

Towns County Herald

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Matheson attempted murder trial set for Sept. 6

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The jury trial of Charles Jason Matheson is scheduled to begin next week on Tuesday, Sept. 6, in the Towns County Courthouse.

Matheson stands accused of attempting to murder his estranged wife, Crystal Matheson, by allegedly shooting her eight times with a 9 mm handgun inside her Hiawassee workplace in January 2021.

One of multiple witnesses to the shooting, Crystal is expected to provide trial testimony.

The trial will focus on allegations that Jason Matheson entered Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation and Wellness Center on Jan. 26, 2021, and fired upon Crystal "with malice aforethought" in an attempt to cause her death, according to charging documents.

At the time of the shooting, Crystal had a protective order in place against her husband from when he was arrested for strangling her in July 2020 in

Clay County, North Carolina. He was arrested again in October 2020 for violating that protective order.

In anticipation of the trial, members of the Towns County Grand Jury were called back Aug. 18 for the purpose of issuing a superseding indictment, allowing the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office to fix a "clerical error" in the original indictment from March 2021.

"We cannot change so much as a comma on an indictment without a Grand Jury's

approval," District Attorney Jeff Langley said. "The new indictment does not change the charges in any way - it is still the same three charges: Aggravated Assault, Aggravated Stalking and Attempted Murder.

"We just fixed the typo, and since we had to bring (grand jurors) in to do that, we also gave some better defining wording to (Count Three). This was an added meeting of the Grand Jury; they were not regularly scheduled to meet again until October."

Langley said he believes the trial will last between five and eight days. Prosecuting the case will be Assistant District Attorneys Buster Landreau and Kelly Holloway, with Public Defender John Cloy of the defense, and visiting Superior Court Senior Judge Albert Collier presiding.

Matheson pleaded not guilty to the charges in April of last year, and though he faces decades behind bars should he be found guilty in a court of law, he is presumed innocent until such time.



Jason Matheson

Pro Rodeo, Acoustic Sunsets returning to Fairgrounds

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is not skipping a beat when it comes to offering family friendly events for the public, with both a rodeo and a free concert coming this week on the heels of another successful conclusion to the annual Georgia Mountain Fair that wrapped up Saturday.

Back by popular demand, the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo is returning this Labor Day Weekend for a second bull-riding spectacular in 2022 after the Memorial Day Weekend that saw thousands attend from across the area in May.

Brought once again by the Southern Rodeo Company, the action-packed, All-American weekend will kick off at 8 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 3, with



Bronc riding is just one of the many fast-paced rodeo pastimes that will be performed in the second Hiawassee Pro Rodeo of 2022.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2020

gates opening at 6 p.m. A second day of bronc-bucking fun is set for Sunday, Sept. 4, following the same schedule.

Originally, the rodeo was to be sponsored by Memory Lane Classic Car Museum alongside a truck show, but since Memory Lane owner Jer-

ry Smith passed away in June, the Fairgrounds has stepped in to sponsor the rodeo in his stead.

Smith was a tremendous supporter of local charitable causes, having sponsored multiple fundraiser events for the

See Pro Rodeo, Page 8A

71st Georgia Mountain Fair says 'farewell' until 2023



Kids had a blast with face painting, rides and more at the Amusements of America carnival during the 71st Annual Georgia Mountain Fair.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Having taken place amid the beautiful backdrop of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the 71st Annual Georgia Mountain Fair is officially in the books after another successful nine-day run that

ended on Saturday, Aug. 27.

Thousands of attendees from near and far traveled to the fair in 2022, traveling with family and friends to enjoy all the carnival rides, food and craft vendors, live musical performances, historical demonstrations and special acts, photo exhibit, antique reed organ playing and more.

Whether catering to longtime patrons or first-timers, there was truly something for everyone, from young and old alike, including the Majestik Spectacular Globe of Death and Rollo the 10-foot stilt artist, the Pioneer Village, a front-row seat to the Hamilton Gardens and beyond.

See GA Mtn. Fair, Page 8A

Gospel Music Festival lifts spirits in Union County



Storied Southern Gospel Music group The Kingsmen performed two shows during the first ever Union County Gospel Music Festival over the weekend.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE - The Lord was present last weekend at the Union County Gospel Music Fine Art Center. 2022 was the first year of many planned for the Union County Gospel Music Festival, and things opened with a bang, featuring gospel giants like Jeff and Sheri Easter, Gold

City, and the Kingsmen.

Full of spirit and song, the festival provided family friendly faith-based entertainment the evening of Friday, Aug. 26, with performances resuming Saturday afternoon and into the evening.

According to Kingsmen baritone, Hiawassee native Alan Kendall, the Union County Gospel Music Festival was first conceptualized about a year ago

among other musicians looking to return to worship after COVID-19 put a ban on public performances.

"We were coming back from COVID, and we knew that we needed to try to bring some concerts back into the mix. We just knew it was time," Kendall said.

Many music festivals thrive in busy city atmospheres,

See Gospel Music, Page 3A

Heritage Festival to highlight local history this weekend

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE - After a two-year hiatus due to COVID-19 concerns, the Union County Historical Society is bringing back the beloved local tradition known as the Mountain Heritage Festival this Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 3-4.

The festival will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on both Saturday and Sunday, and while it's being held at its usual place at the 1906 Grapelle Butt Mock House, this year will include access to the renovated John Payne Cabin.

See Heritage Festival, Page 8A



The Mountain Heritage Festival honoring the history of the area is returning to the Mock House. Pictured here: a butter churning demo from 2015 outside the John Payne Cabin.

Animal nonprofits take center stage at Movers & Shakers

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County cares not just for its two-legged residents, but also those of the four-legged variety, and some area organizations have found that uniting the two go hand in hand.

That was made clear earlier this month when the Mountain Movers and Shakers welcomed Animal Rescue Financial Support CEO Sue Scott; High Lonesome Therapeutic Equestrian Center founder Lauren Dilts; and Paws Working Dog Support Network CEO Ed Abel.

The Murphy-based nonprofit High Lonesome is the only equestrian therapy barn

within a two-hour radius of Cherokee County, North Carolina. It started January of this year with a mission of "supporting the growth and healing of the mind, body and spirit of individuals with varying abilities in a therapeutic environment through a partnership with equines."

That therapy comes in the form of horseback riding lessons suited for both adults and children. They also cater to a wide range of disabilities, including non-verbal autism and blindness.

In just eight months, High Lonesome has taken on 20 riders with the help of 25 volunteers who do everything from assist dependent riders to take care of the horses, of which there are five available for riders

to bond with, and the farm is growing as much as it can.

"We are actually going to have our first big fundraiser Nov. 11 in Andrews called 'High Lonesome Hoedown,'" said Dilts, inviting those interested to come for dinner, drinks and music. The goal is to raise enough money - about \$20,000 - to construct a proper arena.

Additionally, with enough support, Dilts hopes to eventually be able to help veterans and visit schools and nursing homes to share the positive emotional impact of being around equines. Her wish is for the program to be free, and in pursuit of that dream, Dilts has begun to apply for grants.

Understandably, bigger dreams call for greater

See Movers & Shakers, Page 5A



(L-R) J.J. North, Sarah Craine, Cathy Owenby, Sue Scott, Lauren Dilts, Hannah Cook and her service dog Dax in a recent meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,681.74

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Nottely 1,771.55

Barcode

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FOOTBALL

Sept. 2 vs. Union 7:30 PM

Hiawasse
Night Market
Friday, Sept. 2
5-9 PM

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Gospel Music Festival...from Page 1A

but Kendall believed that the Union County Gospel Music Festival needed a different kind of touch, as the goal was to “bring it over here away from all the things that are going on in the cities right now.”

Blairsville fit the bill, and Kendall is still of the opinion that it was the best choice for the festival, considering the “small-town America” atmosphere of the North Georgia Mountains.

His feelings were confirmed over both days when audience members clapped, cheered, stood, and raised their hands toward Heaven to testify to the lyrics that moved them.

Friday’s lineup included the Kingsmen, Jeff and Sherri Easter, Brian Free & Assurance, Jordan’s Bridge, and Josh and Ashley Franks.

Speaking of whom, Josh Franks himself served as the emcee for that first night and some of the second, doing his part to introduce vocalists, briefly list their accomplishments, and sometimes insert humor into dialogue between performances.

Humor indeed played a role in the goings-on, which Kingsmen tenor Chris Jenkins found perfectly appropriate when he asked the audience, “I believe God’s people ought to have more fun than anybody in the world, don’t you?”

That sentiment was demonstrated well in the friendly rivalry between Franks and his “co-host” Pat Barker of The Guardians, who argued over which host made the better pre-



Gospel-duo Jeff and Sherri Easter performing at the Fine Arts Center Friday night.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

senter in light of Franks’ excitement and Barker’s puns.

“Go home, Josh,” boomed a playful voice over the speakers as one of the sound operators mimicked the Holiest Judge, at which point Franks immediately feigned fainting to the roaring amusement of the audience.

Saturday was even busier, with Chris Adams and Union County fine arts students performing a pre-show before the festival commenced its second day with afternoon shows from gospel royalty Karen Peck and New River, Phil Cross and Poet

Voices, Real Truth Revival, and another performance from Josh and Ashley Franks.

By Saturday night, the house was packed. Upper and lower seats were nearly all taken up by folks applauding the likes of Gold City, the Mylon Hayes Family, The Guardians, and for the second time that weekend, the legendary Kingsmen.

Notably, the oldest member of the Kingsmen, 83-year-old bass singer Ray Dean Reese, was inducted into the Southern Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2008, and Brian Free, formerly

of the Gold City Quartet, is the most awarded tenor in gospel music history.

The most breathtaking part of the concerts occurred in the second half of each night. After each band had their turn in the spotlight, everyone came back to share the stage together. The resulting collaborations were a huge hit, but the Kingsmen also used this time to unveil a surprise.

As it turns out, bass Ray Dean Reese had been training a protégé, and 20-year-old Drew Laney received wild applause and whoops from the crowd after blowing everyone away with a rib-tickling bassline that left a heartwarming proud grin on Reese’s face.

Both nights saw performances lasting close to three hours, with each group performing about four or five songs. The intermission between individual and group shows allowed audience members to visit tables lined with wares from each band.

The most popular choices were CDs and shirts, followed by USB thumb drives containing entire albums. As the musicians sold their own merch, many folks also lingered to get autographs from their favorite singers, or just to request selfies.

More valuable than that,

on a more personal level.

“I’m thankful for everybody who came out and supported the festival. I really appreciate it,” Kendall said, adding that he hoped “that we presented (the festival) in a way that pleases God, and I just hope that they draw from it what I have drawn from (music) all my life.”

41st Anniversary of Georgia Mountain Fair’s Photography Contest: Winners from 3 States

This year’s Georgia Mountain Fair celebrated with great success the 41st year of the Photography Contest! Prize money was awarded to 50 exhibitors, who entered from three states with 258 pictures in all. The Photograph Contest Committee happily welcomed many first-time participants to this annual contest. Many of them said they learned about the contest on social media this year, a public relations practice started by new Contest Director Janet Cosby. This exciting exhibit offered a variety of subjects, but had an unusual twist: some of the same subjects appear throughout the displays—from celestial skies of the Milky Way, capturing lightning, many snow scenes, wild elk and deer butting heads, lots of bears, numerous butterfly and bird photos, and several amazing shots of the moon, and glaciers! North Georgia Technical College Photography Dept. entered again this year and won many prizes. With so much quality work in the Contest, the judges had a quite a challenge selecting prize winners!

The Top 3 winners and their pictures: First Prize \$200: Kelly Kennon, Murphy, NC – “Winter Solace”; Second Prize \$100: John Davis, Hiawassee, GA – “The Mechanics”; Third Prize \$75: Barry Pressman, Murphy, NC – “Soulmates”.

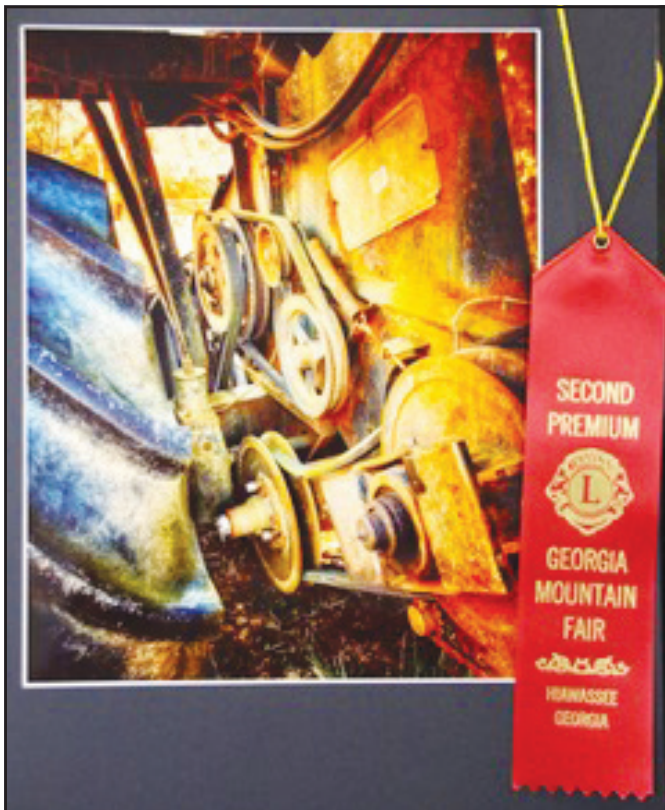
Other prize money went to 10 Fourth Place winners and 18 Fifth Place winners: Fourth Place \$35: Georgia: Bethlehem - Wendi Jones; Blairsville - Skip Lowery; Blue Ridge - Kathy Thompson; Brasstown - Robert Grand; Hiawassee - Edwin Jones; Oakwood - Glen Abernathy; Toccoa - Lucas Thompson; North Carolina: Murphy - Jim Allsopp, Kelly Kennon; Tennessee: Knoxville - Jeremy Burke; Fifth Place \$ 25: Georgia: Blue Ridge - Amanda Higgins (2); Brasstown - Robert Grand (2); Calhoun - Brad Gibbs (2); Dahlonega - Stevie Howell; Fayetteville - Alex Austin; Hiawassee - Robert Wagner; Oakwood - Glenn Abernathy (2) Rabun Gap - Jonan Keeny; St. Simons - Chris Slack; Young Harris - Dianne Williams (2); North Carolina: Andrews - David Woody; Murphy - Kelly Kennon; Barry Pressman.

In addition: Twenty-nine \$10 Honorable Mention Prizes were awarded for outstanding photographs.

Contest Director Cosby and her Committee were very pleased at the variety of subjects shown in this year’s photo show; and were especially happy that participants followed the Rules, which made the show go smoothly all week. Many people made comments about the excellent exhibits, some saying this was the “Best



“Winter Solace” by Kelly Kennon - First Place



“The Mechanics” by John Davis - Second Place



“Soulmates” by Barry Pressman - Third Place

Show in Years!” The Contest was promoted through announcements in newspapers, colleges, and radio stations; as well as through social media. The Contest Team is very grateful for the help of the Fair’s Manager Hilda Thomason, before and during the Contest; and also for Fair’s Maintenance Crew who gave the photo hall a new coat of wall paint and assisted in setting up tables and risers for the exhibits.

Director Cosby thanks all the photographers for their participation and hard work, which made this 2022

show a success! And gratitude to the public for turning out in big numbers to see excellent photography this year. By the end of the second day (out of the five-day show), over 300 visitors saw the photographs! She encourages all the exhibitors and everyone who loves taking pictures to enter their best work next year at the annual summer Georgia Mountain Fair Photo Contest. Starting in May next year, watch the newspapers, social media, and the Fair’s website for notices for how to enter the 2023 Contest.

Sheriff's Office continues to arrest local drug offenders

News Special
Towns County Herald

Towns County Sheriff's Deputies received a call for service at a residence on Hidden Valley Road on Aug. 19. During the call, a deputy observed suspected drugs and drug paraphernalia in plain view. The residence was secured, and a search warrant was obtained.

Cocaine, marijuana packaged for sale, possible hash, THC, drug-related objects, suspected heroin and cash were seized. All suspected drugs were sent to the State Crime Lab for testing.

Erin Lee Murrah, 43, of Hiawassee, was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of cocaine, possession of hash, possession of THC, and possession of drug-related objects.

In a separate incident on Monday, Aug. 22, the Sheriff's Office conducted a traffic stop in Hiawassee on a person of interest in a drug investigation after numerous citizen complaints regarding this individual and his involvement in drug activity.

The traffic stop resulted in the seizure of methamphetamine and a large amount of cash, and Grant Matthew Caldwell, 34, of Hiawassee, was arrested and charged with driving without a valid motorcycle license and possession of methamphetamine.

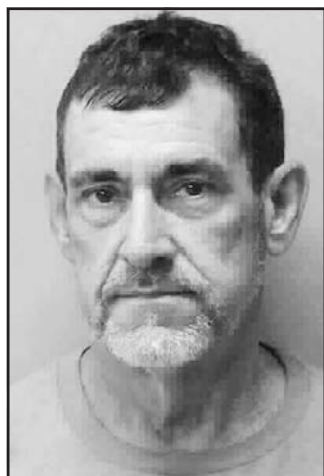
In another separate incident, citizen complaints in reference to suspected drug activity at two residences on Rolling Acres Drive in Hiawassee led to a drug investigation and five arrests on Monday, Aug. 22.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug Unit investigated the activity, and as a result, the following drugs were confiscated from the two adjoining residences: field-tested pure fentanyl, field-tested marijuana, field-tested methamphetamine, field-tested cocaine and pills.

Five individuals, all of Hiawassee, were arrested and charged with the following:

Dexter Neldon Adams, 58: possession of drug-related objects, possession of marijuana, possession of firearm/knife during the commission of a crime, possession of cocaine, possession of Schedule IV controlled substance, possession of methamphetamine, and possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute.

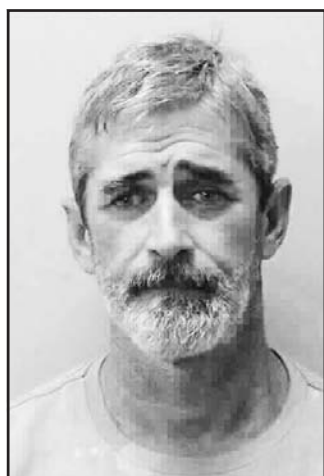
Chyanne Kyndle Boone, 26: possession of fentanyl and possession of drug-related objects.



Dexter Neldon Adams



Chyanne Kyndle Boone



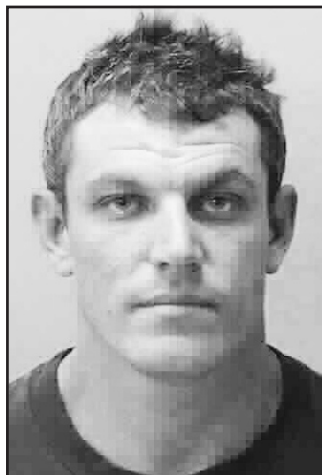
Ronald Scott Bouchard



Heather Lynn Heard



Michael Shane Satterfield



Grant Matthew Caldwell

Ronald Scott Bouchard, 52: possession of marijuana.

Heather Lynn Heard, 47: possession of methamphetamine and possession of drug-related objects.

Michael Shane Satterfield, 38: possession of fentanyl and possession of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the citizens for their information which led to these arrests. Citizens and the Sheriff's Office working together can make Towns County a safe and better place to live.

The above individuals are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.



Erin Lee Murrah

Movers & Shakers...from Page 1A

assistance, and Dilts said that as High Lonesome develops, more and more volunteers will be needed. It should be noted that no prior experience with horses is necessary, as training will be provided.

The second speaker in the Aug. 12 meeting was Sue Scott, CEO/CFO of Animal Rescue Financial Support, Inc., though many will know her as the founder of the Towns County Feline Feeders and as the wife of Movers and Shakers organizer and emcee William "Scotty" Scott.

The non-profit Animal Rescue Financial Support, Inc., known affectionately as ARFS, is also a new organization. Like High Lonesome, ARFS was incorporated in January and received its official 501(c)(3) documentation in March.

Any group, organization, or individual in need of financial help related to pet care or animal rescue within the tri-state area – especially but not limited to Towns, Union, Clay, and Rabun counties – can turn to ARFS for help.

Help ranges from the continuing project of covering the spay and neuter costs of feral cats around Towns County and beyond to assisting impoverished pet owners with getting treatment for suffering pets.

ARFS has spent over \$4,300 to date helping local animals, to include providing second chances to a stray mother cat with a broken foot and her kittens suffering from "oozing skin lesions," and fundraising to send a dog with a collapsed trachea to the University of Georgia for treatment.

"We have some pretty big plans, but we're going to need your help to do these plans," said Scott, revealing that some of these plans included building pens for dogs kept exclusively outdoors on chains.

Gordy Jones of the Towns County Civic Association has already gathered a group of volunteers to build

the pens so long as ARFS provides the financial support, but in the words of Scott, "We can't do anything until we get the revenue to do it."

ARFS also wants to tackle the county's major feral cat problem. The organization has covered costs for emergency spays and neuters, but more trappers are needed, and the tri-state area is in desperate need of a cat sanctuary to safely remove stray felines from occupied property.

"I get calls all the time from people who have to surrender their animals because somebody went into a nursing home, or somebody died, or somebody's moving and they can't take their animals," Scott said. "But there's no place to put these animals."

"It's been a big problem, so before I breathe my last breath, I want to see a dog sanctuary and a cat sanctuary."

Next up, Paws Working Dog Support Network CEO Ed Abel spoke about the upcoming Pet Celebration of Clay County and what it stands for.

The event takes place in Hayesville, North Carolina, and has spread out to include most of the Historic Hayesville Square. The purpose is to raise money for local shelters and programs like Paws, ARFS, High Lonesome and "any animal-related businesses that help the community."

The 11th Annual Pet Celebration runs from 2-9 p.m. on Sept. 17, and in addition to food and a 7 p.m. Gnarly Fingers concert, animal lovers can take advantage of services like low-cost vaccinations and training demonstrations, with animal adoptions and much more available as well, such as a parade and costume contest.

Abel largely views the Pet Celebration as a children's event meant to teach the younger generation about the importance of caring for animals and the significant roles they play in human lives.

"Just to give you a brief rundown, Paws is a service dog program," Abel said. "We train service dogs to work with people with disabilities – diabetes alert dogs, seizure dogs, mobility dogs. We do not do emotional support dogs."

"The second thing that we do is we provide dogs to law enforcement for first responders – search and rescue dogs."

So, there's plenty for people to support by attending the Pet Celebration in September, as evidenced by Hannah Cook, who attended the meeting with her Paws-trained diabetes alert dog, Dax, who has notified her mother five times to potential low blood sugar emergencies.

Cook annually swims Lake Chatuge, and for each foot she clears, she raises money for Paws. Last year alone, she raised over \$3,400, and this year, she hopes to make or pass the \$5,000 mark.

To learn more about helping local animals, providing help for someone through animals, or to support these organizations, check out www.highlonesomestables.org or call 828-835-3739; visit www.arfs-inc.org or call 762-294-9467; or come down to the Pet Celebration on Sept. 17.

The Mountain Movers and Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee.

Dementia Caregivers Support Group

If you are caring for a person with dementia, join us for our monthly meeting for conversation, education, and support. The Towns County Support Group meets the first Tuesday every month at 1:30 at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in Hiawassee. For more details call Alzheimer's Association at 800-273-3900 or email Shannon Larsen at shannon.larsen@homestead-hospice.net. NT(Aug31,22)CA

Georgia Mountain Fair ...from Page 1A



Jerry Taylor playing antique reed organs in the Exhibit Hall of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is always a popular attraction during the fair and other times of the year.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Wyatt Espalin doing a little porch pickin' in Pioneer Village over at the 2022 Georgia Mountain Fair.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

John Collins of Greenville, South Carolina, made his first ever trip to the fair as a vendor, setting up a booth for his company, Modern Forestry, which sells wax melts and

soy-based candles and can be found at www.theforestrystudio.com.

In business since 2015, Collins was inspired to start Modern Forestry after his

wife began getting frequent migraines. They tried various potential remedies, but nothing seemed to work, and she would have to lie down until the headaches subsided.

“Things did not get better, so we went to our doctor to figure out the problem, as we thought it could be sugar-related,” Collins said. “As it turns out, it was from the wax from our candles that were paraffin-based, which is a fancy name for petroleum.

“Petroleum is one of the producers of parabens and phthalates, which those two things will mess with your endocrine and nervous system, which control all the most essential functions of human health but are the least strong.

“It’s been a great journey so far because it became my passion to find greater fulfillment to help many others with their health and wellbeing.”

Added Collins, “I have driven through Hiwassee a lot for other events, and I would

always think, ‘Wow, this is a very beautiful spot.’ I wanted to find reasons and longer events to come up here more, and when I found out about the fair, I signed up as a vendor to be able to do both.”

Based on his experiences at the fair, Collins said he definitely plans to return “as much as I can for future shows.”

“Everyone and the locals that I have interacted with are just amazing, very welcoming and loving people,” he said. “This area is booming, and it has a gorgeous landscape and people with warm hearts.

“One of the greatest things about here is the support from everybody to the other makers and crafters and the whole community. This has given me such light, and

this a very special thing that is happening.”

Fairgrounds Event Coordinator Shannon Baldwin-Nguyen was elated with the turnout and participation this year, and she reflected with enthusiasm on the week-plus of offerings.

“This year’s fair went extremely well, and we had some cooler weather because we did not do it in July, so I know everyone enjoyed the cool mountain air better,” she said. “We had a really great turnout with people that I met from many areas, including Atlanta, Chattanooga, Asheville and several others.

“My favorite part of any event is always the vendors, and I love seeing everyone come out and interact

with each other, shopping local, supporting each other and watching everybody just make more connections and friendships.

“We greatly appreciate everyone that supports our events, and we want to go ahead and inform people on the next big things coming next month with the Dailey & Vincent’s American Made Music Fest on Sept. 15-17, and the 49th Annual Shelby Mustang Car Show on Sept. 23 and 24.

“We can’t wait to see you all there.”

For more information on upcoming events, visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com or stop by the office in person at 1311 Music Hall Road in Hiwassee.

Heritage Festival...from Page 1A

As guests stroll backward through time, they can enjoy a multitude of performing artists, both in groups and singing solo. If possible, arrive early enough on Saturday at 9:30 a.m. to hear the unique sounds of a bagpipe band celebrating the largely Scottish heritage of Appalachian settlers.

Later in the day, expect performances from the Tunnel Rats Band, Shooting Creek Band, and the Mars Hill Porch Pickers, all of which offer traditional bluegrass music to listen to while perusing the festival.

Also playing on Saturday will be John Cochran, Cathy Maddox and Mike Lane. Sunday will see Nelson Thomas and Jim Wood take the stage, but the Tunnel Rats Band, Mars Hill Porch Pickers, John Cochran, Mike Lane and the Shooting Creek Band will also return.

And there’s a lot to see, considering there’ll be a Confederate camp reenactment courtesy of Sons of Confederate Veterans, along with other living history displays that include activities like gold panning with Bud Akins, cooking over a hearth with Cindy Rafter, quilting with Rita Killian and

Evelyn Payne, butter churning with Mary Carol Akins, and possibly blacksmithing.

In a similar vein, Union County Middle School FFA Teacher Katie Rittenhouse and her students will be setting up a petting zoo around the Payne Cabin, including animals that would have been – and still are – used as livestock by mountain farmers.

Even vehicle lovers will have a chance to check out old-school mountain transportation, as a restored Ford Model T, first introduced in 1908, will be parked out front on display.

Nearly 70 vendors are booked to set up booths at the event, and from souvenirs to practical commodities straight out of the history book, guests will have quite a bit of shopping space on the massive front lawn of the Mock House.

More modern products will include dog collars and bandanas, custom T-shirts, and balloons. Still, there’s an impressive lineup of “old-timey” items like goat milk soap, woodcrafts and metalwork, and kids can find stuffed animals and other toys from Addison’s Cotton Candy and Snacks, a local business of Blairsville.

Along with mementos, household items and furniture, visitors will also enjoy a wide variety of food and drink. Kettle corn and turkey legs may have been enjoyed back in the day, but most gustatory fare will consist of modern-day goodies like hot dogs, hamburgers and shaved ice.

Of course, this is only considering the freshly prepared food, as some vendors will be selling packaged teas, raw honey and even gourmet hot sauce.

Popular choices often seen at other events will in-

clude My Pop-Pops Nuts, Chill and Fill, Nana and Papa’s Ice Cream, Jim’s Smokin’ Que, Smokeout BBQ of the Blairsville Restaurant, and the Snowie Shaved Ice Truck.

Along with food, vendors and reenactments, younger guests can have their faces painted, and certain brave individuals can try their hand at axe throwing courtesy of Axe Daddy. If interested, folks may also watch live demonstrations of crafts such as Brad King’s woodworking laser.

To further support the community, information booths for certain local organizations will be set up as well, including the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, LeafFilter Gutter Protection, the American Legion Post 121, and Air Med’s emergency transportation services, represented by Shelley Eyerly.

The Butt Mock House, otherwise known as the Mountain Life Museum, is on a 1.8-acre site at 25 School Street in Downtown Blairsville. Admission is free, and it should be noted that volunteer traffic directors will be present to help with parking.

In addition to offering a one-of-a-kind view back in time, the other purpose of the Heritage Festival is to act as a fundraiser for the Union County Historical Society, which is run primarily by volunteers who care deeply about preserving that which came before.

During festival hours, the Old Courthouse Museum on the Square will be open for people to venture through for an even deeper look into the history of the area, and people should keep in mind there are plenty of keepsakes to purchase to support the society, including the new 2023 calendar featuring local waterfalls.

Pro Rodeo...from Page 1A

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and other organizations since bringing his nonprofit museum to Young Harris more than two years ago.

“We are excited to bring the rodeo back,” Thomason said. “Jerry had made plans to have this rodeo at his facilities, and tragically, he passed before he got to have it. He really wanted to have it, so the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is doing the rodeo in his memory and honor.”

Added Thomason, “It will be nationally ranked cowboys and cowgirls competing for cash money and a chance at nationals. There will be bull-riding, bronc-riding, bareback riding, barrel racing, calf roping, breakaway team roping and steer wrestling.”

And, moving forward, Thomason said the Fairgrounds plans to continue doing two rodeos per year, “because we believe there is a need for it,” one on Memorial Day Weekend and the other Labor Day Weekend.

“This event has gotten so big that we even had to add a third night in the spring,” Thomason said. “So, bring your family and come to enjoy a patriotic weekend at the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo.”

Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$15 for kids ages 6-12, and free entry for those 5 and under, with the younger guests in particular likely to enjoy the inflatables and mechanical bull-riding on offer.

Rodeo vendors will be onsite selling turkey legs, smoked or fried; peanuts; kettle corn; smoothies and other drinks; shaved ice; ice cream; pretzels; hot dogs; hamburgers; Philly cheesesteaks; lemonade; nachos; pizza; and a variety of apparel.

Local singing sensation Summer Rahn will perform “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and Calvary Baptist Church Pastor Nathan Browning will give the opening prayer and welcome on both nights.

In other event news, stemming from the success of its debut run each Thursday in July, the Acoustic Sunset

Concert Series will be returning to the Hamilton Gardens in September for another month-long venture into the relaxing sounds of regional musical talent.

Free to attend, the extended series will run Thursday nights from Sept. 1 through Oct. 6, with the lone exception being Sept. 15 to leave room for the three-day Dailey & Vincent’s American Made Music Festival at Anderson Music Hall scheduled for Sept. 15-17.

Staged inside the “Jewel of the Mountains” inside the Fairgrounds, people can look forward to gorgeous mountain views and cool weather at the Paris Pavilion and adjacent stage, with access to delicious food and beverage vendors from 6-9 p.m.

Live music starts at 7 p.m. each night, and The Murphys will play Sept. 1; Trailer Hippies Sept. 8; A. Lee Edwards Sept. 22; Claire Kelly Sept. 29; and, finally, Alicia Stockman on Oct. 6, all Thursdays.

So, grab a lawn chair, a blanket, and be sure to attend starting this Thursday to partake in the calming aura of live music, food and drinks at sunset inside the beautiful Hamilton Gardens.

“The event was very popular and so much fun,” Thomason said. “People wanted to continue it and didn’t want us to stop, so we decided that we would extend it.

“We want everyone to come out and enjoy the great talent lined up for it at the Gardens, because we appreciate everyone for always having fun at our events.”

Thomason would like to thank the following sponsors: Mark Tuggle RV Center, Dan Paris, the Towns County Conventions & Visitors Bureau, and Union General Health System. As always, donations from the public, which go toward upkeep at the gardens, are always appreciated.

For more information about these rain-or-shine events, visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.