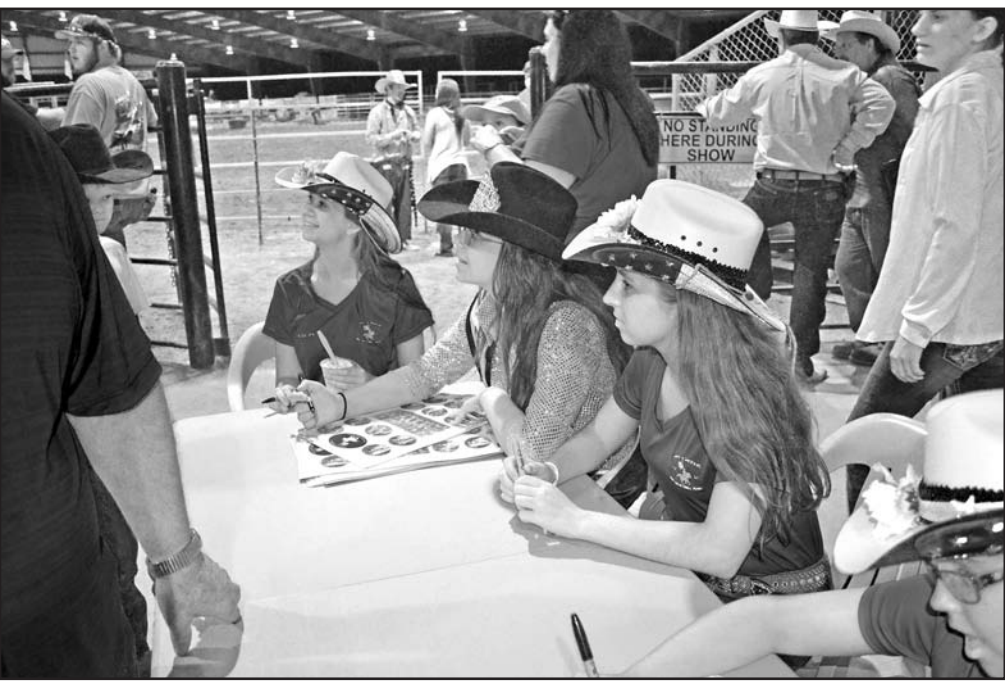


Rodeo...continued from Page 1A



Alyssa McFarland, this year's Georgia Junior Rodeo Queen and the Sass N Saddles Precision Drill Team, signing autographs



one will have the chance to win a brand new Dodge truck. All they have to do is be the lucky draw and throw a horseshoe and get it around the pole.

"Other than that, we are throwing a lot of free items into the stands. Chic-Fil-A is throwing a lot of free stuff into the stands.

"We drive the Dodge truck around the arena and throw out free hats and t-shirts. There's a lot of free stuff to be given away.

"We have all kinds of food vendors out here. If you're hungry, come on, we have it. We have bounce houses, pony rides, just a lot of stuff for the children to do. We have a lot of souvenirs as well. The saddle club is selling T-shirts.

"We have something for everyone in the family. We're looking at around 2,500 just for one night. It's a big event and it's growing every year."

The major events of both evenings were bareback riding, saddle bronco riding, calf roping, team roping, steer wrestling, barrel racing, bull riding and breakaway roping, which was lady-specific.

Professionals competed in these events, with the final outcome weighing in on if they would compete at a higher level or not. Some walked away with outstanding numbers from the judges and some did not, but

either way they were equally cheered on by the crowd in a grand show of Blairsville hospitality.

These pro events were not the only happenings at the rodeo last weekend. A three-team barrel race was a prime act, in which members of the audience were encouraged to participate. Two blindfolded team members had to maneuver their way around the arena while pushing the third team member in the wheel barrel, which tried their best to give directions. The winning team won \$100.

Calf scrambles were a huge hit as well, one for the children and one for the ladies. The object of the scramble is to get the ribbon on the calf's tail as it runs around the arena.

The winning child scrambler won \$20, while the winning lady won \$100.

Sass N' Saddles, Union County's Precision Drill Team, gathered much fanfare from the crowd with their intermittent display of skill and crafted horsemanship.

One of the team's final performances on Saturday supported the theme for the night, "Tough Enough to Wear Pink," where every cowgirl and cowboy was challenged to wear pink to raise awareness for Breast Cancer.

"We try to donate to a variety of charities and organi-

zations, for example, those that support work towards finding a cure for cancer," said Gerald Patterson, President of the Union County Saddle Club.

The 2016 Miss Rodeo USA, Harmony Latham, also made a grand appearance at the rodeo. Blairsville is one of her many stops of the year after being crown Miss Rodeo USA back in January.

According to Norton, agent for Circle N Rodeo Production, Blairsville Pro Rodeo is one of the best rodeos he has been fortunate enough to attend.

"I've been all over the Southeastern United States in 31 years and I would like to say that this is one of the nicest facilities that I've been to," said Norton. "This is great. The people of Union County definitely have something to be proud of."

Mountain Valley Motors was the main sponsor for the rodeo. The premier sponsors were: Union General Hospital, Nelson's Tractor, American Cowboy Store, McClure Truck and Trailer Sales, General Supply, Chic-fil-A Blairsville, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Zaxby's, Total Recovery and Alexander's Store.

"We'd like to just say thank you to our community and to our county for supporting us and for this beautiful arena to put on this event," said Patterson. "We're very grateful for everything."

Station 13...continued from Page 1A

is worth somewhere in the neighborhood of \$50,000, and the county will save close to \$75,000 in turn lane construction thanks to Rye completing that work.

Rye in turn saved money thanks to the commissioner speaking with GDOT about decreasing the deceleration space of the turn lane coming off of Murphy Highway heading toward Blairsville, so the situation was a win-win for everyone involved.

"It's exactly where we need one," said Chief Dyer. "We were looking at Gum Log, because that was kind

of the center point of where we don't have coverage, and that would cover every bit of it. So, that's just a little ways down the road, and it helped us out a lot."

According to Chief Dyer, there are three other locations around the county for which he and the commissioner are evaluating a need for fire stations in the next five years or so – the west side, extreme south side and Suches – and those potential stations in turn could help people save money on their homeowners' insurance, plus quicken response times in case of emergencies.

For now, Fire Station No. 13 seems all but inevitable, thanks to the land donation.

"Once we have the building in place and a fire station inspected and certified, (residents) can go to their insurance companies, and the insurance companies can look at it and say, yes, you are within five road miles of a fire station now, and you will get a different ISO rating," said Chief Dyer, adding that regardless of ISO rating, the Union County Fire Department will respond to every call they receive.

Retirement...continued from Page 1A

and hard work towards bettering his department.

"From the City of Blairsville, this is just a small token of appreciation, shown to you with this plaque, for your dedicated service to our city, to your department and for the city as a whole for the last nine years," said Mayor Conley.

"I appreciate everything that you have done, you have shown leadership, you have put the job before other things at times and, Ken, and you have been our salvation at the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

"I'm very appreciative because not only have you made it better than it was when it was new, you have brought on two excellent employees that you are leaving with us that are going to carry on your good works."

Smith bought a house in Blairsville 15 years ago but only decided to make it his permanent home a little over nine years ago. He had always planned on retiring in Blairsville but when an opportunity arose to work for the city, he jumped at the chance and moved from his home in Panama, Florida.

Before coming to Blairsville, Smith worked at St. Marks Powder for 26 years in the utilities department. He received his higher education

from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College and Florida State University and became licensed in wastewater in 1984.

Smith first started at the Wastewater Plant as the lead operator but moved up in ranks quickly. During his time at the plant, Smith assisted in renovations to the plant, upgrading the current system to be as efficient and environmentally friendly as possible.

Since Smith has taken over, Wastewater Plant observation has become electronic, with the capability for any Wastewater employee to view the process at the plant remotely if needed.

"I've enjoyed my time here with the City of Blairsville," said Smith.

"Sure, there have been times that were bad, like all jobs, you have days that you might not want to think about, but I've really enjoyed this job, I've enjoyed the challenge and I've enjoyed the people I've worked with.

"The mayor has given me all these accolades about what I've done but I really couldn't have done what I've been able to accomplish at the waste treatment plant without the employees, not just the two who work with me, but all of the rest of the departments who have helped out,

given advice and who have sent their people down to help us.

"It's been a great team effort, not only from the people in the field but also from all the staff from the departments, city council and the mayor.

"Without the council and the mayor providing us the funds that were necessary to do the things we had to do, and working with us, we would not have been able to accomplish what we've been able to together.

"I thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of what we've done here for the city, for the future. That's all I've wanted, to do my job for the people of the community and for the future of Blairsville."

Smith plans to spend his retirement in the company of his friends and family, especially his wife, Lisa, who retired last year. The two have already begun making plans to travel west to visit National Parks and see parts of the country they have yet to venture through.

Current Lab Manager Jody Cook will be taking over for Smith when he leaves. Smith's last day at the Wastewater Treatment plant was Monday, June 20.

Puppets...continued from Page 1A

to start a puppet performance group.

"Then I thought, well, we could perform at all the local branches too, because they usually hire entertainers to come in. There are no puppetry arts in North Georgia, so I thought it could be really cool. I wanted to produce a show that could tour to every branch."

Creativity and kids go hand in hand, and Stone hopes to use these puppets as a creative way to get kids excited about reading and coming to the libraries.

The troupe will be performing 30 to 45 minute shows, featuring shorter acts and one longer act, all of which will be drawn from stories and fables. "Tortoise and the Hare," "Mother Hubbard" and "Frog and Toad" are just a few of the many shows Stone hopes to have ready for the company's tour.



"While we're performing the show, the book goes on a big screen behind us," said Stone. "We talk about the author and how many books they've written, and give them a little background information."

The Friends of the Library of Union County donated \$1,000 to the puppet company, and the Georgia Public Library Service donated \$1,500, allowing the initial cost of the troupe to be fully funded, something for which Stone is very grateful.

Stone is coordinating the first puppet production with the Summer Reading Program at Towns County Public Library on June 16, one show at 11 a.m. and another at 1 p.m. Other tour date times and locations can be found on

the new Mountain Regional Library System website at www.mountainregionallibrary.org.

In other Mountain Regional Library news, the System Board of Trustees held its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, June 8, at the temporary location of the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris.

Throughout the meeting, the board reviewed the financial report for the third fiscal quarter, as well as the proposed budget for the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

All libraries within the region shared updates for the quarter, specifically the programs that each library will

be implementing throughout the summer.

Individual libraries hold summer reading story times for children, all following the Georgia-wide theme, "On Your Mark, Get Set...Read!"

This year's theme promotes health and fitness in conjunction with reading, giving kids the opportunity to enjoy a good story while learning useful information on how to stay healthy.

Renovations are underway for the new Mountain Regional Library facility in Young Harris, and the board hopes to open the library to the public around mid-October.

FSA County Committee nomination period now open

The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced that the nomination period for local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county committees begins on Wednesday, June 15, 2016. "Through the county committees, farmers and ranchers have a voice. Their opinions and ideas get to be heard on federal farm programs," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "It is important for county committees to reflect America's diversity, so I encourage all eligible farmers and ranchers, including beginning farmers, to get involved in this year's elections. We've seen an increase in the number of nominations for qualified candidates, especially among women and minorities, and I hope that trend continues." To be eligible to

serve on a FSA county committee, a person must participate or cooperate in an agency administered program, be eligible to vote in a county committee election and reside in the local administrative area where they are nominated.

Farmers and ranchers may nominate themselves or others. Organizations representing minorities and women also may nominate candidates. To become a candidate, an eligible individual must sign an FSA-669A nomination form. The form and other information about FSA county committee elections are available at www.fsa.usda.gov/elections. Nomination forms for the 2016 election must be postmarked or received in the local USDA Service Center by close of business on Aug. 1, 2016.

FSA will mail election ballots to eligible voters beginning Nov. 7, 2016. Ballots will be due back to the local county office either via mail or in person by Dec. 5, 2016. Newly elected committee members and alternates will take office on Jan. 1, 2017.

While FSA county committees do not approve or deny farm ownership or operating loans, they make decisions on disaster and conservation programs, emergency programs, commodity price support loan programs and other agricultural issues. Members serve three-year terms. Nationwide, there are about 7,800 farmers and ranchers serving on FSA county committees. Committees consist of three to 11 members that are elected by eligible producers.