

# North Georgia News

2 Sections 22 Pages

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## Cruisers break bread in Christmas tradition

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

There was plenty of happiness and cheer during the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club's year-end Christmas Party at Cook's Country Kitchen on Friday, Dec. 13.

Every year, the group gathers to break bread and celebrate their philanthropy in the community; the Cruisers raise tens of thousands of dollars a year for a variety of local causes, like veterans in need, student scholarships and Christmas shopping for kids, as well as donations to other groups.

Also part of their Christmas tradition is a White Elephant-esque "present raffle" in which members make a game out of giving each other

gifts. As a 501(c)(3), club members consider themselves a charity group first and foremost, but it all started with a love for vehicles. Whether muscle cars, vintage hot rods, lowriders or just snazzy modern rides, the one thing that unites the club is a respect for classy automobiles.

Indeed, many of the gifts purchased for men included car products; Marcus Tuschel received a bottle of wax, and Tommy Jones made sure to hide his bucket of car care goods so that other Cruisers wouldn't be inspired to "steal" the gift.

That was all part of the game. Every Christmas gathering, presents are handed out via tickets. A number is called, and whoever drew that ticket gets to choose a gift set

aside for a man or woman. If another person wants a gift claimed by somebody else, he or she can take it.

It's all in good fun, though. The Cruisers and their spouses are a good-humored bunch, and although there were several playful jabs as somebody opened their gift slowly or another threatened to snatch the prize, laughs were shared by all.

But several things rested heavy on their hearts that evening. For one, it's expected that Club President Dick Couture will retire after seven years in the position, and Second Vice President Brian Grubbs is almost certain Couture will say no to an extension.

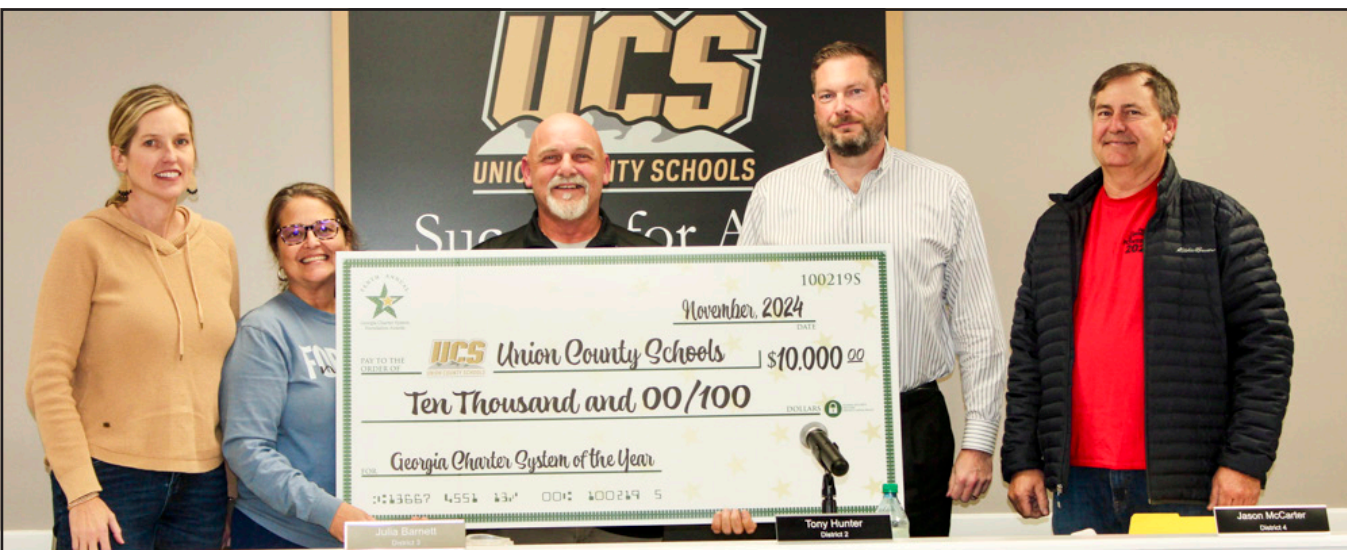
"We're getting older,"

See *A Cruiser Christmas*, Page 6A



Blairsville Cruiser Marcus Tuschel opening a car-related gift during the club's annual Christmas Party last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## BOE celebrates state award, academic success



Union County School Board members are pleased to have accepted a check on behalf of the schools for being named Georgia Charter System of the Year. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County School Board has received \$10,000 for being named the Charter System of the Year for the State of Georgia. Board Member Julia Barnett traveled to Atlanta to receive the check on behalf of the schools.

"This is really attributed to every employee who works here," said Superintendent John Hill in the Nov. 19 regular board meeting. "We're really proud of that and very thankful. (It's) very humbling, and we're very appreciative of our staff and their hard work."

In other news, Facilities Director Mike Patton revealed that a statewide investigation

for lead has resulted in the City of Blairsville sending out a warning notification in the wake of water quality testing.

"We could investigate from the meters to our buildings, but they've got to investigate on their side," Patton said, adding that the status of lead in the water was "unknown" at the time of the meeting. The investigation is ongoing, and Patton said findings should be available "very soon."

Construction on the new Elementary School continues to be ahead of schedule and under budget. Asphalt paving is complete around the perimeter of the building, and the drop ceiling and painting of the interior are over 70% complete; See *School Board*, Page 7A

## New rec gym increases capacity for youth sports

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Recreation Department opened its new gymnasium on Dec. 2, which was immediately put to use during the grand opening with shooting practice between kids and local officials.

Situated between the Sports Center and Voting Center on the Glenn Gooch Bypass, the facility was "added on" to the former building and can be accessed through a side door, though it also has a front entrance and lobby.

While there are two gyms already in the Sports Center, the new gym features the one big room with reinforced floors See *New Rec Gym*, Page 6A



The Union County Recreation Department enjoyed a ribbon-cutting ceremony by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce for the new gym this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Four women charged with possessing meth in jail

News Special

On Thursday, Dec. 5, the Union County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Division conducted an investigation that resulted in four inmates of the Union County Jail receiving additional charges for drug-related crimes.

During the investigation, an amount of methamphetamine was located inside of a cell in the female pod. Five search warrants were obtained through Union County Magistrate Court for five female inmates for drug-testing purposes.

It was further learned that Lora Ann Deyton smuggled a quantity of methamphetamine into the jail through the use of a bodily cavity and distributed



**Lora Ann Deyton**  
it to three other female inmates. Due to this action, Deyton received additional warrants for distribution of a Schedule II controlled substance, crossing



**Kaitlyn Brianna Kincaid**  
the guard line with drugs, and possession of a Schedule II controlled substance, all felonies. See *Meth Possession*, Page 6A

## TCSO deputy shot during traffic stop; suspect at large

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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YOUNG HARRIS – The Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the Towns County Sheriff's Office are seeking the public's help in locating a man who shot TCSO Deputy Austin Bradburn following an early morning traffic stop Friday.

At press time Monday, Bradburn was still being treated at Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville for a gunshot wound to the leg that was not considered life-threatening, and he is expected to recover, according to law enforcement officials. See *TCSO Deputy Shot*, Page 12A



Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson welcoming Deputy Austin Bradburn, a Blairsville resident, to the agency in October. Photo/Facebook



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# A Cruiser Christmas...from Page 1A



Once again, Cook's Country Kitchen served as the celebratory backdrop for the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club Christmas Party, on Dec. 13. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Grubbs admitted, revealing that it was hard to find someone with the "time and energy" to devote to being club president. Not only that, but they need to be a bit tech-savvy, according to Board Chair Wayne Tanner, saying that "nobody else knows computers."

There is a concern, no matter how light, about the continued existence of the organization. For his part, Tanner believes the younger generation isn't interested in cars the same way "old men" might be, but there's a bit of a misconception around that.

Some of the Cruisers have found that people assume the organization is focused primarily on antique rides – it's not. There are those in the group who admire modern makes and models, like "a nice Honda" or various pickup trucks.

That's why there was

a renewed interest in really getting out in the community and drumming up some interest from the younger generations. Talk is set to continue at January's club meeting regarding what to do going forward.

But for Friday night, the Cruisers were content to enjoy the presence of friends and family and dine on good food. Courtesy of the staff at Cook's Country Kitchen, guests had their supper taken directly to their tables.

The meal included delicious holiday fare like sweet potato casserole and cranberry sauce along with veggies such as black-eyed peas and green beans. There was also a pick of chicken or ham, which, for the daring, could be doubled up.

"(It's a) good meal," Tuschel remarked with a warm smile, joking that he

was a "growing boy" before digging into his dessert of peach cobbler. At the end, he and his fellows applauded the cooks and waitresses for a job well done.

As far as further business, Jones announced that some 100 kids were able to go Christmas shopping with the Cruisers this year, and Grubbs encouraged whoever could go the next day and support Shop With a Cop on Dec. 14 to do so.

The Cruisers look forward to another year celebrating fellow motorheads and doing good for the community, whether that be assisting kids, veterans or other folks just needing a helping hand.

To learn more about the organization, to assist its fundraising efforts or to consider joining, head to [www.blairsvillecruisers.com](http://www.blairsvillecruisers.com) and check out the Blairsville Cruisers Facebook page.

# New Rec Gym...from Page 1A



Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris joined other sports enthusiasts in receiving shooting tips from local rec basketball youngsters during the new gym grand opening. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

and a stage toward the back. The whole project was paid for solely by Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax funds, and the total came out to be about \$2.9 million.

According to Parks & Recreation Director Scott Thompson, approximately \$2.8 million covered the architecture and engineering, along with construction, equipment and furniture. The rest is going toward "remaining invoices to be paid (by) smaller amounts."

The impetus behind the gym's construction was, in short, growth. The sports programs at Union County Schools are growing, and the Commissioner's Office perceived a need for kids to have more space to practice and play.

That said, the new gym

has some special additions that'll make it valuable to residents of all ages.

Those special floors, stage and an impressive sound system are what set this gym apart from its fellows. While it's certain to serve as the "playing field" for basketball and other sports – particularly for younger children – it was also built to accommodate community events like square dances and aerobics classes.

Not only that, but it may attract even larger attention in the future in the form of festivals; the venue is already booked to be utilized by the Misty Mountain Quilters Guild at 2025's QuiltFest next September.

The lower half of one wall is discreetly lined with electrical outlets to hook up voting machines

should overflow capacity be needed during early voting in upcoming elections. These were also added in the name of future growth, but it's not anticipated they'll be necessary for a while.

While special events might require a part-time position to manage, staffing is for the most part covered by those already employed at the Sports Center. Volunteers and local students may also have a part to play running the concessions stand.

Because of its literal link to the Sports Center, the new gym pretty much operates on the same hours: closed on Sundays but open from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays; noon to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays; noon to 4:30 p.m. on Wednesdays; and 11 a.m.-4 p.m. on Saturdays.

# Meth Possession...from Page 1A

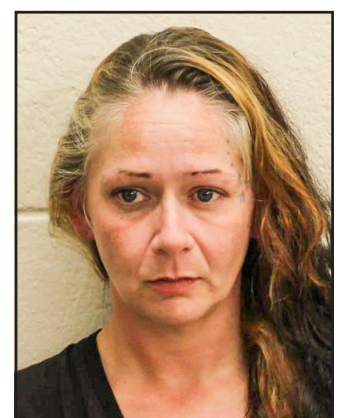
Additionally, Sonja Leia Morgan, Kaitlyn Brianna Kincaid and Amanda Marie Lester were charged with felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance in relation to this incident.

Below are the charges for which each of these inmates was previously incarcerated:

Lora Deyton, 36, of Young Harris, was arrested on Dec. 3, two days prior to the jail investigation, for possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine and possession with intent to distribute crack cocaine.

Sonja Morgan, 37, of Murphy, North Carolina, was arrested on Nov. 5 for possession of methamphetamine.

Kaitlyn Kincaid, 28, of Murphy, North Carolina, was arrested on Oct. 18 for aggravated assault, trafficking methamphetamine, trafficking fentanyl, fleeing and attempting to allude officers, driving while license suspended, possession of drug-related objects,



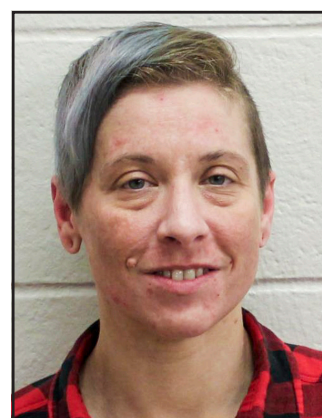
Sonja Leia Morgan

two counts possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, and possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute.

Amanda Lester, 38, of Young Harris, was arrested on Nov. 1 for felony probation violation.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

UCSO Sheriff-elect Shawn Dyer said that it is a



Amanda Marie Lester

relatively rare occurrence for drugs to be smuggled into the jail but that it can and does happen in every jail around the country.

"We're not going to put up with drug smuggling and drug use in the jail," Dyer said. "It's a danger to our jail inmates and staff, and we're not going to tolerate it. And when we find it, we're going to charge everybody that participates in it."

# School Board...from Page 1A

half of the light fixtures are installed and expected to be finished this month.

Patton stated that things are moving along “way ahead of schedule,” and Hill suggested a potential ribbon-cutting sometime in April 2025 with the hope that kids could participate and be there when the public tours the building.

It was also confirmed that students at the alternative school can expect next year’s classes to take place at the “old” Elementary School building. The switch will happen at the same time elementary teachers get ready to move their classrooms over to the new building.

The board also received an update on the Benchmark Curriculum that they recently invested in. According to Primary School Principal Debby Decubellis, it has been a struggle to adjust for both teachers and students.

“It is stretching our

teachers, and most importantly, it’s stretching our kids. They’re having to think harder, they’re having to work harder – that’s not a bad thing,” Decubellis said, adding that the most difficult aspect of the change has been trying to get students to take assessments online.

That said, there have been successes. Kids are “digging deep” into subjects that are considered above grade level and performing in outstanding ways. Sometimes, that may present as writing more than required on assignments or having deeper conversations with educators.

Decubellis and primary teachers said that, overall, Benchmark has been a good thing to date. The board agreed and discussed renewing the curriculum after its initial three-year subscription during the work session that preceded the regular meeting on Nov. 19.

In the regular meeting, the



**Members of the Union County Middle School Girls Volleyball Team received recognition in the School Board meeting last month for achieving 2024 status as Middle School Mathlete Champions.**

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Middle School Girls Volleyball Team was recognized as 2024’s Middle School Mathlete Champions.

Additionally, it was revealed that the College and

Career Academy had received state certification. Presented by Union County High School Principal Josh Davis, the CCA Governing Board and Hill were thanked for their work in securing success.

“We could not have done it without y’all’s support,” Davis said, calling the CCA Board to the front of the board room for proper recognition.

Those who were due

to leave their position after a full six-year term were shown special gratitude, such as Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe, who serves as the Governing Board’s Chair, and Vice Chair Chris Wadle.

During a policy update review, Dr. David Murphy said that opioid antagonists would be kept at the school.

Board Member Jason McCarter expressed concern about potential policy changes that may come with the upcoming Trump administration, but Murphy did not foresee any significant differences.

The School Board meets the third Tuesday of every month starting with a 6 p.m. work session inside the Board Office at 124 Hughes Street in Blairsville.

# Mayor Jim Conley receives GMRC’s Chairman’s Award



At the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission’s (GMRC) Annual Meeting held at The Boathouse at Lake Lanier Olympic Park on Friday, December 6, 2024, Jim Conley, Mayor, City of Blairsville was presented the 2024 Chairman’s Award.

Chosen annually by the Chairman of the GMRC, the award is presented to an individual who has demonstrated leadership, support, and vision for the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission. Jim Conley currently serves on the GMRC Council, Executive Committee, and the Chief Local Elected Officials Board.

Ken Schubring GMRC Chairman stated: “Whether through his tireless efforts, visionary thinking, or helping the GMRC overcome challenges from time to time, this individual has consistently demonstrated a commitment to our collective mission.”

On receiving the award, Jim Conley stated: “I want to thank the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission for this



**(L-R): GMRC Executive Director, Heather Feldman and Jim Conley, Mayor, City of Blairsville**

award and thank Chairman Ken Schubring, Executive Director Heather Feldman, and everyone else for their service to the GMRC. All members of the GMRC have the opportunity to use their services for the cities and counties.”

Other awards presented included the Elected Official of the Year – Cliff Bradshaw, Towns County Sole Commis-

sioner; Appointed Official of the Year – Bryan Lackey, City Manager, City of Gainesville; GMRC Employee of the Year – Faith Bryan, Information Services Director; and Council Member of the Year – Bill Chafin, Hart County Private Sector Representative.

For more information, contact Heather Feldman at (770) 538-2626.

# Cybertruck driver flees after stop for ‘laying drag’

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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Tesla Cybertrucks are no longer a rare sighting in the North Georgia Mountains, but it's not every day that a fully electric vehicle is seen laying drag in Blairsville. That's what got police to take particular notice of the Cybertruck driven by resident Macon Hill earlier this month.

After 9 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 5, a patrolling Blairsville Police Officer spotted Hill allegedly driving erratically and spinning his Cybertruck's tires up Bob Head Street, prompting the officer to pull him over in

front of Cabin Coffee off the square, BPD Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said.

Once stopped, the officer made contact with Hill and obtained his information, after which "Mr. Hill decided he would take off," heading south on Cleveland Street and continuing on Gainesville Highway with patrol cars in pursuit, Baxter said.

What resulted was a high-speed chase that exceeded 100 mph at one point; it was nighttime, so traffic was sparse, but in the interest of public safety, Blairsville PD called off the chase shortly after it turned onto Town Creek School Road,

Baxter said.

"We did pursue him for a little ways, but since we knew who he was and where he lived, the pursuit was terminated," Baxter said. "We subsequently went straight to his residence, and he was at his residence and the vehicle was there on-scene."

Blairsville PD and the Union County Sheriff's Office took Hill into custody, and he was transported to the jail. Georgia State Patrol also responded to the residence, according to Baxter.

Hill, 42, has been charged with two felony counts of fleeing or attempting to elude

police officers. He is also facing six misdemeanor charges: DUI – alcohol, less safe; obstructing or hindering law enforcement officers; reckless driving; improper passing; failure to maintain lane; and laying drag.

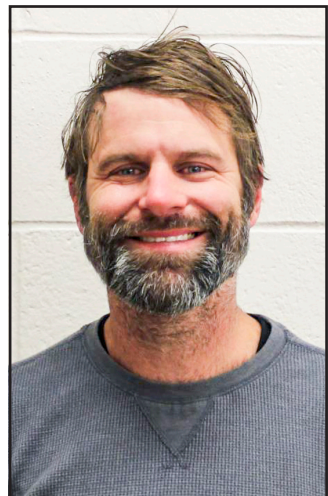
He bonded out three days after his arrest and is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

As to why Hill fled the scene of his traffic stop, which resulted in numerous additional charges – including two felonies – instead of a couple misdemeanor traffic violations, Chief Baxter said he did not know.

Responding to an area

media Facebook post last week, Hill expressed remorse and apologized for his "mistake," citing recent personal tragedy that led him to cope with alcohol. On fleeing police, he said he was rushing home to care for his dogs "before facing potential legal consequences."

In a Sept. 11 post on his own Facebook page that appears to have been removed recently, Hill referenced a past prison sentence he received for "(taking) someone's life by drinking and driving." He expressed remorse for that, too, saying that he had yet to forgive himself and was "still crying for the one who passed on."



Macon Kimball Hill

## TCSO Deputy Shot...from Page 1A



TCSO Deputy Austin Bradburn thanked his "brother in blue," TCSO Deputy Cameron Adams pictured here, for staying by his side in the hospital on Friday. Photo/Facebook

The suspect has not been identified but is described as a white man of about 6 feet in height and weighing between 170 and 180 pounds. He was wearing a black beanie, gray hoodie and black athletic pants at the time of the shooting, according to the GBI.

This incident unfolded just after 2 a.m. on Dec. 13 when Deputy Bradburn spotted a silver Honda four-door sedan – 2010 or similar model – with no tag, prompting him to initiate a traffic stop on Plott Town Road in Young Harris, near the Union County line.

The driver of the Honda stopped but immediately got out of his vehicle and approached Bradburn. The man did not obey commands given by Bradburn, who then unsuccessfully attempted to tase the suspect, according to the GBI.

A fight over Bradburn's gun ensued, resulting in Bradburn being shot through-and-through his left leg, after which the suspect drove away in the Honda, leaving Bradburn's gun at the scene.

Towns County EMS and law enforcement responded to the scene and provided care to Bradburn, who was subsequently life-flighted to Northeast Georgia Medical.

A former deputy for the Union County Sheriff's Office, Bradburn swore in as a Towns County Sheriff's Deputy on Oct. 8, according to a Facebook post featuring Sheriff Ken Henderson welcoming his new deputy aboard.

On social media Friday

afternoon, Bradburn shared a graphic image of his gunshot wound and thanked "all my other fellow officers who arrived on scene to administer help and who are looking for the suspect," as well as "everyone who has messaged me to check on me."

He also gave a special shout-out to fellow TCSO Deputy Cameron Adams, whom he described as "not only my partner but my brother in blue."

Deputy Adams applied a tourniquet to Bradburn's leg to stem the bleeding while they waited for EMS to arrive following the shooting. Further, Bradburn said Adams traveled to the Gainesville hospital Friday and "stayed by my side even after working all night."

"I will be okay just got some recovering to do," Bradburn wrote, adding, "If you have any information, follow the instructions below. Please let's get this guy!"

Anyone with information that could lead to the apprehension of the suspect is being asked to call 911 or the GBI Tipline at 800-597-8477; go online to <https://gbi.georgia.gov/submit-tips-online>; or make a report via the See Something, Send Something mobile app.

GBI Region 8 Special Agent in Charge Kim Williams can be reached at kim.williams@gbi.ga.gov. The investigation remains ongoing.