craft Show
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Varsity Football:
FRIDAY, Nov. 8th 7:30 PM
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