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square and courthouse with haunting decorations, just in time for trick-or-treaters.

Eerie music and classic Halloween tunes played all night long, as children and adults in costumes of all shapes, sizes, and levels of terrifying enjoyed themselves during the safe, community-oriented holiday activity.

"We appreciate all of the businesses that take the time, the money and the effort to come down and make this what it is," said Harper. "And I'm very grateful that this many people decided to come out to trick-or-treat around the square."

Before Hometown Halloween got started in 2006, many Blairsville businesses handed out candy inside their individual stores.

One of the biggest benefits of having a central location for vendors and trick-or-treaters alike is that it's a safe environment – local law enforcement shuts the square to through traffic during the event and keeps a watchful eye out.

Plus, the evening offers residents a true sense of community, perhaps more than the door-to-door trick-or-treating of old.

People from all over the mountains attend Blairsville's Hometown Halloween on the Square, and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said that what he appreciates most about those who visit is all the happy children.

"The kids in the community and other communities pretty much depend upon us to have this event," said Mayor Conley. "Each year, we try to grow the event ... and if it wasn't for the vendors who do participate, we'd be in trouble because of the crowds that show up."

Continued the mayor: "My favorite thing about Halloween is seeing the joy on kids' faces."

Every kid who attended got the opportunity to go

home with a month supply of desert on-demand, though a few creative kiddos went home with something savory to balance the sweet.

Three children received gift certificates to Michael's Italian Life Caffe as prizes for winning a Halloween Costume Contest put on by Harper toward the end of the trick-or-treating.

Kelly and Kariann Corcoran won in the Family category, for their mother-daughter Little Red Riding Hood and Bad Wolf.

Kaylee Dockery won First Place for Most Creative Kid Costume, with her spot-on recreation of Te Fiti from Disney's "Moana."

And young Emma Guffey, dressed as an adorably fluffy chicken, earned First Place in the Cuteness category.

Of course, the vendors had about as much fun as all the kids. Just ask Origami Owl proprietor Sharon Penner, whom the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce recognized recently as owning the Business of the Quarter.

"It's fun. You get to dress up, you get to be a kid, you get to play," said Penner, now in her fourth year handing out candy as a vendor during Hometown Halloween.

Husband and wife duo Suresh Kishan and Vina Patel, owners of the Comfort Inn Blairsville, also gave out candy to trick-or-treaters, though this was their first year doing so.

Both Kishan and Patel, who dressed as a hippie and a witch respectively, said they had so much fun meeting new people and handing out goodies to all the kids that they'll definitely be back again next year.

Trick-or-treaters started clearing out as the temperature dropped that evening, well after dark, though several brave souls stuck around for an outdoor viewing of "Hocus Pocus," a Halloween favorite of many a boy and ghoul.

Just down the road from the square on Halloween, the First Baptist Church of Blairsville was holding its own Fall Festival, with a variety of activities, games, candy and actual food for kids and their families.

FBC Pastor Dr. Fred Lodge said that they didn't have an exact headcount, but that the church had given out about 840 hotdogs by the end of the night.

It was also the first time in 12 years of holding the festival that the church ran out of candy and needed to go get



More than 2,000 people from all over the region lined up to get candy around the Blairsville Square on Halloween. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Some costumes were scarier than others! Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Dr. Fred "Woody" Lodge and Derrick "Buzz Lightyear" Hartley of First Baptist Church of Blairsville pose for a picture with the Flash during the 2017 FBC Fall Festival. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

more.

"We do this for the betterment of our community and the sense of cooperation," said Dr. Lodge, who dressed as Woody to FBC Associate Pastor Derrick Hartley's Buzz Lightyear from "Toy Story."

Their costumes played into the church's upcoming Family Movie Night, which will take place in the First Baptist Church back parking lot at 6 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 5.

The evening will feature a screening of "Toy Story," and patrons of the event are

encouraged to dress up as their favorite character from the movie.

Popcorn will be provided at Family Movie Night, though the church does ask that visitors bring their own chairs, blankets and snacks.

Dr. Lodge was recently nominated for presidency of the Georgia Baptist Convention, and he finds out in about a week the results of that election.

"There are 3,600 Georgia Baptist churches, so, to be chosen from that many pastors – it's pretty special," said Dr. Lodge.

# Cruisers...continued from Page 1A

locals out in droves to grab a cup of coffee, take a gander at the new location and congratulate the club for this giant step forward.

"This is such an amazing group," said Regina Alison, Union County Chamber of Commerce President. "Looking around this room, this is such a great group of people and the cars are amazing too. We're so glad to have them as part of the chamber of commerce, it is an honor to be able to support these guys and all that they do for the community."

"We really do appreciate everything that these guys do."

Cruisers, car enthusiasts and supporters of the organization mingled, talked classic cars and reminisced over the last 10 years that the group has been in existence, thanking everyone for coming out for the inaugural opening day of the clubhouse and for the consistent outpouring of love and support that the club has always felt from the community.

The Blairsville Cruisers was started several years ago by a small group of car-loving enthusiasts and soon grew to a full-blown club. By 2007, the group officially became a non-profit organization and has since dedicated their time and energy to helping the community through their love of beautiful classic cars.

One of the biggest fundraisers of the year, the car raffle, serves as a means for the club to raise monies to give back to the children of the community by buying Christmas for a group of school children. Each year, the group meets at Walmart and each Cruiser teams up with a student and off they go to spend as much as \$200 to \$250, depending on how much the club has been able to raise in a year, to buy toys, clothes and other essentials.

"We raffle a car off every year, that's our big fundraiser, to help the children at Christmas time," said Pete Barley, Blairsville Cruisers President. "We take them all shopping and that's a big deal for the kids, and it's a big deal for us too. We also fund money for the Sheriff's Office for their program at Christmas time. They do a lot for the kids as well."

"Last year, we took over 60 kids just for our 'Shop with a Cruiser' program, and that doesn't include the kids we were able to help with the money we donated to help with 'Shop with a Cop.'



Classic cars already on display at the new clubhouse. Photo/Lily Avery

They took 109 kids shopping last year. I don't know what it's going to look like this year but as long as we can help the kids, we're happy to do it."

In addition to Christmas shopping, the club donates to the Union County Food Bank, local families in need and anyone who the Cruisers can lend a helping hand to throughout the community.

"We love to help the whole community," said Barley. "We have a lot of good support from all of the members and all of our sponsors and we're just really grateful and thankful for everything that we're able to do and for all that everyone has done

for us as well.

"I really appreciate everyone that took the time to come out and be with us this morning. It really means a lot to us."

This year's "Shop with a Cop" and "Shop with a Cruiser" is just around the corner and while the Cruiser's have already raffled off their car for the year, anyone who wishes to donate to help a child buy Christmas can do so by sending donations to: Blairsville Cruisers, P.O. Box 2502, Blairsville, Georgia, 30514.

"Shop with a Cop" will be held on Dec. 9 and "Shop with a Cruiser" will be held on Dec. 12.