

North Georgia News

75¢

2 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

www.nganews.com

Legal Organ of Union County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1909

Wednesday, July 9, 2025

July 4th boat explosion sends seven to hospital

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Tragedy struck a local family on the Fourth of July when a boat exploded on Lake Nottely, injuring seven people aboard. Thankfully, no one was killed, but two of the seven injured individuals received major burns, including a juvenile teenager.

Two passengers took life flights to Grady Burn Center in Atlanta; four went by ambulance to Union General Hospital, with one, the youngest of the injured, then being transported to Wellstar Cobb Medical Center Pediatric Burn Unit; and another was taken by car for local treatment.

Blairsville resident Art Miller, who has owned the boat in question for two years with no issues and whose family and friends were using it that

day, reported on Facebook Sunday that all but the two most seriously injured individuals had been discharged home following treatment.

As for the two patients who remained in medical care at press time, the worst injured was estimated to have received between 70%-80% burns covering his body. Miller said he was in critical but stable condition and would require multiple skin graft surgeries.

The other inpatient sustained an estimated 25%-35% burns but was up and walking around the Grady Burn Unit on Sunday.

A GoFundMe account has been set up to assist the Millers and their friends during this challenging time: <https://gofund.me/808d0493>.

The boat exploded around 3:20 p.m. Friday. Shortly before the explosion,

the boat operator had pulled safely into Nottely Boat Club & Marina in Cozy Cove to re-fuel after tubing on the lake. Miller detailed on social media what happened next to the best of his knowledge.

After re-fueling, the boat operator idled away from the dock but saw some trash in the channel. He circled around and one of the kids in the boat grabbed the trash out of the water. Seconds later, the occupants heard a pop, and then the "catastrophic explosion" occurred.

Everyone immediately jumped into the water except for the boat operator and two teenagers, and the operator was able to grab the teens and physically throw them overboard, Miller said.

When the Union County Fire Department arrived, the

See Boat Explosion, Page 2A



Blairsville resident Art Miller's boat exploded on Friday while his family and friends were using it to celebrate the Fourth of July. The cause remains under investigation. Photo/Facebook

Suches Fireworks light up Valley Above the Clouds

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Sports Editor

What began decades ago as a humble local celebration has transformed into one of North Georgia's most anticipated – and fastest-growing – Independence Day celebrations.

On Friday, July 4, the annual Valley Above the Clouds fireworks show returned to Woody Gap School, where an unconfirmed record-setting crowd gathered across the field, school grounds and surrounding areas to celebrate under skies that cleared up in time for the display.

Presented by Station No. 5 of the Union County Fire Department, the event has steadily grown beyond the small mountain community of Suches, drawing hundreds of attendees from across the



Union County Fire Station No. 5 hosts the annual fireworks in Suches, and firefighters pulled off yet another display for the record books. Photo by Todd Forrest

Local Veteran Roger Pilcher turns 90 with family, friends

By Shelly Knight
North Georgia News

Retired U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Roger Pilcher celebrated his 90th birthday on Friday, June 27, and people from all over North Georgia attended the birthday bash held at The View Grill inside the Union County Community Center.

Pilcher enlisted in the Marine Corps at the age of 17. The Corps recognized his leadership and abilities early on, and he rose through the ranks to become an officer quickly.

Over the course of his 28-year career, Pilcher received numerous medals, highlighted by the Meritorious Service Medal. He had several tours overseas, including Vietnam, Japan and Okinawa. He was even once stationed at Quantico.

Crystal Gaylord, Events and Marketing Director for the Community Center, hosted the event.

"I happened to meet Mr. Roger Pilcher through the Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment, where I became an associate member," Gaylord said. "The Corps are frequent visitors here. They come in



Veteran Roger Pilcher had a big party at the Union County Community Center last month to celebrate turning 90. Photo by Shelly Knight

Independence Day a huge success at Meeks Park

By Brittany Holbrooks
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

As the nation celebrated America's 249th birthday, thousands of people from near and far gathered at Meeks Park and the neighboring North Georgia Technical College Blairsville Campus for the

annual Red, White & Blairsville Fourth of July Fireworks.

Families and individuals alike enjoyed an entire day out, having summer fun on the playground or in the skate park and partaking of sweet treats like ice cream and lemonade courtesy of Nana and Papa's Ice Cream and Southern Sips

Lemonade. Full Throttle Ministries was out serving up barbecue plates beside Butternut Creek and hosting a television raffle.

Continuing another part of the local Independence Day tradition, the Union County Nursing Home brought

See Meeks Fireworks, Page 6A



When it comes to views of the Meeks Park Fireworks, it's hard to beat the local campus of North Georgia Tech, which graciously allows people to spectate across the highway from the park. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

UCSO assists with another multiagency trafficking bust

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Two drug traffickers from just over the state line are out of business following a multiagency investigation that led to their arrests on Thursday, June 26, according to the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office in North Carolina.

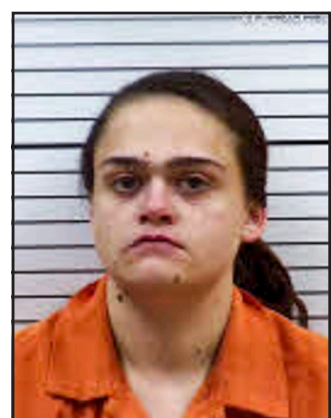
Scott DeCasper and Julieana Perry have been charged with trafficking methamphetamine and various other offenses, the Sheriff's Office said. DeCasper and Perry have been listed as Cherokee County residents, though DeCasper formerly lived in Blairsville.

The arrests came after a lengthy investigation and subsequent joint operation between narcotics agents with the sheriff's offices of Cherokee County in North Carolina, and Union, Fannin and Gilmer counties in Georgia.

Investigators had received information that DeCasper and Perry would



Scott DeCasper



Julieana Perry

be traveling to Georgia to pick up meth to bring back to Cherokee County, so on June 26, agents from each sheriff's office conducted a vehicle stop on the pair in Gilmer County.

The Gilmer Crime Suppression Unit found over 10 ounces of meth inside the vehicle, and DeCasper and Perry were placed under arrest without incident and confined in the Gilmer County Detention Center without bond, the Cherokee County Sheriff's

Office said.

About two months ago, UCSO Staff Sgt. Jay McCarter joined the roughly two-year-old investigation, bringing additional resources to bear thanks to his inclusion on the FBI Safe Streets Task Force.

McCarter has been active on the FBI task force since March, and Union County Sheriff Shawn Dyer said his participation as a duly sworn federal officer assisting area

See Trafficking Bust, Page 2A

Vol. 116 No. 29

Arrests - 2B Legals - 10B
Church - 3B Obits - 5B
Classifieds - 10B Sports - 8A
Opinion - 4A

Downtown Master Plan Public Input Session 7/10 See Page 11A

26th Annual Butternut Creek Festival 7/19 & 7/20 See Page 3A

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Upcoming Events See Page 12B



**You work hard for your money.
Shouldn't it be working hard for you?**

BLAIR BURCH | LPL FINANCIAL ADVISOR

BLAIRSVILLE | 177 Highway 515 East | 706-745-0435

**United
Community
Advisors**

Securities and advisory services offered through LPL Financial, a registered investment advisor and broker-dealer (member FINRA/SIPC). Investment and insurance products are not FDIC insured, are not bank guaranteed, and may lose value.

Boat Explosion...from Page 1A

flaming boat was drifting back toward the dock area due to the wake created by multiple private boats arriving to assist the people in the water, according to Fire Chief David Dyer.

Chief Dyer said that firefighters quickly established two commands, one to get the injured people out of the

water for medical transport and treatment – their top priority – and another to handle the fully-involved boat and defend the dock.

Apparatus from nearby Fire Station 13 arrived first, followed by firefighters from Stations 1, 4 and 7. Union General EMS and two medical helicopters also responded, and the Union County Sheriff’s Office worked traffic near the scene at Angel Hart Lane and Nottely Dam Road.

Some of the burn victims were able to make it to shore, while others swam to a nearby private dock and needed to be pulled from the water. Dyer said it took about an hour from the time firefighters got there to when they were ready to leave the scene.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division is investigating the explosion since it took place on the lake. At this stage, authorities are unsure of what caused the boat to explode before burning up and sinking near the shoreline.

Addressing online speculation, Miller said the boat operator followed proper re-fueling procedures, and Dyer advised people not to speculate about the accident.

“There have been a lot of

rumors about what could have been done and what happened and all that,” Dyer said. “But I think people need to wait until the investigation is done to know what happened, and not ‘Monday morning quarterback’ a lot of this stuff.”

As of Saturday afternoon, Dyer said he was unaware of any other emergencies involving injuries occurring over the Independence Day holiday, whether from fireworks, car wrecks or other incidents on the lake.

Chief Dyer has been a firefighter in Union County for over three decades and has never seen anything like this happen here: “We’ve had a couple of boat fires, but I’ve never had a boat explosion.”

“It could have been a lot worse,” Dyer said. “Somebody could have gotten killed, so they are fortunate to be alive. We’re fortunate that we didn’t have seven or eight people

Pilcher Turns 90...from Page 1A

to socialize a lot. We’ve done some fundraisers for them.

“Because of all the ways they help the community and the time we spend together, you start to become family. Mr. Roger came in several months ago and told me he wanted to hold his birthday here. When we found out it was his 90th birthday, I knew we had to make it special.”

His guest list was extensive, including family, members of the American Legion Ira Weaver Post 121, the Rotary Club of Union County, the Marine Corps League, and many of his friends.

“He was president of the Vietnam Veterans of America, and several of them are here,” Gaylord added. “I think he even invited the lady at the Post Office. He really wanted this party to be a big one.

“He picked out the menu he wanted to serve his guests. We have hamburger steaks and gravy, baked chicken, garlic mashed potatoes, green bean almonidine, and his favorite dessert, peach cobbler and ice cream. And we made him a custom-shaped 90 birthday cake.”

As for the “birthday boy,” Pilcher said he never thought he’d live to be 90 years old.

“I never thought about age as I went along, and I never really retired,” Pilcher said. “I quit working for money, but if I was still physically able, I’d still be working. I was always

burn up bad, but it’s still bad business for these poor folks who did get a lot of burns.

“Technically, this is sort of a mass casualty incident for us; we had seven patients there, and possibly more, but nobody else was complaining of anything. It was a chaotic scene for a while. Our guys got there and took control over it.

“We had three or four ambulances there, were trying to coordinate helicopters coming in and where they were going to land. There was a storm coming in, too, so we were trying to get everybody arranged to get out of there.

“Burn patients are something that you don’t deal with on a daily basis trauma-wise, so that sends them to a different type of hospital and was another stressor added to the mix.

“I think everybody did well as far as our public safety folks. I know the family is very appreciative of it. It’s just a bad accident, and we were trying to make the best out of that

situation.”

And while Miller has described July 4, 2025, as “the worst day of my life and for my entire family,” he is grateful for the local first response and thanks “everyone for the outpouring of love and support.”

“Thank you to all the amazing responders, Fire, EMS, Sheriff, DNR, and the ER staff at Union General,” Miller said. “And the folks in the boats and the residents of the house that everybody ended up at.

“I rarely ask for prayers, but we need them now more than ever. Thank you again for reaching out, and I’m sorry if I don’t get back to you immediately.”

Miller is a retired battalion chief from Palm Beach County Fire Rescue in Florida. He and his family have been longtime supporters of Union County Fire and other first responder agencies. Currently, he is in the process of becoming a volunteer firefighter.

and riding around. It’s amazing that he’s 90 years old. He is a force of nature.

“I’m so grateful for this veteran’s community and the people who check in on him and help him. They are so wonderful. We are so far away, and he couldn’t still be living on his own without the support they provide. We couldn’t do it any other way.”

Jim Yohe, friend and Air Force veteran, said that “Roger has always been special to us.”

“He has done an awful lot for the community,” Yohe said. “When Hurricane Helene hit, he went out and started collecting items for the Blairsville Veterans Association to send up there. He’s a dynamite activator. Whatever needs to be done, he does. There are an awful lot of people who would rather just sit and watch.”

Remarking on the recent natural disaster relief efforts, Pilcher said people wouldn’t believe how they got the backpacks full of supplies up to the devastated areas of Western North Carolina.

“We put them on mule trains,” Pilcher said. “There was no other way to get those items to the people who needed them.”

The birthday party served as a lovely celebration for a very special soldier, husband and father. Pilcher is a resident of Young Harris and is active in multiple North Georgia communities.

Trafficking Bust...from Page 1A

investigations has been paying “big dividends.”

In addition to greatly assisting in this case, McCarter has aided in the investigation and apprehension of close to 30 drug offenders since entering the task force this spring, many of them out-of-town suspects directly responsible for drugs coming into the community.

McCarter said this joint investigation showed that Union County residents had received drugs from DeCasper and Perry, which is something Sheriff Dyer wants stopped across the board.

“We’ve had trouble in recent years with people going outside our jurisdiction to other counties and buying drugs to bring back here to use in our county,” Dyer said. “There wasn’t a whole lot we could do about that other than lock them up for using drugs – and we want to get the source.”

In light of this dilemma, Dyer thought it was a great idea when McCarter approached him last year about signing up for the FBI Safe Streets Task Force to expand the investigatory scope of the UCISO Narcotics Division.

“Being a part of that allows us the ability to receive extra intel and all kinds of other resources where he can travel to outside jurisdictions and help these other counties,” Dyer said. “And we do it as a joint effort; we go and help them bust these drug dealers.

“This last arrest with Scott DeCasper and Julieana Perry, as a result of being in this task force and the intel we learned here and working with

Hope House

Hope House is a faith-based, non-profit benevolence center helping Union County residents, transients, and homeless in times of critical need. Hours of operation are Monday and Tuesday, 9 a.m.-noon; and Thursday, 1-4 p.m.

Hope House is located at 215 Blue Ridge Street, Suite E, Blairsville. Phone (706) 781-3090.

these other sheriff’s offices, we were able to make this significant trafficking arrest.

“And this is one of the perks of being in that task force. It’s not actually costing us any money to be in the task force, but it is saving us some money because they pay part of (McCarter’s) wages.

“Plus, it gives us almost unlimited resources to help surveil these offenders, track them and make their arrests possible without them even getting the dope back to our county. So far, it’s working out really good, and we hope to continue that in the future.”

Added Dyer, “I would like for the community to know that we’re working every angle that we can to catch drugs in Union County. We’re not going to stop it all, but we’re going to sure put a big dent in it.”

Iota Iota awards scholarship to Webb

Iota Iota, a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi, proudly awarded one of its 2025 scholarships to Roger Blake Webb.

The \$500 scholarship was presented by LuAnn Nutt, vice president of Iota Iota. Randy Zimmerman, a teacher at Union County High School, said Blake was a dedicated,

The Cherokee County Sheriff’s Office would like to extend its appreciation to the sheriff’s offices of Gilmer, Union and Fannin counties for their help and commends them “on a job well done in their continued effort to protect our communities.”

Sheriff Dyer is grateful for the interagency cooperation as well, and he also thanks community members for the information they provide investigators.

“If anybody’s got any tips or info on people that are using drugs, please call in (at 706-439-6066) and let us know,” Dyer said. “People leaving tips will remain anonymous, and we will check into it.”

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



(L-R): Randy Zimmerman, Blake Webb and LuAnn Nutt

Cancer Society volunteers host survivors' luncheon

By Shelly Knight
North Georgia News

On Saturday, June 28, the Union County Unit of the American Cancer Society hosted a cancer survivors' luncheon at First United Methodist Church, with a theme to "celebrate, remember and fight back."

"We are going to try to do this every year as long as we can," said local Board Member Wendy Holden in her opening remarks. "I want to thank everyone for being here and to thank our team for their help preparing this."

First Methodist Senior Pastor Jimmy Hood said the blessing and welcomed everyone, congratulating attendees on being survivors.

"Know that we keep you in our prayers," Hood said. "We pray for your strength during those difficult times and want you to know that God walks beside you. And we are grateful to God for the advancements in healing and technology."

Union County Unit Board Member Sue Upchurch, a cancer survivor herself, explained that the goal of the luncheon was to "celebrate our cancer survivors," and she expressed appreciation to First Methodist for agreeing to host "this celebration of life with us."

Upchurch has been an American Cancer Society volunteer since 1983, when she moved here from Atlanta. She has been involved in all the local fundraising and awareness

efforts, from Relay For Life and Daffodil Days to the Great Smokeout and hospital health fair outreaches.

"A couple of dear friends who passed last year were a part of these efforts, and there are about four of us who continue to carry the torch," Upchurch said.

Holden said that, originally, the group held a survivor's picnic at the actual Relay For Life, but "since we are not doing that, we decided on this luncheon."

"It was Barbara Richardson's idea," Holden said. "She has passed on, but as Sue said, we are carrying through for her. I've been a volunteer with the American Cancer Society for about 10 years."

And while the fight against cancer continues, strides have been made, even at the local level. Volunteer Fran Edwards said everyone was grateful to have a "wonderful cancer center here in Union County now," making treatment easier for area cancer patients.

"We used to take patients to Gainesville or Atlanta for their chemo or radiation treatments, and they had to go several days each week," Edwards said. "It was very hard on us and on the patients, but there was no other answer."

"If they needed treatment, they had no other choice. They could not afford to stay in a hotel for weeks at a time. But now we are blessed to have this center, and we have doctors here that bring chemo treatment to people."

Edwards was 59 when she had her first mammogram, which discovered that she had cancer: "I needed two lumpectomies. My faith is what got me through. Now I get my mammogram every year."

According to the American Cancer Society, women between 40 and 44 have the option to start screening with a mammogram every year, while women 45 to 54 should get mammograms every year.

"Women 55 and older can switch to a mammogram every other year, or they can choose to continue yearly mammograms," per the Cancer Society. "Screening should continue as long as a woman is in good health and is expected to live at least 10 more years."

The American Cancer Society was established in 1913, and the first successful chemotherapy treatment occurred in 1947. The organization's mission is to eradicate cancer, and it works to improve the lives of people with cancer through advocacy, research and patient support.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States. The overall mortality rate continues to decline because of the reduction of smoking, earlier detection for some cancers and improved treatments.

However, the work is not finished yet, and the research must continue. For more information and to learn how to donate toward the fight to end cancer, visit <https://cancer.org>.



The Union County Unit of the American Cancer Society thanks First United Methodist Church for allowing the use of its facility to host the recent Cancer Survivors' Luncheon. Photo by Shelly Knight

Meeks Fireworks...from Page 1A

three buses of residents out to celebrate with the rest of the community. And the residents were grateful for the opportunity, such as veteran Harry Jackson.

"(Being American) is the greatest. Ask any veteran – they can tell you," Jackson said, tears welling in his eyes. "Most people take (America) for granted or don't care anything about it. It's rotten."

The Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce has led the fireworks for decades and got the Nursing Home on board attending years ago, and Jackson said he was happy not just to see so many people out celebrating together but to be able to do so himself.

"Hooray for the red, white and blue," cheered Kelvin Burch, a friend of Jackson's. Nearby, Mary Anderson, sporting a patriotic crown and red, white and blue necklaces, was in agreement.

Anderson's favorite part of July 4th is simply being American, and she prays her children and grandchildren continue to enjoy the freedoms secured for them here.

"I'm very happy with it," Anderson said of the event, remarking how "nice" it was from her vantage point at the college. 2025 marked the second year she has attended with the Nursing Home, and she was "amazed" at how organized the traffic control and scheduling were.

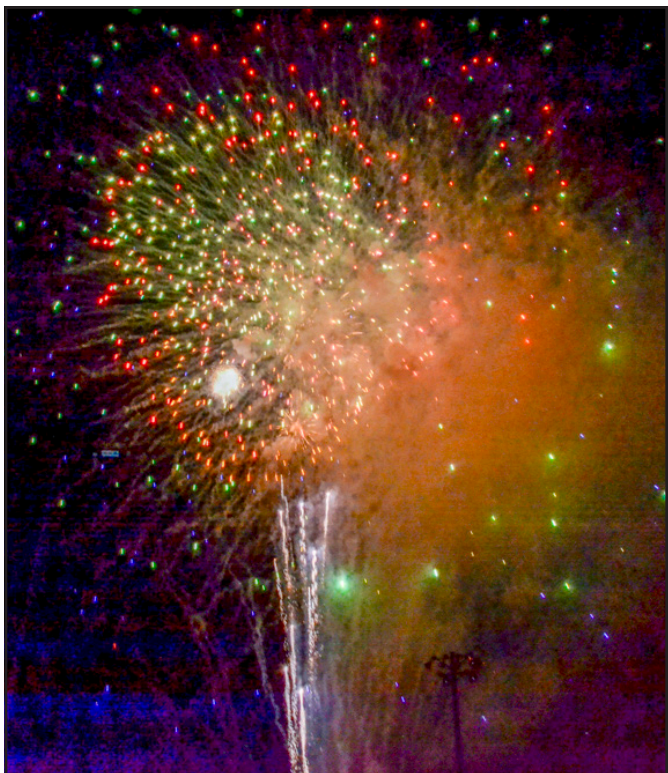
"It's spectacular and heartwarming; the key word is heartwarming," she said.

Tamara Sandler and her family sat close by, enjoying an evening of milkshakes and playing ball. This year made a full decade the Slanders have been observing Fourth of July at Meeks Park and North Georgia Tech; the strong sense of community is what keeps them coming back, but of course she lauds the stunning visuals the fireworks provide.

A unique aspect of the Red, White & Blairsville celebration is the inclusion of the massive switch that some lucky local children get to flip each year. As it turns out, Luke, 11, Ethan, 9, and John, 4, had a very special story behind their selection in 2025.

Their father, Frank Worsham, is a member of the U.S. Army and was set to be deployed to Germany on July 7, relocating with his wife and children to Stuttgart from Fort Stewart. Worsham's parents, Dave and Pam, live in Blairsville, and so the family happened to be visiting before the big move.

"We put in a request to delay the move to Germany until after the Fourth so we could spend one last Fourth of July here," explained Frank, who admittedly had much on his mind regarding the meaning behind the holiday. "I just think about all the sacrifices that some of my friends have made, especially on combat deployment."



The fireworks at Meeks Park lasted a good 30 minutes this year, giving people plenty to be grateful for as they pondered Independence Day on their way home after dark. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



Pictured here with Chamber President Steve Rowe, the Worsham Boys played a key role in the Fourth of July fireworks this year, pulling the switch to spark them off at 9:20 p.m. Friday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

"We sacrifice a lot as a family, you know, with Frank being away a lot. (July 4 offers) just the luxury of being together," said Jennifer Worsham, Frank's wife.

As to how the Worsham children ended up flipping the switch to start that evening's fireworks display, Chamber President Rowe met Dave Worsham, who struck up a conversation and mentioned the family's circumstances.

Rowe thought it would be fitting to have the boys set off the fireworks this year, considering it would be their final celebration of Independence Day in the United States for at least the next three years.

"Frank is not just my son, he's my best friend," Dave said,

emotional and grateful for the chance to make a few more memories with his son and grandsons.

The youngest Worshams made their way up to the switch around 9:20 p.m., and together, the trio triggered the start of the fireworks show that made the night memorable for everyone else in attendance.

Some spectators watched with their eyes, their minds no doubt in similar places as Harry Jackson and Frank Worsham's. Others, like Pam Gray and her young grandson Dallas, cheered aloud with every boom and crackle.

And all were in agreement that there was something worth recognizing that night and every year thereafter.

Blue Ridge Mountain Conservation District accepting Olin Hughes Memorial Scholarship Applications



The Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is accepting applications for the Olin Hughes Memorial Scholarship. This opportunity is for college sophomores, juniors, and seniors from the district which includes Towns, Union, Rabun, and Fannin Counties. The \$1000 scholarship is for students actively engaged in a field of study

related to agriculture, forestry, environmental science or soil and water conservation. A committee of supervisors from the Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD will determine the winner of the scholarship. A check will be mailed to the student's college or university account where the money can be used for fees or books. Please visit the Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD web page to download the application. Applications should be completed and returned by September 5, 2025.

Please mail the completed scholarship application to: BRMSWCD, 165 Wellborn Street, Box 3, Blairsville, GA

30512.

The Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District is a unit of state government that manages and directs natural resource management programs in Fannin, Rabun, Towns and Union Counties. The District works with farmers, landowners, homeowners, and with other units of government to educate and actively promote programs and practices that support the conservation, and use and development of soil, water, and related resources.

More information can be found at www.gacd.us/blueridgemountain.

Suches Fireworks...from Page 1A



As always, the grounds outside Woody Gap School served as the spectator area for the Suches Fireworks this Fourth of July, with families spending the day playing games and having fun before the nighttime display.
Photo by Todd Forrest

Southeast.

The tradition started when a small group of locals used their own money to launch bottle rockets at the Suches General Store.

As more spectators gathered each year, the celebration grew, eventually moving to Woody Gap School in the 1990s. Community

support expanded as well, with residents donating money and selling food and drinks to help fund the fireworks.

“This started long ago with a few people at the store,” affirmed Fire Lt. Doug Pruitt of Station No. 5. “Eventually, we started collecting donations, and it continues to grow each year.

“We get a lot of compliments on the show, which we’re very proud of. It’s a great family-fun environment – just a great atmosphere – and everyone seems to have a good time.”

By sunset, every corner of the school property and surrounding lots was filled with families, folding chairs and picnic blankets. Many spectators arrived hours early to claim a spot, while others gathered across Georgia 60 at the Suches Community Center and Fire Station No. 5.

Children passed the time with sparklers, footballs and frisbees as the crowd continued to grow.

At 9:20 p.m., emcee Larry Wood took the stage to introduce his granddaughter, 19-year-old Nealy Webster, who performed the national anthem. A graduate of White County High School with deep family roots in Suches, Webster spoke about what the event

means to her.

“I grew up on that stage, and I love coming back here,” she said. “I started doing this when I was 8 years old. It’s very nostalgic for me.

“All of my family grew up here, and it’s nice to have them all together. This place is like home. I sing the national anthem everywhere, but this is my favorite place to perform.”

By 9:40 p.m., darkness had settled over the valley, and the sky erupted in color. The fireworks show lasted more than 30 minutes, with booming echoes rolling throughout southern Union County.

The event is organized entirely by Station No. 5 and requires months of preparation – from securing permits and ordering fireworks to stocking concessions and estimating crowd sizes. On the day of the show, the department spends hours setting up and conducting safety briefings.

About 15 to 20 volunteers helped run the event and ensure safety throughout the evening.

“This is strictly a fire department-sponsored event,” Pruitt said. “We have a lot of people who donate money and walk through the crowd with a boot to collect. We’d like to thank all of our individual and corporate sponsors – we couldn’t do this without them.”