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# North Georgia News

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## Beloved tradition returns with Easter Egg Hunt

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Meeks Park was the site of controlled yet adorable chaos April 9 when the annual Easter Egg Hunt by the Union County Recreation Department officially began at noon.

Originally, the event was supposed to start at 10 a.m., but organizers got wind of a snowy forecast and wanted to give the winter weather time to clear off before the hunt got underway.

Still, volunteers, parents and kids showed up in their warmest winter attire for a brisk spring celebration.

Approximately 4,000 eggs were scattered around the park's upper ballfields, their bright colors visible from the grass before the surprisingly competitive sport of Easter egg hunting began. The hunters

themselves were separated into three age groups: 2-4, 5-7, and 8-10.

Announcer Jennifer Becker from the Union County Recreation Department was there to explain some ground rules, such as the requirement that older children pick up eggs for themselves, but most paid more attention to the prize baskets of candy and toys sitting on the stand behind her.

Three metallic-colored prize eggs – one per age group – were hidden somewhere out in the fields. Contained inside the prize eggs were tickets that landed each lucky recipient one of the Easter baskets.

Also worth mentioning was that there were other baskets filled with sweet goodies that could be won with raffle tickets picked up by kids on their way out of the fields – again, one basket for each age group.

Nathan Odel and Rachel Grano were present with their 8-year-old daughter Josephine, who happened to find one of the metallic blue prize eggs.

"We haven't been out since she was 4, when we first moved here," Grano said. "I think she knew what her strategy was. There was a special egg out there, so it was more important to look for the special egg."

It happened to be the first one Josephine found, and she was still holding it on her way out of the park.

Odel beamed, "She went directly toward it."

It was astounding how quickly each of the three hunts went. Toddlers were exempt from the rule barring parental help and needed some guidance picking up the coveted plastic chicken fruit. Because of this, it took some time for the littlest

guys and girls to complete their own hunts.

By contrast, when the 8-10 group hit their own field, parents barely had time to snatch photographs of their children before they were already gone, leaving a picked-clean pasture in their wake.

This all rounded out to about 45 minutes of family-friendly fun, including the tense process between hunts of checking eggs for tickets.

Despite the careful planning and schedule change, snow did begin to fall just before the event. It wasn't enough to cover the ground or impact visibility, but the sprinkling did add a magical quality to the fun.

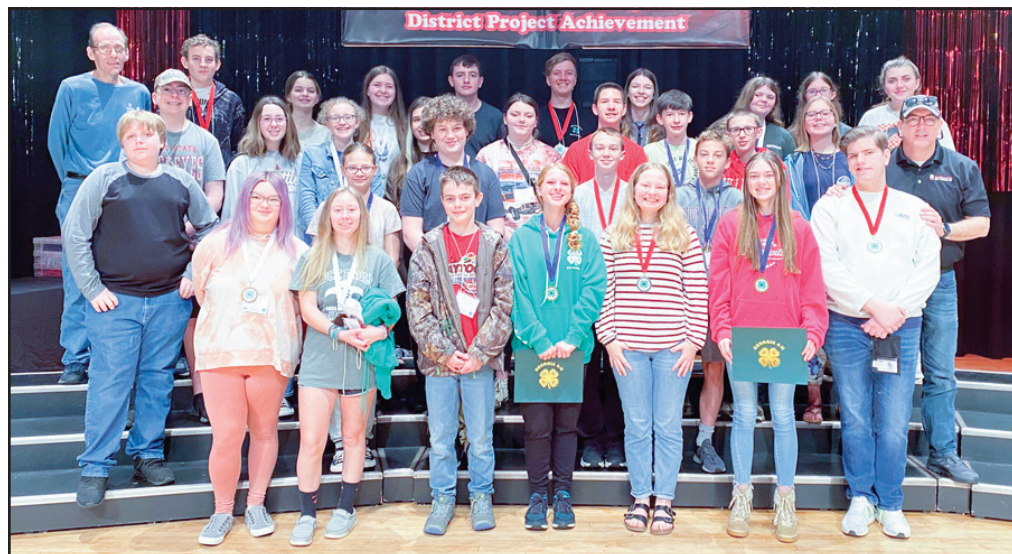
Becker is unsure of the exact date when Blairsville began its egg hunts, but she does know it has been a tradition

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Josephine Odel showing off the prize egg she found in Saturday's Easter Egg Hunt, which earned her a special Easter basket. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Union County sends three 4-H'ers to state competition



Union County students participating in the Junior/Senior Division of the 2022 4-H District Project Achievement competition. Photo/Submitted

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County 4-H students have experienced much success with District Project Achievement, breaking several records in the 2021-

22 school year and sending three students on to state-level competition.

DPA is a program that lets students pick subjects of interest to research and document, culminating in a presentation and public speaking contest among peers

and judges for advancement and prize opportunities, with an ultimate goal of personal development.

This year's competition started with 40 counties from Northeast Georgia the first weekend in March and ended

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## BOE approves one-time salary supplement, lawn care

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education convened a special called meeting on Tuesday, March 29, to hear a proposal by school leadership to approve Gov. Brian Kemp's one-time

Quality Basic Education salary supplement of \$2,000 for teachers and staff.

School Superintendent John Hill said the supplement would be funded by the Georgia Department of Education in the amount of \$815,827, but distribution of the funds still needed local board approval.

Hill also requested approval of a \$2,000 supplement for about 75 school positions that were excluded in the one-time state payment because "it's the right thing to do," ensuring that everyone in the nearly 500-strong school workforce received a supplement.

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Union County Board of Education members voting in their called meeting last month. Photo by Mark Smith

## Morgan Fussell to spike for Penn State Altoona Lions



The Fussells, left to right: father Wayne, Morgan and her mother Linda during the senior's signing ceremony. The empty chair on the right is for Morgan's grandmother Lois Lewis, who recently passed away. Photo by Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County High School senior volleyball standout Morgan Fussell has inked a scholarship with Penn State Altoona to

continue her athletic career at the Pennsylvania State commonwealth campus in Logan Township, PA.

Despite being an eighth-grader during Union County volleyball's inaugural season, Fussell and her Class of 2022 teammates played an essential

role in the program's five-year rise to dominance.

As a sophomore in 2019, Fussell's contributions were vital to the Panthers' first Elite Eight appearance during the program's third season. A year later, Fussell was attacking

See Morgan Fussell, Page 6A

## Blood drive continues to honor UCSO Deputy Whittle

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

In partnership with Blood Assurance, members of the community once again gathered for a great cause on Saturday, April 9, inside the

Pat Haralson Civic Center for the biannual Derrick Whittle Memorial Blood Drive, a staple event for the last decade.

Whittle was a deputy with the Union County Sheriff's Office who suffered a fatal 2011 car accident after swerving off the road en route to an

emergency call involving a potentially dangerous scenario with a gun.

Every year, Whittle's parents Jim and Sharon keep his memory alive by holding a blood drive, which was a huge success in its first outing

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Donors turned out in force to give back by giving blood at the annual Derrick Whittle Memorial Blood Drive. Photo by Jeremy Foster

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## BOE Meeting...from Page 1A

Unfunded positions mechanics, bookkeepers, and included clerical employees, "about 30 more teachers than we

earn on the allotment sheet from the state, largely due to special education numbers."

Providing a supplement for the unfunded positions required the use of \$156,150.36 in Emergency and Secondary School Emergency Relief III and other grant funds, and the board approved both measures on the table that Tuesday.

The purpose of the special called meeting was to have these issues resolved before the April 1 payroll.

"We appreciate the governor doing this for folks in education. They'll all appreciate that, I'm sure," Hill said.

School Board Chair Tony Hunter agreed, saying, "It makes me happy just to be able to do this for our staff."

Moving along, the board also heard a proposal to accept a bid from Hartness Mountain Farms, LLC out of Murphy, North Carolina, for lawn care of campus grounds.

"We submitted numbers to several of the local vendors that are present here in the county," said Assistant Facilities Director Derrick Pruitt. "Across the board we felt like, number-wise, (Hartness) was the fairest of all of them. And they had the manpower (and references) to back it up."

Assistant Superintendent David Murphy said the bids were published in both the Georgia Procurement Registry and the Union County legal organ, the North Georgia News.

"We're doing some of the lawn care ourselves, like our

stadiums and ballfields, those sorts of things, so that we can make sure they're done to our liking," Murphy said, to which Hill added, "and to keep the price on this bid down."

Facilities Director Mike Patton said that his department has elected to do in-house lawn maintenance for the baseball and softball fields and the new practice field next to the upper Performing Arts Center parking lot, as well as the Agriscience Center on

Gainesville Highway.

The winning bid from Hartness was in the amount of \$11,000 per month for the seven-month duration of the lawn care season, April through October, for a total of about \$77,000 on a one-year, renewable contract.

Patton said some of the lawn care bids they received were as much as triple the cost of the previous year. School officials were expecting to pay a lot more due to increases in fuel costs and the lack of lawn care

labor, and they were pleasantly surprised with the Hartness bid, he said.

The football field is covered with artificial turf, so no lawn maintenance is necessary there.

School Board members unanimously approved the Hartness bid.

The Union County Board of Education meets the third Tuesday of each month beginning with a work session at 6 p.m. inside the School Board Office.

## Blood Drive...from Page 1A



**Jim and Sharon Whittle are dedicated to honoring their son Derrick's memory by "giving back like he did" with his namesake annual memorial blood drive.** Photo by Jeremy Foster

of 2022. The cause seems to grow year in and year out, with this year's turnout thought to be the largest yet. Although the day was spent giving blood by donors, people still enjoyed community interaction, tasty snacks, radio music and warm coffee.

Blood Assurance Group Leader Katera Channell was on hand to help with the donations. As a phlebotomist of nearly 12 years, Channell has developed a deep insight into what events of this nature mean to communities around the world.

"With Blood Assurance, all of the blood stays local to those who need it in their surrounding communities," Channell said. "We think of a blood donation as one more hug, one more kiss, one more holiday, one more dinner for an entire family."

"You affect three different families when you donate one pint of blood, so that is why I do what I do - I get to help people behind the scenes. There is someone lying in the hospital right now just waiting for the right person to come along to match their blood type, so a lot of people really do not know the importance of donating blood and how many lives it could touch."

Local donor Michael Swain attended his first year at the blood drive, and in sheer happenstance, he had a story of his own that closely related to that of the Whittles as to why he decided to donate.

"I moved here from Macon about four years ago, and (Derrick's story) really hit home with me, as I lost my own son three years ago when he was only 17," Swain said. "My son was also in a car wreck, and he had to have numerous amounts of blood that he received (due to) functions just like this."

"But ultimately, it was not enough to save him due to the serious nature of all his injuries he sustained. I realized then that if it was not for things like this, then someone else's son or daughter might not have the chance for their life to be saved, and I wanted to make it a point from that day on that I was going to try and do my part to help save other lives for the rest of mine."

"I wanted to continue to honor my son's memory in the exact same way of Derrick's, and I want to let people know that if you have the ability to donate blood for others' lives, you should, because your blood can save one family's life just like someone else's blood could save your own family's life."

Jim and Sharon Whittle are the forerunners of the event, held biannually on or near Derrick's April 11 birthday and the anniversary of his death, and they are thankful for the community participation.

"We do this in remembrance of our son, and we wanted to do something for our community to help those who might be in an insufferable similar situation," Jim said. "Over the years, we

have collected over 700 units of blood since we have been doing this.

"Our son helped people and was a good-hearted man, so this is a great spinoff on what he did and what his values were. We know this is exactly what he would be doing if he were still alive, and this is what he would have wanted to happen in his passing."

Added Sharon, "Blood Assurance fully agreed and wanted to help us when we first contacted them, and since then, we have been able to go from one a year to two. We have them in April and September. His birthday was in April and he died in September, so we try to honor him in those months, and it allows us to help the community and others more throughout the year."

"The community has been absolutely wonderful in showing their support for this. Our donations have typically been from the lowest in the 30s to the highest in the 90s, and we can never be grateful enough when people turn out to give and help other lives to live another day."

"We also raise money every year by selling Boston butts to go to a scholarship fund, because we have created 'The Derrick Whittle Memorial Scholarship' for graduating seniors at Union County High School who need a little financial help."

"We could not do any of this without the growing support from our wonderful community."

## Proclamations for Confederate Memorial Day Signed

The Smith's Legion Chapter #2699, of the United Daughters of the Confederacy® (UDC), Blairsville, and the David W. Payne Camp, #1633, of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Blairsville, met with Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris of Union County to sign Proclamations to commemorate Confederate Memorial Day on April 26, 2022.

Confederate Memorial Day, also known as Confederate Heroes Day, is an official holiday and/or observance day in part of the US South, to honor those who died fighting for the Confederate States of America (CSA) during the War Between the States.

In the spring of 1866, the Ladies Memorial Association of Columbus, GA, passed a resolution to set aside one day annually to memorialize the Confederate war dead. Mary Ann Williams, the association secretary, was directed to pen a letter inviting ladies associations in every former Confederate state to join them in observance. Their invitation was written in March, 1866, and sent to all of the principal cities in the former Confederacy, including Atlanta, Macon, Montgomery, Memphis, Richmond, St. Louis, Alexandria, Columbia, and New Orleans, as well as smaller towns like Staunton, VA; Anderson, SC; and Wilmington, NC. The actual date for the holiday was selected by Elizabeth Rutherford Ellis - she chose April 26th, the first anniversary of Confederate General Johnston's surrender to Union Major General Sherman at Bennett Place. For many in the Confederacy, that date in 1865 marked the end of the War Between the States.

The first official celebration as a public holiday occurred in 1874, following



**Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, Union County, signs Proclamation with Michael Pettus, Commander of SCV Camp, of Blairsville; Jeanette Earle, President of UDC Chapter, of Blairsville; Ann Atchison of Young Harris; Michelle and David Fusco of Blairsville**

a proclamation by the Georgia Legislature. By 1916, ten states celebrated it on June 3rd, the birthday of CSA President Jefferson Davis. Other states chose late April dates, or May 10th, commemorating Davis' capture.

In Georgia, the fourth Monday in April was formerly celebrated as Confederate Memorial Day, but beginning in 2016, in response to the Charleston, SC church shooting, the names of Confederate Memorial Day and General Robert E. Lee's birthday were struck from the state calendar and the statutory holidays were designated simply as "state holidays".

In 1868, General John A. Logan, who was the commander in chief of the Union Civil War Veterans Fraternity called the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), launched the Memorial Day holiday that is currently observed in the entire US. According to General Logan's wife, he emulated the practices of Confederate Me-

morial Day. She wrote that Logan said it was not too late for the Union men of the nation to follow the example of the people of the South in perpetuating the memory of their friends who had died for the cause they though just and right.

The Smith's Legion Chapter meet most every 4th Saturday, 11am, at the Veteran's Building, Blairsville. Chapter members are from Towns, Union, and Fannin Counties of GA, and from Clay and Cherokee Counties of NC. Eligibility requirements for the UDC include women, 18 years of age and older, who have a Confederate Veteran in their blood line, lineal or collateral. If you are interested in joining the UDC and you are not sure of your ancestry, we can help you search your family lineage. For more information, please contact TARA62860@aol.com. There is also a local Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp (SCV) in Blairsville, the David W. Payne Camp #1633.

# Egg Hunt...from Page 1A

since at least the 1990s, and ever since she first started working for the Rec Department six years ago, she has handled the hosting and preparation of the Easter Egg Hunt.

"It's one of my favorite events. It's so fun to watch the kids. Their eyes light up," said Becker, adding that, while some holidays lose their charm in adulthood, the excitement kicked up during the annual egg hunt makes observers "feel it through (the children)."

About three months of preparation go into planning the Egg Hunt. Becker begins by ordering the eggs at least two months in advance to ensure they arrive on time – an especially keen move this year

during an era of unpredictable shipping times amid global supply shortages.

Moreover, it was a relief that, as with many other local events, the Egg Hunt was able to happen this year. Hunts from the past two years were canceled out of an abundance of caution for COVID-19, and judging by the plentiful turnout, the tradition was sorely missed.

"The fact that families came out in the cold – that says a lot about their commitment to our community and just how much they want to see their children enjoy our community," Becker said. "And such an event like this allows families to be together."

Easter Sunday is April 17.



Toddlers got a helping hand from parents to pick up their eggs during the April 9 Easter Egg Hunt at Meeks Park.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

# 4-H DPA Competition...from Page 1A

the third weekend with eight surrounding counties: Dawson, Fannin, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Pickens, Rabun, Towns and

White.

Overall, the competition enjoyed one of the largest turnouts in recent years, and

compared with past DPA gatherings, Union County Schools and 4-H broke several local records.

The Cloverleaf DPA Division of fourth- and sixth-graders sent its largest delegation ever at 110, had its largest group of winners generally, and experienced its

most First Place earners.

Together, the Junior Division of seventh- and eighth-graders and Senior Division of ninth- and 12th-graders sent their largest local delegation of participants at 31 and featured the most junior and senior competitors, largest increase in own-student participants, and most winners at 26.

Alongside these accomplishments, three Union County 4-H'ers performed well enough to advance from the Junior/Senior DPA Division to the state competition July 23-27 at the Crowne Plaza Ravinia in Atlanta.

Upcoming state competitors are sophomore Alexa Beckman, who earned First Place on her DPA Project regarding bearded dragons as companion animals; sophomore Addie Scott, who placed second with her DPA Project pertaining to general recreation ballet; and junior Maggie Payne, who earned top honors with her project on plant and soil science of the Atlantic Giant Pumpkin.

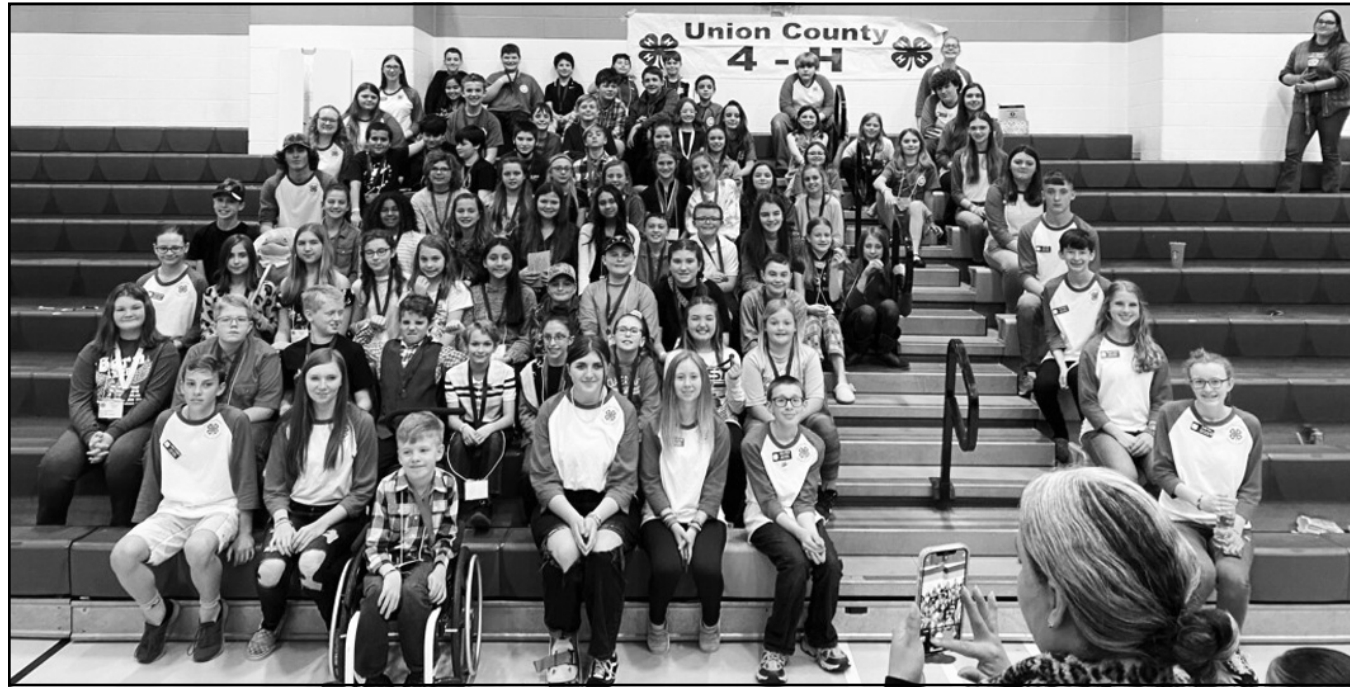
Union County 4-H

Coordinator Timothy Jennings with the local University of Georgia Extension Office in Blairsville is particularly proud of all the children's accomplishments.

"One of the core programs of Georgia 4-H is public speaking, an important keystone of any facet of life," Jennings said. "It is absolutely vital for success in life ranging from everything to friendships, relationships and even career-wise."

"Being able to communicate properly and positively to anyone you around – (students must) have those good talking skills for any endeavor. It also helps with being self-confident and furthering your own special abilities, because internal confidence translates outwardly."

"I am extremely proud of all the hard-working students who competed in these contests. I know each and every one of them are so dedicated to their schoolwork and outside interest activities and will be able to achieve anything they put their minds to in their lives."



Union County 4-H'ers in the Cloverleaf Division of this year's District Project Achievement competition, grades four through six.

Photo/Submitted

# Morgan Fussell...from Page 1A

the net, and the school kills record, en route to an Area 8 Championship and a trip to the Class AA Final Four.

Finally, for an encore in 2021, Fussell put an exclamation point on her career by reaching a second straight Final Four following back-to-back Area titles. Over Fussell's final two seasons, the Panthers won 22 consecutive area matches, taking all 45 sets during the streak.

Fussell's dedication to her craft also caught the attention of Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, who approached her during her junior year about starting a volleyball program at the Union County Recreation Department via work-based learning at the school.

And after two years of lobbying Union County Schools to begin a middle

school volleyball program, the two-time First Team All-Area selection couldn't balk at the opportunity to teach the sport she loves.

During the spring of 2021, Fussell hosted future Panthers twice a week at the Union County Sports Center, instilling the much-needed fundamentals that were often missing in freshmen volleyballers upon their arrival at UCHS.

"We have loved having her (at the Commissioner's Office), and she has been the life of the party, or what little bit of a party that we have in our office," said Paris during Fussell's signing ceremony last month at UCHS.

Turning and speaking directly to Fussell, Paris said, "We're very proud of you and excited for you – thank you for sharing your life with us."

Despite all her accolades

on and off the court, Fussell's athletic career remained in limbo as late as February, even with her senior season wrapping up three months earlier.

According to Fussell, Penn State Altoona was one of the colleges to accept her application back in the fall, but she was still uncertain which school she would attend. But everything came into focus during an impromptu trip to Pennsylvania for a campus visit on Friday, Feb. 11.

Ahead of the visit, Fussell emailed the school's volleyball coach, Phil Peterman, to inform him she would be stopping by. She also attached her high school statistics to help cut through all the messages he receives from optimistic young volleyball players from across the nation.

After touring the campus

and meeting Peterman that Friday, the coach immediately extended an offer to Fussell. Taking a little time to think it over, Fussell eventually texted the coach to accept his invite on Saturday while returning home with her parents.

"I told him that I would love to accept his offer and be a part of the team, so he sent me the signing paperwork that following Monday," Fussell said.

After taking Peterman

up on his offer, one of Fussell's first calls was to her high school coach, Anna Chapman.

"Morgan loves volleyball, but there came a point where she threw her shoes away – she thought she was finished," Chapman told the audience gathered for Fussell's signing.

"But I remember, I was at a church event, and she called me, almost in tears. I could hardly understand her, but she said, 'The coach contacted me from Altoona, and he wants me

to play.'

"I got off the phone and just cried to my husband, 'The Lord was before her in all of this,'" Chapman continued while holding back tears herself. "He knew that she would still get to play, but she prioritized her academics first, and that's what hard work and dedication will get you."

For more Fussell coverage, including additional coach interviews, check out this week's Sports Section.



Morgan Fussell, center, with Union County Commissioner's Office representatives Jennifer Mahan, Lamar Paris and Renee Deibert.

Photo/Submitted