

North Georgia News

4 Sections 20 Pages

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Schools gear up for return on Friday, Aug. 12

By **Brittany Holbrooks**
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Schools start back on Friday, Aug. 12, and parents and students both should be excited for the changes at each school.

For example, Union County Primary boasts an all-new fire alarm system, safety upgrades in the front office, a new area dedicated to school resource officer interactions, and a new canopy to keep car riders out of the elements.

"We're going to have new flooring, we've got new lighting, we've got new paint on the walls - it's not industrial white, it's different," Primary Principal Shane Womack said. "They'll be stepping into a virtually brand-new building."

The Primary School's Meet Your Teacher event will be on Aug. 10 and 11 by appointment only due to the heavy influx of new students.

Union County Elementary has new mulch and borders around some of its playground equipment, and while there haven't been many other changes in the realm of renovations, Principal Jerry Bavero commended the custodial staff for their work this summer.

"We're just ready to get staff back, students back, and get back to doing what we do best - helping students learn and grow, develop, work hard and have fun," Bavero said.

Middle School Principal Pat Donaldson said she is excited about the new car rider access road running up

from the Waffle House, which will assist the system with the all-new traffic patterns for the Middle, Elementary and Primary schools.

"We think it will really help with our traffic flow and we'll be able to get our kids in and out quicker in the mornings and in the afternoons, so that's definitely a plus for parents who are trying to get to work on time themselves," she said.

The addition of a construction plant will serve as a turning point in the transition from Middle School to High School. Eighth-graders will be able to earn credit for High School and can make progress on their Pathway if building is their passion.

Some of the heaviest summertime construction work took place at Union County

High, especially when it comes to the vocational end of the campus, although the main building and gym did receive a new coat of paint, flooring and fire alarm system.

The old Vocational Building, which used to house four small labs and even smaller classrooms, has been completely remodeled to have two large classrooms and even larger labs.

And the all-new Union County College and Career Academy stands as one of the greatest achievements among this year's lengthy list of rehabs and additions. It will be ready for use as soon as school starts, with just a few finishing touches remaining to be put in place.

"We've got about
See Back to School, Page 2A



John Hill
Union County Schools Superintendent

UCSO fields bomb threat, device in separate incidents

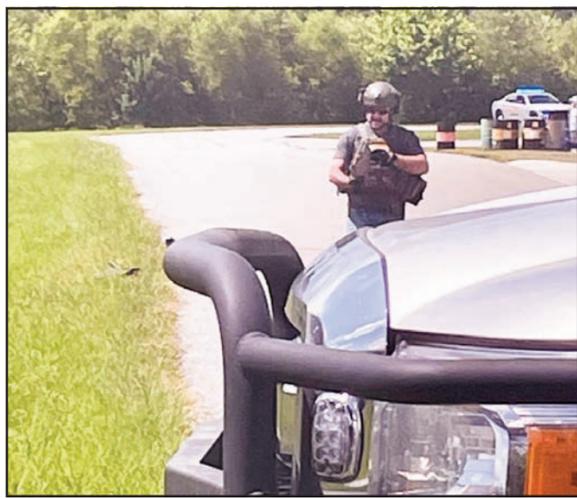
By **Shawn Jarrard**
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Federal and state authorities are investigating more than two dozen bomb threats at Georgia post-secondary educational institutions from last week, including one at the North Georgia Technical College Blairsville Campus.

The local threat was actually the second to be called into North Georgia Tech, the first being at the Clarkesville Campus on Monday, July 25, and the second in Blairsville on Tuesday, July 26.

After clearing the campus of students and faculty shortly before 1 p.m. on Tuesday, a search of the main building was conducted but no explosives were found. No devices were located at any of the other bomb threat locations, either.

Responding in Blairsville were the Union County Sheriff's Office, Union County Fire Department, North Georgia Tech Police, Blairsville



A member of the GBI Bomb Disposal Unit after affixing X-ray equipment to a suspicious device found off Commerce Way July 28.

Police and the Union County Emergency Management Agency, with assistance from the Georgia Emergency Management Agency.

"The bomb threat was one of those that was happening all day Monday and Tuesday

at multiple schools all across the state," UCSO Capt. Daren Osborn said. "We evacuated the main building and got in contact with GEMA, and they were able to get a bomb-sniffing dog up here from the Dawson

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Dr. Butts, 86, to recount old times at courthouse Aug. 13

By **Brittany Holbrooks**
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

It's no secret that Blairsville has a deep past, and preserving tales from times gone by for future generations is an important task.

In pursuit of such preservation, the Union County Historical Society is making an effort to re-introduce those memories tangibly in a talk with Blairsville native Dr. James Butts at the Old Courthouse on Saturday, Aug. 13, at 2 p.m.

Pertaining to local history, the Butts family is intrinsically tied to the county. Hubert Butt taught at Young Harris College from about 1923 to 1942. By then, without a retirement plan and too old to be drafted during World War II, he and his wife Louise and son James moved to Blairsville.

Dr. Butts' uncle owned "about a quarter of the square," including a service station that his father would go on to rent. Dr. Butts can remember growing up in a two-story

house across from the Union County Heritage Center on School Street.

"He's going to be talking about starting out in his younger days, you know, like us playing baseball and how he developed and stuff like that - the old-timey stuff," said Historical Society member Bud Akins of the upcoming talk.

As mentioned, Akins grew up with Butts, and the pair played baseball together in an "unofficial Little League" when they were about 11 or 12 years old, so their personal history goes way back.

"He is one of the few people in Hall County that made medical units available, and his son, Allen Butts, was a doctor over there; he used to be my doctor," added Akins, elaborating on the personal relations between himself and the Butts family.

As for some further insight from Butts himself, he said that he decided to become a doctor as early as eighth grade, when his teachers motivated him to pursue a



Dr. James Butts

greater education with the passion he had for learning.

"(They) thought that I ought to do a different route, a different track. They thought that maybe I had good enough brain power to do something different," Butts said. "I was just more interested in learning and doing schoolwork than a lot of people were."

Akins and Butts' years of playing baseball would pay off. Butts went on to attend Emory

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School Board adopts budget, new policies in meeting

By **Shawn Jarrard**
North Georgia News
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Union County Board of Education members adopted the school system's Fiscal Year 2023 Final Budget in their July 19 regular meeting, with figures having increased across the board for the upcoming school year.

Compared with FY 2022, revenues are up about \$6.9 million, and expenditures have gone up more than \$7 million, with many of the increases attributable to the wildly variable financial and employment circumstances that have arisen since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the system's estimated unassigned fund balance is sitting at around eight months of operating reserves, which will undoubtedly benefit local taxpayers in the coming years as the country enters a recession, to potentially avoid having to raise property taxes or furlough employees in hard economic times.

To balance the biggest budget in school history, the Board Office will be transferring



Union County Board of Education members Janna Akins and Julia Barnett in the July 19 School Board meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

\$927,360.59 from reserves, as FY23 revenues are projected to come in at \$53,838,931.09, which is under the amount projected for expenditures at \$54,766,291.68.

Expenditures are up for many reasons, starting with yearly State Salary Scale increases for teacher pay and retirement, with 84% of the entire budget comprised of salaries and benefits that include more than \$11,000 in annual health coverage per insured employee.

The system is also matching for non-certified employees - bus drivers, nutrition staff,

paraprofessionals, etc. - the state-mandated \$2,000 pay raise for certified teaching staff, which will aid in employee retention during a difficult hiring period.

Plus, the school system is working to refill critical faculty positions that were vacated over the previous year, and it has budgeted for increased safety and security measures as well as hikes in power, fuel and food costs due largely to inflation, according to the Board Office.

Current year revenues include an additional \$1.94 million from the state after

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Music & Moonshine Festival sets a 'shining example'

By **Jeremy Foster**
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The three-day Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival at Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery and the Downtown Blairsville Square was such a success over the weekend that organizers are already planning for a return in 2023.

Well over a thousand people attended July 29-31, enjoying more than 70 artists, merchants and food vendors, plus distillery tours, axe throwing, a mechanical bull, a costume contest and more, as well as plenty of tasty beverages from businesses and Granddaddy Mimm's that certainly hit the spot.

The festival took place largely around the Historic Courthouse, with dozens of small businesses from around the area benefiting from the music and moonshine draw by selling all manner of crafts and products.

On top of the free tastings at multiple booths with the

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Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery offered a terrific venue for live music over the three days of the Mountain Music & Moonshine Festival.

Photo by Jeremy Foster



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SPORTS
Softball
Aug 6 vs. Lumpkin 11 AM
vs. Commerce 3 PM

Suches Fire Station
Open House
Aug 6 @ 4-7 PM

Gov. Brian Kemp
@ Community Center
Aug 4
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Back to School...from Page 1A

\$350,000 worth of equipment grants (split between four labs), because when you do construction with the state, you can apply for equipment grants," Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Josh Davis said.

Continuing, "We also received a \$57,000 grant because we're adding the construction program at the Middle School. So, in total, it's right around \$400,000 worth of equipment grants, which we're very excited about to equip the labs (and) meet industry standards to train our students."

"Our construction program has partnered with Habitat for Humanity," Davis added. "They're going to start building a house each school year for Habitat for Humanity, and then once they get it almost completed, they'll move it to wherever the site is."

As for Woody Gap School, new Principal Wendy Reynolds revealed that a bridge has been built between the school and community garden to allow students to get hands-on experience with agricultural learning. Additionally, new flooring has been put down in the gym and lobby.

"We're going to do a Back to School Bash where the community can come in and meet the (two) new teachers and see the different things that have been added in the spring and in the summer," Reynolds said.

Woody Gap and the Union County Elementary, Middle and High schools will all be holding Meet Your Teacher on Tuesday, Aug. 9, from 4-7 p.m., although the High School has an additional program for students.

Meet the Panthers will be held on Aug. 4 at the Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium. Running from 5:30-7:30 p.m., the event will allow upcoming High Schoolers to talk to upperclassmen and perhaps find an interest in sports, music or other extracurricular activities.

All schools now have a start time of 7:50 a.m., though parents can dodge traffic and drop off students as early as 7 a.m. for breakfast.

Regardless of financial status, school staff highly recommend that parents fill out free and reduced lunch forms. Breakfast for every child is free, and all reduced-cost meals will be 40 cents. Districtwide, the standard lunch price for

pre-K through fifth grade is \$2.50, and \$3 for sixth through 12th grade.

"Historically, every child was able to receive a free lunch," Hill said. "And now they will not be, so we really have to have these forms updated. It's really important."

Added Assistant Superintendent Dr. David Murphy, "Even if you don't plan on applying for free and reduced meals, we need those applications. We want to do everything we can to support our community."

"We are extremely excited about this school year," Hill said. "We ask that everybody just pray that we have a great year for the children. We want to see them back, we've missed them, and we're here to help our parents and students be successful."

"Our three goals as a district are: No. 1, safety; No. 2, relationships; and No. 3, expectations. We want the best experience for all 3,041 (currently registered) kids that we can provide them."

And parents, don't forget the Backpack 2 School Bash free school supply event at the First United Methodist Church on Aug. 6 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Dr. Butts...from Page 1A

University in no small part due to a scholarship from Ty Cobb, the legendary American Major League player.

"That was a boondoggle, that scholarship," recalled Butts. "I had to work hard; I didn't want to lose it, (so) it put a little pressure on me to keep my grades up."

With his brilliance recognized by a legend and his memories of a Blairsville before so much development, Butts' knowledge will surely prove fascinating to those looking for some insight into daily life as it was over 70 years ago.

Arguably, with such deep roots in the county, Butts serves as a fitting representative for local heritage. At any rate, he can provide a window to a past that's steadily becoming equal parts untouchable and unfathomable.

For instance, Butts can remember a time when today's commodities were luxuries. In fact, his father owned the first television set in Union County circa 1952, and because of that, the Butt household quickly became a very popular locale. He admits that there was another television in town at the Milton Hotel, but it wasn't "set up so people could come watch

it and leave."

It's easy to see, then, why Butts would be such a good choice as a guest speaker on behalf of the Historical Society. Despite his status as a celebrated surgeon and holder of prominent historical titles, Butts remains humble.

"Bud called me and asked me if I'd come up there and give a talk," he revealed. "And I said, 'Well, what did you want me to talk about, Bud?' He said, 'Anything you want to.'"

Because of who he is, Butts is no stranger to public speaking, and perhaps that's the very reason why he said he needed to do some preparing before heading back up to Blairsville from his current home in Gainesville.

"I have done so many talks in my lifetime, you wouldn't believe," he said. "I was kind of like Elizabeth Taylor's seventh husband: 'What can I do to make this interesting?'"

Of course, Akins and the rest of the Historical Society believe Butts' wealth of knowledge is, indeed, interesting. Akins said he invited Butts to come speak of the priceless knowledge he

holds not just on the specific events of the past, but also because of the change that can be measured through his experiences.

"(We need to) let people know how things worked back in the old days," Akins explained. "People nowadays don't realize what that could have been like, you know? And people need to know how tough it was to get an education and make a living in Blairsville, Georgia, back in the '30s and the '40s."

Butts agreed, saying, "All these talks are good, they're educational, and it gives people a little bit of touch with the past."

Be sure to come to the Union County Historical Courthouse on Aug. 13 to hear more about how a local baseball player became a lauded physician, what Blairsville was like over half a century ago, and just maybe gain a new perspective on the Union County of today.

Admission is free, and the upstairs level of the courthouse can seat up to 207 people. Akins hopes to see all those seats filled.

"If you want to hear the history of good people, why, come to the Courthouse on the Square," Akins said.

Bomb Threat...from Page 1A

County Sheriff's Office and clear the building."

In a separate incident on Thursday, July 28, 911 Dispatch received a call around 1:30 p.m. about a suspicious "device" discovered on Commerce Way: a homemade object fashioned out of a crossbow arrow attached to some type of plastic piping later discovered to contain BB shot.

"There was a device

located behind North Georgia Heat Treat that appeared to look like a pipe bomb," Capt. Osborn said. "We called the GBI and they sent their bomb disposal squad."

"The device was X-rayed and ruled a non-explosive device. It was deemed safe and taken apart without having to be detonated."

At press time, authorities did not know the purpose or

origin of the object, which was discovered by a Heat Treat employee around lunchtime Thursday.

Responding agencies were the Sheriff's Office, Fire Department, Union General EMS and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Anyone with information about either incident is being asked to call the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066.

Friday Night Concert at Historic Union County Courthouse

This Friday, August 5, the Union County Historical Society will be hosting a Friday Night Concert with the musical group Lighthouse.

Married for 54 years as of June 2022, Gerald and Verna Edwards make up the musical group Lighthouse. Gerald Edwards has been preaching for 60 years. The pair moved to Blairsville in 2020 and has loved it ever since.

The group has recorded 4 CD's with a 5th one in the works. Both Gerald and Verna sing multiple parts with Verna playing the keyboard, piano and organ. Their genre of music styling covers Southern, Country & Blue-Grass Gospel with an occasional Black Gospel & Blues Gospel tunes.

The group is searching for a 3rd vocalist if you are interested. Several of their songs have made national radio charts.

We hope to see you this Friday at 7 PM at the Historic Courthouse for a great concert!



Gerald and Verna Edwards

Friday Night Concert Schedule at the Historic Union County Courthouse

- Friday evenings 7 PM**
- August 5th ... Lighthouse (Christian)
 - August 12th ... Roy Perren (Elvis)
 - August 19th ... Jim Wood
 - August 26th ... Mike Lane
 - September 2nd ... Open
 - September 9th ... Bound to Ramble
 - September 16th ... Mars Hill Porch Pickers
 - September 23rd ... John Cochran and the Cowhands
 - September 30th ... Wilderness Pickers
 - October 7th ... Nelson Thomas
 - October 14th ... Open
 - October 21st ... Open
 - October 28th ... Skillet Lickers
 - December 2nd ... Roy Perren (Elvis Christmas)
 - December 9th ... North Georgia Chamber Symphony

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Blairsville City Council reviews over 50 years of ordinances

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Blairsville City Attorney Marvin Harkins said in the July 12 council meeting that he had reviewed all city ordinances and many resolutions going back over 50 years as part of an ongoing effort to clean up and post online the city's governing laws.

"I have looked through every single ordinance and most of the resolutions dating back to 1971, I think," said Harkins, who's been working on this project since May. "That's 150 ordinances, 32 resolutions, and a bunch of (intergovernmental agreements)."

Harkins compiled a five-page list, which started out as a 15-page list, of all the current ordinances that have never been repealed, "including the Hog Raising Ordinance, which prohibits raising of hogs within 300 feet of another residence in the city."

"Gee, I was really planning on that for some extra income," joked Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook to a few laughs.

"So, we know what the ordinances are," Harkins said. "I would like to ask you to consider having a work session to talk through these."

"Do you want to prohibit hog raising? There is an ordinance in here about trailer parks, which refers to mobile homes," said Harkins, adding that the legal definition of

mobile homes changed in 1976, and the ordinance doesn't say anything about manufactured homes or campers.

"So, I want to ask you two things, two categories. One is, there are some ordinances in here that you probably don't want to continue. The other one is, there are some ordinances that we don't have that you might want to add."

"There's nothing about regulations (addressing) trespassing at the airport, for example. That could be a public safety issue. So, some of the stuff that's here needs to come out, and some stuff that's not here probably needs to go in, but that's your decision to make."

Taking Harkins up on scheduling a work session to further review the matter, the City Council met again on Thursday, July 28, to consider the many ordinances still on the books and whether to keep them or repeal them, and what new ordinances, if any, to enact.

Harkins said the purpose of the ordinance review was to pull everything together sensibly so it can be submitted to Municode to place online for viewing by anyone needing to research the ordinances, which will relieve City Hall of that task and streamline city government.

After much discussion of most of the current ordinances, it was agreed that they would all be left in place for now and that the council would wait



Blairsville City Attorney Marvin Harkins explaining the many city ordinances on the books in a called meeting last week.

Photo by Mark Smith

to see what ordinances Union County develops so that the city can mirror them.

Further discussion and action concerning Blairsville ordinances will take place at future council meetings.

In other news from the July 12 regular meeting, the council approved the Blairsville Municipal Airport to use "1200.aero," software that tracks and records all general aviation flights including those made without a flight plan.

1200.aero uses Automatic Dependent Surveillance – Broadcast, more popularly known to pilots and air traffic controllers as ADS-B, which became FAA-required instrumentation on nearly all general aviation aircraft about two years ago.

The cost of 1200.aero is \$1,140 per year, and, according

to Airport Manager Aaron Mannheim, is well worth the investment.

Mannheim said the airport has had the use of 1200.aero for over a year for free as a trial period, and that it's been an incredibly effective tool for the airport, pilots and airport management.

The council also approved the purchase of a 2019 model passenger van from Ware Chevrolet for use by detainee crews in the amount of \$40,500. The van has an odometer reading of about 54,000 miles and comes with a three-year drive train warranty from General Motors.

Blairsville City Council and Mayor Jim Conley meet the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall.

School Board...from Page 1A

reductions in FY22 austerity cuts, and there's \$2.4 million in remaining federal funds related to COVID relief measures and the \$3 million state grant for the College & Career Academy.

Among other increases, Title Ad Valorem Tax revenues on vehicle sales and ESPLOST proceeds are way up, and property tax collections came in about \$550,000 higher than the budgeted amount last year.

Importantly, revenue from property taxes has been budgeted to stay the same in FY23 at \$16 million, meaning the School Board will be sticking with its plan to roll back the property tax rate.

During remarks in the work session that immediately preceded the July 19 regular meeting, Superintendent John Hill reiterated the Board Office's commitment to lowering the millage rate in 2022.

There has been much concern among property owners about taxes this year, as, for the second year in a row, property values for many residents following annual reassessments have gone up substantially due to inflated market values driven by people relocating during the pandemic.

"The school system and School Board have nothing to do with (assessing property values)," Hill said. "We don't initiate that, we don't drive that, we don't have our hands in that in any capacity."

"The only interaction we have is, we determine what the tax rate is going to be for property owners. So, that initial (notice of assessment) that was sent out is simply what (our tax bills) would be if we leave the millage rate the same as it is."

"And the board and myself are definitely planning on reducing that millage rate considering the (22% average increase in property values), and we don't need that much money and we're not going to ask for that much money. We're going to keep those taxes as low as we can."

Hill said that once the tax

digest is available – hopefully this month – the School Board will hold a called meeting to set the millage rate "considering that we would like to roll it back and reduce that millage rate," and he noted further that leaving the rate the same is "off the table."

School Board members discussed the budget in two May public meetings and their June 21 regular meeting before posting the budget to the district website June 29 and adopting it July 19, and the Board Office will send the approved budget to the Georgia Department of Education by Oct. 31.

Policy Updates

The board also held a second reading and approval for a slate of new policies and policy updates regarding: Unstructured Break Time, Divisive Concepts Complaint Resolution Process, Material Harmful to Minors Complaint Resolution, Student Attendance, and Parents' Bill of Rights.

Several of the new policies are coming in the wake of recently enacted state legislation aimed at addressing concerns expressed by Georgia parents regarding the potential for certain concepts being taught around, for example, racial superiority and age-inappropriate sexual content.

The Divisive Concepts Complaint Resolution Process and Material Harmful to Minors Complaint Resolution policies are primarily designed to prohibit discrimination and specific instruction based on such concepts and provide a means of redress for parents.

Similarly, the new policies pertaining to the state-enacted Parents' Bill of Rights are aimed at ensuring parents have a "fundamental right to direct the upbringing and education of their minor children" and that schools cannot keep from parents certain information about their children.

The Parents' Bill of Rights guarantees parents access to records relating to

their children and instructional materials used in classes, and, further, allows parents to object to classroom materials and withdraw their children from "the school's prescribed course of study in sex education."

As for the Unstructured Break Time Policy, the board adopted an update based on other recent legislation requiring schools to schedule daily recess for all kindergarten through fifth-grade students, "except on days when a student has had physical education or if reasonable circumstances such as bad weather or other scheduled events or emergencies impede recess."

Previously, school boards could have a discretionary policy allowing or prohibiting recess for these students, whereas the new policy makes unstructured break time a requirement.

The Student Attendance Policy was updated to add 4-H activities as excused absences.

In other business, School Board members approved the Georgia Department of Education FY2023 Facilities Contract for reimbursement of eligible funds for the major Primary School renovation and High School paint, floor and fire alarm system work, all of which will be completed in time for the 2022-23 school year.

Once the application process is finalized with the state, the school system will be receiving reimbursement funds in the amount of \$1,333,130 toward these primarily ESPLOST-funded projects, which cost a total of \$9 million to complete.

Also on track for completion by the Aug. 12 start of school are the College & Career Academy construction and Vocational Building renovation at Union County High, which are being paid for with a \$3 million state grant and a previously budgeted amount of \$834,066 in ESPLOST funds.

Looking ahead to the start of a brand-new school year next week, Hill said with excitement that "we will be ready for our kiddos."

Hiwassee Garden Club Flower Show open to the public

Have a green thumb, a garden of beautiful, interesting plants, consider entering your plants in Hiwassee Garden Club's 72nd Annual Flower Show. This year the show is titled Plant America the Beautiful. Show dates are Friday, August 19, 2 PM - 8 PM; Saturday, August 20, 10 AM - 8 PM; Sunday, August 21, 10 AM - 6 PM. Horticulture, Youth Design and Youth Horticulture are open to the public. Entering is easy and garden club members will be available to help if you have questions when you bring in your plant specimens.

Specimen categories include annuals, perennials, shrubs and trees. Your submission should be a single stem. If possible the botanical name of the plant should be provided. If you don't know the botanical name when you bring in your specimen a garden club member will be available to

help you locate the information needed for entry. Containers for specimens will be provided. There are also categories for container and hanging plants. Entries must have been grown by the exhibitor and been in the exhibitors possession for at least 3 months. Ribbons will be awarded by a panel of certified judges.

Youth, ages 4 through 18, can participate in both design and horticulture categories. This year the design classes are preschool through age 7, "Born on the Fourth of July"; ages eight through twelve, "Born in the USA"; ages thirteen through eighteen, "Uncle Sam Wants You". Children who would like to participate must be preregistered. To register for a design class you may contact Sharon Payne at 706-896-2337. To register for participation in Youth Horticulture contact Elaine Bacon at

706-896-4556.

Entries may be delivered to the flower show building which is located across from the Exhibition Hall at the fairgrounds. Tree, shrub, container-grown plants and hanging plant exhibits may be submitted on Wednesday, August 17th, 10-6. All other Horticulture, Youth Designs and Youth Horticulture may be submitted on Thursday, August 18th from 10-6.

More detailed information regarding entries can be picked up at the Hiwassee Garden Club clubhouse, 34 River Street, Hiwassee, located behind the courthouse. Information sheets will be in a holder attached to the outside door. The Flower Show is open to the public with admission to the Georgia Mountain Fair and is open for viewing: Friday, August 19th, 2-8; Saturday, August 20th, 10-8 and Sunday, August 21, 10-6.

Veterans Memorial Park making progress at Meeks



Meeks Park is the future home of the Appalachian Memorial Veterans Park, pictured here with local veterans and project stakeholders. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Following a meeting of the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park Project Committee on Monday, July 18, several members gathered to install a sign announcing the project at the site donated by Union County where the memorial will be constructed in Meeks Park.

“This memorial park project is something that we’re trying to do for the entire Appalachian area,” said Dan Wickersham, retired U.S. Army. “It’s not just Blairsville. We’re trying to bring everybody together from a big radius of this area. We’re going to build monuments to each one of the services at this park.

“We’re pleased so far with the community support. We’re actually receiving some pretty good donations, even now, right from the infancy (of the project). We expect this to be an event destination for people to come up here and look at this.

“The scope of it, I think, will really be a great credit to the veterans and to the community,” Wickersham said.

And it really is a veteran/community project, as is evidenced by the fact that

Union County GOP President Rob Mawyer and Marketing & Public Relations Officer Derek Nagel, both non-veterans, are both on the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park Project Committee.

“This is something we’ve had a vision for for the last few months. Fundraising has started, and (installing this sign) is one step closer to making it a reality,” said Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7394 Cmdr. Chuck Honaker, retired U.S. Army.

“Having a tribute, a memorial to veterans that is highly visible to the youth in our area, with ample parking – it’s just something we’ve been wanting to do, and we’re excited that it’s finally being accomplished.

“It’s taken the help of sponsors in this area, civic organizations. It’s really going to be a community event with not just one major sponsor but with multiple sponsors, from corporate all the way down to individuals.

“It’s not going to be a cheap undertaking, and the end results are going to be great. The main thing is it’s going to be visible to the kids,” Honaker said, alluding to the fact that so many young people in America know little of the sacrifices made for freedom and the cost

of being free.

“We’ve had some good meetings, got a good team assembled covering just about all the bases,” said Memorial Park Project Manager Ed Crenshaw, retired U.S. Navy. “We voted to put a ‘future home’ sign, which we did today, and it will give everybody who comes in here to the park a visual to see.”

Crenshaw said there is a QR code at the bottom righthand corner of the new sign that people can use to make donations through PayPal with their phones.

Nagel said, “I’m one of the non-veterans on the committee. This is one of the most important, worthwhile projects I’ve ever been involved with in my life. It means the world to me that these guys have included me the way that they have. It’s been a lot of work – it’s been almost like a full-time job for me.”

“It’s such a great effort in this county and this town. It’s a collaborative effort, and we’re really seeing who some of the most patriotic businesses are,” Nagel added, noting that the total cost of the project is estimated to be about \$200,000.

The new memorial park will augment Union County’s



Last month, local veterans and Veterans Park project members installed this sign as an indicator of things to come at Meeks Park. Photo by Mark Smith

other patriotic offerings, among them the War Memorial near the Downtown Blairsville Square and the Maj. Leon Davenport Veterans Building off Georgia 515 west of its intersection with Murphy Highway.

As an aside related to the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park, Nagel and Crenshaw said that Blairsville

will finally be getting a Vietnam Era Sheridan tank for display in front of the Davenport Veterans Building.

Crenshaw said Chaplin Richard Hoibraten, retired U.S. Navy, made the original request for a piece of military memorabilia for display in Blairsville nearly a decade ago.

“We were on the list for

about nine years to get (this tank),” said Crenshaw, adding that Union County stepped in and poured a concrete pad for the tank to sit on.

Renee Deibert of Union County Government was on hand to see the new sign go up that Monday, and she said that, hopefully, the tank will arrive sometime in the coming weeks.

Music & Moonshine...from Page 1A



Despite a few afternoon rain showers, Downtown Blairsville was busy over the weekend for the Music & Moonshine Festival. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



The Music & Moonshine Festival inspired a robust attendance at the Old Union County Courthouse, with many vendors and small businesses well supported via excellent sales figures July 29-31. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Moonshine Passport Drink Tour, the live music kept festival patrons entertained throughout as they boosted both the bottom line of local merchants as well as the tax base.

Hundreds of guests attended Saturday night’s big concert at the distillery featuring headliner Keith Anderson, the renowned County Music artist who by all accounts put on a truly electrifying show.

Anderson has produced three Billboard Top-10 songs and co-written hits for Garth Brooks, George Jones and Big & Rich, the latter resulting in the 2007 No. 1 country hit, “Lost in this Moment.”

And distillery owner/County Music icon Tommy Townsend and friends performed that evening, too, giving folks much to write home about.

Also performing during the festival were Rick Davenport & The Boys, Mountain Breeze Band, Heart of Pine, Bone Daddy’s Band and Kim & Curtis Jones.

“Originally, we were just wanting to put on a small concert here for everyone,” Townsend said before taking the stage Saturday night. “But when we met with Darren Harper of the Downtown Development Authority and with the Chamber of Commerce, we all collaborated a little bit, and the city wanted to make it into a huge annual festival, so of course we were on board with it.

“It has been amazing so far. I have met so many people from all over the U.S. and even Germany, and we did not expect the huge success that we have had, so I want to thank our community and travelers for coming out to show your support.”

Townsend’s longtime friend and colleague Buddy Jennings, son of the legendary Waylon Jennings and now a retired road crew engineer, came down from Nashville to show his support for the festival.

“This was a great turnout

with plenty more room to grow for next year,” Jennings said. “I have seen my fair share of festivals, but they seem to already have the system down, and next year’s will absolutely be bigger.

“A lot of things may have changed in music over the years, such as digital downloads and streaming and such, but the one thing that will never change or top it will be seeing great music live and in person, so I am definitely coming back next year.”

Many area businesses and organizations sponsored the event, including the Chamber of Commerce, Visit Downtown Blairsville, Granddaddy Mimm’s, Iron Mountain Fence, Brown Haven Homes, Folger Gas, Lucky’s Restaurant, Teppanyaki Time, RRG Roofing and more.

For more information and to stay on top of whatever Townsend is up to next, visit www.tommytownsendmusic.com and www.granddaddymimms.com.