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answered the question about Union General Hospital's future.

During Dyer's tenure as hospital administrator, Union General was named Georgia Rural Hospital of the Year three times. In 1994, the hospital was named among the Top 10 rural hospitals in the country. In 2000, Union General was named Georgia's Small Hospital of the Year, an award that would return in 2007. In 2011, Union General was named a Top 100 hospital nationwide.

According to her successor, Mike Gowder, Dyer retired leaving Union General Hospital as one of the most financially stable medical facilities around.

"She had a vision for the future," Gowder said. "We're debt free; we're in solid financial position. That's the legacy that Becky Dyer leaves behind."

Mike Gowder worked as Dyer's right hand for almost 14 years. He said working with Dyer has been a true blessing.

"I feel blessed to have been able to have worked under her," Mike Gowder said. "She's a lady of few words, but everything she says has meaning to it."

Dyer mentored Mike Gowder the whole way until the day she departed for retirement.

"She pretty much taught me everything I know as far as hospital administration goes," he said. "The key to that is

communicating and getting along with the position.

"It's been the best job in my life," he said. "It's been a dream come true. I could never have imagined enjoying this job as much as I have working under Becky."

Mike Gowder said it was a sad day when Dyer announced her retirement.

"It was an emotional time," he said. "The last week or so as she was packing up to leave, were surreal moments.

"She had told me a year or more ago that she was considering retirement," he said. "I just hoped that as that time got closer, she would reconsider and stay. I was hoping she would stay until I got retirement age. It was a very sad day when I watched her walk out."

The best part about Dyer's retirement, "she's only a phone call away," Mike Gowder said.

"And she let that be known," he said. "I've already called her several times. I'm glad to know that she is a phone call away. I won't hesitate to call her. It's a very comforting feeling knowing that she's still a presence when she's needed."

Mike Gowder said Dyer left the ship in smooth waters. He said he didn't foresee Union General Hospital going through any major expansions over the next decade.

"When we built the new tower, we built the 80,000 square feet addition out front and then we renovated the historic portion of the hospital," he said. "There's 80,000 square feet that's new and 75,000 square feet of renovated space.

"We built the tower so we could go up another floor," Mike Gowder said. "That would add another 30,000 square feet."

Mike Gowder doesn't see an additional 30,000 square feet of space being necessary any time soon.

"Our in-patient occupancy rate is not at the point where we could apply to add more rooms to our hospital," he said. "We follow the rules of Certificate of Need. We would have to experience a high occupancy rate for a certain period of time before we could ask for more beds. Our in-patient census has not increased very much over the last 10 years.

"With Medicare, Medicaid and insurance compa-



Retired Union General Hospital Administrator and CEO Becky Dyer shares a moment with long-time associate Kathy Hood.

nies dictating when people can come in the hospital and when they have to leave, we don't see a lot of increase in the in-patient business," he said. "However, we have seen a big increase in outpatient services."

Outpatient services may have to be expanded in the future, Mike Gowder said.

"But I don't think we'll be going up another floor in the next 10 years," he said. "We doubled our size when we built the new tower, so we have a lot of room to grow."

Union General Hospital also is a leg up on the competition in terms of equipment and technology, Mike Gowder said.

"We bought all new equipment when we did the new addition/renovation project," he said. "I think our X-ray equipment is better than you'll find at any rural hospital. It's the latest, state-of-the-art equipment. It's better than some of the equipment that they have in Gainesville and even further south of here.

"In terms of technology, we're up there, we're totally wireless, we have a patch system, that's where images are put on digital screens, and our X-rays can be read on a monitor," he said. "Doctors and specialists from anywhere, as long as they can access the Internet, we can those special-

ists look at our images when we need to."

The hospital has new beds, new radiology equipment, and new monitoring equipment, Mike Gowder said.

"I doubt that you could find another rural hospital that is any more modern than Union General Hospital," he said. "On top of that, we've got the best group of physicians. I don't know of another rural setting that has the physicians that we have. They are 26 physicians dedicated to this hospital."

Years ago, there were only one or two physicians in the community.

"My dad (George Gowder) was the only doctor here for awhile," Mike Gowder said. "We've got a solid group of physicians here now, and a number of consulting physicians that are here part-time, so, it has really grown over the years."

Bottom line, Dyer prepared Mike Gowder for his next step up the proverbial ladder.

"I think Becky has prepared me over the past few years," Mike Gowder said. "She turned more and more duties over to me as the years went by; she's done a great job preparing me to take over. We've just got to try and keep the ship out of the ditches."

McConahy winner of CSB's smartphone promotion

Community & Southern Bank (CSB) is proud to announce Patti McConahy of Blairsville has been named the local winner of a region-wide, in-branch promotion. Selected at random, McConahy will receive a free smartphone, compliments of CSB.

"Congratulations to Patti and all of our North Region winners who took time to visit their local bank branch and inquire about CSB's mobile banking application," says Jeff Whittington, chief banking officer for CSB. "We value all of our customers and appreciate their willingness to learn more

about our expanding product and service offerings."

CSB recently joined an elite group of banks to offer mobile deposits with the introduction of its new mobile app - available for iPhone, Androids, and Blackberry phones, as well as tablets. In addition to mobile deposit, the CSB app allows users to view and search account history; transfer funds between accounts; pay bills; and access branch locations, as well as driving directions.

To enhance consumer knowledge and ensure customers understand how to navigate the application, CSB

began an in-branch promotion on Nov. 5, 2012. The promotion allowed customers to register for a free smartphone in multiple branch locations, with winners being notified Jan. 4, 2013.

In all, 17 smartphones were given away to multiple winners in CSB's East, Metro, North and West regions.

For more information on Community & Southern Bank's mobile application or to inquire about additional products and services, please visit myCSBonline.com or call the Customer Care Center at 801-901-8075. NJm23.A4)SH

Appalachian Trail hikers and Forest Service manage bear conflicts with bear-resistant storage canisters

The USDA Forest Service and Appalachian Trail hikers are experiencing fewer black bear conflicts along a 5-mile section of trail from Jarrard Gap to Neels Gap in the Chattahoochee National Forest after implementation of a seasonal requirement for all overnight campers to carry bear-resistant canisters to contain personal garbage, toiletries and foods. The requirement goes into effect again this year beginning March 1 and ends June 1.

The regulation was first issued in 2012 by the Forest Service as an alternative to closing the area along the Appalachian Trail in the Blood Mountain Wilderness to camping. In previous years, concerns about hiker safety after repeated bear conflicts required temporary, seasonal camping closures for the area. Now, hikers have the option of camping in the area year-round as long as they carry and use a bear-resistant canister in the springtime. The requirement was developed in consultation with the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division.

"We have worked closely with the Forest Service to find the best solution, and we support them in taking this measure to protect hikers," said Shelley Rose, President of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club. "So far, we are seeing fewer bear-hiker interactions, and that's a good thing for both the hikers

and the bears."

Bear-resistant canisters trap odors inside, eliminating the lure of food, and they are designed to be tamper-resistant against extreme force. The regulation requires that the canisters used must be solid and non-pliable. These canisters can be purchased or rented at most retail stores and online sellers that stock camping gear.

"Any bear that associates people with food is a dangerous bear because it's going to be aggressive," said Andy Baker, Blue Ridge District Ranger for the Forest Service. "By removing the lure of foods and other odors, we stop giving bears a reason to approach a campsite."

The storage regulation is mandatory for all dispersed camping in the Blood Mountain Wilderness within a quarter mile of the trail from Jarrard Gap to Neels Gap, which includes the Blood Mountain Shelter and Woods Hole Shelter. Hikers who choose not to camp along this section of trail are not required to carry a canister. Traditional food storage methods in the wilderness, such as hanging food bags between trees, are not allowed as a substitute for using a bear-resistant canister under this regulation, but are still encouraged at other times and in other areas of the forest. However, these methods are not as effective as bear-resistant canisters at preventing bears from retrieving food.

Forest officials say black bear encounters have increased

significantly in recent years in the Blood Mountain Wilderness. Bears become more active as the seasons and weather change. They are particularly attracted to human food brought into wilderness in the early spring when natural food sources are not yet plentiful. This is also the peak season for north-bound Appalachian Trail hikers to begin their journeys.

Blood Mountain was designated as a Wilderness Area by Congress in 1991. Wilderness designation means the land has been set aside for permanent protection because of its intact natural ecosystems. The Forest Service manages it in a way that allows many recreational activities, but also provides some restrictions to protect the area in its natural state. Wilderness visitors are asked to practice the Leave No Trace ethic, a set of guidelines for minimizing their impacts including planning ahead, staying on durable surfaces, disposing of waste properly, leaving what they find and respecting wildlife and other visitors.

For more tips on how to protect yourself and also protect black bears when visiting the National Forest, visit the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests website at www.fs.usda.gov/conf or contact the Blue Ridge Ranger District Office at (706) 745-6928. A map of the area covered by the regulation is available online, at nearby trailheads, and at the District Office. NJm23.Z3)CA