

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

www.townscountyherald.net

Publication Number 635540 Volume 93 Number 16

Wednesday, February 16, 2022

TCMS Indians, Lady Indians claim championships

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Feb. 5, Towns County Middle School Indians and Lady Indians Basketball teams a double win when both teams accomplished the unmatched task of taking home Tri-State Conference Tournament Championships in their respective divisions.

This year's tournament featured six other teams ranging from the Rabun, Macon and Jackson areas, and saw the ladies earn their first ever championship win, with the boys achieving a back-to-back championship victory having been 2019-2020 champions as well.

The Lady Indians completed the season with an 11-6 record and defeated Highlands Middle School 29-20 in the final round of the tournament, and the boys with a record of 15-2 by defeating Tallulah Falls Middle School 32-27.

"It felt very awesome to be able to be with a team and be a senior and help lead them and earn a championship with them in my final year," said eighth-grade Girls Team Captain Scottlyn Fain. "It makes me sad that I am going to be leaving, and I will miss them."

Jonas Rouse, is the eighth-grade boys captain, and he, too,

was proud of his team's accomplishments this season.

"It felt like we should have won because we worked so hard for it," Rouse said. "I plan on continuing to play in high school and maybe winning more championships."

The teams are led, respectively, by Ladies Head Coach Kerri Abernathy, who experienced great success in her first season of coaching, and Boys Head Coach Rollie Thomas, who likewise experienced tremendous success in his first year of coaching the boys.

"We are just really proud of the hard work and dedication they have put into the program," Abernathy said. "They put a lot of hard work in their schooling, which carries over to the court as well."

"We started off the season with some very tough competition that was not in our conference play, and I think that helped us see the high level of competition that we needed to play at to be successful. I attribute that to us really breaking it down to work on fundamentals and getting that team chemistry right so we play together as a team."

"Our girls really worked hard and learned from everyone, and that undoubtedly set a good tone for next year. Everyone has learned what role they need to play, and I am excited to see TCMS Champions, Page 8A



The TCMS Boys and Girls Basketball Teams made school history when both teams won their regional Tri-State Championship games this month. The teams were honored during the halftime of the TCHS Varsity Girls Basketball game Feb. 11. Photos by Lowell Nicholson

School system begins 2022 with transition to normalcy

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County School System Teacher of the Year Rachel Surles of the High School received a check from Blue Ridge Mountain EMC in appreciation of her service at the monthly school board meeting on Monday, Feb. 7.

EMC General Manager and CEO Allan Glidewell and Director of Communications Kelly Crawford presented the check to Surles.

"It's especially an honor to support the teachers," Glidewell said. "Isaac Newton said this once: 'If I've seen farther than other men, it's because I've stood on the shoulders of giants.' Occasionally, it's good to recognize the giants."

Moving along, School Finance Director Myra Underreprints for the month of January 2022 were \$1.767 million,



BRMEMC General Manager Allan Glidewell presenting Towns County School System Teacher of the Year Rachel Surles with a check for her accomplishment. Photo by Mark Smith

making collections for the current fiscal year for January more than \$5.9 million, for all intents and purposes at budget of \$6 million.

"That means, going forward, we can expect our pay- See Board of Education, Page 3A

Historic Music Hall benches on sale in April for \$50

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The \$1 million project to replace all the seats inside Anderson Music Hall benches continues, with General Manager Hilda Thomason getting ready to start removing the old benches to make room for individual theater-style cushioned seats.

And the old benches will be sold for \$50 apiece to help raise money for the new seating.

"We have had the same seating arrangement here in the Music Hall since we opened in 1978, so we knew it was time to get some fresh updates here," Thomason said. "It's been a long time coming."

"We want people to be more comfortable with the new far-so-cushioned seats and not so scrunched up on the benches so everyone can have



Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason is looking forward to the community participating in buying the old Anderson Music Hall bench participating to help fund the new theater-style seats. Photo by Jeremy Foster

more space. The new individual seats will also feature a cup holder for your drinks and the fairgrounds have been raising money for the project since last April, with \$155,000 amassed so far thanks to events such as the Memory Lane Classic Car See Music Hall Benches, Page 8A

'Shine-Thru Parade' continues Night to Shine tradition

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – It was all smiles at the First United Methodist Church of Union County on Feb. 5 as the usual "Night to Shine" gala became a daytime "Shine-Thru Parade."

Historically, the annual event celebrating the area's special needs residents has taken place in the evening, but amid a world still reeling from COVID-19, organizers opted to bring the event back with some creative wiggle room in 2022.

Night to Shine came

about in 2014 thanks to the efforts of the Tim Tebow Foundation. Set up like a prom night, anyone 14 and older can participate as a guest for a dedicated time of enjoyment honoring individual "Kings and Queens" with special needs from Towns, Union, Fannin and Beyond.

The nationally recognized event is hosted by local churches, and Blairsville's First United Methodist Church was no exception, with the 2022 Night to Shine having been organized by Joe and Kim Tatman, who celebrated their fifth year putting on the event.

"Because of COVID,

both last year and again this year, we cannot host an indoor prom," said Kim Tatman, who remained determined to let folks with special needs know that they are still loved.

Last year, party favors and food were delivered directly to the homes of caretakers and participants in lieu of a gathering, but this year, with the advent of the "Shine-Thru Parade," the Prom Kings and Queens were able to return to the church.

Guests attended in everything from trucks and vans to sleek cars and sizeable buses passing through the parking lot to stop at various deco

See Night to Shine, Page 8A



Union County Fire Department and Mascot Sparky Dalmatian enjoyed the "Shine-Thru Parade" as much as the guests earlier this month at First United Methodist Church of Union County. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Firewise Coalition educates public on fire prevention

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On Tuesday, Feb. 8, the Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition hosted a public educational session on fire prevention, tips and tricks of the trade in Marion Hall of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

The meeting was rescheduled from the previous month due to icy road conditions in January.

Of the 124 Firewise

Communities statewide, Towns County is home to 24, or nearly 20% of all Firewise Communities in Georgia, in one of the smallest counties in the state. And organizers are hopeful that residents in Union County will want to spread Firewise to their communities also.

So, why should people pay attention? Because fire is an eventuality up here in the heavily forested North Georgia Mountains. That's where Firewise comes in, to serve as a way for residents to take control of factors that can dramatically

reduce their risk in the event of wildfire.

Firewise USA is a program of the National Fire Protection Association aimed at educating the public on important information regarding necessary precautions to take to maintain the prevention and reduction of wildfire risks.

Research has demonstrated that proper preparation of homes and landscaping plays a vital role in minimizing the potential for catastrophic harm caused by wildfires, which can transfer from ignited vegetation

or an ignited home through radiation, convection and traveling embers.

Furthermore, experiments, models and post-fire studies have shown that homeowners would greatly benefit from conducting proper fire mitigation up to 200 feet from the foundations of their homes.

Firewise suggests that residents request a fire-risk overview by visiting their local Georgia Forestry Commission office or fire agency to learn more about the science-based guidelines that help residents

prepare their homes and properties for wildfires.

Frank Riley is the executive director of the Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D Council, the Georgia Firewise liaison, and the Appalachian RC&D Fire Adapted Communities Coalition Administrator. He outlined the purpose of their efforts in the meeting.

"Our dedication is solely to help our communities become safer from wildfires and provide guidance to make a defensible space around your See Firewise, Page 8A



Michael Courey
Towns Firewise

2 Sections 16 Pages
Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,671.96
Chatuge 1,917.90
Nottely 1,726.08

Inside
Arrests 2A
Chamber 7A
Church 4B
Classifieds 6B
Opinion 4A
Legals 7B
Obits 5B
Sports 2B

SPORTS
BASKETBALL
Region Tournament
@ Commerce
2/15 Girls vs. Greene Co.
2/16 Boys vs. TBA

Towns County
CTAE Students
See page 5A

National
Salute to
Veteran Patients
Week
See page 1B

Ninth District
Community Action Agency
Emergency
Programs
Funding
See page 7B

Commissioner Bradshaw speaks to local Democrats

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw provided an update on several county projects when he met with Towns County Democrats on Thursday, Feb. 10.

Prominent among them was upcoming renovations to the county courthouse in Hiwassee. The renovations are being funded with proceeds from a 1% Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) approved by voters in 2020. While the coronavirus pandemic and resulting supply-chain problems have delayed the project's start, the interest accumulating on the \$2.3 million now in the SPLOST account have been a silver lining in face of inflation, which has raised the courthouse project cost from \$8 million to \$9.5 million, Bradshaw said.

"We're gaining interest, not paying interest" on a bond that Bradshaw said he purposefully did not secure due to the pandemic's uncertainty. "The county is doing very well financially. We have been very frugal since COVID

hit," he said.

The courthouse renovations are expected to take 12 to 14 months to complete. County offices will vacate the building and move into the old county recreation center, where improvements to the HVAC system will begin within the next two weeks, resulting in a bonus of better air conditioning for local pickleball players when they resume rainy-day matches there. Bradshaw also reported that a new covered pavilion with restrooms and picnic tables will be built at the Towns County Pickleball Complex. He did not give a timeline for that project.

As the SPLOST is a six-year tax, Bradshaw said funds generated by it will be available to replenish the county's "rainy-day" fund from which money may also be drawn to pay for the courthouse and other projects. "We hope to have [the courthouse project] paid for in full, with no loans and no interest due, by opening day," he said.

In the meantime, Brad-



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

shaw said he will continue to improve county wages, which he noted have increased 50 cents per hour each year since he took office in 2017, and to upgrade all of the county's equipment.

As the county grows, Bradshaw said "We are trying to stay ahead of the growth that we know is coming." As a result, he said the county will be updating its ordinances and will take steps for stricter enforcement of its permitting process, particularly building

permits, and enforcement of such measures as the Mountain Protection Act which limits the amount of soil, trees, and vegetation that can be removed from land above 2,200 feet in elevation.

"We're not going to let people move up here and scalp our mountains and decrease our property values," he said, adding that doing so would damage the very things that attract newcomers and visitors to Towns County.

Another update Bradshaw mentioned was a change at the county transfer station, i.e., the county dump, where residential and commercial garbage are now disposed of in separate and distinct areas. Anything bagged is considered residential, he said. The new system should result in a cleaner and faster experience, he said.

In response to a question about the potential for crypto-mining facilities coming to Towns County, Bradshaw said the county is looking into a 120-day moratorium which could be considered at the next commissioner's meeting. The moratorium would be followed by an ordinance "that would make it so strict they would not want to come here," he said.

"I still love coming to work every day," Bradshaw concluded with obvious enthusiasm.

Towns County Democrats meet the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. at the county civic center in Hiwassee.

County Chair Charlotte Sleczkowski reminds voters that applications for absentee ballots for the May 24 primary will be available starting March 7 and the application period will close May 13. She emphasized that the application period is shorter this election cycle than in previous years because of Georgia's new voting law.

Board of Education...from Page 1A

ments to be drastically lower," she said, because most of the tax receipts are in for the year.

Sales tax receipts for December 2021 were about \$232,000, surpassing December 2020 receipts of \$214,000, so people are still coming in and spending, she said.

Underwood said 50% of the fiscal year was complete as of the end of December 2021, with 41% of budgeted revenues having been received and 51% of budgeted expenditures having been spent.

As is normally the case, the budget always comes into balance around this time of the fiscal year, she said. The board approved the December 2021 financial statements.

In other news, Middle School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs made a special announcement in the meeting.

"If you haven't heard, TCMS made history this past weekend when our girls and boys basketball teams both won their region championship games," she said. "Both teams are now the 2021-2022 Tri-State Conference Champions, and they ended their seasons in First Place.

"The girls were coached by Kerri Abernathy and Sheena Kendall, and they beat Highlands Middle School 29-20. And the boys, coached by Rolie Thomas, came back from behind in the last couple of minutes and beat Tallulah Falls Middle School 32-27."

Elementary School Principal Shannon Moss and High School Principal Roy Perren reported that, though there were several positive cases of COVID at the beginning of January within their respective student bodies and staff, most

had recovered and only a few positive cases remain.

"The COVID numbers are starting to decrease," Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said. "I expect those to continue to decrease over the next few weeks and, hopefully, get back to ground zero where we started off the school year."

Moss reported a total of 442 students currently enrolled at TCES, with only two students remaining online.

He also announced a Dental Bus visit to campus on Friday, Feb. 11, and he reminded everyone, twice, that Spring Break 2022 starts on April 4, to some chuckles from the board.

Hobbs reported a total of 218 students currently enrolled at the Middle School, with eight students remaining online and zero cases of COVID within the student body or her staff.

Perren reported a total of 299 students currently enrolled with only one remaining online. Perren said that was the lowest enrollment total in quite some time due to people moving away from Towns County.

Moving forward, several requests, retirements and recommendations were all unanimously approved/accepted by the board in the normal course of school board business.

Requests to surplus a 2011 Ford F-350 two-wheel drive truck and livestock trailer and use the proceeds to purchase a newer, possibly four-wheel drive vehicle and larger livestock trailer was approved along with a 16-week professional leave for Colin Taylor to do his student teaching.

The immediate resignations of Custodian Annette Parsons and Assistant Head

Start Teacher Joy Bright were accepted. Parsons will be replaced by Debbie Daniel, and Bright will be replaced by Hillary Lewis.

End-of-school-year resignations of Special Ed Parapro Robin Welker, Elementary Special Ed Teacher and former School Board Member Laura Bannister, and Elementary School Music Teacher Catherine Seis were accepted.

Both Berrong and Moss said they would actively try to convince Seis, a Towns County teacher of 20 years, not to retire just yet.

Approved substitute teachers are Leah Craig, Kari McCullough, Jeffrey Vardo and Krista Massell.

Substitute Bus Driver Patricia Doche and Part-time School Nutrition Assistant Terri Seabolt were both approved.

In his regular remarks, Berrong announced that both school real estate transactions – the 16-acre property sale in Young Harris and the 9.5-acre property purchase adjacent to campus – had closed, and that the system is excited to have the additional campus property.

Berrong also mentioned that the schools are considering building a maintenance barn.

"Currently, our maintenance has little buildings spread out over the entire campus. So, we're looking at trying to find a location to put them (all) in one building," he said.

Assuming funds within the budget can be found, Berrong said he would like to start the project in Summer 2022.

The Towns County Board of Education meets the first Monday of each month at the Middle/High School Media Center beginning at 6 p.m.

Firewise...from Page 1A

homes," Riley said.

Michael Courey is the lead volunteer coordinator of the Towns County Firewise Coalition managing and maintaining the activities, schedules, events and information sessions for the group.

"Fire mitigation is very realistic, and it works," Courey said. "The Firewise program is set out to decrease the risk of individual life, community life and property loss.

"Without taking appropriate precautions to keep our homes a little bit safer to wildfires, then we are subject to the whims of the possible tragedies that can occur. But with a little effort and common sense, the risk can be decreased dramatically."

Also discussed that evening was the SSTAR protocol. Many people are accustomed to burning leaves and other yard debris at the

properties, and Firewise promotes the use of an acronym to remind people of the best way to maximize burning safety.

SSTAR stands for: Space, 25 feet between fire and woodlands; Space, 50 feet between fire and structures; Time, from sunrise to sunset; Attendance, stay on-site until a debris fire is extinguished; and Reasonable precautions, like having tools and other measures in place to prevent escaped fire.

Precautions include having a continuous pressurized water source; a man-made or natural barrier to contain fire; hand tools and fire-containing equipment; weather awareness; and knowledge of fire danger designations of hazardous conditions like low relative humidity and high winds.

Other presenters were Judy Potter of Towns Firewise, Towns Fire Chief Harold Copeland, Union Fire

Chief David Dyer, Towns Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Georgia Forestry Chief Ranger Blake Melton, and GFC Wildland Urban Interface Specialist Anthony English.

Nick Peters, who is the Assistant Fire Management Officer for the U.S. Forest Service Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, was also in attendance, and Joe Boone helped to organize the meeting at the church that evening.

After the meeting, several Union County residents expressed an interest in starting Firewise Communities.

For more information on wildfire prevention, visit www.firewise.org. For guidance on how to apply for hazard mitigation grant programs or get a neighborhood Firewise Community established, call 813-486-8997 or email michael@courey.net or townsfirewise@gmail.com.

Chamber of Commerce to host Career Fair March 8

The Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce is hosting a Career Fair on Tuesday, March 8 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Towns County Recreation & Conference Center in Young Harris. The Chamber received an overwhelming response from many local businesses with job openings.

The list of businesses that will participate includes: American Pest Control, Brasstown Valley Resort, Brother's at Willow Ranch, Carolina Mountain Solar, Chatuge Regional

Hospital and Nursing Home, Cobb-Vantress, Inc., Drake Software, Erlanger Western NC Hospital, Hiwassee Hardware, Hiwassee Park, Healthy Smiles by Dr. B., Hinton Rural Life Center, Holiday Inn Express Hotel & Suites, Homestead Hospice, Lake Chatuge Lodge, Mountain Home Health Systems, The Ridges Resort and Marina, Splash Island, Marina Station, Marina Provisions, The Oaks Lakeside Restaurant, Towns County Sheriff's Department, Union General Hospital, United

Community Bank, Windstream Communications and the William Holland Lapidary School.

If you are looking for employment or a change in careers you will not want to miss this event. The event will be held in the Conference Center at the Towns County Recreation & Conference Center just east of the intersection of Hwy. 17/69 and Hwy. 76 in Young Harris. Admission is free. For more information, contact the Lake Chatuge Chamber at 706-896-4966.

Young Harris revisits booster pumps, honors Edwards

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Immediately prior to their regularly scheduled meeting on Feb. 1, the Young Harris City Council and Mayor Andrea Gibby welcomed the public to a hearing addressing the annexation of the Kaiser Dean and old Fire Station properties into city limits.

Attending from the public were Gordy Jones, Jim Makielski, Victoria Lindsey, Rosemary Walker and Wendy Torr, although they didn't offer any opposition to the overall decision to properly annex the properties' boundaries into the city, which was subsequently approved.

After an intermission for water and bathroom breaks, Gibby called the regular monthly meeting that on Tuesday, Jan. 25, the Young Harris Water/Sewer Committee discussed the topic of the problem-plagued Timberline booster pump.

"What came out of last Tuesday's Water/Sewer meeting was some further discussion as to what route to take to fix the Timberline booster pump," Councilman Steve Clark said, before explaining options to either move the pump or introduce a secondary pump and tank to the area.

Clark said he felt anxious about potential issues with a buildup in water pressure at the current altitude should the tank

be replaced, which could lead to the subsequent need to replace "a bunch" of water lines.

The process would also further delay providing an overall solution to the issue. Gibby proposed another meeting with the Water/Sewer Committee to clarify information and further iron out plans.

"That would move us along, and we could go ahead and get it done," Councilman John Kelley said.

In other news, Gibby presented a Small Town America Civic Volunteer Award to Deb Edwards. Gibby nominated Edwards last year, and despite competition from 700 nominees in 49 states, Edwards came out on top.

"The person I chose,"

Gibby began, "has been on the City Council, has been on the Planning Commission; she has done a ton of things in this city and this valley and our community.

"She currently chairs the Planning Commission; she's on the Placemaking Committee; she is leading the effort for art in public places; she is on the GICH Committee for the county; she's been on the Watershed Coalition Board; she's just the epitome of public servant and community volunteer, and I am so proud to give her this award — it's a national award."

To the applause of everyone in the room, Edwards accepted a bouquet along with her award, which she called "a shock" after thanking Gibby for the nomination.

Briefly, toward the end of the meeting, Gibby took a moment to ask those gathered to speak with their elected representatives after mentioning that she had attended the Georgia Municipal Association Conference in Atlanta.

"It is really important that we have beds to put children who are suicidal," said Gibby, who holds the topic of mental illness in children "near and dear" to her heart. Some of her concerns arose when she learned that the adolescent unit in a Gainesville hospital had been converted into a COVID ward.

Gibby said she would continue providing updates from the Georgia Municipal Association, as the goal is to strive toward "a place in our state and in our cities that make things compatible and good for everybody."

For the final point of the gathering, the council heard from members of the public who had come to voice their concerns.

First up was Makielski, who wanted to know why the council "was basically doubling the costs of the water," saying that many of the people affected by the recently imposed booster pump surcharge are on fixed incomes. He also wanted to address another issue.

"I live downstream, and



Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, right, presenting resident Deb Edwards with a well-deserved national award recognizing her above-and-beyond civic involvement.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

about a half a dozen of my other neighbors have the same problem," Makielski said. "The problem's when the pumps come on, we lose all water pressure. Then about four or five seconds later, maybe a little bit longer, it'll come back somewhat."

"So I mean, it loses pressure; you'll have the faucet on, maybe 20 pounds coming out — it'll go to nothing. It doesn't matter if it's 2 o'clock in the morning, or in the middle of the day."

This prompted Victoria Lindsey to ask about the water bill increase, which she believed wasn't fair to impose on a neighborhood primarily composed of the working class and retirees. She also took issue with the "constant" presence of city water workers across the street from her home.

"To ask us to give you twice as much as we normally do is outrageous," Lindsey said. "Everybody in the community needs to share, but the thing I can't understand is why do we have to pay for the repairs, and when are they going to stop, and how much more are they going to increase, and how did you even come about a \$26 a month increase?"

Before answering, the council allowed Rosemary Walker and Wendy Torr to speak their own side of the story. Mayor Gibby reminded the group that she had put in a request for state and federal grants to hopefully lower water bills and help cover the repairs of the pumps.

"The council is listening to you, and once we know if we've gotten any extra money, they will take it back up and reconsider," Gibby said. "Of course, we don't ever like to raise rates, but at this stage, one pump is going to cost around \$200,000 to fix, so it's not like replacing \$2,000 or \$5,000. It's \$200,000."

"I've applied for the money. We'll see if we get it, and then we will reconsider what we're going to do, but we're happy to share any and all (decisions)."

To close, Gibby invited anyone from the community with concerns about anything going on in the city to join the monthly council meetings and take part in witnessing decisions or further voicing opposition.

Young Harris City Council meets the first Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. inside City Hall.

Music Hall Benches...from Page 1A

Show and other activities, in addition to people making donations and committing sponsorships.

"We are also selling the new seats for \$300 each in which you can choose to commemorate a memory or in honor of someone with a personalized engraving," Thomason said. "We will start construction on April 17, which is the day after the Chris Janson concert, and I will begin selling the benches in the Music Hall on April 20 to the public."

"The project is aimed to be completed by the end of June, so we have to work on the replacement in sections of benches in between event dates. We have come up with a plan to at least try to do 100 per day."

"I have had several people call with interest in buying the benches. They will be \$50 each. Any funds raised will go toward the new seats. People will have to pick the benches up here if they buy one, because we cannot deliver."

Lastly, Thomason added



Hilda Thomason showing off the comfy new theater-style seats that will soon be installed inside Anderson Music Hall.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

that many people may not be aware, "but we want to mention that we have booked two new concerts who were not mentioned before on our previous lineup schedule, and they are Mark Chesnutt and Tracy Byrd, who are slated to play on Aug. 20."

People interested in donating toward the theater seats or purchasing a bench or tickets may contact Thomason at the Georgia Mountain Fair office at 706-896-4191. Additional information on upcoming events can be found at www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

TCMS Champions...from Page 1A

see what they are going to do in the future."

Coach Thomas is also excited for the future prospects of his young players as many of them move onto varsity level play at the High School, and he said this season's championship success "speaks volumes of the level of skill and commitment that our players had and their

discipline."

"When we started seeing some adversity into the season," Thomas said, "the leadership is what really helped us out in the end, because the strength of the schedule we had outside of our conference definitely paid off."

"We had a heavy eighth-grade leadership this year, but we also included some younger

guys, and they will be stepping into that leadership position next year, so they will have a strong advantage coming off with being with a championship team."

"We worked so well with the varsity program and ran all of the same sets offensively and defensively, and that really helped us to become the future program."

Night to Shine...from Page 1A



2022 Night to Shine Queen CJ McGuire made quite the entrance for the Feb. 5 parade on her very own chariot.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

rated stations. By 9:45 a.m., there were 13 stops in total manned by a variety of volunteers decked in colorful clown costumes.

With contributions from Sicily's Pizza, Ingles, Dunkin' Donuts, Chick-fil-A, and of course the hardworking members of the First United Methodist Church, there was plenty of food to go around.

Jackie and Lamar Franklin had charge of Table 6, where they handed out jewelry to ladies and combs to gentlemen. Looking back on past events, the couple compared 2022's layout with the way things were pre-COVID.

"We had a hospitality room for the caregivers, and we played Bingo and they served dinner," Jackie said. "And they could just let go because we took care of them. Lamar did photography that time, and the next time, he was a server at a table."

Still, they greatly enjoyed being able to help host an in-person event, and both made their way to the passenger sides or back seats of vehicles to personally offer gifts to King and Queen attendees.

Just up the parking lot at Station 5, Kathy Cook handed out chicken biscuits. After telling her granddaughter Savannah about the event, the latter was so excited that she drew up an "Eat Mor Chikin" sign to adorn Cook's table.

In fact, there were several cases of volunteers putting their best and more into presentation, as just down the way at Table 11, Maggie Guer-

rier took her clown costume to another level by adding a fanciful bright red superhero cape that helped her cut a striking figure.

Guerrier joked about being part of the "cool group," despite the fact that her team enjoyed a bit more heat under a coveted spot in direct sunlight.

But it wasn't just volunteers dressing up and having all the fun. More importantly, many guests of honor wore their best getup despite not getting out of their vehicles until the firehouse photo op at the end of the Shine-Thru Parade.

Ariel Sutton, 30, grabbed attention with a gorgeous dress covered in sequins that dazzled the eyes in the morning sun and perfectly matched her deep purple lipstick.

And CJ McGuire, wrapped snugly in a blanket, sat atop a truck-shaped chariot decorated with balloons and a poster bearing her name with heart-shaped tinsel.

Clyde Williams' family drove all the way from Toccoa, and he said he was having a lot of fun so far — and this was only at Table 8.

"This is my first time doing the Night to Shine Drive-Thru," Williams said with a smile on his face, "but I'm going to try to do it again next year."

Sydney Davenport tries to attend every Night to Shine, and while she admitted that it is more fun to dress up for an indoor night in the church's ballroom, she was still able to enjoy the parade.

Once guests had moved through the other stops, they were invited to get out of their vehicles and take a photo with the Union County Fire Department mascot Sparky the Dalmatian.

Of course, Sparky could also come to them, as demonstrated when the daring dog crawled into a van and nearly had to be "extracted with the jaws of life." Sparky was a big hit with more than a few Kings and Queens, one of whom insistently kept taking his paws in an attempt to warm up.

Joe Tatman offered a comically oversized but delicately decorated picture frame prettied up with roses. From his vantage point at the very end of the event, he was able to keep track of the fruits of his and his wife's labor of love.

In total, about 90 volunteers participated, whether they were from the church and its youth group or from the Boy Scouts and Union County Cheerleaders.

Of the approximately 60 guests, 40 were present for the parade, with the other 20 residing in Blue Ridge and being unable to attend, though the Tatmans had committed to delivering food and party favors directly to the honored recipients.

The joyful event was augmented a week later on Friday, Feb. 11, with a "Night to Shine Virtual Celebration." Watching from home, incredibly loved Kings and Queens got to enjoy a virtual walk down the red carpet, karaoke, dancing and special guests.