

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

February 11, 2015

## Sixth-grader makes Bee history

Emi Leonard becomes first sixth grade Spelling Bee champion

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Union County Middle School sixth-grader Emi Leonard was determined to win last week's countywide Spelling Bee.

She wanted to win for all the sixth graders who had never won before. She wanted to prove that seventh and eighth graders did not rule the roost when it comes to spelling.

Well, she did what she set out to do.

Emi is the Union County Spelling Bee champion and will head to the district bee Feb. 28 at Mabry Middle School in Marietta.

"It's cool being better at spelling than seventh and eighth graders," she said.

Emi began her quest to defeat upper classmen in earnest, when she took on seventh-grader Tommy Orchanian in the finals.

Tommy was nervous. His task at hand as the finals began was to spell "goliath."



Runner up Tommy Orchanian, Champion Emi Leonard, and Bee Coordinator Denise Driskell. Photo/Charles Duncan

"G-L," Tommy spelled the word, and then let out a sigh of disbelief.

You see, according to the Bee rules, you can't take back a letter once you have pronounced it out loud.

The next sequence, Emi

must spell the next two words correctly.

The first word was *berserk*, which Emi spelled with no problem. The second word was *irrigation*, and again Emi

See Bee, Page 3A

## Support for Tricia Spear continues this week

The outpouring of community love for Tricia Spear continues at noon on Friday at the Union County Community Center.

Tricia is home from the Neurological ICU at Erlanger Medical Center, where she had been since the beginning of January.

On Friday, a special luncheon will be held for Tricia at the Union County Community Center. The event will be limited to 150 tickets, which are available now. The donation for the luncheon will be \$30.

Advanced ticket sales are being offered at United Community Bank, Blairsville office; Blairsville City Hall; Humane Society Thrift Store, Blairsville; and the Towns County Chamber of Commerce.

Tickets also will be offered at the door on Friday prior to the luncheon. If you are unable to attend, donations for Tricia will also be accepted at locations listed.

Tricia is a great friend to our community and few have gone untouched by her compassion. Whether volunteering for events, giving up her days off to help at the Union County



Tricia Spear

Farmers Market, saving a stray animal or helping with the needs of families displaced by a fire, Tricia has always been the one who steps up time and time again to offer assistance to anyone and everyone.

The love and support continues on Saturday, Valentine's Day, when the No Greater LOVE 5K and 1-mile Walk is scheduled at Meeks Park in Tricia's honor.

Friends of Tricia are hosting the event to raise money that goes toward a Recovery Fund that will pay bills and expenses while she is unable to work. There are several ways

to help.

Become a sponsor for the event by contacting Colleen Urbaniuk at colleen-1969@hotmail.com or stop by the Seasons Inn Motel or The Humane Society Thrift Shop (both in Downtown Blairsville) to get a sponsorship form.

Register to participate in either the 5K or the 1-mile walk. Registration forms are available at the Seasons Inn Motel, The Humane Society Thrift Shop or online at active.com.

Participants can register the day of the race. Registration begins at 9 a.m. and the race starts at 10 a.m.

Entry fees are \$25 for the 5K and \$20 for the 1-mile walk. Registration includes an event t-shirt for all those who pre-register for the event.

Volunteer to help for the event. Please contact Colleen Urbaniuk at Seasons Inn, (706) 745-1631.

Make a donation to The Tricia Spear Recovery Fund at United Community Bank.

And always remember that prayers, prayers, and more prayers for Tricia's full recovery and her vibrant return to doing the things that she loves.

## Transitional home coming to Blairsville

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Mayor Jim Conley and Blairsville City Council held their regular meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 3.

In the meeting, Rev. Richard Rivera of Neighbor's Hand Refuge for Hope presented an outline of the Neighbor's Hand Discipleship Program.

"We started back about four and a half years ago, come this June will be our fifth year," said Rivera. "We are a ministry, we are incorporated, we are a 501(c)(3). What we set out to do four and a half, five years ago, was to basically rub elbows with the people that were hurting in our community. So, what we started to do was begin just meeting immediately needs."

Neighbor's Hand began by meeting with people for prayer and counseling, and helping with electric bills and heating bills during the winter.

"What we soon found out was that there was a community of people that were re-



Council member Martha Cone, center, listens as Mayor Jim Conley introduces Richard Rivera of Neighbors' Hand Refuge for Hope. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

ally just hurting - native folks that were just trying to do everything they could to get by," said Rivera.

One of the findings of Neighbor's Hand was that usually, if someone needed help paying their electric bill one month, that person was likely to need help the next month and the month after that.

"What we decided to do

was we began to expand our ministry so that we assigned coaches to them," said Rivera. "Those coaches were people to come by beside them to encourage them, but to take that time, 40 days, just to walk with them and begin putting a quick plan together, if you would, like a short-term life plan, together."

More than just paying an electric bill, this process

seemed to help people get on track, and some who looked to Neighbor's Hand for assistance ended up going back to school.

Today, the program is 120 days long, and Neighbor's Hand focuses on helping people budget their finances.

"Now, what's taking place is we have a ministry that has expanded to the point where we have 30 community partners that we use on a week to week basis," said Rivera.

These 30 partners allow Neighbor's Hand to put a plan together for members of the community who are struggling, be it from loss of a job or any number of issues, so that they can take control of their situation once more. Neighbor's Hand has also partnered with several agencies outside of the community - the L.A. Dream Center and an agency in Florida that deals with rehabilitation - to bring new services to the area.

One such service is the

See City Council, Page 2A

## Vince Stone named new MRLS library director

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Welcome to the Mountain Regional Library System, Vince Stone.

"The MRLS Board of Trustees would like to announce the hire of a new director of the three county library system of Fannin, Towns and Union Counties," said the board in a statement. "Mr. Vince Stone from Cleveland, Tenn., has accepted the position effective March 1, 2015, with his first day of work being March 2."

Stone accepted the position following the MRLS Board of Trustees quarterly meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 4.

"Mr. Stone comes to the MRLS with over 15 years of experience owning his own business in the Cleveland, Tenn., area," according to the statement. "He has a bachelor's degree from Lee University in communications, and two master's degrees from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in communications and information science."

Stone is a successfully published author, and his best-selling book, "Embracing Your Inner Mediocrity:"



Vince Stone

Making Peace With Reality," landed him a couple of interviews on the Fox News Channel, including the show Fox and Friends.

He has also written several novels based on the prophet Elijah from the Old Testament aimed at young adults.

"He has worked for the last three years as a school media specialist in Cleveland and Chattanooga, Tenn.," according to the board's announcement. "An open house will be scheduled before the end of February so the community can meet Mr. Stone."

See Director, Page 3A

## Union County Grand Jury stays busy in January

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Grand Jury was busy during the January Term.

Grand jurors handed up indictments against Misty Stephens Ekeberg, James Allen Ridley, Lena Shock Thompson, Caleb Mitchell, and his brother Dallas Mitchell, David Lewis Hornick, and Carl Junior Farmer.

Ekeberg and Ridley face charges of trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine, possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, possession of marijuana with



Caleb Mitchell

intent to distribute, six counts possession of a controlled substance, giving false information to officers, obstruction, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and possession of drug-



Dallas Mitchell

related objects in addition to traffic violations.

Blairsville police arrested the two during a traffic stop on Georgia 515 during the early morning hours of Oct. 31, 2014.

Officers seized almost 7 ounces of marijuana, approximately 28 grams of methamphetamine, assorted drug-related objects and what is believed to be 5 pounds of ginseng, BPD reports show.

Other seized items included a Smith & Wesson 9 mm handgun, several pocket knives, and almost \$1,700 in cash, BPD reports show.

The arrest of Ridley did not go without incident. The 38-year-old Lafayette man, who was wanted in Walker County, refused to exit the white Ford Explorer driven by Ekeberg, 35, of Hiwassee.

See Indicted, Page 2A

## Gibson pleads guilty to rape; to serve 17 years

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

A Union County man accused of rape has pleaded guilty to that charge, and has been sentenced to life to serve 17 years.

Gibson was sentenced to life, with the first 17 years of that sentence to be spent in confinement, Union County Superior Court records show.

The remainder of Gibson's sentence is to be served on



LaBobby Gibson

probation, court records show. Gibson must comply with the conditions of probation as imposed by the court, court records show. Once out of prison, Gibson must register on the state's sex offender registry, court records show.

As part of the agreement, other charges that Gibson faced were dismissed.

In November 2013, a Union County Grand Jury handed up three indictments against Gibson that include multiple sex

crimes.

Gibson, 28, was indicted on a charge of "strong-arm" rape, from an incident that allegedly occurred Aug. 16, 2013, Union County Grand Jury records show.

Gibson also was indicted for false imprisonment, aggravated sexual battery, and sexual battery related to the alleged incident that reportedly occurred Aug. 16, 2013 off Hayfield

See Plea, Page 2A

## Burglary suspect found hanging in store ductwork

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

A 25-year-old man who recently moved to Blairsville from Summerville, is a suspect in a series of recent break-ins following his arrest last week on a charge of burglary, Union County authorities say.

Alexander Vladimir Kowaliuk, was charged with first-degree burglary after he was found dangling from the duct work at a convenience store on Georgia 515 early Feb. 4, Union County Det. SSGt. Daren Osborn said.

According to Sgt. Osborn, Kowaliuk's family had reported that he left the home around 10 p.m. Feb. 3 and had not been heard from since.

Around 5 a.m. on Feb. 4, the manager of the convenience store discovered Kowaliuk dangling from the ductwork inside the store. He called 911 for



Alexander Kowaliuk

assistance, Sgt. Osborn said. Union County Fire & Rescue removed Kowaliuk from the ductwork, and Union County sheriff's deputies interviewed him, Sgt. Osborn said.

"He said he wasn't trying to burglarize the store, he was simply walking on the roof and fell through the ceiling," Sgt. Osborn said. "We discovered where he had built a make-shift ladder of sorts on the outside of the store. We believe Mr. Stone.

See Burglary, Page 3A

Vol. 106 No. 7

2 Sections, 22 Pages

Weather

Thurs: Clouds Hi 34 Lo 17

Fri: Sunny Hi 39 Lo 22

Sat: Clouds Hi 43 Lo 10

Arrests 8A

Church 9A

Classifieds 3B

Opinion 4A

Legals 5B

Obits 11A

Sports 12A

No Greater LOVE

Feb 14th to benefit

Tricia Spear

See page 13A

RELAY FOR LIFE

American Cancer Society

MEETING

Thurs. Feb. 12th

See page 6A

Donations NEEDED

Union County Food

Pantry

Ingles Supermarket

March 7th

See page 8A

SPORTS

UCHS Basketball

Tues. Feb 10 vs. Oglethorpe

5:30 PM BOYS

Fri. Feb 13 vs. TBA

@ Greene Co. 4 PM GIRLS

Saturday:

Region Finals @ Greene County