

# CASA...from Page 1A



In recognition of Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month in April, Enotah CASA planted 295 blue pinwheels in the lawn of the Old Courthouse to represent the children assisted in the circuit in the past year. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

the organization has maintained its laser focus on the needs of the children of North Georgia. “We have not even skipped a beat,” Lago said, commending her volunteers

and employees for their efforts. “Our volunteers in the past year have advocated for over 295 children. “While some of the government agencies have

really had their hands tied in terms of making home visits or putting eyes on the children physically, our CASAs have made those visits and done all those kinds of things, which are

so valuable.” The COVID-19 crisis has presented unique challenges society-wide, including for Enotah CASA, which has embraced the use of newer technology to get the job done.

“A lot of our CASAs are older and learning how to use Zoom for the first time, which is how our court hearings are,” Lago said. “They have really stepped up and done what is needed to focus on these children.”

Of course, as a community-based nonprofit, Enotah CASA relies greatly on the support of the communities whose children it champions, with fundraising efforts having been especially impacted since the onset of the pandemic.

Dancing with North Georgia Stars, for instance, is the largest fundraiser CASA puts on each year, and sadly, it had to be canceled in 2020 out of concern for safety amid COVID-19.

So, CASA has had to get creative to try and make up for that loss, developing new fundraisers that don’t pack so many people into an indoor

venue. “Last September, we did our first Mountain Arts Festival, and we are going to do it again this September,” Lago said. “Right now, we are doing a Boston butts smoked meat sale as a fundraiser (with pickup available April 3).

“We are focusing on April as Child Abuse Awareness Month and doing the ‘I Am For The Child’ training and bringing in two great speakers. It will be virtual, and it is free because of our great sponsors.”

The “I Am For The Child” virtual training will take place Friday, April 16, from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m., with registration available at enotahcasa.org. Presenting sponsors for this event are Attorney Daniel Duello and community supporter Fred Weil.

Fortunately, the community has been a powerful driving force behind CASA, steadily donating and aiding the organization in the last year to continue helping children who are otherwise helpless in their own situations.

And though CASA would like to bring back Dancing with

North Georgia Stars as soon as possible, Lago said she wants to wait until it is sufficiently safe to have the event and take time to prepare for it.

As such, CASA will focus on its other fundraisers this year, with organization members also putting their energy into getting the word out about the need to recruit more CASAs.

Lago encourages the community to keep an eye out for the 295 pinwheels now spinning in the breeze on the lawn of the Old Union County Courthouse, designed to honor the children CASA volunteers have served over the past year. And the need is not going away.

“As these children are out in the community more, going back to school and stuff, we are starting to have more children come into care,” Lago said. “Our biggest reporters are our educators and police.”

“We are absolutely in need of volunteers. They can go to our website or give us a call, and we have training that can be done virtually with our lead advocate.”

## Mildred Underwood retires after 45-year banking career

Blairsville native Mildred Underwood has retired earlier this year after more than 45 years in the banking business. Underwood joined United Community Bank in 1988 as a Loan Officer Assistant to bank founder and previous CEO Jimmy Tallent and most recently served as Senior Compliance Officer and Compliance Program Manager

“Mildred’s expertise, leadership, attention to detail and superb work ethic have been invaluable to our company,” said Carol Chastain, Chief Compliance Officer for the bank. “She will be sorely missed by all of us, but we wish her the best in her new job as grandma.”

“Mildred has been a

vital piece of our team for years,” added Susie Hooper, Director of Human Resources for United Community Bank. “She has supported so many divisions of our team, nurtured employees, and provided unparalleled service to all of our customers and community. We are grateful for her influence and the legacy she leaves.”

Underwood has worked in various consumer, commercial and mortgage lending divisions for the bank. For the past few years, she has been a part of the crucially important compliance group—serving as a subject matter expert for all lending regulations, regulatory change management, training and compliance exam coordination. As Senior Compliance



Mildred Underwood, Officer and Compliance Program Manager, she was also responsible for audit and compliance monitoring. (N/Apr7.23)CA

## Blairsville Cruisers...from Page 1A



People should go ahead and plan on attending the upcoming Cruise-In on the Square on Saturday, April 17, from 3-7 p.m. Cruise-Ins help raise money for local causes. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

expected, and we are happy to be back.”

This year, the Cruisers are looking for a return to normalcy after all the changes wrought from COVID-19, including a return of the ever-popular raffle car fundraiser.

“We haven’t found one that has suited us yet – we are kind of picky,” Brown said of the next potential raffle car. “We have to find a nice one that is within our budget, too. We are still looking, though, and hopefully we get one this time.”

“We will probably get another Mustang or convertible. We want something that will fit the crowd and something that people will want to be in a raffle for.”

Last year, COVID impacted the Cruisers by limiting their visitors and total number of car shows, but despite these shortcomings, the

nonprofit persevered and was still able to raise money for the programs they support.

“We had a good turnout on our Veterans Show (in November), and all of that goes to veteran associations,” Brown said. “We got to take around 60 kids to Walmart last year (for Shop with a Cruiser) and let them spend around \$250 apiece.”

“Thankfully, we had some good people that donated, because we didn’t have a car to raffle off. We usually do pretty good on the car, so we are hoping to get one this year. COVID had us shut down pretty bad, though – we didn’t get to do a show until July (in 2020).”

Guests of the Cruise-In on Saturday enjoyed getting out in the warm spring weather and sharing their enthusiasm for classic cars with like-minded individuals.

Event attendee Christen Hamby said she developed her passion for cars as a little girl watching her dad work on them, so she experiences a strong tug of nostalgia when she visits such shows.

“This is so neat, and my husband and I love going to car shows like this,” Hamby said. “It is wonderful to see people getting out and about and having a good time. The weather is beautiful, and I’m looking forward to things getting back to normal.”

The Blairsville Cruisers will host their season opening Cruise-In on the Blairsville Square April 17 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Every month thereafter through October, the Cruisers will host their Farmers Market Cruise-In the first Saturday and their Square Cruise-In the third Saturday.

For more information, visit BlairsvilleCruisers.com.

## INKA Art Sale in Young Harris to benefit local children

What began as two ladies’ desire to meet area children’s needs has grown into an ongoing fundraising endeavor. In January, Inge Enstam and Karin Butler felt a tug at their heart to help area children stay warm in the winter.

After talking with CASA, S.A.F.E. and Family Connections they learned the children’s needs were much more than they could meet by themselves.

Using their artistic skills to create and sell items with 100% of the profits from sales going to help area children, they launched INKA Garden, Patio and Bespoke Art. Inge

and Karin transform old glassware, dishware, vases, plus found objects (often donated) to create beautiful garden, patio and bespoke art.

Their first sale was in March was a huge success. They believe it was because everyone wants to help children and shoppers know that 100% of the profit goes to fund area kids’ needs through the agencies listed. It’s a win/win situation.

Inge and Karin stay motivated, energized and creating four to six days a week so children have what they need.

Anyone can help by liking or sharing the Inka Gar-

den, Patio and Bespoke Art Facebook page, shopping at one of the sales or donating items which can be used to create more art to sell. For a sampling of new items created and future sales dates and locations, follow INKA Garden, Patio and Bespoke Art Facebook page.

Their second sale will be Saturday, April 10, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 5192 Pine Crest Road, Young Harris, inside Pine Crest Subdivision.

Everyone is invited to come ‘shop for kids’ and encouraged to bring their friends. Together we can make children’s lives better. (N/Apr7.23)SH