

Physicians...from Page 1A

a family practice clinic in Blairsville.

Mike Gowder and Dr. David Gowder allegedly conspired together to illegally obtain oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam.

Dr. David Gowder unlawfully obtained these controlled substances from patients that he treated at the hospital. He also illegally issued prescriptions for oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam in the names of his and Mike Gowder's family members, existing hospital patients, and fictitious patients.

The prescriptions were issued outside the usual course of professional practice, and Mike Gowder and Dr. David Gowder knew the drugs obtained with the prescriptions were not intended for the persons for whom the prescriptions were allegedly written.

The drugs obtained with the illegal prescriptions were not for any legitimate medical purpose.

Dr. David Gowder would direct Union General Hospital employees to fill the prescriptions at local pharmacies. He would provide cash to the employees to pay for the drugs and would direct the employees to return the drugs they obtained to him.

Mike Gowder used his position as the chief administrator at Union General Hospital to fire hospital employees who tried to expose Dr. David Gowder's illegal prescribing and obtaining of oxycodone, hydrocodone and alprazolam. He also used his position to intimidate other employees into concealing Dr. David Gowder's unlawful acquisition of controlled substances.

Between April 2013 and April 2015, Dr. David Gowder issued at least 19 illegal prescriptions for oxycodone pills, 21 illegal prescriptions for hydrocodone pills, and five illegal prescriptions for alprazolam pills, including by forging the names of other physicians.

Dr. Heaton illegally prescribed oxycodone and

other controlled substances to Mike Gowder, Mike Gowder's family members, and others, knowing that the prescriptions were issued outside the usual course of professional practice and that the pills obtained with the prescriptions had no legitimate medical purpose.

Dr. Heaton violated standards of medical practice by prescribing thousands of doses of oxycodone and other controlled substances to Mike Gowder, Mike Gowder's family members, and others without adequately documenting the medical need for the prescriptions in patient files and without monitoring patient abuse of the pills they obtained.

Mike Gowder obtained oxycodone by fraud, subterfuge and deception by filling the illegal prescriptions that Dr. Heaton issued for oxycodone at different pharmacies in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina in an effort to conceal the large numbers of oxycodone pills that Dr. Heaton was prescribing to him.

Between May 1, 2013, and June 16, 2015, Dr. Heaton wrote at least 74 illegal prescriptions for oxycodone to Mike Gowder.

In addition to filling the prescriptions at pharmacies in Georgia, Mike Gowder often travelled to North Carolina and Tennessee to fill multiple prescriptions at a month at pharmacies in those states.

On multiple occasions, Dr. Heaton wrote two prescriptions for oxycodone for Mike Gowder on the same day. On other occasions, Mike Gowder would travel to North Carolina to fill one prescription and Tennessee to fill the second prescription to conceal the fact that multiple prescriptions were written to him on the same day.

Oxycodone and hydrocodone are powerful pain medications that are listed as controlled substances under federal law because each has a high potential for psychological and physical abuse and dependence.

Oxycodone, which

may be combined with acetaminophen, is sold generically under brand names including Percocet, Endocet, Oxycontin and Roxicodone.

Hydrocodone is sold generically or under brand names including Lortab, Vicodin and Norco.

Alprazolam is commonly prescribed to treat anxiety. It is sold generically and under the brand name Xanax.

John Michael Gowder, 60, Dr. David Gowder, 61, and Dr. James Heaton, 61, all of Blairsville, are expected to be arraigned April 9, 2018, at the federal courthouse in Gainesville.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment only contains charges. The defendants are presumed innocent of the charges, and it will be the government's burden to prove each defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by the Drug Enforcement Administration, and members of the Union County Sheriff's Office, Cherokee County (North Carolina) Sheriff's Office, Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, and Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task Force.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys William L. McKinnon Jr. and Laurel R. Boatright are prosecuting the case.

The North Georgia News and Towns County Herald reached out to Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley following the April 6 federal indictment announcement.

Langley's office presented evidence last year for the local indictment of Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton, and the district attorney has been in contact with U.S. Attorney Pak.

"We're going to work closely with the federal prosecutors as they work their case and we work our cases," said Langley. "They are not mutually exclusive. Both cases can be prosecuted. But certainly, we're going to coordinate our work with the federal prosecutors."

Tallent...from Page 1A

of community-focused banks offering a wide variety of financial services to customers in four states.

"Money's the same color at all banks, interest rates are about the same," said Tallent. "It all boils down to people and the service."

"And I'm just so proud of our people, the passion they have in treating our customers the way that they would want to be treated, with a servant heart in a service business. That's critical to the success."

As Tallent points out, UCBI has succeeded in maintaining a three-way balancing act between investors who put their money and faith in the company, the 2,100 employees who work for the bank to carry out its customer-forward mission, and the customers themselves, who make it all possible by utilizing the bank's many services.

"My life has been richly blessed by the people that I've had the great fortune to work with and get to know over this long ride," said Tallent.

From here, UCBI will forge ahead with its community-focused business model, with aims to continue investing in growth markets and offering specialized lending lines, all while paying close attention to mobile and online banking trends.

Today, more than 150,000 UCBI banking customers are enrolled in online banking, up 14 percent from a year ago, while online and mobile banking usage is up 63 percent year-to-date.

United has invested about \$2 million in mobile banking technology in the last year alone, as the trend of online banking continues to skyrocket.

Alongside news of Tallent's retirement, UCBI announced on April 2 that Lynn Harton, president and

CEO of United's banking subsidiary, will be filling Tallent's considerable shoes as CEO of the publically traded holding company following his retirement in June.

United Community Banks, Inc. announces CEO Succession Plan

United Community Banks, Inc. (NASDAQ:UCBI) (United) announced today that, after almost 35 years of service, its Chief Executive Officer, Jimmy Tallent, will retire from his current position effective June 30, 2018. Mr. Tallent will move into a new role as Executive Chairman of United's Board of Directors. Lynn Harton, President and CEO of United's banking subsidiary, will become CEO of United. As Executive Chairman, Mr. Tallent will continue to focus on board governance, strategic planning, and corporate development.

Mr. Tallent has been with United since 1984. Under his dedicated stewardship, it has expanded from a single location with \$40 million in assets to a four-state regional community bank with \$12.3 billion in assets. Mr. Tallent's strategic vision and commitment to culture and corporate responsibility have been instrumental in United's success.

"I have been committed to seeing United become a market leading institution and regain the strength we have enjoyed for decades. Today, the Bank is thriving and it has one of the most capable management teams in the industry. Lynn has done an excellent job as Chief Executive Officer of the Bank, and the time is right for me to reduce my role," said Mr. Tallent. "I am grateful to the shareholders, the management team, and the Board of Directors for their confidence in me and proud of what we

"My No. 1 priority will be to assist Lynn in any way that I can, to help him in any way that I can," said Tallent on his upcoming role as UCBI board chair.



Lynn Harton have accomplished together. The future is bright for United and I look forward to serving in my new role as Executive Chairman."

"I am honored to lead this organization into its next chapter," said Harton. "We have a solid foundation, and are well-positioned for continued growth and success. It has been an honor to work alongside Jimmy for the past several years, and I look forward to continuing to serve United together in our new roles."

Harton was named CEO of United Community Bank in August 2017 and was elected to the Board of Directors in February 2015. Prior to joining United in 2012, Harton served in executive capacities with various financial institutions. These include serving as CEO of The South Financial Group, and Chief Credit Officer for both Regions Financial Corporation and Union Planters Corporation. He began his career with a twenty-year stint at BB&T. (April 27/18) CA

Moore...from Page 1A

"Primarily local large landowners in the Brasstown Creek Watershed area were concerned about a decline in fishing," said Moore. "Some of them have been there their whole lives and fished it as kids, and all of a sudden they were not able to catch those large fish like they used to."

The local landowners went to the soil and conservation departments in the four surrounding counties in the early 1990s to ask for help with the water pollution issues in the Brasstown Creek area.

"It was very difficult for those agencies to address the problems of Brasstown Creek because this watershed covers all these political boundaries," said Moore. "Excess sedimentation and bank erosion was destroying this spawning habitat and causing the water to be muddy, and fish get their oxygen through their gills."

"So, these were the problems, and we had to have grants and money to fix these problems and recover the fish population."

The coalition was officially formed in 1995 with a mission "to sustain good water quality

in streams, lakes and rivers that flow into the Hiwassee River," according to HRWC.net.

"Our first grant was from



Photo by Mark Novak
Callie Moore is the executive director of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition.

North Carolina Clean Water Trust Fund, and it was \$2.1 million for Brasstown Creek," said Moore. "Today, that stream is no longer impaired."

The HRWC grew from working on Brasstown Creek to working on all the other watersheds in the four counties that needed to be cleaned up.

Over the last 20 years, the HRWC has brought in grants totaling more than \$7.5 million to assist the Hiwassee River Watershed, and the coalition now has over 400 members and 80 active volunteers.

Approximately 93 percent of the funds have been spent for on-the-ground projects

and programs to facilitate water quality improvements in areas where it has declined, and less than 7 percent has gone to cover coalition operating costs, according to HRWC.net.

J.C. Berrong also spoke to the group about Operation Clean Sweep, which will be running from April 16 to April 21 in Towns County. Volunteers are needed to clean up debris from the roadways.

Also in the meeting, Syler Church, the Second-Place finisher in the 2018 Top of Georgia Speech Contest, delivered his award-winning speech about breaking out of one's comfort zone.

Water Leak...from Page 1A

something called an isolation valve, which will allow for crews to fix the leak with minimal interruption of water service.

The city believes the leak is in a pipe running off the main, but if workers dig deep under the road to fix it without plans to install an isolation valve, they could have a big water nightmare on their hands right next to a major highway at US 76.

"It's the pipe that goes under and across the road, feeds the old fire station, goes up, feeds the carwash, Gibson's Restaurant, the one behind there and another couple places," said Willer of the leak.

Willer came up with three quotes for the installation of the valve, which will require a special crew to come out and install the valve while the water line is live. The quotes were \$4,800, \$5,800 and \$6,000.

"Everybody agrees we need this valve put in so that they can not just fix this, but if there's problems in the future, they don't have to turn off everybody's water," said Mayor Gibby. "That's businesses as well as residential."

Mayor Gibby recommended that the city do a little more research into the quotes, and the city council authorized her to contract for the repair up to \$6,000, to allow the city to get started on the project when the research is complete.

In other business, the council approved a sign permit for the Living Word Revival Center, which is the church that is renting out the old Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Headquarters



Photo by Shawn Jarrard
Young Harris City Councilmembers Jared Champion, center, and Matt Miller in their April 3 regular meeting.

in Young Harris.

The mayor said that she would be sitting down soon with the EMC general manager and one or two of the directors to discuss options around doing something long term with the old headquarters.

A representative of Boyd Management, which runs Young Harris Apartments, attended the April 3 meeting to ask the city to reconsider the water rate for the apartments.

The apartment complex, which houses 14 families according to Boyd Management, operates on a single 4-inch water meter.

Back when the building was developed, the developer asked for the 4-inch water meter instead of the 2-inch water meter. In years past, the city didn't have a separate rate for 4-inch water meters, so the apartments enjoyed the 2-inch rate.

However, when the new water/sewer rate schedule went into effect last year, it incorporated a new rate for 4-inch meters, and Boyd Management told the city on April 3 that it cannot afford the new rates.

The apartments are coded RD 515, for "affordable multifamily rental housing for

very low, low, and moderate-income families, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities," per HUD.gov.

As it stands, residents are looking at water/sewer bills totaling more than \$100 a month, and the rep from Boyd Management said the company was afraid of losing the property.

The city council agreed that evening to convene its water committee to evaluate options and conduct research ahead of the May council meeting.

One possible solution to the problem was a proposed new rate for 4-inch residential water meters, though the mayor advised caution due to the number of legal factors surrounding the establishment of water rates.

"We can't just set rates willy-nilly," said Mayor Gibby. "It's not allowed and it's actually illegal."

Added the mayor: "We're going to have to contact our engineering firm and let them weigh in on this. We're going to have to contact our attorney and let him weigh in on this. And we're probably going to have to contact USDA and get them to weigh in on this."

Drug Arrests...from Page 1A

said Mayor Ordiales. "She will just manage that through GMA."

Guest speaker J.C. Berrong was on hand to address the city council on the upcoming "Operation Clean Sweep."

Operation Clean Sweep will run April 16 through April 21, and Berrong is asking that the community get together and volunteer to pick up trash from the sides of the roadways.

"We go down our city and county roads and we see a lot of debris on the sides of the roads," said Berrong. "We see a lot of plastic bags, a lot of it is (food) wrappers and a lot of it is cigarette wrappers and packs."

Added Berrong: "We are most interested in everybody to participate in this. The mayor has agreed to pick up all the city streets."

Contact J.C. Berrong to participate in Operation Clean Sweep, and to find out when the pizza will be served as the operation closes out, his phone

number is (706) 781-8366.

Gloves, bags and safety vests are available at the Towns County Courthouse and the city halls of both Hiwassee and Young Harris.

The motion to approve a contract with Greg Fender to oversee the right of way management for franchise fee collections was unanimously approved.

"That is to make sure we are collecting the franchise fees, not just from Blue Ridge EMC, but any franchise fee that is due to us," said Ordiales. "It's \$1,000 a year like we discussed at the work session, and I think at least for the first couple of years it's probably a good investment for us."

Councilmembers also voted to approve Randy Day as the local issuing authority for the Georgia Environmental Protection Division.

Day will be inspecting building projects to make sure that builders and construction companies are not harming the



Photo by Mark Novak
The Hiwassee City Council and Mayor Ordiales on April 3.

environment.

"I think that is important, because he is there Day One, versus if we wait until something happens, we're way too far into the problem," said Ordiales. "He's already licensed and insured and everything else, and the only increase will be, per permit, 5 or 10 percent of the permit, and we're not making any money on them anyway, so it's the way to go."

Added Ordiales: "I met

with the EPD lady, and she was very nice. And the handbook I can show you is a three-ring binder and at least 400 pages of things you have to look for, and we don't want to get into that."

The Hiwassee City Council will meet at city hall on April 12 for a work session dedicated to discussing the ServLine water leak insurance. The meeting will begin at 6 p.m.

4-H members selling Vidalia onions



programming for the students in the 4-H program; such as camp, educational trips, community service outreach, and public speaking competitions.

An online order form can be found at www.facebook.com/Townscounty4h. You can also visit or call the Towns County Extension office to place an order at 67 Lakeview Circle, 706-896-2024.

Order deadline is April 30th and delivery will be around the second week of May! These onions will be fresh off the farm from South Georgia; do not miss out on being a part of this great fundraiser!

Spring is in the air and that means cookouts are right around the corner! Be sure to be the talk of the neighborhood with the freshest sweet Vidalia onions around!

The Towns County 4-H program is selling 10 lb. bags of Vidalia Onions for \$10 each. Proceeds go to help fund