

# Children play games and meet Santa before Christmas parade



Youngsters playing a game of Christmas cornhole on the Downtown Blairsville Square during the Dec. 16 Historical Society/DDA Christmas event. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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Before the annual Christmas parade on Dec. 16, many gathered around the Downtown Blairsville Square for Christmas festivities and fun activities while they awaited the main event.

Local businesses and organizations hosted the activities, offering a time for the community to bond while enjoying Christmastime.

Each group had its own stand that offered children an opportunity to complete a game or activity for a candy prize.

One of the booths that the children seemed most attracted to was put together by Aviagen, and the children played a game similar to cornhole, but with a foam dart gun.

"We thought, for the little ones, they could do little ornaments that have little rainbows underneath, and they could put them on their tree when they are done," said Kim Deaver, one of the booth workers. "We have the grand finale over here,

the cornhole that our maintenance department put together for us.

"We have bean bags just in case anyone was to be offended by the gun, but so far, all has run smoothly."

Rustic Mountain Decor put on another popular game for the children to enjoy, where the kids threw a ball into different buckets at varying lengths to win festive prizes.

"We have a set of buckets lined up here, and the children have to make their way through all of the buckets to win the best prizes," said June McElDowney, co-owner of the store. "Each bucket that the kids make the ball into earns them a prize."

Other booths with activities had arts and crafts for the children to make and personalize their decorations.

Craft booths included Michael's Italian Restaurant, where children could make cutout trees; Amazing Grace Catering, which had different crafts for the children to choose from; and many other groups that had activities such

as coloring, do-it-yourself ornaments, and opportunities to make personalized Christmas cards for someone.

When the attendees did not want to be in the cold weather, they could make their way inside the Historic Courthouse on the Square, where a bake sale and photo opportunities were held.

Hot chocolate and hot dogs were available inside for guests wanting to get warm and wait for the start of the parade.

On the bottom floor of the courthouse, the children took pictures with one of Santa's reindeer in front of the large Christmas tree.

Many families stood around the open area and took pictures and videos of their children interacting with the people in the costumes.

Upstairs, kids cheered and stared in awe at Santa sitting in his chair, awaiting the next child to make their way to his lap.

A large line formed, and families mingled as children anxiously anticipated the moment that they would get to

tell Santa what they wanted for Christmas.

When the children got to Santa, they told him their Christmas wishes and smiled for the photoshoot by both a photographer and the parents

of the kids.

Following the festivities and activities, the attendees took places around the square and waited for the big Christmas Parade.

Christmas activities that

took place downtown on Dec. 16 were joint efforts between the Union County Historical Society and the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority.



There were plenty of activities for children to enjoy around the Blairsville Square on Sunday, Dec. 16. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

## Range...from Page 1A

point to the proposed gun range, and they were in contact with Forest Service personnel by radio.

The five shooters each had a pistol and a rifle and were instructed to load, make ready to fire and fire only on command. The reason for both pistols and long guns is that long guns tend to be louder than pistols, and both required testing.

Once everyone was in place, firing began at noon sharp. A total of 32 pistol shots were fired in two minutes and four seconds, and 17 rifle shots were fired in one minute and 54 seconds.

When the firing finished, everybody met back at Forest Service Road 292 for a debriefing.

There did not appear to be any complaints from any residents near or far, and no one on any of the teams reported any excessive noise from their vantage points.

The purpose, said Bekkerus, was to do a sound analysis based on topography and acoustical features, which is based on scientific modeling, because someone at the Oct. 24 meeting had asked if they would do a live-fire exercise.

"This was a chance for residents to actually hear an example of live-fire and determine, 'Can I actually hear this from my porch or not?'" said Bekkerus, adding that it's a way for residents to share their observations directly with the Forest Service.

Continued Bekkerus, "After we did that first



U.S. Marine Corps Veteran and Union County Gun Club member Wayne Roshaven helping out during the live-fire testing. Photo by Mark Smith

exercise (in October), we had subsequent requests from some of the folks that help manage the Appalachian Trail. They asked us to do it again, because the first time they were not up there on top of the ridgeline, which is in the zone of influence.

"This month, the contractor is working up a report that summarizes all the comments that we receive, and it'll be categorized by issue. If somebody just said, 'I'm not for this,' and they didn't give us a reason, well, it gets thrown out."

For his part, Sheriff Mason said he thinks the range will be good for a number of reasons, especially for the young people of the county, and by extension, the country.

"For our national defense, we need people interested in firearms," said Mason. "We need people trained to know how to use them."

"And then, your law enforcement officers and the sheriff's office, we have no city, county or state or federal-owned property that we can go and qualify like we're required to do by law." Law enforcement officers are required to target shoot monthly to stay in practice.

Bekkerus concluded with the comment that having this facility will reduce the number of people going out into the national forest to practice shooting, where there are no range rules or safety berms, which can be dangerous.