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Kevin and Cindy Bierschenk met with many community leaders, like Wayne Fowler and Lamar Paris, in the March 14 reception hosted by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce. Photo by Mark Smith

here at the hospital. And Lamar said it best, this hospital means a lot to all of us, and it's growing, and we're going to need it more than ever.

"This is but a drop in the bucket that you see here tonight at your reception, but I think the whole county will echo our sentiments, also. So, welcome, once again."

Rowe recognized former Union General Hospital Board Chairwoman Patsy Efrid, who recently left the board after 12 years of service to the hospital, before introducing current Board

Chair Myron Turner.

"Forty-five resumes came to our board," said Turner. "Each of us had an opportunity to evaluate those and see what we had coming for us. And I think I evaluated all 45. We chose five."

"Kevin was one of the five. So, we bring all those up here to Blairsville, and we sat down and talked to them. And our doctors even had lunch with them. After that, we wound up with two: Kevin and another good candidate."

The board chose

Bierschenk, according to Turner, partly because he came from a farming family in Nebraska, which meant that he was no stranger to hard work. It also helped that his wife was from Dahlonega.

"Kevin, Cindy – thank you for coming to Blairsville," said Turner. "Thank you for joining our Union General family. We appreciate you much."

Bierschenk, too, was thankful, expressing his gratitude that evening for those who gathered to meet with him and his wife.

"We're honored, myself and Cindy. This has been a dream to come up to this neck of the woods. You have a great hospital," said Bierschenk, noting that the quality of care in this hospital system is well known in the Georgia Hospital Association, for which he is chair-elect.

Bierschenk also said he was honored to be following in retired Union General CEO Lewis Kelley's footsteps, and that he already felt right at home, since his wife's folks are from Lumpkin County.

"I am from Nebraska," said Bierschenk. "I've lived down south since 1986, so I do talk with marbles in my mouth. You've got to slow me down sometimes. I do have two daughters; one of them is at the University of South Carolina, and my other daughter is in Charlotte. Thank you very much. We're honored. This has been a great turnout."

Before closing out his remarks, Bierschenk made sure to compliment the hospital dietary staff members who prepared all of the appetizers for the reception.

"I've never seen this kind of food in a hospital setting, so thank you," he said. "One other thing – the reason I am coming here is because of the staff. You couldn't ask for a better team. And I have a great board to work with. Also, thanks to the Board. Thank you."

Bierschenk's first day as CEO of Union General Hospital was Feb. 25. As CEO, Bierschenk is responsible for

both Union General and Chatuge Regional Hospitals and Nursing Homes, as well as the various

clinics, physician partnerships, etc., under the hospital system's health care umbrella.



Four generations of Harkins family members in one photo at a 100th birthday celebration for I.T. Harkins on Saturday, March 16. Photo by Mark Smith

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initials I.T. stood for.

Well, I.T. didn't know what his initials stood for, and rather than walk all the way back to Suches to ask his mother, he adopted Ira from the name of the man who'd given him a ride into town, and Thomas from an uncle of the same name.

Among the attendees at I.T.'s birthday celebration were Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and County Manager Larry Garrett, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Farmers Market Manager Mickey Cummings and Tax Commissioner Lee Knight.

"It's an honor to have all of you here and an honor to have I.T. come over here and have his birthday party," said Paris. "And we're just so proud of them and the family and all they've done for our country and our world and Suches. You could just go on forever. What a great honor it is to know and appreciate and be around these people. So, we thank you folks for coming. And Happy Birthday."

The family, too, was thankful for everyone's attendance at the 100th annual celebration of the life of I.T. Harkins.

"Dad's roots have been

in Union County, of course, ever since he was born," said Tom. "And I can speak for both Robert and I that we have thoroughly enjoyed coming here during our early childhood, experiencing life, experiencing so many close friends."

Added Robert, to a round of applause and laughter, "Lamar, I hope that you live to be 120 and I'm one of your pallbearers."

Judy Carpenter, president of the Union County Historical Society, then led the "Happy Birthday" song in honor of I.T.

"I want to thank you for showing up – I'm surprised," said I.T. "Thank you. Thank you."



Friends and family of I.T. Harkins gathered to celebrate the Suches native's 100th birthday on March 15 at the Mock House Annex. Photo by Mark Smith

Union County Schools 2019-2020 Pre-K Registration Roundup



Bright from the Start and Union County Schools recognize the documented advantages of early learning and predicted success in later grades. Our school system meets the child-care and early educational needs of Georgia's children and their families by providing a daily, quality, fun learning environment.

The Union County Pre-K program is open to any

four-year-old child who loves to play and learn! Our Pre-K program prepares children for Kindergarten and beyond. The Pre-K classes are located in the primary school and transportation is provided, if needed. Children who will be four years old on or before September 1, 2019 are eligible to enroll. Space is limited and seats will be filled on a first come, first serve basis.

Parents/Guardians must call 706-835-4321 or visit the Union County Primary School Registrar's Office prior to the face-to-face registration.

The Pre-K Face to Face Registration will be held March 4th, 5th and 6th at the Union County Primary School and you will be given a date and time for registration.

Certified Birth Certificate and Georgia Public Health Form 3300 must be brought to the registration appointment. 3300 forms may be obtained from the Health Department or your doctor's office. In addition, Bright from the Start requires two forms of Proof of Residency (utility bills, lease, statements, etc.). N(M620.22)CA