

North Georgia News

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Celebrate Independence Day Union County-style

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Blairsville's turning thoroughly red, white and blue for Independence Day on Tuesday, July 4, and there's a little bit of everything for the whole family.

A long-standing tradition continues at Meeks Park with the Red, White and Blairsville 4th of July Fireworks Show.

Courtesy of the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and sponsored by Union General Hospital and the Mountain Life Team, the event is free for all to attend and will utilize different parts of the park for different activities.

As always, the North

Georgia Technical College campus across Georgia 515 will be joining in on the fun, hosting several food trucks carrying goodies like boiled peanuts, cotton candy, pork rinds, kettle corn and lemonade.

The fun starts at 7:30 p.m. and will run until about 10 p.m. Fireworks will be shot off near the upper ballfields inside Meeks and will be visible over the tree line in the rest of the park and across the road at the college.

To help support chamber events and the annual fireworks show, people can purchase a \$10 raffle ticket for a chance to win the Ultimate Camping Package.

Valued at over \$2,700, the winner of the package

will take all there is to offer, including but not limited to a 10-person tent, a paddleboard, camping grill with sauces and spices, Yeti cooler, his-and-hers Ray Ban sunglasses, his-and-hers custom knives, four camping chairs, yard game packs, a three-night stay at Vogel State Park and a three-hour Jeep tour at Carolina Crawlers.

Vogel State Park will be busy this year on Independence Day, offering summer celebrations alongside patriotic observance. Different events will happen on a schedule, so be sure to double check depending on what tickles your family's fancy.

The day starts bright and early at 7 a.m. with registration

for the 5K and 1-Mile Fun Run/Walk down at the group shelter. Tickets are \$20, and the actual walking (or running, if you prefer) starts at 7:30 a.m.

At 9:30 a.m., Vogel's Visitor Center will play host to a flag raising and a salute to veterans. Come outside to view the bike parade at 10 a.m., then hang around on the shore of Lake Trahlyta to check out the paddle boat races.

Artists of all ages can participate in the Sandcastle Contest taking place at noon on the beach. At 1 p.m., the field games open at Vogel's ballfield, and people camping can show their American pride by decorating for the Cottage and Campsite Decorating

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Fireworks will be blasting off at Meeks Park, Woody Gap School and other venues around the region for America's 247th birthday on Tuesday, July 4. Photo by Shawn Jarrard/2018

Rubber Duck Derby tickets start selling July 1



The Blairsville Police Department is excited to be selling Rubber Duck Derby tickets starting Saturday. Pictured here: Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer and Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

On your mark, get set, quack!

The Fifth Annual Rubber Duck Derby is just two months away, set for the first Saturday in September every year on

Butternut Creek next to the Union County Farmers Market. And fundraiser tickets go on sale this Saturday, July 1, to benefit the Blairsville Police Department's Shop With A Cop Christmas Program for well-deserving kids in the community.

People may purchase tickets for \$10 apiece by simply talking with any BPD officer, stopping by the Blairsville Police Department at 96 Blue Ridge Street, or calling the non-emergency line after hours at 706-439-6038 to arrange a

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Veteran Miller gifted father's 1945 burial flag

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Vietnam Veteran Roy Miller was shocked when a contingency of the North Georgia Honor Guard Eastern Division's best showed up to his apartment at Stonehenge Senior Living with the 48-star American flag that once draped the coffin of his late father.

August "Gus" Miller survived the battlefields of World War II only to tragically pass away in a car wreck in 1945 not long after returning home. His widow, Ruth, was presented the flag at Gus' funeral when Roy was just 3 years old.

But earlier this month, on Saturday, June 17, Roy had the chance to celebrate

See *Miller Burial Flag*, Page 6A



Vietnam Veteran Roy Miller, overcome with emotion, accepting his father's burial flag from Mark Harbison of the North Georgia Honor Guard this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Interfaith Luncheon brings unity and commitment



The First Annual Interfaith Luncheon on June 16 served as both a fellowship opportunity and a brainstorming session to increase the regional impact of the Ecumenical Food Pantry.

By Lynne Pike
Guest Contributor

The first annual Ecumenical Food Pantry Luncheon hosted by Mountain Presbyterian Church on June 16 exceeded expectations.

Churches represented were Mountain Presbyterian, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Vincent de Paul, Coosa Methodist Church, and The

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Volunteers serving at the food pantry were also invited.

Over 20 people were in attendance. Following the welcome and blessing on the food by Pastor Paul Min of Mountain Presbyterian, Dawn Berg introduced those attending, and Judy Maurer thanked ecclesiastical leaders

and volunteers for their continued efforts and support.

During lunch, after becoming better acquainted, attendees participated in a roundtable discussion for improving an already successful food pantry program that serves about 2,000 residents of Union, Towns and Fannin counties each year.

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Carr Law Office opens as museum, Welcome Center

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The historic Ben Carr Law Office in Downtown Blairsville has officially

opened for visitors following a celebratory ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday, June 16.

After about 10 months of fundraising between the Union County Historical Society and

the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, plus light renovations, the building will serve a different purpose now by doubling as a museum. See *Carr Law Office*, Page 6A



Local stakeholders met at the Ben Carr Law Office this month to officially open the building as a new welcome center and museum. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Local woman victim in Murphy, NC, murder case

MURPHY, N.C. — In the late-night hours of Friday, June 23, Cherokee County Sheriff's Office Patrol Deputies responded to a report of a possible hit-and-run incident near the intersection of US 19 and Snap-On Drive.

Deputies arrived on scene where they located a fe-

male, Lena Shook-Thompson, originally of Blairsville, with apparent life-threatening injuries. Cherokee County Emergency Medical Services were called and responded to the scene and attempted to stabilize the female.

During the course of the See *Murder Case*, Page 2A



Lena Shook-Thompson



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Interfaith Luncheon...from Page 1A



L-R: Kathleen More and Pastor Paul Min of Mountain Presbyterian; Darlene Bone and Elaine Moss of Coosa Methodist; President Mark Miller of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; and Ted Gaudette and Lodi Wetzel of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Vincent de Paul.

Ideas generated included coordinating efforts with food pantries from other churches, inviting additional church leaders and their congregations to join the efforts of the Ecumenical Food Pantry, requesting monetary donations from civic organizations, seeking additional funds and sources for obtaining food and other items, providing

The Ecumenical Food Pantry is supported by the following churches: All Saints Lutheran, Coosa Methodist, Cross Point, Mountain Presbyterian, St. Clare's Episcopal, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Vincent de Paul, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Any other church, group or individual who wishes to become part of this valiant effort to serve those in need in our community may contact Kathleen More at Mountain

bag lunches for those in urgent need, including extra special packs like birthday bags and expectant or new-mom gifts, and finding even more efficient ways of collecting, providing and distributing goods to those in need.

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Any other church, group or individual who wishes to become part of this valiant effort to serve those in need in our community may contact Kathleen More at Mountain

Presbyterian Church, 706-745-8036.

Judy Maurer stated in her opening remarks, "We all worship one God and the same Jesus." As members of different faith groups unite, our differences matter less than our common goals in worshipping together and serving others at home and abroad.

In this local community ecumenical mission, we are following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ in loving one another and providing for families, widows, orphans, sick and afflicted, and anyone in need of comfort and other basic human needs.

He said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

(Matthew 25:40)

Our nation was founded by God-fearing men who defended Americans of all faiths. Our first freedom granted under the Bill of Rights is Freedom of Religion. That right is in jeopardy. We believe in defending the rights of all people to worship as they may.

The condition in our world today right down to our own state and the community in which we live requires our united efforts under God to bless the lives of others and to provide for their needs as we are able.

There are great blessings in store for those who believe in Him and serve their fellow men and women as our Savior did, regardless of individual beliefs. We are all children of the same God.

Murder Case...from Page 1A

initial investigation, it became apparent that the victim sustained these injuries as a result of an assault that had occurred. Thompson was transported to Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital where she succumbed to her injuries and was pronounced deceased.

After further investigation, the suspect, Patrick Ryan Williams, was taken into custody and charged with murder. Williams is currently being held at the Cherokee County Detention Center under no

bond and is scheduled to appear in North Carolina District Court on June 28.

"We appreciate the Cherokee County Emergency Medical Services, Cherokee County Dispatch and all others involved in helping to resolve this incident," Cherokee County Sheriff Dustin Smith said. "The vital role they play, in conjunction with the relationship they have with our law enforcement personnel, were critical in solving this case."

All individuals are pre-



Patrick Ryan Williams

sumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Rubber Duck Derby...from Page 1A

ticket transfer.

The derby has only increased in popularity since it began in 2019, growing from a race filled with 1,200 ducks to 3,000 in 2023. That's a ton of community support for local children who may not get many presents – if any – under their trees for Christmas.

Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter wants people to rest assured that, as always, 100% of proceeds raised will go toward this wonderful cause, and he's grateful for all the individuals, businesses, civic groups, churches and others who contribute to the effort every year.

"And we've got some good sponsors who give us the prize money, so it doesn't even come out of the Duck Fund either, so we're pretty lucky," Baxter said.

Speaking of prize money, the three fastest ducks will receive cash prizes of \$500, \$250 and \$100, respectively, while the "Lame Duck" – the last one to cross the finish line an eighth of a mile down the Butternut – will receive a new gas grill donated by Home Depot.

Blairsville PD is hoping to sell out for the fifth straight derby, which will help to generate enough funds to take at least as many kids Christmas shopping in 2023 as in recent years, around 125.

And the officers will take more if they can, with assistance from Union County Family Connection selecting children to take part in Shop With a Cop: "It depends on the fundraising and on the need in the schools," Assistant Police Chief Shawn Dyer said.

Added Baxter, "We hope it'll be the success it has been. The people of this community have always supported us in this thing. As I tell everybody, it's not about us, it's about our community helping us make this happen. We couldn't do it without them."

Baxter reiterated his gratitude to the many local businesses that donate items for the non-cash prize winning ducks.

"And we couldn't do it without the businesses who donate the prizes," Baxter said. "We don't have any money in our prizes; thankfully, we have a lot of good support from our

business sector and our civic groups. If we didn't have all the help all the way around, we couldn't do this."

Of course, whether an individual or group buys a single ticket or 25, every dollar counts toward making the big Christmas program at the end of each year possible for Union County children.

"We live in a good community, and I think that they trust us to make sure these kids have a successful Christmas, and that's what we aim to do," Baxter said.

More than 2,200 children have benefited from Shop With a Cop since it debuted in 2000 thanks to strong local support, and now, parents who went shopping themselves years ago are seeing their own children reap the rewards of Shop With a Cop as it continues into the future.

People who would like to donate to the program are welcome to do so at any time, as Blairsville PD raises money for Shop With a Cop year-round. For more information, call the Blairsville Police Department during business hours at 706-835-1692.

Independence Day...from Page 1A

Contest, to be judged at 5 p.m.

Struck By Lightning will offer a special July 4th performance at the Lake Pavilion starting around 6 p.m., but be sure to stay long enough to witness one of the nation's oldest state parks come alive with fireworks that begin at nightfall.

Another celebratory option will be at the First United Methodist Church of Blairsville, which will be holding a flag retirement ceremony by the Girl Scouts of Historic Georgia. And FUMC will also give people a terrific view of the fireworks at Meeks Park.

Starting at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 4, The American Legion family will be welcoming people to help them in honoring "Veterans, Family and Friends" with a free picnic.

"We will be serving hamburgers, hotdogs and all the trimmings at the Leon Davenport Building, across

from Longhorn Steakhouse, where the tank is located," The Legion said. "Door prizes, fireworks, and fun! Bring your own blanket or chair, and parking is free! See you on July 4th."

People won't want to forget the other big fireworks display in the county hosted by the Union County Fire Station No. 5 in Suches, which always helps the community celebrate America's birthday in style.

Family activities begin at Woody Gap School around 5 p.m., and refreshments and music will be available. The fireworks will kick off when it's good and dark, around 9:30 p.m. or a little later. Be sure to bring a chair, and outside food and drinks are welcome.

Of course, residents who want to start celebrating Independence Day a little early can head on over to the annual Boat Parade at Nottely Marina, which will return this year on Saturday, July 1. Boats start lining up at 10:30 a.m. for the

parade that will begin at noon.

"We encourage folks to watch the parade from a vessel outside the No Wake Zone," Marina Owner Moriah Doucette said, as space for parking and watching from land are both "very limited."

The parade itself runs inside the No Wake Zone from the buoy, then makes it way to the road and back around.

This year, Southern Sips Lemonade will be available along with local balloon artistry. Trophies and prizes will be announced and handed out at 1 p.m., proudly sponsored by Nottely Marina and Dave and Denise Brown of Blairsville.

No registration is required to participate, and anyone is welcome to join in or come observe the free event. It'll be happening rain or shine, so keep an eye out on the weather.

For information on other local Fourth of July events, check out <https://www.visitblairsvillega.com/>.

Miller Burial Flag...from Page 1A



North Georgia Honor Guard members folded the sacred flag for presentation to Miller as Harbison read the symbolism behind each fold.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

his father's life and sacrifice for his country. His daughter, Tiffney Flowers, had come into possession of the flag and wanted to do something special for her father.

"He's been our rock," Flowers said. "Our entire lives, he's been good to us, and we just adore him."

With a little help from her husband Rick, who serves as an Honor Guard member, Flowers was able to pull it off. A table was set up outside on the porch of Miller's apartment, and from there, a photo of his father watched over the ceremony.

"This is special for us; it's different from anything we've ever done, and I'm proud to be here," said Honor Guard Sr. Vice Cmdr. Mark Harbison. "What we're doing here today is, in essence, re-dedicating this flag. We're folding it and presenting it to Roy as his father's funeral flag."

Harbison recognized Miller's achievements alongside those of his father, commending him for his service in the U.S. Army from 1964 to 1966. Specifically, Miller was based in Saigon – now known as Ho Chi Minh City – to inspect aircraft and handle supplies.

"This banner of love and devotion about to be folded is a living memorial of the courageous thoughts of our fallen comrade," said Harbison

as the ceremony began. As with any flag folding, Harbison pointed out the symbolism behind each aspect of the flag that defines America and her soldiers.

The blue field behind the stars denotes "the sky that overlooks our land" and reminds service members that God always watches over them.

The red stripes represent so much blood spilled in the name of defending the country.

And White "boldly (proclaims) the peace that (Gus) helped bring to our future generations."

"This is his flag. This is our spiritual heritage," Harbison said before the flag was taken up by two fellow members of the Honor Guard, one on each side, to fold it into a triangle meant to represent the tri-corn hats worn by the very first American soldiers during the Revolution.

Each of the 13 folds of the flag had meaning, too, which Harbison read out to those gathered, expressing appreciation for life, veterans, God, faith, the nation and more.

With gentle reverence, the flag was then handed over to Miller, who held it against his chest as his father had once cradled him. Through tears, Miller thanked Harbison and the rest of the Honor Guard, including his son-in-law, for the sacred honor.

Family members filed in to show their support and offered hugs and handshakes to Miller as two friends from Stonehenge sat beside him, one placing a hand on his arm in quiet solace. Together, they shared tears over the moving gesture.

"Some people have good dads, some people have OK dads, but we've got a great dad," said Darren Miller, son of Roy and grandson of Gus. "I mean, he served his country, he's been an incredible father to us – he just don't know how much he's loved. We couldn't be more blessed to have a father like him in our lives. He's just a wonderful man."

Added Flowers, "His dedication to his country, dedication to his family, dedication to his wife, our mother – he just loves with his whole heart."

After the ceremony, Miller held both the flag and the photo of his father close, admitting that while he was "surprised," he was no less grateful to his son-in-law for his role in getting the Honor Guard to perform the ceremony.

"I'm going to have to get onto him. He does this to me all the time," Miller said fondly. "He's very good. He's very good to me. So is that one," he added, pointing to his son, before noting that his daughter is his "angel."

Carr Law Office...from Page 1A

and the new Welcome Center.

The Historical Society came into possession of the old law office in 2014, and current President Mickey Cummings can remember, in the early years of former President Judy Carpenter's service, the board "discussed this building and doing something with it."

As background, the Carrs had situated their house right beside their downtown business, and while the house was moved years ago, the office remained, only to cave in after years of sitting vacant.

Fortunately, the Historical Society began to pick up the pieces, but it wasn't until last year, when the chamber posited the idea for a new Welcome Center, that a plan to finally utilize the building was formulated.

The work was completed in stages, including repairs and careful preservation of old furniture and documents that belonged to the Carrs and the Haralsons.

A celebrated local attorney, Ben Carr was the husband of Austine Haralson, the daughter of another longtime local attorney Pat Haralson after whom the Civic Center and a road in the city are named.

Pat Haralson opened the law office there around the turn of the 20th century, and the building was later used for years by his son-in-law Ben Carr for similar purposes until he retired in the 1980s. Carr died in 1991.

Historical Society Board Member Joan Drake and Bonnie Trudeau decorated the place in preparation for the ribbon cutting and opening, sprucing it up to its current splendor, with the floors being handled by McDonald Flooring.

The new Welcome Center has been filled with various items of historical interest related to Carr and the Haralsons, including the saddle bag of Austin's grandfather, Thomas Jefferson Haralson, being one of the oldest items on display.

"The pieces they chose for the different areas are fabulous," said Chamber President Steve Rowe.

Upon first stepping into the Ben Carr Law Office, time appears to stand still. The shelves stretching from floor to wall are encased behind glass, protecting fragile law books dating back to the 1890s.

In one corner, a typewriter sits as it was found,



Photos and credentials of Attorney Ben Carr are just a few of the historical artifacts located inside the new Welcome Center.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

with a completed summons still tucked into it.

The first room of the Law Office is largely dedicated to Ben Carr and Pat Haralson. Photos of the Carr and Haralson families line the walls along with law certifications and preserved postcards and notes, offering clues to personalities long gone.

"I have some matters of my own to meet and am compelled to call on you for what you are due to me," reads a surviving note without an addressee. "Please give this matter your special attention and let me hear from you, or see me in person, at your earliest convenience. With best regards, I am, Yours very truly, Pat Haralson."

But if Haralson was imposing, the glimpses of Carr seemed a bit more friendly. Although some joked that he looked the same in every photograph, Carr always wore a gentle, knowing smile, and according to those who can remember him, the photos reflect his nature well.

"He was always quiet, and he listened," said Betsy Jones. "We were in business – we had an insurance office," she explained, adding that she "never did have any complaints about Mr. Ben," and, "I never heard him say a bad word about anybody."

Jones remembers Carr doing "a lot of things for the county... bookwork type stuff. He was just always a good guy."

The back room of the Law Office is dedicated to

Austine Carr. In her own right, she holds an impressive legacy as an expert green thumb, taking classes and earning certifications in gardening methods from across the world. One document hanging on the wall is written partially in Japanese, offering a hint to her travels.

But if there was one thing Mrs. Carr loved as much as gardening, it was cats. A photo of the woman in her youth holding a kitten sits beside a favored leopard-print chair. Several folks can remember Austine's feline affinity, and Joan Drake lamented being unable to find a realistic plush cat to tuck beneath the coffee table.

"These are things I found, and I just put them out to make it look like her little section," said Drake. "I mean, it's a law office, but this was her stuff – what was I going to do with it? It needed to be in a corner that was hers."

Margie Falgiano, the sole employee of the Welcome Center, will be there on Fridays and Saturdays, and according to Historical Society President Cummings, the center will also be open on Sundays depending on local events or holidays.

"The Sundays we'll be open will be specific to events that are going on, like the Memorial Day Festival or some of those type things," Cummings said.

Added Darren Harper of Visit Downtown Blairsville, "I know it's going to be a great addition to our downtown."