

North Georgia News

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Scottish Festival draws record crowd

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For the 11th straight summer, deep in the misty highlands of North Georgia, kilts and bagpipes invaded Meeks Park for the Highland Games.

And for the first time, the Downtown Square played host to the Blairsville Scottish Festival's Ceilidh (Kay-Lee).

The event brought in thousands from across the nation and from across the pond as the Clans gathered in Union County for three days of festivities and the traditional Scottish Highland Games.

Following the Kilted Classic Golf Tournament on Friday morning, everyone was invited to partake in the entertainment beginning in the early evening with a new twist added to this year's festivities.

The Scottish gathering, known as the Ceilidh (Kay-Lee), was relocated from the Community Center to the Seasons Inn Plaza and Union County's Historic Courthouse Square.

"We've been doing the Ceilidh the same way for 10 years and we decided that it was time for a change," Festival Committee Member Jim McAfee said. "We've always had a sit down dinner but now that the streetscaping is finished on the square we decided to hold it there and open it free for the public."

After outlasting a late Friday afternoon thunder-shower, the Downtown Square resembled a 'Little Edinburgh' with musical performances by Great Highland Bagpipes, The Blarney Girls, Scott McAleely, and Colin Grant-Adams.

The Royal Scottish Country Dancers were on hand and inside the Historic Courthouse, comedian Bob Valentine delighted the audience with his Scottish wit and humor.

"We've always had family in for the Scottish Festival but this is the first year that we've been able to attend the Ceilidh," said Pam

See *Highland Games*, 3A



Photos by Lowell Nicholson

Missing Wisconsin man seen on Trail in NC

By Charles Duncan
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A 50-year-old Wisconsin man believed missing on the Appalachian Trail, and last seen in Union County, is alive, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Paul D. Paur, of West Allis, WI, a suburb of Milwaukee, was last seen Tuesday, June 10, at the Standing Indian Shelter on the Appalachian Trail in Macon County, NC, Sheriff Mason said.

"We've got a positive ID that he was in Macon County, NC," Sheriff Mason said.

The Sheriff's Office also received reports that on June 7, Paur was seen at the Deep Gap Shelter on the Trail in Towns County, and at the Plum Orchard Shelter, also in Towns County on June 8.

"We had a report that on June 7 that he ate supper with a Boy Scout troop," Sheriff



Paul Paur

Mason said. "He was seen the next day at the Plum Orchard Shelter. He was positively identified. The folks that knew it was him had read the *Towns County Herald*."

Law enforcement first became concerned about Paur when his backpack was discovered in the middle of the Appalachian Trail on June 5 in Union County, Sheriff Mason said.

See *Missing*, 2A

Harrah's Valley River Casino and Hotel could open by Spring

By Charles Duncan
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Hiwassee – The \$110 million Harrah's Valley River Casino and Hotel Phase I Project in Cherokee County, NC could be completed by spring to mid 2015, said Paula Wojtkowski, regional vice president of talent development and external relations.

Wojtkowski, speaking at the annual Towns County Homeowners Association meeting, said the project could be completed by no later than July.

The casino will be owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and will be managed by Caesars Entertainment Corp.

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians already owns Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort in Cherokee, NC, about an hour's drive from the new casino location.



Paula Wojtkowski

The Valley River Casino and Hotel, which includes 300 rooms, will be located about 30 minutes from Union County, and just a slightly longer drive from Hiwassee. Basically, just past Wal-Mart in Murphy on Highway 74.

It also will target patrons from Knoxville and Chattanooga, Tenn., and the Metro Atlanta area.

See *Casino*, 2A

BOE approves Fiscal 2015 budget

Budget increase won't cause tax hike; student numbers on the rise

By Charles Duncan
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The student numbers at Union County High School are on the rise and so is the Fiscal 2015 budget.

The total budget is set at \$25.885 million for Fiscal 2015. That's up from \$23.662 million in Fiscal Year 2014.

Union County Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jeremy Williams told Union County Board of Education members that the increase is due to the rising cost of instruction.

However, he also told the board that an anticipated increase in ad valorem tax



Dr. Jeremy Williams

collections and increased funding coming from the state would allow the budget to absorb the increase without raising taxes.

"From the state standpoint, we're earning more money from the state," Dr. Williams said. "We underestimated tax collections last year, and with the \$14 million anticipated for collection in the next fiscal year, there should be no tax increase."

Dr. Williams said that the school system has been slighted about \$10 million from the state over the past few years. With the economy rebounding, the state is putting money originally designated for local control back into the hands of local school boards.

"Last year we lost \$1.6 million," he said. "We need to know that students are being prepared, not at a minimum-competency level but with rigorous, relevant education, to enter college, the workforce or the military at a level that makes them competitive with students from other states," Dr. Barge said.

The new assessment system will be a comprehensive single program and not a series of tests as has been the norm.

See *Schools*, 2A

Cost of student lunches on the rise

By Charles Duncan
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Union County school lunches will experience a cost increase when students return to classes in the fall.

The cost of a lunch at the Primary School will jump 20 cents a meal, School Nutrition Director Courtney Waller told the Union County Board of Education last week.

The cost of a meal at the Primary School jumps to \$2.05. Meanwhile, lunch at the Middle School is going up from \$1.95 to \$2.10 and from \$2.05 to \$2.20 at Union County High School. Breakfasts will remain free.

In other business, the BOE voted to spend \$23,437 on percussion instruments for The Woody Gap School.

Calling it an investment for the long haul, David



Gary Steppe

Murphy, co-principal at The Woody Gap School, said the school would start percussion music classes in the fall.

The enrichment activities are expected to help in student achievement, Murphy said.

"Music has proven to increase SAT scores over the long haul," Murphy said.

The BOE also approved

the Fiscal Year 2015 Family Connection contract with the school system. The contract must be submitted to the state by June 30.

Family Connection funds come from the state and pass through local school boards.

This is the 16th year for Family Connection in Union County.

"I want to take this opportunity to say that we appreciate the school board and school system for continuing the relationship with us," Director Katie Jones said.

The board also approved bids on fire equipment; tires for transportation, propane, pest control, garbage pickup, and fuel. Kings Fire and Equipment, Sugar Ridge Pest Control, Waste Away, Snyder Tires, Appalachian Propane and Thomas Oil took the bids.

Georgia cans CRCT, EOCT testing

By Charles Duncan
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State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge has announced a new assessment system aimed at replacing CRCT and EOCT testing.

Georgia Milestones will be aligned to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and will require more from students than the CRCT and EOCT it replaces, according to Dr. Barge.

Georgia Milestones will provide a more realistic picture of academic progress, according to Dr. Barge.

A major benefit of the new system is that it is one



Dr. John Barge

consistent testing program across grades 3-12, whereas previously students took a series of individual tests.

The increased expecta-

tions for student learning reflected in Georgia Milestones may mean initially lower CRCT or EOCT scores.

"We need to know that students are being prepared, not at a minimum-competency level but with rigorous, relevant education, to enter college, the workforce or the military at a level that makes them competitive with students from other states," Dr. Barge said.

The new assessment system will be a comprehensive single program and not a series of tests as has been the norm.

See *Testing*, 2A

Chapman earns high education honors

By Charles Duncan
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The director of Union County Schools Special Education department has been named the 2014 Outstanding New Special Education Director.

The Georgia Council of Administrators of Special Education chose Kristy Chapman for the honor.

The award goes to an educator who has five years or less experience as a Special Education Director and who has performed outstanding service in their time



Kristy Chapman

as a Special Education Director. Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe was

ecstatic about Chapman's honor. "Please join us in congratulating Ms. Chapman on her outstanding accomplishment," Steppe said.

As a testament to her dedication to the county's children with disabilities, Chapman recently participated in a Special Olympics fundraising event.

She collected donations from supporters who wanted to see her go Over the Edge for Special Olympics Georgia. Chapman raised \$1,195 before rappelling off the Buckhead Tower in Atlanta in April 26.

Vol. 105 No. 25
2 Sections, 26 Pages
Weather
Thu: T-Storms Hi 88 Lo 65
Fri: Clouds Hi 88 Lo 67
Sat: T-Storms Hi 84 Lo 65

Arrests 8A
Church 9A
Classifieds 2B
Opinion 4A
Legals 5B
Obits 11A
Sports 12A

8 0 4 8 7 9 1 9 3 1 4 2

June Events at Brasstown Bald
Union County Recreation Football and Cheerleader Registration
See Page 12A

Vietnam Veterans
meeting June 23rd
Cadence Bank

2014 RODEO PRO RODEO
June 20th and 21st
Union County Saddle Club Arena
See Page 1B

GMREC SUMMER LAUNCH PARTY & FUNDRAISER!
JUNE 21ST
See Page 1B