

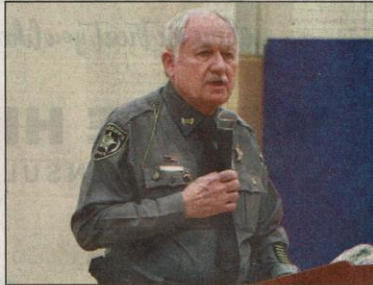
# Gun Club annual meeting draws over 300 people

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The Union County Gun Club held its first annual meeting in two years on Thursday, March 3, at the Union County Sports Center. Last year's annual meeting was cancelled due to pandemic concerns.

A crowd of about 300 folks turned out for the meeting, which featured a healthy mix of longtime members and new signups that evening. It was an expectant occasion, with everyone anxious to hear news about the ongoing development of a dedicated local place to safely practice shooting.

After all, people have been patiently waiting for nearly five years for the county to realize the construction of



Sheriff Mack Mason was pleased with the turnout of the Union County Gun Club's annual meeting last week, as were Gun Club Board Members.

Photo by Mark Smith

a modern target range, as it has been a long and arduous process wading through all the legalities associated with siting a gun range on U.S.

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The Sports Center proved to be an excellent venue to accommodate the more than 300 attendees of the March 3 Gun Club annual meeting.

Photo by Mark Smith

Forest Service land.

Add to that pandemic delays, a dynamic funding process, skyrocketing construction costs and supply chain issues, and it all combines to form a recipe for frustration on the part of Gun Club members, many of whom have been faithfully paying dues since the club's inception in July '17.

But at long last, as America begins to level out after the bumpy ride of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Gun Club is finally at the point where the construction of a modern target range is in sight.

The target range will be 90% funded through a Georgia Department of Natural Resources grant consisting of passthrough federal monies authorized by the 1937 Pittman-Robertson Act, which is based on excise taxes collected through sales of firearms, archery equipment and ammunition.

It is in this way that hunters and other firearms enthusiasts pay their own way for the construction of target range facilities.

In May 2020, President Donald Trump signed the Target Practice and Marksmanship Training Support Act into law, amending the Pittman-Robertson Act to allow states five years instead of two to generate matching funds, and reducing the local match requirement from 25% to 10%.

This is a huge benefit to Union County residents and taxpayers, who will save big time due to the updated funding model.

"We now feel the (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program should be able to process and approve the project grant amendment (increasing funding to 90%) in (four weeks or less)," Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said in the meeting.

"In the meantime, we will be waiting on the new updated intergovernmental agreement from (Assistant Chief of Game Management) Walter Lane of DNR. Once we have that document and the new grant award letter, my office is ready to put the project back out to bid.

"The timeline for that looks like mid-April at the latest, and hopefully (we will) begin construction soon thereafter."

The first bid process was derailed for a couple of reasons, including the pandemic delay, and the fact that construction materials and fuel costs rose significantly between the time of the original construction estimate and receipt of the single bid last year.

So, it was back to the drawing board, but Gun Club President Paul Clark said that this time around the county will be proactively seeking out bidders rather than simply waiting for responses after publishing the request for proposals in the legal organ.

Lane will be including a new cost estimate of \$3.4 million in the updated intergovernmental agreement, which, with a 10% local match, should leave the county on the hook for just \$340,000 in construction costs if no other funding sources come in — well under the \$600,000 originally budgeted for the project.

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason is the unofficial spokesperson and political

liaison for the club, and he spoke at length in the meeting, reiterating why the county needs a target range and praising everyone who has "stuck to their guns" throughout this long, drawn-out process.

To name just a few reasons, resident firearms owners need a safe place to be able to target shoot; there needs to be a safe place to train people who want to learn to shoot; the Sheriff's Office needs a qualification range; and, hopefully, fewer people will "go out into the woods" and discharge firearms indiscriminately.

Mason also announced that, once again, the Sheriff's Office will be holding a Concealed Carry Class this summer, to last about an hour and a half. The popular class will take place sometime after July 1 to account for any updates in state laws made during the current legislative session.

This class is vitally important because it will instruct people when deadly force is called for and when it is not, and that, said Mason, can keep someone from doing something illegal and going to prison for the rest of their life.

For more information on the Concealed Carry Class, call the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066.

Top Gun Firearms, which opened its doors in 2021 in Blairsville, donated a Radical Firearms AR-15 rifle that was raffled off at the close of the meeting.