

Whitener...from Page 1A

being transferred to the intensive care unit of the hospital.

As of Saturday, Dec. 22, Whitener had developed

a collapsed lung that required a procedure to correct, and she stayed in the Gainesville hospital until Friday, Dec. 28, when she was finally able to be moved to the Shepherd Center.

At Shepherd, Whitener will undergo six weeks or more of physical rehabilitation. Fortunately, she has retained some movement in her legs, and her family has said she is eager to gain more strength and usage of her legs at Shepherd.

Whitener remains in good spirits and has high hopes for her continued treatment, and she is aware of and ready

to accept whatever the outcome might be, according to her family.

"This is going to be a long road of recovery for Brittany and her family," said Rose Garrett, a friend of the family. "They are very appreciative of the prayers, love, support and everything that has been and is being done for them."

"The family would still like to ask for the continuation of prayers for Brittany as she embarks on this journey into physical therapy rehab."

Federal investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board are responsible for determining the cause of the crash.

The investigation could take up to two years, according to an NTSB spokesperson, though a preliminary report is expected within 10 business days of the accident.

However, the status of

the investigation and progress of the preliminary report were unavailable at press time.

"Due to the lapse in appropriations and government shutdown, this website will no longer be updated," according to NTSB.gov. "For more information on available government services, please visit USA.gov. Accidents still can be reported to the Response Operations Center at 202-314-6290."

As previously reported, local authorities were alerted to the accident around 7:36 p.m. on Dec. 19, when Union County E-911 received a call about a possible downed aircraft near the Blairsville Municipal Airport. There was no explosion, no fire, just a report of a possible plane crash.

When authorities arrived on the scene, they searched the area and discovered that

a Piper PA-28 aircraft had indeed crashed in an open field adjacent Kings Road and less than one-half nautical mile from the airport.

The field terrain was too rough for emergency vehicles to access initially, so a neighborhood good Samaritan quickly drove his tractor to the scene and bush hogged a path to the accident.

Following Whitener's extrication from the plane and medical evacuation, local authorities continued to secure the scene for the arrival of investigating officials with the Federal Aviation Administration and NTSB.

Local agencies that responded to the scene the night of the crash were the Union County Sheriff's Office, the Blairsville Police Department, the Union County Fire Department and Union General EMS.

First Responders...from Page 1A

of resolve to work a job that regularly drags one away from family time, which is a sacrifice first responders are willing to make for the greater good of their communities.

Those who possess this self-sacrificing resolve are people like Amanda Craig, Mary King, Holley Kemp and Heidi Morris – all Union County E-911 Dispatchers who worked 12-hours shifts on Christmas Day – and Carrie King, Ashley Churchill, Lynn Powell and Kasey Rafter, who worked News Year's Eve and Day.

Like most first responder agencies, it's true that Union County Dispatch never sleeps. Dispatchers work long hours, multitasking every step of the way to make sure that all the pieces come together in an emergency.

From taking a 911 call to recording all relevant information and quarterbacking the response of any number of agencies, dispatchers do it all – and it's often a thankless job.

Fortunately, these tireless crusaders of emergency response coordination maintain a positive and professional outlook around the clock, even after seemingly pulling the short straw by having to work on a holiday.

This positive attitude came across most recently during Christmastime, in the work area of Union County Dispatch, which featured stockings hung with care, garland, bows, a variety of other festive decorations and a very special Christmas tree.

The Christmas tree was particularly bright and featured ornaments representing each of the dispatchers, including Brenda Abercrombie, who experienced her End of Watch on March 14, 2017.

Carrie King, who has been with Union County Dispatch for more than three years, said that when she works on holidays, her family tunes in



Brenda Abercrombie served as a Union County dispatcher for more than 22 years before her End of Watch on March 14, 2017.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

on the scanner at home.

"We just make arrangements," said King. "As soon as I leave here, I'll go over to the family's and stuff. And what family I can see beforehand, we do it that way."

"When you sign on for this, you know (you'll be working on holidays). But it's okay – you want to make that sacrifice. I mean, I love it."

And Union County 911 Director David Dyer is proud of his E-911 employees, who work together in teams of two for 12 hours at a stretch, even through the holidays, which can be especially hard for growing families.

"When you don't have kids, it's not that bad," said Dyer. "You explain to your parents, you explain to your grandparents, and you can work around it."

"But when you start having kids and you have to work around those holidays, it's hard for them to understand at all. The public never knows that. They never think about it."

"They never think about having an emergency on Christmas Day or on Thanksgiving Day. But when that happens, they want somebody there right then, so it never stops."

Lt. Millie Baxter is in charge of the day to day operations at the E-911 Center, and she also knows all too well the personal sacrifices made by first responders. She has, after all, worked many a holiday in her 21 years as a Union County dispatcher.

"We'd get up and do Christmas before I came to work," said Baxter. "We'd get up at 3:30 in the morning, having Christmas, and then I would come in and do my 12-hour workday. You adjust your family time and you make it work. It's a part of public safety."

Baxter and Dyer are perpetually impressed by their exceptional dispatchers, all of whom go out of their way to work as a team in every type of situation, including those that are stress-filled and those filled with merrymaking on the holidays.

"It takes everybody getting along, working together and solving problems together to get it done," said Dyer. "If you have a bad working environment, it really adds more stress to the already stressful environment that's created just from the job. So, it's really helpful to have a lot of people who work well together."

Carroll...from Page 1A

Sheriff's Office for a while, and Johnny has held a number of law enforcement positions throughout his career.

Carroll's longtime

assistant police chief, Michael "Bear" Baxter, is set to be sworn in as the new police chief in the Jan. 8 regular meeting of the Blairsville City Council.

The North Georgia News would like to thank Chief Carroll for his many years of service and commend him for a job well done.

Courthouse...from Page 1A

"The problem was not as recognizable when we had Santa Claus here a few weeks ago, because that was mostly upstairs where the heat was currently working," said Ensley.

With the upstairs heat going from not working to operable, Ensley still finds it important to replace the upstairs heating units to ensure that they do not stop operating again.

Currently, the Historical Society is looking around for quotes and hopes to find one in a reasonable price range to help the Historic Courthouse to have full heating again during the winter season.

"Right now, we are working on getting the quotes, and we have had a couple of donations so far, with our largest one being from the Ford family," said Ensley. "We are guessing that the whole replacement will cost about \$40,000, meaning we need around \$30,000 more to cover the cost."

To help reach that goal, Ensley and the Historical Society are asking local businesses and individuals for donations.

As the Historical Society continues to raise funds for the project, Ensley said that it's possible they may have to close the Historic Courthouse temporarily until the heating problems are resolved.

"We will know after the first of the year when we have our meeting," said Ensley. "Since it's the slowest time of the year, we might just close except for maybe one day a week, when we have to go in

and answer some phone calls or whatever needs to be done.

"That's what we will discuss during the first meeting of the year, because it might be the best thing we can do while we work on estimates and do the best we can on getting heat and air in there."

If the decision to close the Historic Courthouse is made, the open days will still allow access to visitors, with electric heaters set up to keep the areas warm enough to work in, according to Ensley.

"The Historic Courthouse does not get a lot of tourist

attention this time of the year," said Ensley. "Most of the people that come in are looking to do some genealogy work and look into their lineage, so we want them to still be able to do that until we get the heating fixed."

"We have had some important historical jobs in the county that wouldn't be done if it weren't for the Historical Society. We are a nonprofit, so we have to depend on donations just to operate, but that doesn't really fund things like this."

People interested in donating to help the Historical Society fix its heating problems can call 706-745-5493. Donations can be mailed to P.O. Box 35, Blairsville, GA 30514.