

## Iwo Jima...from Page 1A

Iwo Jima Vet for the thoughtful invitation.

For the last nine years, Johnson has chaired the Iwo Jima Anniversary Committee.

He was integral in getting the Memorial Statue commissioned and installed, and he has worked hard to make sure that the men who died in the battle he witnessed with his own eyes remain honored to this day.

Johnson said in the Jan. 15 meeting that, after nine long years, he would be stepping down as chairman of the Iwo Jima Anniversary Committee following this year's celebration.

Of course, he still plans to be involved, but Johnson will be turning 97 on March 7, and he said it was time for someone else – perhaps the Marine Corps League – to take over the organizational efforts of the annual Iwo Jima remembrance in Towns County.

For more information on the upcoming celebration, contact Walt Scott at 706-897-9610 or Johnson at 706-970-0195.

Looking back, a much younger Bud Johnson arrived offshore of Iwo Jima, Japan, aboard the USS Silverstein on Feb. 16, 1945.

He had earned the rank of Chief Petty Officer Third Class several months prior, and



**Iwo Jima Veteran Bud Johnson holding up a piece of correspondence from the White House.** Photo by Shawn Jarrard

as Chief Quartermaster of the ship, he held the wheel for three straight days as the entire crew of the destroyer escort went to battle stations.

Johnson and his fellow sailors in a fleet of more than 400 ships bombarded the island ahead of the Feb. 19 amphibious landing of the Fourth and Fifth Marine Divisions.

Every branch of the military was involved at the Battle of Iwo Jima, including the U.S. Coast Guard, which took Marines ashore.

The Marines captured

Mount Suribachi on Feb. 23, 1945, four days after the ground assault began, and Johnson witnessed both U.S. flag raisings from his ship at Iwo Jima.

Americans claimed victory at Iwo Jima more than a month later on March 26, 1945. Greater than 6,800 Americans died in the battle, and almost 20,000 were wounded.

The Japanese also sustained heavy casualties, with all but 200 or so of the 21,000 Japanese soldiers stationed there being killed in combat.

## Cornett...from Page 1A

“I think that there are three scenarios that could happen with football here. No. 1, we take 14 players to the same Region, and somebody’s going to get hurt. And half the team will quit after being beat senseless every game, so football dies.

“Second scenario, we do away with football and try to build up our youth programs so that, down the road, we have a program. I think football will die that way, too.

“Third scenario is, we play a non-Region schedule and play people our level. Still maybe go 0-10, but it’s not completely discouraging to the players so that they keep coming back to play.

“Those are the only three scenarios I see happening. Two of them aren’t good, one of them is the only option in my mind.”

The third scenario as outlined by Coach Cornett was the only option he viewed as viable for the future of the program, though he said he felt “restricted in that third option,” so he resigned.

“I just felt like, for the safety of our players, we have to go non-Region,” said Cornett. “And if that’s not an option, then I can’t in my right mind get off the bus leading them into something that’s not safe.”

For this same reason, no other potential coach has been willing to take on the position from within the school system.

There is definitely interest from outside the system, however, as the job has been posted to Teach Georgia, where more than 60 people have already reached out about the position.

School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said he agreed with Cornett that the situation wasn’t optimal, and that, if the team weren’t halfway into two-year contracts with 10 teams to continue with Region play, it’d be an easy decision to withdraw from Region 8A.

There are penalties for withdrawing from Region play early, such as \$1,000 per broken contract, plus a third of each team’s gate and concessions.

Cornett said that he believes there are ways around



**Coach John Cornett receiving an ice bath from his players following a past victory.** Photo by Lowell Nicholson

the fines, but that it’s up to the school system to decide what it wants to do.

Of course, there are still many variables at play: it’s too early to know whether or not more students will sign up to play football next year; any input from a new coach must wait until one is hired; and other schools need to be contacted to see if Towns County can come up with a new schedule in time.

As far as next steps, Berrong said the school was still evaluating its options, and that the system would ultimately do what was best for the kids.

“Coach Cornett did a great job,” said Berrong. “He came in and took our team to the first state tournament we’ve ever been to. It’s unfortunate that he’s leaving us.

“I wish he would stay and give us one more year to try to get out of this and continue what he was doing. I think everybody was happy with the job he did.”

Cornett’s football coaching resignation became official in the Jan. 14 meeting of the Towns County Board of Education. He is currently entertaining an opportunity to teach at his old high school – Class of 1992 – in Maine.

No matter what he decides, he said he’ll always value his days here in Towns County.

## Civic...from Page 1A

and computer science.

The college has partnered with other institutions in the areas of medicine, engineering and law. A student may, for example, study mathematics at Young Harris for three years, then, with a 3.2 GPA or higher, be automatically accepted into the University of Georgia’s engineering program.

Another thing that the college is doing to serve the region, said Van Horn, is making college affordable for students who might not otherwise be able to go to college.

“If you live within one of our adjoining five counties that are around us and you’re a commuter student, you can attend Young Harris for \$10,000 dollars a year,” he said. “If you get the HOPE Scholarship, you only pay \$5,000 dollars.”

Van Horn said one of the main goals of all these programs is to “grow our own” and to stop the “brain drain.” That is, to grow doctors, engineers, lawyers and skilled individuals locally and retain them right

here in North Georgia.

YHC Head Baseball Coach Stephen Waggener also took the floor to update the audience on Young Harris Baseball.

“Year one, I feel, was a major success – 26 (wins) and 24 (losses) doesn’t sound glamorous, but I want to tell you, it’s probably my favorite year in coaching so far, just watching everything come together,” said Waggener. “We had a lot of successes – national runner-up finish, (and) had another NCAA Division II World Series appearance.

“YHC qualified for the Peach Belt Conference tournament last year in baseball. This was the first time YHC qualified for the post-season since joining the NCAA. Our 15 Conference wins was also a school record since joining the NCAA.

“We swept Flagler, who was Top 10 in the nation at the time, right here on our home field.”

The Young Harris



**Dr. Drew Van Horn, president of Young Harris College**

Mountain Lions had a “walk-off” grand slam home run against UNC-Pembroke that ended up being the Peach Belt Conference Play of the Year.

“It was a really dramatic moment – probably the turning point of our season,” said Waggener.

Waggener said he is expecting big things for the team this year and in the years to come.

Chuck and Liza Strub updated the Civic Association on the progress of the Towns County Clean Sweep

## Flu Season...from Page 1A

reported 16 new septic permits – 10 less than the same quarter last year – two additions and four repair permits issued.

The current number of food service establishments in Towns County is 54, and there are 18 tourist accommodations in the county as well.

There were five rabies investigations with zero positive cases.

Deputy Director of Georgia District 2 Public Health Jonathan Terry presented the final draft of the newly revised rabies control rules to the board for a vote.

Previously, said Terry, the county’s rabies control rules did not match those of the state. New rules were drafted, and two public hearings were held. No objections were lodged.

The draft local rabies control rules were approved and

signed by all board members.

With Nurse Manager Rebecca Flanagan out on maternity leave, Dr. Logan gave the Nurse’s Report. There was a total of 603 patients for the quarter, down from 634 patients in the same quarter last year.

Logan attributed the drop in total patients to the shortage of staff. She said Flanagan is planning to hire a part-time nurse when she returns to work.

District Administrator Lisa Hocker, in giving the financial report, said that expenses are up significantly more than revenues for a couple of reasons.

First, pharmaceuticals were paid for in the first six months of the year. Those pharmaceuticals include the flu vaccines for last year’s flu season, she said.

Second, Roxanne Barrett’s retirement has increased expenses because of the money forfeited to her pension fund, which the state charges to the county.

“We’ll be looking at that and ways to help Rebecca and the staff serve our community more,” she said, which will help to increase revenues and offset expenses.

The good news is that there’s \$207,686 dollars in the General Fund as of Dec. 31, 2018, which is approximately five months of operating funds.

“I think \$207,686 in the fund balance is a pretty healthy fund balance,” said Berrong. “It’s the best shape we’ve been in since I’ve been on the board.”

## Whitener...from Page 1A

friends – Robert Atkinson, Renea Greiner and Michelle Seay.

All three women worked together at RiverStone Medical Campus in Blue Ridge, where Atkinson served as a pharmacist prior to opening Our Hometown Pharmacy in Blairsville.

According to Whitener, the four of them had decided on a whim to go out that evening to look at Christmas lights around the area.

When it came time to land about a half hour later, something must have gone wrong, though Whitener said she doesn’t remember.

“He was walking me through all the steps of how to land, and he was flipping all these switches,” said Whitener of Atkinson, who was operating the plane. “I don’t remember how we landed, how we hit or anything. I mean, we could see the runway because it was lit up, and that’s the last thing I remember.”

Continued Whitener, “I just know we were coming in to land, and then the next thing I know, I was hollering and I could see the rescuers in the woods.”

She told Channel 2 that she next remembered waking up at the hospital in Gainesville following her emergency surgeries, and that it took a couple of days for her to feel anything in her legs.

While at Northeast Georgia Medical, Whitener learned that all of her friends had perished in the accident.

“It was really emotional,” said Whitener in the Channel 2 interview. “Those were my best friends.”

Since those frightening early days after the crash, Whitener said she has regained feeling all the way down to the insides of her ankles, and she is optimistic that she’ll walk again.

And for the support of seemingly countless individuals, many of whom have been complete strangers, she and her



**Junior and Brittany Whitener at the Shepherd Center, as Brittany stands with the help of a special machine.** Photo/Facebook

family are thankful.

“For everybody to rally behind me, people I don’t even know, that’s more than what words can express,” said Whitener. “I’m very hopeful. If I survived a plane crash and made it this far, I’m surviving.”

Whitener told Channel 2 that, as she battles to get better every day, she’s also working to overcome survivor’s guilt with the help of family and friends, including the loved ones of those lost.

“They told me not to feel that way,” said Whitener. “So, that made me feel a lot better just communicating with them.”

People who would like to assist Whitener as she recovers from her injuries can visit her GoFundMe page for updates

and how to contribute. The easiest way to find the page is to use Google to search for “Help Nurse Brittany Whitener.”

“All funds collected will go directly to Brittany’s husband Junior Whitener to cover her medical and living expenses during her recovery,” according to the page. “Any amount helps. Please keep Brittany in your thoughts and prayers. Thank you so much for any help you can give, even if it’s just sharing this on your social media accounts.”

Folks can also support the Whiteners by attending a special Benefit Dinner & Auction on Saturday, Feb. 16, at 3 p.m. inside the Haralson Memorial Civic Center at 165 Wellborn Street in Blairsville, hosted by Blue Ridge Motorsports Park.

## Movers...from Page 1A

Ethics by the Georgia Municipal Association.

Hiwassee was the recipient of over a million dollars in grants – \$600,000 for the sewer plant and \$400,000 for the water plant, plus some smaller grants for safety and training.

Ordiales introduced the new economic development officer at the Movers and Shakers meeting, Denise McKay.

McKay will be working with Ordiales, County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

and Mayor Andrea Gibby, which gives her a great deal of latitude in dealing with potential new business for Hiwassee, Young Harris and Towns County.

Ordiales talked about her drive to reduce the city’s debt. And, slowly but surely, Ordiales said she is bringing that to fruition.

Grace Howard, who actually started the Clean Sweep project six years ago, though it didn’t get the name until three years ago, spoke about the humble beginnings of the project and her determination to eradicate trashy roads in Towns County.

Six years later, the Strubs got involved. Howard said they picked up the where she and J. C. Berrong left off and are as “rabid-avid” about cleaning up Towns County as she is.

The first initiative the Strubs came up with was unsecured loads.

“An unsecured load is whenever you’re carrying something in the open part of your truck and it’s not been fastened or bungee-chorded or taped or strapped down. That’s an unsecured load,” said Liza. “It’s against the law, and there can be fines of up to \$5,000

initiative.

Of particular concern has been people who haul trash unsecured to the Transfer Station. Liza said that, since the beginning of the unsecured load program, unsecured loads have gone from 47 percent of trucks coming to the Towns County transfer station down to 16 percent. That’s a major improvement.

Overall, they said, the initiative has been well received in the county and is supported by Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales.

## Amateur Radio License testing

The Union County Amateur Radio Club is conducting FCC amateur radio testing for all levels on February 2, 2019 (first Saturday of the month). The tests will be given at the Union County Community Center/Blairsville Chamber of Commerce (2nd floor), 129 Union County Recreation Road. If you are inter-

ested please contact John Walters at 706-897-4419 for more details and reserve your seat for the test. \$15 is charged to cover cost of materials. Testing starts at 9 a.m. Walk ins are welcome but the testing committee leaves at 11 a.m. See <http://www.arrl.org/what-to-bring-to-an-exam-session>. See you there. NT(0an30Z16)CA



**Local volunteer extraordinaire Grace Howard also spoke in the Jan. 25 meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers.** Photo by Mark Smith

With the help of personnel at the Towns County Transfer Station, the Strubs were able to determine in October 2018 that 47 percent of the loads were coming in unsecured.

Liza had flyers made and posted them at the Transfer Station, had them distributed to businesses around the county and posted them on city and county websites. Transfer Station employees also spoke with drivers about their unsecured loads.

By December 2018, the percentage of unsecured loads brought to the transfer station was down to 16 percent; a great improvement.

The Strubs, with the help of the Towns County Civic Association, the Commissioner’s Office, the Sheriff’s Office, Towns County Schools, the Boy Scouts of America, the Mountain Movers and Shakers, and other local organizations, are getting the word out about Clean Sweep.

And it’s beginning to show.