

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Fire department rescues residents in flash flooding

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Flash floods, many feet deep in places, reached nearly every corner of Union County on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, stretching from Suches, with its higher elevation, all the way to Coosa Creek and beyond.

Cities have reported record high temperatures for the month of December in states all over the Eastern U.S., and Union County experienced highs close to 70 degrees on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Despite the wacky weather, there have been no reports of anyone being seriously injured due to the unusual amounts of rain,

though the Union County Fire Department did successfully execute one rescue mission in the morning hours of Christmas Eve.

A call came in to the fire department from 911 dispatch that an RV park at Pegasus Landing off old Blue Ridge Highway was experiencing bad flooding from Coosa Creek, and that there were people trapped

inside a flood zone.

"We had 10 fire vehicles and 12 firefighters respond," said Patrick Schmidt, a firefighter and EMT at Station 1. "When we arrived on scene, we couldn't make access through the main entrance of the RV park (because of a flooded bridge), so we had to go to the backside of the park. When we got inside the park, there were approximately six to eight campers that were underwater, anywhere from a foot to about 3 feet of water.

"We had to deploy our boat to rescue two people. The water was at the bottom of their camper door. So, we rescued two people by boat, and there were four other people in the park that needed help out, but they did not need help by the boat, though we had to use personnel to assist them out."

Despite the water only being three feet deep, Schmidt said the people at the RV park did the right thing by calling the fire department, as flash floods cause a phenomenon known as "swift water."

"It can sweep away vehicles, people and everything else," said Schmidt. "With all the rain we had, we wanted to



Massive flooding at Pappy's Marketplace

get the people to dry land as quickly as possible, because we did not know how much rain we were going to get. The time we were there, the water had risen, and the current was getting stronger by the time we loaded the two people into the boat and got them to dry land. So, that's the hazard we were

facing, the swift water, which can sweep you away, and the rising water also." Not only is fast moving water a hazard, but flash flood waters can contain any number and kind of untold debris

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Union County Firefighters deploy rescue raft to save two from moving waters on Christmas Eve morning

2015: a year of big changes and successes

By News Reporters
North Georgia News

Heading into each New Year, the *North Georgia News* rounds up the biggest stories and newsmakers of the outgoing year, and 2015 was certainly a year for headlines in Union County.

In a surprise move that not even she saw coming, Cindy Williams, longtime president and CEO of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, announced that she would be leaving her position in the county as of Jan. 6, 2016.

"After that time, I will be relocating to Cartersville to take the position of president

and CEO of the Cartersville-Bartow County Chamber of Commerce," said Williams in a letter to her chamber members and friends. "The decision to take this next step in my career was one of the hardest I have made to date. However, I have been granted a tremendous opportunity and simply could not let it slip away."

Bartow County boasts a population of more than 100,000 residents, or roughly five times that of Union County. The new post will be a challenging one, but Williams has held the same role here for nearly a decade, so she will be ready when the time comes.

"My nine and a half



Cindy Williams

years with this organization have been more gratifying and enriching than I could have ever imagined," said Williams.

"I will be forever grateful to those who entrusted me with the care of this great chamber, and those who in so many ways have supported me along the way."

In the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Annual Meeting in September, the BRMEMC membership elected Mickey Cummings of Union County, Roy Perren of Towns County and Larry Williams of Fannin County, all of whom were nominated by petition.

At that meeting, the membership all but ratified its support for continued

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Akins: 'help us fund C.R. Collins Scholarship'

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Charles Roscoe Collins may have passed away in 2000, but the legendary Union County educator lives on through his namesake scholarship.

And for those who remember C.R. Collins and his many contributions to the community, now would be a good time to start thinking about giving back by helping students of the county continue their educations through donations to the C.R. Collins Scholarship Fund.

The scholarship was started in 1993 by Bobby and Beverly Jackson of Blairsville, announced at a birthday party held for Collins at the Union County High School.

"We got the scholarship started, and we got the fund up to \$10,000," said Bud Atkins, who is currently with the Union County Historical Society, and is a past student of Collins. "I worked on it and worked on it and worked on it, and I finally



C.R. "Fess" Collins

got it up to \$20,000. This scholarship, in the bylaws of it, says that it has to be a student from Union County attending Young Harris College, and it's been that way since we started the scholarship."

Atkins has been a caretaker of sorts for the scholarship, making sure it

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Blairsville police give to Food Pantry

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Food Pantry is currently – and always – taking donations to help families in need, both throughout the winter holidays and beyond.

Located within the Pat Haralson Memorial Civic Center at 165 Wellborn St., the Food Pantry is run by Ann Sullivan, Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. Community Resource Coordinator in Blairsville.

"We get no government funding, it's all local donations," said Sullivan. "We depend on the people of this county, and we've got some darned good ones that help us. The



Blairsville Police with Ann Sullivan (middle) assist Food Pantry with personal donations

police department does, and we

is taking up. The elementary school already has, the 4-H kids

are in progress, taking up food for the Food Pantry."

The Blairsville Police Department recently dropped off nearly a full truck bed worth of food donated by officers, which is something the department tries to do every year.

"We're trying to give back as much as the community gives to us," said Cindy Neely, Clerk of Municipal Court/Secretary for Blairsville Police Department.

Neely and the Blairsville Police experienced another wonderful year with their Shop With a Cop program, as Community Support allowed them to help more than 100 children shop for Christmas

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County budget up over 2015, individual property taxes down

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris adopted the county's 2016 budget in the December commission meeting.

Coming in at \$14,965,882, the 2016 budget is about 3.75 percent higher than the budget for 2015, which was \$14,423,923.

A bigger budget means that some costs have gone up over last year's budget, but revenues have also gone up to cover the added expenditures without raising tax rates, so that Commissioner Paris was able to keep individual property taxes lower despite an increased budget amount.

"Sales tax revenues have increased," said Commissioner Paris. "Property tax revenues have started to increase – the property tax rate has decreased some, but there are more people that have built houses. You've got almost 120 houses built this year, so the digest is growing, but the tax rate for the individual has gone down a little bit."

According to the 2016



Lamar Paris

budget, the county expects to collect nearly \$250,000 more in taxes than in 2015, including property taxes, fuel taxes, property transfer taxes, etc.

Sales taxes to be collected are estimated to increase by \$300,000, for a total revenue boost from taxes at around \$550,000 for all taxes in the county.

Important increased expenditures include the Union County Sheriff's Office and the Union County Jail, which

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Christmas special for many thanks to Give-a-Gift

By Shawn Jarrard
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For another year running, the Union County Sheriff's Office Give-a-Gift program has helped parents, grandparents and guardians provide Christmases for children.

This year, the program served more than 40 families and close to 80 children – and none of it would be possible without overwhelming community support.

"We're just very appreciative that the people donate like they do," said Sheriff Mack Mason. "And if someone has forgotten but meant to, they can still donate,

and it will go toward next year."

Give-a-Gift allows families that come under hard times to make it through the holiday season with the help they need to give children Christmas mornings to remember, as though they weren't going through hard times at all, at least for one special day.

For many families, difficult circumstances are unavoidable.

One single mother of three, who visited the sheriff's office on present pickup day last week, said that she had lost her job recently and had to file for disability.

"This is a blessing here," she said. "If not for Give-a-



Ginger Carey and Mary Fortenberry help Sheriff Mack Mason with UCSO Give-a-Gift

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Happy New Year