

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Voters say 'yes' to ESPLOST

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Only supporters of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax showed up at the Board of Elections Office on Hunt Martin Street Tuesday night.

The results renewed their faith in the spirit of Union County.

ESPLOST won, or rather, the voters of Union County scored their biggest win of the year.

Almost 2,000 voters turned out to cast ballots on the referendum that would extend the local penny sales tax for education by two years.

The final tally: 1,332 'yes' to 612 'no,' or 68.52 percent in favor of extending the sales tax for education.

"The affirmative vote to extend the education sales tax

extends my faith in the people of Union County," said Union County Board of Education Chairman Gary Davenport. "This vote shows strong support for the children of this community. Even with a low voter turnout, this is still a huge win for the children of this community."

The first votes tallied gave a chilling feel to the hallway where supporters stood awaiting results.

Eleven votes against, two votes in favor were the results of absentee voting.

Early voting provided a renewed sense of excitement as 602 said 'yes' to 268 opposed.

Early voting set the tone for the rest of the night, as one-by-one, each precinct came in with an affirmative vote in support of the sales tax extension.

"This is huge," said BOE member Julie Barton. "This community has a history of supporting its children."

"Somebody had to help us as we were growing up, and we got that support," she said. "It only makes sense to do the same for the children of today."

Our fathers and grandfathers helped us, and what the voters said tonight is, we're going to help the children of tomorrow," Barton said.

The battle to renew the sales tax got underway early as the Union County Republican Party's Executive Committee asked voters to turn back the sales tax.

They submitted a press release to the *North Georgia News*, which was printed asking voters to vote 'no.'

They turned to a billboard campaign, again asking voters to dismiss the sales tax that supports education.

Tuesday night, voters spoke loud and clear about how they felt about education.

"This says a lot about our community," Davenport said.

Unofficial Union County Election Results

Special Election March 19, 2013 • Votes By Precinct*

	Blairsville	Coosa	Choestoe	Jones Creek	Owittown	Ivy Log	Suches	Trackrock	Dooley	Gumlog	Pat Colwell	Absentee and Advance Voting included in Precinct Totals	TOTALS	Percentage	
ESPLOST															
YES	210	135	77	129	125	143	50	84	86	131	162	601	2	1,332	68.52%
NO	59	76	50	46	61	81	24	44	57	43	71	268	11	612	31.48%

"I'm glad our school board stayed united in this pursuit of extending the education sales tax."

"The voters spoke tonight," Barton said. "Education is absolutely a non-partisan issue."

ESPLOST Committee members Jason Karnes and Jim Williams agreed that the 'yes' vote speaks volumes about the Union County community.

"It shows that the citizens of Union County saw the importance of this sales tax,

and I'm very proud that they showed their support," Karnes said. "Also, I'm thankful that the school board was so willing to be open about this issue."

"I think it's a victory for the children of our community," Williams said. "That's what this was really all about. This election showed a unified school board whose priority is doing what's best for the children of our community."

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris was all smiles.

"This shows that the majority of the county has the best interests of our children at heart," he said. "Our citizens should all feel proud, and now it is up to our school board, with continued input from the community, to wisely spend these ESPLOST funds. I have full confidence that they will be dedicated to that purpose."

"Congratulations to our citizens, our schools, our teachers, support personnel and above all, our children."

Owenby, Stone take on new leadership roles for schools

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
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Union County Primary and Middle schools will have new principals in the new school year.

The Union County School Board promoted from within to replace retiring UCPS Principal Troy Collins and Union County Middle School Principal Donnie Kelley, who resigned his post.

Millie Owenby and Gwen Stone have been chosen to lead UCPS and UCMS respectively by the Board of Education.

Owenby replaces retiring Principal Collins, and Stone will fill the void created by the resignation of Kelley, Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe said.

Kelley is leaving Union County Middle School to follow his wife to Memphis, Tenn., where she will teach at the University of Memphis.

Owenby, currently assistant principal at UCPS, has bachelor and masters degrees in Early Childhood Education from North Georgia College. She received her Specialist's degree in Educational Leadership from Lincoln Memorial



Millie Owenby, left, and Gwen Stone have new responsibilities as principals at UCPS and UCMS respectively.

University. Owenby has worked as a paraprofessional, Special Education teacher, regular education teacher, and Assistant Principal. She has worked in the Union County School System for 21 years. "Millie is definitely qualified for her next opportunity in the education field," Steppe said. "We interviewed several candidates and we felt that she

was the best choice for our Primary School and its students." Stone earned her bachelor's degree in Natural Science from Shorter College, her master's degree in Education from the University of Georgia and her Specialist's in Educational Leadership from Lincoln Memorial

See Principals, Page 2A

Scrap metal laws have changed

By Joe Collins
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The state of Georgia has implemented a Secondary Metals Recycle registration program in an attempt to combat the theft and conversion of ferrous and non-ferrous metals for cash.

In English, it means retail metal recyclers must be documented by the state through the Sheriff's Offices throughout the state or face criminal penalties.

It's the state lawmakers' solution to the theft of metals from churches, homes, government entities and businesses.

The metals recycling industry, or more commonly referred to as scrap metal, has become very profitable and has gained very interest in the legal



If you're going to sell scrap metal, you better be registered with the Union County Sheriff's Office. Photo: Joe Collins

and illegal acquisition of profitable secondary use metals.

Unfortunately, the illegal acquisition of this recyclable resource has caused great harm to many individu-

als, churches, businesses and government entities through financial loss and destruction of property.

See Scrap Metal, Page 2A

National college bass championships coming to Lake Chatuge in August

By Libby Shook
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Young Harris - Lake Chatuge's largemouth bass will be in the national spotlight Aug. 1-3.

Young Harris College has been chosen to host the 2013 Carhart Bassmaster College Series National Championship.

Of course, YHC's homefield advantage is Lake Chatuge, site of the ESPN nationally televised championship collegiate bass tournament.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall expressed appreciation to Young Harris College and President Cathy Cox as he presented a check to her for \$1,000 last week, for their role in bringing what Kendall describes as "the



Lake Chatuge largemouth bass will be in the national spotlight in August. Photo: Lowell Nicholson

biggest event ever to come to Towns County."

Commissioner Kendall definitely hit the nail on the head with that comment.

The event is expected to have a regional economic

impact benefiting surrounding counties that include neighboring Union County.

President Cox was definitely excited about the upcoming event.

See Bass, Page 2A

The Eggs will fall at Meeks Park

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
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Saturday figures to be a lot of fun for hundreds of children at Meeks Park.

That's when the sky starts falling. Well, it may ap-

pear the sky is falling but, it's really hundreds of plastic Easter Eggs.

The fun begins at noon at Meeks Park ballfield as children ages 2-11 will watch from a safe distance as a helicopter drops hundreds of plastic eggs onto a field already covered

with thousands of other eggs - 25,000 total - and then the children will be released to their age appropriate section to collect their portion of the Easter Eggs, said Duff Conley, director of Union County Parks and Recreation.

See Egg Drop, Page 6A

Sheriff: 'one charged in pill bust'

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
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A 15-month narcotics investigation by the Union County Sheriff's Office has yielded results.

Detected with the department arrested Gina Michelle Burnette, 40, of Blairsville, at her residence for several drug-related charges connected to the distribution of high-powered painkillers, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said last week.

Detected served three arrest warrants on Burnette, Sheriff Mason said.

"We took some heavy-duty painkillers - several hundred - off the street," Sheriff Mason said. "It was some solid police work. If anyone hasn't noticed, we're sending a message that Union County is not the place to be dealing illegal drugs."

Two vehicles were seized along with the drugs,



Gina Michelle Burnette

the sheriff said.

Union County sheriff's Lt. Chad Deyton and Detective Tyler Miller made the bust, Sheriff Mason said.

"They put a lot of man-hours into this bust," the sheriff said. "There were several hundred painkillers discovered during this operation. They had a street value of approximately

\$50 a pill. "Deyton and Miller took about \$20,000 worth of high-powered drugs off the street," Sheriff Mason said. "We'd like to say it's all in a day's work, but a lot of work went into this case."

Allegedly, Burnette was dealing the high-powered narcotics locally at a cost of \$50 a pill, detectives said.

During the bust, the detectives discovered approximately 400 Oxycodone, Opanas, and Roxycodone, the sheriff said.

Detective Miller opened the case in December 2011 and vetted details of the operation the entire time.

Burnette was charged with four counts of distribution of a Schedule II controlled substance; five counts of possession of a Schedule II controlled substance with intent to distribute; and one count

See Pill Bust, Page 3A

T Bentley has big decision to make

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For the past four years, T Bentley's leadership has been evident in the classroom, the community, and on the playing fields.

Now the Beta Club president, starting quarterback and starting right-fielder will become a leader for our nation's armed forces as he has been accepted into West Point and the Air Force Academy.

He also has received a Congressional Nomination

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U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss, (R-GA) and T Bentley get acquainted on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C.

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Awake America Prayer Meeting
Thursday, April 4
11:59 a.m.
Blairsville City Hall flagpole
See page 9A

2013 American Cancer Society Memorial Service
Sunday, March 24
2 p.m.
Brackett Community Room
Located behind United Community Bank
See page 8A

Suches Annual Spring Clean-Up
April 6 & April 13
Trash bags will be provided & available at Country Pen Gap/Wolfy Gap
See page 8A

Woody Gap Tennis
Thursday, March 21
4 p.m.
@ Tallulah Falls

UCHS Baseball
March 20 • 5 p.m. JV @ Pickens
March 21 • 5:30 p.m. JV @ White

UCHS Soccer
March 21 • 5 p.m. JV @ Pickens
March 22 • 5 p.m. @ Washington Wilkes