

North Georgia News

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Union County School System facing \$1.762 million shortfall

By Charles Duncan
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The Union County Board of Education is between a rock and a hard place.

A shortfall of revenues combined with increased financial burdens imposed by state cutbacks, increased Local Fair Share obligations and mandated salary requirements will impact the 2012-2013 budget set by the board. How much impact remains to be seen.

The school is staring at expenditures of more than \$24 million, with only slightly more than \$22,258,000 in revenues.

The board is facing a \$1.762 million budget short-

fall and is continuing to look for ways to balance next year's Fiscal Budget.

Adding to the current budget woes, federal stimulus money – approximately \$1.3 million – ended with the 2011-2012 school year.

"We're looking to get things balanced," said Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe. "It's easy to expand, but it's really hard to tighten the belt. It's definitely not pleasant."

The County's Tax Digest continues in a downward spiral. The digest brought in less money in 2012 than it did in 2006, County tax records show.

In addition to the Tax Digest woes, the board is faced with state of

Georgia Austerity cuts of more than \$1.63 million. On top of that, based on the state's Quality Basic Education formula, Union County must surrender more than \$5.9 million in what is termed the "Local Fair Share" by the state of Georgia.

When all revenues are in and accounted for, the state uses a QBE formula to determine how much the "richer counties" must surrender to offset budget woes for "poorer counties." Once that figure is determined, the first five mills of a county's revenues come off the top to send to less fortunate schools.

The funds lost to Local Fair Share and state Austerity cuts has put the Union County school board in a very



Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe discusses fiscal woes the school system has with Board of Education members. The system faces a \$1.762 million shortfall. Photo/Charles Duncan

vulnerable financial position. The board would have to increase the millage rate by more than 1 mill to avoid cuts to personnel.

Having gone up on last year's millage rate, the board

decided against additional millage rate increases. The board increased the millage rate by more than 1 mill last year and still had to furlough teachers eight days.

To get nearer to closing

the gap on the \$1.762 million shortfall, the board voted to not fill five certified teaching positions left open due to retirements.

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The Clans returned here at Meeks Park

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Ten years ago, the Blairsville-Union Chamber of Commerce was looking for ways to boost tourism. It appears they have hit a home run with the Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games.

"Ten years ago, several of us were on the board of directors of the Blairsville Chamber of Commerce and we were looking for something to bring people together, so they would spend a weekend here," Kimberly Poe Miller said. "One of the members of the board at the time, Jim McAfee had been attending different Scottish festivals and he brought the idea to the table, so several of us went and visited other Scottish Festivals around the area."

"We thought, 'we have Scots and Irish here, that's who we are. Those were the people who actually came and settled here.' So we decided that we would try it and it's grown every year and we have volunteers who keep coming back and our guests keep coming back and if you look in the parking lot we have cars from everywhere," Miller said. "Kentucky, Mis-



It's called the axe throw. Photo/Todd Forrest

souri, and I have 16 members of my family here from Tennessee and this is the seventh year that all of them have come. So it becomes a family affair, or a clan affair.

But that's how it got started. We were looking for some way to bring people to Blairsville, to have a good time, to spend the weekend, and we thought 'we can do this.'

"The volunteers keep coming back so they enjoy it as well. You can't beat us

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Sheriff warns residents to protect valuables

By Charles Duncan
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A recent string of entering auto cases has the Union County Sheriff's Office on high alert

Thieves have targeted items inside vehicles at area churches and other locations around the county, Union County Sheriff's reports show.

The Sheriff's Office wants to remind residents to keep their personal belongings and valuables out of view in their vehicles, locked or unlocked.

It is also important to keep vehicle windows closed and doors locked.

There have been a re-



Sheriff Scott Stephens

cent increase in the number of vehicle break-ins and thefts from vehicles, Union County Sheriff Stephens said.

"Often, the stolen items have been left in plain sight within the vehicle making them a prime target for thieves," Sheriff Stephens

said. "There have also been several other reports of unlocked vehicles being targeted, rummaged through and items stolen."

Most importantly, remember to keep personal items out of view and vehicles locked during upcoming revivals at area churches as there have been reports of these illegal activities in church parking lots, Sheriff Stephens said.

"Another important reminder for residents, during the coming summer is to keep doors and windows secured if they are away from their residences," Sheriff Stephens said. "If you intend on being out of town or on vacation, secure your residence and make sure all doors and

windows are locked."

Union County Sheriff's Office PIO C.J. Worden adds that it's wise to let a trustworthy neighbor know to keep an eye on your house, if you're going to be out of town. "Stop mail and newspaper delivery or have a neighbor collect it," he said. "You also can request extra patrols from the Sheriff's Office. Talk to your neighbors and report any suspicious subjects or activity in the neighborhood."

He adds that if you are away from your home for an extended period of time, have someone keep your grass cut while you're gone.

"Burglaries even occur when you are only gone for a short time," he said. "Vary your routine as much as you can."

Farmers Market thriving; produce a plenty

By Charles Duncan
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The Union County Farmers Market was bustling with activity on Saturday.

Michael Clark was there from English Country Gardens selling annuals and perennials; so was Will Kerr and his family offering cabbage, potatoes and broccoli; Britt Turner traveled from Suches to sell her spa creams and remedies; and Joy Nywening was there offering handcrafted handbags and handmade stuffed toys called "Cuddle Pals."

Oh, and Patrick Malone and his wife were there selling raffle tickets.

All in all, there were 53 vendors. All told, there was honey to be had, jewelry, handcrafted signs, onions, tomatoes, several varieties of cabbage, some unbelievable broccoli and there was plenty of other early vegetables.

And business was good for vendors during the second week that the Farmers Market has been open.

The Market is open from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sat-



Honey, vegetables, fruits and other bargains are at the Market. Photo/Charles Duncan

urdays and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesdays.

Clark was running out of flowers. He said he did very well in the two weeks of the Market's opening.

"We did very well," Clark said. "The longer we get into the season, the more mature the vegetables will be, and the more vegetables will be available. When the

vegetables are here, the people are here.

"It might started off a little slow, but it gets busier and busier as the crops come in," he said. "The numbers of people coming here will only increase as the volume of vegetables increases."

Kerr agreed and said he only anticipates more and more patrons coming to

the Market in the next two to three weeks because the popular vegetables will be coming in.

"We'll be getting into July by then and that's when a lot of crops will be coming in," he said. "I'll have a ton of sweet corn here then and a lot of other vegetables like

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City moves forward with sign ordinance process

By Charles Duncan
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The Blairsville City Council has started the process of adopting a new sign ordinance.

The Council heard the first reading of the new sign ordinance last week at City Hall.

Mayor Jim Conley said the ordinance was basically the same one that Judge Robert Struble ruled against in awarding signs to Allison Outdoor Advertising in April.

Struble ruled that the city of Blairsville failed in its attempt at a sign ordi-



Mayor Jim Conley

nance, and awarded partial summary judgment to Allison Outdoor Advertising, Limited Partners.

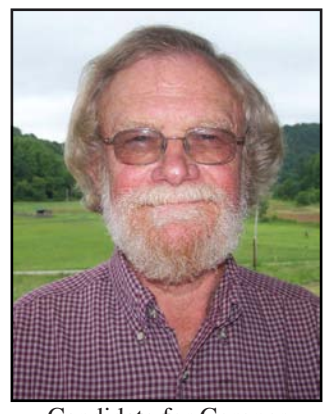
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Lamar Paris



Candidate for Commissioner See page 2A

Benny Brookshire



Candidate for Coroner See page 2A

Cummings: Market valuable to locals

By Charles Duncan
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Mickey Cummings was grinning from ear-to-ear on Saturday.

The extension services coordinator for Union County was in the zone as the Union County Farmers Market vendors and patrons did business on Saturday.

Cummings was pleased with the number of vendors, especially those selling produce.

"We've got onions, cabbage and potatoes, some are selling greens," he said. "Today is the first day we had

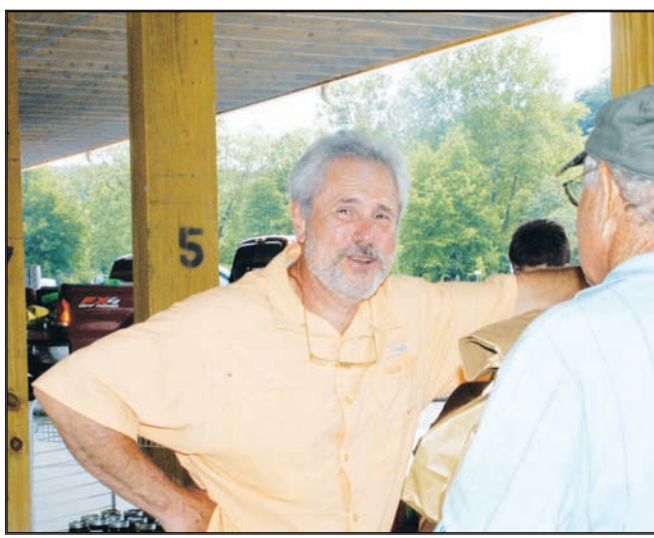
green beans and the three people that had them sold out. We should be having more and more each week."

Cummings was pleased with the crowd numbers. He expects those numbers to only get better.

"I expect in the next two to three weeks we'll have corn, I expect to have tomatoes in here in two to three weeks," he said. "I'd say by the first week in July, we'll have everything in here produce-wise. There'll be a lot of people coming in here."

More than 60 vendors

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Extension Agent Mickey Cummings talks produce on Saturday at the Market. Photo/Charles Duncan

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Gilreath joins NGN

The North Georgia News is proud to welcome Adam Gilreath to our family in the position of Advertising Sales.

Adam comes to us from the Suches area and is a native of Union County. Having grown up here in our area gives Adam a special understanding of the challenges our small businesses face, and places him in a unique position to help grow your

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Green Bean Festival

calling local artists & crafters

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