

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Program provides Christmas for foster children

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Imagine spending Christmas without family – that's what it's like being a foster child on Christmas Day.

Thankfully, the Towns and Union Foster Children's Enrichment Program has been hard at work gathering donations made by generous individuals to provide rewarding and positive Christmas experiences for children who are currently caught in the legal system.

The program, a nonprofit entity, is carried out by former and current CASA volunteers – that's Court Appointed Special Advocates for children.

Because the identities of children in foster care are kept

secret for their own protection, people who decide to sponsor a foster child never know the name of the kid they are helping.

On the other hand, the child gets to fill out their very own wish list to be used by a sponsor for shopping, so it's almost as if each sponsor is Santa Claus for a special child in need.

The process begins around the first of September, as program co-founder Pat Elliott begins rounding up a master list of children who will benefit from the yearly Christmas program. This year, that number is just over 100.

Once the group figures out who all they're going to be taking care of – with anonymity intact, of course – foster parents receive blank wish lists to be

filled out by the children.

"Over the years, we've developed a big list of sponsors," said Richard Paolillo, another of the program's co-founders. "We'll send the sponsors a list, and they'll buy the items on the list. We also get cash donations, too, which comes in handy because we always have to buy extra (to finish filling in some wish lists). It's grown over the years, because some sponsors have been with us for a long time."

The program was founded years ago by now ex-CASAs Elliott, Paolillo and his wife Mary Jane, as well as Sherry Wendt, in order to fill a need for kids when other programs fell through due to the economic recession.

Some of the main
See *Foster Children*, Page 2A



The Towns and Union Foster Children's Enrichment Program is a local nonprofit made up of CASA or former CASA volunteers. Pictured L-R: Richard Paolillo, Kathy Malone, Lorena Johnson, Diana Smith, Pam Curley, Liz Ruf and Pat Elliott.

Cruisers take 65 kids Christmas shopping

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Cruisers and Walmart teamed up on Friday morning to help spread Christmas joy to more than 65 needy children in the Union County area during the Sixth Annual Shop With A Cruiser event.

Throughout the year, the Blairsville Cruisers hold fundraisers and raffles that culminate in December when the Union County School system selects the children that will take part, and they are taken to Walmart where the Blairsville Cruisers and other local volunteers take the kids shopping, allowing them to purchase just about anything in the store.

"The school selects the kids, and all that we do is go with them while they shop and pay the bill," said Wayne Tanner of the Blairsville Cruisers.



Walmart plays a huge role every year in providing community Christmas programs with streamlined shopping experiences, benefiting countless Union County children during the Christmas season. Pictured here, L-R: Alice Patterson, Walmart Personnel Coordinator; Pete Barley, Blairsville Cruisers President; Wanda Hollis, Walmart cashier; and Ashley Mathis, Walmart cashier.

In the past, each student that amount increased to \$200, but this year, due to the generosity of the community,

that amount increased to \$250. According to Blairsville Cruisers President Pete Barley, the majority of the children

carry on the spirit of giving by using much of their \$250 to buy gifts for their family

See *Cruisers*, Page 3A

Firefighter Burnette recovering in Gainesville

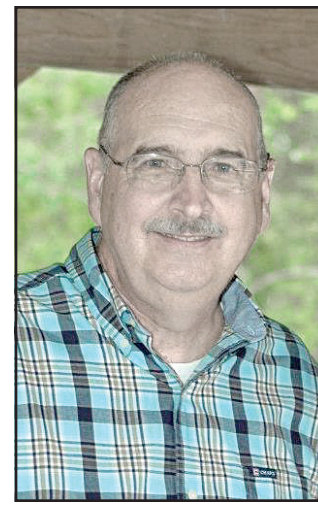
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

When David Burnette pulled out of Station No. 2 last Friday afternoon, it became immediately apparent that something was wrong.

Burnette, a volunteer firefighter and first lieutenant in charge of the Station 2 area, had taken the lead in Engine 2. He was being followed by Tanker 2 on a call to a smoke alarm.

Instead of completing the turn out of the station and onto Jones Creek Road, the engine carried on across the road, over a corner of land onto old Blue Ridge Highway, all the way across it, off the other side, through a fence, then into a power pole, according to Union County Fire Chief David Dyer.

Bystanders reported witnessing Burnette seemingly unconscious behind the



David Burnette

wheel, and when his fellow firefighters responded to the scene, Burnette had no apparent pulse and wasn't breathing, according to Chief Dyer.

"They got him out of the
See *Burnette*, Page 2A

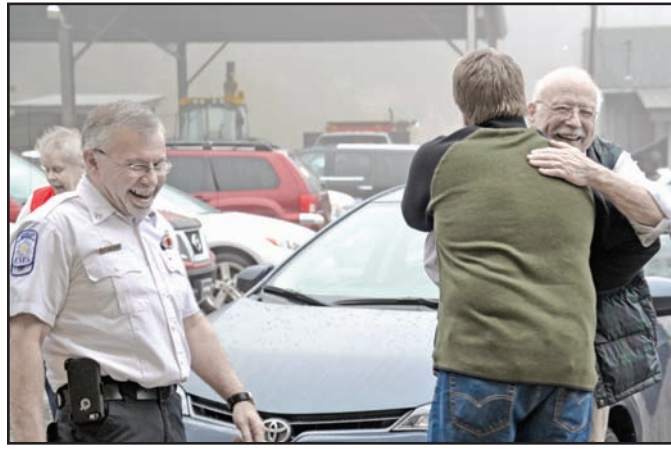
Miner hangs up helmet after 32 years

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES – More than 50 community members and local public safety personnel gathered at the Union County Fire Department Station No. 5 to celebrate the retirement of longtime volunteer fireman Jim Miner on Saturday, Dec. 17.

Many in the fire department organized the surprise event to honor Miner, his family, and his dedication and love for the people of Union County during his 32 years of service with the UCFD.

"Volunteer firefighters are service people," said UCFD Chief David Dyer. "They serve the community. But, there are some people who go beyond that. They are the first ones there. They're the last ones



Longtime Suches Firefighter Jim Miner greets guests of his surprise retirement party at the Suches Fire Department, Station No. 5.

to leave. They do extra work, they do work that no one else wants to do.

"Not only do they serve the community, but they also serve the firefighters. They're rare to find. In this

fire department, that person is Jim Miner. He's been involved in every community thing, in every firefighter thing. Jim has always been there.

"When you think about
See *Miner*, Page 1B

Davenport thanks supporters, says goodbye to Board of Education

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

There are many words to describe a man like Gary Davenport.

He is a father, a grandfather, friend to many, a businessman and jobs provider in the community, longtime former rec department coach, board chairman, and the list goes on.

There is a best word, however, that can be used to describe the man in all his chosen and accepted roles – Gary Davenport is a leader.

And on Tuesday, Dec. 13, the Union County Board of Education bid a fond farewell to Davenport as their chosen chairman.

Friends and family,



Gary Davenport with his children, Daniel Davenport, Janna Akins and Crystal Telford

along with faculty and staff of Union County Schools, gathered to honor Davenport with a reception at the board office that immediately preceded the regular monthly meeting that evening.

Dr. Fred Rayfield, who

came on as superintendent of Union County Schools in July, opened the reception with warm words for Davenport and his 20 years as a board member.

"There are a lot of things
See *Davenport*, Page 4A

'Adopt-a-Grandparent' gifts the elderly

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For the fourth year running, Roberta Ford and Kristy Wallace assembled their helper elves to hold the annual Adopt-a-Grandparent for Christmas in Union and Towns counties, this year on Friday, Dec. 16.

Ford and Wallace, both Independent Beauty Consultants with Mary Kay, started the program in 2013 with the Union County Nursing Home. They expanded their reach the following year, in 2014, by adopting the grandparents of Chatuge Regional Nursing Home.

Last year, the two, in what they call their "Joy Team," were able to add residents of the



Roberta Ford, Kristy Wallace and Brigitte Edghill hand out Christmas gifts at the Union County Nursing Home every year as part of their Adopt-a-Grandparent for Christmas program.

Rep. Gurtler thanks voters, looks ahead

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Recently-elected District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler spoke to area residents at the Mountain Movers and Shakers weekly meeting at Mary's Southern Grill on Friday, Dec. 16, thanking constituents for their votes and sharing his thoughts on issues that will be discussed during the upcoming legislative session.

Gurtler, who ran and won on a Republican ballot, will be representing Union, Towns, Rabun and parts of White County in the Georgia House of Representatives come Jan. 9.

Gurtler is no stranger

to the Mountain Movers and Shakers – he announced his campaign at one of the group's meetings at the first of the year, so he found it only fitting to return to the group before heading off to the Capitol Building for his first General Assembly meeting.

"I want to talk about what's been happening since the election," said Gurtler. "I want to talk about the big issues we'll be facing come this legislative session, and what my plan is as your next state representative."

Of the many pertinent issues that will be discussed at length with state legislators starting in January, Gurtler shared that he plans to vote against the 2017 state budget,

See *Gurtler*, Page 3A



Incoming District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler took his oath of office in January.

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MERRY CHRISTMAS

The offices of North Georgia News and West Printing Company will be closed on Friday, December 23rd.