

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

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75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 94 Number 13

Wednesday, January 25, 2023

Hiawassee PD investigating graffiti vandalism

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Hiawassee Police Department is looking for a graffiti vandal who spray-painted vulgar and offensive messages at six Main Street locations between City Hall and the Something Special furniture store.

New Police Chief Jeremy Parker believes the vandalism occurred sometime between Saturday night, Jan. 14, and Sunday morning, Jan. 15.

He said Friday that the department suspects a single person committed the crime, with the investigation so far identifying one person of interest who has been in town for at least a couple of weeks, though

additional information was not available at press time.

The targeted locations spanned about a half mile stretch of US 76: outside the City Hall entrance, on a wall at the Dairy Queen Restaurant, the back of the Verizon building, on Eastgate Church, a police car at Thomas Tire, and then across the highway on a moving truck at Something Special.

Messaging included anti-police and anti-religious rhetoric in orange lettering, and Parker said the message scrawled on the church – “God isn’t real we made him up for money” – as well as Islamic references at the Dairy Queen are being looked at as a potential hate crime.

Hiawassee PD believes the person responsible is likely

younger, as one of the messages sprayed on the moving truck read “Skool suks.”

“It seems to be an isolated incident just in that area there,” Parker said, noting that no other businesses reported any damage. “We’re working closely with businesses in that area, (pulling surveillance footage that may show what happened).

“We’re asking that if the public saw anything around the Saturday night/Sunday morning timeframe, please reach out to us.”

Additionally, business owners who haven’t already checked are being asked to review any security footage to see if they can spot anyone suspicious in the area during the

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Graffiti on Eastgate Church in Hiawassee: “God isn’t real we made him up for money.” Photo/Facebook

Civic Association receives briefing by local leaders

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Civic Association members met at the Civic Center for their first bi-annual meeting of the year on Jan. 19 to receive insight into the past, present and future of the county.

“Our mission is to provide a platform for all residents in Towns County to address issues and problems of mutual interest which affect the management, planning and development of the county and its environs,” according to www.townscountycivicassociation.com.

Speakers for the evening included Towns County Historian Jerry Taylor, Rev. Fred Whitley, Young Harris College President Dr. Drew Van Horn, Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

Taylor of the Towns County Historical Society



Former YHC Chaplain Rev. Fred Whitley, who served in his position from 1980-2008, presented a moving history of the college and town of Young Harris in the Jan. 19 Civic Association meeting.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

began the meeting, fittingly, with the origins of the county, including a discussion of the very first inhabitants of the area: the Cherokee.

Despite their belief that

great evil resided in the West, the tribe was ordered to march, quite literally, through a veritable hell of starvation, disease and exposure to the elements

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Bradshaw updates group on county happenings

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Friday, Jan. 20, the Mountain Movers & Shakers held their weekly breakfast meeting to discuss community topics, welcoming as guest speaker Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw to relay valuable information to the public.

“I love being your commissioner, I love this area, and I love this community,” Bradshaw began. “Myself, Sheriff Ken Henderson and other elected officials here in the county are determined to keep our way of life the way it is.

“Even if I am not your commissioner, I’m never leaving here, because what I really do every day is just be pas-

See *Movers & Shakers*, Page 6A



Cliff Bradshaw
Sole Commissioner

North GA Tech congratulates GED recipients in ceremony



Six area students graduated with their GEDs in a ceremony earlier this month at North Georgia Tech Blairsville.

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – North Georgia Technical College recognized six outgoing students during its High School Equivalency Recognition Ceremony inside the Blairsville Campus Conference Center on Tuesday, Jan. 10.

The Adult Education Department of North Georgia Tech offers a range of free classes – including GED test prep – for adults 16 years and older who are residents of Fannin, Franklin, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White counties.

For Union and Towns students, such instruction takes place at the Shirley Miller Building next to the Union County Public Library.

That Tuesday, Elizabeth Gavel, Lauren Hogsed, Emma Kusch, Amber Reed, Amber Taylor and Erika Winkler each received their High School Equivalency diploma from NGTC President John Wilkinson, following remarks from Winkler and Dean of Adult Education Shelby Ward.

“This is a hard-earned achievement,” Ward said. “The GED is not an easy test. You can ask anyone that tried taking it, so these students have really accomplished a lot.”

Winkler, introduced by Adult Education Instructional Coordinator Paula Ary, stepped to the podium to address her fellow graduates, highlighting a journey that began with her departure from high school during 11th grade.

“Halfway through the first semester, I decided I was

going to night school to graduate early,” said Winkler of Fannin. “And since I’m standing here today, you all know I did not achieve that.

“I went to two different night schools but didn’t have the dedication to finish. I work a full-time job and eventually decided that I was OK with not finishing school.”

Winkler recalled the guilt she felt when her original high school class graduated. Ultimately, the fear and remorse of disappointing her family provided the motivation to try again.

“I was tired of feeling sorry for myself, and that is when I did the best thing I could possibly do and enrolled at North Georgia Tech Adult Education Center in Blue Ridge,” she said. “The help

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By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Occasionally, the Towns County Herald will conduct interviews with county residents and visitors going about their daily business around town to ask what is top of mind for them these days.

That’s how, last Friday, the Herald came to speak with a woman named Lucille out in the parking lot of the Dollar Tree in Hiawassee as she was heading in to get some general household necessities.

Asked if she perceived anything heading into an upswing for 2023, she replied, “only my attitude, but everything else seems to be still very difficult.”

“You can’t find good help, and it’s a lot of things that are not on the upswing yet, which is very sad, because it



Residents doing some shopping at the plaza near the Junction in Young Harris last week.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

doesn’t have to be like this,” she said. “Not just the workforce, everything – the people, the attitudes.

“I mean, for me, everything is an attitude, and I choose

to have a good attitude. I don’t care what’s going on, if I have a good attitude, I’m OK. I can’t help it if somebody else is having a bad day; if I can help them

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TCSO continues ‘war on drugs’ with two additional arrests

News Special
Towns County Herald

On Tuesday, Jan. 17, Towns County Sheriff’s Investigators set up a controlled “buy bust” for narcotics.

As a result, Tracy Joy Shook, 52, of Hayesville, North Carolina, was arrested. Investigators confiscated Ad-derall, a Schedule II controlled substance, and Shook was charged with felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance with intent to sell/distribute and felony possession of a controlled substance.

During the arrest, Nathan Allen Lemay, 50, of Hayesville, was also taken into custody. A search of his person revealed a large amount of a substance appearing to be methamphetamine. The substance field-



Tracy Joy Shook



Nathan Allen Lemay

tested positive for methamphetamine laced with fentanyl.

Lemay was charged with felony possession of methamphetamine and felony crossing guard lines with weapon/drugs/intoxicants.

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

Sheriff Ken Henderson said he is pleased with his drug investigators and their commitment.

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out of their bad day I will, that's all I can do.
 "Life as we know it will never be the same again because people are too afraid of who's doing this and who's doing that and 'Oh my God you've got a cold, don't come near me.' It's crazy due to increasing social anxiety and isolation, and if these stigmas stay, we're in big trouble.
 "I just go on living. At this point of my life, I should be retired, but I'm going to keep working because I'm healthy and I can do it. I don't see any reason to stop working; I enjoy it. My goal is just to stay healthy, keep doing what I'm doing, help anybody that I can, and just keep the Lord Jesus Christ first in my life, and everything else falls into place."

A short distance away, resident Phillip Haines was leaving a morning breakfast at the Sundance Grill, and he shared his thoughts about what he believes is going on from a national perspective.
 "Last year, it's been kind of rough," Haines said. "But then again, the way I see things and how this country is turning, I feel like, not right away, that it's going to end up going into a Civil War.
 "What I see now is the rogue policies and how they want to defund the police. I never thought I would see stuff like that. And think about how prices have gone up with groceries and other things, I feel like things have just gone down the drain.
 "The main problem with

it all is the politicians and their leadership; they've got their security and private airplanes, but they want to cut off things from us, and yet they aren't going to follow the rules.
 "They want to hurt people with jobs and get rich off of us and (make us) suffer but them not. Like when they closed that pipeline, that really hurt us."
 As a sales manager of a floor cleaning company, Haines said that his personal goals this year are to "set out to try and find more business accounts and stuff, which I've already gotten two new ones, and focusing on better health."
 "So, that's good, and every day I just try to remain happy and positive. I don't ever give up," he concluded.

ICL Upcoming Winter Classes

The Institute for Continuing Learning (ICL) at Young Harris College has announced courses for the Winter term. Most classes are two hours in length. Please be

advised courses have limited seating so it behooves you to register early.
Women Unwound: A Story of Feminist Literature-Zoom only by Mikala Jones. 4 Sessions, Thursdays, January 26 – March 9, 1 PM – 2:30 PM. Class is every other week - 1/26, 2/9, 2/23, 3/9.
Getting to Know Your Camera by Stephan Banakas. 5 Sessions, Thursdays, January 26 – February 23, 2 PM.
Delicious Whole Grain Baking by Ann Marie Stanczyk. 4 Sessions, Wednesdays Febru-

ary 15 – March 8, 9:30 AM.
Lets Make a Pillow by Shirley Deasy. 1 Session, Saturday, February 18, 10 AM – 3 PM with 1 hour lunch break.
Breath-Based Meditation and Stress Relief – Term Two by Mark Anderson. 4 Sessions, Mondays, February 20 – March 13, 1 PM.
Good Shepherd Church, 495 Herbert Hills Drive, Hayesville, NC.
 For more information please visit www.iclyhc.org for registration and detailed course information. NT(Jan25,A2)JH

TCSO Drug Arrests...from Page 1A

ment to the local war on drugs.
 Across Northeast Georgia, fentanyl and methamphetamine have been devastating to the area. Violent criminal drug cartels are responsible for drug smuggling into the United States.
 Sheriff Henderson and staff are committed to eliminating and controlling these extremely dangerous synthetic opioids and fentanyl in Towns

County, with officers working diligently to confront these issues and disrupt the supply and sales within the community.
 As part of its mandate, the Sheriff's Office has been targeting known high-level drug traffickers and local drug dealers who sell this poison and create further addiction as deputies continue to serve and protect to the best of their ability for Towns County.

Sheriff's Office arrested 84 individuals on felony drug charges in 2021. The number of arrested increased to 104 individuals in 2022 for a 23.8% increase in one year.
 "This increase reflects the impact on drug suppliers and dealers in Towns County," Henderson said. "These drug arrests are due to hard work and are a reflection on the Sheriff's Office staff and deputies."

Georgia Mountain Writers hold January meeting



(L-R): back: Chris Braun, Alan Cone, Ted Furlipa, James Davis, Jackie Volk, David Hourdequin; (front): Mary Cone, David White, Franklin Boulineau

The Georgia Mountain Writer's Club met January 4 at North Georgia Technical College to share fiction, memoir and essays. Optional topics for the month were New Beginning, End of the Line and Stranded.
 Several chose the New Beginning prompt:
 In "Wade in the Water," Jackie Volk describes a Christmas season that cannot possibly become more hectic... until a water main bursts in her church. The floors flood, the lights go out, the restrooms stop working, and services are moved onto YouTube. Nevertheless, friends who gathered in fellowship and prayer recognize that Christmas comes neither from stores nor church buildings, and that, in the spirit of the hymn, they will wade through to the other side.
 In Mary Cone's "This Diamond Ring," a young lady's quarrelsome temperament, a 90-pound catfish and a discarded engagement ring conspire to frustrate a romance that was, perhaps, not meant to be.
 In "Are You Ever Ready for a New Beginning," David White discusses New Year's and other resolutions. He observes that old habits are stubborn, that breaking them requires courage, and that we

ought to be generous in helping others start their own new beginnings.
 Several stories were based on the prompt, End of the Line:
 In Alan Cone's "The Ride into Abilene," a sour young lawman escorts a cattle thief to his execution. However, the prisoner has a few good tricks up his sleeve, and no intention of ending his career in Abilene.
 Franklin Boulineau shared his poem, "Satisfaction Unforeseen" in which he describes the restoration of an 1896 home to its original dignity and beauty. The eleven-year undertaking draws two people closer together, and it's dreamlike culmination brings them lasting joy and pride.
 James Davis "The Baron and the Castle," tells about helping a stranger find the location of the latter's ancestral origins, traced to a remote 16th century German castle. James finds the castle and drives him there. The owner, a baron, is at first very hostile to the uninvited men, but then invites the two Americans in for drinks, intrigued by a genealogy book detailing his family history. Offered a tour, James discovers that the owner has a priceless art collection of fa-

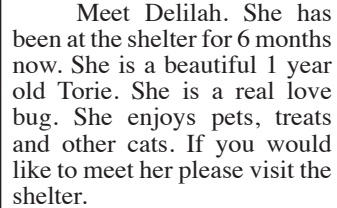
mous artists going back to the 1500's. Then they are offered to view the dungeon, which he politely declines.
 Chris Braun humorously considers each of the prompts, "New Beginning, End of the Line or Stranded," and the difficulty of choosing among them. Which should he pursue? More than one, perhaps? All three? Drat, his time is up.
 David Hovrdequin treated us to an autobiographical selection, "Low Country Memories." Few recollections compare to the bonding experiences between father and son. In this artistically rendered memoir, a young boy is introduced to the suspense and excitement of a first deer hunt.
 Our Wednesday, February 1 meeting will be held at 10 AM at North Georgia Technical College, just across Highway 76 from Meeks Park in Blairsville. Our room is located in the front of the main building, BLDG A, just off the large hall.
 Please limit reading time to five minutes so that all have a chance to present. Optional topics will be Making Do, Atonement and Narrow Escape, but feel free to write on whatever you like. Any questions, contact connie.rosenberry3@gmail.com. We hope to see you there! NT(Jan25,Z7)CA

NO PAWS LEFT BEHIND SAFE PET PROJECT PET of the WEEK

Hi there! My name is Marge. Nottely Oaks Animal Hospital and Safe Pet Project rescued me from being euthanized. I am a very lucky dog. I am in the "No Paws Left Behind" program and also just finished up my training at Colwell Detention Center. I graduated top of my class.
 I am a very happy and intelligent dog. I really love to play with children and seem to love everyone. I'm not quite sure what happened to my original owners. I must've gotten lost and too much time has passed. I'm totally vaccinated, spayed, and microchipped. I'm looking for a really good home that I can grow old in. Not only am I housebroken, I know several commands and I learn more each day. I'm extremely affectionate and love



belly rubs. I do give sloppy kisses and I'm sorry for that.
 I do much better being the only dog in the home since I'm not fond of sharing my water dish. I will definitely make you laugh so please come by and see me. If you're interested, call Debbie at Safe Pet Project 706-400-7075 Ext 2. NT(Jan25,Z9)CA



Meet Delilah. She has been at the shelter for 6 months now. She is a beautiful 1 year old Torie. She is a real love bug. She enjoys pets, treats and other cats. If you would like to meet her please visit the shelter.



Meet Hershey. He has been at the shelter for 5 months. Hershey is a fun loving guy that would love a new brother or sister. He loves toys. He needs a fenced yard with a family and lots of toys. If you would like to meet him, please call the shelter at 706-781-3843 to make an appointment.

All of the animals adopted from the Mountain Shelter are spayed/neutered, microchipped, have received preventative deworming and flea treatments, and all vaccinations (including rabies) appropriate for their age, as well as any other medical care required to make happy, healthy, pets. Please be sure to check out our website, www.pawsga.org. NT(Jan25,Z6)CA

Aid for Animals

Animal Rescue Financial Support, Inc. (ARFS) financially supports needy animals and those who care for them. Please help us care for homeless, hungry, and hurting animals by sending a donation to ARFS, P.O. Box 972, Hiawassee, GA 30546. All donations are tax deductible. Got questions? Email us at info@arfs-inc.org or call us at 762-294-9467. T(Jan25,A1)JH



VFW Bingo
 The VFW Post 7807 in Hiawassee has Bingo every Sunday afternoon at 2:30 PM. Doors open at 1:30 PM.

We are located on Highway 288, Sunnyside Road, Hiawassee, Ga. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us and have fun! Starting January 16. For more info call 706 896-8387. NT(Jan25,A1)JH

Veterans Thrift Store Volunteers

Veterans Thrift Store, a product of Club 66, 2641 Hwy. 66, Young Harris, GA is open from 10 AM to 4 PM, Wednesday thru Saturday, helping local veterans in our community. We are looking for volunteers to help with the thrift store.
 We are accepting gently used items: furniture, appliances, toys, clothes, etc. For details call 706-379-3774. NT(Jan25,Z2)CA

February Garden Chores from your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - Forsythia and quince are easy to force into bloom indoors. Cut branches when the buds show a touch of color and place them in a vase of water. They should bloom within a week or so.
 February is a good month to plant and transplant trees and shrubs. Prune flowering shrubs that flower before May just after they bloom; prune those that bloom after May prior to spring growth. Prune apple and pear trees. Continue dormant pruning; prune out any tree branches that are crossed, broken, or diseased.
 Observe Arbor Day by planting a tree on February 17th. In Georgia, Arbor Day is celebrated the third Friday in February.
 Fertilize established ornamental trees and shrubs always following label directions. Cut back butterfly bush to 12-18 inches to promote thicker growth and more blooms. Check the mulch around your landscape plants and add some if necessary. Trees and shrubs should have about a six-inch-thick covering layer of mulch. Prune overgrown broadleaf shrubs late this month.
 Prune evergreens. Do not severely prune pines,

spruce, or junipers as they are unable to generate new growth from old wood.
 If necessary, prune crepe myrtle by selecting 3, 5, or 7 main stems. Prune old seed heads and twiggy growth that grows from the base of the plant. Prune Clematis armandii immediately after it blooms.
 Flowerbeds - Fertilize spring bulbs as they emerge with 10-10-10, following label directions. Note gaps in plantings and plan fall bulb order. Prune ornamental grasses down to 12-18 inches to expose base of clump to sunshine.
 Prune climbing roses after the first flush of blooms. Now is a good time to tie main canes to a support before they leaf out and remove any stray canes.
 Divide ground covers that have become too thick and prune back liriop before new spring growth begins by setting your lawn mower to its highest setting and cut.
 Look for blooms on your Lenten rose (Hellebores orientalis). Keep faded flowers and weak growth removed from pansies and keep them well watered and fertilized.
 Soil Test - Take soil samples from your garden area in order to plan your fertilizer program. Contact your

County Extension Agent for instructions on having your soil tested. Prepare vegetable garden area for planting. Add fertilizer and lime if indicated by your soil test.
 Houseplants - An occasional lukewarm bath in the sink or shower is a tonic for houseplants that overwinter in hot, dry rooms.
 When the weather is extremely cold, close the window shades or place protective cardboard between houseplants and window glass to protect houseplants.
 Compost - Add any remaining leaves and garden debris to your compost pile if you have one. If you do not have a compost pile, start one.
 Miscellaneous - Clean out the old nesting materials in your bluebird boxes early in the month and they will be ready when the bluebirds are ready to nest. Feed birds and provide them with a fresh supply of water. Use cat litter or sand on icy sidewalks instead of salt. Too much salt can burn nearby plant roots.
 Service your lawn mower so it will be ready when you are for spring grass cutting.
 Jo Anne Allen
 Master Gardener
 Extension Volunteer
 (706) 400-8139

Hiawassee Graffiti...from Page 1A



Graffiti at the Dairy Queen property: "Allah is a lie/Have some bacon it's so good." Photo/Facebook

relevant hours.

"Once we're able to narrow down the timeframe, then we'll be able to see if (the perpetrator) appears on several different cameras and just continue the investigation there," Parker said.

Nearby dumpsters were searched last week, and while no spray cans were recovered, the chief is hopeful that the incident will remain an isolated one, especially since the occurrence has been prominently highlighted in local news and social media.

Regarding the anti-police rhetoric, Parker said that's

something officers are used to dealing with, as it has become more common in recent years for people to "spew out their anger toward law enforcement."

"It's disheartening that something like this would happen in our town," Parker said. "But we are aware of the changes that are coming to Hiawassee, and we just want everybody to work together and to be respectful of other people's property."

Parker and the City of Hiawassee are thankful to local business owner Steve Green of Pine View Buildings for offer-

ing a \$1,000 reward for information that leads to an arrest in the case.

"We are working diligently to solve this incident," Hiawassee PD said on Facebook Sunday. "If you have any information regarding this incident, please contact the Hiawassee Police Department at 706-896-2888."

The episode is reminiscent of an unsolved spray-painting spree from July 2020, which featured messages like "Kill All Cops" and "Death 2 Amerikkka" along a stretch of US 76 between Sunnyside Road and Papa's Pizza To Go.

GED Ceremony...from Page 1A

and support that I received there inspired me not to give up on my goal.

"While preparing for my test, I was offered the opportunity to dual enroll at North Georgia Technical College, where I chose to take the pathway to earn my criminal justice certificate. Being enrolled in the criminal justice program made me realize how much I wanted to be an officer.

"I am incredibly grateful to everyone at the Adult Education Center and everyone at North Georgia Technical College. I am blessed to have been given the opportunities that I've had. I truly believe that I would not be standing here today without all the help and

support that I received."

Once the graduates collected their diplomas from Wilkinson and turned their tassels from right to left, Dr. S. Vinson Burdette, Vice President of Student Affairs, led the Joint Enrollment presentation. Burdette recognized two graduates, Reed and Winkler, for completing their dual-enrollment certificates while earning their GEDs.

Reed earned a certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education in December and plans on enrolling in the Early Childhood diploma program at NGTC. Meanwhile, Winkler entered the Criminal Justice Specialist program in August and expects to finish

up in March.

Blairsville Campus Director Matthew Mashburn delivered the closing remarks, declaring the graduation exercises as one of his favorite NGTC events.

"This is only the second one I've attended, but I'm always impressed at how many friends and family members come to support you all," he said. "If there is anything we can ever do for you, please don't be a stranger. You're always welcome back here at any time."

For more information on taking advantage of these community resources, please visit <https://northgatech.edu/adult-education/>.

Civic Association...from Page 1A

that claimed thousands of lives.

"In other words, the Cherokee were given a free trip to hell under armed escort," narrated Taylor.

Early settlers won the divvied-up acreages in land lotteries, and Taylor encouraged folks with long local histories to go home, dig out their records, and look at the old documents that state things like the lot, district, and section numbers and the name of the winner.

Towns separated from its progenitor of Union County when its inhabitants wanted to "get to the courthouse, do their legal business like paying taxes, voting, getting a marriage license, recording their will, or whatever, and get back home before dark so they could do their chores."

The mountain people of "Hiwassee," as it used to be called, persevered over the years, but there has been a history of exodus after exodus for families struggling to earn a livable income.

Taylor finished with a rhyme written by one of his ancestors from Towns County, "What will we do? Where will we go? Ask someone else; I do not know."

Next, former Young Harris College Chaplain Rev. Fred Whitley lingered in the 19th century a bit longer to tell the story of the college's humble beginnings. The very first class, consisting of four boys and three girls, was held in 1886 on a cold January morning at a vacant storefront.

The prayer for God to watch over and bless the school was heard on that first morning, and several benefactors helped pave the way for future generations with funding for further development. In particular, Judge Young L.G. Harris gave enough money to construct a chapel.

"The school was soon named in his honor – Young Harris – and the town changed its name from McTyeire to Young Harris," explained Whitley.

For years, Young Harris served as a community school that could, in theory, see students grow from elementary school all the way through college. It wasn't until 1958 that the place became dedicated to higher education only.

The 1970s saw "new, energetic leadership" responsible for improvements like updated facilities and new learning centers. The sprawling plaza and a residency hall came along in the '90s to house a growing student body.

Whitley's own history with Young Harris began in the mid-1960s when he attended as a student. In 1980, he returned to teach classes on the Old and New Testaments and to become campus minister. It's worth noting that he remembers Trisha Yearwood as a student in one of his Old Testament classes.

During his service, Whitley ministered to many college students and their families. He always liked to close with one statement, which he repeated for those at the meeting:

"If you come to Young Harris College, you just may get more than what you need to make a living. You just may get a life – a whole, full, purposeful life that will make a difference. I did, and so have hundreds of others."

Upon Whitley's closing, Young Harris College's current president Drew Van Horn fittingly took the stage next to discuss the current status of the school and project the lofty dreams he holds for its future.

Van Horn credits his



Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong delivered a glowing report card for the school system in the Civic Association meeting last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

passion for learning to being the first person in his family to pursue higher education. Similarly, he believes the heritage of Young Harris is one of education, especially with a marriage to religion and spiritual understanding.

"We want folks with open, clear minds and warm hearts," Van Horn said of the campus.

Nowadays, YHC subscribes to something called the New American College Model. Such a creed follows the logic of surveying a community and focusing especially on its needs. The goal then becomes educating young folks to fill those needs wherever the chips may fall.

For Towns County, that has meant providing more programs and specialized courses to streamline degrees in recent years. For example, the Business in Public Policy Degree was split up into Business Administration, Marketing, and Finance. Additionally, students can become certified before entering the workforce for certain jobs, like financial planning.

And there are yet more possibilities on the horizon for upcoming scholars. Young Harris will be offering a Master of Science in Leadership and Supervision sometime around June of 2025.

Speaking of catering to the human aspect of society, Young Harris may soon offer a master's degree in Clinical Counseling. After last fall's semester saw nine students hospitalized for suicidal ideation, Van Horn was inspired to look into studies that would produce more helping hands for those suffering from mental disorders.

In other news, Young Harris will be opening a "microsite" in Fayetteville in August, as that community does not have a four-year college: "It (is) an agricultural area, and those students reflect an awful lot of what our students are," Van Horn said.

Finally, Van Horn aspires to open affordable low-income housing on land adjacent to the campus to serve as "housing for us to attract teachers, to be able to attract nurses, to be able to attract law enforcement, first responders" and other "young professionals."

Before college comes 12 or 13 years of standard schooling, and Towns Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong was there to discuss the statistics of Towns County Schools and where the system stands among surrounding counties. But he also took a moment to rewind.

During the early 2000s recession, Towns County was not spared from the lack of industry plaguing the rest of the nation. Because there were no jobs for parents, the system experienced a gradual dip in school population.

Although the current day still sees a small student body,

the Towns County School System scored among the highest contenders in Pioneer RESA in recent testing, and, according to Berrong, "as far as test rates go, we've been doing very well for a very long time."

To get an idea of how impressive that accomplishment is, consider that there are 13 North Georgia counties that make up the Pioneer RESA, or Regional Service Agency. That adds up to about 15 school systems working together to keep track of statistics, successes, and the specific educational needs of the communities that take part in the program.

In other words, Towns boasts a stellar reputation of going above and beyond, having one of the highest RESA scores in the state. 2022's graduation rate of 91.8% may be slightly lower than it has been in years past, but it's still higher than the average Georgia graduation rate of 84.1%.

Although he admits being heavily biased, having been a product of the local school system himself, Berrong truly believes that Towns County's success lies in the fact that its community has always been tightknit.

"It is just a big, large family here in Towns County," Berrong observed.

Last but not least, Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw offered a little bit of insight into what goes into keeping the county running. Bradshaw sees the frequent meetings between himself and the commissioners of neighboring counties as a learning experience.

"I came home and realized after the first time (the other commissioners and I) met, these other counties are facing the exact same problems we're facing as time goes on," he said. "You know, some may be a little bit different, but they're all basically the same."

"That is something that we're going to keep doing because it helps me to see what direction we need to go to fix some of these problems."

Just as Taylor's niche is history, and Whitley, Van Horn and Berrong care strongly for the education system, Bradshaw admitted his passion was in the county itself. This equips him for facing those problems, like strategically stimulating county growth while maintaining a "small-town feel."

On the subject of the future, Bradshaw said that "only God knows" what's in store for Towns County, but he reassured Civic Association members that he would do everything within his power to keep the spirit of the county alive.

"Look how much we have grown in recent times," Bradshaw said. "As your commissioner, I know what I want to see. I want to see a vibrant community. I want to see people who need to be working or have to work working or raising families; the retirement folks enjoying their life in a great area."

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sionate about our wonderful, intelligent and loving community."

Bradshaw then noted that "it's a mess at the Transfer Station right now because our route driver for Waste Management that hauls our trash is sick. They are trying to get another truck driver to bring us trailers, but they are having labor problems just like us."

Next, he informed people that he had just returned from a conference in Chattanooga, Tennessee, with the Association of Tennessee Valley Governments.

Bradshaw and Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Parris serve together on the ATVG Board of Directors representing Georgia with the Tennessee Valley Authority, which generates the power used by more than 10 million people in the region, including Towns County.

"An interesting note is that TVA and federal government are pushing electric vehicles heavy," Bradshaw said.

"They were talking about all the stations they're putting in to charge the vehicles and are putting everything towards green energy."

"I don't think we're going to see them in the rural areas like here as fast as you naturally would in the big cities, but according to what they're telling me, they're coming."

Switching gears again, Bradshaw spoke of a recent meeting he had with the Georgia Department of Transportation about his longstanding ask for a center turning lane on US 76 on the way to Young Harris.

"They are working on it," he said. "This project is turning out to be bigger and more complicated than they anticipated after them reviewing all their traffic studies alongside engineers. They're going to do it right by trying to acquire right-of-way after realizing some extra dangers."

"It's estimated to get started around 2024. Crooked Creek where the jail is at is set

to be repaved in 2026, and 76 right here all the way through will continue to patch it until 2029."

In conclusion, Bradshaw described the move to and ongoing operations at the Temporary Courthouse location at the Old Rec Gym as "absolutely smooth" while the main courthouse undergoes major renovations.

"We were moved in just a couple of days, and everything's working great," he said. "I give the most credit to God for all of it, but also to our other elected officials, our employees and every hard-working person for helping to make it happen."

The official move-in date for the new courthouse should be within 14 months, Bradshaw said.

Members of the Mountain Movers & Shakers non-partisan civic group meet weekly each Friday at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill, usually featuring a local guest speaker or two.