

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Halloween options plentiful for kids in '22

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

On Halloween Night, Monday, Oct. 31, the Blairsville Boo Bash at Meeks Park will be doling out treats to costumed kiddos from 4-7 p.m., "or until the candy runs out," said Crystal Wagner, Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce Director of Operations and Marketing.

"We already have 30-plus trunks ready to hand out candy," Wagner said of the chamber-organized event. "We will have food trucks and Jim's Smokin' Que, Smoke Out BBQ, ice cream and other snacks, mascots from local churches coming, games, activities and so much more."

"The Union County High

School Band will also be doing a fundraiser along with us this year with their Haunted Trail, and there will be a costume contest with prizes for different age groups going on as well.

"So, we are excited to see all of the kids and costumes again, and we are preparing for another big night."

In the leadup to Halloween Night, on Saturday, Oct. 29, at 6:30 p.m., there will be a Fall Harvest Dance at the Civic Center, with proceeds going to Joshua's Warriors.

Also Oct. 29, Vogel State Park will host a Fall Festival from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., featuring vendor booths, food trucks, hayrides, a cake walk, rubber duck races, live music all day, campground trick-or-treating from 5-6:30 p.m., campsite decorations contest, ghost story

readings and more.

And while it's not exactly a Halloween event, the chamber will be hosting its annual Blairsville BBQ Cookoff Oct. 29 from 4-7 p.m. at the Union County Farmers Market, rescheduled from the beginning of the month due to concerns over Hurricane Ian.

"It will be our second year doing this event, and folks can come out and buy a Taster Ticket for \$5 and sample from each of the Pit Masters and place their vote for someone to be awarded Blairsville's Best Barbecue, in which PaPaw's BBQ won last year," Wagner said.

"And we will also have blind eating and judging to award for best ribs, brisket, sides and dessert, live, livet

See Halloween '22, Page 6A



The School Transportation Department put together a "Spooky, Scary Bus Tour" to the delight of children attending Trunk or Treat on Saturday. Photo by Jeremy Foster

Blairsville native Drake completes Appalachian Trail

By **Todd Forrest**
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Ralston Drake's family questioned their son's mental health when he first broke the news that he would attempt the 2,180-mile hike from Georgia to Maine along the Appalachian Trail.

"My family told me I was going to get eaten by a bear," Drake said with a laugh. "They had a difficult time coming to terms with it, but I introduced them to a lot of different books by people that helped them see that it's a really neat thing, and you're not out there by yourself and that animals aren't much of a problem. I saw three bears the entire time, and every single time they always ran away."

The Union County High School Class of 2015 graduate sums himself up as "the classic millennial," and he credits that self-diagnosis as being the catalyst for his five-month journey through 14 states that began earlier this year on April 25 and culminated at the summit of Maine's Mt. Katahdin on Oct. 3.

"I just graduated college (in 2021), I don't like corporate America, I don't have a job, and I just want to do the things



UCHS Class of 2015 graduate Ralston Drake at the summit of Maine's Mt. Katahdin, the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail. Photo/Submitted

I want to do," Drake said. "I'm going to do, no mortgage, and I don't owe anybody money, so it was really the perfect time to follow my dreams."

Drake's fondness for the outdoors developed at a young

age while growing up in the Northeast Georgia Mountains. But it wasn't until he arrived at Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, that hiking became a passion for Drake.

See Drake Completes AT, Page 2A

Canal Lake Boat Ramp gets courtesy dock extension



Commissioner Paris with retired DNR Col. Eddie Henderson at the Canal Lake Boat Ramp. The recently completed dock extension can be seen in the background. Photo by Mark Smith

By **Mark Smith**
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The extension of the Canal Lake Boat Ramp courtesy dock reached completion earlier this month to the excitement of boaters and fishermen alike who use the ramp during fall and winter months.

No longer will boaters have to chance damaging their vessels on the rocks when lake levels are low, nor have to wade in to the bank in cold temperatures to retrieve their

boat trailers.

Retired Department of Natural Resources Officer Eddie Henderson, who now lives in Union County, was instrumental in getting the project completed.

"I was the colonel over the Law Enforcement Division (at DNR) - been retired four years," Henderson said. "Several years ago, talking with Commissioner (Lamar) Paris, we worked with DNR to get these courtesy docks put in to enhance the recreational

opportunities for the boaters on the lake and the community."

According to Henderson, Georgia DNR receives federal funds that are designated for boater access, some of which may also be used "for enhancement of boat ramps and boater access."

"So, we were able to get those (boat ramps) put in," Henderson said. "And then, as in this area here, when the lake gets so low, that end dock was just sitting on the

See Canal Lake, Page 2A

Granddaddy Mimm's turns 6, raises money for syndromes

News Special
North Georgia News

Our local Diamond Certified Distillery is turning 6-years-old, and everyone is welcome to the party on Oct. 29 starting at 6:30 p.m.

The Sixth Birthday Bash will feature live music, axe throwing, food and more, and in addition to commemorating the birthday of Granddaddy Mimm's Distilling Co., the event will serve a very special purpose for the Townsend Family for other reasons.

Piper Kimsey, founder of Distillery, has been diagnosed with two rare genetic diseases: Chromosome 9P- and Chromosome 2P+ Syndromes. Megan Kimsey, mother of Piper, daughter of Tommy, and General Manager of Granddaddy Mimm's, has worked tirelessly to raise funds for research in Piper's honor.

Kimsey created PJK

See GDM Turns 6, Page 2A



People will be able to buy this special T-shirt to help Granddaddy Mimm's fundraiser for medical research into two rare genetic diseases afflicting local youngster Piper Kimsey.

Tragedy strikes motorcyclist in tree-falling accident

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

A Florida man with a home in Blairsville died in a freak accident Saturday when a large pine tree fell on him as he drove his motorcycle in the south end of the county.

At approximately 1:49 p.m. on Oct. 22, the Georgia State Patrol responded to a motorcycle crash on West Wolf Creek Road involving Kirk Lopez, 59, of Jupiter, Florida, GSP said Sunday.

"The motorcycle, a 2017 Enduro 690, was traveling south on W. Wolf Creek road when a tree fell from the east shoulder of the roadway, striking the motorcycle and its driver," GSP said. "The male subject was deceased at the scene."

West Wolf Creek is a single-lane road that runs through the Chattahoochee National Forest near Vogel State Park.

According to authorities,



This pine tree fell across West Wolf Creek Road Saturday, killing a local motorcyclist who was riding through the area.

a companion motorcyclist had to lay his bike down to avoid colliding with the tree,

suffering injuries that were not considered life-threatening. See Motorcycle Accident, Page 2A



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Drake Completes Trail...from Page 1A

the theology major.

“When I got to college, I was very fortunate to travel all over and hike and see the world, but I always wanted to see the Appalachian Trail,” he said. “I had some friends who went out West to hike the Pacific Crest Trail, so I called and asked them what it was like to quit your job and just go for it.

“At first, they said it was terrifying, the thought of quitting your job, but then they told me it was the most rewarding thing they had ever done and they highly recommended that I (hike the Appalachian Trail).”

While studying abroad in college, Drake gained valuable experience in multiple locales, including the Colorado Rockies, the Cascades of Washington, and even the Middle East with his trek up the historic Mt. Sinai.

However, his most enduring ascension came in the South American Andes, where he bagged an 18,000-foot peak near Santiago, Chile.

“Our water froze the night before, so we didn’t have anything to drink,” Drake said. “My one friend started throwing up, because when you’re at that elevation, you have to (stay hydrated). He also didn’t bring gloves, so he had socks over his hands, and I didn’t have pants, just a pair of leggings. It was one of the most miserable but most rewarding experiences of my entire life.”

When the time came to begin his Georgia-to-Maine journey, Drake underwent a range of emotions and mindsets in the early days following his departure from Springer Mountain.

“It’s funny how your mind goes through so many changes early on,” he explained. “I was excited when I started, but then I thought, ‘What am I getting myself into?’ Then I said to myself, ‘You’re going to be out here for six months, so you might as well get used to it.’

“You have to keep telling yourself that you’re doing something worthwhile and are capable of doing it.”

While some take the journey one day at a time, Drake looked forward to the next 100-mile marker.

“Every 100 miles there’s a marker, and it’s usually just rocks on the side of the trail,” he said. “Instead of looking at it like I had 2,000 miles to go, I looked at it the other way; I would tell myself, ‘You’ve walked 200 miles, that’s an amazing feat.’ I used every 100-mile marker as an individual achievement itself.”

On a typical day, Drake awoke between 7:30 and 8 a.m., consuming a protein bar or a pastry with a cup of coffee for breakfast. After packing up his campsite, Drake hit the trail by 9 a.m., covering 3-4 miles between rest breaks. On average, he would travel 15-20 miles each day, stopping for lunch and the occasional scenic view before making camp.

“There’s a lot of good days, but mostly it’s just very monotonous,” he said. “It can also get very lonely on the trail, so whenever I could, I always camped at a shelter with other people.”

Despite beginning in April, Drake didn’t run into any autumn snows during the Northeastern segment of the trail. In fact, his only real obstacle was a minor injury on day two when, near Blood Mountain, he rolled his ankle after stepping on a root.

Being so close to home, he returned for the night, applied ice and grabbed an ankle brace from his UCHS basketball days before heading back to Neels Gap the next morning.

While the physical and mental side is well-documented among thru-hikers, the spiritual aspect was a prominent factor in Drake’s time on the AT.

“You meet all kinds of people out on the trail: Christian, non-Christian and all different backgrounds,” he

said. “But I don’t care who you are, you can’t help but have a spiritual experience out there.”

“I heard so many people credit their time on the trail as ‘serendipitous’ or an ‘alignment of the stars.’ In my opinion, you can’t help but see God when someone starts telling you these stories. And whether they realize it or not, God is working through everybody, no matter what.”

Drake also began noticing the popularity of his on-trail YouTube videos and Facebook posts back home in Union County.

“You know, I don’t really know why that happened, but it just began to take on a life of its own, and I was really shocked,” he said. “I can’t thank everyone enough for all the support and well-wishes I received while on the trail. It means a lot to me and is very special that my little hometown would become so invested in me.”

Upon returning home, Drake admits that it took some time to readjust to the daily grind of modern life. Although, there were some benefits to finally being out of the woods.

“I will never take indoor plumbing for granted ever again,” he joked. “But you get used to being in the woods where life is so simple. You eat, you sleep, you walk, and you try to have a good time – there’s not much else. You make great friends, and there’s not a lot of worries out there.”

“As soon as you get back, you begin thinking about finding a job and other obligations, so it’s been a bit weird, but I’m getting used to it and I know everything will work out.”

Drake graduated Lipscomb with a bachelor’s degree in theology in 2019, and then with a master’s degree in business administration in 2021. The future is undoubtedly bright for the young man, and the North Georgia News wishes him Godspeed on his continued journeys.

Canal Lake...from Page 1A

dirt (and rocks). This will give better access without somebody damaging their boat pulling up on the riprap.”

Speaking on behalf of Union County Government, Paris said his office was excited to have the dock extension available to the community.

“It was nice when this ramp got put in, but in the dead of winter, it didn’t help the fishermen fishing in the winter,” Paris said. “And believe it or not, a lot of people fish in the fall and winter.”

Continuing, Paris reiterated that the dock extension will allow easier access for boaters, especially those who go out alone, which is particularly difficult when there is nowhere to tie off when putting in or retrieving a boat or other watercraft.

“Now, they’ll be able to tie their boat up (away

from the shore) and not have to put it on the rocks while parking or retrieving their boat trailers,” Paris said. “And in the meantime, Mr. Henderson suggested that, while they’re extending the dock, it would be good if the county could get more of the parking area paved.”

And that’s just what the county did. So, now there is much more area to park vehicles and boat trailers at the Canal Lake Boat Ramp, with additional striping coming soon.

In other lake news, Union County Manager Larry Garrett said that the county has secured a permit from the Tennessee Valley Authority to install another dock extension at the Poteete Creek Boat Ramp.

The Poteete Creek Boat Ramp suffers from the same issue that once plagued the Canal Lake Boat Ramp

pertaining to low lake levels in fall and winter, which, again, is problematic, especially for lone boaters.

“Everything (at Poteete Creek) is happening this year,” Garrett said. “(The dock work) should be in place this year, and it’s a Union County Recreation Department project.”

Garrett also mentioned that he is looking into developing a trout stream – trophy trout or catch-and-release – for fly-fishing. Towns County and Fannin County both have them, and he said it’s time Union County did, too, adding that it will be a long process, probably two or three years.

Garrett and Henderson went on to say that Union County has two fish hatcheries that it can draw trout stock from: Rock Creek, a federal hatchery, and Lake Burton, a state hatchery.

GDM Turns 6...from Page 1A

shirts that have successfully been sold around the country. Over 250 shirts have been sold, and with additional donations, Kimsey has raised \$6,900 for research to be divided between the two syndromes.

“This community shows out in huge ways all of the time,” Kimsey said. “I’m blown away by how generous everyone has been and am thankful for other small businesses who have helped along the way. We have much bigger plans coming in terms of raising money, including starting our own nonprofit.”

Granddaddy Mimm’s got their start officially – and

legally – distilling corn liquor back in 2016 and have grown by leaps and bounds ever since. From moving to a new location, adding 15 new flavors, and giving back to the Blairsville community through it all, this is a huge accomplishment for the business.

“This was supposed to be a hobby,” Townsend said. “We never dreamed we would be where we are now.”

The Oct. 29 Birthday Bash will take place in the distillery’s parking lot in Downtown Blairsville, and it is sure to be a fun time for all.

“We love hosting events

like these,” Townsend said. “Music and moonshine go hand in hand, and we couldn’t think of a better way to celebrate turning another year older.”

Musical acts will include Chance Howland, Whiskey Stills and Mash, Taylor Austin Dye, and Tommy Townsend, Rick and The Boys.

Additionally, the bash will feature a caricature artist, and Jeff from the hit TV show “Moonshiners” will be doing meet and greets.

Gates open at 6:30 p.m. Saturday and music starts shortly after. As always, this a BYOC (Bring Your Own Chair) event, and be ready for a good time.

Motorcycle Accident...from Page 1A

though he was transported to Union General Hospital for medical treatment.

Union County Sheriff’s Staff Sgt. Brandon Hogsed responded to the accident, and he said he had never seen anything like it in his 23 years in law enforcement.

“Two witnesses pulled into the campground off West Wolf Creek to eat a sandwich, and they noticed this tree that was leaning toward the road,” Hogsed said, adding that they were going to park under the tree but decided against it.

“They were sitting there eating and heard the tree start cracking,” Hogsed continued. “About that time, they heard the motorcycles come, and (one of the witnesses) said it was like slow motion.

“The tree fell, the motorcycle was right there on it, and it got the first motorcycle and hit him in the head, knocked him off and killed

him instantly.

“Then, the other motorcycle that was behind it saw what happened, and he laid his down and wrecked.”

Hogsed noted that the witnesses, who were in town for leaf season, said the motorcycles “weren’t going fast – they were just riding through there.”

Responding to the scene were personnel with the Union County Sheriff’s Office, Union County Fire Department, Georgia State Patrol, Union General EMS and the Union County Coroner’s Office.

Funeral arrangements for Mr. Lopez were not available at press time.

Halloween '22...from Page 1A

music and classic cars being displayed from the Blairsville Cruisers," she concluded.

Then, on Sunday, Oct. 30, First Baptist Church in Downtown Blairsville will be hosting a Fall Festival for families and kids running from 4-6 p.m.

"Come join us for an afternoon of family fun with free hotdogs and popcorn! Participants will visit over 30 car trunks for games, candy and prizes," according to FBC Blairsville on Facebook.

On the north end of the county, Antioch Baptist Church off Gumlog Road will also be hosting a Fall Festival on Oct. 30 starting at 5 p.m., complete with a costume contest, bounce houses, Trunk-R-Treat, games and prizes.

Union County Schools got a head start on the Halloween season this past Saturday, Oct. 22, with the Future Farmers of America-sponsored Fifth Annual Trunk or Treat party.

For the first time, the event took place at the C-Wing parking lot of Union County High as opposed to the Agriscience Center, with plenty of space and safe conditions for the enjoyment of all.

Halloween festiveness was on full display with costumes of superheroes, pop-culture TV stars, classic monsters, icons of old movies and fame, rock stars and plenty more.

Alongside the many pounds of candy handed out, children received free books on behalf of the Literacy 4 Georgia grant the schools receive every year, and the evening also featured a haunted tour bus,

costume contests, Pac-Man games and so much more.

"The whole event just really quadrupled last year," High School Principal CT Hussion said. "It got so big that it was causing traffic issues, so we thought this was a much better place to do it (compared with the Agriscience Center)."

Added Hussion, "Public events really blew up after the COVID-19 pandemic; our entries have gone way up, and the kids seem to really enjoy this. I love the whole thing, and this is just another one of the things that we do that involves the community."

"The school is the hub of the community in a small town like this, so it is good to be able to get everybody on our campus and let them have some fun."

Middle School Agriculture Teacher and FFA Adviser Katie Rittenhouse gleamed with joy, sharing that she was "very ecstatic to show what the school has to offer."

"We are a lot more than just FFA, sports, or education," she said. "We are about community relationships and showing the depth and diversity that the Union County Schools have."

"This has turned into probably our biggest event that the FFA hosts all year long. Last year, we had 22 trunks, and this year we have 37, so it has just skyrocketed and boomed, which is awesome."

"It has become a district-wide effort as well, with FFA, sports teams, the police, local business, staff, maintenance, cafeteria, bus drivers, custodial, central office and others getting involved."

"So, in my opinion this



Students of the UCHS Interact Club won "Scariest Trunk" in the decorating contest for the Oct. 22 Trunk or Treat by Union County Schools. Photo/Submitted

is my favorite thing that we do, and my favorite part is when a child comes up to me and asks me to guess what their costume is, and I get to play along."

Originally hailing from Macon and Clay counties respectively, parents Cayce and Emily Price have lived in Union for nearly three years now and came with their Middle School-aged children, Lyla and Hayden, to survey every bit of the action.

"I love how the school offers something not only for students but for all of the community," Emily said. "It's a safe, clean and good environment for everybody to be, regardless of their age."

"This is our first time coming to this event, and it is

just wonderful. Everybody is so eager to be here and having fun, and I think that is a big deal."

Added Cayce, "My family has been in this area for generations, and we have really been enjoying our time here in these North Georgia

Mountains.

"We have been to many events around here, like the Sorghum Festival and at the Fairgrounds, and I feel like everything is just getting to be more and more here with the population growing," he

continued. "Like with this being our fourth school year here, enrollment sets a record each time, so I think these community events are going to grow in importance to get everybody involved and knowing each other."

Commissioner Paris amends short-term rental moratorium

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In his Oct. 20 meeting at the Union County Courthouse, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris adopted a resolution amending the moratorium on applications for short-term rental business licenses, which has been in effect since Aug. 16.

The resolution amended the moratorium language such that "no new short-term rental properties shall be added under any current business license starting Oct. 20, 2022, at 7 p.m. until the moratorium is repealed or by the adoption of new regulations or ordinances."

Amending the moratorium closes a loophole that would have allowed a license holder to bypass the intent of the moratorium, which is to give Union County time to develop short-term rental regulations that will responsibly govern short-term rentals.

In his Commissioner's Comments, Paris said the county is not quite ready to have the first reading of the Short-Term Rental Ordinance, but he anticipates it will be ready by the November meeting if not before then.

"We're working with several counties on this," Paris said. "Our six-county area includes Rabun, Towns, Union, Pickens, Fannin and Gilmer. We're all trying to work together on this to make sure we have ... the best ordinance possible."



On behalf of Rotary International, Dr. Richard Raborn accepted this proclamation for World Polio Day from Commissioner Lamar Paris in his Oct. 20 regular meeting.

Photo by Mark Smith

Moving along, a second reading of the Union County Amplified Sound Ordinance was conducted with one minor change to the spelling of the word "offense" with an "s," which can also be spelled "offence" with a "c."

Both spellings are correct, but the former spelling is more commonly used in the United States, so that spelling was adopted for the ordinance. Because of the spelling change, Paris elected to delay the adoption of the ordinance until next month's county meeting.

Back in the August county meeting, four local substance abuse treatment organizations were awarded \$5,000 each by Union County, the maximum

they could apply for, and the autonomous committee that decides which organizations will receive grant funding recently made the decision to offer each organization additional funding.

Freedom Ministries was awarded an additional \$2,500; New Hope Counseling, \$5,000; Positive Pathways Inc., \$2,500; and Union County Family Connection, \$5,000.

An agreement between Cummins, Inc. and Union County for planned maintenance of the generator located at the Union County 911 Center in the amount of \$1,252.30 was approved by the commissioner.

This contract is effective from Nov. 1, 2022, through Oct. 31, 2023, and covers two service visits, one full-maintenance service, and one maintenance inspection during the agreement period.

Paris made two proclamations at the October meeting:

Oct. 4, 2022, was proclaimed to be Frank and Florence Ford Day in Union County, which was featured in the Oct. 19 edition of the North Georgia News.

Oct. 24, 2022, was proclaimed to be World Polio Day in Union County, with Rotarian Dr. Richard Raborn, President of the Delray Beach, Florida, Rotary Club, accepting the proclamation on behalf of Rotary International.

"We've been very lucky in the United States, as we've been very effective in getting rid of polio," Raborn said. "We don't have to worry now every summer that some of the kids in the community are going to be paralyzed."

"It's a great honor that Rotary got involved and did this whole thing worldwide. So, thank you," concluded Raborn.

And finally, Paris announced a rescheduling of the December county meeting to Tuesday, Dec. 13, two days earlier than usual due to scheduling conflicts. Normally, he holds his monthly meetings on the third Thursday of each month at the Union County Courthouse starting at 6 p.m.

Tractor Safety Workshop at GMREC



Kubota M5-111 from Nelson's Tractor

The Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center invites you to a Tractor Safety Workshop on November 4th from 9 AM to 4 PM. Whether a hobbyist or a full-time farmer, it is crucial to understand how to operate a tractor and implements safely.

Participants will learn operator controls, hitching, hydraulic & PTO connections, operating on steep terrain, maintenance, and more. Participants will then put the skills to use during the hands-on portion with tractor driving

and hooking up implements. Amazing tractor accessories will be given out! Continuing education units will be awarded, and lunch will be provided.

The workshop is free to attend, but registration is required. Sign up at <https://rb.gy/slko2> 195 Georgia Mountain Experiment Station Road, Blairsville, GA 30512. Demonstration tractors provided by Nelson's Tractor and this event is proudly sponsored by the Chestatee-Chatahochee RC&D. NT10e26Z10JCA