

Union County Sheriff's office encourages workplace safety



The Union County Sheriff's Office visited the staff of Piedmont Heart of Blairsville to help them with workplace safety

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Piedmont Heart of Blairsville is the first business in the county to invite Union County Sheriff Mack Mason to visit and speak about safety in the workplace.

The safety meeting took place last month, just after the New Year, and the sheriff brought with him Chief Deputy John George and Lt. Daren Osborn to speak with Piedmont Heart employees during lunchtime.

Together, the trio examined what safety precautions the office already had in place, and made suggestions for a more cohesive safety plan, which Piedmont Heart agreed to work on before getting back in touch with the sheriff for a status update on their progress.

"We went over the details of security cameras, panic alarms, what to do in a situation if somebody comes in and seems suspicious – we told them what they needed to do and what needed to be done," said Lt. Osborn. "They didn't have a safety plan in place for their personal safety, and we gave them ideas on what to do for their personal protection."

One of Lt. Osborn's personal favorites when it comes to personal safety is pepper spray – a non-lethal deterrent that can be carried where most places prohibit weapons, such as in the workplace. Also, Lt. Osborn told employees to always be alert to their surroundings.

Ivy Viera, who works in the front office of Piedmont Heart and who is the business' safety officer, was the one who placed the initial call to get the sheriff's office involved.

Leading up to that phone call, Viera said that she and a coworker had had a conversation about all the violence that has been going on in public places over the last year.

Another concern Viera had was if people mistakenly thought that Piedmont Heart carried controlled substances – which they do not – because they are a doctor's office, and what they should do if someone comes looking for drugs.

"What they explained to us is really about safety for yourself first – try not to be a hero, as much as you want to be," said Viera. "If someone was to come in the door, the first thing that you do is try to get all the employees

and anyone that's in the back area, any employees and any patients, and try to get them out to safety, out the doors as quickly as possible, and call 911."

Since the sheriff's visit, Piedmont Heart has instituted several new security measures, and the employees now know what to do in the event of spontaneous workplace violence.

"I think it's necessary in this day and age, with what's going on, and especially in our little town – I think it would be a good idea if a lot of the other businesses in the area had the sheriff come out," said Viera. "Like they said as well, don't be afraid to call them. It's better to call them than not to call them. Don't think that we're bothering them. If something is going on in the office and we think that someone is in danger, call them, because that's what they're here for."

Lt. Osborn agreed that it's better to be wrong than to be sorry when it comes to violence breaking out in the workplace or in public spaces in general.

"We're willing to do this at other places if we're requested," said Lt. Osborn.

Leadership ...Page 1A

of this program, and also Renee Deibert with North Georgia Technical College, who is the Leadership Chair."

Also in the meeting, Commissioner Paris appointed Donna Plott to the Union County Board of Health for a six year term, running from Jan. 1, 2016, to Dec. 31, 2021.

"Ms. Plott will be filling the position vacated by Charlene Grizzle," said Commissioner Paris. "I would like to take this time to thank Ms. Grizzle for her dedication and service to this Board of Health."

For many years, local artist Al Garnto has been populating important public spaces with his one-of-a-kind metal artwork, such as his Kinetic Sculptures at Meeks Park and the Butternut Creek Golf Course, and the Iwo Jima Memorial Statue in Towns County's Foster Park.

And the commissioner announced in last Thursday's meeting that Garnto would be committing to more outdoor sculptures in the county, work commissioned with grant money.

"I hereby accept this grant awarded to Union County by the Georgia Council for the Arts Vibrant Communities Grant in the amount of \$3,330, for the construction and placement of two sculptures in Meeks Park II at the new Kayak Ramp," said Commissioner Paris. "The work will be completed by Al Garnto. One will be related to fishing and one to kayaking. We look forward to seeing his designs."

During his comments portion of the meeting, Commissioner Paris opened with a discussion of winter weather.

"We have spent a lot of hours listening to National Weather Service weather briefings, making emergency planning, working with the Road Department on snow and ice removal, and spent lots of time riding the roads to be able to let the public know what kind of shape our roads are in," said Commissioner Paris. "As usual, our Road Department has done an exceptional job on our roads."

"Although we have had very little snow this year, we have had two sessions of icy and slick roads, but what we have been blessed to avoid is the ice slick roads that you cannot even stand up on, much less drive on."

The commissioner thanked the public for staying off the roads during inclement weather, adding that, with 11 snow plows, Union County had more than any other rural county in the state.

"I have been working with GDOT for about six months in trying to have a camera and weather station mounted on Blood Mountain to help us forecast and provide information to the public, as this is the single most asked about road condition because of the number of people that go to Gainesville for work, medical care and medical emergencies," said Commissioner Paris.

"GDOT does a great

job of keeping our state roads cleared in the county, and they do a very good job on the mountain. The camera has been mounted by the state, but no weather station yet, and the bureaucracy has prevented us from having visual access to the cameras yet.

"We are also in the process of mounting our own cameras up there and hope to be able to provide still shots to the public, but it may be next winter before it is ready. However, we already have some periodic visuals of our own, so we are making progress for the future."

Commissioner Paris also went over the county's recent acquisition of a new motor grader, purchased to the tune of \$198,950 using SPLOST funds. In addition, the county placed an old motor grader for sale on GovDeals, netting \$61,000, offsetting a significant portion of the cost of the new vehicle.

Earlier that Thursday, Commissioner Paris went down to the newly opened playground at Meeks Park, and noted it was already being used by many children.

"(The playground) has lots of climbing and slides, requiring much more exertion than in the past, and it was so fun watching the kids playing today," said Commissioner Paris. "We hope to have new swing sets in place in about 45 days, and the baseball fields – Rich and Bryant – will have complete new infield material on them, making the rain much less of an impact of playing softball and baseball."

The playground cost \$49,500 to complete.

Spanish ...from Page 1A



L-R Front: Emily Dietrich, Molly Hayes, Madison Barnett, Channa Carroll and Catherine Dangler. L-R Back: Erik Love, Sara Dietrich, Brooklyn Bergen, Alyssa Arnold, Morgan Sidell and Brittney Stinnett. Not pictured: student Mallory Barnett and parent chaperone Lori Bergen.

Tuesday.

On Saturday, Feb. 20, students bagged groceries for tips and collected donations while greeting folks at the door in the Ingles of Blairsville, all to raise spending money for their upcoming Spring Break trip to Costa Rica.

And the trip will be a once-in-a-lifetime educational adventure for the students, many of whom have never even boarded an airplane.

"At this point, the students have independently

covered the bulk of the trip's cost," according to literature made available in Ingles Saturday. "However, there are some expenses that will be incurred on the trip that are not covered. We are asking that you please consider donating toward this unique educational experience."

Stinnett traveled to Costa Rica by herself in college, when she was only 21, and she said the country offered a safe environment within which to experience lessons from the classroom out in the

real world.

Erik Love, who is also going on the trip, is a social sciences teacher, and he too has an extensive background in travel, both domestically with students and personally in the international arena.

Looking at the students' itinerary for the upcoming trip – planned through a student travel company called Explorica – one may be inclined to feel jealous over what these students are about to experience.

They will be visiting Tortuguero National Park on the Caribbean Coast, which features canal tours and sea turtle nesting. La Fortuna will be another favored destination, which is considered the gateway to the country's only active volcano, Volcan Arenal. The students will also be visiting natural hot springs and kayaking on Lake Arenal.

The students will visit other sites of historical and cultural importance within Costa Rica, including Monteverde and the country's capital, San Jose, all while practicing their Spanish and blending in with the locals.

While down there, the students will meet up with a group of students from Towns County High School, who incidentally signed up to go at the same time.

And in order to give back to the beautiful country of Costa Rica, and to show the Central American peoples how things are done in Union County, the students will take a day to visit with poor children and work in a soup kitchen.

All in all, these 10 students are in for a multifaceted educational experience, and everyone is excited for the journey.

Trial...from Page 1A

museum.

Berrien, who knew the security system of the museum, allowed his two accomplices, posing as potential museum donors, into the museum after hours to swipe the priceless piece of art.

However, their plan was thwarted by a security guard, who confronted Berrien and his accomplices. But being the curator of the museum, Berrien was able to buy time for the painting to be removed from the building. However, the security guard chased down the thief and retrieved the painting.

The captured thief agreed to testify on behalf of the state and implicated Berrien as the mastermind.

Berrien's defense team argued that Berrien was unaware of the plot to steal the painting, and said that he was taken advantage of by an old friend who was also involved in the theft but decided to back out at the last minute.

That friend, who was also a convicted felon, testified that the theft attempt was all his idea, and he used Berrien as a means to enter the museum late at night.

Member of the cleaning crew testified that Berrien was struck in the head by an associate of the accomplice, so there was no way that he was involved.

However, a police defense witness argued that the shot to the head was planned so Berrien would appear innocent.

Each witness statement and testimony was written and acted out by a member of the Mock Trial team, along with the arguments from both the prosecution and defense teams.

Following the performance, Mock Trial Attorney Coach, the Honorable Judge Murphy Miller, and a team of evaluators consisting of Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley, Enotah Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorney Buck Levins, Gainesville attorney Ted Cassert, and



Defense Attorney Clay Picklesimer

others, had nothing but praise for each performance while offering ways the students could slightly improve their courtroom demeanor.

"This (Mock Trial program) is just a wonderful thing, and I can't express how thankful we are for the coaches, the children, the evaluators, and it's just a pleasure to be associated with everyone," Judge Miller said following the scrimmage.

"I'm sure Judge Miller has better things to do on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, but he commits to this team his knowledge, expertise and guidance," said Teacher Coach Amy Payne following Judge Miller's comments.

Then speaking directly to Judge Miller, Coach Payne said, "We couldn't do what we did here today without you, and I appreciate everything that you do for us, Judge Miller."

The students representing



District Attorney Addie Murphy

the prosecution were: Sage Royston, Addie Murphy and Stephen Normyle. Witnesses for the prosecution were: Madison "Kat" Capstick, Raphaela Aleman and Claire McPherson.

The defense team consisted of: Brooke Hamby, Emma Crosby and Clay Picklesimer. Defense witnesses were: Matthew Peney, Canaan Dyer and Nicholas Atkinson.

Christianna Morris and Jacob Mathis served as timekeepers. Jarrett Holbrooks was the court artist.

Supporting team members are: Matthew Poe, Emily Owenby, Adalyn Rogers, Emma Hendrix, Kelli Tritt and Milo Bauman.

The team's teacher coaches are Amy Payne, April Krieger, Erik Love and Peggy Caldwell.

The District Competition will held on Saturday, Feb. 27, at the Bartow County Courthouse beginning at 1 p.m.

UC Lions Club February meeting



(L-R): Lion Gerry Bailey and Lion's President Gene Little

The Union County Lions Club held a meeting February 11, 2016 at 6:30 p.m. at Steve's Steakhouse in Blairsville. A most prestigious award was given to a Lion member. This award is the "Melvin Jones Fellow" Award. Melvin Jones is the founder of the Lions Club.

Lions began in June 1917 when a young Chicago, ILL insurance agent, Melvin Jones, presented to a group

of separate business clubs the idea of consolidating the individual clubs into one strong influential club with the goal of helping the community and serving humanity. So this award was presented to a most deserving Lion, our Club Treasurer, Gerry Bailey. Congratulations to you from our club!

For more information about the Lions Club call President Gene Little at 706-374-6638. Lions Motto: We serve.