

MERRY CHRISTMAS

from the staff of
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American Legion observes 'Wreaths Across America Day'

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Although the occasion at the Union County Farmers Market was somber on Dec. 18, there was a general sentiment of pride and hope among the members of American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121 as they observed National Wreaths Across America Day honoring deceased local veterans.

As in years past, Post 121 kept up the tradition of honoring veterans by placing wreaths of remembrance at two local cemeteries, Union Memory Gardens and Holly Hill. The event has been ongoing since 2005 and is celebrated nationally in over 2,700 locations.

It took a while to prepare. On Friday, the group set up where they would gather at the Farmers Market, getting ready for the first step in a weekend dedicated to reverence. Additionally, American Legion Auxiliary members spent the day handing out 38 giftbags to local veterans.

For the official Wreaths Across America Day observance on Saturday, Post 121 members met up and proceeded with the first part of a tradition that took place over two days this year, with a subsequent wreath-laying occurring on Sunday, Dec. 19.

The reason for the two-day local observance in 2021 was that the live balsam fir wreaths, delivered from Maine to Georgia, encountered an error in transit, resulting in the

Dec. 18 service, with Dec. 19 being set aside for the physical act of placing the wreaths.

Fortunately, Post 121 adapted, and trivialities such as wet weather and delivery delays did not stop members from taking part in the greater good of remembering their peers and honoring the country that so many have died to protect.

Beginning at 11 a.m. Saturday, Post 121 Wreaths Across America Coordinator Ron Tanner welcomed volunteers, guests, and veteran family members before holding a moment of silence to honor prisoners of war, soldiers missing in action, and veterans and active-duty service people.

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Patriotic veterans honoring their deceased compatriots in observance of Wreaths Across America Day, pictured here Dec. 19 at Union Memory Gardens. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Historical Society celebrates Christmas, elects new officers



The Union County Historical Society elected three officers for 2022 in the year-end Christmas Banquet on Dec. 14: Freya Jones as Vice President, Patti Everett as Secretary and Mickey Cummings as President.

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

An atmosphere of good cheer and holiday spirit permeated the Union County Historical Society Annual Christmas Banquet, as members gathered for food and fellowship at the Community Center on Tuesday, Dec. 14.

The event also served as a time to elect three new officers, and guests had the opportunity to win door prizes and partake in a raffle.

Historical Society President Judy Carpenter opened the event with a warm welcome, and Edie Rich read a moving poem entitled "The Soldier's Night Before

Christmas," after which Betty Jane Schuler led the Pledge of Allegiance and Bud Akins offered the Invocation.

It was then that everyone lined up to fix their plates, with Historical Society members and volunteers alike breaking bread, sharing conversations about the holidays and making

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'Shop With a Panther' makes Christmas merry for kids

By Jeremy Foster
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

On Monday, Dec. 13, the Blairsville Walmart hosted a special event for children called "Shop With a Panther," which is administered by students at Union County High School.

Much like Shop with a Cop, the occasion provides local schoolchildren living with less-than-fortunate circumstances the ability to go Christmas shopping for themselves and loved ones, enabling a fully magical Christmas.

Shop With a Panther caters to second-grade students nominated by teachers who think they need a little extra help throughout the holidays.

Spearheading the program is Dixie Conger, who teaches STEM biology/anatomy and physiology at the high school and sponsors the Beta Club,



Shop with a Panther offers younger children an opportunity to bond with their older peers, who act as guides and role models during the festive shopping experience.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

a community service-based program in which students must maintain a 93 grade-point average or higher for all four years of high school.

"We had 25 kids selected to come shopping today, and they each were given \$150 to spend," Conger said of the

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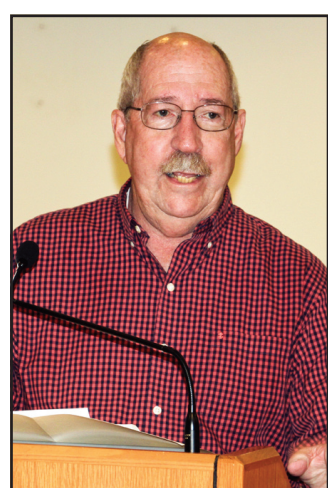
Paris adopts budget, thanks elected officials and staff

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris adopted the 2022 Union County Government Budget in a Dec. 13 called meeting at the courthouse. Half a dozen members of the public attended, and no questions were posed in the meeting.

All told, the FY22 Budget balances to \$22,878,191. This is up \$1,129,411, or about 5%, from the FY21 Budget of \$21,748,780. People can find the FY22 Budget that was adopted last week by visiting <http://www.unioncountygov/>.

According to the Commissioner's Office, most of the 5% bump in expenditures comes from salary increases that are important for employee retention and recognition of hard work, plus increases to various department workforces



Lamar Paris
Sole Commissioner

to better provide services to residents and visitors.

For the most part, the budget is the county's fiscal planning document outlining pay for employees to, for example, protect the populace by way of the Sheriff's Office, Fire Department and 911

Dispatch; fix local streets with the Road Department; and process judicial matters in the local courts.

Other budgeted expenditures are the countywide medical helicopter service membership, employee pay at the county-owned golf course, personnel to offer other recreational opportunities via the Recreation Department, gas for emergency vehicles, and much more.

Helping to balance the budget are additional revenues projected for 2022, including an extra \$997,886 in property tax collections over '21 due in part to growth in the county digest.

Also included in the budget are a couple million dollars in American Rescue Plan funds – federal money earmarked for public safety infrastructure in the wake of COVID-19. For example, the

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Local patriots recognize first responders in county meeting

Changes coming to meeting format



L-R: Paramedic Felicia Asher, Fire Sgt. Pat Schmidt, UCSO Staff Sgt. Andrew Glass, Kendra King and Sid Turner in the Dec. 16 county meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Sid Turner of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution presented three Union County first responders with recognition

awards at the December meeting of Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris on Thursday, Dec. 16.

A gaggle of members from each of the services represented by the three first responders crowded the room, including Sheriff Mack Mason and Fire Chief David Dyer.

UCSO Staff Sgt. Andrew Glass was presented with the Law Enforcement Commendation Medal. Turner mentioned Glass' many accomplishments in law enforcement, and Mason commented approvingly that Glass is a great asset to the

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The offices of the
North Georgia News and
West Printing Company will be closed Friday,
Dec. 24th and will reopen Monday, Dec. 27th

County Meeting...from Page 1A

Sheriff's Office and to the community.

UCFD Sgt. Pat Schmidt, also an EMT, received the Fire Safety Commendation Award. Schmidt was instrumental in developing and overseeing the fire safety education programs that are conducted in the community and the school system.

Dyer commented that Schmidt has been and continues to be paramount in promoting fire safety throughout Union County.

Paramedic Felicia Asher of the Union General Ambulance Service was presented with the Murray King Award. This award was named after a Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons member who had a heart attack and received compassionate care from EMS.

Though emergency workers were unable to save Murray's life, his wife, Kendra King, wanted to show her appreciation for EMS efforts in Union County, so she established the award with the local SAR chapter.

Asher, while working full time, attended nursing school and has become a licensed registered nurse.

"She can be trusted to care for patients with little or no supervision. She's an asset to the Emergency Medical Service and to our community," Turner said.

In other news, Clint Mueller and Gabriel Carter of the Association County Commissioners of Georgia presented District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter with the ACCG



L-R: Clint Mueller, Stan Gunter, Gabriel Carter and Lamar Paris in the county meeting last week.
Photo by Mark Smith

Legislative Service Award.

Gunter is a former Superior Court Judge and is currently in his freshman year as a Georgia State Representative.

"Rep. Gunter helped pass some legislation that allows us to use technology to do more teleconferencing in the court system, and he's working on a lot of initiatives to help us speed things up," said Mueller, referring to the current pandemic backlog in Georgia's courts.

Gunter, of Union County, was presented with a large gilt-framed photograph of the Old Union County Courthouse along with the award.

COUNTY BUSINESS

Moving along, Paris approved an agreement renewal with Correctional Resource Group for the food service for inmates at the Union County Jail. The contract effective date is Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2022. The cost increase is 2.1% for 2022, or about \$10,000.

Next, Paris approved an agreement with Leidos Security Detection & Automation, Inc. for annual maintenance and repairs for X-ray machines and metal detectors at both courthouse entrances in the amount of \$11,400, effective Nov. 30, 2021, to Nov. 30, 2022.

The commissioner then approved an agreement with CRSA Probation Services, Inc. for probation services to Union County Probation Court. There is no cost associated with this agreement.

An agreement between Republic Services, Inc. and Union County for transportation and disposal of solid waste from the Union County Transfer Station at a rate of \$45.50 per ton was approved. The effective date is Nov. 22, 2021, through Nov. 21, 2022.

Paris approved an agreement with Positive Pathways, Inc. for the use of meeting and office space located at 243 Hunt Martin Street in Blairsville in the amount of \$1 per month. The duration of this lease will be from Dec. 1, 2021, to Nov. 30, 2022.

He said the building at 243 Hunt Martin Street is the Old Merritt House that was purchased the same time as current the drug court property, which is located across the street from the Union County Library.

Two Accountability Courts Grants were accepted, one for Family Drug Treatment Court for \$36,324 with a grant period from Oct. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2022; and another for Local Law Enforcement in the amount of \$15,603 with a grant period from Jan. 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022.

A Memorandum of Understanding was approved between Union County Schools and Union County to set the terms for Union County to apply for and confer funds from the State of Georgia for the Public Safety Officials and First Responders Supplement Grant.

This memorandum will allow Union County to apply for the grant on behalf of Union County Schools for the eligible full-time certified law enforcement officers that are employed by the school system to provide each of them with a \$1,000 pay supplement.

Moving along, Paris said the county had applied to the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank for a program grant for intersection improvements at Pat Haralson Memorial Drive and Deep South Farm Road, which is at the entrance to Union General Hospital.

"If awarded this grant, we can use a small portion of our current SPLOST funds, under the roads and bridges project, to fund our match," Paris said. "This is a project

that could have been funded using (Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) funds, had the TSPLOST (referendum passed)."

Paris added that this intersection is especially ripe for improvement given Union General Health System's recent groundbreaking for a three-story, 42,000-square-foot medical office building adjacent to the hospital.

Paris announced the implementation of a six-month moratorium on cryptocurrency and bitcoin mining sites or data centers in Union County, citing the need for the county to develop an ordinance or ordinances regulating such businesses here.

Interest in heading off the development of crypto mining facilities has been growing in the community after noise and other complaints around such installations in neighboring Cherokee County, North Carolina.

Finally, Paris announced a county meeting schedule change for next month. Normally, county meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month. However, due to a scheduling conflict, the next meeting will occur Jan. 18, which is the third Tuesday of January 2022.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Resident Cindy Vandereedt was the pre-approved speaker on the December agenda. She has spoken in other public meetings this year, including in last month's commission meeting, in which she expressed her thoughts on why TSPLOST failed at the ballot box.

In last week's meeting, Vandereedt spoke about past SPLOST expenditures, claiming that the Commissioner's Office has, in multiple instances in recent years, not followed state law in administering SPLOST funds, and she asked for "more transparency" on SPLOST spending.

Responding, Paris disagreed with Vandereedt's conclusions and tied her comments to what he believes to be a larger effort by a group of vocal detractors that has been spreading incorrect information about him and his office this year.

He said, in future meetings, his office will be rebutting specific publicly made comments it views as being factually wrong.

"We will discuss future projects next year, but our meetings will take on a different culture," Paris said. "For those who have spent the past several months making false or inaccurate statements about the county operation, your statements may be directly addressed from the podium in a calm, peaceful and respectful manner."

Following adjournment of the meeting but prior to opening the public comment period, Paris got an early start on his pledge to address what he views as "false or inaccurate statements" by fact-checking a recent letter to the editor from the North Georgia News.

Other changes are expected in upcoming meetings, he said, like the reduction of speaking time from five minutes to three minutes for members of the public who request to appear on the agenda, a change that was rolled out in the December meeting.

"Most counties do three minutes," Paris said after the meeting. "Since I've never had to deal with people on the agenda in 20-something years - we've just opened it up at the end and let people just talk, and they've always been reasonable."

"However, the people that have been coming up to talk (in recent months) have, in my opinion, not been reasonable, and they're taking more and

more time; when they get to five minutes, they say, 'Well, I'm not quite through.'

"We talked to the attorney, and he said three minutes is a very adequate amount, so we're going to three minutes. We're adjusting as we go along because these are all issues that we've never dealt with. We've never dealt with people being meanspirited and mean-acting in the past."

"So, we're going to adjust our meeting until we finally get to the point to where we're going to have civil meetings. As long as we still have people that are not being civil, then we're going to make adjustments to make sure the meetings end up that way."

Regardless of how much time public presenters are granted in each meeting, Paris said everyone has a right to come to his office and ask whatever questions they want during regular business hours, and he welcomes them to do so.

At the beginning of the Dec. 16 meeting, Deputy Union County Attorney William Mercer laid out ground rules for people wishing to speak during the public comment period at the end, requesting that everyone use "decorum" when speaking.

The meeting became heated in the public comment period, however, with an exchange between Paris and resident Alexis Moore, who made a presentation in last month's meeting in which she implied he was "gaslighting, scapegoating, isolating dissenting voices (and) silencing people."

On Dec. 16, she continued her criticism of Paris for reducing the speaking time of residents appearing on the agenda, and she took issue with the "giant presence of police" in the room, which has seemingly grown in recent months as meetings have featured more vocal opposition.

Moore directly challenged Paris' integrity and asked if residents who are critical of his words and actions are "now being considered terrorists for asking you questions like what we've seen happening in the school board (at the national level)."

The two entered a contentious yet brief back-and-forth conversation, with Paris declining to recognize the "ridiculous" question and ultimately asking officers to escort Moore out of the meeting to end the argument.

"It's interesting that each of the last four or five county meetings, public meetings, there has been one person designated in the courtroom to either make a scene or do something enough to be asked to be rejected," Paris said, just minutes before ejecting Moore. "We've never had that in the history of this county, but we have had that of late."

"So, I'm not going to comment on it except to say, those that were asked to leave deserved to be asked to leave. And we're going to have civil and obedient meetings from this point forward."

A few other residents asked questions pertaining to subjects brought up in the meeting, after which the meeting disbursed.

Union County Transfer Station closed Dec. 24-25

The Union County Transfer Station will close Dec. 24-25, 2021, and Jan. 1, 2022, in observance of the Christmas Eve, Christmas and New Year's holidays. Normal business will resume on Monday, Dec. 27, and the Transfer Station will remain open on New Year's Eve. Thank you for your patience.

Union County Government wishes everyone a safe and Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year.

Budget Adoption...from Page 1A



911 Lt. Millie Baxter, Fire Chief David Dyer and County Finance Director Laura Driskell at the Dec. 13 budget adoption. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

county plans to use some of these funds to build Fire Station 13 in the north end of Union.

"The process of passing a budget begins with the submission of proposed budgets by the various departments and by the constitutional officers (that is, elected officials)," per the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

Continuing, "Constitutional officers must include the amount of anticipated revenues by source and the amount budgeted for expenditures (i.e., at the department level, unless a more detailed legal level of control is adopted) in the proposed budgets they submit.

"At this point, the board of commissioners (or sole commissioner) is free to make reasonable adjustments to the proposed budget, including funding cuts."

Fortunately, the Commissioner's Office said it did not have to make funding cuts this year thanks to the

diligence of all parties involved in keeping costs in line with estimated revenues.

The newly adopted budget will maintain county operations for the next fiscal year running Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2022.

Prior to adoption, Paris held a Dec. 2 public hearing to present the budget and give the community an opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback.

"Since the last meeting that we held here, we invited anyone that had any questions to let us know," Paris said Dec. 13. "(We had an) open records request, and I have that information if needed."

"Other than that, we did not hear from anyone else, and nobody from the office heard from anyone else. So, unless somebody's got a question they wanted to bring up before we adopt the resolution, we'll be glad to hear from you."

With no questions forthcoming from attendees,

Paris officially approved a resolution adopting the FY22 Budget before closing the called meeting that lasted just over four minutes.

"I am proud of our staff and elected officials and all county employees who work so hard to keep our operation costs under control and to maximize our revenue," Paris said. "I want to especially thank Laura Driskell, Union County Finance Director, for her hard work on the budget this year, and all those that assisted."

"I'd also like to thank Larry Garrett, the county manager, and Pam Hawkins, the purchasing agent, for their hard work on the budget as well. So, the budget is hereby approved, the resolution is adopted, and the meeting is adjourned."

"Thank y'all very much. Sorry that (the meeting is) short and sweet, but every once in a while, it's nice to have one short and sweet."



Rotary: People of Action

Chamber Matters and New Pathways

On December 9th, The Rotary Club of Union County was pleased to welcome Steve Rowe, Executive Director of the Blairsville Chamber of Commerce. Steve was president of the Rotary back in 1998 and he's a Paul Harris Fellow.

He gave an exciting account of the state of business in Union County. The county is looking at a major increase in tourism and the Chamber is doing things to make us an even more attractive, upscale destination with features like providing four new car chargers for electric vehicles. We have a diverse market that has viability in both the hospitality and manufacturing industries, so the Chamber is helping to develop the local workforce by promoting projects such as the College Career Academy that's under construction on the UC School campus. The county is also being well represented in niche markets and recently staged a very successful Wedding Expo. The Chamber, which was founded in 1981 has almost 700 members.

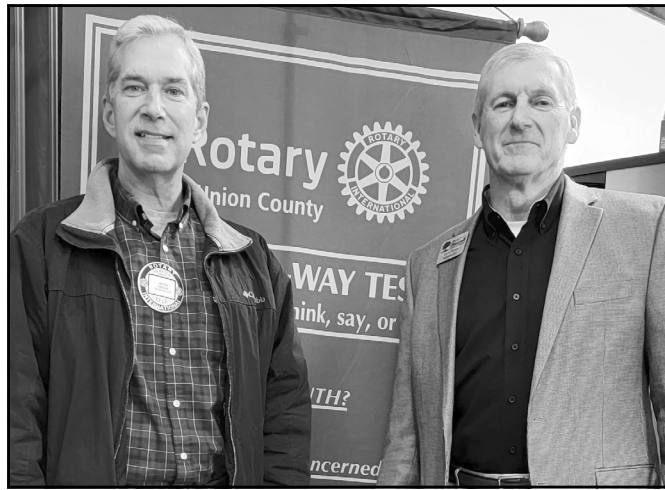
The Chamber also sponsors several events that bring business into the county such as Sporting Clays, golf tournaments, 4th of July fireworks and their popular membership events, Eggs & Issues and Power Lunches.

On Saturday, December 11th, quite a few Rotarians, members of numerous community groups and local government officials were present at the opening of Positive Pathways on Hunt Martin St. in downtown Blairsville. Summer Cress, the inspiration and director of the program officially opened this Recovery Community Organization

(RCO) — an independent, non-profit group led and governed by recovery specialists and community leaders, including several members of Rotary. RCOs carry out recovery-focused local education and outreach programs and provide peer-based support services for members of the entire community. Rotary has followed

Positive Pathways growth and hosted Summer Cress and co-founder Shawna Harkins as speakers at their meetings. The Club was pleased to make a generous donation to the new enterprise.

Think about joining Rotary, a fun, exciting organization that provides networking, fellowship, and vital services on a local, national, and worldwide level. The next regular meeting is Thursday, January 6, noon, at The Skillet in Blairsville. To learn more, give Rotary president Daniel Duello a call at (706) 603-3036.



Mitch Griggs, the Executive Director of the Union County Development Authority and Steve Rowe, Executive Director of the Blairsville Chamber of Commerce



Ed Sternberg, past president of the Rotary Club of Union County, presents a Rotary donation check to Positive Pathways, (L-R): Maranda Stephens, Shawna Harkins, and Summer Cress

One Year Anniversary COVID Vaccine Our Best Protection Against COVID-19

One year ago, the words Georgians had waited months to hear were finally being heard: "First shipments of COVID-19 vaccine arrive in Georgia."

Twelve months since that first small allotment of vaccine, about 6,000 doses, and the initial shots were administered, more than 6 million Georgians have received at least one dose of vaccine, nearly 5.5 million Georgians are fully vaccinated, and 1.2 million Georgians have gotten booster doses.

"Countless lives have been saved thanks to the COVID vaccine," said Kathleen E. Toomey, M.D., M.P.H., commissioner of the Georgia Department of Public Health. "A year ago, the vaccine couldn't come soon enough — it gave us hope and a path out of the pandemic. People were anxious and lining up to get their shot."

The Georgia Depart-

ment of Public Health (DPH) is grateful to all public health and healthcare providers for their dedication and continuing work to get shots into the arms of Georgians.

"Our COVID vaccines are safe and effective and can prevent severe illness and death from COVID," said Toomey. "If you are someone who wanted to 'wait and see' about the vaccine, please don't wait any longer. As long as people are not vaccinated, COVID will continue to spread, and variants will continue to emerge."

Currently, the Delta variant is responsible for more than 99% of new COVID cases in Georgia, primarily in unvaccinated individuals. So far, there are only 5 reported cases of Omicron variant in Georgia, but that number is expected to increase. Scientists are still studying Omicron to determine the severity of illness it may cause and how vaccines

will hold up against it.

All Georgians aged 5 and older are eligible for vaccination. Booster doses of vaccine are recommended for adults aged 18 and older who completed their first series of Pfizer or Moderna vaccine at least six months ago or two months ago for J&J vaccine.

Along with vaccination and booster doses, the CDC recommends general prevention measures such as wearing a mask in public settings, staying 6 feet from others, avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces, and frequently washing your hands to protect against COVID-19. Individuals who have symptoms of COVID-19 or who may have been exposed to someone with COVID should get tested.

To find a COVID vaccine or COVID testing location near you log on to dph.ga.gov. For additional information on COVID-19, visit cdc.gov.

Shop With a Panther ...from Page 1A



Walmart is happy to partner with all manner of Christmas shopping programs like Shop with a Panther, held last week by the students of Union County High. Photo by Jeremy Foster

primary school participants. "The chaperones for the kids are high school students that are in the Beta Club," she continued.

"It really excites the kids to be taken shopping by the teenagers. Some (of the high school chaperones) were former participants themselves in the past, so that makes a huge difference.

"You can definitely see the compassion for others in these kids, as they not only want to shop for themselves, but they want to get something for Mom or Dad or another special person in their lives.

"This is really a special day for everyone involved here, and the fun does not stop at shopping, as when we leave here and go back to the school, we will spend the rest of the day playing games, wrapping the presents and eating pizza for lunch.

"I think it is important to

be able to help people during this season. This is a special time of year for kids and adults, because there is a certain type of feeling that revolves around the holidays of family, love, gifts and trying to focus on spending quality time with each other."

As with any community, many families struggle financially in Union County – especially around the holidays – so those involved with Shop with a Panther take extra pleasure in providing for children who are no less deserving than those belonging to families with greater means.

And High School Principal C.T. Hussion was elated to watch all the kids – his high school students and their primary school counterparts alike – having such a good time with huge smiles on their faces.

"We were unable to do this last year because of the

heavy onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this marks our 10th year doing 'Shop With a Panther,'" he said. "It is really good for our (high school) kids to work with the younger kids and go around with them and have fun making sure they have everything they need for Christmas.

"This is just really good for us to be able to give back to our wonderful community."

Monies for Shop With a Panther come by way of student fundraising efforts of various clubs in the high school, as well as community donations from individuals and businesses.

The late Ed Rohrbaugh, former high school principal, started the program about a decade ago, envisioning Shop With a Panther as a way to improve the Christmas experiences of younger children in need while teaching older kids that giving back inspires hope for a brighter future.

Placing Wreaths...from Page 1A

Post Chaplain Richard Hoibraten led those gathered in prayer, and the entire ceremony emphasized and embodied the mission statement of the movement, as explained by Tanner at the podium.

"Remember the fallen," Tanner said. "Honor those that serve and their families. Teach the next generation the value of freedom."

Like the reveal of a beautiful work of art, the wreaths in question were displayed, some destined to represent specific individuals such as Allyson McGraw's husband and Jeanne McGill's father.

At each laying, a gorgeous wreath is presented at the headstone, and a spouse or child, sibling or friend, or even a volunteer speaks the deceased's name and thanks them for their service and sacrifice.

But it should be emphasized that organizers do not want the message of Wreaths Across America to be misunderstood.

"We are not here today to 'decorate graves,'" Tanner said. "We are here to remember not their deaths, but their lives."

Both cemeteries began their wreath-laying ceremonies



For the local observance of "Wreaths Across America Day" at the Farmers Market Dec. 18, Daughters of the American Revolution Old Unicoi Trail Chapter Regent Pam Matthews spoke on the 1776 patriots who chose freedom over tyranny. Photo/Submitted

at 1 p.m. on Sunday afternoon. Holly Hill's wreath placement was overseen by Ron Tanner, while the Memory Gardens service was managed by retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Dan Wickersham.

Participating in the services were other local organizations, including the American Legion Riders, North Georgia Honor Guard, and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Historical Society ...from Page 1A



Everyone agrees that the Historical Society is fortunate to have such dedicated members as Bud Akins and Judy Carpenter, pictured here in the organization's Dec. 14 Christmas Banquet at the Community Center. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

new introductions. About 30 minutes later, Carpenter recited an impressive list of society accomplishments for 2021, including renovations and additions to the Historic Court House and Butt-Mock House.

Jim Williams, whose mother Betty was a member of the Blairsville City Council as well as a prominent member of the Historical Society, then introduced the nominated officers from among the society's board members: Mickey Cummings, Freya Jones and Patti Everett.

Cummings, whose name is known well throughout the county, will serve as the new president of the Historical Society in 2022, as current President Judy Carpenter will be stepping down from the position to become an advising member on the society's Executive Board.

With years of experience managing the Farmers Market and Canning Plant – not to mention 33 years spent as an agent – Cummings is not only an accomplished agriculturist but also knows the value of preserving history.

"It's just important for Union County to preserve what history we have left," Cummings said. "So many of the people we've looked up to over the years have passed on; we need to preserve that heritage."

Being civically minded,

Jones said she was concerned about the position of Historical Society Vice President because, as she joked, "nobody else would do it," so she will be assuming that role in '22. Jones is also the Office Manager of the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center.

"If you move here, how do you know what culture you're moving into?" asked Jones, using the rhetorical question as a means of demonstrating why she believes it is important to upkeep past documents and continue to catalog current events.

For her part, Everett believes that "preserving the past helps us look to the future." Always appreciative of history, she has experience in being a secretary off and on through the years.

And though she has been a board member "forever," this will be her third term serving as the society's secretary. Her job will be to take notes during meetings.

The vote to accept Cummings, Everett and Jones was unanimous.

At this point, some new faces were welcomed to the Historical Society Board, with the new members being introduced as Eva Decker, Mike Cook and Cora Bauman.

Moving on, Carpenter thanked the Historical Society's tireless staff who work at the Old Courthouse Museum, including Edie Rich, Patsy

McCullum, Presley Rich, Linda Boyette and Margie Falgiano. They, along with the board leadership, were applauded for their service.

New Society President Cummings took a moment to thank outgoing officers Betty Noe as secretary, Bill Collins as vice president, and Judy Carpenter, who served as president for the past three years.

After handing out honorary plaques to particularly dedicated members of the Historical Society, Carpenter named Betty Noe and Darren Harper as the two "Volunteers of the Year."

There were also two "Preservationist of the Year" awards, the first going to the Blairsville Garden Club in honor of Shirley Walker, whom Carpenter cited as one of the society's "most loyal volunteers."

Commissioner Lamar Paris accepted the second award on behalf of the citizens of Union County who have supported the Historical Society in its many endeavors, particularly restoration projects.

Carpenter also presented a plaque to Sam Ensley for his "invaluable" years-long service coordinating Friday night concerts and other music-centric events.

Cummings gave Carpenter her own plaque for her service as the President of the Historical Society, as well as a gift certificate for Serenity in the Mountains.

"Thank you for your years of service," Cummings said as Carpenter met him at the podium. "We are a much better organization than before you came."

For a final time, Carpenter took to the podium to thank the Historical Society for granting her the opportunity to serve as its president, particularly noting that the Historical Courthouse staff were vital to many great accomplishments.

Union County Historical Society extends Brick Walk Sale

The Union County Historical Society has extended their Brick Walk sale through December.

At half price of \$50 bricks purchased in memory or honor of a loved one would make a great gift.

Please call the Historical Society at 706-745-5493 or come by the Old Courthouse on the Square to purchase one of these bricks and check-out

other items in the gift shop including our 2022 calendar Historic Hearthstones which featured color pictures of many homes in Union County.

We also have books by local authors, a new addition of black and white framed photos of historic places in Union County and Cemeteries of Union County Books. These items would make great Christmas gifts.