

North Georgia News

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Chamber, United Community Bank host Christmas events for the public

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Although the weekend was cold and rainy, the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce brightened the mood with its annual Holly Jolly Christmas event, which took place on Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Union County Community Center.

More than 100 attendees made their way through the events at the Community Center, some of whom waited outside for the doors to open so they could be among the first to enjoy the festivities.

"We had people lined up at the door at 8:30 this morning," said Chamber President Steve Rowe. "The only thing we didn't get to do was the train, but we have the Chick-fil-A cow upstairs, and

Santa up there.

"We are definitely happy with the outcome, considering the weather. It's been great. We have the Gingerbread Village and Tour of Trees alongside these other activities."

In the lower floor of the Community Center, attendees could enjoy a few reindeer games and a cakewalk, which was provided by Dixie Confexions.

On the way up the stairs, there were two photo opportunities for attendees to take advantage of if they wanted a picture to capture the moment.

"What we did with the photo ops is, we have people here to take the picture using the guest's phone, then they can take their picture themselves to print it off and use for a Christmas card if they want,"

said Rowe.

Upstairs, the Blairsville Post Office had an area set up for kids to come by and write their letters to send to Santa, and kids crowded around the area, awaiting the opportunity to personally write to Santa and tell him what they wanted for Christmas.

Children also had the opportunity to meet the big man in person, as they navigated the line for the chance to sit in his lap while all the parents took pictures.

The line for Santa stretched out the doors, and many families mingled around the room as their kids waited their turn.

Breakfast with Santa was hosted by United Community Bank, which partnered with

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Kids and adults alike had a blast at the 2018 Holly Jolly Christmas and Breakfast with Santa, sponsored by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce in concert with United Community Bank.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Vogel Tree Lighting continues despite cold and rainy weather

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Despite the cold and rainy weather, Vogel State Park went through with its annual Christmas Program and Tree Lighting, ensuring the event did not get canceled for bad weather a second year in a row.

While the event could not be held in the normal field across from the big tree due to rain, organizers still made the event possible by moving it under the large pavilion sitting on the lake.

This relocation and weather did not stop guests from coming to celebrate the annual event, with some attendees making sure that they would get the chance to be part of the program.

As time passed, the small crowd grew to fill the entire pavilion, eventually leaving no more seats for people to take.

For the first hour of



Santa Claus and Janet Hill at the 2018 Vogel State Park Tree Lighting, with Mike and Cheri Young. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

the event, attendees mingled with each other in social hour fashion while enjoying hot chocolate and cookies provided by House of Prayer, Pine Top Baptist Church, and other local

churches that wanted to provide beverages and snacks for the event.

During this time, children

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Shop with a Cop takes 100 children shopping for Christmas

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
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With Christmastime and the season of giving well underway, many families struggle to provide some of the Christmas luxuries that bring magic to this time of the year.

To help give children an equal opportunity to enjoy the season, the Blairsville Police Department, with help from other local first responders, held the annual Shop with a Cop Program on Saturday, Dec. 8, at the Walmart in Blairsville.

This program offers children in need the opportunity to personally pick their own gifts, allowing them to move freely around the store with adult chaperones as they look for Christmas presents for themselves and others.

Most of the children in the program range from fifth grade to high school, and each child is given an allotted amount of money to use during



Keith Lockwood and Ginger Carey of the Union County Schools Police Department during the 2018 Shop with a Cop on Saturday, Dec. 8.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

their time with the program. "This is our 18th year of Shop with a Cop," said organizer Cindy Neely. "We have helped an average of 100 children for the last 10 years. When we first started, we took See Shop with a Cop, Page 3A

Union County fifth-graders graduate from D.A.R.E. program



Union County fifth-graders graduated from the D.A.R.E. program on Friday, Dec. 7, at the Fine Arts Center. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Schools celebrated fifth-graders who completed the D.A.R.E. program and gave each student a certificate during a graduation ceremony on Friday, Dec. 7, at the Fine Arts Center.

D.A.R.E. stands for Drug Abuse Resistance Education, and nearly 250 students took part in the ceremony.

Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris was the first speaker that day, and he talked with the children about the dedication of Union County educators and the Schools Police Department in teaching them about drug abuse.

"Just remember that the D.A.R.E. program is important,

and that these guys know what's best for you," said Paris. "They're going to teach you what's best for you."

"And thank you all for being good citizens of Union County and making this a better place to live, because of how responsible and how educated you guys are becoming, and you are our future in this county."

Following Commissioner Paris, Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley took the podium to say a few words to the D.A.R.E. graduates.

"I'm so appreciative of the police department here at the school and all the teachers and everyone, and the Board of Education and all the board members, and everyone who had a part establishing this program here in Union County

Schools," said Mayor Conley. "This is something you really need to take seriously."

"It doesn't take very much for you to get influenced by your peers to do something you shouldn't be doing. I am proud of each and every one of you students that are graduating today."

Each student was individually called up during graduation to accept their hard-earned diplomas for completing the program.

Students were required to write essays prior to the ceremony, and each essay was submitted in a contest.

The winner of the essay contest was Natalie Henderson, who read aloud her essay on the importance of the D.A.R.E.

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People can prepare for nasty winter weather with Ready.gov

By Shawn Jarrard
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Residents of the North Georgia Mountains just experienced their first taste of winter weather for the season, getting plenty of rain over the weekend followed by a light mix of sleet and snow early Monday.

In an attempt to get ahead of the large storm front that began moving through the region on Friday, the National Weather Service issued a Winter Storm Warning and held a series of special weather briefings late last week.

Heading into Saturday evening, some weather models

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Gap at the Towns/Union line on Sunday, Dec. 9.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Raffensperger, Eaton win locally and statewide in Dec. 4 runoff

By Shawn Jarrard
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With results favoring the Republican Party in the Dec. 4 General Election Runoff, the 2018 midterm election season is finally over in Georgia.

Republican Brad Raffensperger defeated his Democratic challenger Josh Barrow in the runoff race for Secretary of State, taking 759,944 votes (51.97 percent) to Barrow's 702,251 votes (48.03 percent) statewide.

Here in Union County, Raffensperger enjoyed a much larger margin of victory, having received 80.87 percent of the vote with 4,292 votes to Barrow's 19.13 percent with



Brad Raffensperger

1,015 votes. Both statewide and locally, Republican Incumbent



Chuck Eaton

Chuck Eaton experienced similar margins as Raffensperger in his See Election, Page 2A

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