

Christmas...from Page 1A

Chick-fil-A to provide food for the morning event.

"I think it's wonderful to have an event like this for everybody, whether they are our customers or not," said Sharon Arnold, Administrative Assistant at the bank. "It gives the kids time to come out, spend time with Santa, play games, and have breakfast.

"It's great this year teaming up with the chamber, because it's not as crowded up

here as it usually is where we normally do Breakfast with Santa, and I can definitely see us partnering with them again."

After the kids enjoyed their meeting with Santa, they could move to the side rooms where they crafted different Christmas decorations to take home with them.

The Woody Gap Band of Steel made an appearance at the event, playing a selection

of Christmas songs while attendees gathered around them to listen.

Although the Holly Jolly Christmas event has ended, the chamber invites people to come to the Community Center throughout the month of December to see the Tour of Trees, which will remain until Dec. 31.

For more information on the chamber and other upcoming events, check out VisitBlairsvilleGA.com.

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could go to the back of the pavilion where Santa was sitting, and they could take a picture with him while they gave their Christmas wishes.

Live entertainment also carried on through the hour, with country music artist Justin Terry leading the first selection of a mixture of Christmas and country music.

"It's great to see everyone come out and join us tonight," said Terry during his performance. "I'm glad to see a large crowd here despite the miserably weather."

The audience cheered aloud as Terry finished each song, and many came closer to the stage to record and take pictures with the musician.

Another singer, Mike Young, took the stage following Terry.

"I want us to remember the most important reason for the season, and that is Jesus Christ," said Young.

Although Young only sang one song, the audience requested an encore to the gospel music, and Young happily gave the crowd what they wanted.

The speaking part of the program was led by organizer Janet Hill, who helped bring the very first lighting to Vogel 16 years ago.

"With the weather being so bad tonight, we had to move the event down here, but I would like to give the volunteers a big round of applause for their hard



Country music artist Justin Terry singing at the 2018 Vogel Tree Lighting.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener work in decorating the pavilion this afternoon," said Hill. "For 14 years, we did this program out on the field, and we did have snow some with a little bit of rain.

"One year, we did have to come to the pavilion because of the sleet, and we only had 75 people come that night, but we have had as many as 800 turn out for this program, and I really appreciate the faithfulness of those that keep coming every year and making it a family event."

Last year, the Christmas Program and Tree Lighting was canceled because of snow, though the lighting still technically happened as scheduled.

"We were sad that we had to cancel it, but we did have a

little ceremony out there for the guests that were actually staying on the park with us," said Park Manager Jack Becker in 2017. "We had about 30 people.

"We lit the tree, sang a couple carols, and then we went back to the Visitor Center for hot chocolate and coffee."

This year's program had carolers, too, and children came up to chime in for a few songs.

Santa also made his guest appearance on stage, singing "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer," and reminding everyone of the real reason for Christmastime: Jesus Christ.

Each performance added to that message, and at the conclusion of the event, organizers invited all guests to light the candles that were provided by Antioch church.

With candles lit, everyone joined in to sing "Silent Night" to end the night of festivities at Vogel State Park.

6th Annual Blairsville Holiday Stop & Shop a huge success

Guests were welcomed with Hot Apple Cider and Hot Chocolate by Sharon and Mike Bonkosky when they entered the 6th Annual Blairsville Holiday Stop and Shop (BHS&S) which was held November 30th and December 1st at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center in downtown Blairsville.

With 41 direct sales/home-based businesses to choose from, it was a buy local shopping extravaganza right here in the tri-state area. The Neely family entertained us with their beautiful harp & violin music again this year. I want to thank everyone who came out in the cold and rain to shop with us on this busy and eventful weekend around the community.

I started the Blairsville Holiday Stop and Shop in 2013 because there was a need in our community to make shopping easier for the public to access some of the home based/direct sales businesses without going from home to home or traveling two hours to the closest mall. From starting with 9 vendors the first year to having over 50 vendors within 3 years has made shopping a true pleasure.

A large majority of the vendors that are well known in the direct sales industry were represented, like Origami Owl, NYR Organics, Mary Kay Cosmetics, Pampered Chef, Scentsy, Norwex, Tupperware, LuLaRoe, Premier Designs, Rodan & Fields, LipSense, Usborne Books, Sea Girls Pearls, ColorStreet, Real Time Pain Relief, Enagic and Thirty-One Gifts. Also had an eclectic variety of handmade crafts/small home businesses like Crooked Creek Farm / FoxFire Blends, handmade quilts from Bunch of Quilts, Georgia FireSteel, Hillbilly D'Lights Jams and Jellies, Che' Designs, Sunshine Stitchery, Black Rock Custom, Mountain Top Threads, Sassy Bell Delights (Not Just a Dip), Sonshine Promises, Okra Patch, Crafts from Me by Peggy Lee, Naturally Country, The Neely Family,



Santa Claus visited with children during the Holly Jolly Christmas, which took place at the Union County Community Center on Saturday, Dec. 8. Photo by Jarrett Whitener



A crafts table at the Vogel Tree Lighting, which took place under the pavilion next to Lake Trahlyta due to rain. Photo by Jarrett Whitener



Nottley Marina, Inner Beauty, Jerree's Unity Alpacas, Muddy Moses and Mom Pottery, Ava Anderson's Bicycle Wreaths and Alysia Hargus Photography for all of the fantastic photos and headshots. This year the Blairsville Holiday Stop and Shop help support 3 local Charities: The 9th District Food Bank, Union County Relay For Life, and the S.A.F.E. Angel Tree (giving gifts to families staying at the shelter).

I am proud to announce the Naomi Havens with Usborne Books also had a book drive for S.A.F.E. during the BHS&S and was able to donate over \$150 worth of books. Thank you for helping us raise funds and awareness with our community.

Without the continued help and support of the following people and businesses, it would not have been possible for the BHS&S to be a huge success. I wish to thank Erika & Charles Rich with Smokey Mountain Shoppers Guide, Pat Malone with "This Week in Blairsville" radio show on WJRB 95.1FM & WJUL 97.5FM Radio, Lisa and Rachel Lily with Brainstorm, North Georgia News, Laura Ward, Lisa Ficalore, Jammie Murphy, Deanna Myers, Oleg Malyshev, Judy & Wayne Jolly and the Cabin Coffee Team, the Blairsville Union County Chamber of Commerce, Darren Harper with the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority, Bread and Bleu, Jason Anheier with Eat-zeez, The Neely Family, Sharon & Mike Bonkosky (greeters) and all of the vendors. I wish to thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Mark your calendar now so you don't miss the festivities for the 7th Annual Blairsville Holiday Stop & Shop on December 6 & 7, 2019. For updates, please LIKE and follow us on Facebook at Blairsville Holiday Stop and Shop. For more information, please email BHSandStop@gmail.com.

By: Sharon E. Penner



Usborne Books peaked imaginations



The Neely Family entertained with harp and violin music



2018 Holiday Stop and Shop first day vendors