

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, July 29, 2020

County buys property recently owned by ex-hospital CEO Gowder

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris has purchased a 3.382-acre piece of property for the county that belonged to former hospital CEO Mike Gowder as recently as January.

Paris realizes the \$750,000 purchase will be controversial to some, but he says the acquisition of the property at 1159 River Bend Farm Road has everything to do with the future good of the county, and who is to do with Gowder, noting that the county long-term."

He said it's important for him as commissioner that the deal be regarded as "fair and honest and for the public to see," because ultimately, he believes the purchase will assist the hospital financially while also allowing the county to one day usher in much-needed retirement living in that area, of which the 3.382 acres is but a part of a larger whole.

"I've bought a lot of property for the county, and I've had people question me every time I bought it," Paris said. "This is stepping out on a limb, and people may not like it, but I'm thinking about the county long-term."

The deal closed July 17 between the county and Scotty Fain's BLK, LLC, which Paris said received the property from Gowder in January to settle a personal debt between the men.

County government spent \$750,000 on the property purchase, more than \$100,000 below a private appraisal obtained by the county. The local Board of Assessors has a longstanding value of \$705,978 on the property.

Gowder was sentenced last month to a year and a day in federal prison following his October 2019 conviction

See Property Purchase, Page 2A



With an eye toward the future, the county has purchased a River Bend Farm Road property featuring a home with 5,367 square feet of living space. Photo/qPublic.net

Boy Scout Stratton prepares tools for display at Mock House Museum

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County High School Senior David Stratton completed his Eagle Scout project recently by assisting the Union County Historical Society with a unique preservation project at the Mock House Annex.

"I was looking around for stuff to do for my Eagle project," Stratton said. "The Historical Society had a ton of stuff they needed to do, so I talked with Bud Akins, and he said I could wash up some tools and display them, and it was my pleasure to do it."

Stratton helped clean and organize many antique tools to

See Stratton, Page 2A



David Stratton completed his Eagle Scout project recently, assisting the Historical Society with an antique tool display. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

In-class vs. online learning decision due Friday; school starts August 17

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education unanimously approved a proposal on Tuesday, July 21, to begin the school year on Aug. 17 with a hybrid calendar featuring four days of in-class instruction and one online learning day each week to minimize the risks of spreading COVID-19.

Additionally, students may participate in a 100-percent online learning option, though parents must choose between full-time online lessons or face-to-face hybrid instruction for students "via an electronic form by July 31 so that plans can be made to accommodate the student's learning choice."

Under the four-and-one plan, each week, students will attend school Monday through Thursday, with Friday serving as a virtual-learning day. All online learning – both the one-day and full-time options – will utilize Google Classroom to maintain a streamlined experience for all students.

This hybrid plan will provide maintenance and



Superintendent John Hill chose to wear a mask in the July 21 meeting of the Union County Board of Education, detailing a recent close call with COVID-19. Photo by Todd Forrest

custodial staff an extra 24 hours to deep clean and sanitize the buildings and buses; enable a "72-hour lay period that allows the virus to die"; and give teachers time to focus on online learning students, as well as plan and develop online curriculum.

And while in-class students may transition to full-time online learning at any

point in the school year, children enrolled in fully online classes are committed for the entirety of each nine-week grading period and must wait until the beginning of the next nine-week period to switch to in-class education.

"If you choose online learning, that's wonderful," School Superintendent John Hill

See School Decision, Page 3A

Davenport to say 'goodbye' after decades-long career at nursing home

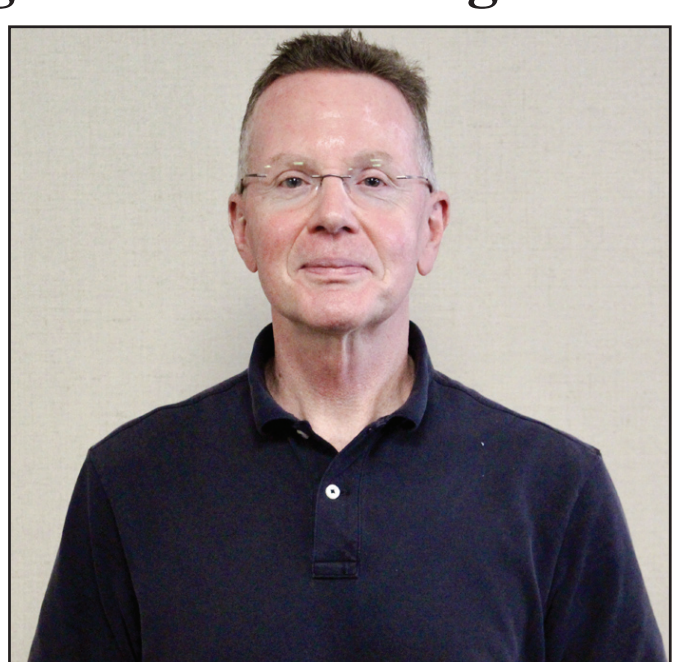
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

After more than 40 years of service and employment at the Union County Nursing Home, longtime Administrator Doug Davenport will retire following his last day on Friday, July 31.

"I have had the opportunity and privilege to meet and work with so many residents and families," Davenport said, "and the opportunity to serve beside the most dedicated group of health care professionals anywhere."

"It is really inspiring to see the efforts of these dedicated individuals and the difference they make each and every day in the lives of so many."

In his time, Davenport has seen the nursing home grow from a 60-bed facility at the old Union County Hospital off Hunt-Martin Street, to its current 150-bed expanded facility next to Union General, where it moved in 1997.



Longtime Union County Nursing Home Administrator Doug Davenport's last day on the job will be Friday, July 31. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Over the years, he has relished the opportunity to serve County's finest, from World War I, II and other veterans, and learn from many of them

See Davenport Retires, Page 6A

Farmers Market continues to prioritize safety for vendors, customers



Dave Reiswig is a regular crafter at the Union County Farmers Market, offering a variety of handmade wooden bowls, pens and more every Saturday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Since the season opener in June, the Union County Farmers Market has brought in hundreds of people to peruse locally grown produce and handmade crafts.

And with COVID-19 lingering through the summertime, the market continues to prioritize the safety of vendors and customers alike. Market Manager Mickey Cummings feels that the market has been successful in this goal.

"With what the governor was saying and everything, we put masks out for everyone, and they can use them if they want to," Cummings said July 25. "I think his message is getting out, and I really appreciate people wearing them."

"We have been doing our best to be safe. It is hard to say about the numbers of visitors, but people are parking across the way. We have put blue marks down and are asking people to keep their tables behind the blue mark 3 feet back in the stall."

"What that has done is put people in the stall instead of out in the aisle so there is not as much congregating right in the middle, but people still seem to be coming, and a lot of our folks are selling out. One of our corn growers was sold out at 8:35 a.m."

Of course, most market attendees seem thankful that rules are being followed and precautions are being taken to ensure people's safety.

Steven Shane of Duluth said Saturday that he found the changes to be barely noticeable,

and that the market has retained a largely normal appearance.

"I think the Farmers Market is really on top of the safety, and I feel like I am safe while being here," Shane said. "It is an outdoor venue, and they are asking people to social distance and wear their masks. The vendors are working to make this safe, and it is really working out."

"Not once have I had to think or worry about the virus. Despite the masks, it feels almost normal, and I think that is what makes it so successful with people. When people feel like things are normal, they tend to be more receptive to minor changes."

As is customary, vendors at the market provided a variety of products over the weekend, with different farms having

See Farmers Market, Page 2A

Early in-person voting continues now through Friday next week

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The first week of early voting for the Aug. 11 Republican and Democratic Primary Runoff Elections went relatively well for a runoff, netting more than 350 in-person votes and, due to COVID-19, an above average return of 1,297 mailed absentee ballots as of Friday, July 24.

Early in-person voting runs now through Friday, Aug. 7, taking place weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in the Jury Assembly Room on the bottom floor of the Union County Courthouse, which is accessible via a clearly marked entrance around the corner from the lower main entrance to the courthouse.

As previously reported, voters can cast ballots even



As the sign says, early in-person voting access is available on the lower floor of the Union County Courthouse. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

during lunchtime, though importantly, there is no required Saturday scheduled for weekend early voting due to the runoff nature of the election.

The courthouse is still under a judicial order because of the pandemic, meaning

See Early Voting, Page 3A

Vol. 111 No. 31

4 Sections 24 Pages

Weather

Thurs: T-Storm Hi 77 Lo 65

Fri: T-Storm Hi 78 Lo 64

Sat: T-Storm Hi 82 Lo 64

Arrests 5B

Church 3C

Classified 2D

Opinion 4A

Legals 4D

Obits 5C

Sports 2B

See page 6B

Duck Derby

Tickets Available

See page 6B

S.A.F.E.

Cancels

Blue Jean Ball

See page 1C

TOYS FOR TOTS

Fundraiser

See page 5D

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

EXTENSION

Garden Lecture

August 7

See page 3A