

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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## John Hill takes over as acting school superintendent

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor

John Hill is now the acting superintendent of Union County Schools.

Hill takes the reins from Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield two and a half months ahead of schedule, as Dr. Rayfield still plans to retire at the end of the 2017-2018 school year.

Citing health and personal reasons, Dr. Rayfield will work from home as associate superintendent to Hill leading up to his retirement.

The Union County Board of Education voted to name Hill acting superintendent in an April 10 called meeting.

"I'm excited about the future, excited about working for the students of Union County, because that's who I



Union County Schools Acting Superintendent John Hill

work for," said Superintendent Hill. "I feel like I answer to the students of Union County."

"Those are my customers, are the kids, and we want to

provide the highest quality of education we can with the financial ability that we have. And we want to contribute to our community and make it a better place. That's the goal, to make these kids employable, happy citizens of Union County."

Hill was already set to become superintendent on July 1, and he said the school system will maintain course as he begins the job early.

"It's just a continuation of what we've been doing," said Hill. "I feel very comfortable with things - it's just getting started a few months early. No big deal, no challenges, really."

"We've been working towards this goal, it's just expedited a little bit. I still have the assistance when I need it, so that's a great feeling, having the experience in Dr. Rayfield that I

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## Director candidate forms to roll out soon; due back June 25

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor

YOUNG HARRIS - The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors has approved the new Director Candidate Form ahead of the 2018 director elections.

All nine directors gathered for their monthly meeting on Tuesday, April 10, to discuss the new form and other business.

Starting this year, candidates will be presented with a user-friendly form for candidacy, which could be available at BRMEMC.com as early as this week.

The new candidate form will come with an informational sheet about the job, designed specifically to give candidates a better idea of what will be expected of them as EMC directors.



BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms

Furthermore, the form will prompt candidates to answer questions about their interest in the position, with one goal being to more accurately describe the potentially demanding director

workload.

"One thing I've heard from the board, people really need to understand what the time commitment is," said EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms in the meeting.

Members who submit a form for candidacy will be subject to a criminal background check, and they must be considered members in good standing, i.e. not be in a state of suspension with the EMC.

All candidate forms must be in to the EMC's Nominating Committee no later than June 25.

Members of the Nominating Committee will meet on May 10 for an informational session. They will meet again, tentatively on June 26, and that meeting will serve as the final day nominees will be

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## Gowder brothers, Heaton plead not guilty to federal charges

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor



Former hospital CEO Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton pleaded not guilty to federal charges in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, Gainesville Division, on Monday, April 9.

All three defendants appeared before the court

to hear the criminal charges against them, and following their pleas of not guilty, they were each released on \$10,000 unsecured bond, per court documents.

Now, attorneys for the defendants will work to file motions on their behalf ahead of a May 16 pretrial conference, during which time next steps will be discussed with a U.S. magistrate judge.

The pretrial conference will take place telephonically, and only the attorneys who will actually handle the case at trial are required to participate on May 16, not the defendants, per court documents.

Various elements of the cases against the defendants will be discussed in the pretrial conference, including circumstances surrounding: Any arrests; any

statements made by the defendants to law enforcement; any searches or seizures that resulted in evidence that the government intends to use against the defendants; the potential use of expert testimony; and other elements, per court documents.

Evidentiary hearings will also be scheduled in the pretrial conference, per court documents.

A federal grand jury handed up a 212-count indictment listing the Gowder brothers and Dr. Heaton as defendants on Wednesday, April 4, and the document was unsealed on Friday, April 6.

The three men have been indicted as part of Operation SCOPE, "for illegally prescribing and obtaining thousands of doses of prescription pain medications

outside the usual course of professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose," per a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

"These defendants allegedly abused their positions as medical professionals to obtain illegitimately thousands of doses of prescription pain medications and now face serious federal charges," said U.S. Attorney Byung J. "BJay" Pak that April 6. "The Department of Justice is committed to fighting the opioid epidemic through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of licensed medical practitioners who abuse their positions of trust to engage in illegal conduct."

Operation SCOPE stands for "Strategically Combatting

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## Blairsville woman dies in single car accident

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor

Robin Underwood, 51, of Blairsville, has died from injuries sustained in a single car accident that occurred on April 10 at the intersection of Georgia 325 and Pat Colwell Road, according to authorities.

The accident happened at about 5 a.m. and was discovered around 6:50 a.m., nearly two hours after it occurred, when a good Samaritan driving by noticed headlights coming from the side of the road and pulled over to offer help, according to authorities.

Underwood's vehicle had overturned, and she was unresponsive and later pronounced dead at the scene, according to authorities.

The Georgia State Patrol investigated the accident and



Photo/Facebook

Robin Underwood determined that Underwood's vehicle, which had been traveling north on Georgia 325, traveled straight through the intersection at Pat Colwell Road.

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## 911 dispatchers honored during national appreciation week

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor

When emergencies strike and lives hang in the balance, it's the calm voice in the dark that make sure help arrives - the voice of a 911 dispatcher.

The Union County E-911 Emergency Dispatch Center welcomed friends and fellow first responders to a special dinner on Thursday, April 12, to recognize National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Those gathered enjoyed the reading of a proclamation by Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, who declared the appreciation week would run from April 8 through April 14 in the city.

"When an emergency occurs," said Mayor Conley, "the prompt response of

law enforcement officers, firefighters and paramedics is critical to the protection of life and preservation of property.

"The safety of our law enforcement officers, EMS and firefighters is dependent upon the quality and accuracy of information obtained from citizens who telephone the Union County 911 center."

Added Mayor Conley: "Public safety telecommunicators are the first and most critical contact our citizens have with emergency services ... (and) are the single vital link for our law enforcement officers, EMS and firefighters by monitoring their activities by radio, providing them information and ensuring their safety."

In a proclamation of his own, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal also praised the

work of dispatchers whose contributions to public safety are often overlooked because of the behind-the-scenes nature of the job.

"Georgia's public safety telecommunicators," said Gov. Deal, "have made substantial contributions to the apprehension of dangerous criminals, the suppression of fires and the care of those in need of medical treatment, among other emergency tasks."

"Public Safety Telecommunicators Week provides the opportunity to recognize public safety telecommunicators across the state for their commitment to safeguarding the lives and property of Georgia citizens."

Union County E-911 Dispatch is headed up by

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Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Union County E-911 Emergency Dispatch, left to right: John Pickelsimer (Mapping), Lt. Millie Baxter, Director David Dyer, Carrie King, Holley Kemp, Becky Walker, Ashley Churchill, Amber Baltzell, Lynn Powell, Amanda Craig and Heidi Morris. Not pictured: Denny Dills, David Walker and Scott Neidecker.

## Importance of Second Amendment stressed in meeting



By Mark Novak  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

"Protect yourself," said Union County Sheriff Mack Mason in front of a packed house at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center on Tuesday, April 10.

Several hundred residents from Union and neighboring counties attended the sheriff's ever popular Weapons Carry Class, which his office has put on multiple times in the last year.

"I'm very interested in everyone in Union County that is a law-abiding citizen, not a convicted felon, to have

a firearm," said Sheriff Mason. "Know how to use it, protect yourself, don't be a victim."

Added Sheriff Mason: "If you call 911, we will try to get there, but it might take a little while. Your best defense is knowing how to use a firearm and being proficient with it. I want you to understand that your sheriff's office and your officers are behind you 100 percent in this effort and endeavor."

"Protect yourself. Learn how to do that. This is what it's about tonight, learning what the law is and how you can legally defend yourself or your family

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## Rep. Doug Collins gives an update from Washington D.C



U.S. Congressman Doug Collins

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Assistant Editor

It's safe to say that U.S. Rep. Doug Collins of Georgia's 9th Congressional District has been keeping busy in Washington D.C.

With all the news lately about the \$1.3 trillion omnibus spending bill, on top of House Speaker Paul Ryan's retirement announcement and the failed vote on a Balanced Budget Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Congressman Collins has had a lot on his plate.

The congressman said he's still working to secure better and more competitive broadband

internet service back home in his rural district, and that he and his colleagues remain constantly committed to safeguarding the economy in the nation's capital.

In other news, Collins saw some movement earlier this month on a bill he introduced last July - the Prison Reform and Redemption Act.

Rep. Collins introduced the bill after seeing a growing trend of successful criminal justice reforms take place in many states around the nation, including his home state of Georgia.

"What we're trying to do is make sure that folks who make mistakes and want to correct those mistakes have the tools and

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**PANTHERS BASEBALL**  
Apr 17 vs. East Hall 5:30 PM  
Senior Day 4:45 PM  
**SOCCER**  
Apr 20 vs. Gilmer 5 & 7 PM  
Senior Night

**Allegheny Lodge**  
**Big Breakfast**  
Saturday, April 21st

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**FOCUS**  
Union County  
Farmers Market  
Saturday, April 21st

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**CRUISE IN SATURDAY APRIL 21ST**

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