



UNION COUNTY COMMUNICATOR

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Byron Herbert Reece Heritage Center Groundbreaking



The groundbreaking for the Byron Reece Farm and Heritage Center was held on Wednesday, December 2 in the Jury Assembly Room of the Union County Courthouse. The ceremony was originally scheduled to be held at the Reece farm, however, the weather did not cooperate so the event was moved to the courthouse. Despite the weather, a good crowd was in attendance.



Brief History of the Farm Development

The purchase of the Reece Homeplace was initiated by James E. Mathis, Sr. on behalf of the Brasstown Bald Interpretive Association (later renamed the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Interpretive Association (COFIA) for the purpose of making it available to the US Forest Service to develop into a working farm interpretive center. Because of financial restraints within the Forest Service, this never happened. Realizing that COFIA would never have the resources to develop the farm into an interpretive center, other options were explored. Through Garland Reynolds, President of the Friends of GA State parks and Historic Sites, Burt Weerts, the director of the Department of State Parks and Historic Sites, was contacted to determine if the State might be interested in

developing the farm as a Historic Site. Bert was very much interested in the State developing the farm, and in October of 2002 a group gathered at Brasstown Valley Resort for a press conference, at which time the Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Interpretive Association presented the farm to the Department of State Parks and Historic Sites to be developed as a Historic Site perpetuating the literary and cultural legacy of Byron Herbert Reece, Georgia's greatest Appalachian poet, writer and intellect, and as a treasure to NE Georgia's history and tourism. Unfortunately state revenues decreased, causing the department to release the property back to the Interpretive Association. But as a result of our partnership with the State parks, a friends group was formed similar to other state parks like the Friends group at Vogel State Park, and Dr. John Kay, retired Young Harris

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Commissioner's Corner



We are pleased and excited to FINALLY be able to start work on the Byron Herbert Reece Heritage Center. It has been a long and sometimes discouraging process to jump through all the hoops necessary to get this project going. But I think when it is completed it will be one of the most important tourist venues in this area.

We are also pleased to report to you in this issue what has been accomplished to date with our SPLOST fund projects. Although our SPLOST funds have not been as high as originally anticipated, we still feel that we have been able to complete several important projects.

As we begin the New Year, I encourage all citizens to participate in your government by attending county meetings and letting us know your thoughts and concerns. Thank you for your support.

“This was an unexpected surprise and I am very humbled and appreciative to have been selected to receive this distinguished honor” stated Commissioner Paris.

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government..

Thomas Jefferson

County Department News

GIS Department: Recently a new Historic Sites Layer for the GIS was completed. There are 80 official Historic Sites in the County and 54 of those are old schools. Also, building photos and new 911 addresses are still being added to the new Building Footprint Layer. Currently about 4,200 of the 27,243 buildings in the County are completed. This project will take some time to complete and should be very helpful to our Public Safety personnel once completed. Another project coming soon will be smartphone access to the GIS for county employees. A new submeter GPS receiver has been recently acquired for gathering data for the GIS.

Commissioner’s Office: Commissioner Paris was recently selected by Georgia Mountains Regional Commission as Elected Official of the year. This selection is made by the GMRC staff. Chairman Stovall said, “Paris is an excellent example of an outstanding public servant.” “He exemplifies what I think our communities look for in a leader in their respective cities and counties” added Ex-

ecutive Director Danny Lewis at the GMRC Annual Meeting held in Dillard.



Commissioner Paris stated, “This was an unexpected surprise and I am very humbled and appreciative to have been selected to receive this distinguished honor.”



Meeks Park: A new playground for toddlers has been added at Meeks Park. It is located next to the existing playground.



Pictured here enjoying the new play equipment are Nathan and Eli Waters, grandsons of Peggy Deyton who works in the Commissioner’s Office.



County Meeting Schedule for 2010

The Union County Commission holds its regular scheduled meetings on the third Thursday of each month. All meetings are held at 6:00 p.m. in the Union County Courthouse, 114 Courthouse Street, Blairsville, GA.

The dates for 2010 are as follows:

January 21	February 18	March 18	April 15	May 20
June 17	July 15	August 19	September 16	October 21
November 18	December 16			

Meetings are open to the public. We encourage you to attend and participate in your government.



Around the County

North Georgia Network Receives \$33 Million for Broadband



North Georgia Network Cooperative (NGN) has been awarded more than \$33 million in federal stimulus funds to construct an ultra-high speed fiber optic network throughout northeast Georgia. NGN is a new nonprofit cooperative organized by county development authorities, North Georgia College and State University, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and Habersham EMC to improve services available to business and residential consumers throughout the region. Governor Perdue and Vice President Joe Biden traveled to Dawsonville to make the announcement



of the award. Pictured above is Commissioner Lamar Paris with Vice President Joe Biden and below is Development Authority Executive Director Mitch Griggs with

Sonny Perdue.

Kiwanis Learns About the 2010 Census



Antonio Flores, Partnership Specialist with the Census Bureau, was the spokesperson who presented the program to the Kiwanis at their regular meeting on December 21. Also in attendance were Commissioner Paris, Peggy Deyton with the Commissioner's Office, John and Bea Nishimuta, Complete Count Committee, and Juanita Crake, Partnership Specialist with the Census Bureau.

The census will determine how \$300 billion will be allocated to the States, and areas within the States. In the 2000 census only 56% of Union County responded to the census. The non-counts will cost Union County \$1500—\$2000 per year per non-count for the next 10 years. There are a number of reasons why the response rate is low. There is distrust of the Government, and hard to count subcommunities. The challenges to the Complete Count Committee are how to account for 1) renters in low income neighborhoods, 2) younger people who are more mobile 3) homeless and 4) multigenerational families.

Immigration status is not an issue for the Census. The Census Bureau is recruiting workers for the 2010 Census. They advertise that you can earn good pay, get paid weekly, work flexible hours, receive paid training, receive reimbursement for authorized mileage and other work-related expenses, and help your community have a successful 2010 Census. More information is available at www.2010censusjobs.gov or call toll-free 1-866-861-2010.

SPLOST Projects Update

We continue to do road work and have just completed hauling over 6000 tons (300+ truck loads) of mudhole gravel. This used to be funded by the State of Georgia GDOT, but because of their shortfall, we have had to pick up this expense this year.

- We have also hauled over 1300 loads of dirt to the new Farmer's Market site. We will soon begin construction on the two sheds and pavilion. With some grant funding we are hoping for, we may be able to build a new canning plant. At a minimum, we plan on having the new Farmer's Market ready for the upcoming crop season.

- We will also soon be widening parts of Old Smokey Rd. and straightening out a curve near the Farmer's Market and will hopefully pave this road in the next year or two. We also hope to be able to build a roof over the horse arena this spring. Once we have some issues straightened out with TVA easements, we hope to begin work there soon.

- We are still going through the red tape required with USDA in applying for loan funds for the new multi-function community building at the Golf Course. We anticipate this will be delayed for six months at least without some miracle to help with Federal Government requirements.

- The Suches Community Center is almost complete. We took down the "old gym" at Woody Gap School, rebuilt it across the highway, and have added two community meeting rooms/small library and gym/recreation area that should be a tremendous asset to that community.

- The new bridge and trail at Meeks Park is being held up by the weather, but should be ready by spring. We have now completed work at the Civic Center and the adjacent parking lot and it is being used now. The new parking lot is completed and being utilized at the "Rubber Floor" (Old Middle School) Gym and Recreation Dept offices. You will be surprised at the changes.

The new library addition will begin probably in late spring when it will be put out to bid. It is being partially funded by SPLOST (\$900,000) and partially with a grant from Governor Perdue and the Legislature for \$ 1.6 million. In the spring we will begin some new paving projects and hopefully, despite the dismal economy, Union County citizens will see a lot of progress going on in our community in 2010.

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Because of the combined grass roots support of all the groups and individuals of northeast Georgia, both public and private, this educational, cultural, historic and tourist venue is now coming to reality.

Byron Herbert Reece History continued

College professor, was recruited to organize the Byron Herbert Reece Society. This Society began functioning in July 2003 with Dr. Kay as its chair. The need now was to find an owner/developer of the farm.

Dr. Kay appointed a Farm Development Committee, chaired by Fleming Weaver, and this group developed a plan to move forward with the development of the farm venue. It was determined that if the Interpretive Association donated the property to Union County and they in turn leased it to the Reece Society through the County development Authority for a period of fifty years, we would be able to apply for and receive state and federal monies through the Union County ownership as well as private funds through the Reece Society. Lamar Paris, Union County Commissioner and Vice Chair of the Reece Society, agreed to and enthusiastically supported this arrangement.

This proposal was approved by COFIA, and on June 5, 2004 at an on site ceremony, the property was deeded to Union County and a fifty year lease was granted to the Byron Herbert Reece Society.

The services of Garland Reynolds, FAIA, of Reynolds Architects of Gainesville, GA were engaged as the board approved architect, and he designed the Reece Farm Venue that was also approved by the Reece Society Board of Directors. A Master Plan was established.

Donations and improvements to date include: First, the donation of the property by COFIA and a small house and land located at the entrance of the property by a relative of the Reece family. Additionally, \$50,000 from United Community bank in Blairsville, GA, a major in-kind donation by Union County to clear the land of its major undergrowth and other services resulting in over 3,000 person hours; the pro bono services of both architectural and civil engineering work to date; the construction of the working entrance to the farm by Georgia DOT; the relocation of the power lines by Blue Ridge Mountains EMC that cross the entire length of the farm; the countless hours provided by the Georgia Mountains Regional Development Center in grant development services.

In addition to donations, the Reece Farm Development has been successful through the efforts of John Philips of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, in securing a \$50,000 matching grant from the Appalachian Region Commission. This grant money and the match has been used for the restoration of the three historic barns located on the property, and they will house the interpretive setting for the Appalachian Farm Culture found in the Georgia mountains in the early 1900's. We have also received a second ARC grant for \$50,000 which will be used for the design and implementation of the Educational Exhibits for the farm buildings. The design phase has been completed and the implementation phase will begin when we have a caretaker on site for security.

Union County has been successful in securing a Georgia Department of Transportation, Transportation Enhancement Grant in the amount of \$671,000 with a 25 percent match required and a One Georgia Grant for \$175,000 designated for the renovation of the Visitors Center. Now that GDOT has approved our site plan, these two grants can be accessed and the contract has been let to begin immediate construction.

Because of the combined grass roots support of ALL the groups and individuals of northeast Georgia, both public and private, this educational, cultural, historic and tourist venue is now coming to reality.

