



# Happy Labor Day

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75¢

# North Georgia News

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## Veterans Building gets much-needed renovations

By Shelly Knight  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Local veterans gathered this month to celebrate big renovations at the Maj. Leon Davenport Veterans Building off Georgia 515.

Leading the get-together was Mike Merritt, who serves as American Legion Georgia District Nine Commander, American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121 Commander in Blairsville, and President of the local Commanders Group.

"There were some \$50,000 worth of materials (in this project)," Merritt said. "Home Depot donated and installed the flooring; Sherwin-Williams donated the paint. Rick's Rentals donated the salvage containers, and the

windows were replaced by the county.

"The static display was refurbished by Chris Reece. The county poured the concrete pad, and we went out for bids to paint it. Vendors wanted thousands of dollars to complete it, but Chris donated hours and days' worth of his time to create the beautiful display you now see.

"Again, Mr. Lamar (Paris) and Sherwin-Williams were essential parts of the process. (Lamar) doesn't like to take a lot of credit for things, but he is very involved with the veterans.

"This whole thing was a community project, a team effort, with the county, families, veterans, and folks from every branch of service. The Seabees

did so much maintenance work for us."

The building was originally a home built in the 1970s that moved to its current location at 76 Blue Ridge Highway when Georgia 515 was built.

It was initially used by the Chamber of Commerce and since has been donated for use by local veteran groups, where numerous events are hosted to promote camaraderie and patriotism throughout the community.

The Veterans Building was in desperate need of renovations as the floor was bowed and the breeze flowed through the windows even in the winter. And the entire community responded to that

See Veterans Building, Page 6A



American Legion Post 121 Cmdr. Mike Merritt presenting Doug Davenport – son of Maj. Leon Davenport, for whom the Veterans Building is named – with a Certificate of Appreciation for the Davenport Family's renovation support. Photo by Shelly Knight

## BOE talks fundraisers, new student shuttle service



The Union County School Board is Janna Akins, Julia Barnett, Tony Hunter, Jason McCarter and Patrick White. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County Schools are back in session, and that was the main topic of discussion at the Board of Education regular meeting on Aug. 15.

Superintendent John Hill revealed that 2024 marked "historically high enrollment," accounting for 3,128 students across the district. Fittingly, there was a record number of new hires to help teach them.

Hill also explained that

this year's first day back on Aug. 9 was made unique by "an issue out in town" that knocked the power out at the Elementary, Primary and Alternative schools as well as the Central Office.

The mishap involved a power line on Cleveland Street and was solved after just a few hours, causing minimal impact.

To prepare for the new school year, the board was faced with a list of planned field trips and fundraisers to approve. Board Member Janna

Akins asked why fundraisers were so frequent; her concern was that, in general, financial needs were not being met.

As explained by new High School Principal Josh Davis, most fundraisers raise money for extracurricular groups and clubs. The students earn money to be able to pay for trips, sometimes across the country for national competitions.

Teachers also fundraise for their classrooms. Primary See Board of Education, Page 6A

## Distracted driver to face charges in GA 325 wreck

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Three people went to the hospital with suspected serious injuries last week after an alleged distracted driver from Fannin County failed to maintain lane and collided head-on with a Union County motorist on Georgia 325, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

The two-vehicle accident happened shortly after 4 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 19, near the intersection of One Tree Hill, per GSP.

Leading up to the crash,

Joseph Barton, 28, of Blue Ridge, was driving his 2004 GMC Sierra south on GA 325 negotiating a right downhill curve, per GSP.

Traveling north and negotiating the corresponding left uphill curve was Randy Jones, 77, of Blairsville, hauling a flatbed with farming equipment in his 2011 Ford F-350.

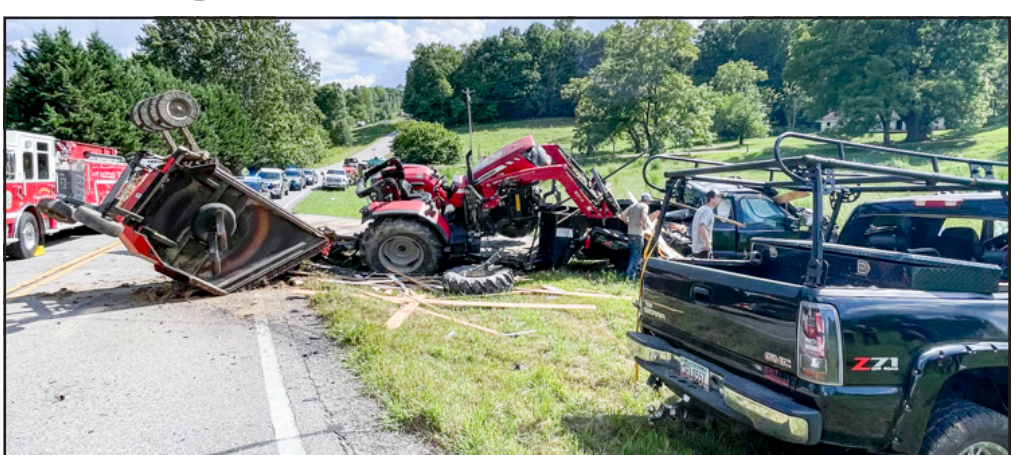
Barton was distracted and failed to maintain his lane of travel, resulting in his GMC going into the opposite lane to collide with Jones' truck despite both drivers swerving at the last minute in an unsuccessful

attempt to avoid the crash, per GSP.

After the initial impact, the GMC rotated clockwise and traveled off the west shoulder before coming to an uncontrolled final rest. The Ford rotated counterclockwise and traveled off the west shoulder as well, striking a fence and coming to an uncontrolled stop facing northwest, per GSP.

Two witnesses told GSP that the GMC was completely in the wrong lane of travel, thereby causing the crash to occur.

Both Barton and Jones See GA 325 Wreck, Page 6A



Two trucks smashed into each other after a reportedly distracted driver failed to maintain his lane on Georgia 325 Aug. 19, sending all occupants involved in the crash to the hospital.

## Blairsville man dies in collision with dump truck



Area residents took to Facebook this month to discuss the need for a red light at Loving Road and Georgia 515 in Fannin County, where a fatal wreck involving a Blairsville man took place Aug. 16. Photo/Facebook

By Shawn Jarrard  
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A Union County man died on Aug. 16 after driving into the path of a dump truck loaded with 30 tons of gravel, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

Michael Lynn Goss, 76, of Blairsville, passed away at the scene.

Driving a 2009 Honda Accord, Goss was waiting at the stop sign on Loving Road at Georgia 515 in Fannin County around 1:30 p.m. that Friday, just before the accident occurred, per GSP.

A 2007 Mack 700 dump truck was traveling west on GA 515 in the right lane when

Goss attempted to cut straight across all lanes of the highway to continue north on Loving Road, and Goss' failure to yield resulted in a fatal T-bone accident, per GSP.

After the impact, the Honda rotated counterclockwise and traveled into the right lane of GA 515 East before arcing back in a clockwise direction and coming to a final uncontrolled rest facing northwest in the gore separating the left lane of GA 515 East and the left turn lane, per GSP.

The dump truck continued straight before veering across all lanes of GA 515, exiting the south shoulder, traveling up an embankment, striking a tree with

its front, and overturning onto its right side where it came to final uncontrolled rest facing south, per GSP.

The dump truck traveled a distance of approximately 794 feet after impact. It was loaded with crushed M-10 gravel for a total gross weight of approximately 60,520 pounds, per GSP.

The driver of the dump truck, an Ellijay man, was transported for medical evaluation of suspected minor injuries, per GSP.

Three witnesses provided statements about the crash to GSP, and a dash camera inside the dump truck recorded the accident.

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## Veterans Building...from Page 1A



The Veterans Building renovation included the creation of a new patriotic display in a comfortable sitting area. Photo by Shelly Knight

need. Veteran Ed Frizzell spearheaded the effort. He saw the need, jumped into action, and got the job done. That's what being a veteran is all about.

"The community has shown veterans a lot of respect and caring over the years, and we wanted to reflect that in this building," Frizzell said. "We wanted to show the community all our appreciation for the support they've given us."

"That's why I got involved in this project, and I wanted to support Doug Davenport and the efforts of his family as they worked on this project."

Doug Davenport spoke at the gathering. Davenport

is the son of beloved local veteran and community pillar Leon Davenport, who passed away in 2017 and after whom the Veterans Building is named. "The veterans are such an important part of our community," Davenport said. "I grew up an Army brat and have always had a special place in my heart for veterans."

"Each time I pass this building, of course, I think of my dad, but I also think of the dedication and commitment represented by each of you, and I thank you all for your service to our country."

"But I also thank you all for your service to our community. You bless and touch a lot of lives with your efforts. God bless you all in the

continued work you do."

Barbara Davenport, surviving wife of Maj. Davenport, said, "This brings back a lot of memories for me. We were married for 63 years. Looking back, I would not change a moment of it. It's quite an honor being an Army wife."

"I love veterans because they've done so much for us. I know what they've done; I was there. I feel that they should be cared for more than they are. They've taken care of us."

For his part, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris highlighted his belief that "the county's job is to take care of the building and the property, and that's what we're doing here."

## GA 325 Wreck...from Page 1A

were transported via medical helicopter to Northeast Georgia Medical Center, and currently unspecified charges are pending for Barton upon his release from the hospital, GSP said.

Barton's condition was unclear at press time, but Jones has reportedly suffered multiple broken ribs and undergone surgeries for broken legs, though he is expected to recover.

A 19-year-old passenger from Ellijay who was riding in Barton's vehicle also required medical treatment after the crash, per GSP.

On today's busier than ever roadways, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason advises motorists to "always pay attention and drive defensively, because we have too much traffic here now."

"Be prepared to take evasive action," he continued, "because you just might end up with somebody in your lane on the wrong side of the road."



Both vehicles were disabled in the Aug. 19 crash on Georgia 325.

## Board of Education...from Page 1A

School Principal Debby Decubellis noted that educators receive money through school funding for basic supplies, but sometimes teachers might want a new rug to better fit their room or sorting baskets for organizational purposes.

"I think what you're getting at (is) ... there's nothing in there that's an obligation for the board to be funding. These are extra things," said Hill, with Decubellis adding, "The needs are taken care of."

"If you do need things, that's another thing, but wants - I'm OK with wants," said Board Chair Tony Dyer, settling the understanding.

A lot of roadwork was started over the summer to help ease traffic flow on campus, and Hill wanted to call the board's attention to a couple of projects in particular.

The Primary School's secondary car pick-up lane has priority, and although it's still gravel at the moment, the hope is to one day pave it. Some parking places at other schools have also gone out for bids.

On the subject of traffic, Transportation Director Kody Owenby revealed that the shuttle bus system was a "huge hit" among parents and has seen increasing use; all students in one family are dropped off at the youngest's school, with the older ones taken where they need to go by the school shuttle.

"We've just got a lot of cars coming through the Primary especially," said Owenby, adding that car riders were up by about 100 compared to last year. "We're really down on the number of kids riding the buses in the morning."

Owenby theorized that if more students rode the bus or the shuttle, it would cut down on the amount of traffic, with Board Member Patrick White agreeing.

"We've got plenty of room (on the buses) in the mornings, but we encourage that anyway," Owenby added, revealing that the Traffic



Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill in the Aug. 15 Board of Education meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Department meets every day to help iron out traffic issues alongside the Sheriff's Office.

Construction of the new Elementary School continues on schedule - in time for the next school year - and under

budget. All the brickwork should be completed in the next month, but the roof is on as well as the skylights. Painting for one of the areas has begun, and windows are due to be placed over the next two weeks.