

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## UCSO honors two of its own in Criminal Investigations

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
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The Criminal Investigations Division of the Union County Sheriff's Office handles a wide variety of crimes dealing with people and property, including the act of stealing.

Invariably, some of the toughest crimes to crack involve theft, as there are usually no witnesses, and oftentimes no distinguishing characteristics on stolen property to identify it as having been taken from anyone in particular.

Fortunately, Union County has one of the best solve rates around in terms of property theft, thanks to the vigilant efforts of Lt. Daren Osborn and Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer.

The pair has received a Division Level Commendation

for their recent recovery of tens of thousands of dollars in stolen property. The special recognition came by way of their supervising officer Capt. Tom Mangifesta during a June 2 staff meeting with the rest of the Sheriff's Office.

"Working together as a team," Mangifesta said, "you both were able to not only make a total of nine arrests, but you recovered over \$36,500 worth of stolen property, which was returned to the victims of these crimes."

"Your tenacity, professionalism and investigative skills should be commended. Your efforts and dedication to duty should serve as an example to your fellow deputies. It is my pleasure to commend you both for a job well done."

The recovered property consists of two cars, an F-250

truck, a Kawasaki motorcycle, merchandise from Walmart, property taken from front porches of homes and more. The bulk of the recoveries were quick turnarounds from cases assigned between mid and late May.

"Some of them, there was no suspect listed and no clues whatsoever, and they were like a couple bloodhounds out there," Capt. Mangifesta said. "They put their noses to the grindstone and started checking with some of the informants they have, posting videos on our Facebook page, and getting the public involved."

Mangifesta, Osborn and Dyer see their successes in Criminal Investigations as the result of strong working relationships, both with the public and with neighboring

See Commendation, Page 2A



UCSO Capt. Tom Mangifesta wrote a recent letter of commendation regarding the hard work of Criminal Investigations Division detectives Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer and Lt. Daren "Bear" Osborn. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Resident, racing professional Melneciuc assists Indy 500 win



Helio Castroneves with team members in May after his fourth Indy 500 victory. Union County resident Perry Melneciuc is third from the right, next to Castroneves. Photo Courtesy of Meyer Shank Racing

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Blairsville's Perry Melneciuc joined NASCAR Hall of Famer Bill Elliott and Georgia Racing Hall of Famer Mike Rich last month as fellow Union County residents excelling in the world of auto racing.

Already a successful

motorcycle racer and team owner in his own right, Melneciuc's current endeavor involves working as one of the six over-the-wall pit crew members on recent Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves' Meyer Shank Racing team.

"It's huge, it's the biggest race in the

world," Melneciuc said regarding the Brickyard victory.

The 2021 Indianapolis 500 took place May 30, 2021, featuring a 33-car field driving 200 laps in excess of 200 mph for 500 miles of racing.

"When you look at how many spectators (are in) See Melneciuc, Page 6A

## Rodeo thanks first responders, showcases American traditions

News Special  
North Georgia News

The Blairsville Pro Rodeo last weekend, bringing with it plenty of cowboys and cowgirls showcasing their love for America's longstanding traditional pastime.

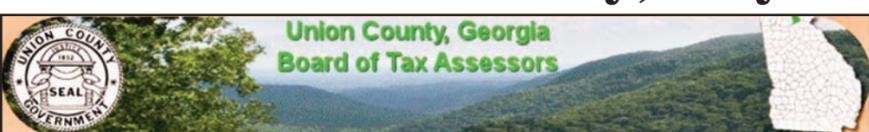
Competitors entertained a crowded arena with action-packed contests while participating in an event sanctioned by both the International Professional Rodeo Association and Southeastern Professional Rodeo Association.

Presented by the Union County Saddle Club and Circle N Rodeo Production, with Mountain Valley Motors See Blairsville Pro Rodeo, Page 6A



A bull tossing its rider on Saturday night during the main event of the packed-out Blairsville Pro Rodeo. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Property assessment notices to be mailed Thursday, July 1



By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Union County has completed the revaluation of all taxable residential and commercial real property in the county. As such, annual notices of assessment for all property owners featuring their new values will be mailed starting July 1.

2006 was the last time a countywide revaluation was completed, and the process has become necessary again, as Union County must maintain current property values to comply with state law.

More than 22,500 parcels have been assessed in the revaluation, including vacant property, homes, farms, commercial and industrial

properties.

The county hired Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions & Services to conduct the revaluation over about two years. Field work finished in April and data analysis wrapped this month. Now, all data has been turned over to the Tax Assessor's Office to generate new assessment notices.

See Property Tax, Page 2A

## Paris addresses target range, Purple Hearts and COVID funds



Commissioner Paris welcomed local Purple Heart recipients to his June county meeting. Photo by Brandon Montgomery

By Brandon Montgomery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris covered a lot of ground in his June 17th regular

meeting at the courthouse, including the acceptance of a \$1.8 million grant from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

The grant is for the

construction of the highly anticipated Union County Target Range and comes with a \$600,000 local match, which may be used for direct funding

See County Meeting, Page 3A

## Women's group to benefit S.A.F.E. with fashion show

By Allison Youngblood  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Local women's group Community Connections 101

has organized a fun fashion show and silent auction fundraiser for S.A.F.E., a local shelter dedicated to serving victims of domestic abuse in Towns and Union counties.

The women-only fundraiser will be on Saturday, June 26, at the House of Prayer Church Family Life Center. The event begins at 1 p.m. See S.A.F.E. Show, Page 3A



Community Connections 101 leadership is Donna Neal, Hannah Johnson, Kathy Davis, Laura Hutt, Cathy Kirby and Cindy Gallucci. Not pictured: Diana Lee. Photo/Submitted

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# Commendation...from Page 1A

law enforcement agencies.

In fact, much of the recently stolen property was recovered in Fannin County with the help of the Sheriff's Office there, though a lot of their cases are solved with good old-fashioned policework like knocking on doors and talking with people.

In terms of crime prevention, Mangifesta said there are a variety of safety measures people can take, including locking doors to homes and vehicles, and securing outdoor equipment either in a shed or inside a garage.

Sometimes, however, locked doors and secure storage are not enough to deter motivated individuals who illegally enter the homes and cars of others. When they do, often there are no witnesses to the crime and no way to tell if what they stole came from the victim.

That's why Mangifesta recommends people log serial numbers related to personal property like vehicles, guns, lawn equipment and electronics, so these items may be entered in a database and potentially traced back to their rightful owners should they turn up in a pawn shop or elsewhere.

In lieu of keeping track

of serial numbers, people might consider engraving something personal into their property, like a driver's license number, Mangifesta said, to make identifying recovered property easier. He does not recommend etching Social Security numbers.

Mangifesta said it's also a good idea to fill out a bill of sale for goods sold directly to third parties to avoid having to deal with the legal repercussions of, say, someone using a gun its previous owner sold to them in a crime.

Simple steps like maintaining hedges in front of the house and installing motion-detection lights can go a long way toward preventing burglaries, too.

Of course, there are many reasons people commit

theft. Due to ongoing impacts of COVID-19 on the economy, for instance, times are still tough for some people, who may be stealing to make a quick buck, or in the case of yard equipment, to start a new business venture.

Drugs remain the biggest motive for property crime, as people steal items to sell for drug money. The drugs people are abusing these days are harder and more addictive than in years' past, like meth, heroin and prescription pills, so are more likely to inspire illegal behavior to acquire.

Additionally, Mangifesta wants people to be aware that several scams continue to make the rounds, like the one about the Internal Revenue Service collecting back taxes via gift card payments or the

lottery representative looking for payment on taxes before winnings are disbursed.

The CID captain urges people to disregard anyone calling to ask for money via gift cards. Should a resident have doubts as to the veracity of their caller, he or she may ask for a call back number, hang up, Google the number, or call the Sheriff's Office for assistance at 706-439-6066.

"The elderly are the most vulnerable," Mangifesta said. "Scammers will find them on Facebook and say, 'Oh, I'm in the service, I'm over in Afghanistan, and I don't have enough money to get home to visit my family. Could you help out?'"

"We've had a few of those. People just need to be careful."

# Backpack Program...from Page 1A

School helps families secure free school supplies by soliciting community donations of commonly used school items, as well as monetary donations to acquire additional supplies.

This year's Bash will take place Aug. 7 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at First United Methodist. The Bash is a fun community event for families aimed at recreating the exciting back-to-school shopping experience for children. Also, the event will feature "food, fun and games."

"When children check in (to the Bash), they get a ticket for their book bag, and a volunteer walks them around to shop," said Tricia Wallace, a local kindergarten teacher who has been involved in the event since it began six years ago.

All grade levels are welcome to attend, and parents are asked to register their children in advance at <https://sites.google.com/view/backpack-2-school-bash>. Registration for the 2021 Bash will open on July 1.

Union County Family Connection acts as a liaison between the schools and those aiding the supply cause, letting organizers know what is needed and exactly how to help.

"This backpack event is a way that we help Family Connection in meeting this high need with the school system," Wallace said. "It has evolved. When we started out our first year, we did 99 backpacks, and we were so excited. This year, we're planning on doing 450."

Assisting for the first time with collections will be United Community Bank,

which wanted to do something for local school kids so reached out to the School Board office earlier this year, according to Bank Deposit Floater Sharon Arnold.

Starting July 1, Arnold said UCBI will begin its "Stuff the Bus" initiative, hosting a small school bus stationed at the main location in front of Ingles on Georgia 515 to remind people that they can drop school supply donations off at the bank to benefit the 2021 Backpack 2 School Bash.

The following supplies are needed: college/wide-ruled paper; crayons; markers; colored pencils; glue sticks; binders, 1/2 inch, 1 inch, 1.5 inch and 2 inch; subject dividers for binders; three-prong folders; College/wide-ruled marble notebooks; pocket folders in a variety of colors; cap erasers; pencils; blue, black and red pens; highlighters; safety scissors; handheld pencil sharpeners; pencil boxes; pink pearl erasers; index cards; protractors; rulers; backpacks for the Primary School; and financial contributions.

All monetary donations will go toward the purchase of supplies to fill in the gap of what's needed after sorting through collections. People wanting to donate money may do so at First United Methodist or at United Community Bank.

There are no income requirements to participate in the Backpack 2 School Bash, which is open "to all families who are residents of Union County."

# Property Tax...from Page 1A

Each assessment notice will feature a "Total Estimated Tax," which is only an estimate using last year's millage rate, which, again, is required by the state.

Property owners will receive their 2021 tax bill later this year with a new millage rate that will include an adjustment due to the growth in the tax digest, according to the county.

People who wish to file

an appeal regarding their new assessed value can fill out an appeal form, available in the Union County Tax Assessor's Office or online at [www.qpublic.net/ga/union](http://www.qpublic.net/ga/union). The office is located at 65 Courthouse Street, Suite 4, in Blairsville.

All appeals must be filed within 45 days from the date of the notice.

The total increase in the property digest following revaluation will not be

finalized until all appeals are processed, though the county has said the revaluation will result in the total digest of real properties increasing "significantly."

As reassessment considers market values of all properties in the county, GMASS used values as of Jan. 1, 2021, for the purposes of revaluation. This has ensured that tax bills received by property owners include a current fair market value that is then taxed at 40% of the actual value.

# Union County School System New Student Registration for the 2021-2022 School Year



New and transferring students in Pre-K through twelfth grade (K-12) may be registered for the upcoming school year at Union County Primary School, 592 School Circle, Blairsville, GA 30512. Parents will need to contact the registrar at 706-835-4321 to schedule enrollment.

The summer enrollment office hours will be by appointment only. Please don't wait until school starts to register. The first day of school is Thursday, August 12th. Waiting until the end of July or beginning of August to call to enroll your student may cause your child to delay their first day of school.

In order to expedite the registration process, please download the "Enrollment Packet" from the school system's website at [www.ucschools.org](http://www.ucschools.org). A printed copy of the packet can also be picked up at the Primary School office by appointment. The packet will need to be completed and the required documents indicated below will need to be presented. Your child will not be enrolled until the school has ALL of the required documents.

Documents you should bring when enrolling a student:

Age Verification: The school system requires evidence

of the student's date of birth and accepts as evidence a birth certificate or an alternate document from the prioritized list in the state enrollment rule.

Social Security Number: The school system complies with the provisions of O.C.G.A. §20-2-150, which requires a person enrolling a student to provide a copy of the student's social security number or to sign a form stating that the person does not wish to provide the social security number.

Immunization Certificate: The school system requires proof of immunization as required by O.C.G.A. §20-2-771, which includes an exemption for religious grounds and provisions for a temporary waiver.

A Georgia Department of Human Resources Form 3231 marked "Complete" for the appropriate grade level shall be considered proof of immunization.

Out of State Immunization Records will need to be transferred to a Form 3231 by the Union County Health Department PRIOR to registration. The Union County Health Department is located at 175 Chase Drive, Blairsville, GA, 706-745-6292.

Certificate of Vision, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening (Form 3300): This can be obtained from your child's doctor or from the Union County Health Department, and is required for enrollment in Georgia schools.

Proof of Union County Residency (2 documents). Examples include: Current (within

2 months old) lease agreement, vehicle registration form, mortgage documents, property tax notice, homeowner's or renter's insurance bill, utility bills, etc.

A cellphone bill, driver's license, or bank statement are not acceptable.

Withdrawal Form/Report Card from the student's most recent former school.

Returning Enrollment Packets and Documents: There are three ways to get the enrollment packet and documents to the registrar: Scan and email them to [registrar@ucschools.org](mailto:registrar@ucschools.org); Fax them to 706-745-8391; Call the registrar at 706-835-4321 and schedule an appointment to bring them to the Union County Primary School in person.

Documentation for Homeless Students: Homeless students, as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act, shall be enrolled immediately with full participation in school activities, regardless of whether all of the above can be provided at the time of enrollment. The designated employee responsible for care of homeless students shall assist the person enrolling the homeless student or the unaccompanied youth in acquiring the necessary documents for enrollment in accordance with the requirements of the state enrollment rule and the McKinney-Vento Act.

Please feel free to contact the Enrollment Office by phone at 706-835-4321 or by email at [registrar@ucschools.org](mailto:registrar@ucschools.org) if you have any questions regarding student registration. N01m23Z3CA

# County Meeting...from Page 1A

or labor on the project. The effective dates of the grant are April 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2023.

Included in construction will be a 100-yard rifle range and a 25-yard pistol range as well as a support building containing a classroom, administrative office, storage and public restroom.

Paris said the project has been in the works for several years now after a long process to gain access to the U.S. Forest Service land, and he hopes the county is nearing the final stage of preconstruction and paperwork.

It's possible that everything will be approved and construction can begin on the project in the next three to six months, he said.

Another topic of great interest from the meeting was the Youth Sports Complex that is set to be built near the Farmers Market and Georgia 515. Paris accepted a contract for \$18,400 for professional design services by Hayes, James and Associates, Inc.

The contract, which went into effect on May 20, 2021, will include concept site plans, preliminary engineering, clearing and grading plans, and land development permitting. The complex will feature four baseball diamonds for use by children participating in rec sports.

An agreement between the county and Gardner

Spencer Smith Tench & Jarbeau, P.C., was also accepted for design services including schematics, design development, construction documents and construction administration for the new Union County Public Safety Complex.

The cost of this agreement will not exceed \$68,490 and went into effect on May 28, 2021.

Commissioner Paris said the plan includes an approximately 7,900 square foot fire station with three bays for emergency vehicles and a sleeping/living area.

It will also have room for an ambulance bay and sleeping area for Union General EMS when and if they decide to stage an ambulance on the north side of the county, as the new station will be located near US 129 at the Ivylog Creek Bridge.

Continuing, Paris accepted another agreement with Gardner Spencer Smith Tench & Jarbeau, P.C., for design services including schematics, design development, construction documents and construction administration for an addition to the Union County Senior Center.

The cost of this agreement is not to exceed \$20,000, and it went into effect on May 28, 2021. This project will include a 1,400 square foot addition of new multi-stall restrooms and an exercise equipment room for senior citizens.

Moving on, Paris accepted a third agreement with Gardner Spencer Smith Tench & Jarbeau, P.C., for the schematics, design development, construction documents and construction administration for the addition to the S.A.F.E. House in Union County.

The cost of this agreement is not to exceed \$10,000 and went into effect on May 28, 2021. Included in this project will be a 750 square foot addition consisting of a meeting room and storage room, with the existing area to be converted into a playground.

Also in the meeting, Paris welcomed a group of combat veterans from across North Georgia, honoring the men for their service to the United States and proudly signing a proclamation declaring Union County to be a "Purple Heart County."

The proclamation recognizes the service and sacrifice of the nation's men and women in uniform who were wounded or killed by the enemy while serving to protect the freedoms enjoyed by all Americans.

Signing the proclamation puts Union County one step closer to becoming a member of the Purple Heart Trail, an initiative being championed locally by veteran Ryan McPherson.

"The purpose of the Purple Heart Trail is to create a symbolic and honorary system

of roads, highways, bridges, and other monuments that give tribute to the men and women who have been awarded the Purple Heart medal," according to purpleheart.org.

In other business, Paris signed a resolution to open a bank account at United Community Bank to receive funds distributed directly to the county as apportioned by the American Rescue Plan Act.

On March 11, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, committing \$1.9 trillion in federal spending to aid in U.S. economic recovery amid COVID-19.

Alongside one-time direct payments to more than 100 million citizens, expanded federal unemployment benefits for many workers, and more, the American Rescue Plan also featured \$65 billion in direct funding to county and city governments across the nation.

For its part, Union County will be receiving a total of \$4,760,974, with one half having already been delivered and the rest expected next year.

The county is still working out how the money is to be spent, with the Association County Commissioners of Georgia stating that the primary purposes of the funds are to "make counties whole

# S.A.F.E. Show...from Page 1A

with doors open at 12:30 p.m. Event organizers ask those wanting to attend to register by emailing cc101events@gmail.com.

Standing for Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, S.A.F.E. serves victims of domestic violence and sexual assault and provides advocacy for children in abusive situations as well. The S.A.F.E. shelter offers 15 beds for women and children and houses men in need off-site.

Community Connections 101 was founded by President Cindy Gallucci as a private Facebook group in January 2021 to fulfill a need she perceived in Blairsville, especially after society spent nearly a year in isolation due to COVID-19.

The group provides area women a space for bonding, including recent move-ins who have no way to meet and make friends. And membership has soared, today boasting 515 members after just five months in operation.

Women of all ages and backgrounds are free to join and participate in planned gatherings and outings, like weekly morning coffee meetings and monthly book club meetings at Abide Coffee.

The idea for the fashion show came via Kathy Davis, director of the Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center and treasurer of Community Connections, who felt a fundraiser for S.A.F.E. was much needed since the center was not able to hold traditional fundraising events during COVID.

Davis' suggestion to raise money for the shelter was received warmly by fellow Community Connections 101 leaders, including Gallucci, Vice President Donna Neal, Secretary and Model Coordinator Hannah Johnson, Silent Auction Coordinator Cathy Kirby, CC101 Ambassador and Stage Manager Hannah Johnson, and Sponsor Coordinator Diana Lee.

Together, they arranged the fashion show and silent auction, with the show set to feature 35 models of all sizes, shapes, backgrounds and an age range of 6 to 70-plus years old who will be modeling more than 80 thrifted and gifted outfits.

The five categories of modeling are: high fashion and low cost; summer fun; multigenerational outfits, e.g. mothers/daughters, grandmothers/granddaughters; evening wear; and decades, from the '20s to '90s. Each outfit can be bid on by attendees.

Over 65 items will fill the silent auction, such as tickets to Splash Island, art and jewelry, gift cards to local restaurants, and a six-person dinner at Chateau Bliss prepared by MasterChef competitor Noah Sims.

The afternoon will be filled with entertainment, including a skit by Davis, emceed by local radio personality Sherry Raines, live music by Terri Kilpatrick, and a speech by S.A.F.E. Executive Director Molly Cousins.

All proceeds from the event will go directly to S.A.F.E. to support individuals in need and/or in crisis. Check donations can be made out to S.A.F.E., and cash or card will also be accepted.

Community Connections 101 would like to thank event sponsors L&M Furniture, Mountain Life Mercantile, Vertical Church, Rick Urban with RE/MAX, Bank OZK, Jeff Davis with State Farm, United Community Bank, Kate's Grooming Cottage, and Selah Hair Salon.

Questions about the fundraiser can be directed to cc101events@gmail.com. For more information about S.A.F.E., visit www.safeservices.org.

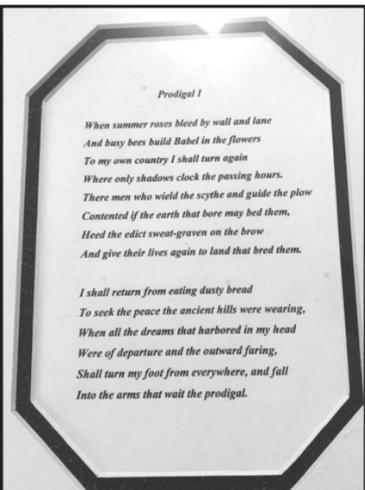
# Remembering Reece: Greear remembers poet with 'wall of honor'

A couple of years ago, a dear friend to me and to Byron Herbert Reece, Mrs. Mildred Greear, allowed me to take photos of a couple of her cherished poems by Mr. Reece. She had them beautifully framed and hanging on her wall of "honor." It was apparent how dear they were to her. I wish to thank her for sharing her experiences with me. I, too, share her admiration and respect for the beloved man and poet.

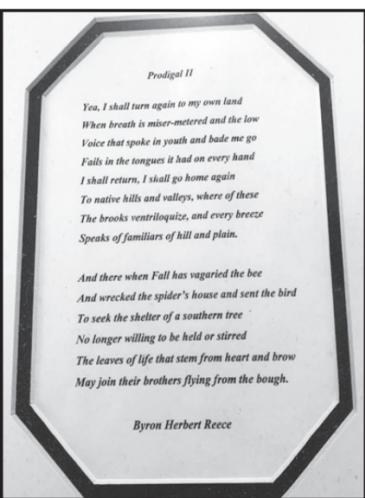
Reece's love for the earth and his particular portion of his homeland comes through very clearly in his poetry. I'd like to share these with you. It was also the desire of Mrs. Greear that his poetry be published in a way that many might recognize his depth and talent. Mrs. Greear and her husband were close personal friends with Byron Herbert Reece.

"Remembering Reece" is provided by the Byron Herbert Reece Society in an effort to keep alive the legacy of the nationally acclaimed poet and native of the Choestoe Valley at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. -Jerri Duncan Gill, Chair.

NTUm23.Z14)CA



"Prodigal I"  
 When summer roses bleed by wall and lane  
 And busy bees build Babel in the flowers  
 To my own country I shall turn again  
 Where only shadows clock the passing hours.  
 There men who wield the scythe and guide the plow  
 Contented if the earth that bore may bed them,  
 Heed the edict sweat-graven on the brow  
 And give their lives again to land that bred them.



"Prodigal II"  
 Yea, I shall turn again to my own land  
 When breath is miser-metered and the low  
 Voice that spoke in youth and bade me go  
 Fails in the tongues it had on every hand  
 I shall return, I shall go home again  
 To native hills and valleys, where of these  
 The brooks ventriloquize, and every breeze  
 Speaks of familiars of hill and plain.  
 And there when Fall has vagaried the bee  
 and wrecked the spider's house and sent the bird  
 To seek the shelter of a southern tree  
 No longer willing to be held or stirred  
 The leaves of life that stem from heart and brow  
 May join their brothers flying from the bough.

Byron Herbert Reece

# Melneciuc...from Page 1A

attendance) and how many people follow the race, the interest it attracts and the average speed of the cars, it's definitely the biggest race in the world," Melneciuc said.

Still, he had to pause for a moment when asked where the Indianapolis win ranks among his career accomplishments. As co-owners, Melneciuc and his wife Kellee helped guide motorcyclist Joey Pascarella to a victory in the Indy 500's two-wheel equivalent.

"When my wife and I won the Daytona 200, that's still a little closer to my heart," said the Canadian-born gearhead. "I hate to say that, because the Indy 500 is the biggest race in the world, but we were in charge of more pieces of the puzzle.

"The bike still sits in the living room of my house, and we have the trophy. If we were going to be successful, it (would fall) on my wife and I. We had already taken a few swings at it before we won the thing.

"I played a very small part (in Castroneves' record-tying fourth Indy 500 victory)," Melneciuc continued. "It takes so many people – I believe there are probably 16 or 17 people assigned just to one car.

"But that's not including the team owner, manager, Honda support, support from the chassis manufacturer, electronic engineers, truck drivers, all the way to mechanics, strategists, and spotters; it just goes on and on. I was a small piece of a big puzzle."

Melneciuc, who started with Meyer Shank Racing as a body mechanic and works as a "fly-in floating mechanic" during the week, handled the windshield tear-off duties during the 2021 Indy 500.

"About two years ago they put a new canopy on the cars to protect the drivers," Melneciuc said. "Now it has a left and a right windscreen so the driver doesn't get hit in the head with



**Perry Melneciuc (pronounced "mell-nuh-chuck") during his younger days as a motorcycle racer.** Photo/Submitted

debris or a tire.

"Before, the driver had a thin piece of plastic over his visor, and whenever he got bugs or oil splatter on it, we could just peel it off. Now those are on the windscreen, and at Indy, we had eight (tear-offs on each windscreen).

"My job is to go over the wall and peel them off by the little tab on each one and just try to stay out of the way of the fuel and tire guys."

Another moment near and dear to Melneciuc came when he took a chance on a young south-Florida motorcyclist in 2008.

"My wife and I owned and ran a motorcycle team from 2008-2012, and we had some phenomenal moments roll through our lives," said Melneciuc, who raced motorcycles in the AMA Pro 250cc Grand Prix class in his early years. "There was a kid out of Miami, Florida, named Barrett Long, and he applied for a wild card spot in a World Grand Prix race.

"The race was in Indianapolis, so they offered a spot to an American driver since the race was in the U.S. (Long's) dad called and asked if I would help, and I had known them for years, but the chances to qualify are about 1

in 1,000.

"Anyway, the kid qualified for the final spot in a world championship event on a six-year-old motorcycle."

Already signed up for another year with MSR, Melneciuc will get a shot to help Castroneves make history at the 2022 Indianapolis 500. With his fourth Indy title in May, Castroneves joined A.J. Foyt, Rick Mears and Al Unser as the only four-time winners.

But when the day comes that Melneciuc is ready to put the fast lane in his rearview, Blairsville is the place he will continue calling home.

"We've been (in Union County) for about eight years now," said the former Braselton resident. "The first two years we bought an RV lot near Sunrise Grocery and spent about three days a week up here. We just fell in love with the area because of the (bicycling) and peace and quiet.

"So, we ended up buying a house about six years ago, and we absolutely love it. It's a perfect place to rest and recharge the batteries.

"It's a 180-degree difference from being at the racetrack, which is noisy, dirty and chaotic. Blairsville is green, clean and quiet. It's just awesome."

# Blairsville Pro Rodeo...from Page 1A



**Law enforcement, military personnel and first responders received a standing ovation in a patriotic flag-raising ceremony each night of the Blairsville Pro Rodeo.** Photo by Lowell Nicholson

— Ram Truck acting as the main sponsor, the event took place over two nights, Friday, June 18, and Saturday, June 19.

Saturday contests took place under rainy conditions due to Tropical Storm Claudette cutting its way northeastward from Louisiana, but that didn't stop spectators from turning out in droves, as those who didn't get a seat under the covered Union County Arena simply brought umbrellas.

The Union County Sash 'n Saddles Precision Drill Team kicked things off each night with patriotic horseback performances, followed by flag-raising opening ceremonies dedicated to the military, law enforcement, fire rescue, and

first responders, featuring local participants.

Rodeo contests included bareback and saddleback bronc riding, ladies breakaway roping, team roping, tie-down roping, steer wrestling, cowgirl barrel racing, and crowd favorite bull riding, with top quality livestock provided by Hedrick Rodeo Company.

Children even got in on the excitement with activities like the mechanical bull, calf scramble, bounce houses, and a bungee jump, and the family-friendly event featured a variety of food, ensuring everyone in the family could grab a bite of something scrumptious to eat.

"If you were unable to make it to the rodeo this

weekend," rodeo organizers wrote on Facebook Sunday, "you missed an amazing Opening Ceremony and Grand Entry.

"We want to thank the Union County Sheriff's (Office), Blairsville Police Department, Union County Fire Rescue, Life Care Ambulance, Dillon Gross our announcer, and especially USAF First Sergeant Matthew Miller for the presentation.

"We had standing room only both nights and had over 200 contestants compete. (Mark) your calendars for June 17th and 18th, 2022, (because) we're gonna do it again."

For more information, visit [www.BlairsvilleProRodeo.com](http://www.BlairsvilleProRodeo.com).