

Happy New Year! 2022

"Land of Lakes, Mountains, Scenic Beauty and Friendly People"

75¢

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, December 29, 2021

Ludlum named 2021-22 System Teacher of the Year

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County High School Class of 1989 graduate Jennifer Ludlum, who has been in education for 24 years, was nominated by her peers to be Union County School System Teacher of the Year for 2021-2022, announced in the monthly Board of Education meeting on Dec. 14.

After 14 years in administration, Ludlum returned to the classroom five years ago to head up the system's Success Center, which houses grades six through 12 in an alternative setting that is different from the Alternative Education Program.

"My goal is to build a relationship with each student and their family to help in any way I can, to focus on kids' individual needs," Ludlum

said. "I think that relationship is so important."

Ludlum's peers think she is very important, too, and highly effective, evident by their nomination of her as System Teacher of the Year. Ludlum will now be in the running for Georgia Teacher of the Year.

In other news, the principals for each of the system's five schools had some noteworthy announcements in their end-of-semester reports. Paramount among their concerns was where students stand academically after nearly two years of pandemic restrictions.

Measures of Academic Progress tests developed by the Northwest Evaluation Association are used by teachers throughout the schools to determine where students are excelling and where they are deficient, so teachers know

what subjects to emphasize in their respective curriculums.

All principals reported positive results from MAP testing in each of their schools. Also, given that it is the winter holiday time, all reported Christmas events the students were enthusiastically involved in.

Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight said her school's agricultural program had received a \$52,000 construction-related equipment grant from the Georgia Department of Education, adding a warm thank you to CTAE Director Josh Davis for his help with procuring the grant.

Primary School Principal Shane Womack reported that one of his school's big goals "is to have a more normal school year." This has been difficult with news of the recent omicron variant of COVID-

See System TOTY, Page 6A



L-R: UCHS Principal C.T. Hussion, System Teacher of the Year Jennifer Ludlum and School Superintendent John Hill in the Dec. 14 School Board meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

Community to bring in New Year 2022 with style

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

2021 saw change for better and for worse, not just in Blairsville, Hiwassee and Young Harris, but the entire globe.

COVID-19 continues to present some level of threat, though medical technology is keeping hard on the virus' heels. Unfortunately, as a result of the disease, some local businesses have had to close their doors for good.

But there was also an influx of hope as the first steps in returning to normalcy rolled out, with much returning in 2021, including familiar festivals and other events canceled the previous year, allowing young and old alike to get out of the house and re-enter the world again, so to speak.

On that note, 2022 should be anticipated with optimism. Certainly, Union and Towns



Tommy Townsend, performing here at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in August, will be hosting a New Year's Eve Bash at Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery in Blairsville. Photo by Derek Storm

counties will be bringing in the New Year on a positive note with plenty of festivity. Not only will there be classic celebratory fireworks

See New Year, Page 2A

Sheriff's Office continues search for missing teenager

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Investigators with the Union County Sheriff's Office have been searching for Jady Edna Maurer for more than a week and are asking anyone with information on the 16-year-old's whereabouts to come forward.

Jady has left home before and is not thought to be in danger at this time, the Sheriff's Office said Sunday.

The family is offering a \$1,000 reward "for the person or the information that brings Jady Maurer home safe," per a Christmas Day Facebook post by the missing teenager's aunt, Renee Neace.

Last seen Dec. 19, Jady is possibly in the Murphy/Hayesville/Marble areas of North Carolina, or in the Blue Ridge or Atlanta areas of Georgia, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Jady is described as being 5 feet, 3 inches tall and

weighing approximately 115 pounds, with blonde hair and blue eyes.

The Sheriff's Office has followed up on several leads thus far, but no new information helpful in the case had been substantiated by press time.

She has been entered as a missing person in both the Georgia and National Crime Information Centers, and the National Center For Missing and Endangered Children is "following this case."

The original Dec. 20 Facebook post by the Sheriff's Office detailing Jady's disappearance has been shared more than 1,000 times.

There has been much discussion on social media regarding the case, including a potential sighting of Jady in distress in Cherokee County, North Carolina, but again, no leads had turned up useful information by press time, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Instead of posting



Jady Edna Maurer

information on social media, investigators are asking people with knowledge of Jady's location to contact the Union County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division at 706-439-6066, referencing Case No. 211222362.

Softball prodigy seeks local support to pursue dream

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Chevale Kinderknecht is an amazingly talented local softball player who has had an incredible passion for the sport from a very young age.

She is currently 14 years old and a freshman homeschooled student enrolled in the online GradPoint program, which not only allows her to pursue her softball dreams but also enables her to complete the academic work she needs to try and graduate early.

Her ultimate goal is to one day shine in the Softball Olympic Games. For now, she has her sights set on entering to compete in the USA Softball Junior Olympic Cup.

And with a slew of accomplishments in her glove already, she is trying to rally community support behind her to help make her dream come true.

For the past few years, Chevale has been playing with a traveling 18U Softball Gold

See Kinderknecht, Page 6A



Local softball extraordinaire Chevale Kinderknecht holding a Triple Crown Coin given to her by an umpire who was exceedingly impressed with her performance in the Colorado Sparkler Tournament earlier this year. Photo/Submitted

MEC kids make a difference with Humane Society drive

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Student Voice Team of Mountain Education Center's Union County site has already established itself as a helpful organization in and around the community, having kickstarted movements such as food drives and helping nursing home residents refill their bird feeders.

And most recently, the student-led group decided to focus its attention on the county's four-legged populace.

Elijah Batura, a 17-year-old high school student, had the idea of supporting the Humane Society Mountain Shelter by hosting a donation drive for towels, blankets and pet food. The idea brought in support from beyond the student body, with hearty donations by staff



Elijah Batura, right, of Mountain Education Charter High School in Union County, spearheaded a student-led effort to donate blankets and towels to the Humane Society Mountain Shelter. Photo/Submitted

and parents as well. Batura said he was motivated to help the Humane Society because he has always been a fan of animals, and although he does not plan to pursue a critter-related career,

See MEC Kids, Page 2A

Vol. 113 No. 01
4 Sections 20 Pages
Weather
Thurs: T-Storm Hi 69 Lo 49
Fri: Showers Hi 68 Lo 57
Sat: T-storm Hi 70 Lo 49

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

SPORTS
BASKETBALL
UCMS vs. White Co.
Jan. 6th 4:15 PM
UCHS vs. Commerce
Jan. 8th 3 PM

Union County Planning Meeting
Jan. 4
See page 4B

Union County SPLOST Reports
See page 3A,2C

Club 66/ Marine Corps League Donations
See page 1D

New Year ...from Page 1A

to look forward to New Year's Eve but also good food and other forms of entertainment at a variety of area venues.

One should keep in mind that while these events are happening at different times, they will all be occurring on Dec. 31, so some planning may be required in order to find the experience that fits the needs of the family or an individual.

An event with extensive involvement from both counties

will be the annual New Year's Eve Fireworks at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, free in Hiawasse. The Blairsville Cruisers will be hosting a car show from 5-7 p.m., and the fireworks are set to go off around 8:45 p.m.

Local vendors will be present with arts and crafts and plenty of food down in the fairgrounds' booths, and folks will be able to enjoy all the displays from the "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!"

extravaganza prior to the start of the fireworks.

Performing live will be Hiawasse-based "Our Way Band," who opened up recently for Foghat and Night Ranger. Incidentally, preparations are well underway for the upcoming Jan. 29 "for KING & COUNTRY" Christian concert inside Anderson Music Hall at the fairgrounds.

New Year's Eve food sales will begin at 5:30 p.m., including hot chocolate, hot dogs, barbecue, firepit items and more.

Food and vendor purchases will be the only things that guests will have to pay for at this event; entrance and viewing the car show are free. The big show will feature \$5,000 in fireworks, and while there is no cost of admission, donations are welcome to help defray costs of the event.

This will be a family-friendly affair, so alcohol will be prohibited. Questions should be directed to 706-896-4191.

The Marina Station New Year's Eve Celebration kicks off at 9 p.m. on Dec. 31 in Hiawasse. The party will swing through just past 12:30 a.m. of Jan. 1, 2022. Guests are encouraged to dress in their best '90s attire and can expect a dance contest and live music by "Natti Love Joys," who have co-billed with Joan Jett, Three Dog Night, The Band, The Clash, The Ramones and more.

Appetizers and drink specials are on the evening's menu. For more information,

call 706-896-2262.

Granddaddy Mimm's of Blairsville is hosting a New Year's Eve Party that will surely be a blast with its moonshine toast. Needless to say, guests must be at least 21 to enter. The \$75 per person admission includes access to live music, a photo booth, and even a catered meal.

Due to safety regulations, there is an attendance cap at only 65 guests, so head out early. Festivities will start at 8:30 p.m. and carry on until

just after the birth of the 2022 New Year. To find out more, call 706-781-1829.

Young Harris' Brasstown Valley Resort will be holding its annual New Year's Eve Gala with a 2021 theme of "Winter Wonderland." The gourmet dinner buffet for the formal affair will be open from 7:30-9 p.m., with music and dancing straight through to the balloon drop at midnight.

Reservations are required and include a two-night stay. For pricing information and to put

in a reservation, call 706-379-9900, but be advised that slots are filling up quickly.

People may also check out New Life Family Church's New Year's Eve service for another family-friendly option. The Blairsville-based gathering will last from 5-7 p.m., and guests will be able to sit down for a meal together afterward. Contact Pastor Don Parmely at 706-781-6142.

Happy New Year's from the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald!

MEC Kids...from Page 1A

he still does what he can to help those in need.

The Student Voice serves as a sort of student government. New projects are chosen monthly by the students themselves, and since membership is participatory in nature, older students and veterans of the Mountain Education Center tutor and mentor the younger members.

A crucial element of the Student Voice is allowing the teens to "have a say" in the workings of the school and in their community, giving the youngsters the chance to think critically about their impact on the world, for better or for worse.

By taking charge of their own time and extra-curricular interests, students can begin to examine what it is they genuinely enjoy doing and thinking about the career

options available to them.

It is, admittedly, a bit more difficult to get some projects up and running. The club is still reeling from the impacts of COVID-19, as evidenced by the severe drop in regular members. There are about 10 who can continually make it to the meetings, but they do what they can.

Outside pressure holds no small influence, especially considering the ongoing pandemic. Batura mentioned that some of his peers had come up with the idea of a bake sale, but there were doubts that it would really take off due to the health concerns of selling homemade food.

But according to MEC Graduation Coach Angie Burns, Batura's movement to help the Humane Society was a total success. Burns lauded the effort Batura went through

to raise awareness for the drive, and when all was said and done, the many donated items "filled up a huge box."

"(Batura) got the box from Home Depot, and he did it all," Burns said. "He got the boxes, he did the posters, and went around to each classroom and asked for donations."

Even after the delivery of the donations earlier this month on Dec. 15, the two student-crafted posters – one for cat fans, the other for dog lovers – continued to hang for a brief time as a reminder to others to help their community.

The mission of Mountain Education Charter High School is "to provide a second chance to students across North Georgia to earn an accredited High School Diploma in a student-centered, self-paced, evening public high school."

For more information on the Mountain Education Center, visit mymec.org.

Goldwing Hiawasse Chapter GA-J donates to Union County's "Shop with a Cop" program



The local Goldwing Hiawasse Chapter GA-J presented a donation to Sheriff "Bear" Baxter to support Union County's "Shop with a Cop" program. This is the fifth year that Chapter GA-J has been involved with this worthy program.

Chapter GA-J welcomes riders and co-riders of all types of motorcycles. We meet on the 3rd Saturday of each month at Daniel's Steakhouse, 273 Big Sky Drive, Hiawasse at 11 AM for lunch and fellowship and 12 noon for our meeting. Please come check us out. Visit our GWRRA GA District website at www.gwrra-ga.com.

Prepare your Home for Winter: Emergency Tips

Getting trapped at home can happen during a weather event, even with all of our modern technology. Those of you who live up narrow mountain roads can be in trouble during a winter snow or ice storm if you depend on electricity for heat, water, and cooking and you have a power outage. If you have a medical emergency first responders may not be able to get to you quickly.

Here are some tips to help you prepare for the emergency. A storm can occur when family members are in different places, so develop a family communications plan.

Make a Ready Kit for at least three days of self-sufficiency. Familiarize yourself with the terms that are used to identify winter weather.

Keep space heater safety in mind: Use electric space heaters with automatic shut-off switches and non-glowing elements. Remember to keep all heat sources at least three feet away from furniture and drapes. Make sure your home is well insulated and that you have weather stripping around your doors and windowsills to keep the warm air inside. Make sure you have a working carbon monoxide detector. If you have a wood burning fireplace, consider storing wood to keep you warm if winter weather knocks out your heat. Also, make sure you have your chimney cleaned and inspected every year.

Have at least one of the following heat sources in case the power goes out: Extra blankets, sleeping bags and warm winter coats. Fireplace or wood-burning stove with plenty of dry firewood, or a gas log fireplace. Kerosene heater, with proper ventilation.

Prepare your vehicle: Fully winterize your vehicle: Have a mechanic check anti-freeze, brakes, heater and defroster, tires, and windshield wipers to ensure they are in good shape. Keep your gas tank at least half full. Keep an extra Ready kit in the trunk of your car. In addition to the basic essentials, consider adding a portable cell phone charger, ice scraper, extra blanket, sand for traction and jumper cables.

Make sure you have a

cell phone with an emergency charging option (car, solar, hand crank, etc.) in case of a power failure. People who depend on electricity to operate medical equipment should have alternate arrangements in place in case power is out for an extended period of time. Plan to check on elderly/disabled relatives and neighbors. Plan to bring pets inside. Know where the manual release lever of your electric garage door opener is located and how to operate it in case you lose power. Fill a gallon container with water and place them in the freezer to help keep food cold.

During Winter Weather listen to NOAA Weather Radio to stay informed of winter weather watches and warnings. Also monitor commercial radio, television, and the Internet. Check on elderly/disabled relatives and neighbors. Bring pets inside. Keep in mind that during a severe winter storm it could be hours, or even days, before emergency personnel are able to reach you. Do not call 911 for information or to report a power outage.

Allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing. Open cabinet doors to allow heat to get to uninsulated pipes under sinks and appliances near exterior walls.

Always exercise caution when using alternative light and heating sources: Use flashlights during power outages instead of candles to prevent the risk of fire and have plenty of extra batteries on-hand. Never use an oven to heat your home. Never bring portable generators, camp stoves and grills into your home; they should only be used outside. Keep them at least 20 feet away from your home's windows, doors, and vents to prevent deadly carbon monoxide poisoning.

Follow tips for keeping food safe in an emergency. Watch for frostbite. Warning signs include white or grayish-yellow skin, numbness and skin that feels unusually firm or waxy. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately. If medical help is not available, get the victim to a warm location and immerse

Frank Riley
Executive Director of RC&D



the affected area in warm water. Frostbitten areas are numb and can be easily burned so avoid using heating pads, fireplaces, or radiators for warming. Do not rub the frostbitten area; this could cause more damage. Watch for signs of hypothermia, including shivering, memory loss, fumbling hands, slurred speech, and drowsiness. If the victim's body temperature is below 95 degrees, seek medical help immediately. If medical help is not available, get the victim to a warm location, remove wet clothing, warm the center of the body first using an electric blanket and if conscious, give the victim warm, non-alcoholic beverages. Be prepared.

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



December 2, 2021
In memory of **Robert "Larry" Ashley**
In memory of his birthday
By: Brenda Ashley

December 8, 2021
In honor of **Shirley Walker**
On her 93rd birthday
By: Joan Mannheim

December 26, 2021
In memory of **Denny Wetter**
On the first anniversary of his death
By: Judy Wetter and family

January 2, 2022
In memory of **Virginia B. Meeks**
On the occasion of her birthday
By: Terry and Ginger Meeks

Bell ringing information at 706-745-5493

System TOTY...from Page 1A

19, he said, but everyone is rebounding well.

"We did allow parents to come in on craft days," Womack said, noting that the students, parents and teachers all "had a ball, so we are looking at a more normal back-to-school experience."

Elementary School Principal Gerald Bavero was elated to report that, in addition to great MAP results, every student had set personal goals earlier in the year, and a large majority had been successful in achieving those goals.

"(Students) are having fun. The parents are appreciative. The teachers are happy. Things are working," Bavero said. "I can't say enough about the support from our district leadership and from (the School Board)."

"We're going to double down as we come back in January and hit the second half hard and get these kids caught up and do what we do best here in Union County."

Middle School Principal Pat Donaldson reported amazing progress over the first semester of the 2021-22 school year.

Across the board in grades six through eight, the average MAP testing scores between August and December

revealed an increase of 2.17 grade levels in English language arts and 3.8 grade levels in math, Donaldson said.

In layman's terms, that means students improved their understanding of English language arts and math subjects significantly over the course of the first semester and are catching up fast following prolonged pandemic restrictions. And this is happening throughout the system.

High School Principal C.T. Hussion reported that his students have been incredibly involved in the community, as evidenced by the Veterans Day event at the Performing Arts Center on Nov. 11, in addition to their normal innumerable high school activities.

Of note was Hussion's mention of the "Shop With a Panther" event where high school students paired up with second-grade students for Christmas shopping. Some of the Panthers even paid for the younger kids' overages with their own money rather than putting toys back on the shelf.

And that was just one of many events the high school has been involved in, as students have performed in plays and at local events like the Blairsville Christmas Parade, Kris Kringle Market and barbecue cook-offs.

"We really are looking forward to coming back and gearing up for the second semester," Hussion said.

Moving along, Superintendent John Hill and Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Josh Davis reported that the Heavy Equipment Operations Pathway has been instituted within the CTAE family of hands-on training classes.

"This just came out," Hill said. "The state Board of Education approved this. The first course, the safety course, is the same for about all the CTAE courses. But the second two (courses) will be focused on heavy equipment and operations."

Added School Board Chair Tony Hunter, "I think the median age of an operator is 55 now. It may be older than that, I don't know, but it's a necessity for the standard of living that we're accustomed to."

"They're starting to do some good common-sense things, and this is one of them," said Hill, referring to Georgia State School Superintendent Richard Woods and the Georgia Department of Education. "It's a great job opportunity for our kids."

In other business, Special Education Services Assistant Director Michael Perry said that, currently, the system had 446 students receiving special ed services, with another 45 in the evaluation process.

"We have 153 students that are receiving accommodations for the 504 Plan," Perry said. "So, if we add all that up ... it would total 644 students, which would make up 16% of our student population."

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 "prohibits discrimination against individuals whose physical or mental impairment substantially limits one or more major life activities," according to the Georgia Department of Education.

Athletic Director Mandy Hunter reported that winter sports were in "full swing," and spring sports will be starting up early in 2022.

"I think that we're all just trying to be involved with each

other and support each other, because last year we didn't have a lot of that," said Hunter, referring to all the pandemic-related shutdowns.

Also in the meeting, the School Board approved its 2022 meeting dates. Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of each month, with exceptions next year being the October meeting set for Oct. 25 and the December

meeting set for Dec. 13.

Board members approved the budget for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund III, or ESSER Fund III.

ESSER Fund III is a part of the federal American Rescue Plan Act approved by Congress in response to hardships incurred due to the COVID pandemic. These

funds are distributed through the Georgia Department of Education.

The October 2021 Financial Report was unanimously approved in the meeting.

Next month, the board will meet on Jan. 18, starting with a work session at 6 p.m. in the Union County Board of Education Office.



Jennifer Ludlum received checks from both the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and Peachstate Federal Credit Union for being named System Teach of the Year in the December School Board meeting, pictured here with Erik Brinke of BRMEMC. Photo by Mark Smith

Kinderknecht...from Page 1A



Chevale Kinderknecht, 14, delivering some serious heat from the mound. Photo/Submitted

Team, the EC Bullets, under coach Mike Prairie.

Playing for the Bullets, she has gained an even more extensive knowledge and work ethic by attaining several outstanding accomplishments, such as: attending nationals in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; pitching at the Hall of Fame Stadium Complex; earning several special invitations to elite camps with top Division I schools; and pitching multiple remarkable games to receive the Triple Crown Coin from an umpire in the Colorado Sparkler Tournament after holding a team for over five innings.

Often noted as "one to keep their eyes on," the rising star has a goal of becoming the next big brand in the softball world. To do this, she is appealing to her hometown to support her financially in her endeavors.

"The training for

everything can be pretty extensive with money costs," said Tracy Kinderknecht, Chevale's mother. "Time spent traveling and other necessities for vehicle upkeep and maintenance, gas, lodging, food and other general home bills. It takes a lot of toll on everybody to continue this journey."

Already, the softball sensation has undertaken a considerable amount of traveling this past year for games in Colorado, Florida, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama, which "is a must to be seen by the top colleges in the nation," Chevale said.

"My parents support me to the fullest, but I am hopeful to look for donations to sponsor my travel efforts, because I do have other siblings, and I would like to take most of the financial burden off of my family so I do not feel like I am taking away from my siblings," she said. Stepping up her game,

Chevale has recently devoted a lot of time to The Gym of Blairsville, acquiring a personal athletic weight trainer to take advantage of the gym's special training section where she has access to softballs and a caged batting net to work on her fastpitch.

"If not for everyone that has helped so far, none of this would ever be possible," Chevale said. "Thank you to everyone who has believed in me to help me reach my goals. You make a difference, and I will forever be humble and grateful for all you have done for me."

People can follow Chevale's journey and inquire about becoming a sponsor via: Facebook @ChevaleKinderknecht2025, or "Chevale Kinderknecht Fastpitch Pitcher 2025"; Venmo @Tracy-Kinderknecht; Twitter @ChevaleKinderk2; and email at chevalekinderknecht@gmail.com.