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local levels, according to Jon Suggs, public information director for the GDVS.

"At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Defense started a 50th anniversary commemoration for the Vietnam War, I believe it was three years ago, and essentially they're observing the 50th anniversary from when the war started until all the way through 2025, which will be 50 years after the end, so just observing those events as they move through these about 15 years," said Suggs.

"They have a program through which other entities can partner with that program, so the state of Georgia is an official commemorative partner in the 50th anniversary commemorations. On the state level, as part of that, we decided to develop the Certificates of Honor program to give to all of Georgia's approximately 234,000 Vietnam Veterans."

The very first Certificates of Honor were given out on March 30, 2015, when the statewide program launched.

"We had a ceremony at the capitol with Gov. Nathan Deal and the director of the Department of Defense's Office of Commemorations were both there to launch this Certificate of Honor, and we gave out the first ones to representatives from the various state veterans service organizations - American Legion, VFW, Military Order of

the Purple Heart," said Suggs.

"There were about 15 altogether, each of which put forward one representative for their organization to receive the certificate directly from the governor. And then afterward, we had a longer ceremony for everybody else who was able to come and receive those."

Since then, the Georgia Department of Veterans Services has been involved in 112 ceremonies like the one that is coming to Blairsville, and more than 8,200 certificates and 6,800 pins have been awarded since March of last year.

"We're trying to give them to as many Georgia Vietnam Veterans as we can, as we can get to come out, and programs like the one that we've got coming up in Blairsville help us to reach more of those veterans," said Suggs.

Feedback for the certificate program has been overwhelmingly positive, said Suggs.

"What we hear from so many Vietnam Veterans is how much they appreciate this public thank you," said Suggs. "You're talking about a group of veterans that, unfortunately, most of them never heard that. In fact, many of them heard quite the opposite when they came home from service at the time, in the 1960s and 1970s, when the war was going on and was very unpopular.

"As a country, we've gotten a lot better with how we treat our servicemen and

women, how we distinguish between those who set the policy and those who actually go and do the fighting - that we appreciate those who fight on our behalf, whether we appreciate why they're doing it or not.

"That's something that we're always trying to do better by Vietnam Veterans, and make up for that time when we weren't there and we didn't say thank you. So this is the state of Georgia, as the state, trying to make up for lost time."

Any Vietnam Veteran reading this on Tuesday, Feb. 16, who would like to participate in the program but have not signed up to receive a certificate should know that there's still time to make it into the Feb. 17 presentation.

"For this program, we'll be taking names through the end of the business day on Tuesday (Feb. 16)," said Suggs. "Anybody who is eligible, which is any honorably discharged Vietnam Veteran, they can fax that to (404) 656-7006, or scan and email it to certificates@vs.state.ga.us, marked Blairsville Vietnam Veterans Ceremony."

Along with Commissioner Roby, a representative of U.S. Congressman Doug Collins' office will be in attendance Wednesday, and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley will present a proclamation on behalf of the city.

Pastor Page 1A

Osborn received a call to meet with the pastor, who had also called the Blairsville Police. As it turned out, whoever had punctured his tires had more in store where that came from.

"He had received a text message that basically stated the tires were only the beginning, Romans 12:19," said Lt. Osborn, adding that the incoming phone number was unknown to the pastor.

Romans 12:19 in the King James Version of the Bible reads: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

Authorities believe the message to have come from the same individual who sent other harassing text messages to the pastor in October, though that case is still under investigation.

The Bible verse referenced seemed to speak to the opposite of the actions being taken by the perpetrator, but that did not deter this person from further harassment of the pastor.

The Sunday following the incident with the tires, the pastor returned home to find his mailbox had been smashed, which seemed to be fulfillment of the threat made in the text message the previous Tuesday, according to Lt. Osborn.

Fortunately, the case broke wide open when a witness spotted a vehicle with the alleged perpetrator smashing another mailbox later in the week last week.

After tracking down the unique, older model car and interviewing the owner of the vehicle, three juveniles were taken into custody, where they gave full confessions.

One of the juveniles was responsible for the text messages, two were

responsible for the damage to the pastor's tires, and all three were responsible for driving around with a baseball bat and smashing the pastor's and another's mailbox.

Charges include felony criminal damage to property for the tires for those involved, and misdemeanor criminal trespass for the mailboxes.

As for why the juveniles were harassing the pastor, authorities said they could not divulge that information at this time, but added that the pastor had not committed any wrongdoing.

The case was solved before further escalation could occur thanks to the hard work of the Blairsville Police Department and the sheriff's office.

"We encourage our young people to stay out of trouble and not commit crimes that may be on their records for the rest of their lives," said Sheriff Mack Mason.

BOE...from Page 1A

coming days. We anticipate employing Dr. Rayfield on or about the beginning of March, and anticipate his beginning work before the beginning of the coming school year.

"We believe that Dr. Rayfield is well suited to carry on the progress that the school system has made under the leadership of Mr. Steppe, and he will be able to continue the school system's focus on improving student achievement and financial efficiency. Copies of the press release by the board relative to our naming Dr. Rayfield as the single finalist, and the documents relative to his application are available to the public on request at the board office."

Davenport went on to say that public input concerning Rayfield can be directed to the board members' email addresses, available on the Union County Schools website.

The board then voted 4-0 to name Dr. Rayfield as the single finalist - Board Member Tony Hunter was not present, though Davenport said that Hunter was in agreement about Rayfield.

Rayfield was selected out of 27 applicants, nine of which were interviewed, and only Dr. Rayfield received a call back for a second interview, according to Davenport.

According to the release issued by the board, Rayfield was selected for many

reasons - he hit every trait and characteristic found most important in an employee and community survey, and he has an extensive background as an educator, superintendent and in agricultural education.

Rayfield earned his bachelor's degree in agricultural education from Auburn University in 1988, his master's degree in the same from the University of Georgia in 1993, and his Doctor of Education from Oklahoma State University in agricultural education with an area of specialization in educational administration, all in 1995.

His extensive background in agricultural education will fit nicely within a community that considers agriculture and the schools' FFA programs of high importance within the county,

Veterans aid triad formed in county

It is a linking of three great organizations with the goal of assisting disabled veterans in need. The three members of the triad are Vietnam Veterans of America chapter 1101, Rotary Club of Union County, and Corporate Building Supply Company.

The goal of the triad is to provide Ramps to veterans within Union and Towns county that need them, cannot afford them, or are mired in the bog that should supply them called the VA.

Our triad will, after being notified of a veteran, qualify the veteran and discuss their needs. The services provided will be

according to the board.

Prior to coming to Union County Schools from Decatur County, Rayfield served as superintendent of Cook County School System for seven years.

Rayfield was also CTAE director for Cook County Schools, as well as an assistant principal there, and he worked for the Georgia Department of Education as a regional education specialist from 1998 until 2002.

He has been a high school teacher, a cooperative extension educator in both Georgia and Oklahoma, and an assistant professor at OSU.

Steppe announced his retirement in early November, and the search for his replacement began shortly thereafter.

free entry/exit ramps to the home, widening of inside doorways to allow for wheelchair access, and possibly the minor remodeling of bathrooms and kitchens to meet the need of a wheelchair bound Veteran.

The service will be totally free, but has a few restrictions. The Veteran or their spouse must own, and be living full time in, the home being addressed. The Veteran must not be able to afford the modifications. And the Veteran must live in Union or Towns county.

The process is simple. Notify a member of VVA chapter 1101, or Union Rotary Club. As much as possible, all information will be kept confidential. After a short vetting period, Rotary will provide a design and a bill of materials to the supply company. VVA will make the request for funds from the supply company who will in turn request funding from its corporate offices. Once funding is approved workers from Rotary, VVA and the supply company will complete the job.

If you are, or know of a veteran in need of our services, please contact the Chamber of Commerce and ask for the number of Rotary or VVA in Blairsville.

Lastly, if you are a building supply company, a construction company, or just someone with building skills please contact VVA or Rotary via the chamber and we will be glad to add you to the list of resources.

There should be no Veteran without means for self-help in these two counties that will not get this assistance.

Submitted by: Mike Priven, President, VVA GA chapter #1101



John Nix and the Country Cousins entertain more than 200 in attendance at the Historic Union County Courthouse on Saturday, Feb. 6.

Nix...from Page 1

"In 1953, Clayton was stationed in the Air Force in Memphis, Tennessee, just as Elvis Presley was beginning to play around Memphis - this was anything he could get," said John. "Clayton would book him in the NCO club. Then they came to be friends, and Clayton helped Elvis around there before he got big."

When Bill Monroe died in 1996, Cranford played his Kentucky funeral, and in 2001, both Cranford and Clayton joined John as inductees into the Atlanta Country Music Hall of Honor.

Being the longest playing band in Union County, Nix - who plays the fiddle, mandolin and guitar - has seen members of his Country Cousins come and go.

Homer, Clayton and Cranford have all passed away in the last several years, as have many of John's musical cousins, though they every one played music right up until the end.

"So many of them have gone on," said John. "That's the sad part, but it's just something that happens. I've got more good memories about my pickin' than anything. When one of them passes on, you miss them, but you've still got good memories, even though they're gone."

And with plenty of support

from his ever revolving mix of Country Cousins, Nix plans to continue the tradition that he and his brothers began nearly seven decades ago.

"I hope to play a whole lot more," said Nix, now 80. "I don't want to quit, there ain't no plans to quit. Only the Lord knows when I want to quit, because I don't want to quit myself."

Nix is thankful for all of the support he's had throughout the years, in the form of fans, friends and family.

"Lots of people who supported me are gone - I can think of hundreds of people that, when I started out, would be with me if they were here," said Nix. "I want to thank all of the people around Blairsville that have always helped me."

Commissioner Paris' proclamation, which named Feb. 6, 2016, as "John Nix and the Country Cousins Day," also recounted a history of the band in Union County and abroad.

"John Nix and his brothers, Homer, Clayton and Cranford, started the band Country Cousins in the 1950s, with Homer Nix on the guitar, Clayton Nix on the mandolin, John Nix on the fiddle and guitar, and later Cranford with a banjo, replacing Homer."

"The Country Cousins have played music all over the mountain region for the past 65 years, including square

dances at Vogel and the Walasi-Yi Inn on Blood Mountain, and Country Cousins played with the world famous Skillet Lickers at the Gainesville Civic Center in 1956, and they played for Sen. Zell Miller's gubernatorial campaigns.

"Country Cousins played with Bill Monroe at Young Harris College to kick off the first wagon train to the Bald in the late 1950s, and then played the first wagon train dance on Bald Mountain. Country Cousins played for many dances in the Old Masonic Lodge here in Blairsville. They were also the original band to play at the Oprey in the Wildwood in the 1960s."

"Country Cousins were the inaugural band for the Blairsville Sorghum Festival, and have been the house band for the festival every year for the past 45 years. And Country Cousins have played for many street dances on the Blairsville Square, fundraisers, nursing homes, reunions, and benefits, making them well known and respected in the community."

John Nix will next perform at his home church singing, the third Sunday in March at 5 p.m., at Shady Grove United Methodist Church.

Nix and the Country Cousins can also be heard at the Historic Courthouse, the night before the Blairsville Sorghum Festival Parade.

Quilts...from Page 1A



Clinton Bond Strough, 93 year old WWII Veteran

comes with what we call our 'presentation case,' which can also be used as a pillow case," Young said. "Each veteran is presented with a copy of a poem and the three-part message (that was read aloud by guild member Lula Williams), and a special individual 'Thank You' note."

The first quilt was presented to U.S. Army Veteran Charles King, who served in Korea and currently resides in Young Harris.

The next quilt was given to Long, who is a resident of Blue Ridge and served in the Coast Guard during the Vietnam War.

Following Long, Segars received his quilt. Segars lives in Hiawassee and served in the Air Force during Vietnam.

Up next was Lunsford, who joined the U.S. Army in 1967, was a veteran of Vietnam, and is a resident of Blairsville.

The fifth and sixth quilts were presented to Davis along with Larry King, both of whom are Vietnam Veterans and reside in Blairsville. King served in the Army while Davis was a member of the Air Force.

Of the nine quilts presented that day, only one went to a World War II veteran,

and that was Strough.

Originally from Middletown, Indiana, the 93-year-old Strough served in the Army during World War II, and is currently a resident of Hayesville, North Carolina.

The next quilt was presented to Barrett, an Army veteran of the Vietnam War and a resident of Hiawassee.

Last but not least, the final quilt was presented to Lester, a resident of Blairsville who served in the Army during the Korean War.

Prior to handing out the quilts, Anna Stone read a poem titled "Quilts of Valor" by Katie Valentine - the poem was presented to each veteran along with their quilt.

According to guild member Bonnie Garrett, Quilts

of Valor is a national grassroots organization comprised of thousands of quilters in every state in the Union.

Since 2003, more than 132,000 quilts have been presented both at home and overseas, to combat veterans of current and past wars including World War II, Korea, Vietnam, both Iraq wars and Afghanistan. Quilts have been sent overseas.

"We honor veterans who have been touched by war with a Quilt of Valor," Garrett said, providing background information on the Quilts of Valor program. "We know the debt we owe our military is beyond repayment, but we've come here today to honor these nine veterans for their wonderful service."