

Parade...from Page 1A

holiday cheer, as the house will be decorated for Christmas.

Along with organizing the weekend of festivities, historical society members have been hard at work getting the old courthouse ready for the holiday season, hanging

wreaths around the outside of the building and upon every door inside, getting the interior Christmas tree decorated and adorning the square with the finest holiday decorations.

And if patrons get a

hankering for something sweet while out and about on Saturday, the Historical Society will be hosting a bake sale of all homemade treats.

“On the square, we are having a bake sale to pay for some of our upgraded Christmas decorations,” said Stevens. “The ladies have done additional decorations around the entryways, so to do that we’re having a bake sale. There should be some really good homemade stuff.”

Throughout the month, there will be a Christmas concert series in the upstairs of the Old Courthouse, presented by the historical society. Included in the lineup this year will be a Christmas hand bell ringing performance with The Valley River Ringers, as well as “Christmas Favorites Meet Broadway,” with W. Gordon Graff.

In addition to the Holiday Concert Series, there will be caroling on the square just before Christmas on Dec. 20, and plenty of other opportunities throughout the



This is the Union County High School Marching Band as it existed in 2013.

month to celebrate the festive season.

“We are a small town that has grown in the last few years, but we still want to have that small town community with a feeling of our roots

being here,” said Stevens. “A lot of times the old-timey ways bring that back, and that’s important for our kids and grandkids and just this community as a whole.

“We’re very excited

about this holiday season and can’t wait to start things off with the parade. It’s a really wonderful time of year for the community to come together and just enjoy this great season.”

Burn Ban...from Page 1A

time Monday, the Rough Ridge Fire in the Cohutta Wilderness of Fannin County had been 87 percent contained.

The Rock Mountain Fire that had so nearly threatened Tate City in Towns County was 45 percent contained at press time, though still burning in Rabun County, as well as in neighboring Macon and Clay counties in North Carolina.

Union County has been spared any major brushes with wildfire, though firefighters have put out several small fires that could have become much worse.

Firefighters at Station No. 2 responded to a Thanksgiving Day fire that started along GA 515 across from Red’s Country Kitchen, right near the Union/Fannin county line.

The 911 call went in to

Fannin County Dispatch after a motorist spotted the fire, and Fannin County both alerted the Union County Fire Department and responded to the scene of the fire.

Union County Fire Station No. 2 sent firefighters to the fire, though Fannin County was able to extinguish the fire before it got out of hand.

The cause of that fire is still under investigation.

In a non-fire related incident, Union County Search and Rescue responded to a mutual aid call out of Lumpkin County on Saturday.

According to authorities, Lumpkin County received an emergency call regarding a hiker experiencing chest pains, so they contacted Union County for assistance.

Along with the U.S. Forest Service, first responders out of Lumpkin and Union counties utilized the Byron Herbert Reece Trailhead in Union County to gain access to the hiker with chest pains.

As for the ongoing burn ban, to reiterate, the ban totally prohibits all outdoor open flames, and that ban has been in effect since Nov. 4.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, with Fire Chief David Dyer’s recommendation, added weight to the Nov. 4 burn ban proclamation by amending a portion of the civil emergencies section of the Code of Union County in a special called meeting on Wednesday, Nov. 9.

This amendment created a new section within Chapter 22, Article II, of the Code of Union County:

“The Union County

commissioner, in conjunction with the fire chief of Union County, shall be authorized to ban all open burning of all types, including campfires, bonfires and any other open burning, when atmospheric, environmental, drought or other dangerous conditions of any type warrant such ban by creating significant risk of fire.

“Such ban, once declared, shall continue until lifted. Such ban can be imposed countywide or limited to a specified area or areas, or limited in other ways. Such ban shall not include fire department training fires nor covered gas grills.”

The ordinance also gave the Union County Sheriff’s Office the ability to enforce the new amendment by issuing citations to violators of the burn ban.

Residents are encouraged to call the fire department should they witness any outdoor burning.

Drought...from Page 1A

non-drought conditions also causes financial losses for the producer.

Thankfully, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, under the 2014 Farm Bill, has a program to help livestock producers recuperate some of the losses incurred because of drought conditions.

The current year 2016

Livestock Forage Disaster Program, or LFP, provides compensation “to eligible livestock producers who have suffered grazing losses for covered livestock on land that is native or improved pastureland with permanent vegetative cover or is planted specifically for grazing,” according to the USDA’s most recent Farm Bill Fact Sheet.

Eligible livestock under the LFP include alpacas, beef cattle, buffalo, beefalo, dairy cattle, deer, elk, emus, equine, goats, llamas, poultry, reindeer, sheep or swine that have been or would have been grazing the eligible grazing land or pastureland, according to the Fact Sheet.

The Livestock Forage Disaster Program is administered locally by the USDA’s Farm Service Agency, or FSA. Each county has an FSA representative, and since 1996, that representative for Union, Towns, Fannin and Gilmer counties has been FSA County Executive Director P. Kevin Thomas.

“This is one of the quicker programs that the government has to compensate cattle farmers,” said Thomas, who urges livestock producers to sign up for LFP assistance. “If you’ve got acres and you’ve got cows, we’ll get you some money.”

Added Thomas: “We’ve done livestock forage programs before, but the magnitude of this drought seems a lot worse (than in years past). This is probably one of the longest lasting droughts we’ve had, because it started in March, actually, as far as below normal rainfall.”

Jesse McKeral of Fannin County, who stopped by the Farm Agency office in Blairsville last week, said he has felt a real impact on his cattle operation since the start of the drought.

“Everybody’s having to start feeding hay earlier,” said McKeral. “The grass just didn’t last. I started feeding hay in September, when normally I wouldn’t start feeding hay until the end of October.

“Of course, the value of hay has shot up, because more people are buying hay – no one has any. So that’s really why I need the program. It’s either buy hay or sell cattle, and cattle are cheap (right now).”

And aside from causing grazing issues, the drought has begun to take a toll on water sources that farmers have historically relied upon.

“Little branches and creeks, I’ve never seen them this low,” said McKeral. “Wherever you’ve got cattle, if their branch dries up, that’s what I’m worried about. I’ve got a couple of branches that are pretty low.”

For more information and/or to apply for LFP

assistance, residents should reach out to Thomas by the end of January. His office is located inside the Haralson Memorial Civic Center at 165 Wellborn St. in Blairsville, and the office number is (706) 745-2012.

According to a previous release issued by Thomas:

“Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LFDP) provides compensation to eligible livestock producers who suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or cash-leased land.

“Livestock producers in Union, Fannin, Gilmer and Towns counties are eligible to apply for 2016 LFDP benefits on grazing land.

“To participate, eligible livestock producers must complete a CCC-853 and submit the required supporting documentation for 2016 losses.

“Producers with cash-leased land are required to provide written lease agreements from the land owner containing specific information on the rented land.

“In addition, grazing land for which benefits are requested under LFP are required to have been reported to the FSA office; if the land has not already been reported, a late-filed acreage report can be accepted, but a ‘late-filing’ fee will be assessed (\$31).”