

Grandparent...from Page 1A

lacking and needed TLC.

“There’s a large percentage, and it’s anywhere from 55 to 75 percent of the residents in nursing homes don’t have a soul visiting them. And sometimes, for some of them, we’re the only visitors.”

As part of their visit, the women dress up with the Christmas spirit in mind – Ford as Santa with her helper elves – and the team goes into each establishment on its list bearing gifts of love made through community sponsorships for nursing home and assisted living residents.

“Any individual can sponsor a gift for \$15, or a local business,” said Ford. “They can sponsor however

many gifts they want, and it consists of a hand cream and a winter accessory. It’s wrapped with a handwritten tag from the sponsor.

“And yes, the hand cream is a Mary Kay product, but it’s fragrance free so it won’t affect anybody. It can be used for male or female, we don’t have to cross any lines – how many males, how many females – we don’t ask those questions. Everybody is blessed with a gift. We have the honor of going room to room and visiting them.”

Many residents of both counties were served that Saturday, including 150 from Union County Nursing Home, 14 from Lazy-R and 112 from Chatuge Regional Nursing

Home, for a total of 276 gifts.

“Every year we’ve grown one facility, so next year we’re hoping to grow one or two facilities more,” said Ford. “We have a good time. Just to see their faces and their smiles as we’re coming into their rooms – that’s an honor in itself.”

The largest sponsor of Adopt-a-Grandparent has been Paris Nails of Blairsville, donating an entire day of revenue toward the program, giving nearly \$800 this year alone. Other big sponsors include Union General Hospital Inc. and United Community Bank, and many individuals donated this year.

Ford was just made aware by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce that her business

will be the next recipient of the Business of the Quarter award, and she will take her time during the celebration in January to talk about Adopt-a-Grandparent with other local businesses.

“For me and Kristy, Mary Kay is not a J-O-B,” said Ford. “It literally is a job that we enjoy, and it mingles with ministry. Everything that we do is uplifting somebody, gifting somebody, making them feel better about themselves.”

A third member of Ford and Wallace’s Mary Kay team couldn’t make it Saturday, Alicia Rogers of Hiwassee, due to a family emergency.

“That’s one of Mary Kay’s foundational standards in the business, is God first, family second, career third, and that’s the first thing I said to her, no problem,” said

Ford.

Commissioner Paris, who attended last year’s Adopt-a-Grandparent function also, enjoyed walking the halls of Union County Nursing Home and visiting with the folks at Lazy-R. A native of Union County, Commissioner Paris took the time to say hello and talk with old friends who now live in those establishments.

“This is heartwarming, touching, humbling, just amazing,” said Commissioner Paris after visiting the nursing home. “I was proud to get to come. Last year was the first time I’d done it, and it’s pretty incredible. We’re just blessed as a county to have a facility with staff as caring as they are here.”

Joining the Joy Team and Commissioner Paris on their gifting rounds was

Union County Nursing Home Activity Assistant Carla Colombo.

“The residents absolutely love these kinds of things,” said Colombo. “It’s very generous for the community to do this for them. They were even giving out hugs to Santa (Ford), so they really liked it. It’s just really nice for the community to step up and do this, especially for people who have no family.”

Colombo would like the community to know that the nursing home is always taking volunteers to come and visit, to take part in activities with the residents.

“All year round would be a good time,” said Colombo. “They usually just come through the holidays, but most people could use a visit all year round.”

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Board of Education.

The classroom furniture will fill 20 classrooms, including the soon to be finished 10-classroom addition to the primary school, and the furniture will cost \$64,874.51.

Each set of classroom furniture will feature a teacher’s desk with chair, 25 student desks with 40 chairs, the additional chairs to allow seating for one kidney-shaped table and a rectangular table for small-group work, and two tables which will hold four computers.

In the lunchroom, nearly two dozen tables that have been in use since the school was built in the 1980s will be replaced at a cost of \$21,549. All told between the lunchroom and classrooms, the furniture will cost \$86,423.51, and will come out of the school

system’s General Fund.

Also in the meeting, the board voted to put out a schedule of approved SPLOST projects for the school year beginning July 1, 2014, through June 30, 2015.

The school board is required by state law to release the schedule, and it details where every penny of SPLOST funds is allocated, including original estimates of projects, current estimated costs, and amounts already expended toward the completion of projects.

The schedule released this year highlights what projects remain to be worked on using the latest SPLOST referendum of 2013, as well as SPLOST funds from 2008 that were used to help complete the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Remaining projects

include the Union County Schools Agricultural Science Center and classroom additions to the Union County middle and high schools, among others.

The schedule shows that voter-approved SPLOST funding estimates have decreased since original estimates were given.

Original estimates show a grand total of \$39 million worth of projects between the 2008 SPLOST to help with the Fine Arts Center and the projects approved under the 2013 SPLOST. Current estimates show a decrease of roughly \$8.5 million, to about \$30.5 million.

Union County Schools will continue to use the 2013 SPLOST until it runs out in 2018, at which point it expects to have all of its outstanding SPLOST-approved projects completed.

The board previously worked out a pay-as-you-go

system to avoid bonding into debt, so the projects are paid for as SPLOST funds are accrued.

For its recent SPLOST projects, the board has worked with Southern A&E, an architecture and engineering design firm, and in the meeting the board approved contracts to work with the company moving forward with its ongoing SPLOST initiatives.

“Any project that we have, like our SPLOST projects, we have to pay the architects and engineers a certain percentage to develop the plans, to vet the plans, and to do everything that they need to do,” said Dr. Jeremy Williams, associate superintendent of Union County Schools, following the meeting.

Southern A&E was approved to receive 5.5 percent of construction costs on SPLOST projects it oversees.

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recognition of his “leadership and investigative skills that have made Union County a safer place.”

“We work hard, everybody here does, and it’s just a blessing,” said Capt. Deyton of receiving honors that night. “They could have given this to anybody in there, but they picked me. It’s just an honor and a privilege.”

Also recognized at the Christmas dinner was Union County Sheriff’s Deputy Shane Burnette, who rescued

two residents from a burning home on Thanksgiving Day while on routine patrol.

“I’m just glad that I was there,” said Deputy Burnette. “I’m glad that God put me there, and that those people are okay. That’s my biggest thing – I’m just thankful, and I still pray for them every day that they’re going to recover from the fire and make everything okay.”

Burnette has served as a member of the Army National Guard for more than two decades, and his previous law enforcement experience includes being a police chief in Alabama.

Union County Chief Deputy John George read one of several letters of commendation for the actions of Deputy Burnette that Thanksgiving Day, and the Sons of the American Revolution awarded him a medal for heroism “in recognition for outstanding bravery and self-sacrifice in the face of imminent danger, thus exemplifying the high ideals and principles which motivated and sustained our patriot ancestors.”

The sheriff’s office even honored Jim’s Smokin’ Que, which catered the dinner this year as in years past, to show appreciation for the continued support by the restaurant.

Santa Claus stopped in after dinner, allowing the children of deputies and officers to sit in his lap, make Christmas requests and pose for pictures.

Joining in on law enforcement family time in the United Community Bank’s Brackett Room that Monday was Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, who also received an invite from Sheriff Mason.

“It’s always a pleasure to be out here with our law enforcement people, the city and county,” said Commissioner Paris. “I’m just proud to be here amongst them. They make me feel safe, our community is safe, and I appreciate them inviting me to their Christmas function.”



The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution present deputies Shane Burnette and Chad Deyton with special awards of recognition. Photo/Shawn Jarrard