

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, October 3, 2018

Paris, Griggs confirm that Union County is growing again

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

More than 10 years after the onset of the Great Recession, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Union County Development Authority Executive Director Mitch Griggs both agree that economic recovery is alive and well in Union County.

Griggs said he and Paris have tracked three economic indicators since 2011: labor force, building permits and Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax revenues.

The latest labor force figures for Union County show that there are 10,216 people between the ages of 16 and 64 who are either employed or actively looking for a job. And as of June 2018, 405 of those people were unemployed.

That calculates out to

3.96 percent unemployment in Union County. However, this doesn't account for people not registered with a state employment office who work on an unreported cash basis, or who are not on the unemployment benefits rolls.

However, at least the local unemployment figure gives Griggs and the county some idea of the trends since 2011. The unemployment rate in January of 2011 was 9.7 percent – significantly higher than it is now.

Regarding building permits in Union County, there were "between 60 and 80 building permits per month" being issued over a period of about three years, said Paris.

"Then the recession/depression hit and everything just died, and we went down to many months where we

only had one; and a couple of months we had no permits," said Paris, adding that this went on for two or three years. "Had we stayed at that 50 to 60 to 80 permits per month, to me, that's non-sustainable as far as keeping our quality of life.

"If we continue to dump in that many homes year after year, I think we would lose part of what makes Blairsville a unique place. It's still part of the country. It's still in the country.

"Yes, it's growing. Yes, we have more traffic, and we've got more people. We've tried to make it a place where people want to move to and people want to stay. The basics are here of what people want."

Paris said the Great Recession, as difficult as it was, didn't hit Union County as bad as it hit other communities.

See Growth, Page 2A



L-R: Randy Day, Nora Lawn, Lamar Paris and Mitch Griggs.

Photo by Mark Smith

Mountain Education Charter HS opens new Central Office in Cleveland

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

CLEVELAND—Officials with the Mountain Education Charter High School celebrated the Grand Opening of the school's new Central Office at 1963 Tom Bell Road on Saturday, Sept. 29, in Cleveland.

With 16 sites throughout north Georgia, which includes the instruction of students from 17 towns and Union counties, the Mountain Education Charter High School provides students with access to a regular high school education outside of regular school hours.

As evening, self-paced, public high school that grants regular diplomas, this form of secondary education offers flexibility to students in need of accommodations.

But having locations in 15 Georgia counties can



The new Central Office building for the Mountain Education Charter High School in Cleveland.

make it difficult for employees to communicate with one another, which made the idea of a creating a Central Office especially appealing.

"If I wanted information, I would have to set up a meeting that may not happen for a few days," said MECHS Superintendent Wayne Lovell on Sept. 29.

To solve this problem, the organization decided to build a Central Office where all the school leaders could gather and be close to each other.

"Now that we have a Central Office, I can walk across the hall, or down the hall and get all the information I would need without having

See MECHS, Page 6A

Voter registration busy ahead of the Nov. 6 General Election

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

It appears that many people in Union County who have previously not voted have suddenly found the motivation to do so this year, as residents are registering locally by the hundreds to vote in the 2018 General Election.

"We've added more than four of five hundred people in the last six months," said Union County Deputy Registrar Diana Nichols.

That portends a large voter turnout in Union County for the Nov. 6 General Election, in which Republican Brian Abrams and Libertarian Ted Metz are all vying to become the next Georgia governor.

Also on the ballot will be many other political races; several proposed amendments to the Georgia Constitution; two



Diana Nichols

Proposed Statewide Referenda; and the question of whether to continue the SPLOST in Union County.

A sample ballot can be obtained at the Union County Registrar's Office inside the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, and at www.mvp.

sos.ga.gov, which also features valuable voter information that can be personalized to each resident.

In case people aren't aware, there is more than one way for a Union County resident to vote.

There is the traditional way, where a registered voter travels to his or her precinct between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Election Day and casts their ballot.

However, registered voters also have the option to vote early at the Registrar's Office, which will save a wait in line at the polls on Election Day.

Early voting in the 2018 General Election starts on Monday, Oct. 15, and runs weekdays through Friday, Nov. 2.

During the three weeks of early voting, the Registrar's Office will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, and at www.mvp. See Voter, Page 2A

BOE contracts for ESPLOST projects, works to replace gym ceiling

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Editor@nganews.com

The Union County Board of Education has contracted with Southern A&E for its architectural design services on upcoming ESPLOST V projects.

Board members voted in their Sept. 18 regular meeting to accept Southern A&E's bid for the school system's ESPLOST V projects. The architecture firm's fees will be negotiated on a per project basis and capped at 6 percent of project costs.

Furthermore, the contract with Southern A&E is open-ended, meaning the system will be able to pursue different architects if the board doesn't like the firm's work moving forward.

"Since 1970, Southern A&E has proudly served the design needs of over 64 K-12 educational systems in Georgia," according to SouthernAE.com. "During that time we have completed: 108 new elementary schools, 64 new middle schools, 34 new high schools and thousands of additions and renovations."

Many people will be familiar with Southern A&E's work, as the full-service architecture and engineering design firm is responsible for several projects right here in Union County, including the design of the middle school, high school, Fine Arts Center and Agriscience Center.

Of course, not all projects in the ESPLOST V list require architectural services, such as the ordering of new buses and

replacement of the system's radios.

But the design firm will be working on a variety of ESPLOST projects, including major primary school renovations in the next couple of years, as well as upcoming renovations at the elementary school, the construction of a new fieldhouse at the football field, and other, smaller projects.

All told, nine different architectural firms submitted bids to design the system's ESPLOST projects, and the board office put together a volunteer ESPLOST Advisory Committee to analyze the bids and make a recommendation to the board.

This committee included parents, school employees, See ESPLOST, Page 3A



Christy Townsend, Carla Drake, Olivia Graham, Nikki Schuknecht and Millie Owenby of Union County Primary School.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Lassiter's condition improves; family thankful for prayers

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Editor@nganews.com

When 10-year-old Lassiter Windsor had to be airlifted to a trauma center for a head injury he sustained in a car accident on Thursday, Sept. 20, his family immediately rallied around him for support.

As news of the boy's condition spread, the Union County community and beyond rallied around him and his entire family, too, and the prayers and support have increased daily.

And it looks like that support has been paying off for Lassiter, whose condition is improving by the hour, according to social media posts made by the family.

"Lassiter is breathing on



Lassiter Windsor

his own with help from a nasal canula," said Heather Held Green, Lassiter's mother, on Monday, Oct. 1. "He is awake but not able to talk yet. He is moving both arms slowly.

"The doctors explained that after head trauma his brain needs to reconnect. So, one day at a time... one step at a time... thousands of prayers now! See Windsor, Page 2A

41st Annual Indian Summer Festival coming this weekend



Little Indians performing during a past Indian Summer Festival. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES – Fall is officially in the air in the Valley

Above the Clouds, meaning it's time for the Indian Summer Festival to take place on the grounds of Woody Gap

School. Now in its 41st year, the festival will occur on Saturday, Oct. 6, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. See Festival, Page 6A

Vol. 109 No. 40
4 Sections 28 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Sunny Hi 83 Lo 59
Fri: Sunny Hi 84 Lo 60
Sat: Sunny Hi 83 Lo 61

Inside
Arrests 7A
Church 5C
Classifieds 2D
Opinion 4A
Legals 5D
Obits 7C
Sports 2B

PANTHERS FOOTBALL
BYE
SOFTBALL REGION TOURNAMENT
Oct 2 & Oct 4
@ Monticello Time TBA

Attention: Public Scam NOTICE
See page 2A

Lassiter #00 Spirit Night Chick-fil-A
See page 4B

Sorghum Festival Schedule
See page 1B