

# North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## UCFD firefighter saves two from burning home

By Charles Duncan  
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An elderly Blairsville couple is safe today, after being saved from their burning home by an off-duty Union County firefighter.

Dustin Lee, a three-year veteran of the Union County Fire Department was on his way home from a weekend shift at Fire Station 1 when a call from dispatch caught his attention.

Lee, who lives a short distance from Larry and Lavonne Bennett, was driving by the Bennett home when the call was dispatched.

He saw a plume of smoke coming from the garage area, but, initially, didn't think it was smoke.

"It looked like fog, and given the conditions of the morning (drizzling rain and fog), it didn't look like a home on fire," Lee said. "But, I saw someone going into the house."

Bart Hood, a neighbor of the Bennetts had seen the same thing Lee had seen. He initially dismissed it as fog. But, as he drove through the neighborhood, the white fog turned



UCFD Firefighter Dustin Lee, center, fights the blaze on Ivy Log Creek Lane last week. Photo/Charles Duncan

Hood alerted Lavonne Bennett that the fire.

When Lee arrived, smoke was thick inside the home. He instructed Hood, who was on the Bennetts' front porch to get to safety. Hood advised Lee

that two people were inside the burning home.

Lee first got Lavonne Bennett with safety. She had a walker with her when Lee encountered her. Lee initially thought the walker belonged to Lavonne Bennett. He would learn otherwise in the moments to come.

Lavonne Bennett told Lee that her husband was still inside the home. Larry Bennett, unable to walk under his own power, engaged Lee in conversation.

Lee, realizing Larry Bennett would need help getting out of the home, asked Bennett to grab a hold of his neck to lift himself.

"I tried to carry him out, but he told me that I was a big boy, but, I wasn't that big," Lee said. "The smoke was really thick inside the home. Mr. Bennett wanted to stop for a moment while we were trying to get out. I told him that we didn't have time to stop, just hold on and we'll get outside."

As Lee and Larry Bennett exited the home, something happened and the smoke lifted and cleared.

See Fire, 3A

## Dustin Lee: 'I was just doing my job; I'm a firefighter'

By Charles Duncan  
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Dustin Lee shrugs when he's called a hero for saving an elderly couple from a burning home on Ivy Log Creek Lane.

"I did what any Union County firefighter or public servant would have done," he said. "The Good Lord put me in the right place at the right time. I utilized my firefighter training and my instincts just kicked in."

"Am I a hero? Maybe to Larry and Lavonne Bennett, but, I was just doing what I'm trained to do," he said. "I'm proud I was there to help. I'm proud Larry and Lavonne Bennett are okay."

Lee was on his way home when a call was dispatched regarding a garage fire at the Bennetts' home. Lee, who lives a short distance from the Bennetts' home, was right on top of the situation when the call came out.

Without aid of firefighter turnout gear, he went inside the burning home and rescued Lavonne and Larry Bennett.



Capt. Richard Jones, left, and Firefighter Dustin Lee. Photo/Charles Duncan

Larry Bennett is unable to walk without the aid of a walker.

The home was a total loss, but the Bennetts are safe and sound thanks to Lee.

"When I got to the walkway, I noticed a gentleman trying to get inside the house," Lee said. "I recognized him. It was Mr. (Bart) Hood. I asked

See Lee, 3A

## Lee up for service commendation

By Charles Duncan  
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Union County Fire Chief Charles Worden has been in the firefighting business for a long time. He knows a hero when he sees one.

That's why he's recommended Union County Firefighter Dustin Lee for a Commendation of Valor.

Lee, without aid of firefighting turnout gear, rescued an elderly couple last week from their burning home on Ivy Log Creek Lane.

"Without a doubt, if Lee were to go into the home and help those folks out of that burning house, we're looking at a totally different situation today," Chief Worden said. "It would be a very sad situation."

Lee shuns the hero label, but Chief Worden begs to differ.

"Yes, Dustin Lee was doing what he is trained to do," Chief Worden said. But,



Firefighter Dustin Lee, left, takes a break from fighting last week's blaze. Photo/Charles Duncan

we honestly believe that if Lee were to go above and beyond his call of duty, there would have been a totally different outcome to this incident.

"Two lives were saved

thanks to the actions, bravery, and training of Firefighter Lee," Chief Worden said. "There easily would have been another life lost depending on how far the neighbor would have gone to save the Bennetts, if Dustin would not have been there."

"We're very fortunate to have such a dedicated person as a member of our department," Chief Worden said.

In a letter to Union County Commissioner Nancy Paris, Chief Worden recommended Lee for the department's highest honor.

"As you're well aware, the Union County Fire Department is made up of some of the best men and women in North Georgia," Chief Worden wrote. "And, as always, it was a team effort with this incident. However, we feel that firefighter Dustin Lee demonstrated the courage and honor that can only be found in a true public servant and hero."

See Honor, 3A

## Kris Kringle Market thrives

By Charles Duncan  
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Patrons braved heavy rain and high winds on Friday at the Union County Farmers Market to attend Kris Kringle Market.

Undoubtedly, the numbers were limited on Friday as the threat of rain kept most families at home. A monsoon would later prove them right as heavy rains and high winds stormed through Union County.

However, on Saturday, with only cooler temperatures to worry about, record numbers turned out for the final day of Kris Kringle Market.

More than 40 entries blessed the baking contest. Crowds perused the Market looking for Christmas gifts and Christmas produce. A good time was had by all.

Charles Totherow was doing his business selling his homemade canned goods. Pickled beans, pickled corn, butter beans, green beans and Totherow's jams and jellies were hot items.

"It's been good today," Totherow said on Saturday.



Dakota Collins makes a sale at Kris Kringle Market. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"The pickled Paris Peppers are a hot item, literally, and figuratively. Commissioner Lusting Paris is still a bit distrustful of those Paris Peppers however."

Market Manager Mickey Cummings was thrilled with Saturday's record turnout.

"Santa Claus has been here, the kids went crazy,"

See Market, 6A

## Townley Construction to do water projects

By Charles Duncan  
North Georgia News  
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The Blairsville City Council has selected a contractor to do water system improvements that include the Haralson Drive water project.

The Council selected Townley Construction out of Dawsonville. Three sealed bids were opened last month in the Council Room at City Hall, and Townley Construction came in with a \$1.441 million low bid.

Buckeye Construction out of Canton, NC bid \$1.940 million on the project. The second lowest bidder was Gainesville-based Strickland



Mayor Jim Conley & Sons Pipeline at \$1.787 million.

The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority awarded a \$1,693,000 Drinking Water Loan to the City of Blairsville to pay for the improve-

ments, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said.

The money will be used for the water system improvement project that includes upgrading undersized and aging waterlines along Pat Haralson Memorial Drive and Deep South Farm Road for improved flow and pressure and reduced water leaks.

The city also plans to replace its existing water meters with a wireless automatic smart reading system for its 1,310 customers, which will improve meter reading efficiency, reduce labor costs, and provide a more accurate measurement of water usage throughout the

See Projects, 2A

## Holly Jolly Christmas a delight

By Mason Mitcham  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Participants in the first Holly Jolly Christmas and Annual Tour of Trees may not have expected a flash mob, but that's exactly what they got.

A flash mob is a pre-planned dance routine kept secret until a certain time, whereupon the participants converge and dance their hearts out.

In this case, the participants were members of the Mountain Liners line dancers,

See Christmas, 2A



The Christmas Spirit has arrived in Blairsville-Union County. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

## Parade proves to be a crowd pleaser

By Mason Mitcham  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Hundreds of spectators and their children turned out to the Historic Courthouse to watch the Christmas Parade on Saturday.

The Holiday Spirit was in the chilly air as those on parade floats tossed out candy from their Christmas-themed rides.

Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll led the parade.

He and his officers will be participating in Shop With a Cop this year, a program that provides for underprivileged children during Christmas.

Following him was the Union County Sheriff's Office, which will be doing a similar program called Christmas with the Kids.

Playing loud and proud, the Union County High School Marching Band followed the police escort.

A plethora of other vehicles, representing businesses, churches, and organizations, followed.

See Santa, 6A



Mrs. Claus and Santa arrive in Blairsville in time for the Parade on the Downtown Square. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

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Vogel Christmas Tree Lighting Saturday, Dec 14th  
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UGH Auxiliary sponsored Robin Gerard Jewelry Sale  
Wed. Dec 11th 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.  
Thurs. Dec 12th 7 a.m. - 5 p.m.  
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Marine Corps League Toy Drive  
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BASKETBALL:  
Tuesday, Dec. 10th @ Lumpkin Co 6 PM  
Friday, Dec. 13th @ White Co. 7 PM  
Saturday, Dec. 14th vs. Fannin Co. 4:30 PM

WRESTLING:  
Friday, Dec. 13th @ Towns County