

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Former hospital CEO, physicians indicted in federal court

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton have been brought up on federal charges in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, Gainesville Division.

The three men have been indicted as part of Operation SCOPE, "for illegally prescribing and obtaining thousands of doses of prescription pain medications outside the usual course of professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose," per a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

A federal grand jury handed up the 212-count

indictment on Wednesday, April 4, and the document was unsealed on Friday, April 6.

The Gowder brothers and Dr. Heaton were expected to appear in federal court in Gainesville after press time on Monday, April 9, to be arraigned on the charges.

"These defendants allegedly abused their positions as medical professionals to obtain illegitimately thousands of doses of prescription pain medications and now face serious federal charges," said U.S. Attorney Byung J. "BJay" Pak. "The Department of Justice is committed to fighting the opioid epidemic through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of licensed medical practitioners who abuse their positions of trust to

engage in illegal conduct."

Robert J. Murphy, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division, also commented on the indictment.

"Americans rely on healthcare providers, many of whom are medical doctors, to use their training to help patients and to 'do no harm,'" said Murphy. "The physicians and the hospital CEO in this case violated the law and betrayed their responsibilities by unlawfully obtaining and dispensing prescription opioids."

"The moment these individuals decided to engage in this criminal behavior, they became nothing more than traditional drug traffickers. DEA, its law enforcement partners and the U.S. Attorney's



Mike Gowder

Office are committed to stemming the tide against the current opioid epidemic."

The following information comes directly from the April 6 news release.



Dr. David Gowder

According to U.S. Attorney Pak, the indictment, and other information presented in court:

From 2011 to 2015 John Michael "Mike" Gowder was the Chief Executive Officer



Dr. James Heaton

of Union General Hospital in Blairsville. Dr. David Gowder was the Emergency Room Director at Union General, and Dr. James Heaton operated

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Tallent to retire after leading United Community Bank for decades

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

Under Jimmy Tallent's leadership, a single community bank founded in Blairsville grew to become the third largest Georgia-based bank and a \$12.3 billion holding company with more than 150 banking locations spread across four Southern states.

Now, after a nearly 35-year career that began at the Union County Bank in 1984, the chief executive officer of United Community Banks Inc. is ready to retire.

"I had two goals in mind that I put in place two years ago," said Tallent. "One is, I wanted to see this company back in a very strong position financially, and we're there."

"Secondly, I wanted to make sure that we had a senior management team in place that can carry this company



Jimmy Tallent

forward for well into the future. Honestly, both of those boxes are checked. United is in a great, great place today, so the time is just right."

Tallent will remain in his current position until June 30, at which point he will transition to leading the company's board of directors as chairman.

He will continue to reside in Blairsville and work out of his offices here, though he said that, nowadays, technology has made it easy to work anywhere he may be needed.

"This is where it was birthed, and I'm very proud of that," said Tallent of the company. "It's not so much about being in any one location. We have a videoconferencing system that's used all the time every day."

Known as "The Bank That Service Built," UCBI holds fast to a specific creed that emphasizes the customer-first approach at United Community Banks, and Tallent believes strongly in what he calls the Golden Rule of Banking, "treating our customers the way we would want to be treated."

He has returned to this rule time and again over the

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Eric England, patriot and Union County native, passes away

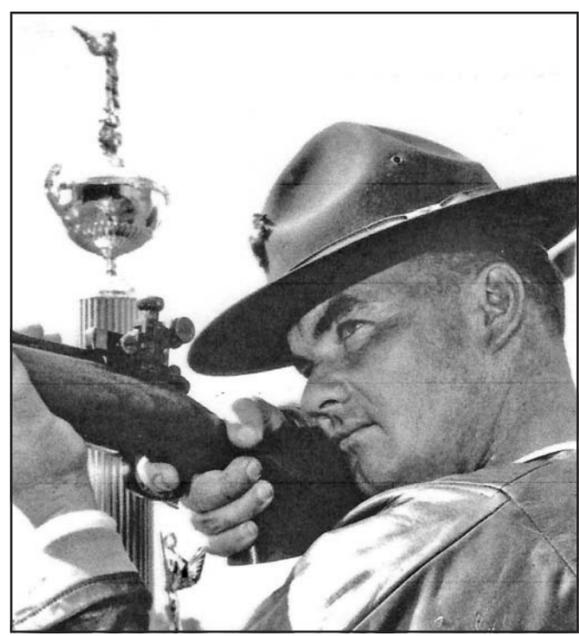
By Shawn Jarrard
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Real life American hero and world-renowned marksman Eric England, 84, passed away on Saturday, April 7.

England, a retired Master Sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps, was considered by many to be the world's greatest marksman, though he embraced his legacy with thoughtful humility.

The Union County native had 98 confirmed combat kills and many more unconfirmed as a scout sniper in Vietnam, thereby saving an untold number of American lives during combat.

In December 2017, the U.S. Marine Corps posted a video interview with England to YouTube titled "A Sniper's Distance."



Eric England

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Pinwheels in place for Child Abuse Awareness Month

By Shawn Jarrard
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Driving around the Downtown Blairsville Square this month, notice the 291 blue pinwheels stuck down in the lawn of the Historic Union County Courthouse.

The pinwheels are a national symbol of child abuse prevention, and each one of the 291 pinwheels represents a child advocated for in 2017 by volunteers with Enotah CASA.

These children were abused or neglected in some way, enough to require legal intervention in their best interests.

Enotah CASA is a nonprofit organization with the goal of ensuring that every child has a safe, permanent home. They do this by providing specially trained volunteers known as CASAs,

or Court Appointed Special Advocates.

With the best interests of the children in mind, CASA volunteers advocate for the needs of abused and neglected kids in the custody of the Department of Family and Children Services, and throughout lengthy legal processes in the Enotah Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court.

Ninety-two of the 291 children who received help from Enotah CASA volunteers in 2017 were children of Union County, with the remainder coming from either Towns, Fannin or White counties.

The blue pinwheels will be on display in Blairsville through April, and they serve to commemorate April as Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and Union County

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris met with Enotah CASA Executive Director Linda D'Angelo on Tuesday, April 4, to jointly sign a proclamation in recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month.

"For me, I would speak to the families of these children, and just hope that if they're in a situation, that they'd reach out to help themselves before they would end up losing a child," said Mayor Conley. "There's help out there for all of us. It's a matter of reaching out."

The commissioner remarked Enotah CASA's seconded and also urged every able resident to do his or her part in showing support for troubled families in the community.

"We've got a lot of great programs in the community and a lot of opportunities to donate and help people, but

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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Enotah CASA Executive Director Linda D'Angelo and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley on the Downtown Blairsville Square.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

City council gives Blairsville Police Department part-timers a raise

By Shawn Jarrard
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Assistant Editor

The Blairsville Police Department and Union County Sheriff's Office share a unique bond - all city officers are deputized, and a number of full-timers in each department work part-time for the other.

In recognition of this above-average working relationship, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason attended the regular meeting of the Blairsville City Council on Tuesday, April 3.

As an action item in the meeting, the council hired another of Sheriff Mason's deputies, Ricky Henry, to come aboard as a part-time



Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carrroll, BPD Officer and UCSO Deputy Gary Hooper and Union County Sheriff Mack Mason at the April 3 meeting of the Blairsville City Council.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Stockwell arrested after string of burglaries

By Shawn Jarrard
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Assistant Editor

A man registered as a sex offender in Union County is behind bars in Polk County, Tennessee, for burglarizing an elementary school, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Kevin Stockwell, 39, is also wanted for burglary in Fannin County, and the Union County Sheriff's Office wants him, too, for a couple of Blairsville burglaries, per UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn.

"On Jan. 31, we received a report of a burglary at a residence off Jonica Gap Road here in Union County," said



Kevin Stockwell Lt. Osborn. "The victims were part-time residents, and a neighbor that watches their

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PANTHERS BASEBALL

Apr 10 @ Fannin 5:55 PM

Apr 13 vs. Fannin (DH) 5 PM

SOCCER

Apr 10 vs. Tri County 4:30 PM

American Legion Charity Golf Tournament April 14th

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Blairsville Garden Club Landscape Seminar

April 27th

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CONFEDERATE MEMORIAL DAY APRIL 28TH

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