

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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UCSO joins task force aimed at catching child predators

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Union County Sheriff's Office has made its first arrest as a member of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, a collaborative law enforcement program that brings state and federal resources to bear in tracking down offenders who would abuse or exploit children online.

Shaun Joseph Kanady, 21, of Blairsville, was arrested May 12 and charged with four counts of sexual molestation for exchanging sexually explicit images with a minor, and one count of sexual exploitation of children for possession of child sexual abuse material, UCSO Sgt. Marc Pilote said.

It was Kanady's second arrest on similar charges in a little over a year, with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit having taken him into custody on four counts of child pornography possession back in February 2020.

Last year's arrest stemmed from GBI investigators working on cybertips regarding Kanady's online behavior, reported to them by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, or NCMEC.

"Anything you do online, all of these service providers – whether it's Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, whatever – if they discover child pornography, they are federally mandated to report it to NCMEC," Pilote said.

After receiving such a report, the National Center attempts to narrow down the geographic area and a state so it can forward the info onto the relevant Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, or ICAC, at the local level.

The ICAC program is a "national network of 61 coordinated task forces representing over 4,500 federal, state and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies," according to <https://www.icactaskforce.org/>.

These agencies and their members continually engage themselves in "proactive



Shaun Joseph Kanady

and reactive investigations and prosecutions of persons involved in child abuse and exploitation involving the internet."

As Union was not an ICAC Task Force member at the time, the initial Kanady tip went to the GBI. But now that UCSO has joined the program, those tips are sent directly to the Sheriff's Office, which is in a better position to handle local cases in a timely manner.

The investigatory powers utilized by the GBI on Kanady's case in 2020

are the same Pilote put to use as a member of the Task Force looking into the 2021 accusations, enabling him to cut out the middleman while retaining access to state-level resources to catch an alleged local offender.

Pilote has been a detective with the Criminal Investigations Division for several years now, and in that time, he has noticed that approximately a third or more of his cases involve children. That's why he wanted to get involved with the Task Force, to stop local criminals from hurting more kids.

He approached Sheriff Mack Mason last year about joining the Task Force, and the sheriff gave him the go-ahead. Pilote received specialized training from the GBI in November, allowing him to take over investigating tips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

At the time of his most recent arrest, Kanady was confined to house arrest with an ankle monitor, with a condition See ICAC Task Force, Page 3A



UCSO Sgt. Marc Pilote looks forward to using his training as a member of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Berry makes the Ivy League with Dartmouth College

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Most high school seniors never consider prestigious Ivy League institutions when narrowing down their college picks, but Union County's own Mollie Berry wouldn't allow the minuscule acceptance rate of her school of choice to impede her lofty aspirations.

Dartmouth College's acceptance rate hovers between 7% and 8%. But as challenging as that seems, according to the campus newspaper, only 1,749 incoming freshmen were accepted for the Class of 2025 from among 28,357 applicants, resulting in a record-low 6.17% acceptance rate.

"I knew they were my See Berry, Page 6A



Following high school graduation in May, Mollie Berry visited Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, the Ivy League school she will be attending in the fall. Photo/Submitted

Woody Gap's Disser headed for Northwestern Ohio

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES – "I'm bored" are two words that Woody Gap School Class of 2021 Valedictorian Grant Disser has not uttered in a very long time.

Attending online classes since the March 2020 COVID-19 shutdown, Disser logged his senior class' highest grade-point average while completing his welding certification at North Georgia Technical College and earning a full scholarship to the University of Northwestern Ohio.

And he did this while holding down three different See Disser, Page 3A



Woody Gap School Class of 2021 Graduate Grant Disser will be attending the University of Northwestern Ohio on a full scholarship this fall, pictured here accepting his diploma from Superintendent John Hill May 22. Photo by Todd Forrest

Farmers Market opens season with crowded exuberance

By Allison Youngblood
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Farmers Market celebrated its season-opening day on Saturday, June 5, with a warm reception for excited market vendors and patrons.

Stalls were full of smiling local vendors eager to get back to some form of normalcy, with COVID-19 mask restrictions relaxed compared to last year, while customers made their way busily from table to table perusing the various homegrown produce and homemade wares.

Market Manager Mickey Cummins was thrilled to have weekly visitors returning, which he hopes will continue See Farmers Market, Page 6A



The Union County Farmers Market's own Patrick Fix helped direct the first POP Kids Club of the season on June 5. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

School Board to adopt FY22 budget, explore new E-SPLOST



Union County Future Farmers of America youngsters received plenty of accolades in the May School Board meeting for recent accomplishments in state-level competition.

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Board of Education members will adopt the FY22 school budget in their June 15 regular meeting. Running July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, the upcoming budget is considerably larger than the current budget.

For FY22, the schools are looking to spend a total of \$47,158,509.28, up about \$7 million from FY21. Revenues have increased as well, projected to be \$46,919,395.30 in FY22 versus \$38,482,861.34 for the FY21 budget.

The projected ending fund balance for FY22 is \$23,858,352.02, which is roughly \$6.8 million more than the projected ending fund balance for

FY21.

Both current and next years' budgets are getting considerable boosts from federal, state and local revenue sources, everything from three rounds of CARES Act funding to reduced austerity cuts and big upticks in local sales and property tax collections.

Specifically, the district is gaining \$6,354,259 in CARES Act monies for FY21 and FY22; a "Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia" state grant for \$630,949; \$1,286,000 in additional QBE funding; and \$2.75 million more in property tax collections over 2021.

Furthermore, the schools absorbed more than 25 positions to save the district \$2.2 million during an uncertain FY21 amid COVID-19, though the Board Office

will be spending about \$2.4 million to refill some "critical vacant positions" next year.

"Throughout the year, we have absorbed positions when people have left through retirement or resignations if at all possible and reduced spending to the bare necessities to try to conserve funding as we were unsure of future funding cuts," School Finance Director Karen Bundy said.

Other expenditures include an additional \$1.6 million in faculty salaries for FY22 due to automatic step increases and scale adjustments, as well as a teacher retirement increase of 0.75%. The Board Office noted that 84% of total budget expenditures is for salaries and benefits. See Board of Education, Page 2A

Paris accepts new development standards for multi-family housing

By Shawn Jarrard
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In a June 1 called meeting, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris accepted a new section of the Union County Code of Ordinances pertaining to the "Minimum Development Standards for Multi-Family Dwellings."

The new section is the culmination of nearly two years of work, coinciding with the lifting of an emergency moratorium in place since August 2019 on the development of such housing like apartment

complexes and townhomes.

Paris held a first reading of the development standards in his April 20 regular meeting, followed by a May 6 public hearing, a May 20 second reading in last month's regular meeting, and finally acceptance on June 1.

Members of the community have attended each See Multi-Family Housing, Page 2A

Commissioner Lamar Paris is hoping that the county's new standards for apartment-style developments will usher in responsible housing sector growth moving forward.



Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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Board of Education...from Page 1A

Budgeted E-SPLOST collections are also increasing from \$4 million to \$5 million in FY22, and altogether, year-to-date revenue increases have helped to offset the number of property and other tax dollars the schools will have to spend to maintain and even expand services for students.

The Board Office held two advertised hearings last month to discuss the budget, on May 11 and May 18, with no attendance or comments from the public. Board members approved the FY22 Tentative Budget in their May 18 regular meeting and are set to adopt it on June 15.

Fortunately, the district does not anticipate a millage

rate increase in 2021, and school officials have said they will continue to follow conservative budgeting practices in accordance with sound fiscal strategy, especially considering ongoing uncertainty surrounding the pandemic.

Unexpected over the past year has been the strength of sales tax collections throughout the pandemic, resulting in projections that the district will reach its hard cap of \$21 million for Education-SPLOST V collections some 11 months early in the five-year collection cycle.

As such, the district is looking at options of putting ESPLOST VI to a vote a year

earlier than expected to avoid interruptions in collections. A ballot initiative could be called as soon as November of this year, but the School Board is also looking at May 2022 as a potential date.

The board discussed these options in their May 18 work session, with members leaning toward a strictly “pay-as-you-go” model for ESPLOST VI rather than building in the potential for SPLOST-backed bonds for emergencies, like with ESPLOST V, during which no bonds have been issued.

Board members are working with Attorney Cory O. Kirby of Harben, Hartley & Hawkins, LLP, to get the



Technology Student Association members Paxton Meyer, Tyler McBride, Rachel Reid and Emily Frizzell have been recognized by the School Board for their high-achieving status in state competitions, pictured here with CTAE Director Josh Davis.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

SPLOST referendum ready to put before voters, with an announcement expected soon on when exactly the measure should appear on ballots locally.

Awards & Recognitions

Also in the May 18 regular meeting, the Board Office honored students and faculty with numerous awards.

Students recognized for their performance as 2021 Career & Technical Student Organization state winners were:

For DECA, Reid Baumeister finished Fifth Place in the category of Business Finance.

For Future Farmers of America, Emma McConnell, Alyssa Sweat, Austin Fairless and Ashley Shipes won for Farm Business Management Team and will compete at nationals in the fall.

Also for FFA, Colby Elliott, Michael Bruce, Miriam King, Emma McConnell and Alyssa Sweat earned FFA State Degrees.

Additionally, Tanner McGee placed third for Tractor Driving, Daniel Fortenberry placed fourth for State Junior Prepared Public Speaking, and Miriam King was recognized for Farm Journal Pork Business.

Members of the Technology Student Association earned quite a few awards, including First Place for the Engineering Design and Build Project team of Hannah Todd, Jordan Pemberton, Tyler McBride, Paxton Meyer and Emily Frizzell.

The TSA team of Emily Frizzell and Rachel Reid placed third for their essay on Engineering Solutions in a Pandemic.

Coming in Second Place for the TEAMS competition (Testing in Engineering Aptitude of Math and Science) were Hannah Todd, Jordan

Pemberton, Emily Frizzell, Tyler McBride and Paxton Meyer.

Hannah Todd and Jordan Pemberton earned Seventh Place for the Forensic Science Competition and Ninth Place for the Program Promotional TSA Brochure; and Emily Frizzell placed fourth in the Rube Goldberg Machine Competition.

School Nutrition Director Cindy Jones and her staff received a certificate recognizing the school district's successful participation in the “2020 Vision Plan for School Nutrition,” a farm-to-school initiative as outlined by the Georgia Department of Education.

“The vision ... for the 2020 project is to have at least 20% of every meal in every Georgia public school to be comprised of Georgia products by the start of the 2020 school year,” according to the state.

Staff members received “Extra Mile Awards” for going above and beyond in carrying out their duties, including retiring educators Elementary School Principal Millie Owenby, Middle School Principal Gwen Stafford, and Woody Gap School's Althea Cantrell and Sheila Tritt Collins.

“Ms. Althea Cantrell, although she has spent her career as a math teacher, has never failed to recognize a child as a whole and the school as a whole,” Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight said. “She recognizes that being able to factor a trinomial is alright, but making sure that child feels respected and loved is much more important.”

“She has worked beyond her classroom – Student Council, the Local Studies Heritage Program, being involved in making sure that the traditions of the school are carried on.”

Added Knight, “Ms. Sheila Collins also has been an

exceptional educator for Union County for many years. She is particularly gifted in meeting the needs of those who need extra help along the way.

“Over the years, more than one student has said that, if it had not been for her, they would not have made it to the graduation stage, and this year has been no exception to that. There are children graduating this year because of what Ms. Collins has done for them.”

Additionally, Knight said that, “between these two ladies here, when you include their time as students at Woody Gap School and their time as educators, there's about a century of experience right here.”

School Athletic Director Mandy Hunter accepted the 8AA Sportsmanship Award for the classiness and sportsmanlike conduct of Union County High School students and coaches for the 2020-21 year, as decided by region athletic directors.

Uchs English Teacher Dr. Crystal Beach was recognized for “Going the Extra Mile” in assisting the schools to write and edit successful major grant applications and for helping to procure the national Divergent Award for “Literacy in a Digital Age.”

School Police Chief Chad Deyton played a video showcasing K-9 Bailey Berry, a 4-year-old Goldendoodle, for her work at the Union County Primary School.

Bailey is certified as a therapeutic dog and works with her handler, School Resource Officer Chad Berry, and Primary School Counselor Misty Graves to assist children experiencing emotional and behavioral issues.

Bailey, Officer Berry and Counselor Graves all received recognition that evening for their work inspiring students with how good a role model Bailey is in following directions at school.

Multi-Family Housing...from Page 1A

of the recent meetings to raise various concerns, including about the potential for out-of-control growth, clearcutting, increased traffic, strain on emergency services, quality control with building materials, etc.

The commissioner said that without zoning, the county was restricted in what it could do to limit the development of multi-family dwellings, and he was loathe to commit to zoning because he believes people should be able to do what they want with their property for the most part.

He attempted to alleviate people's concerns, however, by stating it was his intent to use the new standards to slow any potential influx of apartment-style buildings, and several people said they hoped development would create affordable housing to support retirees and the local labor pool.

Reacting to a sudden interest of developers in 2019, Paris enacted the moratorium and extended it several times until acceptance of the new standards last week.

“As more and more apartment complexes are being built here in Union County permanently, there needed to be some specific rules and regulations for their construction,” Paris said. “This was due to the impact they would have on county roads and the impact they could have on emergency services, specifically the Fire Department.”

While the new requirements make it more difficult for apartments to be developed in the county, Paris said he is not completely against them and wants to make sure that the ones that are built are safe for everyone.

Plus, it's not like developers can just build apartments anywhere they please, Paris said, noting that all multi-family dwellings must have access to city sewer, and that much of the county is publicly owned land, with both

factors limiting the geographic reach of such buildings.

Paris assured people that any unforeseen problems that arise in the future can be addressed in a similar manner to expand on the new standards.

According to the new code section, a multi-family dwelling is “a structure that can house five or more units but is limited to no more than 100 units.”

The section outlines a variety of restrictions and standards for construction, including a maximum building height of 40 feet “as measured from exterior roof peak to the lowest exposed exterior point of the structure.”

Among the other requirements are specifics regarding setbacks from property lines and other structures, and the creation of vegetative or structural buffers around the perimeter of such developments “sufficient to screen (them) from” neighboring properties.

Other stipulations include the paving of all roads within developments, the inclusion of culverts to prevent flooding, the installation of fire hydrants in accordance with the International Fire Code, and more.

Also in his May 20 regular meeting, Paris proclaimed April 2021 as National Donate Life Month in recognition of the “110,000 men, women and children (awaiting) life-saving or life-enhancing organ transplants,” with 4,400 “residing in Georgia alone.”

Paris also held the second reading for the proposed

removal of Chapter 82, Article II of the Union County Code of Ordinances, referred to as the Speed Zone Ordinance.

“Each year, the Department of Transportation provides Union County with what they refer to as the Speed Zone Ordinance,” Paris said. “They list out what the speed limit should be on each state highway going through Union County.”

Added Paris, “Union County has to approve and send a signed copy back to GDOT. Union County goes one step further to ensure we receive this, and we actually go and check the speed limit signs to make sure they are marked in accordance with the document provided by GDOT.”

GDOT's list was mistakenly included as part of the local code in 1992, and Paris recently learned this was unnecessary, as GDOT is responsible for setting the speed limits for state highways, so he removed the offending chapter in the June 1 called meeting.

In other business from May 20, Paris re-upped an agreement between the county and Air Methods for emergency air medical transportation of county residents. The agreed amount is \$76,765, of which the county will pay one half and Union General Hospital will pay the other.

“This is the local emergency helicopter service provided to our residents,” Paris said. “Whether full or part-time, it is paid for with property taxes.”

Correction:

An article in the June 2 edition of the newspaper mistakenly stated that Army Veteran Janice Walters-Taylor organized the May 29 Memorial Day event for American Legion Auxiliary Ira Weaver Post 121.

While Walters-Taylor did put together the event,

the annual Memorial Day Ceremony and Parade is an independently organized endeavor not attached to any particular veterans' service organization, though local VSOs do attend and assist with the ceremony.

The 2021 ceremony did not include a parade.

ICAC Task Force...from Page 1A

of his release being that he must not attempt to access the internet, Pilote said.

But Pilote discovered in January 2021 that Kanady was not following his bond conditions after receiving a tip via NCMEC and from investigators in Idaho who alerted the local Sheriff's Office that Kanady "was messaging a minor female out there."

As a member of the Task Force, Pilote served legal process to social media companies for information that led to Kanady's arrest on his

current charges.

It took a while to receive the requested information, as "electronic service providers" are constantly filling such requests. Fortunately, Pilote said communications between Kanady and the minor in question ceased after the investigation began.

Kanady is being held without bond at the Union County Jail. He has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Currently, Pilote is investigating several tips from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and he's grateful to be able to work these cases at the local level as part of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

The Task Force provides plenty of training opportunities as well as access to specialized equipment through the GBI, which makes itself available to assist in local ICAC investigations analyzing electronic devices for the possession of illicit materials.

"Right now, I'm at the very beginning of what I can do with the Task Force," Pilote said. "The most basic function is to work cybertips when they come in from NCMEC."

"But if I wanted to work proactive type cases, I could take training from the GBI and I would be able to work other types of cases, like dark web investigations or catch someone who may be wanting to meet a minor in person and

perform sexual acts."

Another function of the Task Force is public outreach and education, Pilote said, so churches, civic groups and other community organizations may call the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066 to request a presentation or more information on internet safety for parents and/or children.

And ICAC is likely to make a positive impact in still other ways, as research in

recent years has indicated that many internet sex offenders are also committers of hands-on child molestation, Pilote said, so prosecuting online offenders may help undiscovered victims of sexual abuse.

"As part of the Task Force, we're working hard at it, and if you're breaking the law in this county, we'll catch you," Pilote said.

Disser ...from Page 1A

jobs in Canton, Cleveland and Marietta.

Originally from Cobb County, the Disser family relocated to Suches, where their children received the "hands on" education available at Woody Gap, including

Disser's sister Logan, who just completed her junior year in Suches while dual-enrolled at the University of North Georgia.

"We're very proud of him," Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight said. "He is a representation of what a strong work ethic can accomplish."

When he's not excelling at his studies, he is employed one day a week at J. Christopher's in Marietta, a Georgia-owned restaurant with two dozen locations between Savannah and Nashville, Tennessee.

Furthermore, Disser, whose family still owns a home in Cobb County, repairs commercial doors in Canton three days a week while restoring classic cars at a Cleveland body shop.

"It's just about finding a balance between everything," Disser said. "But considering this was my senior year, I only had two classes, so the workload wasn't all that large. I would just find ways to balance work and school, even if it meant doing them at the same time."

"When I was repairing doors, we would ride around in the truck all day, so I would bring my laptop, and in between jobs when I wasn't driving, I would (do my schoolwork)," he said.

Despite his multitasking expertise, automobiles are where his passions truly reside.

Not only has Disser restored multiple vehicles, but he is attending Northwestern Ohio to join the school's high-performance motorsports program featuring a 7-acre complex with a dragstrip-style

launch pad, a skid pad to test lateral g-forces, and an off-road 4x4 test course.

"I saw an ad on Facebook for the school's high-performance program, so I looked into it, thought it was pretty cool, and I applied and was accepted," Disser said. "I took the SAT because the valedictorian scholarship is dependent upon your score."

"I actually (just received my results) and scored high enough, so it's official: I am going to University of Northwestern Ohio."

Disser visited the university in April and was immediately fascinated by the campus, particularly the motorsports complex.

"The town is small, about the size of Dahlonega, but the school was really nice, and the high-performance motorsports building was very impressive, especially the chassis building," Disser said.

Eventually, he plans to open a garage of his own, however, he realizes a lot can change between now and college graduation.

"I'm not 100% certain, but my end goal is to open a shop doing restorations and just working on custom cars," he said.

Disser credits Charlie Shatzen for helping steer him to his current path four years ago.

"What he does is very similar to what I want to do," Disser said. "He's a friend of my parents, and when I was 14, I would work in his shop. He definitely played a large role in my future."

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



June 5, 2021

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June 15, 2021

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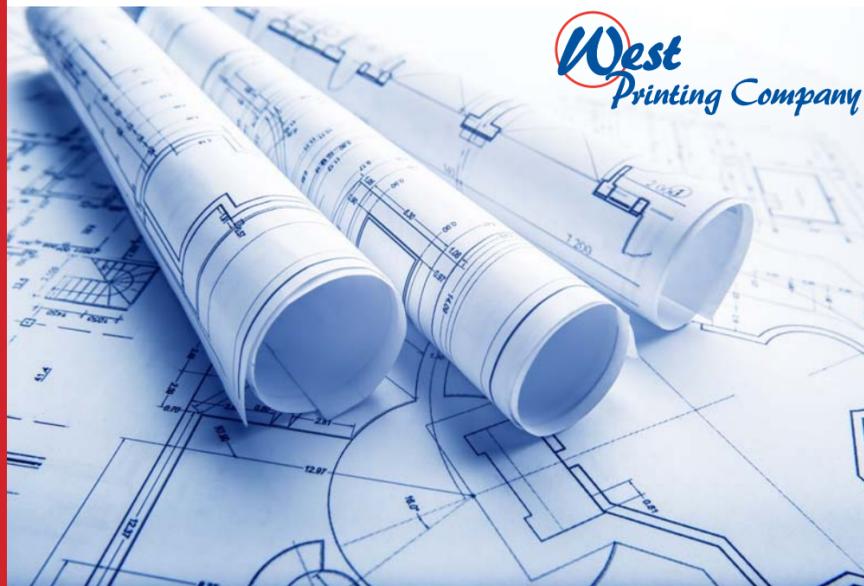
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Berry...from Page 1A

top school, so I applied early decision," Berry said. "(That means you can only apply to one school, and if you're accepted, it's a binding agreement.)"

"I was actually at my job at a local law firm (on Dec. 16) when I checked online and it said I had been accepted."

Though Emory University and the University of Georgia were her backup choices, Dartmouth offered her the most amount of scholarship and has remained Berry's dream school since Day One of starting down the Ivy League path, when COVID-19 lockdown measures steered her in that direction during the summer of 2020.

"Applying during a pandemic came with challenges," she said. "All of my research was online. None of the schools that interested me were accepting in-person tours, so everything you wanted to learn about a school had to come online, and that's how I ended up attracted to Dartmouth."

Berry's campus visit eventually came to fruition last month, when she departed with her family for Hanover, New Hampshire, on the morning of May 22, just one day removed from her Union County High School graduation exercises.

"Everyone was super nice and helpful, and I really liked it because it has a small-town feel similar to Blairsville," Berry said of Dartmouth and the familiar scenery of western New Hampshire, where the Appalachian Trail converges with Main Street in downtown Hanover.

"Everything up there looks the same (as Union County)," she continued. "It was super nice and the people were very friendly."

Berry's plans are to major in government or U.S. history and to attend law school after



Mollie Berry graduated May 21 a proud member of the Union County High School Class of 2021. She starts Dartmouth College in the fall semester.

Photo/Submitted

graduation. In mulling over her future, she briefly contemplated majoring in political science, however, she was relieved to learn that Dartmouth offers government in the place of poly-sci.

"I really liked government better because (that field of study has) always intrigued me throughout my high school experience," she said.

Over the last four years, Berry has never been lacking in support as she pursued her goals, and as a result, she is eager to express her gratitude for her family, friends and teachers.

"I want to thank my parents and my family because they were always there for me," she said. "Then, my two best friends, Landry Baenninger and Bryana Sirianni, were always there for me, too."

"Ms. (April) Krieger at the high school, she was so helpful during the entire process of applying to college, getting in and all that good stuff. I also want to thank my Mock Trial coaches."

Continuing, "I want to

add that during the application process, there were a lot of people who were quick to remind me how hard it is to get into an out-of-state college, but I knew that (Dartmouth) was the right choice for me, and I'm really glad that I followed through with it.

"That makes me even more thankful for my support system, my family and friends, and how they always urged me to do my best."

A few notable Dartmouth alumni include: four-time Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Robert Frost; Fred Rogers of "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" fame; 19th century Republican congressman and staunch abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens; former New York governor Nelson Rockefeller; Political commentator and conservative filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza; and current Major League Baseball pitcher Kyle Hendricks, who went from the Ivy League to the ivy-lined confines of Wrigley Field as a member of the World Series-winning 2016 Chicago Cubs.

Farmers Market...from Page 1A



L-R: J.W. Preston, Ron Tanner, Linda Cacchioli, Melanie Reed, Jim Reed, Patti Cousins and Glen Cousins disseminated information from the American Legion table at the Farmers Market Saturday.

Photo by Allison Youngblood

from now until closing day in October. The market is open every Saturday between 7 a.m. and 1 p.m. and on Tuesdays from 2-5 p.m.

Visitors are also invited to come out on Fridays from 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. for the Trash to Treasure sales, beginning on June 18.

Cummings touched on the return of special market events this summer, including the Tractor Parade around Labor Day and the annual Agricultural Hall of Fame induction ceremony, with specific dates and other details to be made available later.

Sheila Ruud of Crooked Creek Farms in Young Harris has been selling her goat-milk based soaps and cosmetics at the market for 11 years, and she expressed confidence that this would be a great season after COVID-19, with restrictions being lifted and high vaccination rates.

Lanai Breaux, from "Nana's Sweet Treats" in Blairsville, debuted her baked goods in the market last year during the pandemic.

Despite such a potentially rocky beginning getting her start amid COVID, many customers returned to her booth throughout the summer last year to partake of her "Baked &

Highly Flavored" sweets, and she was joyful to see familiar faces stopping by her booth again in 2021.

Roy Bamfield of Murphy Pottery in Murphy, North Carolina, has been selling pretty, functional pottery at the market for 10 years now. He was glad to be back and said he deeply appreciates mask mandates being lifted, as his limited hearing means he relies on lipreading to understand folks.

With rows of stalls filled with unique arts and crafts, clothing and various other products, as well as fresh produce and delicious foods, there was something for everyone in the family to enjoy at the Farmers Market Saturday.

Plus, there's a special event for children with the POP Kids Club, standing for Power of Produce, which meets one Saturday a month. The opening installment on June 5 had kids planting sunflower seeds to take home and grow.

And while part of the market's appeal is entertainment and an abundance of fresh produce, there was a greater sense of community that was revived on opening day.

University of Georgia Master Gardener Robin Volker

summed the sentiment up by saying that "it's important for people to remember that we must not allow fear to cause us to be separate from one another," lest neighbors forget their sense of community.

American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121 is a big supporter of veterans in the community. The post has a market booth dedicated to collecting donations and raising awareness about veteran suicide and suicide prevention.

Volunteer members of the American Legion also work to recruit other community members to become involved in local veteran service organizations, including the American Legion Auxiliary, American Legion Riders, and the Sons of the American Legion.

The Legion was selling American and military branch flags Saturday, raffling off a Golden Boy .22 Rifle for \$10 per ticket, and accepting donations for snacks at the booth.

Generally, guests seemed to enjoy their trips to the Farmers Market that day, with common refrains being heard of, "This is the best market ever," and the proof was in the high rate of attendance and overly abundant smiling faces.



This rabbit box trap was on display during the opening day of the Union County Farmers Market June 5. Inscribed: "Built by Claude Thomas. Died 92 years old. Donated by Charles King."

Photo by Lowell Nicholson