

Winter Storms...from Page 1A



Towns County Schools closed on Friday for bad weather, with school officials citing early morning snow and ice in parts of the county.

accidents and assist stranded motorists during the storm, Chief Deputy Terry Conner said.

All told, the Sheriff's Office responded to 19 motor vehicle accidents plus other weather-related calls between Saturday and Sunday morning, according to information received from Towns County E-911.

Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith reported no accidents or stranded motorists within city limits.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC crews stayed busy all through the tail end of last week, restoring several power outages throughout the system caused by rain and snow, with all power outages restored by Saturday afternoon.

"Just a quick reminder that we are available 24/7 to receive notifications of power outages and crews are always on call," EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms said. "Employees work hard here at the EMC, and their hard work and efforts are very much appreciated. Thank you again for your support."

Some businesses stayed open while others closed, and plenty of residents seemed happy to make a day of it Saturday, driving around to see and take pictures of all the freshly fallen snow in the county, though many families stayed in and built snowmen instead.

Much snow melted Saturday afternoon, but there was still plenty of crunchy snow and some ice remaining early Sunday, prompting many churches to close for the day.

More heavy rainfall is expected this week, and residents are advised to keep an eye on weather forecasts and to stay indoors before bad weather strikes and during storms.

All in all, the county was very fortunate to have had a quick snow blow through over the weekend that resulted in no serious injuries, though much of that fortune came by way of emergency personnel responding in a coordinated countywide effort.

Local first responder agencies include Towns County Fire Rescue, the Sheriff's Office, E-911 Dispatch, Hiwassee PD, EMA, Towns County EMS, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and the Road Department.

515 Project...from Page 1A

acquire more right of way, i.e. remnant properties; or requests for design changes that cause additional environmental and/or utility coordination.

Project scheduling can also be impacted by non-responsive property owners or legal representatives.

"This project consists of widening the existing SR 515 to a four-lane (with) rural divided sections outside the city limits of Blairsville and Young Harris, while widening from a three-lane urban section with bike lanes and sidewalk inside the city limits of Young Harris," according to GDOT.

"Also included is a two-lane rural bypass on new location around the west side of downtown Young Harris," GDOT continued. "The location is in Union and Towns County between Blairsville and Young Harris."

"Two new bridges are planned—one bridge replacement and one new location at the county line, over Brasstown Creek. The widening along the corridor alternates from side to side of the existing alignment in order to avoid impacts to streams and wetlands, as well as historic and archaeological resources. The total length of the proposed project is approximately 8.4 miles."

Strickland said there have

been no changes to the project design in the last year and that layouts are available on the GDOT public outreach website at por.dot.ga.gov.

Once there, select Towns County, click "Go," then click on "122900 Young Harris Bypass." This will bring up links to the project layout maps and other details.

As previously reported, GDOT has been conducting archaeological digs near Brasstown Creek off Georgia 66 for several years now, resulting in the discovery of "pre-contact period" Native American artifacts within the proposed area of the Young Harris Bypass.

According to GDOT, the goal of the digs, which are expected to run through spring 2020, is "to recover data that will contribute to an understanding of the lives of past inhabitants in this area" ahead of new road construction.

Two unavoidable archaeological sites are being mitigated by a team that's currently busy digging up whatever artifacts it can uncover for analysis before the bypass project gets underway.

"These two sites are significant for their data potential and what we can learn about the previous inhabitants from the past," GDOT Archaeologist

Pamela Baughman said. "They are significant for the archaeological data or information that we can understand about who lived there."

"That's why we are focused on these two sites in particular, because they are significant and unavoidable by the bypass project."

Added Baughman, "We keep the artifacts kind of general, because we can't legally share information about the location of sites or sometimes the particular components of sites because we don't want people going out there on their own."

"What I can say is that these are significant sites that date back to the pre-contact period, and they are older sites that relate to previous Indian occupations. They are significant within the context of the inhabitants of Towns County, with one site being a geologic feature with an outcropping of soapstone."

Representatives of the Towns County Historical Society have been and continue to be a consulting party on the archaeology project, according to GDOT.

And while all access to the excavations is restricted to authorized personnel, GDOT will host a public day at each site before excavations conclude "so that the public can see the excavations and talk with the archaeologists doing the work."



Motorists had a hard time at the base of Ramey Mountain at the Junction Saturday.



Cole Patrick, 3, of Hiwassee had fun crafting this snowman with his family over the weekend.



Five-year-old Drew Stack built a snowman with his dad on Saturday in Hiwassee.

SPLOST...from Page 1A

County and who we are, and we, naturally, want to look good. But one thing we will not do is overspend or overbuild. We will not do that. We will not let that happen at all.

"So, I know, over time, that we wanted to remodel the building and make it more functional, even in the commissioner's office."

Space issues abound throughout the courthouse, including inside the commissioner's office, where the room to the left of the reception desk that's currently occupied by two workers is, in fact, a closet/storage area.

"Then, going back to the efficiency of the building," he said, "as far as the utilities go, we're constantly having problems with the heating system; it's a boiler upstairs that heats this building with water, and the parts are becoming obsolete."

Furthermore, the courthouse has no central air, meaning it has to be cooled in the summertime via window units that are very inefficient. The windows are a problem, too, because air can be felt coming through them, Bradshaw said.

"So, we definitely want it to look better, be more efficient for the people who work in here with their space, because we're outgrowing it, and we want to make it more efficient as far as utilities go," Bradshaw said.

In addition, the courthouse needs a major electrical wiring upgrade, as it's just not set up for today's modern computer and communications systems.

"It's time to spruce it up," Bradshaw said.

Which is why the

commissioner has decided to put a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum before county voters that asks them to vote yes or no on a SPLOST to pay for courthouse renovations and other capital improvements.

As previously reported, a SPLOST is a 1-cent sales tax collected countywide for use on various capital projects for public facilities such as the courthouse renovations, and the referendum would appear on the May 19 General Primary Election ballot.

If approved by voters, the six-year SPLOST would go into effect Oct. 1, 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, 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.

The commissioner prepared the language of the referendum by soliciting comments and suggestions from everyone who works

in the courthouse, including judges, elected officials and clerical workers.

Doing this, he was able to come up with a list of the most important things needed at the courthouse, using cost efficiency, security and accessibility as a baseline.

"We understand that we all have our wants, but we're going to fulfill our needs," Bradshaw said. "We're not going over the top."

Because it's so early on, not all of the details of the courthouse renovation project are known at this time. Bradshaw said that, though he has interviewed some architects, he can't formally engage anyone until he gets the green light from voters to proceed.

The point of consulting architects so early is to find out how many of the needed renovations can be feasibly considered given the proposed SPLOST funding.

"What the architects are looking at are these porches that go around the building — it's a lot of wasted space," Bradshaw said. "Maybe extending the walls out on the back and the sides, that would give us a lot more room."

"Then you have a lot of wasted space in the foyer, so they're looking to see which way is going to be the more cost-effective way. Is it taking advantage of the wasted space, or adding on to the back?"

Bradshaw said there's one architect in particular that he's very impressed with who will be coming to Hiwassee this month to go over the building before making a concept rendering of what the renovated exterior could look like.

Chamber...from Page 1A

that the lottery was able to pay the loan back after its first week in business.

Fast forward to today, and Landroche said the Georgia Lottery is bringing in record-level funding, having generated \$1.21 billion last year alone for education, all while experiencing eight years of consecutive growth, including "four years in a row of a \$1 billion-plus to HOPE and Pre-K."

"Gov. Miller was convinced that if we could give students a jumpstart to their education by enrolling them in a free pre-kindergarten," Landroche said, "and then give the best and brightest an opportunity to stay here in Georgia by going to college

on a lottery-funded Hope Scholarship, chances are that those folks will stay in Georgia, work in Georgia, that they would create jobs in Georgia, and that they would raise families in Georgia. And that's exactly what's happening in this state."

"We raise the dollars — that's what our job is — and we transfer them over to the state four times a year on a quarterly basis," Landroche continued. "We don't oversee the educational programs that we fund. There are two state agencies that do that, and they do an outstanding job on that."

Also during the presentation, Landroche provided a breakdown of every

dollar spent on lottery tickets.

"It varies by game, but about 63 cents, give or take, goes to player prizes," Landroche said. "We know that people like to win."

Last year, players won \$2.88 billion in prizes, Landroche said, with the next big chunk of lottery proceeds — about 26 cents for every dollar spent on lottery tickets — going toward education.

The Georgia Lottery ranks No. 2 in the nation per capita in sales and fifth in the world, according to Landroche, which has resulted in over 1.6 million students being able to jumpstart their education through Pre-K and more than 1.9 million students benefiting from HOPE in college.

City Council...from Page 1A

The three members approved last week will serve as county representatives on the board: Stephanie McConnell, Daniel Burch and Dwayne Anthony Phillips.

Hiwassee JDA Board members are Josh Alexander, Joe Ruf and Vicki Constantinides.

Young Harris City Council should be forthcoming with three board member appointments in the near future, as council members there approved the city's inclusion in the Joint Development Authority in their own Feb. 4 regular meeting.

The JDA will be headed up by Economic Development Director Denise McKay, with the purpose of promoting economic development throughout the county and cities.

Hiwassee City Council members also approved a new landscape contract that the city has advertised on Facebook and in the Towns County Herald until the end of February.

The contract will include how many times a business would be needed for landscaping services through the year, and bids will include prices to maintain the Hiwassee Town Square, city sidewalks and Mayors Park.

Closed bids will be opened on Feb. 24 at 2 p.m. at a public meeting, after which a contract will be awarded to the winning bidder.

The next order of business at last week's meeting was the approval of a new

Planning Board member to replace former councilman Kris Berrong. Council members nominated and approved Councilwoman Nancy Noblet to serve in that position.

According to Ordiales, the Planning Board only meets as needed to discuss and approve new construction taking place in the city in accordance with city ordinances.

The next order of business was for council members to appoint from among themselves a mayor pro tempore to fill in for Mayor Ordiales in conducting official city business on occasions when the mayor is unavailable or if she should become incapacitated.

Once again, the council appointed Councilwoman Anne Mitchell to serve as mayor pro tem.

In other business, the council voted unanimously to approve Blight Resolutions for the Paris buildings the city recently purchased for economic development purposes on Main Street.

Declaring the long-unused buildings blighted will enable the city to apply for grant funds to repair them in preparation for future local businesses at as little cost to taxpayers as possible.

The grants the city is applying for include the Community Development Block Grant, USDA Rural Development Grant and Appalachian Regional Commission.

Ordiales said the city has already started the application

process, though it may take some time to receive the grants.

The USDA grant would be worth \$99,000, potentially for each building, while the Community Development Block Grant could bring in as much as \$500,000.

Also Feb. 4, the council voted unanimously to dismiss Cenlya Galloway from her position as municipal court clerk. Council members made their decision — effective Feb. 15 — following an executive session that was called to discuss personnel and potential litigation.

Afterward, Mayor Liz Ordiales said the city was not at liberty to discuss its reasons for dismissing Galloway as court clerk, citing personnel matters. And though Galloway retained her office job inside City Hall, she resigned from that position following her dismissal, Ordiales said.

Galloway was not available for comment by press time.

City Hall is now in the process of securing another municipal court clerk, which is a position responsible for collecting fines and fees paid into the court, among other responsibilities, according to the Georgia Municipal Association.

This position will most likely be a part-time position, as court responsibilities are limited to a once a month court appearance.

City Council members will meet again for a regularly scheduled work session on Monday, Feb. 24, at 6 p.m. inside City Hall in the upstairs training room.

Baseball...from Page 1A

"Resurgens Orthopaedics has given us a grant for new equipment to start up to 10 more new programs throughout the state of Georgia," Duncan said. "We're really trying to find volunteers and coaches wherever we possibly can."

"Even though we may have a disability, even though I may have autism, we want to be given a chance to show what we can do. We're teachable — all we have to have is an opportunity, and not to have the same preconceived perceptions of what one with autism can

and cannot accomplish. "Instead, give us the support so that we can succeed, because when we do succeed, it helps everybody."

For more information about starting a team or volunteering with the Alternative Baseball Organization, contact Duncan by phone at 770-313-1762 and by email at alternativebaseball@gmail.com. The organization's website is www.alternativebaseball.org.

GWRRR meetings

Chapter J of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRR) meets on the third Saturday of each month (excluding December) at Daniels Steakhouse, Hiwassee. Fellowship/food at 11 a.m. with the meeting at noon. We welcome riders of all motorcycle brands located in the north Georgia area. We focus on friends, fun, riding safety, and knowledge. Check our website for ride schedule. For further information, you may contact Bill and Barbara Schleicher at 706-379-3018. www.chapterjgwrrr-ga.com. NT(Feb12,22)CA