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# North Georgia News

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## Schools prepare for COVID as students await Aug. 17 return

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
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With students set to return Monday for the 2020-21 school year, Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill wants the community to know that, while COVID-19 may be an inescapable reality, the system's goal is to keep students and staff as safe as possible this year.

About 75 percent of the system's 2,900 students will be returning for face-to-face classes, including the children of Woody Gap School, with the remaining 25 percent of kids opting for completely online learning.

Google Classroom is being implemented across the board to keep students on the same page. As such, teachers will have the ability to instruct from home if they get sick or need to quarantine, and they'll be able to take over other teachers' classes virtually should the need arise.

For those roughly 2,100

kids who will be on campus, Hill said his top priority is going to be "health and safety" as teachers and staff welcome students back to campus for the first time since schools closed mid-March.

"Everybody here is excited," Hill said. "They have a lot of things on their plate that they have not had prior to this pandemic. We'll be focused on safety this year as our No. 1 goal.

"In the duration of my career, I've never said that student achievement was No. 2, but I'd like to say to the community, parents, students - health and safety is our No. 1 goal in Union County Schools this year, because if we don't keep everyone healthy, we can't teach children.

"Our job is about teaching children, but we do have to change the way that we operate significantly to even begin to be able to be operational during a pandemic."

Hill and the schools arrived at their extensive



L-R: David Murphy, Tiffany Setzer, Dr. Paula Davenport and John Hill physically distancing for a picture at the Board Office last week.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

reopening plan through guidance from state officials via the departments of Health and Education, as well as the system's COVID Task Force consisting of school leaders,

local medical professionals, and Emergency Management Agency Director David Dyer. Union General Health Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett is also on the system's

Task Force, and she will be sworn in as a Union County Board of Education member in 2021.

Among the numerous operational changes

amid COVID-19 are daily temperature checks for staff and students; strict bus-riding protocols to include dedicated a.m./p.m. routes for students;

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## Castoff Pet Rescue looking for community support in pandemic

**By Jarrett Whitener**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Many volunteer organizations are hurting financially right now due to their inability to host regular fundraising events because of COVID-19, including Castoff Pet Rescue.

Castoff is a nonprofit, no-kill animal rescue group based in Blairsville, and it serves Towns, Union and Fannin counties in Georgia, Clay and Cherokee counties in North Carolina, "and wherever the need arises."

"The rescue organization was established in 2006, and at that time our group of volunteers fostered the animals in their homes, as we did not have a facility to call our own," according to castoffpetrescue.org. "In February of 2007, we obtained a building that had been a boarding kennel in the 1980s and had fallen into a state of disrepair.

"Our volunteers worked diligently to bring the facility up



Castoff Pet Rescue volunteers do what they do for the love of animals in the community.  
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

to standards and suitable for our plan. Thanks to compassionate and caring volunteers and the support of people just like you, Castoff Pet Rescue has been able to place hundreds of dogs and cats in forever homes."

And now, because of the limited options, Castoff has been looking for ways to support its rescue pets during

this time, with one major source of revenue being their Thrift Store at 19 Cobalt Street, Suite C, open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. every Tuesday-Saturday.

Manager Walter Hoth is concerned about running out of money for the shelter and is thankful to those who are supporting the Thrift Store.

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## City Council hears concerns about leachate, 'racial sensitivity training'

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
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Two members of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association offered public comments in the Aug. 4 regular meeting of the Blairsville City Council, held via teleconference.

Particularly, the two men - Doy Lively and Ross Malme - were there to speak out against the leachate processing at the Blairsville Wastewater Treatment Plant, which they say is pumping harmful, yet unregulated manmade chemicals known as PFAS into the water system.

Since August of last year, the city has been treating out-of-county landfill delivered by The Water Authority LLC, a company co-owned by Union County's state senator, Steve Gooch.

The city contends that it is following all state and federal guidelines for wastewater



Site work began last week on the Arby's lot behind Blairsville City Hall.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

treatment, and that it processes over increasing the amount of leachate it is currently processing, though members of the Lake Nottely Improvement Association, or LNIA, appeared skeptical following publication

of a public notice in the July 29 edition of the North Georgia News.

The city ran the public notice advertising for comment on its permit renewal application through the Environmental Protection Division for the discharge of treated wastewater into Butternut Creek.

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## Local Marine Corps League aims to 'revitalize recruiting efforts'

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
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Since becoming the Jr. Vice Commandant of Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 a little over a month ago, Alton "Doc" Coleman has been working to brainstorm new ways of recruiting members.

The Marine Corps League works "to preserve traditions of the U.S. Marine Corps; strengthen the fraternity of Marines and their families; serve Marines, FMF Corpsmen, FMF Chaplains who wear or have worn the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor; and to foster the ideals of Americanism and patriotic volunteerism."

And it is to these ends that Coleman, as new Jr. Vice Commandant in charge of recruitment, is hoping to "revitalize our recruiting efforts."

"Of course, COVID has kind of put everything on hold," he said. "For recruiting efforts, we may have a turkey shoot or a golf tournament - there's

several things that you can do to try to bring about public awareness for the detachment and to invite recruiting. But with COVID, it's been a little different."

At 57, Coleman is one of the younger Marine veterans of Unicoi Detachment, which pulls its membership from Towns and Union counties.

"We're a small detachment consisting of maybe 50 members, give or take, with only somewhere around 10 to 15 who are consistent, active members," Coleman said. "Our members are largely made up of Korean War and Vietnam Veterans, so it is a senior group."

As such, Coleman said recruitment is a constant process, requiring him to always be on the lookout for Marines of all ages, including younger veterans like himself, and even Marines who are freshly out of the service or still serving.

"When I'm at the grocery store or anywhere in town and I see someone wearing a Marine Corps T-shirt or something



Alton "Doc" Coleman signifying they're a Marine vet," Coleman said, "I always introduce myself, give them a business card and extend a welcome to join us at one of our meetings. I also let them know that we're here to serve them should they ever need help.

"We get calls on guys that have never applied for their VA benefits and don't know how. We assist families in need. We've had Marines coming

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## Viral anxieties linger as COVID numbers continue to climb

**By Jarrett Whitener**  
North Georgia News  
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As COVID-19 positive case numbers continue to rise in the county and state, many people remain wary of the virus and its seemingly unstoppable spread.

Arlene Purdy of Union County feels that people need to work together and accept the virus as a reality to enable a fix for the pandemic problem.

"I hear people every day that think this thing is made up by the government or that it isn't real," Purdy said while shopping at Ingles Saturday. "That's just crazy to think about. There are people that are catching this virus, and they are losing loved ones. I think it comes down to shock - people have never seen anything like this before.

"My advice to the people would be to listen to what doctors are saying. At the very least believe that doctors are trying to get this under control. If you have to wear a mask, so



The rise in COVID-19 cases of late has people worried to varying degrees. Pictured here: shoppers at Brasstown Pharmacy last week.  
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

be it, but the more we ignore this virus, the worse it will get."

Murphy, North Carolina, resident Matt Tanner believes that the pandemic is a serious concern, but that national media outlets have blown things out of proportion.

"If you look around you

will see that, as cases go up, more and more people start to stay at home," Tanner said at the Family Dollar Saturday. "I was at Walmart a few days ago, and you could see how many of those baskets they fill just to deliver to people that don't want to go inside. People are

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