

Honored guests celebrate Tim Tebow's 'Night to Shine' at First United Methodist

By Jarrett Whitener
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On Friday, Feb. 8, the First United Methodist Church of Union County hosted its Second Annual Night to Shine event for special needs individuals.

This event is one of many supported by the Tim Tebow Foundation, which aims to make Night to Shine an unforgettable prom night experience centered on God's love for people with special needs ages 14 and older, according to the FUMC website.

"There's about 700 other churches all around the world that are participating in this event tonight," said Kim Tatman, organizer of the event. "We have 108 guests that joined us tonight and around 300 volunteers, so we are very thankful for all the support."

Volunteers for the event worked to decorate the building, making it look like a spectacle that everyone imagines at a typical prom.

"It's amazing how much work these volunteers put into decorating this place and making it look so good," said Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.



The 2019 Night to Shine at First United Methodist Church of Union County was a swinging extravaganza. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

As the guests started coming in, they grabbed their volunteer buddies who would be with them for the remainder of the evening, and they made their way down the red carpet where they were met with "paparazzi" who applauded and cheered for them.

Guests started the night with a dinner before they moved away from the main room to participate in various activities including arts and crafts, a limo ride, and other live entertainment.

In the arts and crafts room, the guests made custom picture frames for them to put photos from the night in and remember the experience.

For the limo rides, guests got in groups to ride together and enjoy the luxury of the

vehicles on the special night that gave them a personalized prom.

"These guests love all the smallest things," said Tatman. "They enjoy making the picture frames, the limo rides, and everything they can do here tonight."

Following the activities, the groups returned to the main area, where they ate delicious desserts and danced to different songs with each other and their buddies.

When the first round of dancing settled down, a video made by Tim Tebow was played, announcing that all guests were to be crowned kings and queens of Night to Shine.

As the names of each table got called out, the buddies crowned each attendee, and the

guests excitedly accepted their royal status for the evening.

With the conclusion of the crowning, attendees enjoyed two final songs to end the night with before they returned home until next year.

First United Methodist Church of Union County hopes to continue this event at their location.

"We would love the community to get behind us and this event with a few donations," said Tatman. "Just remember that these people are really special, and they come from all different walks of life, with some from daycare centers and some with their parents, just all around, and I love that everybody comes together to cross paths and enjoy this experience."



Volunteers and attendees alike had a blast at the 2019 Night to Shine event at FUMC Blairsville. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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Another perk of the Day Program is that Whitener, in all likelihood, will be able to attend the Benefit Dinner & Auction being held in her honor on Feb. 16 in Blairsville.

"I can't thank the community enough," said Whitener. "There's not enough words in the dictionary to thank them for what they've done for me, from donations to prayers to encouraging words through Facebook messages. If it wasn't for all of that, I probably wouldn't be fighting as strong as I am."

Whitener is also thankful to all the first responders who tended to her the night of the crash – the firefighters, police officers, deputies, EMTs, flight medics and others – as she credits them with having saved her life.

"If it wasn't for them and their quick response time, I probably wouldn't be here today," said Whitener. "And I have to thank the good Lord because he spared me for a reason."

"And my husband – definitely my husband – and my mom and brothers, my sisters-in-law. And pretty much the whole community from Blairsville, Blue Ridge, Young Harris, Ellijay.

"People I don't even know have rallied behind me and will send me messages like, 'You're an inspiration to me,' and I don't even know them. So, that encourages me to work harder to achieve my goals."

"It's sort of overwhelming, but not in a bad way – I would never have thought that there'd be that many people rally behind me."

For more information



Brittany Thomas Whitener working hard at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta.

about the Feb. 16 Benefit & Auction, including how to get involved, call 706-897-1631. No RSVPs necessary, just show up and have a good time.

All benefit proceeds will go directly to the Whiteners, who, aside from having taken on additional expenses recently due to Brittany's stay in Atlanta

and continuing recovery, have also temporarily lost one income as she recovers.

And for plenty of inspirational photos and videos chronicling Whitener's progress, check out the "Brittany Whitener Updates" page on Facebook.