

Great Cake Bake to provide books to local children

by Linda Erbele
White County News

Can a sweet tooth help children learn to read? It can if you bring that sweet tooth to the Great Cake Bake Event, which will be held at the Sautee Nacoochee Center Saturday, March 9 from noon to 5 p.m. The goal of the event is to raise enough money to mail a high-quality book each month to White County children from birth to age five.

The books are mailed by Dolly Parton's Imagination Library at a staggeringly affordable cost of \$2.20 per child each month, about \$25 a year per child. The Imagination Library is, according to its website, dedicated to inspiring a love of reading in children.

There is evidence that children who love books start school more

prepared than others. And what child wouldn't love getting a new book in the mail every month?

"Early literacy is where you need to start if you want kids to be reading on grade level by third grade," said Vicki Aiken, a retired elementary school teacher.

She and her husband John retired from Gwinnett County and moved to White County several years ago. Friends who lived here already, but knew them from Gwinnett, remembered that the couple had been involved in a book ministry at their church in Lawrenceville, and urged them to do something similar here.

The Aikens learned of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library through research, and realized that a local non-profit was needed to bring the program to White County. The local organization

signs children up and funds the books. They formed Foundational Literacy, a 501(C)3 and began signing up children, and raising funds.

Based on White County's census information, the Imagination Library's business plan estimated that there are 1,300 children in the age range, and that the local nonprofit would reach 200 children by the end of two years.

"In September 2022, we started enrolling children," Vicki Aiken said. "We already have just under 800, which is actually the five-year goal."

Foundational Literacy's eight-member board has not been intimidated by the vast interest in the program. They've applied for and received several grants, while

continuing in efforts both to enroll children and raise money.

The Great Cake Bake is the next big event, with more than 20 sponsors.

"People have been so generous," Vicki Aiken said. "I don't think anyone has said no."

The event will be held at the Sautee Nacoochee Center from noon until 5 p.m. Saturday, March 9. Admission is free. There will be a bake sale, games, a raffle, robots, storybook characters, the Chick-fil-A cow and children's authors. There will even be dancing pigs.

A cake decorating contest will have categories for professionals, family or amateurs, children and one for White County educators to illustrate their favorite books. All children who enter a cake

will receive a prize.

In addition, the raffle drawing will be at 4:30 p.m. at the event. First prize is a \$400 trip to Dollywood. Second prize is a \$300 fun day in Helen, and third prize is a copy of Dolly Parton's *Coat of Many Colors* book, signed and worth \$150.

"We've been super blessed," Aiken said. "McDonald's and Chick-fil-A have given coupons. The City of Helen has just been incredible. Businesses there have given us free tickets."

For details, visit foundational-literacy.org.

Raffle tickets are on sale at the White County Historic Courthouse in downtown Cleveland from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday, or by emailing cakebake2024@gmail.com.



State House committee passes fishing rights bill

by Dave Williams
Capitol Beat News Service

A state House committee has narrowly approved legislation guaranteeing Georgians the right to fish in navigable rivers and streams over the objections of representatives of recreational boating interests who complained the bill is overly restrictive.

House Bill 1172, which cleared the House Judiciary Committee Thursday by just one vote, is a follow-up to legislation the General Assembly passed on the last day of last year's session.

Rep. Will Wade, R-Dawsonville, was a member of the study committee that resulted from that legislation, Senate Bill 115.

"We have a much better bill and we have added more to the process," Wade said. "I'm hopeful we get it to the House floor soon for a vote and on to the Senate for their input and review."

Last year's bill was introduced following a lawsuit a property owner along the Upper Flint River filed seeking to ban public fishing along his stretch of the river.

After Gov. Brian Kemp signed the bill and it became law last July, some waterfront property owners expressed concerns that the measure included language codifying Georgia citizens' right to use the state's waterways under the "public trust

doctrine."

The new bill struck the reference to the public trust doctrine while maintaining the purpose of last year's legislation, House Majority Whip James Burchett, R-Waycross, House Bill 1172's chief sponsor, told committee members before Thursday's vote.

"By common law, the citizens of this state have the inherent right of use for passage for hunting and fishing on navigable streams," he said.

Burchett emphasized that the bill only applies to navigable streams.

But the measure's opponents argued the current definition of "navigable streams" in state law dates back to the 19th century, a time when Georgia's waterways were used to transport freight.

Joe Cook, coordinator of the Georgia River Network's Paddle Georgia program, said that definition leaves out many streams across the state that are capable of floating a boat.

"Vast numbers of Georgia streams will fall under the category of non-navigable," he said. "Many of our trips take place on rivers and streams that may not be deemed navigable. ... There is a right of passage on all these streams that are not navigable."

He said the state shouldn't be determining where people have the right to float based on a definition that is 160 years old,

and that rivers are used for commerce in very different ways today. He said it's important to include that right of passage in state law.

"That right of passage is important for our tourism and outdoor recreation economies," Cook said.

He said White County is in a unique situation. While the Chattahoochee River is heavily used by tubers through downtown Helen, he said a property owner immediately downstream in the Nacoochee Valley has "asserted their rights of ownership of the streambed to prevent anyone from passing through their property."

"So, existing Georgia law is already restricting the 'right of passage' in White County," Cook said. "I also believe this restriction is largely because the property owner doesn't want anyone fishing in that section. Our effort is one to secure 'passage' only, not fishing rights, on streams that don't meet Georgia's archaic definition of 'navigable.'"

He said it's unclear if the Chattahoochee in White County below the Nacoochee Valley would be considered a "navigable" stream.

Cook gave Mossy Creek as another example.

"I just saw some footage on social media of paddlers running that creek after the recent heavy rains we had," he said. "That's

a stream that is really only paddled when the water is high. It would certainly not meet the state's definition of navigable. If a property owner got the notion, they could prohibit passage down that stream. Thus, the people that come to visit White County to paddle that creek on occasion (and spend money at White County businesses) would likely be forced to go elsewhere to get their whitewater paddling thrills."

Suzanne Welander, author of a Georgia canoeing and kayaking guide book, said recreational paddling is a fast-growing activity in Georgia that generated \$1.1 billion in revenue in 2022 and is responsible for 238,000 jobs.

"I'm concerned future generations might lose this ability to have those experiences," she said.

Committee Chairman Stan Gunter, R-Blairsville, who cast the deciding vote to approve the bill, suggested it could be subject to some changes as its moves through the House.

"This is just the first step," Gunter said following the vote. "There's more to go."

House Bill 1172 now heads to the House Rules Committee to schedule a vote of the full House.

Editor Samantha Sinclair contributed to this report.

WE ARE GROWING, RESERVE YOUR NEW HOME TODAY!



LAUREL LODGE
ASSISTED LIVING & MEMORY CARE

Enjoy Life in the North Georgia Mountains and see what separates us from everyone else.

Affordable Luxury Living Starting at \$3,200/month

Laurel Lodge is not your typical senior living community. Conveniently located within the attractive common areas are the following amenities and services:

- State-of-the-Art Theatre Room
- Executive Chef with Elegant Plating
- Activity Rooms
- Outdoor Covered Patios with Overhead Fans, Outdoor TV and Big Views of the Mountains
- Bistro Bar
- Daily Wellness Checks
- Warm, Cozy Fireside Seating
- Medication Monitoring
- Lounge
- In-Room, Emergency Call System
- Billiards and Shuffle Board
- Daily Housekeeping
- Main Dining Room
- Back up Generator for Auxiliary Power
- Intimate Private Dining Room
- Personal Laundry and Linen Service
- Salon Services
- Podiatry Services
- Cable TV and All Utilities Included
- Free Wi-Fi
- Activity Director Five Days a Week
- Non-Denominational Church Services Every Sunday

Laurel Lodge Assisted Living & Memory Care
706-865-0029
210 Hope Rd., Cleveland GA 30528



FRIENDS AND FAMILY WEEKEND

MARCH 15TH

FREE events beginning 2pm

- Interactive Games, Athletic Events, Campus Tours, Alumni Events, Free Concert, Fireworks Display
- Doors open for main event at 6pm
- Speaker and concert open to the public on a first come first serve basis

Special Guests



Riley Gaines



Sanctus Real and Unspoken

Standing on TRUTH



#1 Christian College in Georgia

The mission of TMU is to equip students with the Truth, through a Biblically-centered education, to fulfill the Great Commission.

100 Alumni Drive, Cleveland, GA
Schedule of events at truett.edu/friendsandfamily

