

North Georgia News

2 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, September 18, 2024

GBI charges woman in bank robbery attempt

Friend says suspect had psychotic break

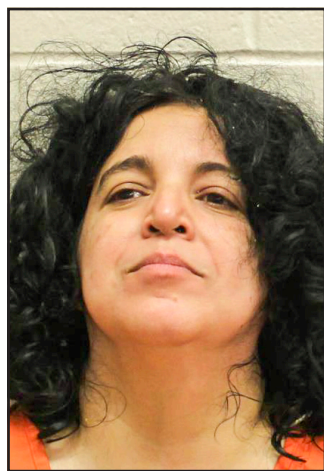
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Blairsville Police Department and Union County Sheriff's Office had their suspect in handcuffs within minutes of being dispatched to a robbery at SouthState Bank on Georgia 515 Monday, Sept. 9.

No one was injured, and the suspect, Alia Ghosheh, 45, who has an Athens address listed at the Union County Jail, did not have any weapons on her person or in her vehicle, according to authorities.

Likewise, no explosives were found in her possession, which was a concern given the nature of the incident, and she is believed to have acted alone.

The alarming episode unfolded quickly that Monday



Alia Ghosheh

when Ghosheh parked her Honda Fit outside the bank just after noon, entered with a duffle bag and a Garfield stuffed animal, threw both behind the counter, and allegedly

demanding that employees "give me all your money."

According to witnesses, Ghosheh acted erratically inside the bank, yelling things like "Free Palestine," "Allah" and, most alarming, "Death to America."

SouthState employees wasted no time in activating a panic alarm, evacuating the building and calling 911, leaving Ghosheh alone in the lobby with law enforcement on its way, according to authorities. It does not appear there were any customers in the bank when the robbery transpired.

Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer happened to be nearby when E-911 dispatched the panic alarm at 12:06 p.m., and he

See Ghosheh Charged, Page 3A



The Honda Fit driven by Alia Ghosheh is thought to have been connected to a potential "road rage" complaint that came into E-911 around the same time she arrived at SouthState Bank last week. Photo by Todd Forrest

9/11 tragedy remembered in gathering at Meeks



Union County Fire lifted Old Glory high with Ladder 1 at the 9/11 remembrance in Meeks Park last Wednesday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Although the Patriot Day Remembrance Ceremony at the Union County Fine Arts Center was canceled last week, a brief but no less poignant prayer service took its place at the upper flagpole in Meeks Park last Wednesday morning.

The observance marked 23 years since the September 11 murderous tragedy conducted by radical Islamic terrorists that shook the United States – and the world at large – to its core.

Organized by Union County Fire Chief David Dyer and Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe, the

annual event has served as a memorial for the thousands of lives taken on that infamous day and to remember the strength America yet carries.

In the past couple of years, the remembrance has also taught younger generations just what happened in 2001 and the powerful emotions and

See 9/11 Remembrance, Page 6A

Dr. Wiles thanked for 45 years of area patient care

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Dr. Mary Beth Wiles is a humble soul, so when presented with her very own plaque honoring 45 years of practicing internal medicine in Union County last week, she was shocked to tears – and incredibly grateful.

The presentation was made by CEO Kevin Bierschenk of Union General Health System and Dr. T. Michele Bradford of High Mountain Healthcare on Tuesday, Sept. 10.

Wiles wasn't expecting the recognition, but her daughter who followed in her footsteps, Dr. Elizabeth Wiles, wanted her mother's contribution to the community to be known. It's not often, after all, that a provider stays in one system for nearly half a century.

Wiles was actually born in Germany and placed in an orphanage, but E.H. and Earlyne Miller, an Army couple from Georgia, adopted her and brought her home with them to Atlanta.

She attended Headland High School in East Point, graduated from Georgia State University, earned her Medical Degree at the Medical College of Georgia, then completed her



Dr. Elizabeth Wiles and her mother Dr. Mary Beth Wiles from Blairsville Internal Medicine. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

residency at Emory University.

As for what started her on a medical career path, Wiles said she was "born wanting to do medicine." She watched her father struggle with illness when she was a child and was drawn to reading medical books, so it was a natural choice.

Regarding how the Wiles family ended up in Blairsville, where Mary Beth would spend decades treating countless

See Dr. Wiles Honored, Page 7A

Page offers insight into Project Chimps sanctuary

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

HIAWASSEE – Project Chimps Outreach Coordinator Nancy Page didn't monkey around while captivating the Mountain Movers & Shakers Sept. 13 with stories about chimpanzees rescued from laboratories and sharing information on the nonprofit sanctuary that takes them in.

Despite common misconceptions, chimps are not actually monkeys, belonging instead to the great ape family. Apes are distinguishable from monkeys due to their lack of tails, and most of them – except for humans and orangutans – are confined in the wild to the rainforests of Africa.

Due to the fact that they share more than 95% of their DNA with humans,



Nancy Page of Project Chimps was excited to speak with the Mountain Movers & Shakers civic group last Friday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

chimps were used in laboratory settings until 2015, when the U.S. banned their use as test subjects.

In 2016, Project

Chimps opened its doors to provide some of these former experimentation victims their "happily ever after" in a facility

See Project Chimps, Page 2A

Local child molester to serve full 25-year sentence

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Randall Wade Sullens knows he will likely die behind bars.

That's because Sullens, 60, has been sentenced to 25 years in prison without the possibility of parole after pleading guilty Sept. 6 to molesting four children.

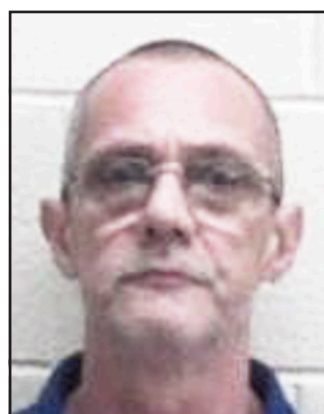
With credit for time served, Sullens will be 82 before he can breathe free air again, and if he makes it that long, he will serve out the remainder of his days on probation and as a registered sex offender.

Sullens, of Blairsville, was arrested on March 3, 2022, following a thorough investigation by Union County Sheriff's Office Inv. Lisa Foos, who is now retired.

Foos uncovered a disturbing number of child molestation allegations spanning seven victims over nearly 40 years, though until March of 2022, Sullens had never been charged with such conduct, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said.

His victims – both boys and girls – ranged in age from 5 to 14 when molested. All were either related to him or were the children of close family friends, and Sullens was able to commit his crimes by successfully masquerading as a trusted person in their lives, Langley said.

The case that brought justice to Sullens' doorstep pertained to his three most recent victims, whose family members came forward to report that he had masturbated



Randall Wade Sullens

in the children's presence on multiple occasions between January and February of 2022.

Over the course of her investigation, Foos learned of another child whom Sullens had sodomized in 2012 and again in 2019, resulting in three

See Sullens Sentenced, Page 2A



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2024 Election Deadlines Info

By Patricia Christ
Member, Union County
Board of Elections

The November election is fast approaching and it is important to keep some dates in mind. The deadline to register to vote is October 7, 2024. If you have moved since the last election, you may need to reregister.

You can check your voter registration status, as well as register to vote, online at the Secretary of State MyVoter

page, <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov>. Or, pick up a registration form at the Union County Elections Building at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, Blairsville. Deliver the completed form to the Board of Registrars at the Elections Building or mail it to the address on the form, postmarked no later than October 7.

Early voting will be held at the Elections Building from October 15 through November 1 (except Sundays). Early voting wait times during the

last election were under five minutes, so consider this convenient option. Election day is Tuesday, November 5, 2024, with voting at Union County precinct locations.

If you prefer to use an absentee ballot rather than vote in person, you can request one from October 7 through October 25. Make the request online at the Secretary of State MyVoter page or pick up a request form at the Elections Building. Return the form in person to the Board of Registrars at the Elections Building or mail it to the address on the form, in sufficient time for the Board of Registrars to receive your request by October 25.

The absentee ballot will be mailed to you, so make your request as early as possible to allow for postal delays. Deposit your completed ballot in the Elections Building drop box or mail it. It must be received by the Board of Elections no later than Election Day, November 5, 7:00 p.m.

The November election promises to be busy. Let's have a great turn-out in Union County!

Project Chimps...from Page 1A

described by Page as a "chimpanzee retirement home."

"If we took our chimps and tossed them out in Africa, they would be killed," Page said about why the primates can't be released into the wild. While certainly not considered domesticated, lab-born chimps don't have the learned knowledge it takes to survive on their own.

Currently, the 236-acre facility houses 95 chimps that originated from the New Iberian Research Facility in Louisiana. The apes arrive 10 at a time on a brightly painted trailer, complete with windows. To reduce stress, there are no overnight stops at hotels, and after a 14-hour ride, they make it to their new home.

"It's their time to live," Page said, sharing the organization's motto that encapsulates the goal of giving the chimps a life of freedom after years of enduring experimentation.

The highly social animals live in family groups led by a single dominant male, but every chimp has access to a 6-acre outdoor playground in addition to their indoor villa housing at Project Chimps.

Some of them struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder, like human survivors of trauma, and because they were previously kept in solitary cages in the labs, they must learn to interact in groups.

"They support each other, they love each other, and they fight each other – that's what chimps do ... That's the reality of how they live," Page said. "They're a lot like us; we fight, too. But it's very interesting to see how they make up."

Page offered information about a few of the chimps

in the facility. Alpha male Kareem, for example, is a quiet leader who settles disputes among his group calmly. After five years of recovery, Gracie faced her fears and braved the outdoors, discovered she liked the playground, and now goes out every day.

And just like individual people, all the chimps have their own personalities. Many have a favorite toy they prefer to go to bed with each night or carry around from day to day. Certainly, all of them have a favorite food – if they don't enjoy food in general like Ray.

In the wild, chimpanzees are omnivorous, meaning they consume both plants and other animals, and up to 70% of their diet is from foraging. Project Chimps provides a largely vegetarian diet of all different kinds of fruits and veggies, supplemented by the occasional dab of peanut butter, protein shakes, Cheerios and any insects they find outside.

As one can imagine, it takes a lot of time, money, and poundage to feed 95 chimps. A full kitchen staffed with volunteers prepares three meals a day and provides plenty of snacks in-between. The cost to feed a single chimp is \$7 daily, and while that may not seem like much, it adds up quickly with nearly 100 hungry mouths.

Sometimes, that food is presented in enrichment items to keep the chimpanzees' brains stimulated. Raisin boxes, as demonstrated by Page, require a small stick or some other tool capable of removing the fruit from tiny holes punched through the toy. Dog treat balls containing peanut butter can also be rolled around for a bit of a challenge.

It's for this reason that Project Chimps seeks donations of common household items that normally get thrown out. Cereal and cracker boxes, water bottles, paper towel tubes and empty tissue boxes can all be put to good use.

Monetary donations are helpful as well, especially since there are still chimps waiting at the New Iberian Research Facility to be taken to their forever home.

That's where tours and events come in, with tickets available for purchase by individuals or groups. It's also a good chance to meet the chimps; to give them privacy, the facility is not often open to the public.

One upcoming opportunity is "Chimp or Treat," set to kick off the weekend before Halloween. Kids can enter for \$10 on Oct. 26 and 27 between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. for a chance to enjoy some spooky, chimp-themed fun.

Not only will they receive a guided walking tour, but they will be able to see the chimps in their habitat from the safety of a viewing window.

"We encourage the kids to wear costumes, so the chimps are like, 'What are you?' And it's so funny," remarked Page, encouraging Movers & Shakers to bring grandkids and support the cause.

The Project Chimps sanctuary is located at 2031 Lowery Road in Morganton. For more information, visit <https://projectchimps.org/>.

Members of the Mountain Movers & Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. inside Sundance Grill in Hiwassee, usually featuring a guest speaker from the area.

Sullens Sentenced...from Page 1A

charges of aggravated child molestation that each carried a potential penalty of life in prison.

Foos also identified three more victims in other jurisdictions related to uncharged molestations dating back as far as 1985, and Langley said his office was close to getting their testimony admitted for the impending Sept. 23 trial that was averted by Sullens agreeing to a negotiated plea.

"These are the victims that we know about," Langley said. "Are there other victims? We may never know."

Langley believes the plea deal, which the victims and their families found satisfactory, speaks to the strength of the case his office and former investigator Foos put together, and he's thankful that Sullens' victims will avoid having to relive their experiences publicly by testifying in court.

"Once it was clearly going to trial, (Sullens) agreed to plea," Langley said. "This individual realized it was highly likely he would be convicted, highly likely he might receive a life sentence, and did not want to go through the process of listening to his victims testify."

Inside the Union County Courthouse on Friday, Sept. 6, Sullens pleaded guilty to three counts of aggravated child molestation and eight counts of child molestation.

Sullens acknowledged he understood when Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Senior Judge James E. Cornwell highlighted that a guilty plea would mean that he would be in prison well past the average age of death for American males and would therefore likely die in custody.

Leading up to his plea, the now-convicted child molester spent an unusual amount of time in the Union County Jail, having been denied bond while awaiting trial.

Regarding his lengthy local incarceration of more than 900 days, Langley cited several reasons for trial delays, including postponements from motions filed by Sullens' attorneys, multiple defense team changes, as well as being a part of the COVID-19 pandemic-era backlog.

Once transferred in the coming days, Sullens will serve the remainder of his 25-year sentence in state prison, to be eligible for parole in the year 2047 – guaranteeing that he will not be able to molest any more children anytime soon.

Langley would like to thank Foos, who was ready to testify from retirement had the case gone to trial, and his lead prosecutor in the case, Assistant District Attorney Anna Guardino, for all the hard work she put in to acquire some semblance of justice for the children.

When it comes to preventing or uncovering child molestations, Langley advises

parents and guardians to remain vigilant in monitoring for "red flag" behavior surrounding the people in their children's lives, especially among relatives and close family friends.

"We occasionally see it, but that kind of stranger-to-stranger, weird guy in the park with a raincoat molesting children – I see 20 relative-to-relative molestations for every stranger-to-stranger molestation," Langley said. "It's 20 to 1."

"Therefore, I would encourage parents – aunts, uncles, grandparents, family members – you cannot, unfortunately, automatically trust someone because they're a blood relative. It's a sad thing to say, but that's the truth. You've got to just be aware and be very, very careful."

Common warning signs include adults outside of the immediate family who: pay "inordinate" amounts of attention to a child; give a child unexplained gifts; go out of their way to arrange alone time with children; and encourage secret-keeping with children.

On the other end of the equation, parents should watch out for children who suffer medical issues with their genitalia, experience sudden changes in bathroom habits, or become unexpectedly withdrawn or fearful after spending time alone with a relative or family friend.

"But that's not always the case," Langley said in discussing how confusing molestations can be for child victims. "Often the child still loves the perpetrator because

the perpetrator gives them attention and gifts, showers them with affection.

"Therefore, especially with younger children, they may not realize that what the adult is doing is wrong. That's why it's not unusual to see children abused and yet stay silent about it for years.

"As a child gets older, something they didn't realize was wrong that happened to them at 5, 6, 7 and 8, suddenly at 12 and 13, they realize looking back, 'that was wrong,' and sometimes that's how information comes out years after the fact."

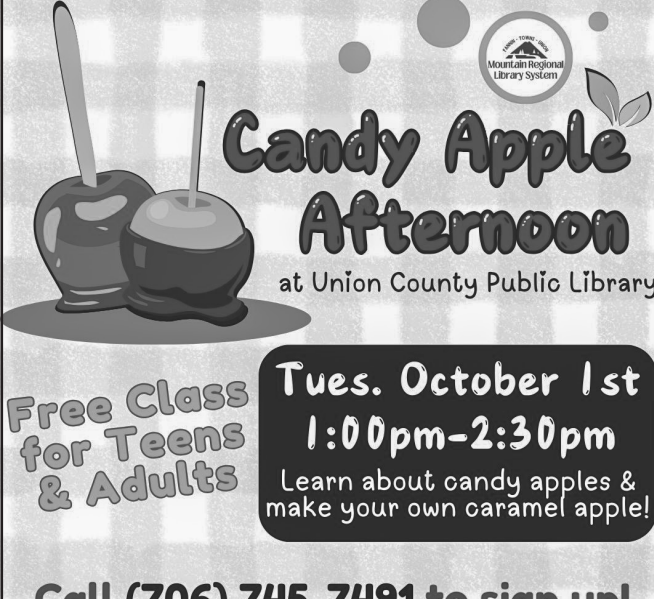
Langley reiterated that parents should be aware of adults "paying attention to a child in an unnatural, improper way," citing potentially concerning behavior being excessive tickling, wrestling and physical contact with pre-teen children, or sexual conversations with children.

"What we suggest to parents is to communicate with your child constantly," Langley said. "Listen to your child, keep communication open – that's your best weapon on preventing this type of thing."

"Never encourage a child to keep secrets from a parent; if anyone encourages a child to keep a secret from a parent, that's a huge red flag."

"And encourage your children, if anything happens to them that makes them uncomfortable, to talk to their parents, talk to trusted adults at school, church, whatever. And those adults should report it immediately if a child reveals anything to them."

Union County Public Library hosts Candy Apple Afternoon Class



The poster features two candy apples, one with a knife and one with a stick. The Union County Public Library logo is in the top right corner. The text reads: "Candy Apple Afternoon at Union County Public Library". A black box contains the text: "Free Class for Teens & Adults" and "Tues. October 1st 1:00pm-2:30pm Learn about candy apples & make your own caramel apple!". At the bottom, it says "Call (706) 745-7491 to sign up!".

The Union County Public Library will be having a FREE Candy Apple Afternoon class on Tuesday, October 1st from 1 PM to 2:30 PM. Teens and adults who sign up will learn fun facts about candy

and caramel apples, and will also make their own delicious caramel apple to take home!

Do to the limited supplies, sign-ups are required for this program, so call (706) 745-7491 to reserve your spot.

Ghosheh Charged...from Page 1A

made it to the bank in less than two minutes.

Three other local law enforcement officers arrived at roughly the same time, and with them in tow, Dyer walked in and arrested Ghosheh, who was simply standing in the middle of the bank lobby, according to authorities.

As a precaution following her arrest, Blairsville PD called the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Bomb Squad to inspect the duffle bag Ghosheh lobbed inside the bank, presumably for the purpose of being filled with money or as an intimidation tactic.

GBI sent a remote-controlled robot into the empty bank to X-ray the bag, confirming that it did not contain explosives, and agents also determined that her car did not contain explosives either.

The bank remained cordoned off with police tape until the scene was finally cleared at about 8 p.m. that Monday.

GBI is leading the investigation and has charged Ghosheh with robbery and two counts of terroristic threats and acts for her alleged actions on Sept. 9.

By press time, authorities had yet to ascertain Ghosheh's motive or what her mental state was at the time of the attempted robbery. She did not appear to be intoxicated and had no drugs on her when arrested, though her erratic behavior continued at the Union County Jail.

After being booked in, Ghosheh attacked a female

detention officer, resulting in additional charges of obstructing or hindering law enforcement officers, and unlawful acts of violence in a penal institution. The detention officer was not injured.

Ghosheh remained uncooperative in the days immediately following her arrest, preventing jail staff from taking her mugshot until Thursday, Sept. 12, and authorities were seeking a medical evaluation for potential mental health issues at press time.

Her movements leading up to the apparent robbery attempt were unclear last week, though a 911 call came in about the same time as the bank alarm, leading to the issuance of a "be on the lookout" for the vehicle of an erratic driver whom authorities believe was Ghosheh.

"This was a quick response time, and the employees did everything they were supposed to do," Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said the day after the robbery. "Thankfully, the individual was apprehended still on the scene."

Added Baxter, "Nobody was injured, and it was a win-win for us and the bank with basically an immediate takedown of the suspect."

Law enforcement agencies from Hall, Forsyth and Habersham counties also responded to the bank, including multiple K-9 bomb-sniffing teams, and the Union County Fire Department and Union General EMS were

on standby throughout the incident in case they were needed.

"I'm just really pleased with the response of all the agencies," Assistant Police Chief Dyer said. "I really think this is a freak thing that happened out of the middle of nowhere - could happen anywhere. Luckily, we were prepared to handle it."

Added Dyer, "Everybody just needs to stay vigilant, because you never know when something's going to happen. Be prepared to take action or get away or whatever."

On Thursday, SouthState Bank Public Relations Director Jaquelyn Smith said that, "while we can't comment on the open investigation, we are extremely grateful for the swift action of both our team members and local law enforcement in this situation."

The GBI said last week that once the ongoing investigation is complete, "the case will be given to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution."

Ghosheh has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

According to authorities, the terror caused by Ghosheh's alleged actions was real, with several bank employees fearing for their lives in the ordeal.

But a friend of Ghosheh's named Amy Stogner, who lives in Florida, called the North Georgia News Friday to provide what she believes is important context surrounding the incident.

"I witnessed her complete break with reality that she had that day," Stogner said. "I've known her a long time, but I've never seen her react that way before ... she went completely nuts."

Stogner described Ghosheh as the "rock" she relied on when going through a divorce in an abusive marriage, saying Ghosheh was a constant companion in guiding her through a terrible time in life to ultimately see her through to better days.

That Monday, however, Ghosheh was acting strangely,

Stogner said, repeatedly calling and texting while "freaking out," claiming to be hearing voices telling her to do things and reportedly seeing frightening imagery that wasn't really there.

According to Stogner, Ghosheh actually lives in a cabin in Murphy, North Carolina - a profile on petsitter.com also lists Murphy as Ghosheh's location - and she was supposedly on her way back from dropping off her boyfriend, who works in the area, when she went to the bank.

And as far as Stogner knows, Ghosheh is not a drug user.

She did, however, have a traumatic childhood, per Stogner, which is something the Florida-based friend believes could have contributed to Ghosheh's "break with reality," along with other more recent stressors such as alleged financial woes, racism and an "abusive relationship" of her own.

Stogner said the last messages she received from

Ghosheh detailed how she would be "going on the news" and "going to jail," and Stogner found out what happened at the bank two days later when she called local authorities about performing a welfare check on her friend.

"My theory is that she just completely snapped that day," Stogner said, adding that she was puzzled why Ghosheh would make statements like "Death to America" and talk about "Allah," as Ghosheh was born in America and is not

a Muslim let alone a terrorist.

"She's just an amazing, beautiful soul - a light in the world," Stogner said of Ghosheh, whom she met online as part of a spiritual healing group. "I wouldn't be sitting here today where I am (without her) ... she helped me get through some really difficult times in my life."

"She was there for me like 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, when my own family wasn't there for me. We called each other sisters."

Citizens For A Better America meeting

Are you happy about the way things are going in Cherokee County, NC, the U.S. and the world? Let's work together to create change, peacefully & patriotically!

We have an information packed meeting and guest speakers in store for you at the Citizens for a Better America monthly meeting. We will hear from Trump Force 47 and a live Zoom call with RNC Election Integrity Director Dave Warren. Bring your

questions and concerns!

Thursday, September 19 at Legends Steakhouse in the private meeting room, 42 Tennessee Street, downtown Murphy, NC. Food ordering starts at 5 PM, meeting starts promptly at 6-7:30 PM.

This meeting is free & open to the public. For more information: Website: <http://www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com>; Email: Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com; Call: (828) 494-7403.

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9/11 Remembrance...from Page 1A



At the 9/11 event in Meeks Park, UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer said local law enforcement was prepared to handle any emergency but asked people to always keep their eyes open for suspicious activity.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

sentiments that surround it.

The Fine Arts Center at Union County Schools has been a great staging ground, Rowe said, because it is “important for the kids to understand their history and the history and heritage of our country,” and the large venue also allowed more people from the community to attend.

That said, this year’s Patriot Day recognition turned out quite different than planned due to unforeseen circumstances. In the wake of the Apalachee High School shooting that claimed four lives and injured nine, similar threats have cropped up targeting other schools across the nation.

Union County was swept up in those rumors recently, and while a Sept. 6 investigation found no such threats were made against any local learning institutions, Rowe said moving the event off campus just made sense this year.

Not only that, but the attempted robbery at SouthState Bank on Sept. 9 has also increased local tensions around safety, particularly after the involvement of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Bomb Disposal Unit, which turned up no explosives or weapons in the incident.

It should be noted that there are plans to continue holding the Remembrance Ceremony at the Fine Arts Center in future years; 2024’s amended service boiled down solely to safety concerns and not a desire to change the event venue.

“We just thought that the timing of having it on campus was not the right time,” Rowe stated before opening the ceremony with a prayer and leading the Pledge of Allegiance to a flag flying triumphantly over the upper ballfield.

Dyer had a word, pointing out the vast differences between the nation before and after 9/11. Despite the trauma surrounding



Fire Chief David Dyer spoke about the importance of unity through patriotism as Chamber President Steve Rowe looked on in the local 9/11 Remembrance. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

that day, one of the things Dyer remembers most is how proud he was of the first responders who answered the call of duty, some of them fatally.

One bright spot in the attacks was the aftermath of patriotism shown all across the nation, and Dyer admitted to missing that. It’s something he believes everyone should strive for today, in a country largely divided.

“We’ve thought about the people who have died ... but it’s time to celebrate how our nation came together,” said Dyer, adding that it’s important to teach the world’s youngest generations about how the country persevered.

Another message relayed was to be mindful of how words can affect others. Especially relevant given the final staging area of this year’s ceremony, Rowe used a simple phrase to help those gathered remember that message’s importance: “If you see something, say something.”

For his part, Union County Sheriff-Elect Maj. Shawn Dyer reassured those gathered that while things have been busy for local law enforcement, they’re “prepared to handle any situation that comes our way.”

“If y’all see something

or hear something, let us know, because that one little thing may be what we need to keep something from happening,” Maj. Dyer said, echoing the earlier sentiment from Rowe.

A moment of silence followed to remember the 2,977 dead in the September 11, 2001, terror attacks.

Pastor Marty Duncan shared that he, like many others, would never forget the indelible mark left by the attacks, and he closed out the service with a brief prayer, thanking God for living “in the greatest country on the face of this planet.”

Earlier that morning, Union County firefighters participated in the annual 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb at the Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on campus.

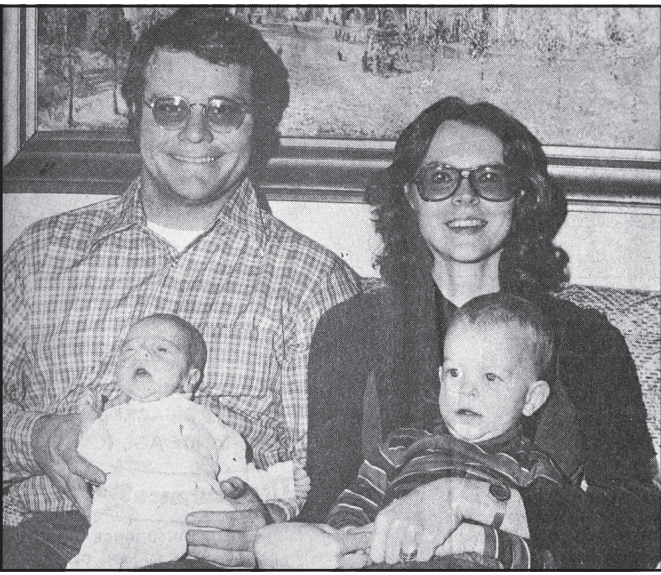
“The firefighters, many in full gear, paid tribute to the firefighters of the FDNY by climbing or walking some 2,200 stairs, the equivalent of the 110 stories of the World Trade Center,” a Facebook post reads.

“This is where hundreds of FDNY firefighters conducted the largest rescue operation in the nation’s history and where 343 firefighters lost their lives on September 11, 2001,” the post concludes.



Union County Firefighters participated in the annual 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb at the Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium of Union County Schools.
Photo/Facebook

Dr. Wiles Honored...from Page 1A



Originally printed in the March 1, 1979, edition of the North Georgia News, this photo depicts the Wiles Family after they moved to Blairsville: James W. Wiles, Dr. Mary Beth Wiles, daughter Elizabeth and son Benjamin.

patients from around the area, daughter Elizabeth said that her dad "really wanted to come to the mountains and be kind of outside of the city."

"He was a police officer," explained Elizabeth, who was about 5 months old when the family relocated to Union County in 1979. "Obviously, the (Atlanta) area was changing a lot, and so it was becoming pretty dangerous."

At the time, Wiles was one of only two doctors in Blairsville. She practiced internal and hospital medicine while Dr. George Gowder

handled family medicine. Wiles was also on call at the Union County Nursing Home for a time, then went back to working nights in the Emergency Room.

To this day, Wiles specializes in internal medicine, though she doesn't handle procedures like she used to. Elizabeth, who acts as a partner to her mother at Blairsville Internal Medicine, handles that while Wiles tackles office duties.

Internal medicine, as described by both Wiles women, can be compared to general care for adults. Types

of cases can involve infectious diseases, neurology, nephrology, oncology, gastrointestinal issues, cardiology, endocrinology, rheumatology, hematology and more.

Compared to the world of yesteryear, Wiles said practicing medicine is not easier but is in fact harder for doctors today due to the bureaucracies surrounding even the simplest things. That said, she understands why such rules are in place and "hopes (they work)."

On the plus side, growth has brought quality of life improvements to the area, including in health care, with more people and paved roads making it easier for an abundance of helping hands compared to a time when isolated physicians wore many more hats.

"We had to take care of everything; we didn't have a choice," Wiles said.

For Wiles, the North Georgia Mountains just seemed to be the right "fit" – not just for her vocation, but her life. She fell in love with the area, and as the whole family shared an interest in the outdoors, being close to nature was just one of many bonuses.

She grew fond of the people here, too, for their easygoing, welcoming nature. In fact, Wiles said people are her favorite part of the job.

"I like talking to patients," Wiles said. "Those are people

who've been my patients for 40 years, and I know their families and I know their dog and cat, and we talk about everything.

"If I'd stayed behind in academic medicine, I could have never had the relationships with people that I have here."

Wiles has stayed overnight at hospitals for the wellness of her patients, braved inclement weather that caused snowed-in facilities, and patiently listened to those in her care when they brought not just their physical ailments to her office but their emotional struggles as well.

"They come with issues with their family members,

emotional issues, aging and living in our current world," explained Wiles, who said that building a rapport with her patients is what has made her career so very worth it.

The North Georgia News and Towns County Herald thank Dr. Mary Beth Wiles for her tireless dedication to patient care over the past 45 years in the mountains.

Union County Volunteer Fire Station 2 Open House



Union County Volunteer Fire Station 2
15 Jones Creek Road S
Blairsville, GA 30512
Open House
September 21st, 11 AM - 2 PM

Appalachian Shrine



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Dr. Mary Beth Wiles was pleasantly surprised to receive an appreciation plaque last week, pictured here embracing Dr. T. Michele Bradford. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks