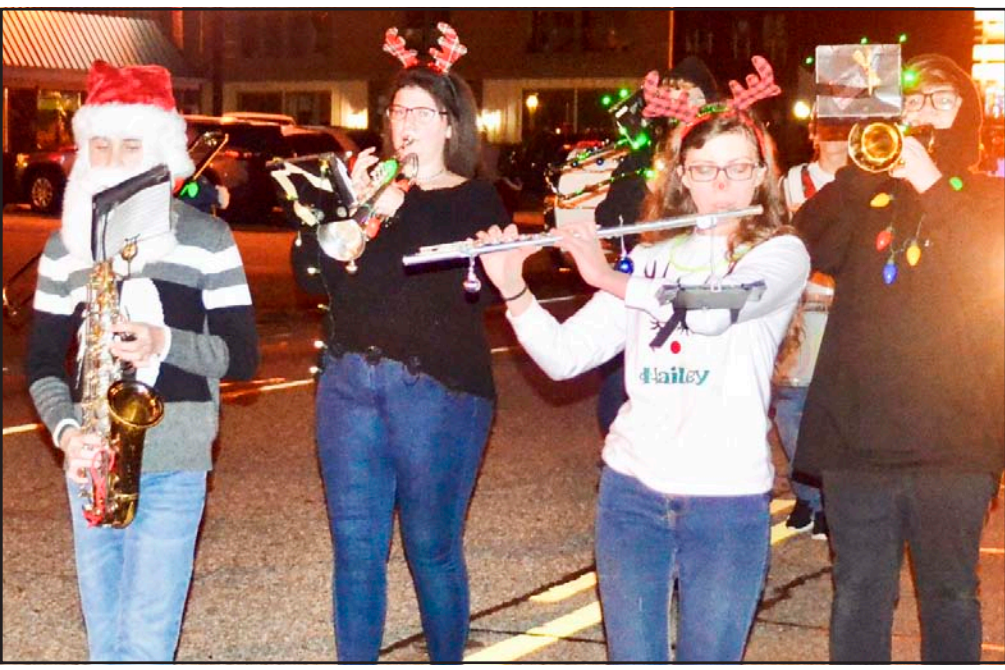


# Parade...from Page 1A



Members of the Towns County High School Indian Raider Band performed Christmas music in the annual Empty Stock Parade Nov. 28. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

help with us. "It feels good to be able to give back, and to get out in the community and let people know who we are and what we stand for. We are trying to win souls for Jesus."

Candy flew from floats and other vehicles as the parade passed by, and kids ran around to collect as much as they could while also awaiting a glimpse of Santa, who rode in the Lions Club float with 2019 Georgia Mountain Fair Queen Carly Woodard.

"I think this parade is for a great cause," local spectator Betty Haynes said. "Some kids just don't have the luxury that we all have and don't get a Christmas like most other kids."

"It is our job as a community and as people to take care of that and make those kids feel like they are a part of something. This isn't just about kids and Christmas presents – it is about connection."

"These kids will remember what is being done for them years down the road, and they will take that with them in life. It helps them grow and find the importance of giving back to the communities they love."

"Maybe one day, hopefully, they will be better off and be in a position where they can give back, too."

Leon Bernard, in town from Florida, was impressed by the bond between the Sheriff's Office and the community here in Towns County.

"Christmas is all about selfless acts," Bernard said. "Things like this are small towns coming together to do just that."

"I may not have much to say about it because I'm not a part of this community, but this is everything I want in the place I live. You just can't beat a small town working together to do something great for kids and their people."

"The Sheriff's Department here is leading by example and taking charge of real issues in



Children enjoy two things above all else during the annual Christmas parade through town – seeing Santa and picking up candy thrown by parade participants. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

this community. It is good to have a sheriff that understands the need on a community level and helps with donations and fundraising.

"Back home, the sheriff is just the sheriff, and they are just cops that I'm sure do things for their families and communities. But this is another level of connection. This is what it is about."

Towns County Sheriff's Administrative Assistant Vicki Edwards-Ellis, who helps organize the event annually, was also impressed with the turnout for the 2020 Empty Stocking Christmas Parade.

"I am always humbled and blessed that people come out for this every year," she said on Facebook Saturday night. "I want to thank every church, business, community group and the horse riders that came out to be in the parade."

Edwards-Ellis also congratulated float contest winners, posting photos of each to her personal Facebook page that evening.

First Place went to ServePro "with their amazing and well put together 'Whoville,' complete with the Grinch himself

and ... (his) dog Max."

The Towns County Lions Club won Second Place, "graciously (going) all the way up to the North Pole (to bring) Santa down here to be a part of the parade."

Finishing in Third Place was Polished Salon, "who had the sweetest customer getting her hair done right on the float."

"We were very excited to have the Shriners here this year and hope that they will come back next year," Edwards-Ellis said. "A special thank you to Hilda (Thomason) at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds who let me borrow their golf cart so I could get around up there."

"David Marella and Steve Osborn, I cannot thank you enough for helping me every year – I could not possibly do it without y'all. Merry Christmas."

Toy and money donations can be dropped off at the courthouse or jail. People inquiring about kids in need and/or wanting to help with the fund can contact the Sheriff's Office at 706-896-4444.

# Community...from Page 1A

Carol Frazier of Hayesville, North Carolina, shared her feeling that people should try their best to be mindful of themselves and others, which is perhaps more important than ever amid COVID-19.

"This year I am thankful for my health," Frazier said at Dollar Tree Nov. 28. "In a time like this, it is important to be cautious of your health and how you are treating yourself."

"Being good to yourself is a step in the direction of being good to others. You have to love yourself and care for yourself so that you can build relationships. I think that is what we need to focus on as a country. People need to be thankful for what they have, as

long as it is good. "Some people are in situations that need some help and extra care, but I'm sure there is something to be thankful for. In a time full of hate and split minds, we need to think about what we enjoy as a nation and how that can help us mend."

Kenny Ferguson of Towns County loves having the ability to do what he wants for the holidays, as some states have made it more difficult to gather with friends and family.

"I'm just thankful to be here in this state," Ferguson said on a trip to Sundance Grill Thanksgiving Day. "I'm thankful to be in the part of the country that is letting us be free

and letting us do Thanksgiving and the holidays as we want to do them, as we have always done them."

"I'm not sure what the people in charge think we are. I guess they think we are dumb or something. I'm not encouraging people with COVID to come into my home and get people sick, but I am inviting my family. It's like if someone had the flu; you don't come to a dinner if you have the flu."

"The way they treat us just makes me feel like we don't have minds of our own and we are incapable of thinking. It's just crazy, but I am thankful that there is sense here, I really am."

# Buchanan Lights...from Page 1A



At least a thousand people drive all the way down Scataway each year to see the Buchanan Family Lights. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

anymore, but I still keep them around."

Located at 469 Scataway Road, the Buchanan Lights run from dusk until around 10 p.m. each night through Jan. 2. Attendance is free, though visitors may leave a donation to defray some of the costs associated with running the lights and adding to the display each year.

For anyone else, stringing the lights and erecting the numerous displays would be a multi-person job, but year after year, Buchanan manages by himself, beginning the task months in advance and working straight through to a Thanksgiving Night debut.

"This year I started a little earlier, in September," Buchanan said. "I didn't even get to try them out before (Thanksgiving). I turned it all on and hoped for the best. We

did have a few small things that happened, but nothing major went wrong."

Added Buchanan, "I do it because I love to. That's the only way you could do something like this, is if you loved to do it. You see people on Facebook and people all over the world that give out after putting the tree up, and I think, 'Yeah, right.' There are 50 or 60 trees in here that I put up."

The nightly display features all the best-known classic Christmas music also, and Santa usually makes an appearance at the Buchanan Lights, but unfortunately, he will be unable to attend in 2020.

"Santa won't be here because of COVID," Buchanan said. "So, this year, I made the Letters to Santa box, and that at least gives the kids something

to do with Santa. If a kid wants to put a letter in the box, then they can do that."

As the out-of-the-way display has expanded, so has its following, to include people like Gayle Hart who drives up from Hall County every year to visit. Hart has been to the lights for the past three years and says the Buchanan home is among her favorite Christmas attractions anywhere.

"This is what Christmas is all about," Hart said. "These folks have been doing this for a very long time, and that word has spread to people that just come out here to see them."

"People like this is what we need in the world. They are selfless and do things like this not because they have to, but because they love it and it makes them happy. This is real Christmas spirit."

# Fairgrounds...from Page 1A



The new Cowtown creamery exhibit at the Mountain Country Christmas offers kids the opportunity to try their hand milking a real cow. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

hours to five or six hours," Mrs. Lamb said of their crafts. "We have coasters and magnets that we have made, and all the ornaments we have hanging on the trees as well."

"We picked this up as a hobby; all of this stuff came out of the yard, and we just started doing it. It has been a lot of fun. This place is awesome. We did the Fall Festival, and it is beautiful here. We weren't expecting so many people to be here on the first couple of nights."

Towns County Historian Jerry Taylor is a regular each year at the Mountain Country Christmas, where he plays music in the Organ Loft of the Exhibit Hall and talks about the antique reed organs donated to the fairgrounds over the years.

New in 2020, guests also get to partake in a live milking demonstration put on each night, and with all the festivities and activities going on, attendees such as Jenny Gibson of Rabun County find themselves returning annually.

"This is my favorite light show every year," Gibson said.



This 10-foot-tall Rocking Horse light display is new to the Mountain Country Christmas in 2020. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

"We have been coming the last three years or so, and we fell in love with it."

"It started because we were camping out at the time and noticed that they had all these lights, so we came to check it out. For \$6, you really can't beat it. Other places charge way more, and they don't have half the charm as this."

"Christmas is my favorite

holiday, and I love seeing people get out and in the spirit of things. There is a sort of magic to it, and that magic makes other people believe a little. It is contagious, and everybody wants to be part of it. I wouldn't miss it."

For more information, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.

# Hamilton Gardens...from Page 1A

night we did it.

"We are trying to get all these (flowers) sold now because it is supposed to be down to 19 on Monday. We have done the poinsettias one time, and this is the first time we have done more with it."

"We have a silent auction with beautiful items, and we have birdhouses and bat houses for sale along with our logo items."

Amelia Dawson of Florida attended the event, and she felt it was a good way to relax with family and enjoy the mountain views amid a setting sun.

"This little event is great," Dawson said. "We were up here for Thanksgiving and to see the Christmas lights, so we decided to come on up and see what this place was all about."

"I'm glad we did; these gardens are gorgeous, and I would have never even known they were up here at the top of this hill (inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds)."

"It is nice having a place here with things going on. Down in Florida, there isn't really a lot you can do as a family because of the COVID situation."

"I'm really happy that we were able to do family activities and actually celebrate the season this year. It is something that we won't forget."

The Christmas greenhouse event marked an end to a successful yet challenging year for the Gardens, as volunteers have had to plan around COVID-19 to make sure they were staying as safe as possible, according to Howard.

"We have had an excellent year," Howard said. "We have had a lot of traffic, mainly because we were one of the few places open."

"We have had a lot of visitors and a lot of people come through today that have never been here before. We are thankful; it has been a good year, even without all



The Hamilton Gardens Christmas event featured a beautiful greenhouse poinsettia flower sale Friday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

our events.

"We will be back during bloom season, which is in mid-April, and we will just be working and tending to the gardens until then. That six-week bloom period will be our next big thing here at the gardens."

Hamilton Gardens will remain open throughout the winter, and members of the Gardens are continuing to make natural Christmas wreaths as custom orders for a limited time. For more information, call 706-970-0011.