

## Bud Johnson...from Page 1A



Iwo Jima Veteran Bud Johnson presented the Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 with a replica of the U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial for the Corps' 245th birthday on Nov. 10, 2020.  
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

December in a discussion of Pearl Harbor. "To remember the people who never had an opportunity to raise a family and have a good life.

"All we can do is keep the memory of these people alive, keep their names alive and what they did alive. It's also important to recognize our veterans of all times and all wars who have sacrificed for the freedom of our nation and the world.

"If it wasn't for our veterans and people serving today, we wouldn't be walking

the streets free. We would be under a communistic government; we wouldn't be free, and people should be free."

Johnson was known throughout the North Georgia Mountains as a hero in many respects — a war hero, a hero for local veterans, a hero for Christ. And as such, he will receive a hero's memorial Feb. 15, which is President's Day and the local Iwo Jima remembrance, time to be determined.

Following the news of his passing, many people in

the community paid tribute to Johnson on social media, including the Towns County GOP, VFW Auxiliary in Hiawassee, Towns County Sheriff Kenneth "Ode" Henderson, Navy Seabee Island X-3, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris, and others.

Several area flags flew at half-staff over the weekend for Johnson, including at the Towns County GOP Headquarters and the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807 Building in Hiawassee.

## Crane...from Page 1A

said. "And if you have to get out, be extra careful. As always, our EMS, volunteer firefighters and other first responders who respond to emergencies are much appreciated."

The Towns County Sheriff's Office and Georgia State Patrol also responded to the scene that Saturday.

Concurring with Bradshaw, Coroner Tamela Cooper said local first responders did an amazing job getting Crane stable so he could be flown to Gainesville, but that sadly, black ice "claims the life of many yearly."

"Winter in North Georgia is gorgeous yet can be very dangerous," Cooper said. "The Coroner's Office has responded to deaths almost every year due

to a motor vehicle accident or someone slipping on ice outside at home.

"We urge our community to be extra cautious during the cold months ahead. Slow down and take precautions to protect yourself and our neighbors."

Crane is survived by his wife Marilyn Crane, brother Michael Crane, niece Tiffany Crane Campbell, nephew Cody Crane, great niece Madison Wehunt, great nephews Matthew and Mason Woodall, uncle Clarence Ledford and cousin Roger Ledford.

"Mark was what many would call a 'jack of all trades,'" according to his obituary. "He worked for his cousin Roger for over 25 years, helped Ken and Sue Entrekin feed and tend to

their cattle, and often picked up side jobs just to help someone else out.

"He was easygoing, very likable and down to earth. Mark enjoyed playing horseshoes, being outdoors, and especially watching NASCAR and spending time at Memory Lane Car Museum (in Young Harris).

Banister-Cooper Funeral Home had charge of Crane's arrangements, with services having occurred on Thursday, Dec. 31, officiated by Rev. Ken Nicholson in the funeral home chapel.

People may share a memory of Crane at <https://www.banisterfuneral.com/obituary/Mark-Crane>.

## GMF New Year...from Page 1A



The Blairsville Cruisers headed to Hiawasse Saturday to assist the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in welcoming the community for fireworks and a classic car show.  
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

celebration.

"With the weather and evening like this, it seemed like a good time to do it," Tuschel said. "They asked (Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason) what she thought about having a cruise-in, and she said it sounded good to her.

"Vendors came out to advertise, and it became an event. It is beautiful with all of the lights. I counted around 30 or 40 cars. We do these cruise-ins and other outings a few times each year (in Blairsville), and this venue is great.

"People really enjoy it and like to see the cars. If we can keep with it like this, that will be terrific."

With hundreds of spectators frequenting the event, many attendees like Lori Stanton of North Carolina said they were happy to find a community event to celebrate.

"This is great for the kids and the family," Stanton said.

"We didn't know if anything would be going on for the New Year, and we wanted to get out and enjoy the holiday together.

"We had a little party at the house where we watched the New York show, but it was so boring this year. There just wasn't any life in it and seemed like it had little effort.

"This is fun, though, and we can be active and eat and just be together. The fun of the New Year is bringing it in with your family and friends."

And families did just that, with kids in the fairgrounds parking lot cheering as they watched in awe the sky explode in a multitude of colors.

Carl Owen of Towns County said he, too, was happy to have something like the fireworks available for everyone in the community, especially since the show did not require a reservation cost or a late night.

"It isn't New Year's anymore, but this is still great,"

Owen said Saturday. "I didn't expect the fireworks to be so long and grand. I thought it would be short and sweet and then we go home, but it was quite the show and something to watch.

"My wife and I come to the shows here every now and then, and it is just great what this place gives to the area. We don't get to come for everything, but what we do see is always wonderful.

"I just want to wish everyone a Happy New Year, and I hope the best for those in our community and in our country. It is a time to celebrate."

With the arrival of 2021, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is aiming to bring back concerts and other events that were postponed due to COVID-19 in 2020. For information on upcoming events, visit [GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com](http://GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com).

## Vaccine...from Page 1A

General Health System, Synergy Health of Hiawasse, Blairsville Internal Medicine, and a joint effort by the Union and Towns County Health Departments.

Currently, the Health Departments, Synergy Health and Union General are providing the vaccine to eligible people outside of their respective offices.

Union General focused its initial vaccination efforts at its own hospitals and nursing homes, though it is now branching out to other medical workers in the community, like home health professionals and local doctor's offices.

With more than 2,500 patients, the vast majority of whom are over the age of 65 and therefore higher risk individuals, Blairsville Internal Medicine will be concentrating its vaccinations in-house for the time being, including staff.

Synergy Health is designated as a mass vaccine provider, and it made good on that status by expanding its offerings last week to interested Towns County medical first responders, a dozen of whom lined up at the E-911 Dispatch Center for a drive-thru vaccination clinic Dec. 29.

Additionally, Synergy Health visited Brasstown Manor Senior Living in Hiawasse last week to vaccinate residents and staff there.

For their part, Brasstown Manor residents receiving the vaccine were overjoyed with the knowledge that vaccination is a crucial step toward regaining some normalcy and respite from their isolation.

"There was an energy that was so positive," Dr. Samuel L. Church of Synergy Health said, comparing the excitement for the vaccine there to the applause he experienced at his own office upon arrival of the first doses. "They are so eager to get their lives back."

Added Church, "A lot of the residents were asking, 'Does this mean we (don't have to) be quarantined anymore?' I had to tell them they're not quite done with their mask yet or with their local quarantine."

Church performed a few hymns on the piano as his team vaccinated residents and staff of Brasstown Manor, which has been fortunate not to have experienced an outbreak of the virus, per the Department of Community Health's COVID-19 Long-Term Care Facility Report.

"There's been such a problem nationally with assisted living facilities having just terrible devastation from the virus that all of them have very rigid precautions, and they

are ready to be free," Church said.

Synergy Health has been coordinating with the local Health Department to try to get the vaccine administered to as many eligible people as possible, and Church said he looks forward to continuing that partnership to help more people as vaccine supplies increase.

Church said residents aged 65 and older can call his office at 706-896-0505 to be added to the list for vaccinations that can begin Jan. 11. People outside the initial vaccine distribution regime will have to wait for public health guidelines to specify their eligibility.

"We have had enormous community interest, whether it's our patients or not, that have been wanting to be vaccinated," Church said, reiterating that more people will become eligible as vaccine availability increases throughout the year.

As of Dec. 31, nearly 600,000 Georgians had received their first vaccine dose against COVID-19. People can visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine> for information about the vaccine generally and the distribution plan moving forward.

So far, not all local medical first responders have wanted the vaccine, which hasn't been formally authorized by the Food and Drug Administration and deploys a technology that's new in terms of use in humans.

There are several side effects associated with COVID-19 vaccination, such as fever, headache, and rarer but more serious complications, though the most common side effect has been injection site soreness.

People must weigh the risks individually, of course, in consultation with health care providers. But for the most vulnerable to hospitalization and death, many doctors believe the risks of an emergency use authorized vaccine are unlikely to be greater than the risks of COVID itself.

Dr. Church said people may experience more intense side effects with the follow-up booster shot, though those have shown to be mostly mild as well. He said this is because, after the first dose, people's immune systems are ready to respond more aggressively.

In terms of COVID-19 prevalence, pretty much everywhere in the US is seeing a winter surge, including the North Georgia Mountains area. This is not entirely unexpected, as the late fall, winter and early spring months are known

collectively to make up the respiratory virus season.

Still, Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said hospitalizations do appear to be up compared to this same time in past years, and COVID hospitalizations specifically are higher currently than at any other point since the pandemic began.

Because of COVID's high prevalence in the community and abroad, Barnett is urging people to remain diligent in following COVID recommended practices such as social distancing, wearing masks, washing hands, etc., and to get vaccinated as soon as it becomes available to them.

She sees light at the end of the tunnel thanks to the vaccine but also recognizes there's more tunnel left to go. As such, she's also urging people not to avoid medical care generally, saying folks should make sure to go to regular checkups and seek help with personal medical concerns.

As far as COVID-19 testing goes, since Nov. 30, the local Health Department has been holding 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. clinics five days a week to allow people greater opportunities to get tested for free.

Starting Jan. 11, however, local testing will be offered "for symptomatic first responders, school employees and court system personnel by appointment" in this same time slot.

Testing for specific occupations only will be replacing general testing locally, so Jan. 11 forward, people looking for free Health Department testing will have to go to 2500 Allen Creek Drive in Gainesville. This site will operate Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. by appointment only.

People can make an appointment by contacting the Call Center at 1-888-426-5073. Center hours are Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays from 7:30 am to 5 p.m., and Tuesdays from 7:30 am to 7:00 pm.

"This change will help meet the demand for providing vaccines to more people as we work through the phases identified by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention," District 2 Public Health said last week.

## Hospice Volunteer opportunities

Regency Hospice, located in Hiawasse, GA has Hospice Volunteer opportunities available in Towns and surrounding counties. Please call our office at 706-896-1251 if you are interested. NT0am6ZJCA