

# North Georgia News

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Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Christmastime comes to Blairsville this weekend

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

This weekend, the mountains will become their very own winter wonderland, if not in the traditional snowy sense, then with a multitude of holiday festivities for families to enjoy ahead of Christmas.

On Saturday, Dec. 3, the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce and United Community Bank will team up once again to host the Holly Jolly Breakfast With Santa, where certain little elves will have the chance to meet the big guy himself.

Spanning from 9-11 a.m., the event is free to attend at the Union County Community Center and includes the aforementioned breakfast, and

families can stay to enjoy all manner of reindeer games, Christmas crafts, caroling, a train ride, and can even write letters to Santa.

In fact, Dec. 3 will be packed with fun stuff to do all across the county virtually from dawn to dusk, and depending on desires, folks can even get their Christmas shopping done.

Down at the Union County Farmers Market, over 75 vendors will set up shops that include everything from arts and crafts to seasonal food and produce for the annual Kris Kringle Market.

Kris Kringle will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., bringing back the outdoor shopping that locals and tourists enjoy during each regular Farmers Market season, albeit with a Christmas theme.

In a similar vein, St. Luke's Anglican Church will host its Annual Christmas Bazaar from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., offering up a sale of homemade quilts, clever ornaments crafted from bird seed, watercolor paintings and more.

For people feeling peckish, the Bazaar will feature holiday delicacies like casseroles, cakes, jams and jellies, and baked goods.

And one of Blairsville's biggest boasts for the holidays is the Christmas Extravaganza on the Square, also on Dec. 3. Bigger than ever in 2022, Downtown Blairsville will host a veritable festival with a smorgasbord of activities like caroling, holiday arts and crafts, and games.

As "something that the See *Christmastime*, Page 2A



The Nighttime Christmas Parade will roll through Downtown Blairsville this Saturday. Pictured here: a 2018 parade float. Photo/North Georgia News

## Hamby honored with bronze memorial at golf course



Relatives of Glenn Hamby attended a special tribute for the late family patriarch on Nov. 22, which included the unveiling of this memorial marker at the Butternut Creek Golf Course. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Family and friends of Blairsville native Glenn Hamby came together on Tuesday, Nov. 22, for a tribute in his honor that included the unveiling of a granite and bronze memorial marker at the No. 1 Tee Box of Butternut Creek Golf Course.

The initial gathering took place in the upper ballroom of the Union County Community Center and featured an informal lineup of speakers offering praise for and sharing stories about Hamby, the one-of-a-kind Owtown resident who passed away on Jan. 12, 2021, at the age of 82.

Hamby famously caught for a Minor League

Baseball team as a young man, played for many local teams over the years, coached and officiated Dixie Youth Baseball, and was well known for his Owltown Baseball Card Shop off Gainesville Highway that served the area for three decades.

Yes, he was renowned for his love of baseball, but really,

See *Hamby Honored*, Page 6A

## Two survive gyroplane crash near airpark in Suches

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Tragedy was averted over the weekend when two people survived a gyroplane crash shortly after taking off from the private High Valley Airpark in Suches around 11:30 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 26.

The occupants of the enclosed two-seater aircraft were up and walking after the crash, and Union General EMS transported the pair to Union General Hospital for treatment of injuries that were not expected to be life-threatening.

Union County Sheriff's Office investigated the accident and found that high wind conditions likely caused the M24 Orion Plus – a light aircraft weighing about 600 pounds – to crash.

Both the owner/pilot and passenger of the gyroplane were visiting from Canton and had been using the small, grassy landing strip adjacent Georgia 180 in Suches to do some flying in the mountains.

UCSO Capt. Daren



The gyroplane that crashed off Glenn Elliott Road in Suches had to be towed away Saturday. Photo/Submitted

Osborn said the plane actually took off twice, landing after an initial takeoff before lifting off again, according to video recorded by witnesses at the scene.

"When they took back off, they were heading in

an easterly direction at the airpark," Osborn said. "They took off at an angle, and as they got around the tops of the trees, I'm thinking the wind got them, because it was windy out there, and that little unit was

See *Gyroplane*, Page 2A

## Runoff early voting began Monday; Election Day Dec. 6

By Shawn Jarrard  
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Early in-person voting for the U.S. Senate Runoff Election between Republican Herschel Walker and Democratic Incumbent Raphael Warnock started Monday and will continue through Friday, Dec. 2.

In-person early voting is occurring in the Jury Assembly Room on the lower floor of the Union County Courthouse at 65 Courthouse Street in Blairsville, with voting hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Runoff Election Day voting will take place Tuesday, Dec. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the 11 pre-assigned precincts of Union County, which are as follows:

Blairsville Precinct – Haralson Memorial Civic Center at 165 Wellborn Street.

Jones Creek Precinct – Jones Creek Fire Station at 15 Jones Creek Road.

Owltown Precinct – Fire Station No. 3 at 14 Waldroup

Road. Ivy Log Precinct – Fire Station No. 4 at 179 Moccasin Road.

Suches Precinct – Fire Station No. 5 at 80 Firewater Lane.

Trackrock Precinct – Old 911 Center at 36 Lindsay Lane.

Dooley Precinct – John Smith Fire Station at 30 John Smith Road.

Gumlog Precinct – Gumlog Fire Station at 5484 Gumlog Road.

Pat Colwell Precinct – Pat Colwell Fire Station at 1520 Pat Colwell Road.

Coosa Precinct – Willie Hutson Fire Station at 114 Willie Hutson Road.

Choestoe Precinct – Old Choestoe School at 1034 Collins Road.

Importantly, in terms of in-person voting, early voting is taking place at the courthouse, so people must go to their pre-assigned precinct if they want to vote on Election Day.

Voters must possess an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots,

such as a government-issued driver's license or identification card.

The deadline to request mail-in absentee ballots was Monday, Nov. 28.

Folks wanting to utilize the official drop box to turn in their absentee ballots can find it in the Jury Assembly Room during early voting hours. Completed absentee ballots may also be dropped off at the Registrar's Office inside the courthouse up to 7 p.m. on Election Day.

By accessing the "My Voter Page" at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>, voters may find their registration status, precinct information, mailed absentee ballot status, voter participation history and more.

Nov. 7 was the voter registration deadline to be eligible for the federal runoff.

Coverage of local results from the Dec. 6 Senate Runoff Election will be made available on Wednesday, Dec. 7, on the North Georgia News website at [www.nganews.com](http://www.nganews.com).

## Annual Thanksgiving dinner blesses Union Countians



Volunteers and church members take the time to break bread together during the Thanksgiving Blessings Dinner inside the Family Life Center of House of Prayer Church last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Thanksgiving is a time to gather with loved ones and celebrate the blessings in life, no matter how great or small, and that was embodied on Nov. 24 at the 2022 Thanksgiving Blessings Dinner hosted at House of Prayer Church.

More than 309 households

got in contact with the ministry's volunteer organizers to either set reservations to dine in, pick up their meals, or have the food delivered by teams of drivers operating in pairs.

Registration was open for about a month in advance, but even those who hadn't signed up were able to call or walk in and get a plate.

This year was especially

busy, considering that 15 churches were involved in organizing everything from the cooking to the number crunching, plus the more than 200 volunteers who donated their time and care into making sure as many residents as possible received warm food and full bellies on one of the most loving holidays of the

See *Thanksgiving*, Page 2A



Vol. 113 No. 49  
Arrests - 3D Legals - 4D  
Church - 3C Obituaries - 5C  
Classifieds - 4D Sports - 2B  
Opinion - 4A

**SPORTS BASKETBALL**  
11/29 vs. White Co. 6 PM  
12/2 @ Fannin County 7 PM

**Jingle Bell Buys Dec. 2-4** See page 2A  
**Short-Term Rental Ordinance** See page 3A  
**Kindergarten Turkey Letters** See page 2D

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# Christmastime...from Page 1A

entire community gets behind,” there’ll be plenty to participate in, including photos with Santa upstairs in the Historic Union County Courthouse from 2-5 p.m.

The jewel event for Dec. 3 will be the Annual Christmas Parade at 6 p.m. Starting at sundown, a tree lighting on the square will herald the beginning of the lineup of over 40 parade entrants, including the Union County Middle School Football Team, Woody Gap Band of Steel, and local 4-H’ers.

Just down the street, the Blairsville Restaurant will be holding a block party on the same day that will begin at 7 p.m. and wind down at 9 p.m. Games like cornhole will be set up in the parking lot along with Axe Daddy’s axe throwing in the usual trailer.

Local indie duo RustedMelody will come out to perform, too, and kids can get their faces painted or stop by one of the s’mores and hot chocolate stations – if they don’t go into the bouncy houses first, that is.

Grits & Greens’ own food truck will serve hamburgers and hot dogs at a reduced price, as according to restaurant General Manager Mike Cook, one of the focal points of the event will be to continue to serve families through difficult economic times.

A S.A.F.E. Angel Tree will be set up at the block party, and Cook encourages folks to consider donating to pay for providing meals to local families in need. For perspective, the restaurant served 10 families for Thanksgiving, and this Christmas, they hope to help at least 40 more.

“If they want to come get a child’s name off of the



Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus in the 2018 Christmas Parade. Photo/North Georgia News

tree and bring back a gift, that would be amazing,” Cook said.

The 10th Annual Blairsville Holiday Stop and Shop will run every Friday in December from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Blairsville Civic Center. Admission is free, and over 50 businesses will be present “to cover all your shopping needs.”

Other events to keep an eye out for include the three-day Jingle Bell Buys sale Dec. 2-4, featuring slashed prices on holiday shopping from local businesses listed in full at [www.visitblairsvillega.com](http://www.visitblairsvillega.com); the 20th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting at Vogel State Park on Dec. 10 from 4-7 p.m., complete with caroling, hot cider, cookies and, of course, Santa; and a special Christmas

Eve service at House of Prayer Church from 4-6 p.m.

And returning in 2022, the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce is welcoming people in to see its monthlong Tour of Trees.

Lining the chamber’s halls will be brilliant trees and wreaths of all sizes, custom-decorated by local businesses and organizations. In a sense, the tour offers a quick snapshot of Blairsville itself, giving people a good idea of that uniquely Union County Christmas.

The tour is completely free and open to any age group, and before Dec. 9, participants can cast votes for the best big tree, small tree, and wreath. Although the winners will be crowned early in the month, every display will remain standing (or hanging) for the entire month.

## Gyroplane...from Page 1A

really light.

“When he got to the tops of the trees, he started bearing back to the right, and he just went down. He disappeared behind the tree line (in the video), and you could hear the people filming saying, ‘He’s crashed.’ And that was the end of the film.”

Osborn described the incident as a “controlled crash,”

as the gyroplane landed more or less straight up a couple hundred yards away next to Glenn Elliott Road, though the body of the aircraft was totaled and had to be towed away.

“I don’t think it was a mechanical issue or any kind of a fuel issue, because some fuel leaked out when we were loading it up on the wrecker,” Osborn said. “We’re very fortunate that

no one was seriously injured or killed in this crash.”

In addition to the Sheriff’s Office and EMS personnel, Union County Fire Station No. 5 of Suches responded to the scene, which was less than a mile north of Woody Lake.

The Federal Aviation Administration and National Transportation Safety Board declined to investigate the incident, deferring instead to the Union County Sheriff’s Office.

## Thanksgiving...from Page 1A

year.

Cal Wolcott and wife Barb are considered key organizers, and the pair were seen scurrying around from station to station that morning and through the afternoon, making sure absolutely everything ran smoothly.

Anyone facing difficult

circumstances is welcome to attend or put in requests for food for the annual event, whether they be people struggling financially, retirees who have no family in the mountains, or recent widows and widowers navigating a suddenly very lonely holiday.

“This is more than just a meal,” local Pastor Scotty Jarrard said. “This is about getting the Gospel out. This is about us reaching our community with the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”

Only a very small percentage of participating households chose to dine in, and they usually consist of those desiring more social interaction. But the families and individuals who stay home are not to be left out of the fellowship, because delivery teams often stay and counsel as needed.

“We’ve got people right now sitting with people at Brannan Lodge because they have no one else to talk to,” Jarrard said, while Wolcott mentioned that the chance to fellowship is just as important to volunteers, as it allows them to receive the message of the Lord or return to it.

It’s worth noting that about 423 plates were delivered to 140 households, while 592 meals were picked up by 137 families.

And one of the best parts about this year was that it was the biggest one yet in terms of volunteer involvement, churches, and even the turnout. Nearly 1,100 meals were prepared that day, and 15 churches were involved in seeing that nobody went hungry.

Church involvement included First Baptist Church, First United Methodist Church, All Saints Lutheran Church, Antioch Baptist Church, Blairsville Church of Christ, Choestoe Baptist Church, Fellowship of the Hills, Harmony Grove Baptist Church, Mountain Presbyterian Church, Redemption Point, St. Clare’s Episcopal Church, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, The Cross Church, The Vertical Church and, of course, House of Prayer.

One heartwarming story from the day revolved around an anonymous family that ran into trouble when their baby went to the NICU. They were relieved for her to be home in

time for Thanksgiving and very thankful for her to be receiving ongoing treatment but admitted that “it’s been a tough week,” so they wouldn’t have time to pick up their meals.

The delivery drivers, whom Jarrard likened as some of the most important members of the volunteer community, came through once again by adapting plans and driving the family’s meals to them.

“(They) did more than help,” Wolcott said regarding the drop-off team, which “provided a tangible example of encouragement in the spiritual by way of the physical.”

Robin Petrucelli was there with her husband John. The pair sat among House of Prayer members who were eating dinner; so many people volunteered that some had to be turned away. Due to complications with family scheduling, the Petrucellis decided to have a quiet luncheon together.

“It’s just good – good for the community,” Petrucelli said. “It truly is a blessing,” she added, saying that being among such good people made the warm environment “feel like home.”

It was easy for her to be grateful for her immediate surroundings, but she didn’t want to forget about how thankful she was for her family. In fact, she said that she wished she could have brought them with her to the welcoming get-together.

Mike Osborn was shadowing Wolcott for the day, preparing for next year’s dinner so he could take over as one of the organizers. While some volunteers work in the same area each year – like the cooks and delivery drivers – those who are willing to step up to the plate train to cycle through as replacements or spare hands.

“Part of what’s neat is each team leader brings along someone beside them in the event that ... someone (can) take over if they’re not able to,” Osborn explained, calling the process a “well-oiled machine” after 11 years of Thanksgiving Blessings Dinners. “I like organizing things, and I can be a doer, or I can be a delegator.”

Speaking of organizers, Wolcott wanted to specifically thank Deon and Michael Brown, Lynn Drost, Kristen Kough, Stephanie Chastain, Bill Beck, Chris Miller, Marea Staples, and Darwin Lindsey.

# Vulcan Materials Company donation secures emergency tools



Union County Station 1 Firefighters accepted a \$2,500 donation from Vulcan Materials Company on Nov. 18.  
Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Fire Department received a donation from Vulcan Materials Company at Station 1 on Nov. 18, complete with a pizza lunch provided for firefighters as a “Thank You for Your Service” during the company’s First Responder Friday initiative.

The donation helped the Fire Department acquire new Milwaukee Brand emergency tools for both the Suches Fire Department and the new Fire Station No. 13, which is currently being built on Murphy Highway.

“We really appreciate any donations that people give and that we have community partners, organizations,

people and businesses in our community that help us do our job,” Fire Chief David Dyer said.

Continuing, “These tools will enable us to do a lot more and increase our capabilities and goals in trying to provide emergency services in our community more efficiently and effectively.

“We are opening a new fire station on the north end of the county, so this grant helps us to buy the tools for the rescue and fire truck in that station.

“Another set of tools will be going to Station 5 in Suches, so it’s increasing the capabilities on both the north and south end of our county.”

Carol Landrum, Manager of Government and Community Relations for Vulcan Materials

Company in Georgia, delivered the donation.

“Vulcan Materials values involvement in the communities where we operate,” Landrum said. “We have been supporting this station since 2019.

“From funds for CPR equipment, Simulaid Adult Airway Trainer, swift water rescue boat, rescue ropes and equipment to the Milwaukee tools, it is vital to possess the right equipment.”

Vulcan’s First Responder Friday initiative recognizes emergency responders quarterly, and Blairsville Plant Manager Tyler Wardlaw and his employees are proud to support their local firefighters.

For more information on the company, visit <https://www.vulcanmaterials.com/>.

## Hamby Honored...from Page 1A

Hamby enjoyed all kinds of sports and competitions, from pool and cards to basketball and golf, and it was his passion for the latter that sparked the idea among his friends to install a marker at the golf course following his passing.

Hamby’s association with local golf dates to at least the late 1960s, when he served on the Butternut Creek Golf Course Board under Ben Carr’s ownership.

His influence on the committee continued after Union County Government acquired the course some years later, to include 20-plus years as chairman and the last years of his life.

Rick Davenport served with Hamby on the Golf Committee at his invitation, and he welcomed everyone to the tribute last week, including Hamby’s wife of 58 years JoAnn, daughter Teresa Hamby Ritzert, son Royce, brother Roy, sister Cheryl Hamby Williams, and other family members.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris made a few remarks, describing his friend as “one of the greatest guys to be in Union County,” and he related several stories that spoke to the departed’s character, work ethic and competitive streak.

“I would like his family and friends to know how much he meant to me and my family,” Paris said, holding back tears. “And we are so glad that we lived in the era of Glenn Hamby.”

Gary Davenport, who served with Hamby on the committee for more than 20 years, was one of several of Hamby’s former youth baseball players in attendance. Davenport touched on his lifelong friendship with Hamby that flourished when he reached adulthood.

“Glenn had countless hours and time into this course and the athletics of Union County,” Davenport said, noting that, without fail before each committee meeting, Hamby would always ride the golf



Glenn Hamby’s friends on the Butternut Creek Golf Committee commissioned this bronze and granite marker to sit at the No. 1 Tee Box.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

course to report what needed to be done to repair or improve the property.

Speaking to Hamby’s experiences in youth sports, Davenport recalled his old coach’s remarkable impact on local children by expecting from them “110%” effort and instilling in them valuable lessons that lasted a lifetime.

Davenport also conveyed the deep sense of loyalty that Hamby inspired among those who were closest to him.

“In this walk of life, you meet a lot of different people and make a lot of friends,” an emotional Davenport said. “But Glenn Hamby, if I’m in a street fight and there are five or six people there, I want Glenn Hamby right beside me, because he will be there until the bitter end.”

In recent years, Davenport, Hamby and a small group of friends went on multiple extended golfing trips together, giving Davenport even more time to bond with and learn from his mentor. On these trips, Hamby would tell stories, golf, and genuinely enjoy the company of his friends.

“He invested a lot of time in this golf course and the county,” Davenport said in

closing. “I don’t know anyone else in the county – a non-paid employee – that spent the time (that he did) with Butternut Creek.

“And I would just like to thank the family for sharing Glenn with us for so many years. Glenn has made a big footprint in this county forever, and I will always cherish his friendship.”

Speaking on behalf of the family, JoAnn Hamby thanked those gathered for honoring her husband, saying, “He would have loved to have been here today.”

Other guests offered moving stories of the time they spent with Hamby, noting his many qualities in life, such as his sense of humor, professionalism at the Georgia Department of Transportation, amiable yet fierce competitiveness and matter-of-fact disposition, and steadfast dependability.

At the end of the engagement, everyone moved outside to the No. 1 Tee Box for the unveiling of Hamby’s marker, which was erected by his friends on the Golf Committee with the blessing of Union County Government.

Installation was delayed for many months due to a granite shortage amid COVID-related supply chain issues. But that didn’t hinder the occasion, which featured rainy weather clearing up just in time to reveal the monument.

“It’s an honor and a privilege to do this,” said Larry Garrett, a friend of Hamby’s who also serves on the Golf Committee. “This man meant everything in the world to me, just like he did to a lot of other people.

“Not only did I lose a good friend, but I lost part of me. So, at this time, we’d like to present this to the family.”

As noted above, the memorial marker features a granite base below a bronze plate depicting Hamby golfing and enjoying life, and it reads as follows:

“Glenn Hamby, a very dedicated and faithful board member and friend of Butternut Creek Golf Course and Union County for over 50 years!”



Gary Davenport was one of Hamby’s many friends to speak from the heart during the Nov. 22 memorial tribute.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard