

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, January 23, 2019

Baxter takes up Carroll's torch as new Blairsville Police Chief

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Ever since he was a young man walking the halls of Union County High School, Michael "Bear" Baxter knew he wanted to be a law enforcement officer.

He vigorously pursued this dream after graduation, and now, in his 26th year in law enforcement, Baxter is the new chief of his hometown police department.

Baxter swore in as Blairsville Police Chief in the Jan. 8 regular meeting of Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and City Council, and his watch as chief officially began at 2 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 15, 2019.

Jan. 15 was a special day for Chief Baxter. It was his birthday, and he was getting

to realize his promotion from assistant chief to chief on the day he turned 45.

But more importantly, it was the day his longtime friend and colleague Johnny Carroll retired as Blairsville Police Chief after 17 years on the job.

"I consider Chief Carroll as family," said Baxter, who remembers well the days before the Police Department, when Carroll served as his training officer at the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Continued Baxter, "He was good to me. He took me in, and I'll be honest with you, I was a slick-sleeve rookie - I didn't know anything. He taught me a lot of things, not just policing. He taught me how to treat people."

Chief Baxter is well known throughout these parts as both a Union County native

and a career law enforcement officer, and given his passion for what he does, it's not surprising that he started in law enforcement less than a year out of high school.

He simply knew he wanted to be a peace officer, so to get his foot in the door, he took a position as a part-time jailer at the old Towns/Union Jail in 1993.

The job didn't pay much at just \$5.79 an hour, and he worked as a substitute jailer, filling in when needed. Sometimes, there wasn't much work to be had, while at one point he worked a total of 13 days straight for 12 hours each day.

But none of this deterred him, and he never let up on his dream of becoming a law enforcement officer.

After spending about nine months at the jail learning

everything he could, then-Union County Sheriff Stanley Richardson, impressed with Baxter's tenacity, sent him for training to become a deputy.

He wasn't even old enough to buy a firearm for training, so his dad helped him out, and off to school he went, after which he became a full-fledged deputy.

Baxter stayed with the sheriff's office until about 2000, when he took a full-time job as a sergeant with the Blairsville Police Department.

The department had reformed under Interim Police Chief Steve Davis after disbanding earlier in the 1990s, and for a brief time, Baxter had worked for both the Sheriff's Office and Police Department prior to transitioning to Blairsville full-time.

He remained in his sergeant position until



Michael "Bear" Baxter

Carroll came on as police chief about a year and a half after the formation of the new

department.

Carroll knew Baxter from their time together at the Sheriff's Office, and he promoted the young officer from sergeant to serving as his assistant chief.

Baxter faithfully carried out his role as assistant chief for 17 years, and now, he has picked up where Carroll left off as Blairsville Police Chief in charge of protecting the lives and properties of Blairsville-Union County residents.

The new chief has been around the square a time or two, and while he's earned himself a reputation for being stern but fair, Baxter is also known for his kindness and generosity toward others.

"Communication is probably the most important thing that you'll learn in this business - communication. See Chief Baxter., Page 2A

Annual Meeting, customer charge, broadband discussed in EMC meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

YOUNG HARRIS - This September, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC will host a weekday Annual Meeting at its own headquarters in Young Harris.

For decades, the Annual Meeting took place on the second Saturday in September at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiwassee, only to change venues two years ago to the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center in Blairsville.

After analyzing 2018 Annual Meeting costs, the board asked EMC staff if holding the big meeting at EMC headquarters would help to lower costs moving forward.

And as it turns out, EMC staff were able to determine that the headquarters would likely do a fine job of hosting the Annual Meeting.

The board also asked the staff to see if there was any wiggle room in the bylaws for the Annual Meeting date, with the thought that moving the meeting from the weekend might be a good way



Jeremy Nelms

to encourage more member attendance, as Saturdays are highly prized days for many people.

EMC staff came through again, isolating a September weekday as a likely candidate to host the 2019 Annual Meeting.

Ultimately, the staff recommended to the Board of Directors that this year's Annual Meeting be held in the covered truck area behind the main EMC building on Thursday, Sept. 26, and the board approved the recommendation in its first regular meeting of the year on Jan. 14.

As previously reported, the budgeted amount for the 2018 Annual Meeting was \$114,100, though the actual cost of the meeting came in under budget at \$99,440.

The 2019 Annual Meeting will take place when workers are already there, and they will be available to help because the office will be closed for the second half of the workday, allowing the EMC to cut down on overtime hours typically accrued during Annual Meetings.

Coupled with other cost-cutting measures like in-house advertising and fewer door prizes, the venue and date changes are likely to result in a savings of about 20 percent, or \$20,000, to the membership this year.

The Annual Meeting serves as a vehicle for the election of new EMC board members, and it also gives the membership a chance to hear directly from EMC leadership, though members are free to attend any of the regular monthly board meetings if they wish to speak with directors.

Also in the January board meeting, EMC General Manager See EMC, Page 3A

City Hall makes new PAPI system No. 1 priority at the airport

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The city of Blairsville is moving forward with plans to install a new PAPI system at the Blairsville Municipal Airport.

Planners with the Georgia Department of Transportation joined Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley at City Hall on Friday, Jan. 18, to discuss making a new PAPI system the top priority at the airport.

PAPI (pronounced "pappy") stands for Precision Approach Path Indicator, and such systems assist pilots with visual guidance when landing, telling them, for example, whether they're coming in too high, too low or just right.

A PAPI system is helpful for daytimes and nighttime landings, as it has "an effective visual range of at least three miles during the day and up to 20 miles at night," according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The overwhelming majority of Georgia's 104 airports have PAPI systems, and Blairsville is looking to get its name added to that list hopefully this year.



GDOT Aviation Program Manager Steve Brian with Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley in a meeting at City Hall on Friday, Jan. 18. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Next steps in securing a PAPI system include a federally mandated land survey to make sure the area around the runway meets the right siting criteria to install a PAPI system.

Concurrently, the city is working to identify and acquire all necessary land around the airport to clear obstructions such as trees that may interfere with installation.

One piece of property needing to be cleared of obstructions is currently under

condemnation, which presents a legal challenge for the city, though the mayor said the city is working to clear up the matter.

Looking ahead, GDOT will be holding weekly conference calls with City Hall concerning the progress and various next steps toward installing a PAPI system.

The meeting on Jan. 18 did not satisfy open meeting requirements, but Mayor See City Hall, Page 2A

Paris welcomes SAR to county meeting, talks upcoming construction

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris welcomed Jared Ogden and Sid Turner of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons of the American Revolution in his Jan. 17 regular meeting.

Ogden and Turner, president and vice president of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter SAR respectively, attended the meeting to recognize two Union County first responders for their service to this community.

Together, Ogden and Turner presented Lt. Tim Schroeder of the Union County Fire Department with a Fire Safety Commendation Medal in honor of his eight years on the job.

"He has been a dedicated firefighter from the very first day and has received several awards for responding to the most calls in his area," said Turner. "He completed his Firefighter I and Hazardous Material (training) at the Operations Level, meeting the standards of the National Professional Qualifications."

"He has completed medical training and is licensed in the state of Georgia as an Advanced Medical Technician. Lt. Schroeder has risen through the ranks to the level of First Lieutenant of the volunteer



Paramedic Dustin Lee receiving the Murray King Award from Kendra King at the Jan. 17 regular Union County Commission Meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

service, and he works part-time at the career station.

"Lt. Schroeder has gone above and beyond his volunteer service by attending classes at the Georgia Fire Academy, including a Fire Inspector class, thus achieving certification as an Inspector at the National Professional Qualifications level."

"As a Fire Inspector, he promotes fire safety within the community. He is also really active, dedicated and shows professionalism in all his work at the Fire Department, and for this reason, we are presenting him with a Fire Safety Commendation Medal."

Next, the SAR

representatives presented Paramedic Dustin Lee with an Emergency Medical Services Commendation Medal to recognize his time as an Emergency Medical Technician with Union General EMS since 2011.

"As an EMT, he constantly delivers quality care to his patients at a high level," said Turner. "He just recently, in December, completed his Paramedic Certification, and he will be giving professional service at this level and will be an asset to the community."

"He is not currently serving in a leadership position, but he sets a daily example of See County Meeting, Page 6A

Decorated Marine honored with patriotic escort home to Murphy

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Area veterans, law enforcement personnel and other first responders paid their respects to fallen U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Christopher J. Lockett by helping to escort his body home from Atlanta to Murphy, North Carolina, on Tuesday, Jan. 15.

Lockett, 26, of Murphy, passed away on Monday, Jan. 7, and further details were unavailable by press time.

Sgt. Lockett served his country honorably and was a decorated Marine, having been awarded a number of medals

and commendations during his years of service.

As a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, Lockett received military funeral honors conducted by the Marine Corps on Friday, Jan. 18.

His funeral service was held at the First Baptist Church of Murphy, with Col. Kevin Jarrard officiating, and he was laid to rest at Sunset Cemetery.

Lt. Daren Osborn, Lt. Tom Mangifesta and Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer of the Union County Sheriff's Office joined the Jan. 15 procession with other area first responders to See Lockett, Page 3A



USMC Sgt. Christopher J. Lockett

UCSO looking for fugitive Naftzger, wanted for child molestation

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Investigators with the Union County Sheriff's Office are asking the public's help in locating fugitive from justice Donald Eugene Naftzger, 70, of Blairsville.

Naftzger recently bonded out of the Union County Jail after having been there for more than a year on felony charges of child molestation and sexual battery for allegedly molesting

his 2-year-old grandson, said UCSO Lt. Tom Mangifesta.

Naftzger is a white male with gray hair and hazel eyes, standing at 5 feet, 10 inches tall and weighing 230 pounds, said Mangifesta.

He was last seen at the jail but was known to frequent the McClure Trailer Park prior to his July 20, 2017, arrest for child molestation, said Mangifesta.

Authorities realized Naftzger was on the lamb See Naftzger, Page 2A



Donald Eugene Naftzger

Vol. 110 No. 04
4 Sections 24 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Cloudy Hi 39 Lo 24
Fri: Cloudy Hi 32 Lo 20
Sat: Cloudy Hi 41 Lo 26

Arrests 5B
Churches 3C
Classifieds 3D
Opinion 4A
Legals 4D
Obits 4C
Sports 2B

SPORTS
BASKETBALL
Jan 25 vs. Rabun Co. 7 PM
Jan 26 @ Putnam Co. 3 PM

Habitat for Humanity
New Home Build
See page 4B

Legislative Update from Sen. Gooch
See page 2C

2019-2020 Kindergarten Round-Up
See page 6A