

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Union General Hospital board assures public all is well

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Nearly two weeks out from the very public arrests of Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder and Dr. Jim Heaton, the Union General Inc. Board of Directors is continuing its pledge to keep the public informed of the latest updates from the hospital.

"The biggest question that's come up to us, is the hospital going to close, and is it sound financially," said Board Vice Chair Jim Williams. "And the answer to that is, yes, we are financially sound, and the hospital is going to continue to operate as normal."

"Lewis Kelley is interim CEO, and the board is very engaged with being sure that the hospitals, all of our organizations, have the support

that they need to continue to do their jobs."

Williams added that, as additional information becomes available concerning the hospital in the aftermath of Gowder's departure, he and the board plan on keeping the public "in the loop."

Concerns over the fiscal solvency of the hospital have been brought to Williams' and Efird's attention by members of the community.

"Whether it's a church or at the post office or at the grocery store, people will say, 'I understand you're on the board, is the hospital going to close,' or, what kind of shape are we in financially," said Williams. "The point is, we're financially sound – probably one of the most financially sound rural hospitals in Georgia, if not the country.

"We're trying to communicate effectively with our staff, with our physicians. We did have a meeting with the physicians and the medical staff on Tuesday (Feb. 9), Patsy and I did, to meet with them, to bring them in the loop of what was going on, and to let them know that we're depending on them to continue to do their jobs as they always have been, and to serve the public."

The Union General Board of Directors is composed of seven individuals appointed by either the commissioner or mayor, and approved by the board itself.

Currently, only six of the seven board members are considered active, as Dr. Heaton was appointed to the board last fall, but has since been suspended pending the board's ongoing internal investigation

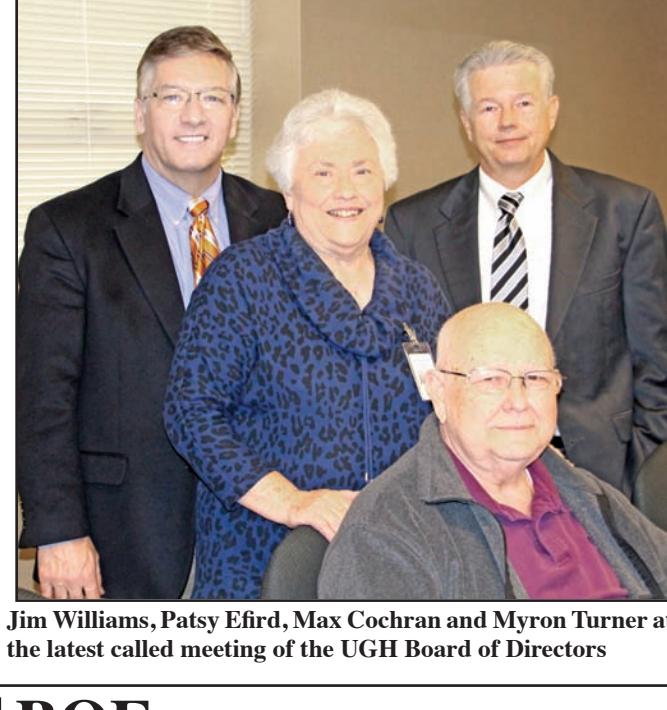
into the allegations against the physician.

Patsy Efird is chairman of the board, Williams is vice chair, and Dinah Paris, Max Cochran, Myron Turner and Steve Rowe make up the remaining active members.

"The board is very much united in our efforts to ensure that the hospital continues to operate as normal, and that we cooperate with law enforcement in any way they seek," said Williams. "If in the event that any information comes to our attention that needs to be communicated with our staff and the community, then we will do so."

Bond conditions of those arrested on Feb. 4 prohibit them from reaching out to any of the board members or anyone affiliated directly with the hospital, so Williams and

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Jim Williams, Patsy Efird, Max Cochran and Myron Turner at the latest called meeting of the UGH Board of Directors

John Nix and Country Cousins honored

By Shawn Jarrard
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John Nix and the Country Cousins band was honored recently at the Historic Union County Courthouse on the Blairsville Square, a place Nix and his fellow bandmates have played countless times over the past 65 years.

Amid dozens of guests, the Union County Historical Society and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris both presented proclamations detailing the history and importance within the county of Nix and his contemporaries.

Live music was the theme of that gathering, which took place over several hours on Saturday, Feb. 6, and many of Nix's friends and family were there for support, including dozens of local and area musicians, many of whom have played with Nix throughout the years.

When he was 15 years

old, Nix started the band with his brothers, Homer, Clayton and Cranford, and as for his "Country Cousins," quite a few of the folks he has played with over the years actually have been cousins, and others just friends, though he has always treated all like family.

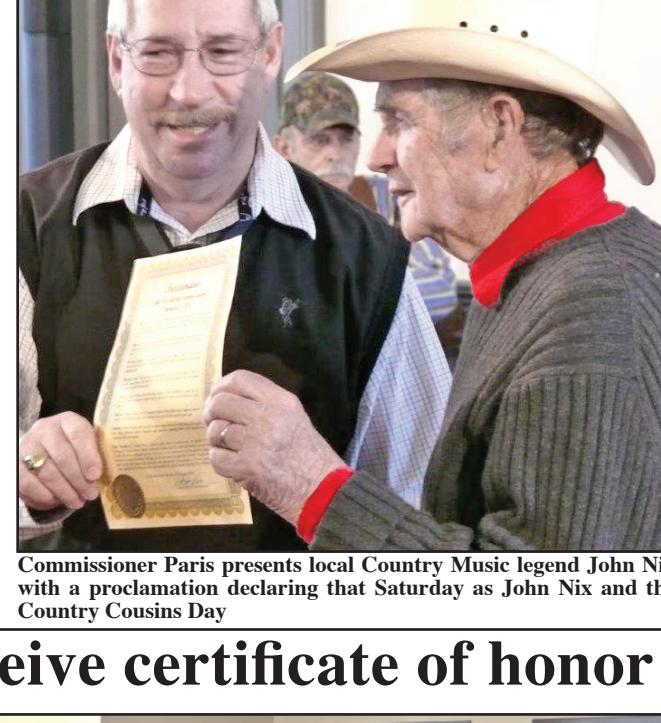
Nix grew up part of a musical family, with one of his earliest influences being his mother, who played piano.

John was the youngest of his brothers, and they played all over Union County and beyond, including square dances, concerts, family reunions and funerals.

Cranford and Clayton Nix both have quite storied musical connections, as John tells it – Cranford spent time in Detroit recording with a multitude of artists at Motown Records, including with The Supremes.

And Clayton spent time with The King.

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Commissioner Paris presents local Country Music legend John Nix with a proclamation declaring that Saturday as John Nix and the Country Cousins Day

BOE announces superintendent finalist

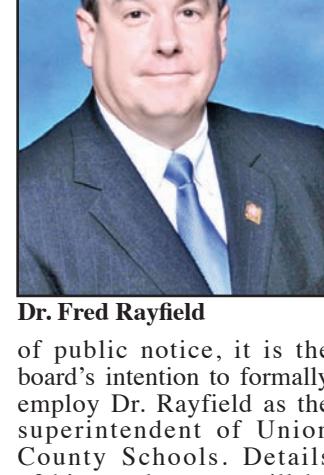
By Shawn Jarrard
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The Union County Board of Education voted in a special called meeting on Monday, Feb. 15, to declare Dr. Fred Rayfield as the single superintendent finalist to replace outgoing Superintendent Gary Steppe.

Rayfield is currently the superintendent of Decatur County Schools, where he has held that post since 2010.

"After a review of all applicants and a number of interviews, the board agrees that Dr. Fred Rayfield is the best qualified applicant for the position," said Board Chair Gary Davenport, just before the vote. "The board is unanimous in its decision to name Dr. Rayfield as our single finalist."

"After a 14-day period



Dr. Fred Rayfield

of public notice, it is the board's intention to formally employ Dr. Rayfield as the superintendent of Union County Schools. Details of his employment will be developed by the board in the

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Vietnam Veterans to receive certificate of honor

By Shawn Jarrard
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One hundred seventy-five Vietnam Veterans from Towns and Union counties will be honored in a ceremony featuring Commissioner Mike Roby of the Georgia Department of Veterans Services on Wednesday, Feb. 17, at 4:30 p.m. in the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Veterans will be awarded the state's Vietnam War Certificate of Honor, along with the Defense Department Commemoration Vietnam War Lapel Pin, all in recognition of their service during the war, and everyone is invited to witness the historic and special event.

"The Vietnam Veterans, very seldom are they ever honored by anybody," said Pat Phillips of Blairsville, who served three tours in Vietnam



GDVS Commissioner Mike Roby, center, tours Union County Schools Fine Arts Center with area veterans and Arts Center Manager Regina Hawkins, ahead of Wednesday's ceremony

as part of the U.S. Army, and who is currently a member of the State Veterans Service Board that will be assisting in the presentations. "They got a bad reputation in Vietnam. People like Jane Fonda gave

us a bad reputation.

"We didn't start the war, but we fought it. We had four people that lost their lives in Vietnam from Union County, and the total nationwide was 58,000 plus. We appreciate the

governor doing this, because this is the first time that's ever happened."

Wednesday's event will be the culmination of work done at the federal, state and

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Local pastor harassment hopefully at an end

By Shawn Jarrard
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Three juveniles have been taken into custody in connection with escalating harassment of a local pastor of a prominent Blairsville church.

On Monday, Feb. 1, the Blairsville Police Department responded to a call in which all four tires of the pastor's vehicle had been intentionally punctured with roofing tacks, according to Lt. Daren Osborn of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Authorities believe that the tacks were placed behind the pastor's tires the night before at the church, so that after the Sunday service, the pastor would have backed over them before driving home.

But it wasn't until Monday that the pastor noticed



Sheriff Mack Mason

there was something wrong with his tires, and after taking his vehicle into the shop, he discovered that they had been flattened seemingly on purpose, according to Lt. Osborn.

The very next day, Lt.

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Quilts of Valor presented to nine area veterans

By Todd Forrest
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The Misty Mountain Quilters Guild, along with the Union County Historical Society, honored nine local veterans with Quilts of Valor over the weekend at the Historic Union County Courthouse.

Charles King, James Ronald (Ron) Long, Thomas Segars, James (Jimmy) Lunsford, Larry Davis, Larry King, Clinton Bond Strouth, Danny Barrett and Robert Lester were honored with custom-made quilts from the Misty Mountain Quilters in honor of their service to America.

Quilts of Valor Coordinator Susan Young announced each veteran, and they were asked to step front



The nine honored Veterans who received Quilts of Valor from Misty Mountain Quilters Guild

and center to receive their quilts as she read a brief history of their service.

Each quilt was colored red, white, blue and gold, and

had been individually stitched

by a member of the guild.

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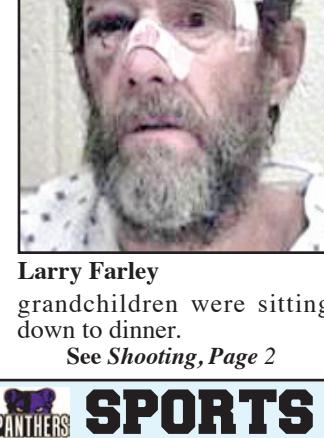
Farley arrested after double shooting, stabbing

By Shawn Jarrard
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Larry Farley, 53, of Blairsville, is in jail without bond following a bizarre double shooting, double stabbing, in which authorities believe Farley was trying to kill his ex-girlfriend, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Around 7 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 4, 911 Dispatch received a call concerning subjects fighting over a firearm in a domestic situation.

The domestic situation began earlier that evening, as Farley's ex and her three



Larry Farley

grandchildren were sitting down to dinner.

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