

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, July 12, 2023

Fourth of July lights up night sky at Meeks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The scent of black powder and smoke lingered in the air over Meeks Park following the annual patriotic fireworks show put on by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday, July 4.

This year's celebrations were dubbed "Red, White and Blairsville," and proved to be particularly entertaining with bigger, more explosive fireworks wowing the many thousands of people in attendance.

"It's a full house," observed Chamber President Steve Rowe shortly before lighting up the sky, theorizing that 2023 may have been one of the most popular years for the

fireworks show yet.

Earlier that evening, a brief rain shower came down, and while some folks left, the ones filing in later that night quickly filled the gaps.

Not only were there plenty of places to hang out and set up viewing spots, like the skate park and both lower and upper ballfields, but there was also a myriad of things to do when it came to food and other attractions.

Nana and Papa's Ice Cream, Southern Sips Lemonade, Jim's Smokin' Que, and Full Throttle Ministries all returned this year alongside other vendors to offer dinner for folks staying in the park for the long haul that evening.

Joshua Wells and girlfriend Grazi Souza drove all the way up from Atlanta to briefly visit Joshua's mother,

Candy, who had been helping her friend, Denise Kelly, hand out hot dogs with the rest of their church.

"We're excited to be here to see the show, the fireworks," said Wells, reminded of the history of America by the light show. "(July 4 means) independence, freedom, and just the freedom that it brings to the rest of the world."

Kelly lost a great-uncle in World War II, and the experience has shaped her sense of patriotism. That uncle, along with so many others who fought for America's security, was on her mind as she climbed the field from the lower ballpark to get a better view of the fireworks – and indeed for the entire holiday.

"It means freedom," Kelly said of the nation's
See July 4th at Meeks, Page 6A



Chamber President Steve Rowe counted down the fireworks in Meeks Park last week with assistance from young Weston Davenport, who flipped the "switch" to activate the colorful bursts for everyone to enjoy.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Suches man, 77, killed in tragic lawnmower accident

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

SUCHES – Tragedy befell the close-knit Valley Above the Clouds on Thursday, July 6, when a resident was killed in a lawnmowing accident on the side of Georgia 60, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Wallace "Wally" Michael Duffy, 77, had been mowing near the side of the road in the 1900 block of GA 60 when the zero-turn lawnmower he was driving apparently toppled into a ditch, turning over and killing him in the process, UCSO Sgt. Marc Pilote said.

A passing motorist called in the accident after seeing the lawnmower upside down on the roadside with its driver underneath. Authorities quickly responded to the scene and discovered Duffy had expired beneath the heavy equipment, Pilote said.

Duffy's family had been searching for him for a couple of hours after he failed to report home earlier that day, Pilote said, and his body was discovered by authorities around 5 p.m.

Known as the unofficial "Mayor of Suches," Duffy was a military veteran and an active member of his community who was very well regarded by his



Wally Duffy neighbors. He will be missed by many.

A large crowd of concerned residents gathered
See Lawnmower Tragedy, Page 3A

Valley Above the Clouds celebrates America's 247th

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES – Once again, the "Valley Above the Clouds" attracted more than 1,000 visitors to its annual July 4 fireworks display at Woody Gap School.

"I'm so happy that I came up here this year," spectator Randy Williams said. "It's a whole lot better than Dahlonega, and it comes with a lot less traffic. You can count me as a regular from now on."

Hours before the first explosion echoed through southern Union County, chairs began unfolding on and around the field behind Woody Gap School, eventually filling the areas around the parking
See Suches Fireworks, Page 6A



To the delight of many, the dedicated firefighters of Union County Fire Station No. 5 in Suches volunteer every Fourth of July to launch fireworks at Woody Gap School.
Photo by Todd Forrest

Three NC men arrested July 5 in Meeks Park gun incident



The Sheriff's Office confiscated a small arsenal from the North Carolina men who drove to Meeks Park last week to settle a personal dispute.

See Meeks Park Arrests, Page 2A

Farmers Market to welcome UCSO for Christmas fundraiser

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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People wishing to bless well-deserving local children at Christmastime can do so at the Farmers Market this weekend by visiting with the Union County Sheriff's Office during the weekly Trash & Treasures Yard Sale on Friday, July 14, and at the regular market on Saturday, July 15.

Representatives from the Sheriff's Office and Jail will be issuing unique challenge coins for donations near Booth 31 between 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. each of those days at the Farmers Market.

"Every year at Christmas, there comes a time when some



of the families need a little bit of a boost, and we are providing our challenge coins again for a donation of \$10 per coin," Sheriff Mack Mason said. "All that money goes to the 'Sheriff's Give A Gift Program' at Christmas.

"We deal with children

ages 2 to 12. The Blairsville PD 'Shop With A Cop Program' provides for older children, so law enforcement is meeting the different needs in the community. We would appreciate anyone who would want to come by and give us a
See UCSO Fundraiser, Page 2A

Annual Butternut Creek Festival returns to Meeks Park July 15-16

News Special
North Georgia News

This weekend marks the 24th Annual Butternut Creek Festival, with 80 vendors, two nonprofit groups and two fantastic demonstrators to be on hand to make the event special.

This popular arts and craft show, always held the third weekend in July, is set up along the shaded banks of Butternut Creek in Blairsville's beautiful Meeks Park.

The festival starts on Saturday, July 15, running from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. On Sunday, July 16, the show will go from

10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Admission, parking and entertainment are free, and there will be a free shuttle service from the parking areas to the event venue.

A variety of food vendors will provide a great selection of tasty items for guests to enjoy as they wander through the show.

The High Country Artisans, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, coordinates the festival. Its membership consists of local artists and crafters who volunteer their time and efforts

to create a show that promotes functional and creative arts for everyone in the North Georgia Mountains.

Proceeds from the show are used primarily to support the art programs in the Union County and Woody Gap schools. In addition, other art programs are helped throughout the community.

There will be a wide variety of artisans participating in the show. Old favorites that attendees look for each year will return, plus there are a number of new crafters offering
See Butternut Creek, Page 2A



(L-R) Jeff Hutt, Tom Chambers, Danny Grojean and Paul Grossmann of the Butternut Creek Festival.
Photo/Submitted



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Butternut Creek...from Page 1A

exciting items for attendees to enjoy.

The art categories will include furniture, pottery, jewelry, fabric art, pillows, purses, candles, soaps, hand-carved old world Santas, lathe-turned and other wood products, oil and watercolor paintings, a caricature artist, photography, metal art, knives, gourds, wind chimes, glass, yard art, birdhouses, hand-crafted leather, musical instruments, scarves, quilts, sculpture and clothing.

Jason Hamilton of "I Saw A Bear" will be demonstrating his artistic chainsaw carving

skills both days of the show. John, Judy and Lance Ziegler, known to many in the area as the Arts of Critter Ridge, will be showing off their blacksmithing skills, and don't forget Judy's beautiful artistic gourds.

Two regular nonprofit groups will also be at the show. The Blairsville Cruisers will be on hand selling their famous car raffle tickets, and the Misty Mountain Quilters Guild booth, also selling raffle tickets, will have a display of

their work.

Entertainment has always been a great part of the show. This year's Saturday line-up has Greg Erwin playing at 10 a.m., Steve Sanders Music will entertain at noon, and Country River Band will play from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

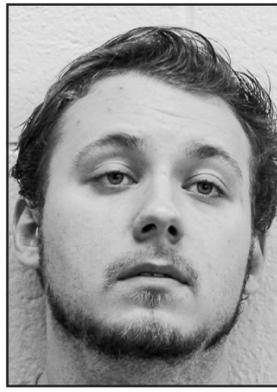
Sunday's entertainment includes Southern Gospel Music from 10 a.m. until noon, Mary Kate Farmer starts at noon, and Country River Band is back again to provide guests with a great selection of

traditional country music from 2-3:30 p.m.

Bring family and friends for an enjoyable day. For more information, check out www.butternutcreekfestival.com, email butternutcreekfestival@gmail.com, visit ButternutCreekArtFestival on Facebook, or leave a message at 706-781-1221.

One other reminder, although everyone loves pets, the Recreation Department does not allow animals in this section of the park.

Meeks Park Arrests...from Page 1A



Tyler Derreberry

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Three young men from North Carolina were arrested last week after driving to Meeks Park with rifles, pistols and knives to settle a personal dispute with an 18-year-old Blairsville man, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

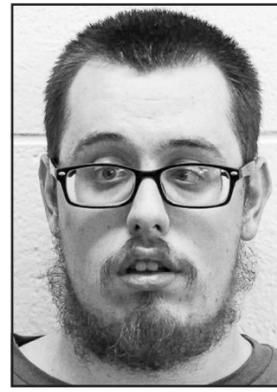
No one was injured, and no weapons were discharged in the incident that occurred on Wednesday, July 5.

Tyler Derreberry, 22, of Brasstown; Robert Helton, 24, of Marble; and Todd Mckown, 27, also of Marble, were taken into custody shortly after the altercation and denied bond on Friday.

Derreberry has been charged with three counts of being party to the crime of aggravated assault and three counts of being party to the crime of terroristic threats.

Helton and Mckown, who are roommates in Marble, have been charged with three counts of aggravated assault, three counts of terroristic threats and a single count of possession of firearms during the commission of a crime.

The event in question stemmed from a texting argument Derreberry got into with the 18-year-old Blairsville man that Wednesday morning,



Robert Helton

UCSO Sgt. Marc Pilote said.

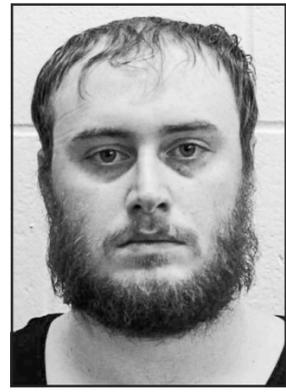
After a heated exchange, the substance of which was not clear by press time, Derreberry and the Blairsville youth agreed to meet at Meeks Park to continue their dispute in person, Pilote said.

Derreberry discussed the dispute with Helton and Mckown that morning at their mutual workplace in Murphy, North Carolina, and the coworkers agreed to go as a group after finishing their shifts in case Derreberry needed backup should a fight break out, Pilote said.

The three men later left work, and Helton and Mckown traveled to get their personal weapons to bring to Meeks – reportedly for self-defense purposes – before all three loaded up into Mckown's Honda Civic and made their way to Union County in Georgia, Pilote said.

At least 10 individuals from Union County, including multiple minors, were waiting in the parking lot behind the upper baseball fields in Meeks Park when the three men from North Carolina pulled up around 3:20 p.m. on July 5, Pilote said.

Derreberry was unarmed, but after exiting the car, he was joined by Helton and Mckown, who hopped out wearing face coverings and holding AR-15



Todd Mckown

rifles with pistols strapped to their legs, Pilote said.

Brandishing the rifles, Helton and Mckown allegedly started screaming at those gathered, threatening to shoot and kill the people attending in support of the Blairsville man, at which point everyone scattered, climbing into their vehicles and quickly driving away, Pilote said.

After the scene cleared, the out-of-town men got back into their car to return to North Carolina; however, a witness who had been present for the potential fray called 911, and a Be-On-the-Lookout was issued for the Civic, Pilote said.

UCSO Patrol Lt. Doug Brackett spotted the car traveling north on US 129 toward Murphy and initiated a felony stop, arresting all three inhabitants of the vehicle without incident, which resulted in a confiscation of the weapons and the subsequent charges, Pilote said.

Confiscated from the vehicle were two AR-15 rifles, two .45-caliber pistols, a 9mm handgun, two large knives, a pocketknife, and additional magazines and ammunition, Pilote said.

The case remains under investigation, and the above individuals are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

UCSO Fundraiser...from Page 1A

donation."

Each keepsake coin bears the badge of the Union County Sheriff's Office on one side, with a Thin Blue Line Flag and an inscription of Matthew 5:9 on the reverse.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God," reads the Bible verse, highlighting one of the guiding principles of Sheriff Mason and his office.

The Union County Farmers Market can be found at 290 Farmers Market Way in Blairsville, just behind the ALDI Grocery Store.

People can also get one or more of the coins at the front office window of the Sheriff's Office at 378 Beasley Street in Blairsville, or supporters can simply donate any amount directly to the program.

After a successful coin fundraiser last year that helped the Sheriff's Office provide Christmas presents for more than 80 families, the sheriff had more coins minted, so there is no minimum number of coins people may acquire while supplies last.

Even though Give A Gift is a Christmas program, donations are accepted year-round in preparation for the effort.

Give A Gift for Christmas has been ongoing since 2001, and the sheriff is grateful for everyone who has supported the program for more than two decades now.

"We spend on average \$250 per child, times 80 kids, runs into a substantial amount of money," Mason said. "The parents give us a list of the child's needs and desires, and our staff does the shopping."

And while volunteering to raise money for kids whose families may be going through tough times financially is certainly an important aspect of what the Sheriff's Office does, UCSO has also been following through in spades with its official duties: protecting and serving the public.

Just in the month of May 2023, the Sheriff's Office answered a total of 2,117 calls, generating 169 incident reports, 98 accident reports, 43 arrests, 454 traffic stops and 304 traffic citations, with most of the citations being written for speeds "in excess of 80 mph," Mason said.

The Sheriff's Office has issued more than 1,000 citations for traffic violations through the end of May this year, and the sheriff advises people to slow down and pay more attention while driving on county roadways, which average over 900 vehicle accidents per year.

In investigatory terms, the UCSO Criminal Investigation Division has been working hard as always to close cases, resulting in conclusions for 36 of 42 cases opened in the month of May alone for incidents

like burglary, theft, elder exploitation, deaths, assault and battery, and more.

"We here at the Sheriff's Office are trying to do everything that we can to keep Union County safe," Sheriff Mason said. "All of our employees work very hard and diligently throughout the course of the year to ensure that that happens."

"We're proactive, we try to go out and stop crime before it happens by being seen, and we're thankful for the good support that we have among the county members that have partnered with us in this endeavor to keep the county safe."

For more information on how to get involved with Give A Gift for Christmas, including specifics about monetary and toy donations, call the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066.

Elizabeth Cecci makes Dean's List

Elizabeth Cecci, a Sophomore from Blairsville, was among nearly 300 students named to the Lakeland University Dean's List for academic achievement for the 2023 Spring semester.

To earn recognition on the Dean's List, undergraduate students must carry a full-time schedule of at least 12 credit hours and earn a 3.5 grade point average.

Elizabeth, the daughter of Mark and Suzanne Cecci, is majoring in Psychology.

Lakeland's list includes students taking classes full

time at Lakeland's main campus in Sheboygan County and through the college's Evening, Weekend and Online Program.

Founded in 1862, Lakeland is a private, liberal arts university serving approximately 3,000 students in seven locations throughout Wisconsin, online and in Tokyo, Japan.

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2023 Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant

The Georgia Mountain Fair is looking for young ladies 17-24 to participate in the 2023 Miss GMF Pageant.

The Pageant will be held Thursday, August 17 in the Anderson Music Hall at the fairgrounds in Hiawassee.

Entry forms and Pageant rules are available on the Georgia Mountain Fair website. Deadline to enter is August 3. Great experience and cash prizes!

Lawnmower Tragedy ...from Page 1A

at the scene of his death last Thursday, expressing grief, shock and disbelief at the tragic occurrence.

The Sheriff's Office would like to thank the firefighters of Union County Fire Station No. 5 in Suches who assisted deputies by keeping people back from the accident site while commiserating with their fellow Suches residents over the loss of one of their own.

According to his obituary, Duffy's life was one "filled with service, both to his country and his community."

"After proudly serving in the Navy, he embarked on a fulfilling career with Florida Power and Light, dedicating his talents and skills to the energy industry until his retirement," the obituary reads. "Seeking a peaceful and scenic environment, he chose to settle in Suches, Georgia, where he found solace and fulfillment amidst the beauty of nature."

"One of Wally's best qualities was his ability to effortlessly make connections with others. His kind and friendly nature endeared him

to all who had the pleasure of knowing him. Wally was genuinely interested in the lives of those around him, and his warm smile and genuine concern made everyone feel special. He was a true friend to all and a pillar within his community."

"Influenced by his photographer father, Wally enjoyed photography from an early age. He occasionally acted as a professional photographer for weddings and special events; and never lost his passion for a well-framed shot."

"Outside of his professional life, Wally cultivated a deep passion for woodworking and building. He was always eager to help with construction projects, and even built custom cabinets as a side business. Though he didn't continue as a professional woodworker, he was never without at least one project in his workshop."

"Wally's commitment to his community was evident in everything he did in Suches. His genuine love for others showed in the compassion he extended to those in need, and his joy at helping wherever he was needed. He was nicknamed by many as the 'Mayor of Suches.'

"Wally Duffy leaves behind a legacy that will forever resonate within the hearts of his family, friends, and neighbors. His unwavering kindness, infectious laughter, and compassionate spirit will be deeply missed by all."

"Though we grieve his sudden departure, let us also celebrate the remarkable life he led and the indelible impact he made on our lives."

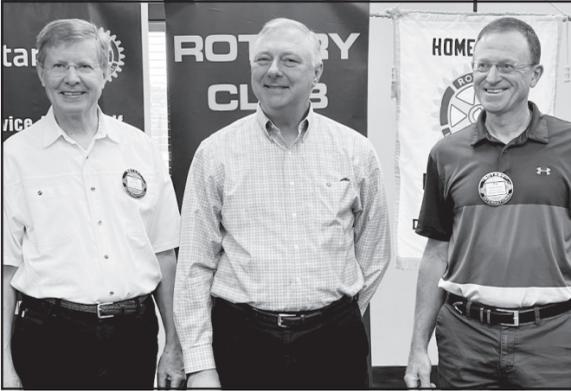
Funeral services for Duffy were held on Monday, July 10, at Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church in Suches.

Rotary In Motion

Events, water quality, and books!



(L-R): Kris Pahl, Callie Moore from Mountain True, John Day



(L-R): John Day, Kris Pahl being inducted into the group, Pat Deluca

On May 25th, the Union County Rotary Club heard from Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris and welcomed new member Kris Pahl into the group. Lamar spoke about the status of Union County including being the third lowest county for tax burden in Georgia! Lamar also highlighted the many events Union County is holding over the summer months. To see the list of all events, visit the event calendar on the Union County Chamber of Commerce website at visitblairsvillega.com. New member Kris has recently moved to Blairsville and

wanted to get involved with Rotary to help make a difference in the community. Kris is a Financial Planner in Union County for Thrivent Mutual Funds. He is located at 276 Fiddlers Cove in Blairsville. Kris is committed to providing financial advice, investments, insurance, banking, and generosity programs to help people in Blairsville, GA make the most of all they've been given.

The following week Callie Moore, the Western Regional Director for Mountain True spoke about how Mountain True works to improve water quality, restore public forests,

promote clean energy, and advocates sensible land use. The vision of Mountain True is to envision thriving communities in their mountain region that are connected to and help sustain both each other and the natural environment. To achieve this, Mountain True fosters and empowers residents throughout the region to engage in community planning, policy and project advocacy, and on-the-ground projects. Callie recommended using an app called Swim Guide that you can use to access the lake water quality wherever you swim! If you would like help or get involved with Mountain True visit Mountaintrue.org for more information.

On June 15th, Janice Cochran and Martha Davenport joined us to discuss Ferst Readers in Union County. Ferst Readers is a program that gives one free book a month for a year to children from birth to age five in Union County! Janice and Martha are apart of the Community Action Team (CAT) in Union County and have provided over 45,000 books to children in Union County. Ferst Readers will provide books that are of impact for the child at their specific age. Ferst Readers also includes ideas to engage your child in the information they are learning from each book. For example, lullabies you can sing, interactive games you can play, and more. All children in Union County from birth to age five qualify to join Ferst Readers. To sign your child up, learn more, or become involved in Ferst Readers visit Ferstreaders.org

Think about joining Rotary and helping with the good work that this organization is doing in our community and throughout the world. It's an exciting group of community leaders that offers networking, fellowship, and vital services on a local, national, and world-wide level. Follow our Facebook or Instagram page at Rotary Club of Union County!

USDA Designates 18 Georgia Counties as Primary Natural Disaster Areas following March Freezes

Atlanta, GA - On June 26, United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack issued a natural disaster declaration for numerous Georgia counties following the untimely March freezes that caused significant damage to Georgia's peach crop as well as other commodities. This declaration allows USDA's Farm Service Agency to extend essential emergency credit to Georgia farmers and follows a months' long lobbying effort on behalf of Georgia farmers and producers by Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper, House and Senate Agriculture Committee Chairmen Robert Dickey and Russ Goodman, Georgia Agribusiness Council, Georgia Farm Bureau, and Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association as well as many others.

"I'm grateful to USDA Secretary Vilsack for recognizing the importance of delivering much-needed relief to Georgia farmers following the

untimely freezes in March," said Agriculture Commissioner Tyler Harper. "Since the freeze, we've worked with our farmers and producers to ensure USDA clearly understood the severity of the situation and the needs of those impacted by the freeze. Georgia peaches are a symbol of the success of our state's number one industry, and this much-needed relief will help farmers and producers across the state bounce back better than before."

USDA FSA loans can be used to meet a variety of recovery requirements including replacing essential items such as farm equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation, or to refinance specific loans. FSA reviews all loans based on the extent of losses, security available, and repayment ability, and Georgia farmers and producers in the below counties are eligible to apply.

Application Deadline: February 26, 2024.

Primary Counties Eligible: Banks, Crawford, Fannin, Gilmer, Habersham, Hall, Jackson, Johnson, Macon, Madison, Meriwether, Monroe, Peach, Pike, Taylor, Towns, Union, Upson.

Contiguous Counties also Eligible: Barrow, Bibb, Butts, Clarke, Coweta, Dawson, Dooly, Elbert, Emanuel, Forsyth, Franklin, Gordon, Gwinnett, Harris, Hart, Houston, Jasper, Jefferson, Jones, Lamar, Laurens, Lumpkin, Marion, Murray, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Pickens, Rabun, Schley, Spalding, Stephens, Sumter, Talbot, Treutlen, Troup, Washington, White, Wilkinson.

More USDA Resources: On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Loan Assistance Tool can help you determine program or loan options. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center.

Annual Photography Contest at the August Georgia Mountain Fair

The opening of the Annual Photography Contest at the August 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee, GA, begins on Tuesday, August 22 at 11 AM and lasts during the remainder of the Fair, August 26, Saturday.

There is no entrance fee but money-prizes are given in several categories, covering 31 winning photos. This year, prize money totals \$1,075. Most of the exhibitors and many winners over the years have not been professionals, although professional photographers are welcomed to participate. Leaders of the contest are always looking for new talent, so new exhibitors are highly welcomed.

Those who wish to exhibit their pictures are requested to sign up by Friday, August 4 by filling out a registration

form, which can be obtained (with the rules) at the main office of the Fairgrounds in Hiawassee on U.S. Highway 76. Or, participants can print them from the web site: [https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/pageserver/applications/fair/fair/forms/Photography Show Application 2023](https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/pageserver/applications/fair/fair/forms/Photography%20Show%20Application%202023).

Some new rules for exhibiting photos are in place for this year. Judges will strictly follow the new Exhibiting Rules, so please be sure to refer to the instructions on the Application form. Setting up photos is only from 9 AM to 1 PM on Monday, August 21.

Judging starts promptly at 1 PM on Monday afternoon and may last all afternoon. Therefore, participants can learn about the winning pic-

tures after 5 PM that same day. Prize money is awarded on the final day of the contest. Judges' names are not revealed but each one is an experienced photographer who comes to the fair from several cities and states. Photos may not be removed early and will remain in the exhibition hall until the end of the last day of the Fair.

The photo exhibit opens to the public at 11 AM on Tuesday morning, August 22. After reading the registration form and the rules, participants may have questions answered by directly contacting the Contest Director, Janet Cosby through email only at janetcosby@gmail.com.

Please do not call the office at the Georgia Mountain Fair for answers to contest questions.

Fourth of July Boat Parade tradition continues on Nottely

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

With boats decorated in themes ranging from mermaids to mullets, the annual Nottely Marina Boat Parade on Saturday, July 1, once again demonstrated why it's one of the can't-miss Independence Day events of Union County.

Marina Co-Owner Moriah Doucette can't pinpoint the exact year the parade started under late owner Carleen Doucette, but the family has traced its origins back to the early to mid-1990s after Carleen founded the Marina in 1992.

"We've been able to find trophies going back to 1994, so we've narrowed it down to around 30 years," Moriah said.

And in all that time, the parade hasn't missed a beat, growing each and every year, including 2020, when not even a pandemic could keep the patriotic local mariners away.

As for trophies, the 2023 hardware went home with the creepy and the kooky. The Addams Family boat captured First Place, featuring characters dressed as members of the fictional family made famous by its many adaptations into television, film, musicals, video games, comic books and other

media since 1938.

Among the remaining 23 entries, the Pac-Man-themed boat, based on the iconic 1980s arcade game, collected Second Place, while the "Toy Story" boat of Disney-Pixar fame finished third.

"We have regulars that have (participated in the parade) for 10 years or more and they make this event fantastic," Moriah said. "We also had some new people this year, which was awesome."

"We have so much fun putting this on each year and we're glad so many people enjoy taking part and coming out to watch."



The Addams Family boat won First Place at this year's Nottely Boat Parade. Photo by Todd Forrest

Additionally, Moriah wanted to add a special thank you to Dave and Denise Brown for sponsoring a new classification of winners this year with the "Should've Been a Trophy" category.

First Place in that class went to "Under Lake Nottely," a Little Mermaid-themed boat. The "Pink and Yellow Barbie"

boat placed second; the "Trailer Park" boat finished third; "Otter Pops" was fourth; and "Ranch Water" came in fifth.

Other winners included the eagle-themed boat, which took home Most Patriotic; "Mullet Time" was awarded the Fun Bunch award; and the hydroboard picked up the Smallest Boat honors.

"We want to thank everyone that has helped make this boat parade what it's become for the last 20-30 years," Moriah said. "All the regulars, all the newcomers, we couldn't have imagined it would grow into what it's become. It's something we look forward to every July 4."



This boat decorated like the famous Pac-Man game came in runner-up in the 2023 Boat Decoration Contest on Lake Nottely. Photo by Todd Forrest

July 4th at Meeks...from Page 1A



Thousands of people from all over the area enjoyed the pyrotechnic wonders provided by the annual "Red, White & Blairsville" fireworks show on the Fourth of July.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

birthday. "It means many things to me, but I guess the bottom line is (that) it's a time of celebration of our freedoms and a time of reflection of great sacrifices made by so many for us to have (those freedoms). Some gave all. We are blessed."

"We smoked England back in 1776," joked Chris Ridenbaugh, who traveled with his family all the way from Pennsylvania to celebrate Independence Day in Georgia with family members who were excited for "the big bang-booms" and jamming out to the DJ's slick, patriotic tunes.

Meanwhile, Scott Bogarde and Katie Bayer were there with friends and family, all settled together on a blanket with red, white and blue glowsticks around their necks and wrists. Bayer was

particularly enjoying herself, considering July 4 is her favorite holiday.

"I just like getting together with friends and family (when) everyone has the day off, getting to relax together and celebrate the Land of the Free and Home of the Brave," Bayer said. "I think it's something very special that a community like this can come together and celebrate a holiday like this," she said before adding with a smile, "and I love coming to celebrate on the lake."

"(Independence Day) means freedom, freedom from oppression," Bogarde remarked.

As was the case last year, the chamber set out a large switch for one lucky tyke to flip and "power up" the fireworks.

Weston Davenport held that honor in 2023 and joined Rowe in counting down. Just a few short seconds later, the show began.

Sparks of red, white, blue, green, yellow and purple flashed against the night sky and trailed down in intense patterns, dazzling crowds that watched all over Meeks Park, lined the sides of Georgia 515, and spilled over into the parking lot of North Georgia Technical College.

For about 20 minutes, guests celebrated the 247th anniversary of the founding of the United States beneath a delightfully bright, colorful sky. At the end, they applauded the chamber and all of those involved in organizing another stellar Fourth of July extravaganza.

Suches Fireworks...from Page 1A

lot, gymnasium and school building.

As sunset approached, visitors filled most of the parking lot and grassy places on the other side of Georgia 60 at the Suches Community Center and Fire Station No. 5.

Youngsters passed the time with sparklers, frisbees and footballs as the grown-ups caught up with friends and family while relaxing and enjoying a comfortable July evening that is all-too-common at nearly 2,800 feet above sea level.

Around 9 p.m., emcee Larry Wood stepped on stage to introduce his granddaughter Nealy Webster to perform the national anthem. The Cleveland resident sang for another 15 minutes, allowing Suches' firefighters a few moments to put the finishing touches on their pyrotechnic extravaganza.

At approximately 9:30 p.m., Wood offered one last call for visitors to find their preferred vantage points as the final bit of daylight disappeared from the clear Suches evening.

For nearly 30 minutes, an assortment of colors filled the night sky, slightly ahead of the blasts that reverberated through the nearby hills and hollers. During a moment of stillness before the grand finale, Wood took the opportunity to thank everyone for attending, thank the nation's servicemen and women, and wish America a



Nealy Webster has headlined the Suches fireworks for years, performing the national anthem and other music to entertain patriotic guests. Photo by Todd Forrest

happy 247th birthday. He also reminded the crowd of the upcoming Indian Summer Festival on Oct. 7-8.

One of the most legendary aspects of Suches' annual July 4 festivities is its humble origins, and nothing sums up America's entrepreneurial spirit like the event's history.

While no one can trace the exact year, the tradition began many decades ago with a few locals firing off bottle rockets at the Suches General Store. As people started gathering there over the years, it became apparent that a few bottle rockets weren't going to cut it, resulting in a trip to Tennessee to upgrade the fireworks display.

However, the firework

runs became more expensive as time wore on, and it became obvious that a little help was needed. And, once again, members of the Suches community showed why they are cut from a different cloth, with locals chipping in by selling hot dogs to cover the cost.

Fast forward to the present day and the Suches Fire Department has taken over the acquisition and handling of the fireworks, which is probably a safer alternative. Meanwhile, the festivities have moved a quarter mile north to Woody Gap School, allowing for larger crowds to soak up a July 4 celebration that perfectly illustrates the essence of an American success story.