

## Board of Ed...from Page 1A

positives currently. We have eight staff quarantined out of around 450, and we have 65 students out of around 2,900. We are doing very well.”

With the hard work of the staff and the precautions of the community and school system, Hill explained that Union County was one of the few school systems in the state

that had gained students during the pandemic.

“The (Department of Education) had just considered giving us our (Full-Time Equivalent student) counts across the state, because the net loss of students in Georgia was over 30,000,” Hill said.

“However, Union and Towns County have both picked up FTE due to (us having) the best staff, best communities to live in, and people are moving here,” he continued. “We are

doing a really good job with COVID and educating our children.

“We actually had increased FTE, and we were able to meet with some State Board of Education members, and they agreed with us that (maintaining last year’s FTE count) should not be the case.

“There has been no ruling or judgment on that, but they were unaware that any districts had gained students during COVID.”

Hill was referencing a “hold harmless” policy that the state is planning to implement to keep schools that lost enrollment from being financially impacted by granting the previous year’s funding amount.

And because Union defied the loss trend, Hill is hopeful that 2021 FTE funding will reflect the system’s additional student enrollment come May, when it’s time to start working on the next year’s budget.

## Christmas Cheer...from Page 1A



Families attending the Nottely Marina Christmas event received free treats from volunteers over the weekend. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

town,” Doucette said. “We were trying to find something to do in lieu of the parade, and we had all the decorations, so we decided, why not? We have Santa here and free hot chocolate for those that come.”

For the Doucettes, outdoor events such as this and Halloween help people focus on more than just COVID-19, which has all but taken over 2020.

“Christmas is a time for us to slow down and chill for a minute,” Doucette said. “We get to spend that time with our families. This is a first for us, and we hope to see some people. I know with COVID, some families in the community are looking for something to do.

“It will be cold for some, and we won’t have too many show up, which will be nice so we can social distance and stay safe.”

The event was made possible with involvement by various groups and individuals assisting the effort, which was free to the public.

Families that came through over the two nights grabbed warm cups of cocoa and enjoyed their evenings there, taking pictures with the many lights and decorations.

Attendee Jasmine Grey said the event made the season better for her family and allowed her kids a chance to see Santa one last time before he left for the North Pole.

“We heard about this

from my parents,” Grey said. “They were telling us that this was going on because we are up for the holidays and were looking for something to do as a family. It is a wonderful thing for people to have going on.

“My kids haven’t seen as much Santa as they like, but they got to tonight, which as a mom is always heartwarming. This is what Christmas is all about. This is a family opening their homes and their hearts to people in the community and allowing them to take part in some of the cheer.

“That is the magic of Christmas and what it means to me. I am very thankful for the people putting this on and giving us a chance to just be normal for a night.”

## Advance Voting...from Page 1A

the last day of early in-person voting, and there’s no Saturday voting this time.

Elections officials are asking that people make every attempt to vote early, as the possibility of bad winter weather may impact the electorate’s ability to make it to the polls on Jan. 5 Election Day.

Between the 2,183 mail-in ballots received by Friday afternoon and the 3,203 people who showed up to vote at the courthouse last week, more than a quarter of Union County’s roughly 20,000 active registered voters participated in the first week of runoff early voting.

With all the negativity surrounding the 2020 General Election, the mood among some voters has been a little more dour than usual, with elections officials commenting that several people have expressed concern about their vote counting. Yes, they said, every eligible vote will count.

Early voting started Dec. 14, the same day the Electoral College met for state electors to cast their votes to determine the next president of the United States, formally selecting Joe Biden to serve as president-elect.

Donald Trump is still waging legal battles in several states, including Georgia, and it remains to be seen whether he will succeed in overturning Biden’s apparent national victory, especially now that the former vice president has secured 270 electoral votes.

Trump has alleged that widespread voting fraud and irregularities interfered with fair and open elections in 2020, which remains to be seen, as the Secretary of State’s Office works with the Georgia Bureau of Investigations to look into 132 General Election fraud allegations.

Additionally, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger announced last week that his office would be partnering with the University of Georgia “on a statewide review of signature match in the Peach State.”

“The partnership will help instill confidence in Georgia’s absentee ballot system in future elections,” Raffensperger’s office said Thursday.

He has asked the UGA School of Public and International Affairs “to conduct research, including a randomized signature match study of election materials handled at the county level in the Nov. 3 Presidential contest.”

“This work will also include research on processes used at the county level to perform signature-matching,” his office said. “The work UGA will perform is a study of a sample of signed envelopes in each county from the presidential election.

“It is intended to be forward-looking, helping to inform and optimize election administration for future electoral contests in the State of Georgia.”

As previously reported, Union County voters will encounter a slight procedural change upon entering the early voting area this election, with the Sheriff’s Office conducting weapons screening via metal detector.

State law says that, excepting qualified personnel, no weapons are allowed inside the courthouse, and firearms specifically are prohibited within 150 feet of any polling place.

Though there have been no threats or reason to think people will bring weapons to vote, the Sheriff’s Office believes the added security will put more people at ease during early voting, especially given the contentious nature surrounding the runoff elections.

The courthouse remains under a judicial order requiring guests to wear face masks, practice social distancing and submit to temperature checks before entering the building.

People uncomfortable voting in a mask may head to the polls on Election Day, as currently, facial coverings are not being required to vote at precincts, though this is subject to change.

There’s also the option of requesting an absentee ballot to mail or drop off at the Registrar’s Office in the courthouse.

Absentee ballots are being automatically mailed to voters who informed the Registrar’s Office they were elderly or disabled on a previous application, though all others need to apply to get their mail-in absentee ballot for the runoffs.

People may request mail-in absentee ballots by visiting <https://ballotrequest.sos.ga.gov>, calling the local Registrar’s Office at 706-439-6016, or swinging by the office at 65 Courthouse Street.

After requesting a mailed ballot, voters can track the progress of their ballot – before and after voting – by signing up at <https://georgia.ballottrack.net/voter/>. Those who receive an absentee ballot but decide to vote in person should bring their mailed ballot to the polls for canceling.

Voters can also access the My Voter Page at [mvp.sos.ga.gov](http://mvp.sos.ga.gov) ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though Dec. 7 was the registration deadline for residents looking to participate in the runoff elections.

Election Day is Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. On Election Day, voters should report to one of the 11 pre-assigned Union County voting precincts: Ivy Log, Dooley, Gum Log, Blairsville, Pat Colwell, Trackrock, Coosa, Jones Creek, Owl Town, Choestoe and Suches.

People are not required to bring their mailed precinct cards, but they must show a valid photo ID to vote.

# Need Blueprints?

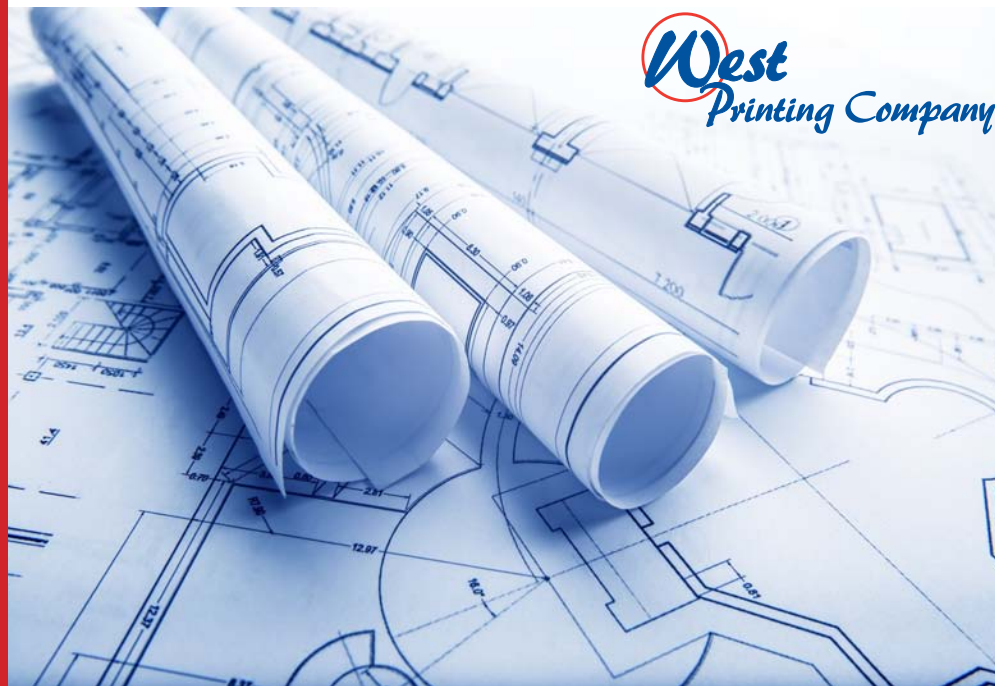
## West Printing Company

For all your large format printing needs!

266 Cleveland Street  
2 blocks up from the Square on 129

706-745-6343

[westprinting@windstream.net](mailto:westprinting@windstream.net)



## Full Service Printer

Business Cards • Business Forms • Notecards  
Invitations • Blue Prints • Rack Cards • Posters  
Stamps • Labels

Full Color printing at rock bottom prices!

Fast, Professional Service

706-745-6343

[westprinting@windstream.net](mailto:westprinting@windstream.net)