

Gurtler...from Page 1A



Mary's Southern Grill in Young Harris packed them in Friday, as dozens gathered to hear what their newly elected state representative had to say.

against the 2017 state budget, explaining his concern for the disbursement of funds throughout the budget.

According to Gurtler, the budget no longer prioritizes what he thinks is best for the state of Georgia, therefore requiring a reworking of the arrangement of funds.

"Georgia is a balanced budget state," said Gurtler. "But, if we keep wasting money, it doesn't really matter how balanced it is if the money isn't prioritized."

"When I worked with Stephen (Allison), we'd open up the budget and nine times out of 10 we'd see something that was simply not the proper role of government. It concerns me as a conservative. So, unless something drastically changes, I'm going to vote against the budget."

Gurtler went on to explain that he understood that his decision to do so is controversial, and that some of his constituents may disagree with his decision. However, he did say that he felt it was his duty to do what he felt best for the state, and that he could not in good conscience vote for something that he saw as an improper use of government.

"There is room for

compromise, of course," said Gurtler. "But, this has gone so far past what the government is supposed to be doing in its proper role, I feel like I have to (vote against it)."

"I don't think I'm going to be alone in this, but as John Adams said, you have to stand on your principles, even if you stand alone. So, that's what I plan to do this coming session."

In conjunction with the pending state budget, Gurtler alluded to the fact that the recently defeated Amendment 1 concerning the state's right to intervene in school systems the state deems as failing will be a topic of discussion in Atlanta come January.

While the majority of Georgia citizens voted against the proposed amendment in the recent election, there is still a significant amount of state legislators who feel it would be in the best interest of public education to implement the program.

"What concerns me is, the people voted on it, into a referendum, and it was shot down," said Gurtler. "I think the legislature is going to try and bypass this. So, we have to be watching out for that as well. But I will keep you guys informed."

Another key point that Gurtler brought up was something he often spoke on throughout the course of his campaign - his desire to repeal the \$5 hotel tax, which he will be presenting to the General Assembly in January. According to Gurtler, this tax

is harmful to the economy of District 8 due to the unique tourist attractions that come with being in a mountainous region.

"It takes money that should be put back into the private sector," said Gurtler. "If my bill passes, I want to repeal the law of the \$5 hotel tax. It would bring \$168,000 back into the private sector. I think that's what we need to do. If it doesn't pass, at least people will be talking about it."

In conclusion, Gurtler promised full transparency to his constituents, saying he hopes to build a relationship with local area media to help keep residents well-informed with state politics, as well as create a forum for patrons to voice opinions concerning local matters.

"I want to tell you what's going on," said Gurtler. "I want to let you know what's happening in the session, what bills are important, what bills I'm voting on. I'll also have that information updated on my website as well."

"Every single bill that I vote on, a yes or no vote, will have an explanation behind it so you'll know exactly what's going on. I really want to keep you guys informed about everything that's happening in Atlanta."

Before closing, Gurtler shared his gratitude for the continuous support he has received from the community, and says he looks forward to serving in the coming year.

Cruisers...continued from Page 1A



Every year, the Blairsville Cruisers raise money to make sure the children of Union County don't have to go without for Christmas. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

and friends.

"Without the support of the community, a lot of these families wouldn't have a Christmas," Barley said. "All of the money we raise throughout the year, the money we get from the car raffle, it all goes to helping these kids out. We have a lot of local sponsors that help us out, as well."

A few of the sponsors that Barley and Tanner mentioned were Walmart, Chick-fil-A, O'Reilly's Auto Parts, Home Depot, the Union County Sheriff's Office and the Blairsville Police Department.

However, the Blairsville Cruisers wanted to make the community aware that they will be submitting a "Thank You" article soon to the *North Georgia News* that will include the complete list of sponsors.

"I want to make sure that I don't leave any sponsors out because we have such a long list of sponsors that helped make this possible," Barley added.

The number of children that participate in this event has grown each year, with approximately 35 kids taking part in 2013. That number continued to grow, with 40 to 50 kids each of the next two years, and 65 in 2016.

After the kids are chosen by the school system and show up for their special day, they are taken by bus to Walmart on the last Friday before Christmas Vacation, where they break off into groups that are accompanied by volunteers from the Blairsville Cruisers and Union County Schools.

This year the cruisers were joined by volunteers from the Union County



The Blairsville Cruisers took a group of students shopping on Friday, Dec. 16, to Walmart. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police Department, employees from the school, as well as employees of Walmart and others who just wanted to lend a helping hand.

After shopping for approximately an hour, the children take their shopping carts through the checkout line, and as Tanner already said, the Cruisers "pay their bill."

Shop With A Cruiser isn't the only way the Blairsville Cruisers give back to the community - they support the Union County Food Bank, they help out needy families during the year by providing food, assisting with gas and power bills, and they have even assisted with funeral costs for local families.

Furthermore, the Blairsville Cruisers give away scholarships to high school seniors. Last May, the Cruisers awarded eight \$500 scholarships to local high schoolers.

Walmart also plays a vital role in the community through their Volunteerism Always Pays (V.A.P.) program.

According to Walmart Personnel Coordinator Alice Patterson, "Our associates volunteer their time so the company can give a large check to the organization that we work for. We (Blairsville Walmart) gave \$5,000 to the Shop With A Cruiser, the Shop With A Cop, and we gave \$5,000 to the Children's Miracle Network."

Walmart cashiers Wanda Hollis and Ashley Mathis enjoyed volunteering their time with the Shop With A Cruiser and Shop With A Cop programs this year.

"Working the checkout line for these events is so heartwarming, because many of these kids are getting presents that they can put back for their baby brother or sister, or their moms and dads, instead of for themselves," Hollis said.

Union/Towns Tea Party meeting

The Union/Towns County Tea Party now meets the 4th Tuesday of each month, 7 PM at the Haralson Civic Center.

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