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Youngblood signs Nashville recording, writing deal

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiwassee native True Youngblood is a well-known musician around these parts, and soon, he could be a household name everywhere after inking a Nashville recording and writing contract.

In the words of Youngblood's father Damon, the accomplishment is "something that only few ever do, especially from our town," and the 20-year-old artist can't wait to make his hometown proud from the big stage in Music City, USA.

Youngblood currently attends Belmont University, a private Christian college in Nashville, Tennessee, and he plans to stay in Nashville for the foreseeable future now that he's secured a publishing deal through MV2 Entertainment

and its label New Lost City Records.

So how did the member of Towns County High's Class of 2022 come to land a music career in the home of the Grand Ole Opry? Last August, Youngblood was performing a Tyler Childers cover with friend Easton Collins when someone uploaded a video of the pair to the internet.

"Just the right person saw it and sent it to another right person, and from there, we got invited in to come and talk and meet; the next thing I knew, they were offering me a deal," Youngblood said.

With a lot riding on the opportunity, the local singer/songwriter said he is a little nervous at the onset of his new profession, but he is excited for what's to come and considers himself lucky to have landed a job doing what he loves.

Throughout the coming year, Youngblood will be responsible for 16 song releases, 12 of which he is contractually obligated to write but won't necessarily be recorded by him. MV2 will decide whether Youngblood will produce the songs himself or if his lyrics will be sent to other artists.

Fortunately, he is used to writing his own material.

"I probably have the worst creative process known to man," Youngblood joked, noting that song ideas sometimes come to him while lying in bed, and after jumping up to jot them down, it may be weeks before he returns to them to flesh out proper tunes.

Regardless of how he executes his craft, he has certainly impressed industry professionals in Nashville — a place he wasn't sure he needed to be until this opportunity

came along.

"For a while, I was kind of like, 'What am I doing up here? I don't need to be up here,'" Youngblood said. "Now, it feels like I want to carve my name out up there, too. I want to be deserving of really having a spot up there."

As to how he got his start playing for audiences, Youngblood can trace his love of musical performance to years ago when he first saw a video of Elvis Presley doing a concert in his hometown of Memphis in 1956.

"I watched how everybody was going crazy over him, and I knew in that moment that I wanted to be just like him," Youngblood said. "Ever since then, I've been teaching myself guitar and just getting after (that dream)."

Just like the King, See True Youngblood, Page 4A



After forging his craft with area performances in venues like the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and the Hiwassee Town Square, True Youngblood, center, is ready to take the stage in Nashville. Photo/Submitted

Mountain Arts donates \$10K to Hamilton Gardens



Mountain Arts Association Board Members David Geiger of Towns County, Carol Duckworth of Union County and Barbara Terrell of Clay County, North Carolina, donated to the Hamilton Gardens last week. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Arts Association gathered at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on Friday, Jan. 5, to present a \$10,000 check to benefit the Hamilton Rhododendron Gardens.

Established in 2003, the Mountain Arts Association, or MAA, has faithfully carried out its mission to support artists through shows, exhibitions, educational events and inspiration, and to enhance the community's appreciation of art through nature preservation. After more than 20 years,

however, the MAA is dissolving because membership in the volunteer organization has dwindled over time, and it has become too hard to keep the nonprofit going for the founding members who remain: Barbara Terrell, David Geiger and Carol Duckworth.

As the era of the nonprofit arts association comes to a close, its board members are excited to donate all of the group's monetary assets to the gardens that define Hiwassee, Georgia.

That the generous donation has been made to the Hamilton Gardens makes the gift all the more fitting, as the MAA's

inaugural project was to put on the Hiwassee Festival of the Arts at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Since that first initiative, the MAA has overseen the Brasstown Valley Resort Gallery, the Christmas Art Events at Brasstown Valley Resort, funding scholarships to Young Harris College and John Campbell Folk School, and providing summer classes in water color, oil and drawing.

So, with their story having begun at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the members of the MAA couldn't think of a better way to spend their re- See Hamilton Gardens, Page 4A

GBI and TCSO investigate human skeletal remains

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
editor@nganews.com

YOUNG HARRIS — The Georgia Bureau of Investigation began a death investigation last week regarding human skeletal remains discovered by the Towns County Sheriff's Office off Gumlog Road the evening of New Year's Day.

After securing the area, Sheriff Ken Henderson requested the state's assistance, and GBI agents traveled to Towns County on Jan. 2 to examine the scene, collect

evidence, and transport the remains to the GBI Medical Examiner's Office for identification and autopsy.

The remains were found outdoors on a property containing a vacant home in the 8000 block of Gumlog Road near the intersection of Barnard Road.

And though the deceased had not been definitively identified by press time, GBI told the Towns County Herald Thursday that "at this time, we have reason to believe the individual is not from the area."

A public release of case specifics is on hold for now, as the investigation by the GBI and Towns County Sheriff's Office remains active.

Among the questions remaining to be answered are facts about identity, cause and time of death, how long the deceased lay undiscovered, how the individual came to be there in the first place, and circumstances surrounding the discovery.

The Towns County Herald will update this story as more details become available.



The Towns County Sheriff's Office secured the scene of a death investigation off Gumlog Road in Young Harris last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Resort employee arrested after fleeing deputies Dec. 10

News Special
Towns County Herald

During a concentrated patrol and drug surveillance operation at the Sunoco on Georgia 17 at the North Carolina state line Dec. 10, Towns County Sheriff's Deputies initiated a traffic stop, at which time the driver fled into North Carolina. The pursuit was terminated for safety concerns.

The driver was identified as Wayne Bruce Odom, 44, of Hayesville, North Carolina. Warrants were issued for Odom's arrest, and the public was asked for anyone with information on his whereabouts to contact the Sheriff's Office.

More than three weeks later, on Jan. 3, the Sheriff's Office received a tip that Odom was working at Brasstown Valley Resort. Deputies arrived at

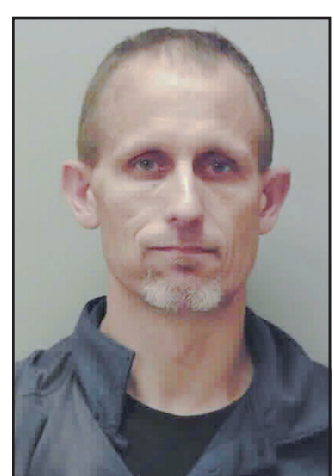
that location and apprehended Odom.

During the arrest, Odom attempted to escape but was apprehended and charged with obstruction. In a search of Odom, an amount of methamphetamine that field-tested positive was found on his person, along with drug-related objects.

Odom was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, possession and use of drug-related objects, and willful obstruction of law enforcement officers.

These charges were in addition to the outstanding charges of felony fleeing or attempting to elude police officers and a seatbelt violation pertaining to the Dec. 10, 2023, incident.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the deputies and



Wayne Bruce Odom investigators for their quick response and apprehension of Odom. He would also like to extend his appreciation to the citizens who called with information concerning the location of the suspect.

Blackberry Smoke plays to packed Anderson Music Hall



Blackberry Smoke performed in front of a sold-out crowd to help the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds ring in the New Year early on Dec. 30. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Every seat inside Anderson Music Hall was filled on Saturday, Dec. 30, as a sea of Blackberry Smoke fans flooded the venue to bid 2023 adieu.

As people shuffled through the crowd to find their seats, purchase merchandise, and buy food and drinks, the California-based Southern Rock band Robert Jon and the Wreck took the stage as the opening act.

The group was founded in 2011 and is known for combining the classic sounds of Western music with the electric flare of rock 'n' roll.

By fusing old-fashioned vocal harmonies with an ener- See Blackberry Smoke, Page 4A

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Hamilton Gardens...from Page 1A

maining dollars than putting it back into the fairgrounds through Hamilton Gardens.

"We have literally come back full circle," said Terrell, the Clay County, North Carolina, representative for the Mountain Arts Association.

"As far as the final thing that (the MAA) was going to do, we looked at many scenarios," she continued. "We looked at possibly dividing up the money for three counties, because I represent Clay, Carol represents Union and David represents Towns.

"But David just kept bringing us back to the gardens, because it is an inspiration for all of our communities."

The funds had been accumulating in the group's bank account since its establishment, coming from membership dues, donations by local businesses, plus grants from both local and state governments, and the MAA was happy to donate the money to go toward garden maintenance.

Along with the check, the MAA has donated to the gardens a glass sculpture by David Goldhagen valued at \$8,000.

The sculpture will be erected near an MAA plaque and will be unveiled on April 13. After the big reveal, the MAA hopes to have a reception at the Paris Pavilion for anyone involved in the organization.

"(Hamilton Gardens and the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds) are staples," Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said. "(They) are a part of our community and our county. Really, a lot of people define who we are and where we're at – across the state and across the country – because of those two



Barbara Terrell of the Mountain Arts Association presenting a grateful Catherine Luckenbach with the \$10,000 donation check for Hamilton Gardens on Friday. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

places right there."

Bradshaw has been working closely with Hamilton Gardens Curator Catherine Luckenbach, and through their work and the contributions of others, the gardens have continued to thrive.

Along with the growing numbers of visitors at the gardens, Luckenbach is proud to bring more live music to the table. This year, she has plans to collaborate with the Young Harris College Director of Bands, Dr. Hayes Bunch, to provide baroque ensembles at Hamilton Gardens.

"Art has always meant a lot to me, and we're bringing it back in a big way (in the gardens)," Luckenbach said. "In fact, this Rhododendron Festival, there will be no vendors up there; there will be art exhibits alone in the pavilion.

"I have artists coming from Asheville, Atlanta and as far away as Nashville, so every weekend there will be different artists. Four of them have already agreed to stay up here

and give seminars (or classes) the next day.

"I am humbled and grateful that (the MAA) recognized the direction we're going in and where we are taking the gardens. That means the world to me."

The Hamilton Gardens were planted in 1981 after Fred and Hazel Hamilton donated over a thousand plants. The gardens were very special to Fred, who visited daily in the early years. He had a vision to create a beautiful public park filled with flowers, and for 43 years a team of volunteers at the fairgrounds have made that possible.

"I was working here at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds when the plants were brought in," Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said. "(The gardens) have come a long way, and we are very thankful and very blessed to have that here in our county.

"Fred and Hazel Hamilton would be very proud of this."

Blackberry Smoke...from Page 1A



Fans lined up at the back of Anderson Music Hall to purchase Blackberry Smoke merchandise during the band's recent trip to town. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

genetic beat and soaring guitar licks, Robert Jon Burrison, Andrew Espantman, Henry James Schneekluth, Warren Murrell and Jake Abernathie can captivate any audience.

After nearly an hour under the constant flashing of the colorful spotlights, Robert Jon and the Wreck said farewell to the crowd and cleared the stage for an explosive performance by headliner Blackberry Smoke.

The country rock band opened with fan-favorite "All Over the Road" and continued to wow the audience throughout the night with interactive songs like "Hey Delilah."

Blackberry Smoke formed in Atlanta in 2000 and has released several albums that have reached No. 1 on the Billboard Country Album charts. Their musical success has led them on tours across the world and placed them alongside groups like ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd and Guns n' Roses.

The band is composed of guitarists Charlie Starr and Paul Jackson, keyboardist Brandon Still, bass guitarist Richard Turner and drummer Brit Turner.

Unfortunately, Brit was

diagnosed in '22 with glioblastoma, an aggressive brain tumor, and has not been traveling with the group since. However, the audience was able to bring him some joy and show their support when Starr pulled out his phone to make a recording for him.

Starr was a great front man for the entire show, interacting with the crowd, sharing personal stories and even commenting on the Orange Bowl football game between the Georgia Bulldogs and the Florida State Seminoles that same day.

"(Blackberry Smoke) puts out a great effort and they always entertain," said Young Harris resident Kent Adams, who attended with several friends. "I thought the opening act was great, and Blackberry Smoke – we just love them. We've been following (them) for about 15 years."

Adams is not only impressed by the band but also loves the Anderson Music Hall inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. He and his friends always enjoy the free, close parking and the friendly mountain atmosphere.

"We've been to this

venue before, and I love (it) because it's not the most modern," he said. "It's old school, and they do a good job."

While Adams has seen several performances there, many individuals in the audience were entering the Music Hall for the first time. For instance, Suwanee resident Amy Cartwright drove nearly two hours to see her first show in Hiwassee.

"I saw (Blackberry Smoke) three or four years ago in Atlanta," she said. "Some friends invited us to that concert and then they invited us to this one; so I really haven't listened to (Blackberry Smoke) in between, but I like them. It's very good music."

"We rented a Vrbo, and we're staying here (two nights). It's pretty cool, and this venue is amazing."

Following that Saturday's performance, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is gearing up for another year of musical entertainment, starting with Chris Janson on Saturday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

True Youngblood...from Page 1A

Youngblood enjoys rock, but he also draws inspiration from country. Having grown up listening to classic country, he looks up to artists like Dwight Yoakam and Buck Owens while trying his best to stand out as a one-of-a-kind talent.

"I'd say (my music is) a little more traditional, but I try to keep the lyrics fresh – not so, you know, 'My truck broke down and my dog ran away and the love of my life left me,'" Youngblood said.

Also one-of-a-kind is his name, True Youngblood, a moniker destined for greatness in this arena if ever there was one. He came by that name after his parents decided on a naming convention for the children they were planning to have – but things didn't ex-

actly go according to plan.

"We were all supposed to be named like, 'True,' 'Trust,' and I think the last one was supposed to be 'Grace' because it was supposed to be a girl," Youngblood said. "But it didn't end up working out that way, so I got stuck with the name True, and my brothers didn't follow the pattern."

Speaking of grace, Youngblood credits God, whom he lovingly refers to as "the Man that gave me the talent." And he acknowledges his parents, Damon and Stephanie Youngblood, along with his girlfriend Olivia Blanco, as being some of his biggest cheerleaders.

Of course, there are his friends Easton Collins and Nathan Staley, the boys who per-

form with him to make up the "working name" of their band, True Youngblood and American Noise.

As they navigate this road together, Youngblood hopes to become an inspiration to other up-and-coming musicians.

"I want people to be able to say, 'Oh my gosh, I played on the same stage as True Youngblood,'" he said, adding, "So, it's kind of inspiring to get up there."

Youngblood's music can be found on Apple Music and Spotify. To book performances and learn how to follow him on various social media sites, check out www.linktr.ee/trueyoungblood or email him at bookingtrueyoungblood@gmail.com.