

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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March 30, 2016

Rep. Collins and Windstream CEO to meet May 9

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Windstream President and CEO Tony Thomas will meet with U.S. Rep. Doug Collins in his 9th Congressional District on Monday, May 9, according to Scott Morris, a Windstream senior adviser in corporate affairs.

An exact meeting place has not been finalized, though Habersham County has been tentatively suggested, according to a representative in Congressman Collins' office.

The two will be meeting to discuss the complaints laid out by the congressman in a series of communications between his office and Windstream in recent weeks, including the following items from the initial Feb. 11 letter Rep. Collins sent to Thomas:

"1. I am concerned that your networks in Northeast

Georgia are at over-capacity. Would you agree with this assessment? If not, please provide documentation demonstrating that Northeast Georgia networks specifically are not operating at over-capacity. If they are, please outline your plan to address this situation.

"2. Please provide a detailed status update regarding Windstream's progress upgrading your copper networks to modern fiber in Northeast Georgia. Specifically, what percentage of the copper network has been replaced and what is the timeline for full replacement with modern fiber?"

"3. Of the fees that you currently collect from Windstream subscribers in Northeast Georgia, what percentage are being used to upgrade infrastructure in the same area as those subscribers

reside?"

"4. In 2014, Windstream was granted by the Internal Revenue Service Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) status. Based on media reports at the time, Windstream's tax savings from this change in status was estimated to cut your company debt by \$3.2 billion and produce \$115 million annually in free cash flow. What is your estimated tax savings to date from REIT status, and what percentage of that estimated savings have you invested in broadband upgrades, both nationally and specifically in Georgia?"

In his response to the Feb. 11 letter, Thomas said that one of the ways in which he planned to deliver "a much improved service experience" would be to appoint a president of Georgia operations, "to ensure a single point of accountability as we work to deliver on our



Tony Thomas



Rep. Doug Collins

commitment to excellence."

Windstream fulfilled this commitment with its March 21 announcement of Jarrod "J" Berkshire, of Ringgold, as the new president of Georgia operations.

"In his new role, Berkshire will be based in Dalton, and oversee the nearly 450 managers and technicians

who operate Windstream's voice and broadband network in the state," according to the March 21 press statement. "There are about 620,000 households as well as thousands of businesses in Windstream's Georgia service areas."

"Windstream is committed to a network-first strategy that will give

our customers the advanced communications services they expect and deserve, and Jarrod Berkshire is the right person to lead that important effort in Georgia," said CEO Thomas in the statement. "He has a deep technical understanding of our statewide network and a real passion for serving our customers."

Berkshire was previously director of outside plant engineering for Windstream's seven-state southeast region, according to the statement, and he has a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from Jacksonville University in Jacksonville, Alabama, and has been with Windstream or its predecessor company since July 2000.

"Every customer matters, and every member of Windstream's Georgia

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30 plus years later and Don's still going strong

By Shawn Jarrard
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Staff Writer

Back when Don Murphy started Don's Car Care in 1984, he was charging \$3 a car wash.

Fast forward more than 30 years to the week before Christmas 2015, which happened to be the last time anyone could get a car wash at Don's Used Cars and Car Care, and an average car wash and detail cost \$45 - more than in '84, but upwards of \$60 cheaper than many competitors.

"We just tried to get them an AI job and a decent price," said Murphy, looking back over his long career in car care. "We were cheaper than everybody else. We tried to give people a good deal and a

good wash job for the money.

"(The cars) had to be good - if they weren't, we wouldn't turn them out. We'd check them at least three times before they went out the door, and we'd check them on the outside again after sitting for about an hour."

Murphy transitioned the business away from the car washes late last year because, frankly, they were keeping him too busy to focus on the other side of Don's - the used cars.

"We had the same customers about every week, the same ones coming all the time," said Murphy. "They came from Murphy, Ellijay, Hayesville, Hiawassee, Atlanta, from Tennessee - you name it, they'd come from all those places. You would not

believe how far they'd drive to get a car washed here."

Now, Murphy is focusing exclusively on the Used Cars aspect of his business, and as such, business has been good.

"If anyone has got anything to sell or anything of value, bring it by and we'll try to buy it," said Murphy. "We'll buy most anything. Buy, sell, trade, consign - just whatever you've got, bring it by and we'll look at it. Any cars, lawnmowers, trailers, four-wheelers, golf carts, ATVs. If we can't buy it, we'll sell it on consignment."

He still gets calls from former customers asking about car washes, though he refers them to neighboring



David Dyer, Don and Georgia Murphy recently shifted Don's Used Cars to focus on individual sales while moving away from car care

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Carroll Sisters Page for Speaker Ralston

By Shawn Jarrard
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Channa Carroll has been a Page for House District 7 State Rep. David Ralston during each legislative session since his election to Speaker of the House in 2010.

"I love going out there," said Channa, 16, a junior at Union County High. "You learn a lot. It's definitely a great experience to go up there and see how everything works in the government, to see how bills are passed and how they're made."

This year was a little different, however - her younger sister, Shae, was also a Page for Speaker Ralston, and the two worked side by side for the first time.

Channa and Shae fulfilled their duties as Pages on Feb. 29, which was Crossover Day for this year's legislative session. Crossover Day - a particularly busy day



Shannon Carroll with his daughters, Channa and Shae, and Speaker David Ralston during Crossover Day at the Georgia General Assembly on Feb. 29, 2016

for legislators - is the last day each year that a bill can move from one chamber to the other in the Georgia Legislature.

Pages are representatives, and they act as go-betweens for legislators and lobbyists,

and help deliver important paperwork concerning whatever bill may be under

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Contracts, litter and Proclamations at Commission meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris entertained a larger than average crowd at the March County Meeting, thanks in part to the recognition of groups in attendance.

In the meeting, Commissioner Paris signed three proclamations, one denoting April 2016 as Parkinson's Awareness Month, another celebrating the hard work of Towns-Union Master Gardeners, and yet another making April Donor Life Month.

"One of the most meaningful gifts that a human being can bestow upon another is the Gift of Life," read Commissioner



Commissioner Paris addresses a large crowd at the March 17, 2016, monthly commission meeting

Paris from the proclamation. "More than 121,000 men, women and children await life-saving or life-enhancing organ

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Mock trial team wraps up another successful season

By Todd Forrest
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Another outstanding year came to an end for Union County's Mock Trial team earlier this month at the Gwinnett Justice Center in Lawrenceville.

With six Region Championships and two District Championships, Union County finished as one of the Top 8 teams in the state, despite the teams not being separated based on enrollment.

In the first round, Union County faced off with the much larger Jonesboro High School, who competes in Class AAAA athletically, in a near-evenly matched competition. Union's



2015-2016 UCHS Mock Trial team completed its season with a top 8 finish in the state

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Yoakam/Whipkey at The Hall April 2

By Shawn Jarrard
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Legendary Country Music artist Dwight Yoakam is headlining Anderson Music Hall this Saturday, April 2, and while tickets remain, they're selling fast.

Opening up for the Honky Tonk musician is Nebraska-native Matt Whipkey, who, like Yoakam, doesn't necessarily conform to

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Matt Whipkey of Omaha, Nebraska, will be bringing his "Midwestern Rock" aesthetic to complement Country Music Legend Dwight Yoakam's signature sound on Saturday, April 2, in Hiawassee. Photo by Kevin Franz

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