

# North Georgia News

3 Sections 40 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

## Celebrate local history with Sorghum Festival

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Here in the North Georgia Mountains, the Blairsville Sorghum Festival goes together with fall like syrup on a biscuit, making for a perfect pairing that is returning – like clockwork – to Meeks Park the next two weekends.

Always the second and third weekends in October, the 55th Annual Sorghum Festival is set for Oct. 12-13 and Oct. 19-20, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day of the festival.

At just \$5 to get in the gate, the low cost of admission is as much a tradition as the festival itself and all the Southern Appalachian heritage being celebrated. Children 12 and under still get in free, and parking remains free, too.

But just what is there to do at the Sorghum Festival, founded in 1969?

For starters, it's a great place to learn the area's history, with old-ways demonstrations of how things were once made, games like Log Sawin' and Pole Climbin' that symbolize aspects of everyday life for the area's ancestors, live music in the vein of sounds commonly heard on porches of yesteryear, and, of course, the making of sorghum syrup right there in Meeks Park to start and end each day.

Because the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers who organize the festival are volunteers, they don't have to price in labor for all that syrup they sell, so at \$15 a quart, people can purchase the jars of sticky brown goodness for

less than half of what many retailers sell it.

Everything about the syrup is locally sourced. The cane is grown by local farmers Andrew Collins and Robert Cobb before the Syrup Makers cut it down to let the juice sweeten. The sugar content in this year's cane is around 20%; for perspective, 16% is considered a mighty successful crop.

After it dries some, the cane is transported to Meeks Park for grinding out the juice to cook on the big 16-by-3 woodfired pan, live for all to see under the practiced hand of Syrup Maker Terry Kane. Then it's strained and bottled by volunteers for sale, and it virtually flies off the shelves.

Then there's the pre-  
See *Sorghum Festival*, Page 2A



Come on down to the Blairsville Sorghum Festival this weekend and the next to watch expert syrup makers practice their time-tested tradition in Meeks Park. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Local support strong for nearby Helene victims

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Hurricane Helene devastated communities across Western North Carolina Sept. 27, and it will take months and in some cases years to rebuild there. But that's a long way off for many folks who are fighting at this very moment to survive.

The widespread destruction of homes, businesses, roads, public facilities and utilities by catastrophic flooding has resulted in over half of Helene's death toll coming from the Tar Heel State, with hundreds still missing and many tens of thousands in desperate need of help.

And the people of the North Georgia Mountains, many of whom hail from or have loved ones living in the hard-hit neighboring areas, know this could have been

their fate. So, with a spirit of mountain resilience and love for their fellow man, North Georgians have been helping in droves.

Individuals, businesses, churches, nonprofits of every stripe, and even local governments and first responder agencies have been working as quickly as they can to deliver aid and equipment to people still reeling from the storm.

Residents have been raiding their own homes for supplies – donations as small as unused toothpaste and hand sanitizer help – and shoppers have been emptying local grocery stores of food, water and everyday items to send to the Appalachians who currently need it most.

Social media has been abuzz with local disaster relief efforts, and brick-and-mortar businesses and organizations have opened their doors to store

and coordinate the delivery of life-saving necessities, much of which must be flown to where it's needed due to terrible road conditions.

After seeing a Facebook post by Catalyst Church in Hayesville, North Carolina, to supply Montreat and Black Mountain the Sunday following the storm, Seasons Inn of Blairsville owner Colleen Urbaniuk put out a call of her own for donations, kicking off a relief drive at the motel.

Since then, generous people looking for ways to help have brought in donations, which she and her husband Chris have been storing in one of their motel rooms until someone picks them up, and they plan to continue the donation drive until there is no longer a need.

Foodland Grocery has been working with the  
See *Helene Relief*, Page 12A



It is heartening to see local youths like these Union County 4-H students stepping up to fulfill the needs of nearby Americans who are facing life and death situations in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Fall Festival opens with carnival rides Oct. 10



A gorgeous snapshot from a past Georgia Mountain Fall Festival. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shelly Knight  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

HIAWASSEE – Here in the North Georgia Mountains, autumn announces its arrival each year with vibrantly changing foliage, cool night air, and warm sunny days. Another indicator of the season is the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival, returning in 2024 with back-to-back weekends starting Friday.

The Fall Festival kicks off early at 5 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 10, with the carnival by Midway Rides Unlimited, though the full festival experience runs Oct. 11-13, and then again Oct. 17-19.

“With first-class music performances, arts & crafts, fun carnival rides, unique attractions and a glimpse into North Georgia’s rich history and culture, the Fall Festival provides something for every member of the family,” promises the Georgia Mountain

Fairgrounds.

The Fairgrounds has been hosting the Fall Festival for about 60 years now, according to Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason, so the event itself is as much a tradition as the heritage it helps carry into the future.

And the local heritage is a huge reason visitors find the area so appealing, which in turns benefits everyone.

“We bring people to the  
See *Fall Festival*, Page 2A

## UCSO Scam Awareness Class to return Friday

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Everyone in the community is invited to attend the second Scam & Fraud Awareness Class of the year on Friday, Oct. 11, at 1 p.m. inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Hosted by the Union County Sheriff's Office, the purpose of the class is to inform the public about popular scams – often targeting the elderly – and provide tips on how people can recognize and avoid scams and fraud generally.

Presenting alongside Financial Crimes Inv. Bob Calamari will be local

specialists in banking, technology and Medicare, and UCSO will be handing out Georgia Consumer Protection Guides and other information on how to stay safe in an era of cold-call scam artists and online fraud.

The class is part of a nearly yearlong initiative by the Sheriff's Office to raise awareness about scams, which have been on the rise. In addition to the big public class, Inv. Calamari has hosted numerous small group meetings with local organizations and highlighted scams in the media.

A key takeaway is that scams usually target the elderly for their lack of



Bob Calamari  
UCSO Investigator  
familiarity with technology and greater likelihood of having  
See *UCSO Scam Class*, Page 6A

## Early in-person voting starts Tuesday, Oct. 15

Statewide ballot measures target tax relief

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

It's ballot-casting time again, with early voting starting next week for the 2024 General Election.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there will be three weeks of early in-person voting running weekdays between

Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

There will be no in-person voting on Monday, Oct. 14, due to the federal and state holiday of Columbus Day.

All in-person early  
See *Early Voting*, Page 3A



Vol. 115 No. 42  
Arrests - 8B Legals - 10B  
Church - 3B Obits - 4B  
Classifieds - 10B Sports - 8A  
Opinion - 4A

**Blairsville Sorghum Festival Special Section** See Inside  
**Greg Smith Band at Old Courthouse Oct. 11** See Page 11A  
**Donate for Kids Impacted by Hurricane Helene** See Page 12B



**You work hard for your money. Shouldn't it be working hard for you?**  
BLAIR BURCH | LPL FINANCIAL ADVISOR  
BLAIRSVILLE | 177 Highway 515 East | 706-745-0435

**United Community Advisors**  
Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor and broker-dealer (member FINRA/SIPC). Investment and insurance products are not FDIC insured, are not bank guaranteed, and may lose value.

# Sorghum Festival...from Page 1A

holiday gift shopping from over 100 arts & crafts vendors who have been hand-picked by festival volunteers to bring as wide a spread of goods as people might want, with several vendors from local groups like the schools to do fundraising of their own.

And folks can stop by the food booth near the syrup pan to get festival-famous concessions by Lisa Kane and fellow volunteers: sorghum popcorn balls; soup beans & cornbread; biscuits of the sorghum, butter, jelly, sausage and ham varieties; Granny Smith apples with sorghum dip; muffins; drinks and more.

While they're at it, people can purchase Sorghum Festival merchandise like hats, T-shirts, sorghum recipe books and commemorative, festival-branded Case Knives.

Lisa Kane has been involved in organizing the Sorghum Festival for 18 years now, but she recalls attending the festival with fellow first-graders back near when the event started and, later, helping out the beloved local tradition when she was in high school.

The Sorghum Festival is a huge fundraiser, but it's also a vehicle for cultural preservation. So, like the others who make up the small group of volunteers running the festival, Kane feels that the event is bigger than herself and insists that the effort remains

as true to its roots as possible to safeguard the heritage of the area while continuing to give back to community members in need.

"You grew up in it, you want your kids to grow up in it, and then you want your grandkids to see what that's all about," Lisa said in giving a big

reason why so few people keep such a massive endeavor going each year.

All the proceeds raised by the Syrup Makers go back into the community in the form of one big annual project – a Fire Department rescue vehicle in 2024 – and year-round charitable giving to worthy causes, such as

## Fall Festival...from Page 1A

mountains here during the fall to see the foliage and spend their money here," Thomason said. "We promote tourism with this event. It's our whole purpose.

"We're grateful that there is no damage from Hurricane Helene and everything is at full operation. We have 68 craft vendors and have probably 25 others on a waiting list. All the talent is coming as scheduled. We are very thankful that people are wanting to come.

"We have a lot of beautiful decorations on the grounds for photo opportunities. The school is getting involved doing a pumpkin contest, and those will be judged and prizes will be given. The carnival will be here

the first weekend, Thursday through Sunday.

"Pioneer Village is up and running, and demonstrations are in full operation. Lots of mouth-watering food trucks and booths will be available, and there will be plenty of entertainment on the grounds with several stages throughout the festival. We have some really good, regional talent who will be appearing.

"There is also a stunt show taking place several times throughout the days, and we will have the World's Smallest Rodeo happening. It will be so much fun for children and adults alike."

The Fall Festival has a new format and schedule this

Christmas presents for needy families and scholarships for graduating seniors.

For more information, including on the annual Sorghum Square Dances each Saturday of the Festival, visit <https://blairsvillesorghumfestival.com/>. The games begin at 1 p.m. every day, and don't miss the kickoff parade that will head through Downtown Blairsville Oct. 12 at 10 a.m.

year. In the past, it has taken place over nine days. But like the Georgia Mountain Fair, this year's event has been shortened to focus on weekend activities.

"Through the week it was slow when school started back, and there just wasn't a whole lot of profit for us, so we had to cut back on the number of days we could host the event," Thomason said. "We are paying a lot of money for musical talent, and it just wasn't possible to host it through the week."

But there will still be plenty to do and see and listen to, so come on out and enjoy the Fall Festival. People can check out all of the happenings at <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com>.

# US Sen. Jon Ossoff introduces Postmaster General Reform Act

By Dave Williams

Capitol Beat News Service

ATLANTA – The U.S. postmaster general would be subject to term limits and Senate confirmation under legislation introduced last month by Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga.

Ossoff has been highly critical of Postmaster General Louis DeJoy since reports surfaced earlier this year of months-long delays in delivering mail processed at a new regional distribution center in Fulton County.

The senator said during a committee hearing in April that only 36% of inbound mail processed at the center was being delivered on time, holding up prescriptions, delaying rent and mortgage payments, and preventing businesses from being able to ship products or receive supplies in a timely manner.

"What we have seen in the state of Georgia in the last year has been abysmal performance," Ossoff said when in-

roducing the legislation. "We must hold the postmaster general accountable."

The Postmaster General Reform Act would limit those who serve in that office to two consecutive five-year terms. The Senate would hold confirmation hearings on the president's nominee for postmaster general both before his or her first term and between their first and second terms.

Postmaster general was a Cabinet position nominated by the president and confirmed by the Senate until 1971, when the U.S. Postal Service was converted into an independent agency. Since then, the postmaster general has been selected by the agency's Board of Governors.

But Ossoff said the office is too important to leave to unelected officials.

"This is a job that so impacts our day-to-day lives the elected representatives of the people need the opportunity to ask questions," he said.

"There needs to be a real job interview."

DeJoy testified at the April hearing that the delays in mail processing and delivery in Georgia were the result of problems encountered during the rollout last winter of a restructuring plan aimed at making the postal service economically self-sufficient.

Shortly after the hearing, DeJoy put the restructuring plan on hold to give the postal service time to figure out what went wrong and how to fix it.

He also announced specific solutions for the Fulton County center in Palmetto, including bringing in more than 100 personnel from other centers and revising transportation schedules between the Palmetto facility and other local mail processing centers.

In June, DeJoy reported improvements in service, but Georgians have continued to complain about delays sending and receiving mail.

# Early Voting...from Page 1A

voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Union County Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owtown, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log. The address of each is available at <https://www.unioncountyga.gov/government/elections-voter-registration/board-of-election/>.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested inside the Voting Center now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Voting Center.

Absentee ballots began mailing Oct. 7. They can be returned using the official Voting Center drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote in this election was Monday, Oct. 7.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and

more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there is just one county-level seat up for grabs in the 2024 General Election: the office of Sole Commissioner.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap annual property assessment increases for taxing purposes.

If passed, the proposed constitutional amendment would create a new homestead exemption to cap assessment increases on homesteaded properties at 3% annually beginning on Jan. 1, 2025.

State lawmakers enabled the referendum this year by passing House Bill 581 and House Resolution 1022, with an "opt-out" provision for local governments.

The proposed cap comes as welcome news to many homeowners, who have seen the values of their properties rise dramatically in recent years due largely to an inflated real estate market driven by COVID-19 pandemic-era relocations to the area.

For homes receiving the exemption starting next year, 2024 would stand as the base-year assessed value. Moving forward, the home would then reflect two values: the homesteaded value that is capped for taxing purposes, and the actual fair market value as it changes over time.

"The base year value may increase each year up to the inflationary rate determined by the State Revenue Commissioner, which may utilize the Consumer Price Index," according to information from the Association County

Commissioners of Georgia. So, annual values could increase from north of 0% to the 3% cap for homesteaded properties, though assessed values would still be subject to accounting for "substantial property changes," which could result in increases or decreases in value depending on what has changed.

If a homestead exempted property is subsequently sold, then the base-year assessed value for the new homesteader would be set at the assessed value for the year immediately preceding the sale.

A homestead exemption reduces the amount of property taxes a homeowner owes on his or her legal residence, and according to ACCG, "this new floating homestead exemption is in addition to and not in lieu of all non-floating homestead exemptions."

HB 581 also creates a new 1% local option sales tax that could be imposed for property tax relief. But for the new tax to be put in place, it would have to be supported by voters in a local referendum.

The bill does several other things related to property and sales tax reform, such as improving the sales ratio study methodology by the Department of Audits and Accounts, removing confusing tax estimates from annual assessment notices and more.

General Election ballots also feature a statewide referendum on raising the amount of tangible personal property tax exemption from \$7,500 to \$20,000. If passed, state law would be amended effective Jan. 1, 2025, to apply to all tax years beginning on or after that date.

State Rep. Mike Cheokas (R-Americus) sponsored the bill that created this referendum, saying, "I hope this will be the first step in reducing the burden of high taxes and prohibitive regulations that adversely affect businesses in Georgia."

Proponents of these measures believe they would provide much-needed taxpayer relief in an era of prolonged inflation, while opponents have expressed concern that they could make it more difficult to raise revenues needed to effectively operate local governments and school systems.

## Breast Cancer Awareness Month: Donation Drive & Giveaway

The Slipstitch Yarn Company in Hiawassee is hosting a Knitted/Crochet Knockers Drive for the entire month of October. Our goal is to collect as many of these handmade prosthetics as we can in order to help women in need post-surgery.

If you knit or crochet and would like to participate in this Breast Cancer Awareness month initiative please come

by the shop for patterns, yarn requirements, more information on the giveaway and a free swag bag! Slipstitch will have yarn for this initiative for 25% off for the month of October.

The Knitted Knockers Foundation has reached out to us and expressed a need for these prosthetics in all sizes, help with the patterns will be available at Slipstitch on Saturdays in October from 10 AM to 4 PM.

# LOCAL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

**MONTGOMERY CONCRETE**  
 ~ FOR ALL YOUR CONCRETE NEEDS ~  
 Forming through Finishing, House Slabs, Driveways, Sidewalks, Stamped Colored Concrete. Top Quality Work! Big Jobs and Small Jobs! • Insured  
 See photos on Facebook under Lee Montgomery  
**Call 706-781-1806**

**SHAWN'S HOME FURNISHINGS**  
**Mattresses, Porch Rockers & More!**  
**"From the Front Porch to the Back Door We've Got You Covered!"**  
 568 Blue Ridge St. • Blairsville, GA  
**706-835-1209**  
 Mon-Fri 9am-5pm • Sat 9am-4pm • Closed Sun

**Southeast Geothermal & Spray Foam**  
**706-745-8685**  
 1442 Blue Ridge Hwy.  
**www.segeothermal.com**  
**www.sesprayfoam.com**

Michelin BFG Uniroyal  
 Specializing In:  
 Alignment • Computer Balancing  
 Brakes • Auto Repair  
 Industrial Foam Fill  
 Oil Changes  
**Thomas Tire, Inc.**  
 Auto & Big Truck Service  
 Oscar Thomas - Owner 76 Shoe Factory Road  
 (706) 745-0264 Blairsville, Georgia 30512

**Randolph Jones Grading**  
 Licensed Septic Tank Repair & Install, Driveway Scrape and Repair, Bobcat, Excavator.  
 Lot Clearing and Basement, House Site, Haul Dirt or Gravel. Any & All Small Jobs Welcome!  
**706-897-4909**

LICENSED INSURED  
**GIBSON LAND SERVICE**  
**706-897-8564**

**TOTAL RECOVERY PAINT & BODY SHOP, INC.**  
**706-745-9703**  
 ALL INSURANCE ACCEPTED

**BIG FROG FORESTRY MULCHING**  
**Tyler Silverson**  
**706-851-3524**

**BPM Group, LLC**  
 Invest. Build. Manage.  
**706-835-6295**  
 General Contracting  
 Property Maintenance  
**www.mybpmgroup.com**

**Wiley & Sons**  
 Licensed Grading Insured  
 Lot Clearing, Gravel Driveways, House Sites, Long Arm Mowing, Retaining Walls, Underbrushing, Erosion Control, Water Management  
**706-897-4065**

**WHITENER'S ADVANCE CONSTRUCTION, LLC**  
 GRADING PROPERTY MAINTENANCE  
 Lot Clearing Retaining Walls  
 Basements Drainage  
 Driveways STUMP GRINDING  
 SEPTIC SYSTEMS LANDSCAPING  
 CALL **706-400-2043**  
 Matt licensed & insured

Let's Talk Trash  
**TONY'S GARBAGE**  
 706.897.6066  
**Weekly Pickup**  
**tonysgarbage.com**  
**706-897-6066**

**GA MOUNTAIN GRADING, LLC**  
 DRIVEWAYS, CULVERTS, STORM DRAINS & MORE  
**706-994-0543**  
**gamountaingrading@gmail.com**

INSURED  
**JUSTICE'S SUPERIOR CLEANING**  
 Clean Spaces, Happy Faces!  
 •Residential •Move-In/Move Out cleans  
 •New Construction •Cabin Rentals  
 •Pressure Washing •Standard & Deep cleans  
 WEEKLY, BI-WEEKLY, MONTHLY, OR JUST ONE TIME...ALL YOUR CLEANING NEEDS!  
**CALL 706-994-1438**

**ALTITUDES REALTY GROUP**  
**Ann Irons Broker**  
**850-625-7447**  
**ann@anniorns.com**  
**www.anniorns.com**  
 Blairsville, GA  
 Certified Luxury Home Specialist • Resort and Second Home Specialist  
 Real Estate Negotiation Expert

**DUNCAN GRADING AND LANDSCAPING LLC**  
**706-994-7200**  
 •Grading/Excavation •Drainage  
 •Lot Clearing •Long Arm Mowing  
 •Driveways •Stump Removal  
 •Septic Installs/Repairs

**JACKY JONES AUTOMOTIVE GROUP**  
 We Make Buying Easy!  
**JACKYJONES.NET**  
 Ford — Hayesville, NC, 828.389.6325  
 Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram — Hayesville, NC, 888.384.3145

## Reece Farm presents Sara Preston on October 11 and Struck By Lightning 2 on October 12

Reece Farm presents Sara Preston! Friday, October 11th, 1-3 PM at the Pavilion.

Sarah Preston has been making music almost her whole life. Beginning at just 8 years old, she sang in the church choir and later began playing guitar in the youth group band. Since that early age, music has been the center of Sarah's life. Music has given her the opportunity to travel throughout the nation and refine her artistic abilities. She has stylistic experience and repertoire in the following genres; country, rock, top hits, blues, soul and alternatives.

Bring your lawn chairs to the pavilion to enjoy two hours of music! Free admission. Donations are greatly appreciated! We invite you to come enjoy the exhibits at the farm before the concert.

Reece Farm presents Struck By Lightning 2, Saturday, October 12, 2024 1-3 PM at the pavilion.

Bring your lawn chairs to the pavilion to enjoy two hours of music! Free admission and donations are greatly appreciated! We invite you to come enjoy the exhibits at the farm before the concert.

Originating as a trio in the fall of 2020, Struck by Lightning was no more than a few old guys that thought getting together to perform at a local open mic night might be fun to do.

A one and done sorta thing. The credit for the name goes to the original founder and lead singer of the group at the time, Mr. Brent Michael "Always in the Right" Key.

With Brent handling much of the vocals and acoustic guitar, drummer/percussionist/guitarist Bill Wilson handled the harmony vocals and Brent's longtime friend and keyboardist, "The Italian Cowboy" Steve 'O' Fineo formed a successful sound all their own. They quickly began booking multiple venues throughout Young Harris, and Hiawassee, GA, as well as Murphy and Andrews, NC during their first 1½ years together.

When Brent decided



Sarah Preston

to step down from the group to pursue other endeavors in Aug of 2022, Steve O' and Bill decided to carry on with the Struck by Lightning name as a duo Musical Group and became known as Struck by Lightning 2.

Bill moved into the lead singer roll and began playing the acoustic guitar full time, while Steve'O continued to explore his creativity with the addition of a second keyboard and supplying the vocal harmonies. In doing so, they have more than doubled their song library to include multiple types of genres including a vast variety of toe-tapin', sing-along country, line-dance, pop, rock & easy listening favorites from as far back as the 1950s to present day. They can also be found dedicating their time to faith based Christian contemporary music venues, as well.

In addition to performing at the local pubs and wineries in the surrounding area, they also perform at various benefits & festivals, and love to provide their musical entertainment for private parties.

You can contact and follow them and their scheduled events on Facebook at: STRUCKBYLIGHTNING 2.

Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer, and his books are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him & his family with exhibits, farm animals, local books and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park.



The farm is also a beautiful venue for your special day with affordable rates. Check out our "BHR Farm Village" cabin rentals at [www.reece-farm.org](http://www.reece-farm.org) on VRBO! Farm exhibits are open Wednesday through Saturday 10 until 4. Free Admission. 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville, GA; 706-745-2034; FB: Reece Heritage Farm, [www.reece-farm.org](http://www.reece-farm.org).

## Bagpipe weekly Instruction and Rehearsal

The Appalachian Saint Andrew's Pipes and Drums bagpipe band meets weekly on Saturday mornings at 9 AM at St. Clare's Episcopal Church in Blairsville, GA, for instruction and rehearsal.

The Band is actively recruiting pipers and drummers, both experienced and beginning! We promise excellent instruction in a friendly and supportive environment, and invites anyone with a serious interest in learning the Great Highland Bagpipe or Scottish Drums to come and visit a rehearsal session. So come join us!

For further information: 678-670-2757 or 770-833-5411.

## UCSO Scam Class...from Page 1A

amassed monetary resources over a lifetime of work, but younger people need to be aware of scams, too, to protect themselves and their older relatives.

Calamari is a seasoned investigator who came out of retirement to work with the Sheriff's Office, and since December, he has focused exclusively on the growing volume of local scam and fraud cases, making him the first local investigator dedicated to handling financial crimes.

A main part of his job is to educate the public about scams, and not just residents. He has visited all the local places that would issue gift cards, money orders or conduct wire transfers – banks, grocery stores, pharmacies, etc. – to alert them about scam prevention.

Prevention is an incredibly important part of combatting scams, because a lot of these crimes originate overseas, so re-claiming stolen money and bringing scammers to justice is often impossible. And, as they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

As part of the presentation this Friday, speakers will go over many examples of scams people should watch out for, and Calamari will review some of the local cases he has investigated since beginning his position last year.

Many topics will be covered, including the potential for scams on e-commerce platforms like Facebook Marketplace and Craigslist, where consumer protections are virtually nonexistent.

There are other scams where people are told they need to use gift cards or money orders to pay for something urgent, like a hoax outstanding bill, tech support for fabricated computer issues, bogus inmate bonding for relatives, etc.

Scammers often request gift cards and money orders because, once redeemed, they are non-reversible, unlike transactions made through banks that can potentially be canceled and/or reversed.

Other common scams include "imposters" pretending to be the IRS, Social Security, Medicare, bill collectors, debt collectors, local law enforcement, funeral homes, sweepstakes operators, romantic interests, pet sellers – and the list goes on.

Then there are the PayPal

scams, the most common being where users: are alleged to have received an overpayment amount that must be returned; receive a fake invoice that needs paying or else; or are being offered an "advance" of free money – always too good to be true.

Calamari will also be alerting people to the massive data breach from April, in which a hacking group claimed to have stolen 2.9 billion personal records from NationalPublicData.com, a public records collection and aggregation company.

People can learn if they have been impacted by the breach by using the free webtool at <https://npdbreach.com/>.

Of course, the Sheriff's Office investigates every locally reported scam case and has been able to make recoveries for multiple residents, but the hard-to-catch nature of the scam industry, and the ingenuity scammers bring to their crimes, makes prevention that much more important.

There is no shortage of imagination being employed by criminals to take advantage of people who don't know how to protect themselves, so being scammed should not carry a stigma for victims, as the only people to "blame" are the perpetrators of crime.

That's why the ultimate goal of the Sheriff's Office is to help people avoid being scammed by arming them with the knowledge of what to do in situations where someone is soliciting money from them over the phone or online.

Fortunately, the awareness efforts seem to be paying off, as Calamari has noticed a decline in big-ticket

scams. "Knock on wood, but the big ones, like the Coinstar machine where scammers are stealing tens of thousands of dollars – they've kind of dwindled," Calamari said, noting that more recently reported crimes include fraudulent credit card activity and offers to clear up fake bench warrants for "missed" jury duty.

Calamari implores residents to take advantage of the class to "get educated and be aware of what's going on in the community as far as the scams, because it's nationwide."

"Here at the Criminal Investigation Division, we're trying to prevent major issues from occurring to where, if we educate the public, they know that when they get a phone call or a text message they don't recognize, and they listen to the scammers, they know it's BS and take the appropriate action," Calamari said.

For people who can't make the Oct. 11 class, the Sheriff's Office plans to offer it on an ongoing basis and remains willing to come speak with any group requesting to learn more, like churches, businesses, assisted living facilities and nonprofit organizations.

Residents may report scams or fraud to Calamari by calling the Sheriff's Office at 706-439-6066, ext. 3119.

Internet crimes can be reported at <https://www.ic3.gov/>, which is the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center. People can also have their phone number placed on the National Do Not Call Registry at <https://www.donotcall.gov/>, which targets telemarketer activity.

## Citizens for a Better America October 17th meeting scheduled

The most important election of our lives is coming up soon! Come and hear what these candidates have to say and bring your questions.

We have an information packed meeting and guest speakers in store for you at the Citizens for a Better America monthly meeting. We will hear from Congressman Chuck Edwards in person and will have a live Zoom call with Michelle Morrow candidate for NC Superintendent of Public Education. Bring your ques-

tions and concerns! Thursday, October 17th at Legends Steakhouse in the private meeting room, 42 Tennessee Street, downtown Murphy, NC. Food ordering starts at 5 PM, meeting starts promptly at 6-7:30 PM. This meeting is free & open to the public.

For more information: Website: <http://www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com>; email: [Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com](mailto:Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com); call: (828) 494-7403.

# Helene Relief...from Page 1A

Urbaniuks to coordinate support like water, monetary and other supply donations by customers, as has Mountain Shelter Humane Society Thrift Store with pet food.

Others have assisted as well in Downtown Blairsville, like Granddaddy Mimm's Distilling Co., which has offered additional storage space and the use of its forklift for the cause.

And community members – total strangers to the Urbaniuks – have been showing up to help load supplies for transport.

“There’s no plan for any of this, it’s just all of us working together,” Colleen said. “People are great – they just want to help.”

Every little bit helps, too, Colleen said, because for areas like Western North Carolina that have seen so much destruction, the needs are all-encompassing.

“Somebody might have \$5,000 they can donate, somebody might have equipment, and somebody might only have \$3,” Colleen said. “You want to give people an opportunity to know how they can help, and if that’s their \$3 that they can help with, thank you so much. That helps.”

Urbaniuk lives in Hayesville, so she has been able to make solid connections to get supplies directly to the hardest hit communities, including the more out-of-the-way towns that are no less in need, and she advises people offering support to “make sure you know where it’s going.”

Many North Carolina communities have benefited from the Urbaniuks’ ongoing supply drive, like Marion, Burnsville and Spruce Pine. And supplies are often delivered within five to 12 hours, showcasing the impact volunteers can have in the lives of their fellow Americans.

In Towns County last week, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said the Fire Department drove 200 gallons of propane donated by Suburban Propane for use in and around Asheville, and the county was in the process of taking pallets of water to areas without active water treatment facilities.

“Everybody is just working together to try to take supplies up there,” Bradshaw said. “It could have been us, and thank God it wasn’t, but we pray for those that were hit so hard and the loss of life. So, we definitely want to do all we can to help.”

Union County 4-H and Youth Development Agent Katie Hayes is new to her job, having started in August. Already, she has found a worthy local community service project for the students in her program.

Last Thursday, multiple students from seventh-grade through senior year teamed up with Hayes to organize and load donations that have come in from all over thanks to individuals like retired principal Carol Knight and businesses like United Community Bank.

Hayes was born in Asheville, so she knows countless people, including family members, who have been devastated by Helene, and she was particularly touched last week when Elementary School students donated their own snacks to go toward others in need.

“I’m just really thankful that it’s worked out the way that it has and that we’re able to show love to people who really need it right now,” Hayes said. “Thank you, thank you, thank

you. It is so amazing to see y’all show up and bring things.

“It’s going until Oct. 14, so we have plenty of time to bring more stuff in. If y’all have specific things that you’re not sure are accepted, reach out to me and we can figure out where those items need to go.”

The 4-H donation drive is accepting items from Union and Towns residents in Hayes’ office at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center at 165 Wellborn Street in Blairsville. For a list of requested items, visit the “UGA Extension - Union County Georgia” Facebook page or call 706-439-6030.

To date, thousands of individuals have done their part in donating money for necessary supplies or providing items from their own homes. And the list of needs is extensive: clothes, baby formula, toiletries, sunscreen, trash bags, first-aid kits and more, not to mention food and water.

Jordan Hyatt of the Towns County Herald is one of the many individuals who has gone the extra mile in also coordinating donations. She has heard from people as far away as Florida and Virginia who are now bringing supplies to nearby communities in need, like Black Mountain.

Donations can still be made at the Herald Office in Hiwassee, 518 N. Main Street Suite 3, and people can call 706-970-0999 to reach Hyatt, who is being assisted by her best friend Ansley Wiley.

“In times like these, our compassion and generosity can make a world of difference,” Hyatt said. “If you are able, please consider donating to help those affected by this catastrophe. Every little bit helps, whether it’s a small financial contribution, supplies, clothes, water, anything.”

Over in Union County, Brooke Ashman-Henzel has likewise organized an ongoing disaster relief effort. A list of supplies and donation times can be found at her Facebook page, with three drop-off locations in Blairsville:

Her church at World Harvest Church North, 135 Bud Franklin Drive; the Olive Tree Place Holistic Wellness Center at 563 Gainesville Hwy; and Victoria’s Antiques & More at 3196 SR- 515 E.

“I am so appreciative of all the support and outpouring of kindness,” Henzel said. “Let’s keep the donations coming as you can. These people really need our love and support right now.”

A major disaster relief effort is also being led at the First Free Will Baptist Church in Hayesville, and hundreds of other area churches are chipping in, too, like First Baptist Blairsville and McConnell Baptist Church in Hiwassee.

Then there’s the Girl Scouts of Union County, the local Christian group U.S. Men’s Academy, Towns County Schools, Union County Government and so many more – pretty much everywhere people turn, there’s someone, some group or some business showing neighborly care.

And in a time when many communities are still searching for missing loved ones while trying to survive in a world seemingly cut off from civilization, the support from areas that are able and willing to provide it is undoubtedly appreciated – and will likely save lives.

People may call 706-745-5789 to reach the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce for an updated list of businesses and organizations accepting donations.



Thousands of regular people have mobilized across the region to supply hurricane relief for Western North Carolina, like the local volunteers seen here loading supplies coordinated through the Urbaniuks and Foodland Grocery. Aid is also being coordinated elsewhere for the hard-hit areas of Florida, Georgia and Tennessee. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Raptor Rendezvous at Brasstown Bald Oct. 12th

Saturday October 12th Georgia Mountain Falconry will be at the top of Brasstown Bald with 5 falconers accompanied by live Hawks, Falcons, Owls, and a Golden Eagle from Wyoming for folks to observe and ask questions about. They will also be showing a 45-minute multimedia presentation, “Falconry, an ancient sport in a Modern World”, in the Brasstown Bald Theater.



There is no additional charge for the Raptor Rendezvous over and above the basic day use fee to visit Brasstown Bald.

Day use fees are \$8 per adult from 10 AM to 5 PM, children under 16 are free. Please call us at 706-896-4137 for more information.