

Rescue: community responds to lost child...continued from page 1

Butterworth had the Georgia National Guard on alert just in case their assistance was needed.

"I can't say enough about Sheriff Clinton, he understood the situation, he understood it was going to be dark soon; he understood autism," Kim Russell said. "It was an intense search."

Kim's significant other, Dana Russell was driving back home from work in Atlanta. When Dana arrived, it wasn't easy to get into the neighborhood because of all the rescuers.

Just as Dana Russell arrived, word came that a Towns County firefighter and a member of the Appalachian Drug Task Force had discovered Connell on top of the mountain. Connell was discovered at 6:45 p.m.

A barefoot Connell was behind a tree on top of the mountain inside the Chattahoochee National Forest. The two rescuers heard a branch snap and stopped to listen. Connell stepped out from behind a tree. As Towns County Firefighter Austin Denton approached, Connell lifted his arms skyward; he was ready to go home.

"Austin Denton said he

was talking with the Task Force agent in the truck after they found Connell and all of the sudden they noticed that Connell had opened a bottle of Gatorade that was in the seat and was drinking it," Kim Russell said. "He told Connell, 'that's alright little guy, you drink all you want.'"

Connell was diagnosed with autism just before he turned 3 years old. His family had noticed that he wouldn't respond to verbal communication. They thought he was deaf. Kim Russell said a hearing test revealed that Connell's hearing was perfect. Something else was wrong.

He was diagnosed with autism. The family's private insurance provider dropped Connell from medical coverage. If his family had been covered by group insurance, that wouldn't have happened.

The family downsized, sold their primary residence in Peachtree City, and moved to the second home in Towns County in the Soapstone Community. Caring for Connell is extremely expensive. The family home has been designed almost like a fortress. The fences and decks built high to keep Connell contained. How-

ever, the little man has discovered a new talent, he's an escape artist.

He climbs the fences in the backyard, studies them intently and discovers the best way to escape from the fenced area. It almost forces his family to keep him indoors or keep a very observant eye on him.

There are concerns at Towns County Schools, where Connell is a student. Take an eye off of him and he's headed toward the exits. Teachers keep him well within close reach.

Dana and Kim Russell know they'll have to figure out an outside solution. But it's becoming more than they can afford to keep Connell contained within the family residence.

"It's so expensive to raise an autistic child," Dana Russell said. "It costs \$10,000 just to get his teeth cleaned because they have to use anesthesia to put him under."

"Nobody who doesn't have a child on the spectrum or a special needs child has no idea day-to-day what it takes to keep that child safe," Kim Russell said. "It's hard to exhaust Connell, he doesn't have the same pain level as a normal child. He's a wanderer."

Dana and Kim Russell were overwhelmed by the outpour of response to rescue Connell.

"I couldn't believe the response, it was incredible," Kim Russell said. "All the counties, all the agencies. There were four or five counties involved. Towns, Union, White, Rabun, Habersham and Fannin counties. DNR, U.S. Forest Service, Georgia State Patrol, you name it, they were here."

"Gen. Jim Butterworth was going to call in the Georgia National Guard if they hadn't found Connell by dark," Kim Russell said. "We can't express the gratitude that we have for all of these people that were involved in the search."

"Our friends and neighbors were here, people who heard he was missing were here. We were afraid we'd never see Connell again," Dana Russell said. "We were terrified."

"We were overwhelmed and amazed at the rescue effort and how fast that effort was organized," Dana Russell said. "That's the beauty of Sheriff Chris Clinton, he has an awareness of autism that a lot of people don't have in any community, not just our community."



Houdini might be Connell Russell's new nickname. The youngster is anxious to explore his surroundings. Photo/Charles Duncan

Randy Travis...continued from page 1

in 1985 with the release of his debut multi-platinum album *Storms of Life*.

Since his debut, Travis has become one of the most accomplished artists in the Country Music industry with 22 No. 1 singles on the Billboard charts and selling more than 25 million albums. The Silver Anniversary album features a compilation of his greatest hits performed as duets with the likes of Carrie Underwood, recent Anderson Music Hall visitors John Anderson, Kris Kristofferson and George Jones. It also includes the Zac Brown Band from Dählonega.

Travis had worked almost a full week prior to his arrival in Hiawassee as he filled in for Kathy Lee Gifford

on NBC's Today Morning Show with Hoda Kotb on Wednesday where he performed lines from *Someday*, expressed approval of toddlers' rendition of Adele's *Someone Like You* and acknowledged his recent skirmish with law enforcement authorities. Travis would later poke fun at himself saying "he was waiting on someone, but was picked up by the wrong one."

Travis started the show with a medley of his greatest hits including *1982*, *Digging up Bones* with an additional third verse and *On the Other Hand*. Following the medley, Travis eluded to his younger days, joking about his memories of sitting in the back of North Carolina police patrol cars.

Later, he also lightened the mood with stories about throwing rocks at his grandfather and memories about a nursing home back home.

Closing the show, Travis performed an acoustic version of *Never Seen An Angel*, *Three Wooden Crosses*, *If I Didn't Have You* and brought the show to a close with *Forever and Ever, Amen*.

Following the performance, Travis shook hands with every fan that approached the stage. Afterwards he held a meet and greet then later signed autographs for ecstatic fans.

It was a night to remember at Anderson Music Hall, one Randy Travis won't soon forget and neither will his fans.

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Under, the story of the emotional toll on residents in 1941 when a large portion of the county was put under water during the construction of Lake Chatuge.

Both Tallent and Whitehead did extensive research to understand the emotional toll the construction of Lake Chatuge had on residents directly impacted by the TVA project, Behrens said.

Contestants competing against the Towns County students filled the spacious Clayton State University arena, Behrens said.

Competing against both middle school and high school students, Tallent and Whitehead won the prestigious *Georgia Geographic Award* sponsored by the

Georgia Geographic Alliance, and the *Georgia History Award*, sponsored by the Friends of Georgia Archives and History Organization. They also took first place in the Geography discipline in their class.

Tallent and Whitehead, along with fellow classmates in Mrs. Behrens' sixth grade Social Studies Class, Sarah Bastian, Sadie Eller, Savannah Medley and Lydia Moss, competed in state-level events after qualifying at the regional level in February, Behrens said.

It was the first time Towns County has ever competed in the annual state Social Studies Fair, Behrens said.

According to the

Georgia Council for Social Studies who sponsors this event, "local, regional, and state social studies fairs annually present exhibitions of student work from grades 5 through 12. Each project is designed to show research and conclusions about the study of people and their relationships to their physical and social environment. The student develops a visual and verbal presentation by selecting a significant topic of study, gathering and analyzing data, interpreting findings and reporting conclusions."

The Towns County Herald congratulates Mrs. Behrens' sixth grade Social Studies class for their high achievements at both the regional and state levels of competition.

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turkey. "We have dealer space rented," she said. "Most of my booths are filled with antiques and others have craftsmen that make furniture."

She opened Main Street Consignment in Downtown Hiawassee just over a year ago, and she's confident it's time to expand.

The Red Barn is a big venture for Stilwell, who moved back to the Northeast Georgia/Western North Carolina area after spending 16 years in Florida.

Once she got back home, she started to ponder about how she would make a living. The entrepreneurial spirit was flowing inside her veins.

Her aunt has a 10,000 square-foot antique mall in Jasper. She borrowed an idea or two from her and came up with Main Street Consignment in Downtown Hiawassee.

The business opened

on March 5, 2011.

"When I came back home from Florida in the middle of a crunched economy, I was just trying to figure out what to do to make a living," she said. "Main Street Consignment was born."

"I had no idea what to expect," she said. "I was looking for a niche."

To say that Stilwell is an entrepreneur is an understatement.

"I am an animal lover, so when I first came back, I started a pet-sitting business," she said. "I've been doing that for more than four years and I still do it. I had a lot of furniture from the move from Florida so I decided to open up a business where I could sell it."

Main Street Consignment flourished, leading Stilwell to ponder expansion into other areas, mainly antiques and used furniture.

"I had customers com-

ing in asking for furniture," she said. "They were asking for items that I didn't have floor space for in the Downtown store."

The customer demands on her small store in Downtown gave Stilwell the confidence to branch out.

"That's when I came up with the idea to start a used furniture and antique store," she said. "It took a little investigation of the area to find a store with that kind of floor space. We found that store on Bell Creek Road (Georgia 75)."

Thus, *The Red Barn Antique and Furniture Store* was born touting 2,600 square feet of floor space with the option to double that amount should business warrant such a venture.

"I guess with any business, you just don't know what is going to happen, but I had to try," she said. "You never know unless you try. So far, we've been successful."

Indians...continued from page 1

The Indians were perfect in the field. The infield of Boone Moss, Cruz Shook, Harrison Hobbs and Luke Parker were flawless in the field. Bradley Smith, Jake Mullins and Payton Shook were just as flawless in the outfield.

Diehl, just a junior, helped his own cause in the second inning, nailing Morgan Adams with a pickoff move after Adams was caught leaning toward second base.

"That was huge," Diehl said. "It was definitely an inning killer for them."

Diehl cruised through until the seventh inning, bringing a one-hitter into the final frame. With two outs, Diehl surrendered a double to Adams, followed by a single by Thomas Hand.

The pressure was on as third baseman Paul Navarrete approached the plate.

Diehl got ahead 1-2 before coaxing Navarrete to ground to shortstop Harrison Hobbs, who tossed the ball to a stretching Boone Moss at first for the final out.

"We're playing with a lot more confidence it seems like," Diehl said. "We've been getting some great defense in the field, some timely hitting and as a starting pitcher, you can't ask for much more than that."

Head Coach Chris Vardo was excited to see his charges finally take charge.

"It was a well played ball game by both teams," Coach Vardo said. "Dillon Diehl came to play today, great job on the mound, great job at the plate. He came to play today, that's the bottom line. In games when we have a chance to win, he steps up to the plate and does what he does best."

"He's been throwing strikes all season," Coach Vardo said. "He's been solid on the hill."

The final line on Diehl: 7 innings, 3 hits, no walks, 8 strikeouts and no runs.

Indians' catcher Vonya Baldwin got things started off in the first with a single. Payton Chambers walked. Diehl singled in Baldwin and Cruz Shook doubled in Chambers. It was all the Indians would need, but not all they would get.

Harrison Hobbs led off the fifth with a triple. Baldwin walked, and up to the plate strode Diehl. He promptly doubled in both runs to give the Indians a 4-0 lead they would not surrender.

It was all in a day's work, Coach Vardo said.

"We had some big cogs today, but it took all 11 players to win this ball game," Coach Vardo said.

Stookey...continued from page 1

damages to Gene Cooley early last year.

Cooley also was interviewed by 20/20.

Cooley was personal bashed by anonymous posters on TOPIX following the 2008 murder of his girlfriend.

The bashing happened in the community chat room in TOPIX.

Stookey said that a discussion about the murder of Paulette Harper by her estranged husband, Steve Harper, who in turn, took his own life, led to a discussion about Cooley.

The discussion on TOPIX somehow morphed into a chat about the personal life of Cooley.

"The anonymous posters had a field day kicking Gene Cooley around with allegations of child molestation, extensive criminal background, drug rehabilitation attempts, drug use and drug dealing," said Stookey, who represented Cooley in his

defamation suit against the anonymous posters.

Stookey went to work but discovered unmasking anonymous Internet posters wasn't easy. He learned of one key piece of information he needed: the Internet Protocol (IP) address, a unique fingerprint left by every device that accesses the Internet.

"Once you get the IP address, you can go to your telephone companies and say, 'Give me the telephone number it comes back to, along with the name and address of the person who owns that telephone number,'" Stookey said.

It took two years, but Stookey got TOPIX to turn over the IP addresses of Cooley's critics.

The same name kept coming up, and the majority of the negative comments had come from one woman, Sybil Denise Ballew.

Cooley didn't even know who she was, Stookey said. Later it was determined

that Ballew once worked with Cooley at a Blairsville department store a decade earlier.

Supposedly, the postings about Cooley were to "protect" Paulette Harper's young daughter from Cooley, who the anonymous posters had labeled as a "pervert" and "child molester" in the TOPIX chat room, Stookey said.

Eventually, the embarrassment, ridicule and lack of employment forced Cooley to move away from Blairsville and take up residence in Augusta, Stookey said.

Stookey filed suit on Cooley's behalf against an anonymous poster named "MOUTH", which Stookey said was the leader of the pack bashing Cooley.

A Union County jury saw things in Cooley's favor.

He still hasn't seen a dime of the money, but he's back in Blairsville with a clear name.

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success.

"It was a really outstanding day for our boys of Towns County High School football," Coach Langford said. "The community showed up and supported us."

"Just the support and everything was so positive. Everybody had a great time just working and helping these kids out," he said.

"It ended up being such

a beautiful day. You couldn't ask for a better one. I know that the fish were biting for some but not for others," he said. "We've got a lot of great sponsors that make it happen. All of our sponsors make it happen. We feel like it's a great community activity."

"It brings a lot of people together," he said. "What is amazing to

me is that the people at the weigh-in. There was a great number of people there. It looked like more than 100 people were there."

"It was just a fun time," he said. "There's not a much better things to do on a Saturday than go fishing or at least watch people that know how to fish. I like to watch people that know how to anyway."



Vonya Baldwin knows he's got possibly the Big Fish of the tournament. The smile is a good indication that he's about to see a pay day. Photo/James Reese