

Charges...continued from page 1A

yond repair. We have arrested one person in this case with multiple felonies. The investigation is still ongoing. A possibility of additional arrests could happen.

"Jessica Sheridan Van Nus has been charged with aggravated assault, arson in the first degree, criminal attempt to commit murder, and cruelty to animals, two counts," Investigator Donaldson said. "The animals did not survive."

Jessica Van Nus was arrested by Investigator Donaldson within a few hours of law enforcement's arrival on the scene.

"We escorted her from the scene to the hospital and then she was arrested," Investigator Donaldson said. "The initial charge was aggravated assault. The follow up investigation led to additional charges."

Towns County Probate Judge David Rogers has denied bond for Jessica Van

Nus and the case has been handed up to Towns County Superior Court. A Superior Court judge must set bail for Jessica Van Nus, Investigator Donaldson said.

Arrest warrants show that Jessica Van Nus allegedly struck Deborah Van Nus with two different household objects before setting fire to the residence.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office, the state Fire Marshal's Office and Towns County Fire Department were involved in the investigation, Investigator Donaldson said.

According to arrest warrants, Jessica Van Nus is alleged to have struck her mother with two different household objects, and then set the family home on fire, thus, the charges of aggravated assault and first-degree arson, county arrest records show.

The charge of criminal

attempt to commit murder stems from Jessica Van Nus allegedly setting the home on fire while her mother was still inside the residence, arrest warrants show.

The two charges of animal cruelty are involved because Jessica Van Nus' alleged act of arson caused the death of two family pets, arrest warrants show.

As the investigation continues to unfold, Investigator Donaldson is waiting for results of evidence sent to the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Crime Laboratory.

"With the assistance of the fire department and the state Fire Marshal's Office, we are still continuing the investigation. The next step is waiting for results from the state crime lab," Investigator Donaldson said. "We work well with Fire Chief Mitch Floyd and his department and other agencies."

BMW rally brings toys to Towns

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton received an added boost for the Empty Stocking Fund when the BMW Motorcycle Club visited on Sunday.

For the motorcycle club, Towns County is a regular stop on their mission of delivering toys to needy children.

In Towns County alone, the approximate number of children in need at Christmas has nearly doubled since Sheriff Clinton took office in December 2007. That's when approximately 135 children benefited from the Sheriff's Empty Stocking Fund. On Sunday, the number was approximately 230 children with more expected to enroll before Christmas.

"I can't say enough about the BMW Motorcycle Club and everything they do to help us each year," Sheriff Clinton said. "They came through again and at a time when more and more local chil-



Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton and members of the BMW Motorcycle Club celebrate another year of giving.

dren are faced with the option of not experiencing Christmas."

Due to the economy, donations have declined as the number of children in need has risen, but somehow, Sheriff Clinton said, the Sheriff's Office is fulfilling the requests of those in need.

Of the many contributors to the Sheriff's Empty Stocking Fund, the BMW Motorcycle Club made its annual ride to Hiawassee on Sunday to de-

liver toys for the Empty Stocking Fund. The weather for the ride was not as cold as previous years, at a balmy 30 degrees with bright, warm sunshine.

Sheriff Clinton said he is thankful for the very generous donations and involvement of the community, and is grateful for Vicki Ellis and Heather Whitaker, and all Sheriff's Office staffers for ensuring that our local children in need have Christmas gifts.

Rescheduled...continued from page 1A

Georgia Department of Transportation road crews worked around the clock to keep

local roads passable.

By Friday, the fruits of their labors were evident as those big yellow

school buses were back on local roads making the trip back to Towns County Schools.

Gibby...continued from page 1A

Gibby was celebrated by fellow board members with mementos that will remind him of the last 12 years. He received two reminders of the school's mascot, the Indians.

He said he's always preferred being an Indian rather than a chief.

"It's a joy to see all the buildings, all the advancements of the building program and it only had one purpose and that was to educate the kids," Gibby said. "We worked hard to get where we are today."

He also received a plaque from Roy Perren, Darren Berrong and Don Dermody, the principals of Towns County High School, Middle School and Elementary School respectively.

"This truly is a treasure," he said.

The Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax has

made a big difference in helping the school achieve its building program, Gibby said.

"I would encourage the school reinvest in the SPLOST in a couple of years to add a couple of other things, but I'm real pleased. I'm just thankful that I got to serve the time that I did."

The school board opted to let the SPLOST expire in June to allow the county to pass a SPLOST for local capital projects.

Gibby said that the first term of a board member is a true learning experience.

"It takes two to three years to really understand how the system really works," Gibby said. "The following four years, you can really begin to become a very effective board member. It takes a couple of years to build trust within the

board. After that, you begin to understand how a board really works; you understand your limitations and what you're good at.

"I'm a good mediator," he said. "Over the last 12 years we've had some good times, we've expressed our opinions, expressed our differences. But, I've enjoyed working with the boards that I've worked with because when we came out on the other end, we were all in agreement of what we wanted to accomplish."

Superintendent Dr. Richard Behrens praised Gibby's 12 years of service.

"Bob Gibby has been a pleasure to work with over the years," Dr. Behrens said. "He's everything you would want and expect from a member of the Board of Education."

Shop-With-A-Cop...continued from page 1A

and toys for their brothers and sisters and other accessories for their families. The money they did spend on themselves went for solid personal choices as they bought mostly clothing items for themselves.

Some picked out fishing rods, lures and other fishing tackle equipment.

After the shopping adventure, the group was treated to dinner at Georgia Mountain Restaurant.

While *Shop-With-A-Cop* gave these youths a Christmas they wouldn't otherwise enjoy, the program accepts donations year-round, Hiawassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright said.

"We got some donations in today," Chief Wright said. "And when we hear about kids that need some Christmas help, we'll do what we can for them."

"The main thing is the kids," said Wright. "We want them to have a good Christmas. That means everything in the world to us."

Weather ... continued from page 1A

Dec. 13 feel like zero.

Temperatures felt like below zero on Dec. 14 as the mercury dipped to 4 degrees.

Georgia Department of Transportation road crews worked throughout the week to keep local roads passable.

If the region is in for another round of the white stuff, expect DOT road crews to be a bit more prepared this go around. DOT officials admittedly were caught off guard by the Dec. 12 storm. They had expected

the storm to arrive at 11 p.m., not 3 p.m.

The one group that won't be caught off guard by inclement weather: the Towns County School System. Students are on Christmas Break until Jan. 3.