

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Union County students are back in school

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

They're back!  
The 2015-2016 school year got under way for Union County Schools on Friday, Aug. 7, and so far, the year is off to a great start.

"It's gone great," said Primary School Principal Millie Owenby, just before students left after their first full day. "We had lots of parents in the building first thing this morning. Drop-off went well. Our traffic here was very manageable."

Principal Owenby's favorite time during the first day of school is greeting children as they first enter the building, and she can sense changes in the students toward the end of the day.

"I think their stress levels have gone down a little bit, because they've had their day, they've decided that this is going to be good after all - this is not going to be so bad," said Principal



Transportation Director Stanley Garrett welcomes a youngster on the school bus. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Owenby. "They're ready to tell mom and dad all about their day."

The most challenging time of the first day of primary school is when students get ready to go home, as car riders wait to be picked up at the same time that their classmates, many riding for the first time, make their

way to buses.

Transportation Supervisor Stanley Garrett could be seen shuffling between buses before the orange-yellow fleet pulled out, making sure everything was running smoothly.

On the other end of the spectrum, the environment at the high school was a little

more laid back - students there, years out of kindergarten, first and second grade, were old pros at handling the end of the school day.

"It's been a smooth first day - it's almost like the children didn't leave."

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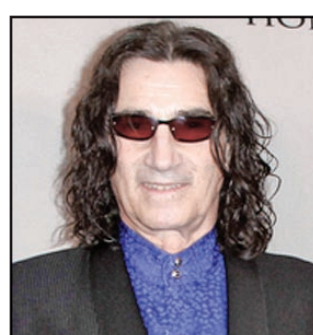
## Oak Ridge Boys coming to Anderson Music Hall

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Oak Ridge Boys have performed at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds before, but come Friday, Aug. 21, the Boys will hit Hiawassee as 2015 Inductees into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

"For The Oak Ridge Boys to become part of that great family is something that's very, very special indeed," said Richard Sterban, the bass singer of the group. "There's no question about it. It's difficult I think, in a lot of ways, to find words to describe how special that is. It's a tremendous honor, and it's a very humbling thing, and to put it very bluntly, it's a big deal."

"We've been able to accomplish a lot of things in our career, but that was kind of



Richard Sterban

missing piece. And now, that's all coming together, and on Oct. 25, we will become the newest members of the Country Music Hall of Fame, and we're so excited about that. It's going to be, certainly, a banner in our career and in our lives."

The careers of The Oak Ridge Boys, the current incarnation of which is the

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## UCHS wins coveted U.S. News & World Report honor



Union County High School celebrates its 2015 Bronze Award from U.S. News and World Report. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County High School has been awarded a Bronze Medal by U.S. News & World Report, a news magazine known for its rankings and data aggregation of educational institutions.

The award comes after close examination of more than 29,000 high schools nationwide, where only 3,990 schools qualified for the honor. The award is a national accolade - all thanks to the excellent teachers, administrators and super-achieving student body at UCHS.

"This is the first time to my knowledge that we've been ranked as a Bronze School," said UCHS Principal John Hill. "Some of the things are English and math proficiency. Also Advanced Placement testing percentages of pass rates, and College and Career Readiness assessment. To be on the list is quite an honor."

U.S. News & World Report has been providing educational rankings since 1983, and many parents and prospective students use the agency's reports to make important decisions concerning

academic futures at various levels, from high schools to graduate schools and online programs.

According to the www.usnews.com, Best High Schools for 2015 were ranked in a three-step process, the first step determining "whether each school's students were performing better than statistically expected for students in their state."

After passing step one, step two assessed whether a school's "disadvantaged students - black, Hispanic and low-income - were outperforming disadvantaged stu-

dents in the state."

If a school made it through the first two steps, like UCHS, then it became eligible "to be judged nationally on the final step - college-readiness performance - using Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate test data as the benchmarks for success, depending on which program was largest at the school."

Making rank in U.S. News & World Report is quite an accomplishment, as the agency analyzes raw data

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## New home numbers holding steady; job market improves

By Charles Duncan  
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The housing industry is making a comeback in Union County.

That's based on the number of permits issued for residential dwellings in a month-by-month breakdown from county records.

Beginning in January, the county approved one permit for a new residential dwelling. From there, the numbers jumped to nine in February, five more in March, 12 in April, 13 in May, 10 in June and 18 in July.

What do those numbers mean?

"It means that building is coming back," said Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris. "The numbers are at the level that you hope to have. If we can average 10 to 15 new home permits



Lamar Paris

a month, that's 100 to 150 homes each year.

"That's a lot of jobs, and a lot of work for a lot of people," Paris said. "That's employment for electricians, plumbers, concrete folks, roofers - it's just a lot of work for a lot of people."

The number of new homes going up peaked in

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## City Council keeps millage rate for 2015 at 2 mills

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Blairsville City Council set the city's millage rate at 2 mills in the August meeting with Mayor Jim Conley, marking yet another year that city property taxes will not be going up.

The city's millage rate has been 2 mills for nine of the 10 years that Mayor Conley has been in office, with one year bringing a rate of 0 mills as a break - albeit unrepeatable - to taxpayers.

"Two mills brings in approximately \$124,000 tax revenue, and once you drop that kind of revenue out of your budget, then you miss it," said Mayor Conley.

According to the 2015 tax digest and five-year history of levy from city hall, the 2 mills this year will bring the city \$122,846, which is a drop of \$629 from last year's total property taxes levied, or a decrease of 0.51 percent.

The lower figure comes from a slight drop in property values within the city, a net M&O digest value of \$61,423,111, which is \$314,430 less than the 2014 digest.

"Most of the people who live in the city are elderly people - I'm talking about those who own property and pay taxes," said Mayor Conley. "There's a lot who live in apartments and pay rent, that don't own property and don't pay taxes, but most of the property owners in the city are the elderly. It's been that way for quite a number of years now, and we've just tried to hold the tax rate down, because our residents have to



Betty Easter

pay a county tax and a school tax, too."

If property values in the city were to fall drastically, the city might have to implement a tax increase, but fortunately, values have remained fairly steady for at least the past five years.

"Raising taxes, that's the last thing that we would think about doing," said Mayor Conley. "That would be kind of a last resort, because we'd still be burdening the same people. When you've got your tax digest made up of majority fixed-income people, that would be a little bit too much of a burden to try to put on everybody."

Also in the city council meeting, Darren Harper of Blairsville's Downtown Development Authority updated the council on the Haralson Development Project.

In the last DDA meeting, Colwell Construction Company was awarded the bid for completion of the project at \$681,886.66, with construction set to begin in the coming weeks.

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## Jobs are available in Union, Towns, and Fannin

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

More than 30 employers from a wide range of industries attended the North Georgia Regional Career Expo at North Georgia Technical College on Tuesday, Aug. 4, accepting resumes and handing out job applications.

"Three county development authorities got in touch with our respective businesses, and that's how we compiled our list of folks," said Union County Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs. "The businesses that are represented here today are folks that either directly reached out to us, or we have reached out to them recently, and we knew that they needed people."

"We didn't have any shortage of companies that needed people - that was a



Job seekers now know that there are jobs to be had in three neighboring counties. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

good thing. And that's really what this was all about. We kept hearing from so many of our area folks that they need quality people, so we thought this would be a great service to them to get as many job seekers as we can under one roof, and help them fill in their

employment rolls."

Together with Fannin and Towns counties, the UCDA reached out to the Georgia Department of Labor to help orchestrate this first ever regional career expo in Union County.

"As far as recruiting

events, last year I believe we held or scheduled about a thousand different events across the entire state," said Project Manager Joel Alexis with the Business Services Unit of the GDOL.

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**Woody Gap Back to School Bash August 13th**  
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**Union County Historical Society's Hand Painted Christmas Ornaments**  
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**SPORTS FOOTBALL**  
Fri. Aug 11 Scrimmage vs. Sonorville 7 PM  
**SOFTBALL**  
Tues Aug. 11 vs. Fannin 5:55 PM  
Wed. Aug 12 vs. Habersham Central 5 PM