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Paris said, referring to the new facilities at Fire Station 1.

"The focus today is on the fire department," Paris said. "It's a big day for Union County citizens."

"These guys at the fire department have deserved and needed this new facility for too long."

"I think we've got a near perfect structure," Paris said. "The guys in this department designed this to meet the specific needs of the department."

"These guys spend a huge portion of their lives here at the fire department," Paris said. "They lived in moldy surroundings forever, they only got that FEMA mobile home a couple of years ago."

"We knew we had to do something. The conditions in the trailer were so cramped that it was unreal," Paris said. "We've done what we've needed to do. We've got facilities that we can be proud of now. We've got a place that future firefighters will want to come and work here."

"We've got four firefighters working 24/7, 365 days a year," he said. "Every wreck, every accident, every med call, every kind of call in the world, they respond."

"Firefighting is really only a small part of what they do," Paris said. "They are true public servants."

Commissioner Paris also praised the county's volunteer force, a group the Commissioner calls the backbone of the department.

"We've got paid firefight-



Almost 100 people attended the grand opening of Fire Station 1 on Shoe Factory Road last week. Dignitaries from neighboring counties and officials with the Georgia Emergency Management Agency attended the event. Station 1 Capt. Richard Jones cut the ribbon. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

ers and volunteers. We couldn't do what we do without both of these groups of individuals."

"The volunteers are the backbone of the department," he said. "They do this for a very nominal amount of pay. They do what they do because they're making a difference in their communities."

"They make a difference that is truly appreciated throughout the county," Paris said. "They do what they do and then go home to make a difference another day."

Following the ceremonies of the day, that included cutting the ribbon with the Chamber of Commerce, folks got down to some serious business, enjoying a meal and fellowship.

"I'm really surprised at the number of people here today," Commissioner Paris said. "This is such a community celebration. With all these people here, it really does feel like a community celebration."

"I can say this about the folks in Union County, they truly appreciate their firefighters," Paris said. "The community knows that their public servants, whether it's with the Union County Sheriff's Office, the fire department, the ambu-



Guests included the firefighting and Emergency Management folks from Towns County. Capt. Jones invites the Towns County representatives in to break bread with their brethren from Union County. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

lance service, or the search and rescue folks, that they're dedicated and work together with one common goal in mind, and that's to make sure that Union County has done what it takes to get the job done."

Chief Worden said the most intriguing aspect of the whole situation, when the firefighters lived in cramped quarters, and in moldy sleeping quarters, they didn't complain.

"They knew there was a

light at the end of the tunnel," Chief Worden said. "They knew we would get the new building and new sleeping quarters in due time."

"They've always talked about what a new building would be like, and judging by what we've seen here today, they're proud to be here," Chief Worden said. "They're proud to be firefighters in Union County."

"I've never seen a bunch

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between \$19 million and \$21 million, Commissioner Paris said.

"We want to anticipate low, and hope for high collections," Paris said.

SPLOST III was approved by voters to collect \$31.5 million. The projection of sales tax collections for SPLOST III was well before the current recession.

"This time, we'll hold that figure to \$19 million to \$21 million," Paris said. "It's better to hold it low and budget for projects within that financial framework."

"If it comes in high, well, that's just an added benefit," he said.

Voters would be approving six more years of special purpose sales tax collections. The county and city will approve an intergovernmental agreement to allow a collection for six years.

SPLOST III was approved for six years, with collections beginning in 2009 and expiring in March 2015. Like SPLOST III, SPLOST IV will include projects for the city of Blairsville.

In terms of what projects will be proposed for SPLOST IV, Commissioner Paris said that list is yet to be determined.

"Over the next couple of weeks, we're going to try and have a projects list," Paris said. "We're looking at several projects. We've got a lot of road projects to look at."

"Hopefully, within the next two weeks, we'll have our list narrowed down for

presentation.

"We want to involve the public in the process, get their comments and see where we stand there," Paris said. "There maybe some things that we've overlooked, and we want the

public to be happy with this process."

"We're looking at economic development," he said. "We need jobs, and we need to be able to attract new business to be able to do that."