

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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50th Anniversary Sorghum Festival promises lots of mountain country fun

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Blairsville Sorghum Festival will kick off its dual-weekend extravaganza of traditional mountain music, dancing, games and sorghum syrup this weekend at Meeks Park.

Since 1969, the Blairsville Sorghum Festival has been a huge draw for people, not just from all over Georgia, but from all over the country. They come because they want to see what life in the North Georgia Mountains is all about.

The festival will open with the traditional making of sorghum syrup at 9 a.m. on Saturday, Oct. 12, at Meeks Park, and the annual Sorghum

Festival Parade will roll through downtown Blairsville at 11 a.m. that same morning.

The Tom Floyd Band and the Rhythm & Fire Band will round out the daytime musical entertainment for Saturday, followed by a rootin', tootin' square dance at the Old Middle School Gym featuring dance caller Mike Arnold at 8 p.m.

Young Miss Nealy Webster and the Country River Band will each perform during the daytime on Sunday, Oct. 13, at Meeks Park.

The second weekend of the festival will begin on Saturday, Oct. 19, with the customary making of the sorghum syrup, and Brian Loy & Paradise56, as well as John Nix and the Country Cousins,

will take the stage on Saturday, Oct. 19, right there in Meeks Park.

There will be another authentic Saturday night square dance at the Old Middle School Gym, again called by Mike Arnold at 8 p.m. on Oct. 19.

Kevin Goodwin, Johnny Carroll with By His Grace, and Dean Parker with Mountain Breeze will perform during the day on Sunday, Oct. 20, on the last day of the 50th Anniversary Sorghum Festival at Meeks Park.

Most of the performers for the festival are Blairsville-Union County natives or grew up nearby in the North Georgia Mountains.

Music and dancing aren't See *Sorghum Festival*, Page 2A



The 50th Anniversary Blairsville Sorghum Festival will begin on Saturday, with plenty of syrup, music, games and vendors for the thousands of people who will attend in 2019.

City Council mulls accepting treated water discharge, annexation request

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Point to Point Environmental requested approval from the Blairsville City Council to discharge treated wastewater into the city sewer system at the regular council meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 1.

The company was hired by the county at the behest of the Underground Storage Tank Management Program of the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to fix a petroleum leak that occurred at the main yard of the county Road Department on Glenn Gooch Bypass.

Senior Project Manager J. Kevin Brown said the contaminated groundwater is now being treated in a fixed-



Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and City Clerk Kaye McCann in the Oct. 1 meeting of the Blairsville City Council.

base, temporary remediation system installed at the yard by P2P Environmental.

The treated water exiting the temporary remediation

system is clean per EPD standards, Brown said, but it is currently being transported to a location near Atlanta, which is Photo by Mark Smith

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Sheriff Mason advocates for New Hope Counseling to treat addiction

By Shawn Jarrard
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Substance abuse is a major problem affecting not only communities around the state and nation but also right here in Union County.

When abused, drugs and alcohol act as catalysts tearing individual lives and families apart. Once the problem persists for long enough and becomes pervasive enough, whole communities can begin to suffer from the very real consequences of chemical addiction.

A frontline witness to the problem at home is Sheriff Mack Mason, who after almost two terms in office has watched with growing concern as more and more people find themselves behind bars for drug



Sheriff Mack Mason

and alcohol-related offenses.

He estimates that, at any given time, the population of the 54-bed Union County Jail consists of more than 50% drug and alcohol-related offenders.

The jail can hold up to 70 inmates with portable bedding

if needed, as is often the case, but after 70, the sheriff has to start sending inmates to other facilities and housing neighboring counties to house local inmates. This in itself is a costly endeavor at \$35 to \$45 a day per inmate, not counting transportation costs.

But Sheriff Mason believes there's another, better way.

If residents struggling with substance abuse can find treatment and overcome their addictions, Mason believes that he and his deputies would see a dramatic reduction in the number of new and repeat offenders committing drug and alcohol-related crimes, not to mention fewer people waiting in jail to enter the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment

See *New Hope*, Page 7A

Johnny Appleseed hands out apples and information at Farmers Market

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Farmers Market hosted the ever-popular Johnny Appleseed Day on Saturday, Oct. 5, to inform people about the importance of apples in local agriculture.

Vann Ross was with his grandson Kody Medeiros to spread the story of Johnny Appleseed, with both of them dressed up to play the part.

"I have been doing this for four years now, and I didn't know a whole lot about him at first," Ross said. "I knew a little bit about five or so years ago, but I really learned a lot when I started doing this at the Farmers Market.

"The thing I didn't know was that Johnny Appleseed was a missionary, and what a way to spread the Gospel right here in our own county.

"A lot of why I do this is because I enjoy the kids. For the most part, when you talk to



Vann Ross and grandson Kody Medeiros both dressed up as Johnny Appleseed for an educational event at the Farmers Market on Oct. 5.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

kids, they know who Johnny Appleseed is, but when you talk to parents, eight out of 10 of them never know. I tell them to talk to their moms and dads about it.

"It's great to meet people, to tell the story of Johnny

Appleseed, and I just love it and I will do it until the Lord calls me home."

Part of Ross' costume was a pot on his head, which perfectly fit the character.

See *Johnny Appleseed*, Page 7A

Gowder, Heaton trial temporarily delayed due to Atlanta murder trial

By Linda Erbele
North Georgia News

The federal prescription drug trial of Mike Gowder and Dr. James Heaton has been temporarily delayed after being scheduled to begin Tuesday, Oct. 8, in the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville, though jury selection is still expected to begin this week.

At press time, Heaton's attorney, Don Samuel, remained busy defending another client in a high-profile murder case that has lasted longer than expected - hence the delay.

Samuel is the lead attorney for Robert "Chip" Olsen, a former DeKalb County police officer charged in the March 2015 killing of a naked, unarmed man.

Jury selection for the United States v. John Michael Gowder and Dr. John Michael Heaton will begin no sooner than Thursday, Oct. 10, according to the U.S. Courthouse in



Gainesville, with potential for further delays for jury deliberations in the DeKalb County trial.

Scheduling a trial date, especially one with multiple defendants, involves the close coordination of many

prosecutors. For example, federal prosecutors have previously notified the judge of other commitments they have in November, as have the defense teams.

The October date for the See *Trial*, Page 7A

Indian Summer Festival welcomes guests and cooler temps in Suches

By Todd Forrester
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

SUCHES - The 42nd Annual Indian Summer Festival drew visitors from across the Southeast to Suches and Union County over the weekend.

"Indian Summer" is a phrase describing the final stint of warm weather before autumn sets in for good each year, though festivalgoers received their first real taste of fall over the weekend with temperatures in the 60s, a cool breeze and cloudy conditions.

Once again, the Run Above the Clouds kicked off the festival with Georgia's only 10K race above 3,000 feet in elevation. At the conclusion of the 8:30 a.m. road race, the

42nd Annual Indian Summer Festival got underway behind Woody Gap School.

According to Woody Gap's Althea Cantrell, the festival, along with her Local Studies booth, benefited from one of its strongest outings in recent history.

"Things went really good," she said. "We had some clouds (on Sunday), so the weather cooperated with us a little better on Saturday, but overall, I think it's one of the best years that we've had.

"Not only our booth, but the teachers' booth, the concessions and everyone had one of their best festivals in quite a while."

The festival had something for everyone - arts, crafts, food, antiques,

pottery, leather, homemade goods, games and more - all while offering folks glimpses into a simpler time and what makes life unique in the small mountain community of Suches.

With surrounding towns all attempting to keep up in a fast-paced world, Suches still provides that close-knit, rural atmosphere, which is why there is no better locale to host an event that showcases the lifestyle of the area's earliest settlers and their Native American neighbors.

This year's festival attracted visitors from as far away as the City of Angels, with Tim Larkin of Los Angeles, California, attending his first Indian Summer Festival after recently relocating to the area.

"My mom moved here over a year ago, and I've been here for about seven months now and love everything about it," Larkin said after purchasing two homemade pies from a festival vendor. "It's a beautiful area with awesome weather, and everyone seems like amazing people, too.

"My first reaction was how small the school was. Coming from Los Angeles to a place where there's only two people in the graduating class was kind of a culture shock.

"But what's really cool is how a lot of the proceeds go to the school and how much everyone here helps out the school and the students. It makes me feel really good knowing that buying a pie might help a kid go to college."



Attendees of the 42nd Annual Indian Summer Festival participating in a Cake Walk behind Woody Gap School on Saturday.

Following the festival on Saturday night was the annual square dance at the Suches Community Center. Beginning at 8 p.m. and featuring live music, the square dance has

become synonymous with the Indian Summer Festival and is starting to develop as a tradition all its own.

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Welcome Visitors to the

50th Anniversary

Blairsville

SORGHUM

FESTIVAL