

New Hope...from Page 1A

(RSAT) Program.

“Sadly, when an offender is sentenced to a state facility for confinement and treatment for an addiction in the nine-month RSAT Program, we wind up keeping them in jail for as many as nine months before a bed becomes available for that program,” Mason said.

And while Mason said jails serve a vital function in keeping the peace, he thinks the best thing to do for people suffering from addiction is to get them proactive help via expert medical care and treatment.

Enter New Hope Counseling of Blairsville, a private outpatient treatment facility founded in 2005 and led by Troy Beaver and Shanna Prather, both substance abuse professionals with years of experience treating patients for drug and alcohol-related addictions.

New Hope is the only state-accredited counseling center of its kind serving Union and Towns counties, and it provides a whole suite of confidential addiction counseling services to anyone needing them.

Beaver and Prather offer free consultations to people seeking treatment for chemical addiction and anger management, and if someone contacts them looking for treatment New Hope doesn't offer, such as mental health, they will make an appropriate next-step referral.

They also conduct aftercare programs for folks who have completed the state-mandated RSAT Program after going to jail, and the facility helps people get their licenses re-instated via DUI school,

which goes a long way toward getting lives back on track.

Beaver and Mason have been friends since their schooling days and became acquainted professionally through their mutual involvement on a local civic group, the Union County Anti-Drug Coalition.

The coalition meets monthly and is made up of people in the community hoping to combat alcohol and drug abuse in Union County. Members include concerned residents, law enforcement officers, people from the schools, Family Connection and others.

A lifelong treater of addiction, Beaver has been able to stress the importance and efficacy of treatment on Mason and the rest of the coalition, and Mason sees the kind of work being done by New Hope as crucial to making headway amid the rising tide of substance abuse.

The sheriff expressed his support for New Hope's mission recently by throwing his weight behind the counseling center while serving on the Union County Drug Abuse Treatment and Education (DATE) Fund Advisory Committee.

As the duly elected sheriff of Union County, Mason has a position on the committee, which is responsible for authorizing state grant funds to go toward various local treatment initiatives.

These grant monies are allocated out of the County DATE Fund consisting of fines and forfeited bonds collected from offenders related to marijuana, controlled substances and noncontrolled substances.

DATE Funds as a grant-

awarding mechanism for treatment programs have been available around the state for decades, though the Union County DATE Fund came into existence more recently following the establishment of the North Enotah Accountability Courts several years back.

State law provides that DATE Fund grant monies are to be used “solely and exclusively for drug abuse treatment and education programs relating to controlled substances and marijuana,” which includes prevention programs for drug and alcohol-related addictions.

That's why the sheriff is such a strong supporter of New Hope, because he sees the potential of funding evidence-based treatment centers like New Hope, which assist people in getting back on their feet by helping them get off drugs and alcohol.

Treatment programs like the ones offered at New Hope Counseling used to be much more prevalent, but due to various changes over the years in the way state funds are allocated, much of the funding for programs and facilities has simply gone away, despite the growing problem.

And the \$17,000 in DATE Fund grant money awarded to New Hope will certainly come in handy, as Beaver said the counseling center has already enrolled nine new people in treatment programs since the grant award was announced in August.

Those are nine more residents, neighbors, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, etc., who now have resources they may not have had otherwise to overcome life-deranging issues that are totally treatable.

“The solution is more

treatment,” said Beaver, who owns New Hope Counseling. “Relapse is a part of addiction. People who are addicts relapse. What we do is, we try to lengthen the time between relapses to the point that they're away from it.”

As far as law enforcement goes, Beaver is calling for greater coordination between the jail and probation sides of the legal equation to allow more addicts to receive treatment, with the ultimate goal of getting more people with addiction back to being productive members of society.

After all, the whole point of New Hope is to offer people the resources to achieve addiction-free lives, which is a cause Sheriff Mason truly believes in.

“I'm concerned about the welfare of these people,” Mason said. “They have actual legitimate needs for treatment, and not enough is available to them.”

“When they come out of prison or out of jail, almost always, they have no money, they have no job, some have no place to stay. There's no homeless shelter or anything here, and they don't have any type of support whatsoever when they come out.”

Alongside aiding New Hope in acquiring the DATE Fund grant monies for the first time ever in 2019, the sheriff plans to address the growing problem of shrinking resources by pushing for the creation of a treatment sponsorship program to be funded through community support.

“I have seen New Hope's passion for working with these people, and I support them 100%,” Mason said. “I would like to see a group formed to help sponsor these individuals.”

“With HIPAA laws, no names would be put out there, but that money could be directed to New Hope for one of their clients anonymously.”

Added Mason, “We have these people out there, they're going to continue to exist. Unfortunately, the way society's going, the ruination of it, it's going to get worse and we're going to have more to deal with.”

“And it's just like I have preached ever since I've been the sheriff and before, the state of Georgia has backed out of putting money into these most needed programs. They've packed a lot of services off on the cities and the counties, and my unanswered and unaddressed question is why?”

“We've had all these

New Hope Counseling is located at 76C Hunt Martin Street in Blairsville. For more information or to schedule a free counseling consultation, call 706-745-4066.

Johnny Appleseed...from Page 1A



John Nix and the Country Cousins performed at the Farmers Market for Johnny Appleseed Day on Saturday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

“When he would go by and shake the apple trees, the apples would fall toward his head, so he started wearing a pot,” Ross said.

The apples being handed out that day were from Mercier Orchards out of Blue Ridge.

Attendees of the Farmers Market enjoyed the stories of Johnny Appleseed and the weather that came with Saturday morning.

“I thought hearing about Johnny Appleseed was neat, and these apples taste great,” said Sam Keith, visiting from Florida. “We are up here for the week hoping to get some good weather and see some of the leaves change. It has been a great morning, and everyone here is great to talk to and so kind.”

“We have come up here for the last few years and only been to this Farmers Market one time besides today. I can't believe we missed it all those times we came up here.”

“It has been one of my favorite things this weekend that we have went to. I think having Johnny Appleseed here to teach me made it so much better.”

Apart from Johnny Appleseed being the center of attention for the day, families with children took part in the



Children built toy racecars out of produce for the last POP Kids Club event of the year on Oct. 5. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

last POP Kids Club event of the season to educate children on the importance of produce.

The activity had the children building toy racing cars out of produce to make the learning experience more fun as they talked about the plants they were modifying for the runway.

POP stands for Power of Produce and is a new program at the Farmers Market this year. As part of the program, children receive special “passports” that they can then get stamped every week to earn Farmers Market

Currency to use at the market.

John Nix and the Country Cousins also performed at the Farmers Market, with plenty of people stopping to admire the old-time country music as they shopped.

The Farmers Market is in its last month of the season, with a few more weekends of events available for participation through Oct. 26.

For more information on these final events, visit UnionCountyGA.gov/Farmers-Market.

Trial...from Page 1A

trial of the two Union County men was scheduled by U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story this past August and is the third trial date set in the case.

First scheduled for February 2019, the trial was moved to April due to a revision

of the indictment that added sex-for-drugs allegations against Heaton.

The April date was delayed after the defense filed a motion to either prevent the jury from hearing new evidence introduced by the government or to allow more time for them to prepare defenses against the new allegations.

In response, Judge Story postponed the trial until Oct. 8, and last week, he issued his order on the request to exclude evidence.

The defense teams' joint motion sought to prevent four women from testifying about sexual relationships with Heaton. Prosecutors voluntarily withdrew two of those witnesses, and in his Oct. 3 order, Judge Story ruled that the other two can testify.

The defense also asked to prevent two other witnesses who are expected to testify on allegations that Gowder provided pills to a person close to him to sell, with the judge allowing one of those witnesses and ruling the other inadmissible.

Gowder and Heaton face 103 federal charges alleging conspiracy to prescribe and obtain controlled substances.

Heaton is also charged with 63 additional counts of prescribing controlled substances “outside the scope of professional practice and not for a legitimate medical purpose.”

As pointed out by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta, both defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.