

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 21, 2020

Nix leaves legacy of music, giving in the mountains

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Local Country Music legend John Nix died Thursday, Oct. 15, following a year of illness.

To the legion of friends he made in his 85 years of life, Nix will be remembered as much for his generosity and good humor as for his decades of live music performances in the North Georgia Mountains. Of course, Nix's name is synonymous with Country Music around these parts, which makes perfect sense considering that he started the fabled Country Cousins band with his brothers Homer, Clayton and Cranford 70 years ago.

Since the age of 15, Nix has been in more venues than can be counted, with some of his

more recent appearances being at the Georgia Mountain Fair, Blairsville Sorghum Festival, Union County Historical Society, Byron Herbert Reece Society and more.

For several years now, John was the last surviving brother of that original band, and he continued performing with countless other musical "cousins" over the years.

"I hope to play a whole lot more," Nix said in 2016 during a proclamation presentation highlighting the importance of his musical contributions. "I don't want to quit, there ain't no plans to quit. Only the Lord knows when I want to quit, because I don't want to quit myself."

Unfortunately, 2020 was a tough year for Nix, especially considering his various health issues and additional risks

associated with the possibility of contracting COVID-19, so he was unable to perform this year.

He gave his last known live performance alongside John Cochran in a Christmas jamboree at the Young Harris Lodge Building in December 2019, where he sang "Christmastime Is Coming."

Many of Nix's most memorable performances took place during the Blairsville Sorghum Festival, in which he participated every year since its inception.

The highly respected entertainer so loved the festival and its purpose of raising funds for those in need that he not only played live music for 50 years to bring people in, but he also grew cane for decades to make syrup to sell for the many community initiatives provided

for by festival volunteers.

It's almost fitting that the festival was canceled this year due to COVID-19. After all, this past weekend would have been the final weekend of the 2020 outing, and it wouldn't have been the same joyous occasion considering Nix's passing.

"The Sorghum Festival was his favorite thing in the world; he loved the Sorghum Festival," son Jeff Nix said. "He loved playing music at it and the parade, the square dance afterward, making cane for syrup to sell. He pretty much got involved in the whole nine yards."

The Union County native lived with his son Jeff for the three years prior to his death, which was time the younger Nix will always cherish, both



Nix playing the fiddle during the Union County Historical Society's Annual Mountain Heritage Festival on Aug. 31, 2019. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Paris proclaims 'Wilonell Dyer Day,' commends Rotary's polio efforts

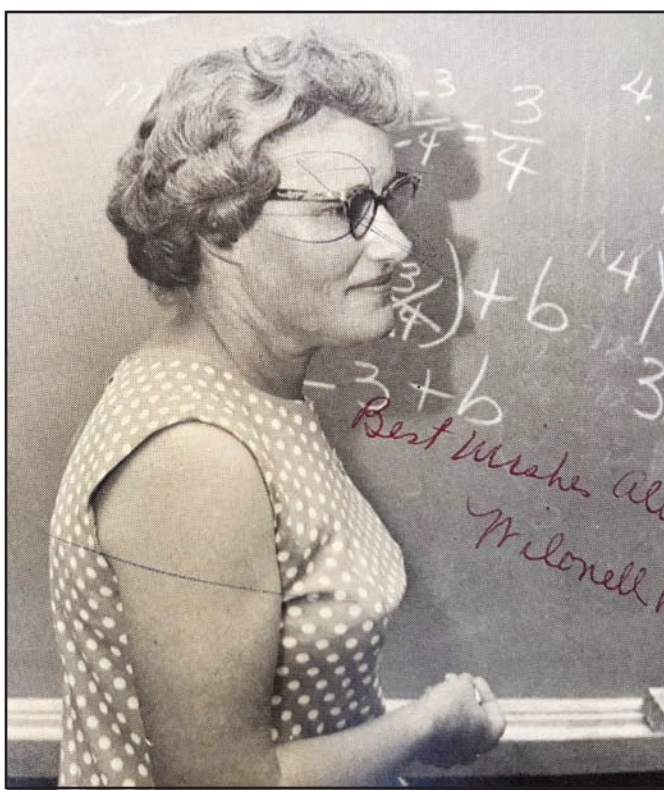
By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

In his Oct. 15 regular meeting at the Union County Courthouse, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris proclaimed Oct. 11, 2020, as "Wilonell Dyer Day" in honor of his former teacher, whom he saw during a recent window visit at the Union County Nursing Home.

"Wilonell Collins was born on Oct. 11, 1919, in Union County, Georgia, in the Choestoe area and (celebrated) her 101st birthday on Oct. 11," Paris proclaimed. "Miss Collins was born and raised on Collins Road in Union County and has been a lifelong resident."

"(She) married Ervin Dyer and they had four children: Jerry, Larry, Judy and Janie. Mrs. Dyer now has nine grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren."

Paris went on to relate Dyer's impressive career as an educator for over 30 years,



Wilonell Dyer as a Union County math teacher in the 1968 yearbook provided by Rachel Brown Brackett.

See Dyer, Page 7A

Record voter turnout in 2020; remember Saturday voting

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The first week of early voting started and ended with lines outside the Union County Courthouse, as registered voters turned out in tremendous numbers to cast their ballots last week.

All told, nearly 2,600 people voted in person for the first week of early voting, meaning that, counting the 2,400 mail-in ballots returned through Friday, roughly 26% of the electorate had already voted with two weeks of early voting left before the big Nov. 3 General Election.

Clear enthusiasm among voters is certainly one reason for the formation of lines outside polling places all around the state, but poll workers and voters alike were also dealing with lines caused by state-level software issues earlier last week.

Early in-person voting began in many places on Oct.



12, but voting in Union County started Tuesday, Oct. 13, due to the courthouse being closed for Columbus Day.

Still, Union Countians had to deal with a problem that had been plaguing the state-run ElectionNet system since the start of early voting Monday, which saw the voter check-in procedure being overwhelmed by the record turnout.

Fortunately, the state remedied the issue by mid-week to get things running smoothly again, even amid the larger than average number of voters, and lines began clearing quickly.

Secretary of State Brad

Raffensperger reported that, as of noon Friday, more than 1.2 million Georgians had voted, which was more than double the 538,695 who voted through the same time period in 2016.

Early in-person voting is definitely up over 2016, with about 162,000 more voters showing up to vote early at local polling places in 2020. But the big standout is mail ballots, with a whopping 601,344 cast through Friday at noon compared to just 85,003 over the same period four years ago.

Advanced in-person voting for the Nov. 3 election continues weekdays through Friday, Oct. 30. People are encouraged to vote early, as turnout is expected to be higher than ever this election, potentially translating to longer than usual precinct lines come Election Day.

All weekday early voting is between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., and people will have the opportunity to vote this

See Voting, Page 3A

Patriots gather for flag-raising at newly installed BPD flagpole

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The Blairsville Police Department welcomed local patriots for the inaugural raising of the American flag atop the newly donated flagpole at Department Headquarters on Wednesday, Oct. 14.

Joining Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter, Lt. Rusty Walker and Mayor Jim Conley were Brad and Jenny Sherman of SafeGuard Lock and Vault, as well as Billy "The Flag Guy" Toups and Wendell Caver of Mountain Flagpoles.

Together, the small group recited the Pledge of Allegiance after Brad and Billy raised Old Glory for the first time in front of the Police Department, which was built over a year ago with one prominent feature



Billy "The Flag Guy" Toups, Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter, Brad and Jenny Sherman, Lt. Rusty Walker and Mayor Jim Conley with the newly installed flagpole outside of the Blairsville Police Department Oct. 14. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

See BPD Flagpole, Page 8A

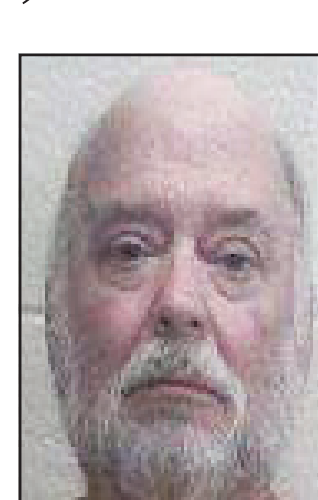
Blairsville man facing two extortion charges in Orlando, Florida

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Norman Cooper was arrested locally last week in reference to two felony extortion charges originating out of the Ninth Circuit Court of Orange County, Florida, court documents show.

Cooper, 66, is the publisher of Union County Magazine and the former editor of the North Georgia News, where he was released from employment in 2012.

The Union County Sheriff's Office took Cooper into custody for the State of Florida on Wednesday, Oct. 14. He signed an extradition waiver that same day voluntarily submitting to being transported to face his Orange County charges.



Norman Cooper

At press time, Cooper was being held without bond in the Union County Jail pending transport to the Sunshine State.

See Cooper, Page 2A

UCSO Narcotics Division seizes thousands of dollars in drugs, cash

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Four people, including three family members, were arrested earlier this month following a two-monthlong drug investigation by the Union County Sheriff's Office Narcotics Division.

The arrests occurred on Tuesday, Oct. 6, after a search warrant executed at 70 Union Drive turned up marijuana-derived THC cartridges and edible candies, marijuana, LSD,

MDMA, and paraphernalia for use with the various products.

Investigators seized \$15,000 in controlled substances; 14 firearms; roughly \$14,000 in cash; and the home and property at 70 Union Drive, which had a fair market value of \$210,000 when purchased in July 2018.

All of the illegal marijuana-related drugs appeared to have come from a Western state where they

See UCSO, Page 8A



Sundance Trey Bischof



Timothy Alan Gunn



Ann Boutwell Gunn



David Austin Otwell

Vol. 111 No. 43
4 Sections 28 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Cloudy Hi 77 Lo 57
Fri: Showers Hi 74 Lo 64
Sat: T-storms Hi 73 Lo 53

Inside
Arrests 2C
Church 3C
Classified 3D
Opinion 4A
Legals 5D
Obits 5C
Sports 2B

SPORTS
FOOTBALL
10/23 @ Banks 7:30 PM
VOLLEYBALL
10/21 State 1st Round
@ Home vs. ACA 5:30 PM

Kiwanis Blairsville
Drug TakeBack
Oct. 24
See page 2C

Beer Festival
October 24
See page 6B

Union County Sample Ballot
See page 4B