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knew he wanted the Give A Gift program to continue this Christmas season, but he also knew he needed to find a new place to keep all the donated presents.

In thinking about where he and his deputies might move all the donated toys, he came up with the idea of storing them in an environment more befitting the reason for the season.

A lifelong churchgoer himself, the sheriff decided to reach out to First Baptist Blairsville to ask for help.

"I feel like that's much more fitting," said Sheriff Mason. "Hopefully, something can be said (at the church) that might uplift or give these people hope, because these are the people who have fallen on hard times, and we see it every day up here."

And since the church is used to giving back to the community anyway, the leaders of First Baptist Blairsville replied that they would be more than happy to lend a helping hand.

"We are coming alongside (the Sheriff's Office) to help them in how they're trying to serve our community," said Derrick Hartley, associate pastor of First Baptist Blairsville. "However we can come alongside them to make their jobs easier, we absolutely want to do that."

Continued Hartley: "I think it's significant to know that this is the heart of our sheriff's department to do this."

In years past, parents participating in Give A Gift have picked up presents at the Sheriff's Office, though

moving forward, that pickup will occur at the Rock Chapel of First Baptist Blairsville at a date to be determined.

"I appreciate the First Baptist Church for helping us," said Sheriff Mason. "It's really a blessing that they've joined in."

The beauty of the Give A Gift program is that parents get to decide whether their children know the toys are actually coming from the Sheriff's Office.

This gives families that otherwise may not be able to afford presents under the tree the option of celebrating like other families would on Christmas morning – the kids don't have to know that mommy and daddy couldn't buy them toys on their own.

After all, hardship doesn't discriminate, and some families find themselves unexpectedly having to choose between the power bill and Christmas morning, which is why donations to the Give A Gift program are always welcome.

Residents can take cash and check donations to the Sheriff's Office, and checks should be made payable to Union County Sheriff's Office Give A Gift.

Those interested in donating toys should keep in mind the 1 to 12 age range, and the sheriff asks that toys be dropped off – new and unwrapped, with no toy weapons, please – at either the church or the Sheriff's Office during operating hours.

Fortunately, the Sheriff's Office has received donations already this year, like the \$1,000 check delivered last week by retired Florida cop Tom Kester.

"I was a cop most of my life, and I've been very blessed, so it's time to give back," said Kester.

Parents interested in being considered for the Give A Gift program can stop in at the Sheriff's Office or call (706) 439-6066 during the first week of December.

The Sheriff's Office would like to thank its own Ginger Carey and Mary Fortenberry for being the driving forces behind the scenes of the Give A Gift program, which has been ongoing since 2001.

Sheriff Mason will be collecting toys at the annual Vogel State Park Christmas Tree Lighting, which will take place on Saturday, Dec. 9, starting at 4 p.m.

Miner...

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Board." Union County Solicitor General Lamar Paris wrote on Facebook. "She was a very special friend."

Commissioner Paris said that Ruth Ann and her husband Jim made Suches and Union County their adopted home for many years.

"She will be dearly missed," Paris said. "Ruth Ann was one of the most dedicated, hard working, caring persons who successfully ran our elections board and elections for many years."

"We mourn with her husband, her family, and many friends," Paris said.

Ruth Ann and Jim Miner have been a staple in the Suches and Union County communities for what seems like forever. The couple moved to Suches from New York in 1984.

For 32 years, Jim served the Suches community as a volunteer firefighter. Volunteers are the first ones at an emergency scene. They're the last ones to leave. They do extra work, they do work that no one else wants to do.

Not only do they serve the community, but they also serve the firefighters. They're rare to find. In the Suches Volunteer Fire Department, that person was Jim Miner. He's been involved in every community thing, in every firefighter thing. Jim has always been there.

His wife Ruth Ann was the same way.

"So very sorry to hear of the passing of Ruth Ann Miner who was a very special lady," said former County Clerk Peggy Deyton. "She was chairman of the Election Board for many years and did a super job. This was during the time everyone had to go to computers, so she had a tough job, but did it well. She was always cheerful and never complained about making the trip from Suches."

"And I know all her friends in Suches will miss her. She and Jim did so much in the community. Now you can rest in peace, Ruth Ann, and be with your daughter," Deyton said.

Libby Stevens, who replaced Ruth Ann as chairperson of the Union County Board of Elections, said Ruth Ann was a community jewel.

"As I sat in church today, I was turning my phone off," Stevens said. "There was a message there that I could not ignore! My dear friend Ruth Ann Miner had passed during the night. Needless to say, the sermon was lost for today."

"I spent the church time remembering the good times and tough times that Ruth Ann and I had shared. She will always be remembered as an advocate for women and the underdog! She will not be forgotten! Heaven gained a good one last night!"

Ruth Ann was what Stevens referred to as the "chief honcho" of the elections board.

"She stepped down as chairperson about four years ago," Stevens said. "She stuck around another couple of years to make sure I was ready. She brought Union County elections from tally-tally-mark to the computer age. She left an incredible legacy."

Ruth Ann also served many years as chairperson of the Union County Democratic Party.

"And she was in charge of Run Above The Clouds in Suches this year," Stevens said. "She loved to be involved in her community."

Robert Jackson, who knew Ruth Ann and Jim through the Election Board, said he was so sorry to hear that Union County had lost such a good friend.

"We will have two empty chairs at our table at Christmas when we have Board of Registrars for a meal," Jackson said. "We always invited Ruth Ann and Jim. She would bring her famous strawberry salad."

4-H...from Page 1A



More than 300 4-H'ers attended the 2017 District Project Achievements competition. Photo/Lily Avery

they must first complete individual County Project Achievements, where they compete with their peers in the classroom.

"I think this gives them great communication skills," said Timothy Jennings, Union County Extension Coordinator. "Public speaking is incredibly important for people to be successful, whether it is in public speaking or any kind of job."

"Everyone needs to learn how to communicate and, for these kids, this is a start. These kids get great knowledge in research, placing their ideas into logical order and presenting it in a presentation in front of their peers."

While the CPAs also count as a grade, 4-H leaders judge the projects. From there, a first, second and third place winner is determined for each subject category. Those lucky winners have the opportunity to compete at the district level.

Students develop a four to six minute long speech on the topic of their choice, becoming an expert on the subject matter. It is their responsibility to develop the speech, the poster, visual aids, and props and then present that speech, first in front of their peers, and later to a room of judges.

Upon making it to the district level, students are broken up into groups based on their project areas and only competing with similar-subjected speeches. At Saturday's competition, 60 different topic groups

were represented. These included archaeology, food for fitness, human development, veterinary science, outdoors survival skills, paleontology and many more.

While a first, second and third place winner was determined for each category, many areas had ties among the winners because of how well developed the students' speeches are. More than half of the students representing Union County on Saturday brought home a prize, 94 percent of the 108 students that were present. And of those 108 students, an outstanding 57 were first place winners, something that Jennings is very proud of, and with good reason.

According to Jennings, while his students have worked diligently and put their best foot forward to making each project exceptional, the accessibility of the 4-H program in schools plays a major role in the success of the students, and Jennings is exceedingly grateful for it.

"I think that one of the things that makes Union County so successful is because the 4-H program is required by the teachers," said Jennings. "The school system acknowledges the importance of it and embraces it in the curriculum whereas no other school system in North Georgia does that."

And through this support from the school, Jennings is able to help these kids reach their full potential and, as Saturday proved, shine bright among their peers.

"These kids are really prepared," said Jennings. "On average, our kids have presented their presentations three times before getting here. Because of the encouragement from the schools, we're able to really prepare these kids to go out and be successful. I'm very proud of everything they've done here today."

Valley River Ringers Holiday Performances

Valley River Ringers, a community handbell group will be performing with the Young Harris College Choirs and Band during their "Christmas at Young Harris" event November 28 and 29 at 7 p.m.

A free Christmas concert will be held at Ranger United Methodist Church in Ranger on December 2 at 3 p.m.

A free Christmas concert will be held at the St. Clare's Episcopal Church in Blairsville on December 15 at 7 p.m.

A free Christmas concert will be held at Episcopal Church of the Messiah in Murphy on December 16 at 5 p.m.

Everyone is welcome to attend any and all performances. Call 828-557-7926 for more information. NT(Nov22,214)gg

2018 Board of Health Meetings

Meeting location: Union County Health Department, 67 Chase Drive, Blairsville, GA; 11 a.m.; January 24, 2018; April 25, 2018; July 25, 2018; and October 24, 2018. NT(Nov22,209)CA