

# North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Legal Organ of Union County

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## 53rd Sorghum Fest next two weekends

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

A sweet tradition is returning to the North Georgia Mountains with the 53rd Annual Blairsville Sorghum Festival, running Oct. 8-9 and Oct. 15-16 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. all four days.

Parking inside the Meeks Park festival venue is free, and admission is just \$5, with children 12 and under getting in free.

Spectators won't want to miss the return of the Sorghum Festival Parade in Downtown Blairsville, which will begin rolling at 10 a.m. on Saturday, Oct. 8.

The parade was canceled last year due to lingering concerns over COVID-19, but it's back in 2022 with Parade

Grand Marshal Roy Townsend, known by many as the "Honorary Mayor of Owltown."

Organized by festival presenting sponsor Granddaddy Mimm's Distilling Co., the parade and all of its classic cars and local participating clubs and groups promise to be a fun-filled homage to the heritage of the area, just like the festival itself.

Fifty-three years have passed since the Sorghum Festival got its start around the Old Courthouse in Downtown Blairsville, and syrup making and selling by tireless volunteers remains central to the event, with organizers pledging to spend proceeds on worthy local causes.

Since the beginning, funds raised have gone right back into the community by way of charitable giving to

groups and individuals, which is why, when it comes to local traditions, they don't get much sweeter than the Blairsville Sorghum Festival.

Held for years at the Old Fort Sorghum on the corner of School Circle and Young Harris Street, the event moved to Meeks Park in 2008 when volunteers realized they needed more space to accommodate the growing festival.

Taking on organizational duties for the Sorghum Festival last year was the nonprofit Enotah CASA for Children, which came on board to assist the core group of volunteers who have for decades kept the community-focused event going strong.

Formerly the Blairsville Sorghum Festival Club, the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup

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Look forward to the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers preparing delicious syrup for sale over the next two weekends down at the pan in Meeks Park. Photo by Shawn Jarrard/2021

## Historical Society celebrates contributions of local residents

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County holds a unique place in North Georgia, with a history more colorful than many residents realize, and one need only reach out for the ripples through time to become apparent.

Some of the folks who have made splashes through the years and shaped Blairsville into what it is today were honored with a special reception on Wednesday, Sept. 28, at noon.

The location was the Mountain Luff-Museum room, where a sizeable crowd gathered in accordance with the Union County Historical Society's plans to celebrate the contributions of several particularly well-known residents.

Historical Society President Mickey Cummings introduced the program and its purpose that day, revealing a physical commemoration of the extraordinary honorees: 12 bricks.

The bricks with 12 unique names sat in a plastic tub until they were laid out on a table for friends and family to see, and after the ceremony, they were placed in the sidewalk around the Union County Historical Courthouse.

"Some of these names



(L-R) Sue Collins, Sue Souther, Blanche Chandler, Genelle Sullivan, Odetta Colwell, Josephine Rowan Akins, Barbara Davenport and Roy Hamby. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

are of people who have been around a long time, and they may not necessarily be in the newspaper every week, or they may not be a politician, or they may not be anything with their name out front, but those of us who live here know what they've done for our county, and we want to recognize those individuals," explained Cummings.

Barbara "Bobbie" Davenport grew up "in the shadow

of the Historic Union County Courthouse." Her parents moved from Hiawassee to Union County in 1937, and the family lived in the apartments above the old gas station that her father co-owned on the square.

Notably, Davenport has been a member of First Baptist Church from age 10, and from 1965, has been a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Davenport graduated from the University of Georgia in 1953 and married U.S. Army 1st Lt. Leon Davenport, who

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## Voter registration ends October 11

Early voting begins Oct. 17

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

The last day to register to vote in the Nov. 8 General Election and any subsequent runoff election is Tuesday, Oct. 11.

Registration can be completed in person at the Registrar's Office inside the Union County Courthouse located at 65 Courthouse Street, or residents may fill out an application online or print one for mailing at https://georgia.gov/register-vote.

Monday, Oct. 10, is the Columbus Day state holiday, so the courthouse will not be open that day.

Advanced in-person voting for the General Election will begin in less than two weeks in the Jury Assembly Room of the Union County Courthouse.

Early voting will run weekdays Monday, Oct. 17, through Friday, Nov. 4, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during



lunchtime. There will also be two weekend early voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 22, and Saturday, Oct. 29, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the courthouse.

Election Day voting for the General Election will take place Tuesday, Nov. 8, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the 11 pre-assigned precincts of Union County.

All voters will need to have an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots, such as a government-issued driver's license or identification card.

Residents have been able

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## MEC provides success in non-traditional format

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

For its role in the community, the Mountain Education Charter High School too often suffers from an unfair reputation.

It has been dismissed as an "alternative school," and for years, even many day school students have thought of it as the place their troubled classmates go when they become too disruptive for the typical high school experience.

The rumor goes that MEC's teachers rule with an iron fist reminiscent of a boot camp drill sergeant, boring obedience and discipline into the students who wouldn't behave otherwise.

This couldn't be further from the truth.

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Student Drew Sofield is grateful for the opportunities afforded him by Mountain Education Charter High School. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



MECHS Union Site Principal Brandon Bradburn is a major cheerleader for the kids who graduate with high school diplomas under his watch. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



The Indian Summer Festival went off without a hitch over the weekend to continue the beloved local tradition in the Valley Above the Clouds. Photo by Todd Forrest

## Indian Summer a success despite hurricane fears

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

SUCHES — The prevailing explanation of an "Indian Summer" is a period of unseasonably warm and dry

weather occurring in the fall.

Autumn also marks the peak of hurricane season, and those two contrasting weather scenarios found themselves at a crossroads during the days leading up to last weekend's Indian Summer Festival in

Suches.

And as Hurricane Ian rampaged across Florida, festival organizers faced the difficult decision of canceling or moving forward with the event.

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### SPORTS

VOLLEYBALL  
10/5 Senior Night 5 PM  
FOOTBALL  
10/ @ Banks Co. 7:30 PM

New COVID Boosters Available

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Georgia Mtn. Fall Festival Oct. 7-15

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Hamilton Gardens Event Oct. 6

See page 1D



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# Union Co. Historical Society ...from Page 1A

eventually rose to the rank of major. The two were married for 64 years when Leon passed away in 2017.

Today, she can still remember all the old businesses that used to stand around the square. For example, before the Hole In The Wall was known as such, Margie Henson bought property from Pat Haralson and made a living for herself selling sandwiches.

Odetta Colwell was born Odetta Rousey in Fannin County and was married to Carlton Colwell for nearly 70 years until he died in 2021. The Colwells had six children, many of whom are known throughout the community today: Curtis, Steve, Doug, Tom, Mike and Carla Drake. Carlton started up the family business, Colwell Construction, while Odetta supported the family.

“Oh, (Blairsville’s) changed,” Colwell recalled. “We didn’t have no McDonald’s, and didn’t have no red lights. We had nothing except some hotels and one or two service stations, and that was it. And it’s changed for the better ... It’s progress, and Carlton looked forward to that. He liked progress, Carlton did.”

In particular, Colwell appreciates the fact that the community all still “loves one another” and has maintained a familial closeness through the years.

Born Jan. 31, 1927, Blanche Candler has been a lifelong resident of Union. She graduated from Union County High in 1944, and by 1948 had married Tom Candler, whom she was married to until his death in 1996. Together, they had one daughter, Tommie Lynn, who is now a Burrell.

Roy Hamby is also a Union County native and graduated from Union County High in 1958. That September, he joined the United States Army; two and a half of his more than 20 years of service were spent in Vietnam.

Hamby earned medals and commendations for his bravery overseas, and after retiring from his extensive military career, he became the Blairsville Field Office Manager for the Georgia Department of Veterans Service. In 2005, he officially retired from the state after serving 23 years.

Mamie Townsend Rogers is perhaps best known for helping her husband Ray manage Rogers Grocery during the height of its business when it was the only grocery store in Blairsville. The couple employed “many young men” at their business and raised them as well as they did their own two children.

As Cummings said, “Everybody in Northeast Georgia—and I mean everybody—knows Clyde Harkins.” Harkins’ popularity is linked with his extensive knowledge of the hollers and backroads of Union County.

Well-versed in both nature and history, Harkins is happy to educate anyone, from experienced hikers to novice scholars and beyond. On Oct. 1, he turned 97 years old.

“People from all across Georgia have come to his house to learn about the history and the life history of the area around Suches,” added Cummings. “I know this personally because I visited his house a time or two and ended up spending most of the day learning about our local



The Historical Society installed these 12 bricks Sept. 28 to commemorate the contributions of longtime residents to their community. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

history. And Union County will forever be indebted to Mr. Clyde Harkins.”

Unfortunately, Shirley Miller was unable to attend due to “knee problems,” but her status as a former First Lady of Georgia allowed her reputation to shine regardless. Shirley’s husband, Zell Miller, was the Governor of Georgia for eight years, and “she was the lady behind the scenes who helped Zell be the success in politics that he was, and the legend that he still is.”

Today, Miller is widely known among Young Harris College students as the partner to “Young Harris’ most famous son,” but the Shirley Miller Scholarship has gone a tremendous way toward supplementing the HOPE Scholarship, which was established by her husband and has helped over 1.9 million students across the state achieve their dreams by awarding over \$11.3 billion to accepted applicants.

Bill Collins personally honored his mother Roma Sue Collins alongside Mary Seabolt and Sue Souther, sharing their biographies with the audience just as Cummings had for earlier recipients.

Son Collins introduced Mother Collins with a gentle joke, saying, “Now I have the really unique privilege of talking about my mother. She’s sitting over here looking at me like, ‘What’s he going to say about me?’”

Of nine Collins siblings, only Sue, her one sister, and one of her seven brothers are still living. She herself went on to have four children, of whom Bill is the oldest. Sue is known for her green thumb and dedication to teaching, having worked as a substitute teacher for over two decades.

“She’s always right, and she always has been,” said Collins, sharing a phrase that his mother adopted as her own from another family member. “I know, and you don’t. That comes from her uncle.” Today, she reigns over 11 grandchildren, 22 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild.

Just the day before the

ceremony, Bill Collins sat down to chat with the extraordinary Mary Seabolt, who turned 104 in June. Touting her mobility and keen mind, Collins informed the audience that he and Seabolt “had the best conversation.”

Although she would have liked to attend, Seabolt was regrettably unable to travel to the Butt-Mock House. Seabolt’s age is an accomplishment on its own, but she has come to be known as a hard worker. Collins remembers her saying, “I was born into a farming family, and I married a farmer, so I have worked all my life.”

That being said, Seabolt’s strength doesn’t make her any less friendly – she wanted Collins to pass along a message to the crowd gathered for the historical moment: “Miss Mary sends her greetings to all of you, and she would have loved to have been here.”

“We call her Susie in Choestoe,” Collins said of Souther. The youngest of six children, Souther was blessed to receive an education from North Georgia College and, later, Tipton College. She graduated in 1959 and married her husband Willard in December of 1960.

With Willard in the military, the Southers traveled often to bases all across the country, including California, Alaska, Texas, Michigan, Missouri, and even Washington, D.C. To this day, she’s a wanderer at heart.

Despite her travels, her family “has deep roots” in Union County. According to Collins, “One of her ancestors was John Hunter, and his cabin – their family cabin, as you well know – is down by the Farmer’s Market and (has) been restored.”

Cummings returned to the front of the room to recognize two more recipients, the first of which was Josephine Rowan Akins. She has been a resident of Union County for nearly 96 years, and in spite of the tragedies in her life – being a widow twice over – she keeps going, she says, for her family. They have “made her life most enjoyable.”

Her faith is strong, and

she’s a member of Harmony Grove Baptist Church. Each Tuesday, she drives herself there for Bible study.

“Josephine’s hearing is not what it used to be, but those eyes do not miss anything that goes on around them,” noted Cummings, to the amusement of the audience.

Last but certainly not least, Genelle Sullivan is 95 years old and completely independent. Ever since the death of her husband in 1997, she has lived alone, but before that, the Sullivans had seven children. She can remember when electricity first came to the county because it coincided with the birth of her first child.

Like Akins, she enjoys attending church services at Union Baptist Church, where she’s been a member since childhood.

“Genelle will tell you on any given day how blessed her life has been, even with the sad and bad times she has endured. She always says, ‘God has been so good to me.’” Cummings relayed for Sullivan. Indeed, she feels that way about her award, as well.

“It feels good, really. I’m just glad to be alive,” Sullivan said. “I mean, I really enjoy living and I love people. I love company; I like for people to come to the house.”

The program closed out with an invitation to refreshments of ice cream, cake and punch, which happened to be a hit among both the oldest and youngest guests, and promises that similar honor ceremonies would become an annual tradition.

With the weather providing clear blue skies, friends, family and recipients left the old house to go watch the bricks bearing very important names get set into the Historical Courthouse’s sidewalk.

It’s possible to go see those bricks anytime between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. every day of the week except Sunday. And if one feels so inclined, they can speak with the Historical Society about an official membership to help preserve Union County’s valued history.

## Sorghum Fest...from Page 1A

Makers are continuing the time-honored tradition of cooking up the savory sweet stuff right there in Meeks Park during the festival, while Enotah CASA is running all other aspects of the festival.

As always, the festival will help organizers raise money to go toward their special causes, which for the Syrup Makers include annual scholarships for graduating seniors as well as other forms of local giving.

Enotah CASA is a child advocacy organization that assists abused and/or neglected children from Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin counties in navigating the legal system. Festival proceeds defray costs to maintain the efforts of the volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates.

More than 100 hand-picked vendors will be bringing their handmade arts, crafts and delicious food products this year, from woodworking to jewelry, clothing, metal works, candle making, soaps and everything in between. Live demonstrations of various crafts will also be available.

Returning in 2022 is the Sorghum Festival Concessions Stand, always a local favorite, to feature biscuits with sorghum syrup made at the wood-fired pan in Meeks Park, and folks can enjoy soup beans and corn bread as well for truly traditional mountain fare.

The beloved Sorghum Festival Games will start at noon each day of the festival, offering plenty of fun for the whole family, including Rock Throwin’ and Log Sawin’ for people looking for a physical challenge, with children’s activities as well, including a

sack race.

Then there’s the Biskit Eatin’ Contest that pits participants in a sorghum-drenched showdown to see who can eat the most biscuits. Entering the games is free, so be sure to check them out.

Of course, the Sorghum Festival wouldn’t be the same without the amazing slate of musical and other performance talent over the four-day event, including local acts and two dog shows. For a full rundown, read the Special Section in this newspaper or visit blairsvillesorghumfestival.com.

## Election Dates...from Page 1A

to apply for a mailed absentee ballot since Aug. 22. Absentee ballot requests may be made at the local Registrar’s Office or by accessing the “My Voter Page” at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>.

The earliest day for absentee ballots to be mailed to voters is Oct. 11, due to the holiday, and the deadline to request an absentee ballot is Oct. 28. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, email as an attachment, or in-person to the Registrar’s Office.

People who have voted absentee-by-mail in a past election cycle will need to submit a new application for this cycle if they want to receive an absentee ballot in the mail.

Folks can mail their completed ballots back or utilize the official drop box inside the Jury Assembly Room during early voting hours. Voters may also drop completed absentee ballots off at the Registrar’s Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

From classic competitions

to musical gatherings, the Sorghum Festival offers a glimpse into times gone by, when communities used to assemble at the end of a harvest season to commemorate a successful crop.

As per usual, this year’s festival features crop yields from fields of cane grown and harvested locally, with syrup for sale cooked during the festival down at the big 16-by-3 wood-fired pan located just off the Butternut Creek in the lower field of Meeks Park, starting at 9 a.m. each day.

Voters are encouraged to request and return their absentee ballots early to give their ballot “enough time to travel through the mail and resolve any issues that may arise when voting by absentee ballot,” per georgia.gov.

Mentioned above, the “My Voter Page” website contains much valuable information, such as registration status, precinct information, downloadable sample ballots, mailed absentee ballot status and voter participation history.

Ballots will include political party candidates running in the General Election as well as four statewide ballot questions: two potential amendments to the Georgia Constitution and two referendums to approve acts passed by the Georgia General Assembly.

To review the ballot questions and candidates up for election, check out the sample ballot on the “My Voter Page.”

# MEC Success...from Page 1A

"A lot of people don't know about us," Principal Brandon Bradburn said. "They think we're just credit recovery or an alternative school, but we are our own school. We're an entire school system."

"That's what I love about my job, to hire people, because we hire people who love kids and want kids to be successful. Period."

In fact, the Mountain Education Center's mission statement reveals that this school system wants to "provide a second-chance opportunity for students across North Georgia to earn an accredited high school diploma in a student-centered, self-paced, evening public high school."

Perhaps for some, hearing about second chances may make them ask what a student did to need another opportunity. On the contrary, most of the students attending MEC are ahead of the curve and taking their education into their own hands.

Anyone can attend MEC if a more streamlined approach to education appeals to them, but there are certain situations that push students into that different method.

For instance, students with children, or those interested in joining the military, working toward a specific career, or who have already joined the workforce, may find that MEC's flexible schedule works best for them.

"We have social workers, counselors, interventionists, graduation coaches, career specialists – we have a lot of services," said Lesia Johnson, a career specialist herself. Just like most MEC employees, she also has a part-time job.

Teachers are either retired or have day jobs, and the same goes for the extensive safety network that the kids rely on to reach their graduation goals.

"We don't want anyone to fall through the cracks," Johnson said. "We want them to know that we care about them and that we want to see them graduate. And we stay in contact with them, and we go the path together. We walk this together. Even after they graduate, they will still get back up with us."

MEC student Drew Sofield was a sophomore when he enrolled last year. Halfway through what would have taken a year to complete in day school, he completed the work in "two or three months."

Now, after finishing his

junior courses, he has less than a year to complete three more classes for his senior year.

"Kids want to get in here and get out," observed Sofield, but he said he vastly preferred being at MEC. "It's definitely not just 'alternative' kids; there are some that maybe dropped out of regular high school and wanted to come here to finish up. I mean, you just don't know people's circumstances."

"But I know me and two other kids who are attending this school are here because of extracurricular activities – me, baseball; a girl, softball; one more, rodeo ... If you have to miss school, it's not like you're coming back to school the next week with an inch-thick packet of work to do."

Virtual learning and a flexible schedule allow Sofield to travel as needed for sports. He knows of other students who can't get to campus daily or who are unable to drive, and they benefit from the option to customize their high school experience into something to better fit their needs.

"It's a mix, but all the kids here are respectful, and they have to be, really, if they're really driven to get stuff done," added Sofield. "They're going to come in, work, and that's it."

What's more, the students who do attend live classes can choose their hours, much like an open-ended job. A relatively new option, "early" classes start at 2 p.m. as opposed to the usual 5 p.m., and depending on what they're dealing with outside of school, including job opportunities, students may come in earlier or later from day to day.

"I just like it because if I want to work on math, I'll just work on math, and if I want to work on science, that's there, too," Sofield said. "There's always teachers here, which is good."

"You can't fail here, even if you try. The teachers are just, 'Hey, you've got to get this done.' The grad coaches are like, 'Hey, you've got to get this done by this time.'"

Although academics are the primary focus of MEC's classes, it is by no means the only thing students learn or focus on.

From Sept. 15-Oct. 3, Full Time Equivalency, or FTE, was underway at MEC. Otherwise known as "Student Appreciation Days," the underlying goal of FTE is to get a good idea of student attendance.

"That's how our school gets funds," Principal Bradburn said. "That's the way every school is – they get funds based on the number of kids. So that's kind of how FTE works."

In "normal" schools that tend toward larger student bodies, attendance surveys are usually a quick and casual affair. An average number is taken daily.

But, as Bradburn said, "It's a little bit different here because we're very flexible with the kids and their hours, so we have a window."

That window is open through a course of 10 days so that every student has the chance to be counted. Because many rely solely on online courses, small, specialized lessons are offered for just over a week to encourage students to visit the campus.

"So, we have different events," Johnson said. "Tonight, we had dual-enrollment events, so we call it Double Dip. The kids come in and we tell them how they can go to high school here and to college as well."

Other activities include resume building, sewing, cooking, and even laundry tips, but that's not all. FTE at the Mountain Education Center is called "Student Appreciation Days" for a reason.

"The students get gifts, they get to win things, and when we take them to Advanced Digital Cable (on field trips), we'll take them out to Sicily's (Restaurant)," added Johnson. "We always go there."

In particular, gifts come in the form of giveaways for important technology that many students go on to use for earning college degrees. This time around, the rewards were tablets, charging stations, and Chromebooks.

The voluntary, year-round available Student Voice is another valuable program that offers students an opportunity to volunteer in the community, make their voices heard in the workings of their school, and learn about the positive impacts they can make from their own homes.

MEC may not offer the traditional high school experience, but there's something to be said of its success, which results in students graduating who may not get the opportunity to do so in a more traditional setting, with one of the strongest predictors of life success being high school graduation.

Since its founding in 1993 at the Union County campus, MEC has grown to include 18 sites across 17 counties. In total, 4,000 students have graduated

since its inception. With such quick growth, local businesses like United Community Bank, Nelson's Tractor Company, and Nani's Restaurant have stepped up to provide scholarships to qualifying graduates.

"So many kids don't want or can't thrive in a traditional setting, and they need something else. We're that something else. We're that second chance," Johnson said, embodying the mission statement with her passion and dedication.

Bradburn agreed, summarizing MEC and its accomplishments with simple facts. "It's all about the kids, it's all about the students. No one's here on their own agenda. We just want to see the kids be successful; that's all it's about."

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# Motorcycle ride honors victims of Benghazi, 9/11

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

U.S. Army Veteran Dr. Dan Eichenbaum of the American Legion Riders led the 10th Annual Benghazi/Twin Towers Memorial Ride and Veterans Appreciation Event on Saturday, Sept. 24.

The terrorist attacks of both 2001 on American soil and in 2012 at American facilities in Benghazi occurred on Sept. 11 in their respective years, hence the ride to jointly commemorate the tragic losses every September.

Bikers formed up at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park in Hiwassee, then traveled to the Western Carolina Regional Airport in Andrews, North Carolina, where an air show was taking place.

Well over 50 motorcycles, with many bikers riding with their wives, and two with their dogs, with lights on and American flags waving, and with a sheriff's escort, traveled through Hiwassee to Blairsville, then around the backside of Lake Nottely through to Murphy, North Carolina, ending at the airport in Andrews, a distance of about 61 miles.

Among the motorcycle clubs participating in the event were the American Legion Riders, Blue Angels, Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association, Nam Knights of America, and Heaven's Saints Motorcycle Ministry, to name a few.

Veterans of Foreign Wars,



U.S. Army Veteran Dr. Dan Eichenbaum helps to organize the annual patriotic remembrance ride every year, pictured here at the Towns County Veterans Park Sept. 24.

Photo by Mark Smith

the American Legion, and the Marine Corps League were among the veterans service organizations represented at the event, as were most branches of U.S. military service.

"The purpose of this ride is to remember our heroes; men do not die until they are forgotten," Eichenbaum said. "We had four Americans killed in Benghazi. There was a (quick reaction force) that could have come and helped them out – probably could have saved their lives – but was not allowed to leave, not allowed to come and get them.

"The original ride started in Polk County, North Carolina. The theme of that was 'Bikers for Justice.' And 'justice' means that those who were responsible for letting (those

four Americans) die should be brought to justice.

"I took over this ride in 2016, and this is now the 10th annual ride. And since 2016, it's been in our area. What we do in this ride is plant memorial signs, and the signs say, 'Men do not die until they are forgotten.'

"The purpose of this ride is to keep the memory and the honor of those who died, not just at Benghazi, Libya, but also in the Twin Towers attack in 2001. So, this is about remembering our heroes, honoring them, and never, ever forgetting the greatness of our country."

Retired U.S. Marine Andrew Turner was one of the first riders to arrive at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park on Saturday

morning about 8 a.m.

"I think (these events) need to be acknowledged and never forgotten," Turner said. "Once it's forgotten, it's forgotten; it doesn't come back."

Continuing, he said that, right after these events happened, everyone was patriotic and gung-ho, but 20 years later – a generation gone by – folks in many areas don't even want to recognize them, and he believes these stories should be passed down as part of America's heritage.

"So, unless we pay homage and show honor to what has happened, between Benghazi and the Twin Towers, they'll be lost and forgotten forever," Turner said. "And we can't have that. It's like destroying history."

Retired U.S. Marine Ashford "Ash" Todd had this to say: "When we ride, I think about when those towers came down and where I was and what I was doing. And I think about the guys that were killed in Benghazi – four (Americans) that didn't need to die."

"There were a whole lot of political issues that came up that caused that to happen, and



Blairsville served as a passthrough point for the annual Benghazi/Twin Towers Memorial Ride and Veterans Appreciation last month.

Photo by Mark Smith

it began to divide America at that time," Todd added. "We need to get back and lose this divisiveness that we've got. We need to think about what Christ said, 'Love others as I have loved you.'

"And that's what we need – we need to lose that (divisive) attitude. So, as I ride and I think about those days, I think about my attitude and where I need to be. That's what the ride means to me."

## Indian Summer Festival...from Page 1A



Suches favorite Nealy Webster gave a star vocal performance during the 2022 Indian Summer Festival.

Photo by Todd Forrest

By Friday, it was apparent they had made the correct choice as the dry "Indian Summer" air prevailed, nudging Ian away from North Georgia and clearing the way for the 45th edition of the Indian Summer Festival.

"For the past couple of months, I've been putting together some inventory to bring to the festival," said first-time vendor Mark Foster of Gainesville. "But I was a little worried about the weather and wasn't sure if there would even be a festival this weekend.

"I'm originally from St. Petersburg, Florida, and I saw what was going on down there, so I was concerned it was heading our way. But I'm glad I was able to make the trip

this weekend. This is a really nice event, and I've met some really nice people."

The real winners from the two-day festival that ran Oct. 1-2 were the students of Woody Gap School. Proceeds from the Indian Summer Festival benefit the school's outgoing seniors, with \$600 going to each college or trade school-bound graduate.

More than 30 vendors worked the festival, offering arts, crafts, handmade jewelry and soap, clothing, hats, toys, face-painting, books and more. And the Gaddistown Homemakers were on hand, with their homemade pies being one of the most popular attractions of the weekend.

Along with their fresh-baked goods, always made

on-site at the school cafeteria, the group sold raffle tickets for a shot at taking home a handmade quilt.

"We've had a good today," said group member Margo Crooks. "It's been cold and windy, but at least it's not raining. We've dealt with rain in the past, and we've dealt with colder temperatures than today. We can bring a space heater when it gets cold, but we can't deal with a hurricane."

Added Crooks, "All the money we make goes back to the community. It goes to the school, it goes to the fire station or wherever there is a need in the community, and that's the way it's been since we began 35 or 40 years ago."

The festival featured local music acts, including 15-year-old Nealy Webster of Cleveland and the Woody Gap Band of Steel. The Band of Steel and Webster will perform back-to-back during this weekend's Blairsville Sorghum Festival, beginning at 1:45 p.m. on Oct. 8 inside Meeks Park.

"The music is great and it's such a beautiful location," Mark Foster said of the Indian Summe Fest. "There are some really talented local artists up here. I'm really impressed with everything, the music and the craftsmanship of the other vendors."

When asked if he would return to the festival next fall, Foster didn't hesitate.

"Absolutely," he answered, "I'm 100% certain."



## Wreaths Across America 2022

REMEMBER the Fallen. . . HONOR those who Serve. . . TEACH our children the value of Freedom.

The Knights of Columbus Assembly #2563 will be participating in the Wreaths Across America program.

On Saturday, December 17, 2022 Wreaths Across America will conduct a coordinated wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery as well as over 2,100 additional locations in all 50 states, at sea, and abroad at 10 AM EST.

Knights of Columbus Assembly #2563 (GA0153) will be sponsoring wreaths this year and helping Georgia National Cemetery in Canton, GA by laying Remembrance wreaths

on the graves of our country's fallen heroes.

Please help us honor and remember as many fallen heroes as possible by sponsoring remembrance wreaths. Go online to our Knights of Columbus Assembly account with Wreaths Across America, and click on "Sponsor Wreaths". A single wreath costs \$15.00, but if you purchase two for a total of \$30.00, an anonymous donor will match your purchase with a 3rd wreath: <https://www.wreathscrossamerica.org/GA0153>

Thank you for honoring

and remembering our nation's veterans during this upcoming Christmas Season, and for supporting the Knights of Columbus Assembly #2563 (GA0153) and Wreaths Across America!

Contact for more info: Assembly 2563's Faithful Navigator Richard F. Graff, 706-970-5696, or mail your donation to K of C Assembly #2563 Faithful Navigator, c/o St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, 3717 Hwy. 515E, Blairsville, GA 30512. Make checks out to K of C Assembly 2563, and in memo area write "WAA".