

Demonstrators Protest...from Page 1A



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

Derek Chauvin pinned him face first to the ground with his hands cuffed behind his back. Two other officers assisted in holding Floyd down while he begged for breath and called out to his mother.

Disturbingly, Chauvin sat with his knee pressed to the back of Floyd's neck for nine minutes, even after being told Floyd had no pulse, and the entire crime was caught on video by a bystander.

Chauvin has since been charged with second degree murder in Floyd's death, and three other officers have been charged with aiding and abetting the murder.

The incident is being held up as another example of the undervaluation of black lives in America, especially at the hands of police.

Many remain hopeful for positive change, however, as seemingly universal support for Floyd and his family has erupted from every quarter of society in the aftermath of his tragic killing, from law enforcement to mega corporations, from political leaders to average citizens protesting across the land.

This support manifested locally in the roughly two-hour demonstration that occurred on the sidewalk in front of the Hiwassee 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



Cleveland Grover Meredith Jr., right, of Hiwassee, 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

Hiwassee 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" 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 Hiwassee 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.

Hiwassee 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 Hiwassee 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 Hiwassee Police Department would be there to defend their right to peaceably 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 Hiwassee 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.

Nathanael Allison receives NGTC Presidential Scholarship

North Georgia Technical College Foundation recently announced the high school recipients for the North Georgia Technical College Presidential Scholarships for 2020.

The presidential scholarships have been awarded each year since 2008 to one senior from each high school and mountain education center in the college's eight-county ser-

vice area. The recipients of the scholarships are high school seniors who have excelled in a technical career program in their school and have shown interest in attending or have dual enrolled at North Georgia Technical College.

Nathanael Allison of Blairsville, GA, from Union County High School, was selected for a \$500 scholarship.

NTUJun10,24/CA

The Wilsons return to Mountain Home Music Theater

The Wilsons will return to Mountain Home Music Theater on Saturday, June 13 at 7 PM. The Wilsons, from Brasstown, NC, play country, bluegrass and country gospel. The group consists of Jimmy Wilson (guitar/voice), son David (bass/voice), daughters Jessica (mandolin/voice) and Anna (guitar/voice). They are joined on stage by their friend Bill Pruett (banjo) from Robinsville, NC. They are very good and a crowd favorite in the surrounding areas.

Mountain Home Music Theater offers a family-friendly environment with no alcohol and no smoking allowed in the building. Admission is \$8 with children 10 and under admitted free.

Everyone will be required to wear a mask and be seated.

Mountain Home Music Theater is located 2.5 miles west of Hiwassee on Hwy. 76. Look for the red building! For more info call 706-896-3624. NTUJun10,F6/SH