

# Vaccine Rollout...from Page 1A

vaccine lists of eligible people quickly maxing out and signup portals becoming overwhelmed with requests.

Logistically, vaccination efforts have seen delays in distribution of available supplies and in provision of adequate signup opportunities; people are getting vaccinated here, just not at the rate it could be happening, which is exasperating vaccine providers and would-be recipients alike.

Eventually, there will be enough vaccine for everyone who wants it – some medical experts believe much more vaccine will be available shortly – but until then, health officials are calling for patience as they work to introduce greater efficiency into signup and distribution processes.

Currently, early vaccinations are being focused on medical workers who face greater risk of exposure; on long-term care residents and staff; all Georgians 65 years of age and older; as well as law enforcement, fire personnel, and other first responders.

## Where to Sign Up

In terms of local providers dispensing vaccine for the general public, the list is limited at this time, with all vaccinations being made available by appointment only and as supplies last at present.

For a regularly updated list of locations receiving vaccine shipments in each county, visit [dph.georgia.gov](https://dph.georgia.gov) and click on the link for the “Vaccine Orders List.” People can also find vaccine providers at <https://dph.georgia.gov/locations/covid-vaccination-site>.

The Ingles Pharmacies in Blairsville and Hiawassee are accepting eligible patient signups from the public at [www.ingles-markets.com/covid19-waitlist](http://www.ingles-markets.com/covid19-waitlist).

Synergy Health of Hiawassee is also adding patients to its vaccine waitlist via a brand-new, easy to remember website at [www.ngvax.com](http://www.ngvax.com). Looking ahead, Synergy Health plans on hosting mass vaccine clinics as supplies become available.

People utilizing [ngvax.com](http://ngvax.com) will receive immediate confirmation on the website that they have successfully signed up for the waitlist. Furthermore, folks who register there will be notified once an appointment becomes available, so there’s no need to call the office to verify.

Already, Synergy has more than 2,000 people awaiting vaccination from Towns, Union, and other nearby areas, and Synergy’s Dr. Samuel L. Church is asking that patients only sign up for one vaccine list at a time to maximize the number of people able to get in line.

District 2 Public Health

is responsible for distributing vaccines to local health departments for residents in Union and Towns counties, though people have reported being unable to get through to the designated Call Center to schedule vaccination.

Indeed, for many people, the Call Center number has been ringing through to a message saying it is “not a working number,” but Public Health officials have said this simply means too many people are calling in at once and overwhelming the system.

People are being encouraged to keep trying the Call Center at 1-888-426-5073 or 770-531-5692. Center hours are Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m., and Tuesdays from 7:30 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. Callers should expect to wait on the line after getting through.

District 2 Public Health is hoping to alleviate some of its signup woes by bringing in the private company MAKO Medical to take over all its COVID-19 testing starting Jan. 22.

As such, appointments for free Public Health COVID-19 testing can be made at <https://mako.exchange/splash/GAmakotesting/>. Testing will take place in Hall County at 2500 Allen Creek Drive in Gainesville.

Shifting testing to a private company will allow Public Health to free up its existing workforce to concentrate solely on getting vaccines to the most people, as will an internal hiring drive for new employees and volunteer recruitment efforts for local health departments.

Moreover, District 2 officials have been working with local partners for rollout. In addition to coordinating efforts with Synergy Health in Towns County, District 2 is now working with the Union County Government, which has been asking what more it can do to get the ball rolling.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris held a meeting with District 2 Public Health on Friday, Jan. 15, in which stakeholders finalized plans for a joint Union/Towns mass vaccination clinic, to feature at least 300 vaccinations with the potential to add more this week.

Paris said he wanted to facilitate getting COVID shots into as many arms as possible, so he has volunteered the use of the Union County Sports Center for the effort. Assisting in vaccine administration will be medical professionals with the Union County Fire Department.

The mass clinic will take place over 12 hours on Friday, Jan. 22, and will be by appointment only. People may sign up for a vaccine spot on a first-come, first-served basis

at [phdistrict2.org](http://phdistrict2.org), and officials are asking people not to call the local Health Department for appointments.

Participating individuals will want to arrive masked, wear loose-fitting clothing to receive their vaccination, be prepared to wait 15 minutes for observation, and return 28 days later for a booster dose.

Eligible people can use the same web portal on the District 2 site to sign up for regular vaccine appointments to receive shots at the local Health Department as they become available.

Currently, all Health Department vaccine appointments are booked through February, but more time slots are expected to come online in the coming weeks as vaccine supplies increase, and as Public Health expands its logistical capabilities moving forward.

Appointment availability is subject to change, so people should check back with the website regularly.

The Northeast Georgia Physicians Group out of Gainesville is also offering people a chance to sign up for vaccination at [www.nghs.com/covid-19/vaccine-registration](http://www.nghs.com/covid-19/vaccine-registration), though there’s no waitlist for appointments presently, so people will want to check back daily.

There are several known side effects associated with COVID-19 vaccination, such as fever, headache, and rarer but more serious complications, with the most common side effect being injection site soreness.

People will need to weigh the risks individually and in consultation with health care providers, but so far, for the most vulnerable to severe illness, many doctors continue to believe the risks of the vaccine are unlikely to be greater than the risks of COVID itself.

## Hospitalizations Keep Rising

And while Union General Health System is not offering vaccinations to the public, officials there are vaccinating their own staff and health care partners so they may continue serving these communities, with the first round of second doses being administered in-house this week.

Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said the hospital in Union County is over capacity, with two additional COVID units open and full currently. The formerly “clean” Chatuge Regional Hospital in Towns County is now caring for COVID patients also.

“Unfortunately, we had to start overflowing COVIDs there a couple of weeks ago,” Barnett said. “There is nowhere to transfer them to; all the hospitals in our region are at capacity.”

“They have an entire wing walled off at Chatuge, and we have had as many as 10 COVID patients at our high point. It has been almost unbearable for our little hospital system, but we have taken good care of folks.”

Barnett said the high for the entire pandemic has been nearly 50 COVID inpatients at once between Union General and Chatuge, with people coming in sick from all over the area – that was just last week, and not including inpatients hospitalized for other reasons.

To say it’s been a challenge for the two hospitals, as it has for hospitals across the nation, would be an understatement, though Barnett said they have been able to manage thanks to the hard work of their staff and support from the community.

“I am about to go in for a 12-hour shift to work one of the COVID units,” Barnett said Saturday evening. “It has taken everyone working nonstop to take care of our communities. I am proud of what we have done.”

Dr. Church, who treats patients at Chatuge Regional, Murphy Medical and Northeast Georgia Medical, concurred with Barnett’s assessment of the current state of COVID and hospital care, saying that people need to remain vigilant in their efforts to slow the spread of the disease.

And though hospitalizations are up, importantly, the hospitals are still taking all patients in need of urgent care, with administrators urging people experiencing medical emergencies not to hesitate in coming to the hospital for immediate treatment.

“I don’t want people to misunderstand the situation,” Union General Spokesperson Leslie Daniel said. “People must know it is OK to come to the hospital when sick. The hospital will take care of them.”

# Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. awarded federal funds for the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program

Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. has been awarded federal funds under The Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program.

Union and Towns County has been chosen to receive supplement emergency food and shelter programs in the county. The amount to be received will be determined by the state set aside committee.

The selection was made by a National Board that is chaired by the Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency and consists of representatives from American Red Cross; Catholic Charities, USA; National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.; The Salvation Army; United Jewish Communities and, United Way of America. The Local Board was charged to distribute funds appropriated by Congress to help expand the capacity of food and shelter programs in high-need areas around the country.

A Local Board made up of various local agencies and churches will determine how the funds awarded to Union and Towns County are to be distributed among the emergency food and shelter programs run by local service agencies in the area. The Local Board is responsible for recommending agencies to receive these funds and any additional funds available under this phase of the program.

Under the terms of the grant from the National Board, local agencies chosen to receive funds must: 1) be private voluntary non-profits or units of gov-

ernment, 2) have an accounting system, 3) practice nondiscrimination, 4) have demonstrated the capability to deliver emergency food and/or shelter programs, and 5) if they are a private voluntary organization, they must have a voluntary board. Qualifying agencies (not individuals) are urged to apply.

Union and Towns County has distributed Emergency Food and Shelter funds previously with Ninth District Opportunity and other local agencies par-

ticipating. These agencies were responsible for providing food and shelter for local individuals and families.

Public or private voluntary agencies (not individuals) interested in applying for Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds must submit a request to Brenda Dalin, Ninth District Opportunity, Inc., P.O. Drawer L, Gainesville, GA, 30501.

The deadline to submit a request is January 22, 2021.

NTJan20.Z4/CA

## Wallace makes Dean’s List

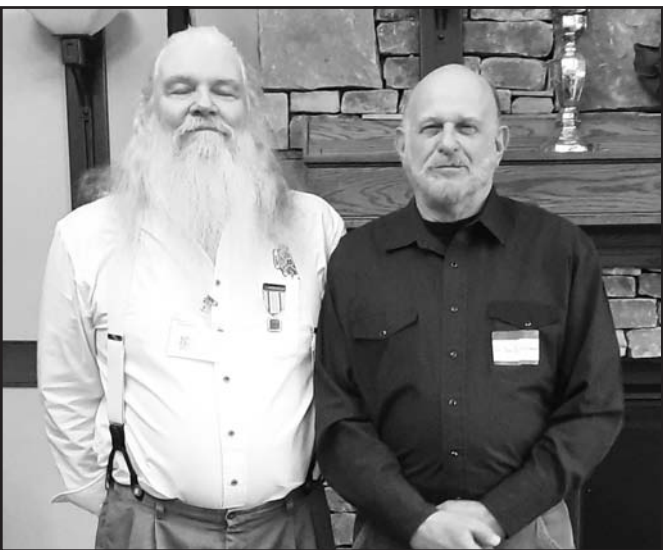
Alma College has released the Dean’s List for those students who achieved outstanding academic performance during the 2020 Fall Term. Students, including Mackenzie Wallace of Young Harris, GA, who achieve a 3.5 or better grade point average during a term, while carrying a minimum of 13 credits, at least eight of which are evaluative grades, are named to the Dean’s List. NTJan20.Z3/CA

## CVB Board meeting

The Towns County Convention and Visitors Bureau will not meet in January 2021.

TJan20.F1/SH

## Sons of Confederate Veterans Fifth Annual Lee-Jackson dinner



The David W. Payne Camp 1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, held its fifth annual Lee-Jackson dinner January 16th at The View Grill in Blairsville. (L-R): Camp Commander Mike Pettus and guest speaker Dr. Dan Eichenbaum. NTJan20.Z14/CA

## Special training to save the hemlocks

On Saturday, January 30 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Save Georgia’s Hemlocks is offering an ONLINE Volunteer Facilitator training. The class is designed for people who want the practical knowledge and skills needed to actively participate in saving our hemlock trees: An overview of the importance of hemlocks, the invasive insect that’s killing them, and options property owners have for saving their trees. Complete how-to instruction covering the trees, the insects, assessing infestations, cultural practices, chemical treatments, biological controls, cost con-

siderations, personal and environmental safety.

Volunteer training to advise and assist other private property owners and nonprofits and to work with the US Forest Service and Georgia DNR to save hemlocks on our public lands.

Registration is required – To register and receive your sign-on instructions, please call 706-429-8010 or email [donna@savegeorgiashemlocks.org](mailto:donna@savegeorgiashemlocks.org) NO LATER THAN NOON ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 29 and provide both your phone number and email address. NTJan20.F4/SH

## Anderson named to Rabun Gap High Honors

Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School is proud to announce its 2020-2021 Honor Roll for Trimester 1. Congratulations to the following students. Head of School’s High Honors: Grade 11 - Dustin Anderson of Hiawassee.

Head of School’s High Honors recognizes students who earned an average no lower than 4.0 with no grade below B+, and no effort rating below satisfactory in Grades 9-12, and recognizes students who have all As with no grade below an A- in Grades 4-8.