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## Rogers 'boys' team up with 'gusto' for 'Liberty!'

ELIZABETHTON – Many families from throughout Northeast Tennessee have helped tell the stories of *Liberty!* at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area.

But none with more gusto and joy than the grandson-grandfather team of Brady and Norman “Buck” Rogers of Gray.

“We have the best time down here you can imagine,” Buck says. “The people are like family. They all call each other by their character names. I’ll tell you, it’s a lot of fun.”

The Rogers’ adventure began three years ago when Buck brought Brady to a reenactment at Fort Watauga, where the drama is staged. “One of the men invited him to stay and and watch. Brady followed him everywhere, most of the day. He was so taken with it.”

A short time later, Brady walked into his grandfather’s house and matter-of-factly announced that he had read about auditions for the play. “I’m going to go, and you’re going to take me,” he said.

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**Buck and Brady Rogers with the bell they donated to Liberty!**





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And that, as they say, was that.

Brady breezed through auditions, immediately landing the role of a youngster whose agile fingers are the bane of all the frontier women who slave over a hot fire. In fact, it is well known in the settlement that no pie, of any flavor, can safely cool on a windowsill – or anywhere else – when the Sneakthief is on the prowl.

Brady loves performing and his enthusiasm has earned him more lines in a role that expands to meet the needs of a young historian/actor.

“There is a wonderful scene where many of the young men in the settlement gather around their friend who has a copy of the legendary ‘Common Sense’ pamphlet by Thomas Paine,” said Jennifer Bauer, *Liberty!* field manager by night and SSSHA manager by day.

“There’s a line that was put in just for Brady, when the cantankerous father of his character’s friend destroys the pamphlet. It is really something to watch how Brady gets into it,” Bauer said.

Buck soon realized that his grandson’s interest and zeal was going to change his own involvement. “He just will not miss practice – absolutely not. And I thought, well, since I’m going to be here anyway, I might as well just take a role too,” Buck says with a grin.

And so Buck now stars right alongside his grandson, as Jacob Brown, the frontier leader whose land purchase led to the establishment of Jonesborough, Tennessee’s first town, and the expansion of settlements down the rich, wide Nolichucky Valley. “And I have to be careful and get it right because he knows all the lines, and he knows if I miss one.”

The duo enjoys the support their family, including Brady’s mother and father,

“I tell my classmates: You should come and do this. It’s really fun, and you’ll learn a lot about history. There’s so much for them to see and learn, about our stories and their placement in history.”

**Brady Rogers**

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Jill and Phillip Rogers, and his grandmother, Dr. Diana Rogers, who worked in the Washington County School System for many years and retired from Bristol City Schools, and is an avid fan of the drama, oftentimes in the stands to watch her favorite men perform.

Buck did “just about everything there was to do at Daniel Boone High School – “from teacher, to coach and assistant principal, and back to teaching again, which was always my favorite thing.” Both educators retired in 2002.

Brady and Buck have loaded up their specially made *Liberty!* cart and appeared in several parades. Their devotion also led to Brady’s gift of a sizable bell that is used throughout the drama to signify important events in the settlement.

Brady said he has been encouraging many of his classmates at Boones Creek Elementary School to come and join him in the drama. “I tell them: You should come and do this. It’s really fun. You’ll have a lot of fun and you’ll learn a lot about history.



**Brady proves why it is well known in the Watauga settlement that no pie, of any flavor, can cool on any cabin windowsill – or anywhere else – when the Sneakthief is on the prowl.**

“You know, there’s so much for them to see and learn,” Brady said. About the placement in history, such as the Transylvania Purchase. Of course, that was the largest real estate transaction in history.”

Brady said his goal is to portray John Sevier in the drama. B.K. Marlowe, who currently holds the role of Tennessee’s illustrious general and first governor,

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blanched when told of Brady's interest, and declined to comment. "I'm sorry but I don't have time," Marlowe said, glancing quickly over his shoulder. "I think I need to go study my lines."

"This is a great experience for the kids, of course," Buck said. "But it is for all of us. We all try to watch after them and, if they happen to get into anything, any one of the adults will straighten them out. Just like a family would."

"After you've been here for a little while, you realize how lucky you are to be a part of it. It's a close and good time for every one of us."

*(Liberty! continues Thursday-Saturday, July 23-25, in the Fort Watauga Amphitheater behind the Visitors Center at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area, 1651 W. Elk Ave. in Elizabethton. Tickets are \$10 for adults; \$9 for seniors; \$8 for students; and children 5 and under are admitted free. For more information, contact the park at 423.543.5808)*



**Above, Brady with B.K. Marlowe, who portrays John Sevier; below, B.K. rehearses for the day when he must hand over Sevier's sword.**



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