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a better time.

"The Union County Senior Center is an amazing program," Paris said. "And it is truly amazing what's done by Kathy Hill, her staff, and the volunteers whose hard work and dedication keep the Senior Center going."

Funding for the expansion came via a highly competitive Community Development Block Grant from the state Department of Community Affairs of almost \$300K. The grant is the culmination of many concerted efforts by various supporters of the Senior Center.

Paris said that a major reason that this money was granted for the Senior Centers expansion project, "is due to Kathy Hill's hard work, determination, and enthusiasm," that she has for the Senior Center and who it represents.

Bill Lassard, one of the center's appreciative patrons, summed up this same sentiment.

Lassard wanted to express his depth of gratitude to Hill. He expressed to all those present that "everything Kathy has done here at the Center is above and beyond, and whatever salary she is making, is not nearly enough."

The grant from DCA through their CDBG program is open to all Georgia counties; the purpose is to "enhance the quality of life," and for this project, according to Patrick Larson, a representative of the Economic Development staff of the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission.

"This CDBG was awarded to the Senior Center to help the community to better serve Seniors in Union County," Larson said. "So congratulations are in order to the Seniors, the Center, and the entire community for all of the hard work that has been done on this people project."

"Without the community coming together, as you have done here in Union County for the sole benefit of the Senior Center, this project would have



Senior Center Director Kathy Hill welcomes a crowd to the Open House of the expanded Union County Senior Center. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

never come together," Larson said. "These grants are getting more and more difficult, and more and more competitive, so the fact that Union County was awarded this project expansion grant is impressive."

Furthering this remarkable achievement was Lamar Gailey, the Community Program director for Legacy Links. Legacy Links is the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) for 13 North Georgia counties, and the agency is responsible for advocacy for seniors, planning, and administration of programs, coordination and the monitoring of services in the area.

Gailey, who travels throughout North Georgia, extended appreciation for the strength of the community in Union County. He congratulated the county on the "beautiful and new improvements" made to the facility dedicated to the advocacy and outreach for the Senior Citizens of Union County.

"This project was a priority project due to the crowded conditions and lack of floor space for the activities, which hinders the provision of services, for a growing number of clientele," Paris said.

"The Senior Center is growing, and the lack of space made it tough, we had only one activities room which served

as the workspace for most of the programs administered by the center; workspace that was "cramped and crowded," Hill said.

Paris said that the entirety of the funds went towards the renovation and expansion of the Senior Center," and as Hill proudly showed, this grant money funded the new activities room, a meeting/functions room.

"There was enough money left over to expand the kitchen area, which is the heart of the county's Meals-On-Wheels program," Hill said.

Meals-On-Wheels is projected to serve 24,000 meals during 2013.

In recognition of the new activities room, Hill, dedicated on behalf of the Mountain Line Dancers, the original activities room to Jeannette Hudack, "our inaugural line dancing teacher who brought entertainment and smiles to all she met."

After the ribbon was officially cut, the assemblage was treated to refreshments, entertainment by the Mountain Line Dancers and by the dulcimer players, Mountain Sounds, and invited to tour the newly expanded Union County Senior Center.

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title was actually for the one in the audience "with the most wisdom."

Jeannette Hill, who is the director and organizer for this event, and is part of the Friends of the State Parks volunteer organization, has volunteered to organize the tree lighting since its humble beginnings.

Hill wanted to make sure that she took this moment "right now to thank all of the volunteers who helped to make this event possible."

Hill continued by explaining that volunteers worked ceaselessly on Nov. 17th to decorate Vogel State Park for the holidays, and in anticipation of the tree lighting ceremony which is the "start of our Christmas festivities."

Later on, after some more Christmas carols, Randy Gambrell, assistant superintendent at Vogel State Park, who has also been in attendance during the last 10 years, spoke to the crowd.

Gambrell began by welcoming everyone to Vogel "because it is thanks to you, the visitors of the park, who continue to make this park system successful."

Additionally, Gambrell thanked all volunteers who helped facilitate the events, and this included a "special thanks to the BRMEMC for providing two bucket trucks to help us decorate the 35-foot Blue Spruce Christmas tree" for the tree lighting event.

Gambrell then added another "special thanks to Southern Tree Plantation in Blairsville for donating all of the "greenery used to decorate the fences."

Gambrell made sure to thank all of the volunteers who have worked all through the year "to raise money to fund the Christmas festivities, in addition to the various other events held at Vogel the rest of the year."

The honor of lighting the tree went to Gambrell, and this has "become sort of a tradition for our little family of volunteers, so we want Randy to continue the tradition," Hill said.

After the Rev. Doug Merck, a Missionary for the Baptist Association, read the Christmas story from the scriptures, Gambrell did the honors of lighting up the Vogel Christmas Tree.



Photos by Lowell Nicholson