

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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July 22, 2015

GDOT, Commissioner Paris agree on Walmart lane

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In the interest of public safety, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and the Georgia Department of Transportation have teamed up to create a new turn lane at the Walmart leading off of Georgia 515.

The new turn lane is one lane's width further from the edge of the road and closer to Walmart, and should be usable by the end of next week.

"If you pulled out of Walmart at the lower exit and you're going to cross the interstate and go back to Blairsville, if you look back to your left, there's visibility for 8/10 of a mile," said Commissioner Paris.

Normally, that 8/10 of a mile offers plenty of visibility



The County Road Department is reworking the turning lane on GA 515 leading into Walmart.

to inform motorists that it is safe to enter the road.

Problems arise, however, when several cars enter the turn lane to turn into Walmart, effectively blocking the view of Highway 515 to anyone sitting at the stop sign

waiting to turn left.

"Even two SUVs would almost totally block your view from the stop bar, so you had to ease up closer to the road, and even then, it was hard to see," said Commissioner Paris.

Work began on the new turn lane last week, with the county helping to grade the area and lay down the 300 tons of gravel. DOT is expected to have the lane paved

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Henson exits race for Union County seat on EMC board

By Charles Duncan
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Danny Henson was all in and ready to run on a petition ballot for the Union County seat on the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC board of directors.

Then he started to think: "If I wasn't running, who would I vote for?"

He then got in his truck and drove to the Union County Farmers Market. There he greeted fellow EMC Union County candidate Mickey Cummings.

"I shook his hand, and I wished him good luck," Henson said. "Mickey wished me



Danny Henson

good luck. I told him I didn't need it, that I wasn't running. With a good man like Mickey Cummings, there was no reason to turn my life upside down to

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Fine Arts Center ready for August opening

By Shawn Jarrard
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More than six years and two SPLOST referendums later, the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center will finally reach completion by the time school begins on Aug. 7.

The \$8.6 million state-of-the-art complex will house tailor-made classrooms for the school system's band, drama and chorus programs.

Initially, the Fine Arts Center was approved during the previous SPLOST cycle, but due to the recession, the schools were only able to come up with \$2 million toward the project.

For several years, the only work done on the center was the laying of the



Workers put the finishing touches on the auditorium at the new Fine Arts Center. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

concrete foundation, as well as parking lots and grading work.

Instead of bonding into debt, the Union County

School Board decided to wait for the next SPLOST cycle,

which gave the center another mandate as it became voter-approved for the sec-

ond time.

The necessary funding came in during the next SPLOST cycle, and com-

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Butternut Creek Festival posts record numbers for two-day event

By Todd Forrest
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Staff Writer

Once again the 17th Annual Butternut Creek Festival was the talk of the town following last weekend's arts and crafts showcase along the banks of the mountain stream for which the festival is named.

The admission-free festival, presented by the High Country Artisans Inc., returned to Meeks Park as 78 artists, demonstrators, non-profit groups, and musicians were on hand to make everyone's day. It has also gained the reputation of being "one of the finest juried arts and crafts shows in the Southeast."

Despite going head-to-head with the opening week-



Elvis entertains

end of the Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee and dodging afternoon thundershowers on Sunday, this year's festival was one for the record books.

"I had crafters tell me that they sold more this weekend than any other weekend

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County to save \$1.6 million in interest

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County taxpayers will be saving \$1.6 million dollars in future interest payments thanks to the restructuring of debt taken on to build the Union County Community Center in 2010.

Coinciding with the current SPLOST cycle, which began this year, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris authorized the issuance of \$8.185 million in a bond sale to JPMorgan Chase Bank, securing an interest rate of 1.66 percent to be paid over the next six years.

This will allow for the payoff of the community center, which currently stands at \$5,122,044.72, leaving right around \$3 million in funds to get started on other SPLOST-funded projects.

In 2010, the county is-



Lamar Paris

sued bonds at an interest rate of 4.66 percent to be paid over 20 years in order to build the community center.

The 2010 bond issuance was structured in such a way as to allow for a complete payoff date no sooner than August of this year, which the county will undertake with this current bond issuance at a much better interest rate. Previously, the county had been making

interest-only payments.

Effectively, the county will owe less interest in a shorter period of time by rolling the community center payoff into the current bond issuance, hence the \$1.6 million in taxpayer savings.

"I've tried to go back and make sure that we're being as fiscally conservative as possible in how we do the next SPLOST," said Commissioner Paris in the July County Meeting. "So, the last SPLOST, we did not have enough SPLOST funds to pay for the community center. We felt like it was appropriate and a good project to go ahead and build, so we did (the community center) and got that financing backed by SPLOST but not paid through SPLOST."

Borrowing money at the beginning of a SPLOST cycle allows for voter-approved projects to take place im-

mediately, instead of waiting for SPLOST funds to accumulate over time. Moreover, this is standard practice for many local governments and schools, according to Commissioner Paris.

Payments can then be made on the borrowed money as SPLOST funds come in each month from the state.

The previous SPLOST cycle that ended earlier this year in April was known as SPLOST III, and the county collected \$22,276,936 during this six-year period – and this is a number the county is keeping in mind for the current SPLOST IV period.

"Being very conservative, we have only estimated to collect this same amount over the next six years," said Commissioner Paris. "We went through it, as we all know, some call it a depression, and

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Peter Noone and Hermits headline GMF events on Friday

By Shawn Jarrard
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Hiawassee - Don't touch that dial, North Georgia – the Georgia Mountain Fair is telling you that you're into something good.

And that something is Peter Noone of Herman's Hermits, playing the Fair this Friday, July 24, at 3 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.

As a special treat, Country Music Star Natalie Noone, Peter's daughter, will accompany her father to perform some of her own material during the shows.

Originally part of the British Invasion of the 1960s, Noone has flexed his staying power over the last 50 plus years and is still going strong.

"The Stones are still going and Paul McCartney's still going, and we're the only ones who are still out there, I think, just because we're the



Peter Noone

most persistent," said Noone. "The Stones won't quit, will they, and the same with Paul McCartney – I'm a fan of both bands. It's like I always say, as long as the Stones are still touring, I've got another 20 years in the business."

Noone and Herman's Hermits are responsible for such beloved hits as *I'm Into Something Good*, *Henry the*

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Collins, Kerr take top honors at Sweet Corn Fest

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Sixth Annual Sweet Corn Festival offered visitors to the Union County Farmers Market plenty to sink their teeth into on Saturday, July 18.

"Every year, we have it to celebrate our corn growers and to help get people to come and try the different varieties of sweet corn," said Market Manager Mickey Cummings. "We've been doing it for as long as we've had the market. We started it at the courthouse when we were there."

As part of Sweet Corn Day, Cummings holds a corn shucking contest, after which all the corn is boiled and patrons can sample the offerings of the different vendors before buying.

Participating vendors were SSM Farm with its Golden Queen corn, 7M Fam-



Harold Collins

ily Farms with Silver Queen, Lee Knight Farm with Honey Select, Freddie Collins Farm with Providence corn and Tip-ton Family Farm with Ambrosia corn.

The contest was separated into two categories, adults and youth, and this year, returning champions from both groups successfully defended



Trent Kerr

their title belts.

"The trick is, I'm not worried about silks, but I want the green off the cob – every bit of it," said Cummings to the contestants. "The secret to this contest is to shuck as many as you can within a 60-second amount of time. We'll declare a winner by counting the ears."

Harold "Combine" Collins shucked 14 ears of corn in a minute, blowing away the competition by having the cleanest ears this side of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"Every year I've entered it I've won," said Collins, who works with his brother at Freddie Collins Farm. "It feels good to have more competition – that's what we're out here for, to get more people in the Farmers Market and have more events. It feels good to defend the title, and I invite anybody to come out next year and see if they can knock me off the hill."

Eleven youths entered the competition, but long-time Youth Shucking Champion Trent Kerr, of Southern Mountain Living by Mountain View Farm, won the day with his total of nine ears.

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Judge Garmon sets bail conditions for Gowder

By Charles Duncan
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A Blairsville man facing six felony counts including three counts of prescription fraud is free on \$50,000 bail, Union County court records show.

Union County Chief Magistrate Johnnie Garmon set bail for Dr. David Gowder at \$50,000 with conditions, court records show.

Those conditions include Gowder not having contact either direct, indirect, or through a third party with the alleged witnesses or codefendants in his case; also, he must appear in court when required.

He also is prohibited from being on the grounds of Union General Hospital, or any associated medical facility with the exception

of receiving medical treatment in an emergency situation, and shall not be employed in any medical or healthcare position, or administrative position in any healthcare-related facility, court records show.

Gowder also was required to sign and execute a waiver of extradition, expressly waiving any rights under the Uniform Criminal Extradition Act, to be extradited should he be arrested in another jurisdiction for violating his bond order, or for failure to appear in court, court records show.

Gowder allegedly obtained prescriptions for the painkiller Oxycodone, a Schedule II controlled substance at a local pharmacy, arrest warrants show.

Gowder also was charged with three counts

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