

North Georgia News

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Union County Schools ready for new year

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County students will make their way to the schoolyard this Friday, Aug. 9, and the system has prepared for them all summer.

Some changes will be rolling out this school year, and, in the words of Superintendent John Hill, "We've got a whole lot of things to be excited about."

One of the biggest changes is that school lunches and breakfasts will be provided at no cost to families and students as part of a collaboration with the Community Eligibility Program.

Nutrition Director Heather Miller said there will also be a focus on "Georgia

Grown" to bring local produce to the schools, and she added that there may be trial runs of new recipes along with nutrition education.

Another big change comes in the form of the shuttle bus program to streamline morning drop-offs for parents with multiple children.

According to Transportation Director Kody Owenby, parents can drop off all their kids at their youngest child's school. From there, the shuttle buses will take the older children where they need to go.

Shuttle buses will be marked by special panther paws so students can easily recognize them, and there will be designated areas to load and unload them. For the Primary
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Union County Schools Administrators and Board Office staff are eager to begin the 2024-25 school year on Friday, Aug. 9. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Western artwork raffle to benefit childhood literacy



Ferst Readers of Union County volunteers are incredibly excited to be raffling off this unique piece of artwork, with tickets available at United Community Bank in Blairsville.

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For the third year running, the Ferst Readers of Union County are collaborating with Western music legends the Sons of the Pioneers to make reading more fun and accessible

for rural kids through an annual concert fundraiser planned for October.

The Ferst Readers discussed the upcoming concert – and a brand-new fundraising opportunity – in their regular meeting at the Union County Community

Center on Thursday, Aug. 1.

Right now, just about everyone is gearing up for the start of a new school year, including the volunteers championing childhood literacy with Ferst Readers.

It stands to reason, after
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UCFD purchases two fire engines for \$10,000 apiece



Union County Fire is grateful to the Fire Department and officials of neighboring Cartersville for giving a great deal on two fire engines.

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Fire Department is proud to welcome two new fire trucks, a known officially as apparatus, bringing the total fleet to 20

apparatus helping to respond to local fire and medical emergencies.

The vehicles were custom built in 2001 and 2002 by Pierce Manufacturing, a popular choice for fire and rescue apparatus, and came

furnished with other supplies like fire hoses and generators.

It all started a few months ago when a Union County fire lieutenant was at a Pierce dealership and got word that the Cartersville Fire Department
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UCHS junior Parker makes first solo flight at airport

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Sixteen-year-old Tyler Parker achieved a significant milestone in pursuing his aviation dreams by completing his first solo flight at the Blairsville Municipal Airport on Saturday, July 27.

Under the watchful eyes of his family, and with his flight instructor Sonny Hinson guiding him via a handheld radio, Parker took off under partly cloudy skies at 11 a.m.

Despite his initial anxiety, Parker, who is about to start his junior year at Union County High School, credited his training for helping him stay focused.

"I had some crazy nerves," Parker said. "It really hit me when I looked over in the passenger seat and my instructor wasn't there. It was a crazy feeling. But once I got (up in the air), all the training



Pilot-in-training Tyler Parker, 16, posing for a triumphant picture after his first solo flight July 27. Photo by Todd Forrest

kicked in and it was a lot better." Parker has spent much of his life in and around airplanes, but it wasn't until around 18 months ago that those childhood ambitions came to fruition.

"Me and my family have moved around a lot, and we did a lot of flying," he said. "I fell in love with it. I love being up in the air; it's so peaceful."

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SAFE Fashion Show raises \$5,528 for abuse victims



Volunteer models had a blast showing off various modes of fashion for a good cause in the Aug. 3 S.A.F.E. fundraiser.

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The S.A.F.E. Fashion Show and Silent Auction returned for its third year on Saturday, Aug. 3, at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center, providing an afternoon of uplifting good times that put the "fun" in fundraising for a good cause.

S.A.F.E. is a local nonprofit with a mission "to provide support, advocacy, and emergency shelter for victims of Domestic Abuse, Child Abuse, and Sexual Abuse, regardless of gender and to heighten community awareness of such abuse in Towns and Union counties."

The organization was able to raise \$5,528 with this

year's fundraiser, which opened around 11:15 a.m. on Saturday, giving attendees a chance to browse all the items up for grabs at the auction. Everything from paintings and plants to tattoo vouchers and gift baskets from local businesses were available for guests to bid on before the show.

Speaking of which, that
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SAFE Fashion Show ...from Page 1A

show was very well received, with all the chairs filled and several folks having to stand.

In all, there were four fashion categories: Every Day, Summer, Fall and Evening. And though there were fewer models compared to past years, they still consisted of women from a variety of backgrounds, ages and builds.

The clothing was sourced from S.A.F.E.'s thrift stores, which are another way the organization raises money for its causes. Thrift store proceeds add to the fashion show fundraising to benefit the S.A.F.E. shelter's upkeep and outreach programs.

S.A.F.E., aka Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, stands as a beacon of hope in what is often some of the darkest days an individual can face. As its name suggests, the organization helps anyone caught in an abusive relationship, whether they be a partner or a child.

Fashion Show Organizer Kathy Davis recognizes how difficult the road to freedom can be. She herself is a survivor of an abusive relationship, and she uses her experience to help others. Her resilience shows through a good sense of humor, which she used that day to open the program.

Fluffy high heels and a lacy thong were just some of the items Davis produced from a shopping bag as she discussed the fickle nature of fashion trends. Along the way, she included humorous stories about how they impacted day-to-day life.

"Back in the day when I was young, if you wore a pair of jeans or anything else with a hole in it, (people) would just make fun of you," Davis remarked, pulling out a pair of jeans sporting splashes of bleach and ripped legs that typically sell for \$100. "For a whole lot less, you can buy them today or go to the S.A.F.E. Thrift Store."

Between categories, raffles for jewelry and soaps, along with live auctions for things like boat rentals, golf rounds at Butternut Creek and even Coach bags and recliners, were received with varying levels of excitement, but all of the options kept the audience on their toes.

That said, the fashion show and prizes weren't the only things to liven up the event.



Donations to S.A.F.E. Thrift Stores ensured that runway participants had something elegant to wear on Saturday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Twice, live entertainment graced the stage by way of Ophelia Williams, who hooked up her own music to belly dance. Wearing a special outfit decorated with sequins and flowers, Williams used a scarf as a prop for her first performance. During her "second act," she swayed up toward the stage from the middle aisle to a quicker tune.

A 20-minute intermission served as the cut-off point for the silent auction and allowed peckish guests to get something to eat. The selection came courtesy of Downtown Pizza and Melissa's Custom Cakes of Blairsville, and Ingles and Zaxby's of Hiwassee.

One of the traditions of the S.A.F.E. Fashion Show

is selling the featured outfits at the end of the day. This year was no different, with a long line of folks waiting to purchase individual articles of clothing along with the items they scored from the auctions.

If you or someone you love is caught in an abusive relationship, call the 24-hour S.A.F.E. Crisis Line at 706-379-3000 for help getting out. The mission statement, shared on the back of the event guide, drives home that anyone can find support with S.A.F.E.

The two thrift stores are located at 27 Pinebrook Drive in Blairsville and 4134 Bonny Hill Drive in Young Harris. For more information, visit <https://safeservices.org/>.



Ophelia Williams entertained guests of the 2024 S.A.F.E. Fashion Show with two dance routines at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center Aug. 3. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

The Deep River Boys in Concert at the Old Courthouse on Square Friday, Aug. 9



The Deep River Boys

The Deep River Boys will be in concert Friday, August 9th, at the Old Courthouse on the Square in Blairsville, GA.

This is a young group of bluegrass musicians who play an eclectic mix of bluegrass, country, folk, and gospel on traditional bluegrass instruments. They have performed across

the East Tennessee and North Georgia area, and members of the group are from Cleveland, Spring City, TN and Blairsville, GA.

The doors open at 6 PM, with the concert beginning at 7 PM. This is a free concert and open to the public. Donations are always welcome and appreciated.

Daughters of the American Revolution Honor State Regent, Helen Powell of Gainesville, GA



Gainesville First Baptist Church was the location of the July 13th reception for the incoming Regent, Georgia State Society, Daughters of the American Revolution. The Regent is Helen Powell of Gainesville. She was installed at DAR Headquarters during the 133rd Congress of the National Society. The theme of the Powell administration is "Volunteer Hearts are Key to Historic Preservation, Education, and Patriotism." Her scriptures are "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and "Rejoice always," 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

State Regent Powell's projects include the Restoration and Preservation of Meadow Garden, Home of George Walton in Augusta; the Revolutionary Era Cannon Restoration for "Loyalists & Liberty: Savannah in the American Revolution" exhibit at the Savannah History Museum; the Gate of Opportunity Scholar-



Annette Bomar Hoppood and Linda Leetun Carr

ship at Berry College and the celebration of American Veterans through Honor Flight. Barbara Weaver, Regent, Old Unicoi Trail Chapter, DAR, of Murphy will work closely with State Regent Powell on her projects.

Representing the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter were Linda Carr, Registrar and Annette Hoppood, Membership co-chair both of Blairsville.

The DAR promotes historic preservation, education, and patriotism and represents

over one million Daughters. A woman 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution is eligible to join. Email oldunicoitrail@gmail.com to attend a meeting or join.

On Saturday, September 7th, the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter will also present DAR at WORK - an "Introduction to DAR" at Union County Library, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM. Email oldunicoitrail@gmail.com for details and to attend. Attendance will be limited.

2024-25 School Year ...from Page 1A



The staff of Union County Primary School are ready to get back to work educating students, posing here during the first day back for teachers on Aug. 1. Photo by Todd Forrest

School, parents can stop under the front awning to drop off their students. As such, there will be a different traffic pattern for that school, but the patterns are largely the same for the other campuses.

“They need to get that green tag though so that the officer or whoever’s on traffic duty up there knows to let them come that way,” said Owenby, adding that parents can talk to folks at the front office to get set up.

Along with that, educational videos will be available after the start of the school year for parents to watch and easier visualize the new drop-off and pick-up procedures.

Athletics are ready to get the new year started as well, with the coaches preparing for their annual meeting. As always, safety is of the utmost importance, and not just with sports; local police and firefighters have undergone active shooter training to be prepared should the worst happen.

Speaking of the Primary School, Principal Debby Decubellis said a recent administration meeting went well. Magnets will be sent home with students detailing the new Parent Hub – a special website serving as a “landing page” for guardians to find important updates outside of social media.

Decubellis and Elementary School Principal Jerry Bavero both have recently taken on a new literature curriculum, Benchmark Advance, which encourages a more “traditional” classroom experience following the heavily online presence adopted in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Otherwise, the only change coming to the Elementary School is the shuttle system.

The Middle School has 12 new staff members, but the biggest change comes in the form of the CarRiderPro system. Principal Tammy Hughes said that if parents are familiar with the system, they can use the same car rider tag.

For those new to the concept, they can check out the Union County Middle School Facebook page to fill out the Google Documents form to get registered.

At the High School, new Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Charlie Cattanach revealed that students can now sign up for a pathway in collision repair. For the time being, the space in the auto shop portion of the College and Career Academy will be shared until the classroom is completed.

Another new option is the tourism and hospitality pathway, which will involve a lot of time outside the classroom. Students will

be working closely with local organizations like the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce to get hands-on experience and learn what it takes to start their own business.

The hiring of a new agricultural teacher means that more students will be able to take the class. On that note, the greenhouse has been moved to the Union County Schools Agriscience Center.

Principal Josh Davis is asking parents to “pay attention to communication” from the High School regarding afternoon dismissals since “big” changes are coming to releases at the end of the day.

Last but not least, Woody Gap School has three new staff members and a new school resource officer, so everyone there is “ready to go.”

Finally, based on state guidelines, new math standards were set in place for all grades, and standardized dyslexia testing will occur three times yearly for kindergarten through third grade.

Pre-K orientation and Meet Your Teacher was set to take place after press time on Tuesday, Aug. 6, with Pre-K orientation happening from 5-6:30 p.m., and Meet Your Teacher running from 5-7 p.m.

Parents of Primary School students, make note – Aug. 7 will be Meet Your Teacher by appointment only.



Union County Schools Police Department coordinated with local first responder agencies for an active shooter training event toward the end of July. Photo/Facebook

Parker’s Flight...from Page 1A



Tyler Parker takes off as his dad, Steve, films his first solo flight here in Blairsville. Photo by Todd Forrest

Having passed the practice written test earlier this summer and completed his first solo flight, Parker’s next step is finishing the final written test and obtaining his pilot’s license.

“Studying for the written test is the hardest part; it is a pain,” he said. “Even studying for the practice test is pretty hard.”

According to Parker, there isn’t a specific number of flight hours that must be

logged before a solo flight – an instructor will sign off when he believes his protege is up for the challenge.

“(Tyler) is an outstanding student,” Hinson said. “Tyler has been flying with me for about 18 months, since early 2023, and he is a very responsible, capable and mature young man, and it’s been a privilege to work with him.”

Hinson is helping Parker get his foot in the door with Iron Eagle Aviation, where he

aims to pilot corporate and private aircraft following high school graduation in 2026. After building up his flight hours, Parker hopes to reach his ultimate goal of becoming a commercial airline pilot.

Tyler is the son of Steve and Amanda Parker. He is a straight-A student and plays wide receiver and defensive back on the Panthers football team. He was also a member of the UCHS Track and Field State Runner-Up 4x100 relay square

Ferst Raffle...from Page 1A

all, that a group dedicated to helping kids with literacy should be invested in the classroom, but they're already making a difference for children before they start their "first day."

Each child enrolled in Ferst Readers receives a free book every month until their fifth birthday, and Union County's branch in particular serves families all over the tri-state area. In total, 340 books were sent out in July, and 339 have already been mailed for August.

While the concert does

bring in a lot of cash for the effort, raffles have a reputation of putting the "fun" in funding. The concert will be no different, thanks to the persistent efforts of an artist sharing the same passions as event organizers.

Mike Carter lives in the suburbs of Branson, Missouri, but his artwork will be on display at United Community Bank in Blairsville until the Oct. 27 concert, when it will be raffled off to one lucky supporter of Ferst Readers.

Specializing in Western art, Carter used colored pencils as his medium to bring the

famous stallion Trigger to life in scrubland beneath a perfectly blue sky. The piece fits in not only with the theme of the concert but is linked directly to the band's history.

Roy Rogers, a founding member of the Sons of the Pioneers, met "movie horse" Golden Cloud through his own career as an actor. The two developed a bond, and Rogers eventually bought the palomino, renaming him Trigger "for his quickness of both foot and mind."

Serving equal parts steed, pet and costar, Trigger

was incredibly important to Rogers, and the two shared many appearances both on and off the big screen. Rogers even managed to housetrain the horse and take him to hospitals to bring joy to sick children.

After his death in 1965 at the age of 30, Trigger's hide was preserved and stuffed through taxidermy, then displayed at the Roy Rogers-Dale Evans Museum. When the museum closed in 2010, Trigger's remains sold for \$265,000 at public auction by a television company that hopes to one day open a Western museum.

Trigger's legacy lives on in Carter's art, where he rears up on his hind legs over cacti and the scorched earth of the American West. The frame comes from the same company that framed Rogers' family portraits in the old museum.

"(Carter) has donated the picture (and) he's donated the frame," explained concert organizer John Cochran, husband of Ferst Readers Co-Chair Janice Cochran. "He just wants to do it ... He's a nice fellow. He came to the concert the first year."

"He was impressed with our program, Ferst Readers," added Janice, with John sharing that Carter is good friends with



Mike Carter is not only a fan of the Sons of the Pioneers but is also a friend of the group, and he donated this original artwork of Trigger the horse to help raise money for Ferst Readers and childhood literacy. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Sons of the Pioneers Trail Boss and Bass Singer Tommy Nallie.

Tickets for a chance to win the artwork can be purchased for \$5 each, and the results of the raffle will be announced on the night of the concert. Proceeds will go toward the Ferst Readers program, specifically to purchase books for the families who sign up.

To participate in the raffle, head over to United

Community's main branch where tickets are sold and get a look at the art. Ferst Readers members are also available for contact, especially Janice Cochran at 706-897-1259.

Questions about the concert can be directed to John Cochran at 706-897-0486. Concert tickets can be found at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/ferst-readers-concert-with-sons-of-the-pioneers-tickets-933312973227>.

New Fire Trucks...from Page 1A



These gently used fire engines cost Union County just \$20,000 for the pair using SPLOST proceeds. Photo/Facebook

was replacing two of its reserve trucks. Not frequently "on the front lines," the engines were in exceptional shape and had plenty of life left in them.

Union County Fire Chief David Dyer, who knew then-Cartersville Fire Chief Scott Carter, was invited to look at the vehicles. Impressed by their condition, Dyer asked if there was any way to buy or receive them as a donation. Carter spoke with the Cartersville City Council about their options.

"(The City Council) said that they would surplus them and allow us to purchase them for \$10,000 apiece," recalled Dyer, who was thrilled with the deal.

Dyer estimates that, at the time of their construction in the early 2000s, a custom Pierce apparatus would come in between \$300,000 and \$500,000. A 2024 model might cost around \$600,000. Through Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax funds, the Cartersville trucks were purchased by the

Union County Fire Department for \$20,000.

"They'll last us for at least another 10 years, no problem," said Dyer, adding that the trucks have been fully outfitted with a complete set of equipment and are "ready to go." Similar to their role at Cartersville, they'll be listed as reserve trucks here.

That said, just because a vehicle is a reserve doesn't mean it doesn't have an important role to play. Reserve trucks can be used "on any fire at any time." Because they must be available at a moment's notice, reserve trucks can make a difference in saving properties – and even lives.

Currently, one of the engines is housed at Station 1 and the other sits at the new Station 13, but they can be kept at any station that needs them.

"We're trying to look at our entire fleet and see what we can move around," Dyer said, noting that since safety

standards require a certain number of reserve vehicles, the "new" trucks are keeping to the metaphorical bench until it's their turn to bat.

In response to questions about the necessity of 20 apparatus, Dyer referred not just to that point, but said that some engines are used as water tanks, or "tankers." These are particularly helpful in rural areas, as not every neighborhood in Union County has access to a fire hydrant.

"The more we can do, the better it is for our citizens and their insurance, so we're always working on those capabilities, too," Dyer said.

Above all, the fire chief feels it imperative to thank the Cartersville Fire Department, Cartersville City Council, and Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris for their roles in helping to acquire the engines.

"It just goes to show you the importance of how SPLOST funding can really help out," Dyer concluded.