

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

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Wednesday, April 19, 2023

911 Dispatchers treated to appreciation dinner, week

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

As disembodied voices coordinating help from the responding end of terrible situations, E-911 Dispatchers and the invaluable work they do too often go unrecognized. But not in Union County, whose very "first" first responders are treated to a week of appreciation every year.

On Thursday, April 13, local dispatchers met up at the E-911 Center on Hunt Martin Street to be showered with gifts, fed a hearty meal and hear a proclamation in their honor designating April 9-15, 2023, as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week in

Union County.

E-911 dispatchers who coordinate police, fire and emergency medical services are Carrie King, Becky Holcombe, Lynn Powell, Ashley Churchill, Mary King, Holley Kemp, Marlana Bryson, Maggie Guerrier, Heidi Morris, Kasey Rafter and Amanda Hammond.

Additionally, 911 Director David Dyer oversees operations, while Lt. Millie Baxter runs the day-to-day at the center and John Pickelsimer staffs 911 Mapping.

Importantly, everyone at 911 does what they do – and exceedingly well – because they care about the people in their community. For their dedication to such life-saving



Commissioner Paris visited the staff of Union County E-911 April 13 as part of a weeklong show of appreciation for the headset-wearing heroes. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Flowers embraces creativity in school mentor program



UCMS student Michael Flowers showing the colorful artwork he has developed through assistance with the Family Connection Mentor Program, pictured here with his mother Linda and mentor Jeanne Mills. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Michael Flowers is an exceptional young man and student at Union County High School.

"He thinks way out of the box," says his mother, Linda,

who has seen his propensity for art blossom within the past four years.

As the youngest of four children, Flowers got his start by doing crafts with the whole family. Now, by age 16, he has dabbled in painting, woodworking, and even music.

For local realtor Jeanne Mills, Flowers is a phenomenal mentee who has really grown into his own ever since she first met him as part of the Union County Family Connection Mentorship Program, when he was a middle school student.

See *Flowers Artwork*, Page 2A

Man dies nearly three weeks after shooting incident

By Shawn Jarrard
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Authorities are looking into the cause of death of a man who was involved last month in a domestic shooting incident that is being investigated by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Jon Wesley Chambliss, 41, of Blairsville, passed away on Easter Sunday, April 9, after paramedics responded to his residence for a medical emergency, the Union County Coroner's Office confirmed last week.

Chambliss had been recovering after surgery for an abdominal gunshot wound that he received nearly three weeks prior on March 22, which required him to be rushed to Northeast Georgia Medical Center at the time.

On April 9, he collapsed in the driveway of the residence while attempting to seek emergency medical treatment, and he was not breathing when EMS arrived. Paramedics tried to resuscitate him en route to Union General Hospital, and he was pronounced dead upon



Jon Wesley Chambliss

arrival, the Coroner's Office confirmed.

Due to the ongoing investigation, the Coroner's Office declined to comment on the cause and manner of Chambliss' death, and it remained unclear at press time to what extent the gunshot may have contributed or if the GBI would be performing an autopsy at the State Crime Lab.

Regarding the shooting incident, around 3:45 a.m. on March 22, a 911 call came in from a woman who had shot Chambliss in an apartment off Emory Circle near Downtown Blairsville. The Sheriff's Office responded to the scene and requested the GBI to investigate the shooting.

The GBI has yet to release See *Chambliss Death*, Page 2A

UCMS delivers straight superior LGPE band performances



The Union County Middle School seventh and eighth-grade band received straight superior ratings at the Georgia Music Educators Association District 9 Large Group Performance Evaluation on March 16. Photo/Facebook

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Members of the Union County Middle School Band turned heads last month when they earned straight superior scores at their March 16 Large Group Performance Evaluation – for the first time in 21 years.

"I call it the standardized testing for band," said UCMS Band Director Daniel Foster. "What happens is, every

spring, bands all across the state prepare for this evaluation concert.

"We have to pick music from a list and play three pieces all together (as a band); two pieces have to be from a specific list that is approved, and then the other piece has to be like a march or a fanfare or opening-type thing."

From there, students perform at Dawson County High School in front of three judges who pay close

attention to different aspects of the performing band, from the way their music sounds to how they work together.

Students are graded on a scale of 1 to 5. The lower the number, the better the score, and for UCMS in 2023, their performance received a perfect score.

And while that in and of itself is cause for celebration, there's a second part to the LGPE that raises the stakes. During sightreading, students

are given pieces of music that they have "never seen before in their life."

"We get six minutes to look at it," Foster said of the sightreading portion. "They can move their fingers, they can sing, they can clap the rhythms, they can do whatever they want, but they cannot make a single sound on their instrument during that time."

In a masterful demonstration of skills, the students rocked that part of

the exam, too.

To prepare the band, Foster called in musical experts, including his own middle school band director – the man he credits with inspiring him to start his own career in education. And hours of practicing at home built up and paid off.

"The kids were just absolutely amazing," he said. "They're the ones that really put in all the work and responded to what I was

giving to them as instruction; they just knocked it out of the park."

Of course, the students were "ecstatic" after their scores came in, no doubt made more confident in their skills after the big honor, and Foster is hopeful that the community "will come out and see these amazing students, because there's no other group of kids like these kids."

"They're doing some See *UCMS Band*, Page 2A



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SOCCER

SWEET 16
4/19 Girls @ Mt. Paran 5 PM
4/20 Boys @ Walker 7 PM

Bud Akins @ Historical Society April 22 See page 3A

UCHS Chorus Presents April 20 See page 4B

Litter Cleanup Contest April 22 See page 1D



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- APRIL 19, 8:30 A.M. - TOURISM ROUNDTABLE
- APRIL 20, 8:30 A.M. - NON-PROFIT ROUNDTABLE
- APRIL 22, 8:00 A.M. - UNION COUNTY CLEAN - UP DAY
- MAY 12, 8:00 A.M. - SHOOT FOR THE STARS GOLF TOURNAMENT
- MAY 17, 8:30 A.M. - YOUNG PROFESSIONALS NETWORK
- JUNE 8, 8:30 A.M. - EGGS & ISSUES, GEORGIA DEPT OF TRANSPORTATION
- JUNE 28, 8:30 A.M. - MIND YOUR BUSINESS, CYBER SECURITY UPDATE FROM LEVA CLOUD LLC, AND BOAZ MEDIA & NETWORKING SOLUTIONS

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Flowers Artwork...from Page 1A

"The mentor program for the mentor volunteers is kind of a word-of-mouth thing," Mills said, fondly remembering the start of what's proven to be an incredible journey. Originally, Mills heard about the program through "a store in town."

After learning more about the volunteer program, Mills felt led to take on a mentee. The Mentor Program offers help to all sorts of different children, but as a mother of a special needs child, Mills was particularly inclined toward Flowers, who has autism.

Mentor Coordinator Pam Pauley played a bit of matchmaking, and when Flowers was in the seventh grade, she introduced him to Mills, who became his mentor. Since that time, Mills has seen a transformation in the ginger-haired boy with a sunny disposition.

"I think (mentoring) made a great difference. I don't think back then he would have completed one of these," Mills said, motioning to several brightly colored abstract paintings.

"During COVID, when he was out, I had an opportunity to chat with his mom, and she told me how he was interested in art," recalled Mills. "And so I said to myself, 'When we get back together, we're going to do something with art.'"

That "something" turned into Mills taking Flowers outside to paint on blank canvases, free to come up with whatever he deemed paintable. In particular, Mills taught Flowers about the abstract work of Jackson Pollock.

Initially, Flowers was "timid" about giving drip painting and flicking a try. Even

after being shown pictures of Pollock painting, Flowers found the process messy; his mother believes much of it also has to do with the sensation of the paint itself against his skin.

Regardless, after he'd worked at it for a while, Flowers grew to enjoy this new mode of expression.

Ever since he and his mentor began painting back in September, he has already produced several finished pieces, and he displayed his artwork at the Blairsville Kiwanis Club's Art & Music Showcase last month in the Union County Historical Courthouse.

He chooses his own colors, although Mills has noticed a bit of a pattern;

Flowers produced a painting around Halloween that featured speckles of warm autumn hues over sharp black lines on a stark salmon background.

"He kind of takes over and does his own thing," Mills said, eager to show off a box filled with brushes, paints, and water jars still tinted orange and blue from the last work that Flowers finished—a canvas filled with blocks of color.

The duo, like other pairs in the Mentor Program courtesy of Union Family Connection, meet once weekly, but Flowers has the final say when one of his paintings is done or requires another week of work.

"There is a great opportunity for all students, where it may not come out

necessarily in class (or) after class, though it could, for skills that can be learned," Mills said of the program, which has changed her life as much as it has changed the life of Flowers. "There is a universe of things for every kid to develop."

Linda Flowers agrees, believing that extra one-on-one connection can make a difference for kids like her son, adding, "(Mentoring) enables them to do stuff like this ... I think it creates such a great relationship, too, over time."

To learn more about the program or to volunteer as a mentor, call Union County Family Connection at 706-745-2322 or email kjones@ucschools.org.

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Chambliss Death...from Page 1A

any additional details while the investigation remains active, such as the circumstances surrounding the shooting, i.e.,

if self-defense was involved, or whether charges would be filed in the case.

An obituary for

Chambliss, including potential funeral service information, had not been issued by press time.

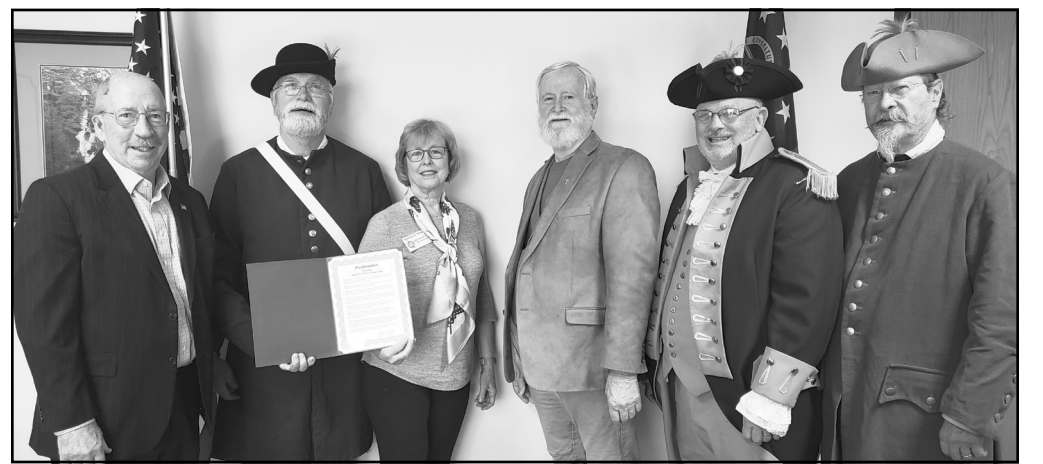
UCMS Band...from Page 1A

really amazing things, and we want the whole world to see what they're doing, because they can accomplish anything," Foster said in

closing, inviting the community to attend the band's Spring "Pops" Concert on April 25 at 6:30 p.m. inside the Fine Arts Center.

Featured music will include works by Randall Standridge, Ennio Morricone, Queen, Soon Hee Newbold, Journey and more.

Patriots Day April 19, 2023 in Union County



Patriots Day Proclamation signing

The Sons of the American Revolution will be having their musket firing on the square on the 19th of April at noon.

A Proclamation was signed on April 12th proclaiming April 19, 2023 as Patriots Day in Union County.

The people involved in

the signing were: (L-R): Lamar Paris; Stephen Weaver - President of the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution; Barbara Weaver - Vice Regent of the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution; Richard Hoibratten - Chaplain,

Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution; Jared Ogden - Treasurer, Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution; and Sid Turner - Vice President, Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution.

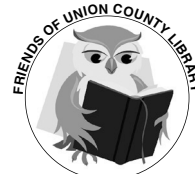
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Climbing Mt. Everest – One Man's Story at UC Library



Advocating for Libraries, Literacy, and Lifelong Learning

Friends of Union County Library have sponsored travel programs in the past where attendees have been asked to share their travel tips and suggestions. This year we have invited Josh Garrison to Union County Public Library's Community Room (303 Hunt Martin Street, Blairsville). He made it his goal to get to a destination not many attempt, and even fewer achieve. This program, Climbing Mt. Everest – One Man's Story, will begin at 4 PM on Thursday, April 25. Bring your questions and join us to hear about Josh's experience.

Below is Josh Garrison's background and his motivation:

For everyone in the United States, September 11, 2001, was a day that changed their lives forever. For Josh Garrison this rang especially true, but whoever thought it would lead him to the top of the world. As



Josh Garrison

a Purple Heart Combat Veteran, Josh served on dozens of deployments with the US Army and the CIA. After surviving 13 years of combat, Josh's life changed once again, now his new battle was with PTSD.

After years of limited success working on this with the VA, Josh stumbled across CBD and immediately saw the improvements in his PTSD. A very short time after this he opened Alpine Dispensary with

hopes of being able to help his Veteran brothers and sisters in arms. Three years later that mission took Josh to the top of the world to raise awareness for the 22 Veteran suicides a day and to highlight the steps of how he overcame his PTSD.

This is a free program. Friends of Union County Library thank Josh Garrison for his service and for being willing to share his struggles and his achievements with us.

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Blairsville plants Arbor Day tree behind City Hall

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Officials with the City of Blairsville joined with the volunteer Towns-Union Master Gardener Association on Wednesday, April 12, to recognize the planting of the 2023 Arbor Day tree, a bigleaf magnolia.

The planting in the greenspace behind City Hall had to be delayed from the actual Feb. 17 annual Arbor Day observance due primarily to supply chain issues, but it all worked out, as the weather last week was much nicer for an outdoor gathering than the rain and cold from February.

With the planting came the recognition of Blairsville as a Tree City USA program member for 29 years, a tenure that speaks volumes to the city's commitment to fostering a greener, healthier environment for residents.

The Feb. 17 event took place inside City Hall and featured the signing of a joint proclamation issued by Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and Commissioner Lamar Paris. Attending also

were officials with the Georgia Forestry Commission, UGA Extension Office and Master Gardeners.

And Mayor Conley was happy to augment the earlier celebration with the April 12 commemoration of the recently arrived magnolia tree being planted in coordination with the national Arbor Day Foundation and the Tree City USA program.

"(We met again last week) since we didn't have the tree when we celebrated Arbor Day on Feb. 17 this year, which was our 29th year of being designated as Tree City USA," Conley said.

The Tree City USA program "provides communities with a four-step framework to maintain and grow their tree cover," according to arborday.org. "It also gives them an avenue to celebrate their work, showing residents, visitors, and the entire country that they're committed to the mission of environmental change."

Mayor Conley would like to thank the Master Gardeners for their assistance with the planting, which used to be organized by the since-disbanded Blairsville Garden



Tree City USA stakeholders gathered last week behind City Hall to commemorate the planting of this bigleaf magnolia, which will grow to voluminous size in the years to come. Photo by Darren Harper

Club.

The mayor would also like to thank local landscaper and resident green thumb Kathryn Litton, who attended last week, for her decades promoting beautification and environmental awareness around the county and city.

We all can play a part in supporting strong and thriving families



Pinwheels for Prevention

In April, blue pinwheels are planted in community "Pinwheel Gardens" across the nation to help increase awareness for child abuse prevention and open the dialogue around strengthening families. The pinwheels are a visual representation of childlike ideals that reminds us that anyone can make a difference in a child's life. This helps to raise awareness for understanding the main causes of such abuse, a few of which include isolation, poverty, health, and social inequities.

As you drive by the Blairsville Square, the 206 blue and silver pinwheels represent each of the abused and neglected children in our judicial circuit.

Enotah CASA (Court



"Pinwheel Garden" on the Blairsville Square

Appointed Special Advocates), SAFE Services, Union County Family Connection, and Union County DFCS encourage community activities and the support of public policies that prioritize healthy child development and child abuse prevention right from the start!

Get Involved: I Am for the CHILD conference, 8:30

AM-3 PM, April 20th; www.enotahcasa.org; Free

Church Volunteer Child Safety Training, April 20th, 6 PM; www.enotahcasa.org; Free

Enotah CASA, SAFE Services, Union County Family Connection, and Union County DFCS encourage everyone to help us ensure every child has a voice in this community.

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911 Appreciation...from Page 1A



911 Dispatchers checking out some of their appreciation swag prior to digging in for a dinner held in their honor last Thursday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

work, Commissioner Lamar Paris attended to personally deliver the proclamation last week.

In addition to recognizing their efforts among the public, the proclamation thanked dispatchers for ensuring police, fire and emergency medical personnel can protect lives and properties while also making sure that those first responders have the information needed to do their jobs safely.

"We thank you very much and always do," Paris said, noting, too, their constant diligence and professionalism. "We know you're the unsung heroes often, and it's easy to forget that somebody's back here getting (emergency responders) to where they need to be on time and in a safe way. Y'all are amazing."

And it wasn't just the county showing its appreciation. Lt. Baxter said that the 911 Center had been overwhelmed with support all last week: "I could just cry because the community has done so much for each one of y'all."

"I want y'all to know every day that you're appreciated, but this week, I think the community has really shown how much they appreciate you," she said to her dispatchers. "I'm very proud of you - I brag on you every chance I can get. Y'all are what makes my job worth doing."

Public appreciation was shown with verbal expressions of gratitude and food being dropped off for the tireless dispatchers, and Baxter presented several community offerings in the appreciation dinner.

United Community Bank provided gift bags and

paid for the delicious meal of parmesan chicken, vegetables and cheesecake, which was prepared by Steven Jarrard of Delish Food Truck Catering.

UCBI Relationship Manager Jimmy Nichols made the presentations on behalf of the bank, and he also attended as a volunteer member of Union County Fire Station No. 2 to hand out gift certificates to G&G Bakery.

"You guys are the lifeline to our community," Nichols said. "As a community member but also as a volunteer with the Fire Department, being on the other end of the radio, I can appreciate what you guys are doing in that (dispatch) room."

Added Nichols, "I don't think a lot of our community realizes what you guys do for us. The amount of stress that people are under when they call and just how you handle it with such grace, and just being able to manage through that, you guys are unbelievable."

Other gifts that evening included certificates for Dunkin' Donuts from Fire Station 4; chocolate-covered strawberries from Union General Health System; free facials from Cass Clinical Med Spa in Hiwassee; a food basket from New Liberty Baptist Church and umbrellas from Union County Dialysis; gift bags from the Commissioner's Office; an upcoming breakfast from Blairsville Police Department; and keepsake keychains from Director Dyer and Lt. Baxter.

The festivities also featured personalized award certificates for each dispatcher, which were largely humorous in nature and highlighted the familial feel at the 911 Center, and firefighters from Fire

Station No. 1 attended to show their support as well.

Dispatcher Heidi Morris has been with the 911 Center for almost six years now, and she said that she and her fellow on-call heroes were definitely feeling the love that week for doing a job that comes with ups and downs.

"I've lost people, I've been the last person on a call with somebody before they died," Morris said. "I helped with the school shooting (incident) that we had this past year, structure fires, I've helped work a couple murders."

"The most challenging thing is not knowing, at the end of the day, if the person you helped lived or didn't make it. That's the hardest part, not knowing the end result of everything."

But sometimes, dispatchers do experience happy news when situations could turn out otherwise, such as the recent calls reporting a missing motorcyclist in Suches who was discovered alive a week later. Calls like that are always a rewarding aspect of the job, Morris said.

"We really, really have been shown a lot of appreciation this week, and it's more than appreciated in return," Morris said. "Just continue to have patience with us, because we are working multiple things at one time."

"Everybody's crisis means a lot to us; we try to help no matter how big or how small (the emergency). We're grateful to be doing what we do. If not for this community, we wouldn't be here, we wouldn't have the jobs that we have. So, we appreciate them, and God bless."