

# Towns County Herald

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## Georgia Mountains Fall Fest returns after missing 2020

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason is predicting the largest ever Georgia Mountain Fall Festival Oct. 8-16, "simply because people have not been able to come in two years to the Fall Festival."

"We did have arts and crafts last year," Thomason said, "but as far as to have any festival we didn't get to music and ground entertainment and exhibits and all that kind of stuff (due to COVID-19)."

"The only thing we're not going to be able to do this year at the Fall Festival is, we had to postpone the cooking contest (because they felt it

wasn't safe for the judges to taste homemade foods given the COVID problem.)"

"We've got all the arts and crafts booths full. There are 65 booths out there, and they're all full. We've got lots of food trucks and food booths. All the exhibits in the Exhibit Hall will be open, and the Pioneer Village."

"And then, we'll have the Nerveless Nocks, which is a daredevil circus that will be here on the fairgrounds (performing three shows per day) the whole nine days."

The Fall Festival will also feature the Cowboy Circus for four days, with Danny Grant performing amazing tricks and teaching people how to tie rope and lasso.

"We've got two shows

that we've got hard tickets on, Tracy Lawrence on Oct. 9, and also on Oct. 16, Ronnie Mil-sap and Mark Wills," she said, adding that both shows have sold over 2,000 tickets already and are expected to sell out.

"The opening act for Tracy Lawrence is going to be the Davisson Brothers," Thomason said. "They were the opening act for Chris Janson back in the early spring, in April, and they were dynamite. Everybody just loved them, so we're bringing them back."

This will be a special year for the members of the Georgia Mountain Fair Band. Each member will be awarded a plaque and recognized on Friday, Oct. 8, for their many years of service in the band.

See Fall Festival, Page 3A



The Georgia Mountain Fair Band will receive special recognition on the opening day of the 2021 Georgia Mountain Fall Festival.

## Chief Deputy Moss updates residents in breakfast meeting



L-R: TCSO Chief Deputy Gene Moss, Office Manager Vicki Ellis, Capt. Eric Wood, Maj. James Baldwin and Community Relations Manager Jill Gittens. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Towns County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Gene Moss addressed the Mountain Movers and Shakers in their weekly breakfast meeting on Friday, Oct. 1.

Though he graduated from Hayesville High School

just across the state line, Moss said there was little difference to him between Clay County, North Carolina, and Towns County, Georgia, growing up.

"I bleed Towns County - this is my home," Moss said, before going on to offer those gathered additional details about his professional background.

Moss has an associate degree in criminal justice from DeKalb College and has completed management coursework for law enforcement administrators through the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government.

He also completed train- See Movers & Shakers, Page 3A

## Hamilton Gardens thanks volunteers before dissolution

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge hosted its last big gathering as an organization on Friday, Sept. 24, to celebrate the many volunteers who have made the gardens a success over the last five years.

The occasion was bittersweet for the nearly 50 volunteers in attendance, as the Hamilton Gardens at

Lake Chatuge nonprofit will, officially dissolve after Oct. 31, at which time the fairgrounds will reclaim grounds maintenance duties moving forward.

According to https://hamiltongardens.org/: "Since 2016, the Gardens has been operating under a management agreement with Georgia Mountain Fair, Inc., which manages the Garden area within Towns County Park."

"This area is outside of the actual (Georgia Mountain

Fairgrounds), under an agreement with the Georgia Mountain Fair Authority, which sub-leases those grounds, including the Gardens, from Towns County."

"Unfortunately, the existing management agreement does not provide any exclusive property or leasehold interest, which has prohibited the ability of the Gardens to secure State, Federal, and private foundation funding."

See Hamilton Gardens, Page 6A



Hamilton Gardens volunteers gathered for a surprise dedication of the West Lawn on Sept. 24. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Hiawassee early voting begins Monday, runs three weeks

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Advanced in-person voting for the City of Hiawassee referendum on packaged liquor sales will begin next week at the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration Office, to run weekdays Oct. 11-29 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime.

As all incumbents for the 2021 Hiawassee Municipal Election qualified unopposed, the sole item that will appear on the ballot is the referendum asking registered city voters to consider allowing packaged liquor sales inside city limits.

This is an off year for countywide elections, and only Hiawassee residents will be eligible to cast ballots in this election, for which the voter registration deadline was Oct. 4.

New this year is the addition of a second day of



Early in-person voting for Hiawassee residents starts next week at the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration Office. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

weekend voting, giving people too busy to vote during the week on Saturday, Oct. 16, and Saturday, Oct. 23, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Election Day voting will take place Nov. 2 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Elections Board Office.

Voters may pick up a copy of the new "Application for Georgia Official Absentee Ballot" from the Elections Board Office located at 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite A, in Hiawassee or print a copy at https://sos.ga.gov/admin/uploads/2021\_Absentee\_

See Early Voting, Page 3A

## Hiawassee Night Market ends second season with a flourish

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Friday, Oct. 1, marked the final Hiawassee Night Market of the 2021 season, though the Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority and City of Hiawassee have committed to bringing the popular event back starting May 2022.

It was a perfect fall evening on the Hiawassee Town Square, featuring terrific weather, 27 vendors and attendance by at least 300 people, including families and their pets.

"I've been talking about doing some kind of night market on first Fridays or final Fridays or funky Fridays for years," Hiawassee Mayor



The family and pet-friendly Hiawassee Night Market may have finished its current season last Friday, but rest assured it will return in 2022. Photo by Mark Smith

## FDA to consider Moderna, J&J boosters

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

For the entire Georgia Department of Public Health District 2, which includes Union, Towns and 11 other counties, a total of 286 fully vaccinated people opted to receive a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine during the wider rollout of the booster program Sept. 27-29.

This included boosters for people who first became eligible to receive a third Pfizer shot last week, and those who have had access since mid-August, when the Centers for Disease Control and Pre-

vention authorized Pfizer and Moderna boosters specifically for immunocompromised individuals.

Initial vaccination efforts in this area consisted primarily of Moderna vaccines, which likely contributed to the apparently low third shot uptake last week, as the new booster shot guidelines only apply to Pfizer vaccinees currently.

Booster doses of the Pfizer vaccine have been newly approved for people aged 65 and older; residents of long-term care facilities; people 18 and older with pre-existing medical conditions; and residents 18 and older who have an occupational or institutional

exposure risk. To be eligible to receive a booster under these new guidelines, people must have received their second Pfizer vaccine at least six months ago.

As previously reported, there is no booster available for Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine recipients at this time, "as right now there is not enough data to support a booster dose recommendation," District 2 Public Information Officer Natasha Young said recently.

On Friday, Oct. 1, the FDA announced that its Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee

would be meeting Oct. 14-15 "to discuss the use of booster doses of the Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine and the Janssen (J&J) COVID-19 Vaccine."

The committee will also hear presentations and discuss available data on "mix and match" boosters, that is, "the use of a booster of a different vaccine than the one used for the primary series of an authorized or approved COVID-19 vaccine," per FDA.gov.

"Vaccines are one of the most important interventions for bringing an end to the ongoing pandemic," said Dr. Peter Marks, director of the FDA's Center for Biologics

See Booster Shots, Page 3A

## Sorghum Fest heading to Meeks Park Oct. 9-10

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE - A sweet tradition will return to the North Georgia Mountains this weekend after being canceled in 2020 due to concerns over community transmission of COVID-19. The Blairsville Sorghum Festival will run two weekends as usual, Oct. 9-10 and Oct. 16-17, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Parking for the festival located inside Meeks Park in Union County is free, and admission for everyone 13 and

up is just \$5. Children 12 and under get in free.

Fifty-two years have passed since the Sorghum Festival got its start around the Old Courthouse on the Downtown Blairsville Square, and syrup making by tireless volunteers remains central to the event, with organizers pledging to spend proceeds on worthy local causes.

Since the beginning, festival proceeds have gone right back into the community by way of charitable giving to groups and individuals, which is why, when it comes to local See Sorghum Fest, Page 6A

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,676.91
Chatuge	1,922.22
Nottely	1,768.75

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**SPORTS**

FOOTBALL 10/8

vs. Commerce 7:30 PM

SOFTBALL REGION TOURNAMENT TBA

See Fall Festival Section of this paper

TCHS Students of the Week

See page 4B

Trick-or-Treating in the Village

See last page

# Movers & Shakers...from Page 1A

ing in profiling sexual predators and serial murders at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford, Connecticut.

After 30 years with the DeKalb Police Department, Moss retired as a Precinct Commander with the rank of Major. He then spent 12 years with the Forsyth County Sheriff's Office and retired from there. In those 42 years, he worked many high-profile cases.

And now, he's Chief Deputy with the Towns County Sheriff's Office, marking his third "rodeo," he said.

"I can't say enough about Sheriff Ken Henderson," Moss said, adding that he was Henderson's campaign manager and jumped at the chance to be his chief deputy when the opportunity arose, as he had done his homework, and Henderson had passed with flying colors.

"I want to talk about our image at Towns County Sheriff's Office," Moss said. "It's important that people perceive the Sheriff's Office as professional and well groomed. So, we've made all the uniforms one color - black - and all patrol vehicles are black and white.

"Black and white police vehicles are proactive. Highly visible policing deters criminal activity and gives citizens a high sense of safety. It also gives TCSO employees a sense of pride in their department and boosts morale."

This, Moss said, has imparted a uniform look and professional image to the department that he felt was lacking in years past. Moss said he and Sheriff Henderson also redesigned the department patch.

Moving on, Moss touched on the fact that law enforcement officers are required by the state to undergo a minimum of 20 hours of training per year in Georgia, though he and the sheriff have mandated that local deputies go above and beyond by completing 40 hours of training each year.

"We've got two or three people now that are trained on high-risk warrant execution,"

Moss said. "It keeps down the liabilities. These people are trained to serve high-risk warrants. It's an officer safety issue; it keeps our officers safe."

"I can't talk much about drug investigations and how we operate, but in two and a half months of very hard work, we've arrested three individuals and taken approximately 11 pounds of meth off our streets. That's a lot of meth (i.e. thousands of doses)."

Meth is made in Mexico, he said, because certain ingredients needed to make the drug aren't as widely available here.

"The cartels do not like Towns County, I can promise you that," Moss said. "We've taken their dope off the street."

"We've made 155 drug and substance abuse-related arrests in nine months (since the sheriff took office). Out of those, 39 were DUIs - drunks taken off the roadway," Moss said, adding, to a round of applause, that the department would continue safety road checks around Towns.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office now utilizes two drug dogs, or K-9 units. Both dogs, he said, are assigned to the TCSO Investigative Unit and "are being utilized responsibly."

"Let's talk about our programs. When we got here, we didn't even have a website. We implemented a website for the Sheriff's Office," he said, noting how easy it is to navigate.

This is in addition to the department's new and regularly updated Facebook page. TCSO uses the Facebook page mainly for public announcements, like road closures and emergencies, but it also has some useful operational information.

"We've got a lot of followers, and we're proud of that," he said.

Moss then introduced his senior staff, who accompanied him on Friday morning: Maj. James Baldwin, who supervises the jail; Capt. Eric Wood, Third in Command; Lt. Johnny McCoy, Supervisor;

Vicki Ellis, Office Manager; and Jill Gittens, Community Development Officer.

The senior staff members introduced themselves and gave a brief overview of their areas of responsibility.

Gittens said two classes sponsored by the Sheriff's Office are coming up soon that are open to the public. The first is a firearm safety class, and the other is the "Refuse to Be a Victim" class. For more information on these classes, call 706-896-4444.

Moss went on to describe newly implemented Deputy of the Month and Detention Officer of the Month recognitions, both of which are morale boosting programs, he said.

"Once a month we do a formal presentation, give (the winner) compensation of some sort and showcase their name," Moss said. "Recognition is very important."

Most importantly, the chief deputy described a newly implemented program of tabletop brainstorming sessions involving scenarios like active-shooter situations, not just at a school, but at various other locations around Hiwassee and the county.

Joining the Sheriff's Office for these tabletop sessions are the Hiwassee Police Department, Young Harris College Police Department, Towns County EMS, Towns County Fire Department, 911 Emergency and the Towns County Schools.

In the last several months, there have been eight or nine of these tabletop sessions, Moss said, highlighting how every public emergency responder agency in the county is working together to practice and train, which is a fantastic boon for the safety of the county.

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley will speak in the Oct. 8 meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers at the Sundance Grill in Hiwassee.

# Local EAA Chapter to host annual Chili Fly-In Saturday, October 16th



Experimental Aircraft Association hosts Fly-In

Blairsville Chapter 1211 of the Experimental Aircraft Association will host its annual Chili Fly-In on Saturday, October 16, at the Blairsville Airport from 10 a.m. until early afternoon.

## Early Voting

...from Page 1A

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"Georgia law allows for absentee-by-mail ballots to be requested no earlier than 78 days and no later than 11 days prior to an election," per sos.ga.gov. "Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, email (as an attachment), or in-person to the local County Board of Registrar's Office."

People are encouraged to request and return their absentee ballots early to give their ballot "enough time to travel through the mail and resolve any issues that may arise when voting by absentee ballot," per georgia.gov.

For the November election, the deadline to return absentee-by-mail ballot applications is Oct. 22. Folks wanting to utilize the official drop box to turn in their absentee ballots can find it inside the Elections Board Office main entrance during early voting hours.

Voters can also drop completed absentee ballots off at the Elections Board Office through Election Day.

The event will take place on the south side of the airport, opposite the new terminal. Entry is from the Old Blue Ridge Highway side.

Pilots from around the region always fly in for a bowl of chili and just to get out and fly somewhere, so it's a great place to meet pilots and aviation enthusiasts and see a variety of general aviation aircraft.

EAA members will be serving up chili, soft drinks, water and hangar talk in the old Blairsville Airport hangar. Though it's not etched in stone, there are usually one or two airplane owners who will take people up for a short flight.

It's also a great place for a young person to check out a career in aviation or for someone that's just always wanted to fly. EAA members and pilots will be around to answer questions.

Ever had a yearning to

# Booster Shots...from Page 1A

Evaluation and Research. "It's critical that as many eligible individuals as possible get vaccinated as soon as possible."

"Once vaccinated, we want to ensure that individuals continue to be protected against the adverse effects of COVID-19. The available data make clear that protection against symptomatic COVID-19 in certain populations begins to decrease over time, so it's important to evaluate the information on the use of booster doses in various populations."

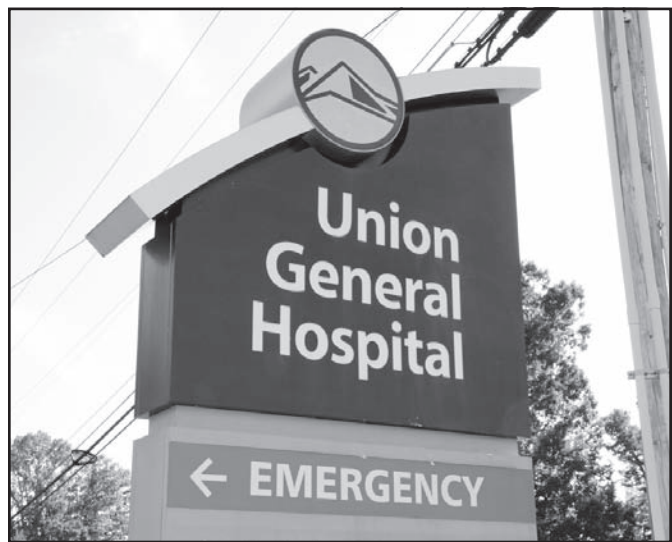
Once the FDA Advisory Committee makes its recommendations, the FDA will follow suit, and the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices and the CDC itself will ultimately weigh in on the matter before additional vaccination policies are adopted and put into effect.

For the foreseeable future, the Towns County Recreation Department at 150 Foster Park Road in Young Harris will be hosting vaccination clinics Mondays and Wednesdays from 1-4:15 p.m., and on Tuesdays between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m.

Towns will also host vaccine clinics at its Health Department every other Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon starting Oct. 2, for both flu and COVID vaccinations.

Union County will continue offering vaccines at its Health Department in Blairsville until demand requires a transition over to the Union County Sports Center, with every other Saturday vaccinations as well.

All doses of the Pfizer vaccine will be available. First and second doses of Moderna as well as the single-shot J&J vaccine will be available upon request. Appointments are not required to attend any day of vaccination, but people may schedule an appointment



COVID-19 emergency room visits declined starkly last week at Union General Hospital in a trend local health care workers are hoping will hold. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

via <http://phdistrict2.org/>.

Turning to local COVID metrics, it appears the now weeks-long decline in community transmission continues unabated through press time, with fewer positive cases among the general public and in the schools and hospitals.

On Oct. 1, Union General Hospital had 28 COVID inpatients; that is still an elevated number, but it's half the record figure set a little over a month ago, and Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said Friday that COVID-related emergency room visits had "dropped off to near nothing the last couple of days."

While local COVID hospitalizations are down from recent weeks, Barnett said that patients requiring hospitalization in this surge, predominantly among unvaccinated residents, "are so much sicker this time and have a longer length of stay so are taking longer to clear out (of) our COVID census."

Fortunately, the diminished inpatient census and drop in ER visits for COVID have allowed the health system to restart some of the elec-

tive outpatient procedures it paused at the start of the most recent surge, and to partially reopen the hospital's wound care and cardiac rehabilitation clinics.

Importantly, the virus that causes COVID-19 is still circulating in the community according to state and local data, and many doctors continue to advocate for vaccination to protect those most likely to suffer severe outcomes from the disease.

COVID vaccines are available for free and without appointment at local health departments, and people may also find them at any number of area pharmacies.

District 2 Public Health continues to offer free drive-thru PCR testing at Union General Hospital for anyone wanting or needing one.

Testing is available Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 35 Hospital Road in Blairsville. No appointment is required to receive a test, but registration via <https://honumg.info/LTSGA015> is encouraged to decrease wait times at the testing site.

# Fall Festival...from Page 1A

They will open for the Belamy Brothers on Friday at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Special accolades will go to band director Bill Cunningham on pedal steel guitar for 50 years of service. Cunningham's dad, "Fiddlin'" Howard Cunningham, was the founding member of the Georgia Mountain Fair Band.

Also being recognized Friday night are band members Barry Palmer, banjo, 44 years; Jim Wood, guitar and director of country music shows, 25 years; Jerry Braswell, bass, 25 years; Steve Vincent, drums, 20 years; Kenny Head, piano, 12 years;

and Dennis Brown, guitar, 12 years.

Sunday, Oct. 10 will feature an Interfaith Worship Service at 11 a.m. and a Gospel Music Show at 2 p.m.

Herman's Hermits and Peter Noone, along with the Grains of Sand Band, will do two shows on Monday, Oct. 11, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

High Road and T.G. Sheppard will do two performances each on Tuesday, Oct. 12, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Lost Saints and Pam Tillis will appear twice on Wednesday, Oct. 13, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

On Thursday, Oct. 14,

Lee Greenwood and Lindsay Beth Harper will do two shows at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 15, will feature Mango Strange and Neal McCoy for two shows at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Admission to the festival is \$12 each day, with free parking inside the fairgrounds and free admission to most concerts, excluding the above-mentioned hard ticket requirements. Festival hours will be 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

This year's Fall Festival promises to be a lot of fun for the whole family with some great Georgia Mountain Fair music to boot.

# Hamilton Gardens...from Page 1A

"The Gardens has been totally dependent upon donations from the community, which does not guarantee continuity of much-needed financial support. State, Federal, and foundation funding are vital for continued operations and management of the Gardens."

Headlining the volunteer appreciation event was an old-fashioned fish fry sponsored by Peggy West-Driskell and Allan Driskell. Allan caught every single fish for the dinner, right out of Lake Chatuge, and the couple fried them up that Friday alongside delicious hushpuppies.

People will remember West-Driskell, herself a Master Gardener, as the generous donor of \$50,000 to the gardens in May 2020, which primarily went toward grading and beautifying the lawn next to the Paris Pavilion to provide an area better suited for concerts and other gatherings.

Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge Executive Director Grace Howard and the rest of the Gardens Board held a surprise dedication of the "West Lawn" that evening, unveiling a stone monument memorializing West-Driskell's magnanimous contribution to the gardens.

Howard also made sure to thank the various groups of individuals who have come together to contribute upwards of 5,000 volunteer-hours each year, equivalent to about \$500,000 in donated labor.

Coupled with the roughly \$500,000 in monetary donations raised by the non-profit since its inception in 2016, the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge has invested about \$1 million in maintaining, upgrading and expanding the Fred and Hazel Hamilton namesake gardens.

Among the groups showered with appreciation that evening were the Enotah Garden Club of Young Harris, the Towns County Master Gardeners, the Clay County (North Carolina) Master Gardeners, the Azalea Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society, the Hamilton Gardens Ambassadors, and, of course, the Board of Directors and employees of the Hamilton Gardens.

"We are here to celebrate the work that you have done up here over the years," Howard said to those gathered, before thanking many individuals and making available to guests Hamilton Gardens keepsakes like logo pins, wine glasses and Christmas ornaments.

Especially known for the annual springtime "Bloom-ing Affair," the 20-plus acre gardens feature thousands of flowering plants that trace their roots to 1982, when Fred and Hazel Hamilton made an initial donation of 1,091 plants, most of which were rhododendrons and native azaleas.

For reference, azaleas are in the rhododendron family of plants, so all azaleas are rhododendrons, but not all rhododendrons are azaleas. And Hamilton Gardens hosts many varieties of rhododendrons



**Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge Executive Director Grace Howard led an emotional appreciation program for volunteers last month.**  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

from all over the world that are found nowhere else in the state.

"There's not a lot of rhododendrons in the rest of Georgia," said volunteer Mike Bamford, who enjoys leadership positions in both the national Azalea Society of America and the Azalea Chapter of the American Rhododendron Society.

The Azalea Chapter out of Atlanta has been integral to the gardens' success, providing support in both hands-on volunteer work and physical expansion of the gardens by, among other things, helping to install an irrigation system to plant a new legacy garden on the grounds.

And volunteers from the American Rhododendron Society would not have contributed so liberally of their time and resources had they not witnessed the incredible level of local dedication at the gardens in recent years.

"What's special about this place is really the people that came together to make this happen," Bamford said. "Public gardens are always about people."

"Everyone talks about the plants, about all the things that are there, but the reality is, it's people who make it happen and people who enjoy it."

"There's a lot of woods, but there's not a lot of gardens. Gardens are special places because they need a lot of people and a lot of labor to (be successful)."

Bamford gave another reason that the Hamilton Gardens are "so unbelievably special," saying that "most of the plants that are here will not grow in the rest of Georgia."

"As global warming has taken over, all the places they could go, they can't grow anymore," he said. "Other than some of the 'maximums,' which have been able to grow (in other parts of the state), most of the 'ironclads' that are here, the really neat and interesting ones from up North and from England, they grow nowhere else in Georgia."

Dynamic duo John Kohli and Teddy DuMont also attended the appreciation dinner. Kohli, too, is among the leadership of Georgia's Azalea Chapter of the American Rhododen-

dron Society, and the couple maintain more than a thousand azaleas and rhodies on their Dahlonega property.

Back in the '80s, Kohli assisted his friend and garden progenitor Fred Hamilton in transplanting many of the rhododendrons from the Hamiltons' estate in Atlanta to Towns County, and Kohli knew the lakeside mountain venue was special then as it is now.

Today, both Kohli and Bamford think that Hamilton Gardens should qualify to serve as a state park, as the numerous varieties – including the 'Hazel Hamilton' hybrid – and perfect growing conditions combine to create a truly unique experience in Georgia.

"That's why Fred planted them all up here, because most of them are 'ironclads,' and that's why they (grow so well) up here," Kohli said, adding that the late Fred Hamilton would have praised the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge for how it has handled his and Hazel's legacy.

Likewise, DuMont said she believed Fred Hamilton "would be so proud" of the current state of the gardens.

"And he'd be excited to know that the love of what he brought to this place was being carried on," she said.

The general sentiment that evening was one of gratitude for the amount of dedication it takes to safeguard the most beautiful aspects of nature, which for the gardens has meant thousands of hours of respectful stewardship by selfless volunteers.

Now, the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge is working to finish out its calendar of activities before the end of October. The group has already hosted its last educational lecture and will hold one more Moonlight Concert prior to dissolution, featuring the music of Trevor Ciogoli Oct. 21.

When all is said and done, the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge – its many volunteers and Board of Directors – can rest assured that, during the organization's relatively short tenure, the nonprofit more than lived up to its mission "to restore, preserve, and enhance this public botanical legacy garden for the education and enjoyment of all who visit."

# Night Market...from Page 1A



**The Hiwassee Honey Company is one of the many vendors available at the Friday Night Market. Pictured here: Wendy and Jeff Edwards with Betsy David.**  
Photo by Mark Smith

Liz Ordiales said. "But once we established the Downtown Development Authority, (the Night Market) was their very first initiative.

"This is our second year, and it's definitely coming back next year. It's a great community event. We have families out here playing with their kids, we have live music.

"This event we have 27 vendors, which is the most we've had. We started off with 17, went up to 24, now we're up to 27. So, we're growing, and it's just a fun event."

Tables were set up in a blocked off street around the square so that people had somewhere to sit after grabbing a bite to eat from one of the several food vendors, who variously offered Caribbean fare, hamburgers, hot dogs, barbecue, ice cream and shaved ice, and even a wet bar.

"It's a great community/family event," she said. "It's just a way of getting the community together and everybody having fun. That's what it's all about."

Local Economic Development Director Denise McKay, who spearheads the Night Markets with DDA Board Chair Steven Harper, said the event runs from 5-9 p.m. the first Friday of each month between May and October – assuming there aren't any pandemics fouling up the works.

"People are looking for a sense of community," McKay said. "You can spend money, (but) you don't have to spend money. It's just a good socialization."

"We have a really nice turnout, and I think we have good quality vendors here, too. And it keeps growing," McKay said, adding that they try to have a good mixture of vendors.

Hector and Ligia Gonzalez with friend Albert Barros were serving up Cuban sandwiches that evening. Ligia, who is Mayor Ordiales' sister, said it was their first year doing the Night Market and that they had been there for the entire season.

"It's more than lived up to our expectations," Ligia said. "It's a great community event, it brings people together, and they love the different foods."

Hector, Ligia and Albert all live in Hiwassee.

"We're from South Florida originally," Hector said. "But we've all migrated up here, getting away from the crowds. Luckily, we were able to retire early and enjoy God's country."

Vendor Maria "Maggie" Grahl, who said she and her husband moved to Hiwassee from Miami in 1998, turned a hobby making handbags out of denim into a business called Maggie's Touch.

Essentially, Maggie re-

tired from banking to do what she had always dreamed of pursuing, saying that this was her first appearance at the Night Market and that she shares space in town with her husband's picture framing business.

U.S. Army veterans and entrepreneurs Sherry and Corey McClendon initially came to North Georgia for a visit, only to find themselves pulling up stakes and moving here from Florida six months later and starting a business making baked goods out of their house.

"A lot of people, especially my husband, kept saying, 'You should make your cakes and sell them,'" said Sherry, formerly a property manager. "One day I said, 'You know what? I guess I'll try it out and see what happens.' And it's been four months and it's already taking off."

This is the McClendons' first season at the Night Market, and they will definitely be back next year.

Entertainment that evening was provided by local talent Kaleb Garrett on guitar and vocals with fellow musician Dave Poole on bass, and the crowd seemed to really enjoy it.

For more information on the Night Market or to get vendor information, call Denise McKay at 706-896-2202, or check the city website at [www.hiwasseeega.gov](http://www.hiwasseeega.gov).

# Sorghum Fest...from Page 1A

traditions, they don't get much sweeter than the Blairsville Sorghum Festival.

Held for years at the Old Fort Sorghum on the corner of School Circle and Young Harris Street, the event has taken place in Meeks Park since 2008, when volunteers realized a need for more space to accommodate the growing festival.

New this year is the addition of a Sorghum Festival hosting partner in the Enotah CASA for Children, which has been brought on board to assist the core group of volunteers who have for decades kept the community-focused event alive.

The Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers will continue the time-honored tradition of cooking up the sticky sweet stuff in Meeks Park during the festival, while Enotah CASA will run all other aspects of the festival, from the gate and games to the vendor booths and live entertainment.

As always, the festival will help organizers raise money to go toward their special causes, which for the Blairsville Sorghum Syrup Makers include annual scholarships for graduating seniors as well as other forms of local giving.

Enotah CASA is a child advocacy organization specializing in assisting abused and/or neglected children from Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin counties in navigating the legal system, with CASA's portion of festival proceeds going toward operations costs to maintain the professional efforts of the volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates.

More than 100 hand-picked vendors will be bringing their arts, crafts and delicious food products to the Sorghum



Festival this year, including at least 50 returning vendors and plenty of new ones.

Among the many vendors arriving from all over the area will be makers of soap, candles, honey, stained glass, wreaths, sewed and crocheted items, dresses, pottery, jewelry, metal yard art, knives, handbags, scarves, dog collars, rope baskets, quilts, handmade plastic fishing bait, photography and more, said Enotah CASA Board Member Jennifer Mahan, who is overseeing coordination of the non-syrup making parts of the festival.

Food options will be numerous also, to include cookies, brownies, caramel apples, lemonade, corn, pork rinds, funnel cakes, boiled peanuts and candied nuts, barbecue plates, fried pies, shaved ice, mini donuts, cotton candy, hamburgers and hotdogs, brats and sausages, jerk and pineapple chicken, steamed vegetables, goulash, chili cheese fries and more.

"Then we've got some people doing dry dip mixes and hand-blended spices," Mahan said. "And we do have our demonstrators. We've got a guy demonstrating pottery, someone demonstrating blacksmithing, weaving and log hewing, and a moonshine demonstrator."

"The Speed Pitch game will be there and the bungee jumping activity."

Returning too will be the beloved Sorghum Festival Games, running each day of the festival from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m., offering fun for the whole family.

There will be plenty of Rock Throwin' and Log Sawin' for people looking for a physical challenge, with children's games as well, including a sack race that is new in 2021.

Then there's the Biscuit Eatin' Contest, which pits participants in a sorghum-drenched showdown to see who can eat the most biscuits. This contest will start at 9:30 a.m. all four days of the festival.

Of course, the Sorghum Festival wouldn't be the same without the amazing slate of musical and other performance talent over the four-day event, and folks can check out the Special Section insert in this edition of the newspaper or <https://blairsvillesorghumfestival.com/> for a full rundown.

From classic competitions to musical gatherings, the Sorghum Festival offers a glimpse into times gone by, when communities used to assemble at the end of a harvest season to commemorate a successful crop.

As per usual, this year's festival features crop yields from fields of cane grown and harvested locally, with syrup cooked during the festival down at the big 16-by-3 wood-fired pan located just off the Butternut Creek in the lower field of Meeks Park, starting at 9 a.m. each day.

Unfortunately, there will be no parade or square dancing this year due to ongoing concern over COVID-19, but there's still plenty for families to do at the 2021 Blairsville Sorghum Festival.