

# Merry Christmas 2023

Land of Lakes, Mountains, Scenic Beauty and Friendly People

75¢

# North Georgia News

3 Sections 38 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, December 20, 2023

## Historical Society gives thanks in Christmas Banquet

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Following the unmitigated success of their Nighttime Christmas Parade at the start of the month, members of the Union County Historical Society celebrated their 2023 efforts in the annual Christmas Banquet on Monday, Dec. 11, at the Union County Community Center.

Attendees started arriving around 6 p.m. and had time to browse the historical-themed and local items up for auction to raise money for the society's historical preservation goals.

A dinner of baked chicken, pork chops, squash, and baked potatoes was served before guests enjoyed a festive cake for dessert, and while

the food may have been the gathering's namesake, the real reason for the get-together was to recognize the people who made a difference in the organization this year.

Historical Society President Mickey Cummings presented several awards in categories, with the two newest Lifetime Members, Spence Davis and Jack Dugger, receiving their plaques first.

Next up were Certificates of Appreciation, which went out to Lee "Santa" Landers, Bonnie Trudel, Colwell Construction Company, Curtis Young, Dorthy Hughes, Jayne Jones, Jim Wood, Julie Sgambati, Kathleen Cook, Linda Floyd, Luke Hedden and Darren Harper.

Volunteers of the Year included Joan Hawley

Drake and Mike Cook. And finally, Historical Society Board Member Jake Gooch and Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe took home certificates as Preservationists of the Year.

Gooch has done yeoman's work promoting the Historical Society with an online local trivia contest and other work, to include countless hours developing historical murals that will eventually be appearing in the downtown area.

And the Historical Society wanted to recognize Rowe's contributions that have proven integral to projects such as the restoration of the Carr Law Office as a Welcome Center downtown and the sponsorship of the Mountain Heritage Festival.

"As a result of (Rowe's) efforts, the Union County Historical Society now has another building it has preserved in the downtown area in the seat of Blairsville, and Union County has a place which welcomes visitors and shares with them the history of our county," Cummings said. "Thank you, Steve Rowe, for all you do."

Also recognized were society members who passed away over the last year. A candle was lit in honor of Clyde Collins, Sam Ensley, Bonnie Ledford and Bertha Saberton. Quietly, Cummings drew attention to the memorial that stood beside the podium to give the souls of friends the best seat in the house.

"Let's remember See Christmas Banquet, Page 6A



Historical Society Board Member Jake Gooch and the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce under the leadership of Steve Rowe received "Preservationist of the Year" honors in the banquet Dec. 11. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Vogel Christmas program celebrates 'reason for season'

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

For the fourth year in a row, the Christmas Program and Tree Lighting at Vogel State Park has been held in the pavilion overlooking Lake Trahlyta due to rainy weather.

Despite not taking place up at the big tree and ball field, this year's holiday celebration went off without a hitch and was beloved by all who attended on Saturday, Dec. 9.

Around 4 p.m., before dark, folks started gathering in and around the pavilion. Small fires kept the chilly wind at bay while visitors picked up hot cocoa and apple cider before perusing an impressive array of cookies, all courtesy of local churches.

In the pavilion were tents

dedicated specifically to kids' activities and photos with Santa, and although there were plenty of things made available for guests, many people dropped off gifts to benefit the Union County Sheriff's Office Give-a-Gift for Christmas children's program.

Following the customary recognition of visitors who had traveled the farthest to be there and the oldest and youngest attendees, group caroling began and ran through traditional Christmas tunes.

To encourage guests to participate, Program Manager Janet Hill gently teased, "Be sure you sing. You know, you're going to sing in Heaven, so you might as well start now."

That phrase set the mood for the rest of the event, which put a heavy emphasis on the true

meaning behind the holiday.

While Pastor Matt Jones of Lebanon Baptist Church in Suches read the classic Christmas tale "A Visit From St. Nicholas" - aka "The Night Before Christmas" - the focus of Vogel's Christmas Tree Lighting has always been about the Lord's birth.

Knoxville-based country singer Justin Terry performed "Christmas Fan" among the throng of children that had gathered on the stage to listen to Jones' storytelling.

"Christmas is all about Jesus, ain't that right?" Terry asked one of the kids during the instrumental break, holding the microphone down to let the audience hear the responses of the little ones. The smallest carolers sang songs like "Away

See Vogel Christmas, Page 6A



Country singer Justin Terry enjoyed singing with children in the Dec. 9 Vogel Christmas Program. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Gooch Christmas Lights offer holiday cheer to residents



The community is invited to come see the Gooch Family Christmas Lights after dark at 92 Wren Drive. With hundreds of features and thousands of lights, the display offers a uniquely festive drive-thru experience that will remain up for local enjoyment through the New Year's holiday.

## Kinetic hosts groundbreaking for \$20.5 million fiber project

News Special  
North Georgia News

State and local officials joined with fiber-broadband

provider Kinetic on Monday, Dec. 11, to break ground on a new, state-of-the-art fiber network that will provide

ultrafast internet to more than 7,300 customer locations in Union County. See Fiber Internet, Page 2A



L-R: Chamber President Steve Rowe, Commissioner Lamar Paris, Georgia Broadband Program Executive Director Jessica Simmons, Georgia Public Service Commissioner Lauren "Bubba" McDonald, Georgia Senate Majority Leader Steve Gooch, R-District 51, and Kinetic State Operations President Michael Foor.



Vol. 114 No. 52  
Arrests - 10A Legals - 10B  
Church - 2B Obits - 4B  
Classifieds - 10B Sports - 8A  
Opinion - 4A

**BASKETBALL**  
12/19 4 & 5:30 PM  
@ White County

**Christmas Special Section** See Inside  
**Meals on Wheels Fundraiser** See page 11A  
**Union County 4-H Achievement** See page 12B



**Need a Mortgage?**  
Call Kitty in Blairsville!  
Kitty Mauzy | 706-439-2185 | NMLS# 512515

**United Community Mortgage**

© 2023 United Community Bank  
NMLS# 421841 | ucbi.com/mortgage

# Fiber Internet...from Page 1A

This is in addition to some 8,400 county locations Kinetic already made “gig ready.”

When completed next year, the \$20.5 million expansion project will make more than 7,300 homes, businesses and schools in Blairsville, Suches and nearby unserved and underserved areas eligible for high-speed fiber internet for the first time.

These homes, combined with the 8,400 other locations Kinetic already made “gig ready,” add up to more than 15,700 locations in the county eligible for Kinetic’s fiber broadband.

This quantum leap to fiber broadband will turn Union County into a Georgia Gigabit Community, in which customers are able to stream, share and download at speeds of at least 1 gigabit a second.

“The people in Blairsville, Suches and other communities will soon no longer be underserved and unserved,” Kinetic Georgia Operations President Michael Foor said at the event.

“I’m a Georgian like you are, and Kinetic is a local company employing local people to help other local people get the best internet experience,” he added. “This important county deserves exceptional internet that will meet its evolving demands for business, educational and personal use.”

At the event, state Senate Majority Leader Steve Gooch, R-District 51, said, “I am proud to have been a sponsor and supporter of broadband deployment legislative and funding initiatives at the state capitol and am thrilled this world-class telecommunications upgrade will benefit communities across Union County.”

“High-speed internet allows folks in this beautiful area to stay connected with school, health care services and family, not to mention business, and is critical to the success of our region’s economy and to future job creation,” he said.

The expansion project is a result of a public-private partnership between the county

and Kinetic.

Union County will use about \$11.2 million in state grant money from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program, part of the federal American Rescue Plan.

The county has also committed an additional \$500,000 in matching funds.

Kinetic will invest \$8.9 million and cover any cost overruns.

The broadband provider covered the entire project cost when making the earlier 8,400 locations gig ready.

Kinetic will lay about 550 miles of fiber optic cable in the expansion project to bring high-speed internet to residences, businesses and schools.

“This groundbreaking signifies the start of new possibilities for Union County,” said Georgia Broadband Program Executive Director Jessica Simmons. “Technology is ever evolving, and this project will bring broadband that can handle present and future demands to this community.”

“I’m glad the county was able to collaborate with Kinetic to expand this critical service to more than 7,300 unserved homes and businesses.”

Kinetic’s ultrafast fiber-optic broadband lets

users upload and download at up to 8 gigabits a second, or 8,000 megabits a second, providing what is known as “next-generation access.”

Households and businesses may call Kinetic toll free at 800-255-8358 to find out if they are, or will be, eligible for a fiber speed upgrade. They may also pre-register with Kinetic for fiber broadband at [windstream.com/kinetic-fiber](http://windstream.com/kinetic-fiber).

Kinetic’s Union County fiber project is part of a \$2 billion multiyear capital investment strategy by Kinetic to dramatically expand gigabit fiber service across the company’s 18-state footprint.

Kinetic’s superfast, reliable fiber connections in Union County empower residential customers to gig speeds to navigate the internet safely from home with no lag times while they work, participate in virtual classrooms or stream entertainment services.

Businesses from small to enterprise size can take advantage of the fiber-backed network to deploy solutions that make their companies more efficient and profitable such as OfficeSuite UC® and SD-WAN.

To learn more, visit [GoKinetic.com](http://GoKinetic.com).



## Adult Fitness Classes for All Fitness Levels

**Union County Recreation Department  
519 Industrial Blvd., Blairsville, GA 30512  
706-439-6074**

Registration opens Monday, 12/11 for Fitness Classes. The fee below covers January-April. Drop-ins are welcome for a fee of \$5 per class.

**Classes begin: Week of 1/8/24, classes end April 23rd**

Tabata (High Intensity)	\$65	Mon/Wed/Fri	6:30 am-7:15 am
Latin Dance Fusion (with weight training)	\$60	Mon/Wed	8:30 am-9:35 am
Core & More	\$50	Mon/Wed	9:45 am-10:30 am
Sit & Fit	\$50	Mon/Wed	10:45 am-11:30 am
Regular Aerobics	\$65	Tue/Thurs/Fri	8:30 am-9:30 am
Dance Jams	\$50	Tues/Thurs	10 am-10:45 am
Yoga	\$50	Tues/Thurs	11 am-Noon
Tai Chi	\$50	Tues/Thurs	12:15 pm-1:15 pm

## Christmas Banquet...from Page 1A



**Multiple individuals received certificates of appreciation Dec. 11 for their contributions to the Historical Society's efforts this year.**

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

those folks. Remember their families," advised Cummings.

The live and silent auctions that evening were a huge success, with many unique items going to generous bidders, including an over/under 28-gauge Franchi shotgun donated by Alexander's Store, which fetched \$1,400; and a queen-sized quilt made of pre-World War II era local materials courtesy of Mock House volunteers, \$900.

Among the 47 total items donated for the auctions were

gift certificates from multiple local businesses; four rolling pins made from a white oak log by Historical Society Member Bud Akins; and prints of the Old Courthouse and Byron Herbert Reece Farm.

Additionally, people bid on a guided flyfishing trip; a guided waterfall hiking tour by Cummings and friends; a CVA muzzleloader; a quilt rack made by Paul Reeves; and a maple-turned bowl that was 14 years in the making throughout its seasoning process.

And then there was the rectangular platter hand-carved from walnut by Brian Ledford; the pearl and diamond necklace donated by Persaud Jewelers; a package of highly collectible pottery made by the late W.J. Gordy of Cartersville; and still other donated items.

Society President Cummings said he is both overwhelmed and extremely grateful for the support the Historical Society receives in its endeavors to keep alive the history of Union County.

## Vogel Christmas...from Page 1A



**Icky weather did not deter families from celebrating the "reason for the season" during the 2023 Vogel Christmas Program, which once again had to move under the pavilion at Lake Trahlyta.**

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

in a Manger" to establish this fact, and shortly afterward, Santa reappeared – this time to address the crowd.

"The real reason for the season is not Santa Claus. It's not a Christmas tree. It's not gifts or presents or toys, or cookies and milk. It's none of those things," said the man dressed in a fur-lined red coat. "The real reason for the season is we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, our Savior."

Reading from a worn, well-loved pocket Bible, Santa Claus himself recited the tale from the Second Chapter of Luke, relaying the story of how the virgin Mary gave birth to the infant Christ in a manger after she and Joseph were denied entry into an inn.

Pastor Marty Duncan of Fellowship of the Hills Church had the honor of counting down

to the tree's lighting, but before that, he explained how the tree was a symbol of not only the holiday spirit but also of the holy spirit.

"The lighting of the tree is very important to me because Jesus said we are to be the light of the world. Each and every one of us are to shine our light for Jesus Christ, and not let our light be hidden," said Duncan just before the countdown began.

As the tree lit up, so too did all the electric candles that were handed out to guests at the beginning of the event. They heralded also Amy Young's rendition of "O Holy Night," which she sang in the darkness of a pavilion dotted with literal and spiritual lights.

Gradually, many in the audience joined her, and while several eyes were already misty

from Terry's performance of "Tell Me the Story of Jesus," Young's strong vocals drove many to tears. She was met with wild cheers and applause as the night closed out.

It was so poignant that Young's message – and indeed that of the rest of Vogel's Christmas celebration – inspired some to start a new tradition.

"I hate that I've not been to it all the years before, (but) I'll definitely continue to go," said Kourtney Queen, who attended with her young son Walker, sister Kylee Payne, and Payne's four children.

"Christmas to me means being with family, being with friends, and giving to others," she added, feeling that the night deeply corresponded with the values Jesus preached about loving thy neighbor.



**As always, local churches banded together to provide refreshments for guests of the Vogel Christmas Program.**

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks