

North Georgia News

3 Sections 26 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Sorghum Festival continues one more weekend

By Shawn Jarrard
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The Blairsville Sorghum Festival welcomed thousands of guests during its first weekend in 2024, wowing people in Meeks Park with over a hundred hand-picked vendors, hours of entertaining Sorghum Games, live music and old-time demonstrations – all for just \$5 to get in the gate.

Now in its 55th year, the festival is a family-forward affair that steadfastly promotes the agricultural heritage of the area, with aims of passing down through the generations the traditions that made Union County what it is today. And in that spirit, children 12 and under get in free.

Hosted by the dedicated group of local volunteers known as the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers, the festival will continue this weekend, Oct. 19 & 20, kicking off as always at 9 a.m. with the making of sweet sorghum syrup down at the big cooking pan next to Sorghum Field.

Sorghum Field is where most of the action takes place, including pony rides and bungee bouncing for kids. That's also where people will find the music stage to enjoy live entertainment from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday and Sunday.

People will want to get there first thing on Saturday to watch the talented students of Blairsville Dance Project perform starting at 9 a.m.

Then there's the

spectacle of the Sorghum Games, a perennial crowd-pleaser that always fills the bleachers around the staging area each day of the festival.

Games begin at 1 p.m. with a Biscuit Eating Contest, followed by Rock Throwing, Pole Climbing, Log Sawing and Horseshoe Throwing – all symbolic of the area's agricultural roots such as clearing a field for planting and celebrating the successful conclusion of a harvest.

As she has for years, locally famous Libby Stevens emceed the Biscuit Eating Contest, entertaining spectators with historical anecdotes and comical observations while recruiting contestants from the audience.

See Sorghum Festival, Page 4A



Cooked and bottled live in Meeks Park, sorghum syrup is just \$15 a quart at the Blairsville Sorghum Festival. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Library renovations lead to four new study rooms



Commissioner Lamar Paris and MRLS Director Heath Lee during the Oct. 8 tour of the new study rooms installed at the library. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

The Union County Public Library has made some subtle changes to the beloved facility in the wake of feedback received from the community and recent space usage evaluations. This

includes four new study rooms across the building, now open and available for use.

"We made the determination that we should ask the Library Board if they were good with the idea of us converting those spaces to individual and group study rooms," said Mountain

Regional Library System Director Heath Lee, adding that "multiple conversations" with the board and Union County Government just a few months ago got the project off the ground.

Half of the funding came from the county via local SPLOST funds, and half came from a Major Renovation and Repair Grant provided by the Georgia Public Library Service, for a total cost of approximately \$65,000.

Essentially, the rooms are not additions so much as renovations. Two of the rooms, located side-by-side next to the magazine section, were created from a larger "hospitality room," Branch Manager Marlene Cannon pointed out during a tour of the changes last week.

"They just cut it in half basically and made study rooms," said Union County Commissioner Lamar Paris, who joined the tour group Oct. 8 in checking out the new rooms.

See Library Renovations, Page 2A

Hundreds honor local heritage in town parade



Shores & Moor won the Grand Prize in Saturday's Sorghum Festival Parade float-building contest. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

The Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade rolled through Downtown Blairsville on Saturday, delighting spectators with fall- and local heritage-themed floats, classic cars and candy for children amid a beautiful blue backdrop of an

autumn morning. Blairsville Police shut down traffic along the parade route to make it a safe event for families and other guests, with the Union County Sheriff's Office leading the parade and the Union County Fire Department taking up the rear.

Union County High Wrestling Coach Michael

Smith-Foot, aka Coach Foot, served as parade emcee. With help from wife Holly, also a local educator, Coach Foot announced the history of the Sorghum Festival dating to 1969 as well as parade participants and float contest winners.

Local dock-building See Sorghum Parade, Page 10A

Early in-person voting in full swing now thru Nov. 1

By Shawn Jarrard
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Advance voting, also known as early in-person voting, began on Tuesday, Oct. 15, for the 2024 General Election.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there will be three

weeks of early in-person voting running weekdays between Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

There was no in-person voting on Monday, Oct. 14, due to the federal and state holiday

of Columbus Day.

All in-person early voting is taking place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Union County Voting Center at 33 Roscoe Collins Drive, located across from Union County High School off the Glenn Gooch Bypass.

See Early Voting, Page 2A

UCSO brings awareness with scam and fraud class

By Shawn Jarrard
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More than 100 residents attended the Union County Sheriff's Office Scam & Fraud Awareness Class – the second of the year – inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center on Friday, Oct. 11.

Four speakers presented information on a wide range of topics related to scams and fraudulent activity, with a primary focus on elder abuse and exploitation. The information was particularly pertinent to nearly everyone in the room, as the vast majority of attendees were senior citizens.

UCSO Inv. Bob Calamari, who is dedicated to investigating financial crimes, reported that local fraud cases have jumped precipitously in the last year.

From January 2022 through November 2023, residents reported 55 instances of fraud toward the elderly. Conversely, over the much shorter time span of November 2023 through August 2024, the Sheriff's Office handled 94 fraud cases involving seniors.

Some of the increase in



People can avoid being scammed by arming themselves with knowledge, which is why the Sheriff's Office keeps up its public outreach efforts. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

reported fraud may be due to efforts by the Sheriff's Office to raise awareness about the issue in the community, removing the stigma about coming forward to report a scam. But it's clear that, locally and nationally, scams are on the rise.

Calamari went over a representative sample of scams

that people can watch out for, such as scams involving PayPal, grandparent scams, IRS scams, Social Security scams, romance scams and others.

He handed out The Georgia Consumer Protection Guide for Older Adults, which See Scam Class, Page 3A

Blairsville man arrested in domestic-related shooting

News Special

HIWASSEE – A Blairsville man was arrested Sunday in connection with a domestic-related double shooting that sent him and another man to the hospital Friday night. Both men were released from medical care over the weekend, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Caleb Avery Hughes, 24, has been charged with three counts of aggravated assault, with other charges pending, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The shooting occurred Oct. 11 at the Sand Bar &

Grille on US 76 in Hiwassee. The Sheriff's Office responded to the bar a little after 11 p.m. on Friday, where deputies discovered two males who had been shot.

According to the initial investigation, the shooting took place after Hughes allegedly forced his way into a vehicle containing three passengers in the parking lot of the Sand Bar. One of the passengers was his estranged girlfriend.

Inside the vehicle, Hughes shot a male victim in the leg with a handgun, and a

See Shooting, Page 4A



Caleb Avery Hughes



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Early Voting...from Page 1A

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Union County has 11 voting precincts: Blairsville, Jones Creek, Choestoe, Owlton, Coosa, Pat Colwell, Dooley, Suches, Gum Log, Trackrock and Ivy Log. The address of each is available at <https://www.unioncountygga.gov/government/elections-voter-registration/board-of-election/>.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested inside the Voting Center now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Voting Center.

Absentee ballots began mailing Oct. 7. They can be returned using the official Voting Center drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Voting Center through 7 p.m. Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote in this election was Monday, Oct. 7.

Residents may visit

<https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there is just one contested county-level seat up for grabs in the 2024 General Election: the office of Sole Commissioner.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap annual property assessment increases for taxing purposes.

If passed, the proposed constitutional amendment would create a new homestead exemption to cap assessment increases on homesteaded properties at 3% annually beginning on Jan. 1, 2025.

State lawmakers enabled the referendum this year by passing House Bill 581 and House Resolution 1022, with an "opt-out" provision for local governments.

The proposed cap comes as welcome news to many homeowners, who have seen the values of their properties rise dramatically in recent years due largely to an inflated real estate market driven by COVID-19 pandemic-era relocations to the area.

For homes receiving the exemption starting next year, 2024 would stand as the base-year assessed value. Moving forward, the home would then reflect two values: the homesteaded value that is capped for taxing purposes, and the actual fair market value as it changes over time.

"The base year value may increase each year up to the inflationary rate determined by the State Revenue Commissioner, which may utilize the Consumer Price Index," according to information from the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

So, annual values could increase from north of 0% to the 3% cap for homesteaded properties, though assessed values would still be subject to accounting for "substantial property changes," which could result in increases or decreases in value depending on what has changed.

If a homestead-exempted property is subsequently sold, then the base-year assessed value for the new homesteader would be set at the assessed value for the year immediately preceding the sale.

A homestead exemption reduces the amount of property taxes a homeowner owes on his or her legal residence, and according to ACCG, "this new floating homestead exemption is in addition to and not in lieu of all non-floating homestead exemptions."

HB 581 also creates a new 1% local option sales tax that could be imposed for property tax relief. But for the new tax to be put in place, it would have to be supported by voters in a local referendum.

The bill does several other things related to property and sales tax reform, such as improving the sales ratio study methodology by the Department of Audits and Accounts, removing confusing tax estimates from annual assessment notices and more.

General Election ballots also feature a statewide referendum on raising the amount of tangible personal property tax exemption from \$7,500 to \$20,000. If passed, state law would be amended effective Jan. 1, 2025, to apply to all tax years beginning on or after that date.

State Rep. Mike Cheokas (R-Americus) sponsored the bill that created this referendum, saying, "I hope this will be the first step in reducing the burden of high taxes and prohibitive regulations that adversely affect businesses in Georgia."

Proponents of these measures believe they would provide much-needed taxpayer relief in an era of prolonged inflation, while opponents have expressed concern that they could make it more difficult to raise revenues needed to effectively operate local governments and school systems.

Library Renovations...from Page 1A



Guests of the library find all kinds of reason to use the facility, from checking out books to participating in any number of programs hosted by the library. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Right across from the former meeting room is the newest addition. An old storage room that was "unfinished" will find new purpose as another study room once the furniture gets moved in. Complete with a closet, the room will house a desk and chairs like its fellows in the coming weeks.

The final new addition was to the Heritage Room, where some library visitors go to research local history and genealogy. Lee speculated that the Heritage Room in particular sees the most traffic, so a closet was converted into another study room so that more people could occupy it.

"This had some shelving and newspapers in there, and just some odds and ends, so we cleaned it out and put access so that we could see inside the room," said Lee, gesturing to the window installed into the side wall.

The three-month process of remodeling has turned out to be worth it. Cannon and Lee

report that the study rooms have seen an outstanding amount of use, with just the two larger rooms experiencing approximately 259 occupations in the last three months.

"We track it each day, and we always guesstimate because sometimes people are in and out," Cannon said.

It was Cannon, too, who detailed how the rooms will benefit the public, though to acknowledge that requires realizing how busy the library is. It's not just about checking out books; people come to the library for meetings, public outreach programs, children's events and more.

"We do a lot of things here, and we are consistently busy. Our community loves this library a lot," noted Cannon, highlighting even more incentive to create the perfect environment for patrons.

While there are cozy little nooks and crannies people can go to sit down and read or work, Cannon used to have to

warn folks sometimes about noise levels, especially during kids' programs. Now, there are even quieter spaces to occupy, and for things like Zoom meetings or phone calls, this means slightly more privacy.

"This is a good time to reacquaint people with the library," suggested Paris. "A lot of people still think a library is a waste of money, and they don't understand that they still offer a good service to a lot of people."

Residents interested in seeing the new study rooms for themselves should stop by the Union County Public Library at 303 Hunt Martin Street in Blairsville, open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Saturday hours are 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., and on Sundays, the library is closed.

For more information, visit <https://www.mountainlibrary.com/>.

Daughters of the American Revolution October Meeting



DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Daughters of the American Revolution celebrated at their October meeting held at the Union County Community Center. The Chapter celebrated the documentation of the rich history of the local Choestoe community, Native American Heritage, Wreaths Across America, and Breast Cancer Awareness. Old Unicoi Trail daughters welcomed a dozen new, prospective, transferred, and reinstated daughters. This 'small but mighty' DAR Chapter continues to grow and contribute to the communities it serves.

The history of the Choestoe community of Union County, Appalachia, and the Cherokee were topics of great interest to daughters. Local author JR Collins spoke on his five books of historical fiction and how he absorbed the stories told around him when growing up in Choestoe. He also shared an exhibit of Cherokee artifacts collected from

the area.

Committee table topics supplemented the program and included relevant information on Breast Cancer Awareness Month of October; November's Native American Heritage Month including Native American literature, the Trail of Tears, and Funk Heritage Center in Waleska; and the upcoming December 14th Wreaths Across America celebration at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Focusing on committee work, Regent Barbara Weaver of Murphy introduced reports by chairs Pam Hodges Greene of Hiwassee, Teresa Ann Reinhardt Atchison of Young Harris, and Sandy Redding Bell, Annette Hopgood and Linda Carr of Blairsville. Topics reported on included the Historic Preservation's committee support for the renovation of the Berrong House in Towns County; daughters' contributions to Little Free Libraries; 'Book Club in a Basket'; Constitution Week wrap-up; Georgia State Society's Fall Forum; Chapter Handbook; and Membership.

Blue Ridge Mountain SAR Chapter President Stephen Weaver updated daugh-



JR Collins

ters on joint activities. Becky London, Treasurer of Morganton supervised the day's fundraising for Wreaths Across America and white socks were collected for veterans at the local VA Center – an annual Chapter project. Daughters enjoyed lunch at The View Grill in the Union County Community Center.

The DAR promotes historic preservation, education, and patriotism and represents over one million Daughters. A woman 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution is eligible to join. Email oldunicoitrail@gmail.com to attend a meeting or join. The next regular Chapter meeting is December 14th.

Scam Class...from Page 1A

he described as an excellent resource provided by the Consumer Protection Division of the Georgia Attorney General's Office.

The guide contains a comprehensive list of scams and scam red flags, letting people know how to recognize and avoid fraudulent activity, whether by phone, online, email, text message, snail mail or any number of other ways that creative scammers try to get access to unwitting victims.

Generally, Calamari told people that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is, such as promises of prize winnings. And if any previously unknown party ever requests money via gift cards and cryptocurrency, it's a scam, no matter the reason they're calling.

Criminals are smart, and they're adapting by the day, so people must be on guard against deceptive tactics like online password "phishing" and the "spoofing" of email addresses and phone numbers to trick people into thinking someone official is contacting them.

As an example of spoofing, Calamari said caller IDs will sometimes show "Medicare" calling, but he pointed out that "it is against the law in Georgia to contact you concerning Medicare purchase or upgrade," so residents can confidently hang up the phone.

There are many other types of scams, and he advised people to "be alert and vigilant" in protecting themselves.

Calamari said scam victims should not delay in calling him at 706-439-6066, ext. 3119, as "time is important" when it comes to investigating - and hopefully recovering from - scams, which are difficult to prosecute based on the overwhelmingly international nature of such crimes.

Cassie McVay of Tri-State Tech Support Inc. was the next presenter, and she offered many strategies "for keeping yourself protected online in 2024."

McVay recommended that people use a password manager to store passwords - never using a single password for multiple sites and updating passwords regularly - and she said residents could also simply write all their passwords down and keep them in a safe.

She went over fraudulent

pop-ups like the "Microsoft" computer locking scam that tells people to contact tech support to resolve a fake issue, and she said that the best thing to do in those situations is to close out of such pop-ups or restart computers.

Among other tips, McVay said people should always update their computer software whenever prompted, as built-in operating systems today are very good at protecting people as long as updates are regularly applied.

People with questions may call 706-994-6183 to contact Tri-State Tech Support, which can also assist people with their computers if they've experienced a security breach.

Local Medicare Specialist Susanne Johnson offered information about Medicare, the federal health insurance program for people 65 or older.

For many reasons, senior citizens are often the targets of scams; they've amassed assets after a lifetime of work, are more trusting, experience cognitive decline from aging, etc. This puts Medicare recipients at particular risk of being defrauded unless they remain "alert and vigilant."

Johnson reiterated that only previously authorized individuals may legally contact a Medicare recipient about their plan, such as the agent who helped them join, so if anyone gets a call about Medicare from someone they don't know, Johnson said they should "just hang up on them."

She invited people in attendance to call her at 706-897-3551 if they had any questions about Medicare scams.

Closing out the presentation, Regional Security Officer T.K. Gordon of United Community Bank touched on multiple common scams and reasons why scams often go unreported, such as embarrassment of victims or fear of having independence removed in the case of seniors.

Gordon said it was the statutory duty of all financial institutions to prevent fraud and report suspicious transactions, but this usually requires the assistance of customers, so he invited people to contact their local bank branch directly if they have any concerns about suspicious activity.

He also provided a detailed info packet and enumerated several facts about



On Oct. 11, local technology specialist Cassie McVay offered an in-depth look at the ways people can keep themselves - and their computers - safe from scammers. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

scams, highlighting that people over 60 are indeed the largest cohort of scam victims, and that the Atlanta Metro Area - which he considers Union County a part of - is No. 2 nationally for identity theft.

In terms of scams, Gordon told attendees to watch out for fake emails in particular by scrutinizing email addresses, and he said to never rely on phone numbers provided in emails to call a financial institution.

He said not to click email links unless a sender can be verified and noted that people should avoid allowing anyone to "remotely" fix their computer issues, as "Microsoft Tech Support NEVER contacts anyone."

Another scam to avoid is so-called "check washing," where checks are intercepted before reaching their intended recipients. Intercepted checks can be made blank and re-written before being cashed and are often "bought/sold/traded via the (dark web) or social media."

For this reason, he advised people to avoid using outdoor Post Office boxes - like the trademark blue ones - that can easily be entered by criminals, and instead walk mailed checks into the Post Office or send via a service like FedEx or UPS.

Switching to cryptocurrency, Gordon said not all crypto investments are fraudulent, but buying crypto via an ATM is always a scam, whether directed to by a third party or simply for the major fees applied by machine operators.

Gordon covered other scams, but generally, he said people can protect themselves by knowing their local banker, never rushing into financial decisions thrust upon them by

strangers, and reaching out to people they trust if they have questions about a situation that could be a scam.

The Union County Sheriff's Office will be hosting other public awareness classes to continue educating the community about how to prevent themselves and loved ones from becoming victims of scams, so stay tuned for future date announcements.

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Sorghum Festival...from Page 1A



Austin Herrera won the Biscuit Eating Contest the opening day of the Sorghum Festival.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Ten brave souls – nine men ranging in age from High School student to senior citizen and one woman – stepped forward to eat their way to glory on Saturday, Oct. 12. Only one would come out on top 15 minutes after the announcement of “Ready, Set, Sop!”

Austin Herrera, 18, of the Blue Ridge area, won Saturday’s eating contest. He was part of a winning Log Sawing team last year, and he figured he’d try his hand – and stomach – at biscuit eating this year, being first to chow down five biscuits while managing to keep it all down.

“If it was just the biscuits alone, I could have eaten more,” Herrera said, noting that the sorghum syrup was tasty but hard to put away quickly. “The syrup adds to it, which makes it a little bit more difficult, because I had to use water to get it down.”

Added Herrera, “I love (the Sorghum Festival). It’s a great place, you get to meet a lot of people, make new friends, hang out, and just have fun.”

Christian Casteel, 24, in town from Columbus for a wedding and to visit a friend, was one of more than a dozen Pole Climbing contestants. He nearly made it to the top of the 20-foot pole, reaching up to claim 19 feet before sliding down, exhausted and sore all over.

And his effort was good enough for First Place Saturday.

“I’ve always loved climbing; I’ve been climbing trees since I was little,” Casteel said by way of explaining his success. “So, anytime there’s a climbing anything, I always try to do it.”

Added Casteel, “I’ve had a great time. It’s my first time here – a really cool festival, lots of diverse booths. It’s cool to see the sorghum syrup and how it’s made. This is my first time trying the syrup, and I love it – I’m a big fan.”

Of course, people will want to visit the multiple historical demonstrations that will be available this weekend, showing guests how once-homemade staples like soap, pottery, blacksmithing items and even moonshine were made back in the day.

Stanley Ferguson of Ferguson Pottery traveled up from Gillsville with his family, including his 90-year-old mom Mary, to sell distinct pottery and perform live turning demonstrations throughout the festival. He’s no stranger to the Sorghum Festival or celebrating heritage.

Ferguson is a sixth-generation potter, from father to son, so he knows a thing or two about honoring traditions, and he said that of all the festivals his family has participated in, the Sorghum Festival is unique for its beautiful location and the interesting people it attracts.

“I’ve done both weekends, all four days – I love to say it – for many years

now,” Ferguson said, and he promises to bring back his pottery demonstration in the future as long as his health holds out.

New this year, proceeds from some of the fundraising, like T-shirt sales and donations for the Sorghum Square Dances in lieu of admission, will be going toward relief efforts for areas of North Carolina and Tennessee that were hit hard by Hurricane Helene.

The rest of the fundraising committed by the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers will go toward local causes, as it does every year.

Speaking of fundraising, folks should be sure to pick up a jar or two of freshly made sorghum syrup for \$15 a quart this weekend and stop by the sorghum food booth to get sorghum popcorn balls, soup beans & cornbread, sorghum biscuits, muffins, drinks and more.

While they’re at it, people can purchase Sorghum Festival merchandise like the above-mentioned T-shirts alongside hats, sorghum recipe books and commemorative festival-branded Case Knives.

And don’t forget the Sorghum Square Dance, which returns from 8-11 p.m. at Pavilion No. 3 inside Meeks Park on Saturday night, after the festival closes at its usual time of 5 p.m.

For more information, visit <https://blairsvillesorghumfestival.com/>.



The Collins Family performed music for two hours on Saturday, Oct. 12, at the stage down on the Sorghum Field.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson



There’s plenty for kids and families to do at the Sorghum Festival, from pony rides to old-ways demonstrations and more.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Shooting...from Page 1A

struggle ensued for the firearm, resulting in Hughes being shot in the arm, according to the Sheriff’s Office. Hughes exited the vehicle and attempted to leave the premises but was apprehended by deputies.

Both men were transported to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville and were released from medical treatment by Sunday, according to the Sheriff’s Office.

Hughes was then booked into the Towns County Jail, where he remained at press time, according to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

GBI is assisting the Sheriff’s Office with the case, in which Hughes has been

charged with one count of aggravated assault for each passenger in the vehicle: one male and two females. Neither of the females was injured.

Sheriff Ken Henderson would like to thank the GBI, the GBI Crime Scene Specialists, the Georgia State Patrol and the

Young Harris College Police Department for their help interviewing multiple witnesses and crime-scene processing of the vehicle involved in the incident.

The case is considered active and ongoing, per the Sheriff’s Office.

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

Local Al-Anon weekly meetings

Are you troubled by a family member or friends’ drinking? Al-anon Family Groups meet in several locations in Towns and Union Counties:

Tuesday: 12 noon, Sharp Memorial Methodist Church, 1114 Main Street, Young Harris, GA.

Wednesday: 7 PM, Mountain Presbyterian Church, 3831 GA-515, Blairsville, GA.

Thursday: 12 noon, St. Clare’s Episcopal Church, 777 Ledford Road, Blairsville, GA.

For more details on Al-anon call 888-4AL-ANON (888-425-2666) or visit www.al-anon.alateen.org.

Sorghum Parade...from Page 1A

company Shores & Moor won the \$500 Grand Prize for its design that featured a boat dock scene on a flatbed complete with live scarecrows, plenty of pumpkins and, fittingly, sorghum cane.

Earning \$300 and First Place was Young's Wrecker Service hosting the students from Union County High School Football and Cheerleading teams.

Mulkey Wrecker Service came in second and won \$200, pulling the UCMS and UCHS Wrestling Teams in addition to adding a pumpkin-themed float.

And Third Place at \$100 in prize winnings went to the U.S. Navy Seabees Island X-3 for a particularly patriotic display.

Youth participation was widespread, both on floats and in the parade generally, starting with the 152nd North Georgia Composite Squadron of the Civil Air Patrol carrying the colors of the state and nation.

Before the big show, the Woody Gap Band of Steel warmed up crowds with steel pan music on the Old Courthouse Lawn, and the Union County High School Panther Band performed while marching in the parade.

Students from Blairsville Dance Project pumped up

spectators with pom-poms as they passed, and the signature sorghum cane float was topped with youngsters waving and reminding people to stop on by the Sorghum Festival after the parade.

All told, 21 groups entered floats, which were interspersed with classic cars from the Blairsville Cruisers, a team of horses and others who simply wanted to show their support for a tradition that brings young and old together in appreciation of the area's heritage.

Smith-Foot, in his second year calling out for the parade, said he enjoys being part of an effort that spotlights the agricultural roots of Union County while incorporating the youth in school programs and athletics to create a generational bridge to keep local traditions alive.

"Not a lot of people even know what sorghum is, so it's almost a lost artform that will disappear if some of the old-timers don't pass the knowledge on," Smith-Foot said, adding that, on top of bringing the generations together, the Sorghum Festival also connects locals with move-

ins. The charm of the Sorghum Festival and its decades-old parade is

emblematic of the reasons people do choose to relocate here, as Union County remains a more close-knit community that cares about celebrating the foundational principles and history of the community itself.

Gary and Toni Chambers moved to Blairsville six years ago from the Augusta area. Prior to Saturday, they'd attended the Sorghum Festival before but never the parade, so the couple staked out a nice spot on Cleveland Street just a hop, skip and jump from the Old Courthouse.

"We love it up here," Gary said. "It's a small-town vibe with traditions - you don't have that in the big cities like you do here."

Added Toni, "Down (in Augusta), it's just not heritage. They have the Fourth of July Parade and Christmas parades, and that's good, but they don't celebrate stuff like this ... it's a totally different world up here."

The Sorghum Festival concludes this weekend, with two more days of syrup-making, Sorghum Games, hand-picked vendors, normally out-of-the-way food options, live music and performances, a square dance and more Oct. 19-20.

Admission to the festival is just \$5, and children 12 and under get in free.



The Union County Recreation Department welcomed youngsters from its athletics programs to toss candy to fellow children in the parade Oct. 12.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Cadets from the local Civil Air Patrol carried themselves with patriotic pride during the Sorghum Festival Parade around the Downtown Blairsville Square. Photo by Lowell Nicholson