

Young Harris...from Page 1A

"Specifically, one of my burning questions was, if a developer had a project and they are looking at three different locations - Hiwassee, Young Harris and somewhere in the county - would the three entities vehemently be recruiting and working against each other? Or would we put forth our best and let the developer make a decision, which is the right way to do it.

"I was assured by the county commissioner that that would be the case, because from a county standpoint, it would benefit the entire county. By the same token, if something is set up at the bottom of the mountain, then we will benefit from that, too."

Mayor Andrea Gibby expressed her support for the city's inclusion on the Joint Development Authority in the Feb. 4 regular meeting, saying that "we want to be at the table when these things happen, we really do."

"There are resources that an authority can bring to the city when we want to develop," Gibby said. "I think the difference between this one and some in the past is that, in this one, each of us have three appointees (to the Joint Development Authority Board).

"In the past with industrial authorities, the commissioner appointed everybody. We have a say in this, and that's different. It is a leap of faith."

The Joint Development Authority has been a topic of discussion in several recent council meetings, with members raising questions about every detail that goes into the creation of the entity.

"I know sometimes we take longer than other people to get things moving, and I don't personally mind that," Gibby said. "I want you to get your questions answered every single time. I want you to be comfortable to either vote yes or no.

"It doesn't matter to me how long it takes, but it may seem to everybody else that we take some time. I think this is



Young Harris College President Dr. Drew Van Horn attended the February council meeting to talk water.

the best process for us, and I'm grateful that you contemplate and get to a good place before you decide to vote."

Both the cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris have formally committed to joining the Joint Development Authority, and Commissioner Bradshaw said he would be doing the same in his Feb. 18 monthly meeting that occurred after press time.

Also in the meeting, Young Harris College President Dr. Drew Van Horn asked the city for a reduction in the minimum billing amount for water that Young Harris College must purchase from the city - from 1 million to 600,000 gallons a month - to reduce costs for the college.

The minimum gallon usage was part of a 1994 agreement that is no longer in place, Van Horn said, noting that the college does not routinely use 1 million gallons of water each month.

City officials met with Van Horn and the college recently to discuss the matter, and next steps include the holding of a Water Committee Meeting to allow the city to discuss the request and review the college's average water usage per month.

Councilman Kelley brought up the much-anticipated pavilion planned for Mayor's Park, passing out drawings

Photo by Jarrett Whitener of the proposed pavilion with an estimated cost of between \$72,000 and \$82,000.

Kelley said he hopes to have a hard quote available on the price of the pavilion by the March city meeting. The pavilion is to be situated in the center of the fence that borders Maple Street, which would require moving some of the playground equipment.

In other business, the city approved its \$6,000 annual donation to support the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris. The donated amount used to be \$3,000 until a couple of years ago, when the council voted to up the amount.

New City Clerk Bobbie Thompson was unable to be at the Feb. 4 meeting, as she was away on city business attending mandated municipal clerk training.

Thompson is brand new in the position, having just started at the end of December as longtime City Clerk Shirley Jarrard retired, and she is working hard to learn governmental finance and familiarize herself with the city's financial computer program.

Young Harris City Council Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month and the public is invited to sit in and listen to changes coming to the city.

Thompson...from Page 1A

Thompson said. "While I was taking the time off, I worked part time for a company that had 15 different corporations that I managed and did their payroll.

"It was a land company, so we also had some dealings with other businesses. After all of that, I came to the college and worked there for a while before moving across the street."

Assuming the myriad responsibilities of city clerk is certainly a lot to take on for a newcomer, though Thompson is confident that her roughly two-years of required training will go smoothly as she works with

the mayor and City Council to acquire all the knowledge and information she needs for the job.

For her part, Mayor Andrea Gibby is thrilled to have Thompson on board at City Hall, as she believes Thompson will be an invaluable asset to the city once she finishes training on all the systems and specifics of being city clerk.

"We are excited that Bobbie has joined our staff family," Gibby said. "She comes with a wealth of knowledge and experience, and we want to welcome her to the city of Young Harris."

Thompson was unable to attend the council's Feb. 4 regular city meeting, as she was away on city business attending mandated municipal clerk training.

City Auditor Marvin Chance of R.L. Jennings & Associates met with Thompson recently to provide some additional help regarding her understanding of municipal finance.

Furthermore, recently retired City Clerk Jarrard said Thompson could take advantage of her 28 years of experience at City Hall by calling her anytime she needed help.

12th Annual Watershed Gala to celebrate clean water



Participants in the watershed coalition's CREEK program learn about phytoplankton and zooplankton from Brenda Hull, the 2020 recipient of the Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award.

The public is invited to attend the 12th Annual Watershed Gala and Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award presentation hosted by MountainTrue on Thursday evening, February 27 in the Charles Suber Banquet Hall at Young Harris College.

The Watershed Gala is held annually to celebrate good water quality still being measured in many rivers, lakes and streams across the upper Hiwassee River watershed and to honor the efforts of those who work to sustain it! The event is also the MountainTrue Western Regional Office's largest fundraiser.

This year's Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award recipient is Brenda Hull of Clay County, NC. According to Gilbert Nicolson who was the first paid staff member of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition (HRWC) in the 1990s, Brenda was one of the organization's earliest supporters.

"She invited me to speak to one of her classes in 1998 or 1999. Then got her classes interested in Corn Creek," Gil noted, going on to say, "I'm so glad Brenda is getting the award."

Indeed, while she was still teaching at Young Harris College, Brenda laid the groundwork for the strong partnership MountainTrue has with the institution today. She continued inviting staff to make class presentations and offered lab periods for conservation biology students to help with fieldwork on stream restoration projects.

"She also encouraged other professors to use the resources we have to offer," adds Callie Moore, former HRWC executive director now western regional director for MountainTrue. "Slowly, but surely, relationships at YHC have grown such that now we work with five different disciplines on an annual basis and we have a written agreement with the college for enhancing and maintaining the Corn Creek stream corridor on campus."

Professional work aside, Brenda is also one of those volunteers who will pitch in and help with just about anything. From leading bird watch outings to helping students identify zooplankton under a microscope and from loaning a canoe to preparing scrumptious hors d'oeuvres for the wine tasting

fundraiser. She also served on the HRWC Board of Directors for 13 years.

The Holman Award, created by David Goldhagen of Goldhagen Art Glass on the shores of Lake Chatuge, is presented annually to the person or group who has done the most to sustain good water quality in rivers, lakes, and streams in the upper Hiwassee River watershed.

The Watershed Gala will begin at 5:30 with a silent auction, raffle and cash bar. The plated meal is served starting at 6:30. After the Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award is presented, local auctioneer and entertainer, Tim Ryan, will auction several select items live.

Reservations are \$50/each or \$360 for a reserved table for eight and must be made by Thursday, February 20th. Reservations may be secured online at: <https://hrwc.net/events/watershed-gala/>.

HRWC is also accepting donations of original art and craft items or gift certificates for the auctions. Please contact Callie Moore to donate auction items or to volunteer at the event: 828-837-5414 or callie@mountaintrue.org.

Arbor Day...from Page 1A

Blake Melton and Edward Berrong, Forestry Chief Ranger Mark Wiles, Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales, Tree Board Chair Joan Crothers and several Boy Scouts from Troop 407 led by Chad Sparks and Timothy Barrett.

Troop 407 members were Brody Barrett, Gus Askea and Noah Earl, all of whom jumped in to help plant the two weeping willows.

But first, the scouts and others gathered round to listen as Wiles spoke about the trees, saying the weeping willow species would grow large on the bank near Lake Chatuge at Mayors Park.

"Weeping willows grow in soils that are low in oxygen, usually in wet areas, but they can also grow in dry areas," Wiles said.

And they grow incredibly quickly, Wiles added, noting that, in the not-so-distant future, they could all come back and sit under a willow tree and have a picnic in the shade.

Wiles then spoke on the history of Arbor Day, which originated with a man named J. Sterling Morton, who settled in Nebraska in 1854.

When Morton arrived in Nebraska, he noticed there were not a lot of trees to protect the settlers from the elements, Wiles said, adding that settlers had to build their homes from mud because they didn't have any trees to use.

Morton was an influential newspaper editor who championed the idea of a state holiday designated specifically for planting trees, with the first statewide observance being held on April 10, 1872.

Wiles said on that first holiday, the people of Nebraska planted more than a million trees, and by the 1900s, every state had its own Arbor Day holiday.

Hiwassee has been



Brody Barrett, Gus Askea and Noah Earl of Boy Scouts of America Troop 407 helped plant one of the weeping willows in Hiwassee Mayors Park for Arbor Day 2020.

Photo by Chad Stacker

carrying on the Arbor Day tradition locally for 25 years, Crothers said, with the city being designated a Tree City USA community by the National Arbor Day Foundation.

Moving right along, Wiles discussed the importance of trees and what people use them for every day all over the world, including as a source of heating, cooking and campfires.

The scouts from Troop 407 read Joyce Kilmer's short poem titled "Trees," which Wiles said Kilmer wrote in a foxhole while fighting in World War I.

Following the history lesson and poem reading, Wiles, Berrong and Melton demonstrated the proper way to plant the weeping willows, which were donated by Dennison Brothers' Nursery and Landscaping in Towns County.

After their demonstration and subsequent planting of the first tree, Wiles enlisted the help of the scouts to plant the

second, quizzing them as he assisted them in planting the tree between the lake and the big pavilion at Mayors Park.

After the planting of the trees, everyone gathered for pictures to celebrate Arbor Day.

According to the Hiwassee Tree Board, "Georgians have done a good job in the state in keeping most areas green by replacing trees that are lost to damage in storms, old age or cut for logging.

"Trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and rain, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen and provide habitats for wildlife.

"They are a renewable resource giving us paper, lumber for our homes, fuel for our fires, and they beautify our community, thus increasing property values, and are a source of joy and spiritual renewal."

School Board...from Page 1A

capacities by teachers.

Berrong recommended Melissa McConnell, who is a classroom teacher and also serves as the FBLA adviser, to serve as the new CTAE director.

Board members approved Berrong's recommendations to create a full-time CTAE director position and to make McConnell the director. Moving forward, Berrong said the schools will need to fill her business teaching position.

Joining board members in meeting was the Towns County Schools Robotics Team, Dragons & Tiaras, which advanced to the State Competition with a Third-Place finish in the North Georgia League Tournament on Jan. 18.

Robotics Team members William McConnell, Curtis Ledford, Alex Mullins, Laura Mauldin and Bentley Floyd delivered a presentation on their award-winning competition.

The team's presentation included a short video showing what they were tasked with and what their goals were during their most recent tournament.

Following the video presentation, the team escorted board members and guests down to their classroom for an up-close look and demonstration of the robot they built to compete in the upcoming state competition, which will run Feb. 21-22 in Cobb County.

The school board also approved the resignations of School Nurse Mary Barrett and Elementary School Principal



School Board Members Stan Chastain and Tamie Bradley in their Feb. 11 regular monthly meeting. Photo by Chad Stacker

Dr. Sandy Page on Feb. 11.

Both women are retiring at the close of the 2019-2020 school year.

Barrett, who's been the school nurse for several years, has two granddaughters who live in Central Florida and is looking to spend more time with them, Berrong said.

"I think we have someone that's interested in that, which is good, because typically, that's a very difficult position to fill," Berrong said of the school nurse job.

Dr. Page is retiring after spending 33 years in education, and she, too, plans to spend more time with family in retirement.

The board office is currently working to fill Page's position for next school year, and an announcement regarding specific next steps will be made in a future board meeting.

In other business, board members discussed and approved the district's mentor grant, "where the community comes in and mentors students in our school system," Berrong said.

"Part of the money that funds that program is a grant that is in the amount of \$19,240 that we typically get each year, and that is from The Council on Alcohol and Drugs," Berrong said.

With the approval of the mentor grant, Berrong said students would need to complete surveys on alcohol and drugs to allow for data collection.

The Board of Education will host its next monthly meeting on Monday, March 2, inside the Media Center at the middle/high school building starting at 6 p.m.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

The next election to be held after the Presidential Primary Election is the General Primary Election on May 19, during which voters will be selecting candidates for various local, state and federal offices to lead their party of choice in the Nov. 3 General Election.

Also appearing on the May 19 General Election Primary ballot will be three countywide referendums: the SPLOST and Freeport Exemption brought by Towns County Government, and Hiwassee's Fluoride Referendum.

As previously reported, concerning the SPLOST referendum, the county is calling for voters to decide on an estimated \$12 million SPLOST to be instituted starting Oct. 1 to finance renovations and possibly an addition to the Towns County Courthouse, which dates to 1964.

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

approval of the issuance of a General Obligation Bond not to exceed \$8 million to facilitate courthouse renovations and a possible addition.

The current Education-SPLOST, which makes up 1% of the 7% sales tax in Towns County, will expire on Sept. 30 this year, so the sales tax rate will simply remain the same at 7 cents on the dollar should voters approve the county's 1-cent SPLOST referendum on May 19.

Regarding the freeport exemption referendum, such an exemption would allow businesses to temporarily store certain goods and raw materials without being subject to property taxes on those goods and materials, at least for a time.

If passed, the freeport exemption would aid existing small manufacturing businesses in Towns County and help to attract new ones, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said.

As for the fluoride referendum, Hiwassee is asking voters whether or not they want to add fluoride to the city drinking water supply that serves many people in Towns County.

The voter registration deadline for the May 19 General Primary, during which the above three referendums and various candidates will be decided, will be April 20.

Be sure to check out check out the "Towns County Board of Elections and Registration" Facebook page for more local election information.

Upcoming "Mile Long Yard Sale"

Want a little extra cash? Bring your yard sale items to the Georgia Mountain Fair "Mile Long Yard Sale"... Friday, March 27 from 10 AM-4 PM. Saturday, March 28 from 8 AM-3 PM. \$30 refundable deposit required and will be

refunded when you leave an empty booth.

Free Parking; Secure Over-Night Venue; Booth Setup Friday at 8 AM; and Booth Take Down by Saturday at 4 PM.