

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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City taking bids on airport project

By Charles Duncan
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The City of Blairsville is in one of its biggest economic development tools, Blairsville Municipal Airport.

The city is in the midst of a \$689,000-plus upgrade project that includes paving for a new North Terminal parking area, the taxi-way area paved, in yet another step in making a North Terminal come to fruition, Mayor Jim Conley said.

"All of this has to be done before we can move forward with building a new terminal building," Mayor Conley said. "Of course we've got a new road already. Many thanks to Commissioner Lamar Paris and a grant that came from the Georgia Department of Transportation, that a new road was built from Highway 515 all the way to the airport property.



The Blairsville Municipal Airport is about to undergo some modern renovations that will increase air traffic and make the airport more user friendly to businesses and tourists alike. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

The road was originally built as an avenue to run water lines to the Walmart property.

"We had to bring the water lines beside the runway at the See Airport, Page 6A

Former UCHS paraprofessional charged with child porn, sexual assault at school

By Charles Duncan
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A 28-year-old former paraprofessional at Union County High School faces charges of sexual assault and two counts of sexual exploitation of children, or child pornography, related to an alleged physical relationship with a Union County High School female student, Union County Sheriff's reports show.

William Christopher Courson, of Blairsville, is free on bail, and is represented by a local attorney, Union County Superior Court records show.

During an interview with sheriff's investigators, Courson accused the victim of trying to set him up by using his classroom computer to make it look like he was sending her personal messages, sheriff's reports show.



Chris Courson

After further questioning, Courson allegedly stopped the interview with See School Assault, Page 2A

Chief: '2012 Shop With a Cop, the best one ever'

By Charles Duncan
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A young boy, no more than 12 years old, sat on the ramp leading into the Extreme Christian Outdoors trailer parked outside the Garden Shop at Walmart.

He had a smile on his face as wide as the Nottely River. There was good reason, he was going to have an excellent Christmas.

Sixty more children ages 11-17 were feeling exactly the same way.

The officers who proudly wear the uniform of the Blairsville Police Department say this event is as much an event for them as it is for the children.

"We look forward to this as much as the children do," said Officer Rusty Walker.

Shop With a Cop has lit up the faces of more than 500 local youth since the program began in 1999.

Each child is allotted a certain amount of money and they shop the way they want to.

Union County Family Connection, teachers and other sources point the prospective shoppers in the direction



Blairsville and Union County's finest after a hard day leading the Shop With a Cop charge. Photo/Charles Duncan

of the Blairsville Police Department.

Many, Assistant Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said, don't shop for themselves.

"These are the kids that fall through the cracks," Baxter said. "It's the kids that are sort of in limbo when it comes to Christmas. Everyone likes to see the eyes of the little ones light up. Well, the tweeners

(11-17) sort of get left out."

A record number of Shop With a Cop kids didn't get left out in 2012. This year's group was part of the most successful campaign in the program's history.

Never before had 61 children had the privilege to be a part of the program. This year's giving was incredible, a tribute to the Blairsville-Union

County community and beyond, Chief Johnny Carroll said.

"In year's past, we've been able to take 40 or so kids on this adventure," Chief Carroll said. "This year, the money came from everywhere, from locals and local businesses to folks reading the North Georgia News online and seeing that we needed do-



It was the start of a beautiful day and a trip to Walmart. Sixty-one children took part in Shop With a Cop on Saturday. Photo/Charles Duncan

nations.

"We got a \$1,000 check from a lady who read the North Georgia News on the Web and she didn't think twice, she called me and asked for our address," Chief Carroll said. "We didn't expect \$1,000, but then again, we didn't expect a check from her at all. She saw the need on line in the newspaper and bless her heart, she

sent us a very generous gift."

BPD Officer Shawn Dyer said the program can grow to help more local children in the future.

"I really think there's a chance we can take 80 to 100 children next year," Officer Dyer said.

Saturday began with the See Shop, Page 3A

City eyes \$1.69 million water project

By Charles Duncan
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The city of Blairsville is on the verge of a \$1.69 million water system improvement project from Pat Haralson Drive to Deep South Farm Road.

The project involves replacement of aging 2-inch PVC water lines with modern 6-inch lines that withstand the need for water pressure.

It also entails upgrading water meters with uber modern Automated Meter Reading technology, said Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley.

Chip McGaughey, an engineer for EMI, presented two projects to the City Council.

The first is the Water System Improvement Project for Pat Haralson Drive to Deep South Farm Road, which entails larger water lines going under Pat Haralson Drive and to the end of Deep South Farm Road.

"The truth is, we don't know exactly how old those water lines really are out Haralson Drive and Deep South Farm Road," the mayor said. "We've got the hospital out there and if there's a break on Haralson or Deep South roads, we're in a bind and their lacking water pressure. It's a must do project."



Blairsville City Council Member Tony Dyer studies contract language as City Engineer Chris McGaughey. Photo/Charles Duncan

The second project is a Meter Replacement Project which would upgrade meters for City customers to AMR meters, Automated Meter Reading, Mayor Conley said.

The new reading system would be more cost effective, save on human error and be more efficient than the outdated meters resulting in a possible gain in revenue, he said.

McGaughey told the council that if these projects could be done in unison, the City would save on support costs.

He said the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority would be the best funding source through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund or the GEFA Georgia Fund

Loan Program.

The deadline to apply for the funding is Dec. 31. The current interest rate is 1.82 percent but the City could get a 1 percent reduction if it combines the Meter Change Out program with the water improvement project.

"It's also possible we could have principle forgiveness up to 20 percent through federal funding," Mayor Conley said.

The cost estimate for the combined projects amount to \$1.69 million and some change, McGaughey told the council.

There was concern about the cost of the combined project.

See Water Project, Page 6A

Tree lighting at Vogel boosts toys project

By Charles Duncan
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The threat of rain didn't keep more than 400 folks from braving the elements and witnessing the lighting of the Vogel State Park Christmas Tree.

The annual event is about much more than just a tree lighting, it's an official toy drive for the Union County Sheriff's Office Give-a-Gift Christmas event.

Give-a-Gift Christmas meets the needs of children

See Toys, Page 2A



A good time was had by all at Vogel State Park. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Rotary Club rewards teachers

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Rotary Club of Union County continues its efforts to lend a helping hand to local students, teachers, as well as those less fortunate at home and abroad.

Last week, the Rotary Club visited Union County Elementary School bearing gifts, \$100 checks for 15 teachers. They also toured the school's computer lab that the



Left to right, Dr. Jeremy Williams, Darlene Helton, Lisa Mashburn, William Stone, Patricia Cook and Debra Collins. Photo/Todd Forrest

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Care to Share
Donate Personal Care Items at
Union County Library
or
North Georgia News
Help Our Community!

It's A WONDERFUL LIFE
Sunday, Dec. 23
2:30 p.m.
Peacock Playhouse
See pg 9A

Tour Misty Mtn. Model Railroad
See page 5A

UCHS Basketball
Fri., Dec. 14 • 7pm vs. Lumpkin Co.
Sat., Dec. 15 • 6pm vs. Towns Co.

UCMS Wrestling
Fri., Dec. 14 • 5 pm vs. Towns & Fannin
Sat., Dec. 15 • 9am
League Championships @ home