

# Reece...continued from Page 1A



**John Kay has been instrumental to the success of the Byron Herbert Reece Society, and was invited to be the keynote speaker at the 2017 Annual Meeting. Pictured here with his family, L-R: John Kay, Patti Kay, Kerri Kay, Tommie Kay and Terry Winter Kay. Photo/Shawn Jarrard**

promote” the legacy of Reece, and it holds an annual meeting for the purpose of going over financials and updates with the membership, celebrating Reece with performances and speakers, and appointing leadership for the upcoming year.

In the leadup to the keynote speaker, Jackie Elsner sang a selection of Reece’s poems, including “The Pilgrim and the Fir Tree,” sung to the tune of “Coronation” by Oliver Holden.

Elsner was joined by Jerry Taylor, who played “Coronation” on a 1920s Estey model JJ portable organ.

The keynote speaker for the meeting was none other than Reece Society founding Chair Dr. John Kay.

Janice Moore introduced Kay, relating how he helped to cultivate and grow the Reece Society starting in 2003, which culminated in the 2012 decision to restore the Reece Farm in concert with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and others.

Kay served as pastor of Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church from 1967 to 1980, and like Reece, Kay was a professor at Young Harris College, where he taught Religion and Philosophy classes from 1967 until he retired in 2001.

He continues to teach ICL classes at the college, and co-founded the ICL program at YHC in 1991.

Kay’s address at the

annual meeting was in many ways a letter of appreciation for Reece and his literary contributions to Union County and beyond.

“I wish to speak today about the legacy of Byron Herbert Reece – about what he left behind – and also about our commitment to ensure its survival and extend its reach,” said Kay. “My purpose is not to convince you of the worthiness of this objective. I take that to be a given.

“Nor do I propose to offer fresh new insights into the legitimacy of his legacy. I will leave that task to the truly wise. In fact, I suggest that by appealing to his own words and experiences, we can allow Reece himself to validate all that he bequeathed to us in his living and his labor.”

Reece received copious praise for his written works within his own lifetime, related Kay, and when his acclaim refused to translate into financial success, Reece continued to toil on his family farm despite his consumptive illness, and subsidized his income by teaching at Young Harris College.

The poet and author was a complicated man, according to Kay, “plagued by loneliness, illness, thoughts of death, and a general state of misery.”

It was likely this great loneliness and misery that caused Reece to take his own life some 59 years ago, though Kay pointed out that Reece did seem to experience genuine

joy through his musings of nature and the ponderings of the passage of time.

“For 59 years Reece has been past the reach of song. But we are not,” said Kay in closing, referring to the epigraph to the Pulitzer Prize-nominated “Bow Down in Jericho,” Reece’s second work of collected poems.

“And his songs remain within our reach,” continued Kay. “Our voices at times may be weak and wavering and unconvincing. We may sing off-key to unappreciative audiences.

“But sing we must, for as Reece declared so hauntingly at the conclusion of one of his best-known poems, ‘I know a journey that yet wants going, I know a song that is still to sing, I know a fallow that waits the sowing – (There never was time for everything.)’

“Dear friends, his time is now in our hands.”

Lunch was served at the conclusion of the meeting, at which point the society’s board of directors met to elect the 2017-2018 officers as follows: Sanford Freeman, chair; Reid Dyer, vice chair; Debra March, treasurer; Carol Knight, recording secretary; and Teresa Sampson, membership secretary.

Outgoing Chair Keith Jones, who chaired the 2017 Annual Meeting, said just prior to the start of the meeting that one of the main goals of the society moving forward is to create greater awareness of the Reece Farm within the community.

“We would love to have more folks from here in Union County come and visit the farm,” said Jones. “It’s not only about Reece and his writings, it’s also about what was life like in the first half of the 20th century here in Union County.”

Jones and Freeman shared upcoming Reece Society events, including the installation of a new polished black marble plaque at the Byron Herbert Reece Trailhead, to replace a bronze plaque that had been installed decades earlier, only to be stolen in the intermittent years.

Freeman also announced that the Reece Society, which this year handed out its first scholarship to a graduating senior, will continue to award scholarships to Union County High School students in honor of Reece, who graduated UCHS in 1935.

Reid Dyer spoke on the proposed trail to connect the Reece Farm to Vogel State Park, and said he’s hopeful that the project will finally begin this year.

Several members were in attendance who knew Byron Herbert Reece in one way or another, including Ethelene Dyer Jones, who, as a sophomore in high school in 1945, interviewed Reece following the publication of his first work of poems, “Ballad of the Bones.”

Grapelle Mock, Jones’ teacher at Union County High, had tasked Jones with writing an article on Reece for the school page in the *North Georgia News*, and during her interview, she showed him a sonnet she’d written in her English class.

He offered her the following advice: “Don’t hide your talent under a bushel like I’ve done so many years.”

For more information about upcoming Reece Centennial Activities, contact the society through its website at [byronherbertreecesociety.org](http://byronherbertreecesociety.org).

The annual meeting is typically held at the Reece Farm near Vogel State Park, but due to a scheduling conflict, society members this year met at the Union County Community Center.



**Attendees of the 2017 Byron Herbert Reece Annual Meeting who, in one way or another, knew Reece in life. L-R: Front Row, Betty Shuler, Dorothy Dyer, Ethelene Dyer Jones; Back Row, Jim Mitchell, Bud Akins, Mary Carol Akins, Rebecca Reece Sirmons and Keith Jones. Photo/Shawn Jarrard**

## UNION COUNTY COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Garden Tours	<b>Every Monday:</b> GMREC (May-Oct)	9 am - 1 pm
Children’s Story Time	Union County Library	11 am
Kiwanis Club	Steve’s Steakhouse	Noon
Civil Air Patrol	Blairsville Airport	6:30 pm
Boy Scouts #101	United Methodist Ch	7 pm
Tri State Bus. Women	<b>Every Tuesday:</b> Blairsville Restaurant	8 am
MMQG Tues. Strippers	Mtn. Presbyterian Ch	9:30-2:30 pm
Get Fit	First UMC	5:15 pm
Smoky Mtn. Melodies	United Methodist Ch	6:30 pm
Hi Country Harmonizers	Branan Lodge	6:30 pm
BINGO	<b>Every Wednesday:</b> Civic Center	7 pm
Butternut Ladies Golf	<b>Every Thursday:</b> Golf Course (Apr-Oct)	8:30 am
Masonic Luncheon	Cooks Restaurant	11:30 am
Rotary Club	So. Bank & Trust	Noon
Get Fit	First UMC	5:15 pm
MMQG Sewcials	<b>Second Monday of each month:</b> Mtn. Presbyterian Ch	10 am-3 pm
Enotah Chapter #24	Masonic Lodge	7:30 pm
Disabled Am Veterans	Veterans Center	7 pm (Jan-Oct)
FPL Retirees	<b>Second Tuesday of each month:</b> Hole in Wall Rest.	9 am
Historical Society Bd.	Old Courthouse	9:30 am
Mtn Laurel Arts/Crafts	Union County Library	10 am
Active/Retired Fed Emp.	Grinds & Glazes	Noon
Mtn. Sounds Dulcimer	Sr. Citizens Center	1:30-3:30 pm
Mountain Coin Club	N. GA Tech	6 pm
Blairsville PTO	UC Primary School	6 pm
Blue Ridge Mtn Jeepers	Steve’s Steakhouse	6:00 pm
Beta Sigma Phi	Kappa Alpha Chapter	7 pm
Eastern Star #304	Location not listed	7:30 pm
Band Boosters	UC Middle School	7:30 pm
Lions Club	<b>Second Thursday of each month:</b> Steve’s Cookie Jar	6 pm
Appalachian Shrine Club	Shrine Building	6:30 pm
Democratic Party	Unity Church of B’ville	6:30 pm
Trout Unlimited	UC Community Cntr - A	6:30 pm
Sons Confederate Vet.	UCB Community Rm	7 pm
Knights of Columbus	Marian Hall	7:30 pm
Eastern Star #471	<b>Second Friday of each month:</b> Location not listed	7:30 pm
His Victory Riders	<b>Second Saturday of each month:</b> Blairsville Restaurant	8 am
PFLAG	<b>Second Sunday of each month:</b> Call 706-389-5269 for Info	