

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Firewise initiative spreading fire safety in county

News Special  
North Georgia News

Residents of Flat Rock Ridge Road have joined the elite safety ranks of more than 1,400 communities in 42 states – their neighborhood has been designated a “Firewise Community.”

The U.S. Forest Service and the Georgia Forestry Commission presented the Flat Rock Ridge Road Homeowners Association its recognition as a Firewise Community on Saturday, June 17.

“Thank you for embracing the Firewise USA program,” said Mike Davis that Saturday, offering words of congratulations.

Davis is the USFS Fire Management Officer for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest.

“By becoming the second Firewise Community in Union County to receive this national recognition, along with the Spring Cove Homeowners Association, you will no doubt encourage others to become involved in this process,” continued Davis. “With your local, state and federal fire management agencies gathered here today, it should be obvious that this is extremely important to us all.”

“We applaud your efforts in bringing Firewise mitigation techniques to your community. The work you have done and

will continue to do in the future will not only help provide protection to you and your neighbors, but to firefighters as well.”

Community representatives for the project were Fred Faist, Bill Lynch, Mickey Ciavola and Pat and Sonya Springer.

The local fire department representative was Union County Fire Chief David Dyer.

USFS representatives were Mike Davis, Jason Demas and Dequincy Gordon.

Tony Harkins represented the Georgia Forestry Commission, and

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The folks on Flat Rock Ridge Road are Firewise. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

## Gowder indicted 32 times in Towns County

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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April 1, 2015, was a huge break for federal, state and local investigators.

That's when Blairsville's Dr. David Gowder was arrested in Blue Ridge on charges of first-degree forgery and obtaining dangerous drugs by fraud following his arrest by the Zell Miller Drug Task Force.

It opened the door to a regional and multi-state investigation of prescription fraud and forgery. Other arrests would follow, and more Gowder family members were alleged to have been a part of

an elaborate scheme to obtain several thousand opioids by using fraudulent prescriptions.

Another doctor, James Heaton, was linked to the alleged scheme.

Last week, on Page 1A in the July 5th editions of the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald*, a story indicating arrest warrants four years or older were drying up in the system in the Mike Gowder, Dr. James Heaton cases in Union, Towns and White counties, was inaccurate.

A Towns County Grand Jury handed up a 32-count indictment against former Union General Hospital CEO Mike



Jeff Langley, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney

Gowder on July 5.

More indictments are expected this week, and possibly even more down the road.

To clarify inaccurate elements in last week's story, O.C.G.A. 17-3-1 provides that felonies four years or older cannot be prosecuted with the exceptions of murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, aggravated sodomy, aggravated child molestation, and aggravated sexual battery.

Applying this statute to these felony prescription drug cases, some of the arrest warrants date back to crimes allegedly committed in 2012,

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## Pro golfer tees up at Butternut Creek



Wyatt Larkin

By Lily Avery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Butternut Creek Golf Course, with its breath-taking views and Kennesaw State University golfer, Larkin has been enjoying the beauty of Butternut Creek for quite some time now, coming to tee off for both leisure and practice.

Recent winner of the 2017 Yamaha Atlanta Open and Kennesaw State University golfer, Larkin has been enjoying the beauty of Butternut Creek for quite some time now, coming to tee off for both leisure and practice.

“I’ve been playing golf here at Butternut Creek since I was six years old,” said Larkin. “I was born in Florida but we came up here. It’s been a home

course for a long time.”

During his childhood, Larkin's family moved to North Georgia from Bradenton, Florida, a move that might seem controversial for a young golfer, since Florida is a golf mecca. Nevertheless, the family moved to Morganton and soon Larkin was frequenting Butternut Creek even more so than before.

“Basically, my mom and dad wanted to get away from Florida even though that was a questionable move since there's all the golf in the world down there,” said Larkin. “But, they wanted to get to the mountains where it was beautiful.”

“So, thank God for this golf course right here in Union County. Without it, and everybody here, and all of the

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## Chamber celebrates Independence Day

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Thousands of patriots gathered to watch fireworks punctuate the night sky over Meeks Park on Tuesday, July 4.

Residents and visitors to the county parked inside the park, across the street at North Georgia Technical College, at the First United Methodist Church of Union County, in the parking lot of Walmart and at various places along Georgia 515.

The explosive display, hosted yearly by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, could be seen for miles, and acted as a fitting celebration for the nation's 241st birthday.

“It never escapes me the significance of the day,” said Chamber President Regina Allison. “If you think back 241 years, these people pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to stand

together and form a new nation.

“That’s just awesome when you think about it, all that they endured and all that they went through so we could be here today celebrating what they did for us.

“To take that a step further, all those that have served in the military, past and present, I think of the fireworks show as a way to honor them, too, because without them, there would be no independence.”

Each year for nearly a decade, the fireworks display over Meeks Park has gotten bigger and better.

In recent years, the continued improvement has come in large part thanks to the presenting sponsor, WoodmenLife, which supplies the \$1,000 prize money for the annual raffle.

The raffle offers members of the community a great way to support the chamber's efforts to put on a fireworks show each year, as



2017 Fireworks over Meeks Park. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

proceeds from the raffle go directly toward funding the shows.

This year's raffle winner was none other than Donna Guess, whose restaurant, Jim's Smokin' Que, supported the raffle in a unique way in 2017

by offering a buy one, get one free round at Pigs Gone Amuk Mini Golf.

Another unique feature of this year's fireworks show was the availability of vendors at North Georgia Tech, such as

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## Canning plant turns 10, open for regular season

By Lily Avery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

After a booming pre-opening and tour at the Union County Farmers Market on July 1, the Union County Canning Plant officially opened for business bright and early on Thursday, July 6 for a full season of canning.

And not only is the canning plant open to the public, but it is also celebrating its 10th year of existence, and the seventh year at the Union County Canning Plant.

Back in 2007, Patrick Fix and Market Manager Mickey Cummings began in the old canning plant and the rest, as they say, is history.

“Our first day opening up the canning plant, there was a constant flow of traffic,” said Cummings. “It just seems to keep growing year after year, along with the Farmers Market, and it's something we hope to continue to see happen



Shirley Dyer canning fresh green beans. Photo/Lily Avery

as the years pass.”

With dozens of jars already filling the canner, the plant comes to life bright and early in the morning, full of

people from the start with only an increased amount as the day wears on.

Last year, more than

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## Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In returns to Hiawassee

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Ladies and gentlemen, rev your engines and clear your weekend schedule – the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In is coming back to town.

The Ninth Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In will be rolling into the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee this week, featuring plenty of classic cars and countless other festivities.

Enjoy three fun-filled days of good old mountain hillbilly fun. See a Pioneer Village, real moonshine still in the works, mountain crafts, and plenty of hot classic cars, trucks, bikes, rat rods and more.

“This gets bigger and better every year,” said Cruiz-In organizer Rakes Parrish.

Running from Thursday, July 13, through Saturday, July 15, the Cruiz-In promises



Get ready for the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In, at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds July 13 through July 15.

a weekend of fun for the entire family.

“This is really bringing some people in from far off places to the Towns County community that probably would never have come here,” said Parrish. “I have plenty of

people from Texas, Illinois, Ohio and other states that are further away. One couple is driving all the way from Phoenix, Arizona.

“So, it's bringing a lot of long distance people,”

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