

Indictments...from Page 1A

one of his 2015 arrests.

The investigation that followed Dr. Gowder's Fannin arrest was a joint operation between the Union County Sheriff's Office and several other agencies from the federal, state and local levels, including the DEA Tactical Diversion Squad,

the DEA Digital Forensics Lab, the Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, and the Cherokee County NC Sheriff's Office.

Along with Dr. James Heaton, five Gowder relatives were arrested on Feb. 4, 2016, as a result of that initial investigation: Mike Gowder, who at the time

was CEO of Union General Hospital Inc.; Dr. David Gowder, Mike's brother; Gail Gowder, Mike's wife; Virginia Lou Harkins, Mike and David's sister; and Jamie Lee Harkins, daughter of Lou Harkins and niece of David and Mike.

The Union County Sheriff's Office served two search warrants that Feb. 4, one at Union General Hospital and the other at Dr. Heaton's office, in order to obtain both physical and digital files and patient records to further their investigation, according to authorities.

Initial charges for the six individuals arrested on Feb. 4, 2016, included:

Mike Gowder, three counts fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

Dr. James Heaton, 41 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substance.

Gail Gowder, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance.

Dr. David Gowder, seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substance, 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance.

Virginia Lou Harkins, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

Jamie Lee Harkins, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

Prayer...from Page 1A

to First Baptist's stage to lead those gathered in prayer over various sectors of public life in the United States of America, including elected office, the military, and families.

"In just a few short days on May 4, 2017, Christians will unite together in prayer all over our country to pray for America in observance of the 66th annual National Day of Prayer," said Sharon Morrison, who organizes the event every year with her husband Richard.

Continued Morrison: "Here are a few thoughts to remember as you pray for America. No. 1, let's pray for lost souls. I think that's the No. 1 thing that we need in America."

Morrison also called for prayers of protection, for God's presence, for peace, for provision, and prayers for proficiency.

"We need those in power to regularly ask for the Lord's help to make it proficient in government," said Morrison. "That includes understanding what it is and what it is not, the proper role of government."

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley attended the county meeting to speak on the upcoming National Day of Prayer.

"I'd just like to say that I'm so grateful for Mr. and Mrs. Morrison, who do all the work in preparation for this National Day of Prayer," said Mayor Conley. "And there's a lot of work to it, believe me, preparing for this."

Several pastors joined the Morrisons and Mayor Conley in the April county meeting for a group photo



Sharon Morrison, one of the annual organizers of the National Day of Prayer events in Blairsville.

following the signing of the proclamation.

Also in the meeting, Commissioner Paris signed proclamations designating April as Child Abuse Prevention Month, April 4 as National Service Recognition Day, April 21 and April 22 as White Cane Days, April 26 as Confederate Memorial Day, April as Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and that May 2017 should be established as Drug Court Month.

Furthermore, Paris signed a resolution giving the new finance director for Union County, Laura Driskell, full administrative powers over county accounts and the county payroll system.

The commissioner also signed an agreement for the Union County Sheriff's Office to patrol various U.S. Forest Service roads for the reimbursed amount of no more than \$2,640 for FY2017.

Also, Commissioner Paris signed an agreement for "Indigent Defense Services" between the public defender office of the Enotah Judicial Circuit and Union County, Lumpkin County, White County and Towns County, with a cost to Union County in the amount of \$88,649.16 for fiscal year 2016-2017.

The last item of official county business in that April 20 meeting was the commissioner's purchase of the ORION Disaster Pre-Planning & Damage Assessment Solution Software, which will cost the county \$2,625 for the first year and \$1,875 to renew automatically each year hereafter.

This program will be a tool to help county employees accurately populate FEMA forms that will be necessary for reimbursement in the event of future disaster declarations.

Recovery...from Page 1A

This year, three applicants were awarded various grant amounts, ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. The recipients this year were Roger Lampert with SMART Recovery, Shanna Prather with New Hope Counseling and Joe Dyer with Freedom Ministries.

SMART Recovery stands for Self-Management and Recovery Training, and is a program that offers a safe place to discuss behavioral patterns, addiction triggers and any type of behaviors that might be self-harming or harmful to others.

All proceeds from the grant Lampert received will go toward assisting and aiding those who struggle with addiction and providing a stable learning environment for those individuals.

Lampert hosts SMART Recovery classes at the Red Cross Building in Young Harris on the second and third Wednesdays of each month, at 7 p.m. He also holds classes in Blairsville at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center on the first and third Mondays of each month at 7 p.m.

New Hope Counseling is an office committed to the care of substance abusers and the necessary steps needed to begin the recovery process, with an emphasis on DUI offenders.

Prather, administrator for New Hope Counseling, said that her grant would be used to assist those who are unable to pay for care, and to further extend the reach of the program to aid in the rehabilitation process for substance abusers throughout Union County.

"We are a state-certified DUI education treatment provider," said Prather. "We also have a DUI school. Essentially what we do is take all people who struggle, but our specialty is DUI and anyone who struggles with substance abuse."

"We have an indigent fund because a lot of people who struggle with substance abuse don't have the funds to get the treatment they need."

"We do what we do because we love to help people. It's the greatest thing in the world. It doesn't even feel like a job."

Unlike SMART Recovery and New Hope Counseling, Freedom Ministries is a nondenominational, Christ-centered recovery program for both men and women who are currently struggling or are recovering from drug and

alcohol abuse.

This organization is based heavily on a 12-step program that incorporates community involvement, meetings and assignments to assist individuals in returning to a productive life.

According to Joe Dyer, this non-profit organization would not be possible without the continuous help of the county through the yearly Union County Alcohol and Drug Rehab Grant.

"Freedom ministries is a Christ-centered drug and alcohol program that we've been doing here in the county for more than eight years now," said Dyer. "We have two hour classes on Monday, and we're going to be doing a two-hour

class on Saturday.

"We work closely with drug court. The majority of our students are associated with drug court."

"We're excited about what's been going on. Drug court has really been a blessing for this community. It's really changed the attitude in this community about recovery. That's what we need, recovery."

"This grant is 90 percent of what makes it possible for us to do what we do, so it means a lot to us."

Those interested in applying for the grant next year can begin doing so mid-summer, and can pick up an application at the Union County Commissioner's Office.

CLARIFICATION

The North Georgia News reported in an article that appeared in the April 12, 2017, edition, that the City of Blairsville would be purchasing water and sewer from Notla Water Authority for a commercial property on Pat Haralson Drive. Following publication of the article, the city reached out to clarify that it will only be purchasing water from Notla, and will continue to provide city sewer to the property.