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on the opening night, the proceeds of which benefited the Georgia Scholarship Foundation with an eye toward FFA students.

Friday brought plenty of educational opportunities for those in attendance, as guest speakers gave fair-centric presentations aimed at fair and carnival promotions,

social media and other topics covering how to attract more fairgoers.

The convention wrapped up with the annual Miss Georgia Fairs State Pageant.

Towns County High School Senior Mia Manto, who is the current Miss Georgia Mountain Fair, competed in the event.

Manto did well, but the honor ultimately went to Kali Turner of the Georgia Carolina State Fair.

Next year, the convention will be held again at the Crown Plaza in Atlanta, Jan. 21-23.

“Plans are already underway for the first ever joint Georgia/South Carolina con-

vention to be hosted in Greenville, SC, in 2017,” according to a statement released by the GAAF. “Fairs are indeed all about building solid, beneficial and lasting relationships, and Georgia and South Carolina’s joint venture is a shining example of success in fairs helping fairs.”

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rural hospitals and their emergency departments.

“One of the main areas of focus for the Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee was to address Emergency Department (ED) stressors in rural hospitals that can contribute and lead to their closure,” according to the report. “In an effort to address this issue, a process to scale down hospital operations and create a stand-alone ED was proposed. After testimony and research it was determined that stand-alone EDs are not financially viable, due to several reasons.

“There are issues with the reimbursement mechanisms and there are extremely high labor costs and capital investments. National trend data also shows most of these being developed in wealthier, suburban areas as opposed to rural areas. It was determined that it takes approximately 15,000 ED visits to break even, which equates to a needed population of approximately 35,000. However, Georgia has virtually no rural hospitals in counties capable of supporting an ED without

outside subsidies.”

And telemedicine will play a key role in relieving the stress on rural emergency departments.

According to the American Telemedicine Association, “telemedicine is the use of medical information exchanged from one site to another via electronic communications to improve a patient’s clinical health status. Telemedicine includes a growing variety of applications and services using two-way video, email, smart phones, wireless tools and other forms of telecommunications technology.”

One example of telemedicine in action is if 911 dispatch receives a call from someone having chest pains, and a telemedicine-equipped ambulance arrives on the scene. Paramedics can give the patient an EKG to monitor heart activity on the way to the hospital, and doctors can review the data as it is streamed wirelessly from the ambulance to the hospital.

Before the patient even arrives, doctors can let paramedics know whether

or not the patient is in need of a more specialized facility. Union General Hospital could, for example, instruct the ambulance to bypass UGH altogether, and get the patient to a rendezvous point with a helicopter to be airlifted to a larger facility that specializes in heart trauma, such as Northeast Georgia Medical’s Ronnie Green Heart Center.

“The goal of the ‘Hub and Spoke’ model is to best use existing and new technology to ensure that patients are being treated in the most appropriate setting, thus relieving some of the cost pressures on the smallest rural hospitals’ emergency departments,” according to the committee report.

By incorporating the “spokes” mentioned above, “healthcare professionals can ensure that each patient is being transported to the appropriate setting, monitor chronically ill patients to help them avoid repeat trips to the hospital and address frequent fliers that clog our small emergency rooms,” according to the report. “Using methods such as health apps with medical

reminders, social and community services like Meals on Wheels and mobile monitoring will relieve some of the most costly pressures on small hospitals.”

Ultimately, the program aims to further communication between healthcare professionals, as well as their patients, in order to maximize patient care.

Joining Union General Hospital in the pilot program are Appling Health System, Crisp Regional and Emanuel Regional Medical Center.

“Just as a medical emergency can’t wait, neither can we wait to act upon these recommendations,” said Gov. Deal in his statement. “An additional \$3 million will be allocated in this year’s budget to the State Office of Rural Health within the Georgia Department of Community Health to fund the necessary tools the four hubs need to effectively implement this pilot program. It is my hope that these efforts are not a temporary fix, but rather the beginning of a long-lasting road to recovery for our rural health systems.”

## Snowman...from Page 1A

available to the large majority of Union County instantly. The entire community gets involved, and it has become something people actually look forward to while weathering the cold, winter months in the mountains.

Rebecca Gilliam posted, “It is great for our community! So many memories have been made that will always be cherished among families and friends!”

The contest encourages families to put down their electronics, get outside, and build something together.

“Another thing I love about the contest is that a



lot of people get snowed in, sometimes alone, and this gives them a way to connect with people around them,” Olver explains. And she’s right.

A resident who just moved to Blairsville in December said, “I was snowbound alone, so I decided to get out and build my first snowman this year.”

A defining feature of the event has become the number of local businesses that voluntarily line up to offer prizes every year. Olver says she started receiving messages from businesses almost immediately offering to donate prizes.

More than a dozen local businesses took part in the offering of prizes for the event.

The Olver family along with scores of local residents who wrote into the site, wish to give their sincere gratitude to these businesses for their generosity.

One participant expressed it well when she said, “The memories made as 186 families, friends, and neighbors got outside together will last long after the scarves and mittens are stashed in the closet, and the snow has melted. You can’t measure that kind of success.”

