

County Meeting...from Page 1A

As has become custom, Commissioner Paris and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley teamed up to issue a local proclamation calling for the first Thursday of May to be a "Union County Day of Prayer."

"It is fitting and proper to give thanks to God by observing a day of prayer in Union County when all acknowledge our blessings and express gratitude for them, while recognizing the need for strengthening religious

and moral values in our state and nation," read Paris from the proclamation.

Joining Paris and Conley for the proclamation were several religious leaders from the community, as well as Richard and Sharon Morrison, who coordinate the annual National Day of Prayer event in Blairsville.

This year's prayer event will take place at 6:30 p.m. on May 3 at First Baptist Church Blairsville.

Also in the April 19 meeting, the commissioner declared that April 2018 would serve as Parkinson's Awareness Month.

As a special guest to speak about Parkinson's awareness, he welcomed his longtime friend and former executive assistant Peggy Deyton.

"I never, never dreamed that one day, I would be standing up here in front of y'all and telling you that I have Parkinson's," said Deyton. "It can strike anybody. I don't want to scare you, but some of you sitting out here tonight, it might be in your future. You just do not know."

Parkinson's is a neurodegenerative disease with symptoms including motor disturbances such as tremors, slowness of movement, rigidity and postural instability, as well as non-motor symptoms such as cognitive impairment, dribbling, daytime sleepiness and slurred speech.

There is no cure currently, but the goal of the proclamation is "for all to recognize the need for more research in dealing with the devastating effects of Parkinson's disease."

In years past, awareness proclamation duties have fallen on Chuck and Brenda Esposito of the Blairsville area Parkinson's Disease Support Group, but the Espositos moved out of the county recently due to Chuck's declining health.

Commissioner Paris welcomed mother and daughter duo Jennifer and Abigail Addington of the Northeast Georgia Food Allergy Support Group, and he signed a proclamation to raise awareness of the growing public health concern of food allergies.

"An estimated 15 million people in the United States have food allergies, including six million children under the age of 18," per the proclamation. "According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, food allergy results in more than 200,000 ambulatory care visits a year involving children under 18."

The commissioner proclaimed April 2018 as National Donate Life Month, bringing attention to the thousands of men, women and children across the nation awaiting life-saving organ transplants.

Furthermore, Paris

highlighted two proclamations he signed earlier in the month, one for Child Abuse Prevention Month and another designating April as Confederate History and Heritage Month, both of which the *North Georgia News* reported on previously.

Moving on from proclamations, the commissioner hired engineering consulting firm CHA Consulting Inc. to provide design services for the proposed new access road at the intersection of Georgia 515 and the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

The new road will service the future Youth Ball Field Complex and the Union County Farmers Market, and the contract with CHA Consulting Inc. "is not to exceed \$44,513 and has an effective date of March 23, 2018."

Paris agreed to pay AMR Business Products Inc. dba DECA \$2,834 for one year of remote software maintenance and services for system failures for Union County E-911's recording equipment.

In other business, the commissioner approved an agreement for indigent defense services between the Public Defender Office of the Enotah Judicial Circuit and Union, Lumpkin, White and Towns counties. The cost to Union County is \$95,563 for fiscal

year 2017-2018.

The county has officially renewed its agreement with Air Methods to provide medically necessary life flights for county residents from June 1, 2018, to May 31, 2019. The total cost of this agreement is \$57,320, which the county is splitting down the middle with Union General Hospital Inc.

Commissioner Paris approved another agreement in the April 19 meeting, this one between Legacy Link for the required FY19 local share of \$95,000.

"These funds are used by the Area Agency on Aging as a match to draw down the federal and state monies for administration, coordination, information and referral, employment and training of older workers and volunteer programs," said Paris. "This program is provided through the Union County Senior Center."

Paris accepted an Accountability Courts Grant for Family Drug Court in the amount of \$30,000 toward the end of the meeting, and also approved annexation into the City of Blairsville a strip of Butternut Creek Golf Course along Pat Haralson Memorial Drive.

"This will allow the City of Blairsville to extend utilities

to adjacent properties," said Paris. "The city came to us a few months ago asking us about that. Fellowship of the Hills is building a church out there. Also, an apartment complex, I don't think it's final, but they're looking out there."

In his commissioner's comments, Paris said the Union County Road Department will be working this spring to get caught up on a number of projects.

"Mainly, though, our project we're going to be concentrating on is over at the access to the Farmers Market," said Paris. "Also, we're going to be trying to build a road access from Highway 76/515, right above the car wash."

"To the right where the Sears building is, just as you get to that property, GDOT wants us to build an access road from there back to School Circle, and that will allow the Sears area to access that property off of that road."

Added Paris: "And it will allow a crossover there, because with the new four-lane that's coming in ... if we don't put this road in, there's going to be a concrete median down through there, and they'll have to go all the way down to the red light to be able to turn around and go back there."

BOE...from Page 1A

Superintendent John Hill gave a brief overview of the upcoming strategic planning process in the work session, noting that the system goes through this process every five years.

As part of its planning process, the board adopted a resolution last month to support the Georgia Vision Project, which is a collaboration between the Georgia School Superintendents Association and the Georgia School Boards Association, or GSBA.

The Georgia Vision Project aims to involve stakeholders "at the local, county, state and regional levels to help move public education in Georgia from a place of compliance to one of innovation and creativity."

Hill said the school system will be working alongside the Georgia Vision Project to develop its updated strategic plan.

"Some of these things are annually," said Hill. "Comprehensive Needs Assessment, that entails all your federal programs, and your District Improvement Plan, School Improvement Plan, those are done on an annual basis."

"But on a five-year rotation, you also have your charter renewal and your SACS re-accreditation, which is coming up in the next school year. So, we would like to hire Georgia School Boards with GLISI (Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement) - that's their business partner in this entity - to help us with strategic planning."

According to Hill, a system's strategic plan is its road map for the next five years, as it "aligns what you're doing budgetarily, what your focus is, what your vision is, what your mission is."

Continued Hill: "One of the things that was identified in the last SACS visit was not as much vertical alignment within the district, and we would like to really increase our internal capacity and our team effort between schools."

"This would also help us have input from various stakeholders like the business community, because that's a huge piece of the puzzle. If our students that graduate are not employable when they graduate, we're not doing our job correctly."

The SACS acronym stands for Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which is a regional accreditation organization recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Later in the regular meeting, the board hired GSBA to conduct its Strategic Planning Service for \$19,500. The service will start this week with a community meeting, and will continue throughout the summer.

Also that evening, School Federal Programs Director Dr. Paula Davenport reviewed the results of a recently completed communication audit conducted by GSBA.

"It's very important that our school system communicates effectively and that we're transparent in all that we do," said Dr. Davenport.

The GSBA representative conducting the communication audit met with a wide variety of school stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, administration and others, and

analyzed the system's methods of communication.

Areas where the system excelled included its use of social media, its regional reputation, the successful implementation of a notification system for parents, and the noted high level of care and passion exhibited by teachers.

However, the representative from GSBA found several areas of communication in need of improvement, including the school's strategic plan, its branding initiative, the school website and others.

Moving forward, especially with the upcoming strategic planning process, the system will be shoring up its communication capabilities to better engage the community and parents, but also to keep internal morale up among teachers, students and staff.

Hill said that the system will be able to save thousands of dollars in redesign costs for the school website by using in-house talent, and he also announced that the system's new app is downloadable by searching for Union County BOE in the App Store.

The app, which is published but still being tested, features all sorts of information about the school system, including news, an events calendar, push notifications, athletics and more.

New School Finance Director Karen Bundy led a brief discussion concerning the audit for fiscal year ending June 30, 2017. She reported no findings and a clean audit, stating the complete audit should be available on the school website in the near future.

The board voted to accept the audit report.

Also in the April 17 regular meeting, the board entertained a number of presentations and awards for various achievements and recognitions of students, teachers and other stakeholders.

Union County Primary School Principal Millie Owenby presented librarian Casey Potts with the Going the Extra Mile Award for her exemplary care of students and their varied educational needs.

Elementary School Principal Gwen Stafford recognized the middle school soccer team for being 2018 Mountain Region champs under the leadership of Coach Chris Robbins.

Members of the boys' soccer team, which went

undefeated this season, include: Dalton Allen, Max Boykin, Xander Clay, Kendall Conley, Landon Cox, MJ Delatte, Elijah Helton, Zion Henderson, Landon Kight, Jasiel Lucas-Mendoza, Paxton Meyer, Isaiah Ortiz, Sean Phillips, Tyler Robbins, Ethan Rouse, Parker Scott and Locke Thomas.

High School Principal C.T. Hussion, Assistant Principal Gerald Bavero and CTAE Director Josh Davis introduced the UCHS Welding Fabrication Team, which placed Runner-Up at SkillsUSA under the guidance of sponsor Derick Dillinger. Those students were Andrew Collins, Michael Raper, Slade Rowan and Isaac Tritt.

In recognition of the high school being named an AP Challenge School by the Georgia Department of Education, Hussion also presented awards to Advanced Placement teachers Katie Scott, Teena Atkins, Greg Chambers, Lynn Deweese, Mark Donahue, Alecia Frizzell, April Krieger and Debbie Nichols.

As part of its regular Partners in Education Award series, the board also thanked leaders from three colleges that regularly team up with Union County Schools to offer excellent dual enrollment opportunities for high school students here.

Partners recognized were Dr. Mark Ivester of North Georgia Technical College, Lori Bramlett and Sandy Ott of University of North Georgia Blue Ridge Campus, and Dr. Drew Van Horn of Young Harris College.

Finally, Administrator Tiffany Setzer presented two awards on behalf of Special Education Services Director Donna Dixon, one to school psychologist Alicia Meng and the other to teacher Carla Drake, both of whom demonstrate exemplary care for students in their charge.

NARFE meeting

Tuesday, May 8 is the National Association of Active and Retired Educators (NARFE) at 11:30 AM at the Hot and Cold Buffet in Ellijay (near Walmart). A report on the information received at the NARFE District Meeting this month and benefits information will be presented with the dutch treat lunch. The National Meeting in Orlando will be discussed also. Bring your concerns and questions and visit with other employees and retirees. You may call President Jim Veal at 706-455-6920 for more information on meetings.