

Trail...continued from Page 1A

two were hiking when his father stood up from a rest break, he fell backwards.

"The young man performed CPR on his father to no avail," Sheriff Mason said. "It was a sad time for the Beckman family, and one that no one ever wants to experience."

Sheriff Mason said he conversed with the young man at length, and learned that this

was the third year the two had hiked to Slaughter Gap from Vogel State Park.

"They had sort of made this a tradition," the sheriff said. "They hiked in from Vogel to Slaughter. That's a pretty serious climb. His father was having more difficulties this year than the two previous hikes."

Chief Worden said the emergency call came in from the young man at 1:38 p.m.

Union County Sheriff's Detective Andrew Hammond said Beckman's death was swift. He passed out during a rest stop, and his son tried to revive him, Detective Hammond said.

"His son said that he noticed his father was taking more breaks than usual on the climb," Detective Hammond said. "They had been doing some serious hiking. They stopped to rest, when his father got up on his feet again, he fell backwards. The son performed CPR until he couldn't perform CPR anymore."

"I don't believe Mr. Beckman was dead when he hit the ground, but, I'd say he died a few minutes afterward," Detective Hammond said. "How high up were they? They were at the peak of Slaughter Gap (elevation 4,338 feet) when this incident occurred."

The man's son was able to call for help with his cell phone, according to Chief Worden.

"Fortunately, he was able to get a signal to make that call," Chief Worden said.

Fire & Rescue volunteers and paid firefighters trekked to the site with life-saving equipment. The hike-in took approximately one hour and a half, Chief Worden said.

"We were able to get within an hour of him and we decided it was best to call in the Rangers from Camp Frank D. Merrill," Chief Worden said.

Chief Worden, who was in command at the base station, summoned the helicop-

ter from Camp Frank D. Merrill in Dahlonega to accelerate the rescue.

Detective Hammond said it was a difficult scenario for the Army Rangers.

"They came in, then they were running low on fuel, they had to get fuel, then come back. They picked up Mr. Beckman and they were running low on fuel again," he said. "It was about a 3-hour ordeal. None of this was easy."

The rescue team made a valiant effort, but had a very difficult time, not only reaching the area, but clearing a spot for the helicopter evacuation, Chief Worden said.

Sheriff Mason and Chief Worden said that a special thanks must go out to all agencies involved, including Union County Fire & Rescue's volunteer and paid firefighters, Union County Sheriff's deputies, and especially the Suches Fire Station.

Also, Camp Merrill should be applauded for their efforts in the helicopter, they said.

NGTC...continued from Page 1A

for our students," Dr. Thaxton said. "Our graduates have the skills that employers want and need, and our goal is to ensure that we keep up with the changing demands of technology and workforce needs."

Beginning with a \$15,000 donation from the Citizens South Bank Fund (part of the Community Foundation of Gaston County, Inc.) in 2011 for the initial planning phase for building expansion, community support has played a major role to the progression of fulfilling the vision.

The additional classroom and lab space on the Blairsville Campus would accommodate the growing number of students enrolled in quality programs.

Though the immediate need is for additional health sciences classrooms and labs, the facility will enhance the educational experience of all students and allow for growth in programs that prepare NGTC graduates for jobs, Dr. Thaxton said.

The laboratory would also give Blairsville students

seeking associate degrees the opportunity to enroll in courses on campus like biology and chemistry that now require them to drive to the Clarkesville Campus, Dr. Thaxton said.

"We appreciate Union County and especially Commissioner Paris," said NGTC Vice President of Economic Development Dr. Mark Ivester. "Anytime there's been a need, they've been willing to work with us. We've helped them and they've helped us."

Farmers

...continued from Page 1A

Paris said the county hopefully will close on the property this week.

"We're going to start work on Monday trying to get our permits ready," Paris said. "We want to get that bridge in, and I wouldn't rule out the possibility of getting more vendor space built this year. It may not happen, it all depends on an increase of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax dollars coming in."

The Farmers Market has won over its detractors. Once called "the great pole barn," the facility has become a main attraction for Union County.

"This is the greatest pole barn anywhere," Paris said with a smile.

Paris said that the Market doesn't compete with the local grocery stores.

In fact, it's prompted local stores to turn to local farmers for fresh produce, he said.

"Foodland, Ingles, they're buying local produce," Paris said. "The Farmers Market is open on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Folks are still buying fresh produce during the week. I think the Market enhances the demand for fresh fruits and vegetables."

"The best thing that's come out of the Farmers Market is that we have more people farming again," Paris said. "We've got people interested in farming, which is good. We'd like to get to the point where everything we buy is local in terms of fruits and vegetables."

"Farmers are the best land use regulators that you can have," Paris said. "Instead of having to put restrictions on what you can do with property, if folks are farming, growing hay, raising cattle, and other livestock, then there's a whole chunk of property that won't be used for development. It self-zones the county. This is our way of encouraging people to grow produce and to encourage folks to buy local."

Union County Farmers Market Manager Mickey Cummings said that the number of local farmers is on the rise due to the popularity of the Market.

"Since the Market opened, we've gone from about 10 full-time farms to 44," Cummings said. "Now granted that's not a whole lot of farmers, but, it's an impressive number that will continue to grow."

Commissioner Paris said he hopes the experience of the Farmers Market continues to thrive.

"This is doing wonders for our local economy," he said.