

North Georgia News

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Property owners protest revaluation in county meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris was met by a crowd of unhappy constituents in his July 15 regular meeting, as many of the roughly 250 people in attendance vocally expressed dissatisfaction with the property assessment notices that hit mailboxes earlier this month.

In anticipation of the crowd, the Commissioner's Office had moved the meeting from the main courtroom of the Union County Courthouse to the large Jury Assembly Room downstairs.

And still, there was not enough room, with people filling the approximately 100 chairs, sitting in the floor,

standing against the walls and listening from the hallways in the meeting that lasted more than two and a half hours due primarily to questions from the public.

Tensions flared multiple times as the commissioner struggled to maintain order, cautioning people against speaking out of turn and disrupting the meeting by threatening ejection via law enforcement if attendees could not follow etiquette and be respectful in the proceedings.

It was a regularly scheduled county meeting with much of the usual sort of business appearing on the agenda, though the occasion reflected highly unusual circumstances for a county meeting, with so many people there to express concerns about

a single topic.

Much discussion among property owners has taken place online and in local public spaces since the annual property assessment notices were mailed July 1, this year featuring a countywide revaluation of all taxable real property, the majority of which is residential.

It was the first mass revaluation since 2006 and had been ongoing for more than two years prior to wrapping earlier this summer. The process became necessary after the state said local assessed values in the county digest had gotten too far out of line relative to the housing market.

Unfortunately, the revaluation has taken place at a time when the market is

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The general mood in last week's county meeting was a combination of anger and confusion over recent revaluations and what they mean for 2021 property tax bills. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Cummings inducted into NACAA Hall of Fame 2021

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Congratulations to Mickey Cummings, who has been inducted into the National Association of County Agricultural Agents Hall of Fame Class of 2021. He is one of four retired ag agents to be inducted nationwide this year.

"The NACAA Hall of Fame Award was established in 2006," per NACAA.com, "to recognize NACAA members for demonstrated commitment, dedication and effective leadership in job performance as an outstanding educator, association involvement at the state and national level, and outstanding humanitarian service."

Currently the longstanding manager of the Union County Farmers Market, Cummings led a stellar career spanning well over 30 years as a University



Hall of Famer Mickey Cummings standing among the latest crop of 4-H giant pumpkins at the Union County Farmers Market. Photo by Mark Smith

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Veterans Room rededicated inside Blairsville Restaurant

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Veterans Room featuring hundreds of photos of local veterans adorning the walls inside the Blairsville Restaurant - Grits & Greens

was rededicated in an early morning ceremony on Tuesday, July 13, with about 35 people attending.

Brainchild of the late Phil Nichols, the Veterans Room began about five years ago after Phil and his wife Jean returned from a hunting trip.

As they were traveling through Illinois, they happened to stop into a small-town restaurant.

"They had their guys that had left to (military) service from that town, from that county," Jean said. "And that got (Phil) thinking that

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Darlene Thompson, Janice Walters-Taylor and Tom Arline attended the Veterans Room rededication at the Blairsville Restaurant last week. Photo by Mark Smith

Home & Garden Show offers 'one-stop shop' for improvement

By Chad Stack
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS - After missing last year due to the pandemic, industry leader Expo Management Inc. will return with its Seventh Annual Northeast Georgia and Western North Carolina Home & Garden Show this weekend.

The home improvement expo will run Saturday, July 24, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, July 25, from 12-5 p.m. at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park in Young Harris. Admission and parking are free.

Expo Management President Bill Anderson is thrilled to be returning to North Georgia, saying that the Home & Garden Show will have safety measures in place for guests concerned about COVID-19.

Masks will be provided for anyone wanting to wear one, and there will be social distancing



The Home & Garden Show returns to Foster Park this weekend, with free attendance and parking for all. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

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Gunter, Paris address chamber in Eggs & Issues Breakfast

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce hosted District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris at its Eggs &

Issues Breakfast event inside the Community Center July 14.

Union General Hospital sponsored the breakfast, which was attended by about 100 community and business leaders, including Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley, Tax Commissioner Lee

Knight, Hospital CEO Kevin Bierschenk, and Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs.

Also in attendance was Field Representative Andrea Wiggins of U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock's office.

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Chamber President Steve Rowe welcomed Rep. Stan Gunter and Commissioner Lamar Paris to the Eggs & Issues Breakfast July 14 to discuss what's going on in local and state government. Photo by Mark Smith

Artisan, craft festival welcomes thousands of guests in 2021

By Allison Youngblood
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Saturday, July 17, brought a beautiful and busy opening day of the annual Butternut Creek Festival hosted by High Country Artisans, Inc.

Organizers of the two-day festival had hoped for close-to-normal attendance a year from the onset of COVID-19, and the throngs of attendees did not disappoint.

Tents lined the shaded walkway in the bottom of



Festival guests Lori Mae, 3, and Rowan, 2, shared an Icee at the annual Butternut Creek Festival July 17. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

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Motorcycle crash on GA 515 sends married couple to hospital

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

A serious motor vehicle accident at the intersection of Georgia 515 and Murphy Highway resulted in a husband and wife being transported to separate hospitals on July 15.

First responders were dispatched to the scene shortly after 2 p.m. that Thursday, according to Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Shawn

Dyer.

When Dyer arrived, a couple of off-duty firefighters, who had been nearby when the accident occurred, were busy administering chest compressions to the husband, who sustained life-threatening injuries, Dyer said.

Operating a three-wheel motorcycle, the couple from out of town had been traveling west on 515 when the crash happened. A truck that had been

heading east on 515 turned left in front of the motorcycle at the traffic light to go up Murphy Highway, causing a collision, Dyer said.

The husband suffered more severe injuries than his wife and had to be airlifted from the scene to Northeast Georgia Medical Center, and she was transported via ambulance to Union General Hospital, Dyer said. The driver of the truck was

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Property Owners...from Page 1A

trending sky high amid people fleeing cities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the incredible demand being absorbed by way of steep increases in home prices.

Coupled with the fact that many properties were undervalued prior to revaluation, this process has caused dramatic increases in home values, which will be paired with a new millage rate later in the year to determine property tax bills many residents are afraid will double or more

in 2021.

Another major concern broached by multiple guests was the county's status as a retirement community, with several comments about local seniors on fixed incomes being unable to afford major property tax increases resulting from revaluation.

Paris said that property tax bills would not be doubling or tripling, which he clarified in his "Commissioner's Questions" from this week's North Georgia News editorial

page.

"The average property tax increase should be under 10%," Paris wrote. "Of course, there will be some exceptions. For example, if the value of my home went up \$100,000, I may see a slightly larger tax increase, but still many others will see no tax increase at all."

The final property tax digest will not be locked in until the Tax Assessor's Office has finalized all appeals of re-assessed values, a process

that has roughly three weeks remaining should property owners wish to take advantage of it.

Once the commissioner has both a finalized digest and a tentative budget, he will know how many tax dollars he needs to raise to keep public services like the Sheriff's Office, Fire Department and more running, at which point he will set a new millage rate.

In terms of the millage rate, Paris said he anticipates his office will be lowering the rate in 2021 due to the increased tax digest following revaluation, though many in attendance remained skeptical, especially after the 17% increase in the county's portion of property taxes last year.

Confusing the matter has been the format of assessment notices mailed earlier this month. The notices are issued by the Tax Assessor's Office, but the state mandates that the notices contain very specific information that may give the impression of notices looking like tax bills.

Many outspoken residents did not understand why the notices showed an estimated tax total that the commissioner was saying would not actually be appearing on their tax bills once his office figures up a tentative county budget and sets the annual millage rate in a couple months.

Basically, the state requires that property assessment notices go out each year containing the current value of the property alongside the previous year's millage rate to establish an estimate of what people can expect their bills to be when it comes time to pay property taxes.

But the countywide revaluation of all taxable real property has set the stage for a significantly larger digest, and conversely, a lower millage rate to finance the yearly county budget that funds all public safety as well as operations for other elected officials' offices, roadway and more.

To explain some of these issues, Paris welcomed Stan King to the meeting. King serves as the CEO of Appraisal Services for Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions & Services, the third-party vendor the county hired to conduct the revaluations starting in 2019.

Paris said choosing to do a mass revaluation instead of hiring a dedicated local staff to constantly update values was a tax-saving measure, helping the county to avoid costly salary, benefit and equipment-related annual expenses.

King explained that the state had determined that many officially assessed values had fallen behind actual values compared to an ever-changing housing market, which has experienced unidirectional volatility since revaluation began two years ago, especially over the last year.

Several commenters lamented a seriously inflated housing market, which they felt translated to reassessed values also being inflated compared to actual values. King said a market correction is inevitable but that most assessments were right based on current fair market values.

Continuing, King said it was actually the individual property owner's job to update his or her property values every year by filing a property tax return, and that if not completed, the Tax Assessor's Office simply uses the property value from the previous year's assessment data.

Each year, property owners have between Jan. 1 and April 1 to file property tax returns to help establish their values, King said. Additionally, people have 45 days from the mailing of their annual property assessment notices to appeal the values recorded in the Tax Assessor's Office.

Fielding a question about how neighboring homes are assessed, King said all homes are assessed based on square footage using a mass appraisal program that factors in various adjustments, including age of a home, amount of heated space, number of bedrooms, etc.

Many attendees had questions about their individual properties, and King asked that they visit the Tax Assessor's Office inside the Union County Courthouse, noting that property owners still had several weeks in which to contest their values by filing an appeal.

He said the employees in the Tax Assessor's Office were ready and willing to work with everyone who has an issue, both to explain how values are decided and to correct potential errors made on any of the more than 22,500 revaluated parcels in the county.

King made a key point about the role of the Tax Assessor's Office, which is to ensure every property owner being taxed by the county and



Stan King of GMASS explaining the ins and outs of the revaluation effort, which took two years to complete and resulted in a countywide reassessment of all taxable real property.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

school district is paying his or her fair share of taxes based on market values from Jan. 1 of each tax year.

That makes the assessment process a two-way street of responsibility in terms of seeing to it that proper values are established and maintained, with said values being best decided by property owners and the Tax Assessor's Office working together to settle on a number, King said.

Appeals can be made by calling the Tax Assessor's Office at 706-439-6011, or by going into the office located at 65 Courthouse Street, Suite 4, in Blairsville.

People may also fill out the online appeal form at <http://dor.georgia.gov/documents/property-tax-appeal-assessment-form>. This form must be printed and delivered to the Tax Assessor's Office. After the 45-day appeal process passes, the right to file an appeal for this year will be lost.

Anyone who would like to see the breakdown of values for their land, house and accessory buildings can look online at <https://www.qpublic.net/ga/union/>. At the site, click the "Search Records" tab at the top.

In other business, Paris welcomed retired police officer and veteran Kevin Bloodworth, a resident who had asked prior to the meeting for the chance to address the commissioner that evening.

Bloodworth started by admonishing Paris for threatening to eject people using deputies, and he respectfully suggested that Paris do a better job communicating with the public as well as planning to keep from overburdening taxpayers, especially those on fixed incomes.

For his part, Paris thanked Bloodworth for his comments and said he welcomed the same from other constituents, adding that people wishing to speak in future county meetings simply need to contact his office in advance to be added to the agenda.

Impact fees on new development and a citizen planning committee were ideas pitched by several attendees, and as he has in the past, Paris verbally committed to looking into both those options and more to determine ways of offsetting tax dollars needed to accommodate growth.

Paris then took the floor himself to discuss his vision for the county and the process by which he arrives at the county budget that then requires him to set a millage rate to raise tax dollars to cover county services.

Wreck...from Page 1A

not injured.

The intersection was shut down briefly following the accident to allow the Georgia State Patrol to survey the scene using a drone, and traffic resumed but remained backed up for a while as first

responders worked to finish investigating and clearing the wreck.

Georgia State Patrol said on Friday that the husband was still in the hospital with a last known condition of "stable."

UC Emergency Management Agency to test Emergency Notification System



Union County Emergency Management Agency (UCEMA) will be conducting a county-wide test of Union County's Emergency Notification System, CodeRED, on August 4, 2021, at 2 p.m.

This alert is being conducted to test our emergency notification system. We will perform this test twice a year going forward. During this test, you may receive a text message, email, and/or a phone call with a recorded message stating that is the test of our notification.

If you would like to register to receive emer-

gency notifications and weather alerts for Union County, you can do so at www.unioncountygga.gov/CodeRed. If you do not receive the message on August 4th, you are not registered in the system.

If you need assistance registering, you may call the Union County EMA office at 706-439-6091.

Please visit www.unioncountygga.gov/CodeRed for additional information and frequently asked questions regarding Union County's Emergency Notification System, CodeRed.

Cummings...from Page 1A

of Georgia County Extension Agent.

The Chickamauga native got into the ag field in part because of a story his grandfather told him about how the first extension agent in his county had helped him quadruple his crop and convert his farm from a basic subsistence farm to a modern agricultural concern in a single year.

Cummings' roots in extension work go back to his first appointment in Wilkes County circa 1982, even before he graduated from UGA with a degree in agronomy.

After posts in two other Georgia counties and several promotions over an eight-year period, Cummings and his wife Lauren moved in 1990 to Blairsville, where he took over the responsibilities of the Union County Extension Office.

As county agent, he helped farmers and others do exactly what his grandfather had outlined in the story from his youth, and he later took on managerial duties at the Farmers Market in its infancy, when it was just a simple setup in the courthouse parking lot.

He raised his boys Will and Wade here, now 35 and 32 respectively, and helped to educate countless farmers, gardeners and kids of the county before retiring as an ag agent in 2015, at which point he transitioned to working exclusively at the Farmers Market.

Cummings received letters of support for his Hall of Fame induction from Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture Gary W. Black; Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris; and Georgia Association

of County Agricultural Agents President Gary L. Hawkins, Ph.D.

Between 1993 and 1997, Cummings served as Secretary, Vice President, President-Elect and President of the Georgia Association of County Agricultural Agents, and between 2001 and 2006, he served as Secretary, Vice President, President-Elect and President of the NACAA.

The retired ag agent also went on to win election to the Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation Board of Directors in 2015, and that's just a smattering of Cummings' many accomplishments throughout his career.

"I really appreciate the award, it shows a lot of hard work," Cummings said. "But none of it would have happened without having a lot of good people that supported me over the years and a lot of good people that I was able to work

with. "So, those people really made it all possible. I can't say enough about them, and I can't say enough about my wife and my sons. And then, I thank God every day for placing me in a job where I could be involved with farmers and with organizations like NACAA and GACAA.

"I never dreamt when I was growing up that I would ever be able to do and see the things I was able to see because of my job. I never was anything special in school. I had a 'B' average. I never was anything special anywhere.

"But this job put me in places where I could be around people that really wanted to succeed, and I had to work hard to keep up with those people."

In addition to the above, Cummings remains heavily involved with 4-H students and their giant pumpkin projects, runs the Canning Plant at the

Farmers Market, regularly hikes these mountains and others, and writes a weekly column for the North Georgia News titled "Around the Farm."



Mickey Cummings has led the Farmers Market since its inception, providing the community with opportunities to celebrate local agriculture for more than 10 years. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Home & Garden...from Page 1A

and hand sanitizing stations throughout the event, Anderson said.

"We have been doing Home & Garden Shows throughout the year, and we have not had any issues whatsoever," Anderson said. "We weren't able to do the show last year because of COVID, so we are excited about this year's show.

"We will be safe, and I hope that the public will feel safe, because this year's show is going to be a great one."

As far as what people can expect, the two days of shows will feature some of the newest products and services in home improvement, along with furnishings, accessories, decorations and remodeling ideas.

From floor to roof and patio to pool, both inside and outside the home, including with

landscaping and more, these Home & Garden Show will have it all.

"This is just a big, big popular event for anyone who needs anything in their home," Anderson said. "Whether it's inside the house, outside the house, on the roof, in the backyard, in the front yard, and everywhere in between."

With so many high-tech homes being built today, Anderson said people can look forward to some of the best accessories and ideas for remodeling, or they can simply ask questions about upgrades to make homes more modern.

In celebrating the seventh time coming to the North Georgia area, the Home & Garden Show will house a seemingly endless display of garden landscapes, water features, home products

and more at Foster Park this weekend.

Additionally, the show will feature several local businesses to help educate, inform, demonstrate and explain their products ranging from flooring, decorations, roofing, gardening and more.

"It's a one-stop shop," Anderson said. "They can find just about anything and everything they need for their home."

"And with the recent pandemic making more people spend time and money inside their homes, people may want to make it as nice and comfortable and livable (as possible), and that's another reason they should come to the show."

The show is free for the public to attend and will be welcoming vendors selling food and drinks to guests both days.

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Veterans Room...from Page 1A

he wanted to do that here. So, he talked to the guys (at the roundtable here in Blairsville), and they were all for it.”

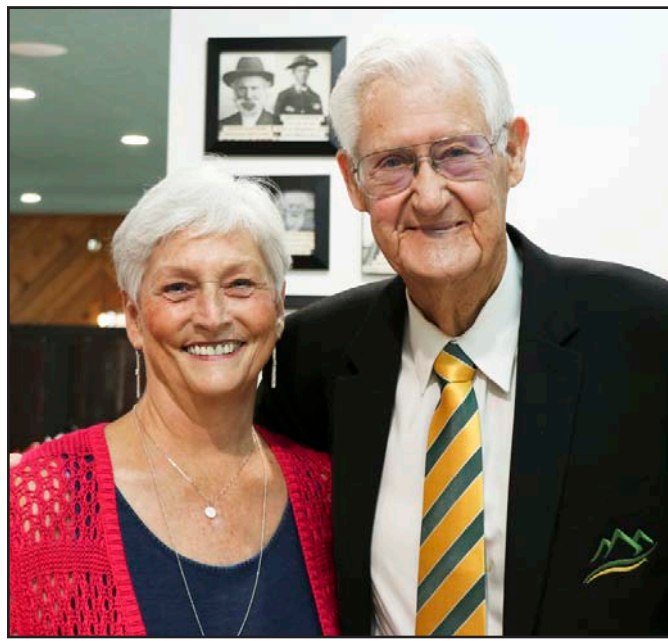
Nichols, a native of Union County and a U.S. Army veteran who served in Vietnam, intended that it be a room dedicated to veterans who were residents of Blairsville when they went into military service.

“It’s just for the Union County people that were born and raised and lived here all their lives and went to service,” Jean said.

She credits friend Patsy Phillips with greatly assisting the effort, saying Phillips collected most of the veteran pictures for framing at the former incarnation of the Blairsville Restaurant.

As the restaurant came under new ownership in 2020, a major renovation took place lasting into 2021, and all the pictures had to be taken down.

Janice Walters-Taylor was contacted by local veterans



Jean Nichols and Wade Smith were honored to have attended the Veterans Room rededication on July 13. Photo by Mark Smith

Tom Arline, Roy Hamby, Charles Turner and Jim McAfee in early 2021 and recruited to head up a revitalization effort of the Veterans Room.

Walters-Taylor was president of the American Legion Auxiliary at the time. She is now an Outreach Coordinator for Valor Clinic, a nonprofit that specializes in helping veterans on the home front.

“I think it was one of the biggest honors of my life to have the joy of touching each and every one of those (veterans), reading their names, reading what war they were in, what rank they got to be, whether they were an MP or a paratrooper or Airborne or whatever,” Walters-Taylor said.

Continuing, she said all the pictures have been digitized and trimmed, duplicates have been removed, and all new frames have been acquired. There is a section of those killed in action, and another of Purple Heart recipients.

The benefactors of the

project have allowed for extra space and extra picture frames so new veterans may be added to the well over 300 existing names and pictures, she said, adding that the Veterans Room also features rolling digital pictures on a flat-screen TV.

Walters-Taylor said plans are in place to include pictures of graduating high school seniors that have committed to military service.

“Folks that come from Union County are the best, most dedicated, most patriotic folks and the best soldiers you’ll ever find anywhere,” said retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Wade Smith, a Vietnam Veteran, area native and founder of the Mountain Education Center.

“I spent 29 years in there, and anytime I could find somebody from this area, I wanted them in my unit,” Smith said of his military service.

For more information on the Veterans Room or to request a veteran’s name and picture be added, contact Janice Walters-Taylor at valorclinicgeorgia@gmail.com or 706-400-9048.



Anyone with information as to the identity of this veteran is asked to reach out to Janice Walters-Taylor, whose contact information is contained in the article.

Butternut Festival...from Page 1A



At the Butternut Creek Festival Saturday, Commissioner Lamar Paris announced the American Legion winning raffle ticket for the 100% American-made Henry Golden Boy .22LR and 500 rounds of ammunition. Photo by Allison Youngblood

Meeks Park, and hundreds of people at a time – thousands over the weekend – perused the dozens of vendors and chatted with artists, buying a variety of offerings at the festival, from yard décor to stained-glass artworks.

Mary Palmer of Ellijay operated her popular “Lost Souls of Salem” booth for her second time attending the festival. Selling her handmade dolls and artwork at a juried event such as the Butternut Creek Festival is what Palmer prefers.

“People that come here know that they’re going to get handmade, original items, not something you can find at Hobby Lobby,” Palmer said, adding that the juried aspect ensures vendors and customers alike that there is a high standard for products being displayed.

Running the “Art by Heather New” tent, New, from Dover, Florida, felt that the festival in Meeks Park differed from other area art festivals because of its family-oriented experience in a relaxing setting.

New sold her stained-glass art for the third year at the festival, but she has attended for many years, as her family visited Blairsville yearly during her childhood. To her, the festival has always allowed artists to connect with one another and bring joy with their different arts.

Sandy Goss and Paula Syzdek, friends from Murphy, North Carolina, found out about the Butternut Creek Festival a few years ago. This was their third year in attendance, and they look forward to coming every year.

“There’s a friendship feeling about it that other large craft festivals just don’t have,” Syzdek said, and Goss agreed that even the other guests at the festival were especially friendly.

The all-volunteer non-

profit High Country Artisans consist of a dedicated group of local artists that started the festival more than two decades ago.

These artists felt moved to create their own event after attending other festivals and finding them lacking in several important departments, such as overall organization, artist treatment, atmosphere and entertainment.

Reflecting the high standards of the founding artisans, the Butternut Creek Festival is extremely well-organized, from tent set-up to the volunteers directing parking. Vendors are treated fairly, and the event is somewhat exclusive due to limited space and registry applications.

The variety of the offerings at the festival was something to behold. Decorations for every reason and season, handmade fine furniture, unique pottery and

wood-turned projects appeared alongside lunch foods and sweet treats in the center of the activity.

American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121 conducted the drawing to raffle a Henry Golden Boy Rifle at noon on the stage where Zach Haines performed a live set of country music.

The winner of the rifle was Rick Mahoney, announced by Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris. The rifle raffle fundraiser supported the American Legion’s scholarship program.

For other entertainment, Mal McEwen, aka “The Mal Hatter,” demonstrated his chainsaw carving skills – always a thrilling show that McEwen says “is the only job in the world that combines the speed and sound of motocross with the skill and accuracy of a brain surgeon.”



Many thousands of visitors flocked to Meeks Park Saturday and Sunday for the return of the Butternut Creek Festival in 2021. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Eggs & Issues...from Page 1A

Commissioner Paris started things off by highlighting the silver lining of the pandemic, that business in Union County in the first part of 2021 had been going strong.

"It's been a tough time, but luckily, business has just seemed to boom during this time," Paris said.

Regarding the recent countywide property revaluations, Paris said to those gathered, "Do not panic." He went on to explain that the state requires such countywide revaluations in counties where market values skyrocket above assessed values.

And, as property owners are well aware, real property market values have exploded upwards recently, which is a good thing. The downside is that, eventually, property assessments must be adjusted upward by state mandate.

Paris said that over 22,000 properties were revalued in Union County under the recent revaluation and that, because the revaluations were based solely on outside exterior observations and no walk-throughs, there would probably be mistakes.

"If there are mistakes with your property, don't panic," Paris said. "Simply go over to the Tax Assessor's Office – you've got (several more weeks) – and most of it they can fix if you've got a small problem.

"If you've got a big problem and you're not happy with (the valuation), you can always appeal your value," he said. "This (revaluation) was not done at all to impact the amount of property taxes we're going to collect."

Paris said it would be at least another six weeks before the county budget is set, at which time he will know how much money in property taxes he needs to fund county government and its attendant services for the public.

Only then will he be able to set the millage rate, and once the School District does the same, tax bills can be mailed, and people will finally know how much their taxes may have gone up in 2021. However, Paris anticipates being able to lower the millage rate with the tax digest increasing.

"This year, the mill rate is going to be much lower," he said. "We don't know what it is yet because we haven't set our budget. But we know it's going to be lower."

Shifting gears, Paris said he has been working with several county departments and the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission for about a year to revamp guidelines on how Union County will work alongside

much needed multi-family housing developments.

He said the moratorium on apartment construction has expired, but while it was in effect, the guidelines for developers were made much stricter, the idea being to avoid overwhelming growth in Union County.

Rep. Gunter began his presentation with a discussion of House Bill 81, the Fiscal Year 2022 state budget. With a revenue estimate of \$27.2 billion, the 2022 Budget embraces a \$1.34 billion increase, or 5.2%, over FY21.

Gunter said over 90% of the FY22 budget will be spent on education and in health and human services, and that the General Assembly supports the governor's recommendation to restore 60% of reductions made to K-12 education funding in the FY21 budget.

Moving along, Gunter said the Georgia Election Integrity Act of 2021 was currently experiencing an uncertain fate.

"I thought we passed a fair bill, but it's in the hands of the courts now, and they're going to tell us whether we hit the mark or missed it," he said.

Gunter then touched on several recently passed pieces of legislation, including House Bill 94 – Theft by Possession of Stolen Mail – which recognizes, importantly, the concept of "porch piracy" by making it a felony to remove mail from the front/back entrance or steps of a home.

"It gave us a (felony) crime for stealing people's mail besides theft by taking," he said, adding that porch piracy was treated the same as a burglary, as if a thief had entered a dwelling.

House Bill 479, said Gunter, has overhauled the citizen's arrest laws in Georgia, which had been on the books since 1863. Of note were new rules concerning law enforcement officers making arrests outside their jurisdiction.

"Under our current law, outside of that statute, you still have the right to detain somebody that has harmed another individual, in defense of your home or in defense of others," Gunter said.

House Bill 593, the Tax Relief Act of 2021, increased the single-taxpayer deduction from \$4,600 to \$5,400; the married-taxpayer deduction from \$3,000 to \$3,550; and the married couple filing jointly from \$6,000 to \$7,100.

Gunter said he has concerns about House Bill 617, which allows college athletes to be compensated for

the use of their name, image or likeness.

"It may keep college athletes in school longer rather than jumping to the NFL," he said. "They may play their whole four years. But when you've got a lot of money floating around like that, everything gets political like the MLB moving the All-Star Game.

"You get into that kind of stuff, and I think it could make those kinds of changes. That's the worry that I have, because you're talking millions of dollars ... in endorsements."

Gunter covered several other important House and Senate Bills, both passed and pending legislation, all of which can be found at www.legis.ga.gov.

The event was catered by the Community Center under the direction of Director of Events Matt Leonard.

Hannah Von Hoff makes Dean's List



Hannah Von Hoff

Hannah Von Hoff, a native of Union County and graduate of Union County High School made the Dean's List for the Spring 2021 Semester at University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her studies include triple major in Food Agribusiness with a Concentration in Law and Policy, a minor in Political Science, Psychology and Business Media.

Miss Georgia Mountain Fair 2021 Pageant

The Georgia Mountain Fair is looking for young ladies 17-24 to participate in the 2021 Miss GMF Pageant. The Pageant will be held Monday, August 16. Entry forms and Pageant rules are available on the Georgia Mountain Fair website. (georgiamountainfairgrounds.com) Deadline to enter is August 11.

Great experience and cash prizes!

Reece Farm presents weekend music featuring Curtis & Kim Jones and The Wilderness Pickers

Reece Farm presents Curtis & Kim Jones, Mtn. Gypsy Music! Two hours of music to enjoy in the outdoors on Friday, July 23, 2021, 1 - 3 p.m.

Curtis Jones reins as the most highly-respected flatpicking guitarist on the planet, expanding on the legacy forged by musicians such as John Coltrane, David Gilmour, Doc Watson and Tony Rice. Jones is often called by fans and critics alike, "The world's fastest and cleanest" acoustic guitarist, an extraordinary technique that he both teaches and brings to his contemporary guitar performances and productions. Speed is only a small part of what Curtis can do though. He efficiently plays 22 instruments and is self taught on all! Through his pure guitar mastery, he has created a new style of Music - "Mountain Gypsy Music" allowing his abilities to weave in and out of Bluegrass, Jazz, Rock, Flamenco, and World Music. It is more original than anything that has been heard since Django Reinhardt!

Kim Jones is an artist, singer, and song-writer. Her vocal influences growing up were Wynonna Judd, Patty Loveless, Janice Joplin, Bobbie Gentry, and Bonnie Raitt, and Stevie Nicks. Her Musical influences include Jaco Pastorius, Richard Wright, Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, and McCoy Tyner. She sings and plays upright Bass with Curtis' Bluegrass band- Primal Roots, performs with Curtis in their Mountain Gypsy Music duo. Kim has been singing her whole life but has only just begun to perform in front of Audiences within the past few years. Kim plays and sings with emotion and delta blues style soul. When asked about her goals through music, her response is "I Just want to share it. It's in here, deep down inside, and I wan-



Curtis & Kim Jones Mountain Gypsy Music at Reece Heritage Farm in Blairsville, GA July 23, 1 pm-3 pm



Wilderness Pickers July 24, 1 pm- 3 pm

na let it out"!

Reece Heritage Farm presents The Wilderness Pickers! Two hours of original & cover songs, with a nine-member band! July 24th, 2021 from 1 p.m. until 3 p.m.

Reece Heritage Farm presents live The Wilderness Pickers, a 9-member band playing original and cover country music! They will be playing at the pavilion. Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy music!

Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer and

his books are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him & his family with exhibits, farm animals, local books and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park.

Open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. with free admission.

Bring your lawn chairs! Free admission! Donations welcome. Reece Farm is located at 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville GA; FB: Reece Heritage Farm, www.reecefarm.org