

# Christmas...from Page 1A

warding experience to be able to help these folks," Sheriff Mason said. "It's something that we should be doing and it's something that we're eager to do."

For the last several weeks, deputies have been tripping over toys at the Sheriff's Office, and that's a good thing, Sheriff Mason said.

"This program is about the kids, it's about a Merry Christmas," Sheriff Mason said. "It's been a tradition here since 2001 and we're going to make sure that tradition continues."

"You can't stop a program like this, it's too important to the community," Sheriff Mason said.

One of the biggest boosts to the program is the commitment by the Blairsville Cruisers, who work year-



**Sheriff Mack Mason** round to make Christmas happen in the Blairsville-Union County community.

"The Cruisers are an integral part of this event for the Union County Sheriff's Office. They put \$2,500 or more in the program this year. They do so much in the community, and making a difference in the lives of children is a huge part

of their mission," Sheriff Mason said.

Families come in and submit applications qualifying their child to receive something for Christmas from Give A Gift, which provides gifts for children ages 1-12 years old. The information includes what the children want for Christmas. The children must be Union County residents.

Donations for the program come from churches, individuals, businesses, and civic organizations. Gifts also come in from Vogel State Park as those who come for the annual Christmas Tree Lighting bring an unwrapped gift for the Give A Gift program.

"There are folks that stop in and give \$20," said co-organizer Ginger Carey. "The Lord will bless everyone that

makes a child's life a little brighter."

Clothing has been a hot request item in 2014, Carey said.

"We've had a lot of requests for clothing," she said. "Disney's Frozen has been a very hot topic this year."

Sheriff Mason said it's not too late to donate to the program.

"If someone forgot to donate this year, they can come by and make a donation for a good start on next year's program," Sheriff Mason said. "We're already saving up for next year. If it's a check, they can make it out to UCSO Give A Gift."

"We're always proud to take checks or folding money," Sheriff Mason said. "And these kids are proud to be having a Merry Christmas."

# Bread...from Page 1A

just good fellowship, a good meal."

All walks of Union County law enforcement and their families were there to break bread in a spirit of communion on that Wednesday, as the UCSO invited the Blairsville Police Department to join in the festivities.

"It also brings employees that normally don't share time together, such as the jail people, who are in their environment, and the deputies on the road, who are in another," said Chief Deputy John George. "It gives them an opportunity to share some time."

Many employees of the UCSO donated to cater food from Jim's Smokin' Que, and the restaurant in turn pledged to donate that money back to the Sheriff's Annual Give A Gift Christmas Toy Drive.

"In this room is every local law enforcement office in this county," said Lt. Rusty Walker, who works with both the UCSO and Blairsville PD. "And to be able to come together like this - it's a good way to fellowship and it's a good time."

More than a few of those who were in attendance pull double duty between the Sheriff's Office and police department, and the camaraderie between the two agencies was palpable that night as people shared laughs and conversation.

"It's awesome to get to be with everybody at one time, because normally we don't see everybody together," said Anita Franklin, who's been working at the jail for a year.

Fixings for the event



included plenty of mouth-watering delights: pulled pork, beef brisket, chicken wings, macaroni and cheese, baked beans, coleslaw, fresh-baked rolls, banana pudding, peanut butter pie, apple cobbler and a smoked salmon dip that was specially prepared for the Christmas party.

"We wanted to help," said Jim and Donna Guess of Jim's Smokin' Que on the donation of their proceeds for the evening to the Sheriff's Toy Drive. The Guess' daughter, Lauren, was also on hand to make sure the UCSO had plenty to eat.

Toward the end of the meal, Sheriff Mason and Chief Deputy George began announcing winners of the door prizes, which included gifts donated by: Freeman Gas, Copperhead Lodge, Thomas Tire, Alexander's Store, Walmart, King Ford, Butternut

Creek Golf Course, Mike's Seafood, American Cowboy Store and Ace Hardware.

Before all was said and done, Santa Claus made a special appearance to the delight of the children of Union County's law enforcers.

And as if there wasn't enough to celebrate, all in attendance sang Deputy Julio Cruz a very happy birthday, and proud parents lined up to take pictures of their children with Santa.

As the event wound

to a close, Caitlyn McGaha warmed everyone's spirits with a surprise performance of Silent Night. McGaha is the daughter of Angie Bates, who works at the jail.

"It's heartwarming - it feels like family," said Bates on the celebration that evening. "That's what we all are, we all are family. It's neat to meet everybody's family. It actually brings everybody closer together. We get to meet their other side, and they get to meet our other side."

