

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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North Georgia News

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Rep. Chastain honors UCFD for Blue Ridge help

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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District 7 State Rep. Johnny Chastain of Fannin County traveled to Blairsville this month to honor the heroic efforts of the Union County Fire Department in answering a mutual-aid call to help extinguish the recent fire in Downtown Blue Ridge that destroyed multiple businesses. No one was hurt in the Nov. 18 fire, but unfortunately, several businesses were completely lost in the large commercial building, as a shared attic space allowed the fire to spread quickly between adjacent businesses. Still, the toll could have been much worse.

within 25 feet of the fire melted from radiant heat, but the home did not burn, and the fire occurred amid the building-heavy strip of Downtown Blue Ridge, threatening to engulf a much larger portion of town.

Thankfully, firefighters were able to contain the blaze to the original structure that housed Danielle's Cafe and other businesses, and part of the burned building was saved with the combined efforts of 57 firefighters and 15 apparatus from Fannin, Gilmer and Union counties.

It was for these efforts that Chastain delivered a certificate of appreciation on Wednesday, Dec. 13, to commemorate Union County firefighters and first responders



Local firefighters were honored this month for helping to knock down the massive commercial fire that threatened the entirety of Downtown Blue Ridge Nov. 18. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Wreaths Across America a patriotic success in '23



Veterans and local children joined forces to remember and honor Union County's deceased veterans on Wreaths Across America Day this month. Pictured here: Kathy and Kevin Merritt. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County joined the rest of the country in honoring the tradition of remembering fallen veterans for National Wreaths Across America Day on Saturday, Dec. 16.

Wreaths Across America is a national initiative that recruits patriotic volunteers to perform wreath-laying ceremonies at veterans' graves.

Local volunteers undertake this task annually to recognize deceased veterans who are important to this community, answering the call of a simple yet important mission: "Remember the fallen. Honor those who serve. Teach the next generation the value of freedom."

To enact the educational part of this mission, many local youths were invited to participate in the program and subsequent wreath-laying ritual.

The local ceremony began at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, and while things started around 10 a.m., there was more to do following the initial presentation.

American Legion Ira Weaver Post #121 Senior Vice Cmdr. Kathy Merritt took a moment to express gratitude for the organizations and individuals involved in making the Wreaths Across America Ceremony possible.

Individuals who received thanks included Dave Patton, See *Honoring Veterans*, Page 3A



The local Wreaths Across America initiative, organized by American Legion Post #121, provided 480 wreaths to decorate veterans' graves at Union Memory Gardens and Holly Hill Veterans Park cemeteries. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Griggs named GMRC 'Appointed Official of Year'



L-R: GMRC Chairman Ken Schubring, UCDA Director Mitch Griggs and GMRC Executive Director Heather Feldman. Photo/Submitted

News Special
North Georgia News
DILLARD - At the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission's Annual Meeting held at the Dillard House this month, Union County Development Authority Director Mitch Griggs was presented the 2023 Appointed Official of the Year Award.

Chosen annually by the senior management staff of the GMRC, the award is presented to an individual who has demonstrated leadership, support, and vision for the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission.

Griggs currently serves on the Commission's Revolving Loan Fund Committee, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Committee, and the Workforce Development

Board, and he consistently and enthusiastically supports GMRC.

"Mitch has championed new ideas, embraced creativity, and inspired those around them to think beyond the conventional," GMRC Executive Director Heather Feldman said. "His forward-thinking approach has not only enhanced the effectiveness of

See *GMRC Award*, Page 2A

Plenty available to ring in New Year '24 mountain-style

By Daysha Pandolph
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Area residents are gearing up for a New Year's Eve like no other as 2023 draws to a close.

This year's celebrations embrace the spirit of Appalachia and the West with rustic charm, live music and traditional toasts, so be sure to show up for one of the many celebrations across Union and Towns counties.

To kick off the holiday, the Mountain Liners of Blairsville are throwing an "End of the Year Thank You Party" at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center from 6:30-9 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 30.

Admission is free, and guests are encouraged to bring their own food, drinks and holiday traditions, such as white elephant gifts and ugly sweaters, to the dance floor.

Across town at Vogel State Park, people can enjoy live music at the pavilion overlooking Lake Trahlyta beginning at 7 p.m.

Meanwhile, at the



The staff of the North Georgia News wishes everyone a Happy New Year and the best 2024 has to offer. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2022

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the beloved Southern Rock band Blackberry Smoke will be taking the stage inside Anderson Music Hall at 7 p.m. on Dec. 30 in lieu of the annual fireworks show.

Although the venue is nearly sold out, there are still several single tickets available online, which can be accessed at <https://www.freshtix.com/events/blackberry-smoke-hiawassee>.

"We're expecting 3,000 people in Hiawassee at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for the concert this New Year's Eve," General Manager Hilda Thomason said. "We will make plans next year to bring back the fireworks show, the food trucks, the crafts and everything else; it was just really hard to do both this year."

Not only has the staff at the fairgrounds been preparing

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BASKETBALL
BATTLE OF THE
STATES 12/28 @ TOWNS

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New Year 2024...from Page 1A

for a big concert all while putting on the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights show for several weeks, but they have also been planning for some big events as the new year rolls in.

The fairgrounds has already booked concerts all the way until August, and the debut of the new Hiawassee Rod Run Car Show and the return of classic festivals such as the Spring Series, the Rhododendron Festival and the Georgia Mountain Fire & Smoke Cooking Festival are sure to bring many visitors to the area.

"We've got 125 cooks lined up already (for the cooking festival in May), and the tickets are already on sale for the tasters," Thomason said. "So, we'll definitely be getting our communities together and making plans for a great 2024."

But before anyone can welcome the new year, they must say goodbye to 2023 – and what better way than attending the annual masquerade-themed New Year's Eve Gala at Brasstown Valley Resort?

The formal gala, which begins at 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 31, featuring champagne and chocolates, a gourmet dinner buffet, music and dancing, is restricted to guests over 21. To attend only the party, couples will be charged \$350 plus tax and gratuities.

For the guest package, which also includes an overnight stay and a breakfast buffet with Bloody Marys and Mimosas the next morning, couples will be charged \$699. All guests must RSVP to attend.

Just down the road at the Ridges Resort, visitors can celebrate New Year's Eve "North Georgia Mountain Style" at The Oaks Lakeside Kitchen for \$290 per couple. Tickets will only be on sale until Dec. 28, however, so better act soon.

Admission to the party includes an open bar from 8 p.m. to midnight, live music by a Motown classic cover band, dancing, a midnight champagne toast, a karaoke lounge, and door prizes such as gift certificates to The Oaks, water park passes and hotel stays.

Later that night, at the Marina Station, the resort will throw a free Boots and Bubbles Bash. Show up in your best Western outfit for a fun night of live music and a cash bar.

All of these Hiawassee celebrations ring in the new year for Towns County residents, who can look forward to the return of Chatuge Burger Week Plus this coming year.

"It's going to run for 10 days," shared Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce President Julie Payne. "It will be sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, and we will have member restaurants participating in that again. We're looking to do that Jan. 16-25."

"We just want everyone to have a wonderful 2024, and bring all your friends and family to the mountains and we'll show them a good time."

Down the highway in Blairsville, the Union County Chamber of Commerce and many local businesses are also getting ready for 2024.

"With the new year fast approaching, we celebrate all of our hard-earned successes of 2023 and gear up for thrilling new adventures ahead," said Union County Chamber Director of Operations and Marketing Crystal Fairless.

"Blairsville is the perfect place to usher in the new year with its charming small-town vibes and breathtaking natural beauty," Fairless continued. "From outdoor winter fun at Vogel State Park to sipping hot

cocoa by the fireplace at one of Blairsville's cozy cabins, there's something for everyone to enjoy."

Paradise Hills Resort and Spa will kick off the holiday fun with a New Year's Eve Pre-Party from 2-6 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 31. For \$85 a ticket, guests can enjoy live music by Chris Carpenter, a glass of wine, heavy appetizers and holiday gifts on the Vineyard Overlook Pavilion. At 6 p.m. sharp, they will toast the new year with Western Europeans.

Later that night, in Downtown Blairsville, Granddaddy Mimms Distilling Co. is throwing a New Year's Eve Cowboy Disco Ball Party from 8 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. To participate in a Western costume contest, guests are encouraged to wear their best "Dolly sequins" and cowboy hats.

There will be appetizers, games, a DJ and a moonshine toast at midnight.

On New Year's Day, Lucky's Taqueria and Cantina will have its normal Monday night live music from 5-8 p.m., as well as a buy-one, get-one free taco sale.

"We wish everyone a safe, festive and unforgettable start to 2024," said Fairless on behalf of everyone at the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

GMRC Award...from Page 1A

our strategic mission but has been instrumental in steering the GMRC to success."

On receiving the award, Griggs said that it was "truly a great honor to be recognized by such an esteemed organization as the GMRC."

"I am grateful for everything the Commission does for Union County and all of the communities in the Georgia Mountains region," Griggs said. "I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to work with such outstanding people and look forward

to continuing to serve the Commission and the citizens of our region."

Other awards presented included the Elected Official of the Year – Bruce Palmer, Commissioner for Habersham County; GMRC Employee of the Year – Ms. Danielle Avelar; and Council Member of the Year – Deborah Mack, Hall County Private Sector Representative.

For more information, contact Heather Feldman at 770-538-2626 and visit www.gmrc.ga.gov.

GMRC is one of 12 planning and development districts in Georgia focused on providing technical assistance to 12 counties and 37 municipalities in the areas of planning, economic development, information services and technology, and workforce development.

The purpose of the GMRC is to promote regional cooperation, to coordinate the activities and policies of member local governments, and to provide assistance to local governments.

Georgia Mountain Writers break bread with Christmas luncheon

Our Christmas luncheon was held December 6th at Vincent's Coppertop Restaurant and was not only fun to share our writings but also a time to see old friends who can't attend regularly. As usual, the writings ran from thought provoking to fun.

Connie Rosenberry's "Santa Knows Best" was a poignant poem on how Santa knows the heart of each child when delivering the gifts to all the children.

Jackie Volk's "Not Quite Right" was a letter to Santa from when she was eight in 1958 telling him she didn't need anything and reminding him of past Christmases.

Fred Teagle's "Epiphany and Incarnation, Emanuel and a Flock of Birds" was a peevish explanation of words and concepts of the Christmas season.

Nadine Justice's "Then & Now" detailed early times from when money was scarce to better times, but family was always the most valuable of all.

Rick Sapp's "What the Dog Knew" started with a low growl and wandered through imaginings of what the dog perceived that we humans don't, ending with he may know nothing at all.

Jean Nethery's "Recipes and Thanksgivings of the Past" was ponderings over which family memories to share with her grandson ahead of his marriage. Included in those memories were three strong-willed sisters who ruled the kitchen.

Dan Smallwood's "The Man in the Mirror" was a re-



Writers Club elves Al and Jean Nethery welcomed former GMRC leader Ralph Kwiatkowski to the group's holiday luncheon Dec. 6.

flexion of how he got encouragement, strength and wisdom by looking within.

Franklin Boulineau's "Past Selective Christmas, Presents, Memories" depicted memories of early rural Depression years and their Christmas celebrations.

Jim Miner's "The Little Old Volunteer Fire Dept – A true Story that Never Happened" told of the fire chief's trip to Hawaii, reflections on landscapes enroute and how it compared to the wonders of Suches.

In Mary Cone's "A Christmas Feast," an ice storm maroons an extended family gathered to celebrate the holiday. Too bad somebody forgot to go grocery shopping for Christmas dinner.

In Alan Cone's "Destiny Under the Christmas Star," Fate needs a little help in con-

vincing a romantically inept pair that they are meant for each other.

Story Starters for our next meeting are: "My Job at the North Pole Was", "2023 and Me" and "Without a Backward Glance". You aren't limited to the story starters but may share writings on any topic you would like. All readings should be kept to five minutes, so all have time to read. You don't have to be a writer to write. You just need to dig up memories you would like to share or make up a story. Anyone can write; it's fun. Don't be shy. Come join us.

Regular club meetings are always on the first Wednesday of the month, 10 to noon at North Georgia Technical College. Next month's meeting will be Wednesday, January 3. Any questions, contact connie-rosenberry3@gmail.com.

Give the Gift of Food to a Senior this Holiday Season with Meals on Wheels



Share the gift of a meal with a home-bound senior citizens in Union County this holiday season through the Home Delivered Meal Holiday Gift Certificate Program. Donate money for the Union County Home Delivered Meal program and we will send a card from you to a senior in our program.

You can provide a meal for one day or for an entire week, month or year. The cost of one meal is \$4.50, one week is \$22.50, one month is \$99.00, and one year is \$1188.00. All

gifts are tax deductible.

Checks should be made payable to Union County Senior Center – Holiday Gift Certificate Program and mailed or delivered to: Union County Senior Center – 95 Senior Center Drive, Blairsville, GA 30512.

From Thanksgiving until New Year's Day, meals will be delivered to senior citizens with a special certificate/card to wish Happy Holidays from the gift giver.

Food is essential to good health for everyone, but especially for seniors who cannot shop or cook for themselves. Our staff and volunteers deliver meals Monday through Friday and check on the seniors – sometimes we are the only

people they see all day. We receive Federal, State and County funding, however the meal cost goes up each year and there is always a large deficit we must make up through fund raisers and donations from churches, businesses, civic groups and community members like you. Due to the continued rise in food costs, demand for meal services have increased and we strive to meet those needs so that no one is turned away from receiving meals that they truly need.

Please assist us in preserving this vital program. Thank you for making a difference in your community!

For more information, please call 706-439-6105.

Honoring Veterans...from Page 1A



Various veteran services organizations participated in a ceremony at the Fine Arts Center Dec. 16 in recognition of Wreaths Across America Day.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Pam Greene and even the group's namesake Ira Weaver for their integral work in raising awareness for veterans' affairs.

Of course, this also included wreath sponsors, who exceeded the 400-wreath goal by paying for 506 wreaths to be laid at veterans' graves.

That Saturday, 480 wreaths were laid at Union Memory Gardens Cemetery and Holly Hill Veterans Park Cemetery. The remainder were sent to the Georgia National Cemetery in Canton, which contains 30,000 graves in need of wreaths.

But before that, Merritt shared a bit of history behind the relatively recent tradition of laying wreaths out in the first place.

Back in 1992, the Worcester Wreath Company in Maine faced a surplus of wreaths around the holiday season, and rather than tossing the excess, company owner Morrill Worcester was

inspired to lay 5,000 wreaths out for the lonely dead of Arlington Cemetery's older sections.

The phenomenon wouldn't gain traction until years later, when a photo of the snow-laden, wreathed graves made rounds on the internet and touched hearts around the world.

Other communities were led to remember their own lost soldiers over the holiday season, and so, Wreaths Across America was born as a nonprofit as well as a sacred tradition.

"It's said a soldier never dies as long as his or her name is remembered," said Post #121 Cmdr. Mike Merritt, marking the transition into the second part of the solemn ceremony inside the Fine Arts Center.

Waiting veterans — one for each branch of the United States Military — were escorted by local youths to lay a wreath before the flag of their designated order.

Each of these initial wreaths was connected to a departed soldier, usually related to the veteran honoring them or the youth at the latter's side. Many of the kids were part of local student organizations like the Boy Scouts, Future Farmers of America and the Civil Air Patrol.

The North Georgia Honor Guard provided a gun salute to wrap up the first part of the program before attendees were invited to hop on a bus to head to Memory Gardens and help hand out the first set of wreaths.

It took about 30 minutes for everyone to meet up, whether traveling by bus or car; but then, as the saying goes, all boots were on the ground in short order to begin unboxing and placing wreaths.

Post Cmdr. Merritt reiterated that there was more to the process than simply "decorating graves," and there was a way to go about honoring a veteran properly.

First, living veterans there to honor their brothers and sisters in arms were paired up once again with a local youth. The pair approached a grave together, stated the name of the deceased, their rank and the conflict they were involved in.

Together, they recognized the veteran's sacrifice, thanked them for their service and, if comfortable, made a respectful salute.

Reflecting comments Merritt made at the beginning of the service, on display that day were clear signs of the deep patriotism running through the community, as many folks in attendance took it upon themselves to help decorate the graveyard.

Individuals balancing wreaths in each arm carefully stepped past rows of headstones

The Browns of Mountain Scene Georgia: History and Memories

There are legendary family histories up here in the mountains of Towns County, but not many can claim the longevity of the Brown family in Mountain Scene Georgia.

If you look on a Georgia road map you will see Mountain Scene on the Hiwassee River on highway 17/75 in the south part of Towns County. At one time there was a post office on the river and a school and 2 churches. The school and

churches were where Mt. Zion Baptist Church sits today. The history of the farm goes back to James Rutherford Wyly, Sr. who received permission in 1813 to begin to build "houses of entertainment" or Inns, along the Unicoi Turnpike which ran from August, Georgia to Tellico Plains, TN.

The old brick house on Highway 75 near Mt. Zion Baptist Church was one of the houses built by Wyly. The house was estimated to have been built in 1820 with hand-made bricks from the clay pit across the road from where it once stood. The house was two stories in the front with a porch and a T toward the back where the kitchen was located. The house burned in the 1980's along with all of the antiques that had not been moved since my mother's grandmother Robena died.

James Wyly was the first owner of the property since the land lottery, and he moved here into the inn he had built and encouraged his friends to move up here. There was no gristmill close by so he provided the property and materials to build a mill. In 1852 he donated the land for the Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church South, now Mt. Zion Baptist Church. John Wyly, a son, and J.W.H. Underwood were executors of Wyly's estate and sold the brick house and property to Ezekiel Brown who was a large landowner and farmer in Cherokee County, North Carolina. He purchased a portion of his property in the Hiwassee River Valley in 1857 from the Wyly heirs.

Ezekiel Brown moved his family to Towns County where he and his wife Margaret lived the remainder of their lives on the property at Mountain Scene where we live today. William Clinton Brown purchased this property in 1891 from his uncle Ezekiel's estate.

William Clinton Brown had two sons, James Norwood and Walter Scott (my grandfather) and two daughters, Sarah and Irene. James received a pharmacy degree in 1902 from the Atlanta College of Pharmacy and worked in Copperhill, TN and Ellijay before setting up a pharmacy in Cornelia which he ran for several years. His sister, Sarah, had run the farm here after her father died in 1914 and when she died in 1917 James sold his pharmacy and moved back here on the river to run the farm. I can't imagine why that was a good move!

Walter went to the University of Georgia in 1914 and received a degree in agriculture in 1917 and came back home to be the first county agent in Towns County and eventually became the Director of Uni-



Frank Riley
Executive Director of RC&D

versity of Georgia Cooperative Extension. He retired in the mid 1950's and fixed up my mother's, grandmother's old house, that was built in 1892 on the farm and he and my grandmother, Clemmie, lived here in the summers and in their house in Athens during the winter months until he died in 1965. When he was going to the UGA, he walked to Robertstown to catch the train to Athens. Needless to say, he did not come home very often.

His sisters died in 1909 and 1917 from the flu epidemic. James and Maggie had 7 boys who all served in the military in World War II and some went on to careers but one, James, stayed here and ran the farm. One brother, Walter was a teacher, and William was a professor at UGA, and Raymond was a draftsman, and Forrest ran a used car business and the others moved away.

When I was a kid, Hi River Country was part of the farm with corn growing in all of the places where there are houses now. James planted all this corn but did not have any animals, I wonder where it went? He always had a sawmill, a bulldozer, and tractors so I spent a lot of time with him when I was up here. The fields and woodlands around the farm are much like they were when I was a kid.

The most amazing thing about all of this is this farm has only been sold 2 times in its history and one of those was to family. Not many families can make a claim like that, and my brother and sisters and all of our kids want to keep it just the way it was when Grandaddy Brown roamed these fields and woodlands. Money is not everything, but family land is. Some things money just can't buy. History, memories, and the solitude of the property are much more important to us.

Frank M. Riley Jr, is Executive Director Chestatee/Chattahoochee RC&D Council.

Codependents Anonymous Weekly Meeting

Codependents Anonymous Meeting: Self-Help group offering a 12 Step Recovery Program meets on Tuesdays from 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. at Rivers of Peace, RCO 166 Josh Hall Road, Suite 4, Blue Ridge, GA 30513. All are welcome.

to seek out the markers indicating military service, and, like so many kids and fellow veterans were doing, spoke the names of the dead and acknowledged their courage and selflessness.

As it does every year, 2023's Wreaths Across America Ceremony proved that there are no limits to the love of one's country — generational, beyond the grave or otherwise.

UCFD Appreciation...from Page 1A

as "Outstanding Georgia Citizens."

Issued by the Georgia Secretary of State's Office, the certificate recognizes "the dedication, courage, and selfless actions from these first responders, for their demonstration of the highest standard of public service and community care. Thank you for your unwavering service to our State."

Chastain presented the certificate at the brand-new Fire Station 13 on Murphy Highway, with firefighters from Stations 1, 2, 3, 4 and 13 present for the award.

"The good thing about living in Blue Ridge and Blairsville and all of our rural towns is just how everybody works together and comes together," Chastain said.

Also attending were local Fire Chief David Dyer, Commissioner Lamar Paris, County Manager Larry Garrett, United Community Bank Vice President and Station 2 Volunteer Firefighter Jimmy Nichols, District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter and Fannin County Fire Chief Larry Thomas.

For their part, the firefighters were grateful for the honor, and though some people might sum up their actions as them "just doing their jobs," it's clear that firefighters choose to don their gear and run toward danger because they care about their communities - and those of their neighbors.

And the Union firefighters were happy to respond to Blue Ridge that day with their Ladder 1 fire engine and 15 career and volunteer firemen.

Chief Thomas said that once he realized the fire had made its way into the building's attic, he knew he needed to call in additional ladder trucks to provide water from above, so he got on the horn with Union and Gilmer counties, "and they were there within minutes."

"I don't know if we



Neighboring District 7 State Rep. Johnny Chastain was proud to present a certificate of appreciation to UCFD from the Secretary of State's Office Dec. 13. Also pictured: UCBI Blairsville Bank President Adam Born. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

could have handled (that fire) from the ground." Thomas said before addressing the firefighters directly. "David is like a true brother to me, and I feel like y'all are the same."

"The crews did a jam-up job that day - couldn't have done it any better. And we snuffed that one out way quicker than we did that strip mall fire back in 2004."

"I'll have to say this: if it wasn't for the help from Union County and Gilmer County coming in, and all of us pulling together as one, we'd probably still be downtown fighting fire."

Mutual-aid calls are a perfect example of the brotherhood that exists between all firefighters, with Union County enjoying mutual-aid agreements with every neighboring county and fire department to ensure appropriate resources are always available regardless of the emergency.

The UCFD motto is "Our Family Protecting Your Family," and the Fire Department does not discriminate. When the

need arises, Union County's firefighters and other first responders jump at the chance to serve not just families here, but those in neighboring communities as well.

"We were there to help and were very glad to help," Chief Dyer said. "Hopefully we won't, but one of these days we may need your help. So, we're very appreciative for our working relationship, and we're glad to help any time."

In his day job, Chastain serves as the United Community Bank Blue Ridge president, and United Community Bank Blairsville President Adam Born also made an appearance to show his support for the recognition and thank the firefighters "for keeping our communities safe and protected."

While the cause of the Blue Ridge commercial fire is still under investigation, the point of origin has been determined as being outside and behind the kitchen of Danielle's Cafe, with no foul play suspected at this time.

4th Annual Gobble Wobble 5k Run/Walk to benefit Isaiah 117 House

Paradise Hills Winery Resort and Spa continues its community outreach and support.



4th Annual Fundraising "Gobble Wobble 5 K Run/Walk" at Meeks Park, Blairsville



"Gobble Wobble 5 K Run/Walk"

Blairsville, GA was the site of the 4th annual fundraising "Gobble Wobble 5K Run/Walk" at Meeks Park, Blairsville.

Organized by the owners of Paradise Hills, Winery Resort and Spa, Blairsville's 1st Farm Winery, this event is specifically for families to create memories together and all the proceeds go back into community programs. The course was at the Meeks Park trails and there were prizes for each age group.

According to event organizers, Robert and Ilke Lander, "This year, we had the largest turn out yet. Over 225 racers joined us to make this the best year yet! We were able to write a check to the local Isaiah 117 House for \$2500. This project is coordinated by Kathryn Nelson and provides physical and emotional support in a safe and loving home for children going into foster care. A worthy cause."

After 21 years in business, the Landers continue to contribute with time and money to the growth and future of this community. Each year, depending on the communities' needs, the funds from the race are funneled to programs benefiting the children of the community.

Over the last few years, the race proceeds have ben-

efited programs like Canal Lake Bible Camp; a summer camp provided for free to any child. This camp is fully funded by donations, volunteers, and the dedicated organization of members of the House of Prayer Blairsville congregation. Other programs include the Tim Tebow foundation's Night to Shine event, providing a prom night for special needs teens/adults... And the Union County High School's Incubator program; a young entrepreneurial class assisting our seniors in the process of creating a business, product or service from inception to full live onstage presentation in front of "sharks", aka leaders within our community.

Organizers say, "We are blessed to live in a community

that values our youth and understands that the investment in their future, is an investment in our future. Union county is a small town with a large heart for its children." Help make next year's holiday event successful by participating, donating, or spreading the word.

Paradise Hills is a family run, boutique farm winery resort located in the Blue Ridge Mountains within the 1st American Viticulture Area in Georgia. Additionally, Paradise Hills offers rustic and luxury cabin rentals, a European style Spa, a farm to table restaurant and beautiful wedding event facilities & yearly workshops for every enthusiast. A list of events at Paradise Hills can be seen on their website, www.paradisehillsga.com.

Gooch Christmas Lights ready for community viewing

The community is invited to come see the Gooch Christmas Lights after dark at 92 Wren Drive.

Take 19/129 North to Mauney Road, which is the first road on the left past Gracie's Nursery. Then go to the third road on the right - that's Wren Drive. The lights will be up for local enjoyment through the New Year's holiday.

People can also visit the Tanner Christmas Lights at 447 Tanner Road, off Kiutuestia Creek Road near the red light at US 76/GA 515.