

North Georgia News

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Jury trial set in federal case against Gowder brothers, Heaton

By Shawn Jarrard
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GAINESVILLE – A trial date has been set in the federal prescription drug case against former hospital CEO Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton, according to court documents filed Oct. 10. The jury trial will take place on Feb. 11, 2019, at 9:30 a.m. in Courtroom 303 of the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville, before U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story of the Northern District of Georgia. U.S. Magistrate Judge J. Clay Fuller of the Northern District of Georgia had previously certified the case as ready for trial on Aug. 28,

according to court documents. All three men pleaded not guilty to federal charges on April 9, after a federal grand jury handed up a 212-count indictment listing the Gowder brothers and Dr. Heaton as defendants on April 4. Each defendant is presumed innocent of the charges, according to the U.S. District Attorney's Office, "and it will be the government's burden to prove each defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial." The men were indicted as part of Operation SCOPE, allegedly for "illegally prescribing and obtaining thousands of doses of prescription pain medications outside the usual course of

professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose," according to an April 6 news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta. At the time of their alleged crimes, Mike Gowder was the CEO of Union General Hospital, Dr. David Gowder was the emergency room director at Union General Hospital, and Dr. Heaton ran a family practice clinic in Blairsville. "These defendants allegedly abused their positions as medical professionals to obtain illegitimately thousands of doses of prescription pain medications and now face serious federal charges," said U.S. Attorney Byung J. "BJay" Pak on April 6. "The Department of Justice



Mike Gowder

is opimmed to fighting the opioid epidemic through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of licensed medical



David Gowder

practitioners who abuse their positions of trust to engage in illegal conduct." Operation SCOPE stands



James Heaton

for "Strategically Combatting Opioids through Prosecution and Enforcement." See Trial, Page 2A

EMC Board talks Hurricane Michael, tax credits, fiber and more

By Shawn Jarrard
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YOUNG HARRIS – Hurricane Michael wreaked havoc across a good portion of the Southeast, proving deadly in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia. Fortunately, the storm only marginally affected the North Georgia Mountains, and aside from a two-hour power outage that occurred overnight in the northern end of Union County, the most that many residents experienced from the hurricane was about 2 inches of rain and mild winds. And though the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC didn't have a whole lot of damage to address here in the mountains, the staff remained ready at a moment's notice throughout

the storm. On Tuesday, Oct. 9, during the regular BRMEMC Board Meeting and on the eve of the storm, EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms announced that, should this area remain largely unaffected, the EMC would be responding to requests for aid from other local power companies impacted by the storm. In the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, the EMC sent two line crews to help out Grady EMC down in Cairo, which is right near the Georgia/Florida state line, and a crew to Washington EMC in Sandersville, located in central Georgia. Also in the Oct. 9 meeting, the board heard from Myriam Simmons of Ryan LLC, a global tax services firm



Jeremy Nelms

specializing in tax advisory and consulting services. Simmons' presentation focused on an investment See EMC, Page 7A

Early voting has begun; vote now through November 2nd

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Early voting began Monday and will run for three weeks leading up to the big General Election on Tuesday, Nov. 6. Every weekday between now and Friday, Nov. 2, during the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., registered Union County voters will be able to walk into the Union County Registrar's Office to cast their votes. The Registrar's Office is located within the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, and it will remain open to voters even during lunchtime. There is one weekend day set aside for voters at the Registrar's Office, which will be Saturday, Oct. 27, from

9 a.m. to 4 p.m., for those who find themselves too busy to vote during the scheduled weekdays of voting. Election Day will be on Tuesday, Nov. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and that day, voters should report to one of the 11 pre-assigned Union County voting precincts. A sample ballot can be obtained at the Registrar's Office and at www.mvp.sos.ga.gov, which also features valuable voter information personalized to each resident. "Georgia law requires registered voters to show photo identification in order to vote in person," according to the Georgia Secretary of State's Office. "When you vote in person, you must show one of the following photo IDs: "A Georgia driver's license, even if expired;

any valid state or federal government issued photo ID, including one issued by the Department of Driver Services or your Voter Registrar; valid U.S. passport; valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency, or entity of the U.S. Government, this state, or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state; valid U.S. military photo ID; valid tribal photo ID." Voters looking for absentee ballots will need to contact the Registrar's Office in the courthouse, or call (706) 439-6016. Tuesday, Oct. 9, was the voter registration deadline to be eligible to cast a ballot in the Nov. 6 General Election. Each of the following See Voting, Page 7A

Forest Service, county to host Target Range Public Hearing on Oct. 24

By Shawn Jarrard
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Representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Union County Government and the Union County Gun Club will be available to share information and answer questions at an upcoming Target Range Public Hearing on Wednesday, Oct. 24.

Interested residents can bring their comments, questions and concerns to the hearing, which will take place at 6 p.m. that Wednesday inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center. Coinciding with information to be provided by the Forest Service, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris is expected to address those in attendance, as is Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, who serves as an adviser to the Gun Club. People who are unable to attend are being urged to send their comments via regular mail to 65 Courthouse Street, Box 1, Blairsville, GA 30512, or via email to commissioner@uniongov.com. The proposed site for the

gun range is a 14-acre piece of Forest Service land off SR 180 near Blairsville. A key aspect of this particular site would be its ability to accommodate rifle shooting at 200-plus yards, pistols and potentially shotguns. The county is making the application for the land to be used as a range, after which the Gun Club will help to construct and manage a range facility. As such, Gun Club members would have regular access to the range, with limited hours for the public, and local peace officers would have a home to train for firearms requalification. Furthermore, the range would potentially be open to See Forest Service, Page 2A

John Nix packs them in at the Old Union Courthouse

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

John Nix, a household name in Union County, performed in front of a packed house on Friday, Oct. 12, at the Historic Union County Courthouse. Nix has performed at the old courthouse many times over the last 67 years, and his show with the Country Cousins has become an annual event on the Friday before the start of the Blairsville Sorghum Festival, where the Country Cousins were the inaugural band at the festival opening 49 years ago. Nix, now 83, started the band with his brothers Homer, Clayton and Cranford in the early 1950s, and some See Nix, Page 2A



Local legend John Nix performed at the Historic Union County Courthouse on Friday, Oct. 12. Photo by Mark Smith

Patterson now facing burglary, child molestation charges

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A Union County man, arrested last month for allegedly being in possession of a stolen motorcycle, has been arrested again and is now facing additional charges of burglary and aggravated child molestation, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office. Aaron Dale Patterson, 30, is originally from Union County, though he moved to Simpsonville, South Carolina, some years ago, according to the Sheriff's Office. It was during a recent trip back to Union County that Patterson allegedly perpetrated a series of crimes, according to the Sheriff's Office. As previously reported, Lt. Daren Osborn with the Criminal Investigations Division was on the lookout for Patterson in

connection with a 2006 Honda motorcycle allegedly stolen out of Cherokee County, North Carolina. Resulting from a Sept. 18 traffic stop by Sheriff Mack Mason for loud mufflers, Lt. Osborn made contact with Patterson and served him with a warrant for theft by receiving stolen property from another state. After further investigation, Lt. Osborn took out additional warrants for burglary on Patterson, though he had already bonded out on his initial charges, said Osborn. Authorities received information that Patterson would be in a certain area of SR 325 on Monday, Oct. 1, and based on that information, UCSO Lt. Osborn, Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer and Deputy Chris Jackson successfully initiated a traffic stop involving Patterson, said Osborn. "During the traffic stop, he was arrested and brought to



Aaron Patterson

the Union County Jail on my burglary charges," said Osborn. "And while they were processing him into jail, a quantity of methamphetamine was located on his person." The confiscated drugs resulted in additional felony charges of possession of methamphetamine and crossing the guard lines with drugs, said Osborn. See Patterson, Page 2A

July Term 2018 Grand Jury Indictments continued

The following individuals, who are presumed innocent until proven guilty, were indicted during the July Term 2018 of the Union County Grand Jury, which met for a second time in September: Shawnetta Dawn Reece, child molestation; three counts sexual assault of a student. James Edward Garrett, four counts child molestation; three counts sexual battery against a child under 16; three counts criminal attempt to commit a felony; two counts aggravated sexual battery. Christopher Lee Deyton, six counts child molestation; aggravated sexual battery; four counts criminal attempt to commit a felony. Barbara Vanessa Bates, child molestation. Joshua Lee Bryant, possession of a controlled

substance; two counts possession of drug-related objects. Wendy Nicole Perry, aka Nikki Perry, possession of a controlled substance; two counts possession of drug-related objects. David Baron Burrell, criminal attempt to commit a felony; illegal use of communication facility; possession of a controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects; recidivist. Cassie Ann Cooper, possession of a controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects. Curtis Milton Cooper, possession of a controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects. Keith Alan Thomas, possession of drug-related objects. Mary Elen Bello,

possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of drug-related objects. Randy Delain Ledford, four counts illegal use of communication facility; four counts distribution of methamphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of drug-related objects. Thomas Deven Egan, two counts sale of methamphetamine; two counts illegal use of communication facility; possession of a controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects. Tabitha Ann Barton, three counts sale of methamphetamine. Justin Lee Williams, theft by shoplifting. Danny Dewayne Dockery, terrorist threats. See Grand Jury, Page 7A

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