

We Are Still Here...from Page 1A

in the Cherokee language.

An eight-foot bronze statue depicting a Native American stickball player stretching out to catch an unseen ball will be the centerpiece of the We Are Still Here Memorial.

"The figure draws upon the ancient game of stickball that is still played by Southeastern tribes today," said Nelson, adding that the statue will be placed in Blairsville's Meeks Park.

"The unveiling of the memorial will take place in September of 2015, and will be attended by the elected chiefs of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, the

United Keetowah Band and the Cherokee Nation, as well as the Muscogee (Creek)," said Worden. "We are raising funds to pay for the cost of the statue and to defray part of the cost for flying the chiefs and their spouses from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to Atlanta, and back to Tulsa."

This project came to life last March, when Brown, Worden, Lance and Nelson teamed up as a part of Leadership Union.

Leadership Union is a 14-week course put on by Tobie Chandler of the Union County Chamber of Commerce, in which participants gain greater awareness of the county by

identifying and enhancing "their individual leadership styles through training sessions, discussion panels, field trips and a community service project," according to the Blairsville Chamber website.

The original financial goal for the project was \$3,500, but as the idea changed and grew, the money needed for completion grew as well, to \$56,000.

Plans for a Kickstarter crowdfunding campaign are in the works, and the We Are Still Here Memorial Executive Committee is currently taking donations. Donations can be made at any United Community Bank in the ac-

count of TSNAI, or Tri-State Native America Initiative, Inc., and checks can be made payable to TSNAI and mailed to P.O. Box 1231, Blairsville, Ga., 30514.

"We are addressing you to beseech each and every one of you to embrace this project as your own, as this project has been conceived in such a manner that it not only befits Blairsville and Union County, but also benefits the same," said the executive committee in a letter to those in attendance Monday.

Find out more information on Facebook at "Blood Mountain - We Are Still Here."



Kathie Garrett, left, and Haley Grizzle are the faces of the We Are Still Here campaign. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

New Restaurant...from Page 1A

Lisa," said Michael Collins. "My family called her Lee as a nickname, so that's kind of where the Michaellee's came from. And when we opened the restaurant in Hiawasse eight and a half years ago, it was Michaellee's Chocolate Caffe.

"And on this recent move, it was still a little confusing to folks about being a Chocolate Caffe - they didn't understand it was a full-service restaurant. So, this time when we made the move, we changed it to Italian Life Caffe. We're still keeping the Michaellee's signature name, we just changed the second name to Italian Life Caffe."

Jan. 17 marked the last day of business for Chocolate Caffe in Hiawasse.

"It was a pretty quick transition," Michael Collins said. "We closed down there last Saturday evening. We moved on Monday, installed on Tuesday, inspected Tuesday and Wednesday, and opened Wednesday. It was a very quick three-day turnaround."

The main reason for the move was the need for more space mixed with the perfect location in nearby Blairsville,

which is where many of the Collins' regular guests are from, anyway.

Located in the Timberlake Village shopping center of Hiawasse, the former incarnation, Michaellee's Chocolate Caffe, used up every bit and more of 1,520 square feet of space.

Now, the Collins' can utilize 3,000 square feet split between upstairs and downstairs areas in the historic King's 5 & 10 building.

"With the split unit, we have our prep kitchen and our office, and soon to open will be our retail section that was in our Hiawasse restaurant with our oils and vinegars from Italy, our truffles, our homemade fudge, gelato and sorbet from Italy," Michael Collins said. "So, that will be a secondary business that we'll run in tandem with this one."

The menu remained intact during the move, and long-time customers and those new to Italian Life Caffe can expect to be palatably thrilled with the same level of excellence and taste with which Michaellee's has come to be known.

"Mediterranean and Italian, raviolis, lasagna, Panini

sandwiches, which has been our signature for eight and a half years," Michael Collins said. "Pasta, meatballs, sausage."

And patrons can look forward to another signature dish of Michaellee's, the chocolate tortilla, which was developed out of the Chocolate Caffe kitchen.

"It is actually a sweetened tortilla with savory ingredients inside made into a wrap," Michael Collins said. "It looks like chocolate. It's sweetened with cocoa powder, but it's not really sweet."

On top of the savory and the sweet, Italian Life Caffe will be serving illy brand coffee, which is well known overseas and in Italy. The Collins' plan to expand their current offerings of the famed coffee brand in their retail space centered downstairs from the main restaurant.

The Downtown Development Authority of Blairsville and the City of Blairsville were instrumental in making the transition from Towns County to Union County as smooth as possible for the restaurant.

"The people in Blairsville

have been absolutely wonderful to us," said Lisa Collins. "All of the city officials, the county officials - they couldn't do enough for us, it seemed. They were just so friendly. And all of the citizens have been very welcoming. We are very excited about what Blairsville is doing with the square, and we wanted to be part of that."

Michaellee's is a family-owned and family-run business. Michael Collins serves as the executive chef, Lisa Collins is the general manager, and son Lenny Collins, who is a culinary school graduate, is the restaurant's sous chef.

"We're just excited to be here," said Michael Collins. "Everybody in Blairsville has just been fantastic. From the city officials to the residents, it's been almost overwhelming how nice and cooperative, and they want you to be here. We want to thank everybody who was involved in this, because it's just been unbelievable."

Michaellee's Italian Life Caffe is open seven days a week, Sunday through Thursday, from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., and Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Blackwell...from Page 1A

Blackwell. "They live in Blue Ridge, and so that's what got us up here."

They named their baby Jessica, and she is now 14-years-old and attending Union County Middle School.

"It's been great," said

Blackwell. "We love the area and have been so happy to raise a family here. We love the people, we like the small town feel, even though we are getting larger. It's been a wonderful place."

Blackwell's Auto began humbly enough, with only nine cars on the lot. And today, business is booming with a large variety of cars and services.

"We sell used vehicles," said Blackwell. "We have two full-time mechanics down below. I know there are so many people who come in that never even knew that we change oil. We also sell tires. We have a full selection and keep a lot of tires in stock. We do car detailing - we've got two full-time detail guys. We try to do pretty much everything in-house on what we sell so that it keeps our costs down."

Much of Blackwell's inventory is purchased directly from new car dealerships, handpicked by Blackwell and his staff.

"We try to keep some classic muscle cars and older cars all the time," said Blackwell. "We always want to try to keep something like that in stock. We try to find the latest model stuff and lowest mileage."

Prior to coming to Blairsville, Blackwell worked as a commercial estimator, where he would estimate the cost of painting large buildings.

And that's where long-time business associate Vince Frusciante came in - Blackwell needed someone who knew about selling cars.

At the time, Frusciante had more than 30 years of experience in the car industry, having run a Ford dealership in Naples, Fla. He also worked for the business that Blackwell bought out when he and his wife moved to town.

"I talked him into coming in and mentoring me and teaching me about the car business, and so that's how our relationship started," said Blackwell. "He's been with me 14 years."

Employee Brandon Anderson has also been with Blackwell for nearly 15 years, highlighting the dependable, consistent nature of Blackwell's Auto.

Blackwell's Auto has cultivated a reputation of quality both within Union County and afar, as Blackwell has embraced the Internet to expand his business.

"We're probably selling 60 percent of our inventory out of our county," said Blackwell. "So, really, our growth is people, and with the Internet and Internet advertising, it's amazing - we have a

guy flying in tomorrow from Florida to buy a vehicle and drive it back. So, he's flying to Chattanooga, renting a car, driving here, because of the price and the uniqueness of the car."

Blackwell attributes the success of his business to being honest with his customers, and aims to continue the level of service to which people have grown accustomed.

"We have mechanics and we have the service department so that we can check vehicles out the best we can before we sell them," Blackwell said.

The Blackwells also own Mason's Treasures & Mountain Restorations, which is located next door to Blackwell's Auto on Blue Ridge Highway.

Mason's Treasures specializes in antiques and collectibles. The business is named for Blackwell's grandfather, James Mason.

Rick and Michelle Wilhelm operate Mason's Treasures, which has been open on Blue Ridge Highway for two and a half years.

For more information on Blackwell's Auto, visit www.blackwellsauto.net, or call (706) 745-7952.

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