

ESPLOST

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2016 College and Career Ready Performance Index, a comprehensive rubric that grades many aspects of each

school. “When you look at us as a school system, you’ll notice a few things,” said Dr. Williams. “Last year (2015) was a down year for us, we had a little bit of a drop. The No. 1 reason was we had a change in a test. “We had gotten very good at taking the CRCT. We’d gotten very good at rote memorization, spitting things back out. Where we struggled was more of that high-order thinking, the writing responses, how do we respond to text, how do

you explain the reasoning behind things.” After making several adjustments, Dr. Williams said, the schools were able to bring their scores up from 2015 – so much so that they went from sixth in the Pioneer RESA last year to being first this year. And out of 180 school districts in the state, Dr. Williams reported that Union County Schools ranked seventh in 2016 CCRPI results, putting Union County squarely in the Top 10 of school districts statewide.



Representatives from Bowen & Watson attended the December 2016 meeting of the Union County Board of Education to discuss their bid proposal for upcoming school projects.

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on her childhood and the loss of her father at a very young age. Brendle could not shake the word ‘change’ and what it means within the scope of adolescence in society, and she wanted to find a way to impact the community in a positive way. “Two weeks before my sixth birthday, my father committed suicide,” said Brendle. “Because of that, I often struggled with my identity and what that meant for me. As I got older, I began to see that I’m definitely not the only person to have this kind of problem, and it can happen for a lot of different reasons, primarily to young people.

“I founded Change to help create environments for growth and relationships among young people so they know they are not alone, and that they are important members of the community.”

Centered on the group’s slogan, “You matter, your life is important, someone needs

you,” Brendle hosts activities and school-based events to promote positive relationships among students with adults in the community.

“In February, we’re going to be participating in a program called No One Eats Alone,” said Brendle. “What we’re going to be doing is taking some adults from the community and a couple of high school students, and going to the middle school to eat lunch with the students there.

“It’s all on the premise that school violence starts in the middle school lunchroom. Lunchtime for kids, especially in middle school, can be kind of scary. You’re either sitting with your friends and there can be peer pressure during that, or you’re eating alone.”

No One Eats Alone is just one of the countless activities Brendle has scheduled for the year, and she hopes to continue growing the organization and community involvement through such programs and events, like the New Year’s Masquerade.

By hosting a New Year’s Eve celebration, Brendle aspired to create the sense of community and importance that serves as the backbone for the organization. While not heavily attended during its first year, the event provided an inviting space for area youth to ring in the new year together, with music, fellowship and plenty of coffee provided by Cabin Coffee.

Though Brendle does not know if she will continue to

host a New Year’s celebration annually, she does urge those in the community who want to be involved in this program to join. Both adolescents and adults are invited to visit one of the group’s monthly meetings, which are held on the first Saturday of the month at 2 p.m. at Cabin Coffee in Blairsville.

“I tell people all the time, if you want to get involved, we need your time,” said Brendle. “Time is a commodity that no one has much of. Young people don’t care where you spend your money; they care where you spend your time, so it’s a big deal to them, even if they don’t say it.

“Time spent with these kids can mean a lot more than anything you could ever buy them.”

Wildfires

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The Richard Russell fire was one of two in the area that was started by car crashes, with the second fire occurring in nearby Lumpkin County, just off of 129 South in Swain’s Cove, only a few miles from Neel’s Gap. This fire covered an expanse of approximately 200 acres, but has also since been contained by USFS officials.

“The last we checked with the U.S. Forest Service, both fires are considered contained and monitored,” said Union County Fire Chief David Dyer. “This means that they are currently not out, they have lines around them, and the U.S. Forest Service is monitoring to see if there are any hotspots or anything that may get out.

“But these fires are very close to being declared completely out.”

With how easily these two fires started and spread, Chief Dyer urges residents to continue to be vigilant about open flames, even though the recent countywide burn ban was lifted. According to Chief Dyer, just because the area has seen rainfall does not mean that the county is no longer in a drought.

“We’re still in a drought,” said Chief Dyer. “We’re not in an exceptional drought anymore, we’re in an extreme drought as of right now. We still need a good bit of rain to get us out of this drought.

“It’s still dry. The air is dry, and fire season does not technically start until January. That’s when the air is really dry and it dries the leaves out a lot, increasing the chance of a wildfire.”

According to the United States Drought Monitor website, an exceptional drought, classified as a D4 drought, is the most severe level of drought by which an area can be categorized, and Union County has only moved one level up from that, to a D3 extreme drought classification.

These categories are determined by precipitation accumulation, soil moisture, agricultural and economical impacts, as well as many other waterway and seasonal observations.

For Union County and the surrounding area to be lifted from a D3 extreme drought, there needs to be at least five inches of rainfall, though preferably a few inches more, something officials hope to see in the coming month. While residents can have outdoor fires if they first obtain a burn permit, please remain cautious and do not leave any fires unattended.

“With these high winds we’ve been experiencing, and when it’s dried out like it is, we still need a little bit more rain,” said Chief Dyer. “People can still burn if they can get a burn permit, but they need to use a lot more awareness and caution.

“People can have bonfires and outdoor fire pits, but they need to be very aware that the fire can get out. Residents need to proceed with caution when burning, and they do not need to leave fires alone. Someone needs to be there with the fire at all times or the fire needs to be put out completely.”



Hi there! Tessa here. I am a 9 month old spayed female Great Dane mix. I was taken in at Mountain Shelter along with my brother. We were abandoned by previous owners but thanks to Mountain Shelter, we are warm and well fed. They keep telling me I am the sweetest dog they have seen. You need to check me out for yourself though. I do like other dogs and I am just an all-around sweet girl. I can be adopted from Mountain Shelter January 2nd through January 9th for a \$50 fee.



Meow! It’s me, the beautiful green eyed Gracie. I am a spayed female, grey and white (mostly grey) cat who is a year and a half old. I am a talker so you will know when I’m around. I am very shy at first, it takes me a bit to warm up. I would actually do better as a barn cat. I am very aware and am on the look out for anything. I am quick on my feet so if it is a mouser you want, I would do a good job. I am ready for my forever home. Stop by and see me at Mountain Shelter. I know you will be taken with my big beautiful green eyes. I can be adopted from Mountain Shelter for a \$10 fee.