

# Bitterman...from Page 1A

2017. Having earned a bachelor's degree in business, Bitterman's immediate plans

out of college didn't include education. But after finding success as a business owner, he was recruited into teaching

at Bowdon High.

"At first I wasn't sure, but once I got in front of those kids, I loved it," said Bitterman. "It was amazing to see the lights come on (in the students), or to see them accomplish something they didn't believe was possible. To me, that's what it's all about."

After stints at Brookwood High in Snellville and Gwinnett School of Math, Science, and Technology in Lawrenceville, Bitterman arrived at Buford in 2008 to change the culture at a school that was defined by its gridiron success.

"When I arrived, (Buford) had 15 State Championships, mostly in football, but none of the kids were making it in college," he said. "So, they brought me in to focus on discipline and academics, and when I left, they had 47 state championships."

"At the end of the day, you have to have a culture of discipline so they can perform academically, then that culture of discipline will lead to more academic and athletic success."

With an impressive resume in both education and business, Bitterman still considers Union County a "dream job," citing community support and the school's recent improvements in the classroom, extracurriculars and athletics.

"This place is prime

for success," said Bitterman. "They have an amazing staff, amazing kids and an amazing community. Mr. Hill and Mr. Hussion have put together a united team from kindergarten through 12th grade, and with that, the possibilities are infinite."

"And when you have a community that is hungry for success, you can be great in a lot of different ways."

The community and the leadership weren't all that attracted him to the mountains, said Bitterman, adding that he believes firmly in the potential for greatness in all kids, and that he sees no reason Union County can't reach the same level of success as Buford.

"This may sound crazy, but I believe the state championships that can happen here are endless," he said. "State championships exist in all areas, (including) in vocational and the arts."

"I want every kid to feel important, and at the end of the day, the expectation is not only to win, but to do it with character, integrity and sportsmanship."

"Success didn't happen overnight at Buford. It was a process, and you have to get the academics right first. My first year, we won two state championships, and my last year we won nine. But more importantly, we took the

graduation rate from 67% to 94%, so it was academics that took (athletics) to that level."

According to Superintendent Hill, Dr. Bitterman will take over as the sole athletic director for all grades to start the 2019-2020 school year, while Mandy Hunter will remain the athletic director for the middle school.

Previously, all school athletics were led by a three-person athletic committee composed of Hunter, Coach Brian Allison and Principal Hussion.

Allison stepped down from the committee to focus on coaching high school football, and now Bitterman will serve as the sole athletic director with assistance from Hunter.

In the meantime, Bitterman says he'll be spending time analyzing and meeting his future co-workers before officially beginning this summer.

"Right now, I just want to get to know everybody and let them know that I care," said Bitterman. "Until they know that I actually care, they're not going to care about what I know or where I've been."

"My past is my past, and what's done is done. What I'm doing today is going to define me. I'm Union County now, baby, and let me tell you something – that's what I'm all about."

## Whittle...from Page 1A

donors the first year of the blood drive, and Jim said they average about 60 blood donors each year.

"We haven't been disappointed yet," said Sharon. "You don't see, usually, two buses at a blood drive. It's all in memory of Derrick. It's not us and it's not Blood Assurance – it's all for Derrick. People still love him and remember him."

Added Sharon, "The worst nightmare that a parent has when they lose a child is that their child will be forgotten. You've probably heard that, and it is very true. We can't let that happen."

Derrick was the type of guy who liked helping people, according to his father, "and by doing this in his honor, he's continuing to help people."

Continued Jim, "We just appreciate everybody coming down, their time and the blood they donated, and all the help that people have given us to make this happen."

In September 2018, the Whittles held a yard sale to raise money for scholarships to be given out in their son's name this upcoming May.

"We raised almost \$6,000 just in that one yard sale, a two-day yard sale," said Sharon. "And the reason we did that is the community support. We couldn't do any of this without this community. Union County is just absolutely wonderful."

She encourages anyone grieving over the death of a loved one to take part in a local program she leads called GriefShare, which focuses on comfort, answers and hope.

"It teaches people, through God, how to receive comfort after they've lost a

## Musket firing at The Historical Building



Warning: The Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter will be firing Revolutionary War Muskets on April 18th from 10 AM to 2 PM. This is for remembering the shot heard around the world at Lexington. The event will be held on April 18 instead of April due to Friday being "Good Friday".

The Chapter Color Guard will be dressed in colonial attire and will demonstrate how muskets were fired in the Revolutionary War. No, there will be no live ammunition; however there will be gunpowder similar to that used at that time. This is an annual event conducted by the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter among other patriotic activities to educate the public about our history. Wave as you drive by the Historical Building on Thursday, April 18 and notice the various flags on display.

Displays by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the SAR will be set up inside the building showing period items used by the colonists. Musket firings may not be possible if heavy rain occurs at that time.

For additional information about the SAR contact the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter president, Jared Ogden at 770-855-0007. N/Apr17.212/CA



The blood drive resulted in 59 units being donated, which has the potential of saving 177 people. Photo by Mark Smith

loved one, whether it's a spouse or a sibling or parents or child or a friend," said Sharon. "It's a very good program."

"It's 13 weeks long and it starts on Monday, April

29, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Blairsville Church of Christ."

For more information about GriefShare, call Sharon Whittle at 706-781-7581.