

North Georgia News

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Sheriff Mason has bent Santa Claus' ear

By Charles Duncan
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When Union County Sheriff Mack Mason was growing up, there was no such thing as Shop With A Cop, or the Sheriff's Office Give A Gift Christmas.

The only cruisers around were a bunch of young boys riding their bicycles through the various community neighborhoods.

No, there were no community groups raising funds to buy Christmas for local boys and girls. Christmas at that time included an apple or orange, peppermint candy if you were lucky and maybe a few walnuts.

Times have changed, and since 1999 in the City of Blairsville, Shop With A Cop has become a community staple. Since 2001, the Sheriff's Office also has become a community priority.

And Shopping With A Cruiser has become a community focus as well.

In 2014, Sheriff Mason and the Sheriff's Office are hoping to bring Christmas to 20 or more families.

"A lot of kids wouldn't be getting anything if it weren't for the graciousness of the people in the county," Sheriff Mason said. "It's a very humbling experience to be able to provide for these children that otherwise wouldn't be getting anything for Christmas."

"Some families have fallen on hard times, the economy is down, and it's a re-

See Christmas, 3A



Gas prices dropping outside of Blairsville

By Charles Duncan
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Gas prices have dropped significantly in recent weeks.

Thanks to the bottom dropping out of the cost of crude oil, many locations are seeing prices at or below \$2 a gallon.

In Blue Ridge, gas prices are \$1.93 a gallon. Prices throughout Fannin County are at or below \$2 a gallon.

"Gasoline prices are plunging down," said Mark Jenkins, spokesman for AAA - The Auto Club Group. "Oil prices dropped for the fourth consecutive week because of increased oil production and low demand, and that's keeping downward pressure on the price of gasoline. It is unclear exactly how low prices will go, but gasoline will keep getting cheaper as long as oil does."

In Blairsville and Union County, that's not entirely the case.

Prices have dropped and range from \$2.19 a gallon to \$2.43 per gallon.

See Gas, 2A



While gas prices fell below \$2 a gallon at various stations in Northeast Georgia and Tennessee over the weekend, prices in Florida are not far behind. The lowest prices in Florida are in the Jacksonville area at about \$2.10 a gallon. If prices keep falling at a rate of 2 cents a day, Florida motorists could begin finding gasoline below \$2 by the end of the week.

Though gas prices are as cheap as they have been in Blairsville and Union County since 2009, many question why they aren't similar in nature to neighboring Blue

Deputies, BPD and sheriff and chief break bread



By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Union County Sheriff's Office celebrated its second annual Christmas Party under Sheriff Mack Mason's Administration on Wednesday, Dec. 17.

"This is just all of us being able to come together without being in a work environment," said Sheriff Mason. "Of course, we've all got our phones and our radios, and are subject to have to leave at a moment's notice, but this is

See Bread, 3A

A shopping cop's work is never done

By Charles Duncan
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On Dec. 13th, Blairsville Police Chief Johnny Carroll was worried some child would be left out in the quest for Christmas toys.

He made sure he added that if a child was in need that some one close to that child should call the Blairsville Police Department.

Shop With A Cop was held on Dec. 13 at Walmart in Blairsville.

On Friday, Chief Carroll and No. 1 Elf Cindy Neely were gathering gifts for those children less fortunate that missed the annual Shop With A Cop event.

By the end of the day,



Chief Carroll said, "Mission accomplished."

Stashed in the inner confines of the Blairsville Police Department were bags

of gifts hand-picked for those shoppers that couldn't make it to the annual Shop With A Cop event.

"I know what it was

like to get without anything," Chief Carroll said. "There's nothing to be ashamed about it. We just knew we were poor and didn't have anything."

"We were grateful for what we got for Christmas, but it was never anything to amount to nothing," Chief Carroll said.

"That's why these cops are proud to get out and help those less fortunate individuals and help put a smile on a young person's face," Chief Carroll said.

Chief Carroll will always believe that making a difference in a young person's life will pay long-term dividends. His theory is that

See Shop, 2A

Shopping With A Cruiser a fun experience

By Shawn Jarrard
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Christmas just got better for several youth in Union County, as the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club had another successful run with Shop With A Cruiser at Walmart in Blairsville.

Shop With A Cruiser is modeled after the Shop With A Cop program, where Cruiser volunteers take children from Union County Schools shopping at Walmart for Christmas presents.

The Blairsville Cruisers support multiple charitable efforts, including the Blairsville Police Department's Shop With A Cop and the Union County Sheriff's Give A Gift programs.

Shop With A Cruiser aims for a younger demographic, especially those with special needs.

"We need to sponsor these young kids, too," said Blairsville Cruiser Chairman Wayne Tanner. "The other kids that Shop With A Cop are 12 to 18, and we figure these younger kids need these a break, too."

In conjunction with the



schools, the Cruisers generate a list of children who need that extra bit of help in order to have that special Christmas experience.

Tanner's daughter, Sherry Lovell, is a paraprofessional at Union County Middle School, and she helps

to make sure the right children are selected each year to take part in Shop With A Cruiser.

And the Cruisers turned out in force this Christmas season to assist 40 children from the school system in picking out their presents at Walmart.

Each member who

volunteered his or her time walked the store with a child or two, pulling down bikes or encouraging them to get what they really wanted.

"A lot of times, those kids, even the little kids,

See Cruiser, 2A

Jeepers do their part to make Christmas special



By Todd Forrest
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'Tis the season of giving and the Blue Ridge Mountain Jeepers are on the front lines, helping ensure that no one will battle hunger during the Christmas holiday.

Every three months the

Jeepers deliver non-perishable goods to the local food banks, but seeing that it's the holidays, the group has collected enough funds to make a monetary donation to the food pantry, located at the Blairsville Civic Center.

"We think the food bank

See Jeepers, 2A

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MERRY CHRISTMAS
from the staff of the North Georgia News