

Parade...continued from Page 1A

by the employees of the marina and the appropriately named, red, white, and dead, Zombie Boat took home the grand prize.

Other boats that received trophies were the "Ambie Car," a vehicle that doubled as an automobile and a boat. The little red convertible was driven to the event, turned right onto the boat ramp and directly into the water.

The Union County High School, Class of 2012, The Sea Monster, Liberty,

Eat More Chicken, and Scooby Doo boats also were awarded trophies.

The Boat Parade has grown in each of its 17 years but this was Julio Abreu's first.

Abreu took over the day-to-day operations of Nottely Marina in October last year and is excited about the future of the Boat Parade, Nottely Marina, and the local community in general.

"The Marina is doing 10 times better than it's ever done," said Abreu. "Next

summer were going to have all kinds of good things happening here.

"The Boat Parade was great, the band was great, I loved it all. I can't wait to go see the band again at Copperhead Lodge," he said.

Sheila Doucette, daughter of Nottely Marina owner Carleen Doucette wanted to thank everyone who came out and participated. She also wanted to thank her mother for coming up with the idea of the boat parade and for holding it every year at the Marina.

"I would like people to know that the parade and decorating contest was started by her and that she is the original owner of Nottely Marina," said Sheila Doucette.

Each year it gets bigger and more fun, said Richard Smith, creator of cosponsor MytownsUSA.

"It's a wonderful tradition and the marina does all the work and they just hold it for the fun of it," Smith said. "It's turned into a great public event and it's lots of fun."

Donations...continued from Page 1A

Union County, said 4,409 military personnel died in the Iraq War which concluded in late 2011.

Hamby hopes for a community effort similar to when Union County's War Memorial was established in the mid-1990s to help erect an Iraq War Memorial.

"We have put a pedestal up for every major war," Hamby said. "That includes the Indian Wars that relate to this county. It's the right thing to do, it's the dignified thing to do to recognize the Iraq War veterans along with the rest of the wars because Congress has declared it a war.

"Those folks suited up to fight for their country," Hamby said. "And 4,409 paid the ultimate sacrifice for their country and untold numbers have served. Look at all the casualties, those wounded in action.

"Once you enter the military, your life is not your own. Once people start shooting at you, life is never the

same," Hamby said. "You can't ever change that, you can learn to live with it, you can make friends with what's bothering you, but you can't change it and it will never go away."

The donation effort for the original War Memorial raised thousands and was countywide with residents, students, churches, civic groups, businesses and veterans working together to raise the necessary funds to erect the memorial to the county's 158 war dead from wars ranging from the Indian Wars to the Vietnam War.

"I'd like to think we can raise this money in a matter of three weeks," Commissioner Paris said. "It's a worthy cause. Any time you honor the people who served and paid the ultimate sacrifice, it is a worthy cause."

According to Hamby, if you've got a war memorial, that memorial must be representative of the wars that impacted Union County.

"We want the Union County War Memorial to represent all the wars that affected Union County," Hamby said. "We need to update the memorial to include the Iraq War, and eventually, the Afghanistan War."

Hamby said there isn't a definitive number of how many Union County residents have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I'm not sure the United States Military has that figure," he said. "We know we have veterans from those wars, but we don't know how many."

Union County native Chuck Honaker was wounded and severely injured in Iraq on Aug. 20, 2003; he received the Purple Heart. His friend and Staff Sgt. Bobby C. Franklin, who worked here, but lived in Mineral Bluff, died in the same incident in which Honaker was wounded.

If you know of someone that served in Iraq or Afghanistan from Blairsville-Union

County, contact the North Georgia News with a name and branch of service.



Bob Spaulding, Roy Hamby, Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and decorated Iraq War Veteran Chuck Honaker have kicked off the process of collecting donations to erect a memorial to those veterans who served in Iraq. Photo/Charles Duncan

Suches...continued from Page 1A

Martina McBride, and James Brown blasted from the loud speakers as people of all ages passed the time waiting for the show. The festivities had a family reunion feel as everyone gathered for what some may call "the best fireworks show" in Northeast Georgia.

Folks from all over the country were attendance. License plates revealed that some visitors had come from as far away as Texas, Kansas, and Alabama. Some were just visiting while others have summer homes in the area and never miss the fireworks display.

And Kenneth Stephens fits that final description.

"It's a small town and we're just small town people," Stephens said. "I've had a house in Suches for 49 years. We're retired and we come up to Suches twice a year. We come every year to the fireworks but this is the first time we're going to be sitting up close."

Stephens, a native Georgian who currently re-

sides in Florida, spent his holiday fishing, and despite having a successful day on the Toccoa River, he wasn't about to skip the chance to marvel at the night sky being lit up over southwest Union County.

"I spent the day fishing and there were a lot of people there, but I still caught my limit of trout," Stephens said. "If this is your first time at our fireworks, then you'll be impressed. We always put on a good show. "We had a good one last year."

As you arrived in town, you could see the cars lining both sides of Highway 60 and every available parking spot was taken at the schools and fire station while some parked at the post office and at Wolf Pen Gap Store.

As you made your way down to the field, you could smell the smoke from the grills and sparklers, as children and grown-ups alike, passed the time, anxiously awaiting the main event of the evening. Once you reached the field,

you could see the fire trucks and the exact location where the fuses would be lit. That's where you could find a seasoned veteran from Suches' storied July 4th extravaganza's past, Larry Wood.

"We just shoot them, holler, and run," said Wood. "Me and Little Richard (Paulson) shot off the first fireworks in Suches down at the (General) store.

"We've been doing this for at least 25 years. It grows every year, we get a lot of repeats. I guarantee you that 90 percent of those folks are repeats. It's basically become a tradition and we put it on for the people and it saves us from having to drive across the mountain. We always get a lot of compliments."

Driving across the mountain didn't hinder some families, however they were traveling to Suches from Blairsville for the show.

Some Blairsville residents that attended Nottely Marina's Boat Parade earlier in the day, made the drive across Wolf Pen Gap just for the Fourth of July light show.

A lifelong Suches native, Adam Gilreath said that he isn't surprised that some Blairsville folks would rather drive to Suches, due to the brilliant reputation that has preceded the town's fireworks exhibition for years.

"We've always known that," said Gilreath, the newest employee at the *North Georgia News*. "It was the greatest ever. People come up here from all over because of the family atmosphere and wonderful fireworks."

Bell Ringing Union County Old Courthouse



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