

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, May 10, 2023

Nat'l Day of Prayer promotes Christian values

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

James 5:16b, "Pray fervently in righteousness and avail much," served as the theme for the 2023 National Day of Prayer, observed locally on Thursday, May 4, inside the First Baptist Church of Blairsville.

The National Day of Prayer began in 1952 via a joint resolution in the United States Congress. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan designated the first Thursday of each May as the official observance date, and it's been celebrated nationwide ever since. To reach those who

could not be present for the nonpartisan and non-denominational event, the local prayer assembly was broadcast over two radio stations.

Several area pastors and leaders served as prayer warriors at the annual gathering. After a short introduction by event organizers Jack and Pam Schroeder, First Baptist Pastor Ricky Powell provided the opening invocation.

Ed Lawrie, First Baptist's Minister of Music, invited everyone to join him in singing Matt Redman and Steve Angrisano's "10,000 Reasons."

Kate Barrett, Emmy Berdux and Dakota Stanger performed "The Blessing,"

as popularized by Elevation Worship, Kari Jobe and Cody Carnes. After the songs came the "official" prayers, with each dedicated to a different facet of American life.

Pastor Justin Jarrett of New Union Baptist Church in Blairsville led the Prayer of Thanksgiving, in which he expressed gratitude to the Lord not just for being able to live in a country that allows him to gather and worship openly, but for life itself and a loving Savior to make it worthwhile.

A silent prayer for the good of the program was followed by the Prayer for Church, led by Dr. Al Haywood of Pathway Christian Counseling in Blairsville.

Haywood asked that sinners be humbled and forgiven through "the bride for which Jesus died," that is, the church.

"In a world that is desperately searching for answers," Haywood asked that the church serve as a light for "that man, woman or child that's lying in the ditch of sin, bleeding," so that the Lord could bring them "to a point of healing physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually."

Calvin Bobo, Pastor of First Baptist Andrews, North Carolina, served as a missionary to Ukraine and other areas of Eastern Europe. He administered the Prayer. See Nat'l Day of Prayer, Page 3A



Pam and Jack Schroeder are the principal organizers of the annual National Day of Prayer event in Union County. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Bud Akins shares loves of history in lecture series

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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No one living can match Blairsville native William Harvey "Bud" Akins when it comes to preserving the heritage of Union County, something he's done again and again over his 85 years on Earth, even as times continue to change in the North Georgia Mountains.

In so doing, he has proven, as Hank Williams Jr. put it, that "A Country Boy Can Survive." Such was the theme of his talk on Saturday, April 22, the first of several public discourses lined up for this year's Union County Historical Society Lecture Series.

Bud has done more than simply make Blairsville his lifelong home. As a retired Georgia Department of Transportation engineer and founding member of the Historical Society circa the early 1970s, he has taken part in both building and preserving this community.

He has also personally witnessed many of the county's biggest changes, such as the



Bud Akins asked his wife Mary Carol to join him for special recognition at the end of last month's Historical Society Lecture Series. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

arrival of electricity in the 1940s, and the establishment of Georgia 515 in the '90s as a major thoroughfare connecting the mountains to the wider world.

With all he's seen and played a hand in, Bud deeply understands the history of this place, and he imparted some of his vast knowledge and lessons

learned by sharing several of a lifetime's worth of stories via an hourlong lecture and accompanying photo slideshow that Saturday.

Historical Society President Mickey Cummings and Past President Judy Carpenter introduced Bud and welcomed the many guests. See Akins' History, Page 6A

UCSO, GBI continue searching for missing man

By Shawn Jarrard
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At press time, the Union County Sheriff's Office and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation were still seeking the public's help finding Cordell McMillan, an autistic man who has been missing from Union County since Friday, April 28.

"McMillan, age 21, was last seen walking away from his home on Nichols Circle in Blairsville, Union County, Georgia, on Friday, April 28, 2023, between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. wearing a green shirt, blue jeans, and a backpack," GBI said Sunday.

"McMillan may have made his way to Atlanta, Georgia," the GBI continued. "McMillan is a white man, 5'9" tall, and about 120 lbs."

Anyone with information about the location of McMillan is being asked to call the GBI

regional investigative office in Cleveland at 706-348-4866, the Union County Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066, or the GBI Tip Line at 800-597-8477.

Anonymous tips may be made at <https://gbi.georgia.gov/submit-tips-online> or by downloading the "See Something, Send Something" mobile app.

McMillan has not been heard from or seen since he told his roommate he was "going to the city" on April 28, prompting the roommate to report him missing on Saturday, April 29.

A missing person poster put out by the family says that McMillan should be considered endangered "due to higher



Cordell McMillan functioning Autism/PTSD."

"[He] does not act like a typical adult (childlike at times)," the poster reads, also noting that McMillan wears glasses, hats often, a mustache, and has "trouble interacting with people."

School Board to hold second budget meeting May 16



Union County Board of Education members in their April regular meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Board of Education and Board Office staff will hold a second Budget Public Meeting in their monthly work session on Tuesday, May 16, at 6 p.m. to receive input for the Fiscal Year 2024 budgeting process.

School Board members are expected to adopt the tentative budget in their June regular meeting, just in time

for the start of the next fiscal year on July 1. The tentative budget document will be made available to the public after its adoption next month.

Though not yet finalized, the Board Office said the FY24 budget will be smaller than the current year's total budget, which balanced to about \$54.8 million, because it will not include major grant funding that appeared in recent years.

Key considerations in the forthcoming operating budget feature several

increases, however, including the annual state-funded health insurance cost per certified school employee, like teachers and administrators, rising from \$11,340 to \$18,960.

Superintendent John Hill said health care for non-certified employees – secretaries, custodians, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, lunchroom staff, etc. – is set to go up, too, but adjustments will occur incrementally over the next three years to help. See School Board Budget, Page 2A

UGH generates \$227 million for local, state economy

News Special
North Georgia News

In 2021, Union General Hospital of Blairsville generated \$227,205,000 in revenue for the local and state economy, according to a recently released report by the Georgia Hospital Association, the state's largest hospital trade association.

Union General had direct expenditures of more than \$99,585,000 in 2021. The total economic impact of those expenditures was \$227,205,000 when combined with an economic multiplier developed by the United States Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis.

This output multiplier considers the "ripple" effect of direct hospital expenditures on other sectors of the economy, such as medical supplies, durable medical equipment and pharmaceuticals.

Economic multipliers are used to model the resulting impact of a change in one industry on the "circular flow" of spending within an economy as a whole.

During the same time period, Union General Hospital provided approximately \$7,082,000 in uncompensated care while sustaining more than 735 full-time jobs throughout Union County and the region.

When a U.S. Department of Commerce multiplier is applied to the jobs number, it is revealed that an additional 1,851 jobs are supported across the region due to the economic activity of Union General Hospital.

The hospital spent \$50,885,000 in salaries and benefits, resulting in total household earnings in the community of \$106,290,000.

"Union General Hospital is dedicated to providing timely, quality care to our patients and community," said Union General Health System CEO Kevin Bierschenk. "We are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and treat anyone who comes through our doors."

"We are proud to partner with Union County to offer this care and ensure our communities thrive in terms of wellness as well as economically. We are dedicated to ensuring our residents receive state-of-the-art health care services."

"We provide quality care to every patient, regardless of ability to pay. This environment often puts financial stress on our state's hospitals."

Hospitals can cope with negative operating margins in the short term, but hospitals that are unable to realize and maintain positive operating margins will likely face



Kevin Bierschenk Union General CEO

closure sooner or later, which can be detrimental to the health and wellness of their communities.

According to Bierschenk, every community needs nearby access to a strong, vibrant health care system that will not only meet the health care needs of its residents, but also attract other industries and businesses to the area.

"Preserving access to health care is extremely important, and we are the primary guardian of health in our community," Bierschenk said. "A healthy community depends on the strength of its hospital, both financially and in treating patients."



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Spoofers target grieving loved ones in scam

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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A particularly deprived scam cropped up on the local scene last week when someone began spoofing the phone numbers of area funeral homes to call and steal money from the grieving loved ones of recently deceased people, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The scammer has been asking for financial and other personal information to process over-the-phone payments of funeral expenses, UCSO Capt. Daren "Bear" Osborn said.

None of the funeral homes in the area solicit payment information over the phone, and the Sheriff's Office is advising people to disregard these calls.

Mountain View Funeral Home of Blairsville was the first to report the activity to law enforcement after two separate individuals alerted them to the scam.

"It has come to our attention that scammers have been contacting families which we have served in the past few months asking for credit card/debit card numbers and Social Security numbers," Mountain View owner Charles Long said last week.

"On the caller ID it shows Mountain View Funeral Home telephone number, but it is not us calling," Long continued. "They will even give one of our names that work here at the funeral home."

"It is not just the Mountain View Funeral Home;

it is happening to other funeral homes in the area. Please hang up and do not give any of your information to them. Please contact Bear Osborn at the Sheriff's Department if this happens to you."

Banister-Cooper Funeral

Home of Hiawassee also released a statement last week about the potential scam.

"While we have no reports of our number being spoofed or scammers representing themselves as Banister-Cooper, please

know that we will never call asking for your credit card number... never," the statement read. "If anyone calls representing themselves as us, hang up immediately and call our direct number 706-896-2218."

School Board Budget...from Page 1A

school systems better absorb those costs locally.

State funding is determined by the Quality Basic Education Formula, which is calculated based on the number of full-time equivalent students attending a school system, the level of experience and education of teachers, and health insurance needs for certified staff.

QBE funding from the state is reduced each year by subtracting the equivalent of 5 mills for the "local fair share," the total of which is determined by the annually revised property tax digest.

Coupled with increased health care costs and the Union County digest going up considerably in recent years due to COVID-19 pandemic-era relocations to the area, the system will be receiving a significantly smaller QBE allotment for students in FY24.

"The actual number is not going down as much as you would think because of the increased health care rate we're getting," Hill said. "The take-home dollars are not going down tremendously, but the money is ear-marked

for and has to go to health care insurance costs for those employees.

"So, we're losing \$2.2 million in state funding if you really boil it down to the bottom line. We also anticipate an increase to that local fair share for two more years because there's a two-year lag between when the county does the tax appraisal of the property and when our funding comes out."

Moving forward, grants will help soften the blow of that steady increase in the local fair share and lighten the strain on taxpayers for typical expenditures like instruction and technology, pupil services, media services, administration, maintenance and operation, student transportation, etc.

Hill, School Finance Director Karen Bundy, the Union County Schools administration team and the Board of Education are trying to avoid making any cuts to next year's budget, as the goal is to keep as many options open for students as possible.

Some kids may thrive in sports or fine arts as opposed to base academics, and it would "be a shame" to lose

funding for those programs," said Hill, who maintains that the team has tried to be "very good stewards of taxpayers' money."

Union County is not the only school system under financial stress. Many rural mountain communities are facing similar tough budgeting decisions, as "everywhere has seen this population boom and increased housing prices and values," Hill said.

Thanks to healthy fund reserves, the Board Office staff said there is no plan to raise property taxes within the next year, even as the local share increases by \$2.2 million. It's hard to see beyond that point, Hill said, but discussions will continue in the May 16 meeting.

Board members held the first Public Budget Meeting on Tuesday, May 9, after press time, to augment the upcoming Public Budget Meeting set for the work session next week.

The Union County Board of Education meets the third Tuesday of every month starting at 6 p.m. inside the Board Office at 124 Hughes Street. The public is invited and encouraged to attend.

Relay For Life Annual Event Ready for Saturday, May 20th



The word cancer is not a word anyone likes to speak or hear about and no one desires to be diagnosed and treated for cancers of any kind at any age. "Our local communities become focused on this fight against cancer all too often and many times our hearts and minds become burdened," stated Allyson McGraw, longtime volunteer for the American Cancer Society here in Union County. "For well over 50 years there have been individuals, businesses, and churches who have led this fight and are still involved in supporting the research that has made great strides in our lives," she added.

The 28th Annual American Cancer Society's Relay For Life will be held at the Union County Farmers Market here in Blairsville on Saturday, May 20th, from 6 PM - 10 PM. Details were presented in last week's news release when the Pre-event free Picnic for Survivors was announced for 4:30 pm to 5:30 pm. also at the Farmers Market.

This week we want to send out a big thank you to our 2023 Sponsors for our 28th Annual fight to end all cancers. Mia Crowe, Event Leadership Team Accounting Chair has provided the latest updated list.

Platinum Level Sponsor is the Northeast Georgia Medical Center/Cancer Services; the Silver Level Sponsors are: Alexander's Store and King Ford; Bronze Level Sponsors include: America's Home Place; Brock Kelley Trucking LLC; Cozy Cove Realty; L & L Rental/Jackson Housing LLC; and Louise McTaggart.

There will be a final listing of all levels of sponsors and also listings of In Kind Donors on display at the event and in our post event releases as well. "All current sponsors are updated often and are displayed with our online and social media information also," added Accounting Chair Mia Crowe.

"Our local volunteers and teams want to extend our sincere condolences and prayers to the family and staff on the passing of Wanda Rose West, longtime Office Manager at North Georgia News. She and the staff and her family have generously supported our community efforts in fighting cancer in many ways through the years," stated Allyson McGraw. "She was always ready to help me with any sort of printing needs or questions about getting 4-H info published and then in later years with news releas-

es for Daffodil Days projects or Cancer Survivor Fashion Shows," she concluded. It is this type of business support that truly makes an impact on our lives.

With the support of our small and large businesses as well as our churches and RFL teams the American Cancer Society is making a difference in the lives of cancer thrivers", adds Allyson McGraw.

"As I think back about my earlier volunteer involvement with the American Cancer Society I realize how often I received free educational materials for my 4-H programs on stop smoking and tobacco use; when I handed out Breast Cancer and Mammogram information at County Health Fairs coordinated by local UGA Cooperative Extension staff". All of that plus the amazing research programs that created mammograms and the guidelines for early detection of breast cancer. "That particularly hit home when I thought back to the suffering and pain my Aunt Alma experienced as she died from her undiagnosed breast cancer. I had assumed she would have sought medical help at her yearly exams at the very least, not realizing that she

did not get those checkups. I just assumed she did because I did and my mother did!"

When someone thinks about all the types of cancers that are now able to be detected early when treatments work to lessen the suffering and burdens or when a cancer is cured or in remission, we should also be aware of the support that you contributed has and will continue to make a difference.

Encourage those who are currently in the fight against cancer and those that can now proudly and thankfully say they are cancer survivors to join other thrivers and fighters on Saturday, May 20th at the Union County Farmers Market from 6 PM to 10 PM for our celebration and remembrance ceremonies. Walk with your family, friend, neighbors, and sponsors too! Family friendly activities and information that will inspire you to stay healthy and fight cancer.

For more information on how to participate or how to support the Union County Relay For Life event on May 20th contact Allyson McGraw at 706/835/8384. There is also information on the website: www.cancer.org or by calling 1-800- ACS-2345.

Mountain Friends Book Club Anniversary meeting

In 2003, some members of Friends of the Union County Library set out to form a book club. The Mountain Friends Book Club will celebrate its 20th anniversary at its May meeting.

We have met continually for 20 years, missing three times for snow and four times for Covid. Covid didn't even hold us down for long. We met, masked, at Meeks Park for several months and then resumed meeting at the Library.

Although the membership has changed over the years, the format remains the same. Members sign up to be responsible for a particular month. They each select the book available in the Pines Library System early enough to give everyone the time to

read it, and then facilitate the round-table discussion. Book selections have included biographical, historical, classics, fantasy, fiction, and non-fiction. Sometimes everyone agrees on reaction to the book and sometimes there are dissenting opinions. Either way, the discussion is usually very lively. The most often-heard comment is: "I never would have chosen this book to read if it weren't for this group, but I'm glad I read it."

The Mountain Friends Book Club meets the second Wednesday of each month at 1 PM in the Library Meeting Room. The Librarian has a list of upcoming books to be presented and interested parties are welcome to join us or to just give us a visit.

Top of Georgia Plein Air Festival at Hamilton Gardens

The Top of Georgia Plein Air Festival is happening this week, May 12 and 13, in the beautiful Hamilton Gardens at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds!

Artists from New York to Florida are participating in the painting event and vying for \$2000 in prize money! Artists will set their easels up among the rhododendrons and azaleas, visitors can watch the artists' canvases come to life with color and beauty.

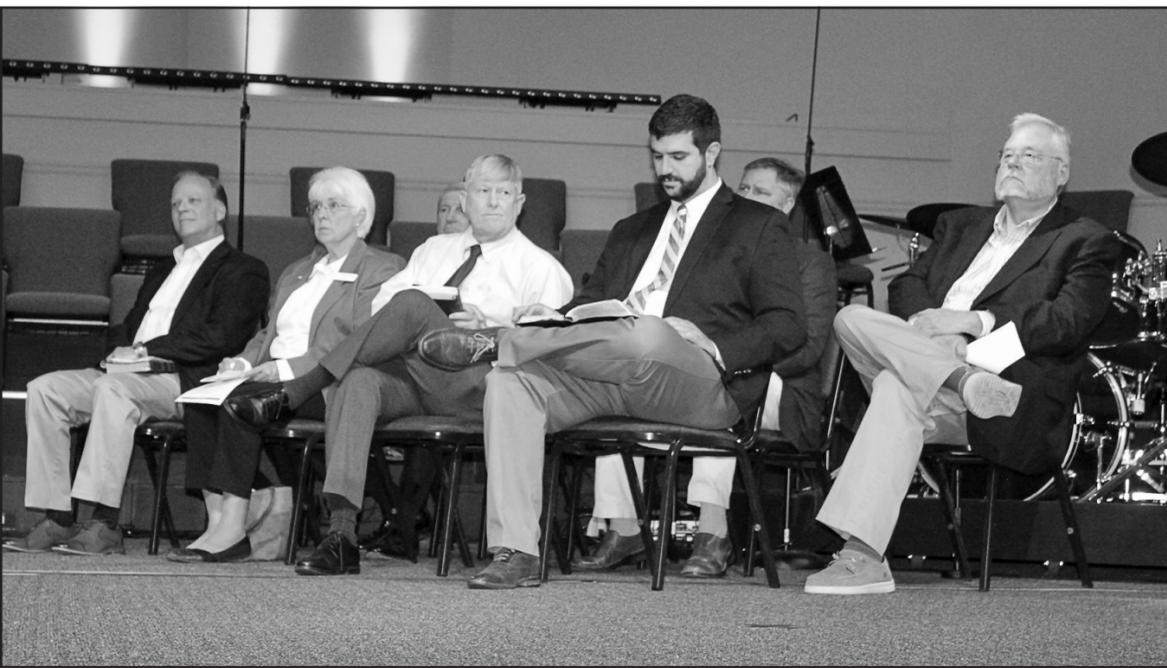
The paintings will be

judged on Saturday, May 13, from 1 - 2 PM. The artworks will then be available for purchase at the Wet Paint Sale from 2 - 5 PM, at the Hamilton Gardens Pavilion.

Come and experience this art happening sponsored by Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hamilton Gardens, The Azalea Farm in Blairsville, Mountain Art Association, Mountain Regional Arts & Crafts Guild.

For more information: togpaf@gmail.com.

National Day of Prayer ...from Page 1A



Local leaders waiting their turn to pray over America on the First Baptist Blairsville stage May 4. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

for World Missions and those who take the initiative to go, as well as the folks who need to hear the message of Christ via missionaries.

Steve Rowe, President of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, delivered the Prayer for Business, asking for success for local commerce. To make a point of how business is more than just the transfer of money, he asked audience members to stand if they owned their own business or shopped at one.

"This is just a little indication of how important our businesses are," Rowe said. "We all either work, we shop, we visit businesses, and it's an opportunity to show the love of God. We can show God through our actions, through our words, and just the way we treat others."

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley administered the Prayer for Government, saying that the purpose of a responsible government is to maintain peaceful communities that echo the values of the gospel.

Not only that, but Langley prayed for authority figures and those in employment of the

government to act with good judgment and follow the heart of Christ.

Redeemer Baptist Church Pastor Bill Schakat led the Prayer for Military. Veterans stood as the audience applauded their service, and Schakat asked that the Lord bless veterans and active duty servicemembers the world over.

Indicative of the symbolic crest on the front of the program's brochure, Schakat made the point that everyone should be a warrior for the kingdom of Heaven.

Ricky Powell returned to the stage for the Prayer for Education, expressing gratitude for educators and students, adults and children alike, as learning is a lifelong journey.

For teachers and professors in public and private schools, secondary education, and other institutions, Powell prayed for "their safety, their health, their wellbeing ... (and) their best to inspire, motivate, and nurture their students." Along with that, Powell asked that God grant educators rest, because they "work harder than people know."

The Prayer for Media was delivered by Legacy Broadcasting President Lee Lancaster, who took a break from monitoring the live broadcasts to administer a prayer to encourage "those who are out there every day, getting up and going in, no matter the circumstances, and going to be Christ in a very dark place."

His prayer included fellow radio and television broadcasters, social media administrators and users, and newspapers.

Finally, Pam Alexander of Blairsville's Hope House led the Prayer for Family, which she called one of the greatest of God's gifts. The message was meant for those who work in family and child services like youth and children's ministry or counseling, and included the massive blanket of anyone who is part of a family or wants one.

"Healthy families provide for children to grow into mature adults and model Your Son's love by serving one another, thus making cornerstones for (Your) foundation," prayed Alexander, asking the Lord to strengthen and "lift up" all families, be they composed of a mother

and father, a single parent, or grandparents.

Minister of Music Ed Lawrie closed the program by leading everyone in singing "Be Thou My Vision" as the lyrics scrolled across two display screens on the walls of either side of the stage.

"God bless you," Lawrie said with a smile at the end of the performance. "Thank you for coming tonight. You are dismissed."

Reece Farm presents Curtis & Kim Jones, Mountain Gypsy Music! Friday, May 12 from 1-3 PM

Reece Farm presents Curtis & Kim Jones, Mountain Gypsy Music! at the Reece Farm & Heritage Center Pavilion, Friday, May 12, 2023, 1-3 PM. Bring your lawn chairs to the pavilion to enjoy two hours of music! Free admission and donations are greatly appreciated!

Curtis Jones reins as the most highly respected flatpicking guitarist on the planet, expanding on the legacy forged by musicians such as John Coltrane, David Gilmour, Doc Watson and Tony Rice. Jones is often called by fans and critics alike, "The world's fastest and cleanest" acoustic guitarist, an extraordinary technique that he both teaches and brings to his contemporary guitar performances and productions. Speed is only a small part of what Curtis can do though. He efficiently plays 22 instruments and is self-taught on all! Through his pure guitar mastery, he has created a new style of Music - "Mountain Gypsy Music" allowing his abilities to weave in and out of Bluegrass, Jazz, Rock, Flamenco, and World Music. It is more original than anything that has been heard since Django Reinhardt!

Kim Jones is an artist, singer, and songwriter. Her vocal influences growing up were Wynonna Judd, Patty Loveless, Janice Joplin, Bobbie Gentry, and Bonnie Rait, and Stevie Nicks. Her Musical influences include Jaco Pastorius, Richard Wright, Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, and McCoy Tyner. She sings and plays upright Bass with Curtis' Bluegrass band - Primal Roots, and performs with Curtis in their Mountain Gypsy Music duo. Kim has been singing her whole life but has only just begun to perform in front of audiences within the past few years. Kim plays and sings with emotion and delta blues style soul. When asked about her goals through music, her response is "I just want to share it. It's in here, deep down inside, and I wanna let it out"! Bring your lawn chairs! Free admission, donations welcome!

Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer, and his books are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him & his family

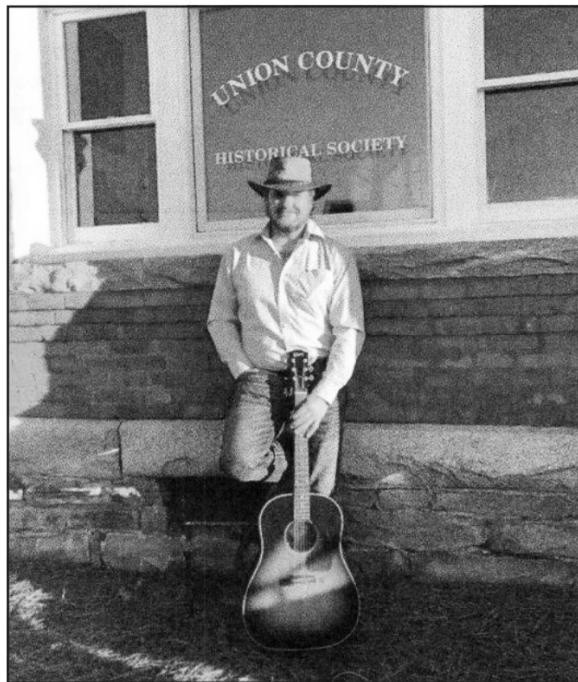


Kim and Curtis Jones

with exhibits, farm animals, local books and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park. Please come and enjoy the farm exhibits before the concert.

Farm exhibits are open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 AM until 4 PM. Free Admission. 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville, GA; 706-745-2034; FB: Reece Heritage Farm, www.reecefarm.org.

Mike Lane in concert at Historic Courthouse



Mike Lane

Union County Historical Society on the Square in Blairsville presents Mike Lane, a local musician, in concert on Friday, May 12th beginning at 7 PM. He plays country classics, old and new. This is a free event, so come on out and join us at the courthouse. The doors open at 6 PM with the concert beginning at 7 PM. All donations are accepted and appreciated.

Akins' History ...from Page 1A



The Family of Bud Akins. Back (L-R): Jeff Barry, Vicki Stewart, Mary Carol Akins, Kevin Adamson, Kim Loccisano, Lyric Brogden and Greg Brogden. Front (L-R): William Akins, Jan Akins and Bud Akins.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

in attendance, including members of Bud's family, to the upper courtroom of the Old Courthouse on the square.

As it happened, the occasion marked the first time the new sound system, dubbed "The Sounds of Sam" in honor of society member Sam Ensley, was used to record a lecture for posterity's sake.

Additional funds are needed to put finishing touches on the sound system, Cummings said, and people may stop into the courthouse museum during regular hours to donate toward the cause.

Bud began his lecture by paying tribute to prominent local preservationist Edith Paris, who passed away in 1985, noting her instrumental roles in forming the Historical Society and saving the Old Courthouse – "one of the finest places in the county" – from being demolished.

He then took people on a journey from his birth in April 1938 through being educated at an early age in various community buildings around the county, including the old Legion Hall and Baptist Church, demonstrating a major difference from the way kids are educated today.

Similarly, many of Bud's stories artfully juxtaposed past and present, showing attendees just how much has changed in the intervening years.

One of the biggest shifts has been the way people come together. Volunteer groups like the Historical Society and others work to keep the old ways alive, but it was a smaller community back then, and people were closer, more involved in the lives of their friends and neighbors.

For instance, Bud spoke about a murder trial he sat in on in that very courthouse as a teenager in 1954, a time when such events were big public spectacles. The defendant was found not guilty and paid for his legal fees by deeding over the family farm.

Of course, some things haven't changed so much. After his father left his mother when Bud was 3, he, his mom and two sisters moved in with Bud's grandmother, echoing a family dynamic that exists for many today.

A key difference in those times – besides the fact that his grandmother's 90-acre property cost her just \$1 an acre to buy – was that Bud's uncles teamed up to build the family a new house in 1945, in the Canal Lake Community, showcasing a commonplace example of the resilience, closeness and self-sustaining nature of mountainfolk who knew how to take care of their own.

People of the area faced greater hardship in Bud's youth, having to do more

for themselves with fewer resources and opportunities. But it was also an era when residents could more readily count on family and friends to survive – and they were happy doing it.

Bud recalled fondly the ways his family subsisted, even without much money. The Akins, including young Bud, picked bell peppers and completed other tasks for wages, and the family had their own milk cow, raised their own chickens, and grew their own food to put on the table.

There were school buses back then, but a lot of kids walked to class, particularly in the younger grades when churches served as education centers. When he was a little older, seventh or eighth grade, Bud began attending "Town School" as the school system was referred to by the locals.

At Union County High, he and his teammates enjoyed multiple banner seasons in basketball and baseball, particularly in 1955 when the teams went to the state playoffs in both sports for the first time, and the entire town celebrated their success. That was before the football program existed.

He graduated UCHS in 1956, and knowing he had to "get out and go to work," Bud quickly joined the state Highway Department after getting an employment recommendation from a friend.

The young road worker started out making \$150 a month, which wasn't much money even by 1950s standards. So, to earn a better living, he began attending Marietta's Southern Technical Institute in 1959 for a two-year engineering degree, a year of which he spent playing basketball.

All told, Bud spent 34 years in GDOT's engineering department, serving toward the end of his career as Assistant Area Engineer for Lumpkin, White, Towns and Union counties.

He ruined his knees in the process, walking many a mile in the North Georgia Mountains to keep as many roads paved and passable as possible, though Bud said he would do it all again because he remains grateful for his lengthy career.

But he wasn't in his new career long before he "got a call from Uncle Sam," who drafted him into the U.S. Army 1st Infantry Division, aka "The Big Red One," named after the division patch. The 1st Infantry is the oldest continuously serving division in the Regular Army.

His two-year tour of duty took him first to Wildflecken and then to Berlin in Germany, where he served during the Berlin Crisis, in which the U.S.

attempted to maintain stability in the German capital in the leadup to the Berlin Wall being built in 1961.

While in Berlin, Bud received an impromptu visit from a friendly face, U.S. Army Maj. Leon Davenport, a fellow native son of Union County, and the two talked about the military and their shared birthplace.

The young man's superiors wanted him to stay in the service, telling him they needed "a bunch of people in the Army like you," but Bud made it clear when his time was up that he would be heading straight home to "God's country," his beloved Blairsville, Georgia.

He shared many more stories that day, about the enormous 52-pound catfish he caught in 1958 after wrestling with it for 45 minutes on Lake Nottely; the family he started with his late wife Ann McCollum Akins; his Historical Society escapades over the years, which included multiple stints as president during which time he helped secure important artifacts and properties, like the Butt Mock House, a Ford Model T and an original lamp from when the square was first electrified.

Bud used his stories to highlight simpler days when the community worked and spent more time together, both in solving problems and honoring that which came before, and he urged those gathered to continue the traditions that led to the prosperity Union County enjoys today.

At the end of his lecture, Bud asked his wife, Mary Carol Akins, to join him in front of the audience, where she received a warm welcome from the many who know her. Mary Carol is the daughter of Edith Paris, and she and Bud share a deep love of Blairsville's heritage.

The pair became involved after Bud received a directive from his dying wife Ann in 2009 to "find somebody to be your partner ... (in) the church," and he and Mary Carol, both members of First United Methodist of Union County, have been happily married for more than a decade.

Bud's daughter Kim Loccisano traveled all the way from Ohio to be there on April 22, and joining her to support Bud for the lecture were several more from the family, including Bud's son William Jr. and other members of the Akins tribe.

It was a joyous occasion featuring a reception with cake and punch downstairs, and everyone left the Old Courthouse with a greater sense of community, a healthy respect for local history, and a better understanding of just how "A Country Boy Can Survive" – by working with others.

Master Gardeners to Host Spring Plant Sale on May 27th

Spring is here and for many it's the time for tending gardens and sprucing up the yard. Gardening enthusiasts can stock up on flowers, shrubs, trees and native plants at the upcoming Towns-Union Master Gardeners Spring Plant Sale, Saturday, May 27. All proceeds help to build and maintain public gardens in Towns and Union Counties.

The plant sale will be open from 8 a.m. to noon at the Union County Farmers Market, located at 290 Farmers Market Way in Blairsville. All sales are cash or check only.

The many plants and seedlings available will include native, deer resistant, edible, and pollinator-friendly plants for sun and shade that thrive in Union and Towns counties, including many easy-to-grow plants for beginner gardeners.

Towns-Union Master Gardener Association

Spring Plant Sale

Saturday, May 27 • 8:00am to Noon

Union County Farmers Market
290 Farmers Market Way, Blairsville

Native and Pollinator Plants
Herbs and Vegetables
Locally Grown Plants



"TUMGA"

Proceeds to fund TUMGA Community Projects

Cash or checks only - no credit cards.

All plants are grown locally, and the Master Gardeners will be on hand to help with your selection as well as to offer advice on planting, care, and maintenance.

Attendees can also tour the adjacent Gold Medal Garden, a demonstration garden that includes native and pollinator plants appropriate to the North Georgia region.

Admission and parking are free. Attendees are encour-

aged to bring their own bags, boxes, or tubs to carry plants. Pets are not permitted at the plant sale and the Union County Farmers Market will not be open that day.

To learn more about the UGA Master Gardener Extension Volunteer certification program, visit tinyurl.com/ugamg. Find free local gardening tips on the Towns-Union Master Gardeners website at perennialpals.com.