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children and their parents arriving at Blairsville City Hall and filling out the Shop With a Cop paperwork. The parents then left the children with Blairsville's finest.

But before they left, they took with them a food basket complete with everything necessary for a Christmas dinner. It's one of the rarest twists to any Shop With a Cop programs statewide.

Also, more than 40 volunteers from area churches showed up to help the Blairsville Police Department complete its annual Christmas mission.

"We couldn't do what we do today without these volunteers," Assistant Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said. "They are the heart and soul of Shop With a Cop. They're in with us on this mission of making Christmas happen for all these boys and girls that make up Shop With a Cop."

The face of one volunteer was very familiar to the children, School Resource Officer Sally Tanner.

"This is a great event and I'm honored to be out here and help today," she said. "I sort of stand out, my uniform isn't the same color as every one else."

Many of the volunteers were from Harmony Grove Baptist Church and Xtreme Christian Outdoors, a local mission with the purpose of making the outdoor dreams of challenged children come true. The show airs on Windstream's Local Channel 4.

Jeff Deaver, chaplain of the Blairsville Police Department and a big part of Xtreme Christian Outdoors, said Shop With a Cop is truly a humbling experience.



"It's humbling, very humbling," Deaver said. "It makes you realize just how blessed we are."

"Sometimes we get caught up in things going on in our lives and never realize what other folks are going through," Deaver said. "Especially what's going on with the kids. They're innocent as can be."

"The humbling part is to see the smiling faces of these young people, watching them get to go out and shop, well, it's heart-warming," Deaver said.

Deaver and Chief Carroll both said Shop With a Cop is a true reflection of the Blairsville-Union County community.

"All the volunteers, the Police Department and everybody that helps put this event on, it just warms your heart to know that you live in a com-

munity like this," Deaver said. "This truly is a community event. A lot of folks may not have been out here physically today, but we know they were here in spirit and their generous donations helped make this event a reality."

"We've just touched the tip of the iceberg," Chief Carroll said. "I don't know anyone in this community that enjoys watching a child do without on Christmas."

"What we saw this year was just absolutely incredible with the number of folks volunteering, the amount of donations received and the Joy we get to share with this program, we're making a difference one child at a time."

Once the shopping was done, Union County School bus 21-46, complete with a Christmas wreath on its nose, was given a police escort, si-

rens blaring to Papa's Pizza in Blairsville, where the children and their BPD friends chowed down in celebration.

"These kids are as excited about getting to go out to eat as they were about Christmas shopping," Chief Carroll said. "This has truly been an incredible experience for them as well as the officers of the Blairsville Police Department."



The kids were treated to pizza and drinks at Papa's Pizza and treated to presents at Walmart. Could you ask for more? Photos/Charles Duncan

American Holly a Christmas tradition

By Jennifer Cordier
Plant Rescue Team

The American Holly, *Ilex opaca*, is an evergreen tree with a narrow, rounded, dense crown of spiny leaves, small white flowers and bright red berries. It thrives in moist well-drained soils, especially flood plains, as well as in mixed hardwood forests. Its range is from E. Massachusetts south to central Florida, west to S central Texas and north to SE Missouri. It is abundant in our southern Appalachian mountains.

As we enter the winter holiday season, the holly tree takes center stage. Its glossy green leaves and red berries decorate our homes, its image appears on Christmas cards, and it is honored in song, poetry and literature.

Our fascination with this beautiful tree has a rich history. The ancient Celts used the holly tree in their summer and winter solstice observances. The pointy leaves of the holly were thought to afford magical protection against evil spirits. Holly sprigs were also brought into their homes during the winter as shelter for the fairies, those tiny spirits of the forests. The Romans used holly to honor Saturn, god of agriculture, during their Saturnalia festival held near the time of the winter solstice.

Evergreens such as the Christmas holly were adopted by the Christian faith. In Christian folklore, the prickly leaves of the holly tree were associated with Jesus' crown of thorns while the berries represented the drops of blood shed for humanity's salvation. The beau-



American Holly

tiful carol "The Holly and the Ivy" reflects this symbolism.

Aside from its interesting history, the American Holly was used medicinally by Native Americans. The berries were chewed for colic and indigestion. A leaf tea treated measles, colds and flu and was used externally for sores and itching. Warning -- the fruits are considered poisonous!

The wood of the holly tree is fine textured and used for inlays in cabinetwork, handles, and carvings and can be dyed various shades. Many songbirds, game birds and mammals eat the berries and the tree provides birds with shelter and protection from predators.

Look for the holly tree on winter hikes, remember its history and many uses and reflect on its beauty as it graces our mountains.

For more information on our native plants and the work of the Preservation Committee, contact Clare Johnston at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center (706-745-2655) or visit our website www.gmrec.uga.edu.

ArtWorks Holiday Open House

ArtWorks will be hosting a Holiday Open House on Thursday, December 20 from 4:30 - 7 p.m.

This is your chance to do some last minute gift shopping in this unique store which features only handcrafted gifts of art, crafts and jewelry. The artists and crafters whose work is carried in the store are all from the tri county area. After you've found that perfect one of a kind gift, enjoy some

refreshments while watching demonstrating artists who will be on hand to share with you their work and answer questions. If you have not been to ArtWorks before, this is a great time to experience this unique store.

ArtWorks is located on Big Sky Drive behind the Hiday Inn Express. ArtWorks is owned and operated by Mountain Regional Arts & Crafts Guild, Inc., 706-896-0932.