

North Georgia News

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Reece Farm Open House 'well beyond our expectations'

By Charles Duncan
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They came from near and far, and many didn't want to leave.

Several hundred Byron Herbert Reece fans turned out for the Christmas Open House on Saturday at the Reece Farm and Heritage Center. It was the last event at the center until April.

It also was the inaugural Christmas event for the center and one that proved to be a success beyond expectations.

"There was an excellent crowd here today," said Reece Society spokesman John Kay. "To be honest, it took our breath away. We didn't expect this kind of turnout. It was incredible."

Noted Georgia author Terry Kay was on hand sign-

ing autographs and copies of his books.

Terry Kay has won four Georgia Author of the Year awards, most recently this year in the Short Story category for his book, *The Greats of Cut-tercane*.

Three of Kay's novels have been made into Hallmark Hall of Fame movies, including *To Dance with the White Dog*, starring Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy.

His books were available for purchase, some brought their own copies of Terry Kay's books for him to sign.

The Gift Shop was swamped, as anything Reece flew off the shelves. Many visitors saw the event as an opportunity to purchase a unique Christmas gift for someone special in their lives.

"This place is truly one of the hidden treasures of the



Visitors at the Reece Center's Gift Shop were taking Christmas back home with them after a shopping spree on Saturday. Photo/Charles Duncan



An almost lifesize portrait of Reece greets visitors at the center's Gift Shop off Highway 129. Photo/Charles Duncan

North Georgia Mountains," said Hilda Croft of Stockbridge. "I'm a Reece fan and I guess you could say I'm buying my Christmas presents early. On Christmas day, the gifts will be underneath the tree, they'll have my name on

them. But, the card will read that they're from my husband.

"I'll give him a big hug for being so thoughtful," she said. The Gift and Craft Shop featured books by and about

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Santa: 'Christmas alive and well in Union County'

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Santa was all over the place in Downtown Blairsville on Saturday as he met with young children in the Historic Courthouse and drove his sleigh through the streets during the Annual Christmas Parade.

Needless to say, Blairsville and Union County was filled with the Christmas Spirit on this day.

The first duty of the day had Santa checking his list at the Historic Union County Courthouse, as children and adults of all ages stopped by to give Father Christmas their wish lists.

Accompanied by Mrs. Claus, the Jolly Ole Elf was this usual talkative self as one-by-one he visited with the long line of visitors at the Historic Courthouse. The wish lists varied, the bottom line was the same: "I want..."

"Most of the children don't want to talk," Kris Kringle said. "Sometimes I can get the little girls to talk by asking them if they want a boyfriend for Christmas, and that usually gets a laugh out of them."

Word is that when Santa



Santa was on the move Saturday during the annual Christmas Parade through Downtown Blairsville. He was accompanied by a few of his elves. The good news is, Blairsville's Children have been nice, not naughty. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

and Mrs. Claus return to the North Pole, they'll be checking their lists to see who has been naughty and who has been nice before returning to Blairsville on Dec. 25th.

Meanwhile, the only thing that Santa couldn't guarantee on Saturday was a SEC

Championship for Head Coach Mark Richt and the Georgia Bulldogs' wish list.

It didn't look like the holiday season with temperatures in the low 60s, but the beautiful weather only encouraged more to come out and enjoy the holiday festivities.

Most of the children in attendance were there for the candy or to catch a glimpse of Santa Claus. But as soon as the sweets started being tossed, Ole Saint Nick was put on the back burner, momentarily.

A few minutes after 2



Santa gets a salute from a young Cub Scout on Saturday. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

p.m. the Christmas Parade got underway, led by the North Georgia Honor Guard and the Cub Scouts.

Following the Scouts was Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley. The mayor was the first to begin tossing out candy and the scramble was on.

Behind Mayor Conley was Union County High School's Pride of the Mountains Marching Band performing "Joy to the World" as they marched around the Historic

Courthouse Square.

Next in line, straight out of *Whoopi*, was *The Grinch*.

And what happened then? Well, in Blairsville they say, that the Grinch's small heart grew three sizes that day.

Then a string of Corvettes came around the square courtesy of Corvette Cruisers. One of the more than 15 'vettes was pulling sleigh bells.

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Kris Kringle Mountain Market draws a crowd

By Charles Duncan
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Santa Claus was in the right place at the right time on Friday.

One-by-one, Kris Kringle heard the Christmas wish lists of each and every child to arrive at the Third Annual Kris Kringle Mountain Market at the Union County Farmers Market.

The two-day event featured holiday treats, gift ideas, ample supplies of Mountain crafts and good old fashioned Mountain hospitality.

For the 60-plus vendors on hand, the event helped pave the way for their holiday shopping, as they sold their crafts or vegetables and banked a little cash.

The majority of vendors were no stranger to the Market, having spent the summer months selling their crafts and produce on a weekly basis.

The weekend vendors included civic organizations like the 4-H Club, the Lions Club and Habitat for Humanity.

Barbara Burnette, a Habitat volunteer, was excited about the occasion. The event offered the charitable group the opportunity to let others know about the program's good works and how they can help.

"It's an opportunity to volunteer with a good cause,"



Burnette said.

Meanwhile, patrons flocked to the vendor booths in search of good food and a special Christmas present. They didn't have to look far to find either.

Toby Collins' shelled pecans were a favorite, as were Joy Nywening's handmade handbags. Britt Turner's home-made creams and lotions were popular as were Wanda Webb's specialty cakes. If you were looking for hand-crafted jewelry, a pocket knife, some pork rinds or some collard greens, the Kris Kringle Mountain Market was the place to be.

"I think this is just great," said Kimberly Owens, of Stone Mountain. "We're up visiting friends, and I'm always ready to look for a bargain and there are plenty of good buys here today."

Of course there was much more to this event. As daylight turned to darkness, a bonfire provided ample lighting and the opportunity for comradery. Bi-Lo provided all the makings for s'mores treats.

Also on hand, gourmet coffee, funnel cakes, and foot-long hand dipped corn dogs.

The event also featured caroling, crafts, jams and jellies, homemade candy, holiday baked goods and other

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Annual Christmas Concert packs the courthouse

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Friday night at the Historic Union County Courthouse wasn't just another concert.

Laurin Smith and the North Georgia Symphony Orchestra had a packed crowd, both on the courtroom floor and in the balcony seating, ready for the group's annual performance.

Contralto Jeanne Luke,

whose voice seemingly has that angelic touch, would be the evening's solo vocal artist, accompanied, of course, by the orchestra.

Luke did not disappoint. She belted out Barber's *Sure on this Shining Night* and *Must the Winter Come so Soon* from his opera *Vanessa*.

She also sang Franck's *Panis Angelicus*, Adam's *O Holy Night*. She also led the crowd in the caroling sing-alongs, which is always a

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The Annual Christmas Concert at the Historic Courthouse was packed out on Friday. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

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