

# North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, June 22, 2022

## Blairsville Pro Rodeo ropes in family-friendly fun

By **Jeremy Foster**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

"Ride 'em cowboys" and "cowgirls" is a famous saying for horse and bull riders, and spectators at the Union County Saddle Club Arena certainly got their fill of both this past weekend during the 11th Annual Blairsville Pro Rodeo.

It was the rodeo's biggest turnout yet, with attendees and contestants enjoying each moment of the family-friendly action June 17-18, making along the June 17-18, making riding, bronc bucking, calf roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing and other memories of the classic American pastime.

Aside from the different categories of competition, folks also took part in a plethora of other activities, from jump

houses to pony riding and mechanical bull riding, plus many great food, arts and craft vendor opportunities.

Miller is the Rodeo Chairperson for the Saddle Club. After retiring with 25 years of service in the Palm Beach County Fire Department of Florida, he moved to Blairsville nearly 20 years ago with a plan to work with horses, just as he did since he was a little kid.

"This is one of our biggest fundraisers of the year for the Saddle Club, and we love giving back to great causes through charities such as cancer societies and others," Miller said. "We especially love putting on this event as a way to give back to the people of our area who aid in our infrastructure and support our economy, and it just brings everyone in our community together."

Palmer Dernel performed the National Anthem as local first responders took part in a flag-folding ceremony, after which the rodeo got underway with all the daring acts of bravery, athleticism and

skilled precision of contestants attempting to tame the animals of the Wild West.

Event Coordinator Art Miller is the Rodeo Chairperson for the Saddle Club. After retiring with 25 years of service in the Palm Beach County Fire Department of Florida, he moved to Blairsville nearly 20 years ago with a plan to work with horses, just as he did since he was a little kid.

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See Blairsville Rodeo, Page 6A



Always the most anticipated event, bull riding was once again a packed spectacle for guests of the 11th Annual Blairsville Pro Rodeo over the weekend.

Photo/Alysia Hargus Photography

## Paris approves gun range contract, roundabout grant

By **Mark Smith**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Nearly five years on from the initial effort to secure a local gun range, a contract to build the Union County Shooting Range was officially awarded to Milestone Construction, LLC in the June 16 monthly meeting of Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

The Union County Gun Club formed in July 2017 to kick start the search for a location within the county to host a shooting range, and the project faced a number of hurdles over the years before finally gaining



Lamar Paris  
Sole Commissioner  
approval and funding. "I hereby give this notice of award for a contract

dated June 16, 2022, for construction of the Union County Gun Range Project to Milestone Construction, LLC, in the amount of \$3.78 million," Paris said. "The only other bid was from Charles Black Construction Company in the amount of \$4.894 million.

"Approximately 90% of this bid price will be paid by grant funds, thank goodness. We hope this project can begin sometime in September."

So, the Union County Shooting Range is finally ready for the kickoff and, if all goes according to plan, the Athens-based general contractor

See County Meeting, Page 2A

## Local GOP hosts patriotic Flag Day at Meeks Park

By **Brittany Holbrooks**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Although organized by the Union County GOP, the June 14 Flag Day Celebration in Meeks Park was a patriotic nonpartisan event meant for the enjoyment of all, young and old, Republican and Democrat alike.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris also took part in the celebration. He held the microphone for a moment, using the time to express his gratitude for a community united by a singular, nonpartisan goal – honoring the American flag, and by extension, the country.

"Yes, there's a few issues going around that everybody doesn't agree with everything, but overall, it's a great country, a great community, a great county, and we appreciate what



A member of the North Georgia Honor Guard salutes the American flag during the June 14 celebration of Flag Day by the Union County GOP.

Photo/Submitted

all of y'all are doing," Paris said. "By being here, you're certainly showing your support for our community and our

American flag." Guests had a few minutes before the official start to scope

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## Resident backs car into front of Lucky's Restaurant

By **Shawn Jarrard**  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Lucky's Taqueria & Cantina lucked out last week after a car backed into the downtown restaurant's patio fencing to wreck a portion of the outdoor seating area that, thankfully, was vacant at the time.

The actual building was spared, though a table and outdoor heater were damaged in the crash, the latter of which was not in use due to temps reaching into the 90s that day.

Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said the accident occurred around 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, June 15, when an 87-year-old Union County resident was attempting to back his vehicle out of the immediately adjacent building that houses Bikes & Hikes.

The resident mistakenly



Luckily, no one was injured in this automobile accident that damaged the patio seating area of Lucky's Restaurant last Wednesday.

Photo/Submitted

mashed the gas instead of the brake and accelerated onto Blue Ridge Street in a backward U-Turn, resulting in the vehicle striking the patio fencing at Lucky's, Baxter said.

Fortunately, no one was hurt, including the driver, and the crash has been ruled an

accident with no charges to be filed.

"If it had been a pretty weekend day or just cooler weather, there would have been people sitting there," Assiant Police Chief Shawn Dyer said. "But this was just an accident."

## Community comes together again to stamp out cancer

By **Mark Smith**  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Relay For Life Yard and Bake Sale garnered a good deal of community support at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center June 10-11, with more than a few people wanting to do their part for cancer research and patient recovery.

Local entrepreneur Sharon Penner organized the event. She is on the American Cancer Society Event Leadership Board for Union County and helps organize several other American Cancer Society events throughout the year.

See Relay Fundraiser, Page 2A



Sharon Penner of Origami Owl organized the Union County Relay For Life Yard and Bake Sale fundraiser June 10-11, pictured here bagging some items for a shopper at the Civic Center.

Photo by Mark Smith

## Blairsville man arrested for downtown property destruction

By **Shawn Jarrard**  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

An 18-year-old Blairsville resident was arrested last week after allegedly throwing a brick through the glass of the Blairsville Police Department's front door and breaking a window at Top Gun Firearms downtown, according to Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter.

Jefferson Guevara Hernandez has been charged with second degree criminal damage to property and criminal interference with government property, both felonies, and with misdemeanor obstructing or hindering law enforcement officers, criminal trespass and probation violation.

The destruction started around 9:40 p.m. at Foodland Grocery in Downtown Blairsville Tuesday, June 14.

Inside the store, Hernandez reportedly dropped and damaged a drink, after which he began to exhibit "erratic behavior," Baxter said.

When Hernandez attempted to put the leaking drink back on the shelf, the store's owner asked him to instead hand it over so it would not make a mess in the cooler, said Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer, who also

serves as a major for the Union County Sheriff's Office.

At that point, Hernandez started walking around the store and throwing various products on the floor, including a package of chicken livers and a glass container of chip dip, Dyer said, all while the owner, who was in the store by himself just before closing, asked him repeatedly to leave.

Upon leaving the store, Hernandez made his way

west down Blue Ridge Street over to the Blairsville Police Department, where he was captured on camera throwing a decorative brick through the glass of the front door, Baxter said.

Next, he made his way further down Blue Ridge Street to Top Gun Firearms, where a security camera recorded him throwing three bricks at the window next to the employee

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Jefferson Guevara Hernandez

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# Relay For Life Fundraiser ...from Page 1A

"It's going very well. We had people line up before 8 o'clock, which was good," Penner said, adding that people had been dropping large plastic bags of clothes and other items for the yard and bake sale at her residence for the last three weeks.

"Overall, the Relay For Life fundraising has been going very well. We just had our Relay For Life (annual event at the Farmers Market) last month," Penner said, noting that the May Relay raised about \$51,200.

Penner said that donations for the yard and bake sale had come not just from individuals, but also from civic groups and businesses as well. For example, the Kiwanis Club of Blairsville donated 32 puzzles of 100 pieces each to sell and raise money.

And there were no prices on anything. "Just make me an offer," said Penner to a shopper who was eyeing something.

"I absolutely feel like living in Blairsville is probably the nicest place we've ever lived with the sense of community," shopper Cindy Mallo said. "We make sure that we visit the thrift stores and any fundraising.

"It's a wonderful way to meet people and to pay it forward. Not only do you find treasures, but you meet really wonderful people. And for a small town, it's amazing how many people do volunteer work."

Mallo was certainly not alone in those sentiments. Bill Schaubel, who was perusing the tables with his wife Letha, said, "Being part of the community and giving back to the community is always a great way to help other people

out."

As for event food, hospitality entrepreneur and Blairsville native Steven Jarrard set up barbecue, fixings and beverages in the Civic Center's kitchen to accommodate new restaurant Smokeout Barbecue, saying the profits would be donated to the Relay For Life Yard and Bake Sale.

"I think this is a good cause, and what better way for us to do it?" Jarrard said. "It's more of a give-back program than a profit thing; we pay it

forward.

"The community has been very nice to me growing up. They've been very supportive of me and of this new business venture, so never forget where you came from and always just pay it forward."

All told, the event raised \$238, which Penner said they were thankful for, as "every little bit helps."

"Every penny, every dollar helps to raise money for awareness, education and research," Penner said.

# County Meeting ...from Page 1A



The Union County Commission meetings continue to be well attended each third Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. inside the courthouse. Photo by Mark Smith

should complete construction in 2023.

On July 19, the Union County Sheriff's Office will host its ever-popular Concealed Carry Class for firearm owners, including instruction on topics such as the difference between weapons carry permits and Constitutional Carry, legal levels of force for self-protection and more.

The class will be held at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center from 6-7:30 p.m. with a Q&A session afterward. Union County Gun Club members will be available on site before the class from 5-6 p.m. to sign up new members and answer questions.

Sheriff Mason advises attendees not to carry firearms into the building as it is a school-owned property.

Moving along in the June 16 meeting, Paris accepted a \$1 million grant award from the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank by and through the State Road and Tollway Authority to Union County.

The grant will fund a portion of the preliminary engineering and construction costs for the Hospital Roundabout Project at the intersection of Pat Haralson Drive and Deep South Farm Road.

"The estimated cost of this project will be anywhere between \$2 million and \$3 million, based on utility company (infrastructure relocation) cost," Paris said. "We have applied for further grant funding, and we'll utilize SPLOST funds as well."

Paris went on to say that, had the TSPLOST referendum been approved last November, the Hospital Roundabout Project could have been paid for without having to dip into county funds.

Next, the commissioner adopted an emergency moratorium on the acceptance, processing and consideration of applications for business licenses for short-term rentals. The emergency moratorium will go into effect in two months on Aug. 16, 2022, for 180 days.

"We have started the process of examining and probably amending our existing hotel/motel tax ordinance, and certainly our short-term rental program," Paris said, adding that the reason for the 60-day delay is to allow those projects currently in progress to be completed and certified.

Four more business licenses for short-term rentals were announced at the meeting on Thursday, down from the 10-15 new business licenses issued in each of the last several months.

Toward the end of the meeting, during his Commissioner's Comments, Paris said the county is in the process of developing a noise ordinance borne out of noise issues brought on from the recent flood of short-term rental properties in Union County.

Paris also accepted an agreement between Gardner, Spencer, Smith, Tench & Jarbeau of Atlanta "for design and engineering services not to exceed \$150,000 for a potential new Union County voter registration and election facility."

"The effective date of this agreement is May 31, 2022," Paris said. "Our project manager would like to get the requests for proposals on this project out by fall so it can be open by January (2024)."

Paris said the plan is to

utilize some of the excess land at the new Sports Center to add an additional gym to the right side of the existing double gym building, which could be used for voting, and to build attached office space for the Elections Board onto the additional gym space.

"This would allow moving early voting from the courthouse, where it often interferes with the court system, to the new facility," Paris said.

In other county business, Paris accepted a contract with Colditz Trucking, Inc. of Blairsville for asphalt resurfacing of multiple county roads through the Local Maintenance and Improvement Grant in the amount of \$1,280,011.20.

Accordingly, Paris approved a Notice to Proceed with work in accordance with said contract between Colditz Trucking, Inc., and Union County. The contract calls for the work to be completed by Aug. 7, 2022.

The Georgia Department of Transportation will pay about \$762,000 toward this work, and the county is only required to pay about \$384,000, Paris said.

"Union County made the decision to go ahead with SPLOST funds and pay an additional \$133,000 so, with the increased cost of fuel and asphalt, we can pave the same amount of miles that we paved last year," Paris said, so that the county doesn't fall behind in road maintenance.

A contract between Freeman Gas and Union County for propane services in the amount of \$1.89 per gallon for the period July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, was approved by Paris.

Last year's rate was \$1.39 per gallon, Paris said, so a 50-cent increase per gallon was very reasonable, especially in the current inflationary climate.

Paris accepted an Accountability Courts Grant for Enotah Felony Drug Courts Supplement Grant in the amount of \$30,832.

The commissioner also

accepted a \$9,600 agreement with Aulick Engineering, LLC of Atlanta for civil engineering services for the Farmers Market property, to include 8 or 9 acres that lay in the floodplain.

"This is a preliminary permitting requirement for potential use and further improvements to the property," Paris said.

He then accepted a Deed of Easement between Mark White Miller and Rochelle Dene Miller and Union County for 0.04 acres as shown on a plat of survey completed by Cleveland & Cox Land Surveying, LLC, Roger L. Owenby, dated May 12, 2022.

"This easement was given by Union County to the property owners for the access road into the rental cabins that are located on Farmers Market Way," Paris said.

Moving along, Paris said the Scottish Festival last Saturday and Sunday, June 11 and 12, was a huge success after being shut down for the last two years because of COVID-19.

And, even with the festival going on, the second week of the 2022 Farmers Market season went very well. And on Thursday, June 16, adjacent to the Farmers Market, one of the first University of Georgia training sessions at the Canning Plant took place, he said.

The new Moccasin Road Convenience Center for garbage and recyclables should be completed in about 60 days.

And, finally, Laurie Brothers addressed the meeting with concerns about election integrity, advocating for a forensic audit of the May 24, 2022, Primary Election in Union County and a hand count of the ballots.

The county meeting was videoed by Ralph Robinson of TV 4 out of Murphy, North Carolina.

Union County Commission meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month unless otherwise specified, always at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse.

# 4th Annual Made in Georgia Festival



Don't miss the 4th Annual Made in Georgia Festival on Saturday and Sunday, June 25 and June 26.

The event will feature 100 vendors from across the State of Georgia specializing in products that were grown, harvested, canned, baked, stitched or crafted in Georgia. Items that will be shown and sold at this big event are pecans, jellies, soaps, body lotions, dog clothing, clothing, bread, candles, pickles, pottery, syrups, and lots, lots more! This is an inside event so you can shop in the comfort of air conditioning!

This year's demonstrations and workshops will be conducted by Carlton Chamblin of Farm 2 Cocktail, Olivia Rader a Georgia Grown chef, Jacob Paul Williams of the UGA Extension Agency and Buster Brown with his birds of prey. We have a real special treat this year - we will have a blacksmith onsite demonstrat-

ing this traditional skill.

A full schedule of events will be posted on the calendar page of [www.golakechatuge.com](http://www.golakechatuge.com) beginning Monday, June 13.

The event will be held June 25 from 10 AM - 5 PM and June 26 from 11 AM - 4 PM at the Towns County Recreation & Conference Center in Young Harris. The address is 150 Foster Park Road, Young Harris, GA 30582. Admission is \$5/adults; children under 14 are free. There will also be a weekend price (attend both days) for \$7.

The Made in Georgia Festival is a great place to find one-of-a-kind gifts and items that are grown in remote parts of Georgia. Please support our Georgia growers and crafters and attend this big event on June 25 and June 26.

For more information call 706-896-4966. The Made in Georgia Festival is sponsored by the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, Towns County Commission, Towns County CVB, City of Hiawassee, Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority, Century 21 Black Bear Realty and LeafFilter. NT(June22,A2)JH

# Union County Flag Day ...from Page 1A

out the best seats, browse some of the patriotic shirts and doormats for sale, and snag one of the 200 free American flags that were paid for by Dave Paeth and County Manager Larry Garrett about a month prior to the event.

Johnny Cash's "Ragged Old Flag" marked the beginning of the festivities. A hush fell over the Conley Pavilion, and all eyes turned to the North Georgia Honor Guard member who stood still, waiting for the well-known tale to reach its end before marching to the front with the flag.

Everyone reverently sang the National Anthem and pledged allegiance to the flag, and local GOP Chair Dena Gooch, moved by the song, commented that unless one loved ones of veterans had much to sacrifice as well.

And true to any summer gathering, there were plentiful hot dogs for volunteers to hand out, and once guests grabbed a bottle of water or a cup of lemonade, they received the opportunity to choose between an extra treat of chocolate cake or a flag made of cupcakes for dessert.

Courtesy of Mountain Flagpoles was a metal flagpole large enough to be flown outside the house and strong enough to withstand winds that would snap more delicate poles. It and several gift cards were up for raffle, while other gifts like the smaller flags and some hats were handed out for free.

Tony and Shelley van Beers were present, both drawn to the event not just for the pride they feel for their country, but because of the deeply personal connections they have to the Stars and Stripes.

Shelley's family has an extensive history in military service, and she herself is a veteran of the Coast Guard.

"I feel that the flag isn't getting the respect it deserves," Shelley said. "There's history behind it, and it's not being taught ... Learn how it started and what the flag represents," she added, saying that she felt an obligation to defend her country as soon as she was old enough to do so.

Tony's parents were immigrants, and he remembers the struggles they experienced prior to becoming citizens as well as the challenges that came with the process of naturalization. Not only that, but with a son who was enlisted in the Army and a spouse who previously served the Coast Guard, Tony believes that the



Flag Day was an occasion for patriotism, food and fellowship in Meeks Park on June 14.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

loved ones of veterans had much to sacrifice as well.

"Where the soldiers are doing what they love, (the family is) not so happy they're going out ... It's hard to understand both sides unless you've been there. It's harder on the families than it is a lot of times for the soldiers," Tony said.

Many others shared similar sentiments that day, and overall, there was an air of hope and pride in attending the very first Flag Day Celebration at Conley Pavilion.

"As divided as the country is over politics, the flag should be one of the things left that we can all stand around and agree to honor and celebrate, because it stands for freedom not just for us, but for the whole world," GOP member Rob Mawyer said.

Much like the van Beers, Mawyer recognized the sacrifices that military families make on behalf of the protection of the nation represented by the flag honored that day.

"People should celebrate the flag to honor veterans who have served and left their families," Mawyer said. "(These families) sent a loved one overseas into harm's way. They don't know if they're coming back alive or all in one piece, and many times they don't."

"At least I can show all those families that are sitting, anxiously awaiting the return of their loved one, that I appreciate them, that I know why I'm free, and also honor all the people who died going back to the Revolutionary War up to the current War on Terror so that you and I can go to bed at night and feel safe and keep our freedom."

While there, Mawyer wanted to bring attention to the new memorial in the process of

being built overlooking Conley Pavilion, the very location of the Flag Day Celebrations.

The Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park was first conceptualized by local Veteran Service Organizations and will pay tribute to each branch of the United States Military.

According to initial designs, the floor will sport a compass rose, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars organization will have the chance to purchase monuments signifying the sacrifice of service members in an array of conflicts.

A walkway will encircle the compass, and in the center will stand the aforementioned monuments to the fallen.

"The reason it's named Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park and not Union County or Blairsville is because we're building it to support the whole mountain region," explained Mawyer, who hopes the memorial will attract veterans and families from Hiwassee and Blue Ridge as well as other states like North Carolina and Tennessee.

"We think this will be a destination point for veterans to come from all over just to see this," he said.

Of course, such a grand vision comes with a high price, and the projected total costs for the project will be more than \$200,000.

Mawyer said he's been primarily looking for corporate sponsors who can spare a pretty penny in bringing the memorial to life, and the greatest contributors will see their names in bronze plaques around the memorial thanking them for their generosity.

That being said, smaller individual donations will also be helpful to the cause.

With a projected reveal

## River City Bank's Full-Service Blairsville Branch now open



River City Bank's Blairsville Branch

River City Bank is celebrating the opening of its first full-service branch located at 206 Hwy. 515 E in Blairsville, GA. The tremendous success of our Mortgage and Loan Office, which opened in late 2020, has allowed us to expand our services and be able to offer full-service banking solutions in Union County. Our growth is a testament to our commitment to support and invest in the communities we serve.

Our full-service Blairsville Office offers a wide range of products and services including personal and business deposits, loans, mortgages, cash management as well as brokerage services. Customers can bank conveniently using our digital services such

as online and mobile banking, mobile check deposit, bill payment, and Zelle person-to-person transfers.

Our team of local bankers look forward to providing exceptional value for our customers in Union County, helping them reach their financial goals through unrivaled care and customer-focused service.

"We are thrilled to be offering full-service banking in my hometown of Blairsville, Georgia," said Jamie Tallent, President and CEO of River City Bank. "As a community-focused financial institution, we believe our core values and relationship-based banking philosophy meet the personal and business banking needs of Union County."

"We have a great team

of bankers who are true financial partners for our customers, and we are excited to expand and offer a complete suite of products and services from a community bank here in Blairsville," stated Blairsville Market President, Scott Nanney.

The bank will hold a ribbon cutting celebration and open house in the near future. We would like to invite the Blairsville community to stop by, meet our River City team, and tour our new branch.

River City Bank, founded in 2006, is a full-service community bank headquartered at 228 North Second Avenue SW, Rome, Georgia. For more information, visit [www.rivercity.bank](http://www.rivercity.bank). Member FDIC. Equal Housing Lender.

## TVA, local power companies meet record June power demand

The Tennessee Valley Authority and 153 local power companies across the region successfully met a record power demand for the month of June during an early season heat wave on Monday, June 13.

At 6 p.m. ET, the power system was reliably providing 31,311 megawatts of energy at a region-wide average temperature of 94 degrees. The previous record for June was 31,098 megawatts on June 29, 2012.

The resiliency of the public power system, even during such extreme conditions, is a result of the hard work and dedication of thousands of women and men working in TVA's diverse

generation plants, managing the region's transmission system and serving 10 million individuals and more than 700,000 businesses across seven states.

Continued hot and humid weather could produce similar high power demands through the end of this week. TVA and local power companies are encouraging users to join them in conserving power and saving money, especially during the peak use hours of 2 p.m. through 6 p.m., by taking a few simple steps:

Turn up your thermostat – even one or two degrees makes a big difference in your power bill and does not significantly impact your comfort;

Use ceiling and portable fans to circulate air – they use less energy than your air conditioner; If possible, avoid using ovens, clothes dryers, dishwashers and other large appliances during peak hours; and Close window coverings on the sunny side of your home or business.

Additional energy saving tips can be found at [www.energyright.com/residential](http://www.energyright.com/residential). Residents concerned about their ability to pay future power bills are encouraged to contact their local power company to discuss the availability of assistance programs, including the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program.

# Blairsville Pro Rodeo...from Page 1A

And that enthusiasm is just as catching for contestants. As a local competitor in the barrel racing event, 21-year-old Alyssa McFarland has been riding since she was 6 and has been a professional barrel racer since 14. 2022 marked her seventh year performing in the Blairsville Pro Rodeo.

"My passion for this began as a young child going to this exact rodeo live and watching them from the crowd," McFarland said. "I remember telling myself clearly that day I was going to do that."

"It is truly incredible to be able to perform in front of a hometown crowd and feeling the electric energy from everybody cheering you on, and

I think everyone loves coming to the rodeo because it draws a great sense of community closeness in an intimate setting, and people can just always expect something new here."

The Hedrick Rodeo Company based out of Madisonville, Tennessee, has been providing the entertainment for the rodeo for all 11 installments. Owner Danny Hedrick is a 39-year horse and bull riding professional, and he shared his excitement for the spectacle Saturday.

"I have loved horses and grew up with them all of my life, and I love the rodeo because it really keeps that Old Western way and lifestyle

alive," Hedrick said. "We say the prayer, we honor our veterans, we stand for the flag, we tip our hats when the ladies come by, we care about making the children happy, and we believe in God's country."

"We love it here because this is an amazing facility, an amazing community of people that we thank for their support. And I believe the rodeo is great because, whether you are 7 or 77, people of all ages can come and always find something to enjoy and appreciate."

For more information and to keep up with future events and news, visit [www.hedrickrodeocompany.com](http://www.hedrickrodeocompany.com) and [www.unioncountysaddleclub.org](http://www.unioncountysaddleclub.org).



Palmer Dernehl performed the National Anthem at the rodeo as local first responders conducted a patriotic folding of the American flag. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

# Property Destruction...from Page 1A

entrance, with the third throw breaking through the shatter-resistant glass to set off an alarm, Baxter said.

At the sounding of the alarm, Hernandez fled the scene. Soon after, a passing motorist alerted the police that the alarm was going off inside the store, and the Blairsville Police Department and Union County Sheriff's Office converged on the area, Baxter said.

A witness reported seeing a "Hispanic male running west on Blue Ridge Street," and law enforcement encountered an individual matching that description walking along Hunt-Martin Street. After being approached by a deputy, the suspect ran into the woods, Baxter said.

Officers quickly identified Hernandez as the suspect, as he lives within city limits and has had prior run-ins with local law enforcement, including for possession of marijuana, and warrants were obtained to arrest him for that evening's destruction, Baxter said.

Police officers and sheriff's deputies teamed up to establish a perimeter around the city and continued their search for Hernandez throughout the night, Baxter said.

Just before lunchtime the next day, Baxter said



Top Gun Firearms was the target of property damage last week, though nothing was taken from the store, according to the Blairsville Police Department. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Hernandez was observed in a wooded area around Cook Street, and a Union County Schools Police Officer detained him for the Blairsville Police Department.

The total cost of the damage is over \$1,000, and Baxter said he is presently unaware of a motive for Hernandez' actions from June 14.

"If you look at everything he did, I'm not sure we were

the exact target," Baxter said. "I think it was just one of those things where we were in the path."

Despite the public nuisance and downtown destruction, Blairsville and Union County are fortunate that such incidents are rare here, and the chief is thankful for the assistance by the public and the good-working relations of local law enforcement agencies.

"The Sheriff's Office and School Police worked with us to saturate the area; he couldn't get out of our perimeter that was set up for over 10 hours, and it paid off," Baxter said before going on to express his appreciation for the members of the community who called in that night.

Incidentally, also the night of June 14, at Michael's Italian Life Caffe, located between Foodland and the Police Department, someone had thrown some patio furniture in the road, and at Hole In The Wall Restaurant, authorities discovered an American flag bent off its pole and an overturned planter, though there was no direct evidence Hernandez was responsible, Baxter said.

Hernandez was denied bond and remained in custody at the Union County Jail at press time. He is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

## UCHS Class of '72 Reunion

The Union Co. High School class of 1972 will be holding their 50 year class reunion Saturday, September 3, at The View Grill. For more information or to RSVP, please contact Debbie McClure Smith via email: [dmsmfs@yahoo.com](mailto:dmsmfs@yahoo.com).



Sass 'n Saddles Precision Drill Team members showed off their horseback riding and choreography skills over the two nights of the Blairsville Pro Rodeo. Photo by Jeremy Foster



Families are what the Blairsville Pro Rodeo is all about, and children were given plenty of opportunities to participate in the event June 17-18. Photo by Lowell Nicholson