

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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January 2, 2013

Union County teen killed in Fannin crash

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
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A 16-year-old Union County boy was killed in a one-vehicle crash in Fannin County the day after Christmas, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

Cody Dwayne Morgan, a junior home school student, who had attended Union County High School, died from injuries sustained in the one vehicle crash, according to the Georgia State Patrol's Post 27 in Blue Ridge.

The accident occurred Dec. 26th shortly after noon, patrol officials said.

Morgan was driving a Ford pickup truck, traveling south on Skenah Gap Road, patrol officials said.

As Morgan negotiated a curve, the Ford pickup he was driving traveled off the

roadway, continued off an embankment, and overturned, patrol officials said.

Morgan, who was not wearing his seat belt, was ejected and suffered life-threatening injuries, patrol officials said.

Morgan's passenger, 15-year-old Cecil Brian Greenway, suffered abrasions to his chest and arms and was transported to Union General Hospital, patrol officials said.

Morgan was pronounced dead at the accident scene, patrol officials said.

According to friends, Morgan was a young person full of life. He loved to hunt, fish, and shoot pool. He also had a passion for riding horses.

He was a hard worker, always helping his father when the need arose.

He was a life-long local resident and contributor to the community.



Cody Dwayne Morgan

He was the embodiment of any young boy growing up in Union County.

All that youthful exuberance came to a halt on Dec. 26 near Skenah Gap.

Cody Morgan is survived by his parents, Joe and Myra Morgan of Blairsville, sister, Kristen Morgan of

Blairsville, brother, Buddy Morgan of Blairsville, paternal grandparents, the Rev. Wayne and Jewel Morgan of Blairsville, maternal grandparents, Wilbur and Nancy Morgan of Fayetteville. Also, he is survived by numerous aunts, uncles and cousins, and a host of friends.

Funeral services were held Saturday, Dec. 29th, at Mountain View Funeral Home Chapel with the Rev. Eric Davenport and Minister Terry Stuart officiating.

Graveside services followed in New Union Baptist Church Cemetery.

Mountain View Funeral Home, in Blairsville had charge of the arrangements.

A family fund has been established at Park Sterling Bank to aid the family with funeral expenses. To donate, call, (706) 781-3166.

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Lady Panthers take second; Panthers third in Battle in Towns County

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Hiawassee - Union County completed its 13th Battle of the States Christmas Tournament over the weekend with the Lady Panthers finishing as the Runner-Up for the second consecutive season.

Junior guard Lauren Zollinger, and senior guard Jeanelle Arnold were selected to the All-Tournament Team.

Meanwhile, the Panthers came in third place for Union's fourth Top 3 finish in eight years.

Senior Rhett McCombs was named to the All-Tournament Team and Senior Zach Odom led the entire tournament in scoring with 25.3



Zach Odom

points per game.

The Lady Panthers pulled away from a gritty Polk County, Tenn. team in the opening round for a 50-42 victory that saw junior Lauren Zollinger post 24 points.

On Day Two, Union County sent shock waves

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Top story of 2012: elections take center stage

By Charles Duncan
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The year 2012 was quite a year in Union County.

From a state championship in 12 and Under softball, to a state champion on the Cross Country course - Emma Garrison - Union County had much to be proud of in the year that was.

It was a year where two judges stepped down from the bench, two new judges were appointed by Gov. Nathan Deal, the Ku Klux Klan paid a visit, Taco Bell came to stay, Union County raised more than enough dollars to erect an Iraq War Pedestal, and the community welcomed a new cannery at the Farmers Market.

You can call both Stan Gunter and Raymond George "judge" and they'll know what you're talking about.

Both were appointed by Gov. Deal following the retirement of Judge David Barrett and the resignation of Judge Lynn Alderman. Both Barrett and Alderman were faced with a measure of controversy that prompted their departures.

Meanwhile, the Down-



Probate Judge Dwain Brackett swears in Sheriff Mack Mason on Dec. 18th as his wife Rhonda looks on. Photo/Charles Duncan

town Development Authority bought the historic Haralson Property in Downtown; Doug Collins became our new 9th

District congressman. Cassidy Davis became the 2012 Homecoming Queen; it was the best year ever for Shop With a Cop;

and record numbers turned out at the Union County Farmers Market.

The Reece Farm and Heritage Center opened in June, and became part of the Southern Literacy Trail Map in September.

Union residents learned that they enjoy the fifth lowest tax rate in the state in October; the Mock Trial Team won Region 6; Union County 911 became Union County E-911, or Enhanced 911.

The year wasn't filled with good news.

UCHS Athletic Director Jim Hughes hung up his hat, his wife, legendary Cross Country coach Jackie Hughes also called it a career after freshman Emma Garrison



Lee Knight

won state championship honors as the best female Cross Country runner in Class AA; retired 9th District Congressman Ed Jenkins passed away at 78; life-long Democrat, J.W. Payne, who served as the county's tax commissioner for 44 years, retired from an office he won while the Beatles were still united.

Payne stepping down sparked what became the county's **Top Story of 2012.**

It was an election year, and Republicans walked away with two more constitutional offices, and the first Republican female elected to the Union County Board of Education, Cindy Byers.

Lee Knight became the first Republican elected as tax commissioner in county history. Mack Mason became the first Republican sheriff in Union County history.

Mason predicted a changing of the guard in the Union County Sheriff's Office following the July Primary.

Almost 6,000 votes on Election Night proved he was right.

Mason defeated Democratic Incumbent Scott Stephens on Nov. 6th. Mason collected 5,781 votes, or 52.71



Cindy Byers

percent, to Sheriff Stephens' 5,186 votes, or 47.29 percent.

A total of 595 votes separated the two sheriff candidates.

"I appreciate everything everybody did for me, I appreciate my supporters and everybody that turned out to vote," Mason said. "I'm just so thankful and humbled that the voters in Union County have given me an opportunity to serve this county. I'm going to do it to the very best of my abilities."

Mason said the voters of Union County have spoke loud and clear.

"I'm very humbled with the support they have shown

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Gooch: Georgia Budget review

By State Sen. Steve Gooch
For North Georgia News

I know I am "preaching to the choir" when I say December has been a busy month for my family. Christmas gatherings, community programs and events, finding the perfect gifts for loved ones—our calendar has certainly been full.

There won't be much of a break between the holidays and the 2013 legislative session for me, but I don't mind.

I am humbled by your support in this year's election, and consider it an honor to represent Senate District 51.

I'm looking forward to being your voice at the Gold Dome, and I'm excited to serve in a new role as the Secretary of the Senate Republican Caucus.

One of the first issues the General Assembly will need to tackle during the legislative session will be the state budget.

This is a pretty complicated process that takes a lot of time, because we have to make sure all state operations are properly funded without overspending.

And it's not just one budget to review—there are two.

First, we will need to re-



State Sen. Steve Gooch

get. Like your household budget, the state has unexpected expenses from time to time and we will need to review and approve a new budget to keep the numbers balanced. Second, we will need to approve the Fiscal Year 2014 General Budget.

Because the FY 2014 budget is based on projections and also how the FY 2013 ends, it will also need to be revised the following year.

So where does our state stand financially?

Currently, Georgia is one of eight states with a Triple AAA bond rating; the highest bond rating available and a symbol of our state's fiscal responsibility. But we are looking at several factors that will require some hard decisions to

be made in regards to our budget.

Our Revenue Shortfall Reserve—think of it as a "rainy day" fund—is currently sitting at \$328 million.

Our state could operate for a maximum of seven or eight years with this money.

However, it's predicted that we will need to use \$170 million from the "rainy day" fund for K-12 enrollment growth when we revise the FY 2013 budget.

Although the reason for having the RSR is so that we can dip into it for unexpected expenses, we can't take from it without figuring out how we are going to replenish what was used.

This is going to be a challenge, because needs in Medicaid, Education, the State Health Benefits Plan, Higher Education and Retirement will likely use up any new state revenue for at least the next two years.

Governor Deal has recommended some tough spending cuts to state agencies and Medicaid programs to try and bring in new revenue. If the spending cuts are successful, they will generate \$250 million for the FY 2013 Amended Budget and \$300 million for the FY 2014 General Budget.

I wish that was the simple fix to our budget issues, but there are other unknown factors

See *Gooch*, Page 6A

Deputies nab alleged peeping tom

By Charles Duncan
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Union County sheriff's deputies stayed busy on Christmas Day - 22-year-old Michel Smith made sure of that.

Smith proved to be a Harry Houdini of sorts for Union County sheriff's deputies as he escaped from a locked patrol car, out ran a taser shot, shed a pair of cuffs and kept his distance from deputies for quite some time following his Christmas Day escape, sheriff's reports show.

The holiday adventure began when Deputy Travis Gibson arrived at a residence on Cody Drive in regard to a male staring inside a residence on that roadway.

When Deputy Gibson arrived, indeed, there was a white male matching the description given by dispatch standing in the person's yard, sheriff's reports show.

Deputy Gibson was driving an unmarked patrol vehicle when he arrived. He pulled into the driveway, got out of the vehicle and approached the suspect. When he identified himself as a deputy sheriff and asked the suspect to come talk with him, Deputy Gibson said the suspect began looking for an escape route, sheriff's reports show.



Michel Smith

The suspect began walking away from Deputy Gibson, despite multiple requests by the officer for the suspect to stop, sheriff's reports show.

Deputy Gibson was close enough to the suspect to tackle him as he began to take flight, sheriff's reports show.

Deputy Gibson took the suspect to the ground, the suspect began to vigorously try to flee. Deputy Gibson pulled his taser and threatened to use it on the suspect. The suspect then complied and Deputy Gibson was able to cuff the suspect, sheriff's reports show.

The officer then advised the suspect that he was under arrest, and began to collect his personal identification, sheriff's reports show.

The suspect was identified as Michel Aaron Lloyd Smith, and he was placed in the rear of Deputy Gibson's patrol vehicle, sheriff's reports show.

show.

While Deputy Gibson was talking with the complainant, he was told that Smith had been peering in a window of the complainant's residence, sheriff's reports show.

The complainant went outside and the suspect, identified as Smith, was gone.

However, Smith returned and the complainant approached him, sheriff's reports show.

Smith asked the complainant for a cigarette and a ride, deputy's reports show.

Deputy Gibson arrived while the two were having a conversation, sheriff's reports show.

Following the discussion with the complainant, Deputy Gibson went back to his patrol vehicle and told Smith that he was being charged with obstruction and peeping tom, sheriff's reports show.

Smith became irate, and began to vent his frustrations. Deputy Gibson closed the patrol vehicle door and left him to vent his frustrations, sheriff's reports show.

While Deputy Gibson conversed with Smith's mother, the complainant yelled that Smith was running away from the patrol vehicle, sheriff's reports show.

Deputy Gibson was not clear on how Smith had

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Celebrate the Business of the Quarter at Business After Hours

Blairsville
UNION COUNTY, GEORGIA
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Thursday, January 10 • 5:30pm - 6:30pm
@ Chamber offices
Business of the Quarter
Blairsville Jaycees

UCHS Basketball

Mon., Jan. 7 • 3pm (JV) & 6pm (Varsity) vs. Hayesville
Thurs., Jan. 10 • 4pm (JV) & 7pm (Varsity) vs. Fannin

UCHS Wrestling

Fri. & Sat., Jan. 4 & 5 @ Jefferson Area Duals Tournament