

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Officials advise caution amid slight COVID uptick

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

One year ago today, residents learned of the first confirmed positive case of COVID-19 here in Union County, followed two days later by the county's first reported COVID death on April 9.

Speaking to the extreme viciousness of the disease, the first known positive case anywhere was traced to China on Nov. 17, 2019, meaning it took less than five months to spread halfway around the world to the mountains of North Georgia.

Since then, the South has experienced two main "waves" of SARS-CoV-2, one last summer shortly following the onset of the pandemic in America, and another over the winter, which seemed to totally supplant the annual flu

season.

To date, COVID-19 has claimed the lives of 65 Union Countians and resulted in right around 2,000 local cases since the April 7, 2020, initial reporting on the state's COVID-19 Daily Status Report.

In addition to lives being lost and diminishing health, businesses were impacted, social norms were upended, public events were canceled, and for a while, life in many quarters seemed to have lost much of its color as people fretted about the virus.

People are still concerned – and rightly so – but the picture is starting to look decidedly rosier. The positivity rate is down from an all-time high earlier this year, as are hospitalization and death rates.

The arrival of vaccines has helped to paint that

rosier picture, thanks to their remarkable efficacy in offering upwards of 95% protection for those vaccinated. Many thousands of doses have already been administered locally, and everyone 16 and older is now eligible to receive one.

There are plenty of reasons to celebrate, but also, there are reasons to keep such optimism in check, as there does appear to be a minor uptick in COVID prevalence in North Georgia and other parts of the country, with people being advised to maintain COVID best practices.

"We have seen a significant decline in COVID over the last few weeks, even having a day that we went almost 24 hours without a COVID inpatient," Union General Hospital Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said at the

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COVID-19 vaccinations are continuing weekly for anyone 16 and older who signs up for an appointment. Pictured here: people checking in for the Feb. 26 mass clinic at the Sports Center. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## CASA continues advocacy, plans safe fundraisers amid COVID-19

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Much has changed over the last year due to COVID-19, but what hasn't changed is the purview of Enotah CASA for Children.

Standing for "Court Appointed Special Advocates," Enotah CASA is a community-based nonprofit that recruits, trains and supports citizen-volunteers who in turn advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children making their way through the Enotah Judicial Circuit.

And Della Lago, executive director of Enotah CASA, wants people to know

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Union County Advocate Supervisor Gina Bennett and County Clerk Jennifer Mahan sold smoked Boston butts Saturday as a fundraiser for the children advocacy organization. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Community hopeful even as virus continues to loom

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

COVID-19 has experienced a significant decline from the start of the year, and though it's still around, ongoing vaccination efforts have caused more people to begin to feel comfortable bringing events back and venturing out of their homes.

Several entities in Union County have been assisting with vaccines since they first became available, including local government and the Health Department, and now, everyone 16 and older can get the vaccine if they want it.

While shopping at Ingles Saturday, local resident Amy Becket took the time to speak with the North Georgia News, saying she encourages people

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from me 2 u Owner Kathy Hatley in Downtown Blairsville invited the Easter Bunny to hang on the square over the weekend. Photo by Meghan Jarrard

## Choestoe Market to provide opportunities for small vendors

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Choestoe Market celebrated its Grand Opening on Friday, April 2, bringing new opportunities to connect the public with small local vendors.

Located across from Jim's Smokin' Que on Gainesville Highway, the venue is meant to augment what's already going on here rather than compete with the popular Union County Farmers Market, according to Choestoe Market Proprietor Donna Guess.

"We are trying to use our property here for people that want to do it every now

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Young sister and brother team Noel and Aiden Hyatt debuted their Appalachian Tails business venture at the Choestoe Market on Friday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

## Blairsville Cruisers host car show kickoff at Sports Center

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Cruisers hosted their first Cruise-In of 2021 on Saturday, April 3, at the Union County Sports Center. And with a terrific turnout of about 60 classic vehicles, the Cruisers have high hopes for a season full of cars

and car enthusiasts.

Cruisers Vice President Charlie Brown said the group was thankful for the use of the Sports Center Parking Lot, as the usual venue for the first Saturday of the month Cruise-In that kicks off every April was not yet available.

"(County Manager) Larry Garrett really helped us

get this together," Brown said. "The Farmers Market is not officially open until May, so we will be there again soon. Larry did the stuff for the sign we have down there.

"This is a better turnout than I thought it was going to be. This has really turned out good from everything I

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The Blairsville Cruisers hosted their season opening Cruise-In at the Sports Center, a one-time venue for the car club, as the Farmers Market won't be open until May. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

## People encouraged by spring, weather support local business



Families enjoyed some sunshine at Meeks Park Saturday, which was a nice turn from the recent rainy weather the county has been experiencing. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

With spring in full swing, people in the community are getting out and enjoying the warm weather.

Of course, there's more to early spring than just fun in the sun, as pointed out by Pam Stroud while shopping at Ingles Saturday. Stroud, of Hayesville, North Carolina, finds it essential to observe the Easter holiday and take the time to be thankful for the little things.

"This time of the year is so important for everyone," Stroud said. "It is a time to remember our savior and a time to celebrate our lives that we are so lucky to have. Sure, we have had it rough these last few months, but it is all part of the plan.

"We are a strong community, and we can come together to overcome anything in the eyes of the Lord. It is also just an important season because things are warming back up, and that is good for people. This place is so alive when it is warm, and I

love it here because of that."

For her part, Lisa Kohl of Murphy, North Carolina, told the North Georgia News that she hopes people will remember to shop locally in support of the area economy.

"I want businesses to succeed," Kohl said at Meeks Park April 2. "With everything going on, I feel like we have kind of forgotten about them recently. I remember when all this started, all everyone wanted to talk about was the economy.

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