

Arrests...from Page 1

bond, according to the sheriff's office:

John Michael Gowder, three counts fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

James Lanier Heaton, 41 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substance.

Gail Gowder, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance.

George David Gowder, seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substance, 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance.

Virginia Lou Harkins, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

Jamie Lee Harkins, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled

substance.

Gail Gowder, Lou Harkins and Jamie Harkins were all arrested for paying for and obtaining opiate pain pill prescriptions written by Dr. David Gowder, according to authorities.

Dr. Gowder was arrested twice last year on charges of prescription fraud, first in Blue Ridge, then in Union County.

Prior to losing his job with Union General Hospital following an arrest last year, Dr. Gowder had been the director of the emergency room there.

According to authorities, an investigation had revealed that, dating as far back as 2008, Dr. Gowder had written hundreds of prescriptions in the names of family members, as well as real and fictitious patients, before paying for and filling them himself.

Also discovered during the course of the investigation, Dr. Gowder would send his on-duty subordinates in the emergency room to local

pharmacies, where they were directed to fill opiate prescriptions for fictitious patients, then bring the prescriptions back to him at the hospital, according to authorities.

The investigation found that Dr. Gowder had also written controlled substance prescriptions for close family members, including his brother Mike Gowder, and that any employees who attempted to report or prevent Dr. Gowder's activities were intimidated, harassed, and were in some cases forced to quit or were fired by Mike Gowder, acting as CEO, according to authorities.

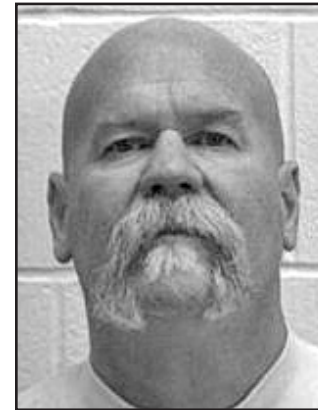
During the operation Thursday in which the Union County Sheriff's Office and the DEA moved in to arrest individuals and seize files, the Cherokee County NC Sheriff's Office also had men on the ground, including the sheriff himself, the chief deputy and five investigators from that office.

"Our drug guys started looking into our fraudulent scripts that were coming through our pharmacies in North Carolina," said Sheriff Derrick Palmer. "A lot of our Cherokee County residents, once we got to checking into this, were overprescribed medication, and were getting a lot of medications that there was just no humanly way they could take - it was not possible that they could be ingesting this much medication.

"So in this investigation, we've been finding that a lot of these pills were going on the street, selling them on the street, things of that nature.



John Michael Gowder, M.D.



James Lanier Heaton, M.D.



George David Gowder, M.D.



Gail Nicholson Gowder



Virginia Lou Harkins



Jamie Lee Harkins



When we started looking at where they were getting these pills and where these pills were coming from, a lot of it was coming from these doctors that we're looking at today that Union County is actually doing arrest warrants on."

According to Sheriff Palmer, many of the prescriptions in question were fraudulent, written out to fictitious people, or simply a matter of overprescribing.

"We have no current charges in North Carolina on any of these doctors right now, but we are looking at

indictments coming down the road, and our investigation is still continuing in North Carolina," said Sheriff Palmer.

Several TV news crews out of Atlanta were in town last week to capture the arrests of Mike Gowder and Dr. Heaton, and for the subsequent arraignment that took place on Friday, Feb. 5.

Sheriff Mason said that, regardless of what transpired last week and over the course of this ongoing investigation, the public should not be wary of the hospital or its staff.

"I want to reiterate the fact that we have a great hospital facility," said Sheriff Mason. "That's where I go when I need medical treatment, and I've always had a great experience with the staff and services there.

"I want to thank the hospital for all of its cooperation that Thursday, and I thank everyone that reached out to us with information. If they have a need to inform us of anything else or have any questions, my office stands available to answer any questions and be of any assistance that we can."

Arraignment...from Page 1



Sheriff Mack Mason and District Attorney Jeff Langley at the arraignment hearing

issued a \$10,000 bail.

According to court documents, special conditions of bail, among others, included: surrendering of the DEA Registration Number that allows physicians to issue prescriptions, if applicable. The defendants cannot be employed in a facility issuing narcotic prescription medication, and they must inform any future employer of pending charges.

The defendants shall not enter the grounds of Appalachian Home Health, Union General Hospital or its affiliates unless in an emergency situation, nor can they contact any employee directly or indirectly. However,

the court will allow Dr. Heaton to read and analyze sleep studies to maintain employment.

The defendants are also not to have contact with witnesses or co-defendants, with the exception of Mike and Gail Gowder, who are husband and wife, though they may not discuss any criminal investigation.

There was also a special condition that prevented the defendants from leaving the custody of the jail until 8 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 6.

Christian was the acting judge after Union County Magistrate Judge Johnnie Garmon recused himself from the case due to conflict

of interest and/or perceived prejudice.

With TV news crews, agents of the Drug Enforcement Administration and families of the accused in attendance, the four defendants without legal representation present faced Judge Christian and Langley before the court went into recess, where Dr. David Gowder and Dr. Heaton met with their defense attorneys and waived their rights to first appearances.

Bail was agreed upon by all parties behind closed doors and the public side to the hearing was concluded.

Free GED® registration at the Shirley Miller Building

Union County Adult Ed is excited to announce that the GED® test passing score has changed to 145 (from 150) in the state of GA. Because of these scoring changes, you may now feel that passing the GED® test is within reach. We offer GED prep classes, practice tests, which are 50% off through March 31, and Compass remedial help.

GA Workforce Development (WOIA) can assist with GED testing and childcare costs, and a transportation

NGTC announces 2015 Summer and Fall Graduates

North Georgia Technical College is pleased to announce that 358 students completed their program of study during the 2015 summer and fall semesters. For all degree and diploma graduates wishing to participate, a formal commencement ceremony was held on Thursday, Jan. 21, at The Torch in Demorest with Matt Arthur, Deputy Director for the Technical College System of Georgia, delivering the keynote address.

Union County residents completing their program of study included: Chelsea D. Arnold, Medical Assisting; Mary Lynn Blankinship, Practical Nursing; Susan Ellen Block, Medical Assisting; David Floyd, Commercial Truck Driving; Alisa Y. Green, Practical Nursing; Sandra J. Harbin, Practical Nursing; Rehnee Herr, Business Administrative Technology; Susan Lynn John-

son, Medical Assisting; Haley N. Jones, Cosmetology; Lauren Ashley King, Medical Assisting; Jessica Renee Franklin Kirtley, Accounting; Nicole C. Lovell, Business Technology; Lori E. McCreadie, Medical Assisting; Lynda Meade, Health Care Assistant; Angela Elizabeth Morris, Criminal Justice Technology; Shane D. Morris, Applied Technical Management; Heather L. Moss, Business Administrative Technology; Jessika Mull, Medical Front Office; Christina M. Nelson, Cosmetology; Rachel Pierce, Medical Assisting; Deborah Pissott, Medical Assisting; Adrian M. Stroud, EMS Professions; Brittany Danielle Sullivan, Applied Business Technology; Michael K. Warren, Air Conditioning Technology; Jill Dawn Wilson, Medical Assisting; Tiffany F. Zimmerman, Practical Nursing.

Blalock St., Blairsville, GA 30512.

Appalachian Duplicate Bridge Club news

On Monday, February 1, seven and one half tables of the Appalachian Duplicate Bridge Club played a Howell movement at All Saints Lutheran Church in Blairsville, GA with the following results: First, Joan and Joe Lane and second, Dee Short and Dorothy Smith. There was a tie for third/fourth among Dan Cornett and Anita Lippmann; and Ray Berry and Joe Wald. Sue Wall and Tim Schoen finished fifth. There was also a tie for sixth/seventh among Jean Pittman and Barbara Mitchell and Myrna Ponkauskas and Lorraine Klug.

On Thursday, February 4, six full tables were in play. Again, the Howell movement was used with the following results: First, Joe Wald and Jim Bell; second, Dee Short and Dorothy Smith; and third, Richard King and Kathy Bradshaw. There was a tie for fourth/fifth among Myrna Ponkauskas and Ray Ferre and Mike Knowles and Pat Mosteller. Sue Wall and Tim Schoen placed sixth.

The bridge club plays every Monday and Thursday at All Saints and would welcome any interested players to join them for a fun-filled afternoon. For more information about the games or to arrange for a partner, call Susan at 706-379-9686.

Upcoming Crepe myrtle pruning class

It is time again to prune and protect those glorious crepe myrtles that grace our area. A pruning class for any interested members of our community will be held on Tuesday, February 16 at 2 p.m. at Hiwassee City Hall, in the upstairs meeting room.

The information/demonstration will last about 30 minutes and will include suggestions for proper tools for pruning, plus handouts. A walking tour of the immediate area around the Hiwassee Square will show "the good, the bad, and the ugly" of pruning choices. Pruning techniques will be demonstrated on a few of the crepe myrtles in this area. Dress for the weather on the

walking tour! In the event of inclement weather bad enough to close City Hall, the class will be rescheduled.

The Master Gardeners of Towns/Union County have been pruning 58 crepe myrtles on Main Street in Hiwassee every year at this time for the past several years. The fruits of our labors are clearly shown

Mountain Seniors to meet

The Mountain Seniors of Towns, Union and Clay counties Monthly Meeting Thursday, Feb. 11 at 1 PM in the Senior Center Building. Refreshments will be served. Our program will be celebrating Valentine's Day. Several members will tell how, when

on those trees, as they become more beautiful and shapely each year. Join us and become part of a growing group of residents who are interested in preserving and restoring crepe myrtles who have suffered 'crepe murder'.

Grace Howard, Master Gardener Extension Volunteer

and where they met the Valentine of their lives and different phases of their life together. Should be very interesting. Our speaker will be Richard Botting who is affiliated with Towns County Food Pantry. We will also make a contribution to the Pantry.

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