

# HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## A Year in Review: Remembering the Top Stories of 2018

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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Last year is officially in the record books, and with it, 52 weeks' worth of local history. Here are some of the top stories of 2018.

The 2018 midterm elections were big news around the state and country, and they were big news in Union County, as well.

Perhaps the biggest local election item that had everybody watching the polls in the May 22 General Primary was whether or not voters would support a fifth consecutive Education SPLOST.

And voters did support it, giving the ESPLOST V referendum a decisive thumbs up with 69.66 percent of the vote in favor. All told, 3,756 people voted for it and 1,636

people voted against it.

An ESPLOST is a 1-cent sales tax that is collected by school systems for up to five years to build new facilities, renovate existing facilities, upgrade HVAC systems in the schools, add to aging bus fleets, update technology and more.

The previous ESPLOST expired over the summer of 2018, shortly after the new one passed, and ESPLOST V collections began promptly on July 1. ESPLOST V has a collections cap of \$21 million.

Three local school board seats were also up for grabs in the General Primary, as the only people to qualify did so as Republicans, meaning whoever won in the primary would be elected following the Nov. 6 General Election.

All three incumbents – Tony Hunter, Keith Potts and

Patrick White – retained their seats on the Union County Board of Education following the May 22 primary.

Of course, Union County wasn't done with elections, not by a long shot.

There was the July 24 General Primary Runoff, which saw the nomination of Brian Kemp over Casey Cagle as the Republican candidate for governor.

Months later, Union Countians voted in the Nov. 6 General Election, which featured another major ballot initiative – SPLOST V.

SPLOST V should not be confused with the ESPLOST that passed in May, as the two are different taxes.

While both are 1-cent countywide sales taxes that have been around for years now, the ESPLOST is collected for use



Members of the Union County Board of Education in the meeting officially establishing the Union County Schools Police Department on July 17, 2018. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

by the school system, while the SPLOST is collected for Union County Government projects, with a small percentage going

to the city of Blairsville. SPLOST V will result in a projected \$24 million in collections over a period of six

years to fund county and city capital outlay projects, such as roadwork, public safety. See 2018, Page 3A

## First responders work around the clock, even on holidays



Union County E-911 Dispatch, L-R: Lt. Millie Baxter, Carrie King, Ashley Churchill, Dawna Townsend and Director David Dyer. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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For Americans all across the country, holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's serve as special times for families to gather round in celebration of faith and new beginnings. People travel, break

bread, share traditions, and otherwise spend time with one another in a predetermined grouping of days set aside for just such festive functions and activities.

But first responders often don't get time off during the holidays, regardless of the occasion or time of year. For families of first

responders, this usually means meals being eaten and presents being opened without a treasured family member's presence, or a major reorganization of everyone else's holiday schedules to accommodate first responder work responsibilities. It takes a special kind

See *First Responders*, Page 2A

## Lone plane crash survivor undergoing physical rehab in Atlanta

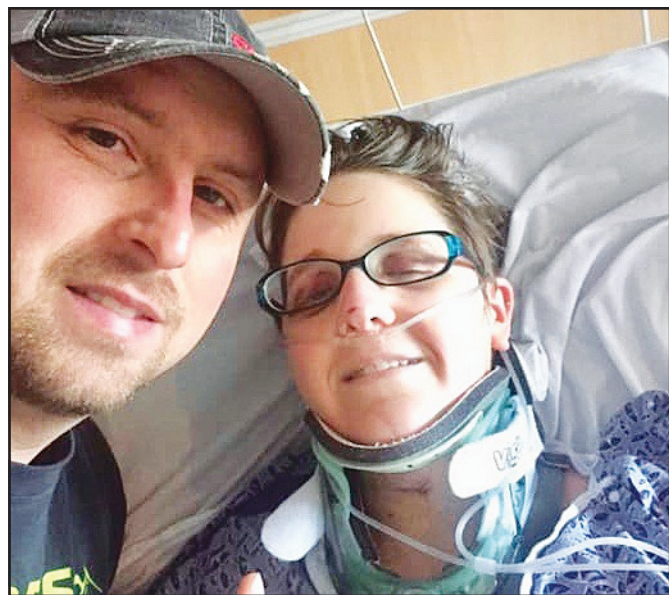
By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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The family of Brittany Thomas Whitener, the lone survivor of the Dec. 19 plane crash off Kings Road in Blairsville, is asking for continued prayers as she recovers from life-threatening injuries she sustained as a passenger in the accident.

Whitener, 29, of Morganton, is currently undergoing physical therapy at the Shepherd Center for Spinal Cord & Brain Injury Rehabilitation in Atlanta, according to the family.

When the accident occurred on Dec. 19, claiming the lives of fellow plane occupants Robert Atkinson, Renea Greiner and Michelle Seay, Whitener was airlifted from the scene of the crash to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville.

There, doctors discovered that Whitener had suffered a



Brittany Thomas Whitener with her husband Junior at Northeast Georgia Medical Center in a photo posted by Mr. Whitener to Facebook on Dec. 24, 2018, with the caption, "My Christmas present."

broken neck and back from the impact of the crash, and she underwent several emergency

surgeries that lasted into the early morning hours before

See *Whitener*, Page 2A

## Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll to retire on Jan. 15

By Shawn Jarrard  
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After 17 years of service as the top cop in Blairsville, Police Chief Johnny Carroll will retire from his post on Tuesday, Jan. 15.

Friends of Carroll are invited to join him for a special retirement reception at the Brackett Room behind United Community Bank on Friday, Jan. 11. The reception will run from 12 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The city will also be hosting a proper retirement party for Carroll on Jan. 15, his last day, to which all city employees and Carroll's family have been invited to attend.

"He's done an excellent



Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll

job as chief of police for his department and for the city," said Blairsville Mayor Jim

Conley. "He never ever missed a day's work unless it was for sickness."

"The city of Blairsville has been a better place to live for having Johnny Carroll. He was around and about in all the businesses, especially the banks."

Before entering law enforcement, Carroll owned both a printing business and a manufacturing business.

He and his son, Shannon Carroll, paid their own way through police academy, and became the only father and son duo in the state to have attended and graduated police academy together.

The two worked side by side in the Union County

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## Historical Society seeking funds to restore heat to courthouse

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Historical Society is in search of funds to help with heating repairs in the Historic Courthouse.

"The entire downstairs furnace is out," said 2019 Historical Society President Sam Ensley. "The upstairs is working, however, it stopped working and recently started working again, but it still needs attention."

This heating problem started about a month ago, with the problem becoming more noticeable as the heating units continue to deteriorate.

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The Historic Union County Courthouse at Christmas

## UCSO looking for Lee in connection with stolen vehicles

By Shawn Jarrard  
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editor@nganews.com

At press time Monday, the Union County Sheriff's Office was seeking the public's help in locating Jacob Lee, 20, of Blairsville, who bush bonded after a short vehicle pursuit on Saturday, Dec. 29.

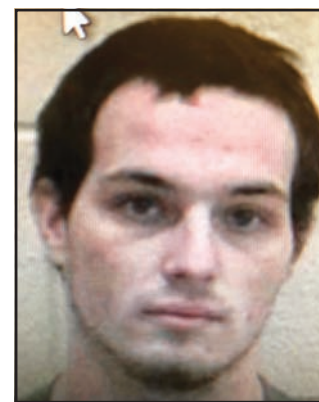
Lee has been on the radar of Sheriff's Office investigators since Dec. 21, when he became a suspect in an alleged stolen vehicle case, according to

UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn.

Authorities had been unable to locate Lee until around 3:45 p.m. on Dec. 29, when Sgt. Andrew Hammond, a patrol deputy, attempted to pull over a vehicle on Old Blue Ridge Highway, said Osborn.

The vehicle – which turned out to be stolen – made a short chase before the driver – who turned out to be Lee – made a run for it on foot, said Osborn.

See *Lee*, Page 3A



Jacob Lee

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