

New Enotah CASA Executive Director Lago wowed by community support

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Della Lago just completed her first 90 days in office as the new executive director of Enotah CASA, and she said she couldn't be happier with her new position.

"I think the biggest surprise, which has meant so much to me, is the way the communities here have embraced CASA and what we do," Lago said. "They're passionate about it, the local businesses support CASA."

"They want to know what's happening with the children in foster care, they want to know how many children are in foster care. Are there enough CASAs to advocate for those children? What can we do to help?"

"If it's supporting Dancing with the Stars, a pickleball tournament, providing food for a training event – that, to me, has been very endearing, to be able to be part of a community that believes in taking care

of the most vulnerable, those children that have already been victimized and traumatized and have been removed from their home and are often forgotten."

"This community believes they are not to be forgotten."

Enotah CASA is a nonprofit organization with the goal of ensuring that every child has a safe, permanent home. They do this by providing specially-trained volunteers known as CASAs, or Court-Appointed Special Advocates.

Because of continued community support, CASAs have been able to serve 100% of the children in foster care in Union, Towns, Lumpkin and White counties, even though there's been a 7% increase in the number of foster kids coming in since last year.

"That means we need more CASAs, more advocates," Lago said. "Because of the unfortunate growth of children in foster care, that means our program has grown."

In other CASA news,

Union/Towns Advocate Supervisor Nicole Lonano was promoted recently to the position of Lead Advocate Supervisor.

Lonano will be responsible for overseeing all other supervisors in the circuit and maintaining the Enotah CASA's various partnerships, such as with the circuit judges and the Division of Family and Children Services.

Between July 2018 and June 2019, Enotah CASA served 42 children in Towns and 75 children in Union County, Lonano said.

"We only have one foster home in Towns County, so unless they go with a relative that's in the area, a lot of them get housed outside of Towns County," Lonano said. "That's the kicker. There's just not enough foster homes to keep them close to home."

And it's the same in Union County, she said, estimating that about 80% of children that are removed from their homes – due mostly to parental

neglect or abuse stemming from drugs and alcohol – are relocated to foster homes or group homes far outside of their home areas, which creates huge travel problems for everyone.

To clarify, a foster home usually consists of a family that has gone through foster training and has agreed to take over the care of a child. A group home is more like an orphanage, where several children are placed in a facility and several trained adults care for them.

Simply put, the job of volunteer CASAs is to ensure whatever is best for a child, mostly through court proceedings, though CASAs travel great distances to be with their charges, which helps give these children a sense of stability in their disrupted lives.

CASAs are the only unpaid individuals appointed in these unfortunate court proceedings and are, therefore, motivated solely by the best interests of children. And because they don't have the



Della Lago



Nicole Lonano

caseload of an attorney, they have the time to genuinely focus on their children.

Furthermore, CASAs save their counties hundreds of thousands of dollars because they replace court-appointed attorneys, who must step in when CASAs are unavailable because there aren't enough volunteers.

Starting Aug. 26,

Enotah CASA will be hosting classes on how to become a CASA volunteer. For more information, call 706-864-0300.

The nonprofit recently announced that its 2019 Dancing with North Georgia Stars fundraising event will take place on Oct. 26 at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Schools...from Page 1A

paint, new cabinets and motion sensor LED lights.

"The great thing about this is, now our school will be completely energy-efficient with the LED lights," Berrong said. "They are motion sensor lights as well, so if we forget to turn them off, the lights will cut off automatically after several seconds."

Berrong added, "The new HVAC systems that were installed last summer are also energy efficient."

The Towns County Comprehensive Schools were built more than 40 years ago and required some upgrades to the bathrooms, like accessible stalls, Berrong said.

And the library/media center has gotten a total makeover, featuring new floors, lighting and modern tables with electrical ports to charge anything from a computer to a cellphone.

Construction at the Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium replacing all the seats has been completed. The new seats are wider for comfort, which resulted in a loss of about 50 seats, Berrong said. The old seats were installed on the bleachers at the Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

Leftover seats will also be installed just behind the backdrop of the Indians baseball field.

A complete remodel of the locker rooms and bathrooms inside the gymnasium is scheduled to be finished before



The renovated library/media center at the high/middle school building. Photo by Chad Stack

the fire marshal inspection Friday.

The Lady Indians will start their upcoming season with new locker rooms at Lowell Nicholson Field. They are looking to add a couple more upgrades with their \$2,700 in float prize money following a First-Place finish in the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade on Saturday, July 20.

The new \$1 million artificial turf football/soccer field was finished over the weekend, adding the infill and the TC logo in the middle of the field. Now the resurfacing and painting of the track can begin.

The sand and rubberized infill are laid in between the synthetic turf fibers and act as a cushioning to absorb impact.

The infill is the main foundation of a field's performance level, offering traction for players to cut, plant and release just like they would on natural grass.

Having the artificial turf will allow for the football and soccer teams, as well as band, to practice on the game field without having to worry about messing up the grass. The practice field above the football and baseball field can be used for a possible agriculture area, Berrong said.

The practice field is located across from the girls' softball field, which is currently used as a practice field for the football team. Once the new turf field has been cleared for use, then the football team and Indian Marching Band can start practicing on the game field.

4-H...from Page 1A

her new role this year, she was a parent volunteer for the 4-H Club. She also worked as a special education paraprofessional at Towns County Elementary School.

"With me being a teacher working in the school system and being a volunteer, I knew a lot of the kids and thought this would be a great opportunity," Figg said. "I just really love the 4-H program and what it's all about."

Figg added, "I came from this home life where I depended on my community, my church, and different organizations. So, I knew as I got older, my calling was to make sure that we have programs for the youth, especially the ones that need that positivity in their life, that help and that extra push in their life."

The Georgia 4-H Program offers several activities outside the school system, and one of

the most significant programs is the Project Achievement, Figg said.

Students who are involved with the Project Achievement can learn life skills and develop leadership, with a primary focal point being public speaking.

"Throughout the year, several students get involved in our speech contest, and when they get into high school, they can compete at the state and national level," Figg said.

The Cloverleaf and Junior 4-H'ers start in the fourth grade and move on to the Senior level once they begin high school. Cloverleaf and Junior 4-H'ers start competing in their school or county, and they can advance to the district level, which is held at Rock Eagle.

Once they go into the ninth-grade, students enter the Senior level of the 4-H program and can compete at the state and national level.

"A lot of people will

compare the 4-H program to FFA, and the Project Achievement is what really sets us apart from FFA," Figg said. "We still do the livestock shows and the state horse shows, but we have this speech program in Project Achievement, which really sets us apart."

"The Project Achievement teaches leadership in these students and gives them the confidence that they need to compete at the state and national levels."

Just after school starts in August, Figg will go into each of the schools once a month to educate the students on the several programs offered by 4-H.

"The Cloverleaf level really just gets them into the Project Achievements, giving them three years of experience, because by the seventh grade is when we really start getting into the big stuff," Figg said. "We go to Rock Eagle for the district tournaments for a weekend, and it's really just a lot of fun."

This past year, Figg took Towns County students Lauren and Abby Mauldin to Rock Eagle, with Lauren winning First Place and her sister Abby finishing in Fourth Place.

4-H also offers a horse club, BB team and an archery team, Figg said, with about 25 to 30 students being involved in the horse club.

"They go to Brasstown Stables two times a week and learn everything there is to know about taking care of a horse and riding a horse," Figg said.

Since 4-H began more than 100 years ago, the organization has opened doors for students to learn leadership skills and has revolutionized how students connect with practical, hands-on learning experiences outside the classroom, Figg said.

Retired Firefighters Breakfast

The Retired Firefighters Breakfast is held the first Friday of each month, 9 a.m. at Skillet Cafe, Blairsville, GA.

Fair...from Page 1A

and see how our education system has changed in Towns County over the last 90 years," said Margaret Dendy, who was giving information about the schoolhouse. "We still have people around here that may have been in a schoolhouse just like this one, so it's good to remember that and the hard work that people have done over the years to make the school system in the county what it is today."

Other demonstrations included moonshine making and soapmaking, which added to the total aesthetic of the Pioneer Village.

Next year marks the 70th anniversary of the Georgia Mountain Fair, with the Fairgrounds hoping to bring in some new entertainment and attractions to celebrate the anniversary.

Although the Fair will not return until next year, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds puts on many events and concerts throughout the year. For more information on upcoming events, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.



Jim Wood & The Georgia Mountain Fair Band performed on Friday, July 26, inside Anderson Music Hall. Photo by Lowell Nicholson



A couple of kids having fun on the mega-slide at the Georgia Mountain Fair Carnival last week. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

2019 Tractor Show and Parade "A Salute to our Farmers"

Come join us Labor Day Weekend for some fun: Union County Farm Bureau along with Union County Farmers Market will be having our 10th Annual Tractor Show and Parade on Saturday, August 31, 2019 beginning at 10 AM at the Union County Farmers Market in Blairsville, GA. Bring any type of tractor you have and enter it in our show and parade. The tractors can be old or new, used or antique, everything farm related is welcome to show and be in the parade or remain at the Farmers Market for the public to view. If you don't have a tractor, just come and watch the parade, look around and buy some produce or goods from our local farmers.

If you are entering the tractor show/parade, please arrive by before 8:30 AM to the Farmers Market in Blairsville with the parade to begin at 10 AM. Please bring your tractor to the last entrance of the market next to the cabin. Pull trailers across the creek and unload the tractor there. You can then register up close to the last building of the market.

Each participant in the tractor show will be given a t-shirt. This event is sponsored by the Union County Farm Bureau and Union County Farmers Market. Make plans today to come, bring a chair and be with us at the 10th Annual Tractor Show/Parade at the Union County Farmers Market.

Also on that day, after the parade the Farmers Market will induct a new class of farmers and others involved in agriculture into the Union County Agriculture Hall of Fame. Go to the website for an application or from the Union County Historical Society for more information.

For more information or questions about the tractor show and parade or the Agriculture Hall of Fame, please call Mickey Cummings at 706-781-8802 or call Union County Farm Bureau at 706-745-6962, or go to our website ucfarmersmarket.com. If you need further assistance you can e-mail us at farmers-market@uniongov.com.

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Benefit for



Arleen Anderson Carroll Battling Renal Cancer

Friday, August 9, 2019

Starting at 5 PM

Towns County Civic Center

(Old Senior Center- Across from Courthouse)

Cake Walk • Auction • Door Prizes • Raffle
Dinner • Live Entertainment

For more info contact Margie Lovingood
706-896-3491