

Towns County Herald

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Ross, Denton graduate from paramedic training

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Emergency Medical Services have two freshly minted paramedics on the crew in Walker Ross and Brett Denton.

This is excellent news for residents, as the medical knowledge of Towns EMS has substantially increased with their graduations last month from Tri-County Technical College.

Ross, 24, graduated from Towns County High School in 2017. He became interested in pre-hospital care through inspiration from "friends who were in the field already" and decided initially to specialize as an Emergency Medical Technician.

He has been employed with Towns EMS since 2021, when he embarked on a path

that would eventually lead him to becoming a paramedic.

So far, his professional journey has been a dream come true, as Ross has "always felt a call to serve in some capacity and admired those who can help others selflessly," and his coworker, Denton, feels a similar calling.

"It's crazy how life comes full circle," 26-year-old Denton marveled. Long before he graduated Class of 2016 from Towns County High, he was in a very bad car accident. Thanks to local paramedics, he survived.

From that moment forward, he was struck with a desire to help others. Initially, he couldn't remember who had touched his life so long ago, but as it turned out, they were closer than he realized.

"The guy that was my preceptor on my first day work-

ing EMS was actually the (one) who worked my car wreck as a kid," Denton said. "That's how I know God has placed me in the exact place I needed to be."

But the road to certification is long and arduous, as they learned. The seven-month paramedic course requires a total of 1,051 hours of training spread over three semesters. Only 277 of those hours are focused on lectures; the rest requires hands-on experience.

Learning human anatomy and physiology, how to interpret cardiac monitors, intubation, correct patient assessment, proper treatment for illnesses, trauma, cardiac episodes and drug dosing are just some of the topics that prospective paramedics face in the classroom and in "real life."

Add to that the nuanced adjustments that must be made

See Paramedics Graduate, Page 6



Walker Ross and Brett Denton of Towns County EMS – second and third from the left respectively – graduated from paramedic training at Tri-County Technical College last month. Photo/Submitted

Hiawassee PD launches 'Home Alone' for Christmas

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Hiawassee Police Department began a holiday tradition for Christmas in 2023, hosting the inaugural "Home Alone" Christmas Eve Social at the Towns County Recreation Center.

With help from community organizations such as Mama's Concierge Service and Georgia Mountain Ice Cream, the Police Department was able to host a meaningful Christmas dinner for those who did not have anyone to spend the holiday with.

Volunteers such as Hiawassee Investigator J.R. Murray and his family baked delicious homemade desserts, while others provided soups, cornbread, crackers and chips.

Once everyone was present and ready to dine, Hiawassee City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick served guests alongside several members of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Security Team.

"The attendance was low but we were blessed to serve and fellowship with the



Hiawassee PD organized this bountiful spread of food for attendees of the inaugural "Home Alone Christmas Eve Social." Photo/Submitted

ones who attended," Hiawassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker said.

Some of the people who came to volunteer were actually in the category of folks the Police Department was targeting for outreach, and all in

all, only a handful of "Home Alone" residents attended the event.

"A lot of people would have been discouraged by having low attendance, but we were happy to serve the

See Home Alone, Page 7

'Biggest Loser Challenge' coming to Chatuge Med Spa

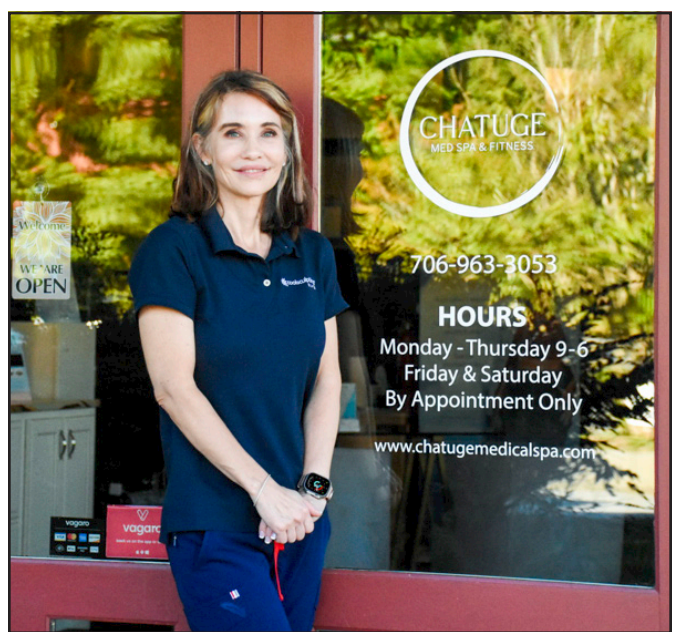
Kristi Bryant of Chatuge Med Spa & Fitness knows that weight loss is no easy journey, which is why she's hosting a local "Biggest Loser Challenge" starting this month. Sign-ups are currently ongoing, set to end on Jan. 10, and the contest will officially kick off on Jan. 15.

While the name of the game might be similar, there's going to be more involved than what was shown on the hit television series.

As the Owner and Lead Aesthetician of Chatuge Med Spa & Fitness, Bryant facilitates a variety of changes in her clients' lives. For some, this might mean facial and massage therapy or eyelash extensions and hair loss treatment.

But for others, it means skin tightening or CoolSculpting – reshaping the body itself. Usually, clients make the choice to undergo these services after intense weight loss, but Bryant wants to offer help to the patients who are just starting their journey.

So, for the inaugural participants of the program Bryant hopes to make an annual oc-



Kristi Bryant, proprietor of Chatuge Med Spa & Fitness, is excited to welcome contestants for her upcoming "Biggest Loser" competition.

urrence, she and the Chatuge Med Spa staff will be there to help them take those critical first steps to changing their lives.

The goal of the competition is the same as the namesake TV show: lose as much

weight as possible over a specified period to win big. In this case, there will be First, Second and Third Place winners.

First Prize will either be a CoolSculpting treatment on an area of the victor's choice

See Biggest Loser, Page 6

Scherer officially cleared in Hiawassee ethics complaint

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In an investigative hearing last month, the Hiawassee Ethics Board determined that Hiawassee Building & Planning Committee Member Paul Scherer had not violated the city's officially adopted Code of Ethics regarding a complaint filed recently.

Resident Maggie Oliver filed the complaint against Scherer on Nov. 13, accusing him of violating the Code of Ethics by "directly or indirectly (making) use of ... official information not made available to the general public for the purpose of furthering a private interest."

The complaint was in reference to an incident involving Scherer that occurred a month prior, on Oct. 13, at Trailful Outdoor Company near the Hiawassee Town Square.

As the property manager for the building Trailful was in the process of buying at the time – which the company has since purchased, according to Scherer – he paid a visit to the business.

There, Scherer shared his support for a "NO" vote by the Hiawassee City Council for a proposed loan to complete construction of the historic Paris Buildings next door to Trailful, according to the complaint and surveillance



Hiawassee Building & Planning Committee Member Paul Scherer did not violate the city's Code of Ethics, as concluded in a recent public investigative hearing. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

footage from inside the business. "He stated he believed three of the council members will also vote NO on the issue on Oct. 30, creating a majority against funding to complete the project," the complaint read. "Paul Scherer also stated to the owners of Trailful that the (Downtown Developmental Authority) was out of money for the projects."

Oliver said in the Dec. 15 investigative hearing at City Hall that she questioned the timing of Scherer's visit, as he was relaying information to the business that she felt would not have been publicly

available at that time.

The visit occurred approximately two weeks before the Paris Business Center loan would become a public agenda item in a special called meeting on Oct. 30, and she felt he was potentially using privileged information gleaned from his city position to influence Trailful.

After all, the city project could not be completed if the City Council voted to reject the loan, which would mean an established drainage problem at the Paris Buildings would go unresolved, leaving stormwater runoff to continue

See Ethics Complaint, Page 7

TCSO confiscates meth in separate recent drug arrests

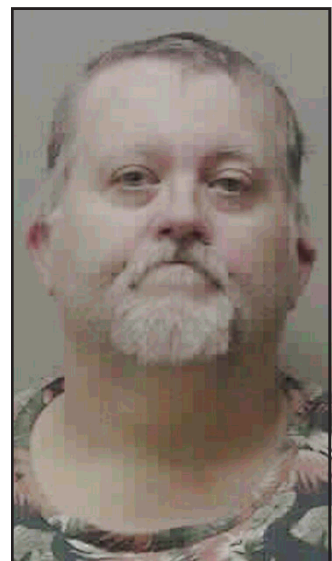
News Special
Towns County Herald

A month-long investigation by the Towns County Sheriff's Office regarding drug activity in the Bugscuffle area resulted in a traffic stop on Sunday, Dec. 17, at the intersection of Main Street and Bell Creek Road in the City of Hiawassee.

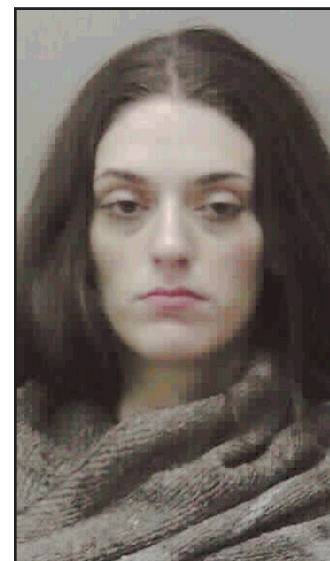
Probable cause was developed, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the confiscation of methamphetamine, which field-tested positive, as well as a handgun.

The occupant of the vehicle was determined to be a convicted felon and was arrested.

William David Ledford, 48, of Hiawassee, was charged with possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possession of meth-



William David Ledford



Katelyn Ruth Ensley

amphetamine, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and possession of a firearm

during the commission of a crime, all felonies.

See Drug Arrests, Page 6

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Lake Levels

BASKETBALL

Towns Food Pantry Hours See page 2



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Blue Ridge 1,669.10
Chatuge 1,918.50
Nottely 1,762.47

1/6 4 PM
vs. Warren County

Love Light Scholarship See page 3

Top of GA Speaking Contest See page 5



You work hard for your money. Shouldn't it be working hard for you?

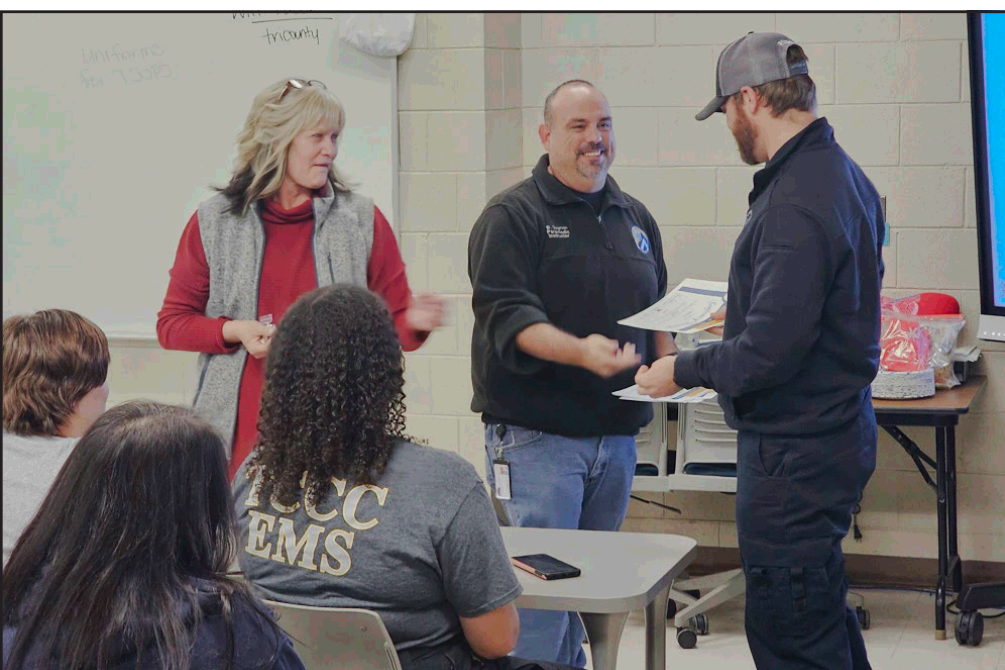
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Paramedics Graduate...from Page 1



Walker Ross receiving his paramedic certification upon graduating from Tri-County Tech. Photo/Submitted

when caring for pediatric patients and it becomes clearer just how much information there is to digest. "Once these skills are learned, students spend the rest of their hours riding in the ambulance with other paramedics," said Towns EMS Paramedic Supervisor Jay Chastain Jr. "They also do clinical hours in the emergency rooms with doctors and nurses, perfecting the skills." Finally, to earn their badge as certified paramedics in Georgia, students must pass the National Registry Test. Broken into two parts, the test includes a written portion that covers the fine details of patient care along with a "hands-on test" where students prove they

can perform those duties. Denton characterized the experience as "definitely one of the most challenging things I have ever done in my life," and Ross concurred: "Completing a paramedic program and meeting the demands that come with it is nearly too much." As for Chastain, seeing medical professionals advance their skillsets at Towns EMS is all part of providing a valuable service to the community and giving assurances to folks that they can count on someone having their backs when tragedy strikes. "We, as a service, strive every day to give the citizens and visitors of Towns County the best emergency care that can be provided," Chastain

said. Both new paramedics see the value in not only finding the strength to complete their studies - while holding down full-time jobs, no less - but in keeping the faith in returning to a difficult job that can put a strain on the emotions. "The reason I will continue to follow this career is simple - I love my community and have a duty to uphold a high standard of care to people on their worst day," said Ross, adding that he was proud of his peers and himself for the big accomplishment. "This job is more than just a job," Denton agreed. "You will not be rich, but it's not about the money; it's a labor of love."

Biggest Loser...from Page 1

for a laser skin tightening treatment, also on an area of their choice - valued somewhere around \$5,000.

Second Place will get \$1,500 off either a CoolSculpting or skin tightening treatment, and the Third-Place contestant will win a \$500 spa day.

There's room for 10 contestants to participate in the four-month plan, which will include weekly monitoring of diet and exercise. Contestants will have access to the spa's Fitness Center to cover physical activity and will keep a food journal to monitor how they choose to fuel their bodies.

"They have to be willing to share their journey, either via social media or the newspaper, and they have to sign a photo release," Bryant added. "It's really all about the contestants and their journey and how they get there."

Anyone who takes on the challenge will also have access to weight loss medication, specifically the generic form of Mounjaro, aka tirzepatide.

This medication helped Bryant lose 34 pounds of her own, which she has kept off for a year now, and the spa's Medical Director has recommended the prescription to her clients since it was approved for use in the United States in May of 2022.

"It's compounded with B-12, so it cuts down on the side effects, and that's what helped me lose the weight," Bryant said, sharing that she suffered from disruptive side effects after trying other medications.

"If people are coming in looking for a quick fix, this is not for them; I don't believe in quick fixes," Bryant continued. "I don't believe in losing 15 pounds in one week - I don't think that's a very

healthy way. I think slow and steady wins the race."

In Bryant's experience, exercise played a pivotal role in turning her life around, and the same will be true of "Biggest Loser" contestants. While they can practice at home or in the Fitness Center, the execution of each tailored plan will be monitored as part of their experience.

"It's really completely customizable," assured Bryant. "Of course, I wouldn't give a 30-year-old the same workout I would give a 60-year-old and vice versa."

That said, there is no age limit on joining. Anyone who feels like giving the program a try can come to a full fitness consultation with Bryant as part of their free application, which also includes filling out a health questionnaire.

Part of that first meeting will include a sample menu plan; Bryant is not a registered nutritionist, but she can offer nutrition guidance, and clients are allowed to tweak their plans within reason.

Strictly speaking, Bryant explained that there were no prerequisites "as long as the client is healthy (and) does not currently take any diabetes medication," as tirzepatide is contraindicated for use alongside diabetes treatments.

If clients decide they're interested in becoming contestants, they do have to understand that some payments are necessary. Their medication will come at a discount; normally, a month's worth of tirzepatide costs \$350, but contestants only have to pay \$300 monthly.

Along with that, Bryant wants to ensure that participants "have some skin in the game" to discourage simply quitting, so there's an initial fee of \$1,200 that includes access to the Fitness Center,

weekly weigh-ins and health consultations.

Those lacking in funds need not fear, however, as Bryant said she accepts payment plans. She encourages clients to work with the Cherry Payment Plan app so that plans are qualified the same day and payments only count toward soft credit checks.

"All you have to do is pay your first payment to get it," Bryant said. "I offer Care-Credit, I take Health Savings Accounts, Flexible Spending Accounts - I take it all."

Overall, Bryant wants to fully dedicate herself to being there for her clients, hence the 10-person limit.

"I'll be there if they need some encouragement - if they just need to call me and say, 'Hey, this week sucks.' I'll be there for them, to hold their hand, because I've been there," Bryant said.

"They're coming to somebody who not only has 29 years in the health and fitness industry, but I've personally been there, so I understand," continued Bryant, adding that she doesn't want contestants to feel judged by the process.

"I mean, stuff happens, you know? Life happens, and sometimes it's beyond our control and tragedies strike. And people go through emotional ups and downs, and our weight fluctuates with that," reassured Bryant. "I'm there to help them. I'm there to serve."

To book a consultation, email kristi@chatugemedical-spa.com or stop by physical located at 144 N Main Street in Hiwassee. The spa can be reached by calling 706-963-3053 and is open Monday through Thursday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Friday and Saturday by appointment.

And for more information, visit <https://www.chatugemedspa.com/>.

Iota Iota Attends Beta Sigma Phi Christmas Luncheon



(L-R): Marie Fertitta, Lois Wiley, Jeanee McJiton, Sally Shuck, Jan Valencia, Carolyn Southard, LuAnn Nutt, Kathy Ross, Robin Zimmerman, Helen Teboe

Ten members of Iota Iota attended the Beta Sigma Phi North Georgia Christmas luncheon held at Brasstown Valley Resort on December 16th, 2023. Preceptor Alpha Gamma of Cumming, a member of the Metro Atlanta Council hosted the event.

There were approximately 100 Beta Sigma Phi sisters who came from all over Georgia, parts of Tennessee, North Carolina, and Alabama. Kappa Alpha of Blairsville was at the luncheon too. It's

always nice to socialize with our Blairsville sister chapter. The first hour members were given the opportunity to try their luck on raffles, buy pecans, and other merchandise.

The event was opened with everyone repeating the opening ritual and saying the Beta Sigma Phi grace. There was a wonderful array of food at the buffet table which was cumulated with coffee and bread pudding.

After eating and visiting, a game of Christmas Triv-

ia was held. All of the sisters in attendance learned some new trivia. Although we didn't have the most correct answers, Iota Iota got eleven and got to pick up prizes.

Robin Zimmerman won one of the raffle baskets and Jan Valencia won one of the 50/50s. Jan was ready to go out and Christmas shop!

A chapter from Tennessee was raking in basket winnings that it was suggested they go to Murphy and play at the casino. NTJm3Z13CA

Drug Arrests...from Page 1

He was also charged with misdemeanor possession and use of drug-related objects.

In a separate incident on Saturday, Dec. 23, Sheriff's Office drug investigators received a tip of a suspicious vehicle containing drugs in the Marathon gas station parking lot on Highway 75 North.

The vehicle was located along with a suspect. Probable cause was developed, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the confiscation of Suboxone strips, methamphetamine that field-tested positive, and drug-related objects.

Katelyn Ruth Ensley, 22, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends "the hard work of our drug investigators and patrol deputies for their continuing success in our fight against drugs."

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



The Towns County Sheriff's Office confiscated meth and a handgun in a drug arrest Dec. 17. Photo/Facebook

Ethics Complaint...from Page 1

collecting in Trailful's foundation.

And rejection of the loan – ultimately approved by the council at a later date – would have presented a significant problem for Trailful, as the owners were seeking a written commitment from the city to fix the drainage issue before they completed the purchase of their building.

The Trailful owners did not attend the Dec. 15 hearing, during which Scherer maintained he had done nothing wrong, and that the beliefs he imparted were not obtained via his official capacity but through personal observations he had made of city officers in recent public meetings.

Hiawassee-based attorney Larry Sorgen chaired the meeting for the Ethics Board, with assistance from fellow Board Members LaJean Turner and Pam Greene.

Sorgen said he did not see what Scherer had to gain from conveying information that might make the business owners decide not to purchase the building from their landlord.

And though the landlord had decided to sell the building following the conclusion of the business' three-year lease, Scherer said there were no other buyers lined up for the property should Trailful pass on purchasing it.

Continuing, Scherer said he considered the Trailful owners to be his friends and simply wanted to share his opinion, as their property manager, about the fate of the city project next door so they would be as informed as possible going into their purchase.

The board heard statements from multiple witnesses, including two fellow members of the Building &

Planning Committee who said the Paris Buildings did not come up in committee until Hiawassee City Councilwoman Anne Mitchell attended their Nov. 8 meeting.

Mitchell, who left the council at the end of 2023 after deciding not to seek another term, attended the planning meeting to voice her concerns about Scherer's actions on Oct. 13. She is the sister of Oliver, who filed her complaint five days after Mitchell went to the committee meeting.

Upon hearing all evidence at hand, the Ethics Board went into closed session to discuss the complaint.

Members reconvened to announce they had found no violation of the city's Code of Ethics, as the evidence did not support the charge that Scherer had used privileged information to further a private interest either "of his own or of his employer, the owner of the

building."

"In fact, if anything else, it would have been contrary to their interests to have given that information," Sorgen said. "Whether or not that information was public, we don't really have any evidence that that was ... information not available to the general public, his belief of what (the council was) going to do."

"Everybody knew there was a brouhaha stirring about (the Paris Buildings) and what the city was going to do about the project. So, the fact that he expressed his personal belief about what may happen is his right as a citizen."

The board said that the parties to the complaint could appeal the finding to the Towns County Superior Court. Oliver told the newspaper that she would not be appealing because she respected the board's decision, so the matter is now considered closed.

Had an ethics violation been affirmed, the Ethics Board would have only been



Resident Maggie Oliver said she respected the Hiawassee Ethics Board's decision regarding the complaint she filed against Scherer as a city official, which he successfully defended against.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

empowered to recommend tee – a recommendation the Scherer's removal from the council would have been free Building & Planning Commit- to accept or reject.

Home Alone...from Page 1

ones who came," Parker said. "With it being our first event and (having) limited time for advertising, I would call the event a total success."

The idea for the Christmas Eve Social came to Parker after serving the children and families of Towns County through Shop With a Hero earlier last month.

While reflecting on that event, he noticed a group of community members that often go unseen – those who have lost a spouse or partner, don't have family coming for

the holidays or have otherwise ended up alone during Christmas.

"For so many years we have (helped) kids and families, and it was just one of those things that was burdening me, because there are a lot of people in our community that are alone and don't have anybody," Parker said. "So, I wanted to do something for them – give them an opportunity to come and kind of brighten their holiday a little bit."

But having only come

up with the idea on Sunday, Dec. 17, Chief Parker and his team had just a single week to organize and promote the heartfelt Christmas dinner.

Securing a venue took a few days, but thanks to Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Towns County Recreation Director Stuart Nichols, Hiawassee PD was able to set up in the Conference Room of the Recreation Center at Foster Park.

And already, Parker and the Police Department are planning for next year, which will give them plenty of time to spread the word about the effort.

"It was our goal to let those who weren't able to spend the holidays with family become part of our family," he said. "We just want to let the community know that we are here for them."

"We take an oath to uphold the laws of the state of Georgia; we're out here to serve our community, and we couldn't do our job without (them). So, we just want to give back to our community however we can and help serve them during difficult times."

On behalf of the entire Hiawassee Police Department, Parker thanks everyone who made events like this one possible throughout the year, and he wishes the people of Hiawassee a Happy New Year in 2024.

Towns County Lions Club celebrates Christmas with music



The Towns County Lions Club's last 2023 meeting on December 12 was an old fashioned sing-a-long Christmas celebration led by McConnell Baptist Church's Associate Pastor Danny Byers and Pastor of Children and Discipleship Steve Awtrey who played acoustic guitars and led the singing of many familiar and favorite Christmas songs.

Once again, Daniel's Restaurant in Hiawassee hosted a special, splendid and spectacular dinner which gave the audience even more reason to enjoy the evening.

The Towns County Lions Club's fabled, fabulous, famous and fantastic Decorations Committee outdid themselves with the famed, festive and fine Christmas party meeting table arrangements. A thousand thoughtful thanks go to Kathy Carlson, Sybil Davis, Nancy Dearborn, Janie McConnell, Martha Meeks, and Susan Willrich.

President Danny Meeks thanked all the Lions who helped with the stupendous and successful 2023 'Give A Christmas' Campaign, most



(L-R): Steve Awtrey and Danny Byers

especially the committee chairs, Julie Payne and Diane Williams.

Club Membership Chair Sybil Davis encouraged the Lions to seek out new members in 2024 to continue to grow and strengthen the club's goals and ranks.

Georgia Mountain Fair General Manager Hilda

Thomason thanked the Lions for their steadfast, strong support of the 2023 schedule and urged the same for 2024. The Pride of the Towns County Lions is the Fair!

The Towns County Lions Club and the Georgia Mountain Fair wish you and yours a very Happy New Year! Let's Roar and Soar in '24!



Happy New Year from Movers and Shakers, Next Meeting is January 12th

The Mountain Movers and Shakers take off this Friday, January 5, but resume our regularly scheduled Friday morning meetings at 8 AM at the inviting Sundance Grill on January 12 with Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

Start making plans to be there January 12 as Commis-

sioner Bradshaw reports on the courthouse remodel, the state of the county, past accomplishments and future goals.

Don't miss your opportunity to hear directly from the top elected official in Towns County, and have your questions answered by Commissioner Bradshaw on Friday, January 12.