

North Georgia News

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Point 27 ministry provides 'Shields of Strength' to LEOs

By Shawn Jarrard
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Point 27 is a nonprofit volunteer ministry with a straightforward mission: "to strengthen and encourage members of the Armed Forces, First Responders, Veterans and their family members with God's Word."

Organization representatives do this by giving out free scripture-engraved dog tags they call "Shields of Strength" to soldiers and first responders, as well as scripture-engraved Folded Flag necklaces to family members of fallen soldiers and first responders.

A major goal of this ministry is to provide a Thin Blue Line dog tag to every U.S. law enforcement officer, and last week, two Point 27 volunteers carried out this mission locally by stopping into

both sheriff's offices in Union and Towns counties.

Retired Hernando County Sheriff's Cpl. Rick Johnson of Florida got involved with Point 27 after his brother-in-law Carl McKellar, who works in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, started volunteering for the organization.

The two men traveled to the area recently to spend Thanksgiving with family members who live in the area, and while they were here, they decided to honor local law enforcement with "Shields of Strength."

"We want all the first responders in this country to realize how much they are appreciated," Johnson said, "for what they're dealing with, all the violence in the world going on today, with the COVID-19 going on today."

"These guys are facing a tremendous amount of pressure

out there, and we want them to know that they really are appreciated.

"The second reason we're doing this is to show them that they're never alone - they've always got God with them. So, when we issue these dog tags, all we ask is they put them on, wear them, and therefore know they've got God with them the whole time."

So far, Point 27 has distributed more than 400,000 dog tags to U.S. soldiers, veterans and first responders, and another 26,000 Folded Flag necklaces to family members of fallen soldiers and first responders.

"That's our mission, and it's all from donations," Johnson said, noting that it costs \$3.50 to manufacture a Shield of Strength.

A full 95% of every dollar donated goes straight



L-R: Rick Johnson of Point 27, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason, Carl McKellar of Point 27, Blairsville PD Assistant Chief Shawn Dyer, and Union County Chief Jailer Tommy Holbrooks. Point 27 delivered "Shields of Strength" to Union and Towns County deputies last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Shop with a Cop ready to take kids Christmas shopping

By Shawn Jarrard
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For 20 years now, the Blairsville Police Department has worked to enrich the lives of underprivileged children in the community with the annual Shop with a Cop for Christmas experience.

And thanks to yet another year of overwhelming generosity by businesses, organizations and individuals in the community, the department will be able to benefit more local children than ever before.

It works like this - the Saturday before the last day of in-person classes before Christmas break at Union County Schools, participating children and Shop with a Cop volunteers meet at the middle school prior to making their way via school bus to Walmart to get some shopping done.

At Walmart, the kids pair off with a chaperone who walks them around the store and assists them in keeping track of their Christmas budget, as each child gets an amount of money thanks to community donations to guarantee presents under their family tree come Dec. 25.

The time these chaperones spend shopping with the kids acts as a great mentorship opportunity, helping to build trust between local law enforcement and future productive members of society.

Year after year, the volunteer chaperones - which include more than just law enforcement officers - remark on how touched they are to see these children spending their Christmas money on presents for family members also.

After the shopping,



Michael "Bear" Baxter
Blairsville Police Chief

the children head back to the middle school for a Chick-fil-A lunch, and each family receives a \$100 gift card to a local grocery store, as well as a food basket prepared by Fellowship of the Hills Church.

Shop with a Cop is a time-honored tradition here, one that has benefited over 1,300 local kids over the years by providing Christmas morning experiences for families that may not get

Volunteers offer nourishment with Thanksgiving ministry

By Shawn Jarrard
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The 2020 Thanksgiving Blessings Dinner brought more than 200 community volunteers and 13 local churches together on Thanksgiving Day for the dual purpose of providing bodily and spiritual nourishment for Union County families and individuals.

As they do every year, volunteers involved in planning the Thanksgiving Day ministry began preparations months in advance before staging the entire operation inside the Family Life Center of House of Prayer Church, which offers its facilities the week of the event.

Casting as wide a net as possible to bless local people in need or lonely, at the beginning of last month, volunteers posted sign-up



More than 200 volunteers came together at House of Prayer's facilities to provide nearly 1,000 Union Countians a delicious Thanksgiving Dinner Nov. 26. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

sheets at various places around town, solicited reservations via online application and by telephone, and even set up a QR code for scanning.

Together, the volunteers bought and prepared enough food to provide 1,000 free Thanksgiving meals with all the

Area residents reflect on gratitude during holidays

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In recognition of Thanksgiving last week and in looking ahead to Christmas, people in the community shared personal reflections on what they were presently grateful for in their lives.

"I'm thankful for my freedoms as an American," Gauge Bishop of Union County said while shopping at Dollar General Friday. "I don't think we have paid enough attention to our troops this year, and they deserve all the thanks we can give them."

"We can't give them enough for what they do every day for us and these freedoms that they allow us to have. That is something this country needs to realize. I'm not just talking about one side or the other - everyone in the country needs to give that appreciation to our



Dollar General is a popular place for shopping, especially on weekends. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

troops. "They have died for this country and will continue to die for this country. Many of them never come back the same, and we need to show them that we are here and that we love them for what they have given us." Emily Marsh of Newton County remarked that she wants people to consider why they are

Public invited to attend Christmas activities Dec. 5

By Jarrett Whitener
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Get ready, Union Countians, for a full slate of Christmas activities, with the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority and Farmers Market offering family-friendly events starting Dec. 5.

On Saturday morning from 9-11 a.m., kids will want to make sure to attend the Holly Jolly Christmas at the Community Center for breakfast and photos with Santa Claus. The annual event will look a bit different this year due to SARS-CoV-2.

"We are teaming up with United Community Bank, and Chick-fil-A will provide some food," Chamber President Steve Rowe said. "We are trying to keep everybody safe (for COVID-19). We will still have



The Chamber of Commerce Tour of Trees is always a popular Christmas event at the Community Center. Pictured here, trees from the 2017 tour.

the Mayor's Train running, but the mayor will not be driving it. "We won't be doing crafts, but we will be handing

Blairsville Airport prepares for January safety projects

By Shawn Jarrard
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Work on a set of safety projects at the Blairsville Municipal Airport will begin in the new year, to include runway rejuvenation, displacing of runway thresholds and installation of a PAPI system.

Mayor Jim Conley and Airport Manager Aaron Mannheim met with the various project stakeholders - representatives with project manager Roy Engineering, contractor Cremac, and Georgia Department of Transportation

Aviation - for a Nov. 23 pre-construction conference.

In this meeting at the W.C. Nelson Terminal, they went over final details of the work that is expected to start in early January 2021. Remac will have 60 calendar days to complete the projects once work begins, excluding delays for abnormal weather.

Blairsville Airport will have to be closed for at least two weeks during the project, with potential intermittent management from an open and close dates depending on the weather. Fortunately, construction will occur after the

holidays, when traffic is slower at the airport.

The extent of the work will include sealing cracks and applying a light coat of asphalt to rejuvenate the decades-old runway; remarking and moving lighting at both ends of the runway to improve approach safety from either direction by aircraft in relation to obstacles near the airport; and installing a PAPI system.

"A displaced threshold is a threshold located at a point on the runway other than the designated beginning of the runway," according

to the Federal Aviation Administration. "Displacement of a threshold reduces the length of runway available for landings."

"The portion of runway behind a displaced threshold is available for takeoffs in either direction and landings from the opposite direction."

As for PAPIs, or Precision Approach Path Indicators, such systems assist pilots with visual guidance when landing, telling them, for example, whether they're coming in too high, too low or just right.

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Mayor Jim Conley is looking forward to the upcoming rejuvenation project at the Blairsville Municipal Airport, pictured here in a Nov. 23 pre-construction meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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