

North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

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Lindsey hits all the right notes at All-State Chorus

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

For the second year in a row, Michael Lindsey has made the cut for a Georgia Music Educators Association All-State Chorus performance, this time as a freshman under the tutelage of Union County High School Choral Director Alicia Covington.

As an eighth-grade bass singer last year, Lindsey experienced a similar audition process for the privilege to head to the statewide competition in Athens.

Students try out once in the fall and again in spring semester, and this year, as a ninth-grade tenor, Lindsey's journey was no different and just as – if not more – difficult. "His preparation really

began in middle school with Melissa Pilote," Covington said, crediting Lindsey's exceptional performance to his strong work ethic and experience gained during his eighth-grade triumph. "She laid the foundational skills for his success.

"There is a big jump in skills between middle school and high school. He grew exponentially as a musician in his preparation."

Trying out for All-State involves more than just an ability to hit the correct notes while singing. Students must sing a solo in Italian, correctly recite scales, and sight-read three musical exercises in their first audition in October.

If they move on to the second round in January, they must put those skills to the test on specific music to be

performed in the upcoming All-State concert.

For Lindsey, the most difficult aspect of All-State tryouts is sight-reading, which requires a student to read unfamiliar sheet music and perform it back to the instructor.

"I'm just not really the best sight-reader," Lindsey said, revealing that his solo was nigh-perfect compared to his hit-or-miss notation tryout. "It's the jumps for me – the jumps between notes that are not just one note or something, just some really weird interval; I struggle with that, and I'll be completely off."

That said, while Lindsey remembers that he squeaked by in last year's audition, for 2022-23, he achieved 10 points above where he needed to be to earn one of the coveted choral spots.

He, along with 4,999 other students across the state of Georgia, tried out for the chance to go to All-State. Out of those 5,000 hopefuls, only 1,400 were accepted.

"It was a whole lot of preparing," Lindsey recalled, saying that being ready for the concert definitely required practice outside of school as well.

From Feb. 16-18, Lindsey stood among the 155 tenors in the ninth and 10th-grade mixed choir made up of 250 students. The group was directed by Amanda Quist of the University of Miami.

"It was really cool to sing with an experienced choir and an experienced director," Lindsey said, adding that both of his back-to-back All-State



Michael Lindsey posing in front of the fabled three-pillared archway of the University of Georgia during a recent trip to Athens to perform for All-State Chorus. Photo/Facebook

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River City displays student talent for Youth Art Month

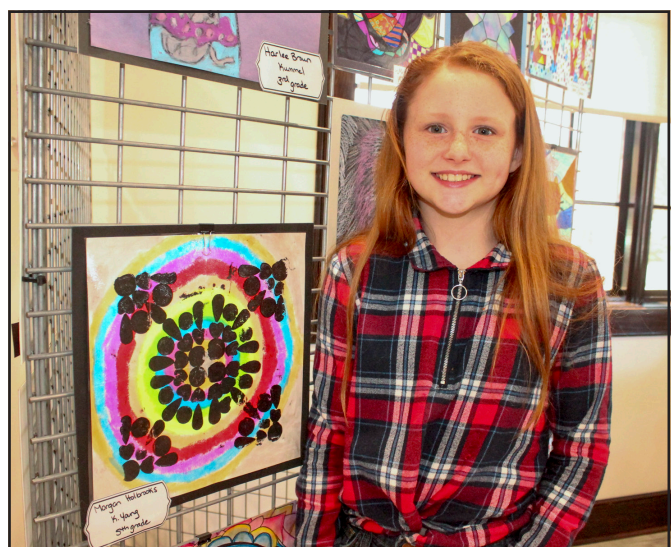
By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Throughout the month of March, River City Bank is celebrating the creative talents of local youths by displaying over 70 pieces of artwork by students in the Union County Primary, Elementary, Middle and High Schools.

The bank held an art reception on Wednesday, March 15, in honor of the children who contributed to the monthlong exhibit, welcoming the students amid a backdrop of their very own paintings, drawings, and even pottery.

With March being Youth Art Month, local Assistant Vice President Katie Mashburn came up with the idea to publicly showcase the students' artistic achievements this month. When River City Bank's Blairsville Market President Scott Nanney heard the idea, he was immediately on board.

In addition to hosting the artwork, River City employees put together something special for Union County's young



Union County Elementary School fifth-grader Morgan Holbrooks is glad to be involved in River City Bank's Youth Art Month showcase of local student talent throughout March. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

artists last week, making decorative snack displays and offering art supplies from local businesses in a raffle.

The prizes, organized by age group, consisted of things as simple as a sketchbook with pencils to a "dot art" set,

where the artist painstakingly decorates an image with a single point of color at a time.

"It was like our grand opening all over again," Nanney said of the reception. "It was like our grand opening,

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Appalachian Shrine Club, God's Club win Showdown

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

If the community thought last year's Super Chef Showdown by Hope House of Union County was a success, 2023 blew the previously-established record out of the

water – or out of the frying pan, as it were.

On March 11, First United Methodist Church of Union County hosted the 11th Super Chef Showdown to benefit Hope House, "a faith-based organization that provides assistance with the

basic necessities of life to Union County residents, transients and homeless population who are in critical need."

And to the delight of many, the 11th installment returned bigger and better than ever. While this year's lineup

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Appalachian Shrine Club won First Place in the Judges' Choice award category during this year's Super Chef Showdown for Hope House. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

DDA recruiting volunteers, talks downtown projects

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Members of the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board of Directors for Visit Downtown Blairsville welcomed more than a dozen members of the local business community in their March meeting.

Prior to the meeting, the DDA put out a call for volunteers to form several committees under the city's Main Street Program, which is a community development initiative that operates through the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

Volunteer candidates who attended the March 7 meeting will potentially be helping the city and DDA by staffing committees focused on the four tenets of the "Better Hometown" endeavor for downtown improvement: Economic Development, Promotion, Design and Organization.

"The mission of our Better Hometown revitalization effort is to help the City of



Blairsville DDA Board Members Robert Rogers and Megan Kimsey in their March 7 monthly meeting inside City Hall. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Blairsville fulfill its potential by using our combined talents and resources to create opportunity and prosperity fitting the special character, heritage and historic preservation of this mountain community," according to program literature.

Committee work will take place in regularly scheduled meetings, said DDA Board Chair Megan Kimsey,

and overlap between the committees is expected with various levels of commitment throughout the year.

"Our work is very feast or famine," said DDA Executive Director Darren Harper. "So, there may be a period of time where we just don't have a lot of need for volunteers. And then there are going to be other

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Historical Society seeking extra audio system funds

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

With the help of community donations, the Union County Historical Society recently installed a new speaker system in the Historic Courthouse in Downtown Blairsville. This comes after the old system began to break down after 20 years of reliable service.

"Sometimes it worked well, sometimes it didn't," Historical Society President Mickey Cummings said.

The updated technology will enhance musical performances, lecture presentations and more in the courthouse. And the system is completely wireless and widely compatible with different types of hardware, making it possible to begin preserving audio records for posterity.

Forexample, if somebody comes into the courthouse and wants to hear a particular lecture or concert from the past, "we can archive those through those recordings and people can listen to them."

"Along with that, we had

to update some things on the Bell Tower," Cummings said.

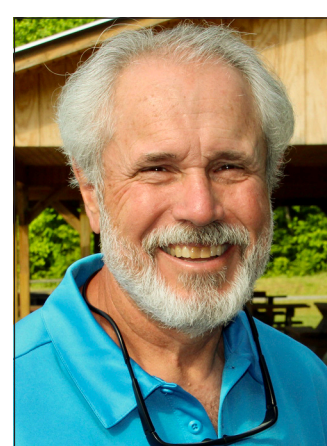
The Bell Tower's old microphone setup has begun to fizzle out, making it hard to hear outdoor speakers at big public events. Cummings remembers as recently as the Christmas Parade of '22 that onlookers could hear the speakers on one side of the courthouse lawn but not the other.

"As a result, we went through a fundraising deal, and we still need a couple of thousand dollars," Cummings said.

In total, the two new audio systems come to a price tag of about \$17,000, and the Historical Society currently lacks about \$2,500 to finish the job.

"We need a little bit more money to cover our expenses," Cummings said. "We're nearly there, and we've been praying for stuff, but we need a little bit more money to pay for the rest of it."

"Once we get finished, not only will the entire system amplify what we're trying to highlight, whether it's music or someone speaking about a



Mickey Cummings, Historical Society President

topic, but we'll also be able to record it. "And then we'll also be able to make announcements during festivals to the outside or during a parade that's going on. You'll be able to play music through it so that people can hear it on the outside. It's just exactly what we needed."

Residents who would like to contribute can make checks payable to the Union County Historical Society at the Old Courthouse. For answers

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Youth Art Month...from Page 1A

but for kids.”

And Nanney was right; the turnout was incredible. The student artists had come out to see their hard work on display, bringing proud parents, grandparents, siblings, and even aunts, uncles, cousins and friends from school.

The collection of artworks was as thought-provoking as it was well-received, and fifth-grader Morgan Holbrooks was happy to share the meaning behind her contribution to the exhibit and what art means to her.

“I decided to go with this pattern because it looked like a flower petal in my imagination,” Holbrooks said, pointing to a blooming kaleidoscope of color featuring 12 heart-shaped silhouettes for petals.

“Art is like an opinion,”

she added. “It’s unique (to every person) in their own way. You can make it how you want it; you can display it how you want it; and you can always retry and retry and get better at it.”

Several kids won special gifts in the raffle or received a \$2 bill in recognition of their unique talents, but there was no official prize for the “best art,” as all were worthy of praise that day.

Nanney believes all art is good art, and educators like Middle School Art Teacher Katie Davis agree. Principals, too, want their creative students to flourish in art-positive environments, and Primary School Principal Deborah Decubellis attended to show her support as well.

The art show and reception will be returning next year, as Nanney said River City will be making it a local tradition – especially considering how well the community has received the artwork that might have been limited in reach to refrigerators and classrooms if not for the reception.

“I can’t tell you how many times we’ve had customers come in, and they won’t go make a deposit right away,” Nanney said. “They’ll go and look at the artwork and spend time circling around before making their deposit and leaving. Otherwise, they wouldn’t get to enjoy it.”

Ultimately, Nanney hopes that the students continue to hone their craft and, as they grow up, put their skills and efforts toward preserving



River City Bank Assistant Vice President Katie Mashburn received enthusiastic support for her idea to host student artwork inside the bank for Youth Art Month.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Blairsville as a place that celebrates and fosters local youth achievement.

“We want you to stay here in Blairsville,” Nanney said to the students. “We want you to grow and open up businesses ... and spread your God-given talent.”

River City would like to thank all the businesses that contributed raffle prizes: Abide Coffee, Blairsville Printing, Book Bound Bookstore, Cabin Coffee, From Me 2 U, Home Depot, Keen Creations and Co., Lasso the Moon Alpaca Farm and Studio, Mountain Lakes Toy Store, Mountain Made Gift Baskets, The Art Department

Studio, The Farmhouse Co., Visit Downtown Blairsville, Walmart, and, of course, all the folks from River City who paid for gifts, too.

In addition to River City’s showcase of the arts, check out the upcoming Kiwanis Club’s Art & Music Showcase, “featuring the best young artists and musicians from Union County, GA.”

Set to kick off at 3 p.m. on March 25 at the Historic Courthouse, there’s still a need for interested local musicians. To schedule a performance, send an email to BlairsvilleKiwanis@gmail.com.

Historical Society...from Page 1A

to questions, Cummings recommends people shoot the society an email to history1@windstream.net.

And coming up on Friday, March 24, at noon inside the Old Courthouse, the Historical Society will be holding a special celebration for longtime contributor Sam Ensley, focusing on how he has touched lives across the county

and beyond.

Ensley is a former educator and member of the Historical Society, and he started the beloved local tradition of Friday night concerts in the old courtroom upstairs in the Historic Courthouse.

“He’s just been a tremendous asset to Union County over the years, and we want people to recognize

his contributions to the county and to the Historical Society, so we’re having what we call ‘Sam Ensley Day,’” Cummings said.

“Everybody’s invited,” he added. “We’ll have two or three speakers that talk about what he’s done for the county, and then we’re going to have some cake and punch downstairs.”

Downtown Projects...from Page 1A

times where we need all hands on deck, typically involving the festivals.”

In addition to serving their community, as downtown business owners and employees, those who ultimately sign up as committee volunteers have skin in the game, so their commitment is likely to make a strong impact in directing growth toward a more profitable downtown sector.

Committee work for upcoming festivals will begin next month for the Spring Downtown Market set for Saturday, April 15, and will continue throughout the year through numerous festivals and other public events until the annual Christmas Parade.

Also in the meeting, Harper offered some updates on Visit Downtown Blairsville projects taking place near the square to advance the infrastructure and aesthetic needs of the downtown area.

The public restrooms to be located behind Hole in the Wall Restaurant are well on their way to completion, with the block structure already in place. Barring supply chain issues, Harper said he expects the restrooms will be ready for use before the Spring Arts, Crafts & Musical Festival over Memorial Day Weekend.

Several flower beds around downtown have been getting refreshed recently, as the DDA decided it was time to update the botanical look of the city.

Also getting a refresh will be the Christmas program, as the DDA will be planting a brand-new Christmas tree on the Old Courthouse lawn so that the annual tree lighting will utilize an actual Christmas tree instead of the giant holly bush that’s been used for years.

“The beauty of that is, it



Progress is ongoing for the new public restrooms in Downtown Blairville, pictured here on Thursday, March 16.

Photo by Darren Harper

takes less lights, it’ll be easier to decorate, and it’s just prettier at that angle and all that good stuff,” Harper said.

The greenspace behind City Hall is still a work in progress. The DDA is working with art students from Union County Schools for a four seasons mural project on an adjacent wall, plus an upcoming flower bed installation by the Rotary Club of Union County.

Chamber President Steve Rowe attended the meeting, and he said development of the Level 3 electrical vehicle charging station, which will be able to charge two vehicles at once in the parking lot behind City Hall, is progressing toward a hopeful Spring 2023 completion timeline.

A Level 3 station is the fastest EV charger on the market and will augment Blairsville’s other charger, a Level 2 station at the Union

County Community Center. The Level 3 station will be the first in the region and is designed to be expanded to meet future demand.

The project is being undertaken in partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority, Visit Downtown Blairsville, City of Blairsville and the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, with assistance by the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

It will be primarily funded via a \$250,000 TVA grant, with a 20% matching portion of \$50,000 to come from chamber funds to potentially include hotel-motel tax dollars plus money raised by local businesses, Rowe said.

For more information on upcoming events, check out <https://www.visitdowntownblairville.com/> and <https://www.visitblairvillega.com/>.

2023-2024 Pre-K & Kindergarten Registration

Open February 13th To March 31st, 2023

Pre-K and Kindergarten School Registration for the 2023-2024 school year:

Monday-Friday, February 13th to March 31st, 2023 from 8:30 AM - 2:00 PM at the Union County Primary School. Pre-K seats are filled on a first come first serve basis.

Please call 706-835-4321 or email registrar@ucschools.org to set up a registration appointment.

If your child turns four (4) years old for Pre-K or five (5) years old for Kindergarten on or before September 1, 2023, and you are a Union County resi-

dent, your child qualifies for our Pre-K or Kindergarten program. When registering, bring these items with you to complete the child’s registration process.

NOTE- Students who are currently enrolled in the Union County Schools Pre-K program at Union County Primary School will NOT need to register for Kindergarten.

Below is a list of 6 (six) required documentation for new enrollment

1. Birth Certificate; 2. Social Security Card; 3. Georgia Immunization Certificate (DPH Form 3231); 4. Certificate of

Registration, Hearing, Dental, and Nutrition Screening (DPH Form 3300), (Completed by the health department or a physician); 5. Two Proofs of Residency documents with physical address and name (Examples include: rental agreement, utility bill, homeowner’s or renter’s insurance bill, property tax notice, mortgage payment document, etc); 6. Complete the online registration forms at this link: <https://www.ucschools.org/parents/student-registration>

Failure to supply all the required documents will delay your registration.

All-State Chorus...from Page 1A



UChS freshman Michael Lindsey sang with the best of the best last month as part of an elite All-State Chorus performance. Photo/Facebook

accomplishments were "epic," but 2023's journey stood out.

"Something just felt more special this year. I don't know – I think it was a little more advanced," he said, laughing as he retold the story of how other performers assumed he was a sophomore by his skill level. "I don't really look that different from most sophomores. I blend in."

And now with two musical marvels under his belt, Lindsey has been thinking more about what his future might look like. He considers comedy his main forte and still shoots for the most humorous stars, but really going above and beyond in chorus has given him other ideas.

"If I had the opportunity to sing professionally, I would take that in a second," he said. "I mean, I still think I would have done that before (making) All-State, but after

this recent experience and just realizing how cool it is to sing with such a good choir, I think I would love to do it for a job.

"If I could go to a school that was all about that, I'd love to do that," continued Lindsey, although he noted that he does not have a specific college in mind yet.

Still, he hesitates at the idea of combining his twin passions of humor and music.

"A lot of people will sing funny songs, but I don't know – to me, I prefer to just play covers. I play piano, and whenever I'm singing, I prefer to sing something that's already written," said Lindsey, who has no intentions of becoming the next Bo Burnham or "Weird Al" Yankovic.

In the meantime, he'll continue to enjoy his high school journey, sticking with Covington for chorus and

performing with the Union County High School Jazz Band.

Covington in particular means a lot to him, and he credits his success not just to Mrs. Pilote of UCMS, but to her as well.

"I'm just really thankful she helped me out; I definitely couldn't do it without her," Lindsey said. "It's nice to have somebody that, at the drop of the hat, if I have a music question, I can just ask. For Mrs. Covington, it's been awesome. She's a really good teacher."

And the feeling of appreciation is mutual.

"I am extremely proud of Michael and his achievements and blessed to have him as a student," Covington said. "He is a well-rounded musician in talent and skills. I look forward to seeing where he goes in life."

Super Chef Showdown...from Page 1A



After placing third in last year's People's Choice award category, God's Club took home top honors in the 2023 Super Chef Showdown. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

of 16 competing chefs was one shy of last year's 17, there was a face-painting table set up by Taylor Schuknecht enjoyed by kids and adults alike.

More than a few event staff walked around the massive dining room with butterflies and smiley faces painted on their cheeks, stopping briefly to speak with one of three celebrity judges.

James "BBQ" Grubbs, local barbecue aficionado and former competitor on Netflix's "The American Barbecue Showdown," returned to judge 2023's dishes with as much gustatory gusto as last year.

"This is a big fundraiser for a good cause. I'm honored to be part of it," Grubbs said, believing that "every community needs people like (Hope House)," adding that "there's no better way to meet new friends and people than over a plate of good food."

Helping Grubbs was owner of the beloved five-star Cuban eatery Nani's Restaurant, Marife Arrazcaeta, along with Jim's Smokin' Que owner Zachary Edmonds. Before the public sampled each dish, the judges took the time to eat first, deciding on their choice in advance.

And there was a lot to choose from. Upon entrance, guests had the opportunity to take a tray to fill up with whatever they desired, and most folks took a bit of everything. Like the judges, they picked favorites once they were done.

Going from right to left, the singular room dedicated to the event had the chefs form a circle with tables set out in the center.

First off was Redemption Point with their keto chicken chili, and beside them was VFW Post 7394 with smoked barbecue. God's Club, who proved popular last year for their strawberry cupcakes, returned in 2023 with special

Almond Joy cupcakes.

The First Baptist Church Celebration Choir offered baked ziti, and supporters from the community had shrimp tacos. Clayton Reeves of Full Throttle Ministries served BBQ baked beans, and the FUMC's very own First Kids/First Youth handed out chili until it ran out.

Melaleuca Wellness Company had Italian lentil soup, complete with crusty bread for dipping. Similarly, New Union Baptist Church served up smoked chipotle chicken salad with bread.

Summit Media Group LLC was a big hit with their Oreo Nutella pie bars, and the Full Bellies Foundation, Inc. lived up to its name with a popular shepherd's pie.

The Appalachian Shrine Club's Korean beef and slaw tacos were a tasty treat, and the Blairsville Police Department returned this year with chili and oyster crackers. Union General Rehab participated by bringing another dessert in the form of Heath Bar Delight.

Then there was Turpin's Towing with their own BBQ recipe, and last but not least, All Saints Lutheran Church served beef brisket sandwiches on slider buns. Of course, there were also finger foods like tuna salad sandwiches from Ingles and the ever-popular hot dog with all the fixings.

With all of those options, it was a difficult feat to choose just one, which is why several guests supported multiple chefs. "Voting" was achieved by donating money into the pots set up at each group's table.

For years now, the Showdown has served as Hope House's biggest fundraiser. What started as a small conglomeration of multi-denominational churches seeking to help the community turned into a refuge in the form of a nonprofit for anyone needing an extra hand.

That help may come in the form of paying a light bill, providing transportation, offering a place to go in times of disaster or abuse, or ministering the Word of God to souls asking questions about salvation.

And thanks to that Saturday's feast, the future of Blairsville's Hope House looks brighter than ever. When all was said and done, guests had helped the organization raise \$12,648 through voting for their favorite dishes, taking part in the silent auction and simply buying tickets.

As lunchtime began to wind down, the winning results were announced. The Judge's Choice Award saw Union General Hospital's Rehab Center in Third Place with their rich, chocolatey Heath Bar Delight.

In Second Place was the Reeves family at Full Throttle Ministries for their flavorful BBQ baked beans.

Taking home First Place was the Appalachian Shrine Club with its specialty Korean tacos.

As for the People's Choice Award, New Union Baptist Church took home Third Place with their chipotle chicken salad, raising a total of \$375 in their donation jar.

In Second Place was the First United Methodist Church with their chili that drew in \$567.

Finally, in the coveted spot of First Place was God's Club with their Almond Joy cupcakes, winning with donations topping out at \$873. Last year, God's Club won First Place for Judges' Choice and Third Place for People's Choice.

Be sure to mark those calendars for March 9, 2024, to be ready for next year's Super Chef Showdown. To donate, sign up as a participant, or to find help for oneself or a loved one, visit <https://hopehouse-unioncounty.com/>.