

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
Towns County Herald
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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.

Rocking tropical-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

Register now for Scott Hogsed Memorial Youth Day

It is that time of year again to get your youth registered for the annual Scott Hogsed Memorial Youth Conservation & Education Day. We would like all youth that can to pre-register. It makes things move much faster to come into the event. This can be done by visiting www.scotthogsedyouthday.com. Pre-registration closes on August 25 at 4 PM. We have changed the main gate opening until 7:30 AM on the 26th so be aware that you don't have to get up so early to get in.

The event, which is held in Brasstown, NC on Fred Cook's farm, is a growing event.

The date is Saturday, August 26, gates open at 7:30 AM and it is totally free. Youth will be learning about outdoor activities including hunting and fishing, archery and firearm safety, and much, much more. We are excited about some new booths this year coming to the event so it will not be the same as in the past. The Nantahala Outdoor Center will be at the event doing an educational booth. Jeff Johnson and his dogs will be with us letting our younger kids learn about bird dogs and bird hunting. Also, the National Guard will be there with a climbing wall and a ropes course. We will of course have the shooting range, fishing pond, and the bow range but we did change our line up a bit so register now. Youth and youth groups, ages 5-18, are invited to attend from all across the region and the nation.

This event also offers a free wild game lunch for all participants and parents. Of course, youth will receive a free t-shirt and goody bag as well as being entered to win one of our great door prizes.

This year we will be hon-



This year's Scott Hogsed Youth Day is honoring the memory of Shannon Christy. Shannon not only loved extreme kayaking but also loved fishing!

oring Shannon Christy. Shannon was 23 years old when she lost her life in 2013 doing one of her favorite things, extreme kayaking. This year we will honor Shannon and her love of all things outdoors, by providing youth with another great youth day.

We are also looking for wild game donations for our wild game lunch. Hunters and fisherman with meat to spare please call Hogsed's Sportswear about donating wild meat for our wild game lunch. We need enough meat to feed 1,800

SMART Recovery program

SMART Recovery (Self-Management And Recovery Training) helps individuals gain independence from addiction (substances or activities), by providing an educational and supporting environment based on SMART Recovery 4 - Point Program.

We teach self-empowerment for recovery from addic-

tion, drug abuse, alcoholism, and alcohol abuse, by teaching how to change self-defeating thinking, emotions, and actions; and to work towards long-term satisfactions and quality of life.

Also if you would like to make a donation to help raise funds for this event please contact Sam Hogsed at 828-361-2117 or call Hogsed's Sportswear 828-389-3088.

If you would like more information about the event visit the website at www.scotthogsedyouthday.com or contact the North Carolina Cooperative Extension at 828-837-2210 ext. 4. August 26 will be here before you know it so register soon!

For more information call 706-994-3692; 76 Hunt Martin Street, Blairsville, GA.