

Towns County Herald

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Reece earns 2020 STAR Student honors at TCHS

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Congratulations to senior Chase Reece, who was named 2020 STAR Student for Towns County High School.

As STAR Student, Reece was responsible for selecting a STAR Teacher representing the educator who has made the biggest impact on his academic career. Reece chose Sarah Vardo, who instructed Reece in health care during his 11th-grade year.

The Towns County Lions Club will honor both Reece and Vardo as STAR Student/Teacher in a special gathering on Feb. 25.

STAR stands for Student Recognition Achievement, and the program is sponsored by the nonprofit Professional Association of Georgia Educators Foundation.

"To obtain the STAR nomination, high school seniors must have the highest score on any single test of the SAT taken through the November test date of their

senior year and be in the Top 10% or the Top 10 students of their class based on grade point average," according to PAGEFoundation.org.

Reece said receiving STAR recognition has meant a lot, but that it's more about recognizing his teachers.

"I wouldn't be able to get a STAR Student award if it wasn't for all the great teachers that helped contribute to my success," Reece said.

And while Reece definitely wants to honor all of the excellent teachers at Towns County, he said Vardo has had the biggest impact on his success and helped him in deciding what he wants to do with his life.

"Being a health care teacher – that's had the biggest impact on me and let me know that I for sure want to be in health care in the future," Reece said.

Reece also touched on the benefits of being a student at a small school like Towns County, such as the strong relationships built between

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STAR Student Chase Reece, center, with Roy Perren, Jeff Myers, STAR Teacher Sarah Vardo, mother Christie Melton, Jim Melton and Dionne Berrong.
Photo by Chad Stack

Firefighters extinguish Enchanted Valley blaze; everyone OK

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

No one was hurt in a fire that burned three homes in the late hours of Saturday, Feb. 1, at Enchanted Valley RV Resort on Georgia 75 South.

Only one of the campers was occupied at the time of the fire, and fortunately, the resident was able to make it safely out of his home to call 911, Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland said.

Firefighters were dispatched to the scene shortly before midnight Saturday, only to find all three campers ablaze when they arrived at Enchanted Valley.

At least 15 volunteers responded to the fire, providing major knocked-down assistance



A fire, breaking out at Enchanted Valley RV Resort late Saturday night, destroying three homes.

Students dance through the night with friends at Winter Formal



Towns County High students had a great time over the weekend cutting a rug at the Civic Center on Saturday.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County High School students let loose during

their Second Annual Winter Formal on Saturday, Feb. 1, at the Civic Center.

The event welcomed all students to a night of dancing

and quality time with friends to encourage relationships outside the classroom, as students who arrived for the event

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Elections board adopts May referendums for county, Hiawassee

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Board of Elections adopted calls for upcoming referendums at a special called meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 29, at the board office.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw submitted two of the calls for elections, one for a referendum on a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax and another asking voters to say yes or no to a countywide freepoint exemption.

The elections board also adopted a resolution on behalf of Hiawassee to allow county residents to decide whether or not they want fluoride added to the drinking water supplied by the Hiawassee Water Treatment Plant.

This means there will be three referendum questions added to the ballot on the May 19 General Primary Election in



Towns County Board of Elections Chair Janet Oliva with County Attorney Robb Kiker in a special called meeting last week.
Photo by Mark Smith

Towns County. Concerning the SPLOST referendum, the county is calling for voters to decide on an estimated \$12 million SPLOST to be instituted starting Oct. 1 to finance much needed renovations and possibly an

addition to the Towns County Courthouse, which dates to 1964.

Voter approval of the SPLOST, to be collected over six years, will also constitute approval of the issuance of a

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Young Harris teen dies in crash near Vogel State Park

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Alondra Gonzalez, 17, of Young Harris, died tragically in a one-vehicle crash just south of Vogel State Park Sunday night, according to authorities.

The accident occurred around 7 p.m. on Feb. 2, as the girl returned from a trip to Helen via US 129 North, friends who responded to the scene said.

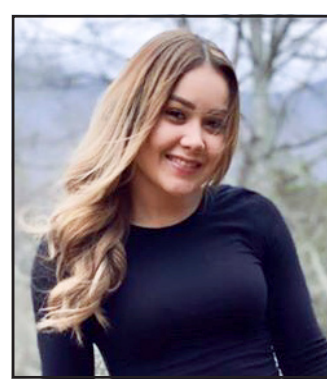
According to the Georgia State Patrol, as Gonzalez negotiated a right curve approaching Vogel heading north, she lost control of her vehicle, a Toyota Scion, causing it to go over the side of the mountain before overturning and fatally striking a tree.

Gonzalez was alone in her car, though witnesses from another vehicle reported that speed may have been a contributing factor in the accident, GSP said.

Emergency agencies on the scene that evening were the Union County Sheriff's Office, Union General EMS and the Georgia State Patrol.

Originally from Puerto Rico, Gonzalez worked as a waitress at Nani's Cuban and Puerto Rican restaurant in Blairsville, according to a post on the restaurant's Facebook page.

"She was our Blonde, smiley, funny Puerto Rican waitress girl," read a post from Monday expressing sadness over the tragedy.



Alondra Gonzalez
Nani's Restaurant has asked people to keep the Gonzalez Family and the Nani's Family in their thoughts and prayers.

"In honor to her we will be closed until further notice," the restaurant said.

Bradshaw sends SPLOST, freepoint exemptions to vote in May

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In a special called meeting on Jan. 29, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw approved the placement of two referendums on the May General Primary ballot, one for a SPLOST and another for a freepoint exemption.

A SPLOST, or Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, is a 1-cent sales tax collected countywide for use on various capital projects for public facilities, which Bradshaw said would include major renovations and possibly

an addition at the courthouse that was originally built in 1964.

The six-year SPLOST would go into effect Oct. 1 if approved by voters, and Bradshaw said it would not cause any fluctuation in the local sales tax, as it would only go live after the current E-SPLOST ceases collections on Sept. 30, meaning the county sales tax would remain at 7%.

Should the SPLOST pass electoral muster in May, the plan would be for the county to issue a type of municipal bond called a General Obligation Bond – subject to voter approval – not

to exceed \$8 million to pay for the courthouse projects upfront, pledging SPLOST collections to cover debt service.

Bradshaw said the "rule of thumb" in this case is that it's usually more cost effective to take on the debt upfront rather than pay-as-you-go, because the total increase in the cost of building materials over time is usually greater than the total interest on the debt.

Approval of the bond will appear as part of the May 19 referendum.

"Once the bond obligations are met, then the cities (Hiawassee and Young

Harris) are each granted a 9% interest in the total collections of the SPLOST each year," County Attorney Robb Kiker said. "The initial estimated collection is \$12 million.

"That is actually very conservative, but as is the nature of the commissioner and Towns County, we're being conservative on (estimating) the collections. And that was done to make sure we have the money to pay the GO bond.

"If it exceeds the \$12 million over that period of time, then the excess will also be paid to the cities, their 9%. Then, after the GO bond is paid

and after the cities are paid, any remainder is paid back to the county for distribution among roads and bridges, fire, and parks and recreation."

Bradshaw also approved a SPLOST Intergovernmental Agreement between the county and cities in the called meeting last week to enable the three municipal entities to share in the SPLOST collections.

The law does not require that the county share SPLOST collections with the cities. However, in a show of support for the cities, Bradshaw decided to share collections, as was done

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Sole Commissioner
Cliff Bradshaw

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