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North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County www.nganews.com

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TSPLOST fails at ballot box; sales tax to remain 7%

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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It was clear early on Nov. 2 that TSPLOST was dead in the water when early voting totals came in just after the close of polls Election Day, with 71% of people who cast an advanced ballot either in-person or by mail voting "NO."

And that figure did not improve when Election Day voting totals rolled in, as the measure failed at all 11 precincts in the county. Fully 72% of the 5,525 votes tallied Nov. 2 rejected the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum.

2021 was an off year for

countywide elections, so turnout was lower for the TSPLOST Special Election than in past regular elections; about 28% of the 20,000-member electorate cast ballots through Election Day, compared with 81% for the 2020 General Election.

Had the referendum passed, it would have resulted in the local sales tax increasing 1% on purchases of tangible goods in the county, including for grocery items, to raise upwards of \$35 million over five years to maintain and improve local roads and bridges for commuters and first responders alike.

But the electorate spoke loud and clear to say it did not want the price of local goods

to increase, especially during a time of out-of-control federal spending and an extended inflationary period with seemingly no end in sight.

Opposition to the referendum placed before voters by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris appeared to be strong in the community, with "Vote NO" signs placed along roadways, in people's yards, and even active campaigning by opponents around the Blairsville Square and other busy areas.

Social media lit up with opposition as well, as did the letters to the editor in the Opinions Section of the North Georgia News.

There was some support for the TSPLOST,

including "Vote YES" signage around town and efforts by a promotional group of local volunteers led by Patrick Malone, though support for the TSPLOST was not as apparent as opposition to it around Union County.

WHY DID TSPLOST FAIL?

On top of people simply not wanting an increase at the cash register, many factors likely went into the defeat, including a string of publicly unpopular moves by Commissioner Paris in the last couple of years, such as 2019's millage rate increase that was

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"Vote NO" signs appeared all over Union County in a campaign against the Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Kayla Hemphill wins election to Blairsville City Council

By Shawn Jarrard
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editor@nganews.com

Blairsville native Kayla Hemphill has won the Nov. 2 Blairsville Special Election to finish the remaining term of City Councilwoman Betty Easter, who passed away in August.

All told, 48 city voters cast ballots through Election Day, and Hemphill won the majority with 26 votes. Frank Pack earned the second most votes with 13, and Teresa Moore received the least number of votes with 9. Blairsville runs nonpartisan elections and has 299 registered voters.

Hemphill was sworn into office after press time on Nov. 9 for a term that will expire on Dec. 31, 2023.

City Councilwoman



Kayla Hemphill
Blairsville Councilwoman

Rhonda Mahan, longtime family friend and neighbor of Hemphill, alerted her after the results came in Nov. 2, and

she went over to City Hall that Tuesday evening to receive warm congratulations from Mahan and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley.

"I was just excited – I wanted to go down and stick my head in," she said. "It's a good feeling. I appreciate all the support that I received. (Betty left) big shoes to fill, so it's a tall order, and I'm excited to have a part in it."

Reiterated Hemphill, "I appreciate (my supporters') votes and will do my best to look after the residents of Blairsville."

Hemphill is a first-grade special education teacher at Union County Primary School, where she has worked for 11 years, and she currently coaches basketball

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Historic Lance Family farm honored by State of Georgia



L-R: Bobby and Janice Lance, Lisa Givens-Mize, Louise McTaggart and Louise Lance-Givens outside the award-winning "Lance Family-Grassy Knoll Farm." Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County landowner Lisa Givens-Mize accepted the Georgia Centennial Family Farm Award last month in recognition of her historic 118-year-old ancestral farm known as the "Lance Family-Grassy

Knoll Farm."

She received the award, consisting of a Georgia Centennial Farm Certificate of Honor signed by Gov. Brian Kemp, on Oct. 13 in Perry during the 32nd Georgia National Fair. Joining her were her husband Jeff Mize and grandchildren Lillie and

Henry.

According to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, "The Georgia Centennial Farm Program was developed in 1993 to distinguish family farms that have contributed to preserving Georgia's agricultural history

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Annual Salute to Veterans Car Show, Auction a huge hit



This perfectly restored 1955 Hudson Hornet brought the good old "American Diner Days" back to the Union County Farmers Market on Saturday. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The 2021 Salute to Veterans Car Show and Auction, put on by the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club and held at the Union County Farmers Market, was a smash hit on Saturday, Nov. 6.

There was no official count, but an estimated 1,000-plus people attended the car show that took place in the runup to the Nov. 11 annual Veterans Day observance.

Cars and trucks were displayed under all three of the Farmers Market vendor sheds, front and back, and along the

front fence line. There were even a few squeezed into the parking lot.

People came from far and wide for a look back into yesteryear through the lens of vintage automobiles and trucks dating from the early 1900s to present day, with vehicles from the 1930s to the 1960s being most prominent.

Many American military veterans reminisced while walking among the vehicles, one of which was a perfectly restored military police jeep. And, not surprisingly, many of the entries were owned and shown by veterans.

The nonprofit Blairsville

Cruisers started the Salute to Veterans Car Show in 2018, and Michele Ladd, chief executive officer and founder of National Veterans Resources, has been a fixture at the car show all four years.

National Veterans Resources is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is "to raise awareness and to provide resources for Active-Duty Military, Veterans and First Responders who suffer with PTSD, Suicidal Thoughts, Addiction and Mental Health."

"Our veterans have signed a contract that they

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Ferst Readers, Andrew Peterson rock the Fine Arts Center

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Thursday, Nov. 4, Christian musician and author Andrew Peterson put on a concert at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center benefitting the Ferst Readers of Union County Childhood Literacy Program.

Peterson, of Nashville, Tennessee, is an accomplished recording artist, songwriter, producer, filmmaker, publisher and award-winning author of

"The Wingfeather Saga."

Alongside receiving multiple "Best Album of the Year" nods from critics and three Dove Award nominations for his music, he is founder and president of the "Rabbit Room," which has published 30 books and fosters community and spiritual formation through music, story and art.

His performance last Thursday was an emotional rollercoaster inside the packed Fine Arts Center, offering a blend of spiritual connection, comedy, life stories and family

love, all centered on messages of unity, loving oneself and others, and the importance of a higher power.

The show benefited the local Ferst Readers program, which is based on the larger nonprofit public foundation organized by Robin Ferst in 1999.

Union County's chapter of the organization launched in 2014, beginning with 126 registered preschoolers receiving free books monthly. Today, approximately 350

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Volunteers with the Ferst Readers of Union County hosted an inspirational concert by Andrew Peterson last week to raise money for local childhood literacy. Photo by Jeremy Foster

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TSPLOST ...from Page 1A

followed by the countywide property revaluation during a pandemic-driven upswing in the real estate market.

The latter was not Paris' doing, but as the public face of Union County Government, he took heat for the revaluation,

Unofficial Union County TSPLOST Results

November 2, 2021 • Votes By Precinct*

Candidate	Blairsville	Coosa	Choestoe	Jones Creek	Owltown	Ivy Log	Suches	Trackrock	Dooley	Gumlog	Pat Colwell	Advance and Absentee Voting included in Precinct Totals	TOTALS	Percentage
One Percent TSPLOST														
YES	210	144	108	185	148	148	49	86	125	144	191	-	1538	27.84%
NO	361	442	328	435	350	475	103	246	316	421	510	-	3987	72.16%

which ended up being revenue neutral in terms of the millage rate while resulting in about \$1 million in additional property tax dollars due to new growth.

Then there's the lingering resentment over a pair of real estate purchases Paris made in 2020 during the uncertainty of the pandemic: the Hill Property for future development that was two degrees removed from former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder, who is currently in prison for prescription drug fraud; and the old Georgia Boot Shoe Factory, property on which

Paris hopes to one day build a new Union County Sheriff's Office and Jail.

External factors undoubtedly contributed to TSPLOST rejection as well, from the contentious nature of the 2020 presidential election and growing discontent with government generally in the time of COVID, which also put people on edge, to the rampant inflation the U.S. has been experiencing for more than a year driving up the cost of local goods that only got worse in the leadup to the referendum.

And the commissioner has been fielding renewed public allegations of improper usage of regular SPLOST funds, which his office has largely boiled down to differences of opinion over how the money should be allocated within approved SPLOST categories, as Paris, the duly elected commissioner, is the one who ultimately makes those decisions.

In his more than 20 years in office, Paris has maintained a heavy focus on building recreational and other public facilities against a backdrop of steady growth, though outspoken critics have publicly accused him of operating a "slush fund" with which he allegedly illegally shuffles around money earmarked for specific projects.

Timing, too, may have played a factor in the election outcome. Multiple county SPLOSTs and Education SPLOSTs have been supported here for more than 20 years, but 2021 was the first time a SPLOST referendum appeared as a lone ballot issue with no candidates for office.

Further, this was a single-county TSPLOST that would have benefited Union County alone, though there is precedent for TSPLOST not passing locally, as the regional TSPLOST that made the ballot in July 2012 failed overall and with the help of nearly 80% of Union voters saying "NO."

It may also be true that the political winds are shifting in regard to the imposition of Special Purpose Local Option Sales Taxes, and perhaps even the fact of Paris' political affiliation with the Democratic Party, which has not previously been an issue in heavily red Union County.

Paris said he realizes many factors went into the TSPLOST defeat, but that his goal in pursuing the tax was simply to expand what the county could do with its roads and bridges as Union continues to grow, to include ramped up maintenance and safety improvements countywide.

"I don't regret we did it," Paris said. "I do regret that circumstances – part of which may have been of our making – but circumstances did not help. But it's still a need of the county, and no matter who is commissioner going forward, it's an issue that's not going to go away."

"It's a tough issue, because it's hard for the general public to know and understand the details of why it's so important. If I had a critique of us – me – it is that we did not do a good enough job of letting people know early enough of what the need was and why the need was."

"But the decision was made, because it was election time coming up, to go ahead and do this, and that hopefully, because the economy was going good at the time we chose to do it, that it wouldn't be an issue that people would be so concerned about in different kinds of ways."

"As it turned out, I don't blame them. I don't blame their decision; I don't blame what they came away with. I don't know how you explain roadwork, but you've certainly got to have more time to do it, and we didn't have enough time to do it adequately, to sit down with different groups of the public and say, 'Here's what we're planning on doing.'"

NEXT STEPS

Paris said he was planning to cut property taxes with the passing of TSPLOST, which would have freed up from the general fund the considerable cost of the county to operate the Road Department, though that is no longer in the cards.



Suches Poll Manager Dena Gooch, right, delivering election materials to the Union County Board of Elections Office Nov. 2, with Assistant Poll Manager Julie Haggas and Elections Board Assistant Donnie Hutson. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

As long as the economy remains up, he doesn't anticipate having to raise property taxes because of TSPLOST failing, but he did say that the millions of dollars in improvements his office was planning for would obviously have to wait. Regardless, he has pledged to keep roads as safe as possible in Union County.

In the meantime, Paris said he'll be looking for ways to stretch property tax dollars and SPLOST funds as far as they will go to keep maintaining the more than 560 miles of county roads, which, apparently, most voters don't think are bad enough to warrant an additional penny sales tax.

Not counting paving and striping, upcoming Road Department costs include about \$2 million in equipment the county will be looking to acquire for routine maintenance, such as long-arm mowing tractors, salt spreaders, dump trucks and more, as this equipment wears out in time.

In addition to property tax dollars and regular SPLOST monies, helping to pay for road surfacing and striping are funds from the state's Local Maintenance & Improvement Grant.

Each year, Union County submits to the state a lengthy list of roads that need improvements and paving. For 2022, the county requested grant funds totaling more than \$4.7 million, though it will only be receiving \$762,533.97 in LMIG funds that come with a 30% local match.

Paris was hoping to be able to take care of that larger list altogether with TSPLOST funds, but with the referendum's defeat, he'll have to do it the way he always has: piecemeal – one mile here, another mile there – and slowly over time.

"We're above a lot of counties right now (in terms of roadwork), but we're still behind on a lot of stuff, and we're not able to keep up (because of funding)," Paris said. "So, the idea was, starting months ago, let's put TSPLOST on the ballot and see if the public would rather lower their property taxes and let everybody participate in paying for roads and bridges."

"Or, do they want to not have a TSPLOST and keep doing what we're doing, which is getting behind more every year (amid continued growth), not being able to keep up with the roadwork or do the roadwork at the quality we need to do because we're having to try to work with about a third or a fourth of the amount of money that we would be able to get had we passed TSPLOST."

"So, as a commissioner who wants to look out for my public and this county to do the best for them and provide them the safest roads, we felt like putting it on the ballot was the best thing to do."

In hindsight, Paris said he would have waited a year to put the single-county TSPLOST to a vote if he knew, when he called the election in August, what he knows now, and he doesn't blame anyone for voting against it: "That's what an election is about."

But he doesn't consider the referendum a mistake or waste of taxpayer money because it still seemed the right thing to do at the time, he said, noting that he would never have put it on the ballot in the first place "if I didn't think there was a serious need for it."

As a smaller special election, the cost to run the TSPLOST referendum will be cheaper than a regular

election, as fewer poll workers and ballots were required, but final costs are still likely to be well over \$10,000 for this election when all invoices are received and everything is paid. These costs were not available at press time.

As previously reported, one reason Paris wanted to call a November 2021 special election for TSPLOST instead of waiting for the May 2022 General Primary was to get an early start on collections during a time of strong economic activity.

In terms of calling another TSPLOST referendum, Paris said he knows the county has an option to put it back on the ballot, but that he's going to try to make current funding stretch as far as possible before considering such an option.

"If we go another year and see, hey, we're just getting so far behind, we may come back to the public and have some public meetings and say, 'We want to show you, here's why we need a TSPLOST,'" Paris said.

Continuing, "If we can sell it to the public ahead of time and let them understand it – this time, we didn't have that kind of time. We didn't have the time to get out and try to sell it."

"So, if we feel that we are really getting behind the eight ball and we cannot keep our roads safe, we've got to go to the public again. But we'll do it in a different way."

At the end of the day, Paris believes that the inevitability of growth – and by extension, the need for more dedicated road money – is something the county should embrace responsibly, with the main alternative being to make Union "a county that nobody wants to come to."

"That's the only way you're going to slow growth down in Union County, because we have one of the most beautiful counties, we have some of the nicest people, we have some of the greatest facilities," Paris said. "Why would somebody not want to come to Union County?"

Added Paris, "So, what am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to quit doing and working toward and trying to make sure that we've got the best of everything we can have for our public, and doing it at the lowest possible cost? Which we are doing and have been doing for 20 years."

CITY OF BLAIRSVILLE

Also affected by the election outcome is the City of Blairsville, which was set to receive around \$3 million of the total TSPLOST collections over five years to maintain and improve the roads of the city.

"I'm very disappointed that it did not pass," Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said. "Disappointed, too, in the number of voters that showed up. I don't think anybody recognized how much the benefit could have been for the city and the county if this TSPLOST had passed."

"But it didn't. Maybe it was the wrong time to put it out there, but I think the commissioner thought he was doing the right thing."

Conley said the city will be missing out on funding that would have benefited both the Blairsville Municipal Airport – a major economic development tool – and helped to keep up with increased city traffic, "especially this truck traffic that has pretty much destroyed some of our streets."

Hemphill...from Page 1A

for seventh and eighth-grade girls at Union County Middle School.

No stranger to local politics, Hemphill will be taking on a role once filled by her mother, Debbie Phillips, who served on the Blairsville City Council from 2002 until her death in 2010. Hemphill credits her mom with passing on a love of and feeling of responsibility for her hometown.

Of course, Hemphill was pleasantly surprised to learn she had won the election with 54% of the vote, which she expected to be a close race, and many people have let her know what they think of her victory.

"I've had a lot of people come to me and congratulate me," Hemphill said. "I work at the school and am around a lot of people every day.

"There are my colleagues and then parents, and coaching Middle School basketball, I've seen all their parents, and there's been a lot of congratulations doled out. I'm very thankful for the support."

Hemphill is looking forward to providing a current educator's perspective on the council and bringing renewed representation for the younger demographic of the city, namely the students and parents who will be calling the shots in Blairsville one day.

"We have to do what's right now for future generations," Hemphill said. "There are things that I'm able to see at school that may or may not affect our students that I might be able to help with on the City Council. So, I think that my perspective from being

a teacher will be beneficial."

She also noted that she has been pleased with the city's trajectory in terms of managing growth. For instance, she likes going to Blue Ridge but believes that Blairsville doesn't have enough space to embrace the same level of activity here.

"I feel like the City of Blairsville has been responsible with growth in comparison to other surrounding counties," she said. "I'm happy with the pace of the growth here in Blairsville."

Tuesday, Nov. 9, was Hemphill's first official meeting as a member of the Blairsville City Council. This meeting occurred after press time.

Next steps for the new council member will be state-mandated training specifically designed for newly elected municipal officials.

The required training is

advocates are all volunteers, there are zero administrative costs, so 100% of fundraising proceeds and donations go toward buying books for kids.

A membership for a child from birth to age 5 costs \$36 per year, or \$3 a month, and that entitles him or her to one book per month delivered to the family home in the child's name. And thanks to local fundraising, the books are provided free of charge to families enrolled in the program.

Final fundraising figures for the Nov. 4 concert were not available at press time. Local sponsors were many, including churches, businesses of every stripe, individuals in the community, and even local medical establishments and government offices.

People wanting to know more about the foundation and how to contribute or get involved can visit Ferst Readers of Union County on Facebook, and for additional information, check out www.ferstreaders.org.

Ferst Readers...from Page 1A

children are served with free reading materials in the county.

The mission of Ferst Readers is to have books in the home of every child to help promote their success and that of the community.

"We believe children who have books in the home and are read to are more successful in school, and it is really awesome what our program does," Community Action Team Member Mitch Griggs said.

Continuing, "Each book is designated by age appropriateness, and each child gets a free book in the mail every month until age 5, which comes with a newsletter and also features reading guides and child activity pages that are designed to make reading fun for the whole family.

"In terms of the important integral facets of early development in a child's life beyond health and safety,



Andrew Peterson

reading is undoubtedly the most substantial.

"All research and studies show very clearly that early childhood literacy is the precursor to all future academic success and life in general, as you need to learn how to read to learn how to function, and learning how to read is the harbinger of all education."

Because Ferst Reader

Local Coast Guard members attend service honoring WWII SPAR and Rosie the Riveter



At the Macon County Veterans Memorial Park: Front (l-r): Honoree Shirley Houston Reagor, USCG SM 1st Class, and her lifelong friend, fellow Rosie the Riveter, Hazel Duvall McWherter; Back row: Bob Poindexter, USCG Auxiliary Flotilla Commander 2-3; Captain Matt Baer, USCG; Paul Thomas USCG Auxiliary flag bearer; Bud Haire, American Legion Post 108 flag bearer; Jerry Smith, American Legion Post 108; and LTG Kathy Gainey, US Army Retired.

C.G. Flotilla 23 members were invited to a ceremony for WWII CG Veteran SPAR Shirley H. Reagor, a native of Franklin, Macon County, NC. The event was held at the Macon County Veterans Memorial Park on Sunday, October 17, 2021.

Flotilla Commander Bob Poindexter and Flotilla members Kay Poindexter and Paul Thomas attended. Thomas carried the American Flag at the ceremony.

The event was arranged by Reagor's daughter, Patty Samsel, and Wish of a Lifetime

to commemorate her WWII CG service and Rosie the Riveter Service. Reagor was one of 10-20,000 women who volunteered for the SPARS during the war, working on projects like rigging parachutes, driving vehicles and cooking.

SPARS, an acronym for "Semper Paratus — Always Ready," the Coast Guard motto, was established by the United States Congress and signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on 23 November 1942.

Rosie the Riveter was the star of a campaign aimed

at recruiting female workers for defense industries during WWII, and she became perhaps the most iconic image of working women.

Between 1940 and 1945, the female percentage of the U.S. workforce increased from 27% to nearly 37%, and didn't stop growing after that.

Both Mrs. Shirley Reagor and her lifelong friend and fellow Rosie the Riveter, Mrs. Hazel McWherter, were honored in celebration of their service during WWII, as well as their 101st birthdays.

FSO-PA Joan Crothers



**Book Tasting
Union County
Elementary School
Cafeteria
November 11, 2021
5:30 - 7 PM**

Union County Democrats monthly meeting

Union County Democrats will meet at the St. Clare Episcopal Church parish hall at 6 PM on the second Thursday of the month.

Any questions please contact Riccardo Rivas rbriivas@aol.com or 239-571-7718. N11Nov10ZUCA

Lance Farm...from Page 1A

by maintaining working farms for more than 100 years.”

To date, the program has recognized over 500 farms around the state and is administered by the Historic Preservation Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, in partnership with the Georgia Farm Bureau Federation; Georgia Department of Agriculture; Georgia Forestry Commission; the Georgia National Fairgrounds and Agricenter; and Georgia EMC.

“My Lance Family heritage traces back to the first settlers of Union County,” Givens-Mize said. “I am proud this is where my mother’s family, the Lance Family, planted their roots.

“I am very proud I was able to obtain and keep in place (about 20 acres of the original 225-acre Lance Family land) in 2010 that had been in the family continually owned by members since 1903.

“I had to compile a great deal of research and family heritage information to apply for and then be accepted for receiving this award ... I hope this land will remain with my children and grandchildren and for generations to come.”

Near Sunrise Grocery in the southern end of the county, on the west side of Wolf Creek, the once 225-acre farm was originally purchased in 1903 by James “Jim” Washington Lance and has been the site of many a triumph and tragedy over the years.

Exactly 100 years after the purchase of the farm, Charles Hill published a book told from Jim Lance’s point of view titled “Blood Mountain Covenant.”

As detailed in the book, in February of 1890, then 29-year-old Lance, the second eldest son of a Methodist minister, had already established his own family by the time his father was found beaten, stabbed and beheaded in Wolf Creek.

The book examines Jim

Lance’s search for justice, or, as he likened it, revenge. Perhaps this was why he earned a reputation as a man with a ferocious temper. For instance, Jim’s grandson, Bobby Lance, recalls a time when his grandfather got into a fight at the voting center and pulled a switchblade on another man.

Despite the trauma of his father’s gruesome murder, Lance decided to carve out a living only a few miles away on the plot of land. He married twice, having 11 children with each wife, and his 22 children went on to create their own lives in the mountains of North Georgia and North Carolina.

A mere quarter of a mile from the farm off US 129 lies the Old Salem Cemetery. It is here that much of the Lance Family has been laid to rest, including John Henry Lance, the father of Jim Lance.

Until relatively recently, the graveyard appeared empty with a distinct lack of formal headstones. Jim Lance’s second cousin Lillie Lance Casey – aunt to Givens-Mize – made sure to rectify the situation and set out decades ago on a mission to honor her ancestors.

Casey experienced the loss of her mother at a young age and had to “step into the role of being the mother.”

It was this, Givens-Mize suspects, that drew her toward caring so much about the rest of the family and keeping meticulous records. Casey served as the family historian with a passion unrivaled by most.

“Because she didn’t work, she traveled a lot,” Givens-Mize said. “She used to joke that her and George Jones were going to see family. She would put in a George Jones cassette tape in her car and go visit all the relatives in the mountains.”

She kept records detailing births, marriages, deaths, and other significant Lance Family

events, as she “made everyone important, whether they were alive or dead.”

And Casey succeeded in her goal to place several gravestones at Old Salem Cemetery in 1988, offering some dignity to those who had gone before her.

Givens-Mize always perceived Casey as more of a grandmother than an aunt, and she credits Casey with being a substantial reason why she picked up the proverbial torch in taking such an interest in her family’s history.

In the 1980s, Givens-Mize began to shoulder some of the responsibility of keeping the family history when Casey asked her to type up some of the documents she had compiled over the years.

“I was good at typing because I took typing in high school,” Givens-Mize said. “She had a passion and love of family and kept them alive and relevant in my life.”

It was this love of and dedication to family instilled by Casey that served as the primary driver, more than a decade ago, in Givens-Mize’s decision to purchase the land, which became available for sale in 2009 amid the Great Recession.

Meanwhile, just a few feet down the driveway, her cousins Bobby and Janice Lance continued to live and work on 65 acres of the original land that Jim Lance himself lived on more than a century ago.

Since about 1986 or ‘87, Bobby and Janice have raised cattle on their own farm, fittingly named Wolf Creek Farm. They still owned the land before then but specialized in truck farming and growing crops like pepper and green beans.

Incidentally, Bobby and Janice Lance received the Georgia Centennial Family Farm Award in 2006 in recognition of their own land and farming heritage – the same



Lisa Givens-Mize – with husband Jeff Mize, grandchildren Lillie and Henry, and state dignitaries – accepting the Georgia Centennial Family Farm Award on Oct. 13 in Perry.

Photo/Submitted

award Givens-Mize earned last month for the piece of Lance land she acquired in 2010 following foreclosure on the property the year before.

“I found out from another cousin that the land had been lost but that I could get it back and keep it in the family, so that’s what I did,” Givens-Mize said.

The cousin in question was local real estate agent Louise McTaggart, whom Givens-Mize acknowledges for the return of the farm to Lance Family ownership. As an upstanding and supportive member of the Blairsville community, McTaggart was quick to alert Givens-Mize to the situation in order to preserve the historical land.

And so, by 2010, the property was back in the stewardship of Lance relatives. Givens-Mize credits her mother, Louise Lance-Mize, for teaching her how to be a successful businesswoman with the funds to buy the land back.

It was renamed to Lance Family-Grassy Knoll Farm, and with Givens-Mize’s passion for heritage, she decided to pursue the Centennial Family Farm Award.

Worried at first that she would be turned down, she instead received a pleasant surprise.

“The people from the State of Georgia not only said, ‘No, that won’t disqualify you for that one year that the Lance Family lost it,’ but they commended me for getting it back,” she said. “I was shocked



The Old Salem Cemetery near the Lance Family-Grassy Knoll Farm, with headstones erected in 1988 by Lillie Lance Casey, Robert A. Lentz, Jean Reece and John Berry.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

about that. I’m so thankful that I was able to get this back into the family.”

Today, on a tour of the Lance Family-Grassy Knoll Farm, visitors can still perceive the echoes of the past if they know where to look.

Placid black Angus-cross cows roam a field marked by old, hand-cut fenceposts that were once part of the locust trees scattered throughout the property. A gravel road, installed through the efforts of Lillie Lance Casey, leads up to the Old Salem Cemetery where past generations rest.

Givens-Mize’s home, built in 1988 or ‘89, is not such a relic. Its electricity and modern furnishings are a far cry from the way her ancestors lived, and it stands as a sign of

the modern era. And though the difference is stark, Givens-Mize believes the steady change is for the better.

“Every generation needs to do their own part in their allotted time here on Earth to improve their circumstances and take care of their family and the future,” Givens-Mize said. “It’s just loaned to us; it belongs to the ones coming next.”

Worthy of note is that the Lances are related to renowned mountain poet/novelist Byron Herbert Reece through his mother, Emma Lance Reece. On Reece’s ancestral farmland, lying close to the Lance property, rests a county-owned heritage center and museum on Wolf Creek devoted to preserving the history of the famous author.

Salute to Veterans...from Page 1A



L-R: Glen Cousins, Michele Ladd, Randy Schue and Jim Reed at the Salute to Veterans Car Show Nov. 6.

Photo by Mark Smith

would lay their lives on the line for our freedom,” Ladd said. “Most of them have had some life-changing experiences and some trauma.

“And so, we’re out there traveling the country just trying to help in any way we can with some of the stressors in their lives. I’m the mom of two veterans. My oldest is a combat veteran, and I saw those changes in him.”

Ladd and her husband Randy Schue, a U.S. Navy veteran, parked their fifth-wheel RV at the car show, where representatives used the RV to demonstrate an FDA-cleared electrotherapy device called Alpha-Stim, which uses an electronic waveform microcurrent to relieve pain, anxiety and insomnia.

The portable Alpha-Stim products are free of charge to military veterans through the Veterans Administration and at a discounted price to first responders with a prescription.

American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121 First Vice Cmdr. Jim Reed and American Legion Riders Post Director Glen Cousins presented Ladd and Schue with a \$1,700 check in appreciation for their efforts in helping veterans.

“We really wanted to focus on veterans suicide prevention awareness. It’s a tragedy; 22 veterans commit suicide a day. Michele seems to think it’s higher than that,” said Reed, a U.S. Marine veteran.

“So, we really focused this year on all of our fundraisers, both the American Legion Riders and the American Legion, to support this cause. We just wanted to give something back.”

When asked why it’s important for people to be aware of veterans and what they’ve done, Reed responded that “military personnel went out and served their country, and as a result of that, some have some issues when they return home.”



Twelve local veteran service organizations set up informational/promotional booths at the 2021 Veterans Car Show by the Blairsville Cruisers.

Photo by Mark Smith

“And I don’t know that they’re necessarily taken care of by the government or the VA,” Reed said. “It’s abhorrent that veterans are committing suicide. So, we just want to be a part of helping veterans become aware of their alternatives.”

“The public doesn’t really appreciate or understand – 22 veterans a day are killing themselves. We owe them something.”

Referring to readjustment to civilian life after the trauma of war, Cousins said that “most people don’t understand what (combat veterans) go through when they get back here. Most people have no idea.”

Added Reed, “The veteran leaves the war, but the war never leaves the veteran.”

Penny and Jimmie Benfield of Blairsville were at the car show sitting with their 1932 vintage car entry when Penny said, “My dad retired from the Air Force, and my brother retired from the Army. I’ve got uncles, cousins retired from the Army.

“But until I got older, I didn’t have a clue of what they did and what they go through for us,” she said, noting that her husband had been exposed to Agent Orange in Vietnam, but she had no idea what that was until she met him.

Penny commented that she and her husband moved to Blairsville nine years ago because of the positive way in which veterans are treated in this area.

All told, the Salute to Veterans Car Show and Auction accomplished its goal of recognizing America’s veterans for their service with the added benefit of bringing awareness of their difficulties in dealing with the mental ravages of war.

Participating in the car show were area Vietnam Veterans of America chapters, Veterans of Foreign Wars posts, American Legion posts and other veteran service organizations of North Georgia and Western North Carolina.

Proceeds from the car show and auction will be going 100% “to local veterans organizations participating in the event and to individual local veterans who need a helping hand.”

Money from the ever-popular raffle for the 2009 Ford Mustang convertible will be going toward area needy children’s Christmas programs.

The Blairsville Cruisers Car Club enjoys membership in North Georgia and Western North Carolina, including Union and Towns counties.