

Band of Steel drums up enthusiasm in Hiawassee



The Woody Gap Band of Steel on the Hiawassee Town Square. Photo/Lily Avery

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
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For the past 17 years, from Memorial Day until Labor Day, music can be heard throughout downtown Hiawassee every Saturday evening.

The same was true on the afternoon of Saturday, Aug. 19, as dozens upon dozens gathered around the gazebo in the Downtown Hiawassee Square with family, friends and canine companions to enjoy an hour and a half of entertainment from the Woody Gap School Band of Steel during the Music on the Square concert series.

Rockingtropical-themed shirts, Woody Gap's infamous Band of Steel set up their steel drums and jammed to calypso-style music, playing popular tunes like "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" and Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds."

This was the Suches band's first time playing at the Hiawassee Square, and only the fourth year that the all steel drum band has been in existence.

"Suches is a very small community, unincorporated, for those who may not know," said Woody Gap Band Director Doug Roberts. "Our school is very unique. We are the smallest public school in the state of Georgia. We have around 50 students, kindergarten through 12th grade.

"So, four years ago, I was approached about starting a music program at Woody

Gap because the school had never had any formal music education program. But there aren't enough kids in the entire school to have a full band.

"I thought it over and I remembered a long time ago when a school in Murphy, North Carolina traded in all of their band instruments and switched over to steel drums. They were successful at it so I said, that's what needs to be done."

And how the program has grown over the last four years. What started as a handful of kids that knew nothing about steel drums has now matured into a program of enthusiastic musicians, well versed in the art of playing the steel drum.

Two years ago, the band students traveled to New York City and just last year the Band of Steel competed in the International Steel Drum Competition in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

"Going to that competition was a really neat opportunity for us to get out and see the way that other people do things," said Roberts.

During the concert, the audience was encouraged to clap their hands, dance and sing along to the music and later in the evening, some members of the audience joined in and learned how to play a few notes on the drums, making for one of the most interactive concerts to visit the square.

Although the Music on the Square is a free event,

open to anyone in the public, it is also a volunteer-ran organization that often needs community donations to continue to provide this beloved Saturday tradition.

This past Saturday, though, the gathered donations went toward the Band of Steel to help with the current expense of purchasing more drums for the students.

As of right now, there are more students interested in playing than there are drums and Roberts wants to remedy that problem as soon as possible. However, each steel drum costs quite a bit of money and is individually handmade, making the need for fundraising more imperative.

"Our main fundraising is going out and playing for people in the community," said Roberts. "We're trying to raise money right now to buy a few more instruments so that everyone can play during every song. And these drums are not cheap. It takes two or three days to make each one.

"We exist off of playing for other people and we're so grateful for this community's generosity."

Roberts and the Band of Steel finished out the evening with up beat, classic tunes and all in attendance had a relaxing evening, full of good music, a good atmosphere and great company.

Don't miss next week's performance, one of the final two of the season, beginning at 6:30 p.m.



The kids from Woody Gap School teaching concertgoers how to play steel drum. Photo/Lily Avery

Enchanted Music on the Square

The ever-popular and audience favorite band... Midnight Express, will be energizing the Hiawassee Town Square this Saturday, August 26, from 6:30 - 8 p.m. High-energy, fun, and fabulous Country Music awaits you! Led by the effervescent Steve Phillips, this band has been the opening act for several major bands performing over the years at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Anderson Music Hall. Steve writes many of their songs, and their latest CD is just plain wonderful... with every song hitting the mark. Come support this local icon, and show them how much we love their brand of

Country! Bring a lawn chair or blanket, your family and friends, and the family pet (on a leash, please, and with clean-up equipment!). Enchanted Music on the Square is a volunteer effort, begun 17 years ago by the late Eugene Jakel and his friend, JoAnne Leone, with the goal of bringing various styles of music to the residents of Towns County and surrounding areas for their Summer enjoyment.

The concert series is able to continue solely on the basis of audience donations and we are very appreciative of the generous support to keep the music going! See you on the Square! NT(Aug23.N1)SH

Sons of the American Revolution Speakers Bureau

The speaker's bureau established by the award winning Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, SAR has been providing presentations to elementary school children and civic groups for some time.

These presentations are made by accomplished speakers on the subjects of Colonial Period of American history and the American Revolutionary War. They may include displays of period replicas showing life in America during that period.

The National Society of the Sons of the American Revolution has the purpose of providing education, preserving history, and promoting patriotism. Contact Chapter President Sid Turner at 706-745-3410 or Secretary David Cook at 706-835-5910 to schedule a presentation.

Retired Firefighters Breakfast

The Retired Firefighters Breakfast is held the first Friday of each month, 9 a.m. at Cook's Country Kitchen, Blairsville, GA.

UNION COUNTY COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Garden Tours	Every Monday:	9 am - 1 pm
Children's Story Time	GMREC (May-Oct)	11 am
Kiwanis Club	Union County Library	Noon
Civil Air Patrol	Steve's Steakhouse	6 pm
Boy Scouts #101	Blairsville Airport	7 pm
	United Methodist Ch	
	Every Tuesday:	
Tri State Bus. Women	Cabin Coffee	8 am
Get Fit	First UMC	5:15 pm
Smoky Mtn. Melodies	United Methodist Ch	6:30 pm
Hi Country Harmonizers	Branan Lodge	6:30 pm
	Every Wednesday:	
BINGO	Civic Center	7 pm
	Every Thursday:	
Butternut Ladies Golf	Golf Course (Apr-Oct)	8:30 am
Masonic Luncheon	Cooks Restaurant	11:30 am
Rotary Club	NGTC	Noon
Get Fit	First UMC	5:15 pm