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and Towns County Probation Office, spoke of the objectives and purposes of probation.

"Our mission, first and foremost, is public safety," he said. "We tie ourselves into law enforcement, the court system, and the local and state agencies to promote public safety. We try to promote positive change within offenders."

Offenders pay back for the crimes they've committed, Beggs added. Since January 2009, Towns County has benefited by more than \$91,000 in fine collections from probations. "That's a labor cost savings of over \$44,000 for Towns County agencies," Beggs said.

Beggs also spoke of an objective of initiating local field units within the probation office that will supervise cases where those on probation do not know when they are going to be visited and drug screened, rather than relying on once a month scheduled visits from the offenders.

Marcene Friedley, executive director of Towns County's Drug-Free Coalition, spoke about the impact of drugs in today's society. She said that the estimated cost of methamphetamine abuse is more than \$1.3 billion in Georgia alone.

"One of our long-term goals is to have a local rehabilitation center serving Towns County," she said.

The coalition also wants to establish a unified neighbor-

hood watch program for Towns County. A program initiated in Bald Mountain Park has been a rousing success.

Elaine McKeever, of Vision Foundation, founded through Hiawasse United Methodist Church, attends the jail every Thursday with a small group of volunteers.

"God has given us his heart on behalf of those who are homeless. The invisible homeless," said McKeever. "We're people who have been there and done that. We're people who have a heart for those who are homeless, hurting, or lost."

Amy Gibby-Rosser, Director of the Towns County Family Connection, spoke of her agency's impact in Towns County.

"Our mission is to improve the lives of families and children," she said. "I know that, in our 10 years, what we've learned is in order for the community to thrive, members in the community have to be vested. I think we do live in a community that wants to look at what's best. We believe that education is the key."

Dot Garrett, with the state Department of Corrections, explained that DOC's Risk Reduction Unit falls under the umbrella of the department's Reentry Program. The Risk Reduction Unit works to reduce the recidivism rate of offenders returning to their hometown communities.

"What we focus on is preparing the inmate for reentry into the community when they first enter the system," she said. "Due to the extremely high cost of incarceration, we're working with evidence-based or research-based programs that really work."

"We want to reduce the number of offenders going back into the prison system," Garrett said. "We want to give them the programs that help them to succeed once they get on the outside. We want to make our state a safer place to live. Public safety is our number one priority. We look at reducing costs to taxpayers by reducing recidivism. A 1 percent reduction in recidivism results in a savings of over \$7 million."

DOC targets changing the way offenders think as they reenter their communities by giving them the tools of change that can impact their lives long-term.

DOC is focusing on the way offenders think, their struggles with substance abuse, and increasing their education, both academic and vocational, including on the job training and apprenticeship programs, Garrett said.

The program also helps offenders find a job and links them with agencies and support groups to help them transition back into their communities.

"We want to establish effective methods that perme-

ate all levels of affected agencies and organizations to reduce recidivism," Garrett said. "We have partnerships in both federal and state agencies that support the offender transition back into the community."

Ninety-five percent of all offenders do go back to their community at some point in time.

"They become our neighbors," she said. "What we are working toward is to make sure that they have the tools they need while they're incarcerated, to help them to become better citizens when they come back into their communities, to be more productive as taxpayers and to create a safer public as well."

The Offender, Parolee, Probationer, State Training Employment Program, or TOPSTEP, focuses on helping offenders get birth certificates, Social Security cards and other documentation that they'll need to secure gainful employment.

"We work closely with the Department of Labor in setting up programs that get our offenders back to work on the outside," she said.

Garrett also touched on the Compass Risk Needs Assessment and other programs, in addition to the Reentry Handbook for offenders, which was initiated by Pat Lehn, DOC Workforce Development Manager.

"We're not getting soft on crime, we're working to get smart on crime," she said.

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would indicate at risk areas to individual properties in Hiawassee, Young Harris and unincorporated Towns County.

The maps are used to help businesses and property owners make better financial decisions in ways to protect their property against the risk of flooding.

A FEMA representative told residents that the September deadline for the county and municipalities to adopt the proposed floodplain maps was for a definite reason.

Congress sets the deadline and if the deadlines aren't met, FEMA could lose funding for the next budget year.

Residents snarled and snapped at that response because they knew that inaccurate maps would definitely hit them in the pocketbooks.

Young Harris resident Brenda Brewer told the crowd

that she spent thousands in insurance premiums and eventually spent \$2,000 to hire a surveyor to help her prove that she wasn't in a flood zone.

"It was a living nightmare," Brewer told the crowd.

Representatives from Georgia Mountains Regional Development Commission and U.S. Rep. Paul Broun's office have offered to help Commissioner Kendall in his attempt to provide a more accurate flood hazard map.

Some residents even offered to chip in on the extensive cost to make the map more accurate.

Commissioner Kendall expressed appreciation to the large number of residents who attended the meeting and unanimously supported his decision to use public funds to acquire more accurate map data.

Sara Evans to play The Hall on March 13

By Charles Duncan
TOWNS COUNTY HERALD
charlesduncan@brmemc.net

Country Music legend Sara Evans is coming to Hiawassee for a March 13 appearance at Anderson Music Hall.

Kings Mountain, NC singing sensation Jimmy Wayne will open for Evans, who has been nominated for Top Female Vocalist or Female Vocalist of the Year nine times. She's claimed two of those awards. She's gone home with seven significant music awards throughout her career.

In 2001, Evans was the most-nominated artist at the Country Music Association Awards with seven nominations overall, and she won her first CMA award when *Born to Fly* won the award for *Video of the Year*, her first major award

of her Country Music career.

Two years later, Evans recorded a long-awaited fourth album, *Restless*. The album's first single, *Back Seat of a Greyhound Bus* was a Top 20 Country hit, reaching No. 16 on the Hot Country Songs. The album sold more than 40,000 copies in its first week of release.

The album's next single, *Perfect* broke through to Country's Top 10, topping out at No. 2, barely missing Country's top spot. The third single from the album, *Suds in the Bucket* was the album's most successful single, becoming Evans' third No. 1 hit and first Gold-certified single.

Today, Evans is an accomplished author, daytime and prime time entertainment sensation and still singing up a storm.



Sara Evans is coming to Hiawassee on March 13 to play the Hall. Kings Mountain, NC singing sensation Jimmy Wayne will open for Evans

Bad Company comes to town Saturday

By Charles Duncan
TOWNS COUNTY HERALD
charlesduncan@brmemc.net

With Bad Company set to take the stage on Saturday night, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' Anderson Music Hall is just getting warmed up for 2010.

Brian Howe is expected to crank up an excited crowd with renditions of *Feel Like Making Love*, *Rock And Roll Fantasy*, *Shooting Star*, *Holy Water*,

Can't Get Enough and *Rock Steady*.

"The Possum," George Jones will ignite the Hall with his life's work of music on Feb. 27.

George Jones began his career better known as "Thumper Jones" and rolled through the years as one of Country Music's most beloved stars and legends.

Admittedly, Jones let stardom go to his head. He grew up with nothing and all

of the sudden his golden vocal chords gave him everything he never expected to enjoy in life.

Soon, bad management, tax problems, alcohol troubles, cocaine abuse, massive debt and a new moniker as "No Show Jones" almost wiped out one of the most storied careers in Nashville.

Three marriages and a mountain of bourbon bottles later, George Jones

finally found his salvation in a little lady named Nancy Sepulvado. He married her, and together they whipped the demons that had plagued Jones since the early days of his music career.

At 78, Jones is having a "blast," according to his Web site.

His health is good, his energy is high and, at long last, he enjoys being sober and interacting with business associates and fans.