

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Wednesday, August 10, 2022

Paris talks target range, noise ordinance and taxes

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Among the many topics discussed in Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris' regular meeting on Thursday, Aug. 4, was the construction timeline for the Union County Gun Range, to be located about nine miles southeast of Blairsville on Georgia 180.

The meeting last week featured the business items for the July regular meeting, which Paris had to reschedule last month after contracting COVID-19.

In the meeting, Paris accepted a \$3.78 million contract for Milestone Construction, LLC to build the Gun Range,

with full completion of the project expected on or before Aug. 8, 2023.

Paris also accepted an amendment to the Intergovernmental Agreement with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources increasing state funding for the range from \$1.8 million to \$3.42 million and decreasing the local match from \$600,000 to \$380,000.

Moving along, Paris extended the March 29, 2022, Emergency Moratorium on applications to develop or expand campgrounds, mobile home parks, manufactured vehicle parks, recreational home parks, recreation parks, tiny home parks, park model parks, and any other similar type of development.

The Emergency

Moratorium was extended for up to 90 days from June 27, 2022.

Union County received a clean bill of financial health from Lead Auditor Clay Pilgrim of Rushton and Company, CPAs, regarding the 2021 Financial Audit.

The proposed Union County Amplified Sound Ordinance was presented to the public and got its first reading at the meeting.

This new ordinance would restrict the use of sound amplifying devices or equipment at any place outdoors in the unincorporated areas of Union County, with exceptions specified in the ordinance. There were no stated objections to the proposed ordinance.

Among other things, the ordinance is meant to discourage anyone within the county, including short-term renters, from disturbing residents in close proximity to them. The date of the public hearing and second reading and adoption of the ordinance will be announced at a later date.

In other county news, Daymond Hughes of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services Division gave a presentation on the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program, specifically, on rabies vaccine bait drops planned for the northern half of Union County starting in mid-October.

Hughes said bait drops will be spread in Union by fixed-
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Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held an action item-packed meeting on Thursday, Aug. 4, inside the Union County Courthouse. Photo by Mark Smith

Gov. Brian Kemp visits with constituents in Blairsville

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Editor@nganews.com

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp made a special trip to Union County on Thursday, Aug. 4, to meet with enthusiastic constituents and share his optimistic vision to continue improving opportunity and quality of life in the state.

The event, organized by longtime friend of Kemp and local businessman Jim Williams, served as both an informational meet-and-greet and a grassroots fundraiser for the governor's re-election campaign.

More than 300 people filed into the Community Center for the standing-room-only gathering, which featured attendance by local elected officials, business community stakeholders, the Union County GOP and everyday residents interested in the goings-on of the state.

Kemp touted his record



Brian Kemp
Georgia Governor

both before and after the onset of COVID-19, the latter of which saw him rise as an early national leader in lifting onerous restrictions that closed many businesses.

During the pandemic,

his office has also facilitated a reliable stream of information from the Georgia Department of Public Health, taking an approach of largely trusting people to make their own health

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Motivational speaker excites staff ahead of school year

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Nationally renowned motivational speaker Jon Gordon took the stage at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center on Monday, Aug. 1, to speak to school leadership, teachers and staff at the outset of the 2022-23 school year.

Gordon, who has a master's degree in teaching and once practiced the profession himself, is the author of the acclaimed book "The Energy Bus" about positivity and overcoming negativity, as well as 25 other motivational, leadership and positive attitude books.

He has worked with professional football and baseball teams, NCAA Division I and II athletic teams, including the Georgia Bulldogs, and major universities, high schools and corporations.

"As a teacher, I learned how challenging it can be and



Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill with motivational speaker Jon Gordon in the Aug. 1 faculty assembly. Photo by Mark Smith

how you face obstacles on a daily basis," Gordon said. "And that was years ago, not like the last two years. What you've been through the last two years (during the pandemic) is like no other. It has been more challenging than ever.

"But I know this: you're more resilient than you thought, and you're stronger than you knew." To emphasize this message, Gordon cited his experience with the Tampa Bay Lightning, a professional hockey team that won the

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Union makes Top 50 for rural development nationally

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In recognition of its business-friendly environment and industrial leadership, Union County has been named to a prestigious nationwide list of 50 top-performing rural, non-metro communities by Site Selection Magazine, a national publication of Conway Data based in Atlanta.

The six other Georgia counties that made the cut alongside Union were Appling, Bacon, Dodge, Elbert, Franklin

and Hart. Formed in 1954, Conway Data helps to match corporations with economic development authorities, among other things, and its publication provides information for use by expansion-planning decision makers like the Union County Development Authority.

"Site Selection Magazine is widely considered the premier magazine for industrial and larger scale commercial-type development," said Union County Development Authority Executive Director Mitch

Griggs. "The basic criteria that (Conway Data) used to identify top-performing communities was looking at (new) projects of at least \$1 million that employed 20 or more employees, or the project resulted in the construction of a 20,000 or more square-foot building.

"And they were only looking at industrial manufacturing, warehouse distribution, and data processing," Griggs added, as

See Top 50 Honor, Page 3A



L-R: Commissioner Lamar Paris, Mayor Jim Conley, Gov. Brian Kemp, Georgia First Lady Marty Kemp, and Economic Development Director Mitch Griggs on Aug. 4. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Fire Station No. 5 throws Open House bash in Suches

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Saturday, Aug. 6, was a day of pop-up thunderstorms for Union County, but miraculously, the weather cleared over the Suches community right around 4 p.m., just in time for Union County Fire Department Station No. 5 to kick off its first ever open house.

Suches is a small, close-knit community in a relatively remote area in the southern part of Union County, just over 20 miles from Blairsville. But the community's small size did not stop an excellent turnout Saturday, as roughly 100 adults and kids came out to sample the cookout and see what Station 5 was all about.

Of course, the kids wanted to climb all over the fire apparatus that were on display and shoot water from a fire hose.

Station 5 didn't skimp on the food, either. They served Grade-A beef hamburgers and quarter-pound beef hot dogs cooked over a barbecue grill, with all the trimmings and beverages to go along with them. And then there was the cake and cupcakes made lovingly by volunteers.

"This is the first year we've done an open house,"



Suches Firefighters Derrick Pruitt and Robert Wadley with LUCUS, a chest compression system, during the Fire Station No. 5 Open House on Aug. 6. Photo by Mark Smith

said Station 5 Lt. Doug Pruitt. "The community appreciation dinner was the predecessor, but we wanted to change gears and see if we could reach a different group of people.

"For probably the last 20 years we've had what we've called a community appreciation dinner, where the community was invited in. I think we started out serving spaghetti, and then it developed into chicken dinners and other things that we provided.

"And the whole point of it was to say thank you to the community members for their support in the many ways that we needed it, but also for their financial support, because we couldn't keep the doors open and reach our mission (to serve the community) without it.

"Over the years it's evolved, and we decided that we wanted to change our focus to not only say thank you, but we also want people to come

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SPORTS

FOOTBALL
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@ Chestatee 7:30 PM



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Maters & Music
Festival Returns
Aug. 13
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County Meeting...from Page 1A

wing aircraft making several passes over an area dropping small packets containing the vaccine. The packets are coated with wax and rolled in fish meal to attract racoons, which are the primary carriers of rabies in Georgia.

The bait-drop aircraft will fly about 500 feet above ground level and drop about 75 baits per square kilometer in bait lines about 1,500 feet apart, which means the aircraft will make several passes over a bait zone where there may be residential dwellings.

These baits have been tested on several animals and are harmless to pets, Hughes said. If found, people should use gloves or a plastic bag to pick up a bait and throw it into the woods for the target animals, as the baits may cause a minor rash in humans.

For more information on the Oral Rabies Vaccination Program, call 866-487-3297.

Paris accepted an agreement for Indigent Defense Services between the Enotah Judicial Circuit and Union, Lumpkin, White and Towns Counties. The cost to Union is \$117,156.79 for Fiscal Year 2022-23.

The county has committed an additional \$20,000 to this agreement to have a Public Defender assigned locally five days a week.

Paris accepted an agreement with the Georgia Department of Corrections for six detainee work details over the next year at a cost of

\$49,318 per detail, totaling \$295,908.

When a work detail is locked down due to COVID or other reasons, Union County will not be billed, though when the work details are unavailable, Paris said the impact is great because the Union County Road and Maintenance Departments rely heavily on them.

The commissioner also accepted a lease agreement with Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce for the use of office space at 129 Union County Recreation Road in the Community Center for \$52,878.60 per year, with \$40,074.60 being considered in-kind.

Resolutions to appoint Jack McKechnie, Mary Ruth Cook and Daniel Davenport to the Board of Directors of the Urban Redevelopment Agency of Union County were accepted by Paris.

"This agency was created back in 2008-2009 with bond money for the construction of the Union County Community Center," Paris said. "The property that the Union County Community Center is located on is still in the name of the Urban Redevelopment Agency.

"The first step in getting this property transferred to Union County Government is to reappoint the board of directors."

This has been in the works since it was brought to the county's attention during a similar process by the Union County Governmental Finance Corporation to transfer to the county the old Bill Elliott property housing the Health Department, Sports Complex and more back in March.

George Burch and

Riccardo B. Rivas were both appointed to the Union County Board of Elections for the term Jan. 1, 2023, through Dec. 31, 2026. Burch was appointed by the Union County Republican Party, and Rivas by the Union County Democrat Party.

Paris accepted Shady Lane into the county maintenance road system, a short stretch of 924 feet.

A whopping 43 county business licenses were approved for short-term rentals. The high number of licenses issued in the last year or so has resulted in the county enacting a moratorium on short-term rental licensing, effective next week, as it works out an ordinance to regulate them.

The commissioner said County Project Administrator Renee Deibert is managing a 10-person committee to study short-term rentals and the impacts they have on the county and will be developing an ordinance to govern short-term rentals in Union.

Also in the meeting, the Union County Senior Center was recognized as a daytime activity center for seniors in Union County.

"The center offers various activities to keep the seniors of our county active, while also providing socialization opportunities," Paris said, noting activities like exercise classes, line dancing, arts and crafts, bingo, music "and other evidence-based programs for health and wellness."

"The Senior Center is also the home base of Meals on Wheels of Union County," he said.

Employees and volunteers of the Union County Senior Center were individually

recognized, as were each of the volunteers for the local Meals on Wheels Program.

Paris then remarked that this year's round of property revaluations had been completed by the Tax Assessor's Office, adding that property revaluations are primarily state-driven, not county driven.

"The average increase in actual sales value of 1,600 properties that were sold this last year in Union County ... was about a 22% increase in value from 2021 to 2022," he said, adding that the county tax assessor must comply with state laws regarding valuations.

Continuing, "If your property increased in that 20%-22% range or less, then your property tax should not go up. The only ones that should go up would be new properties, new construction, or (properties) that were (undervalued to start with).

"Those whose property valuations fall at or under a 22% increase will have no tax increase because we're going to lower the millage rate," Paris said, which should be reflected for the majority of property owners.

Someone asked whether valuations would decrease if property values dropped, to which Paris answered yes, valuations would decrease in that case.

The commissioner went on to say that Deibert is working with an eight-county consortium to study how to best manage the growth that's exploded recently in North Georgia.

"It's not just Union County that's having growing pains. It's all of these counties - Pickens, White, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Rabun, Towns (and one other)," Paris said.

Union Co. Schools...from Page 1A

Stanley Cup after losing the year before.

The Lightning were able to stage a comeback because they shifted their focus from the negativity of losing the previous year to attacking a new opportunity to win the next.

As with the Lightning, Gordon stressed that "we can't go backwards, we have to go forward," and he urged educators to "pull out your telescope and your microscope."

"Telescope, big-picture vision," he said. "Microscope, zoom-focus actions that you will take each day to realize the (big) picture in the telescope."

Illustrating his point, Gordon said a Navy Seal once told him in an interview that most guys who don't make it through Hell Week are too heavily focused on the end of the course, or the big picture. The ones that do make it just focus on making it to breakfast each day.

"Don't worry about tomorrow. We win today," he said. "Remember your vision and your mission; it will fuel you. Remember your purpose; it will drive you.

"Every job gets old. Everything gets monotonous. But purpose keeps it fresh. You need to rise and shine, not rise and whine," Gordon said, further advising school staff members not to dwell on circumstances outside of their control.

Another important point Gordon made was that a person cannot be stressed and grateful at the same time.

"So, if you're feeling blessed, you won't feel stressed," he said, adding that years ago he began taking

walks of gratitude in an effort to become a more positive person.

These walks of gratitude eventually became walks of prayer for him, and he began to change from the inside out, he said, which he credits with saving his marriage and his family.

"Weed the negative, feed the positive," added Gordon, saying that doing so will nourish the mind and soul. "If you don't have (a positive attitude), you can't share it."

Research at Duke University has shown that optimists work harder, get paid more, and are more likely to succeed in business and sports, Gordon said, "so often, what we believe determines what we create."

Gordon also mentioned a concept called "Collective Teaching Efficacy."

"It's the top factor in predicting student success, and here it is," Gordon said. "Do we believe that we can impact our students' lives? If we believe that we can impact students' lives, they wind up having extraordinary outcomes as a result of that collective belief."

So, how are educators to accomplish all this in light of the challenges and adversities they face today?

There's an internal battle going on every day for people's minds, Gordon said, noting that everyone should talk to themselves instead of listening to themselves, offering words of encouragement over listening to their doubts, fears and uncertainty.

"Your positive energy must be greater than all the negatives," he said. "Your faith

must be greater than all the doubt. That is essential."

Gordon concluded his presentation with a focus on three words: Love, Serve and Care.

When a person loves something, he or she is devoted to it so should "let love drive your discipline," Gordon said.

On the word "serve," he said that "we are here, as you know, to serve and make a difference; to inspire. The more we demonstrate commitment and service to others, we get that service and commitment back from others.

"And, finally, we show that we care. You give everything you are to help your students become all they're meant to be," said Gordon, adding that it was the teachers in his own life who made him what he is today.

remarking on the presentation, Superintendent John Hill said, "The view in the telescope as Jon Gordon referred to is (the Union County School System motto) 'Success for All,' regardless of all the craziness in the world and criticism that comes along with serving students these days."

"The microscope that Jon Gordon discussed represents all the small important steps that each one of us take daily progressing toward the goal of each student succeeding in life," Hill continued, adding that he hopes his staff will remember to "weed their garden."

Union County students return to classes on Friday, Aug. 12, and after Gordon's talk, educators will be ready to receive them with all the positivity they can bring to bear.

Foothills of Remembrance: Daffodil Garden Project



Anne Mitchell, Gordy Jones, Seth Lyn, Mark Noyd, Harvey Cohen, Grace Howard, Linda Jones, Gerry Gutenstein, Maggie Oliver

A new initiative of the Children's Memorial Daffodil Project has been created for the Northeast Georgia mountains. Called Foothills of Remembrance, it is designed to provide a locator map for the existing and future Children's Daffodil Gardens and includes Jasper, Ellijay (in process), Blue Ridge, Blairsville, Young Harris, and Hiawassee. The purpose of this project is to build a worldwide living memorial to forever remember the 1.5 million children who were murdered during the Holocaust.

Lloyd's Landing, in Hiawassee, is the site of the new Children's Daffodil Garden. Project partners include the daffodil garden director from the Georgia Holocaust Commission, members of the local Jewish community, the City of Hiawassee, Towns/Union Master Gardeners Association, and Mountain Beautification and Revitalization Association. Work has already begun to bring this special garden back to the area in a highly visible location within the city limits. The initial planting of 1,000 special

bulbs will take place in the fall. Each bulb planted represents a memorial to the Holocaust, a living memorial to those lost. A public dedication of the garden will be held, date to be announced.

Tax deductible donations for this project can be sent to Mountain Beautification and Revitalization Association (MBRA), a 501 c 3 organization. Please make checks payable to MBRA, marked for Daffodil Project and mail to PO Box 382, Young Harris Ga. 30582. For more information call 706 897-6515.

DDA discusses downtown events, upcoming Wi-Fi access

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board held a regular meeting on July 26 at City Hall to discuss various topics including the successful Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival, the new downtown public park and Wi-Fi on the square.

DDA Program Manager Darren Harper lauded the fact that, prior to the weekend-long festival that ran July 29-31, at least 80 vendors were expected to attend, plus multiple musical acts who entertained the masses as they tried a “snoot” or two of ‘shine.

Also offered was an update on the green space located behind City Hall. Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties and the local Rotary Club had previously donated picnic tables that were originally scheduled to be painted by local artists on July 16 before a rain check.

“The picnic tables are painted (now),” Harper said, though the more decorative designs that were set to go on the tables were nixed. “And also, I got to thinking that could be a big train wreck if you just turned people loose with paint cans, brushes and a table.”

That being said, work on the new park remains ongoing, with talks of potentially installing some ramps at the bridge for wheelchair accessibility, but there’s already a considerable crowd of folks enjoying the area.

“Overwhelmingly, people have been tickled at the fact that there is someplace to go for lunch downtown that’s in the shade. People use it,” Harper said, speculating that it would become even more popular once the stifling, muggy summer heat dies down.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe spoke on the upcoming availability of public Wi-Fi on the square, saying that as soon as BOAZ Media and Network Solutions received authorization, work could begin to set up a connection “in short order.”

“I think the deal was that somebody had to agree to let

them maintain it,” Rowe said. “I think that’s going to have to be a DDA approval, to let them maintain it, but I think we need to get a little more information from them on cost and whatnot.”

Harper and Rowe agreed to have a meeting with BOAZ to discuss the possibility of signing a contract, but more pressing was how the Wi-Fi would be paid for.

Some of the proceeds from downtown festivals will likely go toward funding, and Rowe said the Historical Society had already signaled that “they felt like they can absorb the additional \$25 in the telephone fee.”

“The goal is to have coverage for the core of the downtown so that visitors and locals will have quick access to upcoming events, merchant events and community events,” Harper said. “When opening their browser from their phones, it’ll direct them to a page with that sort of information.”

DDA Board Chair Robert Rogers suggested that the Downtown Development Authority begin to consider new projects since so many of 2022’s plans were beginning to wrap up.

In response, Board Member Megan Kimsey brought up the possibility of submitting a request for a grant, mentioned in a previous meeting, that would enrich the community.

As it turns out, Harper had already submitted two grant applications. One of them, in association with the Department of Agriculture, would provide additional funding for the development and enrichment of rural neighborhoods.

Another idea discussed was the possibility of putting tax incentives into place tied to employment rate and property investment.

“That would be a major benefit to anybody that’s expanding or moving in,” Rowe said. “People like Vincent’s (Restaurant) and some of the expansions that other businesses are doing here in town could possibly take advantage of that. If we could look into getting that designation, I think it would be a good thing for downtown.”

Kimsey, who is the daughter of Granddaddy Mimm’s



Darren Harper
DDA Program Manager

owner Tommy Townsend, suggested looking into an official events committee that could spread out the workload of festival planning between multiple people.

“It’s pretty much been just a few people doing all of it. I spent 25 hours a week on just (the Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival), plus my 40-hour-a-week job,” noted Kimsey, who said she would like to put more of those hours into spending time with her daughters.

“I feel like if we had a committee of (about) eight that made the decisions and brought them to the board, (then the board could vote and everything be handled),” she said. “I feel like that would take a lot of time and effort off of the key players that have been planning this (festival).”

The Music & Moonshine Festival was jointly planned by individuals from Granddaddy Mimm’s, Visit Downtown Blairsville, the Chamber of Commerce and the Historical Society as a replacement for the Green Bean Festival.

However, Kimsey said she felt many people got the wrong idea that the event was solely undertaken by the distillery, and that a wider-reaching committee could help dispel such notions moving forward.

Her committee suggestion was met with acceptance, and Harper brought up the potential of pulling members

Top 50 Honor ...from Page 1A

opposed to commercial projects such as the new Aldi food store or LongHorn Steakhouse.

“They looked at Advanced Digital Cable’s expansion of 100,000 square feet, Panel Built Inc.’s expansion at their Mauney Road facility, and Granddaddy Mimm’s Distilling Co. because they’re a manufacturer of agricultural products.”

The news was delivered

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings/times

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to solve their common problem and help others to recover from Alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Blairsville: Lutheran Church, 83 Earl Shelton: Monday 5:30 PM, open meeting, Friday Ladies noon meeting (open). Mountain Presbyterian Church, 2945 Hwy 76: Monday 7F PM, open meeting; Tuesday Ladies (closed) meeting at 7 PM, Wednesday 7 PM, open meeting; Saturday 8 AM, open meeting. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Hwy 76 next to Presbyterian Church: Tuesday 7 PM, Ladies Meeting; Wednesday noon, open meeting.

Young Harris: Sharp Memorial Methodist Church on College Campus: Tuesday 7 PM, Men’s Meeting.

Hiawassee: Methodist Church, 1139 Hwy 76: Wednesday, noon, open meeting. 1298 Jack Deyton Circle: Friday 7 PM, open meeting; Sunday 7 PM, open meeting.

For more meeting info, call 828-837-4440.

in an article published last month by Site Selection’s Senior Editor Gary Daughters, titled “Believing Who You Are: When it comes to rural economic development, Georgia’s the word.”

“Successful economic development requires a focused commitment that includes support for an aggressive, well-funded and professionally staffed economic development authority,” Daughters said.

He goes on to say that “rural Georgia clearly benefits from the state’s overall business climate, ranked tops (out of all 50 states) by Site Selection eight years running, a streak that only ended with a second-place finish in 2021.”

As to what makes Union County unique from a development standpoint, the article quotes Gov. Brian Kemp as saying, “You’ve got to have willing partners at the local level. You just can’t have a community saying, ‘Hey, come bring a project to my area.’”

And local Development Authority stakeholders are anything but passive, as attested to by the level of industry here: Advanced Digital Cable, Panel Built Inc., Corrugated Replacements Inc., Granddaddy Mimm’s Distilling Company, Aviagen Inc., and Cobb-Vantress – just to name a few.

“I’m proud of the Development Authority and what it has accomplished,” Union County Development Authority Chairman Scott Carter said. “The board is made up of some very smart and experienced members who, along with Mitch Grigg’s input, have made Union County a business-friendly place for entrepreneurs to start their businesses and raise their families.”

“None of that would be possible without our local government leaders, Commissioner Lamar Paris and Mayor Jim Conley, who have always been ready and willing to work with the Development Authority, the state and Georgia Department of Economic Development, and Georgia EMC/Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.”

For his part, Paris said

he was incredibly proud of the local economic development professionals and volunteers as well as “our community that have all contributed to making Union County such a special place to live, work and play.”

“I was also very proud that Gov. Brian Kemp and his wife (Marty) chose to come to Union County (Aug. 4) and remind everyone what all he has done for Georgia with the help of State Rep. Stan Gunter, State Sen. Steve Gooch and many others,” Paris said. “Without the support of the business community, this state and this county would not be prospering like it is.”

“While some may want to stop growth, we prefer to try to manage growth to a reasonable level, and that is going to require a lot of planning and work. God has presented us with one of the most beautiful counties in Georgia, if not the Southeast. It is now our job to try and make the best of it.”

Adding to these sentiments, Mayor Conley said that the governor’s continued outreach to rural communities in Georgia “has shown positive results throughout the state, and the impact on our small mountain community has been remarkable.”

“It goes without saying that we are delighted that the City of Blairsville has been recognized as an example of what a rural town can achieve with a local business such as Granddaddy Mimm’s Distilling Co.,” Conley said.

In addition to Granddaddy Mimm’s, Daughters also mentioned INSPIRABUILD, a company that recently moved its operations back to this area, as a qualifying project for the Top 50 title, according to Griggs.

“We certainly want to acknowledge Gary’s work and Site Selection Magazine’s work to do this analysis and ultimately recognize Blairsville/Union County as a Top 50 performing community,” Griggs said.

“Everybody works awfully hard, but we take our responsibilities as a lead economic development agency in the county very, very seriously.”



Kemp Visit...from Page 1A

decisions in consultation with family doctors over compulsion via government decree.

These actions helped keep Georgia's economy not just afloat but growing as those of other states faltered, resulting in a positive financial environment in the Peach State after COVID fears and mitigations initially depressed economic and other activity by the public.

Due to this business-

friendly approach and conservative budgetary practices in uncertain economic times, revenues have continued to flow into Georgia at a phenomenal rate over the last couple of years.

In turn, the remarkable economic success of Georgia has contributed to a state budgetary surplus, which Kemp worked with the Georgia Legislature to return to residents in May in the form of one-time

\$500 tax refund checks to assist households struggling with rampant inflation.

And Kemp was quick to give credit where it was due, noting Georgians' incredible resilience in weathering the pandemic, civil unrest and a contentious presidential election since the initial nationwide COVID shutdowns of March 2020, all while contributing to the success of the state.

He also touted his office's announcement last week of yet another extension of the state's temporary gas tax suspension,

which he first enacted in March to secure some of the lowest gas prices in the nation during an ongoing period of sky-high inflation and fuel costs.

Indeed, those in attendance seemed to appreciate being able to pocket more of their hard-earned money, especially as the country enters a recession amid 40-year-high inflation, likely soon-to-be increased federal taxes and spending, and plenty more economic uncertainty ahead.

The governor touched

on many other topics during his visit, including: the lives of children that will be saved by Georgia's Heartbeat Bill; his healthy respect for police and adequately funding their crime-fighting efforts; the Election Integrity Act of 2021 as shoring up election security; being beholden to residents and not a national agenda, the legacy media or "woke corporations"; the importance of safeguarding values and promoting opportunities vital to Georgia families; making sure churches stay open

in the state, regardless of political pressure, as has been seen during the pandemic; improving education for all Georgia children; and the many differences between himself and his gubernatorial opponent.

After delivering his well-received remarks and imploring people to encourage everyone they know to vote in the upcoming election, Kemp took photos with constituents and spoke with folks about their hopes and concerns for the state.

Station 5 Open House...from Page 1A



The Suches community turned out in force for the inaugural Fire Station No. 5 Open House on Saturday, getting up-close and personal with all the fire station equipment and know-how.

Photo by Mark Smith

in and learn about what we do in hopes of inspiring some membership.

"Before, we didn't have a whole lot of kids and younger folks. It was mainly the elderly part of our community, which we love, but we wanted to try to draw out some of the kids and some of the younger adults."

So, Station 5 volunteers set up demonstration tables in the main garage, with cardiac resuscitation devices on display, emergency evacuation plans for families, and basic information for people to peruse. And the volunteers stayed on hand to answer questions, of which there were many.

They also raffled off a beautiful Henry .22 carbine rifle, among other things that were donated by local businesses for the open house.

And the Air Methods Union General Hospital-based helicopter made an appearance, to the amazement of many.

Pruitt said the volunteer fire service is suffering all over

and the Suches Fire Rescue Service is no different.

"We've got to meet our mission objectives, and if we don't have enough people, then the people that are left have to make up a way to fill it," he said, adding that years ago they had over 30 volunteers, but today they're down to about 15.

Pruitt said there are two levels of firefighters: suppression firefighters and support firefighters.

Suppression firefighters are the fully trained people that enter immediate danger of life and health (IDLH) environments, like a burning structure. Support firefighters perform many of the functions outside an IDLH environment that allow suppression firefighters to do their job safely.

Some of those support functions might be driving apparatus such as tankers and engines, operating the pumps, or helping to refill tankers on

scene where there is no close-by fire hydrant.

However, all are trained to administer basic first aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Volunteers are also familiarized with how an automated external defibrillator works.

Pruitt said about 90% of the calls in the Suches area are medical calls and search & rescue calls, since most of the Appalachian Trail that runs through Union County goes through the Suches area.

Of course, fire service volunteers do a lot more than just run into burning buildings. They are an indispensable asset to their communities and part of a brotherhood of folks that stands ready to jump in and help neighbors through tough situations.

Being a firefighter is a very rewarding occupation, and Lt. Pruitt stands ready to help anybody interested in joining. For more information, call Fire Station No. 1 in Blairsville at 706-439-6095.



Several hundred residents attended Gov. Brian Kemp's campaign stop in Union County last week at the Community Center.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard