

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Chase on Hwy. 515 leads to Mexican Cartel bust in Gordon County

By Charles Duncan
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A high speed chase through Blairsville and West on Georgia 515 on Aug. 29 netted two arrests for felony drug charges in Union County.

Later, the suspects in that chase led Union County Sheriff's Office investigators, Georgia Bureau of Investigation agents and Gordon County sheriff's deputies to a residence in Gordon County that yielded five pounds of raw methamphetamine, sheriff's reports from Union and Gordon counties show.

Raymond Gene Johnson, 45, and Rhonda Joyce Fair, 41, both of Resaca, were

the occupants of a white Ford Expedition, that Johnson drove with reckless abandon through Blairsville and West on Georgia 515 on Wednesday, Aug. 29th.

Johnson led authorities to a residence in Sonorville where they executed a search warrant and arrested a 20-year-old Sandy Springs man.

The residence was being used to manufacture methamphetamine, authorities said.

In a joint investigation along with the GBI, Georgia State Patrol, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Union County Sheriff's Office, and Gordon County sheriff's investigators and deputies, executed a search warrant at a private residence on the Fairmount Highway in



Union County sheriff's Investigator C.J. Worden takes custody of a man authorities say led them on a chase on Hwy. 515. The chase proved to be much more. Photo/Charles Duncan

Sonorville.

Union County Sheriff Scott Stephens said that the man arrested in Sonorville is linked to the notorious Mexican Drug Cartel.

"In recent weeks, authorities throughout the state of Georgia have put a dent in drug trafficking," Sheriff Stephens said. "What started in Union County on Aug. 29th, resulted in taking a serious quantity of drugs out of the North Georgia mountains."

Authorities seized approximately five pounds of raw methamphetamine, also known as "ice," sheriff's reports from Union and Gordon counties show.

Information which led to the acquisition of the warrant had been developed ear-

lier in the day, and a squad of sheriff's detectives dressed in camouflage had the home under surveillance for several hours before the arrest was made.

Alexis Renteria Maldonado was arrested at the scene without incident. He has been charged with trafficking methamphetamine, manufacturing methamphetamine, and possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, Gordon County sheriff's reports show.

A quantity of the methamphetamine was in liquid form, and authorities believe that Maldonado was in the processing of reducing the liquid to solid "ice" form when

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Heritage Festival packs in the tourists

By Janice Boling
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Every year on Labor Day weekend, the Union County Historical Society comes out in full force to welcome visitors to the Mountain Heritage Festival.

People arrive in Blairsville, park their cars, hop on the shuttle, and gather at the Mountain Life Museum for live music, fun demonstrations, lots of shopping, interesting displays, and plenty of good food.

All kinds of crafts from alpaca fiber and decorative arts to pottery and fine paintings are available at the festival.

There is something for every taste and budget. Festival foods are also for sale with kettle corn, fresh tomato sandwiches, homemade ice cream, candied nuts, corn dogs, and BBQ plates topping the list.

Live music is a special treat at this family festival. Music Man Sam Ensley brings the best pickers and players together for two days of the best Bluegrass and Gos-

pel music in the Southeast. Demonstrations include blacksmithing, the Magic Man, hatchet throwing, a civil war camp, musket loading, wood-turning, quilting, spinning, basket making, chair caning, needlework, and other exhibits of early settler life here in the mountains.

Southern Appalachian traditions are kept alive at the Mountain Heritage Festival.

Youngsters get to play marbles, pan for gold, see real live mule loaders in action, and pet the farm animals.

Many leave with colorful face paintings, old time toys, and other treats that stir the imagination.

During this year's festival, Union County's own Don Byers and Historical Society President Bud Akins surprised Sam Ensley with an important announcement.

There is going to be a new holiday in Union County this year called Sam Ensley Day.

Everyone is invited to Sam Ensley Appreciation Day at the Mountain Life Museum on Saturday, Sept. 15. More information will be published before the event,



Locals and visitors alike came out Saturday and Sunday to get a glimpse of the native way of life in early Union County at the annual Heritage festival. Photo/Janice Boling

but mark your calendars and save the date.

When Sam heard the announcement about the upcoming Sam Ensley Day, he

said, "There are lots of other people that deserve this more than I do."

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Don Byers' success continues

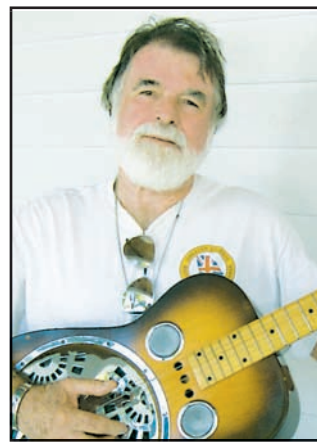
By Janice Boling
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Musician and songwriter Don Byers, an honoree of the Atlanta Country Music Hall of Fame, spent his childhood growing up in Union County. He comes from a family where music is a way of life; both of Don's grandfathers were musicians. Byers received his first guitar lesson from neighbor Billy Burnette in the early 1950s.

As a young boy, his first musical hero was singer/songwriter Hank Williams. Guitarists Merle Travis and Chet Atkins also made an impression on young Byers, which is evident in his music today.

With help from his thumb-picking cousin, legendary Jr. Mauney, Byers developed a unique style of guitar playing. Cousin Ray Mauney, the well-known square dance caller, also showed Byers some chords in the early days.

Growing up, Byers listened to country, Rockabilly, Delta Blues, and local mountain music and learned to appreciate all genres of mu-



Don Byers

sic. During his high school years, he played backup for several singing groups winning multiple talent contests. Byers was voted "most talented male" in the Class of 1960. In 1961, Byers joined the U.S. Army and was stationed in Japan. He soon teamed up with another GI, Ray Lambright, and two Naval airmen, Tom "Monty" Montgomery and Tom "Ski" Racklocky. They formed a Rock 'n' Roll instrumental group called The Strangers which became extremely popular in the Tokyo/Yokohama area. When they

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Foodie Night at The Market bigger than expected

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

If you went hungry last Thursday evening, you only have yourself to blame.

The Union County Farmers Market played host to Foodie Night, The Market version of *A Taste of Blairsville*, and the local support was more than anyone could have expected.

"This is an important weekend for the local businesses and the local economy," said Lorri Berks of Jim's 'Smokin' Que. "There has been a great turn out and we appreciate Mickey Cummings for



The first Foodie Night at the Union County Farmers Market was a rousing success as hungry locals flocked to the tasting event. Event organizers say the crowd turnout was larger than anyone expected. Photo/Todd Forrest

Paris' State of County address on Sept. 11

By Charles Duncan
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris will deliver the annual State of the County Address at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 11 at the Union County Farmers Market.

Commissioner Paris will discuss the overall finances of the county, and update the community of ongoing projects that are coming close to fruition, he said in a Sunday interview with the North Georgia News.

Commissioner Paris



Lamar Paris

will update community members on the progress of the new Union County Cannery

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Dive team recovers two stolen vehicles

By Charles Duncan
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The Union County Sheriff's Office Dive Team has recovered two vehicles from Lake Nottely, reported stolen as far back as 2003.

Dive team members recovered the vehicles Aug. 24th during a scheduled training exercise at Hannah's Dock, Union County sheriff's Lt. Tim Wood said.

Divers discovered the vehicles during the Memorial Day weekend search for drowning victim Jamie Ian Worley, Lt. Wood said.

The Dive Team waited until TVA began to pull



A white 2002 PT Cruiser resurfaces for the first time in several years. Union County Dive team members recovered two stolen vehicles last week from Lake Nottely.

down on Lake Nottely to retrieve the vehicles.

"We examined the vehicles underwater in late May to make sure there were no vic-

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VFW gets a new home

By Charles Duncan
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When Commander Richard Hoibraten of VFW Post 7394 in Union County learned that the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce was moving out of its headquarters off Hwy. 515, he picked up the phone.

The lobbying of Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris began.

The Rev. Hoibraten sent out a lot of prayers about the situation, including several telephone calls to Commissioner Paris.

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Commissioner Lamar Paris gives the keys to the old Chamber of Commerce building to Commander Richard Hoibraten, of VFW Post 7394 in Blairsville. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

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UCHS Football Friday Night Against Fannin County at Home
Lady Panthers Softball Tournament at Oconee County Friday & Saturday
Cross Country Thursday, September 6 at Chestatee

Blairsville Cruisers Car Show at Walmart See page 8A
Friday, Sept 7 5 PM - Dusk

Georgia State Parks & Historic Sites
Mountain Music, Arts & Craft Day Festival at Vogel State Park Sept. 8th. see page 8A

Open House at Fire Precinct 2 See pg 8A
Saturday, Sept. 8
11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Fall Cruise-In at Union County Nursing Home
Sunday, September 9th
2 p.m. - 4 p.m. See pg 9A