

## Qualifying...from Page 1A

various county projects such as the under-construction Double Gym. Longer term, Paris is aiming to start a number of citizen committees to help him with future county planning efforts.

“We want to grow, but we don’t want to outgrow ourselves, so it’s going to be really complicated working and planning the best way to do that,” Paris said. “We want to grow a certain bit, but we don’t want to get so big that we lose our character.

“Even though I’m a sole commissioner, I never make decisions in a silo. I’m always trying to gather information from the public – talk to our elected officials, talk to everybody we can to try to get a consensus of what’s best for the county. It’s not what ‘I’ want, but what ‘We the People’ want.”

Considering the outcome for qualifying incumbents, Sheriff Mason came to the same conclusion as Paris about the electorate’s feelings regarding their job performances, including all the men and women of the Union County

Sheriff’s Office.

“I want to thank the Lord for giving me the health and the wisdom to be in this office for the last little over seven years,” said Mason, who will be entering his third term next year. “I look forward to continuing to provide service and protection to the citizens of this county to the best of our ability.”

2021 will mark the start of Judge Brackett’s seventh term, and he, too, is thankful that residents have placed their confidence in this slate of elected officials.

“It’s a humbling experience to be able to be in office this long, and I think it’s a good testament that the voters of this county have decided that they are happy enough to leave all the current officers in office,” Brackett said. “I believe that’s an advantage to the citizens of the county.

“There are some counties that believe that the officers need to change over every four years, and that really is a detriment to the citizens of the county because you build no relationships with any outside agencies and offices.

“When it’s changing and flipping over every four years, then you don’t have any relationships with folks at the Capitol; you don’t have any relationships with counterparts in other counties that you can rely on, talk and discuss with.

“So, this is an advantage of the citizens of the county to be able to like the officials that they know and believe enough to keep them in office. And I’m thankful and humbled by that as well.”

At the state level, Incumbent Superior Court Judge Joy Parks of the Enotah Judicial Circuit qualified unopposed for the May 19 Nonpartisan Election, paving the way for her to begin her first full term in 2021 after being appointed in 2018 by then-Gov. Nathan Deal.

Candidates qualifying for District 8 State Representative are Republicans Stan Gunter of

Blairsville and Steve Townsend of Clayton, and Democrat Dave Cooper, also of Clayton.

Qualifying for District 51 State Senator are Incumbent Steve Gooch, a Dahlongea Republican, and Democrat June Krise of Sautee Nacoochee. The two qualified unopposed in their respective parties, so they will square off in November.

For federal office, current District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler of Tiger is running for Georgia’s 9th Congressional District, a seat to which Rep. Doug Collins has chosen not to seek re-election as he eyes the remaining two years of Sen. Johnny Isakson’s U.S. Senate term.

Republicans joining Gurtler in the 9th Congressional District Race are Michael Boggus of Commerce, Paul Broun of Athens, Andrew Clyde of Jackson County, Maria Strickland of Blue Ridge, Kevin Tanner of Dawsonville, Ethan Underwood of Cumming, Kellie Weeks of Gainesville and John Wilkinson of Toccoa.

Democrats running for the congressional seat are Devin Pandy of Athens, Brooke Siskin of Norcross and Dan Wilson of Rabun County.

Many contenders have qualified for the Nov. 3 Special Election to fill the remaining two years of former Sen. Isakson’s term following his 2019 resignation for health reasons, including Sen. Kelly Loeffler, whom Gov. Brian Kemp appointed last year for a one-year stint in the seat.

Republican candidates for this U.S. Senate position are Loeffler of Atlanta, Doug Collins of Gainesville, Derrek E. Grayson of Lithonia, Annette Davis Jackson of Lilburn, A. Wayne Johnson of Macon and Kandiss Taylor of Baxley.

Democratic candidates vying for the seat are Deborah Jackson of Lithonia, Jamesia James of Atlanta, Tamara Johnson-Shealey of Tucker, Matt Lieberman of Atlanta, Joy Felicia Slade of Atlanta, Ed Tarver of Augusta, Raphael Warnock of Decatur and Richard

Dien Winfield of Athens.

Brian Slowinski of White Plains was the sole Libertarian candidate to qualify for the race; John “Green” Fortuin of Athens was the lone Green Party candidate to qualify; and Rod Mack of Hapeville was the only Write-In candidate.

Joining other qualifiers for the Senate Special Election were Independents Al Bartell of Atlanta, Allen Buckley of Atlanta, Michael Todd Greene of Mableton and Valencia Stovall of Ellenwood.

Georgia’s other U.S. Senate seat currently held by Incumbent David Perdue, an Atlanta Republican, is also up for election this year. He was the lone Republican to qualify for the seat.

Democrats vying for their party’s nomination in the May 19 General Primary are Sarah Riggs Amico of Marietta, Marcketh DeJesus of Atlanta, James Knox of Evans, Tricia Carpenter McCracken of Augusta, Jon Ossoff of Atlanta, Maya Dillard Smith of Atlanta and Teresa Pike Tomlinson of Columbus.

Shane Hazel of Waleska qualified as a Libertarian candidate, and he will face Perdue and the winner of the Democratic primary in November.

In two statewide races, for Public Service Commission, Republican Lauren “Bubba” McDonald Jr. and Democrats Daniel Blackman and John Noel qualified for Northern District 4, while Republican Jason Shaw and Democrat Robert Bryant qualified for Southern District 1.

There will still be a chance for candidates to qualify later in the year for many elective offices in the November General Election via nominations by petition and write-in candidacies, and interested residents should check the Georgia Secretary of State’s website for more information.

## COVID-19...from Page 1A

hands are visibly dirty.”

More prevention guidelines can be found at CDC.gov, including on the use of facemasks, which are currently not recommended for use by people who are well.

Paris said the county is making every effort to institute these best practices in all county buildings and offices, and Conley echoed that the city is doing the same.

On Thursday, March 5, Union General Hospital and Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett welcomed officials of the Union County Health Department, Union County Schools and other local stakeholders for a COVID-19 discussion.

The meeting was requested by school leadership in an effort to obtain guidance and seek a community-based plan for prevention of and preparedness against COVID-19.

A major concern expressed by the city, county, school system and local health professionals has been the spread of false information and rumors through social media posts, with some noting that, already, at least two local cases of the disease had been erroneously reported on Facebook.

That post contained false information and was removed, and the hospital confirmed on its own Facebook page last week that there were no cases, confirmed or suspected, of COVID-19 in Union County at that time.

Barnett urged people to query official sources like the CDC, Gov. Brian Kemp’s office, and the Georgia Department of Public Health for coronavirus information, and never to rely on random social media posts.

The promotion of good personal hygiene practices by the general public were also stressed in the meeting, with adherence to basic hygiene habits being called out as paramount in preventing COVID-19, especially since no vaccines have yet been formulated and tested at this time.

COVID-19 is a virus known to spread mainly from person to person by droplets expelled from a cough or sneeze that can be ingested or inhaled. The gestation period for the virus appears to be about two weeks, though the CDC says symptoms may appear two to 14 days after exposure.

Infected droplets can adhere to surfaces as well and remain active for about 72 hours, during which time the disease can be transmitted by touch. So, keeping good personal hygiene among healthy and

infected individuals is crucial to preventing new cases.

Dispensers of hand sanitizers have been placed in all city and county buildings, school system buildings, doctor’s offices, clinics, all Union General Health System buildings, and at many businesses and restaurants.

Barnett cited a 2013 School of Hospitality Business study at Michigan State University that concluded only 5.3% of the general public use the 15-20 second handwashing method after visiting the bathroom, and that a surprising number of people don’t wash their hands at all after going.

Currently, all local stakeholders are in constant contact with local, state and federal health officials in an effort to keep abreast of the situation as it unfolds.

The schools informed staff and parents last week of the system’s intent to adjust its policy regarding sickness and attendance based on the discussions in the March 5 meeting, and the board held a called meeting on March 9 after press time to finalize its safety plan regarding COVID-19.

“The good thing about the inclement weather days that we’ve had to take recently, they’ve enabled our staff to utilize our online learning platforms and inclement weather packets for students, allowing teachers to be better prepared in the event that the government does close down schools,” Superintendent John Hill said.

“Not that we feel that it will, but in the event that it does occur, we’re going to feel better as a result of our inclement weather learning instruction,” Hill continued.

“The teachers have done a good job of preparing students with instruction at home, and that’s a worst-case scenario, but we will be prepared in the event.”

Furthermore, the schools are utilizing additional applications of Environmental Protection Agency-approved disinfectants, emphasizing handwashing and coughing/sneezing etiquette, encouraging students and staff to stay home if sick, and advising teachers to work on remote lessons.

All upcoming field trips were discussed in the called board meeting Monday, including a combined band, chorus and drama trip to New York City that has already been paid for and scheduled to take place a few days prior to spring break, which is the first full week in April.

The flu is still widespread and active throughout Georgia, said Union County Health Department Office Manager Glenda McGill at the March 5 meeting, and flu shots are still available and recommended.

Though the flu shot won’t prevent COVID-19, it may prevent serious complications and overburdening of the health care system in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak.

