



Merry Christmas from the staff of the North Georgia News

"Land of Lakes, Mountains, Scenic Beauty and Friendly People"

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Santa highlights reason for the season at Vogel Tree Lighting

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

After a couple of years of rocky weather that put a damper on the Vogel State Park Tree Lighting and Christmas Program, everything this year went off without a hitch on Saturday, Dec. 14.

The weather cooperated, Justin Terry's performance was superb, and Santa visited with youngsters and their parents for pictures and Christmas requests. There was also hot chocolate, hot apple cider and bonfires to ward off the cold.

And that Saturday evening, Santa, known for his jolly, rotund countenance, white beard, red suit and big black belt, did something different.

Santa took time to walk on stage and say what Christmas

is really all about, speaking as if to a group of small children.

"Christmas is not about toys," Santa said. "It's not about candy and cake and eating a lot of stuff. And I hate to say it, but it's not just about Christmas songs."

"The real reason for Christmas is Jesus Christ. And in a sense, that's why we're here, because we want to celebrate Jesus Christ and His coming into the world."

"He came as a baby – well you all know that, don't you? You know that. But just as a reminder to those who may not remember exactly, I want to tell you that story," Santa said. "It's found in the second chapter of Luke."

Santa then proceeded to read right out of the Bible, relating the biblical story of

Jesus' birth.

"Now, let's not forget this time of year. It's not just about Santa Claus. It's not about giving gifts or getting presents. It's not about trees. But it's about Jesus," Santa said, segueing into a prayer of thanksgiving for Jesus' coming.

Janet Hill, who coordinated the event, asked Santa a few follow-up questions.

"So, Santa Claus, I have some questions to ask you," Hill said. "Do children like to pull on your beard?"

"Yes, ma'am. In fact, I'd like to invite them to if they think I'm not real," he said to laughter from the crowd.

Hill said she was very happy with the turnout this
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Santa Claus visited with children at the Vogel State Park Ball Field for the annual Tree Lighting and Christmas Program on Dec. 14.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

'TOP GUN: MAVERICK' saved by Blairsville-based business

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

When the highly-anticipated sequel to the 1986 smash hit "TOP GUN" premieres in June 2020, be sure to pay close attention to the costuming and set dressing – after all, much of it will be from Blairsville.

Former Navy and Retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. William "Whitey" White and his wife Michelle own the Union County-based AV8RSTUFF.com, a one-stop shop for authentic military patches, insignias, coins, ballcaps and other military memorabilia that will appear in the upcoming "TOP GUN: MAVERICK" iconic sequel due out next summer.

The retired bomber/fighter aviator is a huge fan of the original "TOP GUN"

movie. In fact, the Navy-centric motion picture inspired White – call sign "Whitey" – to become a Naval Flight Officer in the midst of the Gulf War, after which he flew combat missions in Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan, just like the heroes on the silver screen.

Coincidentally, a couple of Whitey's flight school instructors at Naval Air Station Pensacola flew several of the aerial combat scenes in the original "TOP GUN," even taking actor Tom Cruise for a flight in a real-life F-14A Tomcat fighter jet like the one his character, Lt. Pete "Maverick" Mitchell, piloted in the movie.

So when Paramount Studios acted on a recommendation from the Navy's combat-aviator consultants and contacted Whitey for help outfitting



William "Whitey" White

the flight suits, jackets, gear, sets and backdrops of what turned out to be "TOP GUN: MAVERICK" with genuine patches and props to lend authenticity to the film, it was



reached out to us to see if we could support their project," Whitey recalled. "They said, 'Whitey, several of our Navy consultants told us of AV8RSTUFF, and we'd like to use some of your authentic squadron memorabilia for a project we're working on.'"

Whitey informed them that "we make – and have in stock – patches, coins, ballcaps, hats and all the authentic military squadron memorabilia you'd need."

This was music to Paramount's ears, of course, and the studio jumped at the chance to work with Whitey and AV8RSTUFF.

"We need enough items to outfit quite a few characters and movie sets for a military aviation movie we're making called (codename) 'Island Plaza,'" Whitey remembered them saying.



Whitey received this commemorative coin from Tom Cruise after consulting on the new "TOP GUN: MAVERICK."

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Intrigued, Whitey hit the internet to see what he could find. He couldn't help it; the memorabilia they required had made him quite curious.

"When I Googled 'Island Plaza,' it came up as the
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Tractor-trailer accident totals three cars, nearly ends in tragedy



This accident was caused by a load of OSB board coming unsecured from a tractor-trailer in front of General Supply on Wednesday, Dec. 18.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

A Peterbilt truck carrying several tons of OSB construction board dangerously lost its load after leaving the road to avoid a crash on Gainesville Highway last week.

Three cars were totaled, two others were damaged, and

a Blairsville woman narrowly avoided being crushed in the accident that occurred in front of General Supply on US 129 South around 10:20 a.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 18.

The driver of the tractor-trailer is being considered at fault for the accident and will face a charge of following too closely, the Georgia State Patrol

said last week.

It all took place incredibly quickly, though multiple witnesses at the scene reported that it felt as if the accident happened in slow motion.

The Peterbilt was driving behind a passenger car heading south on Gainesville Highway when the car signaled for a
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County purchases 12 acres for soccer fields; first responders get awards



Kendra King honored Paramedic Corey Parks with the Murray S. King Emergency Medical Services Award on Dec. 17, pictured here with Jared Ogden of Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter SAR.
Photo by Mark Smith

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North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris announced the purchase of a 12-acre tract of land north of Blairsville in his monthly meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 17.

"I hereby accept this land

purchase and sale agreement between Union County and Gooch Trucking Co., Inc. for the purchase of 12.009 acres more or less of soccer fields (for \$150,000)," Paris said.

"This is something that has been in the process for many months. There was a water plant north of town off US 129 that

had been there for many years, changed owners several times," Paris said, adding that the Soccer Fields are adjacent to the old Cott Water Bottling Plant to the south.

Paris said Gooch Trucking ended up with the entire 27-acre parcel and agreed to sell the
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Shop with a Cruiser and Shop with a Panther stories can be found on 1C

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