

Winter Storm...from Page 1A



Heavy winds in Saturday's storm blew over figures from a Nativity scene of a church at the old EMC headquarters. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

blew down along Main Street in Hiawassee, and storm debris lay everywhere, including limbs, sticks and leaves scattered in the intensity of the storm.

Towns County Emergency Management Agency Director Brandon Walls said the county received no reports of injuries or major damage, but mostly downed trees, blocked roads and utility outages.

The Towns County CodeRED Weather Warning system alerted residents of a severe thunderstorm warning issued by the National Weather Service that evening.

According to the weather

service, such a warning is issued when a severe thunderstorm "is happening or is imminent in the warning area."

"Severe thunderstorms have wind 58 mph or higher and/or hail 1 inch or larger," according to the weather service, which asks that people "seek shelter inside a sturdy building, away from windows" during thunderstorms.

Residents can sign up for local weather alerts by visiting TownsCountyGA.org/emergency-alert-system.html.

Towns County uses CodeRED to send EMERGENCY notifications by phone, email, text and

social media to keep citizens informed of emergencies such as evacuation notices, utility outages, water main breaks, fire or floods, chemical spills, or other emergency situations," according to the website.

"Towns County also uses CodeRED Weather Warning," the website continues. "CodeRED Weather Warning is a unique service that automatically notifies citizens in the path of severe weather just moments after a warning has been issued by the National Weather Service. The CodeRED Weather Warning is available to you at no cost."



The Hiawassee Town Square suffered some wind damage Saturday, including this downed light pole and some stage damage. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



These fallen trees blocked one end of the road leading to Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales' house over the weekend. Photo/Submitted

FBLA...from Page 1A

be advancing to state level competitions! The following students competed at RLC:

Kenzie Livingston in Public Speaking; True Youngblood in Intro to Public Speaking; the team of Jamison Wood and Chase Reece in Emerging Business Issues; Jessica Taylor in Computer Applications;

Kindra Bryant in Client Service; Lelia Barnard in Spreadsheets; Ivie Davenport

in Spreadsheets; the team of Vanessa Floyd and Bazya Smith in Business Ethics; Abby Mauldin in Word Processing;

Will McConnell in Word Processing; Maci Walls in Word Processing; Will McConnell in Financial Math; Layne Rouse in Financial Math; and Zion Calhoun in Business Communications.

Congratulations to all competitors who gave generously of their time

and dedicated themselves to representing our chapter with excellence. Your academic preparation and effort are reflected in your success.

The FBLA State Leadership Conference and Competitions will be held March 20-22 in Atlanta. Three additional competitors from TCHS FBLA will be joining the regional winners to compete in "straight-to-state" events at state conference.

Good luck, Towns County FBLA!

Indictments...from Page 1A

methamphetamine.

Tammy Bokstrom Lawler, possession of methamphetamine; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects.

Matthew Alexander Abernathy, obstruction of an officer; driving under the influence (less safe) (alcohol);

failure to maintain lane; open container.

Steven Michael Hildebrandt, crossing the guard lines with drugs; two counts possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm by convicted felon; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; driving without a

license; improper use of central lane.

Nathan Brice Garrett, burglary in the second degree; criminal damage to property in the second degree; three counts theft by taking.

Christopher Preston Watts, possession of a Schedule I controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects; defective windshield.

Phillip Christopher Shane Ray Willis, possession of a Schedule I controlled substance.

Jessie Wade Nicholson, burglary in the first degree; theft by taking; theft by deception.

Charles Marion Adams, manufacture of marijuana.

Nathan Christopher Adams, criminal trespass.

Shon Moxley, possession of methamphetamine; defective windshield.

Board of Ed...from Page 1A

elementary school includes a new roof and student drop-off canopy, several pieces of equipment in the kitchen, auditorium renovations, flooring, and new heating and air conditioning units, Chastain said.

Chastain met on Dec. 10 with a survey team from the Georgia Department of Education to talk about the new plan, which the Department of Education approved for review by the Towns County Board of Education.

With the board's approval during the meeting that Monday, Chastain said the plan will be sent back to the state for final approval.

The state's survey team commended the school board, superintendent and staff for maximizing the effective use of capital outlay funds for its recent renovations to provide safe and well-maintained instructional facilities for students and staff, Chastain said.

As the school system remains debt-free, Chastain said the state further commended the school board and superintendent for being fiscally responsible, with the state also commenting that Towns County Schools were fortunate to have E-SPOST funds.

It's important to note that the five-year plan is just that: a plan. Depending on how far current E-SPOST collections can be stretched and what other funds become available in the next five years, the schools may have to wait a while before implementing all of the items in the plan.

The school system's voter-approved E-SPOST is set to cease collections starting in October, and it will likely be several years before the schools consider seeking another E-SPOST referendum.



Towns County Schools Facilities Director/Federal Programs Director Erica Chastain delivered a presentation in the Jan. 6 school board meeting. Photo by Chad Stack

In other business, Curriculum Director Stephanie Moss discussed the upcoming needs assessment and improvement plan for Fiscal Year 2021.

"For the past three years, we've looked at this model the federal government has given us for (Title I school improvement plans), and we've used that," Moss said, outlining the process. "So, we got stakeholder feedback and reviewed it and revised our strategies and improvement goals, and (we) looked at our needs and strategies and used that to create our federal programs improvement plan."

Moss is planning to host a dinner for 50 stakeholders to receive feedback for the upcoming federal plan. Once all the data has been collected, she will work with the board to develop three to four new goals for the FY21 needs assessment and improvement plan to improve the schools.

As Title I schools, Towns County's elementary, middle

and high schools receive federal funds due to the "numbers or percentages of poor children to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards," per the Georgia Department of Education.

Also during the meeting, High School Principal Roy Perren talked about the recent success of the Indians Basketball Team, which won the school system's first Battle of the States Christmas Tournament in December.

Perren also recognized the newest member of Towns County's 1,000 career points club, junior Kolby Moss. Joining Moss in the meeting was Head Basketball Coach Rob Benson and Assistant Coach Allen Rogers.

The Towns County Board of Education will meet again on Monday, Feb. 3, at 6 p.m. inside the Towns County Middle/High School Media Center and Library.

City Council...from Page 1A

served on the Hiawassee City Council for 12 years, and he said last week that he was "glad to be back involved with city government again."

A lifelong resident of Hiawassee, Chastain said he sought City Council re-election to give residents and property owners a local voice, and moving forward, he said he's looking to make infrastructure one of his top priorities.

"We've already got the sewer started, and we need to go ahead and finish that, settling the deal with the (Towns County) Water Authority," Chastain said. "Basically, I came back to help."

Continued Chastain, "Now that I'm back, I hope that I can support that and add to it with my knowledge and support of the city. Liz has done a good job. Some of the stuff I agree with, some of the stuff I don't agree with, but we're not here to agree."

"We're here for the people in the city and the betterment of the city."

The mayor said Chastain's return will benefit the city, as he has been around a long time and retains a wealth of information.

Also in the meeting, Ordiales spoke on her recent announcement that the Georgia Department of Transportation had finally approved a crosswalk at Chatuge Regional Hospital on Main Street, as previously reported.



After leaving the council two years ago, Councilman Jay Chastain Jr. took his old seat to conduct city business last week, pictured here with Councilwoman Amy Barrett. Photo by Chad Stack

Ordiales received the news last month from District 1 Traffic Operations Supervisor Shane Giles of GDOT, and she is thankful to Giles and GDOT Assistant Traffic Engineer Jason Dykes for their work securing the crosswalk for the city, which she sees as a major win for public safety.

The handicap accessible crosswalk will likely be similar to the one just up the street at the Hiawassee Post Office, though the hospital crosswalk will undoubtedly feature the latest technology compared to its 2016 counterpart.

"They are going to pick up the cost of everything, the lights and the striping," Ordiales said of GDOT. "We are going to split the cost with the hospital to make the sidewalk

(Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant."

Ordiales had yet to receive formal cost estimates for the ADA sidewalk project by press time, though she said the price for the city would probably be around \$3,000-\$4,000.

In other business, Ordiales spoke with anticipation about the city's first work session of 2020 on Monday, Jan. 27, at 6 p.m. upstairs in the training room inside City Hall, where she will hold a 2019 year-in-review presentation.

Following the work session, the council and mayor will convene for their next regular meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 4, at 6 p.m. inside City Hall.

Elections...from Page 1A

yet fully disclosed.

There's been some concern around the state about pickup of old voting machines and delivery of new equipment in time for installation and training ahead of the March 24 Presidential Preference Primary, but Elections Board Chair Janet Oliva said Towns is actually ahead of most counties in that regard.

The old Diebold voting machines have already been picked up by the Secretary of State's Office, and local officials learned last week that the new voting machines, printers and scanners will be delivered on Jan. 23.

In yet another welcome recent development, Oliva said the board office was able to acquire a training manual for poll workers, so it looks like the state is starting to catch up on its rollout of HB 316 provisions.

And the Towns County Board of Elections Office is doing its part to stay on top of the new requirements in a busy election year.

"The Secretary of State's Office requires that everyone that works in an elections office must complete cyber security training that was prepared by Homeland Security," Oliva said. "All three in our office have completed that. We have certificates, so we have complied

with that requirement.

"Also, we did the new equipment training in Macon in October. We did the Poll Pad training in Calhoun on Dec. 2. And we went to the state combined conference for registrars and elections officials, which was Dec. 7-11.

"Lastly, everyone in our office has official certifications through the state. Rachel Edwards is now certified as a state registrar and an elections official. She has both certifications.

"I have both, and Carolyn Chastain, our part-time employee, is certified as a registrar. So, we all have the state certifications to be able to manage elections."

Edwards and Oliva will be traveling to Lumpkin County on Jan. 17 to attend the state's last scheduled new equipment training before elections begin. This will be the final new equipment training required for election officials.

Oliva said that, though HB 316 presents a big challenge with the new voting machines and new voting process, she is confident that the 2020 elections will run smoothly thanks to her competent staff.

The board office is actively recruiting poll workers, and Oliva said a number of people have solicited poll

worker information on their own. Getting poll workers trained on the new machines and familiarized with the new process will be the next hurdle.

"We are needing at least 30 (poll workers) for the elections, looking at 10 per precinct," Oliva said. "And we're going to need three, by law, onsite at all times: a manager and two assistant managers."

Also in the Jan. 8 meeting, the board discussed an anonymous letter it had received claiming recently hired Elections Supervisor Rachel Edwards didn't live in Towns County yet still voted here.

The property Edwards lives on straddles the Towns/Union county line, and she has always voted in Towns County.

Following state law and guidance from the Secretary of State's Office, Oliva and County Attorney Robb Kiker were able to determine that Edwards fully met the residency requirements for Towns County.

This led the board to conclude that Edwards was certainly eligible to vote in Towns County, and that, furthermore, it would be considered a non-issue moving forward.

Following the regular meeting that Wednesday, the board held a previously advertised public hearing to discuss voter appeals or contested changes in voter status, of which there were none.