

Sorghum Festival says goodbye until next October

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North Georgia News
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In light of the Blairsville Sorghum Festival having come to an end, at least until next year, perhaps the famous line should read: "Parting is such sweet sorghum."

But worry not, fair people of the region – Blairsville's love affair with syrup and all things mountain heritage will reconvene the second and third weekends in October of 2017.

As for this year's festival, organizers were happy with the way everything turned out.

From the four days of Sorghum Festival Games to the making of syrup at Meeks Park, which sold out by festival's end on Sunday, Oct. 16, the 47th Annual Blairsville Sorghum Festival was a sweet success.

Each year, the Blairsville Sorghum Festival Club puts on the festival as a way to give back to the community. The funds the club raises go toward scholarships and families in

need during the year, and the festival itself acts as a way for civic organizations to raise money for their individual causes.

Multiple veterans groups raised both money and awareness at this year's festival, raffling off items such as a raffle or an Xbox One. The Blairsville Kiwanis Club sold its famous pork rinds and boiled peanuts.

Students manned the Union County FFA booth to keep festivalgoers refreshed. The Union County High School Baseball Team Booster Club sold delicious barbecue.

The community benefited, too, even those who couldn't make it out to the Sorghum Festival this year – hotels, restaurants, shops, all saw an increase in revenue during the two weekends of the festival. Tourists contributed also to sales taxes, which is always a boon to the local economy.

Also important, the community got to showcase

itself as a destination for those who live elsewhere, and it can't hurt that the Blairsville Sorghum Festival is the state's Official Sorghum Festival.

The live Bluegrass, Country and Gospel Music, along with the many Sorghum Festival Games, drew in new and veteran Sorghum Festival attendees, and Peter Hart with Atlanta Puppet went out of his way to enchant the imaginations of everyone within earshot of his colorful variety show.

Volunteers and members of the Blairsville Sorghum Festival Club spent many hours over the two weekends making sure that event patrons had smooth transitions from arrival to adios each day.

As for club member Terry Kane, well, he enjoys the great numbers of people he gets to meet each and every year from around the region.

"It's good to see people coming from all different areas – we're glad to see them," said Kane, who cooks syrup from



Terry Kane, front, has been making sorghum syrup for the Blairsville Sorghum Festival for more than 30 years

sunup to sundown during the

festival. "It's good for people to be able to see how things used to be."

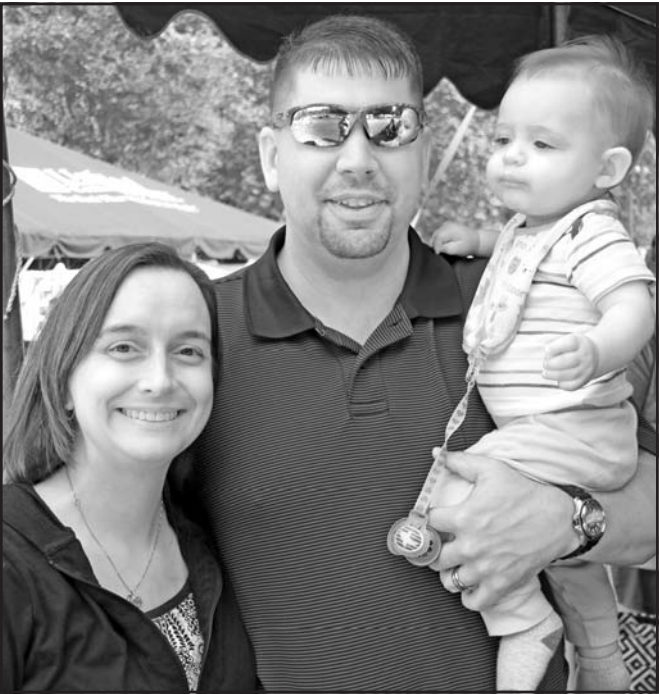
Kane has been volunteering his time and making sorghum syrup with the festival for more than three decades. One thing he would like to see more of next year is, perhaps, a greater volunteer turnout from the community.

"We're always glad to have people who want to come help us," said Kane. "We've got plenty of work to go around for everybody if they want to come."

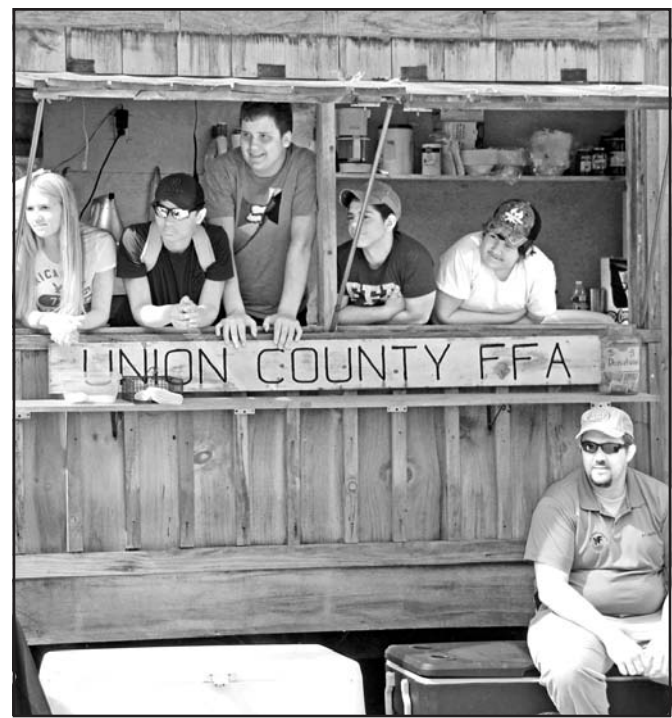
"The main thing I'd like for people to know is what a

benefit this is to the community as a whole, and all the business it brings in and the people that come through. And if they come and help us any time they've got to help, we'd be very appreciative."

Those interested in volunteering should check out the festival's website at www.blairsvillesorghumfestival.com.



Ten-month-old Kampton "Kammo" Hughes enjoys his first Sorghum Festival with parents Evan and Kembra Hughes. Young Kammo was the first baby born in Union County in 2016.



The Union County FFA enjoys watching the Sorghum Festival Games in between customers.



Tucker Mobbs, 15, of Cedartown, won the Sorghum Festival Pole Climbin' contest on Sunday, Oct. 16. Mobbs has been to the festival four years running, and has progressed in the Pole Climbin' event from not placing his first year to Third Place his second year, Second Place last year, and now First Place



Peter Hart with Atlanta Puppet wowed kids with his one-of-a-kind puppet show during both weekends of the 47th Blairsville Sorghum Festival

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specializing in rehab for spinal cord and brain injuries.

During this healing time, many in the community have come together to show their support for Deputy Henderson and his family.

Just this past Saturday, The Cove at Nottely Boat Club held a dedicated concert benefit for Deputy Henderson and his family – donations were collected instead of a cover charge, and all proceeds went to the Hendersons.

The Cove also held a Shake the Lake Challenge last week in order to raise even more money for the Hendersons, where individuals from the community were challenged to jump into the lake based on fundraising milestones.

Shake the Lake participants for Friday, Oct. 14, were: David Green of the Union County Road Department; Nichole Green of the Union County Community Center; Aundrea Owenby with Coosa Creek Embroidery; Wayne Jolly of Cabin Coffee; Pastor Scott Demers of Shooting Creek Church; Dennis Lynn of Inbound Solutions Group; and Brett Dobbins, Melanie Jones and Nathan South of The Cove at Nottely Boat Club.

Cove co-owner Jerz Mike has been in contact with the family, and even recorded



The Cove at Nottely Boat Club is just one of many local businesses that has gone above and beyond to assist the family of Union County Sheriff's Deputy Mitchell Henderson during his recovery.

the Shake the Lake Challenge and the Saturday night concert so that the Hendersons could watch from the hospital.

"The message that the family wants to keep conveying is that they can't thank the community enough for everything that everyone's doing," said Jerz Mike.

Another event took place for Henderson this past

Saturday, a motorcycle ride that headed out from McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in Hiawassee.

And folks will be wanting to mark their calendars for the #239 Turkey Trot, which is a 5K and prayer walk for Deputy Henderson.

The Turkey Trot takes place on Saturday, Nov. 19, at Meeks Park. Registration

opens at 8 a.m., and pre-registering can be completed at active.com.

Registering costs \$25 if done at active.com, and a T-shirt will be included. Registering the day of the race will cost \$30, with T-shirts available as supplies last.

The run and walk begin at 9 a.m. that Saturday, Nov. 19.

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Mountain Research and Education Center's historic cannery building on Thursday, Oct. 13.

The project began over two years ago, when Appalachian Trail Community member Dayton Miller contacted Blairsville-Union

County Chamber of Commerce Tourism Director Tobie Chandler about creating a Union County History Trail pamphlet that would highlight fixtures in the community that are 50 years old or older.

This project spearheaded another meeting between Miller

and Chandler, concerning a hiking trail map for Union County, which ultimately led to the inception of the Appalachian Trail History project.

"So, the next time we got together with Dayton, he applied for a grant through the Appalachian Trail License Program," said Chandler. "When someone purchases a license plate, the proceeds go back to the Appalachian Trail fund."

"Well, they granted us \$5,000 to do a history project, which is on the Appalachian Trail in North Georgia and has a heavy emphasis on the Civilian Conservation Corps and the impact that they had in Union County, such as Vogel State Park and Goose Creek."

After receiving the grant, Chandler, Miller and a team of volunteers hit the ground running, gathering as much information as they could on the trail's history, incorporating local residents who worked either on the trail or with the CCC.

"In 2010, the publication of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, which is called AT Journeys, had a nice article called 'Southern Comfort,' and

it highlighted Blairsville," said Miller. "When that came out, it was such a nice article about Blairsville and Union County that I asked for 50 copies and put them throughout the area."

"Within a few weeks of that we had a special presentation of this article, and from that we discovered the AT Community program that involved communities along the trail and to help educate people along the trail."

"After we joined the community in 2011, we had many objectives we wished to fulfill, one of which was this project."

The project resulted in a detailed pamphlet to be distributed at the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, highlighting trail history and CCC contribution from 1921 until present day. But the ambitious group did not stop there.

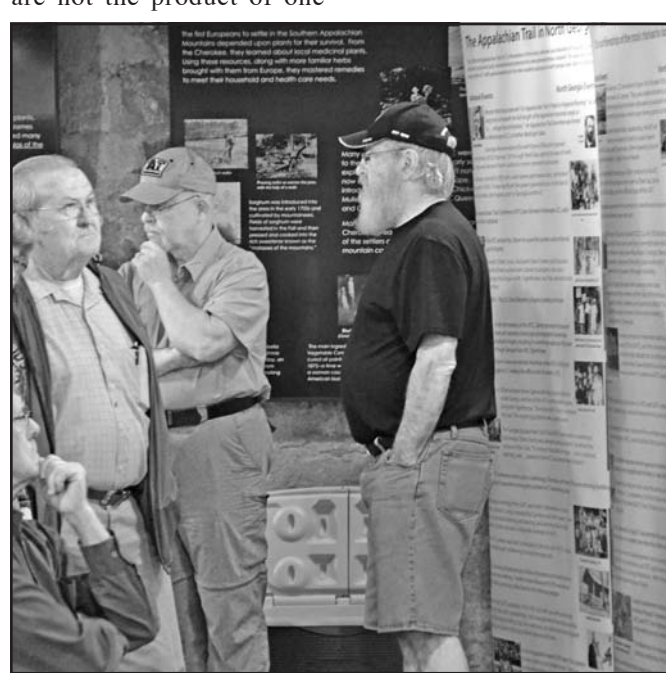
From the pamphlet, four panels were designed, each to be hung in historical landmarks around the county. The panels can be found at the Union County Historic Courthouse, John B. Derden CCC Museum at Vogel State Park, and Mountain Crossings.

Though the information

is the same, the set of panels to be placed at Mountain Crossings will come with a twist. Local artist Al Garnto has been commissioned to create a kinetic sculpture that includes the panels, inspired by an old-fashioned weathervane.

"These adventures are not the product of one

individual," said Miller. "What we've done is the result of a large number of volunteers who've come together, who all have a passion for the history of the area, a passion for the history of the AT and the CCC. That's the basis for what we've done here."



The old cannery building at the Experiment Station hosted dozens of Appalachian Trail enthusiasts for the unveiling of the A.T. Community Project on Thursday, Oct. 13.