

## Vaccinations...from Page 1A

receives the vaccine will need to return for a booster.

Union General Health System vaccinated 280 people between Dec. 23 and Dec. 24, including 175 employees of its hospitals and nursing homes in Union and Towns. 71 residents at Union County Nursing Home and 34 residents at Chatuge Regional Nursing Home.

Dr. Elizabeth Wiles was the first to be vaccinated at Union General Hospital on Wednesday, and she said the occasion marked an important milestone in the pandemic.

"This allows us to feel like we are moving forward and making progress in ending the significant deaths and number of cases in the community," Wiles said. "Even after the vaccine, we are still going to need to wear masks and protect ourselves with social distancing, but this is a step in the right direction."

In-house vaccination clinics will continue for the Health System this week, though vaccines are not currently being mandated for employees, according to Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett, who received a shot herself Dec. 23.

"I hope this is the start of healing our little community and doing our part to get rid of this virus," Barnett said.

There are several side effects associated with the vaccine, though aside from some injection site soreness, which is typical of vaccinations, at press time, the newspaper was unaware of any adverse side effects from vaccines delivered locally last week.

These COVID-19 vaccines are entering into uncharted scientific territory as first-of-their-kind prophylactics. All other vaccines use killed or weakened pathogen to help people's bodies simulate low-level infections to build immunity; this is not so with COVID.

COVID vaccines are mRNA vaccines that don't actually contain any COVID-19 virus. The technology has been around for a while, but this is the first mRNA vaccine to be used in humans.

Basically, these new vaccines contain genetic instructions called messenger RNA. When injected, the mRNA uses people's own cells to create part of the virus' structure called the spike protein, thereby giving the body something to develop antibodies against.

Dr. Samuel L. Church of Synergy Health Inc. in Towns County said the vaccine appears to be both safe and effective, and that people don't have to worry about such a technology rewriting their DNA or anything like that.

But Church doesn't just talk the talk - he received the vaccine himself last Wednesday, and he's been closely following vaccine development as



**Dr. Paul Conrad was one of many frontline medical workers to receive a COVID-19 shot from Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett at Chatuge Regional Hospital on Dec. 23.**

Photo/Tanya Long



**Union County Nursing Home Resident Wilma Groves was happy to get vaccinated against COVID-19 by Assistant Director of Nursing Suzanne Klopp on Christmas Eve.**

Photo/Submitted

part of his official duties with the American Medical Association's national efforts to standardize vaccine dose tracking.

He acknowledges the risks of a new type of vaccine being used for the first time in an emergency setting, but he also points out that, just as the scientific community doesn't know the long-term effects of such a vaccine, it also doesn't know the long-term effects of COVID-19.

"The unknowns are far outweighed by the risks that we know of the virus itself," Church said. "My team and I have been a part of this conversation for a long time, and we are showing our trust in the process and the vaccines, and from a public health perspective as well."

Synergy Health has been designated a mass vaccine provider, which will enable Church and his team to vaccinate everyone who wants it as more stock comes online.

He understands that some people may be hesitant to get the vaccine. However, he remains optimistic that many people will choose to do so as it becomes more widely available, especially older Americans who are more vulnerable to death and hospitalization.

"Even if you don't want to get vaccinated, the

more of the community that gets vaccinated, the better off the rest of us are," Church said. "The more we can get vaccinated early on, the better our whole community is."

Of course, a truly safe and effective vaccine being available for universal distribution would mean that it's just a matter of time before this COVID nightmare is over, and Church is hopeful that such a time is upon us.

"This is surreal, having to wear these masks even dealing with close family members," Church said of COVID-19. "I see this vaccine as the beginning of the end of this craziness, and kind of an emancipation from the shackles of this virus. So, I'm excited about that."

For more information on Georgia's vaccine distribution plan, which will likely feature a firmer timeline in the coming weeks, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine>. There, people will find an active counter showing how many vaccines have been administered statewide to date.

Appointment-only COVID testing is still available at the local Health Department Monday through Friday from 8-9 a.m., so call 1-888-426-5073 to schedule an appointment.

## County Meeting...from Page 1A



**L-R: Eli, David and Debbie Phillips with Donna Howell. Debbie, her family and friends attended the December county meeting for a special recognition. Not pictured: Zoe Phillips, who was at a Fall Sports Banquet.**

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the twins were babies, we actually did a payroll in her living room with the babies in the crib. She's worked with the Library Board and the Friends of the Library.

"I can tell you right now that Debbie's work over there, it's more than dedication, it's more than duty, it's more than responsibility - she loves this community."

Continuing, Howell praised Phillips' dedication to her job, noting her willingness to think "outside the box" to assist community members in attaining "what they needed in their library."

"David and the kids have been great support," Howell said of Phillip's family. "David flew her down to South Carolina for training when the kids were little and stayed and took care of the kids so Debbie could do the bookkeeper training."

"Eli and Zoe have helped out with setting up her programs and helping with crafts and doing all kinds of things - they've literally grown up in that library. I've just always appreciated their support in giving Debbie the time and support she needed to do the job that she did."

In closing, Howell said of her good friend that "there's nobody in the world that's more honest, more diligent, or more dedicated than Debbie."

"I love her, and she loves this community," Howell said. "This community is really going to miss her, the vision that she had for that library and saw it through to fruition, being there every day to make sure that everything was done exactly right."

"We all owe her a debt. I hope she has a long, healthy, happy retirement. I'm proud to call you my friend, and I'm proud to have worked with you for 30 years."

Bradshaw presented Phillips with a plaque of appreciation, which she

gratefully accepted before making a few remarks of her own in the public meeting, emotionally highlighting what the library has meant to her over the years.

"Donna and (former MRLS Director Teresa Haymore) hired me," Phillips said. "I was actually hired in under Commissioner Jack Dayton, so I served through him, served through (Commissioner Bill Kendall), and now with Cliff, so it is a long time."

"I feel like it's just part of me - it's been half of my life. I've had really great support from my family, and as (Donna) said, my kids grew up there. I took them there from 3 months on up ... most of you all have seen them grow up."

Added Phillips, "I've enjoyed every minute. I have had a vested interest in the library. Most of us in our jobs, if we stay that long, we love what we do or we wouldn't do it ... I have loved what I do, and it is bittersweet."

"I'm going to miss my people, my workers ... I will miss a lot of things about it, miss seeing the people every day. All my life I've been involved with people, so that's going to be a little different."

Phillips said people shouldn't worry, however, that she'll be staying busy in retirement. She's always valued the library's connections with the schools, and she'll be continuing in some capacity there as her kids work their way through high school and all that encompasses.

"I do appreciate this," Phillips said of the recognition that evening. "It's been a hard thing - I'm real excited in one big part of me, and in another part, I kind of dread it. But I feel like I've done my part, and someone else will carry on."

"Now, I see where Donna was when she retired. We begged her and begged her and begged her, said 'please

don't do it.' She said she was ready, and I understand that. That's how I feel, even though I will miss it."

Hiawasee Mayor Liz Ordiales also presented Phillips with a gift in the meeting and congratulated her on retirement.

"I had the opportunity to work with Debbie, and let me tell you, no matter what I asked her to do, boom, she was there," Ordiales said. "We put out little tickets for kids to come to the movies, we put out flyers ... and she has always delivered for us."

"We had a good three-year run on the (summer movie series), and hopefully next year we might be able to do it again. And yes, I will be calling you again for that."

"Of course, we got to deal with David, the audio man, and Eli and Zoe were right there putting everything together. It's been a family affair all along, and we really appreciate it."

Phillips' library family held a retirement reception for her on Friday, Dec. 18, in which she looked back on her time at the Hiawasee facility, which received a \$1 million renovation on her watch.

"I have seen a lot of change since I started," Phillips said. "This building was 3,500 square feet, and we added 4,000, so we added more than we had."

"When it started, the shelves had a little on them, and we only had around 20 patrons a day. Since then, collections have grown, and attendance has grown. We can have upwards of 200 a day in the summer. I have seen it go from little to what it is now."

Be sure to check out next week's edition of the newspaper for the latest coverage on the Bell Mountain Park saga featuring appearances by the residents of Shake Rag Road in the December county meeting.

## Fireworks...from Page 1A

7-11 p.m.," Carrion said. "The DJ will come back on at 11 and take us into the New Year with a champagne toast at midnight."

"We will have music and dancing with a full menu, and we want people to come out and enjoy our open-air venue and have a good time. Believe it or not, with COVID-19, we are actually up in guests because everybody wants to go

to an open-air establishment to hang out."

"Things have been really good for us as one of the only open establishments in the North Georgia area, and we are happy to have all these people coming to enjoy our establishment."

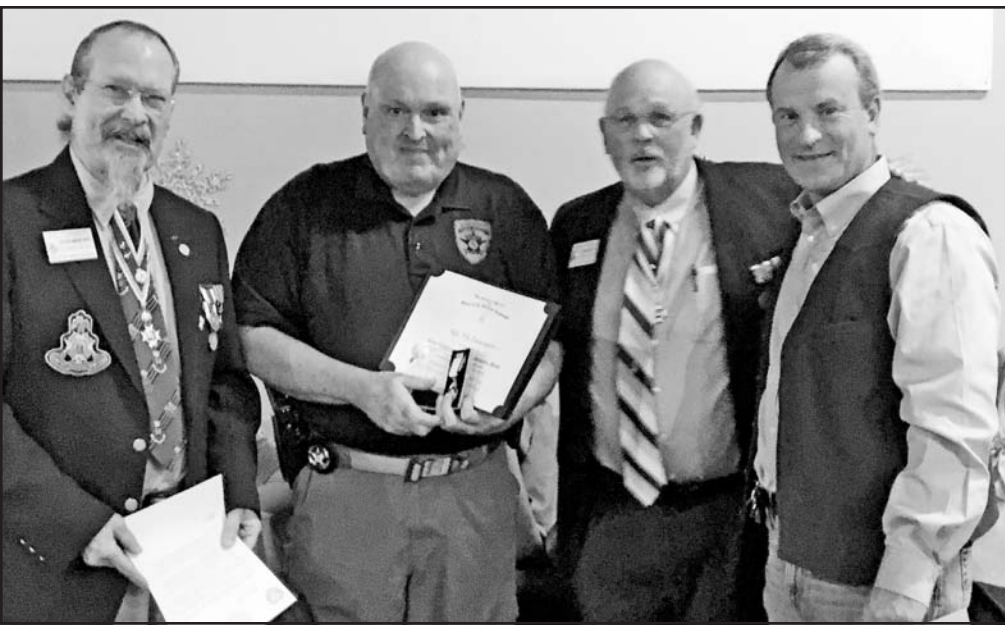
Other venues such as Brasstown Valley and The Ridges Resort are hosting

RSVP-only New Year's events and galas.

The Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce will continue to stay updated with upcoming events at [GoLakeChatuge.com](http://GoLakeChatuge.com).

For Union County, the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce is updating its list of local events at [VisitBlairsvilleGA.com](http://VisitBlairsvilleGA.com).

## Sargent J.K. Davenport receives SAR Law Enforcement Commendation Medal



**(L-R): SAR VP Sid Turner, SGT J.K. Davenport, SAR President Jared Ogden, Fannin County Sheriff Dane Kirby**

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) presented the SAR Law Enforcement Commendation Medal to Sargent J.K. Davenport of the Fannin County Sheriff's Department.

The medal is presented annually in Fannin County to recognize outstanding achievement and dedication to the maintenance of law and order. Sgt Davenport has

served in law enforcement for 24 years. Sheriff Dane Kirby described Sgt Davenport as an outstanding over-achiever, bringing closure to many victims and providing expertise in solving child abuse, narcotics, financial, theft, sex crimes, and burglary.

The SAR is open to male descendants of people who served in the American Revolutionary War or contributed to establishing the United States'

independence. The meetings are open to the public. The Society is dedicated to making the dreams of patriot ancestors a reality by preserving America's heritage, passing historical knowledge to others, and honoring patriotic acts.

For additional information about the chapter or request a speaker for your organization, contact Chapter President Jared Ogden at 770-855-0007. TD023024CA

## Christmas Snow...from Page 1A

"Several cars had skidded off the road, thankfully with no injuries. Two hours later we were moving again, slowly, slowly, and made it home safely by the grace of God."

"The lake effect created colder conditions and more snow on that mountain than at any other spot between Hiawasee and Blairsville."

Aside from religious observations, due to Christmas being a holiday, most people didn't need to drive, so fewer folks got stuck out on the roads than would have been expected other times of the winter. Of course, the county's hardworking road crews and first responders kept at it.

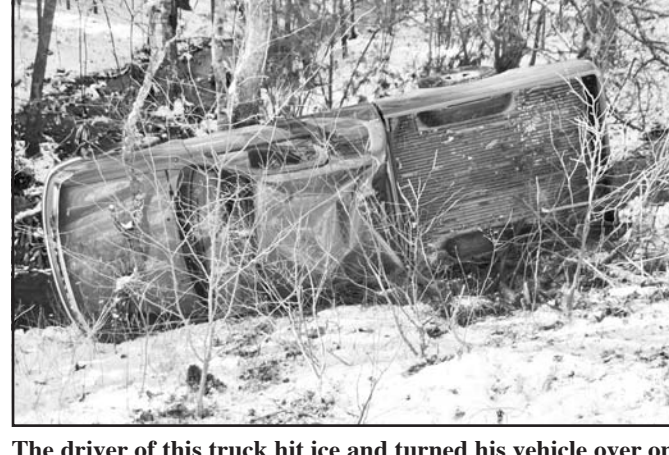
Sheriff's Deputies kept patrolling, E-911 workers kept dispatching, and Towns County ambulances kept responding, so that everything ran about as smoothly as it always does - just with snow and hazardous road conditions.

The Towns County Road Department stayed busy over much of Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and the weekend, laying a salt/gravel mixture to give people traction and make it harder for ice melted from sun exposure to refreeze.

Georgia Department of Transportation workers did a great job maintaining ice-free state roads over the weekend as well, which is crucial to keeping the mountain open for potential emergency transports.

At 25 degrees, the temperature on Christmas didn't get much higher than the low from Dec. 24, so the road remained blanketed with snow and ice for a large part of Dec. 25. It got even colder Christmas night, hitting 13 degrees and ensuring continued black ice conditions early Saturday.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said he greatly appreciated his road crew for getting out Christmas Day and over the weekend to treat



**The driver of this truck hit ice and turned his vehicle over on SR 180 near Soapstone Road Saturday. Fortunately, he's OK.**

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



**Terrible driving conditions manifested quickly the night of Christmas Eve on Swanson Mountain between Hiawasee and Young Harris.**

Photo by Roger Beal

the roadways for residents, with the only real problem countywide being the ice from the pre-snow rainy weather.

All told, it was a welcome end for 2020, in a year that has brought much hardship for

many in terms of health and the economy. Families were able to make pictures and play in the snow, giving area residents plenty of positive moments to fill the holidays ahead of 2021.