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According to the latest figures from the GDOL website, Georgia's unemployment rate, 6.1 percent, lags behind the national unemployment rate, 5.3 percent. But the numbers are looking better, as the state's unemployment rate is down from June of last year, which saw a rate of 7.3 percent.

The most recent data shows Union County's rate at 5.3 percent, right on par with the national average. Union's neighbors, however, reflect higher than average numbers of unemployed – Towns at 8.3 percent and Fannin at 6.4 percent.



The regional job fair attracted job seekers from Union, Towns and Fannin counties. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

These numbers highlight the importance of job opportunities created by efforts such as the North Georgia Regional Career Expo, in concert with the GDOL – a job fair that was several months in the making.

"It's been really good to work with all the partners in this particular area," said Alexis. "Everyone seemed to be on one accord as far as making sure that the event was successful, trying to make sure that everyone got their parts done to make sure the event came off smoothly today."

Front End Assistant

Manager Rehnee Herr of the Blairsville Walmart attended the event with Asset Protection Manager Ginger Little, and they said they found the expo beneficial.

"We've been able to just talk to the community to see what the needs are," said Herr. "It's been very well organized. We've had people that are trying to relocate to the area, we've had people that are getting displaced – I spoke with someone that's been in their field for 12 years, and all of a sudden their contract was not renewed and they're out of a job."

Rachel Conner, store

manager of the Hiawassee McDonald's, was invited to the expo by the GDOL.

"This is actually my first one," said Conner. "So far, it's been fun. There's a lot of interesting, different set of dynamics. I thought it would be mainly young people, but I'm surprised to see that there's a lot of older generation here looking for jobs as well."

According to Social Security website, the full retirement age is now 66, but that number is scheduled to increase over the coming years to 67. And an aging workforce that must put off retirement means a larger workforce.



Rehnee Herr

Fortunately, the scales are tilting toward an employee's market, evidenced locally by the tri-county expo.

"This is actually the first time we've been a part of a job fair in Union County," said Joseph Goble of Advanced Digital Cable Inc. in Blairsville. "We've seen probably around 140 to 160 people come through. I've seen several applicants that I'm certainly going to be looking at in resumes more than once."

Goble, along with many of the other employers on site that Tuesday, expressed appreciation to North Georgia Technical College for use of their facilities.

Flower show success is sweet

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Haralson Memorial Civic Center smelled unusually sweet over the weekend, as the 2015 Union County Farmers Market Community Flower Show opened to the public after a thorough judging of the floral entries.

Offering a wide variety of flower species growing in the North Georgia Mountains, the show gave patrons the opportunity to admire the hard work and dedication of more than 130 entrants from seven surrounding counties: Union, Towns, Fannin, White and Lumpkin counties, as well as Clay and Cherokee counties of North Carolina.

The show is a collective effort of The Garden Club of Ellijay, the Blairsville Garden Club, the Enotah Garden Club of Young Harris and the Hiawassee Garden Club, with representatives of each making up the Union County Community Flower Show Committee, which is co-chaired by Jo Anne Allen and Barbara Baumgardner.

"Each year, this whole show has grown," said Allen, who retired in June as the Union County president of the Towns-Union Master Gardener Association. "Each year, we have more people from the community putting things in, and even the section of design, we started out with just two different classes, and now we've got five classes."

This year, there were four divisions up for judging, with one non-judged category: Horticulture, Youth, Educational and Design.

Several youth entrants delighted guests of the flower show. In the preschool to age 7 category, Lee Church submitted a killer Rattlesnake Master, Sadie Church a brilliant begonia and Travis Church a lovely cone-flower.

Lily Brown, in the 8-12 age range, entered a veritable field of zinnias, and also in Youth, Emily Rittenhouse won an award for her vibrant Echinacea purpurea.

Jessie Holbrook, in the age 13 to high school arena, won a First Award for entering the Super Parfait Red Peppermint Dianthus as part of Union County 4-H.

"We're most proud of the youth," said Baumgardner. "If we don't get the youth involved, there's not going to be a flower show in the future, because everybody's going to be on their electronic devices."

Submitting flowers to be judged in the show is always free, as is admission for the public, which spanned two days this year, on Friday, Aug. 7, and Saturday, Aug. 8.

"I'm a schoolteacher, so I think this is fabulous that the kids have their own section," said Patty Tegtman of Florida, who has a home in Murphy, NC, and came to the show as part of a fun Saturday afternoon. "Gardening takes patience, and you have to know that you're going to not always be successful, and just keep persevering and working on the soil, finding out which plants like which soil, and how much water. I find it relaxing."

Judging of entries took place Friday, just prior to the doors opening to onlookers, and judges from Union, Towns and Fannin counties all had the proper accreditation to perform their duties to National Garden Club standards.

Awards were given to each entry, ranging from First



to Honorable Mention, and the most exemplary flower or cutting from each category received a special ribbon, with all entries either picked up by entrants or donated for use in hospice care.

The show takes place each year in the civic center due to its climate-controlled environment and amount of open space for exhibiting, but still retains its roots as part of the Union County Farmers Market.

Seven and a half years ago, Market Manager Mickey Cummings contacted Allen to see if she could put on a flower show. She and Baumgardner took up the call, and the show that started in the lower level of the Union County Courthouse

before the Farmers Market was built has blossomed into what it is today.

"We raise all of the money to put it on," said Baumgardner. "And when we go to (Union County Sole Commissioner) Lamar Paris each year and say, may we have the flower show? He says, of course – he is the first one to pull out his personal checkbook and write us the first check."

Many sponsors give to the show each year, both monetarily and with donated items such as food or gifts for guests and judges.

2015 sponsors were: United Community Bank, Allegheny Lodge No. 114, Steve's Steakhouse Cookie Jar Restaurant, Commissioner Paris, Cut Loose Beauty Salon, The Hole in the Wall Restaurant, Litton Landscaping, Sears Hometown Store, Tri-County Office Supply, Cook's Country Kitchen, Bagel Barn and Blimpie Restaurant of Blairsville.

Further sponsors were: North Georgia News, BI-LO Grocery, Smokey Mountain Shopper's Guide, Buds & Butterflies Nursery and Garden Center, Nelson Ace Hardware and Garden Center, Stitches of Joy, Crooked Creek Farm Fox-fire Blends, Berry's Honey Farm, Logan Turnpike Mill, Ingles of Blairsville, as well as David and Kimberly Davenport.