

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Mason: three in custody over case of tortured goat

By Charles Duncan
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The Union County Sheriff's Office has arrested three men in connection with the theft, murder and torture of a pet goat from Bunker Hill Road, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Sheriff's Investigator Daren Osborn went to Mt. Juliet, Tenn. in Wilson County last week and arrested Marty Carlton Johnson Jr., 20, originally from Hiwassee, Sheriff Mason said.

He added that Seth Richard Skinner, 21, of Hiwassee, and Eric Shane Dyer, 20, of Blairsville also were arrested and charged in the theft and aggravated animal cruelty of 15-year-old pet *Mercy*, who belonged to Jo Anne Allen.

Skinner and Dyer turned themselves in to the Union



Eric Shane Dyer

County Sheriff's Office, the sheriff said.

"There were a lot of folks that were very disturbed about this case," Sheriff Mason said. "I don't know what makes a human being do something like this to an animal. It's something this department will not tolerate."

Investigator Osborn said that the three acted in concert, and thus all three were charged with party to a crime, in addition to aggravated animal cruelty and theft by taking.

Johnson also was charged with discharging a firearm on the property of another, Union County Jail records show.

The three are accused of aggravated animal cruelty for torturing and murdering the goat. *Mercy* was then tied to the back of a pickup and dragged behind the vehicle at a high rate of speed, sheriff's reports show.



Marty Carlton Johnson

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Johnson also was charged with discharging a firearm on the property of another, Union County Jail records show.

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Seth Richard Skinner

The incident began on Jan. 4 when Johnson, Skinner and Dyer were drinking and watching a movie, *Men Who Stare at Goats*, sheriff's reports show.

"Alcohol was a factor in this case," Osborn said.

Men Who Stare at Goats is a comic war film starring George Clooney, Jeff Bridges, Kevin Spacey and

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Frank outspells 30 to win Union District spelling bee

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County eighth grader Jordan Frank will be headed to Marietta after taking first place in the Union County School System District Spelling Bee held at the Board of Education offices last week.

More than 30 students between fourth and eighth grades, including Woody Gap students took part in the event.

After a practice round allowing the spellers to get a feel for the process, the Spelling Bee lost five participants in the first round. With 26 spellers still alive after the first round, more began to drop out with each round as the words became a bit more difficult with each passing session.



Jordan Frank

Finally the Championship Round came down to Frank and seventh-grader Jake Chastain.

"Fallibility. F-A-L-L-I-B-I-L-I-T-Y. fallibility," Frank spelled to pull his ticket to the District Spelling Bee on

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Nottely River, local creeks overflow

By Charles Duncan
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On Wednesday, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris shrugged his shoulders as he watched a steady rainfall fill up the Nottely River.

By the look on his face, you could tell he wasn't looking forward to 39 more days of wet weather because obviously, he didn't have an ark.

Fortunately, the rains, which began early Wednesday, ended by nightfall that same day.

In between, the heavy rains left the Nottely River and every creek in the county swollen and out of banks.

The rain flooded some homes in some areas along the river bottoms. Emergency Management Agency crews evacuated the Choestoe Village community and Pappy's River Restaurant and shops.

Commissioner Paris said he hasn't seen flooding like this in more than 20 years.

"We lost the Lows Mill culvert, and that culvert will



Wednesday was not a good day to be in Union County. Rains swept through the county and filled up every stream and ditchline. Above, the mailman needed a motor boat to deliver the mail; below BRMEMC workers had a long day keeping the power on. Photos/Joe Collins and Todd Forrest

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Aponte is Woody Gap's STAR Student

By Charles Duncan
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Suches - Haley Elise Aponte grew up in the Star-Kin County School System.

By the time she arrived at Woody Gap School, she felt she was behind her new classmates, and her grades reflected that.

However, in time, the now Woody Gap senior, began to catch up. Smaller class sizes at Woody Gap allowed her to have more one-on-one time with her instructors.

Soon, she was an 'A' student.

On Friday, Haley learned that she was the STAR Student at Woody Gap. She chose Vocational Teacher Gary Butler as her STAR Teacher. He also oversees the school's yearbook.

"It's a huge difference coming from a classroom of 24 to 12 kids to a classroom with 12 to 14 kids," Butler said. "It's a big adjustment at first."

Haley adjusted, and she later excelled in her classwork.

Physics, math and other sciences are now a breeze to her. She's a bookworm, she loves homework and she loves the classroom.

"I want to be an anthropologist," she said. "I love ancient history, I love the History Channel."



Woody Gap's STAR Teacher and STAR Student, Gary Butler and Haley Elise Aponte. Photo/Charles Duncan

Haley has always loved being a student, and homework comes easy.

"I always do what I'm supposed to do (regarding homework)," she said. "If I need help with something, I'm not afraid to ask the teacher to help me work through problems in the classroom."

I think if anyone applies themselves, they can be good students," she said.

Haley said the honor of being STAR Student is humbling, but, at the same time, something that she's proud of because of her study habits.

"It's something that is pretty cool," she said. "I never strive to win awards, but, it's nice when they come in. I've always been more focused on getting good grades."

"When you get good grades,

the awards will take care of themselves," she said.

Haley's primary focus is to learn as much as she can in high school because she knows that college is a different world.

She hopes to attend the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega.

"In terms of being a student, I want to learn as much as I can and carry that over at the college level," she said.

"An education, high school or college, is an important part of life. To have both is a sincere feeling of empowerment," she said.

Haley offers this advice for underclassmen: hit the books, ask questions and never stop learning.

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Mother Nature strikes again with snow, black ice and freezing rain

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
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About 9:45 a.m. on Sunday, Union County residents witnessed a welcomed and familiar site: the sun was shining.

Ice began to melt from the trees and most importantly, the secondary roadways.

A winter storm arrived with full fury on Saturday, bringing snow to Northeast Georgia, including Union and Towns counties.

Ironically, the storm hit on Groundhog Day, just hours after Georgia's official weather prognosticator, General Beauregard Lee saw his shadow and predicted another six weeks of winter, unlike his northern counterparts.

General Lee is looking pretty smart right about now.

As the storm arrived, customers at local grocery stores filled their shopping



Mother Nature struck again around noon on Saturday marking one of the most wicked weather weeks in Union County history. Photo/Todd Forrest

buggies. Not the small buggies, the big uber models that could hold a month's groceries.

Every shopping aisle was full, most of the milk and sandwich bread was either gone or picked over. Locals were preparing for the worst.

After all, they had already witnessed high winds, flooded rivers and creeks and experienced power outages from Wednesday's rain storms.

"Oh my goodness, not

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Romano is Union's STAR Student

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County High School named its STAR Student and STAR Teacher last week and the honors went to Nic Romano and Brett Chatham respectively.

Romano was selected as the highest STAR score in his class after the first semester of the 2012-13 school year.

He then named Chatham, who he had in ninth grade, as Union County's STAR Teacher.

"Mr. Chatham was easily my favorite teacher at UCHS, and I believe he taught me the most, both in and out of the classroom," Romano said. "He was a teacher-coach for Mock Trial, and we connected much more throughout the competition."

When Chatham received the news that he was this year's STAR Teacher, he admittedly was a little shocked.

"(Union County High School Counselor) Gina Donahue told me that she needed to talk to me about something," Chatham said. "It made me nervous at first, but then she told me I was the STAR Teacher. I was very surprised."

Chatham taught Romano when he was a freshman and then coached him on the Mock Trial team his sophomore year. However the last two years, Romano has been involved in the Advanced Academy of Georgia, a residential, early entrance to



Nic Romano



Brett Chatham

college program for high ability high school-aged students who are interested in accelerating their academic careers.

He lives in a dorm at West Georgia University full-time and attends full-time college classes, which take the place of his high school classes and also gives him college credits.

Romano was just as surprised as Chatham to get the news.

"I was quite surprised to be named STAR Student. To be honest, I wasn't entirely sure what the award meant until Mrs. Donahue explained it to me, but I felt honored nonetheless," Romano said.

Romano, currently at West Georgia University, is studying Biology and is currently engaged in undergraduate research with an Evolutionary Biologist, Dr. Ken Spitzer.

"We are in the process

of publishing a paper regarding evolutionary responses in aquatic environments," Romano said. "My plans after graduation are to go to either Georgia Tech, or Stanford University, both of which I have already been accepted to. I plan on getting both a MD and Ph.D."

The Student Teacher Achievement Recognition (STAR) program honors Georgia's outstanding high school seniors and the teachers who have been most instrumental in their academic development.

During the past 55 years, the STAR Program has honored more than 23,500 high school seniors who have in turn chosen their STAR Teachers to share in this recognition.

"We have certain guidelines that they send

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1st Annual Glenda Gooch Foundation Canned Food Drive

In honor of **American Hearth Month**, the GGF is having a food drive to help people in our community. They will accept any non-perishable food at their thrift store,

TRANSPLANTED TREASURES
110 Gainesville Hwy • Blairsville, GA

Lunch & Learn

Tues. Feb. 5 • 12:30pm @ Blairsville Chamber of Commerce Community Room for Union County Community Action Team Learn about Literacy in Union County See page 7A

Fri. Feb. 8 • 11:30-1pm @ Towns Co. Chamber Conference Room for The Patient Protection & Affordable Care Act: What Every Business Should Know About the Healthcare Reform Co-sponsored by Blairsville Chamber & Towns County Chamber See page 7A

UCHS Basketball
Tues., Feb. 5 • 6pm @ Riverside
Fri., Feb. 8 • 7pm vs. Jefferson Senior Night

UCHS Wrestling State Sectionals
Feb. 8 & 9 @ Dublin