

Job Fair...from Page 1A

so that we could capture the working folks, too, who have some time off from lunch.

“Going to 4 p.m. will help us include students from the high school and the colleges who may be getting out of class.

So, we thought it was important to make sure we tried to have a timeframe that accommodated literally everybody.”

Fatz closed its doors earlier this year, so the lot will be the perfect place to host

a local job fair conducive to COVID best practices. Social distancing will be maintained by people staying in vehicles, and employers will be wearing face masks, with applicants encouraged to do so also.

“Although current conditions prevent the Department of Labor from being able to physically participate, we also always partner with them for our job fairs,” Griggs said. “They have been a tremendous resource helping us plan, organize and promote the fair through their database of job seekers.

“We encourage anyone seeking employment to register with DOL for access to all the support services they provide.”

Added Griggs, “For this event, we’ll have employers set up in 10-by-10 pop-up tents with representatives handing out company information, applications and paperwork for the jobs that they’re hiring for.

“What we’ll do is have people come into the Fatz parking lot from (Georgia) 515. The chamber is partnering with the Development Authority to be the coordinators, if you will, so we’ll have somebody there to direct the traffic toward the back of the left-hand side of Fatz.

“On the back corner across from Young Harris Street we’ll have the tents of the participating employers set up in an L-configuration. Folks will drive along the tents

and stop at the employer with whom they’re interested in speaking.”

From there, employers and prospective employees can talk about available positions and exchange information, and there will be designated parking areas for people to fill out applications on the spot.

“At that point, they can either give their paperwork to one of the event volunteers and exit onto Young Harris Street, or they can get back in line if they want to see the employer again to drop it off personally,” Griggs said. “The whole point is to have a unidirectional traffic flow.”

This job fair has been in the works for a little over a month, and Griggs said everyone involved is “excited about the way this is coming together” to benefit the community by improving the experiences of local business customers and the home situations of local families.

“And we’re super appreciative of Mr. W.C. Nelson for letting us utilize the property, because it just sets up so well,” Griggs said.

Turning to the economy, Griggs described the employment environment during COVID as “an unprecedented time in an unprecedented year.”

“One of our biggest

challenges over the last three years, really, has been labor force availability because our unemployment numbers have been so low,” Griggs said. “We’ve effectively been at full employment.

“So, the Development Authority and other entities in the community, region and state have been very much engaged in workforce development activities, working with our middle schools, high schools and technical college and university systems to create workforce pipelines.”

Examining the county’s specific unemployment numbers illustrates Griggs’ point about the need to promote workforce development, as the already low numbers got even lower at the start of the year, before the pandemic struck.

“In January 2018, we were at 4.3%, and in January 2019, we were at 4.2%,” Griggs said. “This year in January, we were at 3.4%.”

These numbers were way down from the January 2011 unemployment rate of 9.7%, when Union was still feeling the impacts of the Great Recession, and earlier this spring, the unemployment picture started looking eerily like nine years ago.

“In March, unemployment took a jump to 4%, and in April, the full force of the pandemic

hit us, and our unemployment here in Union was 9.4%,” Griggs said. “We were better off than most folks. The regional rate was 11.2%, the state rate was 12.6 percent, and Georgia fared better than most U.S. states.”

Fortunately, things began to turn around rather quickly due to various factors like the availability of the Paycheck Protection Program, the state opening back up at the end of April, and businesses getting creative to continue offering products and services during the pandemic.

“That (9.4%) number quickly shifted down,” Griggs said. “By May, we were already down to 6.4%, so we took about a third of that off. June, we hit 5.1%, and by July, we were at 4.9%.”

“So, it’s a testament to how quickly our local economy, the economy of Georgia and the Southeast in particular has rebounded. People are still hurting. We’ve got sectors of businesses that are still hurting. But we’re fortunate in Georgia that we’re not on lockdown.

“The governor opened the state and is encouraging the folks that are working as well as the customers to take reasonable precautions. And that’s been a real plus for us. We’re blessed that Georgia is open for business.”

Addendum:

Following publication of the Sept. 23 article titled “Wilderness Scouts of America benefits impoverished youths, seniors,” former Union County Sheriff Tommy Duncan contacted the North Georgia News to provide additional details about the 1988 bus donation by now-President Donald Trump.

Duncan was sheriff at the time, and he received the bus from three deputies out of Cape May County, New Jersey, who drove it down to Georgia for use by the Wilderness Scouts.

According to Duncan, Trump had the entire bus – one of his luxury passenger shuttles serving casino patrons

– completely reconditioned to be “like new” upon arrival to the old Sheriff’s Office headquarters at the Union County Courthouse.

When the bus got here, Duncan called Wilderness Scouts Founder and President Harold Cornwell, who gratefully accepted the bus from the Cape May deputies, who showed him how to operate it.

And everyone was happy to see all the camping equipment stocked inside the bus, including “sleeping bags, backpacks – everything that Trump could think of, he got them to bring it,” Duncan said.

Following the successful

delivery, Duncan escorted the New Jersey deputies to the Milton Inn for an overnight stay in Blairsville, and the Sheriff’s Office transported them the next day to the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport for their journey home.

The Wilderness Scouts is a longstanding local youth program benefiting children and seniors living with poverty in the mountains.

For more information or to find out how to help, contact Cornwell at 706-400-8191. Monetary donations can be mailed to P.O. Box 807, Blairsville, Georgia, 30514.

Dr. Arencibia...from Page 1A

of many eye conditions. And they do it using state-of-the-art technology and equipment at both locations.

Long before she joined her dad as a fellow optometrist, however, the younger Arencibia worked as a technician at Georgia Vision Center. It was her father’s influence there, his clear impact on patients’ lives, that inspired her to pursue a career in optometry.

“I’ve learned a lot from him,” Arencibia said. “He’s definitely the reason I’m an optometrist today. I really look up to him, and I think he’s great with his patients.”

Added Arencibia, “I’ve always known I wanted to help people and have been really interested in health care as a profession. At first, I thought I wanted to go into nursing school. Once I started working with dad, I fell in love with the eyes; I guess it’s in our blood.”

She continued working in her father’s office while pursuing her undergraduate degree at the University of North Georgia, where she also played basketball, with an ultimate goal of returning home full time to join his practice as a full-fledged professional in the field.

“This area has a place in my heart because it’s where I grew up,” she said of her desire to work in her own backyard. “There’s a need for health care here, and I also feel like it’s a great place to raise a family. I’ve just always really enjoyed the area.”

Upon obtaining her bachelor’s degree, Arencibia enrolled in the brand-new Kentucky College of Optometry at the University of Pikeville,

and she became a Beta Sigma Kappa International Optometric Honor Society member and graduated cum laude after four years of intensive study.

Alongside her schooling, she gained extensive knowledge in ocular disease and family eye care via clinical externships, which included training in private practice, at the KYCO school specialty clinics, Pikeville Medical Center, and at Omni Eye Services of Atlanta.

And now that she’s seeing patients full time in Blairsville, Arencibia says it is her mission to help people understand the importance of having their vision health monitored.

“We can actually see things that people don’t know are going on in their bodies,” Arencibia said, noting that, with dilation, she can spot changes in people’s eyes to alert them to medical conditions they may not be aware of, such as hypertension or early stages of diabetes.

“Sometimes we can even see your risk of having a stroke, or catch tumors and other emergent conditions,” she said. “Especially with kids, they don’t necessarily speak up whenever they’re having visual problems.”

Of course, South East Eye Group offers contact lenses and a whole range of fashionable eyeglasses as well, and Arencibia said their services extend to referrals for any serious medical conditions they might discover using industry-leading tech.

“We have a lot of new technology that really sets us apart from other practitioners in our area, and just the care you’re getting here,” she

said of the family-owned and operated business.

Among the technologies available at South East Eye Group is optomap retinal imaging, which can be used to detect both eye-related and chronic health conditions. And the Arencibias treat a number of conditions like dry eye using the highly effective LipiFlow treatment.

Both the Hiawassee office at 344 Main Street South and Blairsville office at 17 Hometown Way are following all COVID-19 best practices, including mask wearing for staff and patients, social distancing, temperature checks and frequent sanitation.

People can easily arrange an appointment – including a new telemedicine option – and check out available services by visiting <https://gavisioncenter.com>, or by calling 706-896-3303.

Arencibia said the practice will be expanding again in about a year when her sister Alexa graduates from the same optometry program in 2021, and it goes without saying that their father is extremely proud of them both.

When not working to promote eye health among the families of the area, Dr. Gabby Arencibia enjoys hiking, traveling, and spending time with her friends, family, fiancé Cass Coleman of Hayesville, North Carolina, and dog Archie, a Brittany Spaniel.

As a Hiawassee native and Towns County High Class of 2012 graduate, she looks forward to working in the communities she grew up in for many years to come.

Plein Air Painting Event “2020 Fall Paint Out” October 24th

Robert & Angie Hice, owners of the Azalea Farm, Mountain Regional Arts & Crafts Guild and Artworks Gallery are proud to host the “2020 Fall Paint Out” on October 24th at the Azalea Farm in Blairsville, GA.

This 18 acre farm has multiple ponds, a stream and lush fall foliage to inspire artists. Native azaleas will be available for sale. The event is open to all artists 18 years of age and up. All paint mediums accepted. Amateur artists and professional artists are welcome.

For Registered Artists a “Meet & Greet” reception will

be held 3-5 PM on Friday, October 23 at the Azalea Farm. Each artist and a guest are invited to attend. Meet fellow artists and the landowners. Scope out your favorite painting spot for the next day.

For more details and to register for this event, please go to www.mountainartscrafts.org and click on the Events & Classes tab to find the prospectus and registration information.

ArtWorks Gallery, owned and operated by the Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the arts in our local community.

