

UCSO Christmas...from Page 1A



The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons of the American Revolution presented UCSO Capt. Robby Brown with a Law Enforcement Commendation Medal at the Dec. 19 Christmas party.

And that's exactly how Sheriff Mack Mason views his office, as a family unit, and he's thankful for the families of his deputies and jailers who understand when their husbands, wives, moms and dads answer the call of duty.

"The families have to put up with the long hours, the ridicule that we face a lot of the time," Mason said. "Nights, weekends, holidays – if the phone rings, no matter what you've got planned, you've got to go. It's pretty demanding."

Taking a moment to reflect on the reason for the season in the party, Sheriff Mason said Christmas was a special time of faith and reverence.

"Christmas means the birth of our Lord and Savior," Mason said. "Through and by Him we can have eternal life by believing in Him, not by any good thing that we might ever do."

"God had a plan of salvation, and it's extremely simple: belief on the Lord Jesus Christ, the virgin birth, the death, burial and the resurrection. I'm most thankful for that. That's what keeps me going."

The Christmas party featured a traditional American holiday meal – turkey, ham and all the trimmings – preceded by welcoming remarks from Sheriff Mack Mason, Chief Deputy John George, and an invocation by Sheriff's Office Chaplain Fred Freeman.

Dinner was prepared and hosted by the jail's own Correctional Resource Group, with assistance from The View Grill Manager Matt Leonard.

Sid Turner and Jared Ogden of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons of the American Revolution presented the prestigious Law Enforcement Commendation Medal to UCSO Capt. Robby Brown at the party, honoring him for his many years in local law enforcement.

With 25 years under his belt and service under four different sheriffs, Brown is the longest-standing member of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Brown started his career locally as a jailer in 1994, working his way through the ranks as a deputy, school resource officer, and SRO supervisor and lieutenant, before earning his current rank of captain in 2018 as unit commander over security at the Union County Courthouse.

Joining Brown for the occasion were his wife Becky and kids Jakob, Kallie and



Sheriff Mack Mason and Chief Deputy John George welcoming their law enforcement family to the annual Sheriff's Office Christmas Party on Dec. 19.

Madison, all of whom were very proud of their family patriarch.

Fellow law enforcement brother Capt. Craig Davenport joined the rest of the Sheriff's Office in commending Brown for his medal that evening, calling him "a good friend, a good employee and a fine cop."

"We work hard all year long doing a thankless job," Davenport said. "We deal with people on their worst day. There's tragedies that, while they may not be of epic proportions, to (the people experiencing them), they are."

"The people here, whether it be jail staff, the detectives, uniformed officers – we have to come in and pick up the pieces. An event like this gives us a chance to relax and unwind."

Capt. Davenport will be taking over training duties from UCSO Staff Sgt. Billy Purcell, who attended the Dec. 19 party with his wife Mary. It was a bittersweet occasion for Purcell, who was there celebrating his last Christmas party as an official member of the Sheriff's Office.

After 36 years in law enforcement, the last five of which he's spent in Union County, Purcell has decided to hang up his badge effective Dec. 31, 2019.

Purcell worked the security detail for the Union County Courthouse, and due to his extensive background as a Georgia P.O.S.T.-certified instructor with Firearms and Defensive Tactics, he served locally as the head training officer for the county.

A two-tour Vietnam Veteran and Purple Heart recipient, Purcell's law enforcement career includes more than two decades with the

Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College Police Academy, where he also served as assistant director from 2002 to 2010.

Folks will remember Purcell as the friendly and knowledgeable instructor of six Weapons Carry Classes held in recent years at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center, where he informed many hundreds of people of their rights and the "Do's and Don'ts" of carrying weapons.

In retirement, Purcell looks forward to traveling the U.S. with his wife Mary, and he's particularly looking forward to a return trip to Israel, where he formerly trained with Israeli Police in 2005 as a law enforcement exchange officer.

"It's hard to leave, because I really like what I do," Purcell said. "I'll still be hanging out some and will probably still do some training for them. I told them that anytime they needed me to help them with trainings to let me know."

Added Purcell, "I like working with the Sheriff's Department. All these guys are my buddies. They're just like a family, they really are. You hear people say that, and it really is with us. These are some good folks. And the sheriff, he's good for what he says."

"If he says, 'I'll get you a raise in six months,' or 'I'll get you a new car in a year,' look for it, because it's coming. He'll find a way to do it. He's good for his word."

The Christmas party wrapped with the ever-popular picture and video slideshow highlighting some of the lighter moments shared between Sheriff's Office family members – deputies, jailers and office staff – in 2019.

Memorial Dedication...from Page 1A



Lone plane crash survivor Brittany Thomas Whitener surrounded by work family at the Dec. 19 dedication in Blue Ridge.

The family of Robert Atkinson wanted to attend the dedication but was unable to be there that day.

Delivering remarks specially prepared for the occasion was Dr. Raymond Tidman, who currently practices medicine at RiverStone and was one of the previous building owners along with Dr. F. Stan Trigg and Dr. Jack Roof.

"A year ago seems like forever," Tidman said. "We lost four people. I say four people, because three went on to life in heaven, one lost her old life and has had to relearn a whole new one. I acknowledge her struggle, her grit and her family support. The others on that plane would want that support."

"At this time last year, those four people were doing what we do here – owning our job, caring for others with real love and concern ... meeting their needs, helping them solve their problems, and the icing on the cake, bringing them smiles."

"May this bench remind us of this spirit in them, and may we occasionally sit on it and reflect on such."

In response to the dedication, Whitener said she was grateful for the love and support of her entire work family as she continues to heal from the accident that left her a wheelchair user fighting to walk again unaided.

"The memorial plaque

and bench may be small, but to some, like me, it's huge," Whitener said. "It's a small daily reminder of Renea, Robert and Michelle that will make you smile and show how much they meant to the community and to RiverStone and how big of an impact they made."

"They stamped their imprint on RiverStone, the imprint of what amazing people they were. They were a part of RiverStone and now will forever be a part of RiverStone. It's a reminder, a memory and a tribute of them for their families. I'm going to love seeing it every time I get off the elevator."

Whitener returned to work on a part-time basis earlier this year, and she always looks forward to interacting with the public and spending time with her coworkers, especially Rich Greiner, the husband of her late friend Renea.

Dec. 19 is a particularly bittersweet day for Rich, as the occasion marks his wedding anniversary with Renea as well as the day she perished in the plane crash.

But he, too, is thankful for the support of his work family, and he makes sure to stay up to date on Whitener's progress as she continues to recover from her injuries.

Regarding how Renea would have felt about the memorial dedication, Rich said she would "definitely appreciate it," and he continues to cherish

the many memories he shared with his fun-loving wife during their decades together.

"She was a people person, totally, and usually the leader," Rich said. "She was a good person. She liked her job, liked to work – enjoyed friends, enjoyed living here, enjoyed bike rides."

"We put 47,000 miles on an old Honda I had. From Michigan to Indiana to the East Coast; we rode all over. I couldn't fire that bike up without her jumping on it."

Attending the bench dedication with Seay's daughters were their significant others, whose presence added to the several dozen members of the RiverStone work family present for the commemoration.

"A piece of our heart left when our mom passed. We miss her," Brittany Combs said. "Our family would like to thank the community for their continued thoughts, prayers, and support."

"Please continue to pray for all of those affected by this tragedy. The plaque and bench in memory was a very kind gesture from those at RiverStone, whom our mom loved dearly."

The memorial plaque reads as follows: "In memory of the RiverStone community members we lost on December 19, 2018 and all those deeply affected by this tragedy. Forever in our hearts and minds!"

Panther Cookoff...from Page 1A

brought, and we are running out, so it's all good."

The winner of the competition always receives a medal and bragging rights for the year, while the last place is rewarded with a sack of potatoes.

Softball Coach Stephen Mitchell received the title of "Champ" for the competition, CTAE Director Josh Davis came in Second Place, and Band Director Will Stafford earned himself a sack of potatoes for the second year in a row.

"It means a lot to win because there is a lot of really good barbeque here and a lot of good competition," Mitchell said. "I really like to participate because I love being on the grill and cooking low and slow."

Stan Gunter, Jason Karnes, Daniel Liberatore and Kurt Baumeister served as community judges for the tournament, delivering a few surprises along the way, at least according to Principal Hussion.

"I was shocked with how we placed this year," Hussion said. "I was shocked by Greg Chambers coming in a low place and Ryan Talton not winning again this year. Talton has won two years in a row, and



Union County High hosts the annual BBQ tournament as a time of fellowship for faculty and staff before everyone goes home for Christmas break.

he didn't even make the Top 2 this year – it's a different year.

"It takes a lot of hard work and fun competition, and a lot of these people lost some sleep last night working on this food. We are thankful for those that brought in food to help with this meal, and we are glad that we get to do this with our staff at the end of the year."

Following the competition, the Union County Primary School received the gift of a restored school chair

from the Old Young Cane School.

The primary school was thankful for the donation of the chair and looks forward to putting it in the library where kids can see it as they get books and visit.

Hussion said the high school plans on keeping the competition going for years to come, with the event acting as a great way for staff to come together and appreciate one another before Christmas.