

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Son confesses to killing mother, her boyfriend

Double homicide claims lives of Marilyn Laughlin, 60, Anthony Poat, 52

By Charles Duncan

North Georgia News

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A plea for help from 35-year-old Cody Lee Vestal at Rhea Medical Center in Dayton, Tenn., led to the discovery of the bodies of his mother and her boyfriend on Georgia 325 in Union County.

Vestal confessed to Union County Sheriff's Detective Tom Mangifesta that he murdered his mother, 60-year-old Marilyn Laughlin, and her 52-year-old live-in boyfriend Anthony Poat, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Vestal and Poat had a conversation on Saturday, March 14. Detective Mangifesta said Vestal confirmed that confrontation.

Dayton, Tenn. police confronted Vestal after he told medical workers at Rhea Medical Center on Saturday that he wanted to kill himself, authorities in Tennessee and Georgia said.

Vestal returned to his vehicle after telling Rhea Medical Center staff that he wanted to kill himself.

Hospital officials called Dayton police who found



Cody Lee Vestal

Vestal in a Nissan Xterra outside the hospital. Inside his vehicle was a loaded AR-15 rifle, with a second, fully loaded clip.

Vestal was arrested on a charge of disorderly conduct by Dayton police. En route to jail, Vestal began to have convulsions. He apparently had taken two bottles of sleep aid pills, authorities said.

Vestal was returned to Rhea Medical Center, and then airlifted to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, Tenn., authorities said.

The vehicle Vestal was driving was registered to Marilyn Laughlin, of Georgia 325, in Blairsville.

Unaware of a double

homicide at that address, Dayton police contacted the Union County Sheriff's Office and asked them to tell Laughlin that her son was in intensive care in the Chattanooga hospital, Union County Sheriff's Detective Sgt. Andrew Hammond said.

Sgt. Hammond said that Union County sheriff's deputies arrived at the home that Laughlin shared with Poat on Sunday, March 15.

Sgt. Hammond said that deputies knocked on the door, but were unable to get anyone to answer. Deputies returned on Monday, and the scene was the same as it was on Sunday.

"I got a call Monday night of a body inside a house. We went there on a welfare check," Sgt. Hammond said. "We kicked the door in, went inside the home and discovered two bodies."

It was the home where deputies had tried to reach Marilyn Laughlin, Sgt. Hammond said.

"Nothing had been touched since Sunday. The same lights were on, and the cars were parked exactly the way they were on Sunday," Sgt. Hammond said. "We dis-

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Maddaleni named System-wide TOTY



Left to right, Jeanne Maddaleni, Angie Everett, Alecia Frizzell, Michelle Twarog, and Chris Robbins, are the 2015 Union County Teachers of the Year. Maddaleni received System-wide honors. Photo/Todd Forrest.

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education honored its Teachers of the Year last week during the March Board of Education meeting.

Union County Elementary School's Jeanne Maddaleni received system wide

Teacher of the Year honors.

Before she was named as the system-wide TOTY, Maddaleni was given Union County Elementary School's TOTY award by UCES Principal Trish Cook.

"She is so great at motivating children and they want to do their very best for her because they love her,"

Cook said. "She can conquer any behavior, it's like she has magic dust, and it works."

Maddaleni, who is in her 20th year as a teacher, began her career in education after working as a hair-dresser.

However, when her
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Large turnout for Ag Day at Farmers Market

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Crowds of people from all over the region took to the Union County Farmers Market for the inaugural celebration of Union County Agriculture Day on Sunday, March 21.

The Union County Future Farmers of America, Nelson's Tractor, the North Georgia News and West Printing sponsored Ag Day 2015.

Festivities featured fun for the whole family in a three-fold Farmers Market extravaganza: the FFA Blue and Gold Auction, the John Deere Drive Green event and market vendors who set up shop in advance of the market opening on June 6th.

More than 200 items were consigned for the auction, ranging from pipefittings to farm tractors and motorcycles. Over 200 bidders registered for the event, and preliminary figures put proceeds between \$65,000 and \$70,000, of which the Union County FFA will receive a commission.



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In auction terminology, a bell ringer is an item that sells particularly well, and the bell ringer for Saturday was a blue Ford 3910 four-wheel drive tractor that was expected to bring in \$8,500, but netted \$12,000.

And Friday night, during the livestock portion of the auction, animal sales exceeded \$6,000. More than half of those sales went directly to FFA students who raised market hogs themselves.

The Blue and Gold Auction livestock and farm equip-

ment sale serves as a fundraiser for the FFA to defray some of the costs of student attendance at state and national leadership conventions, as well as puts money towards growing and farming initiatives at the high school, and helps these young entrepreneurs gain practical business experience.

"Not only was this a good business venture for our agriculture community, it was a heck of a learning opportunity for our students," said John Pettit, the agriculture education teacher and FFA advisor at Union County High School. "Yeah, we raised some money and that's great, but the real value of that was what the kids are learning."

"We had probably 35 to 40 kids that worked on various things preparing for this auction and actually working for this auction. And they've got something that, if nothing else, they'll remember it

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Todd headed to State STAR competition

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Senior Rachel Todd is headed to state-level competition as Union County High School's 2015 STAR Student.

Todd was announced co-winner of Region 2 in the Student Teacher Achievement Recognition banquet held at the University of North Georgia in Dahlonega on March 17.

She and another student, Andrew Haygood of Pickens High School, scored the same highest score on the SAT for the region, and both are moving on to the 2015 State Professional Association of Georgia Educators STAR Banquet in Atlanta on April 27.

"I was not expecting it at all," said Todd. "After all of the STAR Students spoke and after all of the STAR Teach-



Rachel Todd

ers spoke, they said, okay, it's time to announce our district winners, and they just kind of shot into it. They were like, 'So, if Union County could please come up here.' I looked over at Coach Hunter, and I was like, what? We walked up there and they handed us our

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Rotary 2015 Service Award winners

The Rotary Club of Union County has announced the recipients of its 2015 Service Awards.

"This year's honorees represent the Rotary motto - Service Above Self," said Patty Barnes, club president.

"Our selection committee chose five people whose names or work everyone will



Dr. Jeremy Williams



Charles Worden



Mike Gowder

Mountain Dawg 5K Saturday at Meeks Park

It's time to run the Mountain Dawg 5K Run, March 28 at Meeks Park in Blairsville.

The run supports the Community Council of the Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center.

The Council is a very busy group of volunteers in the North Georgia and Western Carolina mountains. The Council works hard to provide educational programs for children and adults, preserve our native plants and mountain heritage, all without charging any money to participants or students.

The funding for their programs comes from gifts from friends through an annual capital campaign. This year, the Community Council



of the Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center is trying something new, a 5K Run fundraiser.

Join the Council for its very first Mountain Dawg 5K

Run at 10 a.m. on March 28 in Meeks Park. Registration is available at www.ClassicRaceServices.com or www.Active.com. You can also go to the website of the GMRE Center, download a form, fill it out and mail it in. That website is www.gmrec.uga.edu.

Registration is \$20, with a family rate of \$60 for four registrants. Short-sleeve t-shirts will be as supply lasts on race day. Registration is also available in person, on the day of the race. Race Day Registration will begin at 9 a.m. Race begins at 10 a.m.

Awards will be given to overall Male and Female, and top three Male and Female in standard age groups.

Finish line management will be provided by Classic

Race Services with complete results online at www.classicRaceServices.com, www.RunningInTheUSA.com, www.ActiveRunning.com, and www.coolrunning.com.

Please remember that the proceeds benefit the Environmental Education programs of the Community Council of the University of Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center.

The Council provides programs to children, such as Johnny Appleseed and All About Trees, at no charge to students or schools. In addition, the Council has planted an Ethnobotanic Garden on the grounds of the GMRE Center, with guided tours available May through September.

SB&T buys Cadence Bank



Clarkesville - Southern Bank & Trust (SB&T) announced the completion of the previously announced acquisition of the deposits and certain loans of the Blairsville branch of Cadence Bank. In connection with the acquisition, SB&T assumed approximately \$21.5 million in deposits.

SB&T's President and CEO Tony Collins said, "We are pleased to have closed this transaction with Cadence. This transaction represents an important opportunity for SB&T to leverage its strong capital position." Collins further stated, "The SB&T staff is excited about the opportunity to expand our community banking model to Blair-

ville." The Blairsville acquisition is the first expansion for SB&T outside of Habersham County during its 10 year history.

Southern Bank & Trust is a full service community bank with state-of-the-art technology and products designed to serve clients throughout the Northeast Georgia area. Southern Bank & Trust employees understand the value of customers and pride themselves on providing highly personalized financial services to fit the lifestyles of the individual and businesses they serve. For more information on Southern Bank & Trust, please visit www.southernbankandtrust.com.

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UCHS Soccer
Mar 27 vs. Rabun Co. 5 & 7 PM
UCHS Golf
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