

# Towns County Herald

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## Thomason named TCHS principal; Rogers to retire

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

In their Feb. 6 regular meeting, Towns County Board of Education members promoted Towns County High School Assistant Principal Bryan Thomason to lead the High School as principal to start the 2023-24 school year.

It was officially announced in last month's board meeting that longtime local educator Roy Perren would be retiring as principal at the end of this school year, which kick-started the replacement process that resulted in Thomason taking up the mantle.

Originally from Gwinnett County, Thomason graduated from Brookwood High School and later from Western Carolina University in North Carolina, where he first discovered his love for the mountains.

Next year will mark Thomason's 15th year in education, four of which he has served in administrative positions, including being hired as TCHS assistant principal for the 2022-23 school year.

He also spent 10 years as a social studies teacher and has experience as an economics teacher and a football coach, having come to Towns

County Schools from Johnson High in Gainesville.

Thomason has two elementary-school age children and has described his family's move up here as "a dream come true" that he thought would only be made a reality in retirement.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said the process to hire a replacement for Perren actually began last year, as they both knew the current school year would be Perren's final.

"We were looking for the High School principal last year just to serve as assistant principal for the first year,"

Berrong said. "We talked about after the interviews with Mr. Thomason last year that if he was 70% as good as he interviewed, he was going to be fantastic."

Described by Berrong as "tough with high expectations," "fair" and "consistent," Thomason has "earned the respect of the entire staff."

For his part, Thomason "thinks the world of" Principal Perren and lauded him for demonstrating such strong leadership skills, saying he is honored to be following in his footsteps. Additionally, he thanked Berrong for his

See *Principal Thomason*, Page 8A



Bryan Thomason

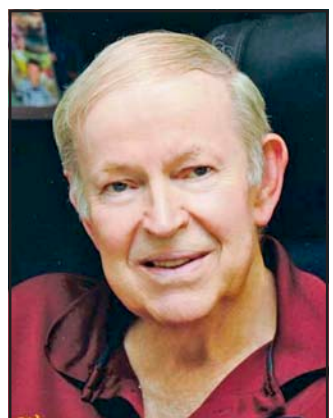
## Thurman's legacy lives on at GA Mtn. Fairgrounds

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

It is common knowledge that former Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Dale Thurman was both dedicated to his job and well-loved in the community.

Terms like "gentle," "easy to talk to," "outgoing" and "respected" come up when people talk about him and the legacy he left behind, and it goes without saying that he will be missed following his passing on Tuesday, Jan. 17, at the age of 78.

Although he was born in Marietta on July 14, 1944, Thurman was a Towns County resident. His parents already lived in Hiawassee; his father



Dale Thurman

was from Ducktown, Tennessee, and his mother was from Union County, just down the road.

"When he was real little, his dad owned Farmer

and Colwell Cabins (in Blairsville)," recalls Thurman's wife Beatrice. Having gone to Marietta for work during the war, his parents just happened to bring Thurman into the world in the city only to return home later.

It was here that Thurman would become involved in his community through organizations like the Hospital Authority Board and, perhaps most prominently, the Lions Club.

Through his Lions membership, Thurman volunteered for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds – then a very different place compared to its sprawling layout today. It was once nothing more than a forested

See *Thurman's Legacy*, Page 8A

## Suspect arrested in Feb. 6 cross-county police chase

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

A Towns County resident allegedly fled law enforcement from Hiawassee to Blairsville on Monday, Feb. 6, only to get away after authorities called off the chase for safety reasons during a busy time of day on Georgia 515.

Thanks to interagency cooperation between the Union County Sheriff's Office and the police departments of Hiawassee, Blairsville and Fair Hope, Alabama, investigators were able to verify the identity of the driver and negotiate his surrender the very next day.

Caleb Matthew Price, 23, of Hiawassee, was arrested and charged with multiple mis-

demeanors in connection with the chase, including fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer, reckless driving, passing in a no-passing zone and failure to obey traffic control devices.

His bond was set at \$20,000 last week, and he remained in custody at the Union County Jail at press time.

The chase began around 4 p.m. that Monday when Hiawassee Police Officer J.R. Murray spotted a dark Ford Explorer that had been the subject of a "be on the lookout" for erratic driving, Hiawassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker said.

Murray tried to pull the vehicle over after it entered city limits from the west, but the Explorer declined to stop and continued to drive erratically



Caleb Matthew Price

while turning around in the McDonald's parking lot, and the pursuit headed westbound

See *Police Chase*, Page 8A

## McKay talks development with Movers & Shakers

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

In the Feb. 10 weekly breakfast meeting of the Mountain Movers & Shakers, Towns County Joint Economic Development Director Denise McKay stopped in to talk – you guessed it – local economic development.

Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority Program Manager Steven Harper, who is a regular at the nonpartisan civic group's meetings, introduced McKay.

"She's done amazing things for the county, for our city, and for our neighboring city in Young Harris," Harper said.

For her part, McKay said



Denise McKay

she was "happy to be here," noting that local economic development has "made a lot of progress in the last four years."

"One highlight we are

going to celebrate is, the Appalachian Regional Commission every year evaluates the county's fiscal status of where they're at," McKay said. "In 2017, Towns County was classified as 'at-risk', and now I'm proud to announce that this year we are back to 'transitional' for the first time since then.

"We do have several projects being worked on right now. Two of them we are pretty far along and, when they come to fruition, should bring about 45 jobs to the area, which is great and what we need to create to help bring and keep families here. Families are needed to keep the county alive."

McKay reminded folks about the Fanning Institute

See *Movers & Shakers*, Page 5A

## Fairgrounds revs up for Annual Classic Car Show



The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' Car Show Committee will be meeting several more times between now and the April 28-29 main event.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On Monday, Feb. 6, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum held the first of several joint Car Show Com-

mittee meetings to begin brainstorming ideas for the upcoming Third Annual Classic Car Show.

The show is slated for Friday, April 28, and Saturday, April 29, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.

Hosted in the conference room of the Fairgrounds Main Office, the meeting featured Alvin Gibson, Marty Roberts, Charles Turner, Matt Turpin, Miranda Burnette, Brian Grubbs, Sole Commissioner

See *Classic Car Show*, Page 5A

## Brand new TCSO K-9 team to patrol in Towns County

News Special  
Towns County Herald

Due to Towns County Sheriff Henderson's ongoing commitment to the war on drugs here in the community, he has welcomed K-9 Zeus aboard as the third addition to the Sheriff's Office K-9 Unit.

Henderson has also welcomed Deputy Tyler Davis, Zeus' handler, to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Deputy Davis and K-9 Zeus are assigned to the Drug Investigation Unit and will be patrolling zones throughout the county.

Sheriff Henderson stated that he believes it is fundamental to incorporate K-9s "in all aspects of our proactive approach to drug investigations



Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson with new Deputy Tyler Davis and K-9 Zeus. Photo/Facebook

## HPD arrests suspect in car-related thefts at hospital

News Special  
Towns County Herald

On Tuesday, Jan. 31, Hiawassee Police responded to Chatuge Regional Hospital in reference to a male subject breaking into vehicles.

Upon arrival it was discovered that the suspect had been located by Chatuge Regional Hospital Security while doing routine rounds. A Chatuge Regional Hospital Security officer was able to obtain a direction of travel where the male subject fled.

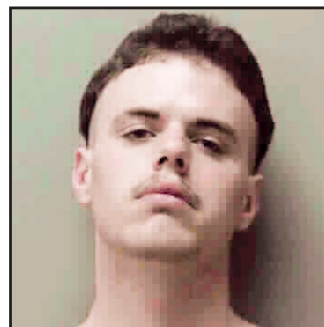
While Hiawassee Police were searching for the suspect in the wooded area behind Walgreens where he fled, a

Towns County Sheriff's Deputy responded to the Budget Inn where they made contact with a male subject who was staying there.

After reviewing surveillance video, HPD and TCSO officers returned to the Budget Inn and checked the dumpster outside the building, where they located most of the stolen items as well as the suspect's clothing that was described by Chatuge Regional Hospital Security.

It was determined that the vehicles which were entered belonged to Chatuge Regional Hospital staff as well as a patient.

The next day, on Feb.



John Walker Bryant

1, John Walker Bryant, 18, of Silerton, Tennessee, was arrested by the Hiawassee Police Department and booked into the Towns County Detention Center.

See *Theft Arrest*, Page 5A

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Lake Levels

BASKETBALL

New Herald Email: tcherald@brmemc.net

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Blue Ridge 1,670.94  
Chatuge 1,917.58  
Nottely 1,761.13

2/14 Boys @ Lincoln

2/16-2/17 @ Greene Co

Kindergarten Registration See page 6A

Iwo Jima Ceremony Feb. 20 See page 7A



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# Movers & Shakers...from Page 1A

Leadership Curriculum that had been implemented in concert with Towns County Elementary and High Schools for student leadership training.

"And now that has gone through, so we're really excited, and this is a really good program because this is how we start to address workforce development," she said.

Referring to last year's successful Young Harris Porch-Fest, McKay said that "we are definitely continuing that this year."

"It was a lot of fun and gave something extra for people to gather and enjoy having a good time," she said. "And the (Hiawassee) Night Market is still on schedule for the first Friday of May through October, from 5-9 p.m."

Added McKay, "A tremendous amount of work has also been done at Cupid Falls with a rain garden just being planted there, and we are be-

ginning the process very soon on the (boardwalk) at Lloyd's Landing being constructed."

She highlighted "something new coming in March," to feature local food trucks on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and on Mondays "with times still being decided" next to Eller's Tire & Service in Hiawassee.

The location is the future site of the Hiawassee Hub, a "mixed-use development consisting of three parcels at Main and River Streets on the square in the beautiful mountain downtown Hiawassee, Georgia, on Lake Chatugee." The project can be viewed at [www.hiawasseehub.com](http://www.hiawasseehub.com).

McKay also said that a Dunkin' Donuts was in the works across from Zaxby's, with more information to be made available at a later date. According to [careers.dunkin-donuts.com](http://careers.dunkin-donuts.com), the restaurant is hiring crew members for a lo-

cation at 385 South Main Street in Hiawassee.

In some poor news for pooch lovers, Harper said there would be no dog park coming to Hiawassee Mayors Park: "The reason the (Tennessee Valley Authority) said no is because of wanting to avoid dog runoff seeping into the lake around here."

"But there will be a dog park in Young Harris behind Cupid Falls as soon as we raise money to put the fence in," McKay said.

The meeting wrapped up with Harper and McKay making the public aware of the brand-new city website [www.downtownhiawassee.com](http://www.downtownhiawassee.com), featuring all things Hiawassee DDA, upcoming events and promotions.

Mountain Movers & Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill, usually with a guest speaker from the community.

# Classic Car Show...from Page 1A

Cliff Bradshaw and Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason.

As of the meeting, 23 cars had registered to participate, and it's still super early, so Thomason feels confident that the 2023 show will exceed the 200-plus cars that turned out in 2022.

"We have Atlanta Motor Speedway being represented by bringing their pace cars, and we're still getting calls and emails with questions and ticket purchases, so this is very exciting, and we're sure that this will be our biggest one yet," Thomason said.

The Car Show will offer families plenty of fun activities regardless of age, including a car corral, raffle prizes featuring a Ranger-brand ATV, silent auction, delicious food vendors, arts & crafts, a swap meet and more.

"Our idea for now on the new car corral feature is where individuals will bring any kind

of vehicle they want to try and sell, put a price on it, and try to sell it right there," Gibson said. "Inclusion of the car corral is included in the price of vehicle registration, so it's no extra charge."

"That just helps everybody get more out of everything going on; we don't want people to pay extra money to try and sell their car and end up not being able to get rid of it."

Commissioner Bradshaw reflected on the fact that the event has continued to grow since its inception, "and people keep registering even up to the day of onsite, so we're extremely looking forward to this year's turnout."

The show will rev into gear with a Kick-Off Party at the Hamilton Gardens the night before opening day on Thursday, April 27, from 6-9 p.m.

And throughout the show's entirety, folks can look forward to musical acts such as

Chris Stalcup & The Grange, Wyatt Espalin, Scott Low Band, True Youngblood, The Murphs and The Old Futures included with ticket prices.

Pure Prairie League and the Atlanta Rhythm Section will play a hard-ticket concert that Saturday night, and so far, "over 1,100 tickets have been sold for that," Thomason said.

Car Show tickets are \$10 for spectators and free for children 12 and under.

Vendor and car registry guidelines are as follows: \$100 for vehicle-covered booth with security (limited availability); \$30 for vehicle and/or swap meet; \$50 for arts & crafts; \$200 for commercial vendor; \$150 for food vendor; and \$200 for a six-person table at the Kick-Off Party.

Visit [www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com](http://www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com) for more information or stop by the office at 1311 Music Hall Road of Hiawassee.

# Twenty-Seven Towns County FBLA Students Competed at the Region Leadership Conference



Twenty-seven Towns County High School Future Business Leaders of America students competed at region level competitions this school year.

Seventeen of these students finished in the Top Ten in the region. Seventeen of these students will advance to state level competition in March. Towns County High School also received the largest membership award for the northeast region of Georgia with 104 members!

These young people have represented our school and community well. Congratulations to all!

Front Row: Jay Grimley – Sports & Entertainment Management, Jersei Jones – Introduction to Financial Math, Lilly Cannon – Personal Finance, Cece Pizarro – Social Media Strategies, Sarah Shook – Spreadsheet Applications, Jaedyn Hancock – Introduction to Social Media Strategies, Ansleigh Hardin – Introduction to Business Presentation and Introduction to Marketing Concepts, Chloe Crowe – Introduction to Event Planning, Madison Molina – Introduction to Information Technology, Callie Drew Livingston – Introduction to Business Presentation, Bella Rose Childs – Introduction to Public Speaking.

Back Row: Curtis Markham – Entrepreneurship, Connor Williams – Introduction to Business Procedures, Zion Calhoun – Entrepreneurship, Brant Youngblood – Sports & Entertainment Management, Dren Green – Social Media Strategies, Laura Mauldin – Word Processing, Eli Phillips – Impromptu Speaking, Kade McConnell – Personal Finance, Layne Rouse – Personal Finance, Jadalynn Reynolds – Introduction to Information Technology, Dhriti Patel – Spreadsheet Applications.

Not pictured: Will McConnell – Computer Applications and Business Ethics, Haley Merritt – Word Processing and Business Ethics. TFeb15.A6JH



# New K-9 Team...from Page 1A

and eliminating drugs in our community."

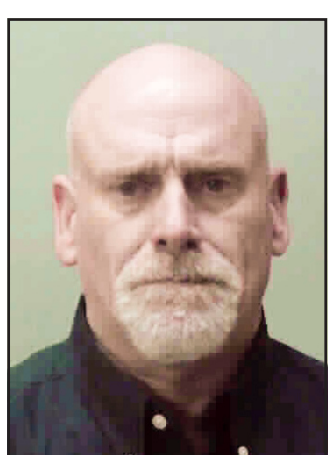
In other Sheriff's Office news, while patrolling early Sunday morning on Feb. 5, a Sheriff's Deputy initiated a traffic stop after observing a vehicle driving suspiciously and without tag lighting.

During the stop, it was discovered the driver was driving without a valid license and insurance. A search of the vehicle resulted in a large quantity of suspected methamphetamine laced with fentanyl, which field-tested positive with a weight of 7.12 grams.

Michael Darren Sears, 54, of Williamsborough, South Carolina, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, possession and use of drug-related objects, driving with license expired, no proof of insurance, no license tag, and tag light violation.

Sears is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Sheriff Henderson commends his deputies for a good job and for keeping these dangerous drugs from reaching the streets of Towns County.



Michael Darren Sears

# Theft Arrest...from Page 1A

Bryant has been charged with three felony counts of entering an auto with intent to commit theft. He has been charged only and is presumed

innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Hiawassee Police would like to thank local businesses for their support

in this investigation, and the department would also like to encourage businesses to consider cameras for their properties.

# GA House of Representatives Legislative Update Week 5

Representative Stan Gunter

The Georgia House of Representatives kicked off the fifth week of the 2023 legislative session on Monday, February 6. With more than a month of session behind us, the pace certainly picked up this week.

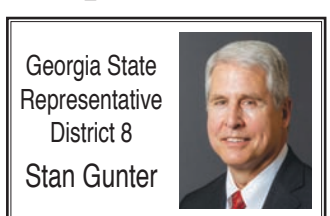
My colleagues and I overwhelmingly passed bipartisan legislation this week to protect our critical infrastructure overseen by the Georgia Ports Authority (GPA), including the Port of Savannah. House Bill 35 would give the GPA's security personnel and peace officers the authority to investigate criminal incidents and handle traffic offenses within one mile of their properties, including making arrests and controlling and investigating pedestrian and motor vehicle accidents. This legislation would also support the surrounding communities by allowing local law enforcement to dedicate less resources to this state authority's operations. Local municipalities impacted by the port system have also expressed their support for HB 35, and this legislation has been sent to the Senate for its consideration.

Additionally, we passed House Bill 52 on the House floor this week to update several other transportation and infrastructure laws. First, to protect the privacy of Georgians, this bill would exempt the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) from open records when a driver's data on public roadways reveals their vehicle information or other personally identifiable information. This provision would ensure that no one could use the Open Records Act in an attempt to obtain an individual's personal information from this agency.

HB 52 would give medical examiners more flexibility and allow medical personnel to arrive to the scene of an accident in a timelier manner. This would also help clear up accidents more quickly, while still ensuring that accurate information is documented from the scene. Additionally, under this bill, the state would be able to provide permits to mobile home manufacturers to transport units that are up to 84 feet in length. Finally, this legislation would authorize GDOT board election notifications to be sent via email instead of mail, and this bill would also update language in our laws to help streamline GDOT's process for public-private partnership contracts and alternative contracting methods.

Currently, Georgia's Spencer Pass Law requires drivers to safely change lanes or slow down when approaching stationary emergency or service vehicles on our roadways. This week, we passed House Bill 119 to update this law to also require drivers to move over for any disabled vehicle, such as another car or tow truck if it is safe to do so. A number of drivers and workers who provide crucial services to drivers have been killed by passing vehicles over the years, and this legislation aims to keep these drivers and roadside workers safe from other motorists.

While we were in the House Chamber this week, my colleagues and I took time to honor Mr. Louis Graziano on his incredible bravery as a U.S. soldier in World War II. Born in 1923, Mr. Graziano is the last surviving World War II veteran to witness Germany's surrender. Mr. Graziano was a



Georgia State Representative District 8 Stan Gunter

master sergeant and fought in the third wave of the Omaha Beach invasion on D-Day. After D-Day, he also fought in the Battle of the Bulge, where he almost lost his feet to frostbite, and he took part in the June 6th invasion of Normandy in 1944. He then served at the Special Headquarters Command in Reims, France, where he witnessed Germany sign the surrender document and then took the Germans to meet General Dwight D. Eisenhower. Mr. Graziano's visit to the State Capitol coincided with his 100th birthday, and I was inspired to meet this American hero and hear his incredible story.

We will return to the State Capitol on Monday, February 13 for another packed week of lawmaking as we get closer to the infamous "Crossover Day," which is the last day a bill can pass out of the House or Senate for the first time and still remain eligible to become law this year. As your representative, it is extremely important for me to hear which issues are significant to you and your family, especially before the Crossover Day deadline. If you find yourself in Atlanta during the legislative session, please feel free to schedule a visit to my Capitol office. You may call my Capitol office at 404-656-5125 or email me at [Stan.Gunter@house.ga.gov](mailto:Stan.Gunter@house.ga.gov).

As always, thank you for allowing me to serve as your state representative.



# Principal Thomason...from Page 1A

regular involvement inside the schools.

"It's kind of cool and refreshing to have your superintendent always in your building," Thomason said. "After I'd been up here about a month, I said, 'Good luck; you're going to have to get rid of me, because I'm not going anywhere.'"

Also in the meeting, Berrong announced the end of an era for another well-loved, familiar face of the school system: Joyce Rogers.

"(We) hate to see her go, but she will be retiring at the end of the year," Berrong said, voicing the thoughts of many in the school system, whether they be staff or students.

Rogers grew up in nearby Hayesville, North Carolina, and has been a fixture at Towns County Schools for over 30 years working the front office for the Middle and High Schools.

Coach Rob Benson, who

came back to TCHS for exactly one year to help lighten the heavy load during a shortage of math teachers in the mountains, will be returning to his own retirement. Art Cartee will take up the position in his stead.

Cartee and his family recently moved to Towns from Paulding County, where he taught higher-level sciences like chemistry and physics for 26 years, and one of Cartee's children graduated from TCHS last year.

Currently, Cartee is working toward a math certification in preparation for his new position.

Concerning another resignation, High School Band Teacher Allison Judd will be going "in a different direction" career-wise, Berrong said, and the position has been officially opened alongside those of Towns County High School assistant principal and secretary.

Briefly mentioned, too,

was Berrong's desire to open a part-time chorus position so that students can once again participate in choir programs.

On the subject of the future, parents and guardians are encouraged to keep a close eye on next year's school calendar, which featured heavily in discussions during the work session period of last Monday's meeting.

"I have gotten a little creative with the school calendar," Berrong said. "What's been happening is, we have three workdays at the beginning of school, and now there's so many requirements on trainings that literally all we do is send the teachers in (to) trainings all day long; they had hardly any time whatsoever in their classroom (at the start of the year)."

No official action has been taken, but the proposed solution is to add more training days by way of changing the school year from a 180

student-day calendar to a 176 student-day calendar, including an adjustment to teacher workdays to make planning more efficient throughout the year.

Teachers' first day back would be July 31, giving them four workdays instead of three, while students would return on a Friday rather than Thursday, with the next workday set for Sept. 22.

October contains the annual fall break, which would consist of three off days Oct. 18-20 to make up a "five-day weekend."

Nov. 10 would see another workday before the five-day Thanksgiving break, followed by an early release on Dec. 15 to herald in two-week Christmas break. Students would return on Jan. 3, and Jan. 2 would be a workday.

Another workday would be Feb. 16, 2024, and because Feb. 19 is President's Day next year, another two holiday days would be added to make a new "winter break" for students.

"We have a workday in March, we have a workday in April before spring break, then we have the two workdays at the end of May as well," Berrong said. "We literally have a break or a workday every single month so that there's not two straight months (that

are) just jam-packed like we usually do."

As such, school would begin a week earlier and graduation a week later, but it's yet to be decided whether this plan will be adopted in the

next school year.

The Towns County Board of Education meets on the first Monday of every month at the Towns County Middle and High School Library starting at 6 p.m.

# Police Chase...from Page 1A

out of the city toward Young Harris.

Towns County E-911 Dispatchers contacted authorities in Blairsville to alert them to the chase as it approached the county line, and soon after, Officer Murray called off his pursuit near Ensley Road in Union County due to traffic conditions growing heavier.

To prevent the dangerous driver from heading into town, Blairsville Police and the Union County Sheriff's Office stopped eastbound traffic at Windy Hill Road and set up a spike strip in front of the Blairsville VA Clinic, according to Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter.

UCSO Maj. Shawn Dyer drove ahead to find the vehicle, which officers knew was traveling their way. As he passed Mountain Building Supply, Dyer said he saw the Explorer going west on the wrong side of the road, and he had to swerve his patrol car to avoid being hit.

When the driver got to the roadblock, he successfully navigated around the spike strip and continued toward Blairsville proper, where he blew through the red light at GA 515 and Farmers Market Way, Baxter said.

At that point, authorities decided that continuing the chase would be too risky, as

it was a busy time of day in a busy section of the county. So, in the interest of the "safety of the general public," they terminated the pursuit.

"It didn't meet the criteria for us to continue chasing it," Chief Baxter said. "The main criteria were the amount of traffic and the safety of the motoring public, and it just was not worth anybody getting hurt for us to continue chasing this individual."

A deputy waited at the GA 515/325 intersection to see if the driver would attempt to leave the county toward Fannin. When he failed to show up, local law enforcement stepped up area patrols to see if he was trying to hide on a side road, and they searched until dark.

The next morning, on Tuesday, Feb. 7, UCSO Staff Sgt. Brandon Hogsed found the Explorer parked beside Coosa Methodist Church off Mulky Gap Road. An investigation revealed that the driver had abandoned the car there and gotten a ride from an unknown person shortly after the chase.

Blairsville authorities coordinated with Hiwassee PD to confirm the Alabama tag of the car that fled Towns County, and when a driver's license photo came back, Dyer, who got a look at the driver the day before as the two passed each other on 515, verified Price as

their suspect.

Chief Baxter reached out to the Fair Hope Police Department in Alabama - Price had just moved to Towns County from there about a month ago - and Fair Hope PD contacted his mother, who helped negotiate Price's surrender to Dyer at the McDonald's in Hiwassee later that day.

Initially, authorities were concerned about the wellbeing of the driver, as they discovered that the Explorer's windshield had been struck by three bullets at some point prior to the chase.

As it turned out, Price was OK.

"You could tell that somebody had walked up to that vehicle and fired three rounds in the windshield from the passenger front fender," said Dyer, who also serves as Assistant Chief of Blairsville PD. The origins of the gunfire remain under investigation.

The above law enforcement officials were pleased that good interagency cooperation led to the arrest, and Chief Parker commended Officer Murray "for keeping a level head" during the chase and recognizing when to call off the pursuit for public safety as conditions grew unfavorable.

Price has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

# Thurman's Legacy...from Page 1A

park under the Tennessee Valley Authority, and some can still remember it being so.

"Now, he didn't actually get the fair started," explained Terry Taylor, a longtime member of the Georgia Mountain Fair Board. "The fair started back in the early '50s. It had been run under a volunteer operation up until that time, and (Thurman) helped grow the fair."

Thurman's involvement at the fairgrounds grew from working events as a Lion to managing and then expanding the venue at its new location after the forest was cleared in 1976, and Taylor became the engineer and designer behind the fairgrounds that Thurman developed.

"Our friendship grew when he was big into the Georgia Mountain Fair and so was I - it was sort of a mutual hobby," Taylor said, recalling when Thurman became the first paid full-time manager of the fairgrounds.

"At the time, when we moved into the new site, the fair was pretty much just a one-week type event, and that's about all we did. And Dale helped grow it into pretty

much a year-round type of event, bringing in different concerts and shows."

Through his dedication, Thurman made the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds a "full-time operation," and although he didn't have a hand in constructing the Anderson Music Hall, it was his idea to provide more frequent entertainment.

"I enjoyed very much working with him at the fair," remarked Taylor with strained emotions. "We spent a lot of time there, and we went on fair trips for one reason or another, too. And we went on Lions Club trips also."

It took a long time for Thurman to decide on accepting a job offer to run the Greater Gulf State Fair in Mobile, Alabama, after 12 years of managing the Hiwassee-based fairgrounds.

"We still stayed in touch, you know," said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason, who served as secretary of the fairgrounds back then. "And of course, he'd come home on the weekends some and I'd see him in town."

Upon his return to Georgia, Thurman moved to

Gwinnett County, where he managed the Gwinnett County Fairgrounds for 27 years, making it his third management position since the 1980s.

He remained busy with annual visits to fair conventions, whether in Georgia or South Carolina, and even won Top Fair Organizer for the State of Georgia almost three decades ago. This was another way Thomason stayed in touch with Thurman, giving him the chance to see her continue the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' development when she became the site's new manager.

Just last year on Nov. 1, Thurman's lengthy career came to an end when he decided to retire and return to Hiwassee full-time.

And on Jan. 17, a few months after returning home, he passed away. He had been married to Beatrice for 55 years, and beyond his passion for the people, they raised a family.

"It's still hard to even realize that he's gone," said Beatrice, remarking that she, Thurman and their two daughters "just lived it day by day."

"We all think we're going to live forever," she began, holding back tears. "He was just - everybody admired him, and he was a good man."

Taylor echoed her sentiment, noting that he will always remember Thurman as "really a good guy, and he really cared about the fair and the people of Towns County."

As for Thomason, she will always be honored to carry on his legacy. That's why his name has been bolted onto one of the chairs at the Anderson Music Hall via a special memorial plaque, leaving behind some physical trace of his touch outside of the legacy he built.

"Nothing makes me happier than to see all the smiles and the happy faces on people who have come to the Georgia Mountain Fair and have brought their family and (are) having such a fun time together," Thomason said, and she looks forward to keeping Thurman's torch alight with her own passion for maintaining the fairgrounds and all the smiles that come with it.



Ruth McConnell, of Young Harris, turned 101 on Sunday, February 5, 2023. She celebrated with family and friends on Saturday, February 4, at Daniel's Steakhouse of Hiwassee.

Last year, after Ms. Ruth turned 100, she said her next goal was to celebrate 101. At her birthday party, she told a friend her new goal is to celebrate 105.

Ms. Ruth is young at heart. One of her greatest joys is spending time with the young children in her family. She is often seen sitting, playing, and reading with her 4 year old great-granddaughter, who loves her "Ru-Ru".

Ms. Ruth was especially excited about watching the Super Bowl this year. Her favorite quarterback is Patrick Mahomes of the Kansas City Chiefs. She adores him and calls him her boyfriend.

Ms. Ruth has stated, "I feel humble and blessed to have lived such a wonderful, full life." Happy 101st Birthday, Ms. Ruth.

# Regional Transit Plan draft accepting public comments



The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has been working with consultants and the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission (GMRC) to develop a first-ever Regional Transit Plan - A guidance document that reviews the performance and priorities for public transit services within the 12-county area. Input from the general public, from transit service providers, from a stakeholder committee, and from area leaders throughout the process has helped the project team create the draft document, which is now available for review on the project website (<https://regionaltdp-gdot.hub.arcgis.com/pages/gmrc>) for the public review period. The goal of the document is

to provide a broad overview of ways the GMRC, GDOT, and other proponents can advance and support transit services across the region. As these documents are completed across the State, the information will help GDOT shape future policy and programming in hopes of delivering more efficient and effective services.

The public is encouraged to provide input on the draft document by sending all comments and questions to [RegionalTDP@dot.ga.gov](mailto:RegionalTDP@dot.ga.gov) with "Georgia Mountains TDP" in the subject line. Once the comment period is done, the plan will go before the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Council for adoption on February 23, 2023.