

During the September 11 attacks in 2001, 2,977 were killed, and more than 6,000 were injured; 2,606 in the World Trade Center, 265 on the four planes and 125 at the Pentagon.

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# North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

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Wednesday, September 7, 2022

## 'Patriot Day' observance at Meeks Park Sept. 11

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce will team up with the Union County Fire Department and others this weekend to "Never Forget" those 2,977 innocent victims brutally murdered on American soil by 19 Islamic suicide terrorists in a multi-pronged surprise attack on Sept. 11, 2001.

Everyone from the public is invited to attend the commemoration at Meeks Park on Sunday, Sept. 11, starting at 8 a.m. in the future Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park area, across from the upper

ballfields. Often referred to as "9/11," that fateful day 21 years ago bore witness to four heinous attacks coordinated in a plan hatched by militant al-Qaida terrorist Osama bin Laden using hijacked airliners full of passengers.

The Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City were each struck by an airliner; one airliner crashed into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.; and a final plane, meant to strike another government building to kill even more innocent people, crashed into a field in Pennsylvania when brave passengers stormed the cockpit and foiled the attack on that flight.

Not only did 2,977 people die in the immediate attack, but many others succumbed to ailments in later years as a direct result of the aftermath of the attacks.

"I feel that different events in our history are very important to remember," said Chamber President Steve Rowe. "Sept. 11, 2001, is one of those events, because, as is often quoted, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'"

Certainly, there is much to remember, and much to be learned, from that horrific event in the nation's history. And 21 years later, America now has an entire generation that only

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Firefighters looking for survivors in the rubble of the Twin Towers on Sept. 11, 2001. Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

## Duck Derby fundraiser a 'quacking' good time

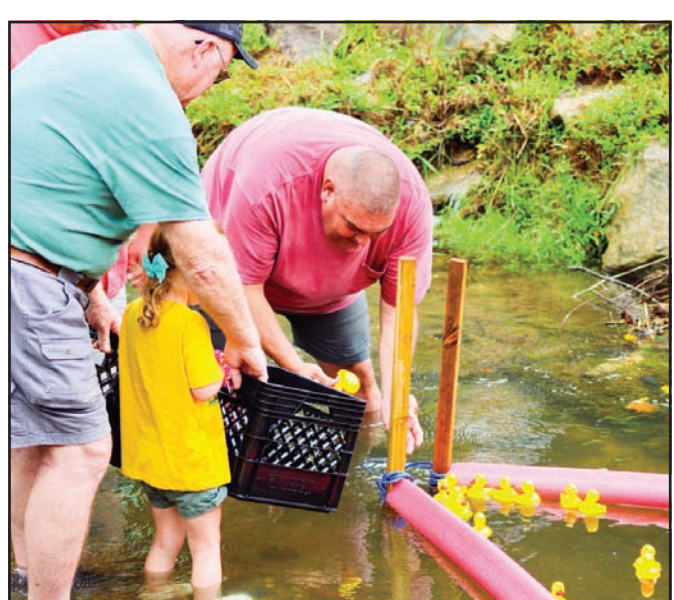
By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The fourth annual edition of the Blairsville Police Department Rubber Duck Derby Shop With A Cop Fundraiser took place this past Saturday, Sept. 3, at the Union County Farmers Market below the Butternut Creek Bridge.

Cindy Neely is the Clerk of Court for the Police Department and a coordinator with the derby, and she was thrilled with the level of participation for the 2022 outing.

"We had 2,629 being entered this year in the derby race, and 113 door prizes being available to win," Neely said. "And all of the money goes to Shop With A Cop."

Shop With A Cop is a cause in which local first responders, spearheaded by Blairsville PD, take underprivileged children Christmas shopping.



Blairsville Police Chief Baxter sorting through winning rubber ducks at the Sept. 3 Rubber Duck Derby, with help from young resident Blair Hoover. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

The program is near and dear to everyone's hearts because many of the kids involved may not get anything for the holiday otherwise.

The event featured Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter

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## UCHS student completes solo flight over Blairsville

By Mark Smith  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Union County High School junior Lara Turner, 16, completed her first solo flight in a Cessna 172 Skyhawk on Thursday, Aug. 11, taking off from the Blairsville Airport for a short flight, reentering the landing pattern, and making a successful touchdown.

And she now holds the record as the youngest female student ever to solo from the Blairsville Municipal Airport.

An aspiring pilot's first solo flight is a milestone in his or her pursuit of a private pilot certificate and marks many hours of ground school study and certified flight instructor-accompanied flying practice. Only a pilot can know the exhilaration of flying solo for the first time.

"It felt awesome," Turner said. "I wasn't scared, no. I felt very prepared, and it really



Local flying enthusiast Lara Turner with Certified Flight Instructor Stephen Thompson. Photo by Mark Smith

couldn't have gone better. I was very proud of myself afterwards, and it was just the most incredible thing ever. I'll never forget it."

Turner is the recipient of a \$10,000 Ray Aviation Scholarship to be used toward

her flight training to jumpstart a career in aviation. She received the scholarship through Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 1211 based at the Blairsville airport. Her aviation scholarship

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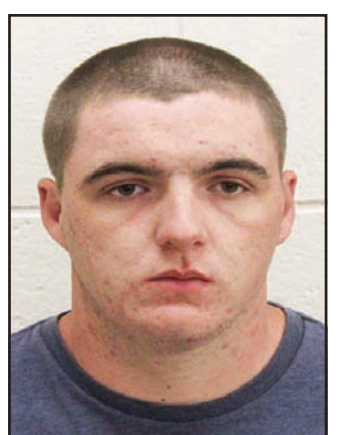
## Two charged with sexual exploitation of children

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

Deputies with the Union County Sheriff's Office made two arrests in recent weeks pertaining to separate incidents of alleged sexual exploitation of children.

The first arrest came after the Sheriff's Office initiated an investigation based on information that a 20-year-old Blairsville man was involved in a sexual relationship with a local minor female under the age of 16, Sgt. Marc Pilote with the UCSO Criminal Investigation Division said.

As a result of the investigation, Brady James Carpenter, 20, of Blairsville, was booked into the Union County Jail Aug. 15 on charges of statutory rape, sexual



Brady James Carpenter

exploitation of children and two counts of child molestation.

"Through our investigation and search warrants, we were able to find messages (between Carpenter and the underage female) that justified the charges."



Jonathan Luis Coronado

said Pilote, who noted the investigation bore out that Carpenter was aware the girl was under the legal age of consent.

Carpenter bonded out the day after his arrest on Aug. 16.

See UCSO Arrests, Page 3A

## Bentleys return from epic 'Great Loop' adventure

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

In nine months' time, Union County residents Tsali and Jacque Bentley completed an ambitious journey known as "America's Great Loop," circumnavigating the eastern U.S. and part of Canada by traversing an extensive list of waterways in their boat named "Compass Rose."

"The route includes the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway, the New York State Canals, the Canadian Canals, the Great Lakes, the inland rivers and the Gulf of Mexico," and can be done in as few as 5,250 miles or "extended to include thousands more miles," per greatloop.org.

For 5,780 miles, the Bentleys lived in a 40-foot



Tsali and Jacque Bentley on one of their many "Great Loop" stops, pictured here at Boca Chita Key, which is only accessible by boat. Photo/Submitted

Mainship 400 power boat, taking in the sights of America from a view that only the seaboard, rivers and lakes could provide, before finally

returning last month to their home here in Blairsville after three quarters of a year had passed.

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# Patriot Day – 9/11 Remembrance...from Page 1A

knows of 9/11 from books and stories from their parents.

And that tragic story is an incredibly important part of American culture that could be lost over time.

“That’s one of those days (that should be remembered),” Rowe said, “and (Fire Chief) David Dyer agrees with me on that, so, we do a collaborative effort every year, and we believe in doing it on September 11.

“We know it’s on Sunday morning this (year), but we’ll have people out in plenty of time to make their church

services and Sunday School classes. We’ll start at 8 a.m. ... and we’ll have the fire engines and the flags out again (at Meeks Park).”

The event will begin with the Union County High School Choir singing “Amazing Grace,” followed by the Blairsville Boy Scouts performing the Flag Ceremony, then the Union County Middle School Choir singing the National Anthem.

“We like to get the entire community involved,” Rowe said. “It’s important to get the

high school and middle school kids involved; just like we were talking about (regarding) history, a lot of them, if it weren’t for things like this, may or may not learn about

September 11.

“And so, it’s important to include them in events. Whether it’s this event or some other event, we enjoy having them be a part of our events and

our happenings if we can.”

After the National Anthem, Senior Pastor Rickey Powell of First Baptist Church will deliver a mini-sermon and a prayer, followed by short speeches from Union County

Fire Chief/EMA Director David Dyer and Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

Rowe, who will close out the ceremony, said the entire event should last no more than 50 minutes.

# Bentleys’ Adventure...from Page 1A



The Bentleys with supporters last month showing off their gold flag for having completed America’s Great Loop aboard their boat, “Compass Rose.” Photo/Facebook

Their epic sojourn on the waterways of America began on Nov. 13, 2021, but had been a long time in the making.

“I retired from Georgia Power April a year ago, and Jacque says, ‘Well, if you’re going to retire, you need to have a plan. You need to know what you’re going to do,’” Tsali said, with Jacque adding, “I said, ‘And if your plan is you’re coming home and telling me what to do, you better find another one, because that one’s not going to fly.’”

Tsali had already begun planning for retirement as early as 2019, and the couple attended their first America’s Great Loop Cruisers’ Association meeting that year in October. A week after they bought their boat in March 2020, COVID-19 forced the Bentleys to put their plans on hold.

So, Tsali worked from home until April 2021, when the world “evened out” and gave the Bentleys their chance.

With that, he retired, and they boarded their boat, the “Compass Rose” – christened as such by the previous owners, which the Bentleys decided to keep because of cherished memories from Tsali’s childhood aboard his father’s sailboat of the same name – and they set out for adventure.

For the first few months, the couple felt anxious about being in waters that they had never visited before. What’s more, they were both still learning.

Tsali may have had ample experience with sailboats after a long-gone trip crossing the Atlantic Ocean, but he had comparatively less knowledge

when it came to power boats. Jacque, by contrast, was a self-proclaimed newbie at sailing.

And boating, like everything else in life, comes with pros and cons. Storms can prove especially disastrous when they move buoy markers and tear up the tides, though the most unpleasant effects can usually be avoided by planning ahead.

“You do this seasonally,” explained Jacque. “You do the wintertime in Florida (when) there are no hurricanes. You’re doing the spring going up the East Coast. You do summer coming across Canada, and then fall coming back down the Mississippi.

“It’s done so that you can be in Canada in the summertime. You couldn’t be up there during the winter; they shut everything down. But then also so you miss the really, really bad weather.”

Last year, 139 people completed their own course around the Loop. Typically, fewer than 200 start, and it’s said that more people climb Mt. Everest and hike the Appalachian Trail than sail the Loop. Whether they decide to put a hold on halfway through or that boating just isn’t for them, plenty of people drop out, but the Bentleys weren’t ones to throw in the towel so easily.

Upon joining the America’s Great Loop Cruisers’ Association, boat owners can purchase a white flag with the AGLCA logo on it. After completing a first Loop, the white flag can be replaced or joined by a gold flag. The completion of a second trip around the Loop calls for a platinum or silver flag, and it’s estimated that less than 50 sailors have earned such bragging rights.

“You look for other boats that have these flags,” said Tsali, talking about how other “Loopers” tend to flock together.

It’s custom, too, for Loopers to create cards to hand out to new or passing friends so that they can keep in contact. The Bentleys’ card, for example, includes photos of the couple, their phone number and email address.

In a big, blue, three-ringed binder they have pages upon pages of similar cards, each representing a singular boat. Each boat represents at least one person, and although it’s “mostly old, retired couples,” other boats housed entire families.

And being social is one of the best parts of the Loop. While it’s possible to just drop anchor, most folks appreciate the safety of a marina at night where they can restock and stay close to land in case of a storm. It can get pricey, considering the most expensive ports demand \$6 per foot of boat space, but in a community built around hospitality, the connections are worth it.

Just as landlubbers celebrate cocktail parties and invite friends over for fellowship, it turns out that sailors do, too. These affectionately named “docktail parties” are key in establishing relationships that may prove

beneficial down the line, as Loopers often lend or receive valuable supplies or even pick up packages for one another.

The Bentleys themselves were popular because of one saying in particular: “‘Always try to go to docktails with a Southerner.’” Jacque recalled. “‘You most often will experience a feast, and you might go home with a gift.’”

Their experiences were well worth it, too, and for many reasons, not the least of which was the binder of new friends they made. To this day, the Bentleys keep in touch with fellow Loopers over a free app named Nebo, accepted by the AGLCA as its “official member locator.”

Both Bentleys enjoyed their trip so much, in fact, that they plan on making another Loop starting this November.

“It will be the exact same route, but we will make sure that we stop at different towns than we stopped in last time,” Jacque said, offering an exception for the stops that were the most interesting, most helpful, or otherwise enjoyable their first time around.

Much like highways on a road trip across the United States, waterways are a scenic method of moving from one destination to another, albeit at eight miles per hour. But that doesn’t mean the journey shouldn’t be savored.

Case in point, on their next excursion, the Bentleys are planning to take things much slower than they did the first time. They had been on somewhat of a time crunch, having arrived home four weeks before their son’s

wedding, so they had a rough idea of when their journey would end.

This time around, they hope to linger and soak in everything memorable. Locations have to offer, whether that’s visiting important landmarks in a big city like Chicago or New York, or learning more about the history of an area, like they did in New England regarding the War of 1812.

For the Bentleys, the Loop lasted nine months down to the day, as they returned on Aug. 13, 2022. They hope their next trip will take about a year to complete.

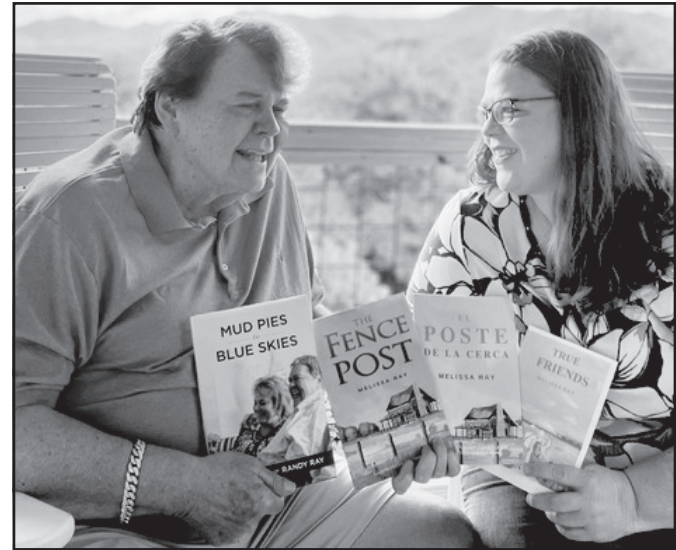
“You get to see everything from the perspective of the water, basically how it was seen 100, 200 years ago, because water was one of their main sources of transportation,” noted Tsali, who found it fascinating that he and his wife were traversing some of the same waterways previous generations used to chart the first maps of America.

Jacque mentioned that it was a staggering thought to realize that, at some of the attractions they viewed, “the history goes even back before (the point when) we think of America as our country.”

In particular, she recalled seeing a relic from a bygone age in St. Augustine, Florida, which is the longest continually inhabited American city of European descent. Beside the marina there, they witnessed a fort dating back to the days of the first Spanish conquerors, amazingly still standing.

“If you’re into history,” said Tsali, “this is really something.”

# New illustrated children’s book, True Friends, by local author



Author’s father Randy, inspiration for the series, and Melissa Ray.

“True Friends” is the new illustrated children’s book by Blairsville resident Melissa Ray.

Randy takes a job as a paperboy with his friend Charlie for the Middleton Gazette. Randy sees that his kindness, hard work and dedication to others provides him with an opportunity to compete and excel in the paper business (and in life). Along with his successes come many new friends, but are they ‘true friends’?

“True Friends: You Can Count Your True Friends on Your Thumbs” is a book that can be enjoyed by all ages. It reveals the power of love and friendship with a caution to be careful what you believe.

Melissa is an author, homeschooling mom, speaker and Belief Coach, who inspires wisdom in others through her four-part process of BELIEVE | SAY | DO | THINK, which transforms our thoughts and words into action, so we can live a courageous and confident life through Christ. Her book, “True Friends” is the second in a series of four books that speaks about why what we believe, say, do and think are so important.

“True Friends” by Melissa Ray is available on Amazon or on Melissa’s website at melissaray.com. She can be reached for speaking engagements or school visits.

# UCSO Arrests...from Page 1A

and he is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

In an unrelated incident, Pilote received a cyber tip last month as a member of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, a collaborative national law enforcement program that brings state and federal resources to bear in tracking down offenders who would abuse or exploit children online.

The tip led Pilote to seek search warrants against various online companies regarding the social media use and other internet activity of Jonathan Luis Coronado, 20, of Blairsville, who was believed to be in possession of child sexual abuse material, aka child pornography.

Following the initial phase of the investigation, the Sheriff's Office had enough probable cause to procure warrants for Coronado's arrest and search of his residence, where multiple devices were seized for forensic analysis by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Pilote said.

Coronado was arrested on Aug. 23 and charged with seven counts of sexual exploitation of children, and the case remains active. He bonded out of the Union County Jail the day of his arrest and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

"This investigation is part of the ongoing effort by the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force to identify those involved in the trade of child sexual abuse material," Pilote said. "The ICAC program, created by the U.S. Department of Justice, was developed in response to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the internet, the proliferation of

child sexual abuse material, and the heightened online activity by perpetrators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims."

Crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children are not new to Union County, though such crimes remain relatively uncommon here, Pilote said.

What does appear to be new, however, is the growing trend among today's youth toward engaging in increasingly explicit sexual language, at least in situations where the Sheriff's Office is called in to investigate, and this is where Pilote believes parents can make a difference.

Some parents might consider it a breach of privacy to closely monitor their children's internet and device usage, but Pilote said that, when it comes to protecting kids from situations and information they aren't prepared to handle, parents must know what their children are up to online.

Technologies that enable personal connections across the globe are truly marvelous inventions. Being able to keep in touch with loved ones, make new friends, conduct international commerce, attend meetings virtually, and view information and current events from almost anywhere at any time are treasured hallmarks of modern society.

But for children especially, there are many dangers involved in such arenas, and parents must remain vigilant if they wish to safeguard their kids before they are mature enough to confidently navigate such perils themselves, whether that be exposure to predatory adults, sexual content, or even age-inappropriate popular culture.

Once upon a time,

when children retreated to the inner sanctum of their homes, they were entering a walled environment wherein parents had near total control over what came into the household, including which people had access to their children behind closed doors.

The internet and the ubiquity of handheld devices, however, have changed all that. Now, everyone from perfect strangers to trusted members of a family's extended network may easily penetrate parental defenses that once shielded children from bad influences and exploitation.

When a child has access to the internet, he or she could be in contact with literally anyone, so a parent knowing with whom their kids are speaking and on what topics is not an invasion of privacy but a duty, Pilote said.

A parent who is aware of the conversations taking place via their child's devices, whether over social media, text messages or phone calls, is better positioned to discover inappropriate contact, which could save a child from being abused or getting into legal trouble themselves.

Furthermore, parents can build trust with their children by educating them on the dangers of internet use to prepare them to make decisions about who and what to engage when they get out on their own, and part of that preparation is making sure kids don't get in over their heads.

"Parents need to be checking their kids' devices and social media accounts," Pilote said. "Know who your kids are talking to. It's all too easy to 'add' somebody that you don't know online, and then the conversation starts to turn south, pictures are exchanged, and (damage is done)."

Pilote said that most of the cases he investigates involving local children being sexually exploited likely could have been prevented by parents regularly examining "what's on their kids' phones."

Such routine monitoring would also clue parents into whatever outside influences are being exerted on their children, as kids oftentimes lead separate lives impacted by peer groups, both real-world and digital.

"A majority of parents

don't even really know how kids talk," Pilote said. "Most of these teenagers are very explicit in their conversations, and not even just on a sexual level, but just the language they use (generally)."

"And when you do get to the sexual side, it's very graphic and detailed. It would honestly shock a majority of parents to know what their kids are actually saying. Monitoring your children's devices is definitely not an invasion of privacy; it's you looking out for the welfare of your kids."

"Kids don't understand that there are predators out there, that there are people who want to do them harm. And that's your role as a parent, to prevent that from happening."

For more information on the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, visit <https://icactaskforce.org/>.

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# Celebrate the 105th Anniversary of Reece's Birth



Byron Herbert Reece at his home in Union County, GA

You are invited to a birthday celebration! Come and join The Byron Herbert Reece Society as we celebrate the 105th anniversary of Byron Herbert Reece's birth! We remember

him as a beloved farmer, teacher, and author of four anthologies of poetry and two novels. We will gather on Saturday, Sept. 10, from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. for a time of celebrating his life and literary works.

Byron Herbert Reece was born on Sept. 14, 1917, the fourth of six children of Juan and Emma Reece. The Cherokee name for Reece's birthplace was "The Place of the Morning Star." That site is now covered by the waters of Lake Trahlyta at Vogel State Park. His family moved a short distance down the creek to the home where his mother had grown up and is the current site of the Reece Farm and Heritage Center, where he lived the rest of his life, farmed the land that he loved, and wrote the

poems that we love today. He has been described as possibly the best writer of his time.

Reece learned to read with his mother's readings from the Bible. It is clear that his writing of ballads was greatly inspired by the rhythm of Psalms in the King James version of the Bible. "Hub" Reece and his brother T.J. and sisters Eva and Kate had to walk the eight miles a day to the Choestoe Elementary School and back. His first-grade teacher recognized how advanced he was and promoted him to third grade. He spent much of his time listening to recitations of upper class students. He entered Union County High School in 1931, nine miles away. He had already built a solid reputation

for being extremely interested in literature and poetry. He graduated No. 2 in his class of 19. Union County High School Principal James Nicholson recognized the genius before him and recommended him to Young Harris College as a writer. After graduation from Union County, he remained on the farm working to help with his family's financial and health needs as he continued his writing. He had published 31 poems before attending Young Harris College. He became a member of the Quill Club where Dr. Lufkin Dance became his mentor. He didn't graduate from Young Harris. After the beginning of World War II, he returned to the family farm to again help his family and continue writing. He later returned to Young Harris College as a Professor of Literature.

In her introduction of "The Bitter Berry: The Life of Byron Herbert Reece," a friend and colleague of Reece, Dr. Bettie Sellers, notes that in 1945, Reece sent this six line, untitled poem to the "Progressive Farmer." It was published in their Letters to the Editor:



Reece writing at night after working on Farm

These hills contain me  
as a field, a stone,  
Yet I contain them also;  
when I fare  
Beyond their borders  
and am all alone  
I need but think of them

to see them there,  
Each hill, each hollow,  
each familiar place  
As clearly imaged  
as a loved one's face.  
~By Byron Herbert  
Reece

## BPD Duck Derby...from Page 1A



Rubber ducks from the derby fundraiser being corralled for collection in the Butternut Creek at the Farmers Market Saturday. As Admiral Duckbar would say, "It's a trap!"

and other officers geared up in water shoes to see the rubber ducks released into the creek by a tractor, after which they waited at the end to gather the ducks in the order that they

crossed the finish line.

Blairsville PD had a special helper on Saturday in young resident Blair Hoover, and local nonprofit Safe Pet Project was also there to support

the effort with members serving as "duck wranglers."

Afterward, Chief Baxter could barely contain his excitement on what happened that day from knowing that the special occasion to help the children of the area is coming up just around the corner.

"This year we have raised nearly over \$30,000 with donations and everything so far, so it has been a very successful year," Baxter said. "I can't say thank you enough to our residents, our visitors and our businesses; the community has been outstanding to us.

"Even though it's called Shop With A Cop, I would rather call it 'Shop With The Community,' because we live in a giving place that wants to help everybody. The people love it, and we love them.

"Without the community and support from other resources, we would not be able to pull (Shop With A Cop) off. We have raised enough money that we are going to be able to take an extra 25 kids with a total of 150 shopping (in December) this year, and we are very proud of that."

## Turner Solo Flight...from Page 1A



(L-R) Stephen Thompson, Karen Turner, Lara Turner, Larry Turner and EAA Blairsville Chapter President Cal Wolcott at the Blairsville Municipal Airport. Photo by Mark Smith

is the first ever to be awarded through EAA Chapter 1211 in Blairsville. Chapter 1211 President Cal Wolcott said they chose Turner because of her age, and she, of all the applicants, seemed the most likely to succeed in completing her goals in aviation.

Flight training doesn't end with a private pilot certificate for someone like Turner, who aspires to become an airline transport pilot with a major airline.

After becoming certified to fly general aviation single-engine aircraft, she'll need to achieve an instrument rating, then a multi-engine rating, then a commercial pilot rating, and, finally, an airline transport pilot certification.

It is strongly recommended by major airlines that an aspiring transport pilot attain a bachelor's degree, plus a certified flight instructor certificate in order to gain the minimum 1,500 logged flying hours needed to qualify with a major airline.

So, to put it mildly, Turner has her work cut out to be successful. But, at her young age and with the support of her family, well, the sky is the limit. Also in her favor is the fact that pilots are in short supply right now, with airlines bending over backward to attract new talent.

Turner's CFI, Stephen Thompson, who has worked with her up to this point and will work with her through both her accompanied and solo cross-country and night-flying training, is a Delta pilot in command who flies Boeing 757 and 767 jet aircraft out of Atlanta.

Her uncle, Jay Mitchell, is a Delta pilot as well, based in Jacksonville, Florida, who

is helping Turner to achieve her dream; and her older sister, Blair, has a master's degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and works in aviation operations for Universal Air.

"Lara is successful because she's got two hugely supportive, amazing parents in Karen and Larry (Turner) in all of her endeavors, her academics, her sports, aviation," Thompson said. "And when you've got your (family) and friends backing you up, that certainly helps to get there.

"Learning to fly – that's a big achievement. It's no easy task. Because of the number of things that you have to learn, it takes the average student about 60 hours to learn to fly."

Turner said she is considering Delta's PROPEL pilot career path, a mentorship program that grooms students through college and into a career as a pilot with Delta.

"Hopefully, this will be an inspiration for other youth in the area to get involved in aviation," Thompson said, because aviation, due to the prohibitive cost, seems like an unachievable, out-of-reach fantasy to most people. But it's not, and Lara Turner is living proof of that.

"Since early childhood, Lara was naturally athletic," Turner's mother Karen said. "She just had a need for speed, loved go-karting, and she's had several dirt bikes over the years.

"She is truly an example of someone who follows her dreams and doesn't allow labels to get in her way – just because the toy didn't come from the pink aisle in Walmart doesn't mean it won't be fun or worth exploring."

"And then," continued Karen, "when she was 14, we brought her here to the airport, and she went up in the air for her first flight lesson. At that point, it was over; this was going to be her future. She got out of the airplane and said, 'That was the greatest thing I've ever done.'"

Karen is hopeful that her daughter's solo flight can be the inspiration for an aviation pathway in the UCHS Science, Technology, Engineering and Math program, which is where Lara was informed by teacher Alecia Frizzell about the scholarship that she then applied for and won.

The following are excerpts from Turner's application essay:

"It was May 3, 2020 – I was 14 and about to climb into the left seat and onto the shoulders of giants. The local forecast was ideal conditions for my first lesson in flight. Filled with eager anticipation, we took to the skies and my world was forever changed."

"Reading this you might be thinking, 'This guy is very outgoing and clearly has a passion for flying.' You would be correct, except that I am a 16-year-old female who has never allowed her gender to define her passions."

"Aviation is a world that has been and remains dominated by men. My athletic ability, adventurous spirit, and competitive personality (not to mention my academic excellence) will bode well in my future plans to become a pilot."

"I want to be a role model for every young female who also dreams of one day having the best view from their office."

Blue skies, Ms. Turner!