

# Dancing with North Georgia Stars kicks off second season

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Competitive reality TV has been a hit among families worldwide for decades now, bringing stars, professionals and everyday folk together to show off their skills and reap the rewards, either for themselves or for a charity.

Now, Union and Towns County “stars” and professionals will have that same opportunity.

Enotah CASA, or Court Appointed Special Advocates

for children, will be hosting its second annual Dancing with the North Georgia Stars event Saturday, Nov. 4 at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

The event, a spin-off on the hit reality TV show, will feature 10 local celebrities from both Towns and Union counties performing a wide variety of dances with professional dance partners.

Some of these local dancers include Blairsville Downtown Development Authority Program Manager

Darren Harper, Towns County Chamber of Commerce Membership Coordinator Crystal Wagner, Blairsville Chick-fil-A Sales and Brand Growth Manager Wes Cook and Hiawassee Mayor Pro-tem Kris Berrong.

“This really brings everyone in the community together,” said Liz Ruf, Enotah CASA Board Chair. “Your friends, your family, your church, everybody will want to come and see you dance and be part of this and that’s what it’s all about.”

“And, through all of that, it helps Enotah CASA raise money so we can train, improve and provide more volunteers who speak up for the kids who are in foster care.”

From Jazz to Hip-Hop to even belly dancing, these dancers are sure to bring a good show, and maybe even a few good laughs, to the stage come November.

Following the show will be a Dancing with the North Georgia Stars Gala at the North Georgia Technical College, where members of the community can meet the celebrities, their dance partners and enjoy a night of festivities and fun.

During the show, the dancers will be competing to win one of two awards: the People’s Choice Award and Judge’s Award. A combined score of each couple’s costumes, choreography and

technical performance will decide the winner of the Judge’s Award.

People’s Choice Award will be determined by which couple received the most votes. Votes can be cast for each couple by either purchasing a ticket or donating money to Enotah CASA in the couple’s names. Both awards are presented the night of the event.

Enotah CASA is a non-profit organization serving four North Georgia counties: Towns, Union, White and Lumpkin.

CASA volunteers typically handle an average of two cases that they will work on for at least two years. In the last year, CASA members have served 268 children from the four-county area, and most of these children are under the age of 12.

“The number of children in Towns and Union counties in foster care went up 25 percent last year,” said Ruf. “So, our efforts to recruit more people, train them and assign them to cases so that they can speak for children is becoming even more daunting.”

Dancing with the North Georgia Stars will act as a fundraiser for Enotah CASA, with all the proceeds going to help abused and neglected children within the four-county judicial circuit. Those who wish to donate can become a sponsor for the event, pur-



Crystal Wagner and Russ Collins. Photo/Lily Avery

chase tickets for the event and Gala, or both.

This is the second year that the organization has hosted the event and, so far, it’s become one of the biggest fundraisers for Enotah CASA, with all funds going toward advocating for children in the foster care system.

“These kids need someone to speak up for them,” said Ruf. “It’s our job to make sure that, whatever happens, it’s in the best interest of the child and this event helps provide the financial support to do that.”

UnitedCommunity Bank

is this year’s presenting sponsor and is selling tickets for the event at the bank branches in both Blairsville and Hiawassee. Tickets can also be purchased at the Towns County Chamber of Commerce or from any of the dancers.

Tickets for just the show are \$25 each and combo tickets to attend both the show and the gala afterwards are \$40.

For those interested in attending the gala at North Georgia Technical College, there will only be 250 tickets available, so purchase those while they last.



Angela Puleo and Kris Berrong. Photo/Lily Avery

## EMA...from Page 1A



The Tuesday, Aug. 8, EMA eclipse meeting was a who’s who of first responders and local government. Photo/Lily Avery

experience an emergency, dial 911 and emergency personnel will get to you.”

While the region is expected to garner a huge influx of people for the event,

it is unknown the exact amount that will be coming into the area next Monday. As of right now, all hotels and resorts are completely booked, as well as campsites and other alternative

lodging.

With that in mind, there is a large concern for not only that day but from Friday, Aug. 18 through Monday, Aug. 21, as most who have booked

rooms for the eclipse have done so for the entire weekend.

Due to this, several county buildings will be closed for either half of the day or the entire day on Monday. The Towns County Courthouse will close at 11:30 a.m. and will remain closed for the rest of the day. The Towns County Transfer Station and the Towns County Road Department will be closed for the entire day.

In preparation for the eclipse, Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton will be providing additional support throughout the county to manage traffic to and from the Fairgrounds, Bell Mountain and monitoring the basic flow of traffic throughout the county during the time when the population is expected to at least double, if not triple, in size.

“We’re doing everything that we can to make sure that we have all of our bases covered and secure,” said Sheriff Clinton. “It’s just going to boil down to numbers and how many people we have come in. We’re going to be all hands on deck. We’ve reached out to a number of other law enforcement entities and hopefully they’re going to be able to send some folks if we need them.”

“I think it’s going to come down to numbers and I’m hopeful that by Sunday we’ll have a handle on just how many people we’re dealing with so we can proceed from there.”

One of the main points of concern in terms of traffic control is Bell Mountain because of it being a high elevation viewing point, with no admission charge. To maintain order and reduce the risk of overpopulation on the Bell, Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland will be heavily patrolling the area and securing the perimeter during the eclipse.

As always, camping is prohibited on Bell Mountain and those who wish to experience the eclipse may do so when the gates are opened at 8 a.m. There are 46 parking spots available on top of the mountain and once those spaces have been filled, no additional cars will be allowed on the Bell other than residents of the mountain.

“When the parking lot fills up, we’re shutting the gate,” said Chief Copeland. “We’ll monitor the gate and we’ll have other crews a little further down to ascertain from the public whether they’re a resident or trying to go to the top of the mountain.”

“If they are going to the mountain once it is full, we will send them to the Fairgrounds.”

For those who do not make it to Bell Mountain before it reaches capacity, the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center is opening its parking lot for cars to come and view the eclipse. Viewing also will be available at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for \$5 per carload.

On Lake Chatuge, the Coast Guard Auxiliary will be stationed on the water to assist

with any issue that may occur with those viewing the eclipse via boat. The Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service and the Towns County Fire Department will be monitoring the lake as well as the county as a whole throughout the event.

During the last meeting held regarding the eclipse, many were concerned with whether or not Towns County Schools should be released for a full or half day. Since then, Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and the Towns County Board of Education determined that it would be in the best interest of the students to cancel school for the day for all staff and all students.

“Our athletic department has gotten together and decided to open up the campus for cars,” said Dr. Berrong. “They will charge per car. I’m assuming that from what we’re hearing about the numbers coming in that the rec center is going to fill up and there’s not many other places for people to go.”

“If there is any overflow throughout the county, you can send them to the school because it will be open to the public to view the eclipse.”

The cost per car to park at the schools during the eclipse has yet to be determined.

“This is a very, very big event,” said Commissioner Bradshaw. “We need to be prepared and I feel like we will be prepared, thanks to all of our public safety officials and everyone involved in coordinating for this eclipse.”

“We want to keep everyone safe and we want to do the best that we can.”