

North Georgia News

2 Sections 24 Pages

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Sons of the Pioneers live in concert Sunday

By Shelly Knight
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Back by popular demand, the legendary Sons of the Pioneers are performing their annual Ferst Readers literacy benefit concert on Sunday, Oct. 27, at 2 p.m. inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center at 926 Panther Overlook in Blairsville.

"We do many benefit concerts, but this one is special," said baritone vocalist and rhythm guitarist John Fullerton. "This is our third year to come down and support Ferst Literacy. We were introduced

to it through John and Janice Cochran.

"They told us what Ferst Literacy does with getting books into the hands of preschool-aged children, and when we found out that something on the order of 40,000 books had been sent out to young children, we thought this was something super special and were honored to be a part of it."

Now in their 90th year as the Sons of the Pioneers, the Country Western giants have been performing locally to help raise money for Ferst Readers of Union County since 2022.

"The Sons of the Pioneers came to be thanks to Roy Rogers wanting to get a vocal group off the ground and go into radio," Fullerton said. "All in all, the Sons have done over 100 total film appearances since their inception in 1933."

"There have been 47 members in the band, and what is so unique is the vocal arrangements, as each song is known for celebrating the beauty and grandeur of the American West and the working cowboy."

"The vocal arrangements have hardly changed at all. We See Sons of the Pioneers, Page 3A



The Sons of the Pioneers

Residents have plenty to do for Halloween '24

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For those feeling particularly festive about the spooky season, Union County always has lots to offer Halloween revelers, with an abundance of family-friendly candy opportunities for little guys and ghouls to attend this year.

Perhaps the most well-known choice is the annual Blairsville Boo Bash by the Chamber of Commerce. The event will run Thursday, Oct. 31, from 4-7 p.m. in Meeks Park, allowing local organizations, businesses and even some individuals to hand out candy as a community.

See Halloween Festivities, Page 3A



Communitywide trick-or-treating returns to Meeks Park on Halloween. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks/2023

Early voting sets local, state records in Week 1

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Advance voting for the 2024 General Election is breaking records around the state, including right here in Union County.

Georgia is considered a "battleground state" in this year's presidential election, and voter enthusiasm is high, demonstrated by the Secretary of State's Office reporting last week that over 1 million votes had already been cast as of Friday around noon.

Union County Deputy Registrar Diana Nichols has been involved in running advance voting for 35 years, and she said this is the busiest

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A line formed in the minutes before the start of early voting on Tuesday, Oct. 15. Always strong, local turnout looks to be even higher this election year. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Annual Sorghum Festival concludes 'til next October

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The 55th Annual Blairsville Sorghum Festival wrapped up this past weekend at Meeks Park, welcoming crowds the likes of which haven't been seen since 2019. Not only that, but this year, sorghum syrup production surpassed expectations.

"We broke a record on the amount of syrup we made in one day; we broke it by probably 35, 40 gallons," said Terrence Kane, referring to the first day haul of the festival on Saturday, Oct. 12, which saw around 165 gallons bottled.

To put that into perspective, the average day of work at the four-day festival results in 100 gallons of syrup, give or take.

"It's similar to growing corn," Andrew Collins said of



The Blairsville Sorghum Festival is a local tradition that has been honored by generations of families, which the organizers hope will carry on for generations more to come. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

sorghum cane. Collins is one half of the festival's two cane cultivators. The plant is grown locally in Union County – planted at the end of May and

maintained until harvest time toward the end of September.

"You have to go through and cut the heads off, strip the See Sorghum Fest Ends, Page 6A

Paris makes proclamations, amends county contract

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris made two proclamations in his regular monthly meeting on Thursday, Oct. 17, to highlight dates and causes he believes are important for the public to recognize.

In honor of efforts by Rotary International and the local volunteers of the Rotary Club of Union County, which have led to the near global eradication of polio, Paris proclaimed Thursday, Oct. 24, 2024, as World Polio Day in Union County.

He also proclaimed Oct. 13, 2024, as St. Clare's Episcopal Church Day to celebrate the 40th year since the church's local founding. The commissioner thanked St.



Commissioner Lamar Paris was joined by Pat Deluca and Ed Sternberg of the Rotary Club of Union County for a World Polio Day proclamation last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Clare's for giving back to many local causes.

Paris amended the August 2023 contract with Winkler and See County Meeting, Page 2A

Domestic violence case ends in life sentence for Shaw

By Shawn Jarrard
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A Dahlonega man has been sentenced to life in prison after being convicted of kidnapping and injuring his then-girlfriend in August 2023, according to Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley.

Cody Shaw, 33, was sentenced on Thursday, Oct. 10, following an eight-day trial in Lumpkin County Superior Court. Under current Georgia

law, he will not be parole-eligible for at least 28 years, Langley said.

A jury of his peers found him guilty on five counts related to his Lumpkin County victim: kidnapping with bodily injury, which carries a mandatory life sentence; aggravated assault; false imprisonment; battery; and obstruction of a law enforcement officer.

Shaw is facing Union County charges in a separate case that features striking

See Shaw Sentenced, Page 3A



Cody Shaw

City Council enacts Master Fee Schedule, talks housing

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville City Council regular meeting enjoyed a full house this month thanks to the presence of the Leadership Union Class of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

Group members were merely there to visit, and business carried on as usual beginning with brief reports from department heads before leading into news about the

See City Council, Page 11A



Blairsville City Councilwomen Rhonda Mahan and Kayla Hemphill in their Oct. 8 regular city meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



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County Meeting...from Page 1A



In the Oct. 17 county meeting, Blairsville Pickleball Club members presented Union County a check for nearly \$20,000 they recently raised for youth sports participants.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

contract amendment adds a new pre-engineered building at the Transfer Station, to cost \$339,900.

County Purchasing Agent Pam Hawkins explained that the contract was amended because Winkler and Winkler provided a quote on the Transfer Station project after zero bids came back to erect the building that will house the new SPLOST-funded recycling baler there.

The project is time sensitive, as the baler has already been ordered, and bidding the project again – and without a guarantee of success – might leave the county in the position of having to accept the new baler without a building in which to install it.

Paris accepted a \$10,500 agreement with Geo-Hydro Engineers Inc. for “subsurface exploration and geotechnical engineering evaluation for the site of the new Union County 911 Center on Shoe Factory Road,” to be built in the near future.

He also adopted a resolution declaring a State of Local Emergency for Union County “due to the potential for an event of critical significance of Hurricane Helene on Sept. 26, 2024,” to make certain damages from the storm

potentially reimbursable by the state and federal governments.

Recreation Director Scotty Thompson and Blairsville Pickleball Club members joined Paris for a \$19,572 check presentation from a recent pickleball tournament. This year, tournament proceeds will go toward helping needy youngsters afford participation in local sports programs.

Two guest speakers from the public made the agenda as well.

Area volunteer Rob Medwed of the North Georgia Tri-State Amateur Radio Club spoke on the importance of ham radio operators in local communities, as they are able to provide alternative emergency communications in destructive events like Hurricane Helene last month.

Navy Seabee Veteran Ed Crenshaw spoke on the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park, which is moving right along behind the upper ballfields in Meeks Park. Thanks to generous donations, the concrete compass rose has been poured and flagpoles installed, and the project continues apace.

“The park will be a place of solitude, one of retrospection and a gathering place for the

recognition of honoring all military branches and Veterans Service organizations of Appalachia,” according to theveteranspark.org, where people can still purchase commemorative bricks.

Resident Vince Peterson was the only attendee to ask a question at the end of the meeting, wanting to know why he had yet to hear back from the Commissioner’s Office regarding his recent inquiry into county budgeting practices; Paris said he would be looking into the matter.

Unless otherwise posted, Commissioner Paris holds his regular monthly meetings on the third Thursday of each month starting at 6 p.m. inside the Union County Courthouse.

In other county business, Paris held a called meeting on Sept. 25 to accept a notice of award for the demolition of the Old Shoe Factory building on Shoe Factory Road. Ricky Rich Construction provided the lowest bid and will undertake the project for \$310,000.

The county acquired the Old Shoe Factory property back in 2020 to serve as a future site for a new Union County Jail. There is no timeline on this project, though Paris has committed to preparing the site for when the need arises.

Early Voting Record...from Page 1A

start to in-person early voting she has ever seen.

By the end of voting on Saturday, Oct. 19, 5,134 Union Countians had cast in-person ballots for this election, with 452 absentee ballots returned by mail – a roughly 68% increase from 2022 early voting totals over the same period and more even than the busy 2020 presidential election.

Given that there are 21,393 active registered voters in Union County, a whopping 26% of the active electorate had cast ballots by the end of Week 1 early voting.

Union County is always one of the highest voter turnout counties in the state, but usually, early voting ramps up toward Election Day, Nichols said, so it will be interesting to see how high the turnout gets over the next two weeks of early voting.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there are three weeks of early in-person voting running weekdays between Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting also includes two weekend voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

All in-person early voting is taking place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Union County Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owltown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log. The address of each is available at <https://www.unioncountygga.gov/government/elections-voter-registration/board-of-election/>.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested inside the Voting Center now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Voting Center.

Absentee ballots began mailing Oct. 7. They can be returned using the official Voting Center drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Voting Center through 7 p.m.

Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote in this election was Monday, Oct. 7.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there is just one contested county-level seat up for grabs in the 2024 General Election: the office of Sole Commissioner.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap annual property assessment increases for taxing purposes.

If passed, the proposed constitutional amendment would create a new homestead exemption to cap assessment increases on homesteaded properties at 3% annually beginning on Jan. 1, 2025.

State lawmakers enabled the referendum this year by passing House Bill 581 and House Resolution 1022, with an “opt-out” provision for local governments.

The proposed cap comes as welcome news to many homeowners, who have seen the values of their properties rise dramatically in recent years due largely to an inflated real estate market driven by COVID-19 pandemic-era relocations to the area.

For homes receiving the exemption starting next year, 2024 would stand as the base-year assessed value. Moving forward, the home would then reflect two values: the homesteaded value that is capped for taxing purposes, and the actual fair market value as it changes over time.

“The base year value may increase each year up to the inflationary rate determined by the State Revenue Commissioner, which may utilize the Consumer Price Index,” according to information from the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

So, annual values could increase from north of 0% to the 3% cap for homesteaded properties, though assessed values would still be subject to accounting for “substantial property changes,” which could result in increases or decreases in value depending on what has changed.

If a homestead-exempted property is subsequently sold,

then the base-year assessed value for the new homesteader would be set at the assessed value for the year immediately preceding the sale.

A homestead exemption reduces the amount of property taxes a homeowner owes on his or her legal residence, and according to ACCG, “this new floating homestead exemption is in addition to and not in lieu of all non-floating homestead exemptions.”

HB 581 also creates a new 1% local option sales tax that could be imposed for property tax relief. But for the new tax to be put in place, it would have to be supported by voters in a local referendum.

The bill does several other things related to property and sales tax reform, such as improving the sales ratio study methodology by the Department of Audits and Accounts, removing confusing tax estimates from annual assessment notices and more.

General Election ballots also feature a statewide referendum on raising the amount of tangible personal property tax exemption from \$7,500 to \$20,000. If passed, state law would be amended effective Jan. 1, 2025, to apply to all tax years beginning on or after that date.

State Rep. Mike Cheokas (R-Americus) sponsored the bill that created this referendum, saying, “I hope this will be the first step in reducing the burden of high taxes and prohibitive regulations that adversely affect businesses in Georgia.”

Proponents of these measures believe they would provide much-needed taxpayer relief in an era of prolonged inflation, while opponents have expressed concern that they could make it more difficult to raise revenues needed to effectively operate local governments and school systems.

Another Constitutional Amendment appears on ballots to ask voters whether they want to create a Georgia Tax Court, which would change the jurisdiction for settling tax cases from the executive branch of state government to the judicial branch of state government.

All but one state legislator supported the measure at the Georgia General Assembly this year, with proponents arguing the change would enable a separation of powers in matters of taxes and streamline the appeals process, which currently runs through Fulton County for all such matters.

Sons of the Pioneers...from Page 1A

still use that beautiful polished three-part harmony vocal blend that Roy was so eager to include. Tommy Nallie joined the band in 1983 and is the trail boss of the group and sings lead voice and plays lead guitar.

“I met Tommy when I was 7 years old, and I caught the bug. I was impressed with the musicianship, and I recognized that those guys were the real deal. We have maintained this great integrity in our sound for over 90 years through radio, films and personal appearances.

“I joined the band in 2018, and I’ve been with them ever since. It was a childhood dream come true to go from being in the audience to being a part of the band. It’s quite an honor.”

Like his bandmates, Fullerton believes literacy is “critically important” in today’s day and age to help children achieve the ability to comprehend the written word, no matter the presentation.

“To get books into the hands of youngsters is huge; we’re living in such a digital age,” Fullerton said. “I’m blown away at the number

of kiddos that even in their teenage years do not have the reading abilities that they should because of the digital age that we’re in.

“I talk to students on the West Coast all the time, and they have removed all textbooks from their classrooms. They don’t physically read like you and I did when we were in school. It’s quite sad.

“I think reading is more important than it has ever been, and as far as teaching reading and proper reading etiquette, I don’t think it’s happening. Everything is digital.”

Fullerton is on to something with that concept. While the data is still coming in, educators know there are considerable drawbacks to digital learning, including heavy reliance on expensive technology and the internet as well as decreased comprehension.

Education in this country began with the Founding Fathers, who knew and understood the critical importance of a well-informed voting constituency. They knew that the fragile American republic was dependent upon

the competency of its citizens. They believed strongly that preserving democracy would require a population that could understand political and social issues. They wanted men who would participate in civic life, vote wisely, protect their rights and freedoms, and resist oppressors and demagogues.

While voting was initially limited to white males, many of the early leaders understood that girls must also be educated, as they would become mothers responsible for teaching their children. In the ensuing years since public education’s inception, the American people have learned the vital importance of literacy. Simply put, without literacy, all other learning is impossible.

Ferst Readers has taken literacy learning a step further by providing quality books for children and their families to use at home during the earliest stages of human development, all at no cost to households receiving the books. The organization’s vision is “to create better learners, brighter futures, and stronger communities by giving every

child under 5 access to quality books in their homes,” which requires fundraising to enact, hence the annual concert.

And focus on literacy is especially crucial right now. Since the onset of COVID, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that test scores have slipped to their lowest levels in decades. Students in lower economic groups are significantly impacted. But that’s not all.

According to the National Literacy Institute, on average, 79% of adults are literate in 2024, 21% are illiterate, and 54% of adults have a literacy rate below the sixth-grade level.

Ferst Readers data shows that 61% of children in the lower economic subgroup do not have a single book suitable for children in their home. Ferst Readers “wants every child to have the best start in life – and nothing helps a baby’s brain develop more than exposure to rich language and loving interactions. The key is having

Shaw Sentenced...from Page 1A

similarities to the case in which he was convicted earlier this month.

His Union County charges stem from a July 4, 2021, incident involving the mother of his child at his family’s cabin in Suches, according to Langley.

There, Shaw is alleged to have gotten into a dispute with the woman over her wanting to leave the property. He allegedly shot a tire out on the vehicle she was attempting to depart in, resulting in his arrest and subsequent indictment for aggravated assault and other crimes, Langley said.

The Union case was scheduled for trial earlier this year but was postponed last minute because Shaw fired his attorney. Considering the life sentence in his Lumpkin case, Langley said whether the Union trial moves forward will depend on the appeal process in Shaw’s recent conviction.

It was while Shaw was out on bond for his Union charges that he attacked his girlfriend at the time, another woman not involved in the Suches incident, Langley said. The Lumpkin County case originated from an altercation in August 2023, for which he was arrested and denied bond.

On Aug. 9, 2023, Shaw and his girlfriend got into a dispute at his family’s property

in Dahlonega. When she attempted to leave, he pulled her from her vehicle, took her car keys and cellphone, threw her against a tree, and then dragged her to a nearby storage shed, Langley said.

In the shed, she tried to get away by climbing over a Jet Ski, but Shaw grabbed a wire, flipped her over, and strangled her by putting the wire to her throat, Langley said. Dragging her into the shed, and therefore outside the view of the public, was how he landed the kidnapping charge.

Along with a prior conviction, Superior Court Judge Raymond George deemed the details of the Union County case admissible in Shaw’s Lumpkin trial because of the similarities between the cases demonstrating a disturbing pattern of domestic violence, Langley said.

“The judge admitted seven similar actions into evidence, including where he assaulted a third woman in 2015 on three separate occasions,” Langley said. “Once in the parking lot of her place of employment, another in the driveway of the Shaw property in Dahlonega, and then a third time where he was convicted of false imprisonment in 2015 for assaulting her at the Super 8 Motel.”

Added Langley, “(At

trial), the victim in the Suches case – the mother of his child – also described multiple assaults over the years by him.”

Three victims ended up testifying in the trial: the woman Shaw strangled in Dahlonega in 2023; the woman in the 2021 aggravated assault with a firearm case from Union County; and the woman whom Shaw assaulted in 2015 that led to a conviction and six-month sentence back then.

In the evidentiary portion of the trial, Langley said Shaw’s mother testified that he was with her when the August 2023 assault was supposed to have happened, which would have made his commission of the crime impossible.

The jury, however, was clearly not compelled by his mother’s testimony in light of the approximately 100 pieces of evidence presented by the District Attorney’s Office and the testimony of multiple victims of Shaw’s reportedly violent and controlling tendencies.

Langley served as lead attorney in the prosecution, which he tried alongside Assistant District Attorney Lacy Ashworth. The case involved hundreds of hours of work, and Langley would like to thank Ashworth “for her great work on this case and her dedication to her profession.”

Halloween Festivities...from Page 1A

Alongside their candy duties, vendors will be competing for the best decorated booth, and prizes await those in multiple age groups for this year’s costume contest.

Another popular option for enjoying Halloween is at the Nottely Marina. Returning for its fifth year, families can attend the Marina’s trick-or-treat event and explore a community rendered ghostly with ghoulish decorations and delights.

Trick-or-treating at the Marina will be open for three days, Oct. 29 through Oct. 31, with the festivities kicking off each evening around 5:30 p.m. Organizers warn that parking is “very limited” and encourage families to carpool if possible.

Morganston-based nonprofit Project Chimps is opening its doors to the public Oct. 26-27 for the annual “Chimp or Treat” Halloween bash. Tickets are available between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30

p.m. Admission is \$10 per child, though kids 2 and under are free. Each additional adult is \$35.

Outreach Coordinator Nancy Page suggests coming in costume to give the chimps something to ponder from their habitats, which guests will be able to peer into from one of the sanctuary’s viewing windows.

Tours around the facility last about 45-60 minutes each, and kids will receive special treat bags filled with vegan and palm-oil free candies as well as non-food goodies.

While the Vertical Church’s Fall Fest already took place on Oct. 18, they will still be out at the lower gravel lot in Blairsville for their pumpkin patch, running now through Halloween, with hours differing based on days of operation.

Monday through Thursday, the church is there from 1-7 p.m.; Friday from 1-8 p.m.; Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m.; and Sunday from

1-6 p.m. Essentially, Vertical Church is selling pumpkins for folks to decorate for the fall season.

The First Baptist Church of Blairsville will hold its Fall Festival on Oct. 27 from 4-6 p.m., similar to a trunk or treat. Kiddos can enjoy bouncy houses and feast on hot dogs and popcorn while of course collecting candy.

“Trunk or treating” has become a popular way to celebrate Halloween, and several local organizations are choosing to follow that route.

House of Prayer will hold theirs on Oct. 30 from 6-8 p.m., and the one hosted by the Union County Future Farmers of America will take place at the Union County Middle School on Oct. 26 from 6-8 p.m.

Also on Oct. 26, Vogel State Park guests will enjoy their Fall Festival from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., including campground decorating contests and trick-or-treating, hayrides, craft vendors, live music, food and more. The night will come to a chilling end with ghost stories, so anyone brave enough can head to Possum Holler by 7 p.m. to partake.

Luke’s Place, known as “a safe place for teens to hang out with friends after school and on weekends,” will be hosting a costume contest for middle and high schoolers on Halloween. Located at 307 Cleveland Street in the basement, the event is the first of its kind for the organization and will also offer games and snacks.

Stonehenge Senior Living welcomes all manner of ghosts, ghouls and goblins to come trick-or-treat on Oct. 31 from 4-5 p.m. There will be designated parking set aside for visitors, who are encouraged to come put a smile on a senior’s face. The residents of four buildings will be handing out candy, and guests can walk between each stop.

Happy Halloween to Blairsville, Union County!

books in the home and being read to from birth.”

Children in the Ferst Readers literacy program receive a bookstore-quality, age-specific book mailed to them at home every month until their fifth birthday. This access to print helps to create a language-rich environment in the home.

“I really hope many people come out and join us,” Fullerton said, promising

an afternoon of high entertainment. “It’s such a great cause, and it’s a great afternoon with a chance to spend some time with some American icons. It just doesn’t get any better than that.”

Tickets for the locally hosted iconic Western music show can be purchased at <https://eventbrite.com/e/ferst-readers-concert-with-sons-of-the-pioneers-tickets-933312973227>.

Military Time Space Force Military Branch Part 4 of 14

By: Whitey White



The Newest Military Branch: The Space Force

The Space Force organizes, trains and equips personnel in order to protect U.S. and allied interests in space and to provide space capabilities to the joint forces. To that end, the Space Force manages space launch operations at the East and West Coast Space Launch Deltas. These bases provide services, facilities and range safety control to conduct DoD, NASA and commercial space launches.

Through the command and control of all DoD satellites, satellite operators provide force-multiplying effects – continuous global coverage, low vulnerability and autonomous operations.

Satellites provide in-theater secure communications; weather and navigation for ground, air and fleet operations; and threat warning.

Ground-based and space-based systems monitor ballistic missile launches around the world to guard against surprise missile attacks.

A global network of space surveillance sensors provides vital information on the location of satellites and space debris for the nation and the world. Maintaining space superiority is an emerging capability required to protect U.S. space assets from hostile attacks.

Sorghum Festival Ends...from Page 1A



Rock Throwin' is just one of many crowd-interactive games available for guests of the Sorghum Festival each year.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

leaves and put it in piles for it to lay for two weeks, and all that's done by hand, so you've got a lot of work in it," Collins continued. "You get down to that, you can load it up and bring it down here, then you start this process."

That process includes sending the cane through the press and pulling the water out of the resulting juice by cooking it down to make it into the syrup people know and love. Just like the harvest, it's a lot of work, but amazingly, from press to bottle, it only takes about 45 minutes to perfect the final product.

Needless to say, the festival requires plentiful support to keep running, and while this year blew expectations out of the water, organizer Angie Dills does have a message for the public when it comes to raising awareness and rallying help.

"A gigantic fundraiser is all it is ... We do it to give back," Dills said of the volunteer effort. "Most other festivals get paid to do what we do, but we don't."

Proceeds from sorghum syrup sales benefit people in the community "who don't like to ask for help" but whose stories touch those around them. In general, the funds benefit people in the community who need help the most.

And while the festival isn't hurting insofar as monetary or labor requirements, there's always a need for more volunteers, especially when it comes to the making of syrup

on-site and general upkeep and management of the event.

Dills expressed a particular desire for Union County's younger generations to get involved, because without a varied backing, projects are doomed to die out. Everything from the parade and the demonstrations to the handmade crafts on sale by local artists is meant to evoke memories of a time long gone by, but that doesn't mean the Sorghum Festival can't instill a love and respect for the past in those who weren't around to remember it.

But there is hope. Tennessee White, for example, is only 8 years old and was having a blast helping his grandfathers Mike Thomas and David Corn make syrup. He only sometimes plays with his toy cars on his "breaks," but what he really likes to do is help throw wood onto the pile destined to become fuel, which Thomas feeds into the flames so Tennessee stays safe while having fun and building a new interest.

The festival itself, now well into its fifth decade of operation, has become synonymous with Blairsville, and it would be a shame to lose everything it offers. Along with the vendors, local charitable organizations like the Disabled American Veterans set up booths to help raise awareness and sell raffle tickets for their own causes.

Local DAV Chapter Commander Bruce Anrig said it's never about how many tickets

they sell but what they can do with the money – much like the sentiment Dills maintains. The American Legion Riders echoed those words as well while on a similar mission.

Another thing that can be agreed upon is that the smiling faces they meet make the journey to their goal all the sweeter.

People like Linda and Robert Hartman, enjoying their 55th Anniversary and visiting from Florida, are the outgoing type and love to help brighten folks' day. Their favorite part of the festival is the live entertainment, and the classic country music they enjoyed was attached to many fond memories of their life together.

And then there are folks like Laz Junco, on the other end of the timetable. He and young daughter Aria were enjoying a day out together while the weather was perfect, taking in the sights of Meeks Park over the weekend. It was their first time visiting the Sorghum Festival, and Junco said he has plans to return next year.

Aria, her cheeks cloaked with pink fairy wings, could get behind that plan; her favorite part was the face painting. Junco, meanwhile, said the best part of the festival for him was the food. Next year, he promises, he'll come hungry and participate in the Biskit Eatin' Contest.

The Blairsville Sorghum Festival returns each year the second and third weekends in October.



The talented local Riverbend Music band performed at the Sorghum Festival on Saturday.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

American Legion Post 121 supports First Responders



One of the four Pillars of the American Legion is National Security and, in that vein, Post 121 is going to honor our local First Responders. Although our mission in the military is different, we understand the first responder community. We sacrifice for our country; they sacrifice for our community. They put their lives on the line to save and protect our town and the people in it, Veterans put their lives on the line to save and protect the Nation and the people in it. So as a small token of both our appreciation and understanding, we are holding a BBQ for our First Responders. "It is the least we can do to honor these men and women," stated Gene Windham, Post Judge Advocate and organizer of this year's event. The picnic will be at Meeks Park in the upper pavilion near the newly installed Veterans Memorial from 4-7 PM on 23 October. "We're going to roll dogs, flip burgers, and share stories with any of the first responders that come," added Mike Merritt, Post Commander. This is just a small token of our appreciation for all they do from a

community of Veterans that understand what it means to raise their hand to protect and serve.

The Post recently held their Fall Social at Trivia Night at the View Bar and Grill. It was a lot of fun, with friendly competition among all that were there. Those that attended are certainly going to do that again because it was such a fun evening. And as always, every Wednesday we meet in the Veterans Room at the Blairsville Restaurant for "Grab a Coffee." We meet at 8 AM each Wednesday where we grab breakfast, coffee and laugh a lot. The Holiday Party committee is in full swing as they finalize the details of the final social event of the year. This year it will be at the building behind the United Community Bank on 6 December.

It's not just fun and games for this Post as we focus in on the third and fourth Pillars, Americanism and Children and Youth. The Post is holding a Flag Etiquette class at Union County Elementary School to teach our 5th graders the meaning of the Flag and so much more. On 16 November, we are conducting a Flag Retirement ceremony at the Veterans Bldg. This is open to the public and a must see for everyone. We will partner with our local Scouts, Cubs, Civil Air Patrol, and Junior

ROTC to teach them about the importance of the US Flag and how to properly retire it from service. This event starts at 10 AM. Bring your own lawn chair and come watch. And we cap our year off with our annual Wreaths Across America event, also open and free to the public. We work with the school and the same groups we listed above to conduct a beautiful ceremony in the Union County High School Fine Arts Center. If you want to sponsor a wreath for Veterans that have passed away, visit <https://legionpost121.org/wreaths-across-america/>. Each wreath is only \$17, and all wreaths are placed on Veterans graves throughout the holidays.

Finally, we will never forget our First Pillar, Veterans Affairs. Everything we do touches a Veteran. Working with our youth gives them hope for the future. Nothing fills a Veteran with more pride than showing our Americanism. And finally, we help Veterans directly. We still go to Stonehenge Senior Center every month to celebrate the birthdays of the resident Veterans. We are part of a large team that provides coffee and snacks to Veterans at the Blairsville VA Clinic. And we're working with Foodland to purchase several food boxes to give to Veterans in need during the upcoming Holiday

season. We're always looking for ways to help each other out.

The American Legion is the largest and one of the oldest and most inclusive of all veterans' organizations worldwide and devotes itself to mutual helpfulness, mentoring youth, advocating patriotic honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to fellow service members and veterans.

All members, and interested veterans, are encouraged to attend our meetings on the third Tuesday of every month; the next meeting is 19 November. We meet at 6:30 PM in the Veteran's Center, 78 Old Blue Ridge Hwy. It's a great opportunity to become engaged in the community and to establish strong bonds with fellow Vets.

The Auxiliary, an organization for spouses and daughters of Veterans, will begin its meeting at 6:30 PM in the same building on the same day. Additionally, the Sons of the American Legion and the Legion Riders will have their joint meeting beginning at 5pm and 5:30, respectively.

For more information on the meeting or any Post activities email the Post at apost121@gmail.com or visit the website at legionpost121.org.

Iota Iota a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi October meeting

Iota Iota a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi held their monthly meeting at Branan Lodge on Tuesday, October 15, 2024. President Helen Teboe called the meeting to order with all members reciting the opening ritual and the pledge of allegiance. Robin Zimmerman introduced our guest Margaret who lives at Branan Lodge. Jennifer Weber and Jeanee McJilton provided a fun Halloween inspired meal with hot dogs that looked like bloody fingers when you added ketchup to the bun, 4 different types of apples with pumpkin dip, salad, a 7-layer dip with Tostitos, a scary face pumpkin with fruit kabobs as hair, and popcorn. The dessert was a cake designed like a onesie for the baby shower for Women's Enrichment Center (WEC).

This month we accomplished several community service projects. We collected 116 pairs of socks, 86 pairs of gloves, 4 hats and 2 XXL vests. That will be given to FUMC for the coat giveaway on November 21st at Antioch Church on Gum Log Road. We donated financially to a family member to help with medical expenses and held a baby shower for WEC. Member LuAnn Nutt gave a report on

volunteering with a church in Hayesville to serve 500 meals and sort supplies at Free Will Baptist Church in Helene devastated NC. She informed us that the day before 800 meals were served. The area still doesn't have electricity or running water. Robin Zimmerman shared that there were 7 ladies that came to the Branan Lodge and Villages breakfast birthday celebration.

Discussion was held on the Beta Sigma Phi North Georgia Christmas luncheon hosted by Iota Iota and sponsored by Metro Atlanta Council (MAC) which will be held on December 7th at The Ridges. The registrar has received 24 paid reservations and 3 chapters wanting bazaar tables. It is anticipated that the luncheon may be smaller than the past two years as several chapters in neighboring states were effected by hurricane Helene. At the next meeting members are to bring in items for the door prizes. Several door prizes were received at the October MAC meeting in Roswell which Helen Teboe and Jeanee McJilton attended.

Tickets are still available for Iota Iota's fundraiser that supports Blairsville community. You can obtain tickets from any Iota Iota member or



Hostesses - Jennifer and Jeanee

reach out to Robin Zimmerman at zimmerman00@hotmail.com or Jennifer Weber at jenniferpfund1@icloud.com. The drawing will be held on December 7th for the large décor basket, the Queen's tea basket, and a gift card Christmas tree worth \$490.

Hostess gift winners were Barbara McMullen, Joan Anderson, Sally Shuck, Denise Long, Jan Valencia, Kathy Adams, Helen Teboe and Margaret.

Iota Iota's next meeting will be held on November 12th at 5:30 at Branan Lodge.

The next Branan Lodge and Villages November birthday celebration will be on November 19th at 10 AM. If you would like to learn more about Beta Sigma Phi please contact our Vice President, Kathy Ross at kfeross3@gmail.com.

City Council...from Page 1A

previously proposed Master Fee Schedule and a new housing development going up near the Union County Farmers Market.

Following its introduction in August, the City Council returned to the subject of the R2024-05 Master Fee Schedule. The document is meant to offer some quality-of-life changes to recording and accessing city expenses. This way, any changes would only need to be made to one document, preventing superfluous ordinances.

"This aggregates all the different fees that the city charges - alcohol fees, business licenses, pretty much any sort of fee that's charged ... into one document," City Attorney Marvin Harkins said, adding that the Master Fee Schedule would not change any fees, just list them.

The City Council unanimously approved the proposal for the Master Fee Schedule.

John Allen of Brown Haven Homes approached the City Council with plans to place a 60-home development measuring 16 acres at Windy Hill Road and Shaw Road. Allen revealed that the company has already gone under contract on the property and wanted to inquire about the viability of hooking up to the city's sewer services.

Mayor Jim Conley suggested involving an engineering firm for proper documentation and measurement, and Allen said Brown Haven is in the process of getting a new survey on the land.

The development is one of five current projects that the company is working on and will follow a master plan design.

"It's very, very well-designed," Allen reassured Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook after she expressed

concerns about fitting 60 units on 16 acres. "It's reasonably priced because of the density, so it'll be very tastefully done."

It was decided to first order and review a report from a city engineer before making any sewer decisions on the project.

Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said that new bodycams were implemented for the city's officers thanks to a grant. He noted that the day of the city meeting, Oct. 8, was Shawn Dyer's official last day as Assistant Police Chief.

"He's got some schooling to do before he takes office as Sheriff," Baxter said. "We'll certainly miss him, but I know he's excited for his new venture."

In May, Dyer won the Republican Primary for the Office of Sheriff, and since no Democrats qualified for the office, Dyer will appear unopposed in the Nov. 5 General Election.

For her part, Downtown Development Authority Director Kristen Bentley had big news for the council. Thanks to a new partnership with Union County High School, a new pathway will soon be available to get kids out in the community - and help them stay after graduation.

Specifically, the Hospitality and Tourism Pathway will allow students to learn not just in the classroom but take notes from local community experts.

A few of Downtown Blairsville's businesses can expect a visit from curious kids on a field trip in January, but for now, Bentley is just excited to see an interest in bettering Blairsville among enterprising young men and women.

Airport Manager Dan Firebaugh offered a brief update on airport operations. Less than ideal weather in September

made for a "considerable" drop in activity and fuel sales, but Firebaugh is hopeful that military activity from Army Rangers will help make up the difference.

"After eight days, we have a total of over \$63,000 in revenue just for this month, so we're going to do good this month," Firebaugh said.

Additionally, Firebaugh asked that some airport fees be revisited, such as matching tie-down rates to other cities and looking into charging rental fees for the airport's three office spaces. Rates of \$100 monthly for the large office and \$50 each for the two smaller offices were suggested, and the topic will be revisited in November after review of other fees.

In a called meeting this month, council members enacted the city's annual property tax rate, aka the millage rate, accepting the rollback as they have in recent years. The 2024 rate is 1.112 mills, revised downward slightly from the advertised rate, which contained a clerical error.

Being able to accept the rollback rate "all goes back to being responsible and really tight with our spending approval at City Hall," Mayor Conley said.

"The fiscal responsibility and the vision of the City Council play a big role," Conley said. "And when it comes negotiating time with (the Local Option Sales Tax), we have a great relationship with the commissioner, and we negotiate 20%, which goes a long way toward helping the tax base."

"The merchants go a long way toward helping the tax base, too, as the economy is a major way we keep our taxes down. We're blessed. That's all I can say."

The Blairsville City Council and Mayor Conley meet the second Tuesday each month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall at 62 Blue Ridge Street.