

## Mattee...from Page 1

She has bachelor's degrees in biological sciences, applied biotechnology and entomology, and a master's degree in entomology.

Entomology is the study of insects, a discipline that fits perfectly within the realm of agricultural science, as one of the big roles of a county agent is insect identification.

But Mattee didn't start out wanting to be a "bug lady," as she puts it.

"Ever since I was 4 years old I wanted to be a vet," said Mattee. "That's why I went to UGA, and that's why I took all the science classes. And then I took my first medical entomology course, and that is what sparked the interest in it."

Through the course of

her graduate studies, Mattee worked with the 4-H program as a volunteer District Project Achievement Judge in the area of entomology, and she spent a lot of time sharing her passion for and knowledge of insects.

"I would bring insects to outreaches, teach kids about insects, teach farmers about insects, and that's how I got my extension connections," said Mattee. "One of the extension agents from the Northeast District actually recommended I apply for this position, and I did, and that's how I ended up here."

Mattee began her job as the Union and Towns extension agent on Jan. 4, with the understanding that her main roles were to be both a communicator and an educator.

"Primarily what I do is, I'm in the office, and somebody will call up and say, hey, I've got this insect, I don't know what it is – can you identify it for me? So they'll bring it in, I'll look at it," said Mattee. "Or they've got a plant disease, or they want to know what grass to plant to prevent erosion. Or they want to know what goat nutrients to feed."

"Just any kind of

questions at all about anything to do with agriculture or natural resources. But also, I take a proactive measure as well as reactive by planning programs."

In January, Mattee oversaw a Vegetable Producers Meeting, and her next planned event will be the Northeast Georgia Corn Production Meeting, scheduled for Feb. 16 from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the Experiment Station.

"Anybody who grows corn or is looking to grow corn can just show up, and lunch will be provided," said Mattee. "All they need to do is contact the office and tell us that they're interested so we can get a headcount."

"It will be for pesticide credit, too. Essentially, anybody with any kind of pesticide certificate, whether it's commercial applicators or private applicators, you need to attend a certain amount of certified events that will give you credit for it to maintain it, so this counts for pesticide certificate credit."

Above all, Mattee is happy for the opportunity to work in Union and Towns counties, and she's learning new things every day in her role as ag agent.

"I'm really excited about

it," said Mattee. "I was really nervous and I didn't know what to expect, but everybody has been just so welcoming. The one thing everybody has told me without exception is, we are so happy you're here."

Mickey Cummings of Union County, who retired last year after serving as an extension agent for 30 years, said that Mattee will be a tremendous asset to these communities.

"I think Melissa is an outstanding person, and I think she will be an outstanding extension agent as well," said Cummings. "She's very intelligent, she has a master's degree in entomology. She's exuberant, enthusiastic – all the things you need to be a county agent, she possesses all those qualities, and I think she's going to do a great job."

Mattee is looking forward to community suggestions for future programs, and said that residents of Towns and Union counties should feel free to contact her with their ideas.

Residents can contact Mattee in the Hiwassee office at (706) 896-2024, or in the Blairsville office at (706) 439-6030. She can also be reached through email at mmattee@uga.edu.

## Robbery...from Page 1

are asking for the public's assistance in identifying one of the robbery suspects pictured in the attached sketch," according to the statement. "The Blairsville Police Department may be contacted at 706-439-6038, or information may be left on the GBI Tip Line 800-597-8477."

Authorities have said that they do not believe the community at large to be in danger.

"As the Blairsville PD's

Facebook page says, this is an isolated incident," said GBI Region 8 Special Agent in Charge Kim Williams. "Obviously there are suspects that are out there, but I don't feel that anyone in the community is going to be at risk. I think it is specific to the restaurant."

The GBI has taken over as the lead investigating agency, and was contacted after Blairsville PD determined that a robbery had been committed.

"We had an officer on the scene within 30 seconds, and subsequently, it was confirmed that a robbery did occur," said Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Michael Baxter. "During the course of the investigation, there was one minor injury that had occurred."

"We feel like it's an isolated incident, and at this point, if I was a business owner or resident in Blairsville or Union County, I don't think this is a pattern that we're going to see."

## UGH...from Page 1

entirety feels very strongly that the community understands that the board is actively involved in the oversight of what's happening today," said Williams. "Patsy and I both are onsite, and will be on a daily basis for the foreseeable future to support Lewis, as well as to let our employees know that we're going to continue to operate our facility at the high level that it has been operated in the past. The community can depend on our almost 1,000 employees system-wide to do the job that our community expects them to do."

Williams has been out at the hospital with Patsy Efir, who chairs the Union General, Inc. Board of Directors, and the two have been working to highlight the positive aspects of the hospital over the negativity of the current situation.

"We have one of the Top 100 community hospitals in the country, and we don't want the community to lose sight of that," said Williams. "It's not due necessarily to the board – it's due to the people that are in there every day, the physicians and the employees, that come to work every day."

Union General Hospital offers a remarkable breadth of medical services to multiple communities, and the list of ancillary businesses is impressive: Union County Nursing Home, Union County Dialysis Center, Chatuge Regional Hospital, Chatuge Regional Nursing Home, Glenda Gooch House, Blue Mountain Family Practice, Hayesville Family Practice and the Clinic at Walmart in Blairsville.

"Five years ago, 10 years ago, people would have to travel across the mountain for dialysis or for cancer treatment – now, they go across the street," said Williams, adding that the hospital has also recently installed a new state-of-the-art cardiopulmonary rehab center. "We have some incredible physicians and support team here locally to take care of the needs of our community health wise."

Since the arrests, Williams and Efir, along with the rest of the hospital staff, have been cooperating fully with authorities, including helping the sheriff's office and the DEA to gather files and records from the hospital.

"The board and our staff are fully cooperating with law enforcement concerning the ongoing investigation, and we will continue to do so," said Williams. "Also, the board is being very proactive in our internal investigation concerning the governance of the hospital, as well as day-to-day operations."

This internal investigation is being conducted at the board level, with legal counsel from Morris, Manning & Martin LLP out of Atlanta.

"Our purview currently is that this is an isolated situation of somebody that is in a senior level management position, that has acted on their own, and that we have no reason at this point to think that any of

our staff was involved directly and such, but we are taking measures to investigate that to be sure that we're aware of all circumstances," said Williams.

Dr. Heaton was voted onto the Union General Hospital Board of Directors last fall, and the board made a decision last week concerning his board seat following his arrest.

"We voted to suspend his privileges from the board pending further investigation, and that's where we stand as of today," said Williams.

For now, transparency is of great concern to the hospital and its board.

"Jim and I went to Chatuge and met with their physicians and the managers over there, and just tried to brief them on what we knew was going on and what we were doing," said Efir. "They knew Lewis Kelley because he had been over there as administrator before. We are just trying to get

to everybody to let them know that we are as transparent as we know how to be, and when we know something, you will know something."

As for what's next, Williams and Efir said that they and the rest of the board are taking things a step at a time, adding that everyone should have faith in their award-winning hospital and local health care.

"Our facility is profitable and has been for many, many years," said Williams. "We have virtually no debt, and we have significant cash reserves on hand. There are very few hospitals in the state or in the country that can make that statement."

"So we want to reassure the public that our health care at Union General, Inc. and Chatuge Regional, Inc. are very healthy financially, and that we will do whatever we can to maintain that, as well as the high level of service that people have learned to become dependent on."