

# Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

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75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 93 Number 10

Wednesday, January 5, 2022

## Indians win second consecutive 'Battle of the States'

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The 27th Annual Battle of the States Christmas Basketball Tournament ran Dec. 28-30, culminating in the Towns County Indians claiming victory for their second consecutive tournament.

Last year's tournament was canceled due to COVID-19, but the Indians were Battle of the States Champions for the 2019-2020 season as well.

Towns County High School hosted the three-day journey that welcomed teams from multiple states in the northern region of the Southeast.

### DAY 1 - LADIES

The Lady Indians played first against the Pendleton, South Carolina, Bulldogs. Pendleton gained the first 3

points of the game from the tipoff, and shortly thereafter, junior Morgan Pierson got the first 2 points for Towns.

Sophomore Laura Mauldin, sophomore Halie Arrowood, junior Sarah Shook and freshman Kaleigh Beaver were the scorers throughout the game, though the ladies lost in the end by 56-37, knocking them into the consolation round for the next day's games.

"We struggled offensively and turned the ball over way too much with bad habits trying to throw the ball through their hands," Girls Head Coach Shea Taylor said. "Going into the tournament, win or lose the first round, you have to be ready to play two more games, and the goal now is to get mentally focused to bounce back for the next one."

See *Indian Champs*, Page 6A



Congratulations to the Towns County Indians for earning their second consecutive championship title at the annual Battle of the States Christmas Tournament Dec. 30. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Riley retires from Fire Dept. after 22 years of service



L-R: Towns Fire Station No. 5 Capt. Royce Nicholson, retired Volunteer Firefighter Frank Riley and TCFA Banquet Chief Jerry Nicholson at last month's Fire Department Christmas Dinner and Awards Banquet at McConnell Baptist Church. Photo by Linda Riley

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Georgia-native Frank Riley may not have grown up in Towns County, but his roots are here, as is his heart.

Currently living at his ancestral homeplace on the Hiwassee River, Riley spent the summers of his youth here helping on his grandpa's farm. And though his career took him all over Georgia and

Florida, he ended up returning to inhabit his family home in Towns, affectionately dubbed Mountain Scene.

Riley is the executive director of the nonprofit Chestnut-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council. He also serves as the Georgia liaison for Firewise USA and as a member of the Appalachian RC&D Fire Adapted Communities Coalition.

And up until a month

or so ago, Riley was a volunteer firefighter with the Towns County Fire Department for 22 years.

To say that Riley is concerned about the welfare and preservation of the area's resources, and by extension, the welfare and safety of its inhabitants, would be an understatement, as Riley has taken things a step or two further than mere concern.

"I wanted to give back."

See *Riley*, Page 6A

## Fairgrounds makes New Year's bright with fireworks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is known for brilliant displays of festive cheer no matter the season, and the final day of 2021 saw an especially fantastic spectacle of fireworks in celebration of New Year 2022.

Even before getting into the fairgrounds proper, animated waving nutcracker soldiers welcomed revelers toward free parking spaces, serving as a preview of the "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights" show featuring vendors for guests to enjoy that Dec. 31 evening.

The sweet smell of fresh donuts was heavy at the gate, but a feast for the ears was also present in the form of live music with an '80s theme courtesy of local group Our Way Band.



A little rain didn't stop area New Year's Eve celebrations, including the fireworks show at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Walking around the village itself was like experiencing something straight out of a fairytale, with lights of all colors wrapped around tree trunks.

The weather was drizzly, with no shortage of um-

brrellas and raincoats, which, unfortunately, resulted in some changes to the schedule, as the Blairsville Cruisers Car Club was unable to make the event due to the risk the inclement weather posed to the classic. See *Fairgrounds New Year*, Page 6A

## Brasstown Valley celebrates with New Year's Eve Gala



Brasstown Valley Resort guests celebrated new beginnings with a "Winter Wonderland"-themed gala New Year's Eve, pictured here during the midnight balloon drop. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On the eve of 2022, Brasstown Valley Resort and Spa held its popular New Year's Eve Gala, an annual tradition since 1995 helping people from all over North Georgia and the surrounding area to bring in the New Year with style.

The theme of the evening was "Winter Wonderland," and it was certainly a wonderful environment filled with excellent catering service,

a slew of alcoholic beverage choices, amazing musical performances by the Atlanta Production Band, and people cutting loose after a stressful year, all in an elegant and exquisite atmosphere of suits and dresses.

General Manager Charles Burton has been with the resort since April of 2006 and was surging with energy for the night's festivities that attracted all kinds of people wanting to get out and celebrate the dropping of balloons at midnight to usher in 2022.

"I think everyone has a fair amount of COVID fatigue from the past two years, and everyone wants to just enjoy themselves and have a good time," Burton said. "The thing that has separated this year from others is that our attendance is up."

"People are tired of staying at home. We have our local community and travelers from all over come out, and this (event) is the best way to end the year on a happy note."

"The reason we continue

See *Brasstown New Year*, Page 6A

## COVID-19 continues to spread in new winter surge

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

North Georgia is experiencing a new COVID-19 winter surge, potentially driven by the omicron variant that has been sweeping the U.S. and much of the globe.

No cases of the latest viral strain had been reported here by press time, and hospitalizations, while increasing, had yet to reach the same volume as the recent delta wave from August and September that saw record levels of inpatients admitted to Union General Hospital.

In addition to other seasonal respiratory viruses making the rounds alongside COVID, utilization of the state's free drive-thru coronavirus testing site at Union General has gone up dramatically in the last two weeks, resulting in a more than 100% increase in people being tested of late.

At the state level, Georgia is reporting new record numbers of COVID cases compared to the previous record set during the last winter surge in January 2021, and nationally, the number of daily new cases shot past 300,000 for the first time ever last Thursday.

But glimmers of hope can be seen, as cases seem to be outpacing hospitalizations and deaths in many places relative to previous surges, potentially pointing to less severe illness overall after a year-long vaccination campaign and almost two years of people developing



Dr. Samuel Le Church  
Synergy Health

immunity through infection. The Georgia Department of Health. See *COVID-19 Spread*, Page 5A

## More wintry precipitation could be heading to Towns



A caravan of Florida residents stopped on the side of Swanson Mountain in Young Harris Monday morning to enjoy the snow. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Most Towns County residents woke up to a not-quite Winter Wonderland on Monday, as the season's first snowstorm dropped a little more than half an inch of the fluffy

white stuff by sunup.

Sub-freezing temperatures to start the week were certainly a change from what has been an unseasonably warm start to winter, with New Year's Day reaching more than 70 degrees less than 48 hours earlier.

But warm winter weather

is on its way out — for this week, at least — with forecasted highs dipping into the 40s, and lows consistently below freezing and potentially into the teens, plus chances for more wintry precipitation late Wednesday night, Thursday and early Friday.

See *Wintry Weather*, Page 6A

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**SPORTS**  
BASKETBALL  
1/7 @ Washington-Wilkes  
5:30 pm  
1/8 vs. Highlands, NC  
6 PM

**CVB Board Meeting**  
Jan. 11  
See page 5A

**Young Harris Eastern Metal Expansion**  
See page 1B

**Paris Business Center Request for Proposal**  
See page 6B



