

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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## Brown convicted of kidnapping, other charges

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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A Union County jury has convicted a 57-year-old Union County man of charges that include kidnapping his estranged wife in June 2012.

Ronnie Dale Brown, a Union County native and long-time business man, was convicted of kidnapping, aggravated assault in violation of Georgia's Family Violence Act, two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, possession of an illegal weapon, and terroristic threats.

Another charge, false imprisonment, was merged with Count 1, kidnapping, Union County Superior Court records show.

Jurors went into deliberations Friday afternoon, and returned with a verdict before midnight.

Brown, represented by Richard Ryzek and Andrew Dowdy, and his estranged wife Debra Brown, were going through a divorce at the time the incident occurred.

Prosecutors unfolded



Ronnie Dale Brown

a solid case against Ronnie Brown.

On June 21, 2012, Ronnie Brown showed up at his wife's place of work at Union General Hospital, and at gunpoint, forced her to leave that location in his vehicle. The incident occurred around 4:30 p.m. on June 21, Union County sheriff's deputies testified.

Debra Brown was then taken to a location near Wolf Creek where she was held against her will, Union County sheriff's reports showed.

Authorities said Debra Brown talked her way through

the incident, convinced her husband that they would get back together, and convinced Ronnie Brown to take her back to her car. When they arrived at Debra Brown's vehicle, the couple then traveled to Debra Brown's parents house; Ronnie Brown brought the gun, later determined to be a sawed off shotgun, along for the ride, sheriff's authorities said.

Authorities testified that Debra Brown went into the home, told her folks to call 911 and went out the back door. The 911 call came from 169 C.H. Colwell Drive, the home of Debra Brown's parents, Union sheriff's deputies said.

Then Union County sheriff's Deputy Travis Gibson soon arrived and began questioning Ronnie Brown as he stood outside.

"Deputy Gibson asked him if he had a gun," then investigator Lamar Dyer said. "He said he had no gun, but Deputy Gibson could see it in the front seat. It was a 12-gauge sawed off shotgun."

Union County sheriff's

Deputy Julio Cruz and then Deputy County Sheriff's Sgt. David Goodwin also arrived at the scene to assist in the arrest.

At the time, the first charge against Ronnie Brown was misdemeanor obstruction for lying about not having a weapon, Deputy Dyer said.

Other charges against Ronnie Brown followed after investigators had the opportunity to interview Debra Brown and her parents, Deputy Dyer said.

Those charges included kidnapping, false imprisonment, possession of an illegal sawed off shotgun, possession of a weapon during the commission of a felony, and aggravated assault in violation of Georgia's Family Violence Act, Union County arrest warrants show.

"It was a very long case, and a very hard-fought case," Enotah Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said.

Senior Judge Frank Mills of Cherokee County heard the case. Sentencing for Ronnie Brown is scheduled for Thursday at 10 a.m. at the Union County Courthouse.

## State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge visits Union

By Azure Welch  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Friday the 13th, may have a negative connotation that comes along with it, but there was nothing but positive energy in the air as Dr. John Barge, Georgia's School Superintendent visited Union County Elementary School.

Dr. Barge has been seen all over the North Georgia Mountains visiting area schools for award presentations and round-table discussions regarding the current condition of Georgia's public schools. In addition, Dr. Barge has spoken about his passionate and ambitious need to change the system for the better in order to "better serve our state's children."

Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Dr. Jeremy Williams, Assistant Superintendent of Union County Schools, members of the Union County School Board, UCES Principal Patricia Cook and UCES Assistant Principal Debra Collins, and numerous other community members attended the



Dr. John Barge

round table discussion with Dr. Barge.

Before the actual discussion took place, Dr. Barge was treated to a tour of Union County Elementary School, which is an extended campus consisting of three different buildings and is here, at least during the school year, to 26 teachers and approximately 600 students.

See Barge, 2A

## Shop With A Cop serves record number

By Azure Welch  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

A record 77 Union County children were treated to a day shopping with Blairsville and Union County's finest on Saturday at Wal-Mart.

For the 14th year, children of Union County realized a Merry Christmas with the Annual Shop With A Cop program.

During the first year, 10 children went shopping with a cop. On Saturday, Shop With A Cop made for a Merry Christmas for 77 children ages 11-17.

The officers who proudly wear the uniform of the Blairsville Police Department and Union County Sheriff's Office say this event is as much an event for them as it is for the children.

"We look forward to this as much as the children do," said Blairsville Officer Rusty Walker.

Shop With A Cop has lit up the faces of more than 500 local youth since the program began in 1999.

Each child is allotted a certain amount of money and they buy what they want.

Union County Family Connection, teachers and other sources point the prospective



Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll helps his shopper last week at Wal-Mart during the 14th Annual Shop With A Cop. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

shoppers in the direction of the Blairsville Police Department.

Many, Assistant Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said, don't shop for themselves.

"These are the kids that fall through the cracks," Baxter said. "It's the kids that are sort of in limbo when it comes to Christmas. Everyone likes to see

the eyes of the little ones light up. Well, the tweens (11-17) sort of get left out."

A record number of Shop With A Cop kids didn't get left out in 2013. This year's success was part of the most successful campaign in the program's history.

See Shop, 6A

## Senior Center opens its doors

By Azure Welch  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Kathy Hill was all smiles on Dec. 9 as the much anticipated dedication ceremony of the expanded Union County Senior Center arrived.

Hill emotionally and graciously addressed the more than 100 people attending the open house by thanking "all those who have helped us on this project; we can't say thank you enough."

The Senior Center staff and Hill have anxiously been waiting the expansion and renovation to become a reality. The reality, to the expansion, consisted of limited and timeworn spaces.

"The expansion for the Senior Center was a necessity because the need for the programs and activities offered by the center continues to grow," Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said.

In addition to the growing numbers of Union's Senior Citizen population, and the need for assistance programs to help those in need, the Center continues to face federal budget cuts, which is an ever present concern for Hill and the volunteers at the Senior Center because they don't know what the future holds.



Lamar Paris and Kathy Hill do the ribbon cutting at the Union County Senior Center last week. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"The budget cuts are in addition to a freeze on the number of seniors that could participate in the Meals-On-Wheels program," Hill said, referring to the Center's principal assistance program. "The meals are not only, what might possibly be their only meal for the day, but also the volunteer

delivering the meal is often times the only visitor that some of these seniors have, ever."

Because of the hardships the Center faces at the hands of Washington lawmakers, this expansion and renovation project could not have come at

See Seniors, 3A

## Students go on a shopping spree with the Blairsville Cruisers

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Cruisers and Wal-Mart teamed up last week to help needy children during the Christmas season.

On Thursday morning, Wal-Mart was filled with the smiles of 30 children as each was given \$200 to spend at the store.

It was time to Shop With A Cruiser and the Blairsville Cruisers were more than happy to oblige, an offshoot of Blairsville's Shop With A Cop.

"They weren't getting to take that many kids and we knew we needed to do something," the Blairsville Cruisers' President Wayne Tanner said. "My daughter teaches special needs kids so we decided to take some of those kids and it just started growing. Last year we took 20 kids and this year we have 30 kids. We just find out what kids are in need and we pay the bill."

Throughout the year, the Blairsville Cruisers hold events to generate the necessary funds to support the program each December, in



Thursday was the day to Shop With A Cruiser. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

addition to Shop With A Cop. They also rely upon sponsors, who play an integral part in making it happen.

"We hold events and auction off cars. Anything we can do to raise money," Tanner

said. "We also have sponsors. Wal-Mart donates every year and O'Reilly Auto Parts donates every year."

According to the Cruisers,  
See Cruisers, 6A

## Patrons celebrate Vogel tree lighting

By Azure Welch  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The weather was cold and dry, but they did not stop the approximately 500 people who attended Vogel State Parks 10th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Although, the day began with rain pouring in the mist, the deluge eased into a misty drizzle just as the holiday activities began.

Hayrides ushered people to the holidays activities at the "ball field."

Once there, the crowd gathered around several outdoor fire pits to watch Mike and Cheri Young and friends, the featured singers and musicians from Dahlonega. The couple and friends sang traditionally loved Christmas Carols.

In addition to the live music, those slightly chilled could grab a hot chocolate, or some hot cider, and pair that with a cookie or some other treat. The evening air wasn't as cold after that.

Especially when you consider that there were those



More than 500 people attended the tree lighting at Vogel State Park on Saturday. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

who traveled long distances to join the festivities, and this honor, and gift bag went to a young lady by the name of Andrea, who is attending school in the area, but hales all the way from Norway.

From another perspec-

tive, gifts were presented to the youngest and the oldest attendees in the audience. These designations went to Trenton Dyer who is 16 months, and George Fontez, an 83-year-old, decorated veteran of the U.S. Military; his honorary

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BASKETBALL:  
Tuesday, Dec. 17th vs. Murphy CANCELLED  
Thursday, Dec. 19th vs. Towns Co. 7 PM

WRESTLING:  
Friday, Dec. 20th @ Union Co. Duals Tournament