

North Georgia News

75¢

2 Sections 20 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

Snow brings slick roads but no major incidents

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The winter storm that moved through the region Friday, Jan. 10, ended up being a best-case scenario for residents, dropping just 2 to 3 inches of snow while causing minimal power outages, downed trees and wrecks in Union County.

Fortunately, the forecast of 30-plus mph wind gusts never materialized, but impacts from the storm continued over the weekend as temperatures stayed below freezing from the onset into Sunday morning, with icy backroads being the main concern.

Snow moved in after daylight Friday, dropping fluffy

flakes into the afternoon before transitioning to a brief period of sleet. A wintry mix resumed overnight Friday, contributing to small backroads remaining icy, but main roads were clear – albeit slushy – as early as Saturday morning.

As always, county public safety agencies and the Road Department were prepared for worse. First responders attended two National Weather Service briefings in the run-up to the snow, acting accordingly to make sure all personnel, vehicles and equipment were ready to respond.

The Union County Emergency Management Agency opened the Emergency Operations Center inside Fire

Station No. 1 at 7 a.m. Friday, before the first snowflake appeared, and all agencies had additional personnel on standby.

EMA Director David Dyer commended residents for largely staying home, noting that the Union County Sheriff's Office and Blairsville Police Department responded to just 15 vehicle accidents during the worst part of the storm; only one of the wrecks included injuries.

Pretty much all county roadways were blanketed with snow on Friday, and the Road Department responded by spreading salt and gravel mixtures and deploying

See January Snow, Page 10A



State and local road crews stayed busy over the weekend spreading salt and gravel while blading snow off thoroughfares in response to the first winter storm of the season.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Union General welcomes first baby born in 2025

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Little miss Oakleigh Ellamae Payne rang in the new year with her birth as Union General Hospital's first baby of 2025.

She entered the world at 11:56 a.m. on Jan. 2, delivered by Dr. Kimberly Denton. Weighing in at 7 pounds, 3 ounces, the healthy baby girl is home and settling in nicely.

Parents Tori and Evan Payne of Hiwassee Dam, North Carolina, couldn't be prouder, and their two sons – Danner, 10, and Waylon, 3 – are excited about their new status as big brothers.

"They absolutely love her," Tori said. "It's like that's all they care about. 'What's she doing? How's she doing? Is she eating good? Is she sleeping good?'" They just want to love on her all day long."

Tori said her pregnancy was thankfully uneventful, and the delivery went smoothly. She had nothing but praise for the Union General Labor & Delivery team that helped to usher in the family's newest addition.

And Tori was especially

See First Baby Oakleigh, Page 2A



Proud parents Evan and Tori Payne with newborn daughter Oakleigh Ellamae. Photo/Submitted

Sgt. Pilote graduates from Firearms Instructor program

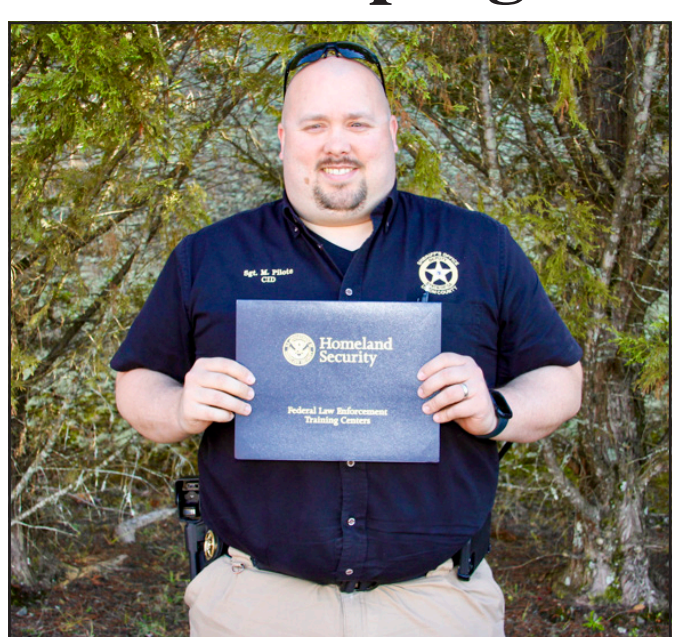
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sheriff's Sgt. Marc Pilote is now a fully certified Firearms Instructor, having just completed a specialized training program administered by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center that is housed within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Pilote is stationed within the UCSO Criminal Investigations Division, where he focuses on crimes that occur between people, like assaults, as well as Internet Crimes Against Children.

When he started his law enforcement career here in 2014, he set a 10-year personal goal of becoming an instructor to offer state-mandated and additional trainings to local deputies.

He met that goal last summer, earning his general instructor credentials through the University of North Georgia Police Academy, enabling him to teach – and even create



UCSO Sgt. Marc Pilote holding his Firearms Instructor certificate. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

courses to meet local needs – on topics ranging from use of force to body cameras, de-escalation and crime scene management.

And last month, Pilote furthered his goal by graduating from the Firearms

Instructor Training Program – an advanced level of training required to expand the type of instruction he can give at the Sheriff's Office.

Pilote traveled to the

See Firearms Instructor, Page 2A

New Sheriff Dyer enjoys a 'seamless transition'

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

From successful grant notifications to donations to the Fire Department and preparing for major winter weather, Union County Sheriff Shawn Dyer has kept busy seemingly every minute of the roughly two weeks he has been in his new role leading the Sheriff's Office.

Of course, there's the law enforcement side of things, and Dyer's office has already overseen a significant drug bust in 2025.

On Tuesday, Jan. 7, detectives with the UCSO Narcotics Division initiated an investigation into Barry "Brock" Harper, 50, of Towns County, Dyer said.

Harper has had multiple past run-ins with local law enforcement, and this time, the Sheriff's Office was looking to take him into custody on felony probation warrants from another county, Dyer said.

Around 7 p.m. that evening, detectives staked out



Shawn Dyer
Union County Sheriff

one of Harper's known travel routes along Gum Log Road, off which he lives in Young Harris, Dyer said.

When detectives spotted Harper and attempted to stop his vehicle, he fled to a nearby residence he is known to

frequent, and there, he wrecked his vehicle and disappeared into the night, Dyer said.

The Sheriff's Office called in a K-9 apprehension team with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law

See Sheriff Dyer, Page 4A

Blairsville City Council holds first-of-year business meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Blairsville City Council and Mayor Jim Conley took care of some annual housekeeping business in their first regular meeting of the year on Tuesday, Jan. 7.

Usually, the council meets the second Tuesday of every month, but the city's

charter stipulates that the first meeting of each year fall on the first Tuesday in January.

To kick off the meeting, the council voted to re-appoint Marvin Harkins as city attorney and Kaye McCann as city clerk and election superintendent, with no discussion necessary.

Continuing with the annual housekeeping, the council also agreed that

Councilman Robert "Buddy" Moore would remain as the mayor pro tempore – the designated backup person for Mayor Conley should he become unable to perform his official duties for any reason.

In similar fashion, council members opted to keep in place the same liaison positions as 2024. Each

See City Council, Page 5A



L-R: Blairsville City Councilman Robert "Buddy" Moore, Councilwoman Rhonda Mahan, Councilwoman Kayla Hemphill, Mayor Jim Conley, Councilman Tony Dyer and Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook on Jan. 7. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



Vol. 116 No. 04

Arrests - 8A Legals - 8B
Church - 2B Obits - 4B
Classifieds - 8B Sports - 6B
Opinion - 6A

January is Stalking Awareness Month

See Page 3A

Board of Elections 2025 Meeting Schedule

See Page 8A

Polar Bear Plunge into Lake Nottely Jan. 25

See Page 3B



You work hard for your money.
Shouldn't it be working hard for you?

BLAIR BURCH | LPL FINANCIAL ADVISOR

BLAIRSVILLE | 177 Highway 515 East | 706-745-0435



Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor and broker-dealer (member FINRA/SIPC). Investment and insurance products are not FDIC insured, are not bank guaranteed, and may lose value.

Firearms Instructor...from Page 1A

federal training facility in Charleston, South Carolina, to take part in the 80-hour course from Dec. 9-20. The course was extensive, featuring all theoretical and practical aspects of training other law enforcement officers in how to properly shoot and handle firearms.

In addition to the knowledge component, Pilote spent a lot of hands-on time with his service pistol running through various drills designed to improve skills like getting on target from the holster and general marksmanship.

He fired at least 1,000 rounds during the training, primarily from his sidearm but also from rifles and shotguns – and that's a conservative estimate, he said.

As an official Firearms Instructor, Pilote will be working with fellow deputies to accomplish their state-mandated firearms qualifications at the Union County Gun Range.

"This now allows me to go and teach our deputies various firearm drills and techniques," Pilote said. "If there's any kind of remedial training needed, I've been trained in various ways to help diagnose shooting problems and how to fix them."

No matter their experience level, all UCSO deputies have at least the basic level of training through their initial state certification, but being able to shoot quickly as well as accurately under pressure is something that requires regular practice, hence the annual qualification.

"Shooting is kind of like riding a bicycle because it is a fine motor skill," Pilote said. "But there is a diminishing return in that, if you don't practice, you lose proficiency in it. So, there is an importance of maintaining that proficiency level, and that's part of the qualification."

The Sheriff's Office treats all training seriously; it must, because the nature of each deputy's job involves the inherent risk of life and death situations occurring at any given moment.

And if that wasn't enough, there's also the issue of liability from being inadequately trained,

which can lead to innocent bystanders being injured, otherwise solid cases becoming compromised, the potential for lawsuits, and any number of other bad law enforcement outcomes.

Of course, Pilote will be striving to prevent such outcomes with ongoing training throughout each year alongside lead instructor Lt. Dustin Walker, who took over UCSO training after former instructor Craig Davenport retired last year to run the Union County Gun Range.

Training deputies in-house is a great way to save taxpayers money, as typically, training elsewhere – even in-state – requires counties to cover for food and lodging for traveling deputies, which is in addition to their pay and fuel costs to get wherever they're going and back.

But not all out-of-county training requires a significant expenditure. Pilote's instruction at the Federal Law Enforcement

Training Center, or FLETC, is a great example of how the Sheriff's Office is always seeking out opportunities to maximize its outcomes at the least cost.

Aside from Pilote's salary and gas for travel, the federal program covered all expenses to train him as a Firearms Instructor – a savings to the Sheriff's Office in the thousands of dollars. FLETC even provided firearms and the massive amount of ammunition used.

"We're really wanting to excel in bringing phenomenal training here, so we're investing in our instructors – both me and Lt. Walker – to be able to do that," Pilote said. "And that will save money from having to go elsewhere if we can host higher-level training in Union County."

Moving forward, Pilote plans to continue his training as an instructor to provide even more training at the Sheriff's Office.

First Baby Oakleigh...from Page 1A

grateful for the care of nursing staff, who pleasantly surprised the parents by informing them that they would have the hospital's New Year Baby because of her Jan. 2 labor.

The family has a history of boys, Tori said, and even though she was hoping for a girl, she was shocked to learn her new baby's gender due to the well-established pattern of sons.

And so far, Oakleigh has been a quiet bundle of joy, only crying when she gets hungry or needs a diaper change.

Originally, Tori had suggested the name "Oaklynn," but husband Evan was more

partial to "Oakleigh." Tori conceded, agreeing that the name was a beautiful fit for their little one.

As for the middle name, Ellamae, it was inspired by Evan's love for "The Andy Griffith Show."

"It was just a name that we liked, but it reminded him of his favorite show," Tori explained with a laugh. "We didn't know her middle name until I was eight months pregnant."

Tori said everyone eagerly welcomed them home after Oakleigh's arrival, and the rest of the family just "loves her to death."

As part of their good fortune for having delivered the first local baby of the year, the Paynes received a special gift basket at the hospital.

"We sincerely thank River City Bank in Blairsville for their thoughtful generosity in providing a beautiful gift basket to the first baby born at Union General Hospital in 2025," the hospital shared. "Your kindness and community spirit are deeply appreciated!"

Presenting the gift basket was River City Bank Vice President, Director of Human Resources, Katie Mashburn.

CROP Walk 2024 – the best yet, surpassing 2023 totals



CROP WALK 2024 participants

While CROP Walk 2023 was extolled as "the best yet," we are pleased to announce that CROP Walk 2024 has surpassed the total proceeds of 2023, making this past year's CROP Walk "the best yet." Held on Sunday, September 1, this year's CROP Walk fundraising came to a close on December 31, 2024, when the final donations were received and tallied. Since 1991, this annual event has raised funds to fight world hunger, locally and globally. While there are hundreds of CROP Walks nationwide every year, our local walk still remains the only one in the entire state of Georgia.

During this past year, we were notified that CROP Walk 2023 had received three awards from Church World Service, the organization that benefits from CROP Walk funds. For several years, CWS has recognized the nation's top 100 CROP Walks in two different categories: one, the single congregation that raised the most funds, and two, the CROP Walk overall that raised the most funds. These awards, called the "Cream of the CROP," ranked the Church without Walls (pastored by the Rev. Fred Whitley) 33rd in the nation, and the local CROP Walk as 87th. The third award, "The Legacy Award" (created in 2023), recognizes congregations that have raised \$10,000+ annually for more than 20 years. As one of the first in the nation to receive this award, the local CROP Walk more than amply satisfies these criteria.

As has been the tradition, our local CROP Walk takes place at Lake Winfield Scott on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend. The event begins with the church service at 10:30am, led by the Rev. Fred Whitley, with special music provided by the Benny Shook family of Young Harris. The walk immediately follows the service, and all participants return to the LWS pavilion for a delicious covered-dish picnic with fish fry.

Thanks to the generous support of numerous individuals, the local CROP Walk continues to help those in need of food. We specially want to thank the following official sponsors of CROP Walk 2024 - Blairsville, Ga: Basket Barn, Cone and Associates CPAs, LLC, +Coosa Methodist



CROP WALK 2024

Church, First UMC of Union County (Friendship Class and others), Foodland, General Supply, Harmony Grove Baptist Church, Ingle's, Leon's Floors, Mike's Seafood and Grill, Property Clean up, Rich Furniture & Cabinet, Strickland & Associates, P.C., Walmart, Wet 'n' Wild; Fort Myers, FL: our affiliate CROP Walk, "The Cypress Lake High School Center for the Arts Dance Department CROP Walk," organized by Nancy Burnham, instructor; Gainesville, Ga: Gainesville First UMC (Aldersgate Class); Hayesville, NC: Goldhagen Glass Art Studio, Lake Chatuge Mah Jongg Tournament, Moore Insurance Services, Inc.; Helen, Ga: Alpine Golf and Scoop de Scoop, Cafe International; Hia-

wassee, Ga: Dockery Home Improvement, LLC, Monte Alban Mexican Restaurant; Suches, Ga: Two Wheels of Suches; Young Harris, Ga: Asiano's Thai/Chinese Restaurant, Brass-town Valley Resort, Enrico's Italian Restaurant, Heavenly Bake Shop, Sharp Memorial UMC (Disciples Class and others), The Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge, Young Harris College (friends and employees), Young Harris Florist.

If you would like to participate in or lend support to CROP Walk 2025, please contact CROP Walk Coordinator Meg Gring Whitley (706) 379-3924 for more information. You are more than welcome to join the ranks and help us continue to "fight world hunger, one step at a time."

Blairsville Cruisers Board Meeting on Wednesday

The first board meeting of 2025 will be held at 4pm Wednesday January 15th at the Tanner Towing Co. office in Blairsville. All officers and board members please attend. Plans for the upcoming season will be discussed as well as upcoming plans for elections of officers and board members.

Interested club member volunteers who wish to be considered for office in the upcoming election are encouraged to attend this board meeting. We will be electing a new president, vice presidents, and several board positions next week at the membership meeting.

The general membership meeting and elections will be held the following week on Thursday January 23rd at the clubhouse on the Murphy Hwy in Blairsville at 6pm. Please make plans to at-

tend this important meeting.

The Blairsville Cruisers is a 501(c)3 Nonprofit corporation that has supported our mountain communities by helping children in need and local veterans who need a helping hand. Since 2007 we have sponsored "Shop with a Cruiser", "Shop with a Cop", Union Co. Sheriffs' "Give-a-Gift", Towns Co. Sheriffs' "Shop with the Sheriff" and Clay Co. Sheriff's "Shop with a Hero" as well as several other programs that assure that no child goes without at Christmas-time. Your donation for raffle tickets along with our other fund raising events and our wonderful sponsors help raise an average of \$50,000 annually. All of these funds go back to the communities where our club members reside to help children and veterans. Thank you for your support of the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club

Georgia's own Jimmy Carter remembered around nation



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in 2014.

Photo/LBJ Library

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter was laid to rest on Thursday, Jan. 9, in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. He died at the age of 100 on

Dec. 29.

A private memorial and burial capped six days of official funeral services for the 39th president, starting with the transport of Carter's remains from Phoebe Sumter Medical Center in Americus to

his hometown on Jan. 4.

The motorcade made its way through Plains with a brief pause in front of Carter's boyhood home and farm. During the pause, the National Park Service saluted the late president by ringing the historic farm bell 39 times.

From there it was on to Atlanta, with a stop at the State Capitol for a moment of silence before heading to the Carter Presidential Center for a private service, after which Carter lay in repose "for mourners to come and pay their respects continuously until 6 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 7."

Public visitations there ended last Tuesday, at which point the deceased president left his namesake center "for the final time with a departure ceremony."

Carter and his family then traveled to Dobbins Air Reserve Base and departed for Washington to the U.S. Navy Memorial, where his remains were transferred to a horse-drawn caisson for a procession to the U.S. Capitol for visitation by members of Congress and the public.

Last Thursday, Carter was taken to the Washington

National Cathedral for his National Funeral Service, with five current and former presidents attending. Afterward, he was flown back to Georgia to return to his hometown for a private service at Maranatha Baptist Church.

People lined the motorcade route during Carter's last trip through town. After arriving at his residence for a private interment ceremony, the Navy conducted a "Missing Man" formation flyover "in honor of former President Carter's naval service and time as commander in chief."

President Joe Biden has ordered that U.S. flags be flown at half-staff at the White House and all public buildings for 30 days from Carter's date of death, and many businesses and residents across the country have joined in the recognition.

For weeks now, Americans have been contemplating Carter's legacy in light of his death.

Carter, who served as the 39th U.S. president from 1977 to 1981, is seen by many as the embodiment of the American Dream, having grown up on a peanut farm before joining the military and rising to the top political office in the land.

As president, the former Democratic governor of Georgia struggled on both the national stage and internationally.

"Jimmy Carter aspired to make Government 'competent and compassionate,' responsive to the American people and their expectations," according to his biography at whitehouse.gov. "His achievements were notable, but in an era of rising energy costs, mounting inflation, and continuing tensions, it was impossible for his administration to meet these high expectations."

In many ways, Carter hit his stride after his presidency, becoming synonymous with humanitarian work by championing efforts like Habitat for Humanity, which makes affordable housing a reality for families facing financial hardships – including in this very community.

Regarded for his honesty and integrity, Carter exuded an "everyman" aura that belied his station in life. He was seemingly most at



Richard Haigler holding a framed copy of the Towns County Herald's coverage of President Jimmy Carter's 1980 visit to Hiawassee. The president and friends went trout fishing here and his Secret Service stayed in the Deer Lodge cabins owned by Richard and his wife Willene.

Photo by Becky Long/Clay County Progress

home amid a rural backdrop, even as president, taking part in ways of life cherished in regions like the North Georgia Mountains.

The farmer turned president famously visited this area for two days in July 1980, arriving via helicopter on the Hiawassee farm of Reuben Walls as chronicled in the Towns County Herald.

"He was met at the field by a crowd of about 300 spectators, some of whom had waited in the heat for as high as four hours," per past reporting. "After waving to the crowd, Carter and his tourage drove from the landing site to the farm of family friend Don Carter, no relation, where he plans to do some serious trout fishing."

At the time, local couple Richard and Willene Haigler welcomed Carter's Secret Service detail to stay in cabins at their Deer Lodge in Towns County. The event still holds significance to the Haiglers all

these years later.

"I've got a check from the White House that's never been cashed," Richard told the Clay County Progress shortly after Carter's death, joking that he was saving the \$267 check "for hard times."

Willene, a fan of the president's, wrote him a letter, and Carter sent her a signed picture of him and former First Lady Rosalynn.

The Haiglers have collected other Carter-era memorabilia over the years, including a framed photograph of the Carters landing via helicopter in Hiawassee.

"I liked Jimmy Carter," Richard said. "He was a working man. He came home and worked the peanut farm. After he retired, he built houses for the needy. He was always on the go. I will remember him as a good man."

Clay County Progress Publisher Becky Long contributed to this reporting.

Sheriff Dyer...from Page 1A

Enforcement Division, which successfully located Harper in the crawlspace of the residence, and he surrendered.

In the crawlspace, detectives located about 23 grams of methamphetamine where Harper had been hiding, adding to his list of charges, which are: felony probation violation, felony meth possession with intent to distribute and reckless driving.

Sheriff Dyer thanks DNR for assisting the Sheriff's Office in arresting Harper, noting that "no law enforcement personnel or K-9 were injured in this arrest."

In an unrelated incident on Jan. 7, the Narcotics Division seized approximately an ounce and a half of meth. This case is active and ongoing, and further information will be released once the case is concluded.

As for the law enforcement grants mentioned above, Dyer learned last week that two grants he had applied for last year as third in command of the Sheriff's Office had been given the greenlight to be awarded.

The grants total \$60,000, to be used to buy new computers and software primarily for patrol cars. Dyer was selective in applying for these particular grants, one through the Governor's Office of Highway Safety and the other with the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police.

As such, there are no strings attached to the funds; it's just free money that allows UCSCO to stay technologically up to date without impacting taxpayers – a practice Dyer looks forward to continuing from his predecessor Mack Mason, who retired as sheriff at the end of 2024.

Dyer said many of the UCSCO fleet's computers are becoming obsolete, and the new equipment will both upgrade reporting capabilities and allow deputies to stay in the field longer instead of having to come back to the Sheriff's Office to complete their reports.

And this week, Dyer will be finalizing the donation of about a dozen bulletproof vests for the Fire Department to augment the few vests already possessed by firefighters.

People don't usually think of the Fire Department as having a need for bulletproof vests. They fight fires, after

all, not bad guys. But Fire Chief David Dyer said the donation would certainly come in handy in cases of extreme emergencies.

"Mainly what we could use them for is any kind of response to an active shooter incident, where we would set up a rescue task force," said Chief Dyer, grateful for the donation. "There would be a group of law enforcement going in with the job of eliminating or isolating the shooter."

"Our job as a rescue task force would be to go in behind them and start triaging and treating people. That's why they call it a task force – we would set up with law enforcement to go into these situations."

"So, they have their protection, and we have some vests, but they're donating more vests for us that we can use for responding on one of these rescue task force teams."

The fire chief said the extra vests will expand the range of sizes available to the department so firefighters have more fitting options to offer better protection should the need – God forbid – ever arise: "Plus, we can send in more people," he added.

Sheriff Dyer noted that while the vests may be "expired" from a manufacturer's – and therefore law enforcement – standpoint, they still have plenty of protective value and should last a long time yet because the vests will not be



Barry Brock Harper

subject to regular wear and tear at the Fire Department.

And he's happy to make the donation to another local agency, especially since the added layer of protection for firefighters would just be discarded otherwise.

Also last week, Sheriff Dyer coordinated with other county offices and attended two National Weather Service briefings at Fire Station No. 1 regarding the winter weather that moved in Friday, making sure the UCSCO emergency response was all hands on deck during the storm.

"The transition has been seamless," the new sheriff said of his first days in office. "We've been really busy getting contracts and accounts transferred over from Sheriff Mack's name to my name. We're starting out working hard and will continue to do so."

Citizens for a Better America Meeting, Jan. 16

Citizens for a Better America [CBA] hopes you had a merry Christmas and a wonderful start to the New Year. After taking December off, we will hold our regular monthly meeting Thursday, January 16, 2025 at Legends Steakhouse, 42 Tennessee Street, Murphy, NC 28906, in the large private meeting room. Legends is downtown Murphy next to the movie theater. We are excited about this being a new year with new opportunities to change our nation for the better. We will have new leadership and taking a new direction. The new direction

will give citizens of Cherokee County more voice in what's going on, and a chance to affect a larger number of issues. This is YOUR chance to step up and become a change agent working for the common good of Cherokee County and beyond. Don't miss this opportunity, come to the meeting and bring a friend! Food orders start at 5 PM, and the meeting starts promptly at 6 and goes until 7:30. Let's work together to create change!

For more information: www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com; call or text (828)458-0691.

City Council...from Page 1A

councilperson and the mayor act as a liaison between City Hall and various departments or interests of the city.

Rhonda Mahan will continue in her role on the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board; Moore at the Blairsville Airport; Tony Dyer at the Police Department; Kayla Hemphill in the Streets position; and Mary Ruth Cook at the Water/Sewer Departments.

And Mayor Conley will remain as the city's liaison on the Union County Historical Society Board.

The council greenlit another appointment, putting Abby Weaver on the DDA Board at the recommendation of DDA Director Kristen F. Bentley. Weaver is a Union County native who owns The Josephine Boutique in Downtown Blairsville.

Currently, the DDA is looking to fill the board seat recently vacated by Courtney Waller, who was appointed last month to the Union County Development Authority Board.

Speaking of economic development, the council approved its usual distribution arrangement of Hotel-Motel Tax dollars: 40% to the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce; 25% to the Blairsville DDA; 25% to the Historical Society; and 10% remaining at City Hall.

In other business, council members decided to



Councilman Buddy Moore and City Attorney Marvin Harkins in the Jan. 7 Blairsville City Council meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

put off a decision to accept Crossing Creeks RV Park sewer infrastructure.

Crossing Creeks has built sewer lines and a lift station to connect to the city's sewer system, and the infrastructure is now hooked up and in use.

In exchange for the sewer access, Crossing Creeks will be turning the infrastructure over to the city at no cost, and city ownership will allow maintenance employees to swiftly address repair issues in the future.

To reduce the city's initial liability, the RV park has coordinated a maintenance bond "or other surety" as part of the agreement to cover potential repair costs for 12 months after the city takes ownership.

However, a sticking point in the city's acceptance of the sewer infrastructure arose in

the Jan. 7 meeting.

Crossing Creeks appeared ready to present the required \$250,000 in bond/cash mix last week if the council agreed to finalize the arrangement.

But Councilman Moore said it was his understanding there was a contractor payment discrepancy on Crossing Creeks' end, and he wanted more information before the city settled up with the development. Ultimately, the rest of the council agreed to table the matter for now.

Among other business, the council authorized its \$11,000 annual contributions to the Union County Fire Department and the Union County Public Library; hired Kevin Potts as Assistant Airport Manager; and made a new Police Department hire in Joseph Patterson.

Chamber of Commerce Trivia Night Donation



(L-R): (COC) Sunny Poe, (SPP) Diane Twirl, Mike Bower, Debbie Magio, Lisa Bower, Cynthia and BJ Otero

It was a very Merry Christmas for the animals supported by the Safe Pet Project (SPP). A local charity in Union County. The Chamber of Commerce's Trivia Night participants donated \$1,000 to assist in the Charities numerous outreach programs.

Safe Pet Project (SPP) was established in September 2021 by a group of individuals with a love for animals and who are dedicated to saving and improving the lives of area dogs and cats.

YHC shines spotlight on hardworking Blairsville native

Teresa Kelley began working at Young Harris College in December 1993 as the administrative assistant to the director of institutional advancement. She started her career assisting with fundraising initiatives, special events, and press releases for YHC events and students' accomplishments. After transitioning to the administrative assistant to the president in 2002, her responsibilities expanded to cover nearly every aspect of the College.

From assisting with Commencement, the Clay Dotson Open, Alumni Weekend, and many other special events throughout the year, to scheduling hundreds of meetings and recording countless pages of meeting notes, Kelley always ensures that things at YHC are running smoothly. She also works with the Board of Trustees as the assistant secretary to the Board, which she says is a very enjoyable experience as they all care deeply about YHC and are always working to improve the college experience for students.

Kelley has witnessed many changes throughout her time at YHC, including the physical transformation of the campus with renovations to the construction of new buildings, to the academic transition to a four-year college and master's program. She has been a part of many special events on campus, including Gov. Zell Miller's kickoff for his gubernatorial re-election campaign in the Susan B. Harris Chapel, special programs with U.S. Congressman John Lewis and conservationist Jane Goodall, town hall meetings with U.S. Senators Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss, and getting to meet Henry "Hank" Aaron and YHC alumni Ronnie Mil-sap, 1964, and Trisha Yearwood, 1984.

During her 30 years at YHC, she has worked for five presidents and three interim presidents, as well as six different chairmen of the Board of Trustees. Each president and board chair are different with their own management styles, which has made her position very interesting with no two presidents or board chairs alike!

"While some people believe that the president is the



Teresa Kelley

catalyst for the success of a college, over my 36 years in higher education leadership, I have learned that the president's success depends on detail, institutional memory, and relationship connections," said Drew Van Horn, former president. Van horn retired in December 2024, with Dr. John Wells taking the reins at YHC Jan. 1, 2025.

"Teresa Kelley is the epitome of those qualifications. I jokingly tell people that Teresa runs the College, but she lets me sit in the big office. In many aspects, that statement has truth. Teresa has kept me from stepping on things better left alone and directed me regarding practices and processes appreciated by the Board, alumni, and campus community."

A native of Blairsville, GA, and the daughter of Susie and Jim Kelley, and granddaughter of Mack and Merner Kelley, she came to YHC as an elementary school student to see the children's plays performed by Theatre Young Harris – not knowing at the time that years later, she would be working at YHC and be honored with a building bearing

her name: The Teresa Kelley Band Building, per the generosity of Trustee Pam Rollins in her ongoing efforts to improve the educational opportunities for YHC students. The name of the building is just one testament to Kelley's years of dedication, service, and unwavering support of the College.

One of Kelley's favorite parts about her position in the President's Office is that it is a rewarding and exciting mix – from trustees' and administration's operation of the College to getting to know and interact with students.

"I have greatly enjoyed my 30+ years at YHC and I've have met so many amazing people, from students, alumni, staff, faculty, emeriti, and trustees who have become friends and feel like family," Kelley said. "Spending so much time working together has been a blessing in many ways. Seeing students mature, graduate, and reach their goals is a very rewarding experience. Working at YHC has been a great part of my life and I hope to continue serving the YHC community for years to come!"

January Snow ...from Page 1A



Many people believe the Old Courthouse on the Blairsville Square looks best when decorated for winter and surrounded by snow.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

snowplows, continuing over the weekend.

Sole Commissioner Harold Collins was out checking county roads Sunday, and he thanked road crews for doing “an excellent job.” He also said that several Road Department clearing crews were at-the-ready for the storm and its aftermath, though only a handful of trees fell.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was all hands on deck as well, quickly restoring the relatively few power outages reported across the system. A lack of ice accumulations from being spared freezing rain reduced damage to powerlines and trees, keeping most homes powered and warm.

Union County Government closed public buildings on Friday, and Union County Schools announced the day before that classes would be virtual the day of the storm. Many local businesses closed on Friday, too, with several gradually re-opening over the weekend.

“We really didn’t have any problems,” EMA Director Dyer said. “We had a few wrecks, but that’s to be expected. So, everybody did a great job.”

“I think people saw what

was coming and expected it to be a lot worse than what it was, which was helpful because people prepared, stayed home, made arrangements. And I think the weekend helped out, because if people had any kind of plans, they canceled them.

“Most employers either had an online day like the kids or they said they’re not going to have work today. Church services, a lot of them said they were going to do it virtually, so I think all those were contributing factors.”

Some of the lingering snow and ice melted Sunday as the sun came out and temperatures climbed above 40 degrees, but black ice into Monday remained a concern at press time, as temperatures once again dropped well below freezing Sunday night.

Union County Schools traveled bus routes Sunday afternoon to decide whether to host classes on campus Monday, opting for another at-home learning day for students, though Union County Government opened public buildings as usual Jan. 13.

County officials are monitoring the potential for additional winter weather coming up this weekend and/or early next week, but it was

still too early at press time to say with certainty what, if any, impacts were on the way.

Regardless of the time of year, during any storm that is predicted to impact travel, Dyer said he advises people to listen to public safety warnings, take precautions and stay home.



Friday produced many picturesque scenes around town, including at the Mountain Life Museum of the Historic Butt-Mock House.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard



The Union County Courthouse was closed on Friday due to travel hazards brought about by the winter storm.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Military Time
 Space Force Military Branch
 Part 10 of 14
 By: Whitey White



The Newest Military Branch: The Space Force

Rebecca Keiser, chair of Women in Aerospace, an association for the aerospace community, says she is “very encouraged” by signs from both Congress and the USSF that the new service will actively seek a healthy gender balance.

“It’s a very good signal that its first two civilian hires were female professionals.” One of them being Patricia Mulcahy—a retired Army colonel who was hired as deputy chief of space operations for personnel and logistics services.

at their “birth” was headed by Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett, and commanded by Gen. John “Jay” Raymond. But there’s controversy in other areas. Harrison says early challenges for the Space Force include resentment from other branches and opposition to its stated intention to declassify some of its capabilities. In the briefing, Raymond admitted that the service’s capabilities were “overly classified” and that it would need to move toward visibility to deter adversaries from threatening U.S. assets in space.

The U.S. Space Force