

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

## 2019-2020 school year to end early for some Union County students

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Members of the Union County Board of Education convened a called meeting on April 14 to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the school system.

The main point of business that Tuesday was a modification to the calendar and the last day of school, initially scheduled for May 22.

School Superintendent John Hill released a memo the day after the regular meeting outlining the calendar changes, designating May 6 and May 22 as the final dates of the 2019-2020 school year. According to Hill, May 7-8 will both serve as teacher in-service days.

Students who have met the required proficiency standards will be contacted by 3 p.m. on May 8 to be made aware of their options for the remainder of the school year. Should families so choose, students may continue enrichment activities until May 22 to improve individual GPAs.

However, if they do not want to participate, all online classes will cease on May 6.

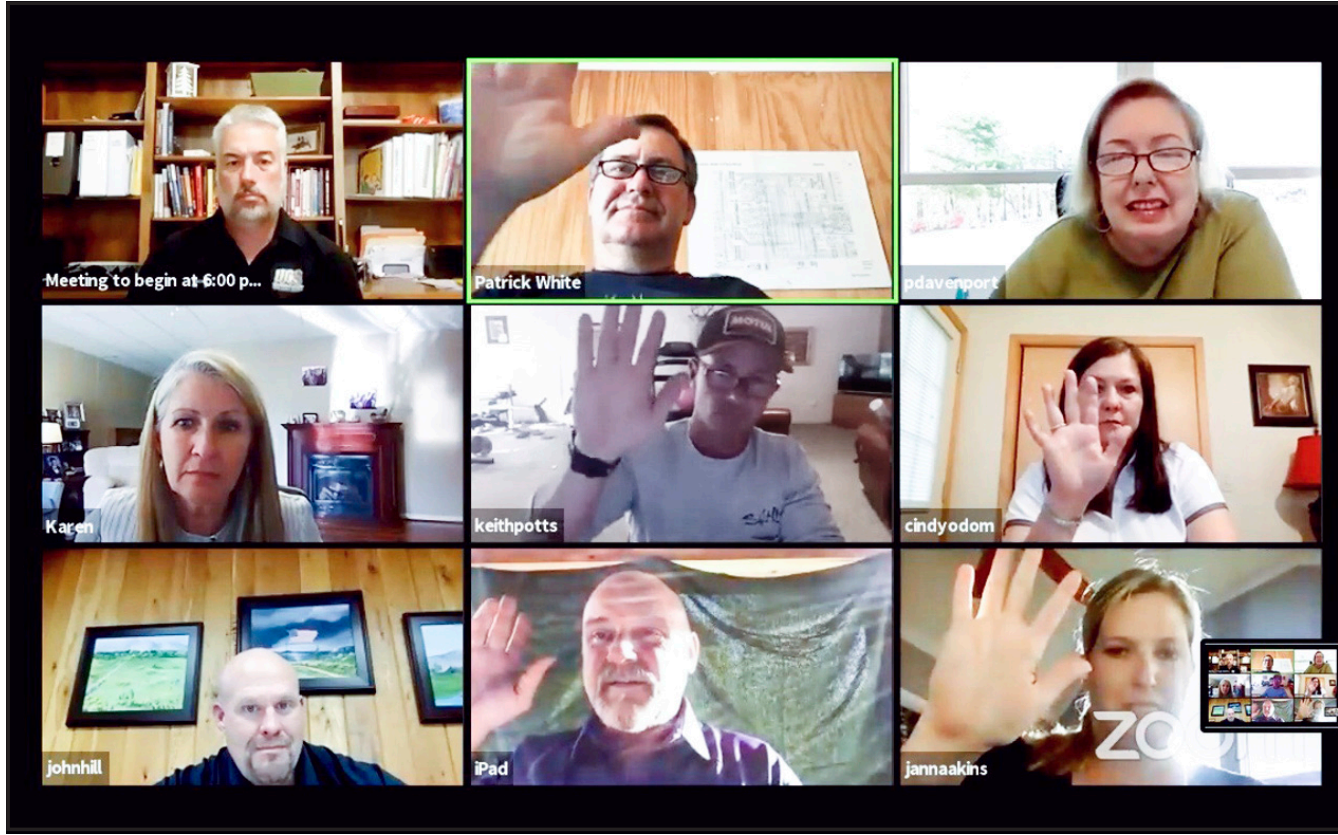
"Parents, this will be your choice as to whether your child will continue with enrichment opportunities or end their online instruction for the year," Hill said.

For students not meeting the required standards, they will receive individualized instruction through May 22 to ensure their preparation for the 2020-2021 school year.

Hill opened last week's board meeting with praise for the staff, students, parents and community for their patience and hard work during the recent shutdown, and he continued his praise in the memo issued by his office on April 15.

"Our dedicated team of teachers and staff have continually gone above and beyond to serve our community during this challenging time," Hill said. "The amount of support our community has shown is simply amazing."

"Parents, you have taken See Board of Education, Page 3A



The Union County Board of Education livestreamed a called meeting on Tuesday, April 14, to discuss an early end to the school year. Photo/Screenshot

## President unveils guidelines for 'Opening Up America Again'

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

On Thursday, April 16, President Donald Trump and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlined their vision for opening the American economy back up in the wake of COVID-19.

There is no firm timeline on when reopening will occur, as it is to be a gradual, three-phase process informed by specific guidelines meant to aid the decision-making of every state's governor in bringing various parts of public life back online.

At this point, all governors have declared states of emergency and enacted varying coronavirus mitigation measures tailored to the needs of their respective states

to limit the spread of the virus and flatten the curve of infection, thereby keeping hospitals from becoming overwhelmed.

These measures have included shelter-in-place orders and the closure of schools and many businesses, which, when coupled with consumers everywhere staying home to follow recommended social distancing practices, has put millions of Americans out of work.

Fortunately, these measures appear to be working on the whole, with Trump reporting last week that America had "passed the peak" in terms of new infections, potentially providing a chance for states to take stock of their individual situations and encourage citizens to resume

their lives. "While we must remain vigilant, it is clear that our aggressive strategy is working," Trump said. "The battle continues, but the data suggests that, nationwide, we have passed the peak on new cases. Hopefully, that will continue, and we will continue to make great progress."

Adjusted figures released Friday as part of the oft-cited COVID-19 modeling by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation show that Georgia hit its "peak" number of daily virus deaths on April 7 with 100 deaths that day, just four days after Gov. Brian Kemp imposed a shelter-in-place order for state residents on April 3.

This new data suggests that the worst may be behind Georgia thanks to people following the recommended health and safety guidelines, though widespread testing still needs to be conducted before a clearer picture of COVID-19 transmission in the state can emerge, including testing for both active infections and antibodies illuminating past infections.

Already, Gov. Kemp has said he is examining ways to open things back up as soon as possible.

"Georgia will utilize the administration's guidelines and collaborate with health and emergency management officials to develop a plan, safely See Opening Up America, Page 2A



Dr. Deborah Birx, the Coronavirus Response Coordinator appointed by the White House, speaking in the April 16 "Opening Up America Again" press reveal.

## Pruitt makes history as Suches' first full-time firefighter



Firefighter Ernie Pruitt, center, is now working full time at Station 5 in Suches, pictured here with Fire Chief David Dyer and Battalion Chief Richard Jones. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

SUCHES – Since 1988, Ernie Pruitt has answered a call to public service by serving the people of his birthplace as a Union County Fire Department volunteer firefighter at Station 5.

For nearly all of the

last 32 years, he has been the first lieutenant in charge of the volunteer station, which includes Station 11 in Suches. All that changed last month, however, when Pruitt became the first full-time firefighter hired to work outside of the dedicated career Fire Station 1.

"Suches is getting busy," Fire Chief David Dyer said,

explaining Pruitt's "promotion" within the department. "There's a lot more fire calls and medical calls over there now, and volunteer signups have decreased over the last few years."

"There's always been a great response over there, but during the firetime, it was getting See Firefighter Pruitt, Page 2A

## Food Pantry stocks up for residents during hard times



Union County Food Pantry Coordinator Ann Sullivan, center, met with Patrick Fix and Mickey Cummings of the Farmers Market last week to receive 88 quarts of donated pinto beans in the Canning Plant. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Food Pantry has always been a steady

source of food for people in need, and thankfully, community support for the pantry's efforts is going stronger than ever during these trying times.

"Believe it or not, financial donations have been up drastically," Food Pantry Coordinator Ann Sullivan said. See Food Pantry, Page 2A

## Local leaders thankful for community; virus testing expands

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

COVID-19 testing efforts are ramping up locally, meaning residents can finally begin to get a clearer picture of what's going on in their communities.

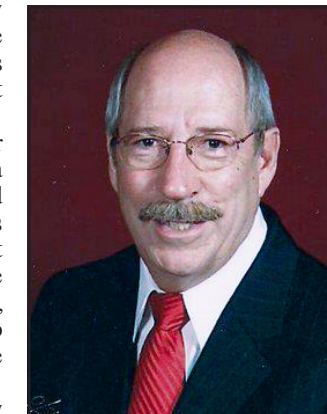
The Public Health Department of Georgia announced on April 15 that everyone with symptoms would be able to get tested for the novel coronavirus, effective immediately.

"Health care workers, first responders, law enforcement

and long-term care facility residents and staff will still be prioritized for testing regardless of whether they are or are not symptomatic," DPH said.

A referral through either the local health department or a health care provider is required for testing, with the Towns County Health Department serving as a public collection site for Union and Towns residents, so people will no longer have to drive to Gainesville for mobile testing.

All of the uncertainty See Local Leaders, Page 3A



Commissioner Lamar Paris

## Crime down across board as people stay home over virus

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

If every cloud has a silver lining, how about the coronavirus cloud hovering ominously over every facet of society?

Arguably, multiple silver linings have come shining through in the current climate.

For starters, unlike any other time in history, the pandemic has proven mankind capable of uniting behind a singular cause, so that the next time a deadly pandemic sweeps

the globe, everyone should be better prepared thanks to the collective efforts that have gone into limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Perhaps one of the more surprising silver linings of this epidemic is the across-the-board drop in local crimes against people and property, as attested to by both the Union County Sheriff's Office and the Blairsville Police Department.

"Everything's kind of down right now for crime, which is a good thing at this See Crime Down, Page 3A



Sheriff Mack Mason

Vol. 111 No. 17  
4 Sections 16 Pages  
Thurs: T-Storm Hi 64 Lo 49  
Fri: cloudy Hi 71 Lo 49  
Sat: T-Storm Hi 72 Lo 46

Inside  
Arrests 4C  
Weather 2B  
Churches 2D  
Classifieds 2B  
Opinion 2C  
Obits 2B

Friends of the Library  
"Bakeless Bake Sale"  
See page 4C

While Our Lobby Is Closed, We Are Still Here For You...  
Offering All Services...  
Use our convenient drop box for no-contact service  
North Georgia News  
and West Printing Company  
We Are Closed On Wednesdays, But Available By Email

Quilt of Valor  
Recipient Honored  
See page 4A