



Michael Gowder

of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, one count of conspiracy; his sister, Virginia Lou Harkins, on two counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, and one count of conspiracy.

Mike Gowder and Dr. Heaton were indicted by a Cherokee County, NC, grand jury, both for five counts of trafficking in opium or heroin, and five counts of obtaining a controlled substance by forgery, according to Cherokee County, NC, Sheriff Derrick Palmer.

Gowder and Dr. Heaton were arrested Wednesday, March 2, Sheriff Palmer said. Gowder is free on \$500,000 bond; Dr. Heaton's bond was set at \$500,000 also, Sheriff Palmer said.

Both are required to appear at an April 4 hearing in Cherokee County, NC, Superior Court, Sheriff Palmer said.

Both now are no longer associated with Union General Hospital in any capacity.

The board hired Lewis Kelley as the CEO of both Union General Hospital and Chatuge Regional Hospital, said Board Chair Patsy Efrid.

Likewise, Dr. David Gowder no longer has any association with Union General Hospital, according to Efrid.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said that the investigation remains ongoing, and that he's proud of being able to partner with so many agencies during the course of this continuing investigation.

The nine-month investigation began after Dr. David Gowder was arrested on April 1 in Blue Ridge by the Zell Miller Mountain Drug Task Force for attempting to fill fraudulent prescriptions for oxycodone 50 mg, and oxycodone 60 mg at an Ingles Pharmacy in Fannin County.

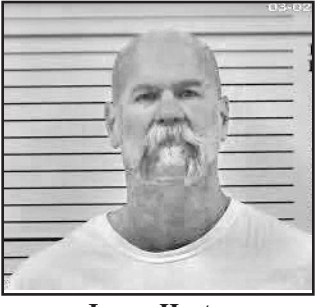
Dr. David Gowder admitted to authorities that he had written fraudulent prescriptions for pain medicine, also admitting that he suffered from a back injury a year prior and eventually became addicted to oxycodone, according to the affidavits.

That arrest led to an in-depth investigation by the Union County Sheriff's Office, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Cherokee County, NC, Sheriff's Office.

A significant part of that investigation included using search warrants at Blairsville Rite Aid, CVS, Ingles Pharmacy, Walmart Pharmacy, and Brasstown Professional Pharmacy, according to the affidavits.

The return from the search of pharmacy records led to the discovery of numerous bogus prescriptions being passed at all of the pharmacies, the affidavits show. The investigation also revealed that Mike Gowder had been getting prescriptions filled. Those prescriptions were for large doses of pain killers.

The affidavits show that Dr. David Gowder wrote prescriptions for a fictitious Albanian missionary named Cathy Bebout. The prescription was for 200 hydrocodone



James Heaton

10 mg pills, and was filled at Brasstown Pharmacy. Dr. David Gowder's sister, Lou Harkins, picked up the prescription, the affidavits show.

The address used for Bebout was 1902 Meeks Road, and investigators learned that that address belonged to Dr. David Gowder.

According to the affidavits, Harkins admitted picking up the prescription. She said she had been asked to pick up the prescription by her brother Dr. David Gowder. She paid \$139.98 for the prescription.

On Aug. 8, 2015, following his Blairsville arrest - his second arrest for passing bogus prescriptions - Dr. David Gowder voluntarily surrendered his DEA registration form, which allowed him to write prescriptions, according to the affidavits.

On Sept. 1, 2015, DEA investigators, Union County Sheriff's Capt. Chad Deyton, and Georgia Composite Medical Board officials interviewed Dr. Heaton regarding the large amount of prescriptions he'd been writing for Mike Gowder, according to the affidavits.

Dr. Heaton acknowledged that most of the prescriptions he wrote for Mike Gowder were not recorded in Mike Gowder's patient file. Dr. Heaton also prescribed pain medication for Mike Gowder's wife Gail, and his son Blake, according to the affidavits.

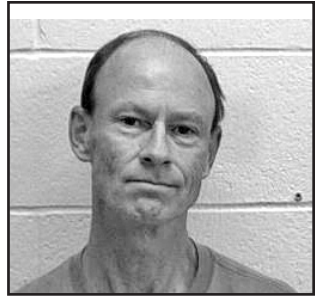
Dr. Heaton told investigators that he knew it looked bad that he didn't have the appropriate required records of prescribing to Mike Gowder, but added that he prescribed to all his other patients "by the book," according to the affidavits.

Dr. Heaton explained that Mike Gowder suffered from back pain that warranted the prescriptions he issued, and that Mike Gowder often came by his clinic after it was closed to get prescriptions, according to the affidavits.

Dr. Heaton explained to the investigators that Mike Gowder was the CEO of Union General Hospital, and that he had known him for 25 years, so he didn't think it was necessary to document Mike Gowder's visits and prescriptions, according to the affidavits.

Investigators say that from Aug. 14, 2014, to June 18, 2015, Dr. Heaton wrote 20 prescriptions for 150 oxycodone tablets per prescription, and one prescription for 40 oxycodone tablets, for a total of 3,040 doses, or pills. That's an average of 304 doses a month - later to be discovered as 319 doses per month, according to the affidavits.

DEA Diversion Agents attempted to interview Mike Gowder at Union General Hospital on Sept. 1, 2015, regarding numerous oxycodone prescriptions filled in his name that were prescribed by Dr. Heaton. Mike Gowder declined to speak with investigators without speaking to his attorney, according to the affidavits.



David Gowder

DEA Diversion Investigator Jason Allen gave Mike Gowder his card and told him to contact him when he was ready to talk. On Sept. 2, 2015, Allen received an e-mail from Mike Gowder requesting that Allen call him at a number provided. Allen called Mike Gowder and spoke with him for approximately 15 minutes, according to the affidavits.

Mike Gowder told Allen that all of the prescriptions were for a legitimate medical purpose, and that none of the pills had been diverted, meaning sold or given away. He told Allen that he knew that that was a lot of pills, but that he needed all of them for back pain, and that he had never given any to anyone, according to the affidavits.

Allen pointed out that in October 2014, Mike Gowder had filled three prescriptions for what amounted to 490 doses. Mike Gowder admitted filling those prescriptions, but insisted they were legitimate, according to the affidavits.

Allen pointed out that Mike Gowder frequently filled prescriptions in three different states. Mike Gowder told Allen that he frequently travels to Murphy, NC, and Nashville, Tenn., according to the affidavits.

Mike Gowder then told Allen that he had stopped taking opioids; he told Allen he stopped "cold turkey," adding that he had withdrawal symptoms for about a week, and that he was able to stop without taking time off from work, according to the affidavits.

From December 2011 to June 2015, Heaton prescribed 15,170 doses of opioids to Mike Gowder, the affidavits show.

Investigators say Dr. Heaton prescribed multiple prescriptions for the same or similar drugs several times a month. Investigators add that there was a pattern of Mike Gowder filling three prescriptions in three different states on a monthly basis.

Investigators say that Mike Gowder frequently had numerous lethal and toxic amount of opioids.

Investigators say they learned that Dr. Heaton received monthly checks from Union General Hospital for unknown reasons. The checks for Dr. Heaton were either hand delivered by Mike Gowder or Mike's wife, Gail Gowder.

Investigators believe Mike Gowder used Union General Hospital funds to compensate Dr. Heaton for providing illegitimate prescriptions for controlled substances, according to affidavits.

They also believe that Mike Gowder and Dr. David Gowder conspired to use their positions and authority as administrators and board members of Union General Hospital to prescribe and obtain controlled substances outside the normal course of practice, and without a legitimate medical purpose prescribed and obtained controlled substances using fraudulent prescriptions, according to affidavits.

# Two more communities are Firewise

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, March 15, The Towns County Fire Coalition met to present certifications to communities that have become "Firewise."

The Firewise moniker is given to communities that have taken steps to prepare for a wildfire threat.

Some coalition members who ordinarily attend the meetings were away on business or personal matters. Those who did come represented a cross-section of those interested in protecting their community from fire.

"We have about six citizens of Towns County and then some representatives of all of the various agencies of Towns County, including the fire department, gathered with one purpose in mind. And that is that, as a citizens group, we do what we can to educate the citizens in our county as to what being Firewise is, in our neighborhood and in our home," said Coalition President Marsha Elliot.

"That's the whole purpose of the Firewise coalition, to provide education and support to communities in the hopes that those communities in turn will do the necessary things to achieve the status of being nationally recognized as a Firewise community," she said.

Representatives of two communities were present to accept their certifications.

"We have two communities today, which now makes us a total of 20 in the county that are certified nationally as Firewise communities, and so we wanted to present them with their official signs today and so use it as an opportunity to get communities who are on the fringes of becoming Firewise," said Elliot.



At the regularly scheduled meeting on March 15, Towns County Fire Coalition presented Bell Creek Estates with an official Firewise sign.

"According to some of the statistics, there are as many as 195 communities in the county.

The definition of a community, I think, is like three or more houses that are gathered together, so this definition of a community is very broad. But there are 195 communities in Towns County. But soon we're going to be up to hopefully 25 of those larger communities. Having gone through the steps that it takes to submit all the paperwork to be Firewise communities," she said.

Jim Roberts, president of the Bell Creek Homeowners Association, accepted the Firewise sign as acknowledgment that his community has become Firewise.

Michael Courey accepted for Ridgeview Mountain community.

"We have 40 lots in our neighborhood and we have about 20 residents. We started in 2008 to have residents in the community, and it's up against a mountain, and there's trees all around us, and we want to make sure, if and when the fire does hit us, for whatever reason, then we won't suffer

the consequences of lost homes," Courey explained.

Becoming Firewise is only step one for these communities. Next on the agenda is to become Ready, Set, Go! certified. The idea is to help residents be Ready with preparedness understanding, be Set with situational awareness when fire threatens, and to Go acting early when a fire starts.

"Our focus this year is to take these existing communities and bring them up to the next level which is a program called - Ready, Set, Go! Firewise is a program that you're looking at the exterior around your house and your neighborhood and identifying those factors within your community that might be hazardous should there be a fire. So the next level is, after we've taken care of the outside and you've taken care of the community needs, and then let's look inside. Do we have smoke detectors? Do we have a plan, should there be an emergency? That's the component called Ready, Set, Go!, and that's what we're going to be offering this year to the existing Firewise communities," said Elliot.

## YHC students presented at Clemson conference

Four Young Harris College students recently presented at the conference "Aftermath: European Reactions to War, Genocide and Catastrophe in the 20th Century" hosted by the History Graduate Student Association at Clemson University on Feb. 27.

Senior art major Jacob Bennett of Ellijay, GA, senior English major Georgia Googer of Cumming, GA, junior history major Jason Edwards of Young Harris, GA, and business and public policy major Faith Bridges of Carnesville, GA, each researched and wrote a component of the paper titled "Expression of the Spanish Civil War in Art and Film: 'Guernica' and 'For Whom the Bell Tolls'."

"These four YHC students presented one of the finest programs of Clemson's graduate conference, despite being the only undergraduates whose proposal was accepted," said Associate Professor of History Thomas Stearns, Ph.D. "With clarity, skill, and polish that far surpassed those of other presenters, they and their project were the hit of the conference! I was so impressed with their hard work, dedication, and professionalism."

All four students were in enrolled in Dr. Stearns' "Film-makers and World Cinema" course last fall. Each student focused on a different aspect of an encompassing cultural



Four Young Harris College students recently presented at the graduate conference "Aftermath: European Reactions to War, Genocide and Catastrophe in the 20th Century" at Clemson University.

and historical theme. "I was able to discuss Picasso's 'Guernica' and art in general with a history professor who was in charge of moderating our panel," said Bennett. "Overall, the experience was insightful and prepared us for presentations in future academic settings."

Scholars from across disciplines were encouraged to submit proposals that explored the aftermath theme with a particular focus on global reactions to the many conflicts of the 20th and 21st Centuries and how the world responded. For the one-day conference, YHC students joined master's and Ph.D. candidates from Clemson University, University of North Carolina-Greensboro, Morgan State University, University of Buffalo, University of West Georgia, Yerevan State University and East Tennessee State University.

"It was a wonderful chance to see exactly how a graduate-level history conference operates," said Edwards, who researched the Spanish Civil War. "I really appreciate Dr. Stearns, and the History Department, for giving us the opportunity to participate in the conference."

Bridges analyzed Ernest Hemingway's novel "For Whom the Bell Tolls," while Googer researched the 1943 film adaptation of the same novel. "Participating in the conference was a wonderful experience," said Googer. "Not only was I able to research and produce work that I was interested in, but I also gained valuable practice in collaborating with others to form a cohesive panel. I am thankful for this opportunity and all that I learned; I know this experience will go on to benefit my work in graduate school and my future career as an educator."

## ICL Spring courses preview at Young Harris College

The Institute for Continuing Learning (ICL) at Young Harris College has announced a diverse array of courses for the Spring term. The Institute offers a wide range of educational opportunities for mature adults who are interested in intellectual stimulation as well as cultural enrichment and shared interests.

The Course Previews are Saturday, April 2nd at 10:30 am in the Wilson Lecture Hall of the Goolsby Building at Young Harris College. This event is open to the public. The Spring schedule has 17 courses offered, classes start the week of April 11th. The ICL Bulletin & Course Announcements are posted on the www.iclyhc.org web site. Thank you for your continued support of and participation in ICL at Young Harris College and we hope to see you at the course previews or later in class.

The following courses are being offered during the spring term: All About Color - Starts 4/11 -ZZZSleep: How to Get a Good Night's Sleep - Starts 4/11 -Spring Wildflower Ramble - Starts 4/11 -North Georgia Spring Birding - Starts 4/12 -Home Safety And Security - Starts 4/12 -Neurology For The Aging - Starts 4/13 -A

War That Changed The World - Sketches Of World War I - Starts 4/13 -Beginning Story Telling - From The Ground Up - Starts 4/14 -Greek Cooking - Starts 4/19 -Our Earth: Its Climate, History & Processes - One session only on 4/21 -Creative Writing 101 - Starts 5/5 -Cajun Cooking - Starts 5/9 -Financial Workshop - Starts 5/10 -Water Colors -Part I - Starts 5/10 -Plant Wizardry - Limit 25 - Starts 5/11 -Medicare - What Are My Options And Benefits? - Starts 5/11 -The Large Hadron Collider - Higgs And Beyond - One session only on 6/2 Individual course registration fees

## Caregivers support group

Are you caring for a spouse, parent, child, sibling, or friend who can not care for themselves or who has a chronic illness?

We Care offers just what you need! We Care is a respite and support group where you can connect with other caregivers. We meet on the first Friday of each month at Redeemer Baptist Church, 36 A Town Square. Meeting starts at 12 noon. Lunch will be provided. Please call Doug & Rebecca Collins at 706-745-2942 if you have questions.

range from \$12 to \$20 each. For more information please visit www.iclyhc.org or call 706.379.5194 email icl@yhc.edu.

## Appalachian Duplicate Bridge Club news

On Monday, March 14, four and one half tables played a Howell movement at All Saints Lutheran Church in Blairsville, GA with the following results: First, Ray Berry and Joe Wald; second, Ray Ferree and Jim Bell; third, Bobbie Mace and Harry Reynolds; and fourth; Mike and Sam Davis.

On Saint Patrick's Day, Thursday, March 17, three and one half tables were in play. Again, the Howell movement was in use. Mike Knowles and Joyce Geiger claimed first place honors. They were followed by Joe Wald and Jim Bell, second; and Sam Davis and Tom Faulconer, third.

The Appalachian Duplicate Bridge Club plays every Monday and Thursday at All Saints and would welcome any interested bridge players to join them. If you are interested, contact Dorothy Smith at (h) 706-745-1532, (c) 706-994-0497, or email, dorothy-smith772@gmail.com.

## How to Renovate Your Lawn Seminar at GMREC

Is your lawn looking a bit rough after this crazy winter? Is it suffering from a weed infestation? Just not looking its best? The Community Council of the Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center invites you to a free seminar to learn how to renovate your lawn. Planting a new lawn or renovating an existing one can be a stressful experience if you do not take proper steps. The key to avoiding frustration is to understand the process thoroughly at the outset. This seminar will prepare you to make good decisions and take the steps you need to have a lush, green lawn.



New lawn at GMREC Center

your lawn look its very best.

This seminar will be held at the Georgia Mountain Research & Education Center on Friday, March 25, from 10 AM until noon. The GMREC Center is located three miles south of Blairsville, on Hwy 19/129. No pre-registration is necessary; however, seating is limited to the first 100 in attendance.

This seminar is sponsored by the Community

Council. Since 2004, more than 8,500 adults have benefited from these seminars. The operating budget of the Community Council is funded by gifts from friends through an annual campaign. If you would like to receive seminar notices by email, send your online request, name and phone number to: gmrec@uga.edu. For questions about this seminar, call 706-745-2655. N(Mar23,21)CA

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