

Weather...from page 1A



Young Harris College received its share of cold weekend weather as well as evidence by the icy limbs on this tree. Photo/Jessica Keaton

low 20s. The real feel temperature was 10 degrees, according to the National Weather Service. Roadways looked slick and the suicide lanes were coated with snow. If not for a 15 mph wind, the blustery snow may have created a more significant accumulation.

The newest snowfall came as the region spent most of the weekend recovering from a downpour of snow on Friday, one that prompted Dr. Behrens to release Towns County students at noon from the classrooms.

Students were absent from the classroom on Mon-

day to honor President's Day.

A couple of years back, no one would have believed that it would be colder today in Towns County, GA than in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, the site of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

While most in Northeast Georgia were trying to stop their teeth from chattering Tuesday morning, the folks in Vancouver were on their knees praying for snow.

When the cold weather will subside is anyone's guess. Dr. Behrens guarantees he won't be paying attention to groundhogs for that assessment.

Moonshine...from page 1A

the sign ups and getting booked for this year's event. We want to get everyone behind this.

"The number of people that come depends on the number of people we can accommodate," he said. "We'll have plenty of food vendors to accommodate hungry folks.

"They'll eat in your restaurants at breakfast and supper," he said.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall once again pledged his support for the event.

"It's a boon to our local economy," Commissioner Kendall said. "Any way we can support you, we're here."

The Ridges Resort hosted the inaugural kickoff party last August and Hooper, a member of Towns County's Tourism Association Board of Directors, said the moment almost took his breath away – literally.

"We were tickled to death to host the first kickoff at The Ridges," he said. "It was an awesome feeling to see all those cars coming in on Thursday night. It was an anxious feeling trying to think of where we were going to park them.

"That's why we're here tonight at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, to get better organized and better prepared for what should be another solid year for the Cruise-In," Hooper said.

Hooper and the Tourism Association hosted Parrish and his family last week at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to meet with business owners and let them get acquainted with the 2010 game plan.

Tourism Association Chair Hilda Thomason, who also serves as general manager of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, said she too was excited about the prospects for 2010.

"Year One was a learning experience for all of us," she said. "Tonight, we hope to capitalize on that experience as we prepare for the 2010 event. This is an exciting event for Towns County.

"It's going to flow this year," she said. "We're going

to make this happen."

Parrish, who spent the summer months of his youth growing up here on Owl Creek, said he was pleased to see such an encouraging turnout to the community meeting.

"I want this to become a lasting event for Towns County and Hiwassee," he said. "We want to see folks in your shops and restaurants. We'll only have these car show folks from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Then we'll turn them loose and we want them to come do business with you.

"Anyone who wants to stay open late on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, that's great," he said. "We can direct these folks to you."

Hooper and The Ridges are ready to host the kickoff event again this year. The Midnight Express Band will provide the kickoff event's musical entertainment.

"We'll do it again this year on Aug. 12. That's a Thursday night and it all kicks off at 5:30 p.m.," Hooper said. "It's open to the public, there's no admission and we'll do a Tour of the Lakes on our 36-foot tour boat."

No, it's not August, but folks in Towns County can't wait for that month to get here. For many, the Mountain Moonshine Cruise-In was the difference maker in an otherwise dismal financial year. They're looking forward to another August and another financial boon to their cash registers.

Locals can also start looking forward to June 2011. That's when the Shriners make the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds their venue of choice. For years, the Shriners have headed to Helen.

"The Shriners' event will be big for Towns County and Hiwassee as well," Thomason said.

The Tourism Association also is in negotiations to bring the Christian Motorcycle Association and their 1,800 members to Towns County, Thomason said.

"It's not a done deal yet," she said. "But we're working on it."

Oxendine: 'jobs first'...from page 1A

Oxendine said all those issues have a common denominator: jobs.

"Transportation equals jobs, water equals jobs and education equals jobs," he said. "The quality of the health care delivery system in each community is a matter of jobs."

Oxendine says his opponents all site similar issues that impact Georgia. The trouble is, he said, they don't know how to fix them.

"You simply address the issues," he said. "We have to show that we're serious about transportation, water and reforming education.

"Also, I think we need to restructure our tax code and create a more modern revenue code that raises revenue, but does this in a manner that is most desirable as possible," he said.

A longtime proponent of the Fair Tax, Oxendine said that the way to get Georgia back on track in the jobs race includes getting rid of corporate income tax, as well as phasing out the state's personal income tax.

He also is a strong proponent of small businesses.

"We have to grow our own jobs," he said. "Entrepreneurs in the long-term will create more jobs in Georgia than a handful of big companies. Other states have venture capital funds. We really don't have a process that identifies our home-grown entrepreneurs.

"We need to identify those home-grown entrepreneurs and help them any way we can to get their ventures off the ground," he said.

"We're bad about running our best and our brightest out of the state because they have a better opportunity in neighboring states," he said.

Georgia's Incumbent Fire Safety and Insurance Commissioner is no stranger to the State Capitol. He knows the inner workings of the Georgia General Assembly. While a student in college, Oxendine served as an assistant to former Georgia Gov. George Busbee.

He began his political career in 1994, running on the GOP ticket against Incumbent Insurance Commissioner Tim Ryles. His narrow defeat of Lyles

was the closest race of his political career.

He has since served three more terms as Georgia's Fire Safety and Insurance Commissioner, before finally deciding to seek the GOP gubernatorial nomination to replace term-limited Gov. Sonny Perdue.

He defeated his Democratic opponent Guy Drexinger in the 2006 General Election by the largest margin of any of Georgia's Constitutional officers, a whopping 65.6 percent of the statewide vote.

"I believe in transparency and I want the people of Georgia to know what they're getting in their next governor," he said. "The other candidates tell you Georgia's problems, but they don't give an inkling of how they're going to fix them. I'm the only candidate with executive experience."

His opponents he says are, well, just politicians.

"We've got a plan," he said. "We hope that Georgians will visit johnoxendine.com and take a look at our 12-point Contract with Georgia and sign up with Team Ox."

Floodplain saga over...from page 1A

tive Faith Jones, employed with the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission, for her commitment in pursuing USGS's assistance and funding for this important project. Faith Jones is a 1980 graduate of Towns County High School and is the wife of Brian Jones of Hiwassee.

Meanwhile, the LiDAR data will be compiled by state of the art technology and equipment which will take 150,000 laser beam shots per second with an accuracy variance of no more than six inches. The project will cover the entire county and will provide information for Digital Flood Insurance Maps.

"It is the primary objective of the state and FEMA to update Georgia's flood maps to reflect current flood risks using the most accurate data available," said Collis Brown, state Floodplain Management Coordinator.

"We appreciate your cooperation in this matter as well as your willingness to assist the state and FEMA in updating Towns County's flood map to reflect the most accurate



More than 80 people turned out at the Towns County Courthouse recently to protest inaccurate data used to compile Lake Chatuge flood maps. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

flood risk," Brown said.

FEMA and DNR were prepared to use inaccurate data to prepare the maps until Commissioner Kendall agreed to fund the acquisition of high-tech LiDAR data to save county taxpayers thousands of dollars that they would have spent on flood insurance had the county been forced to submit to the use of the inaccurate data.

Thanks to USGS, the \$150,000 LiDAR tab is covered, Commissioner Kendall said.

"The ultimate importance of this critical data to the county and city property owners is of such magnitude that we must do everything possible

to correct the problem," Commissioner Kendall said.

Towns County's proposed floodplain maps, rife with errors, are not unique to Towns County but are a nationwide problem, Commissioner Kendall said.

"Accurate LiDAR data is imperative in the preparation of a revised Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map for Towns County," Commissioner Kendall said. "This issue which we were not aware of until two to three months ago has been very time consuming and frustrating; a rather satisfying resolve evolved from this frustration for everyone involved."

YHC...from page 1A

ties to support current and future growth.

The college is experiencing unprecedented growth since it was accredited to offer four-year liberal arts degrees in 2009. For the third consecutive year the school experienced an unprecedented number of students enrolling in classes at the small liberal arts college.

"The community knows we are providing a great education to college students, said YHC President Cathy Cox. "Not everyone sees the impact our operations have on the local economy and on area businesses.

"We make a conscious effort to buy locally and spend locally whenever and wherever we can – and the dollars prove that we're having a huge impact," President Cox said.

From employment, to consumption of utility services and purchasing, to giving back through service to others, Young Harris College is making a significant effort to support local businesses, local governments and local communities.

With approximately 700 students enrolled for 2009-2010, YHC paid more than \$603,000 to Blue Ridge Mountain EMC for electrical and Internet services in 2009. The college also is a huge customer for the city of Young Harris, paying more than \$105,000 for water and sewer services in 2009, while assuming costs to improve city infrastructure in areas where it connects to the campus at no cost to the city.

In addition, the college donated a parcel to the city for construction of its new water tank.

The college spent more than \$250,000 with local businesses for propane and oil for heating its facilities, and almost \$90,000 for cable television and Internet services.

Though the college is exempt from many taxes as a not-for-profit entity, it still paid prop-

SPLOST...from 1A

funds for the library, sewer projects, retiring a \$500,000 debt on the Towns County Detention Center and dollars for ambulances and firefighting equipment.

"In this day and age, we hear about a lot of support for a fair tax," Commissioner Kendall said. "It doesn't get any fairer than SPLOST. It is money not requested of property taxpayers. It is a penny sales tax across the board and everybody pays, including those folks who come to visit our community during the tourism season."

Commissioner Kendall said the most important element in planning for a SPLOST program is the involvement of local residents as they help identify projects that have significant impact for the community.

"But, if the people let me know they don't want it, then we won't put it on the ballot," he said.

The notion of a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax was conceived in 1985 by the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia. The Georgia General Assembly created SPLOST as a means of funding capital projects in its 159 counties.

As a county tax, SPLOST can only be initiated by a sole commissioner or board of commissioners. Later, ACCG and the Georgia Municipal Association reached an accord to make SPLOST funds accessible by municipalities for their capital improvement projects as well.