

## Foster...from Page 1A

This year, the number of children being served is close to 150, which is up from last year, though more of the children are with foster parents closer to home.

Fortunately, the nonprofit has an extensive list of sponsors, all of whom take it upon themselves to give year after year, making gifts to foster children regular parts of their holiday traditions.

Sponsors receive the children's wish lists and go out to buy whatever is on the lists, and many people make cash donations, which enables program members to go out and buy gifts for the children.

The program was founded years ago by now ex-CASAs Elliott, Richard

Paolillo and his wife Mary Jane, as well as Sherry Wendt, to fill a need for kids when other programs fell by the wayside.

Some of the main volunteers who work with the program include former and current CASAs who have helped in years past to wrap presents and deliver them to families before Christmas.

And this year, the program is forgoing the wrapping paper, which will enable foster parents to know what the kids are getting so they don't double gift.

Monetary donations can be given year-round to the Towns & Union Foster Children's Enrichment Program, and those interested

in contributing or becoming sponsors for next Christmas can contact Elliott at (706) 896-3749, or Paolillo at (706) 745-1190.

For convenience, donors can make checks payable to "The Foster Children's Christmas Program," and the checks can be dropped off at Park Sterling Bank for deposit.

Donations can also be made toward the program's Back to School initiative, which is the other area in which Elliott, Paolillo and friends help to normalize the experiences of children in foster care.

The Back to School part of the program takes place before the start of each school year. Foster children are given the ability to go shopping for new school supplies and a new school outfit, just like all



Program volunteers, many of them current or former CASAs, wrapping presents inside the old Towns/Union Jail before Christmas last year. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

the other kids who start school each year with new clothes and materials.

Those involved with the program would like to thank the multitude of generous

supporters who for years have made Christmas mornings special for the foster children of Towns and Union.

Also, program organizers would like to thank Union

County Sole Commissioner Lamy Paris for allowing them to store their hundreds of presents in the spare rooms of the old Towns/Union County Jail.

## Cruisers...from Page 1A

spirit of giving, the Cruisers met with the Blairsville Police and the sheriff's office on Wednesday, Dec. 6, to hand deliver donations for Christmas.

The cruisers donated \$2,500 to the Sheriff's Office Give-A-Gift program, which accepts toy donations and buys gifts for children with monetary donations.

"These donations make what we do possible, and we humbly appreciate it," said Union County Sheriff Mack Mason.

Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll was also thankful for the Cruisers' \$5,000 donation toward the Shop with a Cop program.

"It means a lot," said Chief Carroll, himself a Cruiser. "We can take several children with that."

The Shop with a Cop experience differs from the Give-A-Gift program in that, with Shop with a Cop, children actually go shopping with members of local law enforcement, whereas Give-A-Gift allows parents to take presents home and wrap them

for their children.

Unfortunately, the 2017 Blairsville Shop with a Cop had to be rescheduled from Dec. 9 to Dec. 16 due to the unexpected amounts of snow delivered by Winter Storm Benji, though the program will certainly carry on in the name of giving children happy Christmas shopping experiences.

"We're pretty well on track, maybe a little shorter than where we usually are," said Chief Carroll, adding that the Cruisers' donation will go a long way toward filling any funding gap this year.

Of course, the Cruisers have their own Christmas program on top of all the donations they make to other Christmas programs, and it's called Shop with a Cruiser.

This year's Shop with a Cruiser occurred on Tuesday, Dec. 12, and the cruisers took 61 children shopping for Christmas presents at Walmart, followed by lunch for all afterward.

And with all the children getting Christmas presents between Shop with a Cruiser,

Shop with a Cop and the Give-A-Gift programs, the Cruisers are simply happy to give back, which happens to be somewhere in the neighborhood of \$30,000 toward Christmas for the children of Union County.

"It helps the community, it helps the children out, where they wouldn't have a Christmas," said Blairsville Cruisers President Peter Barley.

The numbers of families needing help at Christmastime seems to be on the rise, and fortunately, the Blairsville Cruisers have made themselves available to accommodate more children.

"I remember three or four years ago, we had 40 kids we took," said Barley. "And then, the next year it was like 10 more, and another 10 more the next year. It's just accumulating."

Continued Barley: "At the end of the year, it all adds up to where we can take the kids shopping and help out needy families, if somebody else needs a hand, too."

For more information on the Cruisers, including how to get involved with the car enthusiasts, visit their website at BlairsvilleCruisers.com.

## Cook swears into Blairsville City Council; City approves billboard



Mary Ruth Cook, right, just after being sworn in to the Blairsville City Council. She will fill the remaining two years left on her sister Martha Cone's seat. Also pictured, Blairsville City Clerk Kaye McCann and Mayor Jim Conley. Photo/Lily Avery

By Lily Avery  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Blairsville City Council welcomed a new council member and heard from several community figures concerning the recent Boiled Water Advisory as well as possible future marketing endeavors for the city during the council's regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 5.

Before the business portion of the meeting began, new council member Mary Ruth Cook was sworn in by Blairsville City Attorney David Barrett to occupy the city council seat in which she was recently elected.

Last week's meeting was Cook's first on the council.

After the council business was underway, Blairsville Chick-fil-A Restaurant Operator Daniel Liberatore requested an audience with the council and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley during the meeting to address the Boiled Water Advisory that took place within the city limits beginning on Monday, Nov. 27.

The advisory was a regular scheduled cleaning of the city's five large water tanks, however, many businesses and restaurants within the city limits were taken aback by the suddenness of the advisory, Chick-fil-A being one of them.

"Thank you for recognizing that I'm here," said Liberatore. "I just wanted to say that, it's more of a request than a question, for more notice. In the future when this does happen, because I'm sure this happens

often, if it happens again or if anything like this does occur in the future, I feel like there is a better way to notify the residents in the city and the businesses in the city, so we can properly plan and prepare for this."

Like many restaurants throughout the community, Chick-fil-A was closed for most of the week of Nov. 27, simply because they were unprepared for the advisory. During the meeting, Mayor Conley and the council took full responsibility for the inconveniences and loss of business that many in the community experienced,

extending an apology and promising for a better system of preparedness in the future.

"As the Mayor, I take total responsibility for my part in this," said Mayor Conley. "At the same time, the Water Treatment Plant fell short on doing things that they should have done also. It is an event that's over with and we got through it, but there is a lot of room for improvement for us."

"One of the improvements is going to be our notification type systems."

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