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with his hometown Fort Lauderdale Police Department.

"It was my life, my bread and butter," Mangifesta said. "There were a few bad days in there – I had to investigate another officer's death and murder in the line of duty. But, all-in-all, I'd have to say it was a very rewarding career."

Mangifesta went on to become the Union president for his department. He used that opportunity to talk with new officers.

"I told them that the day that the job was no longer fun, it was time to get out," he said. "I remember my first day on the job, and I remember my last day."

Mangifesta and his wife discovered Blairsville through friends on the Fort Lauderdale Police Department.

"We heard a lot about Blairsville," he said. "We took some time off in 2000 and came up here, hooked up

with a realtor and sure enough, we spotted a piece of property and said this is it."

The Mangifesta family eventually would move to Blairsville, even having the opportunity to help build their new home. Of five Mangifesta children, only one was still at home.

"He started ninth grade up here," Mangifesta said. "He became involved in football, we became involved in the Quarterback Club. Blairsville was the 180-degree change we were looking for – a nice calming environment."

Today, he's Detective Sgt. Tom Mangifesta, of the Union County Sheriff's Office. He resumed a career that he left behind in Fort Lauderdale when Union County Sheriff Mack Mason asked him what he would like to do as a member of the UCSO.

"I told the Sheriff that I would do whatever he needed me to do; I'll be here as long as Sheriff Mason is here," Mangifesta said. "I had missed law enforcement ever since my retirement. I was working in the jail at the time, and the Sheriff asked me if I would mind going to the po-

lice academy. I was ready to move forward."

Mangifesta went back to the police academy at the age of 59 in January 2014. He felt like a young officer again.

"I knew I made the right decision going back to the academy," he said.

When he graduated, Sheriff Mason and Chief Deputy John George decided that with Mangifesta's professional experience, he needed to be in the Criminal Investigations Division.

"I hope I've been able to help the community and the Sheriff's Office out," he said. "Union County is a safe community and it's a very nice place to live."

Sgt. Mangifesta is one calm individual, something that is essential in solving crimes.

"As a detective, you quickly learn how to talk with people," he said. "You want to get to the truth, it's not our job to choose sides. With experience, you realize that even if someone committed the most heinous crime imaginable, you still don't take their dignity away from them."

"Talk to them like a human being," he said. "Then you ask them what their version of the story is. It's been a successful strategy for me."

"The key to solving crimes is treating suspects with the utmost dignity," Sgt. Mangifesta said. "The ultimate goal is to solve a crime; get to the truth of the matter."

Sgt. Mangifesta and GBI Special Agent Ben Couch managed to get a confession from 35-year-old Cody Lee Vestal, who was recently accused of killing his mother and her boyfriend in rural Union County.

"We impressed upon him that he had his version of what happened," Sgt. Mangifesta said. "If we didn't get his version, all we had was the physical evidence at the residence. He gave us his version in which he confessed. He's contacted us a couple of more times afterward as he remembers other factors. We just treat him like another human being."

"He knows what is in store for him," Sgt. Mangifesta said. "He knows the road ahead. He accepts that."

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said. "So that's the type of project this is for us. We work with local staff, like Kemmy Garrett to try and put these projects on the ground, along with the Commissioner, Larry (Garrett), and others. We're really excited about this type of project and being able to provide public access to public waterways around the valley. These shoreline access projects are exactly the kind of projects that do that for us. I appreciate being here today and I thank you all so much for helping us and supporting our programs."

Before the ribbon cutting, Commissioner Paris offered plenty of thanks to those in and around the community who helped turn an already beautiful tract of land into a gem that the residents of Union County will enjoy for generations to come.

"I have a lot of people to thank because something like this does not just happen and it takes a lot of effort," Paris said. "Fortunately, as you know, in the county, we have great employees and great participation with people who help us. I want to first mention the TVA, and those we work with on a regular basis, which does so much for Union County and this park and all over the county. Anytime we need help or need anything, they are right there for us to provide power, to provide service, to provide anything we need."

Commissioner Paris offered plenty of praise and gratitude to go around for the Carlton Colwell Detention Center.

"We couldn't possibly do it without the assistance of the Carlton Colwell Detention Center and Superintendent Diane Hatchett, and Detail Sergeant Richard Griggs," Paris said. "They work to get everything together. The detail officers are: Officer Heaton, Officer Lunsford, Officer Carter, and Officer Adams."

"Then, the guys that do all of the work, the details," he said. "There are two details that have done the vast majority of this, including building our bridge, doing all the underbrushing, planting a lot of the grass, it's just phenomenal and it happens all over the county."

"We could not do the things that we need to do (without them) and our hats off and thank you to all of you guys," Paris said. "Something that we've learned over the years is, yes, they are detainees and they are here because they did something wrong somewhere along the way, but what we've found is, they get involved and take ownership of these projects. Anywhere we have a project in the county, they do a great job, and they are proud of what they have done, as well."

Finally, Commissioner Paris thanked D.L. Martin, neighbor to the new property.

"D.L. Martin lives in the next house up and he keeps us all straight; whether he is here or not," Paris said. "We know that if we do something wrong, D.L. is going to hear about it and he's going to come get you, so it's like having a second conscience. For a politician, it's like having a first conscience. Thank you D.L. for everything you do, and have done for this community. We could do a whole program just on D.L."

Paris went on to thank others involved in the project



–Larry Garrett, Sonny Mahan and the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Larry Conley, Beau Ballard, and the Union County Recreation Department, and Glen Hamby of the Union County Recreation Board.

He also thanked Tommy Tanner and David Greene and the Union County Road Department, Johnny Holbrooks, Callie Moore and the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition.

He thanked John and Joan Willis and Roger and Jeanelle Harmon who are members of a local canoe club that currently boasts 16 members, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason and the Union County Sheriff's Office, and last but not least, the Union County taxpayers, who made all of this possible through their support of the Special Local Option Sales Tax.