

Pickleball players pack in county meeting



USAPA Ambassador David Block

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

contributed an estimated \$400,000 in economic impact to that community.

Right here in Union County, a couple of the Blairsville Pickleball players taught kids at the school how to play, and they said that the administration will be incorporating the sport as an option in the upcoming curriculum.

David Block of Union County, who is a board certified neurologist and psychologist as well as a USAPA ambassador, expounded on the physical benefits of Pickleball.

"My interest in Pickleball began really from the perspective of health, and what did it mean, especially as I got older, what did it mean to grow old and to lose, unfortunately, whatever faculties and abilities I had 60 years ago," said Block. "And I learned how to play Pickleball, and it has really been quite an extraordinary journey for me."

Currently, there are two places to play Pickleball in Union County, thanks to involvement from Union County Recreation Director Larry Conley and the continued interest of now more than 100 Blairsville Pickleball Club members—a couple of converted tennis courts at Meeks Park and a few courts at the Old Middle School Gym.

It was pointed out that the only "destination" Pickleball arena currently in the state is in Towns County, and those gathered Thursday wished to impress upon Commissioner Paris the growing nature of the sport in order to make a case for a dedicated Pickleball facility in Union County.

Commissioner Paris addressed the large Pickleball group, explaining that SPLOST funds are what would need to be used to build a dedicated Pickleball arena in Union



Close to 100 Pickleball players, most from Blairsville but some from around the region, piled into the July County Commission Meeting.

County, and that that would need to be carefully planned out moving forward, in order to take care of projects that are already on the list to be completed.

"Now, that doesn't mean that we don't have funds," said Commissioner Paris. "We may have some extra funds, and the reason we may have is because our economy is really doing good right now."

"Our sales tax revenue is above projection, so we're feeling a little bit of relief as far as having some funding to do this. But putting it in the line and in the chain of other projects that we have going is the other issue in how we fit it in and when we fit it in."

Another hurdle for the timeline of a potential Pickleball arena is location, according to the commissioner, as he and the county so far have been unable to find a piece of land that would accommodate a structure and the necessary parking.

"We hear you, we know there's a great interest, we know

it's a worthwhile sport and we know that it's going to be here hopefully for a long time to come," said Commissioner Paris, adding that the county was likely about a year and a half out from solving the Pickleball situation.

Also in the meeting, the commissioner signed a proclamation recognizing July 17, 2016, as the 75th anniversary of the Nottely Dam and Reservoir, located in what was formerly known as Thompson Canyon.

The dam was completed in roughly six months, from July 1941 to January 1942, and cost \$8 million dollars, and the commissioner said that the dam and reservoir have served their purposes "of flood control and water conservation by protecting lives and preventing hundreds of millions of dollars in flood damage, as well as generating power for the region."

In other July 21 meeting business, the commissioner accepted roughly \$850,000 in Accountability Court Grants from the state, which Union County receives and distributes throughout the Enotah Judicial Circuit for programs such as mental health court, felony drug court, family drug court and the Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant.

These grants come to the circuit after each county contributes a matching amount each year, toward which Union County gives \$50,000 from an account set aside for the collection of court fees and fines to pay that amount.

The commissioner also appointed Jennifer Queen as county clerk, since she has completed all of her certifications "in record time," and he appointed Barbara Hale to the Union County Library Board of Trustees for a three-year term that started on July 1 and will end on June 30, 2019.

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document that was signed when Mr. (Gary) Steppe was superintendent," Jennings told the board. "Now that we have a brand new superintendent (Dr. Fred Rayfield), I want to update this document. I'm sure he (Dr. Rayfield) is aware of it and has signed it in previous counties. Every county has an extension office and they all have a Memorandum of Understanding."

The board unanimously approved the 2016-2017 contracts with the Ninth District Head Start.

"These are the standard contracts that the board approves on an annual basis for their relationship with Ninth District Head Start," Dr. Rayfield said. "They outline their (Ninth District Head Start

responsibilities and the (Union County) Board of Education's responsibilities, and nothing has changed in those contracts from the previous year."

The acceptance of federal funds for the Union County Learning Enrichment Center for the fiscal year 2017 was unanimously approved by the board. The Learning Enrichment Center is an after school program that serves 170 students from all five schools with an additional 12 hours of weekly support.

"The students receive 45 minutes a day in reading, 45 minutes a day in math, and 45 minutes a day in enrichment," Associate Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams said. "We're entering the third year of this grant, and our funding

did go down a little bit from \$350,000 because the high school numbers are difficult to maintain.

"Trying to keep high school kids after school for 12 hours a week is a challenge. We're okay with the decrease in funds because we're actually serving more high school kids over the course of the year, it's just that they're not there all year. If we're able to get a student in for 6 weeks, that's better than not getting them in at all."

On other items on the agenda, the board is undergoing the final steps to receive reimbursement from the state for the Union County Primary School renovation in the amount of \$900,000. The board will be notifying the state that the renovations are complete so they can recover the necessary funds.

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