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which to view the fireworks, as David Sosensky of Blairsville noted, who has sat in the same spot with his family across the way at the technical college since the fireworks came to Meeks Park.

"It's always been fun, it's always been long enough," said Sosensky of the show. "I don't see any problems or anybody getting rowdy."

Dave Bachman was in town from Nashville, Tenn., to camp with his family at Vogel State Park. The Bachmans have been camping at Vogel for years, and attended the

Meeks Park fireworks display last year as well.

"The Fourth is a time each year to get together with family and friends and celebrate the freedom that we have," said Bachman. "My brother-in-law here, he's in the military, so we're grateful for the freedom that we're able to have because of other people's sacrifices."

Blairsville residents Doug and Jessie Brassel come every year to see the fireworks, and for them, the Fourth of July is a time to celebrate patriotism in a community that fully embraces the opportunity.

"We love it," said Jessie Brassel, who grew up in New York and lived for several years in Florida before moving to Blairsville nearly 11 years ago. "It's actually what we consider the best of both worlds, because it doesn't get as bitter cold as the Northeast, and it doesn't get as beastly hot as Florida."

Towards the end of the fireworks show, which lasted a little more than 20 minutes, a light rain began to fall, but those in attendance were determined to stick it out until the last.

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she said.

Legend has it that the owner of the General Store and a couple of friends became tired with their low-budget bottle rocket display and eventually made a trip over to State Line Fireworks



People watched sitting in lawn chairs, on blankets, on the tailgates of trucks, in cars and, most importantly, gathered around each other in a spirit of remembrance of what it took and continues to take to remain free.

"The Fourth of July, it's kind of like a lot of other major holidays – you have to separate what it's for and

what you're celebrating," said Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris. "This is a celebration, but I think everybody remembers that it is the Fourth of July, celebrating our independence. That's what got our country started and what makes it so special. We worked for and fought and got that independence, and now we celebrate that every year."

in Ducktown, Tenn., and came back with around \$200 in pyrotechnics.

Also upping the ante were Peggy Owens and Jim Miner who went over to the fire station and grabbed as many hot dogs and hamburg-

ers that could be found, not to mention a few colas and they sold them behind the school at the current location, and made about \$200, breaking even.

The rest, is history.

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which kept residents busy from sunup to sundown and beyond, culminating in the annual Meeks Park fireworks display.

"The Big Country Breakfast used to be called a Pancake Breakfast for the Masonic Lodge," said the Rev. Richard Hoibraten, who serves as the current Worshipful Master of Allegheny Lodge No. 114. "We changed it to Big Country because people want more than pancakes."

"We do it sometimes two or three times a year, to invite the public to come out on, say, a Saturday, when there's something going on in the square or in town, to just have good fellowship and camaraderie."

And it's not just for Masons – the Big Country Breakfast is for any and everybody who would like to walk in the door, and just as important, it's for a good cause.

"We have two accounts," said Hoibraten. "We have the operating account and then we have the charity account. Usually, the big breakfasts like this, the money goes into the charity account to keep the money in there to fund scholarships (for graduating seniors) and the needs of other people."

Lodge member Kerry Rittenhouse, who retired as band director of Union County High School a couple of years ago, was glad to see the number of people who came out to support the efforts of the lodge, including his fellow Masons.

"That what this takes, it takes people that are just here, willing to come in, take out trash – do whatever it takes to do," said Rittenhouse. "Not here for any accolades or titles or prestige, just here to be a part of the group and do the things that we do in the community."

Allegheny Lodge has a long history of community involvement, and current membership of the lodge stands at 215 members, many of whom have served in various leadership roles within the organization that effectively emphasizes leadership education.

"Allegheny Lodge has been here in Blairsville for 166 years," said Bert Baumgardner, who serves as treasurer now but who started the breakfast when he was Worshipful Master six or seven years ago.

The idea for the breakfast, which is cost effective for the lodge and easier to host multiple times a year, evolved from an earlier take on the same concept – making good food for the masses in order to raise money.

"We used to do a big annual barbeque out at the research center, and it was very labor intensive," said Baumgardner. "It started out as a Sunday get-together picnic, and it morphed into a community fundraising thing. The thing is, today, we will probably make half of what we made on that."

So stay tuned, Union



County, because the Big Country Breakfast will be back before you know it.

"It was great," said

Don Allen, guest of past WM Neville Smith. "Outstanding, a very good breakfast – well worth the \$6 price."