

Relay...from Page 1A

August of each year.

Team sponsors at Saturday's Relay were able to raise money by channeling their passions into various activities at their campsites. A Relay campsite is a booth sponsored by an organization, such as a business or a church, and many held raffles to win items.

Devan Persaud of Persaud Jewelers raffled off a handmade necklace with a retail value of \$525, while Blairsville Tech Support, a first-year team, sold root beer floats and raffled a seven inch tablet.

One event that touched the hearts of all involved was the Survivors Lap, which is reserved for those whose lives have been altered the most by cancer.

Steve and Mary Newton, both survivors and caregivers for each other, were named Honorary Grand Marshals for this year's Relay.

"It's emotional, it's deep, it's a feeling like, unless you've really fought against the disease, I don't think you can really realize what it means to be able to get there and walk," said Blairsville CVS Manager Steve Newton



of the Survivors Lap.

"I remember three years ago, I was in ICU for 10 days, and there was a point where I wanted to give up. You just get tired, you get tired of fighting. And to be able to look back where you were and then be able to walk this lap as a survivor - gives you chill bumps," Newton said.

Children also made their own Survivors Lap, called Take It to the Track, and

10-month-old Mary Nicole Graphman, who is currently battling cancer, was named Honorary Grand Marshal for that lap.

The theme for this year's Relay was *Carnival of Hope*, which inspired survivors and the more than 20 teams to dress up like clowns and participate in fun activities. Men, women and children alike dressed up in rainbow wigs and hats of every

neon color, and many wore painted faces to celebrate the event's theme.

A Bare Legs Contest pitted the men of the Relay against one another in an effort to win one of three categories: Prettiest, Ugliest and Hairiest Legs.

The annual barbecue contest was a big success, raising \$2,000 alone. James Grubbs of Grub-Ba-Que won the Best Ribs category, while Chandler McCluskey won People's Choice for his team, Little Q.

One of the last events of the evening came as the sky grew dark, signaling the time to begin the Luminaria Ceremony. All around the track, candles were placed and lit inside bags with the names of survivors or those who have passed from cancer, and all in attendance made a lap to honor those named.

Relay For Life is an annual fundraising event aimed at raising money, through community involvement, for the purposes of research and outreach programs designed to help survivors and caregivers.

Union County volunteers work year-round to aid those suffering the effects of cancer, giving of their time for programs like the Road To Recovery, which provides transportation to and from treatment centers, as well as the Look Good ... Feel Better program, that helps women battling cancer to improve their self-images.



Reece...from Page 1A



Carol, David and Molly, the children of the late Bettie Sellers, get an upclose look at the memorial to the late, great poet. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

has come for me to make this transition from a position of leadership to being a good member. There are good people in place, and I have positive feelings going forward."

Along with announcing its 2015-2016 board of directors, the society's new board elected new officers. Keith Jones will serve as the new chair, Terry White as vice chair, Rosemary Royston as recording secretary, Debra March as treasurer and Teresa Sampson as membership secretary.

Professor Ted Olson of the Appalachian Studies Department at East Tennessee State University was the meeting's keynote speaker, and he spoke on the cultural heritage of Reece's work, calling the poet a "masterful author."

"I feel Byron Herbert Reece is the true master of Appalachian Poetry," said Olson. "And it's this remarkable ability to go with the grain of tradition, and go against the grain of the mainstream literary ethos of his era to create work that transcends that era, and is embedded with the best of Appalachian culture and Appalachian speech."

Fleming Weaver, who has headed up the Farm Development and Management Committee since the society began, also stepped down in this capacity, giving way to new leadership in the management of the Reece Farm.

"During this past year, as far as the farm is concerned, we have done a maintenance type of progress because of Union County government," said Weaver, speaking on the farm's new garden and amphitheater. "They have done a magnificent job in being a real partner in the development and operation of this farm."

Commissioner Lamar Paris, who was instrumental in acquiring Reece's farm for use and upkeep by the society, honored the society with a special surprise.

Commissioner Paris is a board member of the Georgia Regional Commission, and in its latest meeting, the GRC presented him with a relic of Appalachian importance.

"*The Reach of Song* quilt is an arts heritage project in support of Georgia's official historic drama," read Commissioner Paris from a GRC statement. "Some 400 seniors in 12 senior centers in North Georgia participated in the planning and participation of this stage prop. It was used on the stage in 1989 and 1990 during a performance of the play."

Reece was the central character of the play "The Reach of Song," and the quilt is composed of tiles made by people who knew the man in life, three tiles represented by Union County and three by Towns County, among others.

For many years, the quilt had been sitting in a box at GRC headquarters, and the commission decided to give it to Commissioner Paris to present to the Reece Society.

After lunch, members met for a dedication ceremony of the recently completed Bettie Sellers Memorial Amphitheater, to honor the life and contributions of Dr. Bettie Mixon Sellers, who passed away in 2013.

Of her many accomplishments, Sellers served as Poet Laureate of Georgia during Gov. Zell Miller's tenure, conducted extensive scholarly work on Reece and won an Emmy for her production role in the film "Voices: Finding Byron Herbert Reece."

A large donation for the performance amphitheater

came from Young Harris College's Institute for Continuing Learning, which chose the Reece Farm as a way to honor her commitment to scholarship at the college, where she led ICL courses.

More than 70 people attended the dedication, including Sellers' three children and two of her grandchildren.

"Mother not only admired Reece's work, but she felt a deep kinship with his rural background and his view of life," said her daughter Carol Sellers Story at the dedication.