

First Cruise-In of 2020 on The Blairsville Square



The Blairsville Cruisers will finally start the season with a Cruise-In on the Historic Courthouse Square Saturday, June 20th from 3-7 PM.

We invite all auto enthusiasts to bring your ride to this event. The public is invited to see the fine vehicle on display. This is a family friendly event. Please use sensible social distancing at this event and wear a mask if you desire.

The Blairsville Cruisers Car Club is a 501(c)3 non profit. The Cruisers, their sponsors and supporters has contributed to the community since 2007 with scholarships and donations to various local organizations. Most visible Cruisers efforts are the Shop

with a Cop in Blairsville & Murphy, Shop with a Hero in Hiwassee & Hayesville, The Sheriff's Give a Gift and the Shop with a Cruiser programs for needy children and their families at Christmas.

The Cruisers Annual Salute to Veterans Car Show each November helps local needy veterans; The Vietnam Veterans of America local chapter, Local VFW in Hiwassee, local American Legions, The Chaplain's Mission Council in Hayesville and the Warriors Veteran Outreach in Murphy.

Many Cruisers members are Veterans and are proud of the car club participation in honoring all Veterans.

We hope our events scheduled for remainder of 2020 will go off without a hitch. This includes our Cruise-Ins on the first and third Saturday of each month, the Union County Nursing home fall show and the 3rd Annual Salute to Veterans Car Show and Auction on November 7th. Visit the BlairsvilleCruisers.com web site or on FaceBook: Blairsville Cruisers Car Club

for additional information about the club.

Be sure to see our new sign at the entrance to the Union County Farmers Market for more info.

Blairsville Cruisers Club members reside primarily in North Georgia and Western North Carolina and in various locations in Georgia and Florida. All automotive enthusiasts are welcome to join the Cruisers. You only need an interest in automobiles and be willing to serve your community to be a part of our club. NT/June 17, 2020

Gowder...from Page 1A

Williams said. The two men served together on the United Community Bank Board.

Laura Williams, Gowder's daughter, spoke on behalf of her family, saying that, as an emergency physician herself, she especially understood his pain at no longer being able to practice.

"The job is in his blood and spirit," she said.

Defense attorney Jeff Brickman reminded the judge of the many support letters written for Gowder by community members. Brickman had asked that his client serve in home confinement with 300 hours of community service related to speaking to people with substance addiction.

"He has the ability, willingness and desire to do that," Brickman said. "He did many things he should not have done, but he was an addict."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Laurel Boatright spoke in the hearing as well, reminding the court that the conduct took place over three and a half to four years, and that Gowder had benefited from his position at the hospital to compel people working under him to do what he wanted.

"Addiction does not excuse the fact that he stole people's names and IDs, forged other people's signatures and stole pills from his patients," she said. "He was able to do this because of who he was. He was able to continue this conduct because people (particularly hospital employees) felt pressured — that they did not have a choice or they might be fired."

"I recognize that David Gowder never personally intimidated anyone, but you would have to be naive to not consider the environment in Blairsville and at Union General Hospital five years ago. The court has to take into account that it was because of who he was, the power and influence wielded by him and his family, that the crime could take place."

Expanding on this, she said it had become painfully clear in interviews with multiple witnesses that many people in

the community believed nothing would happen to him because of his family's longstanding connections to the hospital and status within the community.

"This crime has eaten away confidence in the rule of law in this community," she said. "The law applies to everyone. Even if you are a doctor and a good person, it applies to you, too."

Speaking to the courtroom, Gowder expressed remorse for his crime, observing that he'd let himself and his family down in the process.

He also apologized to the judge and prosecutors for his actions requiring their presence that Wednesday, and he spoke at length about his faith in God and his gratitude for the support of family and friends in recent years.

"I am completely guilty of what I have been charged with," he said. "I look in the mirror and know there is no way to justify my actions and no one else to blame."

He told the judge of the pain reflected in the mirror, saying that he was not the man he wanted to be — not the man his family thought he was or the man his father expected him to be. And briefly, Gowder explained how his addiction developed.

"It happened very slowly," he said. "It's not a line you know is coming; not a line you know you've crossed. Most people call it a moral failure. I believe it's much more complex. It quits being a decision you can purposely make."

Gowder said that, even after he realized he had become addicted, he hid it from everyone.

"I did things I would never have conceived I would do. I was just unable to allow anyone to know or to seek help," he said, noting that, for addicts, life becomes a repeating series of "this is the last time."

"As I stand here, I wonder how someone could do that — and yet I did," Gowder said, before adding that he was ultimately grateful for his arrest, which helped bring him

out of his addiction.

When it came time to deliver the sentence, Judge Story said there were several factors that went into his determination.

"I read all the letters," he said. "You cooperated with the government. All of those things matter. It's my view that this system would not be a system of justice if a person's good works were not weighed in the scales of justice."

The judge added that Gowder had suffered an inordinate delay with the case — from his arrest in 2015 to being told in 2018 that he was under federal indictment.

"There is a strong likelihood he would have served his sentence by now," he said. "He has been prevented from rebuilding his life."

Story said he hoped that Gowder would be able to get his medical license back down the road because, based on the letters he had read, "we need doctors like that."

Continuing, Story said he understood addiction to be an illness and didn't believe in sending people to prison for being addicts, but that "it is the conduct associated with addictions that requires a response."

"Sometimes, you wrote prescriptions for people who did not exist," Story said. "Sometimes, you forged other people's names. You stole people's drugs. I don't think you threatened anyone, but you did put people in fear for their jobs."

As previously reported, U.S. attorneys said that Gowder had "engaged in the ongoing and continuous illegal procurement of more than 130,000 opiate pills over ... four years," but Gowder said in the hearing it was actually 130,000 mg, and not individual pills.

Gowder's former co-defendants — brother Mike Gowder and James Heaton — both have hearings scheduled June 24 for sentencing following their October 2019 convictions on more than 100 counts apiece involving federal prescription drug crimes.

Sentencing for all three men has been delayed multiple times due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coronavirus...from Page 1A

"Summer is here and people are on the beaches or at the lake and going out more.

"I want to have some fun as much as everybody else, but we need to be cautious. As long as we maintain our social distancing and keep wearing our masks, then we should be fine. It is just that people are not wanting to wear masks."

"I don't know if people think they are too good for them or they think they can't get the virus, but they can. It is a very real virus, and we need to be safe about it."

Of course, no one expects quick and easy solutions regarding the pandemic and recent civil unrest, though Amanda Sands said she believes people need to put their trust in God above all else.

"People have lost faith if you ask me," said Sands outside the Dollar General last

Thursday. "People aren't going to church as much, and churches don't seem to be opening back up. It is just odd to me how we can have protesting and all these massive crowds, but we can't go back to church."

"I think people just need a little more God in their lives, and that will get us through it, because he has a plan. I know these times have been difficult

and confusing above all. We just went through a worldwide pandemic that basically shut everything down.

"People have every right to be afraid; I sure was at first. My advice to people is to just trust in God that this will get sorted out. As my pastor told me a few weeks ago, this is all a part of the plan and a huge test of our faith."