

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Total Solar Eclipse brings thousands to Union County, area

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Eclipse mania swept through the region on Monday, Aug. 21, bringing thousands of visitors to town to catch sight of the once-in-a-lifetime spectacle known as a total solar eclipse.

The day sky steadily darkened between the start of the eclipse at 1 p.m. and totality around 2:35 p.m. on Monday, causing a truly unique light to inhabit the county for a brief time.

And as the moon finally blocked out all but the outermost layer of the sun's atmosphere, eclipse watchers removed their protective eyewear to enjoy the full experience of a total solar eclipse for all of two minutes before the sun came peeking back out around the far side

of the moon in the midst of an increasingly cloudy sky.

So, was the Great American Eclipse worth it?

The turnout would suggest that, yes, viewing totality was totally worth it.

Residents and visitors alike showed extreme interest in the Aug. 21 natural phenomenon, as regional roadways filled with thousands more vehicles than is usual for a Monday.

However, several accidents were reported as visitors began to head home. Fire Chief/EMA Director David Dyer said none of those accidents were life-threatening crashes.

Meanwhile, some pre-eclipse figures placed tens of thousands of eclipse chasers squarely in Union County and the surrounding areas on

eclipse day, those numbers may have been overestimated.

Traffic over the eclipse weekend was expected, and though the county experienced the equivalent of a busy weekend, it wasn't as bad as many had anticipated. In fact, most locals stayed home rather than risk getting stranded in heavy traffic.

Union County roads, and particularly Georgia 515, were largely quiet until about an hour before the start of the eclipse, when traffic picked up markedly coming from Fannin and Gilmer counties. Temporary signage along the State Route directed visitors to various businesses and parks.

Overall, the designated eclipse-viewing areas were busy on Monday, though thru-traffic overwhelmed –

thankfully, some would say – expectations, and traffic picked up after the eclipse as people made their way home

through the county.

As far as folks watching the eclipse, businesses all over town held viewing parties, and

the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce offered several safe venues that proved

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The Eclipse reached totality at 2:35 p.m. on Monday in Blairsville and Union County. Blaring music evolved into total silence as the cosmic adventure unfolded. Photo/Shannon Richards

Lt. Gov. Cagle delivers economic message in Blairsville

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Georgia Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle kicked off a six-day, 17-county tour on Tuesday, Aug. 15, which started in Dahlonega before making its way to the Brackett Community Room in Blairsville that first day.

There, Cagle and his wife, Nita, met with local leaders and constituents who were eager to hear his pro-business economic message, which he delivered into following a brief introduction from Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley.

"There are three important ingredients that we've got to be focused on moving forward," said Cagle, who is running for governor. "First and foremost is, in order to continue to be a pro-business



Georgia Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle at the Brackett Community Room on Tuesday, Aug. 15. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Auditors give Union County finances clean bill of health

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Those in attendance for the August Union County Commission meeting heard a report on the county's 2016 audit, which found the county in top financial shape, with plenty of promise for continued financial success in the coming years.

Clay Pilgrim, a CPA audit partner with Rushton & Company, presented several figures from the audit conducted by his company. This is the third year that this firm has handled the county's yearly audit, which is a mandated yearly requirement for every municipality across the state.

Pilgrim began by explaining the county's net



Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris. Photo/Lily Avery

W.C. Nelson Municipal Airport Terminal poised to take Blairsville to new heights

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Already renowned for its excellent service and friendly environment, the Blairsville Municipal Airport has taken a major step forward with the brand-new W.C. Nelson Terminal Building.

For the first time since its completion in June, the terminal opened to the public in a warm reception of community stakeholders and friends of the Nelson family on Saturday, Aug. 19.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley led the dedication of the new building, thanking a seemingly countless number of individuals and sharing with those present just how the new



The new W.C. Nelson Terminal at the Blairsville Municipal Airport. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Authorities recover Eller's body from Lake Chatuge

By Charles Duncan
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HIAWASSEE – The Towns County Water Rescue Recovery Team recovered the body of a 22-year-old North Carolina man from Lake Chatuge on Wednesday, Aug. 16.

Brandon Eller, 22, of Hayesville, was last seen alive in the parking lot of Hawg Wild BBQ, his place of employment, at 5:50 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 14, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Authorities discovered



John Brandon Eller

Teacher arrested for allegedly having sex with student

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

A former Union County teacher is out on bond and out of a job after being arrested for allegedly having sex with one of her middle school students in 2013.

Shawnetta Reece, 40, of Blairsville, turned herself in to the sheriff's office around 3 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 14, according to Union County Sheriff's Lt. Daren Osborn, who worked the case alongside the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

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Shawnetta Reece

John Berry headlines at Granddaddy Mimm's this Saturday for a good cause

By Charles Duncan
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On Saturday, Aug. 26, Granddaddy Mimm's Moonshine Distillery at 161 Pappy's Plaza will be hosting an epic day celebrating many of the fantastic groups in Blairsville and Union County that help rescue, take care of, and find loving homes for so many amazing animals.

There will be animal adoption opportunities, K-9 demonstrations by the Union County Sheriff's Office, and plenty of food and refreshments to enjoy.

Furthermore, there will be lots and lots of live music, including Grammy-winning Country Music star and North Georgia native John Berry, plus Tommy Townsend, the lead singer of Waylon Jennings' former band, Waymore's Outlaws, and North Georgia's Gregory Erwin also will be playing.

The music is going to start at 4:30 p.m. with Erwin, a true singer/songwriter born and raised in the Northeast Georgia Mountains. Erwin is followed at 5:15 p.m. by Granddaddy Mimm's own grandson, Tommy Townsend,



John Berry

and we're all familiar with his musical work.

At 6 p.m., John Berry takes the stage. Berry, active as a recording artist since 1979, has recorded more than 20 studio albums, including one platinum album and two gold albums. In his career, Berry has also charted 19 songs on the Billboard Hot Country Chart.

From noon until 3 p.m., there will be special rescues by the Union County Sheriff's Office K-9 Division. Also, Cast Away Critters will host pet adoptions.

"We're going to have See Berry, Page 3A

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