

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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NWS: Ice in the Thursday forecast

Snow event wasn't all bad for Union County residents

By Charles Duncan
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There's good news and bad news in regards to the upcoming weather forecast.

The bad news, Union County must brace for at least one more round of frozen precipitation on Thursday.

The good news, temperatures are headed for the mid-50s later in the week.

The county has seen its share of cold weather and frozen precipitation over the past two weeks.

From single digit temperatures to what seemed like a mountain of snow, locals are glad to see liquid precipitation rather than the frozen variety.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said, believe it not, the county still has enough salt and gravel to handle another winter storm.

"Really, the main thing is getting our equipment ready," Commissioner Paris said. "We've got the equipment, we've got the salt and the gravel. We're going to



Two-year-old Olivia White was not the least bit upset about the abundance of snow last week. She poses with her Trooper Snowman.

need some more gravel. We don't think it's going to be a major event. We'll try to be prepared, and the public has done an incredible job of staying off the roads during these

weather events.

"People have been using their common sense, and we want to remind everyone to be

See *Weather*, Page 3A

Search and Rescue stays busy during storm

By Charles Duncan
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Union County public safety workers were faced with multiple rescue situations during last week's snowstorm, Union County Fire Chief/Deputy EMA Director David Dyer said.

Search and Rescue, Union County sheriff's deputies, EMS and Union County firefighters from Station 5 in Suches responded to a call of a man who fell through ice formed on Lake Winfield Scott.

"We had an ice rescue on Lake Winfield Scott," Chief Dyer said. "Union County Sheriff's Office, EMS and UCFD Station 5 in Suches responded. A man and his family wanted to take some pictures of the snow. When they got to the lake, he started walking on the ice. When he reached the swimming dock, he fell through.

"Luckily he was able to grab the dock and who came out on the ice, he was able to get out of the water," Chief Dyer said. "It was a great job

See *Rescue*, Page 3A



Rescuers break the ice to reach a stranded couple on the Lake Winfield Scott swimming ramp. The stranded couple was rescued as a team from Station 5 in Suches came to the rescue.

UGH to take part in rural hospital pilot program

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Gov. Nathan Deal announced on Monday, Feb. 23, that Union General Hospital will take part in a four-hospital pilot program designed to stabilize rural health care infrastructure around the state.

The announcement came with a final report of recommendations from his Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee, which he created last April "to identify and provide solutions for the needs of Georgia's rural hospital community," according to a press release from the governor's office.

"When a rural hospital struggles, a community struggles," said Gov. Deal in the release. "Back in April, we stood at a critical juncture for some of our state's rural health care systems, and this committee was just one of the paths taken to ensure that Georgians, no matter where they live, have the ability to receive adequate care.

"These recommendations, a result of countless



Mike Gowder

hours of dedicated analysis and review of a system that affects not only our citizens' wellbeing, but also our local economies, will serve as a strong starting point toward providing high-quality health care throughout rural Georgia."

In its report, the committee found that "four rural hospitals have closed in recent months with total of eight having closed or attempted to reconfigure in last two to three years. Additionally, fifteen rural hospitals are considered financially fragile, with six operating on a day-

to-day basis."

And in order to combat this growing trend in rural hospital failure, the committee recommended the four-site "Hub and Spoke" pilot program.

"The Georgia Department of Community Health, State Office of Rural Health will be designated as the oversight entity for the proposed pilot program implementation and monitoring, according to the report. "This pilot seeks to build out an integrated 'Hub and Spoke' model to prevent the over-utilization of the ED (emergency department) as a primary care access point. Rural hospitals often see over-utilization in patients with congestive heart failure, chronic illnesses (diabetes) and social disease states. The 'Hub' systems have, in addition to the hospital, nursing home, home health and rural health clinic components."

The hub-like quality already found at Union General Hospital Inc., which is currently operating debt-free, is one of the reasons the Rural Hospital Stabilization Com-

mittee selected it as one of the four participants in this pilot program.

"We're very honored to be picked for the pilot program," said Union General Hospital Inc. CEO Mike Gowder.

UGH Inc. is responsible for the operation of many facilities in the surrounding area, including Union General Hospital, Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home, Union County Nursing Home, Union County Dialysis, the Clinic at Walmart, Union, the General Wellness Center and the Glenda Gooch House.

The "spokes" in this model of the pilot program will integrate smaller critical access hospitals, Wi-Fi and telemedicine-equipped ambulances, telemedicine-equipped school clinics, federally qualified health centers, public health departments and local physicians, according to the committee hopes will ease the burden on

See *Pilot*, Page 2A

Significant snow sparks third annual snowman contest



The Tanner Family entry took first place in the Snowman Contest.

North Georgia News
News Special

After several dustings of snow, Blairsville finally fell under the right weather system receiving upwards of 7 inches of snow in higher elevations and a solid 5 in the lower regions. It turned out to be just enough snow to jumpstart the Third Annual Blairsville Snowman Contest.

A now annual event, local residents build a snowman or snow sculpture and post it to the Blairsville Snowman Contest page. Anyone can go to the page and vote by "liking" their favorites. In fact, says Sarah Oliver, host of the event, "We had over 12,500 votes come from all over the United States and even Canada. That's 5,000 more votes than last year, and the page itself received almost 1,000 new "Likes" this year as well. So we're growing."

Growing indeed. In total, 186 snowmen were entered, and the snowmen got so big this year, they created a prize for the Most Massive Entry.

Rebecca Shook took the

prize with her huge dinosaur with a neck so long, Shook had to sculpt snow around a pole for structural support. There were trucks, speedboats, a 7-foot igloo, bulldogs, an American flag, entire snow-scenes, a "Lady Downton," and classic Frosty-style snowmen too.

Amazed at the artistic variety, one participant gushed, "Yeah, I can't wait to see the pictures people will send in next year. People are very creative; love it."

First place prize went to Tara Tanner and her children, Averie and Nash, for their bikini-clad snow lady.

The Wilson family took second prize with a colorful minion and third place went to the Joiner family for their sculpted panther.

Albums with each snowman and the prizewinners from every year are available on Facebook by typing in "Blairsville Snowman Contest."

Utilizing social media is part of what makes this event unique because it is readily

See *Snowman*, 2A

Thomason now leads GAAF

Longtime Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds GM takes on more responsibilities

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Hiawassee - Hilda Thomason, of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, was named president of the Georgia Association of Agricultural Fairs at the 2015 joint Georgia-South Carolina Annual Convention in Atlanta in January.

"The Georgia Association of Agricultural Fairs and the South Carolina Fair Association is all the fairs in Georgia and all the fairs in South Carolina, and they get together and have an annual convention each year," said Thomason.

Thomason became president by serving first as a board member, then moving up the ranks through second and first vice president of the GAAF.

As president, Thomason will be responsible for conducting the quarterly board meetings of the GAAF, and she will play a large role in the annual meetings, heading up the association meeting and introducing speakers at that time. Overall, she will



Hilda Thomason, left, with GAAF Past President Don Garrett.

serve in an advisory role to the GAAF Board of Directors.

"It is an honor to serve," said Thomason. "If you're around all the other fairs and you get involved with the fairs, it helps you to learn from other fairs, too."

Several years ago, the International Association of Fairs and Expositions certified Thomason as a certified fair executive. She traveled to Salt Lake City to become certified after having met all of the qualifications, which

required that she attend many hours of classes and meetings.

All of this taken together - Thomason's CFE credentials and now presidency of the GAAF - means that the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is under the proper care to stay in a position to provide Towns County with plenty of tourism, which boosts the local economy.

As previously reported, according to the latest data from the Georgia Department of Economic Development,

tourism in Towns County brought in \$42.01 million in direct tourist spending for 2013.

Also in 2013, tourism supported 410 jobs, generated \$1.72 million in state tax revenue and created \$1.21 million in local tax revenues.

This number has been on the rise since the start of the recession, increasing to the \$42 million mark from around \$34 million in direct tourist spending in 2009.

Furthermore, each household in Towns County received \$649.67 in tax relief thanks to the 2013 figures, a direct result of the taxes generated by tourist activity, according to GDECD reports.

The 2015 convention acted as a means for the fairs of Georgia and South Carolina to come together and share their successes and network among each other.

All told, 469 people attended the Atlanta conference, and the number of trade show booths maxed out at 46.

The convention lasted three days, Jan. 22-24.

An auction was held

See *Thomason*, Page 2A

Union man faces drug charge

By Charles Duncan
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An investigation lasting more than one month has resulted in the arrest of a 44-year-old Blairsville man.

James Britton McAfee has been charged with one count Violation of Georgia's Controlled Substance Act, and a probation violation, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

According to Union County Sheriff's Detective Lt. Chad Deyton, McAfee's arrest was the result of an on-



James Britton McAfee

going investigation. No further details were available at presstime.

Vol. 106 No. 10
2 Sections, 16 Pages

Arrests 6A
Churches 8A
Classifieds 2B
Opinion 4A
Legals 3B
Obits 9A
Sports 11A

Weather
Thurs: Ice Hi 35 Lo 26
Fri: Clouds Hi 49 Lo 29
Sat: Sunny Hi 54 Lo 31

8 0 4 8 7 9 1 9 3 1 4 2

Veterans,
THIS is
why
numbers
MATTER!!

See page 7A

WOODY GAP
FALCONS

Woody Gap
Student Council
Yard Sale!

See page 5A

Daylight Saving
Time Begins

Sunday
March 8th

UACHS Baseball
Sat. Mar 7 @ Washington Wilkes
Noon (DH)

UACHS Soccer
Tues. Mar 3 vs. Fannin 5 & 7 PM
Fri. Mar 6 @ Washington Wilkes
5:30 & 7:30 PM