

North Georgia News

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Hill, BOE weigh options to combat 'sexting' crisis in the schools

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill delivered some troubling news in the Feb. 19 regular Board of Education meeting – the High School has a "sexting" problem.

Sexting is the act of sending and/or receiving sexually explicit images, and it has been a nationwide issue among teens and pre-teens for years.

Children can face very real criminal consequences for distributing nude images of themselves and others, and unfortunately, it's gotten easier to do in recent years, as kids have 24/7 access to

technologies that enable this behavior.

Here in Union County, the school system has dealt with individual sexting cases in the past, but it wasn't until recently that Hill and other administrators realized the scope of the problem locally.

On Feb. 7, a parent approached High School Principal C.T. Hussion with concerns about possible sexting activity. Hussion turned the complaint over to the School Police Department for an investigation that quickly ballooned from two students being involved to 57.

"Of that 57, I'd say probably 65 to 70 percent of them are athletes, the rest of them are not," said SRO Keith Lockwood in the Feb.



Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill had to deliver some difficult news about a problem of student sexting in the Feb. 19 BOE meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

19 meeting. He went on to say that the majority of students sending nude photos of themselves were

non-athletes, while the majority of students receiving nude photos were athletes.

"It's been an eye-opening experience," said Lockwood. "Dealing with these kids, the No. 1 thing you run across is, they're uneducated. They don't realize (the seriousness of) what they're doing. Peer pressure plays a huge part in that."

Needless to say, the size and scope of the problem was new to administrators, so Hill reached out to a contact at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to ask for advice.

In the conversation, Hill learned that he could either turn kids over to the GBI to face charges, or he could hit the ground running to educate kids about the dangers of sexting,

with the next offense resulting in students being turned over to law enforcement.

Which is why Hill said that his administration would be reaching out to individual parents and local church leaders for help with solving the problem.

As far as doling out punishments, the schools are limited in what they can do about illegal behaviors that occur off school grounds, which seems to have been the case here.

However, one disciplinary option might be to start removing extracurricular activities and other privileges provided by the school, such as revoking driving privileges, the ability to attend prom and play See Sexting, Page 2A

Commissioner Paris welcomes Seabees, VVA in regular monthly meeting



Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris accepting a proclamation from Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris in the Feb. 21 commission meeting.

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris welcomed members of the Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3 and the Vietnam Veterans of America Blairsville Chapter 1101 to his regular monthly meeting on Thursday, Feb. 21, at the Union

County Courthouse. Paris signed a proclamation in the meeting declaring March 5, 2019, as the United States Navy Seabees 77th Birthday.

According to the proclamation, for 77 years, the Seabees have repeatedly demonstrated their skills as firefighters and builders, building and fighting for

freedom, and in peacetime, being Good Will Ambassadors while living by the Seabee motto "Can Do!"

"I am honored to be here to receive this proclamation," said Keith Hunter, member of the Seabees. "If anybody is interested, we are having a Seabee Ball (on Saturday, March 2), and everybody is See Paris, Page 3A

STAR Student Audrey Justice discusses plans after MECHS graduation

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Every year, the Mountain Education Association selects a STAR Student from among its 16 sites in 15 northeast Georgia counties based on SAT performance and academic success in the school system.

Audrey Justice of the Union County Site made the cut as this year's 2019 MECHS STAR Student.

"It's awesome to be the STAR Student," said Justice. "It makes me excited because the STAR Student award for Mountain Ed is for all of Mountain Ed."

Justice took the SAT last year, which required her to study rigorously in order to get the score she wanted and be accepted into the college of her choice.

"Usually, I'm awful at test taking," said Justice. "But I had really sat there and just told myself that I needed to do well on this test, because I was trying



2019 STAR Teacher Kim Perren with STAR Student Audrey Justice at the Feb. 21 Evening with the Stars event.

to get into Kennesaw State, and I wanted to make sure that I would really do well on this test, and it paid off."

Justice would study for the test for three to four hours a night to make sure that she would be prepared enough to do well and get the score she

wanted. "I would want to advise people not to sweat it, because it's a scary test, especially if you are wanting to get into college and you worry that your whole life depends on this test, but it really doesn't," said Justice. See Justice, Page 2A

Chamber honors amazing students and faculty in 'Evening with the Stars'



UCHS students Ashley Palmateer, Sahory Salazar and Madison Yost all received special awards from the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce on Thursday, Feb. 21.

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce held its annual Evening with the Stars banquet and recognition ceremony at the Union County Community Center ballroom on Thursday, Feb. 21.

Well over a hundred people were in attendance, including students, teachers, parents, school leadership, alumni and well-wishers, as

the Union County High School Jazz Ensemble played excellent live background music.

And of course, a number of chamber leadership and ambassadors also attended, including Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley.

Following a banquet of garden salad, baked ziti, baked chicken, mixed veggies, toasted Italian bread, tiramisu and pecan pie, Chamber President Steve Rowe opened the

ceremony with a "Thank you" to everyone for coming and for their recognition and support.

"These students are not only the future of our community, but they also represent the future of our nation," said Rowe. "But without our sponsors, we would not be able to have events like this, so we would like to take a moment to thank our sponsor, Joey Swanson of WoodmenLife." See Chamber, Page 8A

Family escapes death after tree falls, collapses roof onto bed

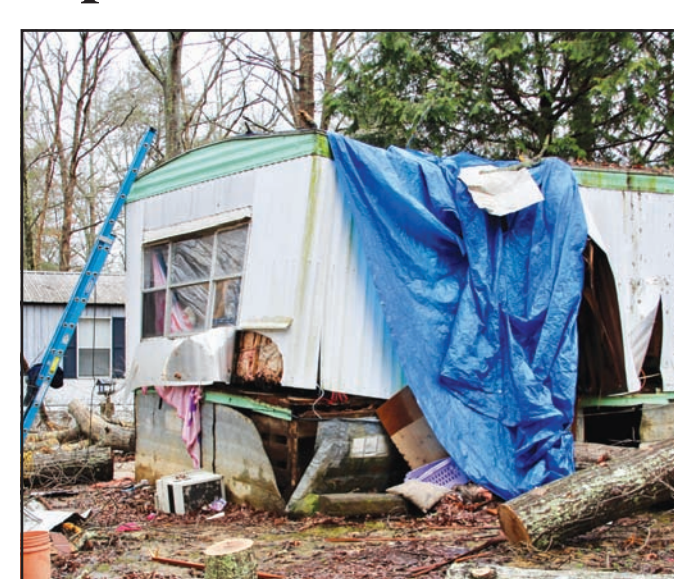
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, Feb. 20, Antonio Henderson awoke to a chaotic scene. A tree had fallen on his home and collapsed the roof onto his bed.

"It was scary," said Henderson, who lives with his family at the Blairsville Mobile Home Park off Fairview Church Road. "At 5:30 in the morning, we heard a loud noise, a crack, and then the tree fell. The roof caved in on top of us."

As a storm raged outside and water poured in through the ruined roof, Henderson and his wife struggled to get out from under the fallen ceiling.

"I had to really gain focus, because once the roof See Henderson, Page 2A



Two trees actually fell that morning, one into another, with the second one landing on top of the Hendersons' main bedroom. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Blairsville man, one other charged in connection with McKinney murder

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Two more people have been arrested in connection with the Dec. 4 murder of Justin McKinney of Morganton, bringing the total number of people arrested in the case to six.

In this latest development from Feb. 11, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Fannin County Sheriff's Office arrested Michael Chase Havard, 20, of Blairsville, and Kevin Jack Chamaty, 20, of Epworth, each on a charge of felony murder, according to GBI arrest warrants.



Kevin Jack Chamaty



Michael Chase Havard

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