

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## GDOT outlines plans to widen Murphy Highway

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Georgia Department of Transportation met with area residents last week to answer questions regarding preliminary plans of the upcoming widening of a 9-mile stretch of Murphy Highway.

In a two-hour Public Information Open House, close to 20 GDOT officials fanned out to accommodate the nearly 400 residents who showed up to view the plans inside the Blairsville Civic Center on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

Several copies of the plans went up around the big meeting room in the civic center, creating a total view of the 9-mile stretch.

Each piece of the overall map featured the proposed satellite images covering the entirety of the project, from the Blue Ridge Street four-way, across GA 515, to Nottely

Dam Road.

GDOT's primary purpose for holding the open house last week was to give residents a chance to view preliminary project plans, after which residents were asked to submit public comments that could potentially send certain parts of the project back to the drawing table.

The reason these open houses are so important is because they make a difference.

In a GDOT open house in Suches last year, there was a massive public outcry over preliminary plans calling for the closure of Lake Winfield Scott Bridge to SR 180 through-traffic, which ultimately sent GDOT back to the drawing board.

Thanks to those comments, GDOT has decided to keep one bridge lane open at all times while they replace the aging structure.

As for the Murphy

Highway widening project, residents who didn't get a chance to leave their comment at the Feb. 21 open house still have time to make public comment by the March 7 deadline.

Residents can go online to [www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Public/PublicOutreach](http://www.dot.ga.gov/PS/Public/PublicOutreach). Scroll down to "Search Public Outreach" at about the middle of the page, and select Union in the "By County" box. Click "Go."

From there, click on the link that reads "Widening SR11/Murphy Highway."

Review the documents uploaded from the open house, and leave a comment by clicking on the "Comment" link.

By navigating to <https://goo.gl/khHC9s>, residents are taken directly to the project page, which is actually the simpler of the two online options.

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Hundreds of residents showed up to the Feb. 21 Public Information Open House sponsored by the Georgia Department of Transportation. On display, preliminary plans to widen a 9-mile stretch of Murphy Highway.

## BOE honors Teachers of the Year

By Lily Avery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

It was award time for Union County's top teachers at the Union County Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

Stacy Olson of Union County Primary School, Kayla Duckworth of Union County Elementary School, Dr. Julie Hale of Union County Middle School, Chris Adams of Union County High School and Doug Roberts of Woody Gap School were selected by their peers as the 2017 Teachers of the Year.

Olson, who has been working in education for going on 19 years, teaches the self-contained classrooms at the primary school, which consist of kindergarten, first and second grades.

According to UCPS Principal Millie Owenby, Olson approaches teaching in a manner that promotes a



Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield presents Dr. Julie Hale, an English teacher at Union County Middle, an award for achieving System Teacher of the Year in the Feb. 21 meeting of the Union County Board of Education.

positive learning environment for all of her students.

"She has a unique personality in the classroom," said Owenby. "There are many things going on in that classroom, many levels of students. She has such a

calming effect in that classroom that she's always the same no matter what is going on. She goes above and beyond."

Duckworth, of UCES, while a fairly newcomer to the

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## Area veterans gather to remember Battle of Iwo Jima

By Lily Avery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Area veterans met Monday, Feb. 20, at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center to commemorate the 72nd anniversary of the beginning of the Battle of Iwo Jima on Feb. 19, 1945.

Six local Iwo Jima veterans were honored at the event: Todd Kimsey, U.S. Navy; Jack Rhodes, U.S. Marine Corps; Clarence "Bud" Johnson, U.S. Navy; Phil Gamache, U.S. Marine Corps; Mack Drake, U.S. Marine Corps; and Joseph Tedder, U.S. Marine Corps.

Members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion Post #23, Sons of American Legion

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Charley Andrews, retired U.S. Army Brig. Gen. presents a certificate of appreciation to retired U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Bernie Fontaine of Suches. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

## 911 Dispatch ready at a moment's notice

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Dispatchers with Union County E-911 save an untold number of lives every year.

They do so by working on the frontlines of emergency first response, calmly coordinating other first responders to arrive promptly at the doorstep of trouble and with help at the ready, oftentimes just in time.

Leading that charge is Lt. Millie Baxter, who runs the day-to-day operations of 911 Dispatch and Mapping.

This year marks Baxter's 20th anniversary with Union County 911 Dispatch, and she's seen many changes in the field during her time, including

a computer revolution.

Back when she started, Towns and Union shared a 911 center, and reports were taken down with a pencil and paper. County maps existed in big books, not as instantly available digitized information.

But there are things that haven't changed, such as the professionalism and calm demeanor with which she and all Union County 911 dispatchers carry out their jobs.

Baxter knows that dispatchers and her, so it's up to her and her team to coordinate every aspect of an emergency response, and to get



Lt. Millie Baxter of 911 Dispatch and Mapping

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## Blairsville man dies in one-vehicle crash

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Friends and family are mourning the loss of a 21-year-old Blairsville man killed in a motorcycle accident on Georgia 325 on Thursday, Feb. 23.

Joel Preston Freeman, of Town Square, Blairsville, died at the scene of the one-vehicle accident, according to Georgia State Patrol Cpl. Robby Russell.

The crash occurred Thursday afternoon on



Joel Preston Freeman

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## Union General outreach training program for Union County Schools

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Staff Writer

It's nearly impossible to predict a medical emergency, but it is possible to prepare for one.

That's why Union General Hospital has developed a first-in-the-region outreach training program for Union County Schools, to promote safety and wellness for students, faculty and staff.

This program was designed to teach school employees important safety initiatives that have been proven to save lives, targeting three initiatives for training: Hands-Only CPR; the use of Automated



Union General Hospital EMS Director Wesley Rogers, right, demonstrates techniques to stop bleeding, with Air Methods Flight Medic Steve Root on Feb. 22.

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## Community supports Dakota Collins

By Lily Avery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Dozens of community members gathered on Saturday, Feb. 25, at the Union County Farmers Market to host a fundraiser benefit for Dakota Collins.

The Collins family is known by many and loved by all, and the benefit last Saturday was a true testament to that.

A senior at Union County High School, Dakota began having severe health issues last year, was hospitalized in December and diagnosed with a kidney disease.

Since then, Collins

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Community volunteers staged a fundraiser on Saturday, Feb. 25, to benefit Union County High School senior Dakota Collins, whose health took a mysterious turn for the worse in December.

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**Union County Headstart & Pre-K Registration**

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**Big Country Breakfast**  
March 4<sup>th</sup>

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**Woody Gap Student Council YARD SALE**  
March 10 & 11

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**PANTHERS SOCCER**  
Thurs Mar 2 vs. Towns 5 & 7 PM  
Fri Mar 3 vs. Riverside 5 & 6:30  
**BASEBALL**  
Fri. Mar 3 @ Commerce 6 PM  
Sat. Mar 4 vs. Commerce 2 PM