

# North Georgia News

2 Sections 20 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

## School Board recognizes Teachers of the Year

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

In their regular monthly meeting on Feb. 22, Union County Board of Education members made several acknowledgments and awards, starting with American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121.

Post members attended to thank Union County Schools for their strong involvement with veterans' affairs and supporting patriotism.

"Anytime we need anything as veterans, I know I can come to (Superintendent John Hill) and he's going to help me out," said Post Cmdr. Mike Merritt, who attended

with his wife, Sr. Vice Cmdr. Kathy Merritt, and Derek and Nancy Kunz.

In return, Hill applauded Legion volunteers for the time they "pour into our students, and they are so valuable and appreciated, so thank you so much."

Also in the meeting, the board welcomed the newest crop of Teachers of the Year.

Every year, teachers from each of the district's schools choose from among themselves who should be named Teacher of the Year. Administration takes no part in the process, and as stressed by Elementary Principal Jerry Bavero, it's a totally peer-dominated process.

For Woody Gap, that was Stacy Olson, who takes on the challenge of "wearing many hats" serving at such a small school, with no small amount of zeal and readiness.

Primary School educators chose Stephanie Stubblefield for "never having a bad day" no matter what happens and always keeping a smile on her face for the sake of her students.

The Elementary School supported Keri Young, who was chosen as Teacher of the Year shortly after being celebrated by her students.

Though she was unable to attend due to illness, Jennifer See *Teachers of the Year, Page 5A*



UCHS Principal Carol Knight presenting Cindy Dobbins with her Teacher of the Year Award last week. See additional Teacher of the Year photos inside. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Another new scam takes advantage of local victims

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Sheriff's Office is issuing another new scam alert for residents, this one involving a computer prompt instructing people to contact tech support after their computers freeze.

Law enforcement is unsure how the prompt is making its way onto people's computers, but when it does, victims are notified that they have child sexual abuse material on their hard drives and are asked to contact a number that appears on the screen.

When reached, the scammer offers to remove the



unwanted files if allowed access to their victims' computers.

One thing leads to another, resulting in personal information being stolen and exorbitant amounts of money being demanded in order to resolve the issue and avoid prosecution for alleged sex

crimes.

Multiple local residents have been scammed this way in recent days, and there's a pattern to the fraud – the people being targeted are predominantly elderly, with the thought that less tech savvy individuals are easier to scam.

Just last week, one Blairsville resident in her 80s wired \$49,000 directly to a scammer's bank account overseas. The crime was only discovered when the scammer tried to get another \$29,000, and the bank froze the account and contacted the victim.

Additionally, a married couple in their 80s were also scammed, only reporting See *UCSO Scam Alert, Page 2A*

## Historical Society talks old county trees for Arbor Day

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Historical Society celebrated Arbor Day this month by hosting a unique program to go along with the planting of two holly saplings in the Old Courthouse lawn.

To celebrate Blairsville's 30th anniversary as a part of the Tree City USA initiative, Historical Society President Mickey Cummings shared the background of some of the city's most long-standing – if a bit leafy – residents.

Some 152 years ago in 1872, Julius Sterling Morton founded the first Arbor Day in the United States, resulting in the planting of a million trees in Nebraska.

Since then, it's been considered a national holiday, and although the federally



The Union County Historical Society got in on the Arbor Day fun this year with a historical take on local trees courtesy of Society President Mickey Cummings. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Local patriots remember fallen at Battle of Iwo Jima

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – On Monday, Feb. 19, Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783 hosted a commemorative service recognizing the brave souls lost in the fateful Battle of Iwo Jima.

The tribute marked the 79th anniversary of the battle, which commenced on Feb. 19, 1945, with patriotic guests gathering at 10 a.m. inside the Towns County Recreation & Conference Center at Foster Park.

Unicoi Detachment 783 Comdt. Alton "Doc" Coleman started the morning off, referring to the battle as "one of the most defining moments in both U.S. and Marine Corps history."

"Today, the Battle of Iwo Jima can be seen as a symbol to the world that when things were at their worst, Americans can be at their best," Coleman



Retired Air Force Col. Roger Graham delivered patriotic marks as the keynote speaker of this year's Battle of Iwo Jima anniversary remembrance. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

said, "Let's not forget the men of Iwo Jima or the sacrifices that they made."

Retired Air Force Col. Roger Graham served as this year's keynote speaker. Having graduated from the Air Force

Academy in 1963, Graham served as an A-26 navigator and co-pilot in 182 combat missions in the Vietnam War.

"One of my motivations for wanting a military career is

## PPP early voting continues through Friday, March 8

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

In-person early voting for the Presidential Preference Primary began last week, with Union Countians taking to the polls to select political party candidates for the office of President of the United States.

Election Day for the upcoming primary is Tuesday, March 12, to include three weeks of early voting that started Feb. 19 to run weekdays through Friday, March 8.

As of Friday afternoon, Feb. 23, 896 people had cast ballots in person at the Union County Voting Center, and 46 absentee-by-mail ballots had been returned.

There are 22,456 total See *Early Voting, Page 2A*



A Union County couple joined about 900 of their peers at the Voting Center last week to cast ballots early for the Presidential Preference Primary. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Candidate qualifying starts Monday, ends next Friday

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Qualifying for public office candidacy to participate in the 2024 elections begins next week, running Monday, March 4, through Friday, March 8.

Candidates will be able to qualify for county-level offices locally between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and from 9 a.m. to noon on Friday.

Republicans and Democrats who qualify will square off against candidates from their own political party in the May 21 General Primary Election to decide who will advance to the Nov. 5 General Election as nominees for the various offices up for partisan election.

There will be a June 18 Runoff Election if no candidate receives majority support in their May primary race, and each winning candidate will

proceed to the big General Election in November.

The outcomes of multiple races could be known this spring if, for example, only Republicans qualify for a public office, meaning the Republican primary winner would appear unopposed in November unless a write-in or petition candidate successfully makes the ballot later in the year.

County offices up for election of political

party candidates include Sole Commissioner, Tax Commissioner, Clerk of Superior Court, Sheriff, County Coroner, Board of Education Posts 1 and 3, and County Surveyor.

A Nonpartisan General Election will also run on May 21, with winners to be sworn into office in 2025. The two nonpartisan county offices to appear on the ballot will be Magistrate Judge and Probate Judge.

Republican, Democratic, Independent and Nonpartisan candidates for county office must report to Elections Superintendent Libby Stevens inside the Union County Elections Office at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive during qualifying hours.

However, candidates qualifying as Republicans and Democrats will first need to meet with their respective political parties inside the Union County Courthouse at

65 Courthouse Street to go through the qualifying process.

All qualifying paperwork must be notarized, and fees should be paid at time of qualifying.

Qualifying fees for local offices are: Sole Commissioner, \$2,918; Tax Commissioner, \$1,778; Clerk of Superior Court, \$1,778; Magistrate Judge, \$1,778; Probate Judge, \$1,778; Sheriff, \$2,122; County Coroner, \$287; Board See *Candidate Qualifying, Page 2A*



Vol. 115 No. 10  
Arrests - 9A Legals - 8B  
Church - 2B Obits - 3B  
Classifieds - 8B Sports - 6B  
Opinion - 6A

**BASEBALL**  
vs. Towns 2/27 5:30 PM  
**SOCCER**  
vs. Athens Acad. 2/28 5:30 PM

**Georgia Legislative Updates** See pages 2A & 3A  
**New Transfer Station Hours** See page 4A  
**Veterans Seminar Registration** See page 10B



## Need a Mortgage? Call Kitty in Blairsville!

**Kitty Mauzy | 706-439-2185 | NMLS# 512515**

© 2023 United Community Bank  
NMLS# 421841 | ucbi.com/mortgage

## Week Seven: Business Under the Gold Dome

Week seven under the Gold Dome has concluded, and we're swiftly approaching an important milestone known as "Crossover Day" on February 29. This marks the deadline for all bills to pass through their originating chamber, commonly referred to as the house of origin. Our advocacy for Georgians has yielded significant accomplishments, including property tax relief, tort reform, reduction of regulatory burdens, enhancements in public safety, and much more. I am appreciative of the Majority Caucus for their unwavering dedication to advancing legislation on behalf of all Georgians.

This week, Senate Republicans Finished the Drill strong as we passed the last of our caucus priorities. SB 449, our workforce priority bill, addresses the healthcare workforce shortage while increasing opportunities for our veterans. By creating more opportunities for licensure, military medics will have a career and credential pathway that allows them to use their previous training to enter the workforce more quickly.

SB 387 and SB 401 that passed this week are priorities designed to improve the foster care system in Georgia. SB 401 implements the recommendations of the Foster Care and Adoption Study Committee and focuses on improving the data collection and reporting for children within the system. SB 387 streamlines the process for issuing identification cards to foster children. Additionally, the Senate body voted on a series of legislative bills relating



**Steve Gooch**  
State Senate Majority Leader

to children and families. I was proud to join my Senate colleagues in voting unanimously to pass Senate Bill 376, a bill which improves the timely permanent placement of a child removed from their home.

To accomplish our priority of ensuring our literacy rates are in line with rising graduation rates, Republicans moved the needle by passing SB 360. This bill expands the use of capital outlay funds to allow for the inclusion of pre-kindergarten programs. In doing this, we give schools the opportunity to provide expanded education to children who are at a critical point in their development.

The Georgia Senate also discussed and passed its amended budget for Fiscal Year 2024. This budget increases funding for maintaining safe and efficient road infrastructure and provides essential support for industries such as agriculture, manufacturing and logis-

tics. It also allocates resources to enhance retirement and healthcare benefits, vital for retaining our state's workforce. Our commitment to a balanced budget ensures Georgia's efficiency, fiscal conservatism and attractiveness for investment.

Furthermore, I joined my Senate colleagues in passing several bipartisan pieces of legislation aimed at supporting both veterans and families. The Georgia Senate approved multiple measures designed to offer essential services to our state's veterans, and I was privileged to endorse this legislation. Having dedicated their lives to defending our country, it's crucial that we fulfill our commitment as legislators.

My colleagues and I were delighted to be present on Wednesday for the swearing-in of Georgia's newest Republican senator, Tim Bearden (R-Carrollton). Senator Bearden joins us at an important time for our state and I look forward to serving alongside him throughout the remainder of our legislative session.

As always, I want to invite students between the ages of 12 and 18 to serve as a Capitol Page. I encourage any students interested in the legislative process who want to spend a day at our Capitol please reach out Chloe Satterfield at [chloe.satterfield@senate.ga.gov](mailto:chloe.satterfield@senate.ga.gov).

Please never hesitate to contact my office if I can assist with legislative matters. I hope to see you under the Gold Dome soon as the 2024 Legislative Session continues.

## UCSO Scam Alert...from Page 1A

the crime after turning over \$35,500.

UCSO Inv. Bob Calamari, who works scam cases with an emphasis on elder fraud, actually made contact with one of the scammers last week, a man with a foreign accent.

He called one of the numbers the victims had been using to communicate with the scammer, and when the man picked up, Calamari asked, "Why are you scamming these people out of their money?"

Calamari eventually revealed his identity, saying that he was working on a case against the scammer.

In turn, the scammer responded with profanities and proceeded to call back repeatedly, eventually admitting in one return call that he was indeed running a scam while professing that people with a lot of money should share it.

Unfortunately, because many of these scams originate internationally, the likelihood of victims recovering their money is virtually zero at present day.

The Sheriff's Office is aiming to increase public awareness about this and other scams to help people avoid

the costly mistake of falling victim to scammers, who are often very convincing in pretending to be official actors like law enforcement, corporate representatives and more.

UCSO hosted a public Scam & Fraud Awareness Class in January, adding to its efforts to inform residents – many of whom are elderly in this retirement community – about how to protect themselves and avoid financial scams, with more classes planned this year.

Generally, people who are approached by others asking for personal information or money via the internet or over the phone are advised to cease communication immediately and reach out to the institution that supposedly contacted them using independently verified contact information.

When it comes to prevention in the child sexual abuse computer scam, Calamari said such prompts should be ignored if they pop up, and that people should shut their computers down immediately, even if they freeze, and wait to reboot.

Tech support companies with nearby physical locations may also be consulted for assistance in determining if a

computer has a virus that needs to be removed.

Residents are encouraged to contact the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066 if they have been the victim of a scam or attempted scam.

Of note, one method used by criminals to gain access to computers and other personal devices is "phishing." According to the Cybercrime Support Network at <https://fightcybercrime.org/>:

"Phishing is one of the biggest threats to our online security. Phishing is a type of social engineering attack that tries to trick you into disclosing sensitive information, such as login credentials or financial information, or install malware on your devices.

"Phishing attacks typically involve spoofed emails or websites that mimic a legitimate site in order to persuade the user into entering their personal information. In many cases, criminals use very realistic-looking emails or websites that are nearly identical to the real thing.

"Attackers may also use other methods, such as instant messaging or text messages, to carry out phishing attacks."

## Candidate Qualifying...from Page 1A

of Education Posts 1 and 3, \$144; County Surveyor, \$35.

Once candidates have paid their fees and submitted their paperwork, they will be entered into the state database by Elections Superintendent Stevens, and their names will be published for public viewing.

Qualifying locally is for county office candidates only. Candidates for state and federal offices will need to qualify with the Secretary of State's Office at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta.

State-level offices up for election in 2024 are: Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge, District 8 State

Representative, District 51 State Senator, Districts 3 and 5 Public Service Commissioner, Georgia Supreme Court Judge, Georgia Court of Appeals Judge.

At the federal level, area candidates may also qualify for Georgia's 9th Congressional District of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Paperwork for qualifying can be obtained at the Elections Office or on the Secretary of State's website at <https://sos.ga.gov/>.

At the website, click on "Elections." In the dropdown menu, select "Elections Division." When the next page loads, click on the "Candidate

Qualification" tab to find "Declaration of Candidacy" forms for local, state and federal offices.

For more information or to find out about obtaining qualifying paperwork locally, contact the Union County Elections Office at 706-439-6041.

Be sure to check out the March 13 edition of the North Georgia News for coverage on qualifying candidates.

Nonpartisans will be elected in May. Independents – should any qualify – will not face election until Nov. 5, when they will go head-to-head with political party nominees who clear their upcoming primaries.

## Early Voting...from Page 1A

registered voters in the county, so combining the above in-person and absentee-by-mail voting totals, 4.2% of local voters had already cast ballots in this election by Friday afternoon.

Early voting also includes two weekend voting opportunities, one that occurred this past Saturday, and another coming up on Saturday, March 2.

All in-person early voting takes place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the new Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

Presidential Preference Primary voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on March 12.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville,

Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owltown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested for this election at the Voter Registration Office inside the Voting Center through Friday, March 1. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Voting Center.

Voters returning absentee ballots can use the official drop box inside the Voting Center during early voting hours; mail them back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or drop them off in person at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Monday, Feb. 12, was the registration deadline to vote in this election.

The 2024 election cycle will be a busy one, with federal,

state and local elections up for voting this year.

Candidates for local elections will qualify the week of March 4 for the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, with a runoff date of June 18 if necessary.

The big General Election is slated for Tuesday, Nov. 5, with a runoff date set for Dec. 3.

April 22 is the voter registration deadline to participate in the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, and Oct. 7 is the deadline to register for the Nov. 5 General Election.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/s/> for voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

## Blairsville Cruisers Members meeting Feb. 27



The Blairsville Cruisers Car Club members from Union, Towns, Clay and Cherokee counties are expected to attend the scheduled members meeting on Tuesday, February 27th at the clubhouse on The Murphy Hwy. in Blairsville. The meetings for the remainder of 2024 will be held on the 4th Tuesday of each month. This change makes it possible for all board members/officers to be in attendance. The former meeting date conflicted with work schedules for some officers of the club.

Big news will be the first showing of the raffle car for the upcoming season. The car raffle has been a standard since 2007 for the car club. Thanks to Wayne Tanner's search and negotiating skills we have a very pristine car to offer this year. A beautiful 2006 red Mustang Premium Coupe will highlight our fund raising efforts. This one owner car has



Win this one owner; 34,000 mile; 2006 Red Mustang Premium Coupe by supporting the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club fund raiser to help children in need in our local area.

but 34,000 miles of use and features full power windows and seats, a set of new tires an aftermarket Bluetooth sound system plus a plush black leather interior. The car is very well maintained and would be great addition to your stable. Raffle ticket sales are the primary source of funds for the club's Children's programs. Tickets, which are now in the printing process, officially go on sale at the first Cruise-in of the season which is Saturday, April 6th. The event starts at 3 PM and winds down around 6 PM. We hope to see you there. You can see more about

the club on the website: BlairsvilleCruisers.com and on FaceBook: Blairsville Cruisers Car Club public group.

The meeting agenda is being sent to members by email and encompasses a great many plans and activities that are scheduled for a very busy upcoming season. Lots of new and exciting events are in the wind for 2024.

Please be sure to attend this important meeting. Guests and visitors are welcome to come explore what the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club is all about and see why were selected as Non-Profit of the Year.

## Historic Trees...from Page 1A

Day on the third Friday in February, so along with the traditional recognition of the city by planting a Japanese snowball tree in the greenspace behind Blairsville City Hall, the Historical Society branched out to do something new.

Rev. Liz Schellingerhoudt of St. Clare's Episcopal Church provided an invocation before the program began, recognizing the Lord's role in nature's beauty and blessing the trees planted. Following her was Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

"I'm so proud of the mayor and the city (whom) kind of drug the county along with them as they really got this done," Paris said regarding maintaining Blairsville's status as a Tree City and the intent to plant more trees locally.

With that, Cummings proceeded to enlighten the audience about the city's historic trees. As a disclaimer, these are not the oldest trees in Union County.

According to Cummings' research, some oaks and poplars in the Cooper's Creek Management Area are over 300 years old, and one hemlock studied near Blood Mountain is estimated to be about 500 years old.

Within the city, the oldest tree on the list is a 239-year-old oak at Rogers Place on Hunt-Martin Street, with a diameter of 59.8 inches and a circumference of 15.7 feet. The tree's measurements are important; it's the only way that Cummings can determine the age without cutting it down or boring into it.

Cummings took the diameter of the "Rogers Oak" and its fellows at breast height and multiplied it by "a growth factor" algorithm to gauge how old the trees were.

Next up was the "Jackson Oak," so named because at one time it stood in front of the smithy of Bobby Jackson's grandfather.

Nowadays, the oak's surroundings include the southern Circle K, heading toward the Gainesville Highway. At 45.7 inches wide and boasting a circumference of 11.9 feet, Cummings believes this tree must be about 229 years old.

Another tree, the "Conley Catalpa," is located on Conley Street, and true to its name,



Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris are always supportive of local Arbor Day efforts, having been happy to join the Historical Society for their first recognition of the occasion this month.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

has ties to Blairsville's very own Mayor Jim Conley. With a diameter of 40.2 inches and a circumference measuring 11.6 feet, it stands 49 feet and is estimated to be 121 years old.

It's worth noting that the property that the catalpa stands on belonged to Conley's grandfather, and Conley himself can recall playing in its boughs when he was just a child.

That said, trees, like all living organisms, have lifespans – long though they may be – and the Conley Catalpa is likely approaching its end. Catalpa trees last for about 150 years, so Cummings estimates it should

have another 20-30 years left.

After the brief history lesson, everyone headed downstairs to check out the two holly trees that had been planted on the lawn. A group photo followed, and thanks to the Georgia Forestry Commission, everyone received a redbud sapling to plant and celebrate Arbor Day at home.

The Historical Society asks folks who find a tree they believe is old to let them know by calling 706-745-5493. Cummings plans to write a series of articles recording some of the oldest trees in the county.

## Union County Transfer Station to extend commercial hauling hours

Effective Monday, March 4, the Union County Transfer Station will be open for an extra hour on weekdays at the commercial garbage side of the facility located at 348 Transfer Station Lane.

The new commercial hauling hours will match the

operating hours of the residential garbage side, so the entire facility will be open from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Saturday hours will remain the same at 7 a.m. to noon, and the Transfer Station will continue to be closed on Sundays.

### Blood Assurance: Local Blood and Platelet Mobile Drives

#### February, March and April

<b>February:</b>	2/28/24 ...	Walmart-Blairsville
<b>March:</b>	3/07/24 ...	North Georgia Technical College
	3/11/24 ...	Union General Hospital
<b>April:</b>	3/13/24 ...	Walmart-Blairsville
	4/01/24 ...	Union General Hospital
	4/18/24 ...	Union County Health Department
	4/30/24 ...	Walmart-Blairsville

To register please call Blood Assurance at 800-962-0628 to make an appointment

# Teachers of the Year ...from Page 1A

Fortenberry was recognized as Union County Middle School's Teacher of the Year.

Finally, Union County High School dubbed Cindy Dobbins as its Teacher of the Year for her dedication to providing the best possible environment and support for special needs students.

Woody Gap and Union County High School's STAR Students and Teachers were also awarded before the board.

Woody Gap's STAR Student Aidan Webb chose Social Studies and dual-enrollment teacher Jason Serrano as his STAR Teacher. Meanwhile, Union County's STAR student Eli Decker bestowed the honor of STAR Teacher on Jared Kelley, who taught Decker physics.

Webb plans to attend Kennesaw State University post-graduation to pursue a degree in computer science. Decker's next steps include going to the Georgia Institute of Technology to major in mechanical or aerospace engineering.

Athletic Director Mandy Hunter presented a Partner in Education Award to North Georgia News Sports Editor Todd Forrest, who "always focuses our community's attention on Union County Schools with his articles, pictures and social media posts."

Hunter commended Forrest's stalwart efforts in covering student athletics for the newspaper, which sometimes means driving "countless miles" to away games and "almost getting run over" by excited players on the field in the pursuit of snapping that perfect photo.

"There is one particular person who is loyal and dependable to all sports and clubs at Union County," Hunter said of Forrest. "Quietly, he is present, never seeking attention for himself but always seeks attention for others. This is one of the most deserving awards I have ever presented."

As revealed by Hill, the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders recognized Union County as the recipient of the 2023-2024 GAEL Vision Award, which recognizes districts for their ability to support staff members as well as involve community leadership in education.

As noted by Board Chair Tony Hunter with a nod toward the Teachers of the Year, the best of Union County's educators helped the district receive such an honor.

Students taking part in Distributive Education Clubs of America, aka DECA, have once again made the cut to head to the International Career Development Conference. This time, however, they'll be flying, as the board approved the trip all the way to Anaheim, California.

The Union County Board of Education will meet again on Tuesday, March 19, starting at 6 p.m. inside the Board Office at 124 Hughes Street in Blairsville. The public is invited and encouraged to attend.



UCES teacher Keri Young receiving her Teacher of the Year Award from Principal Jerry Bavero.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



UCPS Principal Debby Decubellis presenting Stephanie Stubblefield with her Teacher of the Year Award.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



Woody Gap Principal Wendy Reynolds presenting Stacy Olson with her Teacher of the Year Award.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



North Georgia News Sports Editor Todd Forrest was honored to receive a Partner in Education Award for his exemplary coverage of local student athletes, pictured here with Athletic Director Mandy Hunter.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



L-R: Art McCann and John Hill of Union County Schools accepting an appreciation plaque from American Legion Post 121 and Auxiliary members Mike and Kathy Merritt, and Derek and Nancy Kunz.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## 2024-2025 Pre-K & Kindergarten Registration Open February 12 to March 29, 2024

Pre-K and Kindergarten School Registration for the 2024-2025 school year:

Monday-Friday, February 12th to March 29th, 2024 from 8:30 AM - 2 PM at the Union County Primary School. Pre-K seats are filled on a first come first serve basis.

Please call 706-835-4321 or email registrar@ucschools.org for information and to place your child's name on the waiting list.

Your child must be four (4) years old for Pre-K or five (5) years old for Kindergarten on or before September 1, 2024. You must be a Union County resident for your child

to be enrolled in Kindergarten, and a Georgia resident to be enrolled in Pre-K.

\*NOTE\*- Students who are currently enrolled in the Union County Schools Pre-K program at Union County Primary School will NOT need to register for Kindergarten.

Below is a list of 6 (six) required documents for new enrollment. Please bring these items with you to ensure your child's registration is complete.

1. Birth Certificate
2. Social Security Card
3. Georgia Immunization Certificate (DPH Form 3231)

4. Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening (DPH Form 3300) (Completed by the health department or a physician)

5. Two Proof of Residency documents with physical address and name (Examples include: rental agreement, utility bill, homeowner's or renter's insurance bill, property tax notice, mortgage payment document, etc.)

6. Complete the online registration forms at this link: <https://www.ucschools.org/parents/student-registration>

Failure to supply all the required documents will delay your registration.

# Students prepare for speech contest with cash prizes

By Daysha Pandolph  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

**YOUNG HARRIS** – A group of 15 eager students from Union and Towns County middle and high schools, along with one homeschool participant, gathered at the Young Harris College Goolsby Center last Thursday, Feb. 22, for the final session of a six-week public-speaking course.

Throughout those weeks, mentors and instructors have helped the young orators refine their speaking skills and construct a speech on a topic of their choosing for the annual Top of Georgia Speaking Contest.

Mentors Jeff Langley, Gerry Chotiner, Marsha Hyer, Madison Urquiola, Steven Harper, Kathy Merritt, Mike Merritt, Betsy Young, Helen Seymore, Jeff Pierot, Cathy Andrews and Roy Perren come from various educational backgrounds.

From teachers to principals, attorneys, Air Force veterans, law enforcement officers and more, these mentors have been huge assets in guiding the students to success.

This year, Joanna Kay, Caleb Sheffield, Sophia Gobin, McKenzie Bourbeau, Erin Beggs and Adalyn Collins are representing Union County High School in the course and contest.

Four Union County Middle Schoolers – Josiah Kay, Eli Hancock, Grace Lacy and Ella Chandler – are also participating.

From Towns County High School, Loftin Turpin, Cecelia Pizarro, Lilly Cannon and Leland Wilson took the six-week course in advance of the big competition.

And though there were no participants from Towns

County Middle School, sixth-grade homeschooler Caleb Taylor represented area middle schoolers also.

Of the participants, 14 plan to speak at the upcoming Speaking Contest on March 20, which will begin at 6 p.m. inside the Goolsby Center Auditorium.

A panel of judges will determine a First-Place speaker, who will receive \$700; a Second-Place speaker, who will receive \$500; and a Third-Place speaker, who will receive \$300. Prizes will be awarded for both the middle and high school divisions.

Judges John Van Vliet, Jennifer Hallett and Rick Andrews will return this March to adjudicate speeches on a truly eclectic slate of topics such as American dilemmas, healthy and harmful eating, artificial intelligence, sustainable living, sports, heroism, science, history and self-defense.

“This is the most advanced speaking group of students that I have seen (since I have been involved),” commented one of the mentors and organizers, Gerry Chotiner.

Chotiner has been involved in the program for nearly a decade and hopes to make a difference in an area of education where many schools fall short.

“The schools don’t really have the budget for (public-speaking classes),” he said, “so this type of training and mentoring fills an important gap.”

Chotiner shared that due to lack of proper public-speaking education, even many career professionals speak with poor technique. For example, they may use lots of filler words such as “like” or “um.”

“The progression from where (these students) started in the beginning of our teaching



Union and Towns County students will compete at the Top of GA Speaking Contest March 20. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

sessions to the end is just very gratifying,” said Chotiner, who has seen students go from struggling to maintain eye contact in simple conversations to delivering seven-minute presentations to an audience with ease.

Joanna Kay, a freshman at UCHS, had a similar experience with the program. She joined last year with hopes of gaining confidence, then returned in 2024 to participate in the course again.

“It’s a good experience, and you will become more confident and learn things that can carry you, not just through this, but into college and into your career,” Kay said.

First time participant and sixth-grader Caleb Taylor has also seen the lasting impact of the program.

“Public speaking is a skill that not many people really know how to do, but this class has taught me how to do it,” Taylor said. “(When I first signed up), I thought that you could just write (your speech) and say it, but I’ve learned to edit it and all that.”

## Battle of Iwo Jima...from Page 1A

my dad was killed in the Battle of the Bulge in World War II,” Graham said. “I was only 2 years old at the time, so I never really got to know my father.”

This, combined with an early fascination with flying, meant it was only natural he enlisted into the Air Force.

The first focus of Graham’s talk was exploring why the Battle of Iwo Jima made sense not just from a strategic standpoint, but from a moral one. To do that, Graham first shared some context.

At about 60 miles south of Tokyo, the island of Iwo Jima held two Japanese airbases, with a third under construction. Japanese soldiers spent months establishing tunnels under Mt. Suribachi, and by the time of the battle, some 20,000 men were stationed on the island.

From Feb. 19 to March 26 of 1945, the Marine Corps and Navy fought the Imperial Japanese Army on Iwo Jima. American forces faced down 15-foot mounds of black ash just past the beachhead only to brave mortar and machinegun fire from heavy Japanese fortifications.

Victory was hard-won; Iwo Jima is considered the bloodiest battle in Marine Corps history, resulting in over 26,000 casualties. Approximately 6,800 of those were men killed in action.

Such knowledge, along with the well-known Joe Rosenthal Associated Press photograph, “Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima,” has stirred hearts for 79 years.

Graham then took a moment to explore what exactly the men on Iwo Jima faced in terms of the trauma of war. He used his own experience in Vietnam to consider what it meant on a mental level to face combat, and by proxy, so



Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783 Comdt. Alton “Doc” Coleman was happy to welcome guests last week to honor the fallen at Iwo Jima, Japan, on the 79th anniversary of the battle. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

much death. Back home, it was easy for Graham to wonder “if there was really a war going on over there.” Training in Louisiana was different from riding in close quarters with other soldiers, destroying Viet Cong trucks from the air.

When he first arrived in the Pacific, Graham met two other combat pilots and was struck by their efficiency. One, from Puerto Rico, “got very excited when he was in the thick of combat and started yelling in Spanish.” His copilot, from Pennsylvania, was “the calmest man I ever saw.”

Recalling his first real taste of battle, Graham said, “I was thinking, ‘Wow, there really is a war going on over here.’”

Not a month later, his fellow Airmen sent out a call saying they had been hit. When

Graham’s squadron arrived on the scene, “all we could see on the ground was a big, huge area of fire.” Despite performing several flyovers, no other calls came in, and no survivors were located.

“After that, I think I became sort of numb for a while,” Graham said, deciding that he would “do (his) best” for his country and fellow soldiers, with whom he says he developed a strong bond – and he can imagine the same being true for the men at Iwo Jima.

In another story, Graham recalled some pilots in a damaged plane being trailed by another plane as an escort back to the base. The rescue team, seeing signs that the plane was about to explode, radioed their comrades to evacuate.

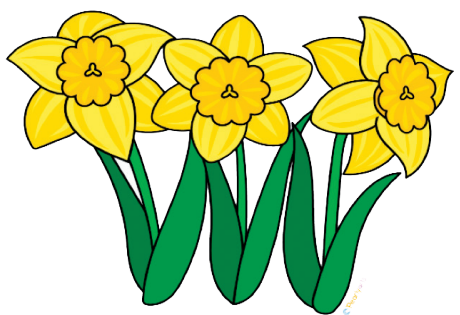
While the men in the damaged plane were able to parachute out, the ensuing explosion caught their defenders’ plane and killed all the men inside.

“You get sort of a feeling of apprehension or anxiety when you’re not directly in combat, when you’re waiting for the next round,” Graham added, describing that the only time he didn’t feel on-edge was, ironically, getting ready for takeoff before combat.

“I think just about anybody that’s been in combat, they never think of themselves ... I think they always think of the people who lost their lives,” said Graham, tying the sentiment of empathy and brotherhood back to the Battle of Iwo Jima.

Inscribed below the statue of soldiers raising the American flag at the summit of Mt. Suribachi is a quote ascribed to Adm. Chester Nimitz. Graham used it to summarize his presentation: “Uncommon valor was a common virtue.”

### Daffodil Days 2024 Flower Of Hope Project



Surprise a friend, family member, or “adopt” a group with a beautiful bouquet of 10 fresh cut daffodils for a \$5 donation to the American Cancer Society.

Contact Email: Wendy Holden at snickers13@windstream.net; 706-781-4166. Flowers will be ready for pick up 11 AM – 3 PM, Monday, March 18, 2024 at Allegheny Lodge #114 on Rogers Street Behind Cabin Coffee. Look for signs and balloons. Deadline is February 29, 2024.

Proceeds support cancer research, education, patient services and advocacy programs of ACS.