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Voice of Democracy promotes patriotism at TCHS

By **Jeremy Foster**
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Garrett Post 7807 in Hiawassee partners annually with Towns County High School to hold the Voice of Democracy Essay Contest, which encourages youth patriotism and help students with scholarship money for post-secondary educations.

Varsity Baseball Head Coach Shannon Floyd is a U.S. history, world history and government teacher for the high school, and he works with the VFW in promoting good citizenship among the student body, assisting the veterans in their desire to support the school system.

"This contest is a great connection between our youth and our veterans and everyone

to be able relate to everyone," Floyd said. "The VFW has always been very good to our school system, and this is a great way to gain the connection and support for each other while helping our students to recognize the sacrifices that individuals have made for us."

"So, as long as I keep teaching, we are going to keep writing it."

The topic for this year's contest was "America: Where Do We Go From Here?" in which students were tasked with writing an open-ended discussion on moving forward after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Towns County High's top placers for the local contest were sophomores Mason Barrett in Third Place for \$50, Jadrian Barrett in Second Place for \$75, and Kade McConnell in First Place for \$100.

"It was easy to write this because it was about America getting into a better America and (state of) positivity going forward to rebuild, and keeping our heads up," McConnell said.

Although a sophomore with a ways to go before high school graduation, McConnell said he plans to attend a college with a good business program to earn a degree in business or finance and own his own company.

Dan Hays is the quartermaster for the VFW Post 7807 who has 20 years of service in the Army and serves as the local director for the Voice of Democracy contest.

"Our purpose for this is to tell people that our foundation and show support to anyone and foster a positive environment."

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L-R: Towns County High School sophomores Mason Barrett, Kade McConnell and Jadrian Barrett finished Top 3 in the local Voice of Democracy audio-essay contest sponsored by VFW Post 7807 in Hiawassee. Photo by Jeremy Foster

Fire Rescue extinguishes multiple fires in two days



Towns County Firefighters extinguished a blaze at this White Oak Drive home inside Bald Mountain Park on Feb. 13. Photo/Facebook

By **Shawn Jarrard**
Towns County Herald
Editor

Without fail, the tireless firefighters of the Towns County Fire Department answer the call to protect life and property, and between Sunday, Feb. 13, and Monday, Feb. 14, they answered not one but four calls pertaining to two struc-

ture fires and three wildland fires.

The first call was around 7:30 a.m. Sunday, when a Bald Mountain Park homeowner experienced a gas fireplace malfunction.

Firefighters quickly responded to knock down the flames that had gotten into the walls of the home, isolating the fire to the place of origin in

the living room and adjoining kitchen area.

No one was hurt in the fire, as a smoke detector alerted the homeowner to the blaze, and while damage was extensive, firefighters were able to salvage a one-of-a-kind sports collection along with multiple firearms.

The very next day, See *Fire Rescue*, Page 6A

Bradshaw, McKay accept economic development awards



L-R: Adam Hazell and Heather Feldman of Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, Joint Economic Development Director Denise McKay and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw in the Feb. 15 regular county meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

By **Mark Smith**
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Joint Economic Development Director Denise McKay accepted the 2021 National Association of Economic Development Award on behalf of Towns County at the Feb. 14 monthly meeting.

The award was presented to Bradshaw and McKay by Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Executive Director Heather J. Feldman and Planning Director Adam Hazell.

"We are here to present a national award to Towns County," Feldman said. "The National Association of Economic Development, or NADO, serves as the umbrella agency for all regional commissions for all 50 states."

"Each year they allow regional commissions to submit innovative projects for an impact award."

Out of only 12 awarded in the entire state, the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission went three for three on awards for projects it partnered with in the region, one of which included Towns County, Feldman said.

Hazell said that, because Towns is not part of a metro area or near an interstate highway, there are extra steps the county and economic development team must take to attract just the right amount of economic development, given strategies identified in the Joint Comprehensive Plan.

"(NADO) lauded the effort on behalf of the county and the cities to put this together," Hazell said, referring to the Towns, Hiawassee, Young Harris Joint Development Authority.

"To do a joint effort like

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Three Dog Night to bring 'Joy to the Fairgrounds'

By **Janelle Marie**
Towns County Herald
Guest Contributor

Following what has been called a magical performance at the iconic Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee, Three Dog Night is headed to Anderson Music Hall at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on Saturday, Feb. 26 – and fans are in for a real treat.

Three Dog Night will be releasing an album this year called "The Road Ahead" featuring new original music, and the legendary act will play at least one song from the new record in Hiawassee this weekend, an a cappella number that has received rave reviews in recent live shows.

Of course, the band will be performing many of its decade-spanning hits for which they are known and loved the world around.

Three Dog Night rose to the top of the music scene with their first Top 10 song "One" in 1969. In 1971, "Mama Told Me Not to Come" took No. 1, and "Joy to the World" sustained the No. 1 Top Ten spot for six weeks. "Never Been to Spain" was also released in 1971, and in 1972, "Black and White" reached No. 1 followed in 1973 by "Shambala" hitting the airwaves.

With 21 consecutive Top 40 hits appearing on the pop, rock and country charts, Three Dog Night retains some of the most impressive music



Danny Hutton
Three Dog Night
industry statistics to date. Tens of millions of Three Dog Night records have been sold. See *Three Dog Night*, Page 6A

TCSO makes three drug arrests with 'Operation Sting'

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office launched "Operation Sting" earlier this month, a new ongoing local law enforcement initiative targeting known drug locations, drug trafficking and drug dealers in Towns County.

Sheriff's Drug Investigation Unit, K-9 Unit, and patrol deputies worked together to initiate arrests and searches of various locations, resulting in two arrests on Feb. 10 and one on Feb. 11.

A months-long investigation led to the arrests, along with confiscation of methamphetamine packaged for sale, weapons and money.

See *Operation Sting*, Page 6A



Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson, right, and Chief Deputy Gene Moss pose with the inaugural haul of "Operation Sting," including a firearm, methamphetamine and cash. Photo/Facebook

Movers and Shakers welcome GDOT officials to meeting



L-R: Movers and Shakers Emcee William "Scotty" Scott with Melodii Peoples and Mitch Garmon of the Georgia Department of Transportation as well as fellow Movers and Shakers Emcee Michael Borkman on Friday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By **Brittany Holbrooks**
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers and Shakers not only stimulate thoughtful discussion within

the community but also recruit interesting guest speakers to answer questions posed by residents.

This held true for the nonpartisan civic organiza-

tion's weekly breakfast meeting at Sundance Grill on Feb. 18, which featured Georgia Department of Transportation

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Fire Rescue...from Page 1A



Firefighters had to cut into this metal garage building at a property off Fortenberry Road, where they battled both a structure fire and a wildland fire Feb. 14. Photo/Facebook

Firefighters were dispatched around 2:20 p.m. to a brush fire near Clayton Mountain, in the east end of the county. While en route, they got a call about another brush fire about two miles from the first so had to divert some of their force to tackle both conflagrations.

"We were fighting two unrelated brush fires on two different fronts and were able to get quick knockdowns on both of them," Fire Chief Harold Copeland said. "One was on Mr. Bert Road and the other was on Mt. Pleasant Road off Upper Hightower."

The cause of one of the brush fires was a homeowner dumping ashes outside, which lit vegetation to start a wildland fire that was exacerbated by windy conditions.

"When you're moving hot ash from your woodstove and/or your fireplace, they need to go into metal containers," Copeland said, noting these can be purchased at any hardware store.

The chief said that a common misconception about fireplaces is that people often think their ashes are cool when, in reality, they're still smoldering underneath with little pieces of wood continuing to give off heat.

"So, when people throw ashes outside their house and we start getting a little bit of wind on there, they heat up, and the fire is on," Copeland said. "One of the brush fires on Monday was from improperly discarded ashes, and the other was undetermined."

After wrapping up fire suppression efforts at the two brush fires, 911 alerted the Fire Department around 3:30 p.m. to yet another fire – a combi-

nation wildland and structure fire on the other end of the county in Young Harris off Fortenberry Road.

And the cause of this fourth fire in two days? The property owner had dumped ashes from his fireplace outside – the second such fire that Monday.

"The ashes started a brush fire," Copeland said. "Due to the wind that day, the brush fire went down to his two-car garage, which had a full cord of firewood (under a lean-to), and struck off the firewood behind the metal garage building."

"It burned the lean-to down and some lawn equipment, and the radiant heat went into the metal building, starting a fire in it. There was a 1985 El Camino project car and a Ford pick-up truck. Crews were able to make entry into the metal building and extinguish the fire."

At the same time firefighters were dealing with the structure fire, which included propane tank explosions that fortunately did not result in injuries, the woods were on fire.

Chief Copeland is thankful to mutual aid firefighting partners from Warne, North Carolina, as well as the U.S. Forest Service and Georgia Forestry Commission in helping to suppress this wildland fire.

"And I have to give kudos to our volunteers," Copeland said. "They got on the scene and were able to use their backpack blowers and rakes to establish a line around the fire, which went on up the ridge pretty good."

"It was an acre and a half fire, and they were able to get around it with our equipment

and establish a fire line to stop it on that windy, low humidity day."

Elevated winds mixed with low relative humidity create particularly hazardous conditions for fire, especially for folks planning to burn yard debris, which can quickly result in out-of-control wildland fires.

A recent law change did away with the requirement that people request a permit from the state before burning hand-piled vegetation. Copeland believes this was a mistake; not only did burn permits make the Fire Department aware of where fires were being conducted, they also allowed the state to notify people if conditions were not safe to burn.

Chief Copeland recommends people get a weather app on their smartphones to keep a close eye on wind and humidity on days they are planning to burn brush. If conditions are windy, perhaps 10 mph or more, and relative humidity is less than about 35%, he advises people not to burn.

"(Especially this time of year), you can go two or three days without any rain," Copeland said, "and due to the topography and our recent steady winds that we've been having, it dries the fuels out quick."

"I want the public to understand that when it is windy outside and the humidity is low, we prefer them not to strike off any fires."

And just south of Towns County last week, federal, state and local fire officials worked to contain a 184-acre wildfire that started northeast of Nicot State Park Feb. 12. After three days, it was announced that the blaze had been 100% contained within the large acreage.

Operation Sting...from Page 1A

"Operation Sting" will continue, with more arrests to follow, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Kevin Sears was arrested and charged with two counts sale of methamphetamine, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, and possession of methamphetamine.

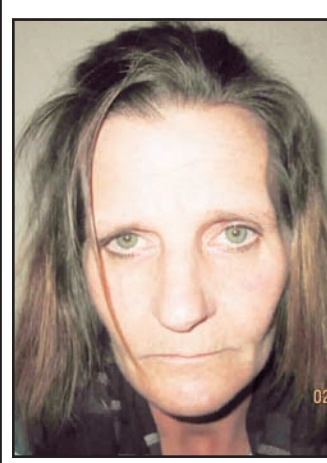
Jason Lanius was ar-

rested and charged with possession of methamphetamine, possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, and possession of drug-related objects.

Brenda Baldwin was arrested and charged with possession of methamphetamine, two counts possession of a Schedule IV controlled substance, violating tag light requirements,

and possession of drug-related objects.

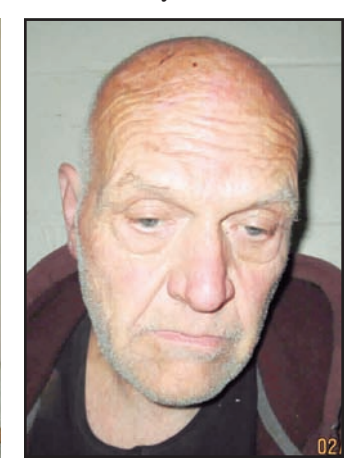
Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that "Operation Sting" is a collaboration of utilizing resources to attack the drug problem in Towns County. He wishes to thank the hardworking, dedicated and committed men and women who work overtime and long hours to protect the county's citizens.



Brenda Baldwin



Jason Lanius



Kevin Sears

County Meeting...from Page 1A

that is fairly rare, so hopefully this is going to serve the citizens well and help you guys realize what you want for the community. Congrats to all of you guys, and thanks for letting us help with the project."

McKay was also awarded the GMRC 2021 Appointed Official of the Year for her efforts in advancing local economic development.

Moving along, Bradshaw said the county is in great financial shape going into 2022. SPLOST goals are on track, and sales taxes are still on the rise.

The bid for the HVAC project at the Old Rec Gym was awarded to Powers Heating and Air, which came in just under \$180,000. The good news is that the company is going to start with the ductwork in about a week and a half.

The bad news is that, due to the current difficulties in the supply chain, the company owner said the air handler won't arrive for another 18 weeks. And the rest of the project can't proceed until the HVAC system is in place.

Bradshaw said it was determined that purchasing a cubicle office system for the Old Rec Gym to house court-house offices during upcoming renovations was less expensive than renting one, and that the equipment would be sold when the county offices were moved back to the courthouse.

The commissioner said the construction time of the courthouse renovation and addition project is estimated to be 12 to 14 months, barring any

more supply chain or COVID-related setbacks.

In other county news, Bradshaw said the Transfer Station project separating commercial garbage drop-off from residential garbage drop-off is nearing completion, with just a few last items to be finished.

Based on the Mountain Protection Act, Bradshaw said he will be amending the Towns County Schedule of Fees to add a Mountain Protection Application Fee of \$125, and a Mountain Protection Permit Hearing Fee of \$200.

"I want the newspaper and the public to understand that if you're going to build a house, if you're going to do an addition, or you're going to build an out-storage building or make any alterations to your home or a commercial building in the county, and you have any questions or are not sure of (something), please call the Building Department," Bradshaw said.

"I want people coming into the county to realize we're here to help you, not hurt you, but you have to follow the rules," he said.

Moving forward, Jim Reynolds was officially appointed to the Towns County Library Board of Trustees, replacing Holly Tiger. Reynolds' term is retroactive back to Jan. 1, 2022.

Bradshaw has amended the Towns County per diem allotment and mileage reimbursement rates for employees who must travel on county business to \$55 per day for food and 58 cents per mile, respectively.

The per diem breakdown is \$14 for breakfast, \$16 for lunch and \$25 for dinner. The changes are meant to bring the per diem allotment in line with current food service costs, and the mileage rate in line with current wear and tear costs on vehicles.

Bradshaw has instituted a 120-day moratorium via a resolution on cryptocurrency mining in Towns County to give the county attorney time to develop a policy and ordinances regarding the same.

Cryptocurrency mining involves a huge bank of computers and servers that generate a lot of heat. The cooling systems for those computers and servers generate a lot of noise. And that sort of business doesn't generate many jobs, Bradshaw said.

Moving along, the county has signed contracts with CRSA Probation Services at no cost to the county; ATLAS Corporation for landfill monitoring at an increase of \$2,500 yearly; and Clampitt's Pest Control for the seven locations of the Towns County Fire Department at a cost of \$2,850 per year.

Finally, Bradshaw approved a grant application with GMRC for the Towns County Fire Department.

"It's a \$240,000 grant with a 5% match from the county. It's an assistance to firefighters grant for vehicle acquisition," Bradshaw said, noting that the county has applied for this grant every year that he has been in office and will continue to do so until the county gets it.

Three Dog Night...from Page 1A

been sold throughout the years, and new and existing fans can purchase their music – either digitally or in stores – throughout the world, including Japan, Holland, England, Canada, Germany, Spain and elsewhere.

Now in their fifth decade of performing, Three Dog Night has not only weathered COVID-19 but is determined to bring something new and exciting to their music chronicles, hence the upcoming album.

"It's so hard to follow the luck we had in our past," founder and frontman Danny Hutton said in a recent interview with the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald. "The songs really had to be good. It would be horrible to just throw out an album and have everyone disappointed, so we worked really hard."

The pandemic lockdown produced the longest touring break for the band since the early '80s, which, according to Hutton, "really made everybody appreciate being back on stage and entertaining ... with a chance to take a second look

at what we do."

And it is a storied second look, as Three Dog Night formed about 54 years ago, in 1968, after Hutton pulled together talented and experienced artists such as Cory Wells, Chuck Negron, Joe Schermie, Floyd Sneed, Jimmy Greenspoon and Michael Allsup.

Regarding his own musical background, Hutton pointed to his Irish roots. The young Irishman moved with his family from Donegal, Ireland, to Boston around the age of 5. He was raised in a musical family with relatives who played multiple instruments.

"There were big nights every month where all the relatives would go to one or the other's houses," Hutton said. "You had to get up and play an instrument, sing a song, recite poetry or dance."

As a young child, Hutton said he hid under the table, too shy to partake in his family's melodious pastime, but the experience was akin to osmosis.

"I was like a sponge," he said. "To this day I know

songs, and I don't know why I know them."

Hutton believes it was these early experiences that gave him a musical ear with the uncanny ability to meld his talents with other incredible musicians and composers.

Fittingly, Three Dog Night's success can be attributed to exceptional live performances while recording unique song interpretations from some of the best songwriters of all time.

The group has recorded music from songwriters – many undiscovered at the time – such as Harry Nilsson, Elton John, Randy Newman, Laura Nyro, Hoyt Axton, Paul Williams and many more.

Since the passing of co-founder and lead vocalist Cory Wells in 2015, Hutton has honed the Three Dog Night eclectic sound into harmonic history with frontman vocalist David Morgan.

Morgan brought his own touring and recording experience to the band, having previously performed with music icons Ray Charles, Dolly Parton, Bruce Hornsby and George Martin.

Three Dog Night has always been comprised of skilled musicians and vocalists well vetted throughout the industry. Paul Kingery is lead guitarist when Michael Allsup is on break, and Danny's own son Tim Hutton of Sugar Ray fame plays bass guitar with the group, with Pat Bautz on drums and Howard Laravea on keyboards. "The Road Ahead" is expected to be released by this summer with new music, and Hutton said the album art will feature a special wink to longtime fans.

"It's (a drawing of) Jeremiah the bullfrog with a hobo stick on his back," Hutton said, previewing the cover. "He's thin with bell bottoms, and he's looking at this road in the mountains that goes to this big temple – Shambala."

Three Dog Night tickets are still available at \$46 apiece for the single performance on Saturday, Feb. 26, 2022, at 7 p.m. For more information or to purchase a ticket, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/>.

Voice of Democracy...from Page 1A

ment for these kids to build their education, whether they go into the military or not," Healy said.

Senior Post Cmdr. Mel Halfon said he wanted to thank Coach Floyd for his involvement with the program.

"We believe education is important, (so this contest al-

lows) these kids have a chance to get a head start on their education financially," Halfon said.

Per VFW.org, "Established in 1947, our Voice of Democracy audio-essay program provides high school students with the unique opportunity to express them-

selves in regards to a democratic and patriotic-themed recorded essay.

"Each year, nearly 64,500 9-12 grade students from across the country enter to win their share of more than \$2 million in educational scholarships and incentives awarded through the program."

GDOT Officials...from Page 1A

District 1 Communications Officer Melodii Peoples and Maintenance Manager Mitch Garmon.

"I am the hub to disseminate information to the public about what we're doing," explained Peoples, describing her communications position.

As for Garmon, he is a native of Towns County and was knowledgeable of local "problem areas," right down to the fenceposts on Shaker Ash Todd's property that sometimes get submerged in pasture floods when local water sources overrun in particularly wet periods.

One topic that was on many people's minds was the upcoming Georgia 515 project to widen the roughly 7.25-mile stretch between Young Harris Street in Blairsville to the City of Young Harris.

The existing road will be widened – and even straightened in places – to a four-lane with rural divided sections outside the city limits.

Also included will be a 1.25-mile two-lane rural bypass around the west side of downtown Young Harris, beginning at Brasstown Creek Road and ending at Timberline Drive.

The 515 project has been a years-long process consisting of engineering and design, archaeological site work, right-of-way acquisition and more, and residents should see construction finally beginning this year, sometime in late summer or fall.

Construction has been estimated at well over \$100 million, with the ultimate result being a safer road to accommodate traffic that is only going to increase in years to come.

"You have so many cars coming through here at a certain point," Peoples said. "And then, with the growth of the community, you're going to see more cars. Then with the growth of the supply chains, you're going to see trucks. I mean, you were seeing trucks already, but you're going to be seeing more trucks."

Peoples distributed packets featuring a list of current and upcoming GDOT projects, with the focus among guests that morning remaining primarily on SR 515.

One attendee asked about the issue of maintaining traffic while additional lanes are being added to the road, and Garmon spoke about a process called "staging."

"(Road workers) will start constructing other parts of the widening while keeping traffic on the current part of the road," Garmon said. "And once they get a new section built – and then let's say they've got to move over to the other side to build a wall and extend a box culvert – then they might shift traffic onto the new portion."

"That way there's no interference in everybody going to and from, and they can continue working on the other side of the project."

Another attendee asked

about economic impact of the project, which Peoples and Garmon said they were not in a position to answer, and one guest posed a new topic of conversation about which he was passionate, becoming heated and even accusatory.

"You guys don't seem to care about (safety)," the man said, going on to ask why more was not being done about visibility issues related to streetlights, or rather, the lack thereof. "We've already killed one person here in this area. How many have to die before you wake up?"

In a room suddenly abuzz with commentary from other Movers and Shakers, Peoples answered that GDOT has control over red lights, while the county has authority over the placement of streetlights, but she said she would forward his concerns to GDOT higher-ups.

To supplement their responses that morning, the officials handed out GDOT Milepost magazines dated Winter 2022, highlighting examples of road designs and various traffic functions like roundabouts and brief articles offering insight into highway upkeep and cleanliness.

For access to project maps and other information, visit <http://www.dot.ga.gov/DS/Maps/geopi> to search for specific projects such as local bridges, permits and signals. The system was brought up during the presentation, and the layout is fairly easy to navigate.