

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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February 20, 2013

## Hughes, Butler honored as Teachers of the Year

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Woody Gap School's STAR Teacher Ely Butler and Union County Elementary School's Judy Hughes have something in common besides education.

Both were named Teacher of the Year by their respective schools last week.

Hughes, system TOTY, serves as the Response To Intervention Coordinator at the elementary school for fourth and fifth graders and has taken a leadership role in the implementation of the RTI program.

"She has attended training sessions and worked diligently to make sure our school follows the appropriate protocol in providing remediation for students through each tier. She is nationally board certified and that says



The 2013 Union County School System Teachers of the Year and the Board of Education. Photo/Todd Forrest

a lot," UCES Assistant Principal Debra Collins said. Hughes was nominated and accepted to serve on the Teacher

Advisory Council for the state School Superintendent in 2011. She attended several meetings at the state Department of Edu-

cation representing her peers throughout the state.

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## Lady Panthers head to State

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Greensboro - The Union County Lady Panther basketball team is back in the Class AA State Tournament for a total of 14 trips to State, matching the boys squads' 14 appearances.

After winning the Regular Season Region 8-AA title, Union County placed third in the Region Tournament last weekend at Greene County High School.

Now the Lady Panthers will travel to Bremen to take on a 22-6 Lady Blue Devil squad at 7 p.m. on Tuesday.

Entering the tournament as the No. 1 seed, Union rallied from a double-digit deficit, but fell in overtime to the eventual Region Champion Rabun County.

On Saturday, the Lady Panthers took their frustrations



Coach David Tucker

out on Jefferson, whipping the Lady Dragons to the tune of 10 treys in a 58-32 rout.

The Lady Panthers will be looking to erase its two first round exits from the 2011 and 2012 State Tournaments where the ladies fell to Greater Atlanta Christian and The Model School.

Coach David Tucker is See State, Page 6A

## City, County, celebrate 19th year as Tree City

By Joe Collins  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Nineteen years ago, Charles Allison was mayor of Blairsville when the city of Blairsville qualified to become a Tree City USA through a program sponsored by the National Arbor Day Foundation.

On Feb. 13th, it was with great pride that the Blairsville Garden Club along with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and present day Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley met at the Mock House to accept the Tree City USA flag from Georgia Forestry Commission representative Tony Harkins.

This flag will be flown at the Historic Union County Courthouse so that all residents and visitors can see the honor bestowed upon the



The Junior Blairsville Garden Club does the honors of breaking ground for the planting of a Dogwood at the Mock House on Wednesday. Photo/Joe Collins

city of Blairsville and Union County.

It is a great task to become a Tree City U.S.A. electorate. The city must abide by

some very stringent rules that include but not limited to establishing a tree board, taking

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## Blairsville man charged in Young Harris domestic violence shooting

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Young Harris - Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton and his deputies apprehended a man accused of assaulting a friend of his estranged wife with a sawed-off shotgun and defused a potentially life-threatening situation.

According to the Towns County Sheriff's Office accounts, Larry Franklin Thomas, 53, of 144 Fairview Trail in Blairsville, violated a protective order and entered the home of his estranged wife and their three children in Young Harris.

Thomas, who is being held in the Towns County Detention Center, faces 10 charges, Towns County Magistrate Court warrants show.

Thomas is charged with two counts aggravated assault, possession of a 20-



Larry Thomas

gauge sawed off shotgun, with the barrel shorter than 18 inches, possession of a 20-gauge sawed off shotgun during the commission of a felony, burglary, three counts third-degree cruelty to children, aggravated stalking, and possession of a firearm by a felon convicted of aggravated assault, magistrate court warrants show.

The incident occurred shortly after midnight Feb. 11th, Towns County Sheriff's reports show.

Arrest warrants show that Thomas broke into the home at 367 Opal Road with the intent of committing a felony.

Once inside the home, Thomas shot the male victim in the face with the sawed off 20-gauge shotgun, arrest warrants show.

Thomas then threatened his estranged wife with the sawed off 20-gauge, taking her and the couple's three children, ages 12, 14, and 16 years of age hostage, according to arrest warrants and sheriff's reports.

A physical altercation then took place between the two men, sheriff's reports show.

During the altercation, the three children escaped.

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## Gooch fights for Woody Gap School funding

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

State Sen. Steve Gooch (R-Dahlonega) came to town on Saturday to meet with locals for an Eggs & Issues breakfast at the Blairsville Restaurant.

Sen. Gooch, serving his second term representing Union County in Senate District 51, touched on a number of issues, including education, transportation and gun control.

Calling the gathering a non-partisan event, Sen. Gooch told the crowd that Georgia's 2014 budget will be \$19 billion. Mingled with federal dollars the state receives, Georgia will operate with a projected \$36 billion budget, Sen. Gooch said.

Sen. Gooch said 60 percent of the state's budget goes toward education.

"I believe in the public school system. I came through the public school system," he said. "Our schools in North Georgia are doing incredible, they are excelling. Of course, I'm sure you've heard that we've got some problems in the bigger systems. The schools in Atlanta are having their troubles.

"We've got school systems failing right here in Georgia," he said. "It's a problem, but we can't keep throwing money at it and expect it to get better. We have to start letting our teachers do what they do best, and that's teach."

Sen. Gooch said he's working to restore grant money back into the Union County School System, part of \$2 million in grant money that is on the cutting room floor at the present time.

"It's about \$246,000,"



District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch discusses news from the Gold Dome at Saturday's Eggs & Issues Breakfast at the Blairsville Restaurant. Photo/Charles Duncan

he said. "It would have a negative impact on Woody Gap School if the cut becomes a reality. I'm doing my best to make sure that doesn't happen."

Sen. Gooch, who represents 200,000 North Georgia residents in the eight counties that make up District 51, said the biggest problem facing the state is Medicaid. The 1.45 percent in Medicaid fees that are charged to hospitals based on net revenue that was set to expire in June was renewed for another four years.

"We've always got a huge hole in the state budget because of Medicaid," he said. "Had that bed tax expired, we would have had another \$700 million donut hole to fill in the state budget. We use that bed tax money to leverage against the federal money we receive for that program.

"There's still a problem with the budget and that's what makes it hard to find that \$2 million. The jury is still out on whether we'll get that grant money restored for our public schools. I can tell you we're working on it," he said. "I'm on the Appropriations Com-

mittee and I'm right there in the room where the decisions are being made."

The difficulty in getting the grant funding restored is that others are competing for that \$2 million, Sen. Gooch said.

"Well, you've got the Colonel from the Georgia State Police coming in and telling us he just needs that \$2 million that he got cut for 18 officers," he said. "The guy from the Department of Natural Resources needs a few million to keep a state park open.

"When you keep going around the room, pretty soon it all adds up to more than \$300 million," he said.

"We put \$170 million of extra money in the budget for education this time because of K-12 growth," he said. "It's time to stop cutting from education. "The governor realizes that," Sen. Gooch said. "He's requiring a 3 percent cut from all state agencies except education. We've gone to that well too many times."

Sen. Gooch also touched

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## Knight ready to enforce title tax

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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Union County Tax Commissioner Lee Knight advises locals to please don't shoot the messenger.

The Georgia Department of Revenue has asked tax commissioners in each Georgia county to beef up security in the wake of the March 1st title changes.

Honestly, Knight doesn't have a problem locally as the commissioner and his staff enforce a new state law passed last year by the Georgia General Assembly.

However, just to be on the safe side, Union County Courthouse security will be on high alert when the new Title Ad Valorem Tax goes



Lee Knight

into effect. "The Union County Tax Commissioner's Office will be ready when the new TAVT system goes into effect

on March 1st," Knight said. "I have talked to the deputies that provide courthouse security and they are ready to respond when or if the situation calls for them.

"Most customers will like the new system," Knight said. "The staff from our office have also gone to school and the Georgia Department of Revenue has also prepared for the recent changes in the state tag computer system called GRATIS.

"Customers that buy a car from an individual will wind up paying more to get their tag," Knight said. "This new registration system will charge 6.5 percent to register your car in Georgia and replaces state and local sales

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## Gooch: 'state says no to Falcons'

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch wants his constituents in eight Northeast Georgia counties, including Union, to know that the state of Georgia will not help pay for a new \$1 billion stadium for the Atlanta Falcons.

Actually, the state wouldn't have had to spend a cent. However, state lawmakers would have had to increase the credit limit of the Georgia World Congress Center Authority, Sen. Gooch said.

"Instead of borrowing \$200 million, they would in-



State Sen. Steve Gooch

crease their borrowing capacity to \$300 million," he said. "The state could then float bonds to build the stadium. The payback of those bonds was going to come from the hotel/motel taxes in the city of

Atlanta, not the state of Georgia.

"Folks would have paid an extra penny tax on their hotel or motel bill in Atlanta," Sen. Gooch said. "There's been a lot of stories reported in the Atlanta media about this and I just want to dispel the fallacies about this subject.

"We (Senate) told the Governor's Office and leadership that there wasn't any appetite in the Senate to increase the bonding capacity for the Georgia World Congress Center Authority," Sen. Gooch said. "We've got enough debt in this country; we don't need to increase more debt in this

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March is Red Cross Month  
Tues., March 26 • 12 - 5 p.m. - Blairsville Community - Harpal Civic Center Blood Drive  
Wed., March 27 • 8:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. - United Blairsville Blood Drive  
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Head Start/Pre-K Registration  
for the 2013-2014 School Year begins  
March 1, 2013  
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Union County Historical Society Membership Drive  
Now - March 31, 2013  
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UC Lady Panther Basketball State Tournament @ Bremen  
Tues., Feb. 19 • 7 p.m.  
UCHS Soccer  
Tues., Feb. 19 • 5 p.m. vs. Pickens Co.  
UCHS Baseball  
Feb. 19 • 5:30 p.m. @ North Murray  
Feb. 22 • 5 p.m. vs. Fannin