

Physicians...from Page 1A

a family practice clinic in Blairsville.

Mike Gowder and Dr. David Gowder allegedly conspired together to illegally obtain oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam.

Dr. David Gowder unlawfully obtained these controlled substances from patients that he treated at the hospital. He also illegally issued prescriptions for oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam in the names of his and Mike Gowder's family members, existing hospital patients, and fictitious patients.

The prescriptions were issued outside the usual course of professional practice, and Mike Gowder

and Dr. David Gowder knew the drugs obtained with the prescriptions were not intended for the persons for whom the prescriptions were allegedly written.

The drugs obtained with the illegal prescriptions were not for any legitimate medical purpose.

Dr. David Gowder would direct Union General Hospital employees to fill the prescriptions at local pharmacies. He would provide cash to the employees to pay for the drugs and would direct the employees to return the drugs they obtained to him.

Mike Gowder used his position as the chief administrator at Union General

Hospital to fire hospital employees who tried to expose Dr. David Gowder's illegal prescribing and obtaining of oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam. He also used his position to intimidate other employees into concealing Dr. David Gowder's unlawful acquisition of controlled substances.

Between April 2013 and April 2015, Dr. David Gowder issued at least 19 illegal prescriptions for oxycodone pills, 21 illegal prescriptions for hydrocodone pills, and five illegal prescriptions for alprazolam pills, including by forging the names of other physicians.

Dr. Heaton illegally prescribed oxycodone and other controlled substances to Mike Gowder, Mike Gowder's family members, and others, knowing that the prescriptions were issued outside the usual course of professional practice and that the pills obtained with the prescriptions had no legitimate medical purpose.

Dr. Heaton violated standards of medical practice by prescribing thousands of doses of oxycodone and other controlled substances to Mike Gowder, Mike Gowder's family members, and others without adequately documenting the medical need for the prescriptions in patient files and without monitoring patient abuse of the pills they obtained.

Mike Gowder obtained oxycodone by fraud, subterfuge and deception by filling the

illegal prescriptions that Dr. Heaton issued for oxycodone at different pharmacies in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina in an effort to conceal the large numbers of oxycodone pills that Dr. Heaton was prescribing to him.

Between May 1, 2013, and June 16, 2015, Dr. Heaton wrote at least 74 illegal prescriptions for oxycodone to Mike Gowder.

In addition to filling the prescriptions at pharmacies in Georgia, Mike Gowder often travelled to North Carolina and Tennessee to fill multiple prescriptions a month at pharmacies in those states.

On multiple occasions, Dr. Heaton wrote two prescriptions for oxycodone for Mike Gowder on the same day. On other occasions, Mike Gowder would travel to North Carolina to fill one prescription and Tennessee to fill the second prescription to conceal the fact that multiple prescriptions were written to him on the same day.

Oxycodone and hydrocodone are powerful pain medications that are listed as controlled substances

under federal law because each has a high potential for psychological and physical abuse and dependence.

Oxycodone, which may be combined with acetaminophen, is sold generically under brand names including Percocet, Endocet, Oxycontin and Roxicodone.

Hydrocodone is sold generically or under brand names including Lortab, Vicodin and Norco.

Alprazolam is commonly prescribed to treat anxiety. It is sold generically and under the brand name Xanax.

John Michael Gowder, 60, Dr. David Gowder, 61, and Dr. James Heaton, 61, all of Blairsville, are expected to be arraigned April 9, 2018, at the federal courthouse in Gainesville.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment only contains charges. The defendants are presumed innocent of the charges, and it will be the government's burden to prove each defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration,

and members of the Union County Sheriff's Office, Cherokee County (North Carolina) Sheriff's Office, Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, and Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task Force.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys William L. McKinnon Jr. and Laurel R. Boatright are prosecuting the case.

The *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* reached out to Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley following the April 6 federal indictment announcement.

Langley's office presented evidence last year for the local indictment of Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder, and Dr. James Heaton, and the district attorney has been in contact with U.S. Attorney Pak.

"We're going to work closely with the federal prosecutors as they work their case and we work our cases," said Langley. "They are not mutually exclusive. Both cases can be prosecuted. But certainly, we're going to coordinate our work with the federal prosecutors."

Tallent...from Page 1A

years to build a large network of community-focused banks offering a wide variety of financial services to customers in four states.

"Money's the same color at all banks, interest rates are about the same," said Tallent. "It all boils down to people and the service."

"And I'm just so proud of our people, the passion they have in treating our customers the way that they would want to be treated, with a servant heart in a service business. That's critical to the success."

As Tallent points out, UCBI has succeeded in maintaining a three-way balancing act between investors who put their money and faith in the company, the 2,100 employees who work for the bank to carry out its customer-forward mission, and the customers themselves, who make it all possible by utilizing the bank's many services.

"My life has been richly blessed by the people that I've had the great fortune to work with and get to know over this long ride," said Tallent.

From here, UCBI will forge ahead with its community-focused business model, with aims to continue investing in growth markets and offering specialized lending lines, all while paying close attention to mobile and online banking trends.

Today, more than 150,000 UCBI banking customers are enrolled in online banking, up 14 percent from a year ago, while online and mobile banking usage is up 63 percent year-to-date.

United has invested about \$2 million in mobile banking technology in the last year alone, as the trend of online banking continues to skyrocket.

Alongside news of Tallent's retirement, UCBI

announced on April 2 that Lynn Harton, president and CEO of United's banking subsidiary, will be filling Tallent's considerable shoes as CEO of the publically traded holding company following

his retirement in June.

"My No. 1 priority will be to assist Lynn in any way that I can, to help him in any way that I can," said Tallent on his upcoming role as UCBI board chair.

United Community Banks, Inc. announces CEO Succession Plan

United Community Banks, Inc. (NASDAQ:UCBI) (United) announced today that, after almost 35 years of service, its Chief Executive Officer, Jimmy Tallent, will retire from his current position effective June 30, 2018. Mr. Tallent will move into a new role as Executive Chairman of United's Board of Directors. Lynn Harton, President and CEO of United's banking subsidiary, will become CEO of United. As Executive Chairman, Mr. Tallent will continue to focus on board governance, strategic planning, and corporate development.

Mr. Tallent has been with United since 1984. Under his dedicated stewardship, it has expanded from a single location with \$40 million in assets to a four-state regional community bank with \$12.3 billion in assets. Mr. Tallent's strategic vision and commitment to culture and corporate responsibility have been instrumental in United's success.

"I have been committed to seeing United become a market leading institution and regain the strength we have enjoyed for decades. Today, the Bank is thriving and it has one of the most capable management teams in the industry. Lynn has done an excellent job as Chief Executive Officer of the Bank, and the time is right for me to reduce my role," said Mr. Tallent. "I am grateful to the shareholders, the management team, and the Board of Directors for their confidence in me and proud of what we



Lynn Harton

have accomplished together. The future is bright for United, and I look forward to serving in my new role as Executive Chairman."

"I am honored to lead this organization into its next chapter," said Harton. "We have a solid foundation, and are well-positioned for continued growth and success. It has been an honor to work alongside Jimmy for the past several years, and I look forward to continuing to serve United together in our new roles."

Harton was named CEO of United Community Bank in August 2017 and was elected to the Board of Directors in February 2015. Prior to joining United in 2012, Harton served in executive capacities with various financial institutions. These include serving as CEO of The South Financial Group, and Chief Credit Officer for both Regions Financial Corporation and Union Planters Corporation. He began his career with a twenty-year stint at BB&T. (NAP11.27)CA

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



March 30, 2018
In Honor of
Terry Meeks
Last Chemo Treatment
by UC Historical Society

In Honor of
Ethelene Dyer Jones
Genealogist
by Eva and Jim Wike

April 6, 2018
In Honor of
Shawn and Joy Foster
5th Anniversary
by Joy Foster

April 13, 2018
In memory of
Fred L. Miller Birthday
by Lorraine Miller

April 19, 2018
In memory of
Virginia B. Meeks
Anniversary
by Ginger and Terry Meeks

April 28, 2018
In memory of
Dollie C. Meeks Birthday
by Ginger and Terry Meeks

April 28, 2018
In loving memory of
Lori Michelle Nuce
Happy Birthday
"Forever in our hearts
and memories"
by Mom, Dad, Bette Lou,
and Maryann

Bell ringing information
at 706-745-5493