

# North Georgia News

75¢

2 Sections 22 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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## Farmers Market celebrates new trail, Beef Day

By Todd Forrest  
North Georgia News  
Sports Editor

The Butternut Creek Trail is officially open for foot traffic as of Saturday, June 7, following a ribbon-cutting ceremony during the opening weekend of the Union County Farmers Market.

New in 2025, the trail celebrates Union County's rich history and agricultural heritage. This initiative has been made possible through a long-term collaboration among several key partners, including Union County Government, the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District, the Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The gentle trail starts

near the Hunter-England Cabin and Historic Homestead, extending nearly half a mile. The initial section of the path runs alongside the banks of Butternut Creek before veering off through a field featuring local crops and returning to the cabin, where an adjacent building has been added, including a sorghum pan and mill.

According to Mickey Cummings, Chair of the Blue Ridge Mountain SWCD, the walking trail has been in development since the cabin was relocated from US Hwy 19/129 in 2018.

"After the cabin was installed a number of years ago, we've always had the idea of putting in a walking trail that highlights the agricultural heritage of the county," he said.

Coming in July,

the trail will feature signs explaining the Georgia Land Lottery, the history of local Native American tribes, the development of agriculture and daily life in Union County.

Cummings noted that a grant to pay for the project was secured with assistance from Frank Riley, the executive director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council, who attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"Our local history is very important, and we need to showcase more of it," Riley said. "I'm from Towns County and live on a historic farm, so preserving this kind of stuff is what we need to do."

Union County Sole Commissioner Harold Collins discussed the new historic walking trail and highlighted

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The Farmers Market was back to its bustling self during the 2025 season opener on Saturday. Photo by Todd Forrest

## Local Vietnam Veteran Reich takes Honor Flight

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

On May 6, Blairsville resident Lanny Reich joined 26 other Georgia veterans on an Honor Flight to Washington D.C. The organization serves as a nonprofit that allows veterans to travel for free to the national memorials of their respective wars; Reich, for his part, served in Vietnam.

Fresh out of high school, Reich signed up for military service and joined the United States Army in 1970. At the height of the Vietnam War, Reich felt it was an "obligation to fight for people who could not (fight) for themselves."

Initially assigned to infantry, Reich spent several months on the front lines before being relocated to Chu Lai to serve as a chaplain's assistant.

"Believe it or not, that was the most boring thing in the war. I mean, there was just no activity except on Sundays, so I was assigned to a combat aviation group," Reich explained.

Though he joined the



Lanny Reich, left, appreciated the opportunity to participate as a Vietnam Veteran in the Honor Flight program this May.

First Air Cavalry as a "patient protector" – someone to man weaponry while the medical staff tended to patients – it was during this time that he learned triage and other lifesaving skills.

Many of Reich's duties depended on what was necessary at the time. A "hot" landing zone at a location

where the enemy was actively firing may have required more defense, but elsewhere, Reich helped where he could by administering morphine and applying bandages. This particular role marked the last chapter of his military service.

Because of his service, Reich was eligible to sign up

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## UCSO makes rapid response in active scam

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

On Wednesday, May 28, the Union County Sheriff's Office interrupted a scam-in-progress, helping to secure \$20,000 of a local elderly woman's money while ensuring her safety after the scammer announced he would be sending someone to her home.

The Sheriff's Office has cultivated the ability to respond quickly in such situations thanks to its dedicated financial crimes investigator, Sgt. Bob Calamari.

Not many sheriff's offices in counties this size have such an investigator, but even then, Calamari's particular dedication in his unique position likely sets him apart from the ones that do.

Calamari takes fraud and scam calls day and night, and when he can, he talks with the criminals themselves to warn them away from ripping people off in Union County. That's what happened here.

The scam in question unraveled swiftly after UCSO

Deputy Matthew Phillips responded to a 911 call a woman placed after suspecting she had been targeted by a scammer. Everyone at the Sheriff's Office knows that when a scammer threatens, call Calamari – so, Phillips did.

Phillips drove to the intended victim's home and stayed with her until Calamari could arrive. In the meantime, the deputy connected Calamari directly with the scammer as they waited for him to join them.

The scammer had been talking with the woman on her cellphone, and Calamari dialed in on the landline, enabling them to rig an unconventional "conference call." Calamari told the scammer the jig was up, and he instructed the woman to disconnect the call and block the phone number.

After Calamari arrived, the woman began describing the scam, with which Calamari was all too familiar, having seen several of the same type in the last few months.

She had gotten a fake email from PayPal claiming



a \$200 purchase she did not make. In hopes of reversing the charge, the woman called into a "customer service" line and granted computer access to the man who picked up on the other end.

Without her realizing it, the scammer had moved money from one of her bank accounts to another before claiming he had accidentally refunded too much money – 100 times too much, to be exact, and if she did not give it back, there would be trouble for them both.

Looking at her bank account, the woman clearly saw \$20,000 that wasn't supposed to be there, so she followed his

See Scam Intervention, Page 2A

## Fishing Rodeo provides family fun at Reece Farm



Sporting cool Fishing Rodeo apparel, Grayson Nix had a great time at the Reece Farm May 28, pictured here with his kid sister Hadleigh.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

The Union County Recreation Department's Kids Fishing Rodeo returned this year to the Byron Herbert Reece Farm & Heritage Center on May 28, providing some "reel fun" for local families.

About 350 fish were released into the surrounding Wolf Creek courtesy of Georgia Department of Natural Resources' Lake Burton Hatchery.

Both rainbow trout and brown trout were available for kiddos to catch, and the event proved quite popular, with estimates of some 100 people showing up to cast their lines in hopes of a bite. It's worth noting that Bass Pro Shop donated \$1,000 worth of hats to the Reece Farm Fish Rodeo and its sister event in Suches.

Before the fun started, Dustin "The Rog" Rogers had a few words to say and partners to thank for their role in making the rodeo possible, including

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## Partnership reaps success for local VA Claims Clinic

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

For the first time, three of District 9's American Legion posts came together with other local organizations to offer a VA Claims Clinic at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center in Blairsville on May 29.



Dozens of area veterans attended the recent VA Claims Clinic organized by three American Legion posts from District 9.

American Legion Post 121 of Blairsville, Post 248 of Blue Ridge and Post 23 of Hiawassee banded up and reached out to other veterans' organizations to make the event happen.

Some credit also goes to the Blairsville Disabled American Veterans. The Sons

of the American Legion and the American Legion Riders were present to lend a hand, in all leading to the involvement of 25 to 30 volunteers, including military spouses.

Credited as "the brainchild" of former Post 248 Commander Jim Callender,

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# Free concerts at the Reece Farm & Heritage Museum June 13-14

The Reece Farm and Heritage Museum will host two free concerts this weekend. These are free shows under the Pavilion. Bringing chairs recommended. Curtis & Kim Jones Mountain Gypsy Music will be at the Byron Herbert Reece Farm Pavillion on June 13, 2025 from 1-3 PM.

Curtis Jones reigns as one of the most highly-respected flatpicking guitarists on the planet. Expanding on a legacy forged by musicians such as David Gilmour, Pat Metheny, Paco De Lucia, Doc Watson and Tony Rice. Jones is often called by fans and critics alike, “The World’s Fastest and Cleanest” acoustic guitarist. This is an extraordinary technique that he both teaches and brings to his contemporary guitar performances and productions. Through his pure guitar mastery, he has the ability to weave in and out of Jazz, Rock, Bluegrass, Flamenco, and World Music styles in a way that is more original than anything that has been heard since Django Reinhardt, while taking the listener to a world of complete beauty, passion, grace and fire.

Kim Jones is a musician, artist, singer, song-writer, and published author. Her vocal influences growing up



Mountain Gypsy Music Kim and Curtis Jones

were Wynonna Judd, Patty Loveless, Janice Joplin, Bobbie Gentry, Bonnie Raitt, and Stevie Nicks. Her Musical influences include Jaco Pastorius, Richard Wright, Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, and McCoy Tyner. She plays upright Bass and sings with the Mountain Gypsy duo as well as occasional keyboard. Kim also plays upright Bass and sings

in Curtis’ full Bluegrass band, Primal Roots. She has been singing her whole life but has only in the last few years began to perform in front of live audiences.

On Saturday the 14th from 1 til 3 PM will be “Me Myself and Ilene” featuring Steve and Ilene Peppers.

The farm is located at 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville, GA 30512.

## Scam Intervention...from Page 1A

instructions and drove to her bank to remove the money from her account.

After she withdrew the sum in cash, the scammer told her to drive down the mountain to deposit the money into a Bitcoin machine located in Gainesville. By that point, the woman’s suspicions had grown, so she refused to make the trip.

That’s when the scammer said he would send someone to pick up the money in person, prompting her to call 911, which brought Deputy Phillips and Sgt. Calamari to her doorstep – thankfully before the scammer could figure out another way to steal her cash.

Even after their arrival, the woman believed the scammer had deposited money into her account for some kind of nefarious plot, but Calamari assured her – confirmed afterward with the bank – that the criminal had simply transferred her own funds as part of the scam.

“Thanks to the fast actions of Deputy Phillips and Sgt. Calamari, this woman was saved \$20,000 that she already had in cash,” said UCSO Capt. Doug Brackett, who heads up the Criminal Investigations Division. “Had action not been taken, more than likely, they would have figured out some way to get that money from her within the next day or so.”

The woman has since closed the affected accounts

and had her computer cleared of a virus that was likely installed by the scammer.

Calamari said the scammer, who went by “Alex,” had an Indian accent, and he believes the man was operating overseas. Out of an abundance of caution, Calamari ordered increased patrols near her home for the next few days to make sure no one attempted to retrieve her money.

But that wasn’t the end of the story. Calamari continued to call the scammer’s phone number. He even offered the scammer a chance to come get the money at the Union County Sheriff’s Office, but the criminal declined to show.

Eventually, the number was disconnected, which is one of the reasons Calamari continues to call scammers after the fact; he wants them to disconnect the numbers they use in order to prevent other potential victims from responding to scam material that exists perpetually on the internet.

In this case, a resident had to learn the hard way about how to respond to scams, though she is now prepared to handle similar situations moving forward. In fact, a few days later, someone named “Mark” called, and she immediately told him to “pound sand,” in Calamari’s words.

Fortunately, there’s an easier way to learn. Beyond

responding to scam reports, the Sheriff’s Office has tasked Calamari with educating the public about scams – the most common types and prevention methods – to decrease the prevalence of financial crimes in Union County.

Calamari has hosted dozens of free classes for the public, ranging from large-scale venues like the Fine Arts Center to smaller gatherings at the library, Senior Center and individual churches.

He always hands out prevention literature from the Georgia Attorney General’s Office in addition to his talks and other presentation materials, and usually a local bank representative or technical support professional attends to provide more information and answer questions.

And the results speak for themselves. Year to date, the local scam rate is down by a double-digit percentage, now that the public has greater awareness of how to avoid being scammed, possibly out of life savings or money set aside for the care of ailing seniors.

Residents can go ahead and mark their calendars for two upcoming Scam & Fraud Awareness Classes hosted by the Sheriff’s Office: Wednesday, Aug. 6, and Wednesday, Aug. 20, both at 10 a.m. inside the Union County Public Library at 303 Hunt-Martin Street in Blairsville.

## VA Claims Clinic...from Page 1A

the Claims Clinic was first fleshed out by him and Post 121 Senior Vice Commander Kathy Merritt before the invitation and involvement of Post 23.

The next step was gauging interest and getting the word out, and although the veterans weren’t required to sign up, a rough head count was necessary to involve governmental organizations.

Approximately 60 veterans took advantage of the clinic between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. The multi-step process started outside with greeters. From there, interested parties headed inside to what Merritt referred to as “intake,” where they stated their name and what they were looking to get out of the clinic.

And that could mean any number of things; from compensation benefits, sorting out delays with claims or seeking health care, many problems were tackled that day with the help of the organizations that sent volunteers out to help mountain-area veterans.

Comfort Keepers, Always Care Georgia and Appalachian Hospice were some of the first faces the vets saw, and they were happy to hand out information. Many of those serviced were elderly, and with certain health care concerns come a need for around-the-clock care.

The American Legion Auxiliary took over the waiting room, serving snacks and coffee.

“(We) didn’t want a gazillion people milling around in there because they’re actually doing business in there, so this is kind of our holding area,” Merritt explained, referring to the Civic Center’s convention

room. It was there that most of the participants found what they were seeking, led to their table by a volunteer according to their intake form.

The Veterans Benefits Administration, Georgia Department of Veterans Service, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, and the Blairsville VA Clinic all had representatives set up to answer any questions posed to them.

Even Radio Station 103.9 out of Blue Ridge held a live broadcast from the Civic Center until noon, hoping to bring more awareness of the event to local veterans and get more traffic. But even as the tables began to get folded up, people walked through the doors, and Merritt regarded the first-of-its-kind venture as a success.

“We were in here setting up, and there (were) like 20 veterans already here waiting,” she recalled from that morning, noting that there was certainly a need for benefits services. “We’re really pleased that we had as many people as we did show up because this is all about helping them.”

With that in mind, there’s talks of holding the Claims Clinic annually, continuing as a joint effort between Post 121, Post 248 and Post 23. Blairsville seems the most likely location, considering Union is the most central place for an event representing all three counties.

“Someone was suggesting that we could center it around military days, like Armed Forces Day, or Flag Day, or Pearl Harbor Day,” Merritt hinted, adding that actual holidays were a no-go

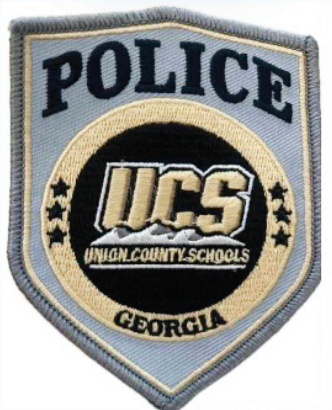
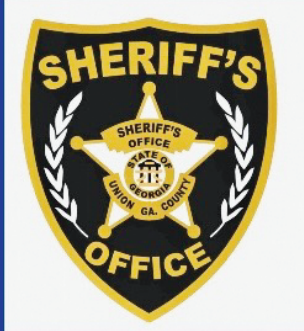
so that VA representatives could be present. “More than likely, we’re going to do it again, (we) just don’t know the timing.”

### Survivor’s Luncheon

The Union County Unit of the American Cancer Society Survivor’s Luncheon, Saturday, June 28, 2025 12 PM, First United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, Highway 515, Blairsville, GA, invites you and one guest - reservations are a must as space is limited. Please call Wendy Holden, 706-781-4166 to register. Deadline is June 20, 2025.



## UCGA 1st Responders Organization



The Board members of the Union County Georgia 1st Responder Organization would like to extend their deepest gratitude to the members of the Joshua's Warriors and the Vietnam Veterans Of America, Chapter 1101 for their incredibly generous donation. Your support means more than words can express and will have a lasting impact on the lives of first responders in our community.

## Farmers Market...from Page 1A



Local stakeholders celebrated a June 7 ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Butternut Creek Trail, which connects nicely with the historical preservation efforts at the Farmers Market. Photo by Todd Forrest

the importance of preserving local history, remarking that agriculture holds a special significance for him.

"I farmed here all my life, and my daddy made sorghum syrup from back before I was born," he said. "We only have two mills left in this county; when I was growing up there were probably between 20-30 mills."

"It would be nice if those two mills could go on forever, but there will probably be an end to them someday, so that's why we want to preserve that."

Blairsville-Union County Chamber President Steve Rowe followed Collins by adding, "There is an art to making sorghum syrup, but there is also an art to making the equipment you use to make sorghum. There's a lot that goes into it, and one thing the

chamber likes to do is preserve the heritage of our county, and this is a big part of doing that."

The sorghum mill and pan near the cabin will be used this fall for live demonstrations of syrup production to promote the new Sorghum in the Mountains Festival.

That same day, the Farmers Market opened for the season with Georgia Beef Day, which came with plenty of hamburgers grilled up for guests of the market.

As part of Beef Day, the SWCD, alongside nearly 30 partnering agencies, hosted a public community education day for conservation and agriculture, sponsored by Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D, Brasstown Beef, Nelson Tractor and Farm Bureau.

Market Manager Dustin

"Rog" Rogers could not have envisioned a more perfect way to launch the 2025 season at the Farmers Market.

"We had a terrific opening day, and I thought it went extremely well," he said. "We had a great crowd, close to 100 vendors, and we capped it off with a ribbon cutting. It was an awesome day for sure. I just want to thank all the organizations that came out for the Georgia Beef Day."

Rogers added that, in addition to Saturdays, the market is open on Tuesdays from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"If you need something during the week, you can stop by and see us on Tuesday," he said. "We've got some big events coming up. Be sure to follow us on Facebook for updates."

## Honor Flight...from Page 1A

for an Honor Flight these many years later, and following his application, he was approved and notified after "just a couple months." Like all selected veterans, Reich had the choice of embarking on the spring or fall flight.

Every Honor Flight participant receives a "guard," or someone to accompany them throughout their trip. If they don't have a person in mind or anyone who is able to join them, then the Honor Flight Network will provide the veteran with a guard. The one rule? No spouses: "It's not a vacation."

Reich's firstborn son, Christopher, went with him to the Capitol. Though Christopher has not served, he has always enjoyed a close relationship and fostered an interest in his father's military history. He and Reich were instructed to travel to American Legion Post #77 in Conyers prior to catching their flight to D.C.

"We went down the night before, got up at 4:30 (a.m.) and met at the American Legion," recalled Reich, who was then "blown away" by the escort for his convoy of veterans. Local law enforcement rode beside them with lights and sirens, totaling about five patrol cars and two motorcycles.

"I imagine the people that saw that wondered who in the world (was traveling)," Reich laughed, though he recognizes that such a response made him feel "special." "They cared enough to show us that kind of appreciation."

That said, the reception didn't end once they reached Hartsfield-Jackson Airport. Welcomers waited at Atlanta and Washington for the veterans to arrive, and when they did, they were met with cheers and applause from other passengers

and even airport staff.

Reich especially commends the organization and planning of the Honor Flight Network, but something in particular stuck out to him as a way of keeping all the veterans together and moving efficiently through the system.

"Every veteran had a wheelchair," Reich said, describing the mandatory rule he found shocking at first. "It's part of that well thought-out process that Honor Flight does. That's what gets you through the airport all together, all at one time – gets you through TSA and onto the airplane."

The Honor Flight tour includes stops at the World War II Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the United States Air Force Memorial, the United States Marine Corps War Memorial (Iwo Jima Memorial), the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Lincoln Memorial, Vietnam Women's Memorial and the Washington Monument.

When Reich arrived, he was looking for several names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Four of them were brothers-in-arms he served with, but one was the brother of a friend he graduated high school with. Upon finding his name, he took a photo and sent it to her, describing the experience as undeniably emotional.

"It was extremely reflective," Reich said. "At each site, there was something for us to understand and just think about."

As a retired Baptist minister, Reich felt there was certainly something spiritual about the trip and described it as "amazing." He's not ashamed to say he shed a few tears throughout the course of his Honor Flight experience, as



Reich posing with a statue honoring Vietnam Veterans during his Honor Flight experience.

did many of his fellows.

"I had to wipe my eyes several times," Reich admitted quietly, voice shaking. He calls his memories of Vietnam "extremely fresh," regardless of how many years may pass.

Along with the memorials, that feeling was compounded during the airport's mail call, another special aspect of the Honor Flight that allows the veterans to receive letters from family, friends and even strangers who want to thank them for their service.

The bond they all shared, too, was unforgettable to Reich. Nearly all of the veterans who joined him on his Honor Flight were from the Vietnam era, but two participated in World War II. Although they'd never met, the thing that united every one of them was their service to their country, cementing them all as America's heroes.

"It was like we had just seen each other the week before," said Reich. "We knew what the other one had done and seen and been through."

For more information on the program, visit <https://honorflightatlanta.org/>.



# Fishing Rodeo...from Page 1A



**The Rec Department enjoyed a terrific turnout for its annual Kids Fishing Rodeo at the Reece Farm last month.**  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Georgia DNR for supplying the day’s catch, Commissioner Harold Collins for approving the program, Rec Department volunteers for helping out and Foodland for donating a solid supper of hot dogs and chips.

Little guys and gals lined the banks from the bridge to just behind the barn, usually with a steadying, helping hand from grandparents or parents. From 6 p.m. to dusk, novice and veteran fishers alike tried their luck – and several succeeded.

Rylynn King, for example, has only been fishing “for a year or two” but was very proud of reeling in a rainbow trout that day. As an attendee

of the Suches Fish Rodeo, she’s no stranger to rod and tackle, and she’s fished at the Reece Farm before.

“I love (fishing); it’s like my favorite thing to do,” King said enthusiastically, detailing that her favorite part of the activity is bringing home her catch. “When I eat it, I’m just so happy, and it tastes better ... when you actually work hard for it.”

Grayson Nix reeled one in just a few feet away, to the great curiosity of his little sister, Hadleigh. His family came to last year’s rodeo, where they were disappointed to have one of their fishes eaten by a snake. This

season, however, they ensured the same thing didn’t happen.

Others, like Dianna Tiu and Brielle Smith, were just having fun with the act of fishing itself. Besties since kindergarten, the two little girls perched themselves on a rock and sat side-by-side, wondering how many fish they’d reel in; they figured they’d get either five or “one of each.”

It was Tiu’s first time fishing, but she decided she enjoyed it – up until she fell in the creek. No injuries were reported, but the wet pants were enough to make her take a break. Smith, meanwhile, called fishing “fun and relaxing.”

Just before sunset, folks began to file back in for hot dogs, ready for a meal after reeling in their hauls. They enjoyed an end to the evening with good food and socializing, and some kids even helped out the volunteers. Although she wasn’t keen on fishing, Nora Collins found she enjoyed handing out hot dogs and making sure everyone got their chips and a drink.

“There’s nothing better than a hot dog on a summer day,” remarked Mickey Cummings, to general agreement.

“I appreciate the volunteers bringing it together,” said Julie Tiu, mom of Dianna, who believed that the rodeo was good for the community. Amanda Smith, Brielle’s mother, agreed, saying fishing was good for teaching the little ones patience.

Both of them – and plenty others – plan to bring their children back for another adventure next year.

## Arthur and Shirley Burnett Celebrate 60th Wedding Anniversary



Arthur and Shirley (Dellinger) Burnett of Suches are celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary on June 11, 2025. Their lifelong journey together is an inspiration to their 4 children, 10 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren. Wishing them many more years of love, laughter, and unforgettable memories.