

# Towns County Herald

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## Booster shots go to mass clinic recipients Feb. 19

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The Union County Sports Center off the Glenn Gooch Bypass will welcome back 1,050 residents of Union and Towns counties Friday for second booster shots of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Sponsored by the Union County Government, Union County Emergency Management Agency, and health departments of Union and Towns counties, the event will be a repeat of the Jan. 22 mass vaccination clinic that featured 12 hours of shots at a rate of 15 vaccines every 10 minutes.

Vaccine supplies remain limited, with new vaccinations still being conducted by appointment only, and the

Feb. 19 clinic will consist exclusively of second shot receivers.

The Sports Center will host future EMA-coordinated mass clinics as supplies become available. In the meantime, the Health Department will conduct the majority of its COVID vaccinations there Monday through Thursday each week to maximize vaccine delivery efforts.

"Having a larger space than the health departments will also give us flexibility to vaccinate more people each day, especially when vaccine becomes more readily available," District 2 Public Health Director Dr. Zachary Taylor said.

In Towns, the Health Department has been regularly vaccinating people with

appointments in the Conference Room of the Recreation and Conference Center, with Foster Park offering its facilities alongside assistance from Towns County Government and EMA for all local mass vaccine efforts.

Sharing this space is Dr. Samuel Le Church and his staff at Synergy Health of Hiawassee, including the all-volunteer COVID-19 Vaccine Team. As a mass vaccine provider, Synergy has been steadily vaccinating large groups of people from the ngvax.com wait list.

Already, Dr. Church's health practice has succeeded in administering over a thousand doses, and his team is prepared logistically to vaccinate more than 1,000 people a day when the time comes, which is certain  
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Bethany Barrett and Lisa Edwards of the Health Department will be assisting the mass vaccination clinic Friday, pictured here Jan. 22 in Union County. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Hiawassee talks Paris Buildings, COVID and CodeRED system

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

In her Mayor's Report from the Feb. 9 Hiawassee City Council livestreamed meeting, Mayor Liz Ordiales delivered an update on COVID in Towns County, comparing then-current data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the prior week's numbers.

"We had 36 new cases, which is up 50% from the prior seven days," Ordiales said. "Our positivity rate is 22.95%, so 23%. We are down in testing; we only did 61 tests in the last seven days. We had eight new hospital admissions, and 20% of all the beds are COVID related."

Ordiales encouraged the

community to stay vigilant and continue following COVID precautions to help with the spread of the virus as well as possible in Hiawassee.

Moving on to local development, Ordiales touched on a major ongoing goal of the city - making progress at the Paris Buildings, which have been dubbed the Paris Business Center, including the acquisition of grants applied for by the city to assist with project funding.

In the meeting, council members entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority regarding the Paris Buildings, which the city has been working to restore over the last year.

The purpose of the



Liz Ordiales  
Hiawassee Mayor  
memorandum is to allow the DDA to manage the Paris Business Center while the city maintains ownership of the  
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## City Council discusses zoning, Cupid Falls improvements

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Young Harris City Council discussed upcoming improvements in their February regular meeting, during which Mayor Andrea Gibby was happy to announce the city had been approved for the Department of Natural Resource Trail Grant to benefit Cupid Falls Park.

The grant is \$194,000 with a 25% local match, which works out to about \$150,000 in free money for use at the park.

"With the cost of goods going up, originally, we had put in that there was not going to just be a ramp down from the upper falls to the lower trail, but also completing the boardwalk," Gibby said in the

Feb. 2 meeting. "But we may have to make some decisions and only do the ramp."

"When we get into this a little bit more, we are going to see what the costs will be and then make some decisions. Initially, we have to finish out the design and get some variance approval from DNR (for work to be done in a buffer zone) because we are going to be working with them."

Attorney Marvin Harkins conducted the first reading to amend the text of the Zoning Ordinance to expand the definition of permitted uses inside industrial-zoned areas, as the current definition is restricted to just public use, i.e. governmental, and public utility.

The ordinance amendment will affect the



Andrea Gibby  
Young Harris City Mayor  
future use of the old Blue Ridge Mountain EMC headquarters, for which the city and EMC have been working to find a suitable use.  
Until recently, the EMC  
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## Area residents looking to ease difficult times with love

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Valentine's Day was yet another holiday affected by the looming threat of COVID-19, and many people in the community spent time last week seeking ways to celebrate while staying safe.

While shopping at Linda's Drapery & Gifts Friday, Timothy McMahon of Fannin County said he believed people should celebrate Valentine's Day to ease tensions over the virus and other concerns.

"Of course, people need to keep celebrating the holidays," McMahon said. "The world can't stop just because of this pandemic. You can celebrate the holiday just fine without going out or doing something big and grand. It is about love, so share the love with the people you love."



Valentine's Day had a different vibe than usual in 2021 because of COVID, though couples still ventured out to spend time together in the community.  
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

"I just hope people learn a little lesson in love, because we need it. With how tense everything has been lately, it

is good to have a little love in our hearts. You'd be surprised what love can do; we just need  
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## Community contemplates state of country, COVID-19

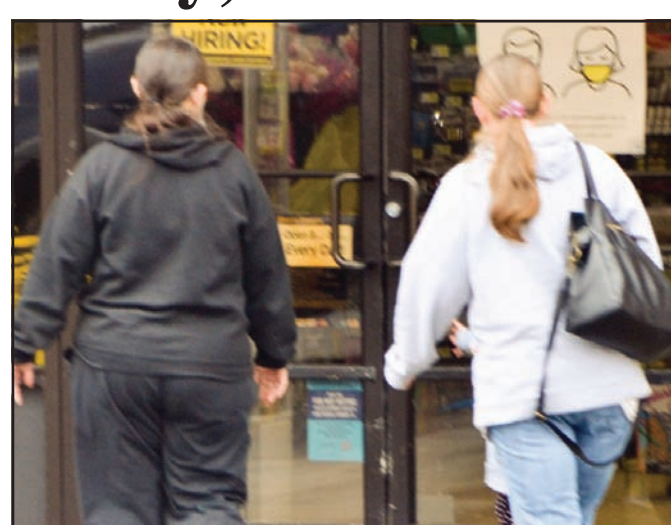
By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Now more than a year on from the initial Jan. 31, 2020, national Public Health Emergency declaration for COVID-19, people in the community remain concerned with the state of the country and next steps.

Alex Byrd of South Carolina, on a trip to the Dollar Tree Feb. 13, expressed his hope for the end of the pandemic and a decrease in the virus figures nationwide.

"From what I have seen, the numbers around the country have been going down, and I think that is a good sign," Byrd said. "Everyone just wants it to be over and get back to the way the country was before all this. All this staying at home has made people go crazy."

"At least if we get the



It's been a year since COVID was first declared a national Public Health Emergency, and people are well versed by now in doing what they need to stay safe.  
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

numbers down, we can work on other issues that have come up in the last year. It just feels completely unreal, this past

year. It is like we have all been asleep and time is going on without us. It has really  
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## Young Harris library opens curbside, hoping in-person soon

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

After announcing a temporary closure in November for financial reasons, the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris reopened Feb. 10 for curbside services, thanks to a 2021 budgetary boost from Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

Patrons of the library can call 706-379-1327 in advance to select a timeslot to take care of library business on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 698 Miller Street.

Regional Library Director Heath Lee is excited to have the library opening back up and is optimistic about bringing in-person services back within the next month and throughout the year.

"If we had a full staff at

MRL, they would have opened back up last week, too, but there is just a little delay there, and that was just staff related," Lee said. "We anticipate about the beginning of March that it will be opened back up to the public."

Lee has been the director for nearly a year now, having started his tenure around the time of the initial closures for COVID-19 last March.

"It has been an unusual year," Lee said. "We have had to shut down (other Mountain Regional) locations from time to time, which is highly unusual - that was actually what I had to do when I started."

"We had to figure out when was the right time to reopen and what was the appropriate service model. This is such a new environment, and we were certainly lacking any sort of PPE that was necessary



Heath Lee  
MRLS Director  
to operate in this environment. So, we navigated that part after a few months."  
Lee hopes the libraries will be able to return to as close to normal operating as possible this year, with each of the  
See *Library*, Page 6A

## Businesses 'Share the Love' with Habitat for Humanity

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE - Habitat for Humanity Towns/Union Counties Inc. and Visit Downtown Blairsville partnered with more than two dozen local businesses Feb. 11-13 for a "Share the Love" fundraiser to benefit the nonprofit organization.

According to Darren Harper, who runs Visit Downtown Blairsville, the Valentine's-themed fundraiser acts as an excellent way to help Habitat and the community while connecting local businesses with customers.

"Last year, Habitat and I did this, and it was kind of a throw-together event," Harper said. "This time of year is usually hard for our merchants. It is after Christmas, it is the

first of the year, this has been an election year, which also makes people hesitant to spend money. So, it has been rough, and we wanted to bring this back this year."

"It is not only a way for Habitat to raise awareness and funds, but also drive traffic to our downtown businesses. We had a lot of people participate this year, which shows that it is effective for them, because someone might come in and purchase something they might have been holding off on, knowing some of those proceeds are going to a good cause."

The local Habitat for Humanity Operations Manager Cathy Wheeler was happy to report that 25 local businesses participated this year, and the group is already looking to expand the event in 2022.



Cathy Wheeler  
Habitat for Humanity  
"At the end of the three-day period, the businesses decided how worthwhile this is," Wheeler said. "We are not locking them into a specific donation, and next week I will go visit all of them and they will have some kind of donation."  
"I get some people that  
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