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Wednesday, February 2, 2022

Towns 4-H welcomes new coordinator Bradshaw

Towns County Herald Staff Writer

Kerri Bradshaw was hired in December as the new coordinator for the Towns County 4-H Cooperative Extension Office, which interacts with local school children to broaden their societal hori-

"In 4-H programs, kids and teens complete hands-on projects in areas like health, science, agriculture and civic engagement in a positive environment where they receive guidance from adult mentors and are encouraged to take on proactive leadership roles," according to 4-h.org.

to be offering these types of learning opportunities at the like to do.

local level as the new 4-H coordinator.

native graduated from Towns County High Class of 2019 before enrolling at North Georgia Technical College for agribusiness, in which she will be public speaking, record keepfinishing up classes this year.

"I have always wanted riculture," Bradshaw said, "so 4-H was an opportunity to do both where I could teach and have an agriculture-based idea

Once a month, Bradshaw will be going to the schools to teach kids about different career clusters. She will assist ing a couple more clubs back them in completing "County Project Achievements" fo-And Bradshaw is thrilled cused on their individual areas interested in 4-H. of interests and things they

ect Achievements, students The 20-year-old Towns choose an area of interest to research and write about with the goal of making a presentation, which helps them to develop "leadership, creativity, ing and other skills."

"Now I am learning to be a teacher, and I love ag- more about the basis of my schedule and trying to get the upper hand on it," Bradshaw said. "It has been a new experience for me working with cids, but I am having a lot of fun and I love it.

'(Moving forward), I would like to accomplish startup like the horse club and garden club and getting more kids

"Our goals of 4-H are to help the students learn more

about a future career and prepare them for work-study and to gain leadership and teamwork skills, as well as public speaking skills.

"I want the community to know that we are growing and are hoping to get more volunteers, and that more programs are on the way, so stay tuned."

Union and Towns Coun-

Cooperative Extension Ågent Jacob Williams said he hired Bradshaw to fill the role for multiple reasons, including that she is from Towns County and "has a connection with the people there.

"I think that is important for her to be successful in the 4-H program," Williams said. "She is also getting her associate degree in agribusiness, and

See 4-H Coordinator, Page 6A



Kerri Bradshaw is the new Towns County 4-H Program Assistant in the University of Georgia Extension Office located at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee. Photo by Jeremy Foster

Major courthouse renovation, addition project progresses

By Mark Smith Towns County Herald Staff Writer

The Towns County Courthouse is long overdue for renovation and expansion and has been in the works for years now, with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic having held things up. However, barring any more sickness scares, the project will finally be getting off the ground.

Commissioner Bradshaw said last week that he had accepted the sole bid from Powers Heating and Air out of Peachtree City to install a new HVAC system at the Old Rec Gym. The company should be starting the installation in "a couple of weeks."

A new HVAC system at the gym is necessary because all the offices at the courthouse

will have to be vacated during the renovation and addition project, and those offices will be moved temporarily over to the Old Rec Gym during con-

"This morning we met with CPL Architects again over at the Old Rec Gym, and with other elected officials from the courthouse, to figure out who is going to be where, Bradshaw said Jan. 26. "CPL Architects is working on the drawing so that we'll know how to lay out the temporary cubicle walls. "As soon as the heating

and air is done, we should be able to secure the temporary cubicle walls. And then the electrician and the IT people will start running all the computer lines, phone lines, and



Cliff Bradshaw Sole Commissioner

A Request for Proposal for the services of a Construction-Manager-At-Risk is currently running in the power outlets to all the cu- newspaper, and proposals will

'for KING & COUNTRY' fills The Hall with God's love



Christian pop band "for KING & COUNTRY" rocked Anderson Music Hall Saturday with a spiritually uplifting concert performance. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks **Towns County Herald Staff Writer**

tain Fairgrounds is known for tertaining the public here, the Joint Convention in Perry. bringing high quality entertain- Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds

ment to the residents of Hia- received a Marketing Award wassee and the North Georgia by the Georgia Association of Agricultural Fairs over the That's why, in recogni- weekend, during the three-day The Georgia Mountion of its dedication to en- annual Georgia/South Carolina

See Christian Concert, Page 6A

Hiawassee discusses water operator needs, plans for 2022

By Mark Smith Towns County Herald

Ordiales announced in the first censed operator on site 24/7, monthly work session of the and, No. 2, because Hiawassee year on Jan. 24 that the city has been operating with only one licensed water treatment plant operator of late because, regrettably, there are no other

licensed operators available.
"It is almost impossible to find a licensed water treatment plant operator," she said. "I have called every place, everywhere, in every city, and everybody is having the exact same problem.'

Wastewater Treatment Plant employee Clint Royce passed the Georgia Environmental Protection Division's required exam the previous Friday, so he will be able to share some of those responsi-

bilities with Water Department Manager Carl Grizzle.

But there is still a need for several more licensees, as, Hiawassee Mayor Liz No. 1, the EPD requires a lineeds to have operator succession in place for the future.

Apparently, this is a statewide issue, with at least part of the cause being the Georgia EPD required exam, administered by the Georgia Water and Wastewater Institute, which has a dismal 37% pass rate, allegedly because of the way the exams are styled.

While attending the Cities United event in Atlanta over the weekend, Ordiales spoke with the Deputy Direcher plans are being considered for a water/wastewater treatment plant operator licensing program through the Technical



Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales

College System of Georgia.

That would be a weltor of Georgia EPD who told come change, especially for small-town water treatment plants in Georgia, and Ordiales will be soon speaking with

See Hiawassee Meeting, Page 6A

Top of GA Speaking Contest off to excellent start in '22

By Jeremy Foster **Towns County Herald Staff Writer**

YOUNG HARRIS -After rebounding from the cancellation of last year's contest due to COVID-19, training for the 2022 Top of Georgia Annual Student Public Speaking Contest got under way last week on Thursday, Jan. 27, inside the Goolsby Center at Young Harris College

Over at least the next five Thursdays, students will be learning the craft of public speaking from a variety of local civic and community leaders who will be mentoring the students in the skill and importance of being able to speak in public settings.

The competition will feature students living in Union and Towns counties in Georgia, and in Clay County, North Carolina. Two divisions will compete, one for middle schoolaged children and another for high schoolers, with private and home-schooled students also eligible for entry.

By the time training concludes, students will be expected to deliver an inspiring four to six-minute speech on the final contest day in March, to be announced at a later date.

First Place winners in each division will receive a \$400 cash prize, with Second Place winners receiving \$300, Third Place \$200 and Fourth Place \$100. Additionally, the First Place high school winner will earn a non-cash, renewable \$5,000 scholarship to Young Harris College. There is still time for

students to apply as a speaker in



Dr. Jennifer Hallett of the Communication Studies Department at Young Harris College believes students will benefit for a lifetime by developing "a combination of good written and speaking skills." Photo by Jeremy Foster

the training and competition by emailing their name, address, phone number, school, and grade level to topofgeorgiastudent@

Charlotte Sleczkowski, chair of the Towns County Democrats and a retired schoolteacher of 40 years, is one of the mentors aiding in the process.

She said the importance of a training program like this is to instruct students "how to speak in public, whether it is a job interview, giving messages or speaking in front of a class or on a stage or whatever the situation may be."

research more background on their topics and helps them be more confident and convincing poise," Sleczkowski said.

when they speak with more Retired physician Gerry Chotiner is a mentor as well as a chairperson leading the effort,

and he said that, oftentimes,

"the students teach us more than we teach the students."

"Although ways of communicating have changed a lot over the years," Chotiner said, "we teach these kids how to better communicate in face-to-face interactions by maintaining eye contact, and be able to deliver instructions that are clear, and just be able to have great people skills in

"Public speaking is a two-phase system: first, you have to learn how to build the speech, and then, you have to learn how to perform it."

Enotah Judicial Circuit "It helps people to District Attorney Jeff Langley was another mentor on hand last week to offer his services.

'I have been involved with this speaking contest for a number of years, and I became involved as a way to provide community service," Langley said. "The important

See Top of GA, Page 6A

Ninth District Opportunity, Food Pantry make a difference

Towns County Herald Staff Writer

With offices in 13 North Georgia counties, Ninth District Opportunity is designed to help financially struggling individuals and families by offering programs such as electric and propane heating assistance, water assistance which started this year - and housing assistance.

"Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. provides a broad range of services designed to assist low-income families to establish self-sufficiency and economic stability," per ndo. org. "All services are outcome oriented, based on local community needs.'

Lake Levels
Blue Ridge

2 Sections 12 Pages Arrests

mation System Administrator and Community Resource Coordinator for the Towns County Ninth District Opportunity office, and she assists with the administration of the Towns County Food Pantry as well.

Stephens has been involved with Ninth District Opportunity for 22 years and finds it incredibly rewarding to be able to help the community around her. "It is very unfortunate

that there is not very much housing available in Towns or Union County," Stephens said, 'so we try to help out with emergency food and shelter money that helps with rent and electric bills when the funds are available.

"We also provide com-Teresa Stephens is the munity service block rent mon-Homeless Management Infor- ey, which is also available for

Classifieds 4B

Church

Opinion

2A 2B

4A



Teresa Stephens **Ninth District Opportunity**

utilities and emergency solution grants through the Department of Community Affairs, which is where homelessness and its prevention comes in. '(For example), if you

had an eviction notice come See Assistance Programs, Page 6A

> **At-Home COVID Test** Kits

TCHS Students Honored

Memory Hearts Meals on Wheels Fundraiser

Legals Obits **3B** 5A **Sports** 2/5 @ Greene Co. 5PM

,669,20

BASKETBALL 2/4 vs. Lake Oconee 6 PM

SPORTS

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Christian Concert...from Page 1A

the fairgrounds went beyond sheer entertainment on Jan. 29 with a concert at Anderson Music Hall that plucked at the heartstrings of all attendees.

If there's one word that describes a community forged in love, it's family, and that was how everyone felt at the fairgrounds on Saturday.

Despite the frigid evening temperatures, Čhristian pop duo "for KING & COUN-TRY" performed in the warmth of the auditorium with a fantastic display of lights, special effects, and bass so loud it rumbled deep in one's heart much like the love of Christ. Native Australians and

brothers Joel and Luke Smallbone of "for KING & COUN-TRY" moved to Nashville, Tennessee, when they were young, as their father, a music promoter, had received a job offer in the states.

It wasn't to last, however, and the entire Smallbone family, including Joel and Luke's four other siblings and little sister on the way, struggled to make ends meet.

They were surprised by the hospitality of their American neighbors and believe God sent them invaluable help at just the right time through the power of prayer.

The brothers, now with families of their own, comprise vocal roles in the band and have picked up other members from all across America. They took the time Saturday to introduce every member of the band, with each receiving a special spotlight and applause.

Using the same advanced lighting technology, they enhanced their performance with bright flashes and artful patterns that moved to the beat as much as the audience did. For some songs, especially toward the end of the show, the music video played behind the band on screens.

And fans were abuzz with emotion before the concert even began.

This was the second "for KING & COUNTRY" concert attended by John and Cheryl White. Hooked by their Christmas performance in Duluth, the couple was moved by the group's rendition of "Little Drummer Boy" and tribute to the Smallbones' parents, "Un-

"Their energy is just all over the place," Cheryl said, remembering how the brothers danced on-stage and "got the crowd going, too." Jokingly, John remarked that it "makes me tired just watching them."

Fan Sharan Pierson, who has followed the band's work for years, initially discovered the group through Facebook. She was finally able to attend her first "for KING & COUN-" concert that night.

"I just think they have an awesome message to share, and they're great at sharing their message with people to spread the news of the Lord," she said. "They're bringing it to people through their music.'

a lot of things we do in 4-H

ter mentality, and she seems

excited about working with

"Kerri has a real go-get-

and Extension.



Representatives from Compassion International recruited numerous "for KING & COUNTRY" concertgoers to assist in their efforts of financially sponsoring children living in poverty across the globe. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Pine Mountain, Georgia. They were camping at Vogel State Park and "made a family trip" of going to see the concert. Eleven-year-old Carter

found out about "for KING & COUNTRY" through his church. A fan of Christian pop, he introduced his mother to the group's rock sound. "It is exciting and gives

a different vibe (from traditional gospel)," Shannon said. "It still allows the same words and feelings and emotions, but in a different way.

"for KING & COUN-TRY' is actually something that, if you want to listen, it'll change the way you feel by a lot," Carter said. "You can go from being dark and broody all the time to helping other people as soon as they need help."

Certainly, one of the things that has spoken volumes over the band's more than decade-long career is the fact that "for KING & COUNTRY's" music has been able to reach such a wide audience, including in Hiawassee.

Among the crowd Saturday were elderly couples on a night out, children being guided around by their families, and young parents with brand

But it wasn't just ticket holders having all the fun; staff were seen bouncing around, dancing discreetly or otherwise to the liveliest songs. And even though folks tending the food stands stayed busy, more than a few bobbed their heads to the music prior to the intermission for yogurt and pizza.

Unlike the rest of the vendors, the band's merchandisers set up inside the auditorium and remained open until the very end of the last song. They offered each of "for KING & COUNTRY's" current albums along with the option to preorder their newest CD.

extras as the Smallbones addressed the audience several times, eliciting laughter with their attempts to pronounce "Hiawassee" and comparing their watered-down Australian twang with that of the South.

Not all commentary was Over on the other side of humorous. The brothers testi- coming shows and events, visit the aisle, Shannon Weems and fied and told the story of their georgiamountainfairgrounds. her son Carter were present from family's migration from "the

that absolutely fits in well with ally good personality traits I anything she wants to do for

excitement to go out there and

like about her, that she has the that matter."

do it, which is without a doubt check out the "UGA Extension

"So, I think she will go book page or call the office at

Coordinator...from Page 1A

Island," including all the difficulties they endured and how

it shaped their faith, citing the ripple effect that perseverance and good deeds had on spreading God's word. "If you have felt pushed

down, if you have felt misunderstood, objectified - if you have felt invisible, know that the Creator of the universe sees you, knows you, and loves you," Joel Smallbone said to the ladies of the audience before their performance of "Priceless." Other songs, such as "To-

gether" and collaboration "God Only Knows" with country superstar Dolly Parton, were just as poignant and more relevant than ever in their message, and by the end of the night, the spotlights had shone brightly on the joyously tearful faces of more than just a few people. Of great importance,

however, wasn't just the concert, as the Smallbones drew attention to the other organization that was present that night: Compassion International.

Sharing the outstanding success story of a friend who was once a child in the program himself, they offered the poignant observation that when people no longer feel the urge to provide for the poor, their souls have gone dark.

Compassion tional is a Christian charity dedicated to connecting people with children in need. The organization had set up a booth that evening not with pamphlets, but with cards displaying little ones from around the world who were awaiting a chance for a brighter future.

From Haiti to Bangladesh, from Mexico to Tanzania, some had suffered the loss of one or both parents, while others had parents who were unemployed.

Everyone who signed up The night was full of fun with the program received a tote bag, and the most dazzling sight outside of the brilliant effects surrounding "for KING & COUNTRY's" stellar music show was that most concertgoers left carrying these bags that

For information on up-

For more information,

& 4-H Towns County" Face-

Hiawassee Meeting...from Page 1A

North Georgia Technical College President John Wilkinson - the former state senator for this area - about facilitating such a program.

Moving along, in October 2021, the City of Hiawassee paid \$300,000 toward the city's last 40-year-term USDA loan principal. One of Ordiales' major goals for 2022 or early 2023 is to pay off the remaining balance of approximately \$590,300. This loan was taken out

in 2013 at an interest rate of 2.75% with an original payout date of 2053, she said. The policy of paying off old loans with higher interest rates is saving the city lots of money in debt service that can be better utilized for other city projects. So far, 83% of old, long-

term, higher-interest debt that was established before Ordiales took office has been retired, she said. Paying off the last of the old debt will leave only more recent loans with terms of 20 years or less with interest rates between 0.5% and 1.5%. All the loans taken out

have been for necessary upgrades and repairs to the Hiawassee water, sewer, and water treatment systems and facilities. Another major identified by Ordiales for 2022 is completing the renovation

over the years, old and new.

of the Paris Buildings into the Paris Business Center on North Main Street, to house a business incubator program, a restaurant, and several storefronts for rent by startup business enterprises.

Among the three grants received by the city in 2021, the largest was a \$600,000 grant to go toward renovating these buildings.

Ordiales anticipates the center will be operational by the first quarter of 2023, even with having to rebid the project because special requirements required by the grant administrators post-bidding were not included in the original bid documents.

As it stands, only one bid was submitted in the initial round, and that same bidder has put forth another bid. However, the bid has yet to be approved by state grant administrators, so neither the amount of the bid nor the name of the bidder has been released.

A third major goal for 2022 is to open the Shook House at 115 North River Street in the first quarter of the year. In December 2021, a donor offered the property to the city for the sum of \$10, which was graciously accepted.

That property has of- Mayors Park, which Hiawasficially been named The Garland and Zuria Shook House. Garland and Zuria Shook were lifelong residents of Towns County, were married for 47 years, and had six children and 14 grandchildren. The house is a monument to their contribution to Towns County history.

A decision as to the best use of the property is being discussed but has yet to be re-Ordiales said a fourth

major goal for 2022 is the project to expand the Water Treatment Plant with a third filter. The project went to bid with an estimated cost of \$1.4 million. came in at \$2.6 million, nearly double the cost estimate. The filter alone is about

\$650,000, and a building to house it will need to be constructed. Ordiales said they have requested a rework of the estimate by Engineering Management Inc., and another bid process will begin when the reworked estimate is submitted. Also, the Hiawassee Wa-

ter Department will be getting a much-needed new 25-by-40 -foot metal building because the old building floods every time it rains. In other business, Hia-

wassee has been recertified as a PlanFirst City by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, which means the city is adhering to the Joint Comprehensive Plan and remains eligible for grants and lowinterest loans from the state. The Hiawassee Plan-

First program will be part of the responsibilities of the new Program Manager of the Downtown Development Authority when he or she is hired. as will the management of the Paris Business Center and the Shook House when they are

Interviews for that position have been concluded and deliberations are underway to choose one of the candidates.

The city has also been Ready Community for 2021-22, making Hiawassee eligible for the anticipated federal dollars to be distributed in the near future for broadband-related infrastructure. Hiawassee will be host-

ing two new package liquor stores this year as a result of the passage of the Package Liquor Store Referendum last November. One of the stores will open in mid-February and the other in late March.

The Tennessee Valley Authority has approved the building of a boardwalk between Lloyd's Landing and inside City Hall.

see has five years to build.

New street signs will appear soon inside city limits. The vendor is having trouble sourcing the metal to make the signs but assured the mayor that the signs will be delivered in March 2022. This includes the Mathis Way sign for the alleyway behind City Hall.

The AirMedCare contract has been signed and paid up for 2022. AirMedCare is the helicopter emergency transport service membership that legal residents of Hiawassee have access to for medically necessary life flights. A new city landscaper is

The sole bidder for the project being sought. The landscaping contract has been posted and the bid process is underway, with bids due in early February. Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith is revising the Hia-

> wassee Noise Ordinance with assistance from City Attorney Thomas Mitchell to make the ordinance enforceable, with more on that to come as the year progresses. Both the mayor and Economic Development Director Denise McKay were happy to

report there are now only 15 open storefronts in Hiawassee. McKay is doing a fantastic job bringing new businesses to the city with the Business Incubator Plan that assists startups with a business plan. For more information

on the Hiawassee Business Incubator Plan, call Hiawassee City Hall at 706-896-2202 and ask for Denise McKay. Hiawassee was desig-

nated a Purple Heart City in 2021, with three signs placed around the city. Disappointingly, someone absconded with all three of those signs. Ordiales said that new signs have been ordered, but there is no timeline on when they will arrive. During a recent roof re-

pair project at City Hall, water leaks were discovered around the windows in the mayor's office and the conference room outside the municipal courtrecertified as a Broadband room caused by weather stripping missing from the tops of the windows.

When inspecting the leaky areas, the glass company suggested that the single-pane windows be replaced with more energy efficient doublepane windows. Ordiales and the City Council agreed.

It was expected that the council would approve the mayor's request for approval of funds to replace the windows at the February meeting of the Hiawassee City Council that occurred after press time on Tuesday, Feb.1, at 6 p.m.

Assistance Programs...from Page 1A

in, you would call us, and we would hopefully help you navigate to keep you in the house if you are income eligible. Of course, all our programs are income-based.

"We also have a Head Start program that helps those outside of the 13 counties, (focusing on early childhood education and other familyoriented services).

heating "Low-income assistance begins in November (each year) for those 65 and older or totally homebound and chronically ill. We do them first because they are the most at-risk. And then on Dec. 1, we start with the rest of the general public, and if you are under 65 and disabled, you would still go into the Dec.1 group unless you

were chronic.' The need for services provided by Ninth District Opportunity has grown every year, Stephens said, noting that, as this is primarily a retirement area, most of the people being served are elderly.

"And we still have a "With supply chains bewaiting list," she said. "The ing backed up and not being

federal government is say ing that we are going to get more funding, so we keep the waiting list to try and cover it, and the turnaround time is typically six to eight weeks."

On the Food Pantry, Stephens said it was developed in 2008 to serve Towns County residents of all ages who find their households in regular need of food assistance. This program is available throughout each year.

"Through the COVID-19 pandemic, our numbers dropped because people were getting additional food stamps and child tax credits, and since they ended in December, we have seen a rise in those younger people asking for food this month," she said.

To utilize the Food Pantry, patrons must be residents of Towns County, "along with other smaller guidelines, and we gain food from the Northeast Georgia Food Bank of Athens, but unfortunately they are low on inventory."

"With supply chains be-

able to get stuff to people, we do purchase food outside of the Athens Food Bank," Stephens said. "If anyone is wanting to donate food to us, we just ask that it maintains in date.

'We are grateful for any help (from the public), as we are about to spend a good amount of money on getting a walk-in freezer replaced that is going bad. We have been waiting about three months for that to come in (also due to supply chain issues).

"Even though we are partners with most of the faith-based churches, the Department of Family & Children Services and Family Connection, we seem to be the best kept secret here in Towns County. A lot of people do not know we exist, and we want to create more awareness that if people need help, we are here to do just that."

For information on getting assistance via any of the programs available through Ninth District Opportunity, either for yourself or loved ones, visit www.ndo. org, or contact Stephens by calling 706-896-4783 or emailing teresa.stephens@ndocsbg.org.

Courthouse Progress...from Page 1A be accepted through 2 p.m. fully at a lower price.

the youth. Those are some re-very far in this program and 706-896-2024.

Wednesday, March 2.

The Construction-Manager-At-Risk method is like the traditional design-bidbuild method but establishes a Guaranteed Maximum Price that the project cannot exceed.

In an "at-risk" arrangement, the construction manager is contractually obligated to adhere to the accepted bid price and is financially liable if the project goes over budget, Bradshaw said.

"This gives us the ability to hire local contractors where applicable, and it gives us the ability to bid out each section of the job," Bradshaw said. "And even though they charge a fee for that, this will actually give us a better product, hope-

"We will start interviewing companies soon, and CPL the selection process, along advised against it. with Towns County Attorney Robb Kiker."

Depending on the state of COVID and materials availability, Bradshaw said that, by the time everyone moves into the Old Rec Gym and a construction-manager-at-risk has been hired, the actual construction of the project could start as soon as May.

However, Bradshaw said he is loath to put a set date on anything because everything is in such flux these days.

tially considered building the of \$12,109,165 was adopted addition first so that the new

building could house temporary offices during the main courthouse renovation, but Architects will be involved in Bradshaw said CPL Architects

> "That's what we were going to do, but the architect said it will take the construction company longer to do the job if we do it that way, which could cost more money. If we vacate the building, we will save money and time," Bradshaw said.

> The project will still be paid for with SPLOST funds and is estimated at this time at \$9.4 million. A more accurate quote will be forthcoming when the county starts receiving bids.

As an aside, the Towns The commissioner ini- County 2022 Tentative Budget in a called meeting on Thursday, Dec. 30, 2021, by the Sole Commissioner.

The 2022 Budget increased by 7.4% over the 2021 Budget, mostly due to increases in employee wages, transfer

station fees, and general inflation, said Finance Director Andrea Anderson. No objections were lodged against the Tentative Budget, and only Bradshaw, County Clerk Linda Hedden,

ed the called meeting.

Top of GA...from Page 1A

thing about this speaking contest is that it gives kids the opportunity to overcome their fear of public speaking, which can be scary and common for a lot of people.

It can be a waste of talent when someone could be an excellent lawyer, community leader, salesperson, among other things, but is afraid of a career path that would require public speaking, and this contest gives (him or her) a chance to work through that fear."

Co-chairing the contest is Dr. Jennifer Hallett, a professor and department chair of Communication Studies at Young Harris College, and she led the training session Thursday with a slideshow presentation highlighting principal areas of focus for

public speaking. the County Finance Director, "I cannot overstate the and two local reporters attend-

said. "Every industry that I know about uses communication skills as one of the top requirements for incoming employees to be onboarded.

"A combination of good written and speaking skills go hand in hand, and this program helps guide the students through the process of combining them to teach (kids) how to make their topic interesting and appealing to their audience. "There is an old saying

that at a funeral, most would rather be in the casket than the one delivering the eulogy, so we try to give them the skills to get through public speaking as something easy and fun, and as a way to build better human connections, and ultimately just gain better self-confidence and empowerment."

The contest is a nonpartisan endeavor that includes importance of having good the following sponsors and public speaking skills," Hallett mentors: Towns County Sole

Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw; Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales; Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby; YHC Communication Studies faculty Jennifer Hallett, Ambyre Ponivas, and Mary Hill; Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley; Towns GOP Chair Betsy Young; Towns Democrat Chair Charlotte Sleczkowski; Terrylynne Marshall; Betty Phillips; and Gerry Chotiner. Donations are being accepted for additional student prize monies. Checks

amount will be accepted, and all donors' names will be listed in the contest program. To inquire about

may be made out to Top of

Georgia Student Development

and mailed to P.O. Box 36,

Hiawassee, GA 30546. Any

becoming a mentor, people may email their name and contact information to topofgeorgiastudent@gmail. com, or call Sleczkowski at 727-543-5489