

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Proud parents welcome 'miracle baby' as first born at UGH in 2020

By Chad Stack
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Congratulations to Holly Franklin and Johnny Gulizia, who welcomed their bouncing baby boy New Year's Day as Union General Hospital's first baby of 2020.

Franklin, of Mineral Bluff, gave birth to son Bryson Reed Gulizia at 10:52 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 1, with Dr. Benjamin Harris delivering. Bryson came into the world weighing 7 pounds and measuring 20 and a half inches long.

Franklin and Gulizia, who live in Murphy, North Carolina, went to sleep just after midnight New Year's Eve, only to wake up at home New Year's morning in labor.

Once the labor pains began, they rushed to the hospital to have baby Bryson,

with an admittance time of around 5 a.m.

Bryson came as a miracle to the couple. Franklin had been told she could never have children after experiencing severe endometriosis, which left her with less than half of an ovary after two surgeries, Franklin said.

"We are so thankful to have a child, because I wasn't supposed to be able to have a kid," Franklin said.

He is truly a blessing and a miracle baby, Gulizia said, with both parents marveling at their good fortune and healthy baby boy.

Franklin said the pregnancy was an easy one for the most part, and that the delivery went quickly. Afterward, she said she wanted to eat was Chick-fil-A, which was compounded by the fact that the restaurant does not

have a presence in Blue Ridge or Murphy.

She and Gulizia have been happy with their stay at Union General Hospital, and Franklin said everything was amazing and that all the nurses were so nice.

Starting 2020 with the first baby born in Union General, which provides labor and delivery services for the surrounding area, Franklin and Gulizia said they felt very blessed for the new beginnings that lie ahead.

The couple said they are looking forward to watching Bryson grow up and showering him with lots of love in their new home, which Franklin and Gulizia have spent the last seven months building and trying to get everything ready for baby Bryson to come home.

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Holly Franklin and Johnny Gulizia in the warm afterglow of a healthy pregnancy and New Year's Day delivery of their baby boy Bryson. Photo by Chad Stack

Flu widespread in Georgia; Health Department urges vaccination



By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Already 15 influenza-associated deaths have been reported in the state this flu season, compared with just four deaths over the same period last flu season and one death the season before that, according to the latest data from the Georgia Department of Public Health. Six of the recent deaths occurred in a single week, between Dec. 22 and Dec. 28, 2019, and of the 20,038 specimens tested in clinical laboratories around the state, 3,031 have come back positive for the flu—roughly three times the number reported this same time last year.

The Department of Public Health tracks influenza infections every year, counting each flu season as starting around the beginning of October and lasting through the middle of May the next calendar year, though people can catch the flu year-round.

Outpatient visits

involving flu-like illnesses in Georgia are currently well above the regional baseline, making it clear "there's a lot of people coming in for care for influenza-like illnesses," said Dave Palmer of District 2 Public Health, which encompasses Union and Towns counties.

"Right now, influenza is widespread in Georgia," Palmer said. "It's way above the baseline. It's high. If folks have not had their flu shot, there's still time to get it."

Available now at doctors' offices, the Health Department and many local pharmacies, the flu shot is considered the best protection against influenza, with each vaccination typically covering several strains of influenza.

"A lot of the strain of flu that we're seeing right now is the B strain, and we're seeing a lot of flu in younger people," Palmer said. "There's two main types of flu."

"You have the A-type, which is the worst type of flu. It's the one that can shift and

drift and change into different viruses. It tends to make people a lot sicker than the B strain.

"But the B strain is still a severe form of illness for a lot of people, especially the very young and the elderly."

Tamiflu is one antiviral medication used to fight influenza, though there are other highly contagious viruses that can cause flu-like symptoms, Palmer said, such as the virus responsible for the common cold.

"We really recommend washing your hands often with soap and warm water. And if you don't have soap and water, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers," Palmer said, adding that people should cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing to help prevent the spread of germs also.

"One of the most important things is, if people are sick, they need to stay home away from other people," Palmer said. "If you're healthy, you want to avoid sick people,"

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Seniors bring in 2020 with hats, party favors and 'Possum Drop'



Senior Center Administrative Assistant Philip McGlamery using his handy fishing pole for the center's annual New Year's Eve "Possum Drop." Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Over 20 local seniors gathered at the Union County Senior Center on New Year's Eve to bring in 2020 with a luncheon and traditional "Possum Drop" celebration.

At about noon, the group broke into a performance of the New Year's classic "Auld Lang Syne," thereafter having a merry time with whistles, horns, party favors, laughter and smiles before and after dropping their soft, knitted opossum.

Senior Center Director Kathy Hill and Administrative Assistant Philip McGlamery said the Possum Drop event started five or six years ago.

"Judy Brown has been making opossums for us, and one year I said, 'If we had a big opossum, we could have a 'possum drop,' because we're always trying to find something fun to do."

Brown cleverly fashions stuffed opossums out of yarn and other materials.

"The seniors don't get to go anywhere for New Year's

Eve—there's a lot that don't get to do anything," Hill said. "So, we decided we'd have our own Possum Drop and we'd use a stuffed opossum. That's how it got started."

"To drop the possum, Philip always brings his fishing pole, and it's a little corny the way we do stuff, but it works."

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County moves to sell Fort Sorghum property with UCDA transfer

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris has transferred ownership of the Old Fort Sorghum property from the county to the Union County Development Authority for selling.

The transfer occurred in a called meeting on Dec. 27 following two public hearings held that same week to discuss the Development Authority's acquisition of the property and solicit comments from the public.

Dating back more than 150 years to 1969, the Blairsville Sorghum Festival has been an economic staple in the county.

The cherished local tradition began as a fundraiser for local needy kids and consisted of just a few people selling jars of sorghum syrup to passersby on the Blairsville Square, and it continued to grow in the intervening years.

To accommodate the rocketing popularity and size of the festival, the Fort Sorghum property at the corner of School



Old Fort Sorghum after demolition started in February 2018. Photo by North Georgia News

Circle and Young Harris Street was utilized in the early 1970s. Then, in the mid-1980s, the fort was built to accommodate the growing crowds.

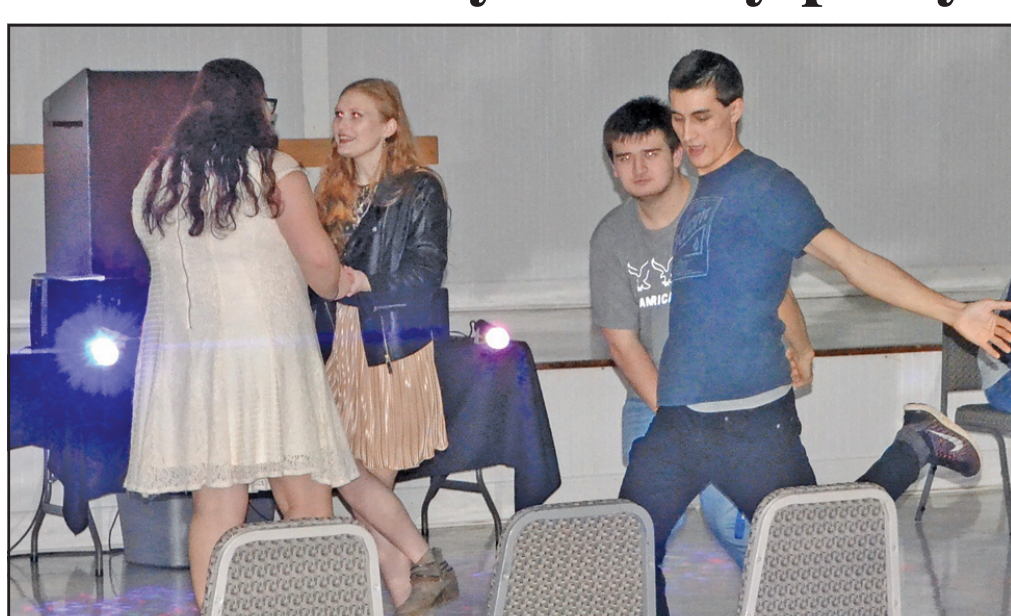
As attendance continued to grow and festival organizers realized the need for ever more space, the Sorghum Festival moved from the Old Fort to Meeks Park in 2008.

Most of the fort was demolished in early 2018, as it had become unsafe and a liability to the county after experiencing a state of prolonged disuse. For nearly two years now, the property has been sitting vacant without any perceived use by the county.

"Union County has

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'Change' celebrates New Year's Eve with family-friendly party



Local students had a blast dancing and playing games at the "Change in Our World Inc." New Year's celebration. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The local nonprofit "Change in Our World Inc." threw its Fourth Annual New Year's Eve Party on Tuesday, Dec. 31, to bring in 2020 at the Haralson Memorial Civic

Center.

Founded by Rebecca Brendle of Blairsville, the youth-centric organization is geared toward assisting middle and high school students by creating a safe environment for adolescents to learn, grow and contribute to their communities

in positive ways.

The annual New Year's Eve Party serves as a family-friendly event to help local families and teenagers celebrate the holiday in a more constructive way, with the New

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