

4-H...from Page 1A

to interfere with a neighbor's privacy.

"In 17 years they've changed locations 10 times," Commissioner Paris said. "To date they have seen approximately 400 students participate in the shotgun program. That number continues to grow each year."

Commissioner Paris said modified trapshooting is one of the biggest sports in the country. Several current Union County shooters are being recruited for college scholarships. And one shooter could be Union County's first Olympic athlete.

"This sport, given the proper facilities, will grow and get bigger," Commissioner Paris said. "Colleges are really just starting to get into the shooting sports. With colleges looking for talent, it only adds to the excitement."

Commissioner Paris said he became aware of the plight of the 4-H Shotgun team about three years ago.

Shotgun coaches Gene Margelli and Keith Herbert have been actively looking for a location to call home for the past three years. They came to Paris for help.

"This has been our biggest challenge as an organization," Margelli said. "We feel we have found the right piece of property that would benefit all the 4-H teams we mentioned plus allow local residents the opportunity to enjoy



The annual District Shotgun meet attracts 450-500 people each year in Union County.

the same activities."

The Union County Shotgun team started 17 years ago with 3 students, 2 coaches and one manual thrower.

Bobby Lance was the first head coach at that time.

The team's goal was to introduce young boys and girls seventh grade through high school to the shooting sports coupled with the University of Georgia's 4-H program of youth development.

Over the years, the program has grown significantly and the opportunity to grow the 4-H program continues

every year, Margelli said.

"While the shooting sports were at one time a boy dominate sport, times have changed," he said. "Girls made up 25 percent of our new team members in 2013."

"We have always had young ladies as part of our team, but find the increased interest by them very exciting and we welcome their participation," he said.

"We anticipate our team to be at 70 members in the next two years," he said. "We are very proud of where we have been and where we

are going, but our ongoing concern has been a place to call home."

For three years running, the Union County 4-H team has been selected to host the North Georgia District Shoot, Margelli said.

"We had six counties who have asked to attend and last year we had 101 young shooters participate and they brought their parents, siblings and grandparents," Margelli said. "We estimated the crowd to be more than 450 people. We expect to grow this number in 2014."

Task Force...from Page 1A

in interdiction, will be utilized in Union County to coordinate and operate The Narcotics Interdiction Program.

"With this new proactive expanded Narcotics Division position, it is anticipated that more investigations will develop," Sheriff Mason said. "With the two U.S. routes – U.S. 76 and U.S. 129 – serving as the crossroads in Union County, it will be the objective of this newly assigned investigator to interrupt and intercept the flow of illegal drugs and money passing through Union County."

"With the increased drug enforcement activities, it is anticipated that there will be more arrests made, more narcotics seized along with additional vehicles and property that will be used to offset Union County taxpayer funds to run the operation and of-

lice," the sheriff said.

The tools used to equip this new investigative position, such as a vehicle, narcotics detection K-9 and new technology, will be mostly funded with funds seized as part of the arrests by the Narcotics Division.

As it is the existing practice within the Sheriff's Office, this new position will continue to share the intelligence gained during this ongoing operation with the Narcotics, Criminal Investigations and Patrol Divisions of the Sheriff's Office, along with Georgia Bureau of Investigations, the Drug Task Force and also Georgia State Patrol and the surrounding counties/states when it involves them.

The Union County Sheriff's Office has been an active participant in the drug task force involving Union, Lumpkin, Town and White Counties for several years, Sheriff Mason said.

"The contribution to this task force for Union County has been the cost of one investigator, who has been assigned to work on the task force with agents from the other three counties."

"Since it is a regional task force, its focus has not solely been on Union County issues," the sheriff said. "Additionally, financial seizures from enforcement activity of the drug task force do not come back to Union County. Financial seizures made by Union County Narcotic investigators come back to the county."

"The seizures from drug

task force cases stay within the drug task force to offset its operational costs," Sheriff Mason said. "When financial seizures are made by Union County sheriff's deputies, 90 percent of the award remains within the Union County Sheriff's Office and 10 percent of the financial seizures awarded go to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for the legal process."

"I would rather work the drug cases in-house," Sheriff Mason said. "Collecting 90 percent of a financial seizure or zero is easy math to me."

Union County filed financial property seizures of approximately \$480,818.20 in assets via drug arrests in 2013, according to Enotah Judicial Circuit statistics.

Of those cases, more than \$50,000 in assets was awarded to the Sheriff's Office, with \$394,600 in forfeited assets pending, according to the circuit.

In terms of drug arrests, Union County made approximately 115 drug arrests in 2013.

Through September 2013, the drug task force had logged 160 arrests in the four-county task force, circuit records show.

Sheriff Mason said further justification to "opt out" of the task force is pure economics – 90 percent of the seized assets for Union County as opposed to passing it off to the drug task force and getting zero percent.

"The seizure money/property to the Sheriff's Office is by law strictly regulated and can only be used for Sheriff's Office training, firearms, vehicles, anti-drug programs and other equipment for law enforcement purposes. Under no circumstances can salaries be paid or supplemented with this money."

In 2013, Sheriff Mason and his department, utilizing seized assets, were able to purchase and or, trade for nine used low mileage Ford Crown Victorias, two investigative vehicles and a new 2013 Animal Control 4x4 truck. These vehicles replaced obsolete, high mileage vehicles that were in disrepair.