

North Georgia News

4 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, February 1, 2023

'Grateful Few' gift Narcan to local law enforcement

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The growing nationwide prevalence of fentanyl has been dubbed "the next wave of the opioid crisis," and contrary to popular beliefs that overdoses only impact those abusing drugs, fentanyl has killed police officers, curious children and anyone exposed too long to the substance.

Fentanyl is often illicitly combined with recreational drugs or "other substances," usually without the knowledge of the user; and at more than 50 times the strength of heroin or morphine, the synthetic opioid can quickly prove fatal without immediate intervention.

Fortunately, local law enforcement can count on that intervention thanks to the heroes in the Grateful Few Recovery Riding Club, who on Saturday made a special donation of the life-saving medication Narcan to benefactors who were grateful in return: the Union County Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police Department and Fannin County Sheriff's

Office. Club members made sure to express gratitude for UCSO Capt. Craig Davenport for reaching out to inform them of the local need for Narcan.

The Grateful Few Club is made up of men and women "who love riding motorcycles and enjoy spending time with others in recovery and sharing our recovery with anyone who is interested."

"Everybody in the club is in recovery," said Grateful Few Co-Founder John Sidders, aka "Sasquatch."

"We've all suffered from some substance abuse disorder in our lives, right?" Sidders continued. "We all found recovery, and this is our way of giving back. And we know that there's some rural counties in North Georgia (that) really struggle with getting funding and financing for the Narcan, and we want to try to help bridge that gap."

Described by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration as "the single deadliest drug threat our nation has ever encountered," fatal



Bike riders with the Grateful Few Club met with representatives of UCSO, Blairsville PD and Fannin County Sheriff's Office for a Narcan donation Saturday.

fentanyl overdoses have risen sharply in recent years, growing to a record reported 108,000 deaths in March 2022 over the previous 12-month period, per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And those numbers abated only slightly as 2022 wore on,

even as record amounts of fentanyl – enough to kill every single American – continued to be confiscated primarily at the southern border.

That's why the Jan. 28 morning delivery of Narcan by seven riders who braved bone-chilling temperatures

over Blood Mountain was so important, as they brought with them 106 two-dose boxes of Narcan to the Union County Sheriff's Office, translating to potentially 212 area lives saved.

The donation grew even greater when Brian Kite of the

Georgia Council for Recovery arrived with another 50 or so large boxes full of Narcan.

Hailed as a "miracle drug," Narcan has been compared to antivenom, epipens, and defibrillators with how much of a difference it

See Narcan Donation, Page 2A

Gunter talks appointment as House Judiciary Chair

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

ATLANTA – After winning re-election to the Georgia House District 8 seat in November, State Rep. Stan Gunter is honored to be starting his second term in office as chairman of the bipartisan House Judiciary Committee.

The appointment came by way of the Georgia House of Representatives' Committee on Assignments led by House Speaker Jon Burns of Newington in Southeast Georgia. Burns succeeded former Speaker David Ralston of Blue Ridge for the 2023-24 legislative session.

Ralston announced Nov. 4 that he would not seek nomination for another term as House Speaker due to health challenges from which he passed away on Nov. 16.

Gunter, who lives in Blairsville and represents

Union, Towns and parts of White counties, was vice chair of the House Judiciary Committee in his first term, and his quick rise to chairmanship allows for greater legislative representation for North Georgia following Ralston's passing.

"The people of our area, the folks that I represent, will definitely have a voice down here (at the Georgia State Capitol) with the type of legislation that runs through this committee," Gunter said. "It also gives me a more respected voice in the (Georgia) Senate as well."

"So, when I go over there to shepherd a bill through, it'll get attention when I'm there talking about it," he said, noting that his relationship with Senate Majority Leader Steve Gooch, whose district overlaps with some of his own, will also benefit North Georgia residents.

It is unusual for a



Stan Gunter
State Representative

representative to make chair of a committee in just his or her third year in office, however, the Committee on Assignments considered Gunter's past judicial experiences as District Attorney and Superior Court Judge in the Enotah Judicial Circuit.

See Gunter Appointment, Page 2A

Huffman indicted for murder in Heritage killing

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Wade Allen Huffman has been formally charged with multiple counts of murder in the Dec. 8 shooting of Eric James Heritage at a residence off Fortenberry Road.

On Monday, Jan. 23, a Union County Grand Jury handed up 13 charges in three separate indictments against Huffman, who, at the time of his arrest for murder, had only been out of prison for about three months from a prior conviction.

Charges include malice murder for the intentional, unlawful killing of Heritage; two counts of felony murder for causing Heritage's death while committing other felony crimes; home invasion; first degree burglary; two counts of aggravated assault; and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Huffman, a sex offender originally out of Ohio, has also been indicted for child molestation, sexual battery against a child under 16, theft by taking, and failure to register as a sex offender.

For the alleged murder of Heritage, who was residing on the Fortenberry Road property where the shooting occurred, Huffman could receive life in prison with or without parole, or the death penalty.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation investigated the case, and based on information available at press time, the newspaper was not aware of any motive for the shooting.

"On Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, at approximately 7:20 p.m., Union County 911 received an open line call from a residence located on Fortenberry Rd," GBI said in December. "During the call, dispatchers could hear screaming and dispatched deputies to a dispute call."



Wade Allen Huffman

"Deputies arrived at the residence to find Wade Huffman, 32, of Blairsville, waiting on the front steps of the residence. Huffman was taken into custody on outstanding warrants for failing to register as a sex offender."

"Officers discovered that Eric Heritage, 38, of

See Heritage Murder, Page 2A

Top of Georgia Contest kicks off student speech training

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

HIWASSEE – Top of Georgia Annual Speaking Contest organizers held their first of six speech development training sessions for area students at the Towns County Senior Center on Jan. 19, focusing on the aspects of constructing a speech.

This year, the number of entrants has grown nicely, with 24 students participating from various grades and area schools for a chance to win up to \$400 in cash prizes.

The students are Noah Lynch, Georgia Cyber Academy, eighth grade; Jolie Schmitt, Union County High, ninth grade; Sophia Gobin, Union County Middle, eighth grade; Olivia Cramer, Hayesville High, 12th grade; AJ Edwards, Towns County High, 12th grade;

Madilyn Walls, Towns County Middle, seventh grade; Abby Pate, Towns County High, 12th grade; Loftin

Turpin, Towns County High, 10th grade; Caleb Sheffield, Union County High, ninth grade; Cooper Church, Home School, seventh grade;

McKenzie Bourbeau, Union County Middle, eighth grade; Katelyn Walls, Towns County Middle, eighth grade; Will Walls, Towns County Middle, seventh grade; Madilyn Walls, Towns County Middle, seventh grade; Sarah Shook, Towns County High, 12th grade;

Josiah Kay, Union County Middle, seventh grade; Joanna Kay, Union County Middle, eighth grade; Owen Devereaux-Liebros, Union County Middle, sixth grade; Nolan Evans, Towns County High, 11th grade; Hudson Evans, Towns County High, ninth grade;

Margaret Evans, Towns County Middle, sixth grade; Esther Kusch, RW Home School Academy, ninth grade; Lincoln Kusch, RW Home School Academy, sixth grade; and Adalyn Collins, Union County Middle, eighth grade.



2023 Top of Georgia Speaking Contest student participants and mentors.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

Steven Harper is the Downtown Development Program Manager for Hiwassee and one of the new mentors in 2023.

"I first heard about (the contest) through the Movers

& Shakers breakfast," Harper said. "I go to those regularly, and I befriended (lead Top of Georgia organizer) Gerry Chotiner. He knows what my position is with the city and knows my background as an

attorney, and he invited me. "I thought it was a wonderful idea. I'm a graduate of the school of moot court competitions and that kind of thing, and I've participated in all of that, so I think speech

development skills are one of the most important things one can learn.

"We love the kids here and want to see them succeed. They're not going to be kids

See Top of Georgia, Page 6A



Vol. 114 No. 06

Arrests - 6C Legals - 2D
Church - 3C Obituaries - 5C
Classifieds - 2D Sports - 2B
Opinion - 4A

WRESTLING

SAT. FEB 4 AREA TOURNAMENT

@ UCHS 10 AM

Blind Date with a Book @ UCPL

See page 3A

Grand Jury Indictments

See page 3A

2023 NASCAR Cup Series Schedule

See page 1B



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.

Narcan Donation...from Page 1A

can make when administered in otherwise deadly overdose situations that oftentimes see law enforcement being first to arrive on scene.

Narcan's power, along with the growing knowledge that anyone who stays by the side of an overdose victim cannot be prosecuted for the possession of their own drugs, has saved countless lives.

"We want to give everybody a chance to find recovery," Sidders said. "That's what we appreciate – the law enforcement being interested in this, because they don't want to see us die either."

At about \$145 per double-dose box, one might wonder how the program manages to fund the purchase of so many doses, especially when they deliver Narcan all across the state. Looking at each biker's jacket reveals a 9/11 memorial patch among the individual style choices, and therein lies the answer.

The club holds a yearly 9/11 Never Forget tribute ride through the mountains that in 2022 began in Dawsonville at the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame and ended at The Retreat at Long Mountain in Cleveland. Participants pay \$25 per rider and \$10 per passenger to fundraise along with the sale of T-shirts and barbecue plates.

2022's ride may not have cashed in as large a haul as previous years due to soggy weather, but some Narcan is better than none. In fact, several of the club's members can attest personally to the power of the drug, having been saved themselves by swift action while overdosing.

"I don't really remember," said Ladybird and Executive Director "Triple-T" Jenn Langston about her overdose experience. She went on to express her gratitude for a life saved and bound down the road to recovery.

Nowadays, she expresses the immense pride she feels for her daughter and their plans to move to Blairsville once she graduates.

"I had a kid, and I used (drugs) the whole time I was pregnant," Langston said. "I was doing the things I shouldn't be doing, and that made me feel worse. So, after she was born

... I felt guilty about it, so I used even more. It's that whole guilt/shame spiral, so I try to let people know that they don't have to live in that."

Not every member of the Grateful Few has needed a dose of Narcan in their lifetimes, but, as referenced by Sidders, every member has struggled with, and overcome, addiction.

Another Grateful Few founder – a large, tattooed teddy bear known as "Big Mike" Keesling – can attest to that.

"There's got to be people out there who might like the club life, but if you're in recovery and then go out with a bunch of guys at a bike night at a bar or something, the temptation's going to be there more to drink or to get into other things that other bikers get into," said Keesling, who brags on his fellow club members the way Langston beams about her daughter.

Among their ranks, he points out counselors and business owners.

"This is a way to keep us all accountable," he said of

their activities. "We still get to do the same things, we still get out and rip and roar and have fun, but we hold each other accountable and keep each other safe. I love each and every one of these people as much as my family."

And if there is one thing Keesling wants folks to remember, it's that other human beings, no matter their circumstances or their follies, are "not disposable."

"I'm sure a lot of people would just as soon say, 'Oh, well, if they die from an overdose, they ain't never going to be nothing anyway,'" he said. "We do recover, we do change, we do grow if we get the chance."

"Recovery is real," Sunshine McCoy added, leveraging her experience as a way to uplift others struggling with the throes of addiction.

McCoy helped hand out Narcan boxes to any who would take them on the grounds of never knowing when one may be useful; she recalls an instance when her wife saved the life of a woman who

collapsed on the street mere feet away from her.

Those interested in supporting the Grateful Few can attend a statewide gala on Aug. 31 of this year. All first responders, whether law officers, firefighters or EMTs, will receive monetary support as well as more boxes of Narcan to bring overdose victims back from the brink.

Additional gala details will be available closer to the celebration's kick-off, so keep an eye on the Grateful Few Recovery Riding Club Facebook page for updates.

The Grateful Few does not discriminate, nor are they tied to law enforcement. If you or someone you love is fighting addiction to alcohol or drugs, visit www.gratefulfewrrc.org or call the club at 678-315-3779.

Any donations made to the club will go 100% toward the purchase of Narcan and funding recovery and support.

As parting words delivered with a playful smile, McCoy offered a unique way to remember the club and its creed: "We're that flower that grows through the crack in the cement."

Gunter Appointment...from Page 1A

On the Judiciary Committee, Gunter will be overseeing "a wide variety of measures relating to law, courts and judges, and constitutional amendments." Furthermore, any legislation "that carries a possibility for civil penalties can be referred to the Judiciary Committee."

Gunter likened his role as committee chairman to "being a judge in court."

"I run the meetings, keep things organized and under control (and decide what bills we hear)," Gunter said. "And I call for a vote when we have a bill in front of us and have heard all the testimony about it."

The 2023 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly kicked off Monday, Jan. 9, and Gunter said the 40 nonconsecutive days of the session will be bringing a lot to the table, though it's still too early to offer many specifics on what the Judiciary Committee will consider.

"I'll be looking at the bills that are assigned to the committee," Gunter said. "I have an attorney on staff that will be reading through the bills with me, and we'll discuss what bills have merit and which ones don't or shouldn't go forward. Then, we'll decide which ones to call for a hearing."

And even though it's early in the session, Gunter said one upcoming bill proposal he has heard about is from a Democratic member of the committee. The bill "requires judges to show their work,"

and he is looking forward to learning more about it as the session continues.

"Judges would have to make a presentation of how many criminal cases are pending, how long they've been pending, any motions that are pending in any case," Gunter said. "Just a whole list of things so that people can see what that judge has been working on or what's in that circuit."

State court judges are primarily elected in Georgia, so requiring them to "show their work" would be a good thing in terms of transparency and accountability, Gunter said, to enable voters to hold judges accountable should they repeatedly fail to make meaningful progress on cases.

"For judges that are doing their job, it's actually pretty easy to do," Gunter said. "But those that are not getting the job done, it'll expose what they're doing."

Added Gunter, "The author of the bill had the experience of having a motion pending for two years, and the judge suddenly assigned it to another court, which basically starts the clock over."

Gunter sits on eight House committees total, including the Rules Committee that oversees what bills are debated on and ultimately voted out of the House each year, and the Appropriations Committee, on which he has been assigned to the important Public Safety Subcommittee.

His work on the

subcommittee is to make sure that public safety initiatives around the state are appropriately funded, dealing with things like budgetary concerns of the court system and state law enforcement.

Separately, the North Georgia News asked Gunter to address the fate of the Mountain Education Charter High School, which is facing potential closure at the end of this school year following unintended consequences of Senate Bill 153 that became law July 1, 2021.

MECHS is a "student-centered, self-paced, evening public high school" with 18 campuses across North Georgia, granting nontraditional students, including those from Union and Towns, the ability to earn an accredited High School Diploma.

Gunter is not directly involved in any legislative fixes, but after recent conversations with House colleagues who are working on the issue this session, he feels confident that "the school's going to survive – it's not going to shut down."

"It may be funded a little differently, there may be some other changes to it, but it's still going to be there and is still going to serve the people that it's been serving in the past," Gunter said. "What's being worked out, I think it's a good compromise."

Added Gunter, "Not all the details are finalized yet, but there is an agreement in the works that I think will make everybody happy."

Heritage Murder ...from Page 1A

Blairsville, had been shot inside the residence. Deputies provided life-saving measures, but Heritage died at the scene from his injuries."

It was not Huffman's first run-in with local law enforcement. The Union County Sheriff's Office took him into custody in 2013 for extradition on a fugitive warrant out of his home state of Ohio, where he was wanted for felony assault charges.

Further, Huffman has a history of failing to register as a sex offender. Prior to his 2013 extradition to Ohio, he failed to register here pursuant to a 2010 conviction of unlawful sexual conduct with a minor in the Buckeye State.

He spent about six years in a Georgia prison for again failing to register as a sex offender in 2015.

After his release from incarceration on Sept. 4, 2022, Huffman registered as a sex offender in Union County on Sept. 7, only to become wanted by law enforcement Halloween night after absconding from his Buford Drive residence while under curfew.

His whereabouts remained unknown until Dec. 7 when a woman came forward to report that a man who had been staying with her had inappropriately touched her underage child, which is the incident corresponding to the above child molestation and sexual battery charges.

The Union County Sheriff's Office quickly discovered that the man was Huffman; the woman had kicked him out of her home before filing the report, so deputies increased patrols of the area in hopes of taking him into custody, the Sheriff's Office said.

Huffman ended up returning the next evening to the woman's home, according to the Sheriff's Office, where

he allegedly shot and killed Heritage.

A bond hearing on the indicted charges had not been scheduled by press time, but Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said his office would oppose any such requests with the intent of holding Huffman until trial, and it is too early to say when that may be.

Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge Buck Levins was to be the judge overseeing the trial, however, given his involvement in

Huffman's last conviction during his previous role as Assistant District Attorney. Levins has recused himself from the case.

Huffman has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

According to the obituary of the deceased, Eric Heritage "was a fun loving and always joking dad, son, grandson, nephew, brother and cousin. His family was his life and (he) adored them all."

GA Regional Commissions see mostly decreased December Unemployment Rates

Georgia Labor Commissioner Bruce Thompson said Thursday that the Atlanta, Central Savannah River, Coastal Georgia, Heart of Georgia, Middle Georgia, Northeast Georgia, River Valley, Southern Georgia, Southwest Georgia, and Three Rivers Regional Commissions all recorded a drop in unemployment rate in December.

"Georgia's highly-skilled workforce and business-friendly environment continues to drive positive economic growth across all corners of the state," said Commissioner Bruce Thompson. "With the unemployment rate trending lower than the national average, we are well-positioned to help businesses remain competitive and find top-tier talent."

The labor force rose in the Atlanta, Central Savannah River, Northwest Georgia, and Three Rivers Regional Commissions.

Employment rose in

the Atlanta, Central Savannah River, Middle Georgia, Northwest Georgia, River Valley, and Three Rivers Regional Commissions.

Claims were down in the Atlanta, Middle Georgia, and Three Rivers Regional Commissions.

Please see a synopsis of each regional commission: o-t-m – over the month; o-t-y – over the year.

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission - Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White counties.

The unemployment rate remained unchanged at 2.4 percent o-t-m, the rate was 2.3 percent one year ago.

The labor force was down 35 o-t-m and down 130,580 o-t-y, to 237,172.

The number of employed was down 5 o-t-m and down 127,797 o-t-y, to 231,554.

Initial claims were up 172 (20%) o-t-m, and up 399 (62%) o-t-y, to 1,042.

Chamber hosts casino night, presents member awards

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – On Friday, Jan. 20, the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce hosted its “Blairs-Vegas” Annual Membership Banquet and Awards Ceremony at Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa.

Dressed in their best cocktail attire, attendees enjoyed a night of fine dining and various Las Vegas-style games like poker, blackjack and roulette, and they were excited to learn who and what businesses won the evening’s awards for top-notch service to the community.

“The casino company we hired gave us vouchers for the winners of the games,” said Crystal Wagner, the chamber’s Operations and Marketing Director. “So, the person who saves the most chips for the night can get a cruise, a four-night stay in Vegas or four-night stay at any hotel in the U.S., and we have great door prizes that we are giving out tonight, too.”

Additionally, a silent auction featured plenty of items donated by chamber members, including annual gym memberships, guided fishing trips, an overnight stay at Brasstown Valley, electric bike rentals and other terrific local opportunities.

Chamber President Steve Rowe welcomed all in attendance, thanking them for being a part of the special event before calling for dinnertime, after which awards were announced in the run-up to the play money “gambling” fun.

Megan Kimsey of Granddaddy Mimm’s Distilling Co. received Ambassador of the Year; Safe Pet Project won the Community United Award sponsored by United Community Bank; Jim’s Smokin’ Que was awarded Business of the Year; and Person of the Year went to Mickey Cummings.

The Chamber Ambassadors Program is “a membership outreach and retention program designed to

involve and inform all Chamber members.”

“Ambassadors are volunteers who, on behalf of the Chamber, make good-will calls to encourage strong continuing membership and active support of Chamber programs,” according to visitblairsvilla.com.

Ambassadors do this by attending chamber events like dedications, ribbon cuttings and Business After Hours socials while reaping the benefits of “continued networking opportunities and close involvement with the community.”

“It is probably one of my favorite volunteer opportunities that I get to participate in,” Kimsey said of the program. “It just means a lot to know that what the ambassadors do is recognized, and it’s so much fun meeting local businesses and learning to have partnerships with them and making our community better.”

Speaking on behalf of local pet advocacy and resource organization Safe Pet Project, Tom Shidaker said “this is a very special night for us.”

“It’s wonderful to be a part of Union County,” he said. “There are so many great businesses and amazing people here, and we’re glad to be a part of that community.”

“We really appreciate our volunteers because it is a volunteer-driven organization, and there is so much passion for the animals that you can feel when you walk in the door of our thrift store, so we’re just as excited as can be to be a part of tonight.”

Jim’s Smokin’ Que Co-Owners Zachary Edmonds and Chris Cuviallo collectively talked about their graciousness and pride for the company’s recognition as Business of the Year.

“I think it’s just a great opportunity to be involved with everything that the chamber does,” Edmonds said. “We really took a step to get involved with the chamber and just try to help out with this amazing community that we’re a part of



Mickey Cummings, Safe Pet Project stakeholders, Jim’s Smokin’ Que owners and Megan Kimsey of Granddaddy Mimm’s earned recognition at the Annual Chamber Membership Banquet. Photo by Jeremy Foster

this year.

“We moved up here three years ago, and it’s just so great to see the community and so many awesome people come together in one night for these awards.”

“Going from being voted Best BBQ in the State of Georgia and now Best Business of Blairsville was a very great 2022 for us.”

Added Cuviallo, “The opportunities that we were recognized for are things that are very near and dear to our hearts. It’s things that we do every day and want to continue to do throughout the year.”

“We want to take care of our community because our community takes care of us, and we’re just blessed to be in a community where everybody is tightknit and knows everyone. It’s just awesome, and it’s all uphill from here.”

For his part, Cummings – who leads the Union County Historical Society as president and is involved in numerous community happenings – said the chamber award as Person of the Year “was a total surprise to me.”

“It just means a lot to know that the community and the Chamber of Commerce thought enough of me to bestow this honor on me,” Cummings said. “We’ve got a wonderful community here; it takes a lot

of people pulling together to do the things that we do, so I really appreciate everybody’s help in all the things we’ve accomplished together.”

By the end of the night, the overall winner at the casino

was Morgan Williams, who “kept her poker face all night” and won \$62,000 in “funny money.” Congratulations to this year’s award recipients and those who fared well at the tables.



Members of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce networked as they celebrated during the Annual Membership Banquet Jan. 20. Photo by Jeremy Foster

Top of Georgia...from Page 1A



Top of Georgia lead organizer Gerry Chotiner and mentor District Attorney Jeff Langley meeting with students at the first training of the 2023 speaking contest. Photo by Jeremy Foster

their whole lives; they’re going to work and become leaders. In order to effectively lead, you have to be able to effectively communicate, and if you don’t know how to effectively communicate, you’ll never get to that next level, and we want our kids at that next level.

“To me, that’s the essence of what this is all about. It’s the perfect time for these kids to learn these skills, and the earlier the better. It serves you so well

later in life, and with this being my first year involved, I’m looking forward to seeing how it’s going to work myself and everyone learning together and about each other as well.”

“The day you stop learning, you might as well hang it up.”

Union County eighth-grader Sophia Gobin is returning to the competition this year after winning her category in 2022.

“I’m excited to compete again and be back at it because we always have such a great group of people to work with who are very supportive,” Gobin said. “My topic this year is still a work in progress, but I’m thinking about doing a court case that was super important and revolutionized things – maybe *Miranda v. Arizona*, but I’m still researching more.”

“I am trying to compete just for the experience, and it also looks good on a college application, so that’s a plus. For now, I am thinking I want to be a nurse anesthetist in my future.”

The students will continue to train with mentors every Thursday in February to hone their skills and perfect their speeches on chosen topics before the official contest, the date of which will be announced later.