

North Georgia News

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United Community Bank relocates headquarters to Greenville, SC

Local jobs, services to remain unaffected

By Shawn Jarrard
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Citing growth, United Community Bank has moved its corporate headquarters from Union County, Georgia, to Greenville, South Carolina, more than 70 years after being founded here in Blairsville in 1950.

Importantly, the bank has committed to maintaining all local jobs "now and in the future," including the positions of all back office and branch staff members working in Union County.

Further, there will be no impact to banking services or local branches due

to the relocation, according to United Community Bank Inc. Chairman and CEO Lynn Harton, so neither customers nor employees will be affected by the transition.

"The people in Blairsville are very important to us," Harton said. "Our team is very talented, and the culture is very important to us. I didn't grow up in Blairsville, but I grew up in a small town.

"One of the things I always tell everybody: I work half my time to stay small and half my time to get bigger, because we have to grow to succeed, but you want to keep that connection and that small town family, service-oriented

piece, because that's really the heart of who we are."

Part of United's "overall growth strategy," the move became official Feb. 2 in a Greenville County Council vote to make United Community Bank the largest bank headquartered in South Carolina.

All told, the retail and commercial bank will be investing \$24.8 million to construct a new headquarters building in Downtown Greenville to allow for expanded operations in the area, which will eventually bring 227 new jobs to the Palmetto State.

Harton said the bank's

holding company will remain domiciled in Blairsville, effectively re-establishing United as a Georgia-owned, South Carolina-chartered institution. This will allow UCBI to enjoy the regulatory environment of the Peach State and the growth potential of Greenville.

The company has been expanding its services and operational capabilities in Greenville since 2012, when Harton came on board there. In that time, the company has grown considerably thanks to opportunities available in South Carolina's sixth largest city.

As such, corporate functions have been increasingly split between Blairsville and Greenville in

recent years, with the new arrangement in the latter enabling the bank to increase its capabilities as it pursues greater independence in the market via growth through continued acquisition.

United sought and will be receiving local tax incentives for construction of the new headquarters building in South Carolina, which is expected to be completed by January 2024 to coincide with the end of a leasing agreement for the bank's current facilities in Greenville.

Ultimately, Harton said relocating the headquarters to Greenville will strengthen United by helping the bank expand beyond what Union County could offer, as both a



Lynn Harton
UCBI Chairman & CEO

talent pool and recruiting tool for company growth.

"As we expand across the Southeast," Harton said, "we continually evaluate the right solutions for the future." See UCBI, Page 2A

Second-shot mass vaccine clinic set for Friday, Feb. 26



By Shawn Jarrard
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More than a thousand people's COVID-19 vaccine plans got put on hold last week, as winter weather-related vaccine shipment delays forced the Health Department to reschedule its second-shot vaccination clinic from Friday, Feb. 19, to Friday, Feb. 26.

The rescheduled clinic is a follow-up mass vaccination for the 1,050 people from Union and Towns who received their first shot of the two-dose vaccine in a Jan. 22 mass clinic

sponsored by the Union County Government, local Emergency Management Agency and Rec Department.

Time and location for the rescheduled clinic will remain the same: 8:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m. at the Union County Sports Center on 519 Industrial Blvd, with appointment holders being asked to report at their originally assigned times on Friday, Feb. 26.

"We apologize for any inconvenience caused by the rescheduling," District 2 Public Health said. "The unprecedented winter weather across our nation and the tight shipment schedule of vaccine are conditions beyond our control."

Second doses of the

Moderna vaccine are supposed to be administered four weeks after first doses, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is OK to wait an extra week to get the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

"The second dose should be administered as close to the recommended interval as possible," per the CDC. "However, if it is not feasible to adhere to the recommended interval and a delay in vaccination is unavoidable, the second dose of Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines may be administered up to six weeks (42 days) after the first dose."

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Chief Deyton: 'Zero tolerance for cars passing stopped buses'

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After several close calls this school year, the Union County Schools Police Department is announcing a crackdown on drivers who illegally pass school buses that are stopped to pick up or drop off students.

Local law enforcement agencies are launching a zero-tolerance enforcement effort to make sure all drivers are stopping as required by Georgia law for buses that have their stop lights and stop arms activated.

"We have received too many complaints of drivers needlessly putting our kids in danger by going around or not stopping for buses on the other

side of the road," Union County Schools Police Chief Chad Deyton said. "You will get a ticket when you are pulled over for illegally passing a school bus. This is your warning."

According to Georgia law, vehicles traveling in both directions on the same road as a school bus, including roads with a center turn lane, must stop for a bus that is picking up or dropping off students (O.C.G.A. 40-6-163).

When the road is divided by a physical barrier such as a concrete wall or a grass median, vehicles traveling in the opposite direction of the bus do not have to stop, however, they should slow down and drive with caution in the area.

Drivers convicted of



Chad Deyton
UCS Police Chief

illegally passing a school bus face steep fines and will have 6 points assessed against their driver's license. Under Georgia law, a driver's license will be

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Many local businesses likely qualify for COVID funding

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs wants local businessowners to know that there are still federal coronavirus impact funds available to them - even if they've managed to recover from the initial shock of the pandemic.

In general, Georgia has rebounded from its COVID-19 economic woes after experiencing a massive spike in unemployment when everything shut down last spring, prompting the initial round of COVID relief known as the CARES Act in March, which Griggs promoted at the time.

Fortunately, within just a couple months, the economy had re-opened and the economy statewide was able to return mostly to life by summer, with sales taxes and activity for many local businesses increasing above pre-pandemic



Mitch Griggs
UCDA Director

levels as folks flocked here from metropolitan areas.

That doesn't mean businesses didn't get hurt in the shutdown, either those that bounced back or the many that remain impacted to this day, and Griggs said all businesses should be looking into new revenue recovery opportunities via the Economic Aid Act that became law in December.

"What we're looking at now, locally at least, is a pretty

healthy economy with a pretty good level of growth," Griggs said. "On paper, things look fairly well recovered if not completely recovered, but we still have areas of weakness, sectors of our local economy that haven't fully recovered and are still hurting from the pandemic."

"Some businesses maybe sustained some losses last year that, perhaps their business is completely recovered and they're back to a normal level of revenues and have rehired everybody, but they've still got a hole in last year where revenues did decrease."

Added Griggs, "That could be a manufacturer, it could be a restaurant, it could be a mom and pop, it could be an attorney - you name it, it literally could be any business where they sustained losses, even if it was for a relatively short period of time last year."

"And when you've got a hole in your revenues, be that for one week, a month

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Masks, attendance and awards highlight School Board meeting



School Police Chief Chad Deyton, Security Guard Wendell Murphy and Superintendent John Hill in the Feb. 16 school board meeting, during which Murphy received the "Going the Extra Mile" Award. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education has tried to make the best decisions possible regarding student safety while continuing to provide a quality

education amid COVID-19, resulting in minimal viral impact inside the district.

In their regular meeting on Feb. 16, board members once more revisited the conversation around safety and quality in the Multipurpose Room of the High

School, discussing whether to keep a districtwide mask mandate for the remainder of the school year.

Superintendent John Hill prefaced the discussion by saying, "I don't have all the

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Paris proclaims 79th Seabee Birthday, talks 'Sanctuary County' and COVID

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In his regular monthly meeting on Feb. 18, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris proclaimed Friday, March 5, a local day to honor the U.S. Navy Seabees' 79th Birthday, encouraging residents to celebrate the occasion.

The Navy Seabees - a nickname for "CBs," or Construction Battalions - were born on March 5, 1942, formed after the Dec. 7, 1941, surprise attack on Pearl Harbor that heralded the United States' entrance into World War II.

Locally, the Seabees enjoy representation in the Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3 Blairsville

Chapter, the members of which are hosting their annual All Military Ball to commemorate the birthday on Saturday, March 6, at 5:30 p.m. at the Ridges Resort in Hiawassee.

According to Paris' proclamation, the Seabees have been utilized to build bases, bulldoze and pave thousands of miles of roadway and airstrips, construct camps, build and maintain supply causeways, erect hospitals, and aid in untold emergency recoveries in support of the U.S. military.

Navy Seabee Richard Hoibraten and four other veterans with Island X-3 accepted the proclamation that evening from Paris.

"I'm truly grateful See Paris, Page 2A



Commissioner Lamar Paris welcomed several members of the Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3 Blairsville to his February regular meeting. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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2/27 @ Pepperell
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SOCCER
2/26 @ Lumpkin
5:30 & 7:30 PM

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