

North Georgia News

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Countywide home values up 22% after reassessments

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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Union County Government announced last week that homeowners would soon be receiving their annual property value reassessment notices, which started going out in the mail June 30. The county also announced a roughly 22% increase in countywide home values versus 2021.

Importantly, the county, led by Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, said that "our plan is to roll back our property tax mill rate."

"Our goal is for the majority of property owners to have little or no property tax increase," the county said in a

June 29 Facebook post.

Still, such a surprise uptick in home values is likely to come as a surprise to many residents, as last year, the Tax Assessor's Office completed a major revaluation process covering all real properties in Union that resulted in about a 30% increase in overall home values countywide.

So, why are property values going up so much one year later, and how often can people expect this to occur?

Per state law, all properties must be reassessed every year based on the fair market value of real estate as of Jan. 1 of the same year. So, last year's property assessments were based on local fair market values as of Jan. 1, 2021, which

actually reflected 2020 housing market activity.

Fair market value is an estimate of how much a home is expected to go for on the open market, and if people will recall, the housing market experienced a boom in 2020 after the onset of COVID-19, especially in rural North Georgia, where people flush with disposable income moved to escape more congested areas.

Unfortunately, this real estate boom that drove up market values – that is, what homes were selling for – happened in the middle of the two-year countywide revaluation process, the first such mass revaluation of property values in the county since 2006.

The countywide revaluation was necessary, as the Tax Assessor's Office had fallen behind in keeping assessed property values up to date with current fair market values as required by state law.

To avoid impending penalties from the state, the Tax Assessor's Office approached Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris in 2019 to request funding to hire third-party appraisal company Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions & Services to conduct the countywide revaluation.

GMASS worked with the Tax Assessor's Office for the revaluation that went into effect last year, capturing



GMASS Appraisal Services CEO Stan King in the July 15, 2021, public meeting regarding countywide property revaluation. GMASS and King assist the Tax Assessor's Office each year in assessing local property values, as required by state law. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Flags fly and boats float for Independence Day '22



"The Nottely Express" – a boat decorated to resemble a speeding locomotive – won First Place in the Nottely Boat Parade over the weekend. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On July 2, the Nottely Marina drew the community out in force for an Independence

Day favorite that's been popular for decades – the Nottely Marina Boat Parade.

The Fourth of July celebration began at noon on Saturday, but even before then, cars had filled up marina

parking and guests posted up at nearby residential areas to pitch lawn chairs high up on the banks for a better view.

As is the case every year, 2022's lineup of decorated boat

See Independence Day, Page 6A

Second full-time, manned Fire Station in the works

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Between 2010 and 2020, Union County experienced a 15.3% increase in population, according to the most recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics. Put another way, approximately 3,300 new residents made Union County their home over that 10-year period.

According to World Population Review, another 1,200 or so new residents moved into Union County in the two years since the 2020 census was completed.

With all that growth, previously uninhabited or sparsely populated areas of the county now feature more residents in need of public services. And so, the dynamics



It takes some imagination now, but by the fall of 2023, the brand-new full-time Fire Station No. 13 should be filling the view here at the entrance to Hidden Harbor on Murphy Highway. Photo by Mark Smith

of Union County's Fire Department and Emergency Medical Service have changed

significantly.

Union County Fire Chief
See Fire Station 13, Page 2A

Farmers Market highlights homesteading, cannery



Farmers Market Manager Mickey Cummings and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris led the ribbon cutting Saturday for the homestead located at the market. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Farmers Market has experienced a bustling season since opening last month, with no signs of slowing down.

Of particular note was the busy schedule for the July 2 market, considering that not only were the usual vendors there to offer fresh and locally sourced products, but a few extra activities were available as well.

First off, with it being the first Saturday of the month, the

Power of Produce Kids Club was afforded a space toward the back of the market, away from traffic, so that kids could work on making their own miniature vehicles out of squash and cucumbers.

Curious children made veggie mobiles and sent them down a ramp for a test run, with most making it as far as the benches across from the crafting table. Saturday's craft was just one of many in a lineup aimed at introducing children to local farmers, the agricultural process and healthy eating.

"Kids earn market coins that they can spend on fresh

fruits and vegetables," Market Assistant Manager Kristy Peney said, offering a further glimpse into the kinds of rewards and projects kids and their families can expect from the monthly program.

"Today is the veggie derby; last month we made composting critters. The kids made critters and then they learned how they could compost them, and we gave them seeds to plant. Everything is agriculture themed."

There are a few local faces who return regularly, but some families trek from Blairsville. See Farmers Market, Page 3A

Meet Woody Gap School's new Principal Reynolds

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Wendy Reynolds, a 1992 graduate of Union County High School, has been selected to take over as the Principal of Woody Gap School to lead the 2022-23 school year.

"I taught in Fannin County for 25 years, and then I came to Woody Gap last year teaching math," Reynolds said, adding that she was very excited when she found out that she had been chosen to serve as the new principal there.

"I feel honored," Reynolds said. "I feel blessed that not only Union County Schools but the Suches community and our school governance team has faith in me as far as my qualifications for this position."

"Over the past year, it's been nice to get to know the Suches community and the students there. I want to give the students the best quality education and get them prepared for whatever they choose to do beyond high school."

Union County Schools Superintendent John Hill described Reynolds as a "quality candidate" with plenty of past leadership experience



Wendy Reynolds
Woody Gap Principal

in addition to having taught math at Woody Gap in the most recent school year.

"She has been very well received by the staff and community in Suches," Hill said.

Reynolds was Assistant Principal and CTAE Director at Fannin County High School for three years, and she served as Assistant Principal at

County Middle School for two years.

The new Woody Gap School Principal holds a bachelor's degree in Secondary Mathematics from North Georgia College, now University of North Georgia, and master's and specialist degrees in Education Administration and Supervision from Lincoln State University. See Principal Reynolds, Page 2A



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Home Values Up...from Page 1A

in the process many home improvements and additions that had not been accounted for over the years.

So, when newly captured home improvements and additions and updated assessments from the countywide revaluation coincided with an incredibly hot real estate environment, the result was a dramatic increase in total real property values in 2021.

Those same market trends have persisted to date, according to GMASS CEO of Appraisal Services Stan King, who said that the annual

reassessment process for 2022 relied upon fair market values for real estate sold throughout 2021, when the market remained elevated.

"Now, since we're under contract with the county, we are reassessing properties every year," King said of GMASS. "It just so happens that we're in an inflated market.

"A good indicator of what is the true market would be comparing our assessments last year to this year. That 20%-22% increase this year is what the market inflated values to last year (based on home sales in 2021)."

King would like to point out that the assessment notices being mailed contain information that may be misleading at first glance, as the state requires that assessed values appear alongside last year's millage rate to produce a current-year tax estimate.

However, as the county has already signaled, the commissioner intends to roll back this year's millage rate, which he will set later in the year after his annual budgeting

process is further along, so that "the majority of property owners ... have little or no property tax increase."

Therefore, the tax estimates on people's reassessment notices – which should not be mistaken for tax bills – are incorrect.

In addition to the Union County Government, the Union County School System also levies property taxes, and Superintendent John Hill said the Board of Education plans on rolling back the school millage rate as well this year.

Moving forward, GMASS will continue to work with the Tax Assessor's Office to keep property values up to date in accordance with state law, with King noting that, given economic forecasts, it is likely that a market slowdown will soon occur and that values will begin to stabilize or decline.

If the Federal Reserve continues to raise interest rates to fight inflation, as it has been doing over the last few months, the housing market may even slow to the point that

assessed home values will start to reverse course and decline in the coming years.

People may check their values by consulting their mailed reassessment notices or by going online to www.qpublic.net/ga/union and clicking "Search Records" in the blue box labeled "Related Information."

"The Tax Assessor's Office encourages everyone to look at your property assessment," the county said on Facebook, "and if you have any concerns, please contact the Assessor's Office at 706-439-6011.

"You are encouraged to file an appeal online, if you feel your property values are not correct. You would file at www.qpublic.net/ga/union where you can also see other similar property values in the county."

Property owners may also file an appeal directly with the Tax Assessor's Office inside the Union County Courthouse. All appeals must be filed within 45 days of the date on the reassessment notice.

Fire Station 13...from Page 1A

and EMA Director David Dyer said one major consideration by the Commissioner's Office and Fire Department is the Insurance Services Organization rating for homes in the north end of the county, where most of the recent growth has occurred.

Simply put, ISO ratings affect homeowner insurance, with underwriters using ISO information to determine rates and premiums.

For insurance purposes, residential structures located more than five road-miles – as opposed to straight-line distances – away from the nearest fire station are considered to not have fire protection.

That, Dyer said, translates to higher insurance rates and premiums for those homes that are outside the five road-mile distance from a fire station.

Constructing Fire Station 13 at the entrance to the Hidden Harbor subdivision, which is located about halfway between Blairsville and the North Carolina state line on Murphy Highway, will alleviate that problem for 200-300 residences in that area of Union County, Dyer said.

Another major concern is the number and type of calls the Fire Department and EMS run in each area, Dyer said, with the large increase in population in the north part of the county translating to an increased number of all types of emergency calls, about 70% of which are medical in nature.

"Then we began evaluating calls – how many calls we run and our response times to this area," Dyer said. "The north part of the county is very busy (and getting busier). There's a large population there; you've got the lake, the Murphy Highway, which is very busy, so we have put plans in place to station career,

full-time firefighters at Station 13."

This means Station 13 will be manned 24/7 with firefighters and EMTs dedicated to accommodating the recent call volume increase.

Currently, the two fire stations that immediately service the Murphy Highway corridor between Blairsville and Ivy Log Road are Station 4 at 93 Moccasin Road and Station 6 at 1520 Pat Colwell Road, both volunteer firefighter stations.

"We're going to put a fire engine at Station 13, which is required by ISO and the standards and training of the Union County Fire Department," Dyer said. "And we're going to put a rescue truck there so we can respond to medical calls, fires, any kind of fire department-related call.

"We're in negotiations with, and we have made an offer to, the (Union General) ambulance service to put an ambulance (at Station 13).

"We have also allowed for a small office at Station 13 for Union County Sheriff's Deputies, which they can utilize for writing up reports or whatever they may need to do, without having to drive all the way back to the Sheriff's Office on Beasley Street in Blairsville."

According to the plans, Station 13 will have a three-bay garage that will house a fire engine, a rescue truck and an ambulance. It will also have living accommodations for up to six personnel, a station lieutenant's office, and the aforementioned sheriff's space.

Plus, the exterior will be designed to blend with the entrance to Hidden Harbor, the developer of which donated the land to the county several years ago with the express purpose of building a new fire station there.

"So, it's a fire station, but it's also going to be a public safety complex," Dyer said. "We're building it with expansion in mind, and it should increase our response time to this area by six or seven minutes."

Six or seven minutes may not sound like a whole lot of time, but it can mean the difference between being able to save or not save a burning structure, or be the difference between life and death for a heart attack or auto accident victim.

The timeline for the project is very tenuous at this point, what with the current global economic woes and supply chain disruptions for materials. However, both Dyer and Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said they hope to have Station 13 completed by the summer/fall of 2023.

Dyer said there are several areas in the county that are beyond that five road-mile limit, though not as populated as the Murphy Highway corridor.

The Fire Department and the Commissioner's Office are always on the lookout for ways to expand and improve emergency services to the residents of the county, which is all part of the regularly updated five-year plan for the Fire Department.

That five-year plan, incidentally, is updated yearly in September/October. In this way, the Fire Department and the county can keep abreast of changing dynamics and plan accordingly.

A Request for Proposal to construct Union County Fire Station 13 will be running in North Georgia News issues dated June 29, July 6, July 13 and July 20. The RFP has also been published on the Union County Government website and the Georgia Procurement Registry.

Principal Reynolds...from Page 1A

Memorial University.

Former Woody Gap School Principal Carol Knight said that Reynolds "has already been a huge asset to the school beyond the classroom."

"The School Governance Team, composed of students, parents, teachers, staff, employees and community members, met with Superintendent John Hill,

Assistant Superintendent Tiffany Setzer, and me," Knight said. "During that meeting, they listed their desired characteristics in the new principal. Mrs. Reynolds checks off every item on that list.

"I look forward to mentoring Mrs. Reynolds over the coming year and to seeing the great things she will do for

everyone: students, staff, school and the Suches community."

Knight, who is considering retirement at the end of the 2022-23 school year, decided to step over to Union County High School as Assistant Principal, 10th and 11th grades, where she can mentor Reynolds in at least her first year as Principal of Woody Gap School.

Mtn. Regional Arts and Crafts Guild Plein Aire Paint-Out



(L-R): Virginia Tinley, W. Craig Sasser, Julia Stevens and Keith Burgess

Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild held its third annual Plein Aire Paint-Out at the Azalea Farm in Blairsville, GA on the rain date of June 18.

Sixteen painters competed for the \$500 in prize money donated by the Azalea Farm owners, Robert and An-

gie Hice. Taking the first prize of \$200 was W. Craig Sasser. Second prize of \$150 went to Virginia Tinley. Third prize of \$100 was awarded to Julia Stevens and honorable mention went to Keith Burgess. Judges for the event were Mary Mike Keller, Karin Butler, Diane

Woodward and Angie Hice.

Breakfast and lunch were served to the participants and Bacchus on the Lake sponsored a reception while the judges deliberated. Next year's paint-out will be held at Hamilton Gardens in the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Farmers Market...from Page 1A

far away to be a part of the program.

Brittany and John Hoover, for example, make a point of visiting the Farmers Market on the first Saturday of every month because they want their children to take advantage of the educational aspect that POP provides.

"It's a very family-friendly environment, very safe," noted Brittany, saying that she and her family much prefer going to Blairsville's Farmer Market rather than those in their native Atlanta. "I like this so much better. In fact, we rarely go to the one in Atlanta because it's just bigger and doesn't feel as quaint. This, we make a priority."

Another exciting "extra" on July 2 was the official ribbon-cutting ceremony recognizing the historical homestead at the Farmers Market.

Market Manager Mickey Cummings oversaw the opening of the site, which features two fields of historical crops like heritage tomatoes and corn stalks known to sprout up to 10 feet high.

Four buildings sit on the plot of land adjoining the Farmers Market, with the farmhouse itself coming to be known as the Hunter-England Cabin.

Constructed sometime during 1831 and 1832, the cabin, which was moved in recent years to the Farmers Market, features a trapdoor that at one time probably led to a root cellar. Given the time period of its construction, however, there's another theory about the trapdoor's function.

"Prior to the Indian Removal Act, you'd think it's probably a place for people to hide (if being attacked)," Cummings said. According to family historians, the back window of the house was used to keep watch for and snipe at hostile Native American warbands.

The Nicholson Smokehouse and Miller Tobacco Barn now stand beside the cabin, and in September, after the tobacco growing at the far end of the second field is harvested, the latter facility will be used to demonstrate how Union County's settlers dried and processed the plant.

One of the most impressive aspects of the homestead is the blacksmith shed that houses retired farming equipment first put to use at least a century and a half ago. Many of the antique tools were donated by Michael Thompson, whose grandfather, Ocean Tate, owned the original building and served as Union County's blacksmith circa 1890.

"We've got it all catalogued," Cummings said, sharing the history of fascinating finds such as his own great-grandfather's sharpening

stone and a 200-year-old set of bellows now mounted above the ground so guests can feel the force of a gust that used to stoke the flames of a forge.

"We'll have actual demonstrations later this summer," Cummings added.

Meanwhile, back at the market proper, produce options are beginning to change for some local farmers as the middle of summer rolls around. Stalls have become brightly decorated with yellow squash, red tomatoes and orange peaches, as mere produce proves it can be just as artful as craft displays.

Cleveland resident Amy Smith has been selling her homegrown veggies in Union County for about 10 years. Despite farming all her life, she said there's nowhere else she'd rather do business.

"I enjoy it, and the people are friendly. I have a lot of friends that come back (to my business). This is a real nice place to come - if you're in the shade," Smith teased, hardly able to catch a break through all the people stopped to pick up a basket of green bell peppers or speckled cucumbers.

"My peppers are just now coming in," said Smith, theorizing that she will probably sell more red peppers in the coming months, along with squash and her most popular item, cucumbers.

Depending on a farm's location, the weather and other intricate factors, some vendors may present different yields. Luckily, every Tuesday and Saturday, from 9 a.m. or 8 a.m., respectively, to 1 p.m., visitors to the market can access handy brochures that provide a general timetable of when to expect certain crops.

Those same brochures contain a list of stall numbers that show where particular vendors are located and what they sell, though for more detailed information, one can always visit the Union County Farmers Market website at ucfarmersmarket.com.

Right behind the market and just below the yet-to-be



Market vendor Amy Smith selling squash and pepper produce at the Farmers Market July 2. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

named homestead sits the Union County Cannery, which opened for use Tuesday, July 5.

Canning Plant Manager Patrick Fix anticipates a busy season ahead until Oct. 6, especially with rising produce costs at the grocery store, believing that more and more people will find an interest in preparing and preserving their own food.

"I don't know for sure if it's going to last, but the way it's starting out with people signing up (to can), it looks like we're going to be filling up both of our appointment times pretty regularly," said Fix, attributing the rise in activity also with the lifting of COVID restrictions.

Anyone wanting to use the Canning Plant must bear in mind that canning is done by appointment only. The Cannery itself is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 a.m. to noon. Appointments are organized into two slots, one from 6-8:45 a.m. and the other from 9-11:45 a.m.

These slots are timed, so it's important to "not bring more than you can do." Volunteers and staff will be on-hand to steam or cook recipes if needed. Speaking of recipes, they must be approved to meet health standards, and for additional safety precautions, close-toed shoes must be worn.

Guests are required to bring their own jars, lids,

bands and ingredients. Bowls, measuring cups, funnels, and the like will be available there at the Cannery should they be needed, but guests are free to bring their own if they feel more comfortable doing so.

To book an appointment and find out prices, call 706-439-6043 or email cannery@uniongov.com. With the overlap of Cannery and Farmers Market hours on Tuesdays, guests can also come visit both - along with the homestead - at 283 Farmers Market Way in Blairsville.



The Homestead at the Farmers Market, which includes the historic Hunter-England Cabin and actual growing crops. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

23rd Annual Butternut Creek Festival coming up July 16-17



(L-R) Herb Bruce, Paul Grossmann, Tom Chambers & Danny Grojean

The warm days of July are here and it is time to get ready for the 23rd Annual Butternut Creek Festival. Eighty-five vendors and several non-profit groups will be offering their wares along the shaded Butternut Creek in beautiful Meeks Park in Blairsville. This popular juried craft show will be held July 16th and 17th. The Saturday hours of the show are 10 am to 5 pm and on Sunday the show runs from 10 am to 4 pm. Admission, parking and entertainment are free and there will be free shuttle service from the parking areas to the event venue. A variety of food vendors will provide a great selection of tasty items for you to enjoy as you wander through the show.

The High Country Artisans, Inc. a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization coordinates the show. Its membership consist of local artists and crafters who volunteer their time and efforts to create a show that promotes functional and creative arts for everyone in the North Georgia Mountains. The proceeds from

the show are used primarily to support the art programs in the Union County and Woody Gap School systems. In addition other art programs are helped throughout the community.

There will be a wide variety of artisans participating in the show. Old favorites that attendees look for each year will return, plus there a number of new crafters offering exciting items for our attendees to enjoy. The art categories you will see include furniture, pottery, jewelry, fabric art, pillows, purses, candles, soaps, hand-carved old world Santas, lathe turned and other wood products, oil and water color paintings, photography, metal art, knives, gourds, wind chimes, glass, yard art, birdhouses, hand-crafted leather, musical instruments, scarves, quilts, sculpture and clothing.

Chad Gainey will be demonstrating his artistic chainsaw carving skills both days of the show. The Blairsville Cruisers, American Legion Post 121, Misty Mountain Quilters and Union County

Fire Department will be on hand to provide information about their activities. They will also be selling raffle tickets to support their projects.

Entertainment has always been a great part of the show. This year's line-up for Saturday is Chris Hampton Music 10:30 am to Noon, Jim Wood Family 12:30 to 2:30 pm and Country River Band 2:30 to 5 pm. Sunday's entertainment includes Southern Gospel Music 10:30 am to Noon, Hunter Grason Noon to 1:30 pm and Country River Band will provide us with a great selection of traditional country music from 2:30 to 3:30 pm.

Bring your family and friends for an enjoyable day. For more information go to www.butternutcreekfestival.com, butternutcreekfestival@gmail.com, visit us on Facebook at [ButternutCreekArtFestival](https://www.facebook.com/ButternutCreekArtFestival/) or leave a message at 706-781-1221. One other reminder, although we all love pets, the Recreation Department does not allow animals in this section of the park.

Council talks audit, airport hangar and speedbumps

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville City Council and Mayor Jim Conley met for their regular monthly meeting on June 14 at City Hall, where they touched on a whole slate of topics including finances, crime, upcoming events, speedbumps and more. First up in the meeting was certified public accountant Clay Pilgrim with Rushton & Company, who presented the Fiscal Year 2021 Audit, handing council members printed slides to better explain his findings along with the bound report.

"I always like to thank you all for having Rushton do your audit, but (I'd also like to) thank your staff – the entire team – (for making) this audit as a process go smoothly," Pilgrim said.

And while June 14 wasn't late for the audit presentation, the date was delayed from a "normal" choice of May due to scheduling conflicts. That being said, the financial report showed no signs of fraud or other concerning deficiencies.

"I'm pleased to present that, for 2021, we have an unmodified, clean opinion on the financial statements. Nothing came to our attention that would prohibit us (from this) opinion," Pilgrim said.

Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce President Steve Rowe reported that the increase in sales tax

collections was based on a 60% jump in tourism to the area within the past year, and based on the first five months of 2022, the trend is continuing to climb.

"We still don't have the exact numbers on that, but that would lead to the increase in SPLOST dollars (and) sales tax dollars, so it looks like people have found the mountains," Rowe said. "We encourage them to come and visit, spend their money, and enjoy it while they're here."

"One thing I would like to say in public and make it known – there is no change in the parking for the fireworks show," Rowe added, addressing recent concerns about parking for the July 4 event. "If anything, the parking has increased for the fireworks show because our COVID restrictions are off."

As for an update on law enforcement, Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter reported an increase in call volume and general activity due to the advent of summer, but most impressive was the recent GBI-assisted arrest of a suspect in the 2014 armed robbery of the Blairsville CVS.

"It was a cold case," Baxter said. "He is currently in the Dawson County Jail because he robbed a CVS in 2015 in Dawson County."

"I won't be releasing anything as far as how this case has come about ... but this individual is currently

incarcerated at Dawson County, and as soon as he completes his time there, we'll be bringing him back to Union County to face his charges here."

Les Burrell, a retired forest service and law enforcement officer, proposed the construction of a new hangar at the airport. A separate proposal to build a new hangar was presented by other parties in the February city meeting.

Having already surveyed possible locations for the new facility, Burrell presented a tentative map to the council.

Particularly, the proposed location is an undeveloped area outside of the airport's fence. The land would require extensive grading work as the terrain is uneven, and a hangar there would need to have its water connected via the main terminal.

Burrell clarified that the hangar would house privately-owned planes and would also feature a road leading back to the terminal building.

While the subject requires more discussion, particularly regarding the establishment of lease terms, the council did not express disinterest in the idea and is taking the proposal under consideration.

Before closing the meeting, the Mayor addressed recent concerns and community conversations about the recent installation of a speedbump on the downtown roundabout exit onto Wellborn Street, which initially featured three



Blairsville City Council Members Tony Dyer and Mary Ruth Cook in their June 14 regular meeting.

speedbumps.

"There's only one speedbump (now); it's on Wellborn Street, and it'll stay there from now on," Conley said. "The reason it was installed was to slow the traffic down – safety."

Councilwoman Mary Ruth Cook believes the newly installed speed-reading signs have worked well to warn commuters of their speed, and Moore offered more insight into the decisions, saying,

"There's a lot of kids and people around, and (drivers) will not slow down. They go too fast."

The Blairsville City Council meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall.

Independence Day...from Page 1A



The '80s-inspired motley crew of the "Nottely Cru" boat at the 2022 Nottely Boat Parade July 2.

participants was not known in total by anyone beforehand, leaving judges and observers to be surprised by the turnout.

Decoration themes were taken from classic summer vibes, to include a craft covered in plastic palm trees and colorful tropical flags, or inspired by new movies, like the boat designed as a plane sporting a "Cruise'n Lake Nottely" sign in honor of "Top Gun II."

"Be a fruit loop in a bowl of Cheerios" suggested a sign held up by one boat passenger dressed in a blue toucan suit, showing that pop culture and food references weren't off the table either. For their enthusiasm, this boat took home the "Fun Bunch" title.

Of course, the Boat Parade was held to celebrate Independence Day, and by far the most popular colors flying from every vessel were red, white and blue.

American flags flew from railings and roofs, and even the smallest, most casual crafts sported shining streamers or balloons. "The Eagle Boat," winning the place for the "Most Patriotic," exemplified this the best with a huge, decorative bald eagle gracing the front.

"The Nottely Express," coming in at First Place, garnered cheers and applause with every pass around the docks and banks. Cleverly decked out to resemble a train, the float played Ozzy Osborne's "Crazy Train" from

a set of speakers while a smoke machine belched plumes of red, white and blue smoke into the air.

Another favorite was the metal-themed "Nottely Cru," whose crew sported big hairstyles and loud outfits highly reminiscent of the similarly named '80s rock band. Fittingly, the motto hanging from the sign around their deck was "Red, White and Cru."

What made them popular outside of the nostalgic reference was their T-shirt gun, which was usually aimed toward the shore and into the waiting, outstretched arms of cheering children.

Kids were also able to look forward to goodie bags tossed from Bunker Hill Pet Boarding's Third Prize-winning boat, which featured a massive inflatable ginger cat stretching on the top.

Anyone was free to participate, and some floats were merely composed of families and friends rather than local businesses or organizations. Yet others weren't even pontoons, with at least a small amount of rogue jet skier activity and, bestowed the "Smallest Boat," a couple paddling a kayak at the end of the parade's lineup.

And then there was the inclusion of an amphibious car. Unlike the boats around him, the driver didn't require a motley crew, and he could be seen smiling and giving

onlookers the thumbs-up as he cruised solo past the shore.

"He stole the show," said Miriam Johnson, who traveled all the way from Madison when she heard about the patriotic celebration from her daughter-in-law. She and her grandson found a good spot toward the middle of a bank, providing them with a clear view they were happy to share with others.

"My favorite one was the Nottely train," voiced Marilyn Walker, who was there with her husband Bill. The pair have been Blairsville residents for 11 years but never got the chance to go to many events. After reading about July 4 celebrations in the newspaper, they marked their calendars and made sure to attend Nottely's nautical knockout.

Even after the initial parade went through, most of the participants circled back around for at least a second time to throw out more treats or spread some national pride toward their landbound neighbors lingering on the marina's dock and banks.

Several boaters shot off poppers and tiny sparklers, displaying their thanks and a sort of informal solidarity among fellow Americans. Even if some guests, like Johnson and her family, were not from Blairsville, everyone present celebrated America's independence and history of freedom.



The Nottely Marina staff passed out trophies for crowd-favorite floats in the boat parade Saturday.