

North Georgia News

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UCFD saves historic home in Downtown Blairsville

By Shawn Jarrard
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The historic Reid-Sampson House caught fire Sunday morning, prompting a swift emergency response from Union County Fire Department to save the bulk of the structure in the heart of Downtown Blairsville.

And while the cause of the fire remains under investigation, Fire Chief David Dyer said no foul play is suspected at this time.

Built in 1853, the home on Rogers Street has most recently served as a "Luxury B&B Inn." Nobody was hurt in the fire, as the buildings on the property were unoccupied at the time.

A 911 call came in shortly after 8 a.m. Sunday, alerting the Fire Department to the blaze. Roughly a third of Fire Department personnel responded, resulting in a quick knockdown with extensive follow-up to make sure the fire

was fully extinguished.

The fire started in a back-half addition to the main building, spreading through the addition's attic. Thankfully, the oldest part of the home was spared fire damage, though it did suffer some smoke damage plus water damage from suppression efforts.

"We fought most of the fire from the backside for a while until we could get up into (the addition's attic), and then we sent crews all the way up in there once we got it ventilated," Chief Dyer said.

Firefighters successfully contained the fire to the addition but had to use chainsaws on the roof to gain entry to the attic space, and they spent the latter part of the morning covering up the holes to protect it from the weather until repairs can be made.

"It definitely will need a roof replacement, and there's a couple of walls we had to breach to get in there, so you're looking at interior damage

then, mainly," Dyer said. "As far as the frame structure of it is concerned, it's fairly intact except for where we had to cut part of it out."

"Thirty-one firefighters from Station 1, Station 13, Volunteer Station 2, Volunteer Station 3 and Volunteer Station 4 responded," Dyer added. "That is a little more than a third of our department, so that's pretty awesome to have that many people here working on this fire."

"And you can see, the building is still here, so it was an amazing job. With a house this old, you don't really know what's going to happen because there's so many holes, so many areas that a fire can sneak around and you not see it."

"For us to get here, stop it where it's at, and to have this many people show up to help us fight the fire - there's more than just one job to fighting fire, there's a lot of exterior work. So, to me, it's a pretty



Firefighters had to work quickly to save the historic Reid-Sampson House after a fire there Sunday. Photo/Submitted

'Christmas on the Square' spreads cheer for residents

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

According to Historical Society President Mickey Cummings, 2023's Christmas on the Square was one of the best iterations of the tradition yet. And judging by how many Union Countians came out to observe the Dec. 2 parade, he wasn't the only one to think so.

The fun started at around 2 p.m. when the Historic Courthouse opened to allow guests young and old to visit Santa Claus and get their pictures taken. He was there until about 4 p.m. when he had to leave to get ready to be in the parade.

Some local businesses were open a bit late to provide for folks hanging around the square until nightfall. Cabin Coffee, for example, was abuzz with activity from families

stopping by to grab a bite or a hot drink. It turned out to be one of the most popular parade vantage points, in fact.

Meanwhile, in front of the courthouse, the Woody Gap Band of Steel provided entertainment with Caribbean-flavored renditions of classic carols. "Silver Bells" in particular was a big hit, with many people caught swaying or singing along to the beloved tune.

Cynthia Price was just one of many enjoying the music, and certainly not the only one to bring a friend along to partake in the holiday cheer, as evidenced by all the bundled-up pups enjoying the night out with their people.

What was truly unique, however, was that Price brought a chicken named Duck Duck Goose, affectionately referred to as Duck for short.

Price and Duck have traveled to many places together, including Yellowstone Park, but Saturday was Duck's first parade. Price was skeptical about how much Duck was enjoying the event, but if ever there was a patient hen, it would have to be Duck, who agreed with Price when she proclaimed, "I love Christmas."

Shortly after the sun set, the flashing lights on the Sheriff's Office cars leading the parade became visible. They, along with the Grinch on stilts, heralded the rest of the show, which from the start delivered a spectacle with off-roaders decorated with everything from string lights to antlers.

Union County High School Senior Ayden Burnett has enjoyed marching in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City twice, with his



Once again, Santa, Mrs. Claus and a Helper Elf rode in the sleigh decorated by the Union County Historical Society during this year's Nighttime Christmas Parade Dec. 2. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Classic Christmas returns to Sports Center Dec. 8 & 9



Mrs. Claus welcomed the Zimmermans to see Mr. Claus at the inaugural Classic Christmas inside the Sports Center last year. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks/2022

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Following the start of local Christmas activities, the holiday cheer will continue this weekend at the Union County Sports Center.

On Friday, Dec. 8, and Saturday, Dec. 9, the Second Annual Classic Christmas will

be held courtesy of the Union County Recreation Department.

Visitors can attend on Friday from 5-7:30 p.m., and then on Saturday from 2-7:30 p.m. The Sports Center stands at 519 Industrial Blvd, aka the Glenn Gooch Bypass, across from Union County High School and right beside the Union County Health

Department.

The very first Classic Christmas featured photos with Santa and a delightful model train, but 2023 promises to go all-out. Each of the two days offers something different, though families are perfectly welcome to attend both if they wish. Admission is free.

See *Classic Christmas*, Page 3A

Dr. Butts passes away, leaves behind historical legacy

By Shawn Jarrard
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Union County lost one of its treasured historical preservationists when Dr. James "Jim" Allen Butts Sr. passed away on Saturday, Nov. 25. He was 87.

Nearly 30 years ago, in December 1994, the medical doctor donated the home he inherited from his aunt in Downtown Blairsville to the Union County Historical Society - the 1906 Butt-Mock House that is central to the beloved Mountain Life Museum.

Butts grew up across the street from the historic home and was happy to donate it for posterity. For decades now, thousands of guests have enjoyed seeing the old ways come to life with the Butt-Mock House, 1861 Payne Cabin, annual events like the Heritage Festival, and more.

Historical Society President Mickey Cummings said that, without Butts' generous donation, he believes the property likely would have ended up as an office building, like other historic properties downtown.

"I think the people of Blairsville owe him a great

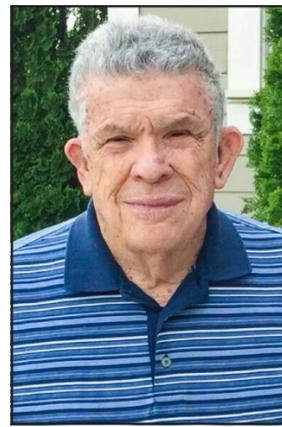
debt of gratitude for donating that Butt-Mock House, because thousands of people have seen demonstrations and exhibits about what life was like at one time," Cummings said.

Families can visit the Butt-Mock House decorated for the holidays during the Historical Society's upcoming Christmas Open House at the Mountain Life Museum, this Saturday, Dec. 9, from 2-4 p.m. The event will feature a tour, refreshments, and crafts for children.

Historical Society Member and Blairsville native Bud Akins was a lifelong friend of Butts - and a patient of his as well, enrolling his family in the good doctor's care at his medical practice down in Gainesville, at least until Dr. Butts retired.

At Akins' invitation, Butts spoke last year for the Historical Society's ongoing lecture series at the Old Courthouse, delivering remarks largely centered on the history of wartime medicine, and Cummings said Butts' visit was the best attended lecture so far.

Akins has many wonderful memories of Butts, including shared time on an "unofficial Little League" baseball team in their youth,



Dr. Jim Butts

and how Butts' father, Hubert Butt, owned the first TV in Union County.

Back then, Hubert welcomed children of the county to their home to watch the World Series and other programming, requiring the connection of two 20-foot pipes to get an antenna high enough to catch broadcasts in the mountains. And despite the snowy reception, everyone was enthralled with the technology.

A Union County graduate, Butts knew from an early age that he wanted to become a doctor, deciding on his eventual career path in the

See *Historical Legacy*, Page 2A



Vol. 114 No. 50
Arrests - 13A Legals - 10B
Church - 2B Obits - 4B
Classifieds - 10B Sports - 8A
Opinion - 4A

BASKETBALL
12/5 VS MURPHY 6 PM
12/8 @ TOWNS 7 PM

Veterans Receive Quilts of Valor See page 7A
NGA Chamber Symphony Dec. 8 See page 5B
Vogel Christmas Program Dec. 9 See page 6B

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Historical Legacy ...from Page 1A

eighth grade after his teachers motivated him to pursue a greater education due to his passion for learning.

After completing his medical education, Butts proved instrumental in helping to develop the high level of medical services available in Gainesville at that time, and the "Poultry Capital of the World" is now renowned across the state for its health care offerings.

"He was a very intelligent person and a dedicated doctor," Akins said of his departed friend. Indeed, Akins holds the entire Butts Family in high esteem, including Jim's son Dr. Allen Butts, who was the doctor of Akins' oldest daughter when she died of cancer.

A Celebration of Life will be held for Butts after the New Year. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Good News Clinics in Gainesville.

"Until the end, he led a long, healthy life enriched with a loving family, many friends, numerous achievements, and much success," according to his obituary. "He had an intense passion for the field of medicine and remained a lifelong learner.

"He loved his farm, and when younger, loved afternoon horseback rides with friends. He was blessed with a wife who

enjoyed traveling, and they explored the world together.

"Anyone who knew him was keenly aware that he had a sharp mind, and he worked hard to keep it that way. He was known to write poetry, give presentations or lectures at local universities, and teach Sunday School lessons.

"He also loved his family, and they knew perfectly well he was a man who valued hard work and achievement. He had high standards for himself and others. An avid sportsman, he was a fierce competitor on the tennis court as well as on the golf course.

"He was educated at Emory University and received the Ty Cobb scholarship to Emory's School of Medicine. He had the honor of caring for Mr. Cobb as a patient during his education. He made a point to pay forward the generosity and chance at education that Mr. Cobb provided.

"He moved to Gainesville in 1966 after his post-graduate training at Grady Memorial Hospital, a two-year service in the Public Health Service on Staten Island, and a fellowship in Hematology at Emory.

"He joined a practice established by Drs. Jennings, Stribling, and Poole. As partners were added, the name eventually became Northeast Georgia Diagnostic Clinic. This is where he practiced until his retirement.

"After retirement he then



Dr. Jim Butts, pictured here with lifelong friend Bud Akins last year, delivered remarks for the Historical Society Lecture Series in August 2022.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

served as Medical Director to the Good News Clinics for 13 years. He was especially proud of two awards given to him by the community.

"In 2016 he received The Sam Poole Volunteer Award, and in 2021 he was recognized by the Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce with a Lifetime Achievement Award for service at the NE GA Diagnostic Clinic and the Good News Clinics.

"He was preceded in death by his parents, Hubert and Louise Butt of Blairsville, but is survived by his loving wife of 63 years, Wynelle

Lowery Butts, and his three children, Dr. James Allen Butts Jr., Lawrence 'Larry' Eugene Butts, and Katherine 'Kathy' Louise Butts.

"He was blessed with two daughters-in-law and a son-in-law as well as five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren."

Little & Davenport Funeral Home and Crematory in Gainesville has charge of his arrangements. People may leave words of remembrance for the Butts Family at <https://www.littledavenport.com/obituary/DrJamesAllen-ButtsSr>.

North Georgia Technical College Names Finalists for 2024 GOAL Program



(L-R): Paul Hopkins; Kaitlyn Crosby; NGTC President John Wilkinson; Maria Zavala de Orozco; and Angie Bartron

North Georgia Technical College (NGTC) recently named four students as finalists for the Georgia Occupational Award of Leadership (GOAL). GOAL, a statewide program of the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), honors excellence in academics and leadership among the state's technical college students.

NGTC's finalists are Angie Bartron, Accounting student of Blairsville, GA, nominated by English instructor Dorothy Hansen; Kaitlyn Crosby, Welding Technology student of Mount Airy, GA, nominated by Welding Technology instructor Ronnie Ayers; Paul Hopkins, Precision Machining and Manufacturing student of Toccoa, GA, nominated by Precision Machining and Manufacturing instructor Derrick Hogan; and Maria Zavala de Orozco,

Registered Nursing student of Cornelia, GA, nominated by Registered Nursing instructor Dr. Martha Marquardt.

The four finalists will compete Jan. 11, 2024, in front of a panel of business, civic, and industry leaders, who will select the college's 2024 GOAL winner. The NGTC GOAL winner will then represent NGTC at the regional and state competitions.

Other nominees include Lanise Baer of Macon, GA; Gerald Barker of Eastanollee, GA; Johnathan Brown of Hartwell, GA; Hannah Carney of Blairsville, GA; Britney Carter of Ellijay, GA; Brian Dickerson of Tiger, GA; Victoria Hartley of Eastanollee, GA; James Hilton of Cleveland, GA; Ashley Logan of Jasper, GA; Ansley McAvoy of Blairsville, GA; Liana Newsum of Cleveland, GA;

Renee Petenbrink of Toccoa, GA; Dylan Rice of Cornelia, GA; Diane Rucker of Hartwell, GA; Mykola Thorbecke of Demorest, GA; and Kelley Ward of Martin, GA.

"The 2024 GOAL nominees were an outstanding group of students who all shared their unique perspectives on the importance of technical education," said NGTC GOAL co-coordinator Rebekah Franklin. "We are tremendously proud of each of these individuals for their hard work and dedication to pursuing excellence in their chosen programs and for stepping outside their comfort zone. We wish them all continued success in their endeavors."

For more information regarding North Georgia Technical College programs or admission, visit northgatech.edu or call 706-754-7700.

Union General Hospital re-designated a Level III Emergency Cardiac Care Center

Union General Hospital continues to provide the latest in life-saving heart care by becoming re-designated as a Level III Emergency Cardiac Care Center (ECCC). This re-designation from the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) means that when you or someone you know has a heart attack, you can trust Union General Hospital to provide fast and effective treatment.

"Receiving the ECCC re-designation is an extraordinary achievement for our team," says Wesley Rogers, Union General EMS Director. "We're so thankful to be able to continue providing our local communities with this level of superior care."

Healthcare organizations seeking ECCC re-designation by the Georgia DPH undergo a thorough evaluation process, including a site inspection and an assessment of emergency cardiac care processes and equipment.

Cardiovascular disease is responsible for approximately 2,300 deaths each day in America. To improve these outcomes, legislation was signed into law in 2017 establishing the Office of Cardiac Care within the Georgia Department of Public Health. The mission of this office is to improve survival rates in Georgia from out-of-hospital cardiac arrests and heart attacks through quality improvement, benchmarking,

and evidence-based guidelines, supported by standardized data collection and reporting system. Hospitals who comply with the Emergency Care Center criteria and protocols are assigned designated levels.

In a letter sent to Union General Hospital, Georgia Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Toomey said, "The Department commends you and your staff for your continued commitment to excellence in emergency cardiac care that is

being provided at your facility. Improving the survival rates from heart attacks and out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in Georgia is exceedingly important."

For the latest updates on Union General Hospital, please visit www.UnionGeneralHealthSystem.com

Union General Hospital
has been re-designated as a

Level III
Emergency Cardiac
Care Center




Classic Christmas...from Page 1A

On Dec. 8, the parking lot outside of the Sports Center will become a live Nativity Scene complete with animals. A heavenly choir consisting of the Union County Middle School Chorus will hand out lyric books so guests can join in caroling, and hot chocolate will be available.

House of Prayer Church will also be present to share the true meaning of Christmas, wrapping the scene together nicely by telling the story it depicts.

As for Dec. 9, kids can make their own ornaments and move inside the Sports Center for other fun Christmas-related

activities.

While the little guys can enjoy hot cocoa for the second day, adults will have access to coffee, and fruit and candy will be handed out for everyone to take home as a testament to one of the oldest gift-giving traditions.

Each ornament the children make will be added to the special Christmas tree set up in the Sports Center and will remain part of the display in perpetuity, brought out annually as tangible memories of years past. Be sure to include names so the little artists get proper credit.

The event also includes

Santa's Workshop, where we elves can once again enjoy the sight of the model train and perhaps even work on their own crafts. Of course, the place wouldn't be a workshop without the Jolly Old Elf himself, and Kris Kringle and Mrs. Claus will be there for photo opportunities.

Union County Recreation Director Scotty Thompson wants to extend special thanks to Pastor Jerry Helton for his involvement along with the efforts of everyone in the Recreation Department for making the Classic Christmas dream into a reality.

"It's all about the kids.

This is something that we hope kids will enjoy doing every year," Thompson said. "It's really important for the community as a whole to just embrace the meaning of Christmas."

Thompson added that while the general "template" of the event will probably remain the same in upcoming years, more activities will be added or changed around in future iterations of the Classic Christmas to make things new and exciting.

Reid-Sampson Fire...from Page 1A



Firefighters cut out portions of the roof on the addition to the historic home to extinguish the blaze Sunday, after which they covered the holes with tarps. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

amazing stop, and everybody did an awesome job."

Dyer said that many antiques in the main part of the home received water damage

but that they believe most of it will be salvageable with professional assistance.

"(The owners are) very thankful (to the Fire Department),

but of course, they're devastated, because this is an antique home and all their antiques were in it, so they're really concerned about that," Dyer said.

Former firefighter receives gift of life with new heart

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Travis Henry's first experience with the Union County Fire Department was in 2010 when he joined up as a Station 3 volunteer, but "a couple of years" later he started working full-time at Station 1, picking up the proverbial hose and axe as a fully-fledged career firefighter.

Along the way, he worked part-time as an EMT for Union General Hospital.

"I was in just about every aspect of the medical-emergency response here other than the Sheriff's Office," Henry said, calling it "a very rewarding job." Ever humble, Henry looks at his service as "doing (God's) will" by keeping patients alive until they could reach the hospital.

Things changed in December 2020.

Henry can remember sweeping the kitchen when he started to have chest pains. After calling his partner, he was transported to the hospital and flown to Piedmont Heart Institute. Once lauded as a hero for saving lives, he suddenly found himself on the other end of the emergency response.

"Congestive heart failure and cardiomyopathy is what they diagnosed me with," revealed Henry, 52. While the diagnosis was frightening on its own, Henry's condition worsened until his heart "just



Travis Henry was in excellent spirits after his heart transplant in October, pictured here just five days after surgery.

gave up."

To save his life, Henry had a balloon pump installed this year – a device that keeps blood circulating to pick up the slack of a failing heart.

Subsequently, Henry was scheduled on Oct. 25, 2023, to receive his heart transplant, but the situation was dire. Within hours of the heart's arrival, Henry was placed on life support because the pump "stopped working" 20 days after its installation.

"(When) you have no

control of anything, even your next breath, you realize exactly Who's in control," Henry said, looking back. Though he came to accept his mortality, Henry admitted he had a preference to stay among the living for a while longer if possible. It looked to be a tall order.

To put things into perspective, Henry recalled that his surgeon shared, "We took out something the size of a cantaloupe, and we put in something the size of a

See Henry's Heart, Page 12A



Henry has loved being back home, pictured here Sunday during a Thanksgiving gathering with family members wearing custom shirts that read "We Got This" – a phrase that he is well known for saying.

Blairsville Christmas...from Page 1A



Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery, featuring Blairsville's own Tommy Townsend playing live music, tied Vertical Church for First Place in the 2023 Christmas Parade Float Contest.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

most recent appearance this year. Once again, he performed with his bandmates on Saturday evening to the applause of his community.

Then came the floats, interspersed with decorated vehicles representing various local organizations, businesses and churches. Conley Contracting, Stonehenge Senior Living, New Harmony Baptist Church, and the local Cub Scout Troop were among the many groups that came out to spread some local holiday cheer.

The Abominable Snowman, Rudolph and even Clarice of the 1964 stop-motion Christmas classic "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" made an appearance, though their status as the most beloved Christmas creatures was challenged by the horses bringing up the rear of the parade and pulling a genuine buggy behind the Union County Historical Society.

Vertical Church chose to recreate the Polar Express for its float, complete with a conductor that followed behind and urged "all aboard." Rather than tossing out candy to the excited masses, they instead lobbed packets of hot cocoa mix stapled with tickets urging more than a belief in Santa, but a belief in Christ the Lord.

Granddaddy Mimm's Distillery's float featured a delightful Toyland-esque display with Tommy

Townsend himself singing country renditions of Christmas classics. A glowing, slow-turning Ferris wheel lit the way for a customer dressed as a polar bear to prance along with a candy cane while fake snow fluttered around.

Between the two, Granddaddy Mimm's and Vertical Church had a tie for the best floats, and the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce will be reaching out to them this week to award them their prize money.

Many people started to head home when the parade wrapped up, but there was still more to do to ring in the season. The Creative Voice Boutique took over as the Woody Gap Band of Steel began to pack up, singing traditional carols with voices of all ages.

The Grazione Family were on vacation from Tampa when, on a stroke of luck, they perfectly timed their visit to

include the annual Christmas Parade.

William and Tanya Grazione, along with their children, enjoy coming to the North Georgia Mountains to "reset," giving them the chance to reconnect with nature and remember how important the bonds of family are.

"We were in the area and saw that it was decorated," explained William. "And we were like, 'Let's just stop and wait and see what happens.'"

"It's (the kids') very first parade," said Tanya, who was quick to find out that the horses – and the Grinch – seemed to be the family favorite. "We don't have that (in Florida)," she added, with William agreeing and saying that he appreciated the closeness of the community here.

"You live in a great town," Tanya said, addressing Blairsville's residents. "This is amazing."



Spectators of the 2023 Nighttime Christmas Parade loved this horse-drawn sleigh Saturday night. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks