

North Georgia News

2 Sections 24 Pages

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Elementary School hits budget target with GMP

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County Board of Education members have accepted the guaranteed maximum price for construction of the new Elementary School behind the Fine Arts Center, which came in just under preliminary cost estimates announced in January despite ongoing inflation.

The guaranteed maximum price, or GMP, means that the system will pay no more than \$30,728,309 for construction of the new school, to be paid for completely with voter-approved SPLOST proceeds plus state funds.

As such, the system will be able to build the new school

without borrowing money, keeping Union County Schools one of three districts in the state to have no debt, Superintendent John Hill said in the called meeting to accept the GMP on Tuesday, Oct. 10.

"We are very proud to bring you a GMP for this building that is within our original, overall budget for the project," Hill said to the board. "We could not have gotten here without your support, and we're very thankful for that."

Further, this GMP actually supersedes the previously accepted sitework GMP such that all sitework costs are included in the finalized total to erect the building.

Construction is ahead

of schedule, so the timeline to welcome students remains the 2025-2026 school year, with actual construction planned to be wrapped up by the end of April 2025.

Board members accepted the GMP in their Oct. 10 meeting, with Hill explaining the history of the project.

"In 2018, we as a board and leadership team identified our facilities needs for Union County Schools," Hill said. "Most people in this room were involved in that process, and one of our biggest needs was replacement of our current Elementary School."

This is not the first time the system has identified the need to build a new school

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School Board Members Janna Akins and Julia Barnett were pleased last week with the Board Office returning an in-budget GMP for construction of the Elementary School.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Prayer vigil supports Israel after Hamas massacre



More than three dozen residents showed up to support the State of Israel through prayer on Saturday, Oct. 14, outside the Old Courthouse in Downtown Blairsville. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
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Dozens of residents turned out for a Stand for Israel Prayer Vigil the evening of Saturday, Oct. 14, on the Union County Historic Courthouse Lawn.

Blairsville resident Brooke Henzel, herself of Jewish descent with family in Israel, organized the "Night to Honor Israel" after the Oct. 7 pogrom by Islamist terror group Hamas, which brutally murdered more than 1,300 Israelis in furtherance of its mission to eradicate the Jewish people.

The atrocities by Palestinian Hamas came on Shabbat morning during the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah, and just after the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War.

Terrorists burned whole families, parents with their children and babies; raped and killed women; slaughtered hundreds at a peace concert; kidnapped nearly 200 people, including American citizens, Holocaust survivors and children, to serve as hostages; indiscriminately gunned down civilians young and old, disabled and able-bodied alike in their homes and on the streets; and launched thousands of rockets into civilian centers across the country.

In the face of such horrors, residents of Union County gathered on Saturday to pray for Israel and let the lone Democracy in the Middle East know that it is not alone in the world.

Guests received Israeli flags as they arrived, and Henzel began the program shortly before sunset, welcoming

people with the aid of a mobile PA system.

"Good evening, everybody, thank you so much for coming to this event," Henzel said. "This is really special and is dear to my heart. I'll just give you guys a little bit of background about me.

"I was raised Jewish; my whole family is Jewish. I have relatives that died in the Holocaust, so this is very near and dear to my heart what's going on in Israel - God put this on my heart to do.

"And I just want to let you guys know that I came to realize that Christ is the true Jewish Messiah at the end of May, so I feel like God's put it on my heart to share that with other Jewish people.

"This is one of the reasons I wanted to do an event, to show our support for

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Sorghum Festival to continue sweet tradition Oct. 21 & 22

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Under the overcast skies of Downtown Blairsville on Saturday, Oct. 14, scores of excited spectators gathered around the square and all along the 54th Annual Blairsville Sorghum Festival parade route to enjoy music, floats, classic cars, and much more.

Leading up to the parade, the Woody Gap Band of Steel gave a lively classic rock performance from the lawn of the Old Courthouse. Meanwhile, a paragliding daredevil made a surprise appearance above the crowd, circling the clocktower to amuse onlookers.

The awaited procession finally rolled in at 10 a.m., with the Union County Fire Department in the lead.

Close behind the giant

red engine, the Union County High School Band marched about 20 dedicated players who had only arrived home from Friday's football game at 3 a.m. that morning.

Serving as Parade Grand Marshal was none other than Junior Bridges, one of the founding members of the Blairsville Sorghum Festival that dates its humble beginnings back to 1969.

Others involved in the parade included the Shriners, entertaining viewers with their tiny clown cars; the Saddle Club on horseback; the Hillbilly carpool - many "hillbillies" sharing a multi-seated bicycle; lots of different floats representing local companies and organizations; and numerous classic cars and jeeps.

Children and adults alike rushed to collect the candy

raining down from the floats onto the street until about 10:35 a.m. when the parade wrapped up.

This exciting tradition of mobile fun heralded the opening of the annual Sorghum Festival, which takes place in Meeks Park the second and third weekends every October from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. all four days of the festival, continuing Oct. 21-22.

The festival is put on by volunteer Syrup Makers alongside Enotah CASA, the latter being a program benefiting local kids in foster care. CASA trains volunteers as courtroom advocates for abused and neglected children, and the proceeds from the festival itself go straight to that cause.

Like always, the festival features tents of different arts, crafts and other merchandise,

See Sorghum Festival, Page 7A



Children and adults alike competed for bragging rights as Sorghum Festival Biskit Eating Contest champions on Saturday. The competitions will continue this weekend.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Sons of the Pioneers to perform literacy benefit concert Sunday



This Sunday, Oct. 22, is your chance to see the legendary Sons of the Pioneers live in concert, all for the worthy cause of raising money for childhood literacy.

News Special
North Georgia News

Fresh from the Grand Ole Opry, the Sons of the Pioneers western music group will be performing in Blairsville on Sunday, Oct. 22, at 2 p.m. inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center at 926 Panther Overlook.

The famed act has been billed as "the most influential western-music group of all time, founded in 1934 and still going strong!"

Sons of the Pioneers are known around the world for cowboy classics such as

"Tumbling Tumbleweeds," "Cool Water" and "Don't Fence Me In," with their iconic harmonies, yodeling and driving rhythm.

There are currently five members of the group: Tommie Nallie, Ken Lattimore, John Fullerton, Paul Elliot and Chuck Ervin.

"You will be blown away by the sound," Fullerton said previously. "The sound will sound exactly the same if you've been a Pioneer fan all your life. The sound has not changed."

"We are still singing the same arrangements that we've

done for all these years, and it will be the familiar cowboy classics that were popular in so many of the western movies," added Fullerton, noting that people will hear those signature three-part harmony vocals and instrumentation.

By every measure, the concert promises to be a memorable event for everyone, held at a state-of-the-art venue.

People from all over the North Georgia Mountains and beyond are invited to come see the performers live in concert this weekend, with

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@ East Jackson

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Early Voting in Blairsville General Election started Monday; continues thru Nov. 3

By Shawn Jarrard
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Advanced in-person voting for the Blairsville General Election began on Monday and will run weekdays between now and Friday, Nov. 3, with two days of weekend voting on Saturday, Oct. 21, and Saturday, Oct. 28.

All early voting will take place between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. inside Blairsville City Hall located at 62 Blue Ridge Street. Election Day is Tuesday,

Nov. 7, with voting set for 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at City Hall.

Four candidates qualified in August for three City Council seats: incumbent Councilwomen Rhonda Mahan, Mary Ruth Cook and Kayla Hemphill, along with Blairsville resident Frank Pack.

Mahan has been on the City Council since January of 2002. By the time her current term expires at the end of December, she will have served five full terms and two years of a special election term for a

total of 22 years on the council. Cook is coming up on the end of her first full term after serving two years and a month of a special election term that started in December 2017, for a total of six years and one month on the council by the end of the year.

Hemphill won a special election in November 2021 to fill an unexpired term and will have served two years and two months when that term expires Dec. 31.

Pack has run for

municipal office multiple times in the past.

As city election outcomes are determined by plurality vote, the Top 3 vote-getters in the upcoming election will each win one of the open seats in November. Terms of office will begin Jan. 1, 2024, and run through Dec. 31, 2027.

Voting in the municipal election will be open to eligible residents of the city. The registration deadline to cast a ballot in the election was Oct. 10.

Requested absentee ballots started hitting the mail on Monday, Oct. 16, and the deadline to request an absentee ballot from City Hall is Oct. 27. People may request an absentee ballot by emailing cityclerk@blairsville-ga.gov, calling 706-745-2000 or visiting City Hall in person.

There is no countywide election in 2023, just the municipal election, so only residents qualified to vote in the City of Blairsville will be able to participate.

Elementary School...from Page 1A

due to a growing student population. The Primary School was erected in 1984 to house kindergarten through fifth-grade students, and by the mid-2000s, the system needed more room.

The current High School was built in 2002, and after the Middle School opened in 2006, the system moved third-fifth grades from the Primary School over to the old Middle School, which originally served as the High School built in 1969.

“Currently, our Primary School has almost 800 students and is extremely full with Pre-K through second grade,” Hill said. “There’s no room at the end there at all, and you have a very aging Elementary School that was not designed to be an Elementary School.”

“So, in 2018, we identified the need to have a replacement for our current Elementary School, and we started the process, which also included a renovation of the

current Primary School so we could get 20-30 more years out of that building.

“In the last year, we have worked very closely with Charles Black Construction, Breaux & Associates Architects and our team ... to come up with a design (to provide) a 50-year building that could be expandable with growth and be able to house 950 students Day 1 of opening.”

The building design allows for each end of the school to be expanded to eventually accommodate 1,200 total students, and it will enable more room at the Primary School by moving second-graders over to the new Elementary School.

Present to discuss details was Project Manager CJ McDonald of Charles Black Construction, the company the board selected last year to manage the entire project for Union County Schools. The system has worked with Charles Black on multiple past projects.

The company received plans to bid on Aug. 31, after which it immediately advertised to subcontractors for bids. There was a public bid opening on Oct. 5, resulting in the opening of 68 bids across 25 bid packages for work like electrical, flooring, painting, HVAC, etc.

“It’s a 114,000-square-foot one-story elementary school,” McDonald said. “Right now, it has 59 instructional units with cafeteria/kitchen, gymnasium, (media center) and

administration center.

“Each side of the building is expandable so you can add eight instructional units on each side. The core is oversized to accommodate that future growth. It sits on a 62-acre site, with 22 acres of that being disturbed. It’s what we call a compact, efficient design.”

Added McDonald, “The gymnasium is a full-fledged 94-foot court; you can hold competitions there ... (and) there’s volleyball (floor) sleeves in this project so you can put volleyball standards in there and play volleyball.”

Wrapped into the \$30.7 million GMP are about \$1.2 million in potentially reimbursable funds, including a \$600,000 contingency for if the system wants to “add scope” or there are unforeseen issues like the discovery of rock during grading, though most of the grading has taken place without a snag.

“By the end of this month, we’ll probably start digging footings – foundations – so we are ahead of the game,” McDonald said.

Overall costs estimated in January were right around \$36.5 million, including architectural fees, fixtures, furnishings and equipment. And now that the GMP for construction has come back, the final budget for the project is \$36,490,000.

“We’re very, very proud to bring something that was in budget from an estimate that was done 10 months ago,” Hill said.

Board Member Janna

Akins asked about the justification of establishing a “guaranteed maximum price,” noting that, “If I’m a sub bidding on this project, and you’re asking me to give you a maximum bid for a project that’s going to happen a year from now ... then I would want to err on the side of caution (and bid high) to protect myself.”

McDonald said that costs are lowered by enabling contractors to order materials as soon as possible because the site is being made available for storage, and that materials pricing, while not exact, is forecast out two years in advance by big supply operations to assist with budgeting.

Akins asked if the GMP would protect the schools from prices continuing to increase in the current inflationary environment. Hill responded, “Yes, ma’am,” and McDonald confirmed that the construction manager at-risk, Charles Black, would “eat the cost” if prices ballooned.

“I do want to comment,” said Board Member Julia Barnett, “in working on other large construction projects, with the inflation that we’ve experienced over the last year, especially, how remarkable it is to be coming in at budget.”

“So, that’s kudos to (Charles Black) and our administrative team. Talk to other people who are doing large construction projects – that doesn’t happen. I’m very impressed, and I appreciate your hard work in making sure we got that right up front and are still able to do it debt free.”

Sons of the Pioneers...from Page 1A

tickets selling for just \$36 apiece. And attendees should know that their support of the concert will directly benefit local children and families.

All proceeds from the concert will go to Ferst Readers of Union County Childhood Literacy Program, which furnishes a free book every month to any registered child in Union County ages birth to five years and helps to promote literacy through early childhood reading.

“Ferst Readers wants every child to have the best start in life – and nothing helps a baby’s brain develop more than exposure to rich language and loving interactions,” according to www.ferstreaders.org.

This means providing reading materials to low-income families to “ensure children have developmentally appropriate books in their homes and provide parents

with resources supporting them as their child’s first teacher.”

Registering a child with the program can be easily done by visiting ferstreaders.org.

With children 12 and under getting into the concert free, the legendary singing group will undoubtedly deliver a family-friendly afternoon of classic western songs written by such greats as Bob Nolan, Roy Rogers, and others.

Reserved and General Admission tickets are available at SonsOfThePioneers.eventbrite.com.

General Admission tickets are also available at Carter Williams Insurance, Union County Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce, L & M Furniture, Pat’s Hallmark, and Young Harris Pharmacy. Please pay with cash or check only at

these locations, and call John Cochran at 706-897-0486 with any questions.



The Union County Lions Club Trash To Treasure Fundraiser will be held on November 4, 2023 at the Union County Civic Center, 165 Welborn Street, Blairsville, GA 30512 from 8 AM - 1 PM; Early Bird Entry from 8 AM - 9 AM, \$1.

It’s time for our next fundraiser to help those in our local community. We have vendors who sell yard sale items, candles, jewelry, crafts, tools, etc. If you would like to be a vendor at our event or have additional questions, please contact Chasity Miller at 706-897-5467 or chasrcs@gmail.com. We hope to see you there.

UNION COUNTY CHRISTMAS PARADE
DECEMBER 2, 2023 6 PM
Sponsored by the Union County Historical Society
Theme: "Santa's Toy Land"
Parade Application

Name of Entry: _____
 Contact Person: _____
 Phone: _____

Type of Entry: Float ___ Automobile ___ Walkers ___
 Animals ___ Motorcycle ___

Entry forms must be received in the Historical Society office by noon on December 1st. Send completed form by email to history1@windstream.net or drop off at the office in the old courthouse on the square. For more information call the office at 706-745-5493.

All entries must have lights. Line up at the old middle school field begins at 4pm on December 2.

Blairsville DDA welcomes Bentley as executive director

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Kristen Feathers Bentley is starting a new chapter in life as the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Executive Director following a Blairsville City Council vote to approve her hire her last week.

She is officially replacing longtime DDA Director Darren Harper, who resigned in August after a decade in the position.

Bentley grew up in Blairsville and has “always been in love” with the city’s downtown area. In her own words, “I remember growing up and just thinking I lived in a little enchanted valley.”

After graduating from Union County High School in 2015, Bentley attended Berry College and graduated in 2019, and by 2020, she was working on a Public Administration master’s degree.

In 2021, she moved to Rome and became the Downtown Development Coordinator of LaFayette, Georgia, and stayed there through her graduation from the University of North Georgia in May of 2022.

By September of last year, Bentley had moved back to Blairsville after a change in her husband’s occupation required a return to her hometown. And she’s been happy to be back.

“I’ve watched it just really evolve into this beautiful, complex, busy little area,” Bentley said. “And I really admire the way that our city administration and our locals value tourism, but also value the power of just building up our locals and our local economy. I think that’s an important balance that small towns today don’t often strike.”

Upon coming home, she “sought to heighten (her) experience in development” by working with nonprofit organizations, and she found her next position as the Manager of Public Relations and Marketing at Project Chimps in Morganton.

As for her current path, Bentley credits DDA Chair Megan Kimsey with alerting her to the open position of Blairsville’s DDA Director.

“We have collaborated on different fundraisers and events that I’ve worked on in the nonprofit world,” Bentley said regarding her relationship

with Kimsey. Seeing the same information about the new opportunity online, she was “thrilled” and decided to take a chance.

Looking forward, Bentley said, “This is my career, for sure. I feel like this city basically raised me, and it’s my duty to keep growing with it.”

For now, Bentley’s main focus will be on local business support. One thing that has always amazed her, she said, is how Downtown Blairsville has low vacancy rates among merchants.

“That’s incredibly rare, and so I hope we can all appreciate that as citizens of Blairsville. That is insanely rare; it’s a treasure to have people who care that much about their community,” Bentley said.

Just as she noticed while growing up and when returning home, Bentley believes that it’s her job to make sure Blairsville continues to both care for its residents and build business from tourism.

Her dream is to support business owners and help them employ practices that will contribute to the longevity of



Blairsville DDA Director Kristen Bentley is excited for her new career at City Hall. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

their work – and, by proxy, their passion.

“I want to keep

empowering locals to be proud of the town they live in, because I am,” Bentley said

in closing, looking forward to many economic development projects to come.

Praying for Israel...from Page 1A

Israel and the Jewish people. Without the Jews, there would not be Christianity, so I praise the Lord for that.”

Henzel then led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a playing of the Israeli national anthem, “Hatikvah,” which translates to “The Hope.”

The evening featured the reading of multiple Bible passages highlighting the historical struggle of Jews for existence free of persecution, and gratitude for God preserving the Jewish people to this day.

“Israel is at war, and the Jewish people need our help today,” Henzel said. “On Saturday, Oct. 7, Israeli citizens celebrated the end of Sukkot. Over 1,500 Palestinian terrorists waged a coordinated and vicious attack against the nation of Israel.

“Thousands of rockets were launched from Gaza into Israeli towns full of innocent civilians, setting entire communities ablaze. Invading by land, sea and air, Hamas terrorists slaughtered over 1,300 people, and over 3,200 injured.

“They have kidnapped over 150 men, women and children, to include Holocaust survivors. Now more than ever, the people of Israel need our support. This horrendous massacre has left Israel in a state of profound shock, racked with grief.

“We can collectively extend comfort and compassion to our Jewish brothers and sisters and our ally Israel by taking a stand and showing our unwavering solidarity. Right now, as shattered families grieve the loss of their loved ones, the first responders gather the dead and care for the wounded.

“This is our time to show unity and generosity for a nation suffering one of its darkest hours. It is our privilege to serve as Christ’s hands and feet and express our

love for God’s chosen people by providing assistance in their hours of need.

“Oct. 7 was the deadliest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust. But make no mistake – Israel is shaken but it is not defeated.”

Lydia Long, known regionally as the organizer of Awake America prayer meetings, led the crowd in a recitation of The Lord’s Prayer before performing “Amazing Grace,” and she was joined in singing by those in attendance. Long livestreamed the vigil on her Facebook page.

Pastor Asa Dockery of World Harvest Church North, where Henzel attends, offered a prayer for Israel, saying that “our heart goes out to Israel and the Jewish people.”

“Lord, as we humble ourselves before you, we call upon the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel to arise over Israel this night and let your enemies be scattered,” Dockery prayed. “We call upon you, Lord, and we ask you to touch, minister to, and heal your people that are broken tonight because of the loss of their loved ones.

“Those that have been

taken hostage, God, please keep them and preserve them, as they are in the enemy’s hands but they’re still in your heart. We ask you to watch over them and keep them and restore them back to their families in your time and in your way.

“We ask that your kingdom come, your will be done in this tragedy. God, and what was meant for your people, you will turn it around for the good of Israel, and the nations of the world will know that there is a God, and His name is God Jehovah. And beside him, there is no other God.”

Sandy Alexander sang “The Goodness of God,” and once again, attendees lifted their voices to form a chorus. Afterward, Henzel opened the vigil up to prayer from guests, and vigil candles were handed out at sunset.

In addition to the many prayers given aloud during the “Night to Honor Israel,” the program also featured silent prayer and the playing of traditional Hebrew songs, all in the service of showing strong local support for a grieving Israel and her heartbroken people around the world.



Brooke Henzel of Blairsville organized the “Night to Honor Israel” over the weekend following the devastating Oct. 7 terror attacks on her ancestral homeland.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Attention all educators! Georgia Retired Educators Day

Union County Retired educators met at the Blairsville Grits and Greens Restaurant on October 11th. President Allyson McGraw welcomed everyone including guests Margie Winkler from Towns County REA, Tiffany Setzer of the UC School system, and special guests Charles and Betty Adams with their daughter, Angie. Libby Stevens honored Charles and Betty Adams with the Handbook Dedication for their many years of service as educators and as members of the Georgia, Towns, and Union County Retired Educators Associations. Copies, prepared by Carolyn Hutson, were distributed. Members will be getting the Handbook by email also.

In the Business session: a reminder about the upcoming Ferst Concert featuring the Sons of the Pioneers; teacher appreciation items were discussed; October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month; contact our area AMBA representative, Lisa McKenzie at 770-616-8276 or lisa.mckenzie@amba.info. if you have questions about insurance coverages.

Members will be notified of the time/place for the Proclamation signing ceremony for observance of Georgia Retired Educators Day on November 5th. Plans for the November meeting were as follows: host-Union County High School Building C; “getting on the bus” and touring new “track” facility and the Agriculture area; Nursing Home gifts/donations will be accepted at the November meeting; a future trip with Towns County



Charles and Betty Adams receive Handbook dedication from UCREA member Libby Stevens

REA to visit the GREA Museum and other local areas of interest was mentioned as well as the 2024 Convention in Athens in early May.

A door prize was won by Annette Smith and the 50/50 raffle by Libby Stevens. We urge you to make sure you belong to the LOCAL (\$15 yearly) association and to the STATE (\$27 yearly) so your voice will be heard with the thousands of others across the state when it comes to protecting our benefits! Our local dues provide monies for a Scholarship for a graduating senior each year, for our local project – Ferst Readers of Union County Childhood Literacy Program, for the state humanitarian project each year

(Totes for Tots 2023-24), and for any supplies needed for maintaining our unit. Dues are tax deductible, and they or any other contribution you may want to make, may be mailed to Sheila Garrison, 121 Parkwood Court, Blairsville, GA 30512. State dues may be paid online at garetirededucators.org. Please plan on attending and supporting our local unit at our six annual meetings. Thank you in advance for your support.

The Union County Retired Educators Association is an affiliate of the Georgia Retired Educators Association and all retired educators, affiliates, and their family members are invited to join this local unit.

Sorghum Festival...from Page 1A

the cooking of sorghum syrup, live music, games and rides, food, and beloved competitions like the sack race, pole climbing, and of course, biscuit eating.

One excited competitor, Hill Duncan, was able to show off his skill when he won the children's biscuit eating competition on Oct. 14.

"I was really nervous I was going to throw up, but that didn't stop me from eating away," said Duncan, who consumed almost four whole syrup-smothered biscuits.

These mountainfolk-type competitions are a huge attraction for many visitors at the festival, such as Shirley Crum, who travels up from Eastpoint, Florida, each year to camp and partake in the tradition.

"We enjoy the pole climbing and the biscuit eating, but we also love the sorghum making. We love sorghum," shared Crum.

Crum isn't the only one

who comes from way off to see the magic behind Blairsville's sorghum syrup.

Durward Evelyn Reed, a Tennessee resident, also stopped by to see the syrup-making process.

"I had to come see how it's made here," Reed said. "Back when I was raised, my daddy raised cane. But when they got ready to make their syrup, they had a mule that went around the pot to ground the juice out of the cane."

"So, I wanted to see how they were doing it here. It's different. It's not like it was back when you had to do it the old timey way."

For the record, sorghum cane used to be ground the same way here, and for years, festival organizers hosted a cane-grinding demonstration using an actual mule.

Another big attraction every year is the local talent, seen both through arts and crafts under the tents and

performances on stage.

"Everybody has a talent, and at a place like this, you get a chance to see those individual talents with people that you wouldn't normally get to," said Pat Braswell, who ran her daughter's booth Saturday. "It showcases individual talents that you wouldn't necessarily get to know about just meeting a person on the street."

Braswell was representing the company Lacey Creative Design, which is based out of Dahlonega and has appeared at the Sorghum Festival four or five times in the past.

"I like the festival a lot," she said. "It's a lot of good hometown types of businesses and a lot of hometown people come. We get to hear a lot of local talent, and it's big enough to be fun and make it economically feasible for us to come, but it's not so big that it's too overwhelming."

Other vendors have also



Considering the massive turnout Saturday, folks might never have guessed that the Sorghum Festival Parade was nearly canceled in 2023 before being rescued by the Chamber of Commerce and community partners.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

seen phenomenal success at the festival, like Jessica Flowers who returned for a second year after selling out completely in the first weekend last year.

The 2023 Sorghum Festival is expected to have great turnout overall and provide plenty of good, hometown family fun – even for those who don't know the taste of sorghum syrup.

"I don't think I've ever had sorghum, so I don't know what the big hype is, but I think it's fun for everyone to bring the local businesses and stuff here," shared Alexis Moody of Blairsville, who enjoyed the festival with her dog Nala after participating in the parade.

Be sure to come down to Meeks Park this coming weekend to enjoy the last days

of the Sorghum Festival and get a taste of Blairsville's famous syrup. And don't forget the Square Dance at the Union County Agriscience Center on Saturday night.

For more information, including a complete scheduling breakdown of the festival and entertainment, visit <https://blairsvillesorghumfestival.com/>.



The family-friendly Sorghum Festival offers plenty of activities for kids, plus shopping – and games, too! – for parents and other guests.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



The volunteer Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers kept the festival namesake staple flowing into jars for sale to eager guests of the Sorghum Festival Oct. 14-15, with more to come this weekend.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Season End Cruise-In on the Courthouse Square Saturday



The Blairsville Cruisers Car Club ends its 2023 cruise-ins this Saturday. The final Courthouse Square Cruise will be held from 3-6 PM with about 50 vehicles expected for the event. There will be two Club Choice trophies awarded as well as door prizes for registered vehicles along with a 50/50 drawing. Tickets for the fund raiser raffle car, a 1995 Camaro Z-28 convertible, are available at the cruise-in. The Camaro will be on display Saturday and Sunday at the Sorghum Festival in Meek's Park with tickets available at the festival.

The annual car raffle is the primary fund raiser for the club's Christmas for children in need programs. The "Shop with a Cruiser" will take 100 children Christmas shopping



Win this 1995 Camaro Z-28 and help local children in need this Christmas season. Get your donation raffle tickets soon. Drawing is November 4, 2023 at the Salute to Veterans Car Show in Blairsville's Union County Farmers Market.

this year on December 2nd. Many of these children would not have much of a Christmas were it not for the Blairsville Cruisers. The Club is 501(c)3 non-profit corp. that helps children and veterans all year with several different charitable programs. Details of the Car Club are available on its website BlairsvilleCruisers.com and on face book: Blairsville Cruisers

Car Club Public Group. Come visit the Historic Courthouse square in Downtown Blairsville Saturday and see some great vehicles.

A big "thank you" to our sponsors, supporters, donors and the wonderful local people who attend our events for making it possible to reach our goal of helping local children in need.

Cruise In On The Square

No Entry Fee • Door Prizes
 Trophies • 50/50 Drawing
 Local Dining

Open to All Makes & Models

3rd Saturday of the month from 3-6 p.m.
On the Historic Downtown Square in Blairsville, GA

Join us all season long as we host events to raise money for the children of our community.

For more information visit: www.BlairsvilleCruisers.com