

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, August 4, 2021

Racing Hall of Fame to induct Mike Rich Aug. 7

By Dave Wiley
Guest Contributor

Finally. After a hard fought three-year election campaign by his fellow crewmates and more than 30 years after his tragic death, Blairsville's own Mike Rich will move to his rightful place at the Georgia Racing Hall of Fame in Dawsonville.

An induction ceremony and banquet will be held this Saturday, Aug. 7, at 1 p.m., and everyone is invited to attend the celebration of a local man who lost his life doing what he loved.

"They couldn't have fit another person into that church with a shoehorn. There were even more outside. And the funeral procession to the cemetery stretched nearly two miles," said close friend Mike Jones, who shook his head at

the memory. "Can you imagine? Two Miles!"

"You know, I didn't watch that racing until Mike got on the track, but he was so dang excited about it that I started watching every race. I wanted to know what happened. I wanted to see him go over that wall!"

Rich was no different than most youngsters growing up in the North Georgia mountains. The Union County native loved the outdoors, he loved sports, and he liked to go fast.

"Mike loved racing," said his widow, Teresa. "He raced motorcycles, a rail buggy he built from the frame up, and he liked to go to the dirt tracks. But most of all he loved NASCAR."

"Each February he, Steve Colwell, Keith Stephens, and a group of friends from Blairsville spent Speed Weeks in Daytona

together. One year they even made their own pit passes from construction paper and colored markers.

"After he made the pit crew, we laughed. He wouldn't need the 'homemade' pit passes anymore!"

Mike Rich had joined a very exclusive club. When it came to pit passes, he had the real thing now.

How he became the Melling Racing/#9 Ford Thunderbird pit crew's right rear tire changer was quite the story itself. A laughing Doug Shaak remembered the tryouts at the Elliott Shop.

"I was already on the pit crew, so I just came to watch. They were lined up over there against the wall, like they were waiting on a firing squad or something, and I went down the

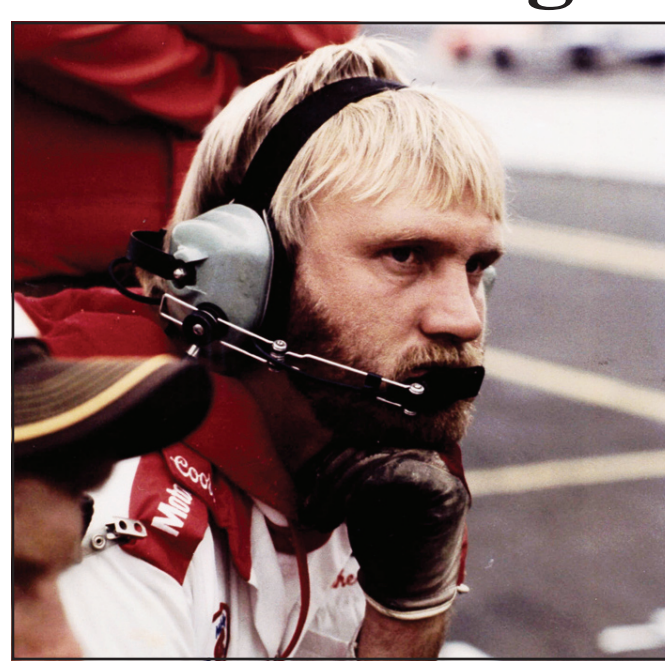
row giving them the once over. They didn't look like much at first glance. Heck, down there at the end, there was this one joker wearing COWBOY boots!"

The Joker wearing the Cowboy boots was Mike Rich.

"With the Daytona 500 barely more than a month away, Bill suggested Mike take one of the spare racecars home so he could practice changing the tire. And boy did he!" Teresa Rich Kelley laughed. "So, many friends and family came by our basement to 'help' Mike practice. And to see the car, of course. I can STILL hear the sound of that air wrench echoing from our basement!"

"To move from being just a fan to jumping the pit wall to change the right rear tire on a car that had dominated

See Mike Rich, Page 2A



Mike Rich

Hatchett, 43, dies from injuries sustained in beating

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

HAYESVILLE, N.C. — A Blairsville woman is dead and a local man is behind bars following an alleged domestic-related assault that occurred just over the Georgia/North Carolina line on Sunday, July 25.

Sarai Sanoma Hatchett, 43, later succumbed to injuries sustained in the assault, which took place in the early morning hours of July 25, according to Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff Bobby Deese.

Darrell Dywayne Williams, 47, of Blairsville, has been arrested in connection with the crime, and he remains

in custody at the Clay County Detention Center on a \$2 million bond.

Around 3:25 a.m. that Sunday, authorities responded to a 911 call alerting them to "an unconscious 43-year-old female" located inside a travel trailer at a campground off Gilberts Way on NC 175 southeast of Hayesville, Deese said.

Information pertaining to the identity of the 911 caller was not available at press time, though Williams, who was standing outside the trailer when first responders arrived, was the only other person present aside from Hatchett, Deese said.

It was not immediately known how long the pair had



Sarai Hatchett

been staying at the campground near Clay County's border with Towns County, but Deese did describe Williams and Hatchett

See Hatchett, Page 2A

13th Moonshine Cruiz-In rolls into Union County

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

After a dozen years in Hiwassee, the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In opened year 13 at Blairsville's Meeks Park, where the event drew record crowds for the three-day car show.

Despite more than 300 cars pre-registered for the occasion, event organizer Rakes Parrish expected the Moonshine Cruiz-In to attract double that number by the end of the weekend, bringing in more visitors than the park could handle.

"We should see upwards of 700 cars (registered) by

See Cruiz-In, Page 6A



The Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In's first year at Meeks Park was a resounding success, registering 768 cars from 21 different states.

Photo by Todd Forrest

More Classic Car Photos on Page 6C

Yoakam wows crowds in sold-out Music Hall show

By Allison Youngblood
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

HIAWASSEE — Since 1979, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has provided quality musical performances for families of the surrounding area. This past weekend, the Anderson Music Hall continued that tradition with a July 31 concert by country superstar Dwight Yoakam.

Yoakam has been a household name since the 1980s, when he began his music career in Nashville, Tennessee. He marketed and produced his own brand of honkytonk music that became popular in the punk rock scene in Los Angeles.

See Yoakam, Page 3A



Dwight Yoakam

Photo/Facebook

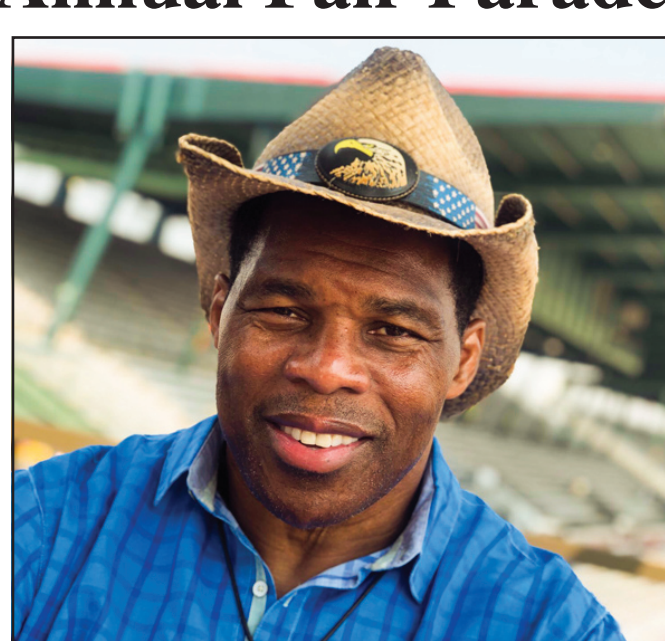
Herschel Walker invited to lead 70th Annual Fair Parade

By Chad Stack
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

HIAWASSEE — Augusta native and past Heisman Trophy winner as a University of Georgia student athlete Herschel Walker has been invited to lead the 70th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade on Saturday, Aug. 14, and he's working hard to fit it into his busy schedule.

For 70 years, thousands of people have flocked to Towns County each summer to experience the Georgia Mountain Fair, running this year Aug. 13-21.

The Georgia Mountain Fair is a one-of-a-kind event with all the hallmarks of a "classic county fair" — rides, games, live music and other entertainment — only done mountain style showcasing the tremendous history and hospitality of the area.



Herschel Walker

Photo/Twitter

There's also the ever-popular town parade and float-decorate winning floats. After canceling the 2020 parade for COVID, Georgia major prizes for those who

See Walker, Page 2A

Local restaurants square off in BBQ Cookoff fundraiser



Papaw's Trading Post Bac-Yard BBQ was voted "Best BBQ in Blairsville" in Friday's cookoff fundraiser.

By Allison Youngblood
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The First Annual Blairsville BBQ Cookoff was a huge success at the Union

County Farmers Market Friday, feeding 750 people and raising \$1,146 for "Feed The Hungry," all while answering the age-old question: "Who has the best butt?"

"Feed The Hungry is a community outreach ministry at First Baptist Blairsville that seeks to minister to those in need in our community,"

See BBQ Cookoff, Page 6A

Historical Society picnic brings membership together

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

After a year of social distancing and pandemic worries, the Union County Historical Society member picnic on Tuesday, July 27, was a real treat at the new pavilion inside Meeks Park.

"It's just an annual thing we do just for the members countywide, just to say thank you for being a member," Society President Judy Carpenter said. "It's nice to get to know some of the members. Some of them, we get applications that we don't see the faces."

Carpenter said things "are going well" for the society,

See Historical Society, Page 2A



Union County Historical Society members were glad to be meeting for their annual picnic in 2021 inside the beautiful new pavilion at Meeks Park.

Photo by Mark Smith

Vol. 112 No. 32
4 Sections 24 Pages
Weather
Thurs: Cloudy Hi 80 Lo 61
Fri: Showers Hi 79 Lo 61
Sat: T-Storms Hi 83 Lo 62

Arrests 2D
Church 2C
Classifieds 3D
Opinion 4A
Legals 5D
Obits 4C
Sports 2B

8 04879 19314 2

SPORTS
UC SOFTBALL
8/5 vs. Lumpkin JV 4 PM
Var 6 PM
8/7 Noon vs. Dawson
4 PM vs. Commerce

Mystery Veteran Identified
See page 6C

Union County 4-H'ers win State Honors
See page 6C

NASCAR
Chase Elliott wins at Nashville
See page 4B

Mike Rich...from Page 1A

on the Superspeedways was a huge challenge. But from the beginning Mike Rich rose to that challenge. He told me he intended to be the best in the business," said JW Waldrop, car builder for the #9, "and that is

exactly what happened."

Bill Elliott and Melling Racing won their only Winston Cup title in 1988, Mike's first year with the pit crew. On October 20, 1990, Mike and his fellow teammates won the

coveted Pit Crew Challenge as the Number 1 team in NASCAR. In less than three years Mike Rich had become a NASCAR Champion in his own right.

Less than a month later, November 18, 1990, at Atlanta with the #9 car in the lead, Mike Rich jumped over that pit wall for the final time. The horrible accident that took his life showed how dangerous conditions were on pit road and the aftermath changed racing forever. His death led directly to the Pit Road safety measures that have saved lives not just in NASCAR, but worldwide, across all forms of motorsports.

"Mike enjoyed life so much," said Mike Jones. "We had so much fun, with the Jaycees, the Sorghum Festival every year and just talking, just hanging out. They say time heals all wounds, but you know the scar tissue is still there. It still hurts. Even after 31 years.

"But I tell you one thing, as soon as I heard the induction ceremony was set, I bought my tickets. I'll be there. For Mike. For Mike and Teresa."

Mike Jones will be there. Will YOU?

The Georgia Racing Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony is set for this Saturday, August 7, 2021. The public is invited to attend. Tickets are available online, by phone or in person. Please buy your tickets in Advance. For more information, visit <http://georgiaracinghof.com/>.

Hatchett...from Page 1A

as having been in a relationship at the time of the assault.

Authorities found Hatchett inside the trailer, unconscious and visibly injured from "blunt force trauma," Deese said.

She did not regain consciousness prior to being transported for treatment at Northeast Georgia Medical, Deese said, and she passed away nearly 18 hours later at 9:07 p.m. in Gainesville.

Based on evidence obtained at the scene, Williams was taken into custody that morning, without incident, on a charge of assault inflicting serious bodily injury against Hatchett, Deese said.

In the wake of Hatchett's passing, that charge is expected to be upgraded when a local grand jury convenes after press time on Wednesday, Aug. 4, Deese said. Williams has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation assisted the Clay County Sheriff's Office with obtaining evidence in the case, GBI Region 8 Special Agent in Charge Kim Williams said.

Hatchett's sister Rachel Lindley made a social media post July 27 detailing the family's heartbreak over the tragedy.

"Our baby sister, Sarai Hatchett, has unexpectedly been taken from this life," Lindley said on Facebook. "She was strong and stubborn and mean, yet she had the biggest heart you can imagine. Even as a young girl, she provided shelter, food, and love to all people and creatures she found in need. This love was extended to so many throughout her

life.

"During a domestic dispute, Sarai suffered major head trauma which resulted in brain hemorrhaging and a massive stroke, cutting off all oxygen to her brain. Sarai was pronounced brain dead at Northeast Georgia Medical Center on Sunday, July 25, 2021. Sarai's partner, Darrell Williams, remains in custody with Clay County NC Sheriff's Department.

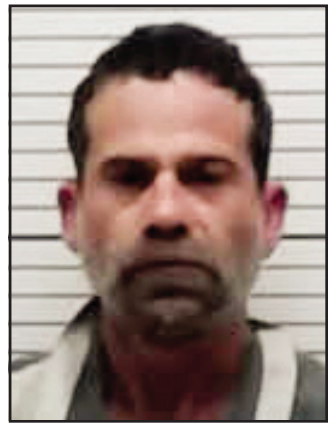
"Sarai's departure leaves an immense void. We may see an abundance of missed opportunities, but I ask instead that each of us focuses on and celebrates the beautiful moments shared with her. I pray that we each find comfort in sweet memories, the love of our family and friends, and in our Heavenly Father who knows all things and has a plan for us all.

"If you have information that might assist law enforcement's investigation, please reach out to Lt. Heath Woodard with Clay County NC Sheriff's Office (828) 644-4217 and to Special Agent Derek Glasco of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (706) 348-4866.

"At this time, we ask that the family's privacy be respected. We welcome your love and prayers and offer ours in return."

The post engendered hundreds of reactions, comments and shares in support of the family, and others memorialized Hatchett on Facebook as well.

"Sarai Hatchett was the very first licensed bartender in Union County and was the face of Copperhead Lodge for more than five years," the Lodge



Darrell Dywayne Williams

posted July 27. "I know that those of you who have been around a while will remember her for her beautiful smile and tenacity for taking care of people.

"The Copperhead family is hurting in sharing this news. Please keep the Hatchett family in your thoughts and prayers. RIP Sarai, you'll always be in our hearts."

A memorial service for Hatchett will be held on Friday, Aug. 6, from 6-8 p.m. in the Mountain View Chapel of Mountain View Funeral Home. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations be made to the Bellview Methodist Church Cemetery fund in her memory.

"Sarai was an avid animal lover and welcomed into her home and her heart any in need," her obituary reads. "Her vast love carried over to her family and friends.

"Never one to meet a stranger, Sarai was well-known and adored throughout the North Georgia community in which she lived. She was most content on any body of water with a line in the water, a special person at her side, and a beloved four-legged friend splashing nearby."

Historical Society...from Page 1A

and that she thinks people are finally "ready to get back out."

"The (Old) Courthouse is open normal hours, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday," she said. "Our Mock House is open Friday and Saturday only right now from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Heritage Festival will be held Labor Day Weekend.

"We're having our Friday Night Concerts and having a fantastic turnout for those (at the Old Courthouse). Sam Ensley is organizing the music and the players and he's also organizing the music for the festival. (We will still have the Christmas Parade and) a Christmas concert."

Unfortunately, Historical Society members were unable to hold the annual Spring Arts and Crafts or Green Bean festivals in 2021 amid concerns among local stakeholders regarding COVID-19.

On the flip side, the half-price Memorial Brick Sale has been a big success for fundraising, Carpenter said, adding that the society has experienced other successes too, like finishing the Payne Cabin

restoration with the addition of new shakes on the roof.

Furthermore, the many Old Courthouse projects have all been finished, including rejuvenating the floors, which Carpenter, Patsy McCollum and Presley Rich did themselves.

The most recent project of getting the Mock House Annex open has been completed with the help of local Boy Scout Grant Ricks from Troop 101 here in Blairsville. Carpenter said moving the display items and setting them all up was no minor feat.

A few small projects remain, Carpenter said, but for all intents and purposes, she and the other members will be able to breathe easy for a while.

As for her part, this is Carpenter's last year of a three-year term as president. She indicated that others in the society have asked her to continue in the role, but she has yet to decide if that's what she wants to do.

Should Carpenter choose to step down, her fellow society members are in agreement that she will be sorely missed, as

she has done a fantastic job throughout her tenure, all while working on other projects.

Food for the July 27 picnic was prepared by the Blairsville Restaurant – Grits & Greens.

For more information and to find out how to donate/volunteer at the society, visit <https://www.unioncountyhistory.org/>.

"The Union County Historical Society was created in 1976 to preserve and promote the history and culture of Union County," per the website.

"This non-profit organization is funded primarily through memberships and donations. The Historical Society uses these proceeds to preserve the historic heritage of Union County.

"We Maintain three historic structures within Union County: the 1899 Courthouse, the 1906 Grapelle Butt Mock House, and the 1861 John Payne Cabin.

"We also present cultural and educational programs and events such as our musical concert series and the Mountain Heritage Festival."

Walker...from Page 1A

Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said she started talks with the Parade Committee and Jerry Smith, owner of Memory Lane Classic Car Museum, about what to do to celebrate the 70th parade.

With Smith being in the classic car trade for most of his adult life, he has developed friendships with other classic car enthusiasts, including football legend Herschel Walker, who helped lead the Georgia Bulldogs to national championship glory as part of the 1980 team.

Having former NFL star and Georgia native Walker as this year's Parade Grand Marshal would be perhaps the best way to bring back the parade after having to cancel the beloved tradition last year, Thomason said.

Currently, Walker is expected to be in San Antonio, Texas, the day before the parade, and Thomason said Walker and Smith are working hard on a plan to fly him into the Blairsville airport on Saturday, Aug. 14, to get him in town with enough time to lead the parade.

This year's parade theme is "Reelin' in the Years," to celebrate the 70 years of Towns County's most near and dear event, the Georgia Mountain Fair.

Thomason said the Top Three floats will have a chance to win a share of \$10,000 in prize money donated by Bob Cloer and Alvin Gibson. First Place will win \$4,000, Second place \$2,500, and the Third Place float will take home \$1,500.

Already, more than 35 parade float applications have been submitted, and Thomason said the Fairgrounds Office is taking more every week.

The parade will start

behind South State Bank just across the street from the Hiwassee Town Square, rolling out at 10:55 a.m. west down Main Street and into the Fairgrounds, where Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee members will cast their votes for Top Three.

Also, the Towns County High School Indian Raider Marching Band will be performing as they walk through town with the parade.

And no doubt, with Smith and hopefully Walker participating in this year's parade, Thomason said the Aug. 14 spectacle will feature plenty of classic cars and hot rods for spectators to marvel over.

Not only is the 2021 parade going to be bigger than ever, Thomason said the nine days of the Georgia Mountain Fair will also be different this year, with a new carnival company bringing bigger and better rides.

There's even a brand new to the Fair show called "A Grizzly Experience", which is an educational Grizzly Bear show and exhibit.

"Get an up close and personal look into the life of North America's most prestigious predator, the Alaskan Grizzly Bear," per georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

"Yogi, a 7-year-old, 600-pound Grizzly Bear and two juveniles, Dottie and Lea, delight crowds of all ages with their impressive sizes and amazing behaviors."

Plus, people can enjoy examples of bygone mountain living in the Pioneer Village and check out the many "Old Ways" demonstrations to see how the area's progenitors made moonshine, corn, shakes, cider, pork skins, quilts, soap, hominy and more, not to mention real-life blacksmithing and glass blowing demos.

All the craft booths have been completely booked, and live musical entertainment has been scheduled for each day of the Fair, with two shows each day inside Anderson Music Hall, one early in the afternoon and the other later each evening.

One-day passes cost \$12, with children 12 and under getting in free. A three-day pass costs \$33 and will save people a few bucks, with the biggest savings available for the Fun Fair Pass at \$90, which covers all nine days of the Fair. Music shows are included in ticket prices.

Carnival rides are an additional charge of \$25 for wristbands or \$20 if purchased in advance, with free parking inside the Fairgrounds for all Georgia Mountain Fair attendees, though no pets are allowed.

Yoakam...from Page 1A



Drake Milligan warmed the audience up for Dwight Yoakam Saturday night, pictured here inside a crowded Anderson Music Hall. Photo by Allison Youngblood

He has produced nine platinum albums, 12 gold albums, and five Billboard No. 1 albums during his career, including "Guitars, Cadillacs, Etc., Etc." which was certified double-platinum, and "This Time," which went triple-platinum.

Several thousand folks crowded into the amphitheater-like venue around 6:30 p.m. to get to their seats in anticipation of a great evening of entertainment.

Concessions such as popcorn, ice cream, hot dogs and alcoholic beverages were made available for sale to the throngs of excited concertgoers.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office kept a watch on things with assistance from

Sheriff's Auxiliary volunteers, who fielded people's questions and helped them find their seats.

Steve Harper and his mother, Jeannie Harper, both of Hiawassee, were thrilled to be back at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and watching live music again.

Jeannie and Steve agreed that they were both looking forward to the show and getting out to see other live concerts since the lifting of COVID restrictions across the state.

"I can't wait to see more (shows)," Steve said, noting that Yoakam was just "the first of a number of tickets lined up."

The Harpers were not the

only ones who felt that returning to the Music Hall was a positive step toward normalcy; the venue can hold up to 2,900 people, and at showtime, standing room outside was the only space on offer.

Drake Milligan, a former American Idol contestant and opening act for Yoakam, fired up the crowd as he stepped onstage and performed country rock classics, even honoring Elvis Presley with an impersonation-style cover.

Milligan also performed some songs off his self-titled debut EP released July 23, including "Over Drinkin' Under Thinkin'," to which the crowd responded exceptionally well.

Following a brief

opportunity to dance with their significant others as Yoakam crooned his distinctive, twangy songs.

To wrap up his 90-minute set, Yoakam took a short break backstage before returning for an encore performance of "Suspicious Minds." After closing, Yoakam asked that attendees stay safe and healthy, because "we need to start living life again."

Fans gave Yoakam an

uproarious round of applause to end the evening, whistling and cheering for an outstanding night of good old country music.

The next event on the roster for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is the 70th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair, which will open Aug. 13 at 10 a.m. and run through Aug. 21. For more information, visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

First Memory Lane Auction & Car Show one to remember



The Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show gave people the opportunity to simultaneously see classic cars and bid to take one home. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Chad Stack
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – A myriad of American muscle cars, classics, trucks, hot rods and customs rolled into the old Blue Ridge Mountain EMC HQ over the weekend for the Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show, the first of many future fundraisers by Jerry Smith to benefit local giving.

Smith, who owns the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum next to Fieldstone Cinemas Six, has been in the business of collecting and selling classic cars for decades, having opened his first classic car museum in Lake Oconee.

After visiting the area, Smith said he wanted to bring a car museum to the mountains, so he opened the local destination about a year ago to much fanfare, and he's been giving back to the community ever since with proceeds from the museum, and now, his car auctions and shows.

Approximately 100 cars were scheduled for auction between July 30 and 31, and people can anticipate repeat events down the road, Smith said, as he and his wife June look to continue the car show

and auction annually in hopes that the event becomes bigger and better each year.

As the 2021 Auction & Show proceeded throughout the weekend, hundreds of car enthusiasts poured in to get a glimpse of their favorite classic, and many put good money on the line for the chance to take home a classic car of their own, either for the first time or to add to a collection.

Richard Kaiser, for example, is a classic car fanatic who drove up from South Florida to attend the event, and he was excited about the car show and auction coming to Towns County.

"For several years, my family and I have been driving to Pigeon Forge in May for the Ford F-100 truck show," Kaiser said. "I was here visiting family and saw the signs for the car show."

"Next year, maybe I will purchase one of these classic cars that I have dreamed about since I was a young boy."

The Memory Lane Car Auction & Show also featured food trucks, prizes for guests, tons of arts and crafts, as well as live music over both days for people to enjoy as they marveled at all of the classic car goodness on display.

Students from Towns County High School, along with High School History Teacher and Head Baseball Coach Shannon Floyd, volunteered and sold tickets for a 50/50 drawing, with the proceeds also going to charity.

"I was very pleased with the turnout, and I want to thank everyone who helped in making this possible," Smith said. And with the first year in the books, Smith added he is already starting to plan the next event.

People who missed the inaugural Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show can always visit the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum, which houses a rotating selection of the many classic cars Smith has been collecting throughout his life.

The Auction & Show was sponsored by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Jacky Jones Ford and the Towns County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Auctioning the cars both days was award-winning auctioneer and Towns Countian Taylor Osborn from Southeast Auction Company.

Charitable proceeds for the weekend festivities were not available by press time Monday.



Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's old headquarters served as the base of operations for the Memory Lane Car Show over the weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

**Bell Ringing Union
County Old Courthouse**

**Bell ringing information
at 706-745-5493**

Cruiz-In...from Page 1A



Burt Reynolds and Jackie Gleason impersonators from “Smokey and the Bandit” took pics with guests of the Moonshine Cruiz-In. Replicas of the Bandit’s Pontiac Trans-Am and Sheriff Buford T. Justice’s Pontiac LeMans were also nearby.
Photo by Todd Forrest

Sunday,” Parrish said Friday afternoon. “We’re seeing a huge amount of cars and spectators, and that has us concerned, (because we have 2,000 parking spaces) and we believe we’ll fill them all up. But everything has been great. It should be a fantastic weekend.”

Classic automobiles and hot rods packed every open space in the complex, beginning with the areas on and around the Bryant and Rich fields, extending along the roadside and the banks of Butternut Creek, and filling up both Colwell fields at the rear of the park.

One of those cars displayed creekside was the 1969 Dodge Super Bee belonging to Cindy and Randy Flowers of Cleveland, Tennessee. According to Cindy, the car helped bring the couple together back in 1976.

Cindy, who drove a 1969 Plymouth Roadrunner at the time, attended a street race where she first laid eyes on Randy and his ‘69 Super Bee. Unfortunately, the police arrived, leading Randy to bolt ahead of their

introduction.

But Cupid’s arrow found its mark that night, and Cindy was determined to meet the man behind the Mopar.

“He was driving (the Super Bee) and I said to myself, ‘I gotta meet that boy,’” Cindy Flowers reminisced. “I didn’t get to meet him that night. I had to find him afterward, because the law showed up and he ran. But we ended up getting married, and five kids and 15 grandkids later, we’re still together and still have both cars.”

Less than a quarter mile downstream of the Flowers was another car-loving couple from LaGrange.

Michael Wood will never forget Christmas of 2020 when his wife fulfilled his lifelong wish by gifting him a 2009 Shelby GT 500 convertible.

“I’ve always had some GTs and lower-level mustangs, but this one was my dream car,” Wood said. “The previous owner bought it as a standard GT 500 but sent it to Las Vegas, to Shelby America, and had it converted to the special edition. It’s one of only 545 convertibles and one of 115 in

Torch Red.”

The Moonshine Cruiz-In marked just the second car show for Wood’s GT 500 after he learned about it at Parrish’s other event, the Emerald Coast Cruiz-In in Panama City, Florida.

“At this show, I get to drive my car through these hills,” Wood said with a laugh when asked what he enjoyed about being in North Georgia. “It hugs the road. It’s a nice ride.”

The event also attracted a fair share of locals, like longtime Chevy collector Randy Hogan of Blairsville and his 1964 Corvette Stingray.

“This is my second Corvette, but I have a 1964 Chevelle, too,” said Hogan, who attended multiple past Moonshine Cruiz-Ins at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds before the show moved to Union County.

Regardless of the location, Hogan never misses an opportunity to swap stories with other gearheads and make new friends in the process.

“I just love sitting and talking with everybody,” he said. “I always try to make it to the Panama City show and stay active with the Blairsville Cruisers. But I really love it here (at Meeks Park). It is a wonderful location, and the people who put on this (event) do a great job.”

Vendors were on site offering everything from auto parts to event gear and merchandise. The newly remodeled gazebo near the Colwell fields featured live music from the Sea Notes, Highway 96, Whiskey, Stills & Mash, Tommy Townsend, and Stephen Phillips & Midnight Express.

Townsend’s own Granddaddy Mimm’s Distillery hosted a welcome party on Thursday night appropriately titled the “Sour Mash Bash” in Downtown Blairsville.

Friday, meanwhile, featured Smokey and the Bandit lookalikes Tim Phillips as Burt Reynolds, aka The Bandit, and Sean Bailey, who portrayed Jackie Gleason’s unforgettable character of Sheriff Buford T. Justice.

The duo took photos with guests while arriving in the iconic 1977 Pontiac Firebird Trans-Am and the

1977 Pontiac LeMans police sedan.

“We had a great show and a great time, I love the

area and love working with everyone here,” Parrish said. “We look forward to being able to keep coming back.”

BBQ Cookoff...from Page 1A



Classic cars combined with delicious barbecue to bring 750 people out for a good cause at the Farmers Market July 30.
Photo by Allison Youngblood

per <https://fbvision.com/feed-the-hungry>.

On the first Saturday every month from 9-11 a.m., First Baptist opens a drive-thru food ministry at its donation storage facility on the east side of campus.

“To get involved serving with Feed The Hungry, or if you are a person in need, call the church office at 706-745-2469 or email us (questions@fbvision.com),” the website continues.

Attendance for the BBQ Cookoff benefited from its proximity to the annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In car show that took place at Meeks Park over July 29-31.

In turn, Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce Event Coordinator Randi Stewart said the cookoff helped keep the massive crowds coming to see the classic car show from overwhelming restaurants in town at dinner time.

Additionally, the contest fostered healthy competition, served as advertising for businesses, and presented a fine opportunity to “Feed The Hungry” in Blairsville.

Visitors were asked to taste test all the samples of barbecue provided at the booths and vote for the best-tasting dish at the end of the evening. The winner of the competition

was awarded the “Best BBQ in Blairsville” trophy alongside copious bragging rights.

All samples were free, but diners could purchase a dinner plate for \$10, with \$2 from every plate going to Feed The Hungry.

Throughout the evening, Cruiz-In participants made their way to the Farmers Market to park their shiny classic cars and pop their hoods for admiring onlookers. Tony Ford provided live music as diners ate, cast their votes, and inspected the cool cars.

Matt Leonard represented Smoke Out, a new barbecue food truck opening in the fall in the parking lot of the Blairsville Restaurant – Grits & Greens. Leonard said he was thrilled to be raising money to help solve hunger in the community and would love to do other such events.

Leonard, who also manages The View Grille at the Community Center, said his new venture will offer traditional barbecue fare as well as barbecue dishes with a twist. Some of the samples Smoke Out provided included jerk chicken and luau pork sliders paired with Southern sides.

Greg Staffins from Big Greg’s Barbeque of Blue Ridge has been barbecuing for more than 40 years, competing and winning many awards in competitions. To show his

support for solving hunger locally, he said he would be doubling the donations he earned throughout the evening.

Heidi Stecher of Rib Country BBQ right here in Blairsville said she and Asif Munshi, the barbecue cook for Rib Country, were very happy to be participating in the cookoff.

“It’s an incredible feeling to be a part of something like this, for us to come out and do something we love to support people and give back to the community,” Stecher said, adding that she was grateful to the Chamber of Commerce for putting the event together.

Voting to select the winner of the 2021 BBQ Cookoff ended around 7 p.m., at which point Chamber President Steve Rowe announced the winner, who, when all the sauce had settled, was none other than Papaw’s Trading Post Bac-Yard BBQ.

The owners of Papaw’s gratefully accepted their award and thanked visitors for coming out and supporting their restaurant and the event, which was sponsored by Union General Hospital.

Chill & Fill Restaurant, which opened during COVID, also competed in the July 30 contest, and they, too, were grateful for such an overwhelming show of support.

Clarification:

An article from last week’s newspaper titled “EMC meetings open to members; fiber optic availability to expand” contained an incomplete explanation regarding Blue Ridge Mountain EMC’s Neighborhood Networking program.

It was stated in the article that at least four neighboring homeowners are needed to get fiber to a neighborhood,

which is true of some, but not all, neighborhoods. The actual number of neighbors needed to enable a fiber build is determined by BRMEMC, through a feasibility study conducted on each individual line, and takes into account such issues as customer density, percentage of overhead versus underground, and required directional drilling costs.

BRMEMC is always expanding its fiber optic network. Through this Neighborhood Networking program, 37 fiber expansions have been identified for this new fiscal year with additional expansions being reviewed each day.

For more information on fiber internet service and expansion areas, visit brmemc.com/fiber.