

# Union County Gun Club becomes reality in sheriff's meeting

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It's official – the Union County Gun Club has been formed.

The club sprang to life quickly last week, resulting from the interest of more than 200 people who attended an informal meeting held by Union County Sheriff Mack Mason on Monday, July 10, at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center.

In that meeting, which followed a Weapons Carry Class conducted by the sheriff's office, the sheriff put out a call

See Gun Club, Page 3A



Hiawasse attorney Russell Stookey and Union County Sheriff Mack Mason. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

## Gun Club...continued from Page 1A

for residents to support the formation of a local gun club and shooting range, and the members of the public who gathered that evening answered his call with resounding action.

Together, those in attendance took the first step in organizing the club by voting to name it the Union County Gun Club, as suggested by Sheriff Mason, and they also donated more than \$1,600 in cash toward getting the club going.

Union County has never had a gun club or range for residents to practice shooting, meaning gun owners either must shoot on their own property or travel to another community to shoot at a non-local range.

Even local law enforcement must rely on private property owners donating the use of their land for shooting practice, which is necessary because UCSO and Blairsville PD peace officers are required by the state to requalify with duty weapons annually.

With the formation of the Union County Gun Club, however, all of that is likely to change in the foreseeable future.

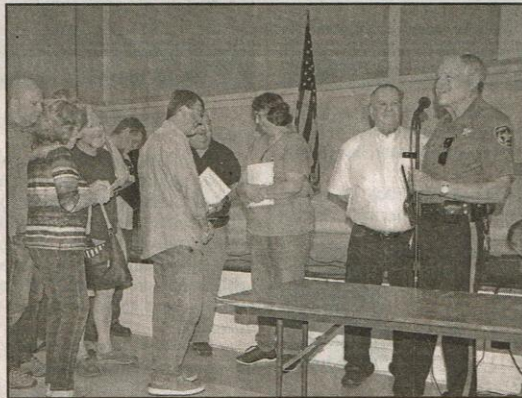
Sheriff Mason, who vowed to be a spokesman for the club, is heartened by the response he's seen already by more than 200 members of the public.

"We can talk all we want to – with action, we'll get things done," said Sheriff Mason. "We're beyond the talking, now. We've got action going. I want to thank everyone who attended the meeting to start the gun club."

Within 72 hours of the July 10 meeting, the club had acquired an IRS number and attained LLC status thanks to the pro bono legal work of Hiawasse attorney Russell Stookey.

Furthermore, the club took on volunteers that evening to serve as a temporary board, which is working in the short term to shore up the framework of the club.

This board is currently engaged in getting a bank account set up for donations and membership fees, establishing bylaws and rules for the club, and setting up regular communications with gun club members.



The sheriff standing alongside volunteers to make up the Union County Gun Club Board. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Moving forward, the most immediate goal of the gun club will be to secure enough flat land for a shooting range geared toward pistol and long-range shooting, and the board is weighing several options.

"We've got just about everything we need to get this off the ground, and we just now need the terra firma to make it all come together," said Paul Clark, who was voted chairman of the gun club board the night of the big community meeting.

Initially suggested by the sheriff, the club is exploring the possibility of entering into a land-lease agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, since a significant percentage of Union County land – some 47.4 percent, or 97,866 acres/153 square miles – is under Forest Service control.

This would, in effect, allow people to shoot on land that already belongs to everyone, explained Sheriff Mason, as Forest Service land belongs to the federal government, which in turn belongs to the people.

The board is also considering and welcoming of any private land donations from interested philanthropic residents of the county, and has expressed interest in purchasing or leasing private land if other options remain unavailable.

Funds for land purchases or leases would come from money raised through membership fees and donations made to the club, though the club is also investigating whether SPLOST funds might be available for the

venture.

The board would also welcome smaller land donations that could be used to establish separate sites for distinct types of shooting, such as a site for pistol shooting and a site for long range shooting.

And Sheriff Mason sees the gun club as a way for residents to put their right to bear arms into practice.

"We're supporters of the Second Amendment, supporters of people's right to have and bear arms, the right of the people to defend themselves," said Sheriff Mason. "When you punch 911, law enforcement will come, but their own bullets will get there faster."

"You need to be able to defend yourself. What do you want? Do you want to be able to defend yourself or do you want to be at some thug's mercy? I encourage every law-abiding citizen that wants a firearm to have one and be proficient in the use thereof."

In attendance for the meeting were dozens of veterans, as well as members of the Northeast Georgia Friends of the NRA and the North Georgia Chapter of The Well Armed Woman, and a representative of the NRA's Women on Target gun clinic.

For more information or to become involved, contact the Union County Gun Club at P.O. Box 442, Blairsville, GA 30514, or reach out to Sheriff Mack Mason at [sheriffmason@unioncountysoga.org](mailto:sheriffmason@unioncountysoga.org).