

Bierschenk...from Page 1A

“My vision is to build off what the prior administration has done and grow from there,” said Bierschenk. “Union

General has done a great job growing ... and we need to keep recruiting physicians into the hospital system.”

Elaborating on his vision of Union General as a health care system, Bierschenk said that, from the hospitals in Union and Towns counties to the nursing homes, clinics and physician’s offices around the area, “everybody’s going to have to work together as a partnership.”

“So, it’s going to be community health, working together to keep people out of the areas where they don’t need to be,” said Bierschenk. “How can we take care of them in the doctor’s office, the Dialysis Center, the Wellness Center, to keep them out from the next level, whatever that is.”

Of course, Bierschenk is fully aware of the woes faced by Union General Hospital over the last few years, including a former CEO being brought up on federal prescription drug charges, and the unrelated \$5 million DOJ settlement for working with physicians outside of contracted relationships.

Nonetheless, Bierschenk said he’s confident in the hospital system moving forward, despite the increasing number of competing health care providers in the area.

The best way to compete with others, according to Bierschenk, is to offer patients exactly what they want in a local hospital system, which he believes to be great quality of care at affordable prices, excellent customer service, and a bevy of medical specialists to fill a variety of local health needs.

Murder...from Page 1A

all juveniles, along with Kevin Jack Chamaty and Michael Chase Havard, both 20 years old.

A fourth juvenile – Lakota Ricky Cloer – was also arrested in the case, and he pleaded guilty in January to two counts of aggravated assault and one count of criminal attempt to commit a felony.

Cloer will serve 15 years in prison as part of his plea agreement, and he will also act as state’s witness against his fellow defendants.

As outlined in the General Bill of Indictment filed in Fannin County on Thursday, Feb. 21, the tragedy that unfolded that dark night in December appears to have been a case of planned murder for drugs.

The evening before McKinney’s death, all six individuals involved in the case were gathered at Cloer’s residence and were present for a conversation in which Dickey, Hill, Manuel and Cloer agreed to rob and kill McKinney for marijuana and pills, according to court documents.

All four juveniles then traveled in Cloer’s truck to McKinney’s residence, and Dickey, Hill and Manuel got out, after which Cloer drove a short distance away to be ready

to act as a getaway driver once the deed was done, according to court documents.

The hour was late and the date had turned over to Dec. 4 when Dickey, Hill and Manuel allegedly entered McKinney’s home, according to court documents.

Once inside, Dickey reportedly killed McKinney by shooting him in the back of the head with a .410 shotgun, while Manuel allegedly shot McKinney’s girlfriend, Anna Franklin, in the arm and neck with a .25 caliber handgun, though she survived the shooting, according to court documents.

“Although Defendants committed the acts in furtherance of the conspiracy with the intent to take marijuana and pills, Defendants forgot to take the marijuana and pills when they left the residence,” according to court documents.

Cloer remained nearby in his truck to whisk his accomplices away from the scene, but he had run out of gas, according to court documents.

He called Havard and Chamaty for assistance, who allegedly brought fuel for the truck “knowing that said fuel would be used to accomplish the cover-up phase of the conspiracy by transporting

Defendants Dickey, Hill and Manuel away from the crime scene.”

In the end, the individuals made it out of the area that morning, allegedly meeting back up at Cloer’s house.

There, Cloer attempted to remove the serial number from the gun used to shoot Franklin, and later that day, he, Chamaty and Havard allegedly traveled to Lake Nottely to toss the .25 caliber handgun into the lake “with the intent of concealing and disguising” the weapon from law enforcement.

The 18-count indictment charges Dickey, Hill, Manuel, Chamaty and Havard with malice murder, felony murder, two counts criminal attempt to commit a felony, five counts aggravated assault, aggravated battery, two counts home invasion in the first degree, burglary in the first degree, and violation of Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act.

Dickey, Hill and Manuel each face charges of possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, while Chamaty and Havard have been charged with tampering with evidence.

Havard is from Blairsville, Chamaty is from Epworth, and the rest are from Morganton.

Walmart...from Page 1A

the Sheriff’s Office secured the store entrances with caution tape and awaited the arrival of a GBI bomb detection professional out of White County.

While they waited, the Sheriff’s Office worked with corporate Walmart to review the store’s surveillance footage to try to determine the origin of the device.

Investigators had a good indication that the object was a confetti popper, as they had received images of the same product from another store, but they were taking no chances that evening.

When the GBI special agent arrived, he entered the store with a couple of local investigators, X-rayed the device, determined it was not a threat and cleared the scene.

Before leaving, the GBI agent remarked that the confetti popper was a good example of an easily alterable item, underscoring the reason that these cases are handled so seriously.

“Walmart acted in good faith on what they discovered in there and took all safety precautions,” said Loyd. “They did exactly what they were supposed to do. Our staff did exactly what they were supposed to do to keep everybody safe, and nobody got hurt – that’s the main thing.”

After law enforcement cleared the scene, the employees who were still on-site went back into the store to start putting away items from abandoned shopping carts.

The party favors have since been removed from shelves at the local Walmart, where they were being sold out of the toy section.

As part of the investigation, UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn and Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer set off the confetti popper the next day, noting that it “sounded as loud as a small caliber handgun.”

No charges are expected

Sexting...from Page 1A

parents to allow your students to attend, and we invite you to attend as well,” said Hill. “Please discuss the gravity of this matter with any students with whom you have contact and help us to educate our children of the dangers associated with this type of behavior.”

As previously reported, the schools are limited in what they can do about illicit behaviors such as sexting that occur off school grounds.

However, one disciplinary option that has been

in connection with the event, and local Walmart representatives are thankful for the serious and timely response of law enforcement and other first responders.

“Just on the whole effort, from the community to our first responders and our team here at the store, it went about as well as it could go for something like that to happen,” said Tim Brown, manager of the Blairsville Walmart.

Responding to the bomb scare that evening were the Sheriff’s Office, Blairsville Police Department, the Union County Fire Department, the GBI and the Georgia State Patrol.

put on the table is the potential removal of extracurricular activities and other privileges provided by the school, such as revoking driving privileges, the ability to attend prom and play sports, etc., to act as a deterrent to such behavior.

“It’s a combination of everything, there’s not one magic solution to this problem,” said Hill recently. “But the first step is to admit you have a problem, put it out there, and get feedback from folks.”