

# 'Memory Lane' museum to display classic cars for charity

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
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YOUNG HARRIS – After giving rise to the motel industry, the suburbs, the interstate highway system and other pillars of 20th-century America, the classic automobile will now bolster Towns County's economy and local tourism in 2020 and beyond.

Last week, local philanthropists Jerry and June Smith brought three truckloads of classic cars to Towns County High School to give the community a preview of things to come.

And later this month, the Smiths will launch the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum, located next door to Fieldstone Cinemas Six at the former site of Fun World.

The museum will house approximately 100 classic

cars, hot rods, motorcycles and more, with galleries alternating weekly from among the Smiths' growing collection of more than 160 automobiles.

Available in the museum are actor Burt Reynolds' 1978 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am from the movie "Hooper," with the hood and dash autographed by Reynolds himself; former NASCAR driver Richard Petty's 1969 Ford Torino; and many other classic cars.

According to Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, the museum will provide a much-needed nitro boost to local tourism following the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that has already claimed the Blairsville Scottish Festival, the Georgia Mountain Fair and other community mainstays.

"This is going to have a tremendous impact on tourism

and the entire area, but most importantly, we're gaining two very valuable friends," Bradshaw said. "(Jerry and June Smith) are wonderful people that want to give back to the community."

"They could have chosen to live wherever they want and however they want, and they chose Towns County."

Originally from Stone Mountain, Jerry Smith comes to Towns County by way of Eatonton, where he operated another auto museum in the Lake Oconee region.

Following a short break from the vintage car business, Jerry acknowledged that he could no longer ignore his two life callings: classic cars and compassion. When the museum opens to the public, all proceeds will benefit local charities, he said.

"Admission will be \$5, with 12-and-under free," he said. "And 100 percent of the proceeds will go to charities in Towns and Union Counties."

"There are some things that are very important to me, things like veterans' groups, the Humane Society, Future Farmers of America, and on and on. We'll also sell shirts, mugs, souvenirs, and we'll hold a few car shows each year, with everything going to charity."

As for how Smith ended up in Towns County, due to health concerns stemming from breathing issues, he chose cool, low-humidity mountain breezes over the central Georgia heat.



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and others, including representatives of the Sheriff's Office, Chamber of Commerce and Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, welcomed Jerry and June Smith to their new "Memory Lane Classic Car Museum" in Young Harris last week.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



The museum will house approximately 100 classic cars, hot rods, motorcycles and more.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

And ever since arriving, he and his wife have been blown away by the warm welcome and local hospitality of Northeast Georgia.

"I cannot tell you how well I've been treated by the people of Towns and Union County in such a short period of time," he said. "I've never seen anything like it. It's a memory

I will never forget. They're genuine and good down-to-earth people, like me."

Jerry said the museum could open as early as this Friday, July 24, despite initially aiming for a launch date coinciding with next weekend's Moonshine Cruiz-In at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

"I hope everyone comes out and supports us, because everything goes to charity," he said. "We're open all day long and it's only \$5. Kids 12-and-under are free, so it's affordable for everyone. I believe we're all going to have a really good time here."

## Fallen oak tree stirs up memories of Union County days gone by



This massive oak stood in Union County for over 100 years, and perhaps longer, though it fell recently after splitting at a fork in its trunk.

Photo/Submitted

By Shawn Jarrard  
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A Union County native reached out to the North Georgia News last week to let the newspaper know about an old oak tree that fell near her home.

That's not to say this was just any old oak tree, however; it was an oak tree that grew for more than 100 years, according to the late Julia Watkins, who lived near the tree.

Watkins – known as Ma Julie to many of her friends – lived to be more than 100 herself, having passed away at the age of 108 in 2005. The resident who contacted the newspaper said Ma Julie told her decades ago that she remembered the tree when she was just a little girl.

And it's possible the tree was much older at the time of its demise, as the average age of oak trees is between 200 and 400, "and there are oak trees over 800 years old that are still alive," according to encyclopedia.com.

There exist a few curious circumstances about the centenarian tree, including the fact that it did not "fall over" in the way most people would imagine.

Many years ago, the trunk of the old tree forked into two main parts. The tree grew to such an enormous size over its life that the weight of its two "halves" apparently caused the tree to split completely in twain at the fork in the trunk, located several feet up the tree.

The tree lies on property recently acquired by the Georgia Department of Transporta-



This painting by Dan Random from November 1999 depicts a home Bob and Thelma Fair purchased in 1949; the fallen oak tree can actually be seen standing on the right side of the painting.

Photo/Submitted



As oaks can live hundreds of years, it looks like the life of this greater than 100-year-old tree may have been cut short when it split in half recently.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

tion for construction of the widening and relocation of SR 515. As such, the tree was likely to be removed soon, anyway.

A couple reportedly mar-

ried under the tree in days gone by, and various people who lived in the area picnicked under it over the years, including a family who owned a home that used to have the tree in its front yard.

That home, formerly inhabited by the late Bob and Thelma Fair, was torn down in 2008. The Fairs purchased the home from Dewey Gribble on July 30, 1949, and thereafter raised five children in the house.

Many happy memories were made at the home and with the tree over time, including by the Fairs' granddaughter Amy Fair Williamson and her children, who lived there most recently for two years after her grandmother passed away in 1998.

## Felony Theft...from Page 1A

Daves makes bond, he will be transferred to Fannin County to face a theft by taking charge there, Osborn said.

Also charged was Corrina Mary Layton, 35, of the same address as Daves, for misdemeanor possession of marijuana and felony possession of heroin, and she has since bonded out of jail, Osborn said, adding that there is no evidence that Layton was involved in the theft.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

All of the stolen property has been returned to its rightful owner, who commended the Criminal Investigations Division for a job well done, UCSO SSgt. Lamar Dyer said.

"He was happy to get his stuff back," Dyer said. "He kept saying, 'I know y'all have got bigger things to worry about than my trailer, but I appreciate the hard work that y'all have done to get it back so quickly.'"

The incident is being held up by the Sheriff's Offices of both Union and Fannin counties as yet another example of successful interagency cooperation.