

Towns County Herald

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Hiawassee, Sheriff's Office celebrate Christmas early

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The annual Light Up Hiawassee tradition transformed the city into a fount of festive cheer on Saturday, Dec. 3. While the weather didn't quite cooperate, it didn't stop any aspect of the multi-faceted event from ringing in the holiday season.

Early in the evening, from 2-5 p.m., the Town Square featured activities set up for families to participate in, courtesy of businesses and organizations like ServPro and the American Red Cross.

A small fire allowed guests to roast s'mores and hot dogs on the way in, and kids could stop and make their own ornaments before grabbing hot chocolate.

Before sitting on Santa's

lap for photos, the little ones also decorated their own gingerbread cookies and got their faces painted by Chelsea Berong.

"It's been a good turnout considering the rain," noted Tyler Osborn, who has been helping organize the event since 2019.

The 4,683 lights decorating the square were lit by a triumphant Marta Izquierdo at the end of the event at 5 p.m., giving folks time to enjoy the view before the Towns County Sheriff's Christmas Parade made its way up Main Street.

"Marta has a big, big day today - she finished all of her chemo treatments yesterday," announced Mayor Liz Ordiales just before the countdown to flip the power switch, causing a cheer to ripple through excited attendees.

The Christmas lights on the square will stay up through Jan. 6, a day known as "Epiphany," which signifies the Three Kings' visit to the newborn Baby Jesus in Bethlehem.

Meanwhile, at the highest parking rises inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the parade participants were lining up and getting ready to wind through Hiawassee.

"I'm so honored to be able to do this," remarked Sheriff Ken Henderson before climbing into the leading truck. "It's all about our kids, you know? We love our kids and want to make sure they're out there having fun and seeing Santa and making sure they get candy, of course."

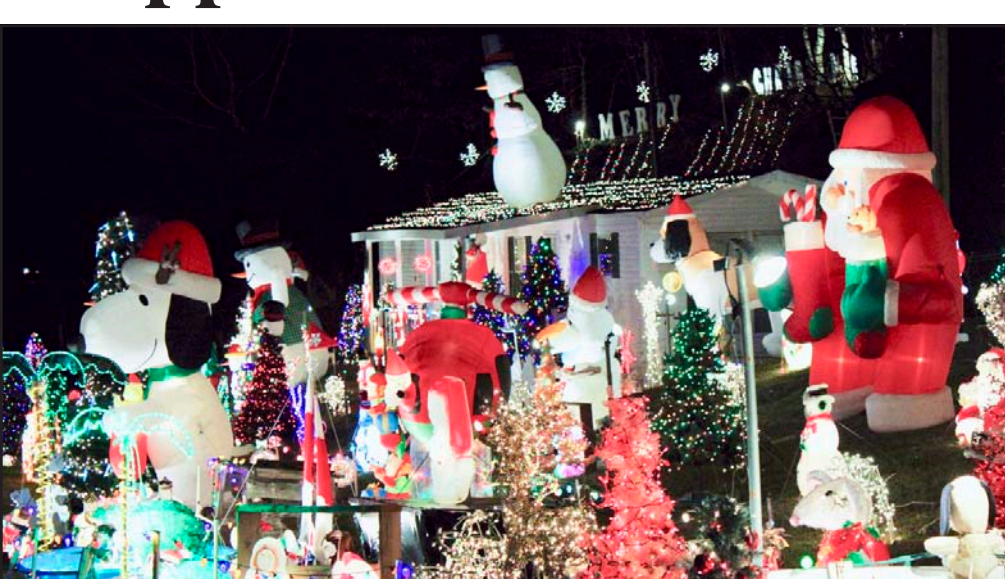
Although the parade is a big part of welcoming Christmas to the mountains, the

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Santa Claus shared his sleigh with Miss Georgia Mountain Fair 2022 Sarah Shook in the Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade on Saturday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Buchanan Family Lights to appear on national TV



It really is amazing what Robert Buchanan accomplishes each year on his property down Scataway Road. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Anyone who's ever been to 469 Scataway Road between Thanksgiving Night and New Year's knows what to expect

prior to arrival. For the uninitiated looking for a winter wonderland experience unlike any other, do yourself a favor and head on over there after dark.

But there's another way to check out the Buchanan Family Christmas Lights this

year - just tune in to the television.

On Monday, Dec. 12, at 9 p.m., ABC's "The Great Christmas Light Fight" will return for the winter, to feature Robert Buchanan of Hiawas-

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Young Harris Tree Lighting a gift to the community

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

A treasured and spirited tradition continued Friday, Dec. 2, at Young Harris Mayor's Park with the long-running annual Christmas Tree Lighting that brought people together to kick off the holiday season.

Hosted by the Enotah Garden Club and City of Young

Harris, the event is always a big draw for families and features participation by children of the community.

"The Enotah Garden Club has been here for (decades), and we always do what we can for the city like taking care of the parks, Cupid Falls, and things like that," Enotah Garden Club Member Carol Townsend said.

"And especially at Christmas-time, we love to help out.

"Tonight, we helped bring along Santa and provided cookies for everyone to enjoy, and we are excited to have the Towns County High School Band playing music throughout the evening along with the kindergarten class of the Towns Elementary School singing songs."

All told, people enjoyed hot chocolate, snacks, desserts,

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Santa and Mrs. Claus had their hands full on Friday, Dec. 2, as children waited patiently to make requests at the 2022 Young Harris Tree Lighting. Photo by Jeremy Foster

Sheriff's Office makes drug bust at Brasstown Manor

News Special
Towns County Herald



Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug Investigators received information in recent weeks about drug activity at Brasstown Manor Senior Living Center in Hiawassee.

A two-week investigation revealed that a tenant's family member had established residency in the tenant's room and appeared to have set up drug operations.

Drug Investigators and K-9 deputies raided the room the evening of Monday, Nov. 28, and uncovered a significant amount of drugs.

The following drugs were confiscated and field-tested: approximately 1.3 pounds of marijuana; 19 grams of mushrooms; over an ounce of THC wax; and drug-related objects.

Charles Willis Beneway III, 62, of

Ramrod Key, Florida, was arrested and charged with felony possession of marijuana; felony possession of marijuana with intent to distribute; felony possession of THC wax; felony possession of THC wax with intent to distribute; felony possession of a controlled substance schedule mushrooms; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; and misdemeanor possession of drug-related objects.

All subjects are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

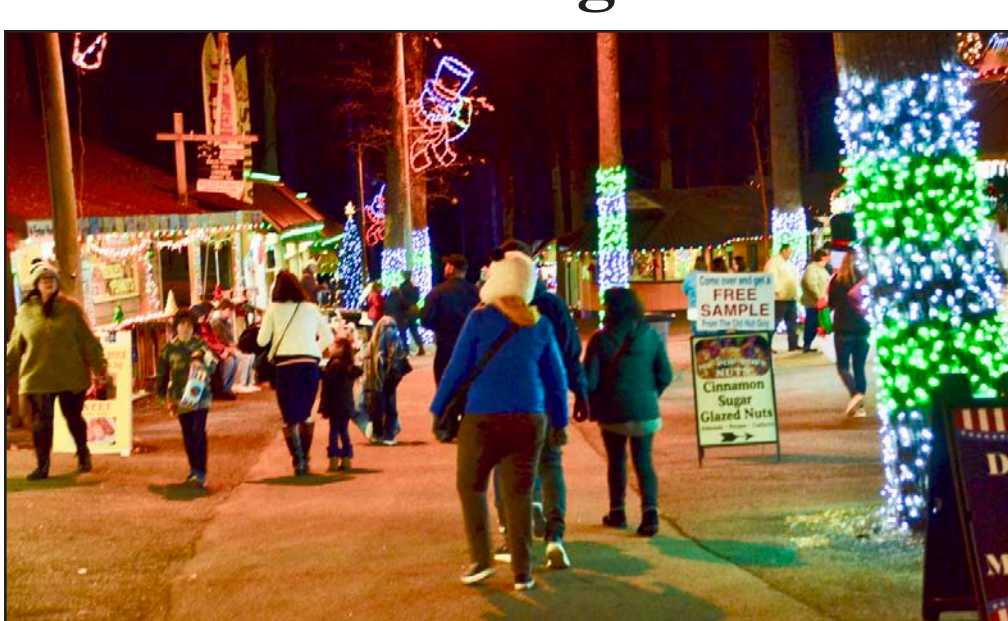


Charles Willis Beneway III



Sheriff Ken Henderson posing with the drugs, guns and cash seized in a recent room raid at Brasstown Manor Senior Living. Photo/Facebook

Mountain Country Christmas continues at Fairgrounds



Traditions like the annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights often act as the glue that holds communities together. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

To the delight of families and visitors to the area, the annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights will continue this weekend before ramping up to offer more than a week's worth of nightly viewings starting next week at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

The walkthrough Christmas experience is available Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 6-9 p.m. through Saturday, Dec. 10, to include an Outdoor Craft Market and visits with Santa Claus each night.

Then, as Christmas draws

closer, the lights will open every evening from Dec. 15 right up until Dec. 23 to give folks even more opportunities to get in on the holiday cheer.

Keep in mind that on Saturdays, the Fairgrounds opens early at 4 p.m. for extended craft show hours.

So far, attendees have been enjoying the many beautiful displays of lights and Christmas-themed decorations as well as the usual array of food and dessert vendors alongside plentiful arts and crafts booth options for Christmas shopping.

Hiawasse couple Nick and Autumn Rhoades were there last week with their son Wilder, who wanted a tractor

this year for being on Santa's "good list."

"This is our second year coming to the Christmas in Lights," Autumn said. "I just love Christmas and being able to see (Wilder's) face when he sees all the lights and Santa, so we are certainly planning on continuing this as a yearly tradition."

Added Nick, "This is definitely my favorite time of year, and I'd say probably that giving and seeing people's reactions to everything and just being with family are my favorite parts of the holiday season."

The Ledford Family of Daniel's Steakhouse made copi-

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townscountyherald.net

VFW

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

Pearl Harbor
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see competing with contenders from around the country to win \$50,000 in prize money, a holiday-themed trophy, and plenty of bragging rights.

"It was such an honor to be included on this national TV show," said Buchanan of the Scataway Lights. "And now we are very proud to be a part of the Light Fight Family of incredible homes that have been a part of this show for years. This year will be over 35 years of doing our display."

More than a hundred thousand lights make up Buchanan's impressively massive home display alongside Christmas music, Nativity scenes, Santa and his reindeer, winter and Christmas-themed pop culture decorations spanning the decades, and much, much more.

Each and every year, the attraction catches the eye of new visitors – young and old alike – as folks drive by or park on the roadside to get out for a walk along the property frontage to marvel at the gorgeous exhibition.

And the festive display has become a Christmastime tradition for many families in the tri-state area, with parents who visited the lights themselves as children now bringing their kids to get in on the holiday goodness.

People should keep in mind that the display may only be viewed from the roadside, as "there's between 800 and 900 extension cords in this yard," so visitors should not walk among the decorations.

As one might expect, it's a lot of work to set up such a pretty picture. Buchanan starts in the last week of August and continues working until about Thanksgiving – or at least, that's the goal.

However, when the "Light Fight" crew paid a visit in 2021 to film ahead for

2022's season, he had to work around a different schedule.

"Last year, it was a lot harder for me," Buchanan admitted. "We got the word we were going to be on the show the last of August ... (so the lights) had to be up Nov. 2. That's cutting out three to four weeks."

Still, he was able to "get it done for the most part" before the judges began their reviews on the East Coast and worked their way back to California. Just shy of half a week, the team admired his setup around the first of November.

As for the million-dollar question of the electric bill to run the lights, Buchanan prefers not to make the exact cost known to the public, but he promises it's a bit of a doozy that he tries not to think about.

"You watch the meter spin as the lights come on," Buchanan said. Importantly, people wishing to help defray the cost of the Buchanan Family Lights can drop a donation into a collection area located at the front of the property.

Perfecting his passion regardless of price, Buchanan has added more wire frames with yet more blinking, winking lights in his favorite multicolored strands, and 2022 in total will see "six or seven" new displays, which Buchanan is still in the process of setting up.

But some things never change, and Buchanan describes himself as a traditionalist when it comes to choosing how to decorate his yard.

"A lot of people are now gravitating toward the digital lights, but I'm still using traditional lights. It's just what I like, my preference," Buchanan said, adding that he still respects the younger generation's attraction to digital setups as opposed to the older physical displays.

"That's what they grew

up with; more power to them," he said. "There's enough lights to go around for whatever your preferences are."

And speaking of plenty of lights, the current estimate of individual bulbs is anywhere between 125,000 to 150,000. As it stands, looking from the road, the tallest tree on the right of his yard holds 32,000 lights alone.

There's no specific goal or design to the layout, and Buchanan believes in the policy of "if I think something will look good this way, I'll do it." The lights aren't put up for competition, after all, even if his hometown will be rooting for him to win on national TV.

Of course, installing close to 200,000 lights calls for a hefty take-down time. Typically, March has rolled around by the time Buchanan has the chance to clear up all the displays, leaving him invested in Christmas decorations six to seven months out of the year.

It's a tiring process meticulously putting everything up only to take it back down, but for all of the 30-odd years Buchanan's been piecing together his yard display, it's been worth it.

"It's kind of getting generational now. Kids that used to be here coming (to look) at the lights, now they're bringing their kids," said Buchanan, who is glad for the tradition, as he's always been attracted to the beauty of the lights and bringing joy to others for the holidays.

Remember to tune in to ABC on Dec. 12 at 9 p.m. to see Buchanan's impressive display broadcast to all of America.

To see the attraction in person, Buchanan stays home every night to maintain the lights, so people are encouraged to come by any time after sundown to check the yard out.

Sons of Confederate Veterans meeting

David W. Payne Camp #1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, continues to meet the second Thursday of each month at 7 PM.

Our new meeting location is the Davenport Veterans Building, across the 4-lane from Longhorn. NT(Dec7,22)CA

End of Year Donation Candidates - Consider MBRA

Many people give donations to 501(c)3 organizations before the end of the year and here is one local group of volunteers you might want to consider, Mountain Beautification and Revitalization Association, Inc. (MBRA). Volunteers in the group accept no pay for their labor and expertise used for projects in Towns and Union counties in Georgia and Clay County in North Carolina.

MBRA volunteers have completed numerous projects in these areas: They built a large fire ring, 4 benches, 2 picnic tables and repaired a boardwalk at Cupid Falls in Young Harris; in Hiawassee they built a fence around the wire elephant, Ellawasee, built a fence and worked a garden bed for daffodils for the Holocaust Garden at Lloyd's Landing; repaired much carpenter bee damage to the Gazebo on the Hiawassee Square as well as building a raised bed at the back of the square stage; fixed a rolling cart for DDA and put in a water timer at the



MBRA volunteers had to rent an auger because of the rocky soil when making the Holocaust Daffodil Garden at Lloyd's Landing.

Towns County Public Library; and helped do cleanup at the gravesites on Cemetery Island in Lake Chatuge. In Blairsville they primed several public picnic tables, and in Hayesville, they cleaned up gravesites at Freedom Cemetery (aka Slave Cemetery).

Most supplies are paid for by the cities and the counties, but volunteers use their own vehicles, equipment, gas-

oline, tools, etc. Some of those tools will need to be repaired or replaced and there are other administrative expenses such as liability insurance to pay, and that's where donations will help. Many more projects have been suggested when the weather warms, so donations will be appreciated.

Send to P.O. Box 382, Young Harris, GA 30582. Thank you for your generosity.

Smith's Legion Chapter #2699, United Daughters of The Confederacy®, Blairsville, GA: "Full Bellies Foundation"

The Smith's Legion Chapter #2699, of the United Daughters of the Confederacy® (UDC), Blairsville, invited as a guest speaker, Becca Sasser, of the Full Bellies Foundation.

Mrs. Becca Sasser tells us she grew up never knowing when her next meal would be. As an adult, she strived to help as many people as she could. Each year, her and her husband Jacob would secretly sponsor a family around the holidays. One day, while working, Becca received a call asking for any known support with school lunch funding after food stamps and free lunches were denied over a small amount of income – the seed was immediately planted!

After a few more calls, an obvious need presented itself. In ten short days, a bake sale and silent auction was put together and through the support of the community, just over \$3,000 was raised, feeding 219 children, with money to spare. The foundation was started and we're moving!

Their mission is to help feed the needy in the community. No child should ever wonder where their next meal is going to come from. Sadly, there is a staggering number of children that are suffering from hunger today – 1 in 5 children deal with food scarcity, with a 42% poverty rate in the area. That's where the Full Bellies Foundation comes in. Currently, the foundation works out of Becca's own home, but she has the help of her husband and family, and of many vol-



Becca Sasser (left) receives Certificate of Appreciation

unteers getting the word out, raising money through several events like bake sales and fundraisers, such as one that will be at Walmart, Blairsville, on December 17th, between 11 AM and 3 PM, sponsored by Grand Daddy Mimms, Blairsville. The organization finds inspiration from Isaiah 58:10, "Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon." The Full Bellies Foundation is a non-profit organization. You can reach Becca and Jacob Sasser at beccasasser@fullbelliesfoundation.com, or at 706-897-7279.

The Smith's Legion Chapter meet most every 4th Saturday, 11 AM, at the Veteran's Building, Blairsville.

Chapter members are from Towns, Union, and Fannin Counties of Georgia, and from Clay and Cherokee Counties of North Carolina. Eligibility requirements for the UDC include women, 18 years of age and older, who have a Confederate Veteran in their blood line, lineal or collateral. If you are interested in joining the UDC and you are not sure of your ancestry, we can help you search your family lineage. Individuals interested in helping to preserve Southern Heritage, but have no southern lineage, can join as an Associate. For more information, please contact TARA62860@aol.com. There is also a local David W. Payne Camp #1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) should men be interested in joining their organization.

Christmas Fun...from Page 1A

involvement of local law enforcement brought attention to the upcoming Shop With The Sheriff, which will happen on Tuesday, Dec. 13, at 5 p.m., and Henderson was glad to talk about it.

"We're so happy that we're going to be able to do this for our kids," he said of the shopping event. "I think we're going to have maybe 50,000 kids going. Anybody who wants to come out - it's one of the most rewarding, heart-touching things you'll ever do."

Residents who donate to the cause can expect their funds to go toward purchasing gifts and essentials for those kids when they go to Walmart on Dec. 13. As food for thought, some don't even ask for toys but instead purchase clothing or shoes for the rest of their family.

The Dec. 3 parade warmed hearts by featuring floats decked out in fanciful lights, vehicles featuring minimal but no less tasteful designs, larger trucks with sirens representing Towns County's emergency personnel, horses with lights braided into their manes and tails, and more.

In fact, having prepared since his time in the park, Santa Claus himself entered on horseback, waving and offering friendly smiles and belly-laughs to the crowd. The Jolly Old Elf headed the group of riders that trailed behind the rest of the parade.



Mayor Liz Ordiales counting down the time to turn on the Hiawassee Town Square Christmas lights for the remainder of the holiday season.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Congratulations to the winners of the parade float contest: Peach State Federal Credit Union in First Place, the Towns County Lions Club in Second Place, and Pine Grove Church in Third Place.

Matt and Audrey Wood had driven all the way from Rabun County with their two boys, Edward Lewis and Barry Wood. They visit Hiawassee often to see Matt's side of the family and eat at Brother's at Willow Ranch.

Audrey elaborated that "we always come to the lights every year - a couple times, for different lights."

Edward, who was already enjoying some of the candy tossed his way, said, "It's so much candy, and also, I love seeing all the Christmas-y stuff. I love Christmas; it's my second favorite holiday of the year. My first is my birthday."

That said, Matt and Audrey were invested more in a different aspect of the parade, having picked up on the vibe of raising awareness for those less fortunate and putting a big focus on local youth participation.

"That's one reason we're here, is there's more stuff to do with the kids," Matt pointed out, as Audrey added, "That was what drew us here today instead of going to our parade at 2 p.m., because it's more kid-friendly and has more things for kids to do."

Hiawassee resident Vivian Osborn brought her grandchildren to the events and was in agreement with the Wood family, saying that she was grateful for the "little village" she and her family live in.

"It's wonderful to be in a small town that comes together for the residents and the visitors, and I think that Towns County is a great place to live," Osborn said. "Hiawassee is wonderful, absolutely."



Chelsea and Clover Berrong at 2022 Light Up Hiawassee. Chelsea brightened children's day by painting their faces at the event.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Tree Lighting...from Page 1A



Towns County Elementary School Music Teacher Jordan Trotman leading her talented kindergarten class in caroling at the Young Harris Tree Lighting.
Photo by Jeremy Foster

candy, live entertainment and so much more on Friday, with Santa coming in on a big red Towns County fire truck.

"Personally, Christmas is my favorite time of year, because, for one, I am actually a December baby," Townsend said, "and we here at the Garden Club want to let (Mayor Andrea Gibby), the city, our president Helen Harvey, event organizer Jackie Taylor, and the schools know that we appreciate them for what they are doing."

"This event would not be successful without them, but my favorite part of all is just the community and getting together and being kind, joyful, and just appreciating the reason for the Christmas season."

Mayor Gibby began the ceremony with a brief welcoming speech to the public.

"It's going to be a fun night," Gibby said. "I love seeing this - this night makes me the happiest all year. I just love seeing the kids, parents, and everybody having a good time."

"We are thankful for so many things, our community

and people, and I want to thank our city staff for putting the lights up, as well as recognizing our Enotah Garden Club for everything they help us do all year long, and Dana Cable for donating our tree."

She then introduced Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church Pastor Stephen Soulen, whose message that evening focused on peace stemming from the Hebrew word "Shalom."

"It's a Jewish word that Jesus would say to people, and that meant that things were right, and everything was right in the world," Rev. Soulen said. "We should all share in the peace, joy and hope together and make things right with our friends, families and each other and our life with God."

Following the opening prayer, the festivities began with children singing and the band playing before Santa arrived to hang out for the rest of the event. He posed for pictures and asked kids what they wanted for Christmas this year.

Ada Bradshaw was a spectator that evening with 16-

month-old son Montgomery, basking in the festiveness.

"Christmastime is definitely my favorite time of the year, and this is the first time I have been here at the Young Harris Tree Lighting (as an adult)," Bradshaw said. "I came here for my nephew Jonah Smith, who sang with the Elementary School."

"I love that my nephew could do this, especially since I sang with the kindergarten here when I was younger. This is a great memory, so it was amazing being able to come back, and this event is a great tradition to have."

"I love being able to come here with a tight community and being with family; I think it's the best thing that Young Harris does for Christmas."

"The most important thing for me is all about Jesus Christ, and I have a really big family, so I just love having them all come home and spending time with them."

And everyone had a holly jolly night under the pavilion in Mayor's Park.

Fairgrounds Christmas...from Page 1A

ous batches of cookies for the public while attending the lights themselves with their children Sabrina, Brayden and Bailey.

"We have made so many great friends in the community, and we are just proud to be involved and just be people helping people," Blake said. "The birth of Jesus is what we are celebrating this season, and that's what we are trying to teach our children and showing love to one another."

"So, we like to give to people and want to give back to the community as we can," he said, with Sarah adding,

"We have been coming here for years, and the town of Hiawassee always shows out."

"Christmas is more fun with kids, for sure, seeing their excitement through their eyes," she continued. "So, they count down the days and we go all out with everything, but we are also teaching them that the real reason for the season is God giving us the ultimate gift."

"You might open up some gifts on Christmas Day, but the ultimate gift (of salvation) was given."

In addition to the lights, many residents also enjoyed

the inaugural Dailey & Vincent Christmasfest at the Anderson Music Hall over the weekend, which featured plenty of country, gospel and Christmas-themed live music Dec. 2 and 3.

Folks heard performances by Rhonda Vincent, Sammy Kershaw, Collin Raye, Aaron Tippin, The Hoppers, the Isaacs and, of course, Dailey & Vincent themselves over the festive two-day holiday concert experience.

Visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com for special event times and more information.