

# North Georgia News

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## Fiddle King defends title to earn 2024 crown

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

There was no need for the Devil to appear at the 2024 Georgia State Fiddlers Convention on June 15; Johnny of The Charlie Daniels Band fame was given a run for his money by the talented competitors who came to play, especially this year's Fiddle King, Noah Goebel.

For decades, the event took place at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds but had to be put on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions. 2024 marks the second year back, and it's also the second year that the convention has taken place at the Union County Fine Arts Center.

According to convention mainstay Barry Palmer, the

prime motivator of the move was to keep folks out of the elements in a climate-controlled environment while continuing to provide adequate space for guests and performers. That said, there were also vendors present lining the outer hallway.

Another important guest was bluegrass legend and actor Randall Franks, known both for his extensive musical repertoire and his longtime role as Officer Randy Goode in "In the Heat of the Night." Franks also happens to be an author and was selling copies of his books along with CDs.

"I'm here to support the fiddling," said Franks, who stated that one of his favorite parts of the convention is witnessing the participation of younger generations. He sees them not only as the

continuation of an age-old art, but also a font of potential and an echo of himself.

"This is sort of the way that we train up the new musicians that are coming behind us; it always has been. It's how I came up and all the young people that worked with me," Franks remarked. "(Performing) got me to guest star on the (Grand Ole Opry) as a teenager and created an opportunity for me to star on television."

Some folks compared the Fiddlers Convention to a sort of "bluegrass festival," and they wouldn't be too far from the truth. As it turns out, fiddling is just the main event. A whole band of string instruments is featured among categories contestants can sign up for, all included in traditional

Appalachian folk music.

Palmer himself is exceptionally skilled with the banjo and crushed the competition for three years in a row before being asked to "give other people a chance." Still, he couldn't be kept from the convention itself, even after open heart surgery.

"I'm like a proud papa," Palmer admitted, having watched it slowly evolve over the course of more than 40 years. He's grateful to have attended most of the shows in the event's 50-year history. "The give and take, the rapport, the bringing together of the minds, the bringing together of musical identities ... Everybody doesn't know what this is or what it's about or what it's been about."

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Two-time Fiddle King Noah Goebel had a blast competing against a host of talented musicians at the 2024 Georgia State Fiddlers Convention on Saturday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## New permanent bridge now open at Fisher Field



County officials were pleased to open the new permanent bridge over the Nottely River at Fisher Field Road last Wednesday. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
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The permanent replacement bridge at Fisher Field Road officially opened on Wednesday, June 12, bringing peace of mind to the residents living in the one-way-in, one-way-out neighborhood serviced by the single-lane bridge.

County officials gathered at Fisher Field to commemorate the opening, which came a couple weeks earlier than expected.

The Commissioner's Office was able to make such a swift turnaround on the

project because the Georgia Department of Transportation effectively declared the situation an emergency late last summer due to advanced deterioration of bridge components reported in a 2023 inspection.

Carter Engineering got to work designing a replacement fix last fall, and in December, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris ordered a prefabricated bridge to replace the old bridge that was erected in 1980.

The county hired Square Deal Enterprises to undertake project construction, which required a temporary crossing

to be erected – completed the first week in April – demolition of the old bridge, and then the setting of the new bridge, which began in May.

Now that the permanent replacement bridge is open, the temporary culvert crossing will be removed, and the land on which it was built utilizing temporary easements will be restored to the property owners' satisfaction. This final phase should take a couple of weeks.

"We're taking this up and reusing this gravel in other places," County Manager Larry Garrett said of the bridge and

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## Ranger training brings community out to airport

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Municipal Airport was abuzz with activity for just about the entire week of June 10, but things were especially exciting on June 14 when the 75th Army Ranger unit parachuted down

from a Boeing CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

Crews were made up of Special Operations members stationed out of Fort Campbell, Kentucky, Flight Operations, along with several military contractors. The flight crew – at least that of the Chinook – consisted of rank-and-file

Army.

As a community with ample support for America's heroes, plenty of local folks came out to see the spectacle. Vehicles lined the roads surrounding the airport, and parking at the North Terminal was packed full; later visitors

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Hundreds of residents traveled to the Blairsville Municipal Airport to check out the military training exercises hosted there last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## UCSO arrests murder suspect on the run from Atlanta PD

By Shawn Jarrard  
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On June 7, the Union County Sheriff's Office apprehended a murder suspect wanted by the Atlanta Police Department.

That Friday, UCSO Capt. Daren "Bear" Osborn received a call from the Fannin County Sheriff's Office with information that the suspect, Tyrus Evan Pippin, 38, was believed to be in Union County.

After running from Atlanta law enforcement, investigators discovered that Pippin had taken up residence in his truck behind a Blue Ridge fire station and was working for a local handyman service. He reported being homeless, but authorities believe he once lived in Fannin County.

Pippin was on a service

call in another worker's truck when the information came in that he was likely in Union County, said Osborn, who quickly mobilized a team of deputies to patrol for the vehicle.

Osborn spotted the work truck at the intersection of Georgia 325 and 515 and stopped the vehicle near the county line, on its way back to Fannin. Pippin, a passenger, was taken into custody without incident about 30 minutes after the call came in that he was here, Osborn said.

"He was not a danger to the community up here," Osborn said. "It's our job to keep people safe, so that's why we jumped on it full force to get him off the streets."

Pippin was transported to the Union County Jail, and Atlanta PD picked him



Tyrus Evan Pippin

up on Monday, June 10, to face his out-of-town charges. Details surrounding the murder investigation were not available at press time, and he is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

"It's unusual to find a murder suspect roaming

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## Council approves new water rates, police vehicles

By Shawn Jarrard  
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In their June 11 regular meeting, Blairsville City Council members enacted the first water rate increase in over a decade for all city water customers. The new rates – up 14% – will be reflected in July water bills.

The council decided to move forward with the increase in April and held a first reading of the ordinance to amend the rates in the May 14 regular meeting before mailing a notice to customers later that month.

According to the city, a recent financial analysis by the city's engineer found that revenues from current water rates could not cover the expense of water treatment and distribution, hence the increase.

As with many aspects of the economy, inflation appears to be the main culprit behind the financial crunch.

"The city has worked diligently to prevent rate increases with the last water rate increase being more than 12 years ago," the city informed water customers in May. "However, due to



Blairsville City Councilwomen Rhonda Mahan and Kayla Hemphill in their June 11 regular meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

rising costs this has become unavoidable. Thank you for your understanding."

Average residential water bills will be going up approximately \$2 per month, per the analysis, though rates are increasing across the board for all meter sizes, both inside and outside city limits.

Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook asked Mayor Jim Conley if he had heard any complaints from the public after the rate increase began to be publicized in recent months,

to which he responded no.

In other business, the council approved the acquisition of two new F-150 trucks from King Ford for the Blairsville Police Department. The department is trading two Chevy trucks and paying \$2,000 apiece for the new trucks.

Council discussions remain ongoing regarding two other police vehicles that Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer said need to be refreshed

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# Fisher Field Bridge...from Page 1A

temporary crossing materials. "So, we're not throwing anything away. The culverts are ours, and we will take them to our Road Department and use them where we can."

After the weight and speed limits were reduced on the old bridge last year, residents worried about safe crossing for themselves as well as the delivery of essential services like responding firefighters, emergency medical transport, package shipments and propane.

Fortunately, there were no accidents or major service disruptions during the time the bridge awaited replacement, and importantly, the new bridge is rated to accept any vehicle that is "street legal," according to SPLOST Project Manager Kevin Hamby.

County officials said previously that on-site construction of a brand-new bridge could take up to a year and a half to complete, which is why they decided to opt for a prefabricated bridge solution that allowed them to prepare the site while the replacement

bridge was built.

"We would like to thank Square Deal Enterprises for doing an excellent job and getting on this right away," Paris said, going on to thank the residents for their patience and the landowners who granted easements for bridge construction.

With some work remaining on the project, a final accounting of costs is still being determined, though recent county estimates put the total price tag under \$600,000, to be paid for with SPLOST funds with the possibility of reimbursement by the state either in part or in whole.

The county will soon be turning its attention to replacing Old Bald Mountain Road bridge over Stink Creek, which GDOT has said also needs to be replaced. As there are other nearby routes for commuters to use there, the cut-through road will simply be closed during



This work truck was one of the first vehicles to use the new bridge on June 12.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

completed this year.

After Old Bald Mountain bridge, the Commissioner's Office will be working with the state to produce a prioritized list of bridges to work on next. Also expected this year is the total re-surfacing of Fisher Field Road, to include all 0.66 miles of the public roadway.

## City Council...from Page 1A

in the fleet.

The council approved a \$12,600 purchase of a new Kubota diesel 48-inch cut mower for use by Water/Sewer Maintenance employees.

Also in the meeting, council members approved a \$14,957.29 repair quote for the screw press at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The press, which separates solids from water being treated, is operational but has been showing signs of decreased efficiency, which the repair will address.

City Attorney Marvin Harkins gave an update on the Murphy Highway/Georgia 515 sinkhole repair, part of which consists of fixing sewer access that ran through a manhole that collapsed in torrential rain last August.

"Last week, the construction manager with Pittman Construction was saying they've been trying to complete the bore from the sinkhole area under Murphy

Highway ... and as soon as they get that sewer line in, they're going to start filling that hole back in," Harkins said. "So, in the next month or so, that should start looking like it's getting complete."

"One thing they need to do, though, is pivot, as soon as they finish with that, and complete the project of moving the sewer line from underneath the Shell station, because it runs down the four-lane, under the Shell station, and intercepts there where the sinkhole's at.

"They're going to bend that around to the parking lot of the Shell station. So, I've been working on the easements for folks for that - still working on that."

Harkins said the construction superintendent for the project estimated that the repair could be finished by mid-July, including replacing the concrete driveway off Murphy Highway leading to the businesses there.

Airport Manager Aaron Mannheim spoke on U.S. Army Ranger training that took place this week at the Blairsville Municipal Airport. The weeklong training featured multiple jumps by paratroopers from military aircraft that required 200-plus gallons of fuel a day at the airport.

Speaking in the meeting, Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe congratulated Downtown Development Authority Director Kristen Bentley and the DDA on a successful Spring Arts, Crafts & Music Festival that drew 11,900 visitors May 25-26.

Rowe also said tickets for the annual prize raffle to support the chamber-sponsored Fourth of July Fireworks at Meeks Park were on sale. The tickets are \$10 apiece and can be purchased by heading to the Chamber of Commerce or calling 706-745-5789.

## Murder Suspect...from Page 1A

the streets in Union County or Fannin County or Towns County," Osborn said. "That's just not an everyday occurrence."

The Georgia State Patrol, Fannin County Sheriff's Office and Atlanta PD contributed to the apprehension, and Osborn

credits the swift arrest to the great working relationships the Union County Sheriff's Office enjoys with neighboring law enforcement agencies.

## New Veterans Support Group welcomes ALL who support veterans



A group of individuals from the tri-county area saw a need for a more inclusive Veterans Support Organization. A number were members of local Auxiliary units but saw where there were many restrictions that prohibited individuals from becoming members due to not having served

in the military, did not have a relative that served in a particular branch or just a myriad of other restrictions that kept individuals from their membership rolls.

The President of the local Navy Seabee Veterans Island X-3 had worked with a particular Auxiliary and became frustrated due to antiquated membership rules that only permitted some to serve and suggested a NEW organization be established that would be more inclusive to those who wanted to be members of an organization that supported Veterans causes but didn't have the many restrictions other auxiliary groups had. The local group of interested folks got together and decided to start a new Veterans Support group and since they were already working closely with the local Navy Seabee Organization decided on naming the organization the "Navy Seabee Veterans Support Alliance." The new organization is now two years old and is incorporated in the State of Georgia as a nonprofit organization and also has received their 501c3 designation.

The Navy Seabee Veterans Support Alliance is a Veterans Support Organization and reaches out to support the local Seabee Island, work with the other Veteran Organizations supporting all Military Veterans, Supporting Students, and local Civic projects.

If you would like to become a member of a local Veterans Support Group that has very few membership restrictions other than wanting to have a fun time and support the items listed above then the Navy Seabee Veterans Support Alliance would like for you to join with them. They meet the 2nd Friday each month at the Major Leon Davenport Veterans Building, 78 Blue Ridge Street, Blairsville at 1:30 PM. Look for the Flags and the Tank out in front of the building which is just across the four lanes from the Longhorn Restaurant and next to the Park N Ride in Blairsville.

To ask questions, call Derek Nagel, Vice President, Navy Seabee Veterans Support Alliance, at 678-677-3620; or email dereknagel@hotmail.com.



The VFW Post 7807 in Hiawassee has Bingo every Sunday afternoon at 2:30 PM. Doors open at 1:30 PM.

We are located on Highway 288, Sunnyside Road, Hiawassee, Ga. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us and have fun! Starting January 16. For more info call 706-896-8387.

### VFW Fish Fry

The VFW is pleased to have you come and have Fish Fry with us at our post on Sunny Side for \$12 or \$15 all you can eat.

The nights of the fish fry is still the 2nd and the 4th Fridays of each month. Remember no Tax & no Tip. We hope to see you there!

### Honor Flight trips to Washington, D.C. for Veterans

Sponsored (no cost to Veteran) Honor Flight trips to Washington D.C. to see the memorials to the Wars in which they served.

Veterans do not have to have been deployed overseas ... just to have served during the War period. World War II, Korea, and Vietnam veterans are included. Spring and Fall flights.

If interested, call Paul at 615-232-4445. Thank you!

## Fiddle King...from Page 1A



The Union County Fine Arts Center hosted the Georgia Fiddlers Convention for the second year in a row June 15.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

The Fiddlers Convention is as much a matter of heritage as it is music. Local giant Fiddlin' Howard Cunningham's daughters, Martha and Amanda, are "the pistons" behind its organization, and Palmer — who knew and was friends with Cunningham prior to his passing in 2013 — credits them with its success.

"It's something good we want to keep, something good we want to continue," Palmer said. "(People) have got to appreciate before they take time to listen, and then when they take time to listen and appreciate it, they'll tell others, and that's what we're asking for."

Understanding and appreciation were displayed in droves by the two-time Fiddle King, 15-year-old Noah Goebel, who hails from Elkton, Kentucky. For six and a half years, he's

honed his skills on the fiddle and attended multiple competitions for his musical ability.

"I came here last year and had a bunch of fun, so I decided to come back," Goebel said, having earned the title last year as well.

Goebel's victory was nearly captured by Bloomingdale's own Marina Lindblom, who lost by only two points. Lindblom's whole family, including nine children, practices music, with most branching out into bluegrass instruments after trying a variety of options.

"I think competing is really good for me and for my playing. It really gives me a goal to work for, and it just inspires me to play," said Lindblom, pleased with making it to the final round. "Even if you don't win, it's such a great experience to just say that you

prepared for something and you were ready."

As for Goebel, he's of a similar mindset in that he views his win as proof that all of his hard work has paid off — quite literally. For his victory, he took home \$400 like the winners of the other instrument categories.

Goebel has plans to return again "unless something else comes up." He hopes to one day make a career out of his music and is considering attending a musical college. It helps that Goebel has, through his practice, learned to adapt based on setting. For some performances, he plays in a group, while for others, he goes solo.

"There's some wonderful competition that I get to compete against," added Goebel, though he recognizes that it "feels great" to come out on top in his own right.

## Army Rangers...from Page 1A



Paratroopers performing jumps over the airport on Monday, June 10.

Photo by Mark Carr



Army Rangers used Blairsville Airport as a staging area for regional training, jumping on-site last Monday and Friday.

Photo by Mark Carr

had to leave their cars along the entry road.

Before liftoff on Friday, the crew allowed the public past the gate to come check out the Chinook and get photos. Guests had the chance to tour the helicopter and even poke their heads in the cockpit while asking questions about the elite air vehicle.

Retired Navy serviceman Daniel Myers and wife Dee particularly enjoyed the tour. For Myers, it brought back memories of a storied military career during which he "stopped counting" how many jumps he performed after 100.

"I'm very familiar with (the Chinook)," said Myers with a smile, calling the craft "nicely kept" and adding that it was his "favorite weapon."

"Today is an exceptionally busy day, but this is about a third more than what we normally do," observed Airport Manager Aaron Mannheim, explaining that while the Army's presence didn't impact the daily happenings of the airport too much, there was a bit more caution due to the increased activity.

For example, training details were purposefully kept slim; Mannheim said that because the parachuters were members of Special Operations, they preferred not

to share too much information about what they were doing, and they "would prefer not to talk to anyone."

"They're kind of like undercover agents, to be honest," Mannheim said. "I'm sure they adapt to whatever's going on. I believe in my heart of hearts that they want to put on a good show for everybody, but then again, it is a training exercise."

So, Mannheim worked with the schedule they gave him, and he put a warning out to any local pilots that there might be military personnel present at the airport — including in the air — anywhere between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., the span of time they were set to parachute.

"I like to preface everything with, 'This is a military exercise, this is a military drill — there is no schedule,'" Mannheim added, referring to the many phone calls he had received asking about what was transpiring at the airport.

That said, while it might have provided some obstacles to work around, Mannheim believes such experiences are good for the airport and the surrounding community. Fuel purchases bring more revenue into the local market and raise awareness of the airport through outreach activities.

Around 11:30 a.m., after a liftoff that sent waves through

the field like a grassy sea, 12 service members jumped at an impressive height of 10,000 feet in the air, approximately 40 seconds apart. They used parachutes that, per Mannheim, they were able to control like hang gliders.

Some called the formation "serpentine," and others believed the "dots in the sky" resembled geese in a loose V-shape. No matter what they resembled, they were "a sight," as one person in the outdoor audience remarked.

With every landing, the soldiers were met with applause and cheers for their service, with some maneuvering to land right in front of the protective fence keeping the public safe.

At about 3 p.m., things wrapped up and the military left, although Mannheim would love to host them at the airport again. Past partnerships have included charter pilots bringing passengers to the city and refueling, but it's not the same as hosting Army Ranger training.

"I love the military coming here. I wish they would put us on schedule to come here more often. I enjoy meeting them (and) I enjoy supporting them," Mannheim said. "I really think it's a wonderful thing that little bitty Blairsville, Union County, can do for the United States."