

GMF rings in New Year with fireworks, cruise-in

By Jarrett Whitener
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HIWASSEE – After a rain delay from New Year’s Eve, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds hosted its first-ever New Year’s Celebration and Fireworks Show on Saturday, Jan. 2.

The free-to-attend event featured food, craft vendors and a cruise-in thanks to special guests the Blairsville Cruisers, who welcomed car enthusiasts for a family-friendly event before the start of the fireworks.

Cruiser Marcus Tuschel said he found the event to be enjoyable and the fairgrounds to be a fine venue to hold a New Year’s celebration.

“With the weather and evening like this, it seemed like a good time to do it,” Tuschel said. “They asked (Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason) what she thought about having a cruise-in, and she said it sounded good to her.

“Vendors came out to advertise, and it became an event. It is beautiful with all of the lights. I counted around 30 or 40 cars. We do these

cruise-ins and other outings a few times each year (in Blairsville), and this venue is great.

“People really enjoy it and like to see the cars. If we can keep with it like this, that will be terrific.”

With hundreds of spectators frequenting the event, many attendees like Lori Stanton of North Carolina said they were happy to find a community event to celebrate.

“This is great for the kids and the family,” Stanton said. “We didn’t know if anything would be going on for the New Year, and we wanted to get out and enjoy the holiday together.

“We had a little party at the house where we watched the New York show, but it was so boring this year. There just wasn’t any life in it and seemed like it had little effort.

“This is fun, though, and we can be active and eat and just be together. The fun of the New Year is bringing it in with your family and friends.”

And families did just that, with kids in the fairgrounds parking lot cheering as they watched in awe the sky explode in a multitude of colors.

Carl Owen of Towns

County said he, too, was happy to have something like the fireworks available for everyone in the community, especially since the show did not require a reservation cost or a late night.

“It isn’t New Year’s anymore, but this is still great,” Owen said Saturday. “I didn’t expect the fireworks to be so long and grand. I thought it would be short and sweet and then we go home, but it was quite the show and something to watch.

“My wife and I come to the shows here every now and then, and it is just great what this place gives to the area. We don’t get to come for everything, but what we do see is always wonderful.

“I just want to wish everyone a Happy New Year, and I hope the best for those in our community and in our country. It is a time to celebrate.”

With the arrival of 2021, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is aiming to bring back concerts and other events that were postponed due to COVID-19 in 2020. For information on upcoming events, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.



The Blairsville Cruisers headed to Hiwassee Saturday to assist the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in welcoming the community for fireworks and a classic car show.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



This year marks a good first for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds – a New Year’s Fireworks show, delayed from Dec. 31 to Jan. 2 due to concerns over rain.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Baby Shepard...from Page 1A



As the first baby born at Union General in 2021, Shepard embodies powerful themes of hope, new beginnings and the infinite potential of the future.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

forward. She recommends that new mothers work on building confidence for themselves by

always keeping in mind what’s best for their baby and family.

“For new parents, I would say that breastfeeding

has been a major priority for me,” Bonner said. “It is important for the baby and their immunity. It has given me a clear mind to know that I am doing everything I can during the pandemic to keep them safe. It is a lot of hard work, but you can’t give up.”

Union General Labor & Delivery makes it a priority to “partner with women and their families to ensure a joyful birth experience,” according to <http://www.uniongeneralhealthsystem.com/health-services/womens-health/labor-delivery>.

“All rooms are private, and your new baby will remain in the room with you around the clock,” per the website. “We encourage mom, dad and baby to spend this time bonding together and becoming familiar with the newest family member.”

“In some cases, we utilize our state-of-the-art nursery for newborns that need monitoring or special care. Our nurses will work closely with you during this time to ensure that you are comfortable and confident in caring for your baby once you go home.

“If you are deciding to breastfeed, we are ready to help make breastfeeding as simple and enjoyable as possible.”

Bud Johnson...from Page 1A



Iwo Jima Veteran Bud Johnson presented the Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 with a replica of the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial for the Corps’ 245th birthday on Nov. 10, 2020.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Johnson took it upon himself to organize the area Iwo Jima remembrance that occurs every February, and he was a key player in securing the Iwo Jima Memorial at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center in Foster Park.

Having served in the Navy for 36 years, four months and four days, Johnson spent much of his life aboard ships.

During his World War II service, he witnessed the raising of both flags at Iwo Jima and survived the detonation of a German mine off the U.S. East Coast on the YMS-21, a minesweeper ship.

“God has been with me,” Johnson told the Towns County Herald in 2014. “God has blessed me and has given me the years he has, because I’ve been kamikazed, I’ve been torpedoed, mines, gunshot – a survivor.”

With humility and grace for having been a survivor, Johnson took up a call to arms in serving veterans in his community while commemorating those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

“As long as God gives me breath, I will honor these precious people out there who sacrificed for our freedom,” Johnson once said. “They paid the full price.”

Always a passionate defender of freedom precisely because he understood its price, Johnson took care to do his absolute best in honoring the memories of those who paid the high cost for others.

“I want to remember them and not forget how they served and sacrificed their lives for us, for our freedom, today,” Johnson said in early December in a discussion of Pearl Harbor. “To remember the people who never had an opportunity to raise a family and have a good life.

“All we can do is keep the memory of these people alive, keep their names alive and what they did alive. It’s also important to recognize our veterans of all times and all wars who have sacrificed for the freedom of our nation and the world.

“If it wasn’t for our veterans and people serving today, we wouldn’t be walking

the streets free. We would be under a communistic government; we wouldn’t be free, and people should be free.”

Johnson was known throughout the North Georgia Mountains as a hero in many respects – a war hero, a hero for local veterans, a hero for Christ. And as such, he will receive a hero’s memorial Feb. 15, which is President’s Day and the local Iwo Jima remembrance, time to be determined.

Following the news of his passing, many people in the community paid tribute to Johnson on social media, including the Towns County GOP, VFW Auxiliary in Hiwassee, Towns County Sheriff Kenneth “Ode” Henderson, Navy Seabee Island X-3, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, and others.

Several area flags flew at half-staff over the weekend for Johnson, including at the Towns County GOP Headquarters and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807 Building in Hiwassee.



The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds offered its usual hotdog roasting stations for hungry attendees to the free-admittance Fireworks Show Jan. 2.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Hundreds of people gathered for an outdoor fireworks show Saturday at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiwassee.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson