

One test labels high school...continued from page 1A

ation is a failing test score. Even then, the formula is convoluted and leaves much to be desired.

The criteria used by the Fed to offer School Improvement Grants focused on the enhanced measure of student achievement in math and English Language Arts. These scores were used to identify possible candidates for the grant. The Fed looked at increases or decreases in these scores over a three-year period between 2007-2009. However, the Fed did not factor in the actual level of school proficiency or whether or not the schools met AYP.

"In other words, this formula did not look at the higher level of scores at Towns County High School even though the school met AYP standards during the three years that were used to compute the SI grant ranking," TCHS Principal Roy Perren said. "We are the only Tier II high school on the list that

made AYP last year."

Grant money sounds tempting, but the school doesn't automatically get federal funding; it has to compete for it with other Georgia schools on the list. Towns County High School will not seek the grant funding.

"This is all about the scores on one test," said Dr. Richard Behrens, superintendent of Towns County Schools. "We're all concerned about it. I mean, we want these young people to be prepared when they walk through our doors into their future."

"We've made some adjustments this year; Roy (Perren) is making more adjustments for next year, including increased staff development," Dr. Behrens said. "I'm confident that the high school and its staff will resolve this problem."

There would be no discussion of a problem if Towns County High School hadn't reached that threshold of 40 percent or more students re-



Principal Roy Perren

ceiving free and reduced lunches.

"That factor alone moved us into a category to receive federal funding that we traditionally have not received," Dr. Behrens said. "The higher percentage of free or reduced lunches makes you eligible for federal funding."

The other event that shifted TCHS onto the School Improvement Grant radar happened in 2009.

That's when 92 percent of

Towns County's rising seniors passed the Georgia High School Graduation Test's math section with a score of 500 or better. For AYP purposes, the No Child Left Behind law requires that students earn a score of 516 or better on the math section of the graduation test.

The score is used to define AYP results. Towns County's score for the math portion of the graduation test was 67.2 because 17 students, who met the required score of 500, fell just shy of the AYP required score of 516.

"In 2009, 17 of our students earned a score better than 500 and less than 516 on the math section of the graduation test," Perren said. "Three of those students scored 515 and four of those 17 scored 514."

"These 17 test scores created the difference in our overall pass rate of 92 percent against the 67.2 percent enhanced pass rate," Perren said. "While we did offer those 17 students the opportunity to retake the test last summer to go

over the 516 mark, not a single one took us up on the offer."

"Honestly, if I were an 11th grader who had passed the test meeting the graduation requirement, I probably would not have taken the test over again myself," Perren said.

Regardless of the 13 percent drop in enhanced pass rate for math between 2008 and 2009, Towns County High School still met AYP, Perren said.

"While I am not proud of being on this list, I am proud of our school and the progress that we have made over the past six years," Perren said. "Test scores are going to fluctuate from year to year. Our small size magnifies the test score fluctuation both to the good and the bad."

"While I do not agree that one test score should result in us being classified as a failing school, I do promise you that we will work hard to get off this list and to stay off this kind of list in the future," he said.

Ramp Festival...continued from page 1A

The turnout was great...this is mountain heritage and part of our lives here," she said.

Beth Walker, a first timer to the region and a South Georgia native, was playing horseshoes outside on the lawn beside the pavilion.

"It's beautiful up here! I love it. We just got here...I didn't know what ramps were, and I found out that they were a food," she said.

Scotty Fain, who helped pull off the event, won fourth place in the Corn Hole competition. His spirits were high as he talked about the festival.

"This is the first year we've had this. We usually have the Christmas celebration, but this is the first year this has gone on," he said. "Susan Wyman, who I've worked with for 20 years, has come up with the idea of the Ramp Festival. This is the only weekend we had

any time at the cabins to take advantage of the use of the pavilion for the entire summer. We decided to have it this weekend. It was short notice, but it turned out really well."

Fain didn't have a clue about the ramps other than they smell like wild onions.

A lack of knowledge over the origins of a ramp was a common reply for those who attended the "Rampin' on the River" celebration.

Meanwhile, the confusion didn't stall the celebration. Between the square dancing, food provided by the Georgia Mountain Restaurant, horseshoes, and Corn Hole competitions, the celebration, lasting from 2 p.m. into the night. The event wasn't short on action.

It was a time that featured camaraderie and good old fashioned mountain flair. The "Rampin' on the River" celebration was both a good



Beth Walker nails a ringer. Photo/Charles Duncan

time and a learning experience for many. It was an educational experience for who attended. They now know that ramps have a distinct smell that can be confused between a hybrid onions and mountain garlic.

They also associate the wild mountain herb with an incredible good time.

Park Land pursued...from page 1A

is centrally located within the county borders. Commissioner Kendall hopes to purchase the land from the county's operating reserve general funds for \$700,000.

Towns County Parks and Recreation Director Wes Hooper says the land is a bargain that the county likely will never see again.

"We need it," Commissioner Kendall said. "The young people here just don't have adequate facilities for athletics and the older generation doesn't have the walking trails that other communities around us have."

"We've got to have a park to build and grow our local athletic programs and have a place for the families in our community to enjoy," Commissioner Kendall said. "The children of this county deserve that much. The residents of Towns County deserve that much."

In February, Commissioner Kendall met with the Towns County Industrial Development Authority and agreed to lease unused property for temporary ath-

letic fields.

Commissioner Kendall used county equipment and employees to develop the temporary athletic fields.

In years past, the Tennessee Valley Authority rejected a request by the late Towns County Sole Commissioner Jack Dayton to use TVA property for athletic fields. To date, TVA and the U.S. Forest Service have both denied a similar request by Commissioner Kendall to utilize some of their property for athletic fields for local youth.

Some 70 percent of Towns County is owned by TVA and the U.S. Forest Service. Geographical obstacles that include an incredible mountainous landscape leave few options for development of suitable recreation facilities, Commissioner Kendall said.

The commissioner envisions developing the new park with sky-friendly security lights and deed restrictions that include that the property must remain in perpetuity as a county recreation facility.

"This park and green space will be an asset for the county, our senior citizens, children, grandchildren and posterity," Commissioner Kendall said. "The alternative use for this property would be hundreds of condominiums and/or single family homes."

"Developers have offered a lot more than we would have to pay for it for the opportunity to build it out," Commissioner Kendall said. "The maximum best use for this property is as a park and recreation facility."

Commissioner Kendall said that overall development of the property would have to be delayed because the county doesn't have a 1 cent Special Local Option Sales Tax. However, work could be begun in increments using county equipment and employees similar to work on temporary fields at the Industrial Park.

"We must and will begin now by preserving this property for a much needed park and athletic fields," Commissioner Kendall said.

Missy Conrad signs...continued from page 1A

"It's exciting; it's going to be a lot of fun."

Conrad brings a rugged presence on the boards and a precise shooting touch to Coach Paul's first team. Conrad averaged 10.3 points and nine rebounds per game in leading the Lady Indians to a very Sweet 16 in the recent Class A state high school basketball playoffs.

"I never expected to get this far, playing college basketball," she said. "I used to be the worst kid on the team. It was just fun making the high school team. I'm anxious to get started and figure out what I want to do academically at Young Harris. I'm excited to be a part of Coach Paul's basketball program. She's been great."

Her father Steven Conrad was a proud papa on Monday, mostly excited by the fact that Melissa will play college basketball this close to home.

"I'm very happy that she has made her decision," Steven Conrad said. "I'm excited to support that decision. It's going to be a thrill to be able to watch her play this close to home."

Melissa Conrad scored 620 points throughout her high school career, but her scoring wasn't always a necessity for the Lady Indians until her senior year. She's also very adept at passing the ball, especially the no-look pass to a wide open teammate in the paint.

Over the course of her career, "Missy" as she is affectionately referred to by her coaches, teammates and fans, played in the Lady Indians' trips to the state playoffs during each of her four years in high school. She went to the Final Four her sophomore year, the Elite Eight her junior season and the Sweet 16 during her senior campaign.

The Lady Indians won a total of 96 games with Missy Conrad contributing significant playing time in each of her four exciting high school basketball seasons at Towns County.



Melissa Conrad will never forget April 19, 2010. It was a day spent with family and friends and a memorable moment. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

"She's one of those players that you dream about having for four years," Lady Indians Head Coach Jim Melton said. "It's going to be tough to replace her, not only as an athlete, but as an all-around person."

"We've gone to the state tournament each year she's played," Coach Melton said. "We've been to the Final Four, the Elite Eight and the Sweet 16 this past season. She's been a vital part of our team."

Coach Melton didn't

hesitate when asked what Missy Conrad means to Young Harris College's new Women's Basketball program.

"She's going to be a good ambassador for Young Harris College," Coach Melton said. "She's a local girl, and hopefully these young kids can relate to what Missy has done and how she has persevered over the years and stuck with basketball."

"She's going on to play college basketball like she's always wanted to do," he said.

SPLOST on hold...from page 1A

1. That would increase the local sales tax from 7 cents to 8 cents, something the commissioner has vowed never to do.

However, Commissioner Kendall didn't rule out putting the SPLOST referendum on the ballot for the November general election.

At the same time, the Board of Education may opt to extend its ELOST collections for another five years by placing that referendum question on the July primary ballot. If voters approved the measure to build additional school facilities, the BOE could delay collection for one year until the existing ELOST expires in July 2011. An extended ELOST would expire July 2016.

Commissioner Kendall had sought to use SPLOST collections to aid in the development of infrastructure projects within the county. The cities of Hiawassee and

Young Harris also would have shared in the SPLOST collections for their local projects.

County projects under consideration included expansion and development of the wastewater treatment plant for future economic growth, public safety equipment, including firefighting equipment and fire hydrants. The commissioner also had sought to use the SPLOST funds to finish paying off the Towns County Jail.

Commissioner Kendall also had hoped for \$100,000 to be used as a local matching grant to \$900,000 to be used to expand the Mountain Regional Library in Hiawassee as well as upgrades to the MRL Headquarters in Young Harris. SPLOST funds also would have been allocated to pay for paving projects on county roads in addition to the purchase of

ambulances and other public safety equipment.

Approximately \$700,000 would have been used to buy land to expanding and develop county Parks and Recreational facilities, Commissioner Kendall said.

Instead, Commissioner Kendall will use funds from the county's operating reserve general fund to purchase 55 acres on Mining Gap Road for the development of athletic fields, walking trails, and pavilions and the preservation of green space. The Commissioner will purchase the property from the operating reserve general funds for \$700,000, or a value of 30 cents on the dollar based on the value of the property.

A new county park will be established and developed in the memory of the property's former owners Ralph and Johnny Foster.

McKinney's Store...from page 1A

Red McKinney's Feed Store, built circa 1902, has always been an iconic piece of Towns County history. In fact, it's the last physical link to the community's storied past.

At one time, it also served as the Hiawassee Ford Motor Company.

"Bright Dickerson used to have a grocery store and feed store in there," Mauldin said. "Daddy got the store after he died. Bright wanted it that way because Daddy had worked there."

"Daddy just had feed in there, he didn't sell groceries," she said. "Folks got to playing checkers in there and it just became a popular place for people to come and share stories. The folks playing checkers, if they found out something, they'd talk about it and people would listen."

In the winter months, patrons would stand around the pot-bellied stove and share stories from throughout the community. They even helped supply the wood for the heater once Red McKinney got feeble.

"When Cecil Sanders came in the store, he'd take the

floor and talk about anything and everything," Mauldin said. "When Cecil was there, folks knew it would be a while before anyone else got to talk."

There was even a "liars' bench" on the outside of the store for the best storytellers.

"Folks would sit there just to see who could come up with the tallest tale," Mauldin said.

Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall said that McKinney's Feed Store holds many memories for locals.

"Without a doubt, this was the happening place," he said. "If you wanted to know what was going on in Towns County, this was the place to be back in the day."

Red McKinney's health declined and Mauldin's sister ran the store. Eventually, the store was sold to Gary Kendall and his sister Pam Kendall Floyd.

The intent was to save the structure and turn it into a retro office building. However, architects informed its owners that the building once remembered as the central gathering place of a small town community was no longer structurally sound.

"It had to come down,"

Commissioner Kendall said.

As Shook Construction worked patiently to demolish the structure, one-by-one, visitors came by to pay their last respects.

They asked David Shook to save them a piece of wood.

"This is truly a day to remember," David Shook said. "It's a sad day, and we're thinking about that with every board that hits the ground."

Bearvassee, which recently moved beside Bill's Barber Shop on Hwy. 76, collected the wood from the McKinney Building and is making keepsake picture frames.

Before the front façade was dismantled, folks posed for pictures in front of the last of the Towns County landmarks.

The Kendall Family made sure that the historic McKinney Feed Store sign was placed in the hands of Red McKinney's family as a treasured keepsake.

Robbie Jean Mauldin will always remember the day.

"This is one place that people from Towns County will always remember and enjoy," she said. "Folks had a lot of happy hours in that store. It was the gathering place."