

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, May 13, 2020

UCHS to hold May 22 graduation; Woody Gap to walk May 23

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

seniors and their families at 8:45 p.m. in the high school parking lot.

Audio will be available via an FM radio signal with a range of approximately 600 feet, allowing seniors and their families to remain inside their vehicles while watching on large video screens.

Recording for video presentation began this week, with members of the Class of 2020 donning their caps, gowns, medals, cords and more to walk across the stage at the Fine Arts Center to receive their diplomas.

Each senior has received a set time to be filmed in one-by-one fashion, and social distancing is being

See *Graduation*, Page 2A



The Union County Board of Education held two called meetings over Zoom last week, in which they discussed graduation plans for UCHS and Wood Gap seniors. Photo/Screenshot

Lt. Leon James assigned UCSO's full-time traffic detail



Union County Sheriff's Lt. Leon James and Sheriff Mack Mason with the county's new 2020 Dodge Charger, which James will be using as a dedicated traffic patrol vehicle.

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

different story altogether. Enter Lt. Leon James, who for the last few weeks has been working traffic full time.

James comes to the task with greater than 20 years' experience in law enforcement, the last 11 of which he's spent

Photo by Shawn Jarrard with the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Now, Sheriff Mack Mason is happy to announce James' assignment as a full-time patrol deputy over traffic enforcement.

See *Traffic Detail*, Page 2A

Early voting starts Monday ahead of June 9 General Primary

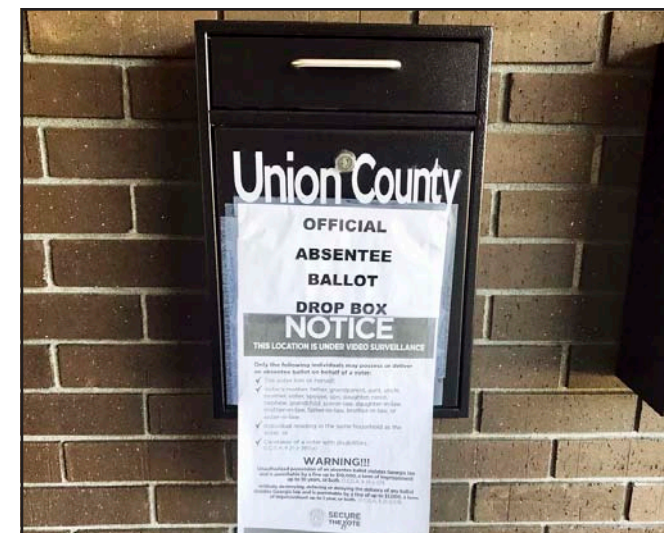
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Early voting for the June 9 General Primary, Presidential Preference Primary and Nonpartisan General Elections begins Monday, and for the first time in election history, voters are being encouraged to wear masks.

Of course, people don't have to wear a mask to cast a ballot, but the fact that mask wearing is being advised by officials across the state is certainly a sign of the times.

It's been a crazy election season, starting with the last-minute rollout of brand-new voting equipment, followed by the cancellation of the March 24 Presidential Preference Primary due to coronavirus, then the postponement of the May 19 General Primary to June 9 for the same reasons.

Moreover, the Secretary of State's Office has initiated a statewide absentee ballot drive to get as many people as



Union County residents can deposit absentee ballots and absentee ballot applications in this drop box affixed outside the Union County Courthouse. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

possible to vote by mail to slow the spread of COVID-19, and the initiative has experienced a number of misfires, including many undeliverable ballot applications and incorrect

ballot mailing instructions. Voters, poll workers and election officials across the state have expressed concerns about in-person voting, so the

See *Early Voting*, Page 2A

Retired Educators celebrate teachers with community support

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer



Eva Boone, 6, helped her grandmother Sheryl Maddox celebrate teachers with the Union County Retired Educators Association last week. Here, Boone thanks her kindergarten teachers Ms. Stephany and Ms. Shannon. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

In recognition of Teacher Appreciation Week, a dozen members of the Union County Retired Educators Association donned face masks on May 7 to responsibly gather and wave signs on the Blairsville Square in support of local teachers amid the coronavirus pandemic.

And appreciation they got, with many motorists honking their horns that day to express gratitude for the county's educators.

"We did this because the teachers are working at home and doing what they need for the students, and I wanted them

See *Retired Educators*, Page 6A

Mathews earns trip to Belarus with Fulbright Student Program

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Blairsville's own Karley Mathews is witnessing a lifelong dream come true in the wake of her selection as a finalist for the Fulbright Student Program.

As a "Fulbrighter," Mathews has received a grant for an English Teaching Assistant program in a participating country outside of the United States, which will allow the 2019 University of North Georgia graduate to teach English in the Russian-speaking nation of Belarus.

"I have friends who are originally from Belarus that I've known for 10 years, and their kids have come to stay



Karley Mathews and French have prepared her for an extended visit to the post-Soviet country. See *Mathews*, Page 6A

Pastors stream 'National Day of Prayer' event for area residents

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

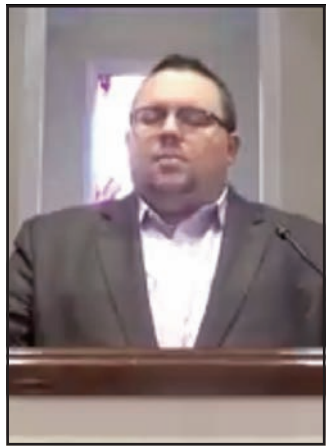
designating the first Thursday in May as the national Day of Prayer for the nation.

"It is just an effort to assemble and pray. Normally, we would have it at Foster Park or some other venue where we could have a lot of folks come in and join us, but obviously, with all the COVID-19 things going on, we decided to put it online."

Area churches pre-recorded the event to host on Facebook, giving the community the opportunity to pray together and talk with one another in the chat.

"The whole purpose for this is just for prayer, and the whole country needs prayer right now with everything going on," Thomas said. "This is just a real positive event to uplift folks"

See *Day of Prayer*, Page 3A



Associate Pastor Bradley Thomas of Macedonia Baptist Church was a central organizer in the 2020 National Day of Prayer event in neighboring Towns County. Photo/Screenshot

Pinnacle Bank completes local switchover after SB&T merger

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Since 1934, Pinnacle Bank has been a trusted name in community banking throughout Northeast Georgia, and now, the Elberton-headquartered bank has a new location in Blairsville.

Pinnacle announced in December it had merged with Southern Bank & Trust, to include the Blairsville branch on Blue Ridge Street, which was originally acquired by SB&T from Cadence Bank in 2013.

Chartered in 2005, the Clarkesville-based Southern Bank & Trust had branches in Blairsville, Clarkesville and



Tim Massengale and Bobby Cepeck of Masstar Signs out of Greenville, South Carolina, installed new signage and Friday at Pinnacle Bank, formerly Southern Bank & Trust of Blairsville. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Vol. 111 No. 20
4 Sections 20 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Sunny Hi 76 Lo 54
Fri: Cloudy Hi 78 Lo 55
Sat: Sunny Hi 81 Lo 57

Inside
Arrests 3B
Church 3C
Classifieds 2D
Opinion 4A
Legals 2D
Obits 5C

COVID-19
Testing
UPDATE

See page 4B

SAMPLE
BALLOTS
FOR JUNE 9
ELECTIONS

See page 2C

Gowder/Heaton
Sentencing
Rescheduled
Again

See page 3B

Quilt of
Valor
Recipient
Honored

See page 1D