

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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BOE won't bond ESPLOST proceeds

By Charles Duncan
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No one really knew what to expect when the Union County School Board met with taxpayers last week at the Union County Middle School Gymnasium.

The forum, designed for the school board to answer questions about the upcoming March 19th vote for an education sales tax extension, brought out details that the school board has no intentions of bonding the proposed sales tax extension if approved by voters.

The school system will have almost \$4 million left over to carry into the sales tax extension, Board Chairman Gary Davenport told the crowd.

The excess ESPLOST dollars are a result of the board's decision not to build a new football stadium and a multi-use auditorium originally



Local residents weren't hampered by chilly temperatures on Thursday as they turned out to learn more about ESPLOST. Photo/Charles Duncan

listied in the 2008 ESPLOST. The football stadium was projected to cost \$4 million and the multi-purpose auditorium was slated to cost \$7 million, Davenport said.

"We weren't confident that we'd have enough money to finish those projects, so we

didn't start them," Davenport told the crowd. "It turned out to be a good decision on our part. If you start a SPLOST project, you must complete it. We would have had to borrow funds to do that.

"Going into this proposed ESPLOST extension, we

have money to work with early on, so we" he said. "We have a bonding option listed on the ESPLOST, but, that's just in case we need to do so."

The school system will have paid almost \$2 million in interest from bonding the 2008 ESPLOST projects. Interest rates have dwindled since, and right now, the board would pay less than 1 percent of \$13.5 million to bond the proposed projects.

All five board members, including Davenport, agreed that no bonding was necessary.

"No bond," said Board member John Strickland.

The board has only one bond payment remaining from the existing ESPLOST, a \$1.5 million payment in August, and then, the school system is debt free, Davenport said.

"I'm for using the entire amount from an extended ES-

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Veterans honored with 'Quilts of Valor'

By Libby Shook
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris was the guest speaker at a special meeting held at the Union County Public Library on Wednesday, Feb. 27th.

The event, jointly sponsored by the Mountain Regional Library System and the Blairsville Veterans' Clinic honored veterans from throughout the region.

"It's really an honor for me to be here today amidst all of these war heroes," Commissioner Paris said. "I consider anyone who has served, or serves today, a war hero.

"I really want to thank all of those folks here today from the VA Clinic," he said. "We're thankful that the clinic



Lamar Paris

is here in Union County and for the staff that does such a wonderful job. They keep our veterans from having to travel long distances for needed services."

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Senate aids Woody Gap School grant

By Charles Duncan
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Suches - Approximately \$246,598 in Sparsity Grant funding for Woody Gap School is part of recommended budget cuts recommended by Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal.

The funding is vital to the smallest public school in Georgia, Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe said.

"It's the equivalent to six teaching positions," Steppe said. "It's money we don't have in our budget."

It's all part of the state's attempt to cut \$2,596,642 from a vital funding program called Sparsity Grants, a program endorsed long ago by former State Rep. Carlton Colwell.

Sparsity Grants are distributed to 21 school systems, including Woody Gap School and Towns County Schools.

The grant funding is in jeopardy because the state is looking to cut 3 percent from the annual \$2 million plus Sparsity Grant program.

Woody Gap School, located on the mountainous Georgia 60, qualifies for \$246,598 in Sparsity Grant funding because of its travel time to bus students to Union County Schools.



Dakota Ethridge and Alex Roberts work to complete a project in Construction Class at Woody Gap School on Monday in Suches. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

In the Non-Quality Basic Education Formula grants, the governor's budget recommends reducing funds for Residential Treatment Centers and Sparsity Grants by 3 percent.

In late February, the House of Representatives reduced these cuts to 1 percent.

The Senate Appropria-

tions Committee, which includes District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, kept the 1 percent cut to Residential Treatment Center funding and eliminated the cuts to Sparsity Grant funding.

The cuts to Sparsity Grant funding will be resolved

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Paris proposes Farmers Market expansion

By Charles Duncan
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris told the county's agricultural community last week that more parking and additions at the Union County Farmers Market are in the works.

He urged the crowd to keep their fingers crossed.

Commissioner Paris, speaking to a packed house Feb. 25th at the Union County Community Center, said the future is bright for the county's ever-popular Farmers Market.

"I would like to thank all the vendors for their dedication to the Farmers Market," Paris said. "Without them and their great products, the interest we have in our market would not be there.

"They are the backbone of the market," he said. "We



Farmers Market vendors listen intently as Commissioner Lamar Paris speaks during last week's banquet at the Union County Community Center.

want to continue to make the market better and are always looking for ways to improve the market and to adapt to improved marketing plans." A couple of ways to improve

the Market experience will be to provide additional parking, Commissioner Paris said.

If that pans out, it pro-

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Garrison honored at State Capitol

By Charles Duncan
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Atlanta - Emma Garrison's dream season continued last week at the State Capitol.

Garrison, a Union County High School freshman, and the Class AA individual state Cross Country champion, and Region 8-AA Cross Country champion, was honored and recognized for her athletic achievements by the Georgia House of Representatives with House Resolution 458.

Garrison was welcomed to the Georgia General Assembly in Atlanta by House District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison and Senate District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, both represent Union County in their respective chambers.

"This week was a special one for me at the State Capitol as I got a chance to acknowledge a wonder-



Class AA Cross Country State Champion Emma Garrison, pictured here with State Rep. Stephen Allison, was honored last week at the State Capitol.

ful student athlete for her achievements," State Rep. Allison said. "Emma Garrison, a freshman at Union County High School, was recognized in the Georgia House of Rep-

resentatives in honor of her victory at the Class AA Cross Country Championships last November.

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Title tax shifts into gear at tax office



Jennifer Kerr completes a transaction at the Union County Tax Office on Friday. March 1st was the first day of Georgia's Title Tax law. Photo/Charles Duncan

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
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The first official day of Georgia's new title tax almost went smoothly in Union County on Friday, Tax Commissioner Lee Knight said.

A couple of folks who had purchased cars from private individuals didn't quite understand that to get a title

for their recently purchased vehicles, that they were going to have to pay 6.5 percent of the car's value, or what's now commonly referred to as Georgia's Title Tax.

"Fortunately, Jennifer (Kerr) got them calmed down," Knight said. "Other than that, it's gone real good. Everything is working well, the state's computer system has worked real well. It looks like they've got all the software that will prompt us to

stay on track and calculate the title ad valorem tax."

A gentleman from Florida who had just moved here paid half of his title tax on Friday and will pay the rest over the next 12 months, Knight said.

"He wanted to do that because he said he was broke after moving up here from Florida," Knight said.

One problem that did

See Tax, Page 3A

Modern Vinyl to open for Three Dog Night

By Libby Shook
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Hiawassee - Mark your calendar for Saturday, March 9th at 7 p.m.

Three Dog Night comes to Anderson Music Hall in Hiawassee with a special local guest, Blairsville's own, Modern Vinyl.

The ever-popular Modern Vinyl will open for the legend known as Three Dog Night at The Hall.

Modern Vinyl bass guitarist Todd Forrest, yes, that Todd Forrest, sports editor for the North Georgia News, said

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Blairsville's Modern Vinyl rocks during a weekend appearance in Murphy, NC. Photo/Libby Shook

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SPRING FORWARD!
Delight Saving Time Begins
March 10

UGH Auxiliary Used Book Sale
Friday, March 15
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Old Lobby of the Hospital
Deep South Farm Rd. side entrance
See page 7A

Historical Society Membership Drive
Now - March 31, 2013
Form on page 7A

Union County Mentor Program
Mentors Needed!
Volunteer to be a mentor to help a child.
helping students Achieve
See page 7A

UCHS Baseball
March 5 • 5:30 p.m. vs. North Murray
March 9 • 12 noon @ Oglethorpe

UCHS Soccer
March 5 • 5 & 7 p.m. @ Pickens Co.
March 8 • 5 & 7 p.m. @ Oglethorpe