

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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## Sheriff: 'Meth bust was two months in the making'



Union County Sheriff's Lt. Chad Deyton, left, and Sgt. Tyler Miller show the fruits of their labors, 1 pound, 2 ounces of meth, and a haul of cash. Right, a cache of weapons found during a search of Gary Dean Payne's home. Payne also is charged with possession of firearms by a convicted felon.

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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The arrest of a 52-year-old Union County man charged with trafficking meth-

amphetamine was the result of an extensive undercover investigation, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Gary Dean Payne is charged with trafficking



methamphetamine; two counts possession of a controlled substance; possession of firearms by a convicted felon; and three counts distribution of methamphetamine, Union County

Jail records show. Payne remains in the Union County Jail without bond, jail records show.

See *Bust*, 2A

## Taylor debt saga continues for Blue Ridge Mountain EMC

GM was reprimanded for his knowledge of the debt

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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The former president of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC owes more than just his unpaid utility bill, documents obtained by the *North Georgia News* show.

The *North Georgia News* reported on April 30 that Terry Taylor was in arrears on his stone crusher company's utility bill in the amount of \$48,643.53.

Taylor was offered a consent agreement by the EMC Board of Directors to pay a minimum of \$1,000 each month, in addition to current electric charges. That bill is down to \$45,643.53. Prior to Taylor's most recent payments, the last payment he made to BRMEMC was March 22, 2012.

If Taylor doesn't meet See *EMC*, 2A



Terry Taylor



Matthew Akins

## Sheriff: 'courts must decide to grant or decline awards'

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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The war on drugs sometimes leads to property seizures.

However, as Union County Sheriff Mack Mason says, the courts award those asset forfeitures.

"Nothing is automatic," Sheriff Mason said. "The state legislature has provided, through the enactment of law, a viable tool in the way of asset forfeiture. These laws not only assist law enforcement in arresting dealers and users, but, also curtailing future drug activity by taking tools of their trade and their property related to it gained from profits."

Assets and property obtained by law enforcement through their seizure usually comes from the sale of illicit



Sheriff Mack Mason

drugs. "While the asset seizure is not our main motivation, the proceeds from it help to offset the cost of expensive drug case investigations," Sheriff Mason said. "These investigations often include extra hours of manpower, technology-based needs, and unforeseen expenses which

may arise. "State law defines that any proceeds from these asset forfeitures can only be used for certain things, such as vehicles, equipment, weapons, training or other direct law enforcement purposes," Sheriff Mason said.

When property is seized, agencies are responsible for placing an estimated value on their claim, through appraisals, Sheriff Mason said.

"If an agency files an item seized, the actual award may range from nothing to the full valued amount or anywhere in between," Sheriff Mason said. "Customarily, the defendant, as well as law enforcement, has an opportunity to go before the courts and explain why the request should or should not be granted.

"Often, the district attorney provides insight on the feasibility of the request for

seizure of property by producing criminal history information, the amounts of the drugs that have been sold and or confiscated. This seizure procedure is a civil matter and is different from the actual criminal trial or penalty phase," Sheriff Mason said.

"These are not secretive measures that we're discussing here," Sheriff Mason said. "Drug dealers as well as users, know that these laws exist and yet they continue to run the risk by continuing their criminal behavior. As long as we make the same choices, we'll continue to provide them with the full consequences of their criminal actions.

"By obtaining these funds, we are able to place the burden right where it belongs, on the dealers themselves."

See *Seizures*, 2A

## Paris: 'property taxes on the rise'

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Unfunded mandates from the Georgia General Assembly will play a major role in the Fiscal 2015 County Budget as Union County property taxes are on the rise.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said the county must raise millage rates by a half mill for 2015. The current millage rate for county government is 5.408 mills; a half mill increase brings that to around 5.9 mills.

The cost of the increase breaks down like this. Homeowners with a homestead exemption and a home valued at \$100,000 will see an annual increase from \$205.50 annually to \$223.82, an increase of \$18.32.

Homeowners with a piece of property valued at



Lamar Paris

\$200,000 with no exemptions will see their property taxes increase from \$432.64 annually to \$471.20, an increase of \$38.56, based on the millage increase.

The commissioner reports that there's more than one issue that is prompting the county millage rate increase.

See *Millage*, 3A

## More than 2,500 fill Union County classrooms

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County and Welborn Gap Schools opened their doors on Friday to more than 2,500 students.

At the Union County Primary School, the morning drop off has changed as the old system was scrapped after two years and with approximately 630 students attending the primary school, improvements had to be made with enrollment numbers on the rise.

The current system brings vehicles up the hill on Welborn St. past the old Middle/High School and around the right side of the building where a parking lot had been. The new parking lot around the playground and eventually leads to the old drop off site, outside of the gymnasium.

According to Union County Primary School Principal Millie Owenby, there have been no complaints

See *Schools*, 3A



## Damaged water meters could cost users \$140 to replace

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Water meters have been the focus of numerous telephone calls to City Hall recently.

A story published in the *North Georgia News* had a little bit more information in it than was needed. It included information about all types of water meters, including the meters that are indoors in the Northeastern United States.

Water meters in Georgia are located in the outside, especially in Blairsville.

The water meters in question at City Hall are part of the Meter Replacement Project designed to upgrade meters for City customers to AMR meters. Automated Meter Reading, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said.

The new meter reading system is more cost effective, saved on human error and are more efficient than the replaced outdated meters resulting in a possible gain in revenue, Mayor Conley said.

The wireless automatic smart reading system is now in use for the City's 1,310 customers. The project was part of the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority's \$1,693,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan awarded to the city of Blairsville last year to pay in part for the high-tech meters.

"Where we had four people reading the old meters and it took two or three days, we have one person reading the new meters in three hours," Mayor Conley said. "A lot of our meters were old and inefficient. A lot of people



The black hockey puck-looking device is a high-tech electronic sensor that sends water usage data to a City laptop to determine a City water customer's monthly water usage. Photo/Charles Duncan

believe their water bill is high because of the new meters.

"In a sense that is correct, but it's because the AMR meters are reading actual water usage, where as the old, antiquated meters were not giving accurate readings," Mayor Conley said.

The City has experienced some trouble with the new meters because some city residents are damaging the new readers with weed eaters and lawn mowers. There is a sensor on top of the meter that looks like a hockey puck. When clipped by a mower or weed eater, the device is damaged.

"The thing we really need to focus on is cautioning the people that the device on top of the meter that looks like a hockey puck, don't run across it with a lawn mower or

See *Meters*, 2A

## Union 4-Hers earn state honors in Atlanta

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News Special

Atlanta - State 4-H Congress competition, held July 22nd - 25th in Atlanta, decided the best in the state in 4-H, and Union County joined that circle of winners again this year.

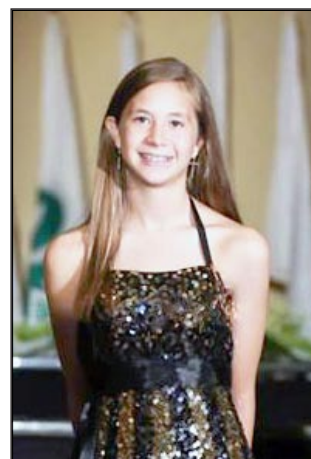
More than 250 4-Hers throughout the state competed for top honors in their respective projects while spending the week at the Crown Plaza Ravinia Hotel in Atlanta.

Kolbe Nix, son of Brian and Kim Nix, won first in the

See *4H*, 3A



Phillippe Jennings, Madeline Walker, and Kolbe Nix, won first place honors in their respective fields.



Ansley Burnette took top honors for the Master Horseman Project.

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