

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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August 5, 2015

Those big, yellow buses are ready to roll

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Dog Days of summer are nearly at an end, heralding the start of a new school year for Union County students.

Heading into the 2015-2016 school year – Friday, Aug. 7, is the first day back for students – Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe and the entire school system aim to provide challenging and engaging opportunities for students.

“Part of our job, we think, is to stretch students, sometimes take them out of their comfort zones and give them some new challenges, and really get them excited about what they’re doing – something that’s new for them,” said Steppe.

This year will feature a renewed, system-wide emphasis on literacy and the ability to communicate in writing and verbally for the nearly 2,800 expected students.

“We’re really emphasize-



Transportation Director Stanley Garrett has the big yellow school buses ready to roll on Friday, Aug. 7.

ing literacy this year, and said Steppe. “That’s kind of the golden key that opens the opportunities for the future. Kids have got to be able to read and communicate, write well and speak well, all those kinds of things.”

In challenging the stu-

dent body to excel, teachers are expected of each and every schoolchild in their classrooms, and in turn, administrators will be holding high expectations of teachers as well.

“Over the years, it’s been acceptable for most of the kids to be successful, and we do

very well in comparison with other schools in the state of Georgia – we do very well,” said Steppe. “But still, we have some students, about 10 percent, that don’t do as well as they should. They don’t meet the standards they need

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County’s combined millage rate dips to 17.675 mills for 2015

By Charles Duncan
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A year after a half-mill tax increase, Union County’s millage rate is on the decline again.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said the rate at which property taxes are determined is going down slightly.

“Our property tax mill rate will go from 5.89 mills down to 5.888, again a very small amount, but the main thing is that it is not going up,” Paris said. “As you can see from the 5-year history and our previous reports, the only property tax increase we have had since 2005 was last year, and it was only a half-mill increase due mostly to the cost of courthouse security and several other items.”

The Union County Board of Education followed



Lamar Paris

suit, as its millage rate will dip from 11.791 to 11.787, the second consecutive millage rate decrease for the Board of Education.

The county’s combined millage rate has fallen to 17.675 mills. Union County assesses property at 40 percent of its value.

The millage rate rollback was difficult as the

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Regional jobs fair on Tuesday at North Georgia Technical College

By Charles Duncan
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The Union County Development Authority has teamed up with the Georgia Department of Labor to host a regional jobs fair at North Georgia Technical College’s Blairsville Campus.

The event, North Georgia Technical Career Expo, touts up to 34 regional employers from Union, Towns and Fannin counties who are looking for workers, UCDA Executive Director Mitch Griggs said.

The career fair takes place at North Georgia Technical College’s Blairsville campus on Tuesday, Aug. 4 from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Up to 34 area employers from the three-county area that are actively seeking quality employees will be present. Companies include manufacturers, IT firms, healthcare firms, educational institutions, trucking firms, retailers, financial institutions, hospitality businesses and many others.

“The UCDA stays in touch with our area businesses and briefs the board of directors on their status so we can stay abreast of any issues or opportunities the Authority may be able to help with,” Griggs said. “A common theme among most of our businesses was job openings and the need to find good employees.”

“We’ve also been aware that the new casino (Harrah’s Cherokee Valley River Road), while creating many new and needed jobs, was putting some stress on other area businesses in the hospitality industry,”



Mitch Griggs

Griggs said. “Thus the UCDA board asked me to try and put together a job fair to help both our businesses needing employees and our citizens needing employment.”

Griggs solicited the aid of the local Department of Labor Business Services Recruiter, Janet Chapman and Department of Labor Regional Coordinator Danette Smith and decided to expand the job fair to include businesses in Fannin and Towns Counties as well.

“We all share a common labor and are partners in our Joint Development Authority,” Griggs said. “The Department of Labor has brought tremendous resources to the effort, including their job fair guru, Bill Bexley, Region 1 Coordinator Lisa Adkisson and other DOL staff that have helped with planning, coordination, marketing, logistics, and outreach for the expo.”

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More than 400 tomato sandwiches served at Market

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

More than 400 tomato sandwiches were handed out to hungry patrons during the Union County Farmers Market’s annual Customer Appreciation Day on Saturday, Aug. 1.

“One day a year, we want to share with our customers and tell them how much we appreciate what they’ve done for us,” said Market Manager Mickey Cummings. “Without our customers at our Farmers Market, we wouldn’t be anything. We want to show our customers how much we appreciate them, so what we do is, we go and secure some tomatoes from



Tomato sandwiches were the topic of conversation at the Union County Farmers Market on Saturday.

Ray Stevens still a crowd favorite at 76

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

After a two-year hiatus from touring, Georgia-born Ray Stevens is back in the saddle again, and he’s never sounded more Ray Stevens.

Anderson Music Hall was the third stop on Stevens’ new touring schedule on Saturday, Aug. 1, and fans from all over the Tri-State region greeted Stevens with hoots and hollers, applause and laughter.

Always a consummate entertainer, Stevens seemed to soak up the energy of the excited crowd and give it right back, dancing and singing his way through classics and to his more modern hits.

“I made my very first record in 1957,” said Ste-



Ray Stevens delighted a crowd of more than 2,000 at Anderson Music Hall.

vens, before launching into a musical rendition of his own career. “For three years I couldn’t get arrested with a hit. So in 1960, I thought, well, I’ve got to do something a little different, something weird to attract attention.”

This prompted Stevens to perform a bit from his classic *Sergeant Preston of the Yukon*, which would prove a herald of things to come stylistically speaking. And the crowd went wild.

“Believe it or not, in 1960, that record was taking off like a rocket, going to be a big hit,” said Stevens. “Then we had to pull it off the market, because it’s my exuberance, I had neglected

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We Are Still Here adjusts timetable for chiefs

By Shawn Jarrard
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The We Are Still Here Tri-State Native American Initiative has adjusted its timetable for bringing the chiefs of four sovereign Native American nations to Union County.

Originally, the chiefs were to arrive in Blairsville on Sept. 24 and stay through Sept. 27, taking part in a Black Tie Dinner fit for these heads of state and other activities, like a Stomp Dance, the playing of stickball, unveiling of a memorial statue and an archaeological tour.

“We’ve had some talks with the chiefs, because two of the tribes are doing elections,” said Jim Brown, a member on the We Are Still Here Executive Committee. “They kind of reached out to us and said, hey, we’ve got elections going on, so we don’t know exactly



Dream Horse found a delighted owner on Friday before the Friday Concert Series at the Historic Courthouse.

who we’re sending. It could be the current chief, it could be a totally separate person. It may be the week of that we tell you. And of course, that kind of sent us into a panicked state, because it’s hard to buy plane tickets the week of.”

This proved a stroke of luck for the initiative, however, as one of the events, the unveiling of the 10-foot bronze statue depicting a Native American stickball player stretching out to catch an unseen ball – the centerpiece of

the We Are Still Here memorial – had been having issues at the foundry due to the complexity of the statue, and likely would not have been ready by the September date.

The new timetable

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Moonshine Cruiz-In draws a crowd to Fairgrounds

By Mason Mitcham
North Georgia News
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The Seventh Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In hit its brakes at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds over the weekend as classic hotrods and muscle cars styled and profiled for the thousands in attendance.

From Thursday, July 30 through Saturday, Aug. 1, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds hosted the annual Moonshine Cruiz-In.

The Moonshine Cruiz-In is a car show uniquely suited for Southern Appalachia, which has its roots in the production of actual moonshine.

It is promoted by Rakes Parrish, who is from Mississippi but has roots in Towns County. His grandmother lived in Towns County, and he used to come here to spend the summers with her on Owl Creek.

When he got the idea to do a show at the Fairgrounds, Parrish at first had a different name picked out, until he talked to Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall.

“I was telling them all about the show,” he recalled. “And Mr. Kendall raised his hand and said, ‘You know what made this town with these cars? It was moonshine. So I vote if everybody else does that we say something about moonshine.’ So we called it the Moonshine Cruiz-In. And everybody likes the moonshine,” he said.

On the first day of the Cruiz-In, cars of all different shapes, sizes, and colors filled the Fairgrounds’ parking lots. Some were reminiscent of 1920’s-era mob boss vehicles. Others sported flaming smokestacks.

Arts and crafts vendors lined the Pioneer Village. Trail-

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PANTHERS SPORTS FOOTBALL

Fri Aug 7 vs. Holy Innocents

Scrimmage 6:30 PM

SOFTBALL

Aug. 7 & 8 Lanier Point

Invitational Gainesville