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coming.” Young and old came together Saturday at Union County Fire Station 1 at 507 Shoe Factory Road for the annual Open House event.

Youngsters waited in line to say hey to Sparky the Fire Dog. Politicians made a last minute stop at the Fire Operations' headquarters as they tried to sway voters to cast a ballot for them. The only thing that swayed anyone on this day was a delicious birthday cake and the smell of good food cooking on the grill.

Open House is an opportunity for the community to come together, break bread and get to know their fire station. Some will get to know the dedicated individuals inside these walls more than others. That's because on occasion, they may have to call on these dedicated folks at any time of the day or night.

On Saturday, families arrived, their children in tow. They went through the food line, where hamburgers, hot dogs and all the fixings were available. Coolers filled with soft drinks and water awaited these folks after they filled their plates.

Firefighters sat down with the families, explained the equipment that was in the fire station and said thank you to the families, because the day's donations help make Fire Station 1 a reality.



Union County's smallest firefighter is ready for action. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Union County Firefighter volunteers and paid firefighters protect Union County.

Fire Chief Dyer believes the Open Houses are akin to annual family reunions, with everyone coming together to witness the annual progress of the fire stations.

Chief Dyer considers the fire department a family.

“We really enjoy having the community stop in and look at all of our equipment,” Chief Dyer said. “When you drive by this facility every day, it looks like just a big building. You can't see what's inside.

“When you're here in person, you see all the trucks, you see all the equipment,” he said. “It's an opportunity to sit down with folks and educate them about our operations.”

Last week, firefighters at Station 2 in the Jones Creek community welcomed the folks that call the area home into those facilities.

“It was a wonderful turnout,” Chief Dyer said.

The Chief said the county's volunteer stations survive on the donations provided by members of each community.

“These stations really depend on those donations,” Chief Dyer said. “\$25 here, \$30 there, it adds up. The personnel from these stations go to wrecks, they go to medical calls. It's really a small price to pay if you're really needing emergency services.”

Speaking of family, Georgia Emergency Management Agency/Homeland Security representative C.J. Worden stopped by Station 1 on Saturday.

“My Dad (Charles Worden) the retired fire chief was here, so I came by to see him and some close friends,” C.J. Worden said. “I work with some of the best people in the world and working with Union County is no exception. I'm proud to be here today.”

On this day, Commissioner Paris was proud to share his birthday with family.

“You want the community to feel that way too,” Commissioner Paris said, referring to the feel of a family reunion. “These volunteers and paid firefighters are a family and they're out here to serve. They're there when we need them and they do an incredible job. The county tries to support them as much as we can and the community follows likewise.”



# Trout...continued from Page 1A

not only about the responsibility that comes with caring for these fish, but also the importance of environmental circumstances these fish so desperately need to survive.

After months of watching the trout grow and thrive, students were finally able to release the fish into the wild. The readiness of the trout was determined by studies provided by Trout Unlimited.

“When the fish reached the length of about four inches long,” said Larry Culpepper, Trout Unlimited member, “it was time to unleash them into a stream.”

Trout Unlimited and Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition members met the UCMS students at the Byron Herbert Reece Farm to assist in releasing the trout. Four students were selected and split into four separate groups, based on their involvement with the trout throughout the year, to unleash the fish while the remaining students looked on.

In the classroom, the fish were kept in a round tank, specially altered with a low-impact lighting system and simulated stream currents to cater to the unique needs of the trout. Such careful attention to detail was also needed for the transplantation of the fish.

Four coolers were individually fitted with insulation and filled with cold water to carry the nearly 90 fish to the stream. With help from the Trout Unlimited members, the four selected students would stock the fish using plastic bags, filling each bag with four to six trout at a time.

The students waded up and down the creek, releasing the trout all along the stream until all fish were safely moved from the coolers to the water.

Students were taught the ins and outs of fly tying and casting by Trout Unlimited members, another important aspect of fully understanding preservation and the population control that coincides.

“Then we, as TU guys, tied flies to show the students what fly tying does,” said Culpepper. “And how it tries to match those natural foods that trout eat.”

Before the fish were stocked, Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition members retrieved specimens of aquatic life living in the stream for students to become more acquainted with what the fish they had been raising would eat in the wild. By allowing the students a closer look into the natural life of a freshly placed trout, students were able to

better understand the life cycle of fresh water fish and just how important every living organism is to the preservation of the fish.

“Trout Unlimited's mission is to protect and preserve cold water species - the fish,” said Culpepper, “And that's really trout and salmon, in the United States anyways, and Hiwassee River Coalition has a very similar mission.”

According to the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, their mission is to “sustain good water quality in streams, lakes and rivers that flow into the Hiwassee River.” With more closely monitored fresh water life, comes greater attention to the water quality in which such wildlife lives. By joining forces with the local Trout Unlimited chapter and the Chattahoochee National Forest Fish Hatchery, they can better accomplish this goal.

Trout Unlimited and all others involved hope to maintain Trout in the classroom as a yearly project.

“We're going to do some stream improvement work on that stream in the coming weeks,” said Culpepper, “So if anyone is interested in stream projects or conservation, they're more than welcome to join us.”