

North Georgia News

3 Sections 26 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, June 5, 2024

Graduates walk tall in Mountain Ed ceremony

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Thirty Class of 2024 seniors walked across the stage of the Union County Fine Arts Center on Tuesday, May 28, to receive their hard-earned diplomas from Mountain Education High School.

It was a fitting number, considering 2024 marks the 30th year of service for the school's Union Campus.

Congratulations to the graduates, who hail from the following counties:

Union County: Natalie Barba, Emmy Berdux, Kolby Chastain, Anniston Dyer, Krissy Garrett, Kyle Harwood, Wyatt Holland, Braden Kinderknecht, Carl Lance, Kai Mobley, Jason Savage, Kyrene Smeltzer, Elijah Waldroup and Sarah Waters.

Towns County: Dani

Beaver, William Coffey, Colton Czarnecke, Darian Durham, Destiny Eskew, Bentley Floyd, Keana Gonzalez Nieves, Indigo Hull-Hatchett, Journey Hurley, Cayleigh Kenner, Brent Lynch, Erin Page, Derick Parker, Chloe Phillips and Zoe Woody.

And Fannin County: Nathan Locklear.

The 30 students have bright futures ahead of them, with 12 graduates planning to attend college, 10 bound for technical college or trade school, four going straight into the workforce, two entering the armed forces, and two not yet decided on what their next steps will be.

"Today, we come together to celebrate not only the accomplishments of these graduates, but the 30-year journey of our school," said Principal Brandon Bradburn, See *Mountain Ed Grads*, Page 6A



Mountain Education High School graduates celebrated their academic achievement last week by throwing their green caps into the air. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Scottish Festival & Highland Games to return June 8-9

By Hannah Mitchell
Guest Contributor

The Scots arrive this weekend, June 8th and June 9th, for the annual Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games.

For years now, the Scots have gathered at Meeks Park on Highway 515 in Blairsville, an area that so resembles the rolling mountains and hills of Scotland that many Scottish settlers decided to call the North Georgia Mountains home in colonial times.

During the festival, Highland dancers, Highland Games athletes, family clans, bagpipers, drummers, and traditional musicians come to celebrate their heritage that is so deeply connected to the region.

Even if you don't know your family's lineage or have little or no Scottish ties, you're invited to come experience Scotland without the need of a passport or international flight across the ocean.

Admission is \$20 on Saturday and \$10 on Sunday, with children 12 and under free. There's also a combined rate of \$25 for both days. Parking is free, and shuttles will be available to take guests from parking areas to ticket gates.

Meeks Park hosts all the events beginning at 9 a.m. on both days. The opening ceremony with the Massed Bands and Parade of Tartans will occur at noon on Saturday, with an officially sanctioned Pipes & Drums

competition set for 2 p.m. on June 8.

Many demonstrators will be at the Highland Games, with their skills on full display. From sheep-herding dogs to fierce birds of prey and Highland cattle; from a bowyer who makes longbows to a sturdy blacksmith in the forge; from dancing exhibitions to multiple music concert areas, there is sure to be something to excite everyone in the family!

Eighty-five athletes who train year-round will be tossing the caber and putting the stone beginning at 9 a.m. both Saturday and Sunday. Men and women come to earn points to rise to the top!

Forty-one clans will be waiting for you to bring your See *Scottish Festival*, Page 2A



Always a popular attraction, the pipe and drum players of the Massed Bands will once again take to Meeks Park for a dramatic musical display at the Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games this weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2023

Union County 4-H Savannah Team shooters win State Title



The state-winning team from Union County 4-H was Ricky Maier, Kade Dills, Joshua Davis and Alex Henson. Photo/Submitted

News Special

The Union County 4-H Trap, Skeet, and Sporting Clays Shotgun Team, also known as the Savannah Team, won First Place at the State Match held in Savannah, Georgia, over the Memorial Day Weekend.

More than 37 teams and 236 youth competed in Savannah for an opportunity to represent Georgia at the National 4-H Title in Grand Island, Nebraska, in late June.

Union County had two Senior Teams, two individual Senior shooters and a Junior individual compete. Senior Team 1 finished in First place,

and Team 2 finished among the Top 20 teams.

"I'm extremely proud of our teams," Head Coach Gene Margelli said. "We must travel from Blairsville to Gainesville twice a month to practice at Cherokee Gun Club, which is the closest facility that meets all our practice needs. Many teams practice two to three times a week."

"For us to finish first in the State Match is a true achievement."

Shooters began practicing last year in September, shooting 50 rounds of Trap, 50 rounds of Skeet and 50 rounds of

Sporting Clays every other weekend at the Cherokee Gun Club.

The First Place winning team, Union Team 1 shooters, included Joshua Davis, Kade Dills, Alex Henson and Ricky Maier. Team 2 shooters included Jack Hyatt, Olivia Temples and Will Henson.

Three other shooters shot as individuals with high scores. Both JaKob Duke and Phillip Jones shot in the Senior Division. Hannah Maier shot in the Junior Division.

Special thanks to coaches Gene Margelli, Shannon See *4-H State Title*, Page 3A

Council nixes alcohol district, advances water rate increase

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

The idea to run a 90-day trial for a Downtown Entertainment District to allow people to openly carry small containers of alcohol within a 0.07-square-mile radius of the Blairsville Square has been scrapped.

In an April called meeting, the Blairsville City Council voted 3-1 in favor of running a limited trial for the district. Councilman Tony Dyer voted no, and while Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook could not be present to vote, she, too, was against the measure.

City Hall scheduled a public hearing on the subject



Blairsville City Council Members Tony Dyer and Mary Ruth Cook have been against the now-scrapped Downtown Entertainment District trial since it was initially proposed. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

for the May 14 regular city meeting, but after behind-the-scenes deliberations based largely on feedback from

members of the community, the city decided to cancel the hearing and remove the trial See *City Council*, Page 2A

Farmers Market welcomes 5,000 guests to season opener

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Farmers Market got back to business on June 1, keeping alive the annual tradition of opening the market for a new five-month season on the first Saturday in June.

Starting bright and early at 8 a.m. and wrapping up around 1 p.m., the Union County Recreation Department estimated that around 5,000 people attended the 2024 debut to shop for fresh produce, flowers, crafts and plenty of other goodies.

Five hundred of those guests enjoyed free hamburgers as part of Georgia Beef Day, a See *Farmers Market*, Page 12A



The season opening day for the Farmers Market featured free hamburgers for all with the educational Georgia Beef Day event. Photo by Lowell Nicholson



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Scottish Festival...from Page 1A

family names to find your lineage and tie you to land of the Scots, with genealogical assistance also available from the Scottish Tartans Museum and Heritage Center.

The Honored Clan this year is Clan Donnachaidh, the members of which will take a special spotlight highlighting their heritage and showcasing their longstanding involvement in the Scottish Festival.

Returning in 2024 is Clann Nan Con, a dedicated group of historical re-enactors who will be recreating what life was like for traditional Scots hundreds of years ago.

Wee lads and lassies are encouraged to attend as well! Special activities for the children include the "Passport to the Clans" activity, where children visit clan tents and learn about each family's history. Once their Passport is full, they can return to the Children's Area to select a prize!

There is also face-painting, mini-golf, a coloring station, and a bouncy-castle – all activities included in admission. Adventurous kids

can also try out some of the Highland Games events, scaled down to child-size.

An exciting new experience this year is a visit from a "real" Scottish princess: Merida from the Pixar film "Brave," provided by Enchanted Events. She will be greeting children from 1-3 p.m. on both days of the festival.

As you're planning your family trip, please remember that children in the Children's Area are required to be supervised by a family member at all times. Unaccompanied children will be given an Irn-Bru soda and a caber to toss!

For our most wee of wee bairns – and for the comfort of their mothers – also available in the Children's Area is a "Quiet Tent" with a changing table. This comfortable spot is ideal for parents with infants if any privacy is needed for nursing, napping or diapering.

What is a festival without shopping? Many favorite vendors with traditional Scottish wares, clothing, and food are returning, plus new merchants who are making

their first trek to the Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games.

Delicious Scottish food, like vegetarian haggis, Scotch eggs and sausage rolls, will be for sale, as will jewelry, sporrans, kilts, T-shirts, traditional musical instruments, home decor, and many more Scottish items.

Come join in the fun at the Blairsville Scottish Festival and Highland Games! There are still volunteer positions available for Sunday in three-hour shifts. Volunteers receive free admission to the festival and a cool T-shirt!

Heed the call of the pipes and the drums, grab your kilt, come to Meeks Park on June 8th and 9th, and try being Scottish for a day! The festival will take place rain or shine, though severe weather may alter the schedule for the weekend.

Find out more at <https://blairsvillescottishfestival.com>, and follow the Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games on Facebook and on Instagram @BlairsvilleHighlandGames.

City Council...from Page 1A

ordinance from consideration.

The district proposal not only received negative reactions from the public – including a letter campaign from local preachers – but it was also not fully supported by the council itself. And with no strong support, the council decided it was not worth pursuing such a divisive initiative.

In the May 14 regular meeting, the council held a first reading of an ordinance to increase water rates by 14%, with a second reading and enactment expected in next week's city meeting on June 11.

According to the city, a recent financial analysis by the city's engineer found that revenues from current water rates could not cover the expense of water treatment and distribution, hence the increase.

This will be the first water rate increase in more than 12 years, which, according to the engineer's analysis, "will result in the average residential water bill (increasing) approximately \$2 per month," per City Hall. The new rates will be in effect starting with July water bills.

In other news, the council approved a resolution authorizing Mayor Jim Conley and City Clerk Kaye McCann to execute a second revision to the Georgia Department of Transportation Utility Aid contract for the Highway 515 Water & Sewer Line Relocation Project.

This project involves the state's widening of Georgia

515 between Blairsville and Young Harris, with city water/sewer lines running through the designation construction area. Unfortunately, construction costs have risen precipitously since project estimates were originally proposed.

"The last estimate provided by GDOT showed the pre-let estimate to be \$4,837,035," according to City Hall. "An updated cost estimate was provided to GDOT by the city's engineer which now shows the pre-let estimate to be \$5,503,625."

GDOT Utility Aid will cover \$2.9 million in project costs, while the city will be coming up with \$2.6 million to finish the job.

Also in the meeting, City Clerk Kaye McCann reported that a developer had approached the city about building a multifamily dwelling on Shoe Factory Road and Cook Street.

The potential development would be outside the city but within 1,000 feet of a multifamily dwelling within city limits, contra to requirements in both the county and city development ordinances.

That evening, the developer was seeking a distance requirement waiver from the City Council, and council members agreed that they had no interest in granting one.

Mayor Conley detailed a request by a local business to implement a crosswalk at Blue Ridge Street and Earnest Street

to allow employees who must park across the road to walk to work more safely.

Council members voted not to approve a new crosswalk there, saying that they do not believe the low level of foot traffic near that intersection warrants such an installation.

Separately, Councilwoman Rhonda Mahan recommended updating signage in the city to bring more attention to the crosswalks that already exist.

The council also approved Zach Edmonds as a new director on the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Board, and following an executive session, decided to increase DDA Director Kristen Bentley's work schedule from 32 hours per week to 40 hours per week.

Additionally, council members voted to implement an Airport Advisory Board recommendation for a refundable "Waiting List Fee" of \$250 for people hoping to secure a hangar in the Blairsville Municipal Airport.

The fee would help to ensure that only serious hangar candidates are signing up for the list, which has grown quite long in recent years. This fee comes as the city works to incorporate GDOT's newly published "Aircraft Hangar Best Practices" into its leasing procedures.

Mayor Conley and the City Council meet the second Tuesday of each month starting at 6 p.m. in City Hall, located at 62 Blue Ridge Street.

Union County American Cancer Society to host Cancer Survivor event June 29



American Cancer Society Relay For Life Volunteers Leadership Team are going into the 37th year of spreading Hope. Sue Upchurch, long-time volunteer here in Union County, along with ACS volunteers being led by Wendy Holden another long time supporter of the fight to end all cancers have announced a luncheon event to be held at the Union County Methodist Church Fellowship Hall on Saturday, June 29th.

The American Cancer Society continues to be the largest volunteer health organization that continues to lessen the burden of cancer in our local communities. The grassroots fighters of all cancers supports that mission by educating, advocating for care and research and offering patient services.

While the not so long ago Covid crisis has lead to many adjustments in our lives these volunteers, caregivers, medical researchers have continued the fight in both large and small communities.

"Our Relay For Life and our Daffodils Flower of Hope and our patient programs like Road to Recovery and Hope Lodges around the world have adapted to their communities in ways that may look different but still focus on lessening the burdens of cancer. Even the very useful and popular Hotline and Websites are easier to use on a 24/7/365 round the clock accessibility," stated Allyson McGraw, another long time educator and fighter for American Cancer Society



efforts here in our mountain areas of Northeast Georgia.

Invitations to cancer survivors of all ages especially are being placed around the Union, Towns, and Fannin Counties.

Volunteer Wendy Holden will be taking the RSVP calls prior to June 14th deadline. Seating is limited at the Union County Methodist Church and of course the volunteers want to plan properly for the food services in June 29th. So check out the invitation ad posted in this edition for directions on getting signed up.

This event on June 29th will focus on HOPE. There will be entertainment and inspiration and support from former Relay For Life teams as we honor survivors from the day they heard...you have cancer... to those who are thriving and living beyond the 5 year goal.

"Research and education have lead to many more survivors - those who fought childhood cancers and are now parents raising their children and enjoying their careers as well as many who are retired and enjoying life in our beautiful mountains and lakes, added Mrs. McGraw.

If you need additional information about the June 29th luncheon contact Wendy Holden at 706-781-4166. The best source of information on cancer is the hotline at 1-800-ACS-2345 or www.cancer.org.

"The American Cancer Society is still spreading Hope especially to people whose lives have been touched by the burdens of cancer as well as the other struggles of life," added Mrs. McGraw.

Over the years local businesses and individuals and civic / youth groups have donated so that our community can continue to be tops in educating, promoting screenings, advocating for better care options and supporting researchers who developed outstanding and successful drugs, surgeries and methods that truly lessen the burdens in our homes, workplaces, and schools.

Our Relay For Life teams want to say a very big thank you as we continue these projects.

Volunteers like Wendy Holden, Ashley Holland, Barbara Richardson, Kathy George, Fran Edwards, Evelyn Fair, Glenda Taylor have been stepping up to continue this fight against all cancers.

If you are interested in helping the Relay For Life volunteers spread Hope, please contact Wendy Holden at 706-781-4166 or at snickers13@windstream.net to place your reservation before June 14th for the June 29th luncheon.

4-H State Title...from Page 1A



Congratulations to all the members of the Union County 4-H Savannah Team, who made a tremendous showing of shooting skill over Memorial Day Weekend. Photo/Submitted

Savannah Shotgun Booster Club
@Shotgun-Booster-Club

venmo

Use this QR Code to support the fundraising efforts of the Union County 4-H Shotgun Team students.

Rankin, Stan Lunsford and Aaron Dills for their dedication to preparing the team for this year's competition. Parents, family members and coaches are very proud of the students' accomplishments.

Georgia 4-H funds registration costs for the National Competition in Grand Island, Nebraska; however, travel and hotel expenses are left for the team to cover. Over the next few weeks, team members will be seeking donations to help pay for these

costs. Union County 4-H is a nonprofit organization, and donations are tax deductible. Please consider donating to the team members when they present a donation letter.

The Georgia 4-H Shooting Awareness, Fun and Education Program (S.A.F.E.) is sponsored by The Georgia 4-H Foundation. 4-H is the Youth Development Program of the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

For more information about this or any other 4-H activity, call the Union County Extension Office at 706-439-6030.

Second Annual Georgia State Fiddlers Convention Returns to Fine Arts Center



We are excited to announce that the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention will return to the Union County Fine Arts Center in Blairsville, GA June 15. Admission is \$5.

The event will begin with registration at 8 AM and competition starting at 9 AM. There is no entry fee for con-

testants. In addition to junior and senior fiddler, other categories include banjo, mandolin, flat picking guitar, finger style guitar, old time banjo, bluegrass band, dulcimer, dobro, 12 and under beginning fiddle, and 12 and under beginner musician other than fiddle. Over \$7,000 in prize money will be awarded. We expect many participants from around the southeastern region and the competition to be exciting and entertaining! In addition to the music competition there will also be crafts, silent auction, and food vendors.

The event's purpose is to showcase musical talent and

preserve the rich cultural heritage of the region while providing economic benefit to the community. As a tax exempt 501c3 the event is dependent on sponsorships for prize money and operating expenses. If you would like to make a tax deductible contribution it can be mailed to Georgia State Fiddlers Convention P.O. Box 370 Hiwassee, GA 30546. If you are interested in volunteering email Georgiafiddlersconvention@gmail.com.

For additional information including rules and judges as well as advance contestant registration visit: <https://georgiastatefiddlersconvention.org>.

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Mountain Ed Grads...from Page 1A

adding that Mountain Education has persevered over the years thanks to an emphasis on “inclusivity and empathy.”

“This sense of unity and purpose has helped us overcome even the toughest of obstacles,” Bradburn said. “Graduates, as you move on to the next chapter of your lives, we know you will carry this spirit of resilience and community with you.”

Rather than naming a valedictorian, Mountain Education has a High Honor Graduate who serves as the head of the class, indicated by the ceremonial “cromach” he or she carries as the first in procession.

The cromach, a staff traditionally carried by Scottish chieftains, was used to clear obstacles, could serve as an offensive or defensive weapon, and stood as sturdy support on rough terrain.

In the case of the High Honor Graduate serving as the “leader” of his or her class, the cromach symbolizes the ability to overcome challenges and handle whatever obstacles may arise.

Further, just as ancient cromachs were decorated to depict accomplishments and conquered territories, so too are Mountain Education’s cromachs adorned with award medallions.

Gonzalez Nieves earned the title of Campus High Honor Graduate for the Class of 2024. While at Mountain Education, she decided to dual-enroll at North Georgia Technical College to pursue a cosmetology degree.

After graduation, she will go on to become a student at NGTC with later plans to earn a degree in fashion design. Gonzalez Nieves believes her family played a huge role in helping her be as successful as she is today, and she thanked them for believing in her and cheering her on.

Her choice to attend Mountain Education was fueled



Mountain Education High School’s High Honor Graduate Keana Gonzalez Nieves receiving her diploma from Principal Brandon Bradburn during the May 28 commencement exercises.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

by her desire to complete high school at her own pace, and she is thankful that she was able to find “the right fit.”

And many students find that right fit, as Mountain Education strives always “to provide a second-chance opportunity to students across North Georgia to earn an accredited High School Diploma in a student-centered, self-paced, evening public high school.”

Anniston Dyer, an Honor Graduate, performed the ceremony’s greeting. Dyer started out by including a special thanks for those who supported her and the entire class along the way, including family, friends and teachers – but especially her Mamaw and Papaw.

“Each one of us has traveled a different path to get here, but with one destination in mind. For me, a lot of hardships and setbacks got in the way of my ideal high school experience,” said Dyer, revealing that at one time, concerns about her education

were superseded by concerns over money for groceries or power.

“I thought I had lost my opportunity, but then I heard about Mountain Education – my saving grace,” Dyer said. “(Mountain Education) offered me and thousands of others a second chance, and for that, I am so grateful.”

As is graduation tradition, students and their family along with staff met up at the Union County High School cafeteria for a shared dinner of tacos and photo opportunities with all sorts of silly props, demonstrating once more, before they go their separate ways, that bonds of friendship and community mean the world.

Scholarships for Class of 2024 graduates were varied and came from 12 different sources, including colleges and local organizations and businesses. Six students earned the title of Honor Graduates.

Congratulations, Class of 2024! Go forth to conquer the world and achieve your dreams.



MEC graduates signaled the start of new journeys in their lives with the “Turning of the Tassels” tradition in the Fine Arts Center last week.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Friendly pet reminder from the Humane Society Mountain Shelter



As these summer days grow hotter and hotter, we at your local Mountain Shelter would like to remind you, please, do not take your dogs with you on your errands this summer and leave them in the car—not even for “just a minute.”

If you can’t take your dogs inside with you every single place you’re going, please leave them home. Yes, we know your dogs love to ride with you—but the risk to them of being in a car, even with the windows “cracked,” even for just a little while, are

immense.

Parked cars are death-traps for dogs: on a 78-degree day, the temperature inside a parked car can soar to between 100 and 120 degrees in just minutes, and on a 90-degree day, the interior can reach as high as 160 degrees in less than 10 minutes. Despite your good intentions, partially open windows will decrease that amount by fewer than 5 degrees.

Remember, dogs can cool themselves only by panting and by sweating through their paw pads. Your animal can suffer brain damage or even die from heatstroke in less than 15 minutes. Please leave him or her home!

If you do see a dog in a parked car on a hot, sunny

day, you can request help in locating the owner from the management of the business you’re visiting. If that doesn’t work, call 911. Give them a clear description of the vehicle and where it is. We recommend waiting by the car until the police arrive. In our experience, that doesn’t take long. Then let the police take it from there.

The best solution, though, is for all of us to remember that no matter how much we enjoy our pets’ company and they ours, in the summer time they should be left at home and not in a hot car, even with the windows cracked, even for a few minutes. Don’t risk your dog’s life. Please leave your pets at home!

Farmers Market...from Page 1A



The Union County Farmers Market is truly a family-friendly destination, with something to appeal to every member of the family, young and old alike. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

public education event courtesy of local cattle farmers hosted in the new Special Event area of the Farmers Market next to the Canning Plant.

Georgia Beef Day was conducted by the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District and sponsored by the Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource and Conservation Development Council, Brasstown Beef, Nelson Tractor and Osborn Farms.

Frank Riley, Executive Director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council, helped hand out fun items for kids like plastic fire hats, stationery and activity books, but more than that, he gave out information about some of the things his organization does.

Young and old alike took the opportunity to pose for photos with Smokey Bear, who stood beside Riley's tent for the day. The RC&D serves as a liaison for Georgia Firewise, the state level of a national group dedicated to managing wildfires with safety best practices.

Riley's role that day was to educate, and while that usually means teaching homeowners how to mitigate potential fire damage to their homes, there's a time for everything – including controlled burns.

"Nature has burned for years," Riley said, casting fire in a different light. As a force of nature, fire clears forests and removes leaf detritus to make way for fresh growth that is nutritious to wildlife, and fire professionals conduct controlled burns to further the process.

At 11 a.m. in the pavilion just down the way from Riley's tent, U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia's 9th Congressional District made an appearance to raise public awareness of some of the political issues that the state's agriculturists face.

"I believe in competition, but I believe in fair competition, too," Clyde said. "I'm working with my colleagues up in Congress to fight for the programs and resources that support our farmers and ranchers."

That includes pushing for fair labels that properly mark meat imitation products, ensuring farmers receive the workforce support they need, and working toward a safe food supply in the ongoing fight

against avian influenza.

"I've never met a farmer that's looking for a handout, but there are times when farmers need a hand up, and that's exactly what I think we need to be doing in Congress," Clyde said.

Meanwhile, Tom and Pat Gray were experiencing a rush of good business. Tom, an avid woodworker for a "couple" years, decided to start selling his craft at the Farmers Market last October and is excited about his first full season.

"Finally, when the guest bed got so covered in them, I said, 'We've got to sell these,'" said Pat with a chuckle.

"These are unique, handmade with love. Hardwoods, basically," explained Tom, motioning to the variety of coasters, checkerboards, lazy Susan turntables and other pieces of practical art crafted using wood from all around the world, from ash to purpleheart.

Ben and Nieata Telenko were enjoying a day out with friends Pam Cato and Amy Gilleland, along with Gilleland's granddaughter, Emma. It was just one of many times they'd visited the Farmers Market, which has become a yearly tradition for the group.

"Today's real fun because we're getting free stuff," Nieata Telenko said, alluding to the Beef Day burgers, and Emma was proud to show off the bag she picked up from the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D.

"I like spending time with my family," Emma said, simply glad to be among loved ones.

Karly Worley, by contrast, was visiting the Farmers Market for just the second time and was thrilled with the wide variety of new products available for purchase.

"We got Karmen an apron that she can help cook with; it's handcrafted," she said, referencing her shy daughter who was content to cuddle beagle puppy Ruger.

"Definitely come out and support your local businesses," added Worley, sending a message to the rest of her community. "They're here working hard every day so that they can spread their joy to everybody."

To check out Tom Gray's Woodcraft, child-sized aprons, fresh produce and more, stop

by the Union County Farmers Market located at 290 Farmers Market Way in Blairsville, open on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. and on Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.