

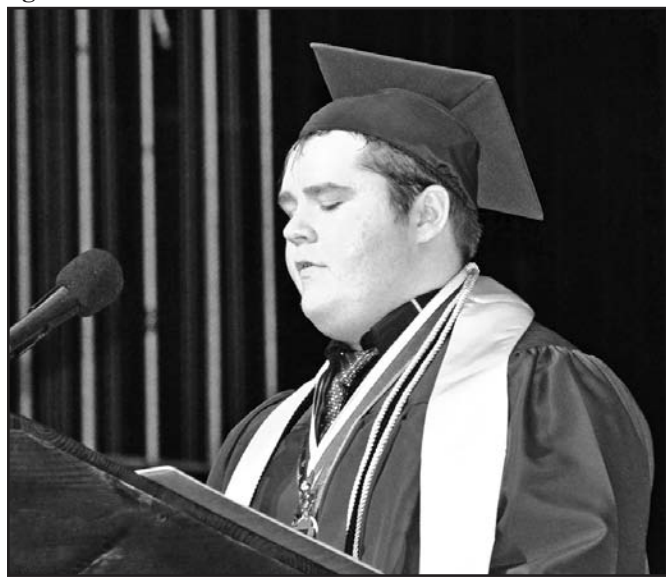
MECHS...from Page 1A

together for the betterment of our students."

Prior to the presentation of diplomas by MECHS Superintendent Dr. Wayne Lovell, local businesses, churches, along with other clubs and organizations from within the community presented scholarships to deserving students.

Scholarships were awarded by: The Blairsville Kiwanis Club, Blue Ridge Adventure Wear, Blue Ridge Kiwanis Club, Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation, Corrugated Replacements - The Jake Lee Scholarship, Fannin Rotary Club, Glenda Gooch Foundation, J. White Electric, Lakewood Capital Group, Lance Law Firm, MECHS Fannin faculty, North Georgia Technical College, Pearson Learning Systems, Shining Star Scholarship, Tri-State Business Women, Tri-State EMC, Union-Towns Employer Committee, United Community Bank, Unity Church of the Mountains, Wade Smith Scholarship, Wesley Mountain Village Resident Association and Woodmen of the World Fannin County.

Honor graduates from the MECHS Class of 2017 not previously mentioned include:



Justin Anderson, Union County Site High Honors, Mountain Education Charter High School. Photo/Todd Forrest

William Wade Allen, Joshua Stuart Jones, Joseph Rush Mauney, Nathaniel Alasdair Mauney and Jericho Daulton Moore.

Remaining members of the class include: Megan Ashley Bailey, Abraham Mendoza Beltran, Enoch Ronald Bruce, Colton James Cochran, Alyssa Nicole Colasuonno, Nathaniel Benjamin Cowan, Jordan Nicole Dyer, James Warren Flud, Megan Faith Foster, Damon Kieth Gibbs, Ashley Lauren Jones, James

Cole Jones, Emma Dalynne Kaylor, Ezra Kain Linderman, Jordan Lynn Lunsford, Boyd Michael Lynch, Alexis Hunter McCulloch, Machalia Marie Nelson, Thomas Richard Nickerson, Tyler Steven Pack, Tyler Wade Persall, Gabrielle Rece Petrunio, Park Cameron Pigott, Rayce Hunter Rivers, Joel Farrell Saunders, Ashton Blake Shook, Bryan Austin Smith, Tinsley Elaine Sosebee, David Daniel Thompson, Mitchell Slade Thompson and Toni Denise Wilson.

Market...from Page 1A

blustery winds and rain.

"We have tents to protect us now," said Crothers. "This is new for us. Commissioner Kendall ordered them for us last year and then the Towns County road crew set them up for us."

And now that the tents are there, the market is looking for even more vendors to fill them up. Reserving a spot at the market is free and anyone is more than welcome to join in on the fun and set up one Saturday morning.

"We have plenty of room for more vendors," said Crothers. "It is free. We aren't looking for any type of vendor, just anybody that wants to come."

Although the market may be small in size, it is mighty in fresh, homegrown goods, such as Sheleila O'Neal and Peggy West's booth.

Each year, the dynamic duo can be found at the entrance to the Farmers Market, just on the left, with big smiles and even bigger bushels of kale. From homemade jams and jellies to fresh produce to plant saplings, O'Neal and West have it all.

"We have an assortment of spring vegetables," said O'Neal. "We also have an assortment of all different types of plants. We have some annuals and some perennials. We have jam, which I make."

"We have 10 or 12 different kinds of jam. Most of it is from some of the fruit that we have. I grow figs and blueberries and blackberries."

Week after week, as the crops begin to roll in, O'Neal and West's booth will continue to grow and become more abundant with fresh fruits and vegetables. As each harvest season comes and goes, market-goers can expect to see anything from field peas to green beans to zucchini.

"We'll offer all the standard vegetables as the season rolls around," said



Joan Crothers talking with a market patron on Saturday. Photo/Lily Avery



Craig and Rachel Pietz with a variety of plants and crafts. Photo/Lily Avery

O'Neal. "We'll have squash and tomatoes and cucumbers and all of that kind of stuff."

"Toward the end of the season, we'll have sweet potatoes. It just depends on what time of the season, and some things drop off, but we grow it all."

"We try to have kale all summer because a lot of people like that, and collards.

We just sort of go with the flow. Whatever is in season, we'll try to have here. Right now, we're just waiting for everything to grow."

And grow it will. Do not miss out on all the Towns County Farmers Market has to offer each Saturday morning, with plenty of produce, fellowship and a beautiful view overlooking Lake Chatuge.

Cummings...from Page 1A

those are full all the time."

According to Cummings, on any given Saturday, the Market could see anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000 people coming through, both locally and out of state, to come see what all the Farmers Market has to offer.

With this large influx of visitors comes an increase in local, even regional, economics. Cummings added that oftentimes, not only will these Market-goers visit the Farmers Market, but they will also visit local restaurants and retail locations. And this does not include the impact it has on those who sell their goods at the Market.

"Every year we do an evaluation of the Farmers Market," said Cummings. "We want to determine the impact of our Farmers Market. So, we ask our vendors how much money they generate on any given Saturday."

"What we found was, on average, our farm or produce vendors bring in around \$369 per week. Our craft vendors bring in somewhere around \$356."

Last year alone, the Union County Farmers Market generated \$600,000 for its Saturday openings - all of which went directly to the vendors.

"Basically, the Farmers Market was generating this money for the people who were selling the product," said Cummings. "If you combine that with what we do at the canning plant and what we do at the yard sale on Fridays, the Farmers

Market was generating between \$1.1 and \$1.3 million for this area just last year.

"We try to balance what it does for the vendors and what it does as a tourist attraction."

Union County Farmers Market features vendors from Union County and the continuous counties, including Towns, Fannin, White, and Lumpkin counties and Clay and Cherokee counties, in North Carolina.

"There's a reason why our vendors must make their products in these areas," said Cummings. "You see these big grocery stores that advertise locally grown foods but locally grown to them is anything from the Southeastern United States. To me, locally grown means locally grown, right here."

"That's where our crops come from. There are a few exceptions but those are for crops that we don't grow in Union County or any of the continuous counties."

Peaches, apples, pecans, muscadines, watermelons, pumpkins, cantaloupes and strawberries are the exceptions that are not native to the area. Watermelons can be grown locally, but do not come into season until August, so vendors are allowed to bring outside melons up until that point.

Vendors that sell at the Market not only have to make sure that their products are locally grown or locally sourced, each of their products must also be verified by a Market employee.

Before each opening day, vendors must provide a list of their products. If a product is not on the list, it cannot be sold at the Market.

For those who sell produce, Cummings also verifies the authenticity of the crops by performing home checks, just to be sure that the Market is only selling locally grown foods, as advertised.

"Our farmers must list everything that they're going to be selling," said Cummings. "Then, this time of year, I start visiting those farms. I make sure that what they have listed is what they're growing on those farms."

"Then when they start coming in June, I go through the buildings every morning, before we open, and make sure that they have in their possession what they have on the list."

"If they have something that isn't on the list, we tell them they can't sell it because I have to verify it's there and that what they're selling is what they're growing."

Cummings added that walk-up vendors are more than welcome each Saturday, space permitting, and that the same rules apply to those merchants.

Beginning Saturday, June 3, the Union County Farmers Market will be open every Saturday, from 7 a.m. until 2 p.m., and Tuesday, from 2 p.m. until 6 p.m., from now until October.

"Come on out and see us," said Cummings. "We'd love to have you."

Water...from Page 1A

businesses via pipes that are part of Water Distribution. Distribution is overseen by Carl Grizzle of the Water Department, and he's also responsible for maintaining the pipes connecting homes and businesses to the city sewer plant.

After treated water is used for dishes, showers, toileting, et cetera, it travels to the Wastewater Treatment Facility, also known as the sewer plant.

The sewer plant is under the direction of Clint Royce, and after wastewater is treated, it's released back into the lake cleaner than when it was originally pulled out.

First to receive inspections by an environmental compliance specialist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Environmental Protection Division was the Wastewater Treatment Facility on April 25.

"They were looking that we were compliant with the state requirements," said Acting Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales. "They were looking that our plants were set up correctly, that we had the proper tools doing the right thing, that we had the proper manpower dedicated to each plant."

"They looked over the whole gamut of everything that could possibly go wrong with the water and the sewer plant, along with distribution."

The state inspector made minor recommendations at the sewer plant, such as the installation of a gate at a lift station located at the plant. The inspector also noted that a few lift stations needed gravel, though none of the suggestions were geared toward improving how the facility processed wastewater.

At the Water Treatment Plant, inspected on May 1, the inspector said that the facility was "gold star" in terms of performance, adding that



The intake pumps in Lake Chatuge, out at the water treatment facility in Hiwassee.

there wasn't a single thing to improve upon.

On the distribution side of things, which underwent inspections on May 2, the main concern of the inspector was that the inventories for both treated water and wastewater needed to be completely separated, as well as the vehicles that service each side of distribution.

Another recommendation was made for the hiring of an additional employee, which was already underway at the time of the inspections.

As a result of the inspections, Ordiales said that the city has already implemented all of the recommendations made by the state inspectors, with the exception of the gate on the lift station at the sewer plant, which is in the works.

"This is a huge deal," said Ordiales. "Ensuring that we're compliant with all of the standards makes sure that the water we are providing to your home is good water, drinkable water, clean water."

Added Ordiales: "Passing these inspections is critical. First of all, if you don't pass the inspections, they can shut your water department down.

So, we're very happy that both plants were in excellent condition, and the corrections for the distribution area are not huge - we've already done them."

Now that the summer months are upon Hiwassee, the city will soon begin experiencing peak water usage throughout the season, which is why Ordiales says the city must continue to grow its water capabilities.

"Within the next 15 to 25 months, we are looking at increasing our capacity at both the Water Treatment Plant and the Sewer Plant," said Ordiales. "That's going to require engineering, new equipment, the buildout of buildings. So, probably combined, it will be about \$3.4 million (in loans)."

One option on the table is for the city to consolidate all its outstanding bonds that are subject to higher interest rates, and pay those off plus have enough to complete the water expansion projects for both plants with one big loan at a lower rate.

LandFest...from Page 1A

at the Fairgrounds from Sept. 14 through Sept. 16.

While the festival is a trademark for the duo, so is their weekly television show on RFD TV, The Dailey & Vincent Show. Every Friday, the show features performances by the group, including guest performances, interviews and down home recipes.

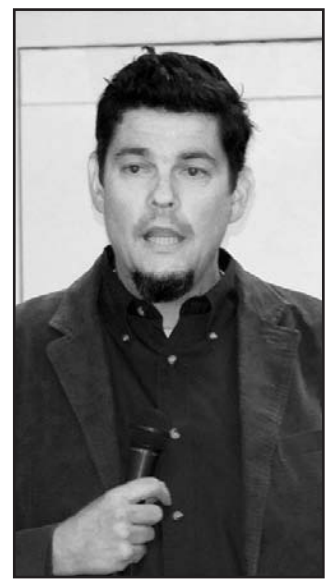
Now, Dailey & Vincent want to shoot the next season of their show at none other than the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

"I just think this would be a really good opportunity for not only the Fairgrounds, but the county," said Thomason. "It could also be beneficial for the surrounding areas as well. National television really could have a huge impact. We have a beautiful county and a beautiful venue and I think we should showcase that."

RFD TV, the channel that would air the show, focuses on rural America, with programs geared toward rural interests, concerns and issues. As of right now, RFD TV has aired two seasons of The Dailey & Vincent Show, with each season featuring a dozen 30-minute episodes.

"I believe we're going to have a really great crowd for the festival this year," said Jamie Dailey. "One of the things that our band is excited about is, we love being with RFD TV. One of the things that we would like to do is bring the film crew and RFD TV to Hiwassee, Georgia and film anywhere from 14 to 26 episodes of our television show during the festival."

"Then, it would air



Jeremiah Davis of RFD TV. Photo/Lily Avery

nationwide once it's on RFD TV which would, in turn, bring a lot of press and a lot of attention to Hiwassee, Georgia, what you are about and what you have to give when people come to tour here and vacation."

According to Jeremiah Davis, RFD TV program director, RFD TV reaches approximately 50 million households nationwide. Of those 50 million, 400,000 viewers tune in to The Dailey & Vincent Show every Friday night, for a total of 52 airings in a year.

While the idea is still in preliminary stages, Zac Koffler, President of APEX Entertainment Management and representative for Dailey & Vincent, brought a proposed budget for the show, including a breakdown of all costs

associated to production.

According to the budget, all facets of filming the show, from pre-production to post-production, would cost roughly \$365,000, which is significantly less than the \$800,000 that was spent for an entire year of the show.

"We would come in here with our production crew and we would shoot the entire three-day festival," said Koffler. "Then we would shoot any b-roll that we all want to work out together. Stuff around Hiwassee, whatever is important to you guys."

"We would shoot all of the episodes here and edit them in Nashville. Then, from January of next year until January 2019, we could potentially be on the air in front of 400,000 viewers every episode."

If the Fairgrounds and the county were to agree to this arrangement, the eight minutes of advertisement per each 30-minute episode would be split between the network and local business and tourist advertisements.

However, if the county could not afford the lump sum, there are other viable options to find funding, such as grants from federal and state entities, like the Georgia Department of Economic Development, as well as form a joint effort with neighboring counties.

Last week's meeting was purely for discussion purposes and no final decision needs to be made until July. Thomason hopes to work diligently between now and then to make this dream into reality, and hopefully boost Towns County's economy along the way.

Rattlesnakes of Appalachia presented by Brasstown Bald

Brasstown Bald - Summer Saturdays! Free Program with park entry! June 10, 2017 from 1 - 2 PM. Reserve your spot for this special program! On June 10, Dr. Chris Jenkins, dedicated snake researcher and CEO of the Georgia based Orianna Society, will present a slide talk "Rattlesnakes of Appalachia" along with the opportunity to interact with a real live native Georgia snake. The Orianna Society's Appalachian Highlands Initiative is particularly focused on the conservation of Timber Rattlesnakes and Hellbenders and their habitats.

Rattlesnakes are one of the last remaining predators in the Blue Ridge Mountains and often overlooked for conservation by the cuter animals. Fascinating and important creatures of our Appalachian Mountain ecosystem, rattlesnakes are local residents of rocky boulder fields and out-



Timber Rattlesnake

croppings where they can keep their cold-blooded-body temperature regulated by the sun and earth's warmth. Come join us in learning about the importance of species conservation! What to expect? Program will take place in the Mountain Top Theatre. Please arrive with enough time to make your way to the top by

hiking the 6/10 mile Summit Trail or by shuttle bus.

Regular entrance fees apply. Limited seating.

Reservations: Limited space available, register online cfaia.org/brasstown-bald-recreation-area-visitor-centers-in-georgia/ or call 706-896-2556 to reserve your spot.