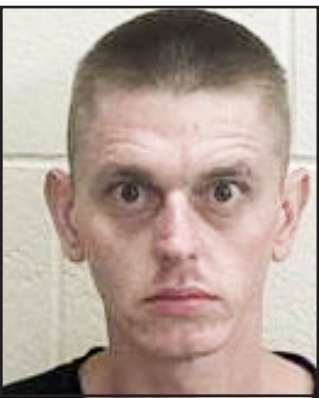


Pot Bust...from Page 1A



Dave Patterson

warrants for the past year but just didn't know where to find him. According to Miller, Patterson has a history of manufacturing marijuana, for which he was last arrested in 2015 at a different property. So, the Sheriff's Office put two and two together in figuring that Patterson was probably hiding at the residence featured in the

anonymous tips.

"Through the weeks, we confirmed that's where he was living and was where he was running his little drug operation, and we went from there," Miller said. "On the morning of the 16th, the Sheriff's Office along with State Probation rolled into the address and made contact with Mr. Patterson."

As a condition of his probation for a prior conviction, Patterson was subject to warrantless searches, leading authorities to find and confiscate numerous items on the property.

"At the time, we knew he was growing marijuana again, so we started searching the woods around his residence and ended up finding a total of 70 marijuana plants (in pots)," Miller said.

Investigators also discovered at least two stolen chainsaws, an unspecified

quantity of harvested marijuana, small amount of methamphetamine, a firearm, about \$700 in cash, and other items that were not confirmed as stolen by press time, Miller said.

Patterson, 35, has been charged with manufacturing marijuana, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime, possession of meth, two counts theft by receiving stolen property and two counts probation violation.

He remained in the Union County Jail on \$70,000 bond at press time. Patterson has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

"Ten years ago, when I started here, it was very, very common to find marijuana growing outdoors, especially when the helicopters came," Miller said. "Through the

summertime, it was common to find it all the time.

"As time has gone on, it's not that common anymore, because it's so easy to (import it) here - it's so cheap and it's top-quality marijuana; what you grow outside here has less THC compared to the stuff you can buy that's really cheap from out West."

Miller said that, on the whole, current levels of local drug use seem to have remained steady in recent years, even with methamphetamine. The main difference is how people are getting it, with most folks seeming to prefer the imported stuff over making it themselves.

"I haven't had a meth lab

- knock on wood - in years," Miller said. "It still goes on. People are still going to grow marijuana, and people are still going to make a little meth that's a little cheaper. But nothing like it used to be. It's too easy to get your hands on for you to go through the trouble, and it's too cheap."

Conservation...from Page 1A

gov. "Today, Georgia has 40 SWCDs encompassing all 159 counties.

"Throughout the state, 370 volunteer district supervisors meet and work to conserve, improve and protect Georgia's natural resources. Each county is represented by at least two district supervisors, one appointed (by the State Commission) and one elected (locally).

"District supervisors are unpaid state officials who work hand-in-hand with the Georgia Soil & Water Conservation Commission and the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service."

One of these supervisors is John Kay of Towns County, who chairs the local Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD. Joining him and others in the meeting was District Program Assistant Micah Williams with the Georgia Association of Conservation Districts.

"It is great to be back together again, scattered as we are, but that is better than not being together at all," Kay said. "I just hope everybody is doing well during this period. I know the work is continuing to go on for NRCS and state visits. I appreciate what Micah has been doing for us."

The group discussed the Olin Hughes Memorial Scholarship, which will be awarded to a high school student in the area. Hughes was a local farmer renowned for his sorghum syrup. He passed away at 93 in 2017. The Hughes Sorghum Syrup Mill is still operational in Young Harris.

"We are sending out emails right now to local high schools; we are looking for juniors (and seniors involved in agriculture and other sciences) to sponsor for that (scholarship)," Williams said.

Williams also discussed the district's 2020 Annual Report and 2021 Plan of Work.

The Annual Report touched on the district's accomplishments over the past year, such as the completion



John Kay is the chairman of the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

of 319 Water Quality Projects, local distribution of educational material, and spearheading of initiatives like hoop house installations and hosting of conservation tours.

Moving on to the 2021 Plan of Work, Williams spoke about the group's major objectives for the coming year, which include:

1. Natural Resources Conservation - Promote the conservation of soil, water, forestry, wildlife and other natural resources.
2. Conservation Education - Promote conservation education through youth and adult education programs.
3. Public Relations & Information - To create public awareness of District conservation programs and objectives.
4. Erosion and Sedimentation Program - Provide technical assistance related to erosion control and sedimentation prevention to citizens and local units of government.
5. Watershed Flood Control Program - Uphold the duties as sponsor of watershed flood control structures in

the District and assist other watershed control structure sponsors with technical assistance.

He then brought up the idea of starting a Facebook Page for the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil & Water Conservation District as a way to get more people connected with local projects and showcase how the district is interacting with the community.

"This would be to better put out to the public what we are accomplishing, what our goals are, what we are doing here, especially in this time of social distancing," Williams said.

District members voted to approve the Annual Report, Plan of Work and creation of a Facebook page that Friday.

The Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD serves Union, Towns, Rabun and Fannin counties. District members are Jennifer Logan and George Daves of Union, John Kay and Virginia Palmer of Towns, Damon Davenport and Ann Stanley of Fannin, and Dick Godfrey and Les Neely of Rabun.

For more information, visit <https://www.gacd.us/blueridgemountain/>.

Marijuana grows like this one are increasingly uncommon these days, according to UCSO Lt. Tyler Miller, as it's much easier to just import cheap, high-quality pot. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Farmers Market...from Page 1A

preparation for her return to the market.

"I have fresh baked goods made with local farm fresh eggs and real butter," Quaiel said. "I have three types of cookies, including chocolate chip, snickerdoodle and peanut butter. I have banana zucchini bread and jalapeno jelly. I have been coming to the market for two years, and I have been into baking my whole life."

The excitement over the return of so many food vendors was especially apparent Saturday, as they were particularly popular among attendees; patrons aplenty consumed boiled peanuts, cookies, ice cream and other freshly made local products.

"It was great to get some boiled peanuts for the first time in forever," Steve Douglas said. "There just haven't been any people selling them around."

"You usually see them on the side of the road or off in little markets, but those haven't been open because of the virus. You don't know what you will miss until you start craving it and you can't get it."

Another popular vendor



LuAnn Quaiel of Lulu's Southern Sweets sold cookies and jellies at the Farmers Market June 20, which is when baked good vendors could return to the market. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

at the market was Hidden Creek Farm & Goat Dairy.

"We won Blue Ribbon nationally for our cheese," Goldie Lukas said. "The owner has over 70 goats on the farm, and she milks them and creates

goat cheeses and spreads that are great for crackers. We have crumbles for salads, and we also have different cheeses."

Hidden Creek has been at the Farmers Market for around four years, and true to form, the stand sold out of its offered products during the first week of the market this year.

Moving forward, the market will be open every Tuesday from 2-5 p.m. and Saturday from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. Until further notice, there will be no special customer events at the market, like the Honeybee Jubilee or free tomato sandwich day, and vendors will not be handing out samples.