

# Eclipse...continued from Page 1A

popular during the eclipse. Credence Clearwater Rival's "Bad Moon Rising" blared on the city's sound system as Eclipse Party watchers celebrated the historic event.

Union County EMA Director David Dyer was likely closest to getting the number right ahead of the day, with his early estimates of about 10,000 additional people coming to Union County.

He and his fellow first responders activated the county's Emergency Operations Center at Fire Station No. 1 on Monday morning, a previously planned precautionary measure, and monitored activity around the county both before and after the eclipse.

On the whole, the county had more rescue personnel on duty at the same time than ever before, as most local agencies employed an all-hands-on-deck approach to staffing for the eclipse.

The Union County Sheriff's Office had everyone in the office out on patrol, as did the Blairsville Police Department.



Meeks Park visitors turn their protected eyes to the sun as the eclipse begins its partial phases on Monday, Aug. 21. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Union County E-911 Dispatch had an extra person on duty during eclipse hours, and the fire department made sure to man several of the volunteer fire stations around the county.

Union General Hospital and EMS maintained greater staff than usual, and the state and federal agencies, like Georgia DNR, the Forestry Commission, and the U.S. Forest Service, all had increased capabilities in the area.

Fortunately, there were

no major emergencies as a result of the increased volume of people in town to see the eclipse, at least as of press time Monday. Instead, there were roars of excitement as the event unfolded.

Though the complete economic impact of the Blairsville Eclipse Experience is unknown at this time, it definitely brought thousands of people to the region, undoubtedly boosting both business and local tax revenues.

# Eller...continued from Page 1A

Eller's body in Lake Chatuge two days after he went missing, at approximately 2:30 p.m. on Aug. 16, Towns County Fire Chief and Coroner Harold Copeland said.

The rescue dive team recovered Eller's body from Lake Chatuge in 12 to 15 feet of water, Chief Copeland said.

Chief Copeland, also Towns County coroner, added that Eller's body was sent to the State Medical Examiner for autopsy, to determine cause of death.

Formerly the Chophouse Restaurant, Hawg Wild BBQ is located adjacent to Lake Chatuge Lodge.

Video surveillance at the restaurant placed Eller walking behind the restaurant toward the wooded area that leads to Lake Chatuge, his sister Elizabeth Dills posted on Facebook.

"The security cameras at work captured an image of him heading from his work

down to the lake behind it," she said. "He didn't clock out, he didn't say he was leaving, only that he didn't feel well. His car (was) still at his work."

Foul play isn't suspected at this time, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office, however, "the case is active and ongoing, pending the medical exam and further investigation."

Towns County's Water Rescue Recovery Team, Towns County Sheriff's Office deputies, Georgia Bureau of Investigation special agents, a Georgia State Patrol Aviation Unit, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, K-9 units from Cherokee and Fannin counties, Citizens Law Enforcement Academy volunteers, and other volunteers assisted in the search for Eller, Chief Copeland said.

Eller is survived by his mother, Judy Ledford, and six brothers and sisters.

"Our hearts are breaking," his sister Elizabeth

Dills said.

Brandon's sister Jessica Dills said she now had "a big hole in my heart."

"I was blessed to have him as my brother," Jessica wrote on Facebook. "This young man was so grounded, caring, smart, and responsible. He loved cooking and hiking."

"He wanted to be in law enforcement," she said. "He carried his Bible around with him always. He was there for anyone and would listen and try to help people. I can only hope God accepts me, so that I can see him again. I know (Brandon) will watch over us."

Funeral services for Eller were held on Sunday, Aug. 20, in the Union Hill Baptist Church Cemetery with the Rev. Clark Moss officiating. A memorial service followed on Sunday at Shiloh Baptist Church.

Mountain View Funeral Home had charge of the arrangements.

# Berry...continued from Page 1A

hamburgers and hot dogs," Townsend said. "We'll have tours of the distillery, and much, much more. Come spend the day with us."

Net proceeds from the event go to Union County Animal Control, Wholly Cats Rescue and Cast Away Critters Animal Rescue, who do an amazing job helping find lost pets, and finding loving homes

for animals in need.

You will even have a chance to adopt a special puppy or kitten and bring them home with you.

Tickets are \$20 with an applicable service charge of \$1.69 through mimms.brownpapertickets.com.

Or, purchase your tickets at Will Call at Granddaddy Mimm's Moonshine Distillery,

at (706) 781-1829. There's no additional fee.

As usual, parking for the event will be at Shady Grove United Methodist Church on Owltown Road for a \$5 fee. A shuttle will bring you to Pappy's Plaza to enjoy the event.

"Y'all come see us," Townsend said.

# Reece...continued from Page 1A

Reece was in her 14th year working for Union County Schools, and began the 2017-2018 school year as a physical education teacher at Union County High.

However, effective Tuesday, Aug. 15, Reece was "no longer employed with the Union County School System," according to an official statement from Union County Schools Superintendent Dr. Fred Rayfield.

She has been charged with child molestation and sexual assault by persons with supervisory or disciplinary authority, stemming from allegations of a sexual relationship with a student dating back to 2013, according to arrest warrants.

Each of the two charges carried with it a \$5,000 cash bond or a \$10,000 property bond, and Reece bonded out of the Union County Jail on a \$20,000 property bond several hours after turning herself in that Monday, according to the sheriff's office.

Per a GBI news release, the sheriff's office recently received information that in 2013, Reece, then 36, had become "sexually involved" with a student.

"The Georgia Bureau of Investigation was requested to assist the Union County Sheriff's Office with the investigation," the GBI said. "During the course of the investigation, the GBI was able to determine that former middle school physical education teacher Shawnetta D. Reece, now 40 of Blairsville, was sexually involved with a 15-year-old

student in 2013.

"The student was moving from the 8th grade into the 9th grade during this time. As a result of the investigation, Reece has been arrested for child molestation and sexual assault by persons with supervisory or disciplinary authority."

A GBI special agent appeared before Superior Court Judge Stanley Gunter on Monday, Aug. 14, to present two warrants for Reece's arrest.

"Between the dates of May 25, 2013, and Dec. 9, 2013, said accused, Shawnetta D. Reece, did commit the offense of child molestation when said accused committed an immoral or indecent act to a 15-year-old juvenile, when she engaged in sexual intercourse with said child," according to one of two arrest warrants issued Monday.

A second arrest warrant has alleged that Reece, in the same date ranges, "did commit the offense of sexual assault when said accused, a teacher and coach with the Union County School System, engaged in sexual contact with a 15-year-old juvenile enrolled in the Union County School System."

The crimes are alleged to have been committed here in Blairsville, according to the warrants.

Reece began working at Union County Middle School in 2004 as a paraprofessional, and she later became a physical education teacher there and coached middle school cross country, according to the Union County Board of

Education Office.

She started coaching cross country at Union County High in 2015, though she continued to work at the middle school in P.E. until the 2016-2017 school year, when she transferred to the high school as a gym teacher and the school's new track and field coach, according to the board office.

It was in 2013, when Reece was a P.E. teacher at the middle school, that she is alleged to have entered into a sexual relationship with a student, the GBI said.

The 2017-2018 school year would have been Reece's second year at Union County High School.

Dr. Rayfield said that the GBI paid him a visit on Friday, Aug. 11, to inform him of the allegations against Reece, and the superintendent added that Reece had no further contact with school children on campus after the board office had become aware of the situation.

"The Union County School System is deeply saddened by the investigations involving one of our employees," said Dr. Rayfield. "The safety of our students and families will always remain our focus and No. 1 priority. We are cooperating with the GBI and all other law enforcement agencies concerning this active investigation."

Once the ongoing investigation is complete, the GBI said it will turn the case over to Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley for prosecution.

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