

## SkillsUSA...from Page 1A

competitions after many recent standout performances at the regional level.

Logan Disser earned First Place in the regional Brick and Block Laying match, winning out over 11 other students to advance her to the state level competition. Home Depot of Blairsville has donated 50 bricks for Disser to practice her bricklaying skills ahead of the big state competition.

Woody Gap's 2020 STAR Student Ernest Waldroup, Duncan Lee, Wes Ponder and Savannah Snow comprise the Woody Gap Crime Scene Team for the 2020 state match.

Austin Crocker, who placed third in state last year in Building Maintenance, will again compete at the state level this year, while Levi Ethridge will compete at state in Wood Working.

So, what is SkillsUSA and

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how does it benefit students?

"SkillsUSA is a national nonprofit organization serving teachers, high school and college students who are preparing for careers in trade, technical and skilled service occupations, including health occupations," says SkillsUSAGeorgia.org.

"We provide quality education experiences for students in leadership, teamwork, citizenship and character building. We build and reinforce self-confidence, work attitudes and communications skills."

In other words, SkillsUSA not only helps to prepare students for lucrative, in-demand occupations, the

program also encourages personal responsibility and imparts the ability to excel in those occupations.

For example, in order for a student to compete at the regional level, he or she must submit a resume in addition to having the skills to compete, just like in the real world.

And students must work for the opportunity to compete, just like in the real world.

"SkillsUSA has been a wonderful opportunity for our kids," Woody Gap Principal Carol Knight said. "They're learning job skills that are in demand out there in the world these days—welding, plumbing, cabinetmaking, tiling, just to

name a few.

"And even if they don't end up doing those things for a living, they're good skills for knowing how to do things in life."

The school system's Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Josh Davis said SkillsUSA is a Career Technical Student Organization like any other high school club, but rather than focus on just one career path, it encompasses a broad range of skills.

In additions to the competitions, Davis said there's an employability piece to it as well, not just the hands-on piece.

## Winter Storms...from Page 1A

a.m. and 1 p.m.

The fast-falling snow blanketed roads and caused a rapid deterioration in driving conditions, and unfortunately, many drivers took to the roads that day before the snow started falling, resulting in deputies with the Union County Sheriff's Office having to work accidents all over the county Saturday.

Georgia 515 at Bowling Gap ended up being a particularly troublesome spot for drivers, where deputies had to work traffic for a couple of hours due to the many cars that couldn't make it up the mountain and either ran off the road or got stranded on the incline headed toward Blairsville.

Thanks to plow trucks, some active assistance from deputies using their patrol cars, and tow trucks that arrived on the scene, somewhere close to 20 stuck motorists were eventually freed from ditches, and the roads were made clear enough for traffic to move smoothly again.

Usually, the Sheriff's Office works in five-deputy shifts, though Patrol Capt. Doug Loyd said he had to call in six additional deputies plus himself to work during the snowstorm.

Counting only calls that came in through E-911 Dispatch, deputies worked nearly three dozen accidents/motorist assists that Saturday, and they assisted even more motorists than that as they patrolled the county and helped people they observed on the side of the road.

Again, no major injuries were sustained in Saturday's accidents, and only a couple of drivers required transport via Union General EMS for medical assistance, Loyd said.

The hill up Cleveland Street heading away from the Historic Courthouse also presented challenges for drivers, as many vehicles became stranded in the southbound lane after failing to gain traction in the snow.

Crews with the Union County Road Department and Georgia Department of Transportation made quick work of securing the roads, however, blading snow and spreading salt/gravel mixture to make the roadways drivable.

City of Blairsville workers plowed city streets also, while Blairsville Police checked on motorists, and before long, the main roadways were safe to travel, especially as temperatures rose above freezing as the morning progressed.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC crews stayed busy all through the tail end of last week, restoring several power outages throughout the system caused by rain and snow, with all power outages restored by Saturday afternoon.

"Just a quick reminder that we are available 24/7 to receive notifications of power outages and crews are always on call," EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms said. "Employees work hard here at the EMC, and their hard work and efforts are very much appreciated. Thank you again for your support."

Many local functions were either canceled or rescheduled Saturday—a Daughters of the American Revolution meeting was postponed, as was a Quilts of Valor ceremony and Woody Gap School's annual Homecoming festivities.

Some businesses stayed open, such as Ingles, Foodland and several restaurants, and plenty of residents seemed happy to make a day of it, driving around to see and take pictures of all the freshly fallen snow in Blairsville, though many families stayed in and built snowmen instead.

Even the Atlanta news media came out, with the 11 Alive StormTrackers ThunderTruck filming footage of the rapid accumulation of plump snowflakes for the rest of Georgia to see.

In stark contrast to the cold weather Saturday was a

structure fire in the metal shop building at Byers Well Drilling on Old Blue Ridge Highway near Fairview Church Road.

No one was present at the business when the fire broke out, and a passing motorist spotted the blaze and reported it to 911. Union County Firefighters knocked the fire down before it could spread from the building, though the interior of the shop experienced a lot of damage.

Fire Chief/EMA Director David Dyer said that the fire is being considered an accident

at this time, and they are still working to determine the cause of the blaze.

As EMA director, Dyer made the decision Saturday to open the county's Emergency Operations Center at Fire Station No. 1, and it remained open for a few hours until the storm abated and the situation around the county calmed down.

Much snow melted Saturday afternoon, but not too much, as there was still plenty of crunchy snow remaining Sunday morning.

Some black ice persisted

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## See More Winter Storm Photos on Page 6B

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what's going to happen."

More heavy rainfall is expected this week, and County Manager Larry Garrett said the county will be out checking on streams and ditches to keep them cleared out in advance of potential flood conditions.

All in all, the county was very fortunate to have had a quick snow blow through that resulted in no serious injuries, though much of that fortune came by way of emergency personnel responding in a coordinated countywide effort.



Resident Paige Barrett and her dog Boone went for a snowy morning stroll in Downtown Blairsville on Feb. 8.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard