

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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Auditors: Union County gets a financial 'thumbs up'

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

A three-month audit of Union County's financial status is in.

"We don't have anything to hide in Union County and anyone who thinks we do, is barking up the wrong tree," Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said regarding open records requests and the financial state of the county.

Commissioner Paris made that statement following an audit of the 2011 county finances by R.L. Jennings and Associates.

After three months of auditing, Union County gov-

ernment operations was determined to be in sound financial shape.

Jennings, the Managing Partner of R.L. Jennings and Associates and the engagement partner on the Union County audit, opened by thanking the citizens of Union County for putting their faith in them to allow them to perform the auditing service.

"An audit can be a pretty intense thing, somebody once described it similar to a proctology exam," Jennings said.

He went on to explain the purpose of an audit and its role in county government.

"Our responsibilities are to basically to express an opinion on the financial statements and the responsibilities



Lee Jennings of R.L. Jennings and Associates. Photo/Todd Forrest

of management, that being the Commissioner's Office," he said.

Jennings discussed several items inside the financial statements, including GASB 34, pronounced to rhyme with The Great Gatsby, The Government Accounting and Standards Board is a new set of accounting rules, considered by accountants to be the most monumental change in government financial reporting in American history.

"They (state of Georgia) passed GASB 34 about six or seven years ago, with the intent to make financial statements more easily readable by the general public."

Included in the audit, were the Union County Health Department, the Building Au-

thority, the Development Authority, and the Urban Redevelopment Agency.

"At the government-wide level, Union County had a \$4 million positive increase in the general funds, which is a great thing to have," Jennings said.

He continued to break down each phase of the financials. There is a General Fund, SPLOST Fund, and non-major governmental fund. Jennings also discussed the collection rate of property taxes by the Tax Commissioner's Office.

"In April, the county was already at 90-plus percent collection on property taxes, which is outstanding. Lots of

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All roads led to Blairsville's Sorghum Fest

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

All roads led to the final weekend of Blairsville's 43rd Annual Sorghum Festival.

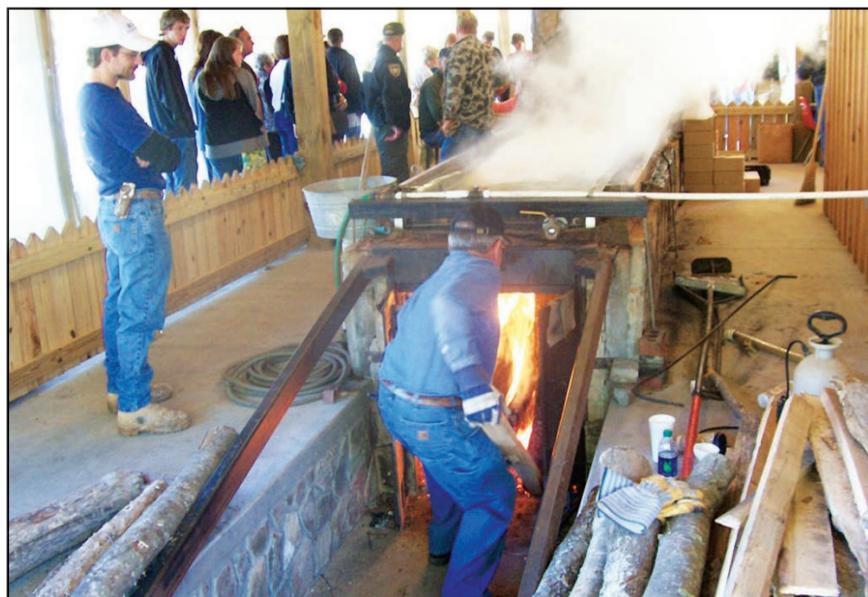
And what a weekend it was as visitors came from far and wide to enjoy the mountainous colors of autumn as Mother Nature painted a beautiful natural landscape.

The number of visitors to the annual festival were up over the past few years.

The weekend traffic numbers on Highway 515 proved traffic was as crowded as its ever been.

Saturday morning, traffic was bumper-to-bumper headed North. In the late afternoon, the bumper-to-bumper traffic was headed South en masse as the traffic was spread out for miles and miles.

The Festival, sponsored by the Blairsville Jaycees, offered something for everyone - festive foods, games for the kids, live music, competitions only experienced in the mountains, crafts on display for sale, a petting zoo, and historic demonstrations of the



Blairsville Jaycee members fire up the sorghum during the 43rd Annual Sorghum Festival's second weekend. The Jaycees sold out of sorghum. Photo/Janice Boling

Mountain Way of Life, square dancing, and fresh syrup right out of the boiling pan.

The visitors came from as far West as California, as far east as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New York and as near as neighboring Hiawassee.

Blairsville Jaycees President Kim Bridges said the festival was a pleasing success.

As usual, the festival's main attraction was the working sorghum mill.

The Jaycees work up the cane and produce the sorghum themselves while visitors

stand by to watch the entire process.

Cane is crushed, juice is collected, the fire is stoked, and when boiled to the perfect consistency, golden, sweet sorghum syrup is the

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Construction costs for Fire Station 1 at \$724,723.14

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County government and the contractor for the new construction and additions at Fire Station 1 have come to terms on the contracted costs for the project, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said.

Commissioner Paris and Winkler and Winkler Construction of Blairsville reached a contractual agreement of \$724,723.14, Commissioner Paris said.

Winkler and Winkler recently completed the construction of the new Towns County Senior Center in Hiawassee.

"Our firemen have been living in sub-standard conditions for well over a couple of years," Paris said. "They are always out there helping the public and they do a great job."



Chief Charles Worden

They've been forced to sleep in a FEMA trailer and that's all about to change."

"Winkler & Winkler is a local company and every single contractor that will be using is from right here in Union County," Paris said.

Fire Station 1 was born

See Fire Station 1, Page 3A

Students hear a powerful message

By Joe Collins
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Chris Sandy had a powerful message to share last week with students at the Mountain Educational Center Charter High School, Union County High School and Woody Gap High School.

It wasn't your average high school assembly. Sandy grew up like any other middle class American high school athlete.

He played on the football team, had a nice car and a pretty girlfriend and was thoroughly enjoying life.

He went to high school parties and hung out with his friends. He learned how to



Chris Sandy

drink alcohol and felt there was nothing wrong with it.

After graduation he continued his lifestyle and still felt no harm could come from his extra-curricular activities.

Sandy thought he was doing no wrong.

The Mountain Education Center Charter High School SADD Chapter and the Union County Family Connection had heard Sandy's story.

They organized an assembly for Thursday and invited the public to attend.

There was more to Sandy's story. He was convicted on two counts of vehicular homicide when he and a friend chose to drink and drive while looking for another party.

That decision turned deadly when Sandy made an alcohol influenced decision to be carelessly on a rural two-lane road and caused an accident that took the lives of two people.

Today, Sandy believes his mission is to travel the country to tell his story to students, in hopes of helping them avoid the same consequences he endured.

He wants students to avoid the same pain his victims' families have endured due to his bad choices. Not a day goes by that he and his own family don't have to deal with the the consequences of his actions.

It is a powerful message to share with students. At age 22, Sandy and his friend were going from one party to another party and he made the choice to drive. It was a rural two-lane road that

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Critters recognized nationally

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Castaway Critters Pet Rescue of Blairsville has been awarded a \$10,000 prize from Petco Foundation's 100 Charitable Partners campaign.

Petco had just surpassed the \$100 million mark for funds raised to help animals.

To celebrate the milestone, the Petco Foundation and Petco store associates selected 100 charitable partners to receive a \$1,000 donation each.

Additionally, Petco and the Petco Foundation let pet lovers nationwide vote for 10 of the Top 100 charitable partners to receive an additional \$10,000 each.

Petco awarded \$1,000 to each of the 100 participants competing in the campaign.

The \$10,000 prizes were awarded after voters na-



Cleo

tionwide selected the top 100 pet organization charities in the country.

Castaway Critters finished fourth in the nation in votes with 5,222 nationwide, according to Petco's Web site.

Their reward: \$10,000. Blairsville's Castaway Critters has found homes for more than

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Hometown Halloween on Oct. 27

By Janice Boling
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Get ready for some hometown fun in Downtown Blairsville.

The Annual Hometown Halloween is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 27 from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

As in previous years, there will be lots of activities for children. Look for everything from free candy, scarecrows, creative Halloween decorations, games, pizza by the slice, cocoa and hot dogs for \$1, cider and hot dogs, peanuts, and more.

As tradition would have it, the Downtown Square and a



Everyone is all smiles at Hometown Halloween.

few side streets will be closed to thru traffic from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Please plan on taking a detour if you are traveling through Blairsville during Hometown Halloween.

Feed the Food Bank is once again collecting food for the Union County Food Pantry during this annual event. On the night of Hometown Hal-

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Car Show a classic in 2012

By Janice Boling
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

No, you didn't take a trip back in time during the weekend.

Those vintage vehicles rolling in and out of town were part of the 2012 Good Neighbors Car Show.

Once again, the event was a hit with visitors, vendors, and participants enjoying the special day at United Community Bank.

More than 200 beautiful antique automobiles, trucks, motorcycles, and boats were on display for a day of fun and fellowship.

The cars were gor-



Service with a smile at the Car Show. Photo/Janice Boling

geous, the weather was perfect, and the crowd was full of smiling faces.

Concession volunteers were busy selling hamburgers and hot dogs, car enthusiasts

were happy looking under the hoods of some nice rides, and everyone was ready with a story to tell.

It was one of the busiest

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North Georgia Motorcycle Show
Sat., Oct. 27
10am-3pm
North Georgia Technical College Campus

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Haunted House
at Fire Station 10
Oct. 26 & 27
6pm-11pm
116 Jones St.
(Off Jackson St. behind Circle K south)
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FRIGHT NIGHT AT THE FORT

October 26-27 & 31
Gates Open at 7 p.m.

Hometown Halloween on the Square

Saturday Oct. 27
5:30-7:30 p.m.

UCHS Football
Friday, Oct. 26
7:30pm
@ Rabun Co.