

Accident...from Page 1A

turn and slowed to make a left onto Town Mountain Road across from General Supply, according to GSP.

Unprepared to stop, the big rig avoided a collision by swerving onto the west shoulder of the road and into a ditch before veering back onto the roadway in front of the store, according to GSP.

"The trailer behind the tractor came off (the shoulder) into the ditch and went over a culvert, at that time causing the load to shift and come undone," GSP Trooper McSween said.

Five vehicles were parked in front of General Supply when the accident happened, three of them side-by-side in a line, with a Jeep Cherokee and Ford F-600 belonging to the business parked opposite the other vehicles.

When the tons of oriented strand boards – construction panels similar to sheets of plywood – broke free of their restraints, they flew off the Peterbilt's flatbed and skidded into and under the five vehicles in the parking lot.

So heavy was the combined weight of the load that it picked up and moved the five vehicles about 20 feet south in the parking lot, depositing one of the parked cars, an Audi Q7, on top of a similarly relocated Subaru Impreza.



The stretch of Gainesville Highway near General Supply and Town Mountain Road has been a trouble spot for accidents in recent years, according to store own Jordan Keen.

Photo by Mark Smith

The tractor-trailer continued down Gainesville Highway a pace until it was able to make a controlled stop on the shoulder of the road, undoubtedly easier now that it had shed its entire load.

Back in the parking lot, a stunned Susan Tate attempted to recover from the shock of nearly being maimed or killed in the accident.

Tate, of Blairsville, was visiting General Supply's Enchanted Forest Gift Shop that morning to finish up her Christmas shopping. She had just gotten out of her Ford Equinox after arriving at the store when she heard the oncoming truck's brakes lock up as it swerved to avoid a crash.

"I had my keys in my hand, and my door was still open," Tate said. "I was in between the car and the door, and I thought, 'I don't have any pockets.' At about that time I heard something, and I looked up. And when I looked up, I saw the (OSB board) start coming off the truck."

Tate made a break for it, and not a second too soon. She was able to get clear of the parked vehicles before the green-colored boards slammed into the cars.

Had she remained in place or reacted even a second slower, she'd have been crushed

between her vehicle and the Subaru, which side-swiped her Equinox before being overtaken itself by the Audi.

"I thought, 'I'm fixing to get killed,' and I took off running," Tate said. "A piece of wood hit my boot and I went to my knees. I jumped up, because when I went down, I thought, 'I don't know what's coming behind me.'"

Fortunately, Tate made it so safety and was later cleared by paramedics following the accident. She didn't finish her Christmas shopping that day but was ultimately grateful to have escaped the experience with her life.

"I feel fine," Tate said. "The good Lord had his hand on all of us here today, but I feel fine. I'm just shook up."

Added Tate, "I'm just thankful everyone's OK. Cars can be replaced – people can't. It was a scary day, but everyone's fine, and that's what we need to be thankful for."

General Supply owner Jordan Keen was inside his store with the two customers whose cars ended up totaled, including Karen Pirie's Audi that she got for her birthday earlier this year.

When Keen and Pirie heard the tractor-trailer's brakes squealing, they looked out the front window and saw what they later described as a sea of

green moving the cars like a wave through the parking lot.

"I saw mine end up getting pushed up on top of everybody's," Pirie said. "It's a miracle that none of us were in our vehicles."

One of the cars totaled in the accident was Keen's personal vehicle, a '95 Jeep Cherokee that had recently had the roof repainted. But that was beside the point for Keen, who said he was happy that no one was injured in the accident.

"It could have been a lot worse than what it was – a whole lot worse," Keen said. "I'm just glad everyone's OK."

Some products and parts of the property were damaged out front, though the main building was spared, and Keen said it was the worst of about eight or nine traffic accidents to have occurred in that same area in the last five years.

Keen said that the county previously contacted the state about installing additional roadside signage warning people about the upcoming turn at Town Mountain Road given the limited sight distance coming around the bend from Blairsville.

Responding to the scene were a host of first responders, including the Union County Sheriff's Office, Fire Department and EMS.

Hamilton Gardens thanks you for another amazing year

As 2019 comes to an end, the Board and volunteers at Hamilton Gardens would like to share the major accomplishments and progress made in restoring and preserving this landmark garden. First and foremost was the completion and execution of the Strategic Plan, a performance path to the future.

The installation of a Guest Registry exceeded expectations with a voluntary sign-in that netted visitors from 37 states and 19 countries, with the car counter indicating 24,000 guests entered the Garden property. A membership/sponsorship program was initiated in the spring at the request of visitors and guests who seek sustainable ways to support the Gardens.

The design and planting of one of the entry beds created "Marsha's Garden", a memorial to Board member Marsha Elliott. The other entry bed has been redesigned and work is well underway for spring.

A new project, the pollinator garden, was planted and plans are to apply for certification in 2020. Volunteers and staff participated in the first Great Georgia Pollinator count; an effort sponsored by UGA to determine the status of these life essential pollinators which are the very beginning of our food chain.

Our partner, the American Rhododendron Society, Azalea Chapter, generously donated special mulch and enough fertilizer to give all rhododendrons and azaleas a much-needed dose of nutrients and protection.

Another restoration project was the treatment of kudzu in the GMF pasture that adjoins the Garden property. MountainTrue staffer, Tony Ward, has been working for the past three years to eradicate kudzu from the garden and this year he tackled the 'motherlode'.

The Moonlight concerts brought approximately 400 guests to picnic on the great lawn, watch the sun set and the moon rise while enjoying some really fine musical talent.

"Let's Get Growing", the summer lecture series, was well attended and provided seven interesting and relevant educational events. And of course, the two benefits, Celebrate the Gardens, and the fall Chili-Out continue to be significant fundraising activities.

The final activity was the honor of decorating the Christmas tree at the State Welcome Center in Lavonia and participating in Light Up Hiawassee. Next year is full of promise, none of which would be possible without the support of donors and businesses



who continue to believe in the Gardens mission; to restore,

preserve and enhance this botanical legacy garden. Thanks.

If you would like to schedule a special garden presentation for a group, or for more information please contact us at 706 970-0011. Follow us on Facebook. NT(Dec25.F5)SH

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