

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, September 30, 2020

Camper explosion rocks RV park, causing one death and four injuries

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com



Frances Rollins

Tragedy struck a quiet Union County neighborhood last week when a camper exploded inside the River's Edge RV Park off old Bald Mountain Road, resulting in one woman's death and the injuries of four others.

Longtime park residents Frances Rollins, 79, and her husband Lamar were apparently unaware that "a disconnected propane gas line" running into their RV had been filling the camper with the combustible gas, according to the Office of Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John F. King.

When Frances went to turn on the stove around 1 p.m. on Sept. 22, the camper exploded, blowing the roof and all four walls out of the home. Both husband and wife required airlifting to Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, where

received while trying to save the couple in the accident.

"Because of the explosion, the wife received burns on over 90% of her body, and the husband also received very severe burns," Commissioner King said. "Three neighbors attempted to rescue the elderly couple from the fire and received lesser burns."

"One of those neighbors managed to pull the elderly woman from the fire ... If it was not for the bravery of these neighbors, both the husband and the wife may not have survived Tuesday's explosion."

The cause of the fire is believed to be accidental, stemming from a propane gas line leading into the home having been disconnected to remove a gas heater and apparently not sealed off afterward, Union County Fire Chief David Dyer said.

Dyer interviewed Lamar



Union County firefighters worked last week to extinguish a blaze after an RV exploded in a propane gas accident, resulting in the tragic death of resident Frances Rollins.

Photo by Al Sorkin

Rollins after the explosion, who told the fire chief that one minute he'd been sitting in his recliner, and the next he was blown out of his chair. He also

reported that he did not recall smelling propane inside the residence.

Propane is naturally odorless so is mixed with an

additive to alert people to its smell in the presence of a leak.

Preliminary See RV Explosion, Page 6A

Army Special Operations training underway in area through Oct. 2



U.S. Army soldiers fast-rope from a CV-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft during an exercise at Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico, on March 1, 2011. Photo/U.S. Department of Defense

News Special
North Georgia News

Elements of U.S. Army Special Operations and other units are conducting training at Dobbins Air Reserve Base and Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia from Sept. 26-Oct. 2.

The soldiers will use training ammunition and other training devices to make the exercise as real as possible.

There will be periods of increased air traffic to include low-flying helicopters, tiltrotor aircraft and airplanes during hours of darkness. During the evenings this week, there

will be air traffic and noise associated with the large airborne presence.

Some of these airborne exercises will occur at the Blairsville Municipal Airport beginning the evening of Sept. 29. The airport runway will be shut down at nighttime during the Army training exercises.

The 75th Ranger Regiment is a lethal, agile and versatile special operations force that conducts forcible entry operations and special operations raids across the entire spectrum of combat.

Tough, realistic military exercises conducted regularly

provide the Rangers a unique edge for real-world missions.

This is routine training conducted periodically to maintain a high level of readiness for the military personnel involved. Every measure to reduce the amount of noise associated with the training will be taken.

"We appreciate the support of the residents and community in the surrounding areas during this training," Deputy Public Affairs Officer Tracy Bailey said. "Due to inherent risks to personal safety, there will be no opportunities for public viewing of this training."

Dr. Gabby Arencibia joins father at South East Eye Group

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

When Dr. Gabby Arencibia graduated as part of the Kentucky College of Optometry's inaugural Class of 2020 in May, she had a clear vision for the future - she'd soon be joining the family business.

Her father is local optometrist Dr. Joey Arencibia, founder of the Georgia Vision Center in Hiwassee. In preparation for his daughter's arrival, Arencibia expanded his practice this year to include South East Eye Group, a division of Georgia Vision Center and new facility based in Blairsville.

Having received her credentialing earlier this summer, the newly minted optometrist began seeing patients over a month ago, and she is incredibly excited to be treating families and members of her native North Georgia Mountains community out of the Union County office.



Dr. Gabby Arencibia

Together, the father/daughter duo help people maintain healthy vision by

offering exams and specializing in the diagnosis and treatment

See Dr. Arencibia, Page 2A

UCDA partners with Chamber, DDA to host 'Drive-Thru Job Fair' Oct. 9

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Attention local job seekers - the Union County Development Authority has partnered with the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Development Authority and several local businesses to host a Drive-Thru Job Fair on Friday, Oct. 9.

With some of the most favorable employment figures anywhere in the Southeast, Union County has fared well compared to state and national unemployment rates in recent years. And while this holds true

even amid COVID-19, local unemployment is certainly up from earlier in the year.

Fortunately, the job fair next week will feature plenty of employment opportunities for residents, with participating employers to include Chick-fil-A Blairsville, Panel Built, Corrugated Replacements, Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen, Ingles, Union General Health, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and Brasstown Valley Resort.

"It will be at the former Fatz Café from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.," UCDA Director Mitch Griggs said. "We wanted to do that time period specifically

See Job Fair, Page 2A



Mitch Griggs

Rodeo ropes in hundreds of guests as first large event in months



Area residents were glad to finally have something action-packed to do at the annual Blairsville Pro Rodeo over the weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

After more than half a year without any big community events for locals to attend, the

annual Blairsville Pro Rodeo made its triumphant return on Friday, Sept. 25, and Saturday, Sept. 26.

The rodeo is the main fundraiser for the Union County

Saddle Club, and the outdoor event was moved from earlier this year for safety reasons due to COVID-19. Nevertheless, the show went on, with a large

See Rodeo, Page 6A

Nearly two dozen residents proclaim 'no more leachate' in hearing

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

More than 100 people attended a virtual hearing hosted by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division Wednesday, Sept. 23.

The purpose of the meeting was for the state to receive public comments on the proposed draft permit for the City of Blairsville's Wastewater Treatment Plant, which governs the operation of the plant and is up for renewal every five years.

Twenty-five people left comments during the meeting,

including Mayor Jim Conley, who said he welcomes people coming to him with whatever concerns they may have moving forward.

Of the 25 commenting, the mayor and Mountain True Western Regional Director Callie Moore were the only two people to speak in favor of the current draft permit, which received a hearing after the EPD determined there was "a significant degree of public interest."

A permit renewal process wouldn't normally be such a hot topic, but recent controversy

See Permit Hearing, Page 6A



Audra Dickson
EPD Wastewater Regulatory Program Manager

Vol. 111 No. 40
5 Sections 48 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Sunny Hi 71 Lo 43
Fri: Sunny Hi 63 Lo 38
Sat: Sunny Hi 65 Lo 42

Arrests 4B
Churches 2C
Classified 3D
Opinion 4A
Legals 5D
Obits 4C
Sports 2B

SPORTS
FOOTBALL
10/2 vs. Pickens 7:30 PM
HOMECOMING
SOFTBALL
9/29 vs. Rabun Co. 5:30 PM

Environmental Awareness Day
October 1

See page 5B

Quilts of Valor Recipients

See page 6B

PANTHERS
SEE FALL SPORTS PREVIEW INSIDE THIS ISSUE