

# North Georgia News

4 Sections 28 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, July 26, 2023

## Makenna Cook welcomed home with town parade

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Welcome home, Makenna Rae Cook!

Makenna returned home from physical rehabilitation in Atlanta on Friday, July 21, receiving a hero's welcome from family and friends who lined the Blairsville Square to cheer on a parade in her honor. She is, after all, a hometown hero to many for showcasing the power of prayer, courage, hard work and terrific medical care after miraculously surviving a devastating brain aneurysm Jan. 8 from which she was not expected to live.

The 24-year-old young woman was arriving home from an extended stay at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, a Top 10 medical facility that specializes in rehab for injuries of the brain, spine and other life-altering traumas. And by all accounts, she has made a tremendous recovery so far.

Shortly after 5:30 p.m. on Friday, Makenna rode around the square in Downtown Blairsville in a parade led by the Union County Sheriff's Office and joined by representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police Department and others.

Loved ones waved

signs and shouted support for Makenna, who waved and smiled in return from the passenger seat of a car driven by her father, Chad Cook, before the family made its way to their Young Harris residence to continue her recovery at home.

"Today is going to be a very special day," Chad said on Facebook, hours before their local arrival on Friday. "It is the day that so many of you have prayed so hard for. Six months and thirteen days after Makenna's aneurysm, we are getting to go home and stay full time."

"This has been an  
See Parade for Makenna, Page 8A



Dozens of supporters lined the Blairsville Square Friday to cheer on Makenna Cook as she made her way home. The family is thankful for all the love and prayers that continue to be directed their way.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Mtn. Music & Moonshine Festival to run July 28-30

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

On the heels of its inaugural success in 2022, the Second Annual Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival will once again be taking over Downtown Blairsville for three days this weekend July 28-30.

Visit Downtown Blairsville organized the festival with assistance from the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and Presenting Sponsor Granddaddy Mimm's Distilling Co., plus other business sponsors who have helped offset musician and production costs.

"The festival and the  
See Music & Moonshine, Page 2A



Tommy Townsend performing in the 2022 Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival, which returns for its second year this weekend.  
Photo/mmmfest2023.com

## UCSO gets new TASERs in donation worth \$57,000

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The Union County Sheriff's Office knows the value of building relationships, both within the community and with other law enforcement agencies.

Such relationships are what have allowed the Sheriff's Office to, for example, successfully raise money each year through community donations to provide presents for well-deserving local children at Christmastime.

And building relationships is what has enabled the close working dynamic between the Sheriff's  
See TASER Donation, Page 2A



UCSO Capt. Craig Davenport showing off the 30 new TASERs that will be upgrading the less-lethal capabilities of patrol deputies.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Deputies band together to help homeless woman in need

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Serve and protect – such is the mandate of the Union County Sheriff's Office. And while "busting bad guys" might be the first thing that comes to mind when most people think of law enforcement, there's another side to carrying the badge that often goes unrecognized.

On Tuesday, July 11, the Sheriff's Office responded to a call of a disabled woman who had to vacate a motel she'd been staying at for lack of funds. Suddenly homeless, the woman was facing the very real possibility of sleeping outdoors in her wheelchair with all her belongings.

Separating her and a safe place to lay her head was a ride to Covington, about three  
See Protect & Serve, Page 2A



UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer receiving a commendation from Chief Deputy John George on behalf of Sheriff Mack Mason for going above and beyond the call of duty.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Veterans get dedicated parking spaces at county facilities

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Nancy Kunz, a local patriot who serves as president of The American Legion Post 121 Auxiliary, had an idea so good that it has inspired two counties to do more for their veterans.

"It came about because when we go (to) Downtown Blairsville, my husband always parks at the veteran parking that is over by the Brown Haven Homes office," Kunz explained. "I said to him one day, 'Why don't we have these all around town at the office buildings and things like that?'"

So, Kunz spoke with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, who was "very receptive" to the idea.

With her advocacy for more veteran-dedicated parking spaces came ideas for where to put them, and Kunz believed they would make a fine addition to other public spaces like the Union County Courthouse, Haralson Civic Center and Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

But Paris took things a step further, and Kunz was pleasantly surprised to learn that he had expanded on her list of locations to install special veteran parking. After getting in contact with the Union County Road Department, Paris ordered signs for Kunz's suggested locales and more.

That list now includes the Civic Center, Courthouse, Community Center, Meeks Park, the Farmers Market, Sports Center, the new Elections



Nancy Kunz and Commissioner Paris standing with one of the new "Military Veteran Parking" signs at the Union County Courthouse.  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Building, Union General Hospital and, of course, city parking around town. According to Commissioner Paris, there are  
See Veterans Parking, Page 2A

## Woman charged with shooting residence using stolen gun

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

A Murphy, North Carolina, woman was arrested last week after allegedly shooting up the residence of a driver at Turpin's Wrecker Service, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Courtney Collier, 32, has been charged with breaking into the residence and a truck on the property, removing items from both, and using a gun she took from the truck to shoot at the residence, which is attached to the company's office space.

UCSO Inv. Rachel Mann said.

The incident took place shortly after Turpin's closed for business on Wednesday, July 19. Earlier that day around lunchtime, Collier had made her way to the Sheriff's Office in Blairsville to report that her vehicle had been stolen by the company, Mann said.

Collier had been in a wreck here a couple of weeks prior, and Turpin's had towed her vehicle. Mann said that Collier's insurance company had arranged to have another wrecker service pick up her  
See Collier Arrest, Page 2A



Courtney Collier



Vol. 114 No. 31  
Arrests - 2D Legals - 4D  
Church - 2B Obituaries - 4B  
Classifieds - 3D Sports - 6A  
Opinion - 4A

**Union County Schools New Student Registration** See page 2C  
**Korean War History: 70th Anniversary of Armistice** See page 8C  
**GMREC Gardening for Arthritis Workshop July 28** See page 6D



**You work hard for your money. Shouldn't it be working hard for you?**  
**BLAIR BURCH | LPL FINANCIAL ADVISOR**  
**BLAIRSVILLE | 177 Highway 515 East | 706-745-0435**

**United Community**  
ADVISORY SERVICES  
Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor and broker-dealer (member FINRA/SIPC). Investment and insurance products are not FDIC insured, are not bank guaranteed, and may lose value.

# Music & Moonshine Festival...from Page 1A

distillery wouldn't be nearly as successful if it wasn't for our amazing Granddaddy Mimm's family," said Tommy Townsend, company founder and co-owner. "This is an exciting weekend for everyone here at Granddaddy Mimm's, the City of Blairsville and our community."

One of the highlights of the festival's second year is the newest venture at Granddaddy Mimm's – the debut of Border Hop Beer in honor of the popular Towns County package store previously owned by Townsend's grandfather and company namesake, Jack "Mimm" McClure.

The first 100 people to purchase a beer at Saturday's concert will receive a free Border Hop Beer Co. souvenir pint class.

"We're really excited to introduce our Border Hop Beer," said Granddaddy Mimm's General Manager and co-owner Megan Kimsey. "We're looking forward to seeing everyone this weekend at the festival. The only thing we want to add is, the distillery will serve individual drinks on Sunday, but unfortunately, no take-home purchases will be allowed (on Sunday)."

The three-day event will feature more than 130 vendors downtown, live music, giveaways, raffles, distillery tours, a 360-degree Photo Booth, a bouncy house and face painting for kids, a food court, a cornhole tournament and more.

Festivities open Friday night with a new wrinkle to the event: the Music and Moonshine 5K Race through Downtown Blairsville at 7 p.m.

Afterward, as the sun sets over Union County, the Travel Channel's Mountain Monsters Team will stop by to share Appalachian legends of mysterious sightings and dangerous encounters from the North Georgia Mountains.

To enter the 5K or cornhole tournament, and to purchase tickets for Friday night's storytelling or any of the other weekend festivities, visit <https://granddaddymimms.com/mmm-23>.

Saturday's music headliner, 7 Bridges: The Ultimate Eagles Experience, takes the stage at 5 p.m., with

concert tickets at \$22 apiece.

Other artists scheduled to grace the distillery stage are The Richie School Band, Tommy Townsend & the Playhouse Band, Nathan Morgan Band, Taylor Austin Dye, The Reeves Brothers, Country River Band, True Youngblood, Old Souls, Zach Alexander, Kim & Curtis Jones, Gavyn Thorsell and

others.

Live music isn't the only item on Saturday's menu; the festival will offer a craft market, distillery tours, a car show, food vendors, festival-goer discounts at Granddaddy Mimm's, music on the town square, and Sip & Shop Drinkin' Passports.

Sunday morning kicks off

with an 8 a.m. church service, including a catered breakfast by Jim's Smokin' Que. Distillery tours get underway at 11 a.m. with drinks and tastings starting at noon.

Participants in the cornhole tournament will take their places at 1 p.m., with Jim's Smokin' Que sticking around to offer lunch.

## TASER Donation...from Page 1A

Office and the Blairsville Police Department, such that many deputies are also employees of the city department, and vice versa.

The Sheriff's Office also excels at developing ties with outside law enforcement partners, demonstrated most recently by the donation of more than \$57,000 in equipment to UCSO from an outside agency.

Earlier this month, UCSO Capt. Craig Davenport received 30 brand-new TASERS with holsters, fresh batteries, 200 live cartridges and 100 training cartridges – enough to completely outfit all patrol deputies and provide training to jail staff and others inside the Sheriff's Office.

"This is at no cost to the taxpayer," said Davenport, a certified trainer in general law enforcement, firearms and TASERS.

Davenport said the donation came by way of his relationship with a fellow TASER instructor who asked that the donating agency remain anonymous. The donating agency, a much larger department, upgraded its own equipment recently and wanted to help out another agency.

The new equipment, the TASER X2 model, will provide

upgraded capabilities at the Sheriff's Office after training enables deputies to replace the older model TASER X26Ps they are currently carrying.

What's the difference? The X26P deploys a single stun cartridge before needing to be reloaded, while the newer model holds twin cartridges and can be used as a stun-gun or for lighting a "warning arc," expanding the less-lethal options available in each deputy's "tool kit" to get unwilling subjects to comply.

The newer models will give deputies the opportunity to deal with multiple subjects, or a second chance to subdue a person resisting arrest after an initial TASER deployment, either because of a missed TASER shot, interference from clothing, or if a suspect does not fully respond at first.

Not only are people under the influence of drugs or alcohol more likely to resist arrest, but they are also less likely to respond to a TASER deployment, so having a backup shot ready to go without the need to reload during an altercation can drastically change the dynamics of an arrest.

Ultimately, the new equipment will decrease the

chances that deputies will need to go "hands on" or draw their service weapons to detain suspects who are not voluntarily surrendering, thereby making potentially bad situations safer for everyone.

"If we can subdue a suspect with a controlled-energy weapon and get them in handcuffs rather than fighting and rolling around on the ground with them, that's what we want," Capt. Davenport said. "We don't want the suspect injured, and we don't want our people injured."

And expanding the less-lethal options for patrol deputies means that the Sheriff's Office can train more jail staff in the use of the leftover X26Ps so that no equipment goes to waste.

Davenport expects to have all patrol deputies trained on the newer models in the coming weeks so that the Sheriff's Office is even better prepared to protect and serve the residents of Union County.

"The goal is to affect arrests with the least amount of trouble as possible," Davenport said. "We don't want to hurt people, but we have a job to do, and sometimes, people have to go into custody."

## Protect & Serve...from Page 1A

hours away, where an assisted living facility had pre-arranged to take her in. But she did not have family or friends to take her and could not afford to pay for transportation.

Enter the Sheriff's Office.

Deputies across two shifts worked to assist the woman, who had been living locally for several months but was unable to maintain a stable housing situation. As night began to fall that Tuesday, a deputy located a taxi service that would be willing to transport her – for \$300.

When UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer learned that \$300 was all that was preventing her from obtaining secure lodging, especially the kind that could meet her needs as a disabled person, he personally arranged to pay for the taxi, and she was

delivered safely.

For his actions, Sheriff Mack Mason issued a commendation from his office in recognition of Maj. Dyer going above and beyond the call of duty.

"This is not a Monday to Friday job," Sheriff Mason said. "When we see a situation like this, we can't say, 'Well, come back in the morning.'"

"We deal with situations that are very out of the ordinary that have to be dealt with right then, where we have got to find a solution. And oftentimes, with certain situations, it is very hard to settle on what needs to be done."

Fortunately, with the help of multiple deputies and a generous third-in-command, the Sheriff's Office was able to manifest the best possible

outcome in a potentially dire situation, providing not just a Band-Aid, but a long-term solution.

"We're problem solvers, and we try to fix people's problems the best we can," Dyer said. "It was our only option; the only thing standing in the way of her getting a place to help take care of her was \$300, and we were happy to help."

Dyer did not want to take all the credit simply because he's the one who gave the money, saying that the episode speaks to the culture at large inside the Union County Sheriff's Office.

"All Union County law enforcement officers are very compassionate and will do whatever it takes for the wellbeing of the citizens," Dyer said.

## Collier Arrest...from Page 1A

damaged car from Turpin's for delivery to an automobile repair shop in Murphy.

The process was taking longer than Collier liked, and she apparently grew impatient and somehow got the idea that Turpin's had stolen her car, Mann said. After investigating the matter, the Sheriff's Office informed Collier that her vehicle had not been stolen.

In fact, her car had been picked up by the other wrecker service as planned on July 18, the day before, and an attempt had already been made to transport it to the body shop, which was closed at the time, with another attempt scheduled for July 19, Mann said.

Collier left the Sheriff's Office and had dinner in town, but instead of returning home to Murphy after eating, she drove over to Turpin's in her rental car, Mann said, adding, "We're not sure why she went there because the car was not even there."

At Turpin's, she allegedly broke into the wrecker driver's home and his personal truck, finding in the latter a gun she used to shoot the residence multiple times before leaving the property, Mann said, noting that Collier and the victim had worked together for a previous employer.

What Collier didn't know was that her former coworker and resident there at Turpin's, who was not at home, had been alerted to her presence on the property by a security system and was watching and reporting her activity to 911, Mann said.

Patrol deputies spotted her driving through town and tried to pull her over, but she kept going. Officers surrounded her vehicle once Blairsville Police joined the pursuit, and only then did Collier finally stop in the middle of the intersection at Home Depot on Georgia 515, Mann said.

She was arrested without incident, and the Sheriff's

Office confiscated the gun she had taken from the property, Mann said.

Present with Collier was her landlord from Murphy, who rode with her to Blairsville to help her figure out the vehicle situation, and Mann said he was an unfortunate witness to the acts at Turpin's.

Mann further stated that the landlord has been cooperative, was not involved in any criminal activity, and that he asked Collier at one point to take him home, a request she refused.

Collier was denied bond last week and remains in custody at the Union County Jail. She has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Her charges include aggravated assault, terroristic threats and acts, first degree burglary, false imprisonment, entering auto, and two counts of theft by taking, all felonies.

## Veterans Parking...from Page 1A

no more signs to put up at the moment, but should the need arise, he will gladly set up more veteran parking spaces. And there seems to be a ripple effect starting from Kunz's suggestion.

"He also spoke to someone in White County – I guess the commissioner there – and told him what we were doing here, and the commissioner there said that's a wonderful idea," added Kunz, revealing that the idea has spread.

County Clerk and Executive Assistant Jennifer Mahan said that the longest part of the whole process was waiting for the signs to arrive, though the wait wasn't long, as Kunz only brought up the idea about two months ago.

"The decision was made basically when she brought it up," said Mahan, discussing how receptive the county was to the project. And Mahan commends Kunz

for approaching the county, noting that she is "easy to talk to, she's easy-going; she's just a great lady."

"I feel great about it because I think it's something that needs to be done to honor our veterans and to make them know we care about them," Kunz said. "And some of them, unfortunately, due to whatever happened to them at their time of service, they can't walk very far if they go to any type of building. So, they need to have that assurance that there's a place there they can park that is comfortable for them to walk from and get their business done."

Ultimately, Kunz wants to express her thanks to Larry and County Manager Larry Garrett for their roles – and eagerness – in completing the project, thereby going the extra mile to serve those who have served their country.

"I am amazed and

grateful to Lamar and to Larry Garrett for getting this taken care of, like, immediately, as fast as they could possibly do it," Kunz said. "They're great – they support everything the veterans do, and we very much appreciate that."

## American Red Cross Volunteers

Make a difference in your community! As a volunteer with the American Red Cross, you can help families recover after a home fire, train individuals in first aid and CPR, support America's military families, or take on any number of other roles that make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient. Get started at <https://www.redcross.org/local/georgia/volunteer.html> or call your NWGA chapter office to ask about volunteer opportunities 844-536-6226.

# Memorial Service planned for Marine found near Trail

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

On Sept. 26, 2022, a Clay County, North Carolina, hunter stumbled across what he initially believed to be an abandoned campsite in the Shooting Creek community near the Appalachian Trail.

As it turned out, the campsite had belonged to U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Sean M. Willey, whose skeletal remains were found in the area thanks to cadaver dogs and a pair of boots – one of which was laced with Willey's dog tags.

In March of 2022, Willey departed from Springer Mountain near Blue Ridge

to begin his journey on the Appalachian Trail. He was supposed to check into a hostel on April 7 but never made it. His final post on social media was from April 4.

DNA testing results arrived in February 2023 and confirmed Willey's proper identification. Medical examiners ruled out foul play

or suicide – a rusted AR-15 found at the campsite had a full 30-round clip.

Authorities believe Willey fell or otherwise met a natural death, but the true cause remains unknown due to the state of the remains and environmental factors.

Willey was a 21-year-old husband, father and a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, though he was honorably discharged on Jan. 31, 2022, after refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccination.

He lived in Ilion, New York, to which his remains will be escorted this week across the Eastern United States by local patriots.

This Thursday, July 27, a ceremony to honor Willey and his service to the country will begin at 10 a.m. in the parking lot of the Clay County Sheriff's Office in Hayesville, North Carolina.

Local Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 members will be present to remember their fallen brother alongside the Clay County Sheriff's Office and American Legion Post #532.

"Ceremony proceedings are expected to commence in front of the main office, weather permitting," Clay County Sheriff Mark Buchanan said. "In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will be moved to the multi-purpose room inside the (Clay County Courthouse)."

Following the service, MCL Unicoi Detachment #783 Comdt. Alton "Doc" Coleman

of Blairsville will make the trek with Clay County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Todd Wingate – himself a Marine veteran – to present Willey's urn and footlocker to his widow and 3-year-old son.

Motorcade participants will include multiple chapters of the American Legion Riders, the Patriot Guard, the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association and various law enforcement agencies.

The multi-state caravan will pass through North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and finally Pennsylvania before arriving at Willey's home in New York.

At least 50 to 100 motorcycles are anticipated to join the convoy, and different detachments and police departments will be adding shoulder patches and other mementos into the footlocker "to tell the story."

Ash Todd, a Towns County member of Unicoi Detachment 783 and former Marine corporal, handcrafted Willey's cremation urn and footlocker. Todd was originally contacted by Post 23 American Legion Riders of Hiawassee because of his status as a past commandant.

"He was a Marine," stated Todd regarding his motivations, admitting he was distraught over Willey having passed alone. "He's one of ours. He was a Marine, and we'll bend over backwards for him."

As a part of the Marine brotherhood, Todd views



Sean Willey  
USMC Lance Corporal

Willey as family, saying, "I'm 80 years old and he was 21 years old, and he was a Marine and I was a Marine, and that's all it takes."

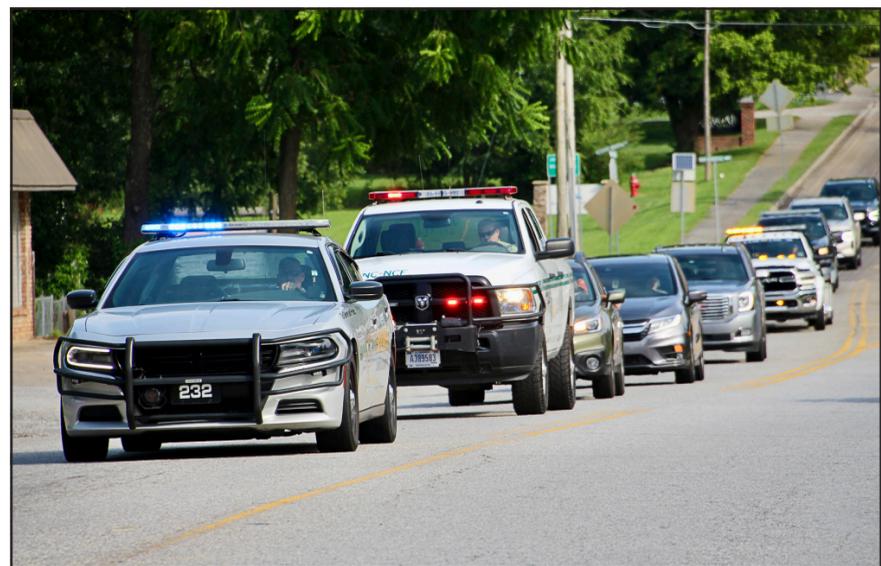
Todd is also donating a 3-inch by 5-inch Marine Corps flag to accompany Willey's remains.

People may watch a live broadcast of the July 27 Memorial Service at the Clay County NC Sheriff's Office Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069234728940>.

The urn delivery is expected to take approximately two days, with the motorcade heading out on the morning of Friday, July 28, and reaching New York sometime in the evening on Saturday, July 29.

Semper Fi, Sean Willey. Thank you for your service, and welcome home.

## Parade for Makenna...from Page 1A



Multiple area law enforcement agencies joined the parade for Makenna Cook on July 21, helping to welcome her home in style. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

unbelievably tough journey, and there is no way that we could have made it through it without all of your prayers. So many of you have taken time

out of your busy lives to join us on the journey.

"You have been right there with us from the very beginning, when we were praying for Makenna to simply be able to move her fingers or wiggle her toes all the way to watching her being able to walk and sing.

"The doctors said that none of this was possible, but God heard your prayers, and through him all things are possible. Our God has been so good to us and he is not finished."

Chad also thanked people for "taking the time each day to read my posts," as the glowing father has used Facebook to keep the North Georgia and Western North Carolina communities that hold Makenna dear up to date on her progress.

"You really made it a very special day for her," Chad wrote the day after the parade. "She cried tears of joy most of the way along the parade route and said that she could not believe that so many people loved her so much.

"It is so wonderful to live in such a wonderful community full of such wonderful people. You didn't only make it a special day for Makenna, you made it a special day for our whole family.

"Yesterday was a wonderful celebration of answered prayers and God's miracles. Thank you for your prayers, love and support. We



Makenna Cook in a recent photo during her extended stay in Atlanta for physical rehabilitation. Photo/Facebook

love you dearly!"

People wishing to continue cheering on Makenna and monitoring her progress, now at Union General Rehab, may do so by following Chad Cook's Facebook page for "Makenna's Miracle Updates."

Come join us at our



## Resource Fair

S.A.F.E. Inc. will be hosting a Community Resource Fair on Friday, August 25th at the Union County Civic Center located at 165 Wellborn Street, Blairsville from 10 AM - 3 PM.

This is a wonderful opportunity for the community to learn about the many avail-

able resources within our local areas. Most resources are offered for either free, or at a reduced rate based on income.

Over 20 local organizations will be represented at this event. For more information, please contact Vicki Franklin at 706-379-1901, or email [vfranklin@safeservices.org](mailto:vfranklin@safeservices.org)