

North Georgia News

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Another adventure begins in Union County

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Two years ago, Union County purchased 6.5 acres of land off the Old Blue Ridge Highway, alongside the Nottely River, and last week, the property was opened to the public.

In the first of many public uses for the property, a launch area for kayaks and canoes was inaugurated with a ribbon cutting ceremony April 8.

Before the ribbon cutting, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris presented a brief history regarding the property.

Sid Chandler, a County Agent during the 1950s and 60s, previously owned the land. About five years ago, Chandler informed Commissioner Paris that he was interested in selling the land to the county.

At the time, the county was involved in several projects so a deal was unable to be reached at the time, but three years later, after Chandler passed away, an agreement was struck with his family and Union County purchased the prime piece of real estate.

In the near-future, the



Let the fun begin! The Nottely River Headwaters Access is now open for fun. A large crowd turned out for the ribbon cutting. Photo/Todd Forrest

land, which borders Meeks Park, will provide additional uses along with an extension of the current walking trails, especially during the Scottish Festival and Highland Games in June and the Annual Sorghum Festival in October.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) helping hand in getting the kayak and canoe launch site opened on the Not-

tely River. The TVA had two representatives on hand for the ribbon cutting – Jerry Fouse, TVA Union Recreation Planner, and TVA Project Leader Kemmy Garrett.

"This is a perfect example of where a local community owns land rights at the same time the TVA has funding available to provide the partnership funds," Fouse

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Hirsch delivers Reece Lecture at YHC

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Young Harris – Renowned American poet Edward Hirsch delivered the Byron Herbert Reece Lecture at Young Harris College on Thursday, April 9.

More than 150 people attended the lecture, which included readings from Hirsch's various volumes of poetry.

Hirsch is the author of several collections of poetry, with a career spanning 35 years. He has also written a number of prose books, including works dedicated to the understanding of poetry.

Dr. Jim May, an English and creative writing professor at Young Harris College, introduced Hirsch and highlighted the importance of the Byron Herbert Reece Lecture Series, which began in 1966 and honors Reece's memory by bringing writers to campus.

All told, Hirsch read more than 15 of his poems to the attentive audience, including selections from "Gabriel: A Poem," which was described as a book-length elegy to Hirsch's son.

Themes of the poems selected for Thursday's read-



Edward Hirsch

ing included loss, love and questions of faith.

In a Q&A session following the reading, Hirsch fielded questions from those in attendance.

One member of the audience asked Hirsch if he could reconcile the intensely personal, "momentary moments" of some of his poems with the apparent quest for eternal meaning that seemed usually to end in empty pursuit.

"I don't know if you could hear the audience," said Hirsch to his audience, giving rise to one of his frequent flashes of humor. "He said,

you seem like a really deeply divided person."

Hirsch in agreement, were about deeply personal, happened to him, while others did contain an internal quest for meaning that seemed to escape him.

"Poetry's my way, and I think it's, for those of us who care about poetry, it seems to me as good a vehicle as any for the quest for meaning," said Hirsch. "When I was younger, I thought that poetry would save us, and now I don't think that anymore. I think poetry does some things better than almost anything else in the world, but it can't give you back the people you lose, for example. It can only give you representations of them." "But I think that poetry is a place to seek meaning, to transfigure the dark and the dreck of our own lives, to take suffering and try to transform it and turn it into something that's made and beautiful that will speak to other people. The power of poetry and the poems that have moved me most in my reading are not poems that have certainties, but poems that have questions."

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Mangifesta brings 30 years experience to UCSO

By Charles Duncan
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Editor's Note – The story of Union County Sheriff's Sgt. Tom Mangifesta is the first of a series of storylines that the North Georgia News will pursue in its attempt to help the community identify with its public safety workers. In the weeks ahead, the newspaper will tell the stories of the public servants that make Blairsville and Union County one of the safest places to live in these United States.

One might mistake Tom Mangifesta for a minister.

With a calm demeanor better suited for the ministry, Mangifesta is a minister of sorts. His ministry comes with a badge, and he's good at what he does.

A veteran of more than 30 years in law enforcement,



Union County Sheriff's Detective Sgt. Tom Mangifesta.

Union County Detective Sgt. Tom Mangifesta is one of a kind – one of Union County's finest.

Mangifesta was an Ex-

plorer Scout during his days in high school in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

The program designed to get young people interested

in public safety careers impressed Mangifesta enough to encourage him to pursue a Criminal Justice degree in college.

"In Fort Lauderdale, we were allowed to ride with the officers," Mangifesta said. "There was close interaction, we actually got to see the officers in action on the street."

Those days as an Explorer Scout led Mangifesta to pursue a profession that has occupied more than 30 years of his life. Mangifesta worked patrol in his first six years; he's worked in the plain-clothes division; and spent 23 years as a detective.

"Burglary, robbery and homicide," he said. "I had the chance to cover the gambit as a detective in Fort Lauderdale."

He spent the first 29 years in law enforcement

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Taylor pleads guilty to murdering wife; to serve 27 years behind bars

By Charles Duncan
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Robert Taylor tells anyone who will listen that he doesn't remember what happened on Nov. 25, 2013.

On Friday, Taylor pleaded guilty to malice murder and was sentenced to serve 27 years without parole, Enotah Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said.

Taylor's story of what happened to his wife, Fran Taylor, changed frequently – it all depended on who was asking him. Eventually, Robert Taylor confessed to killing his 63-year-old wife, Fran Taylor, Langley said.

Taylor's trial was scheduled to begin on Monday; his plea deal made that trial unnecessary.

"We were prepared for trial," Langley said, adding that the state was prepared to call more than 20 witnesses in the prosecution's case against Robert Taylor.

The events of Nov. 25, 2013 unfolded like clockwork and were well documented.

Union County sheriff's Sgt. Shawn Dyer was the first responder to a 911 call on Nov. 25 to Amy Lynn Drive in northern Union County.

The call by the then 67-



Robert Taylor

year-old Taylor reported that his wife Fran Taylor had fallen down a flight of steps leading to the family basement.

It didn't take Sgt. Dyer long to realize that the desperately injured woman didn't match the evidence in front of him. Fran Taylor was dead and her injuries differed dramatically from an accidental fall, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Sgt. Dyer called Union County sheriff's Detective Sgt. Andrew Hammond, who, on the scene, decided that, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and their Crime Scene Investigators would be needed.

Fran Taylor, a 63-year-

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William Holland School celebrates 30 years

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Young Harris – Friends and family, students and teachers, and members of the business community joined the Towns County Chamber of Commerce to celebrate the 30th anniversary of classes at William Holland Lapidary School in Young Harris on Friday, April 10.

Suzanne Sparks Wagner, Mike Sparks and Harold Sparks, three of six children of school founders Harold C. and Mary Lou Sparks, led the ribbon-cutting ceremony commemorating the event.

"Thirty years ago, my parents started this school," said Wagner, CEO and former director of the nonprofit school. "They had classes in the Seabolt Building 30 years ago in May, and they used some of the rooms in Sparks Lodge at that time. It was the following year that Sparks Lodge was used all together for classrooms.

"There probably wasn't anything like the number of people that will be here this Sunday on that particular day when they started. But this is what they wanted to see, that the school went on for the 30 years, and I'm hoping that it will go on for the next 30 years."

Several in attendance Friday held deep roots with



Suzanne Sparks Wagner, and her siblings Mike Sparks and Harold Sparks do the ribbon-cutting honors on Friday in Young Harris. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

the school, having volunteered to help in the school's construction, as well as having taught at the school since its inception.

Bill and Dee Conybear built their home on Lapidary Lane those 30 years ago after acquiring property from Harold and Mary Lou in exchange for their contribution to the school.

"We're very happy to be here, because this is very special," said Dee Conybear. "It's a very nice occasion for old friends to get together."

Dot Kasper, her husband George Henry Kasper Jr., and their daughter, Cheryl Kasper,

will be covering opals with her students.

"It's really neat to look at the old photo albums that they have, and to see how much the school has grown from when it first started," said Director Bob Terebayza, who is starting his fifth season with the school. "The first year they were open, they did just use the small blue building, the Seabolt Building across the way, and just ate here in the lunchroom.

"And there are weeks during the year now that we have every single classroom

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Florida fugitive awaits extradition

By Charles Duncan
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A Florida fugitive is in the process of being extradited to Florida following his arrest by Union County Sheriff's deputies and K-9 Deputy Lacey last week, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Brandon Kyle Blankenship, of 245 Harbin Road, Morganton, is a 25-year-old, who actually is in Union County, was at a location that experienced a 911 hang up call, Sheriff Mason said.

Deputies were dispatched to the location, and when they arrived, Blankenship was spotted tossing a football with another individual, Union County Detective SSgt. Daren Osborn said.

"Our deputies had been searching for Mr. Blankenship for a while to serve him with a TPO (temporary protective order)," Sgt. Osborn said. "He also had a felony probation vio-

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Brandon Blankenship



Luke David Rohloff

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