

# Residents Protest...from Page 1A



**Tori Anderson, left, thanking fellow protesters Friday at the close of the demonstration on Main Street in Hiawassee.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard

land. This support manifested locally in the roughly two-hour demonstration that occurred on the sidewalk in front of the Hiawassee Town Square facing US 76 on Friday.

Upwards of 50 people of all ages and backgrounds from around the region turned out to support the cause, including a group of Young Harris College professors, passersby who happened to see the protest, activists advocating antiracist messages, local workers, retired residents and more.

It was the second area BLM protest in less than 24 hours, with a larger gathering of more than 400 people, by some accounts, having taken place in Downtown Murphy, North Carolina, the day before. Organizers of both protests stressed the peaceful nature of the demonstrations.

The occasion also marked the birthday of Breonna Taylor, who was shot eight times by police and killed during a no-knock raid at her home in Louisville, Kentucky, on March 13.

"Today is a very special day to hold a protest or demonstration," Anderson said to those gathered June 5. "Today, Breonna Taylor would have turned 27 years old — she would have if she were alive."

"I didn't pick this day for that reason, but I thought, what a coincidence that we are doing something so great for this purpose, combatting police brutality, or at least speaking against it (on her birthday)."

Joining Anderson in Hiawassee was her friend and coworker Tatiana Benefield, 22, who hails from Murphy, North Carolina. Benefield said it's vital for people everywhere to show their support for equality, perhaps especially in areas with less diverse populations.

"It's really important for us to be here today because these little towns are predominately white, and there's very few people of color," said Benefield, who is Mexican and Puerto Rican. "I don't know about any other people, but I'm treated very differently, and I've lived here all of my life."

"In middle school I was picked on, not only by the students, but also by the teachers. It's just very hard being a person of color, whether you're light-skinned or not. It's tough."

"So, for us to be out here doing what we believe in, it's just really powerful to me, especially seeing that a lot of the people are mostly white out here fighting for us people of color."

Nearly everyone gathered for the protest wore a mask to protect against the spread of COVID-19, and water and snacks were made available to participants. Materials to make signs were also provided, and the demonstration remained peaceful and mostly positive throughout its entirety.

The majority of passing motorists who acknowledged the protest offered supporting honks, shouts and thumbs up, though many registered their displeasure with a movement they either don't support, don't understand or both.

One BLM protester carrying a sign reading "No Justice, No Peace, Abolish the Police" yelled obscenities at multiple drivers — one in particular for playing "racist"



**Cleveland Grover Meredith Jr., right, of Hiawassee, put several BLM protesters on edge when he showed up with his rifle to hold a counterprotest of sorts on June 5.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard

country music — but his fellow protesters chanted at him to "stay peaceful," and he ultimately stopped shouting at cars.

There were elements of counterprotests as well Friday, as probably seven or eight trucks and Jeeps cruised back and forth in front of the solidarity protest, occasionally revving their engines while flying large flags bearing Trump 2020, Blue Lives Matter and the Confederate Jack.

Another counterprotester, a Hiawassee man named Cleveland Grover Meredith Jr., parked on the square during the event. As he drove by to pull in, he held up an IWI Tavor X95 rifle to show to protesters, which upset several of them.

Meredith parked on the south side of the square near the Main Street-facing protest, exited his vehicle and proceeded to open carry his rifle within sight of the demonstrators, saying he had it "just to let those that are protesting (know) not to get violent," in reference to recent riots in many major American cities.

Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said that, just as the protesters had a right to be there, so did Meredith — as long as everything remained peaceful.

For his part, Meredith, who described himself as "a fifth-generation Atlantan," said he was supporting America, freedom and President Donald Trump. He called the BLM solidarity protest "bullshit" and said the Hiawassee demonstration was the first he had attended to counterprotest.

"It's basically a political stunt done by the higher ups, just paying people to screw everything up," Meredith said of Black Lives Matter, noting that he disagreed with "the violence surrounding" the movement.

"I sincerely believe the New World Order, Cabal, Deep

State — whatever you want to call it — wants society to devolve into a race war so that it's much easier to take over," he said.

The protest lasted from 4 p.m. to about 6 p.m., though a few people stayed behind to continue holding signs. As the main demonstration came to a close, several of the flag-flying counterprotesters parked in a lot across the highway from the Town Square.

Once most of the BLM protesters had gone for the evening, shouts of "white power" could be heard coming from the small group of counterprotesters, as well as at least one instance of "go f--- a n-----," according to Chief Smith.

The three remaining BLM protesters departed around 8 p.m., at which point the counterprotesters left also. Chief Smith said all else remained peaceful the rest of the evening and into the next day, and there were no problems during the protest.

Following the demonstration, Anderson told Smith she appreciated the presence of his officers, who remained on standby at the protest, with backup provided by the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Smith met with protesters right before the event started to let them know that the Hiawassee Police Department would be there to defend their right to peacefully assemble.

"And I made it clear that we were also here to defend other people's rights to disagree with them," Smith said. "We just were hopeful for a peaceful demonstration, and that's what happened — it was a very peaceful demonstration."

Added Smith, "No officer that I've spoken to supports what happened in Minneapolis — no officer supports brutality. It gives us all a bad name. More than anyone, we want to see (those officers) held accountable for their actions."

"I didn't see this demonstration as anti-law enforcement. The people I talked to and the signs that I saw were against police brutality, which everyone should support, especially police."

News of the Hiawassee demonstration spread primarily via Facebook, as did news of the Murphy protest. Details of another Black Lives Matter solidarity protest are already making the rounds online, set for Sunday, June 14, from 6-8 p.m. at the Union County Courthouse in Blairsville.

# Fair Parade...from Page 1A



**The Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee met for the first time in 2020 on June 2 to talk about plans for the 70th anniversary parade.** Photo by Jarrett Whitener

The 70th anniversary fair will take place later in the year than usual because the fairgrounds will be hosting a new carnival in 2020, which will feature bigger rides and other improvements.

After getting this update from Hilda, those gathered last week began planning the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade, which will be held on Saturday, Aug. 15, at 11 a.m.

With lots of participants joining in last year's parade, the group is looking to make this year even better to celebrate the 70 years of the fair.

Judges will be at the parade to determine the best float designs for the event, with \$2,700 to be awarded to First

Place, \$1,700 for Second Place and \$600 for Third Place.

"Bob Cloer is so generous this year, he gave us \$6,000 for prize money for (the contest)," Thomason said.

The Georgia Mountain Fair is currently taking applications for the parade and is looking for people with floats, cars or anything else they can use to make the parade a spectacular event.

Entrants for the parade are required to pre-register and arrive before 9:30 a.m. on the day of the parade.

The Georgia Mountain Fair is hoping to welcome Gov. Brian Kemp as the parade grand marshal, but the committee is unsure if he will be able to

fulfill that role.

"(Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw) has asked the governor of Georgia to be the grand marshal, and he asked him several months ago to do this," Thomason said. "He was at the capital, and he has it on his calendar."

"But with everything going on and the rioting and all the crazy stuff, I'm not sure that he is going to be able to do it. If not, he said he would ask (Congressman) Doug Collins to do it."

For more information, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.

# Farmers Market...from Page 1A

had an effect on this Farmers Market," Market Manager Joan Crothers said. "We opened at the end of May a few years ago, and that was too early. So, we decided last year and this year we would begin in June, so it is just the same."

"We have lots of beautiful plants, decorated gourds and canned goods. We have a few vendors here today, and we have seen around 20 people so far this morning (right at the start)."

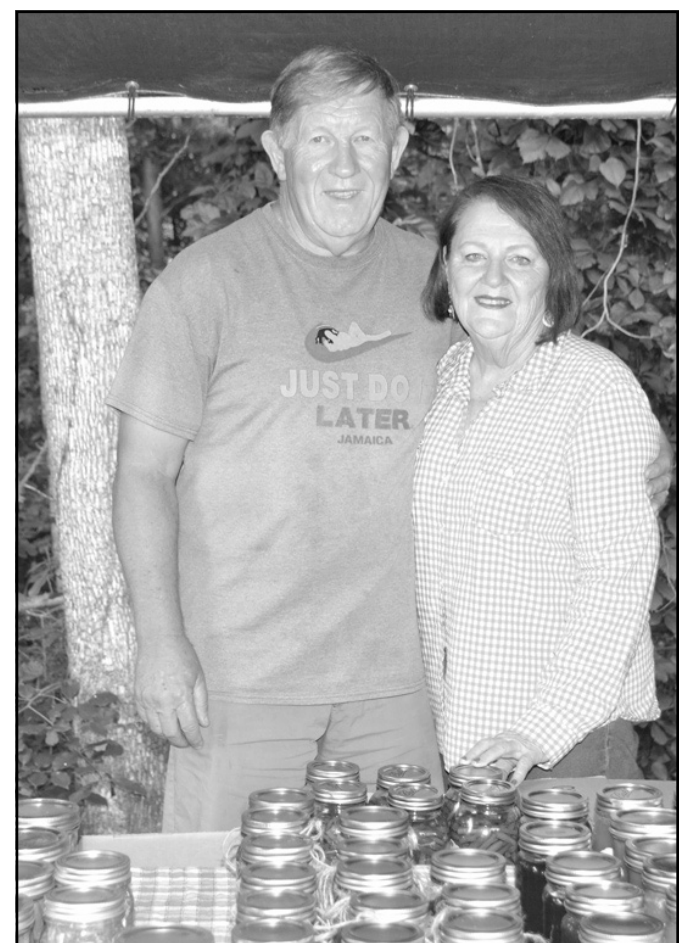
The Farmers Market is an open area sandwiched between the Pickleball Courts & Complex and Towns County Beach, just across from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, and it's a perfect venue for shoppers looking to avoid crowded stores while still being able to get their produce.

"This is a great place to get locally grown produce and plants," Crothers said. "We have a place in town that gets its produce from around Atlanta, and that is pretty close to me. Here, everything is really local, and we have a lot of stuff from this area."

"The commissioner had his people put out the tents and the tables, and we are thankful for that; it is wonderful. It is still free for vendors to set up at 8:30 a.m., and we are open 9 to noon. It has been raining and cool this year, and nothing really grows until it warms up, like, we won't have tomatoes until we have some heat. We are outdoors here, so it is a safe and open place to get what they need."

One vendor, Steve Hutchison, will be selling canned goods during the season, which he has been doing for three years now.

"I got new things like pineapple jam, and I have peach jalapeno and strawberry jalapeno jams," Hutchison said. "I have actually done raspberry this year and other fruits that people have given me. I have muscadines that are actually from Hiawassee here. I got them in the winter and canned them up."



**Steve and Linda Hutchison stayed busy selling canned goods at the Farmers Market Saturday.** Photo by Jarrett Whitener

"The fruits I use are usually given to me. I have all Georgia products that I buy and then can myself. I have a couple of farmers that contact me and tell me what they have an abundance of, so I will take them because I don't like to see things go to waste."

Hutchison is also the mayor of Hampton, where the virus had an impact on City Hall operations, giving Hutchison more time for canning and preparing for the market.

"We had to shut our City Hall down completely," Hutchison said. "We closed from March the 13th until the middle of April. We put our city workers on a limited schedule while all that was going on."

"I am happy to get back out and do some canning and enjoy the market this summer."

I stayed busy during the wintertime, and now I have to sell it to get my money back."

Of course, customers are happy to see the market open for another season, since they get to stop by and grab fresh products that were handled locally.

"It is nice to see markets like this back open in the area," said Betty Orange, a visitor from Franklin, North Carolina. "I have missed getting fresh vegetables and fruits that are from people's gardens."

"With everything being closed lately, the fruits and vegetables in the store are always running out, because that is where people are going to get what they need. Those stores are so crowded, too, and I just like the small stands and sellers like this."

# Walker...from Page 1A

injuries, GSP said.

A native of Sandersville, Walker had many friends in his "adopted home" of Hiawassee.

"His life for the past few years was enriched by his sweetheart Brenda Micali from Hiawassee," according to his obituary. "Tommy had a strong faith in God, which sustained him all of his life."

"He taught the Tommy Walker Sunday School class at Sandersville First Baptist Church for over 25 years, where he formed lasting friendships with many of the members. Later in his life, he was a member of the Sandersville United Methodist Church, the same church he attended as a young child with his mother."

"Many of his classmates from the Washington County High School graduating class of 1960 knew him as 'Bullet' Walker for his skills on the athletic field. He attended Young Harris College and later graduated from the University of Georgia where he became a lifelong member of the Sigma Chi Fraternity."

"During the summers away

from college, he was proud to be an Indian chief at Rock Eagle 4-H Camp. Friendships from these early days continued throughout his life, and he made it a priority to attend reunions through the years to visit with his Sigma Chi brothers, Young Harris College and Rock Eagle friends.

"Mr. Walker, who served in the U.S. Air Force after college, returned to Sandersville in 1971 to work and eventually became the owner and operator of Walker Tire Company, a business his father and grandmother started in the 1950s."

"He was a member of the Georgia Tire Dealers & Retreaders Association and was selected as a board member with this association for many years. Mr. Walker dabbled in politics and was elected Mayor of Sandersville and served a term as Chairman of the Washington County Board of Commissioners."

"Like his father before him, Tommy was a longtime member of the Sandersville Rotary Club, was a Paul Harris Fellow and served as the Rotary Program Chairman for many years. He believed in the future

of Washington County and wanted to serve the community he loved.

"This spirit of community led him to coach football and basketball to many young men over the years, and he still enjoyed watching old game footage."

Continuing, "Tommy was blessed with wonderful friends of all ages. He loved a good joke and didn't mind telling one himself. He believed in the genuineness of a heartfelt, handwritten letter and taught his grandsons the importance of a good, firm handshake. Relationships were vital to Tommy, and he relished in them. He wasn't perfect, but he was special."

The family will celebrate Walker's life "with joy and laughter" on Sunday, June 28, at 2 p.m. at First Baptist Church of Sandersville, and friends and family are invited. In honor of Walker, the family has asked that people please consider donating to a local charity of their choice.

May and Smith Funeral Directors is overseeing the arrangements. For more information, visit www.mayandsmithfuneraldirectors.com.

# Community...from Page 1A

that. We just need to be careful for now."

Despite the concerns and confusion, many residents remain committed to advocating COVID-19 best practices to help slow the spread of the virus.

"People should still be wearing their masks and social distancing," said Patricia Parker at the Dollar Tree Saturday. "With the masks and hot weather, it is dreadful, but we still need to be doing it. There are still older folks here and those with

weaker immune systems, and they need our help."

"I think it is great that things are opening back up, but we are not out of the clear just yet. We need to keep up our good work and stop this thing from starting back up. People don't want to wear them, but the least we can do is be safe in stores and crowded areas. The best way to move forward is to not repeat any of our mistakes."