

North Georgia News

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Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, September 21, 2022

Sheridan tank to serve as new local landmark

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

U.S. Army Reserve soldiers delivered a decommissioned, demilitarized M551 "General Sheridan" Armored Reconnaissance/Airborne Assault Vehicle to the Maj. Leon Davenport Veterans Building in Blairsville on Thursday, Sept. 15, as a training exercise.

That means the Army footed the bill for transport and delivery, saving Veterans of Foreign Wars Brown-Davis-Elliott-Woody Post 7394 and the county that expense.

At nearly 17 tons when battle-loaded, the M551 Sheridan is considered a light tank and was able to be C-130 aircraft when it was in service, which dated from 1969

until 1997.

"It's been a long time coming," said Post Cmdr. Chuck Honaker of the tank delivery, which was well over a decade in the making. "It adds a landmark. A lot of time you'll say, 'Over at the Veterans Building,' and people think you're talking about the VA Clinic."

"Now, all you'll have to say is, 'You know, over where the tank is.' We're happy and excited about it."

"I'm thrilled to death. We've worked on this for years and years and years," added Barbara Richardson, referring to herself and her late husband Bill, who was in a tank command in the U.S. Army and was a member of the North Georgia Honor Guard after leaving the service.

"My husband and I went to all the military bases in

Alabama, and I talked to dozens of people in Washington (D.C.) trying to make contacts to find out how we could get on the list to even get a tank," she said, as she watched the transport pull up in front of the VFW Post.

In addition to the Richardsons, Post Chaplain Richard Hoibraten was a driving force in acquiring the M551 Sheridan tank for the Blairsville VFW.

"We're striving to reunite the military people today so that we can get America back on track," Hoibraten said. "When you see this (tank), don't think of this as a weapon of destruction. Think of it as what it takes to preserve the peace and freedoms that we have today."

"So, this is just an example of what is just an



U.S. Army Reservists delivered this historic Sheridan tank for display at the Maj. Leon Davenport Veterans Building last week. Photo by Mark Smith

Indian Summer Festival to run Oct. 1-2 in Suches

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Come the first weekend of October, Suches will celebrate the 45th Annual Indian Summer Festival at Woody Gap School – the smallest public school in Georgia.

The Indian Summer Festival will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both Oct. 1 and Oct. 2. Parking is free, and admission prices are based on age. Guests 13 and older will pay \$5, children aged 7 to 12 can get in for \$3, and kids 6 and under can enter free.

Interestingly, the size of the K-12 school ties into the beginning and purpose of the festival. Back in 1977, the Woody Gap Sports Club originated a fundraising idea to not only help develop the school and better conditions for students but also to stimulate the community.

And despite the involvement of the Sports Club, it's important to note that festival proceeds go toward more than just athletics.

"More than the Indian Summer Festival over the years have helped purchase

sports equipment, uniforms, trophies, computers, electronic equipment, learning devices and more," read the bright orange brochures circulating around town as an invitation to all who would support the event.

Susan White, a kindergarten and first-grade teacher who has been working at Woody Gap for five years, has been a part of the Suches

community ever since she was 4 years old. White said the proceeds also go toward scholarships for graduating seniors.

"Every student that's going on to higher education, whether it be trade school or college, they're going to get a \$600 scholarship as long as we can do it," she said.

White also revealed that,



Not only is the Indian Summer Festival fun for the whole family, it also supports local school children. Pictured here: The Woody Gap Shop Class Booth. Photo by Todd Forrest/2018

Bailey Adams thrilled to win Homecoming Queen



(L-R) 2022-23 Homecoming Second Runner-Up Caroline Karnes, Queen Bailey Adams and First Runner-Up Saylor Noe. Photo by Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Senior Bailey Adams took her place as Union County High School royalty with the crowning of the school's 2022-23 Homecoming Queen last Friday night at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium.

Adams' moment in the spotlight punctuated the pregame Homecoming festivities ahead of the Union County Panthers' 48-7 victory over West Hall.

Escorted by her father, Chris Adams, a stunned Bailey Adams accepted her newly minted crown from 2021-22

queen, Mia McCombs.

"I was very shocked and was not expecting them to call my name," Adams said when asked about her reaction to hearing her name announced as UCHS Homecoming Queen.

She admitted that the last three weeks have been

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Blairsville Police collar Alabama robbery fugitives

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Last week, the Blairsville Police Department arrested two fugitives wanted for robbery out of Alabama after receiving a tip from an eagle-eyed patron of the Circle K at Blue Ridge (Street and Murphy Highway).

Around 11:30 a.m. on Monday, Sept. 12, a Circle K customer contacted the police department to report a man and woman acting suspiciously outside the convenience store, Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said.

Apparently, the pair were experiencing engine problems with the black Chevrolet Corvette convertible they were driving and kept getting into and out of the vehicle while alternately sitting in the parking lot, as observed by officers once they arrived.

Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer and Officer Bradley Glass took up positions across



Shelby Renee Baxter

the street from the Corvette to observe the behavior of the individuals in question, Chief Baxter said, and before long, the couple left the car in the parking lot and walked over to the Burger King nearby.

When BPD ran the tag, it came back to the wrong vehicle – a Chevy truck – and as Officer Glass inspected the car after the couple went to eat, he observed that the Vehicle



Danial Lee Fisher

Identification Number on the dash had been on, and a separate but detached VIN traced to a Pontiac.

The officers approached the individuals as they dined at a booth in the Burger King, Chief Baxter said. When asked for ID, the pair said they did not have any, and the man gave officers what they found out later was his brother's name.

See Fugitives Arrested, Page 2A

4-H students weigh-in Giant Pumpkin projects



Union County 4-H'ers and Pontiacers posing for a photo with junior Addi Scott's massive First Place 650-pound pumpkin on Saturday. Scott is not pictured because she could not attend the weigh-in. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Sept. 17, a very meaningful, educational and fun occasion happened

at the Union County Farmers Market when Union County 4-H'ers weighed their entries into the annual Giant Pumpkin Growing Competition.

The youths are students

at the Union County School System between eighth and 12th grade who have chosen to take part in the informative and skill-building Union County

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5 PM
SOFTBALL
9/20 vs. Banks Co. 5 PM

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Cummings lectures on waterfalls of Union County

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Sept. 10, the Union

County Historical Society welcomed one of its own, President Mickey Cummings, for an informative public lecture on local waterfalls that

was sprinkled with facts about other mysterious, natural gems of the mountains.

The upper floor of the Old Courthouse that Saturday morning was filled with a sizeable crowd, which hung around for just over an hour to listen to interesting historical facts like the story behind the names of certain falls.

Cummings, a retired agent, decided on the topic due to his own love of hiking and extensive history in caring for the natural world.

"I've always had a hankering to take pictures of (waterfalls), and then when the idea came up, I said, 'Well, I've got a bunch of waterfall photographs already,'" he said, describing his motivation for sharing that passion with the public.

Talking points were shared via a slideshow like other such presentations. Most slides focused on different falls, but some contained other points of interest, like how the mouth of the mighty Chattahoochee River claims a few yards of land in the

southeasternmost corner of Union County at Jacks Knob.

Other fascinating details came in the form of background information on popular locales like Towns County's Cupid Falls, located just behind the Young Harris College. Early in the campus' history, male and female students were strictly prohibited from interacting with each other on school grounds. Sweethearts found solace in meeting up at the nearby waterfall, and so the romantic location earned its name from the mythical cherub symbolizing love.

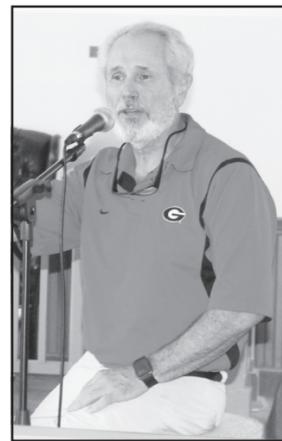
The Daniel Camp Falls, named for the old Daniel Lumber Camp, has a more personal connection to Cummings. He shared an encounter that happened the first time he visited the falls, much to the amusement of his listeners.

His son, who was "about 7 or 8" at the time, had come along for the adventure and was tossing branches and rocks into the water when Cummings tried to start a conversation.

"You never talk to a young boy while he's throwing something, because when I distracted him, he turned toward me, but his arm was still in motion. And he let go of this thing, and I felt like David and Goliath, because this rock hit me right above the ear," Cummings said, motioning to his temple as quiet laughter murmured through the audience.

"I can still see myself falling to my knees. I went down on the ground, and his eyes got real big, and he thought he killed me."

Around 2012 and 2013, Cummings brought 4-H classes out to the woods to not only give them a better understanding of ecology, but to show them



Mickey Cummings
Historical Society President

identifying landmarks such as Union County's 54 waterfalls and their connected bodies of water.

Today, many of those former students are teachers themselves, and others work with various forest services or care for animals.

In particular, that period of Cummings' life held abundant stories of all sorts of hijinks, but the trips themselves were invaluable for helping him develop his own love for nature. Although retired from teaching, he still finds fulfillment in teaching others about the hidden world that lies just beyond their backyards.

And it seemed that the audience was eager to latch on, considering that several people expressed an interest in going on tours similar to the ones Cummings' students took to remote areas of the forest.

"I've already mentioned that to a couple of people, (and) maybe partnering with the Rec Department to do that," Cummings said, although the idea is still in the works. "I'm not interested in making

money, I just want people to get out and see things they've never seen before."

The one thing Cummings wants folks to remember about waterfalls is that, while they are gorgeous for sightseeing and invaluable natural resources, trying to get a good view can be dangerous. Climbing and swimming open up risks for slipping on wet, mossy rocks or being swept away by high water events.

To stress his pleas, Cumming advised that "people around waterfalls ... need to be careful," and despite their beauty and historical value, plenty of deaths have been recorded.

While most waterfall adjacent deaths happened long ago in the early to mid-20th century, it's not unheard of for modern tragedies to occur, such as the drownings of a 38-year-old father and his 6-year-old son at Lumpkin County's Dick Creek Falls in 2017.

"The Forest Service knows about a lot of these waterfalls, but they don't advertise them because they're dangerous," Cummings said. "Let's get out and enjoy them, but at the same time, be careful."

For adventurers who prefer hoofing it alone, Cummings suggests using a topography map. Physical copies can be bought from the Forest Service, and digital copies can be accessed from apps like Gaia GPS or Topo GPS.

To find out more about local waterfalls, swing by the Old Courthouse and pick up a 2023 calendar featuring at least two waterfall photos per month with accompanying write-ups. Each calendar, entitled "Falling Waters," is \$15 with tax.

Indian Summer Fest...from Page 1A

due to Woody Gap's small size, the traditional fundraisers employed by larger systems simply don't work in Suches, saying, "Think about other schools that send home the wrapping paper and the cookie dough, and (say) 'Buy these things.'"

Door-to-door sales in The Valley Above the Clouds aren't exactly practical, so having a community get-together that supports the futures of Suches' children as much as social connections turned out to be a much better choice.

For this year's festivities, coordinators are looking for more vendors. There's already been some interest with somewhere between 30 to 40 businesses signing up, but White said 60 is typically the norm, and she would love to see more.

"There's art, we have a lot of crafty stuff," she said. "There's usually a lot of handmade jewelry. Textiles (are) a big thing; you know, it's jewelry, the pocketbooks, the pillows, the things like that."

White's brief synopsis of handmade goods serves as a general overview of the kinds of products available for purchase at the Indian Summer Festival, and for 2022 specifically, she made mention of at least two woodworkers and one garden artist.

In the past, there's also been an interest in produce,

depending on the availability, and if stopping to grab fresh, local-grown veggies isn't enough, there's plenty of other gustatory delights to fill the bellies of locals and tourists.

"There's usually pretty good barbecue traffic from the locals, that they come in and know they're going to get a plate, or they're going to get a butt," noted Coach Robert Hill, recalling years past when folks made a point of showing up and supporting the endeavor even in inclement weather.

But there's still just one thing that White says the festival is in need of this year, if more restaurants or bakers would like to sign on as vendors.

"We don't have a vendor doing fried apple pies," she noted, pointing to the advertisement on the brochure that stated otherwise. It would be a shame to miss out on the annual autumn treat.

Guests can also do more than shop. Live entertainment will include local artists and even student organizations like the Woody Gap Band of Steel, made popular by performances around Union County in recent years.

Not only that, but younger students will be performing in the annual play "that (tells) the story of the Cherokee Indians who once lived here."

"It's really, really

cute," Hill said with a fond smile, adding that, despite the difficulties that come with corralling tiny children, raising money for a good cause makes everything worth it.

Like last year, the Run Above the Clouds benefit race will not be happening in tandem with the Indian Summer Festival in 2022, as the 5K and 10K races have been moved to the spring due to how busy the fall season is.

In addition to soliciting for a fried apple pie vendor, White is also hoping locals and others can provide photos from past festivals. Because teachers, staff and members of the Sports Club are usually busy managing booths and taking care of upkeep, they don't have many chances to capture their own memories in picture format.

"Please come, plan to eat. You know, just keep in mind that any money you spend with the barbecue booth, the teachers' booth, and the entrance booth, that's going straight back to your kids," said White, hoping to make parents feel welcome. "Come on, we'll be here rain or shine."

To find out more about the Indian Summer Festival or to register as a vendor, visit www.indiansummerfestival.org, or people can email theindiansummerfestival@yahoo.com. Alternatively, folks may call 706-747-2401.

Fugitives Arrested...from Page 1A

Upon further investigation, officers discovered that the couple were Danial Lee Fisher, 33, and Shelby Renee Baxter, 28, both of Mobile, Alabama, and listed as homeless.

As it turned out, Fisher and Baxter were on the run from the law in connection with a Mobile robbery from early September, and they said they were headed to Cherokee, North Carolina, in pursuit of "a new life," Chief Baxter said.

Instead of making it to Cherokee, the couple were taken without incident to the Union County Jail to await extradition back to Alabama to face multiple charges there.

Blairsville PD was able to obtain the correct VIN for the car, which came back as stolen out of Mobile in February. Mobile-linked fraudulent and stolen checks were confiscated from the vehicle, as was a weapon connected to the robbery, Chief Baxter said.

Prior to their apprehension, Fisher and Baxter were considered dangerous fugitives by Alabama authorities, and though they were just passing through, Chief Baxter said there's no telling what they would have gotten up to here with a broken-down car and desperate circumstances.

"I'm just glad that we were able to take them into custody without incident and get them off the streets before they hurt someone," Chief Baxter said. "I want to commend the concerned citizen who saw something that didn't seem right and contacted us to let us know."

Chief Baxter encourages the public to do as the Circle K customer did and adhere to the following common guidance: "See something? Say something."

"We can't be everywhere,

and this is a good example of that, where an individual who goes to that store regularly saw something that he thought was suspicious, and it turned out to be a big deal," Chief Baxter said.

Local charges may be pending eventually, Chief Baxter said, but first he wants to make sure they make their way safely into Alabama law enforcement hands.

At press time, the couple were still in custody at the local jail. They are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Friday Night Concert at Union County's Historic Courthouse

Join us this Friday at the historic courthouse to hear a concert from Roy Perren hosted by the Union County Historical Society!

Roy has been singing for most of his life and doing Elvis shows for close to 20 years. He once lost a talent show because judges thought he was lip-syncing Elvis. Roy enjoys classic country and southern gospel music and sings at churches at events as much as possible. We hope you will join us this Friday at 7 p.m. EST to hear some Elvis hits and country classics.



Roy Perren

Sheridan Tank...from Page 1A



Army Reservists posed for pictures with local VFW members, elected officials, law enforcement officers and others after the delivery and placement of the newest local landmark, a decommissioned Sheridan tank. Photo by Mark Smith

having freedom is. It's not meant to start a war, but to protect and defend (against an aggressor)."

Honaker said Hoibraten started the paperwork to get the ball rolling 10 or 12 years ago when he was commander of Blairsville VFW Post 7394 and Honaker was his adjutant.

"We also want to thank the county for all they've done in making this happen," said Honaker, adding that Executive Assistant Jennifer Mahan, County Manager Larry Garrett, County Assistant Renee Deibert, and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris have bent over backwards to help with the project over the last decade.

"It was a little overwhelming when we were given all the requirements to be able to get this tank up here. (The county) has just been super," he said. "All I had to do

was call them, and they literally took care of everything. We're just blessed to be in a county where there's so much veteran support."

Paris and many of his staff were on hand to witness the tank delivery, as was Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Union County Sheriff's Chief Deputy John George, Blairsville Police Officers, and several veterans to watch as the U.S. Army Reserve soldiers unloaded the tank and placed it precisely on the concrete pad poured expressly for that purpose.

"This is an exciting day. Everybody here is excited," Paris said. "We've gone through all kinds of processes through the years trying to get this tank. It's hard to believe it's finally here."

Paris said they plan to completely refurbish the

exterior of the tank and bring it up to showroom standards. Of course, the hatch is welded shut, the barrel is blocked, and the engine was removed, so, the tank can't move on its own or be fired.

As fate would have it, a former M551 tank commander, named De Wood, happened to be driving by on Georgia 515 and stopped to watch as the Reservists positioned the tank. Wood said he was an M551 "Sheridan" tank commander for eight years in Germany.

"I was literally driving by - my wife and I were going to Blue Ridge - and I said, 'Whoa, there's a Sheridan. I've got to turn around and go see it,'" said Wood, adding that the tank was named after Gen. Phillip Sheridan from the American Civil War.

So, like Hiawassee with their Howitzer and Blue Ridge

with their Huey, Blairsville now has a Sheridan, a robust memorial to the military veterans of the Blairsville/Union County community.

4-H Pumpkins...from Page 1A



Between all 10 4-H pumpkin projects, Union County students grew a ginormous 4,400 pounds worth of giant pumpkin this year, displayed here at the Farmers Market prior to contest weighing. Photo by Jeremy Foster

4-H agricultural program, which holds the honor of earning the Pumpkin Weigh-In State Record of 665 pounds.

Throughout the growing process, Market Manager Patrick Fix works heavily with the kids and side-by-side with the 4-H program, as he has particular experience growing giant pumpkins and donates seeds to the cause "to give back to the community."

Along with cousin and volunteer Tim Grizzle, Fix grew the Georgia State Record Pumpkin at 1,306 pounds in 2017, and he has assisted the local students in earning 4-H Georgia State Record Championships every year since they started growing pumpkins in 2018.

"We have had plaques made that are going to be hung up in the Union County Farmers Market to recognize the 4-H students on the accomplishments that we did on winning the state championship four years in a row," Fix said.

"My favorite part of this is knowing that the students in the 4-H have learned many things in growing," Fix continued, "from planting, knowing the different amounts of nutrients in each one, germinating the plant. These are the basics to

survive, and we helped give them knowledge that they are going to take with them the rest of their lives."

University of Georgia Extension Agent for Union County Jacob Williams was there to rev up the kids on the official weigh-in day as well as to share his thoughts on his appreciation for everyone involved.

"This is our fifth year of doing the weigh-in here at the Farmers Market," Williams said. "The Farmers Market and the whole county has always been a huge supporter of us doing this, and we are really thankful for that."

"Since my involvement with 4-H, this has definitely been one of my top favorite things to be involved with. The weigh-in is very exciting to me because of the anticipation, the kids getting excited, and the crowd."

"The kids get to show off their hard work and be proud of it; whether it is the biggest pumpkin or the smallest, everyone has fun, and the kids feel more confident in themselves, and I think that is the most important."

Now that the largest local pumpkin has been established to enter, keep up with the next

round of the State Pumpkin Contest by visiting www.georgia4h.org.

The participants and placers of the Union County Giant Pumpkin Growing Contest were:

Freshman Kaitlyn Beckman in 10th place at 265 pounds; eighth-grader Ander Faulkner, ninth place at 344 pounds; eighth-grader Noah Payne, eighth place at 354 pounds; sophomore Alexa Beckman, seventh place at 359 pounds; eighth-grader Ben Potts, sixth place at 454 pounds; senior Maggie Payne, fifth place at 457 pounds; sophomore Katie Payne, fourth place at 478 pounds; junior Ava Sharp, third place at 504 pounds; freshman Dominic Sharp, second place at 532 pounds; and junior Addi Scott, first place and overall winner at 650 pounds.

The Union County Farmers Market also sends out a gracious "thank you" to Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District and Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D Council for sponsoring the event.

The Farmers Market will continue Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. through Oct. 29.

Homecoming...from Page 1A

extremely hectic, and she's relieved that the Homecoming process is behind her. However, she noted that being selected to represent her peers is an honor she will always cherish.

"It's all been very stressful, knowing I had to get a dress and get everything ready for this day," she said. "I'm also a cheerleader, so I still had responsibilities to the team on top of getting myself ready for Homecoming. In a way, I'm glad it's all over, but I'm glad that I was able to be a part of

the Homecoming Court.

"I'm very happy and thankful for everyone that voted for me. It means a lot that people think enough of me to nominate and then choose me for their homecoming queen. I couldn't have done this without my family, friends and everyone at the school. I also want to thank my cheer teammates for all their support over the last few weeks."

Seniors Saylor Noe and Caroline Karnes took home first and second runner-up honors,

respectively. The Junior Class runner-up went to Addi Scott, while Mikala Souther earned the title of Sophomore Class runner-up.

Other 2022-23 Homecoming Court representatives were seniors Chloe Potts and Sophie Truex. The junior reps were Katie Byers, Georgia Patton and Lara Turner. Sophomores Brook LeQuire and Mallory Rouse, along with freshmen Mady Adams, Lola Hunter and Kaylee Rader, rounded out the court.

Additional Homecoming photos can be found on this week's Sports Section pages.