

# Board of Education...from Page 1A



The five Teachers of the Year for Union County Schools, L-R: Brandy Hamby, UCES; Dixie Conger, UCHS; Tammy Aaron, UCPS; Ashley Pruitt, Woody Gap; and Caleb Paul, UCMS. Photo by Mark Smith

gone through the 'In Search of Leaders' program for Pioneer RESA.

"Tammy has taught for 16 years at Union County Primary School in first and second grade. So, thank you very much, Tammy, for all that

you do for our students."

As 2018-2019 System Teacher of the Year, Aaron will go on to compete for the title of Georgia Teacher of the Year, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education. Also recognized in the

Oct. 23 meeting were Ashley Pruitt, named Woody Gap Teacher of the Year; Brandy Hamby, named Elementary School Teacher of the Year; Caleb Paul, named Middle School Teacher of the Year; and Dixie Conger, Aaron's

daughter, named High School Teacher of the Year.

In other news, School Police Chief Chad Deyton and Officer Chad Berry presented K-9 Max, the newest addition to the school police force. Max is a German Shorthaired Pointer that is just under 2 years old and is trained to sniff out drugs.

Deyton also said that all of his school police officers had been sworn in by the City of Blairsville, so their jurisdiction now extends to the Blairsville City Limits.

Continuing, Deyton said there is a new epidemic of THC oil in the Blairsville area. The tar-like oil is put into a vape pipe and can be disguised with other scented oils when smoked.

THC is the intoxicating drug in marijuana, and THC oil is the synthesized and concentrated version that is proving extremely dangerous.

In light of these recent developments, Superintendent John Hill said that the schools are very concerned about student health and safety, which is why the school system is now considering vaping products on campus to be drug paraphernalia, with severe penalties for possession.

"Eliijay, Fannin and Jasper - in one week, they had 18 students hospitalized," said Hill, referring to THC oil use. "We're going to take it very seriously. We don't need one of our children dying."



New Union County Schools K-9 Police Officer Max in the Oct. 23 meeting of the Union County Board of Education. Photo by Mark Smith

In other business, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Paula Davenport reported that the schools would probably not get new funding for the after-school program when the current grant expires at the end of this school year due to a limited amount of federal funds going to other Georgia school systems that better fit federal guidelines.

The school board unanimously agreed to investigate the possibility of the system developing its own after-school program, free of the constraints that plague federal programs.

Currently, there are 139 out of a maximum capacity of 145 students that utilize the after-school program, said

Davenport.

The board also unanimously approved a bid in the amount of \$159,891.92 from Legacy Building Systems for a card access reader system.

Prior to the regular board meeting, board members took part in one of the required classes they must complete each year. "Facilities Planning" was the name of the course.

Of interest was a discussion of the possibilities and impacts to the school system of repurposing school buildings to better serve student needs. The consensus seemed to be generally positive in adopting the idea into the five-year plan required by the state.

## Stars...from Page 1A

Levy and Roberto Romero that morning, and the two dancers performed some of their Salsa number right there in Romero's restaurant, the Sundance Grill.

From the looks of their brief performance in the restaurant, Levy and Romero will undoubtedly be a tough act to follow at the Dancing with North Georgia Stars event. And there will be nine other couples doing everything from hip-hop to the Texas Two-Step.

Also on Friday, Ruf gave a short overview and update on the nonprofit Enotah CASA just prior to the dance demonstration.

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate for children.

"Our volunteers - and they are volunteers - who agree to speak up for children in foster care go through 30 hours of training," said Ruf. "And they observe in court for 10 hours before they can be actually assigned a case by the juvenile judge."

"Our juvenile judge here in this circuit, which is Lumpkin, White, Towns and Union County, last year worked 354 cases of children being removed from their homes."

Ruf went on to enumerate the many advantages CASAs offer children of the circuit, such as "having a caring, loving, compassionate adult stand up for a child in court and speak about what's best for that child."

"Not what the parents want, not what the Department of Family and Children's Services think should happen, but what's best for that child," said Ruf. "By having a CASA, our children tend to graduate from high school



Dance partners Vickie Levy and Roberto Romero with Enotah CASA volunteer Liz Ruf. Photo by Mark Smith

with more regularity, they make better grades, their emotional disruptions are less than children that don't have a CASA.

"Therefore, they're better able to acclimate themselves into society and become long-term producers in society. So, CASAs perform not just a value for that child today, but they make an impact for a whole lifetime."

In Towns and Union counties last year, 154 children were removed from their homes and subsequently needed a CASA to represent them in court.

And CASA volunteers of the Enotah Judicial Circuit can boast that they advocate for 100 percent of the children that are removed from the care of parents, though there are many circuits in Georgia that can't say the same, because there are so many kids in care and not enough CASA volunteers overall.

"We've been so fortunate

to have people raise their hand and say, 'I want to be a volunteer. I know I can make a difference,'" said Ruf.

CASA volunteers, she said, saved Towns and Union counties \$193,000 in legal fees last year.

And that is why the Dancing with North Georgia Stars gala event is so important, as for all the good it does, CASA needs funds to survive.

"All funds raised at the event will assist Enotah CASA, Inc. with the training and management of additional volunteers to serve as a consistent adult figure and a voice for the vulnerable children in our foster care system in Lumpkin, White, Union and Towns counties," according to DancingwithNorthGeorgiaStars.com.

Tickets to the event will be sold at the door if available, and they can also be purchased at the website listed above, where donations can also be made.

## Tour...from Page 1A

old hospital, Schmitt weaves a tale from eyewitness accounts intertwined with evidence from recent paranormal investigations.

And according to dispatchers working at the 911 Center, which is located in the basement of the old hospital building, many unexplained events have happened since they moved in during the 1990s. Noises upstairs, apparitions caught on security cameras, a bathtub faucet running in a locked room, just to name a few.

After looking into the claims, local paranormal investigator Alan Foster and his team detected the voices of children, strange shadows in the hallways, and other unexplained occurrences.

Paranormal experiences at the Mock House include but are not limited to: voices detected by digital tape recorders; drawers that open and close on their own; and a growling house cat that appeared to be suddenly disturbed by someone or something located in an empty doorway.

The tour concludes at the Historic Courthouse, where Schmitt presents the evidence discovered by his team. Infrared photos of the shadows taken at the old hospital and other locations, voices picked up at each location using digital tape recorders, and an Ovilus - a device that plays synthesized words based on electromagnetic



Alan Foster leading a Haunted History Tour inside the old hospital/nursing home on Hunt Martin Street in Blairsville. Photo by Todd Forrest

waves and other readings from the environment.

According to Schmitt, the idea for the tour came about after he attended a Union County Chamber of Commerce meeting where it was suggested.

"We decided what locations we wanted on the tour, and then we set out to conduct the paranormal investigations to try and corroborate or debunk (any of the stories)," Schmitt said. "Alan Foster and I have put together a heck of a team with folks who are not only aficionados, but people who were (willing to) volunteer their time to the tour."

"We've been investigating these locations for about two

years now and have found some absolutely remarkable stuff."

Schmitt and his team will continue their investigations and plan on hosting another haunted history tour next fall. For those who were unable to attend this year, stay in touch with the Union County Historical Society for information and tour dates when they become available in 2019.

"The county and Historical Society have been very gracious, and we listen to their suggestions and try to investigate historic locations like the Mock House and Payne Cabin," said Schmitt. "Hopefully, we can add a few more buildings and have an even bigger and better tour next year."

## Food Pantry Turkey give-a-way



Ninth District Opportunity and the Union County Food Pantry will be giving away turkeys on November 16, 2019. You must participate in the Low Income Heating Assistance Program to qualify for this turkey. Call-in for reservations for the turkey will be November 1, 2019 only from 8 a.m. until 11 a.m.

No walk-ins, no voice mail, no early calls for any reason. Telephone number to call is 706-745-6596. (NOct31.23)CA