

North Georgia News

3 Sections 40 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, October 11, 2023

54th Annual Sorghum Festival opens this weekend

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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The fall season is upon the North Georgia Mountains, bringing with it the cooler temperatures, the turning of the leaves, and, once again, the making of sweet sorghum syrup with the return of the heritage-rich Blairsville Sorghum Festival.

Always the second and third weekends in October, the 54th Annual Sorghum Festival will start at 9 a.m. on Saturday, Oct. 14, with the sorghum mill gearing up to grind cane for sweet syrup at Meeks Park.

The festival runs 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 14-15 and Oct. 21-22. Parking is free, and admission is just \$5, with children 12 and under getting in free.

Also this Saturday, locals and visitors alike will want to line the streets of Downtown Blairsville for the annual Sorghum Festival Parade that will roll through town at 10 a.m.

Fortunately, the parade was saved from cancellation this year when the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce agreed to organize it after CASA announced it did not have the volunteer manpower to put on the parade.

Float builders and other aspiring participants can get into the parade this week by registering at <https://www.visitblairsvillega.com/>, with prizes for winning entries set at \$250 for First Place and \$100 for Second Place.

2023 marks the festival's

return to full strength, as the Sorghum Square Dance and Pole Climbing competition – two mainstays that have been absent the last few festivals – make their way back into the tradition.

The Square Dances will be hosted by the Union County Recreation Department at the Union County Schools Agriscience Center both Saturdays of the festival, lasting from 7-10 p.m. Admission is \$10 per person, though like the festival, children 12 and under are free to attend.

Then there's the live music aspect of the festival showcasing plenty of local talent for people to enjoy over both weekends, plus the other traditional games like Rock Throwin' and Log Sawin', not to mention the parade. *See Sorghum Festival, Page 2A*



The big wood-fired pan inside Meeks Park will be cooking up sweet sorghum syrup over the next two weekends. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2022

Byers crowned Homecoming Queen before home victory



2023-24 Homecoming Queen Katie Byers was joined by her proud father David for her crowning on the football field Friday. Photo by Todd Forrest

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Sports Editor

Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium and its guests dressed to the nines on Friday night ahead of senior Katie Byers' crowning as the 2023-24 Homecoming Queen, putting a bow on Union County High School's Homecoming Week festivities.

"This is such a surprise," said the newly crowned Byers.

"I'm very thankful for this opportunity. It means a lot to me, and I'm thankful to my friends and everyone that voted for me."

Byers, who accepted the crown, said she was grateful for the opportunity. *See Homecoming Queen, Page 2A*

Senior Center holds party for retiring Director Hill

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

"Some people have jobs, and some people have callings. She had a calling." Those were the words of Jordan Schecter, one of the many friends who came out to the Union County Senior Center to wish longtime Director Kathy Hill well in her retirement party on Friday, Oct. 6.

All present agreed with the statement, and it's easy to see why considering that over her nearly two decades overseeing the center, she involved herself frequently with activities and participated right alongside many of the visitors, helping some out of their shells and creating an overall accepting environment.

"(I'm grateful for) the wonderful help that Kathy has given me, helping me with so many things in my life. I love the Senior Center. I love everybody here," said Daniel Spivey with a sweet smile made blue with icing. "This is my safe and happy place."

Even among coworkers, she fostered faith and friendship. One recalled coming onto the job without any prior experience and still being welcomed as family and



Beloved Senior Center Director Kathy Hill is retiring from her official duties, seen here with Commissioner Lamar Paris in her Oct. 6 retirement party. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

gave her a chance to grow. Another grew teary-eyed talking about how Hill showed empathy and understanding when her mother, previously a visitor of the center, grew sick and needed her help.

And there's a similar story behind why Hill is retiring. With her husband's failing health, she has decided to step away from her managerial duties and return home to serve

as his full-time caretaker – a decision she reached after much deliberation and prayer. "It's not a job; it's a party every day," Hill said of the center, but in the dining room that Friday, the atmosphere was bittersweet. But just like past celebrations, cupcakes and ice cream were served to take the edge off Hill's leaving. In all, the gathering was a celebration. *See Hill Retires, Page 6A*

Indian Summer Festival supports Woody Gap School

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In the heart of Suches, a sizable crowd gathered outside Woody Gap School to enjoy the 46th Annual Indian Summer Festival from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 7 & 8 – a local tradition in the small mountain town.

As the chilly autumn weekend rolled in, vendors of all kinds set up booths across the field to sell merchandise and promote various causes. Stands ranged from arts and crafts to local honey, churches to political organizations, and even a mobile book fair.

This year's festival offered a variety of musical and visual entertainment opportunities such as performances by the Woody Gap Band of Steel, several student vocalists, and an elementary school play titled

"The ABC's of the Cherokee Indians."

The play serves as a tribute to the original culture of the area and intends to tie the people of Suches back to the history of their home.

"(The elementary school students) all participate," said Woody Gap Principal Wendy Reynolds. "They go through and talk about every letter in the alphabet and how it relates to something with the Cherokee Indians."

Just as the theatrical performance is a beloved tradition at the festival, the pies by the Gaddistown Homemakers are equally as revered. In 2023, attendees could step into the school cafeteria to purchase a pie and escape the cold breeze outside.

But what is it that makes the Indian Summer Festival so special? *See Indian Summer Fest, Page 6A*

Union & Towns County bands unite



The Union County High School Marching Band has been working hard to perfect its space-themed show for competitions. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

As the sun set over Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium on Saturday, Sept. 23, the Towns and Union County Marching Bands took the field to receive

feedback from several judges and give audience members a glimpse of their shows in preparation for upcoming competitions.

Towns County opened the exhibition at 6 p.m. with their show entitled "Bond,

James Bond," featuring several fan-favorite selections from the renowned film series and showcasing soloist Nick Bargas.

Following the outstanding performance, the Towns County Band and

new Director Tim Skinner gathered behind the field goal to hear comments from the evening's judges: retired Ringgold High School director Robin Christian, retired Union County High director Kerry Christian. *See Bands Unite, Page 12A*

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FOOTBALL
10/13 7:30 PM
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S.A.F.E. Remember My Name 10/13 *See page 12A*

Sons of the Pioneers LIVE 10/22 *See page 3A*

Sorghum Festival Special Section *See Inside*

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Sorghum Festival...from Page 1A

to mention the ever-popular Biskit Eatin' contest set for noon each day of the festival.

A full scheduling breakdown of the festival entertainment can be found in the Special Section inside this

week's edition of The North Georgia News.

More than 15,000 people attended the Blairsville Sorghum Festival in 2022, which undoubtedly helped to boost the area

economy by connecting thousands of new customers to local businesses.

And as always, festival attendees can look forward to more than 100 hand-picked vendors specializing

in handmade crafts, delicious foods, live demonstrations and more, on top of the multiple nonprofit booths that will bring awareness to various local causes.

The principal volunteer organizers of the festival – the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers and Enotah CASA for Children – have made sure the 2023 event will be a success for their respective causes.

Right there in Meeks Park, the Syrup Makers make the syrup to sell in the hundreds of gallons every year, providing the festival its namesake product to raise money for local charitable giving, to include scholarships for graduating seniors and financial assistance for folks in need.

As for Enotah CASA, the festival acts as the nonprofit's largest fundraiser of the year, which in 2022 helped the

organization serve more than 200 children navigating foster care in the four-county area of Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin.

Enotah CASA is a child advocacy organization specializing in assisting abused and neglected children on their journeys through the legal system, with dedicated volunteers who train to become Court Appointed Special Advocates.

These advocates ensure that children have a voice in such challenging life situations, and because Enotah CASA is a volunteer organization where an advocate's reward is service itself, the services CASA provides ends up saving local taxpayers many thousands of dollars.

The Blairsville Sorghum Festival is truly a win for everybody, as the festival raises

money for worthwhile causes while giving people something fun to do, preserving local heritage, and supporting small businesses near and far.

Thankfully, when the core group of volunteer Syrup Makers went looking for a partner to keep the tradition going in 2021, Enotah CASA stepped up to help organize the beloved event, which very likely would have been called off for good if not for CASA's support.

"We would like to express our appreciation to the community for allowing us to take part in the Sorghum Festival and be more a part of the community and keep that tradition alive," said Enotah CASA Outreach Coordinator Fran Parks. "This allows us to provide funds for children in the foster system to have a CASA."

Homecoming Queen...from Page 1A

the crown from 2022-23 Homecoming Queen Bailey Adams, edged first runner-up Georgia Patton and second runner-up Elli Harper.

Freshman runner-up honors went to Abigail Gilley; the sophomore runner-up was Georgia Hanes; Leah Cox claimed junior runner-up.

"The last few weeks were very stressful, but it was all very worth it," added Katie, daughter of David and Janice Byers. "Not having school (on Friday) definitely helped a lot. It made it easier to get ready and take pictures.

"I want to thank my family and everyone who made this opportunity possible. But most importantly, I want to thank God and give Him all the glory."

The UCHS Homecoming Court featured Byers, Patton, Isabel Galindo, Haylie Pattee and Addi Scott as its senior representatives.

Cox, Sloane Dyer, Jayden Rogers and Lucy Vinez represented the junior class. Hanes, Abby Barrett and Peyton Grisham were the sophomore reps, while freshmen Harper, Gilley and Payton Murphy rounded out the 15-member court.

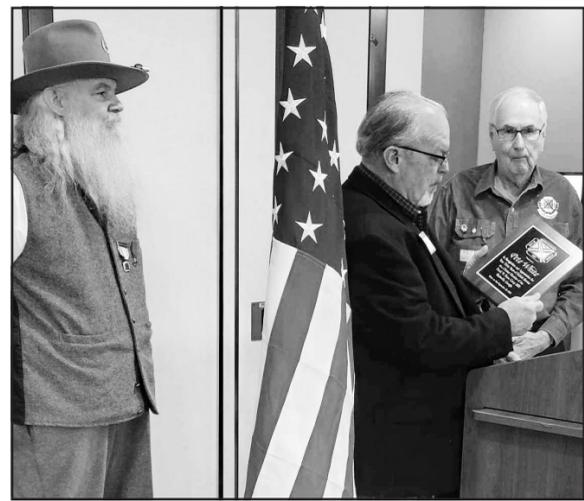
The Union County Panthers improved to 5-1 later in the evening with a 27-7 rain-soaked region victory over Banks County.

Their win capped

off a UCHS Spirit Week that included Thursday's Homecoming Parade and a special Meet the Team event that doubled as a community pep rally later that day.

Byers follows in the footsteps of Adams in 2022, the 2021 queen Mia McCombs, Katie Baumeister in 2020 and Cydney Rich in 2019.

Local resident honored by Sons of Confederate Veterans



(L-R): Camp 1633 Commander Mike Pettus; Adjutant Jessie Pinson; and Treasurer Pete White

Blairsville resident Pete White was recently honored by the David W. Payne Camp 1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), at its recent 30th anniversary celebration held at The View Grill. Camp 1633 was chartered by SCV in September 1993. Now nearly 93, White is the remaining charter member and continues to serve as camp treasurer. Camp 1633 was named for Union County farmer David Washington Payne, a battle-scarred veteran of Company B, 23rd Georgia Infantry, Colquitt's brigade. NT10G11Z7ICA

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Indian Summer Festival...from Page 1A



The people and children of Suches are always thankful for those who turn out in support of the heritage-themed Indian Summer Festival, which took place over the weekend.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

Festival pies so special? The secret, shared Gaddistown Homemakers President Dena Gooch, is simple: the pies are all homemade.

“We published our first cookbook in the early ‘80s,” Gooch said. “We made samples for the recipes in the book for tasting, trying to sell the cookbook, but people started wanting to buy pies.”

Since then, the delicious pastries have been a fan favorite at the festival, with Gooch giving a special shout-out to the late Linda Stover, who perfected the chocolate brownie pie recipe for the organization.

Proceeds from the pies are mostly donated to the Fire Department, with a few going to the Band of Steel and the new Memorial Markers program for veterans. All other festival proceeds, however, go directly to Woody Gap School, as Principal Reynolds explained.

“The Sports Club is the

one that puts on the festival, and they provide scholarships for our seniors and any needs that we have,” Reynolds said.

Like Reynolds, who helped her colleagues run a barbecue stand for the school’s benefit, parent volunteer Tosha Osorio also donated her time to the cause. Osorio spent the weekend commanding a pumpkin-painting booth for the elementary school teachers.

“(The benefits) are endless. The children get new sports equipment, uniforms, anything they need. Shoes for basketball, field trips. They buy the children field day T-shirts. Just stuff like that throughout the year,” said Osorio, who plans to be back to support the school every year.

Merchants were also able to turn a profit while knowing that their registration contribution and presence benefitted Woody Gap students – something that drew in artisans like Sharon Jeffery,

who sold her Red Gazebo Art.

“I’ve been as a spectator but not to sell my art,” Jeffery said. “It’s fantastic. I’ve come a lot of years, but this is the biggest I’ve ever seen.”

Jeffery wasn’t the only return customer/vendor at the event. Many visitors make their way to the festival year after year, such as Blairsville local Hattie Nix-Jackson. Although Jackson has taken a hiatus of a few years from the festival, she has always loved it.

“We have friends that have never been. They’re from Warner Robins, and we wanted to bring them,” shared Jackson.

Overall, the 2023 Indian Summer Festival was a huge success, raising considerable funds for Woody Gap School. Principal Reynolds would like to thank the Sports Club, vendors, volunteers, teachers, admissions, and security for their help in making the festival happen another year running.



Student vocalists from Woody Gap were just a few of the many entertainment aspects of the 2023 Indian Summer Festival.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

Hill Retires...from Page 1A



Friends of Kathy Hill spoke kindly of her tenure as Senior Center director during a farewell party thrown in her honor on Friday.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

was meant to be a comfort, a place where friends could come together and take time to acknowledge the change while reminiscing about the good times.

Ursula Whitelock and her husband Roy deliver Meals on Wheels for the Senior Center, and it was difficult for Whitelock to talk back tears when she talked about her coworker and, indeed, friend.

Folks weren’t shy about reminding Hill of the impact she’d had on their lives. A handful felt moved enough to stand and call out while Hill finished addressing them. That’s where Schecter and his wife Shirley came in.

“We are not really new, but we haven’t been (coming to the Senior Center) that long,” said Jordan, continuing tearfully. “But it has been a blessing to be here, to share, and to especially get to know you.”

“I have never ever seen her say anything unkind,” added Shirley Schecter. “She’s

always been so gracious.”

For her part, Hill held up well, and hardly had the words to express how grateful she was for every senior the center has taken care of over the years. She hopes that things keep going as they always have, infamous exercise classes and humorous music room performances included.

“We just have a good time, and I thank you for that,” Hill fondly recalled. “Everything’s fun; don’t ever think being a senior has to be no fun.”

County Commissioner Lamar Paris joined Hill briefly, keeping his composure to commend her for being an “incredible, amazing” lady overseeing an “awesome” facility. Throwing his arm around Hill’s shoulder, Paris closed with, “We’re going to miss you, honey.”

Even former Senior Center employee Phillip McGlamery was there, just days after knee surgery, balancing on a walker but no less grateful for the chance to give Hill a proper

send-off.

“(Kathy) was great in so many ways,” said McGlamery, who worked with Hill for 12 years. “I can’t say enough thank you’s for the opportunities and the things that she’s helped me with over those years as well as helping y’all.”

“I don’t know what we’re going to talk about anymore,” teased John Hill, son of Kathy Hill and Superintendent of Union County Schools, referring to how often the Senior Center was on his mother’s mind.

Despite wanting to “work all day and quietly slip out the door,” Kathy had a table piled high with parting gifts to take home, including everything from cards to baked goods. For the duration of the event, she made her rounds, saying goodbye to the friends she found in her staff and Senior Center visitors.

“I appreciate mostly your presence,” Hill said to them, addressing a crowd that helped her fight back tears with cries of, “We love you, Kathy.”

Bands Unite in Union County ...from Page 1A

Rittenhouse, retired Towns County High director Frank McKinney, and Young Harris College Director of Bands Dr. Hayes Bunch.

The UCHS Band then fell in to the first set of its competitive space-themed show called "Into the Stratosphere," featuring songs from Gustav Holst's seven-movement orchestral suite "The Planets," "The Final Countdown" by Europe, and "Drops of Jupiter" by Train.

Union County Band Director Will Stafford arranged the show, which features soloists Ayden Burnett, Micah Messer, Evan Nicholson, Josh Pirie, Ivan Garcia, Leah Cox, Willard Woolwine and Mitchell Lickey.

The technicality of the entire drill demanded the audience's attention from start to finish, with a 5/4 drum feature in the middle of the show encompassing a wealth of visuals by the winds. A giant inflatable rocket also wowed viewers as the Color Guard showed off their impressive routine, using the prop to mask equipment transitions.

After the march-off, the judges made their way back onto the field to give feedback on Union County's performance. Following the commentary, both bands socialized on the sideline over a provided pizza dinner.

"The main purpose is to support local bands and to grow as band programs," said Stafford, who helped organize the event with his program's booster club.

Although no awards or



The Towns County Marching Band enjoyed receiving feedback on its 2023 show from judges during a cross-county exhibition last month. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

placements were handed out for the mock competition, the judges informed the bands on what they could improve and work toward in the coming weeks.

"It was huge," said UCHS Assistant Band Director Daniel Foster. "Not just getting some feedback on the stuff the kids already knew and reinforcing what we've already been talking about, but also hearing some other ideas that we hadn't thought about as teachers."

Appreciating a new set of eyes was an ongoing theme at the exhibition, with Towns County Drum Major Bella Rose Childs sharing that having the judges there was an amazing thing for that type of exhibition.

"It helped us a lot,"

Childs said. "When you're doing the show over and over and over again, some things that could be issues kind of go back in the shadows and you can't realize them, so (the judges) pointing them out really helped."

The Towns County Band Program is on a steady path of improvement under the new direction of Skinner, who is taking a different approach to marching band. He only holds practices in the evenings to work around other school activities and gives students opportunities to participate even if they're not able to be in a band class.

"He really helps us practice with a purpose, instead of just going through the motions every single time and not working towards

something," said TCHS Band Captain Max Baron. "I think by the time of our first competition, we'll be in pretty good shape."

In the week following the exhibition, the UCHS Band took a road trip to Franklin County High School, where they spent Saturday, Sept. 30, preparing, executing, and getting feedback on their first competitive debut of the season.

At 3:40 p.m., the band gave an outstanding performance while fighting adversity in the heat as their giant inflatable prop lost air and sagged onto the field. Despite the misfortune, the performance was a success.

Drum Majors Willard Woolwine and Leah Cox placed fourth overall with Superior ratings, while the color guard, percussion, and overall band rated excellent.

"These competitions are a great opportunity for students to perform in front of a new audience while receiving feedback from judges on what they can do to improve their performance," Foster said. "It is also an opportunity for our students to watch and support other bands in the area, because the goal for every single band at these competitions is to improve every single time they perform."

The UCHS Marching

Band will continue to practice and improve throughout the coming weeks in preparation for their final competition of the season.

"We are mainly focusing on two aspects (for the last competition): march technique and making the big impact moments bigger. So, there is contrast in volume and ensuring that our step style is consistent across the band," Foster said.

UCHS will compete for the final time this season at the Peach State Marching Festival on Saturday, Oct. 28, in Rome, Georgia. Towns County competed on Oct. 7 in the Yellow Jacket Classic at Rockmart High School.

You are invited to attend

S.A.F.E.'s

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This is a candlelight vigil to honor Georgia victims that lost their lives to Domestic Violence this past year.



Drum Majors Leah Cox and Willard Woolwine saluting before the UCHS performance. Photo by Daysha Pandolph