

Bradshaw...from Page 1A

introduction of 2020 board members in his Feb. 18 county meeting: Samantha Church, Julia Chinkhan, Mackenzie “Mackie” Wallace, Vanessa Floyd, Kritka “Tikki” Pokharel, Laura Kate Gleaton, Caleb Lynn and Kenda Moody.

Bradshaw has met with the current board twice already this year to explain what a commissioner does “and the

challenges that we face” in local government.

“That’s the part I enjoy the most, is giving them real-life scenarios that sometimes I get put into different positions,” Bradshaw said of the monthly Junior Board meetings. “I love asking them, what would you do about those personal property rights ... how would you handle this?”

“And I’ll tell you, these are the best of the best that Towns County has. They are very, very smart, smart kids, and they’re very active kids.”

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw signed an agreement with architects from Clark Patterson Lee for preliminary conceptual design services on the proposed courthouse renovations that will take place

should voters approve the upcoming SPLOST referendum in May.

The agreement says that the county will pay the architecture firm for any courthouse renovation renderings it makes, mostly of the outside of the courthouse for now, which Bradshaw plans to showcase in a future public meeting to allow residents to view the designs and ask questions.

Furthermore, the agreement states that the fees for the drawings, which are to be negotiated, will be rolled into the SPLOST if it passes in May.

The commissioner said the architect told him the max charge would be \$25,000, though Bradshaw added that it is very unlikely the final bill would be that high, as all work would be conducted on an hourly basis.

“Once the SPLOST passes, and I feel confident that it will, then we’ll sit down with him,” Bradshaw said.

With the agreement signed, Bradshaw said they would move forward with creating designs for the courthouse, and if the SPLOST passes and the county is pleased with the firm’s design work, Bradshaw may decide to hire the company to design and manage the entire courthouse project.

Speaking in the meeting about the upcoming 2020 census was Pat Malone of the Towns County Complete Count Committee, which is an outreach initiative funded by local tax dollars to increase local census awareness.

The decennial census – recurring every 10 years – is mandated in Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, with the first census having occurred in 1790.

For the 2020 census, between March 12 and March 20, every home can expect to receive official Census Bureau mail, which will include detailed instructions on how to respond to the census by mail, phone or – for the first time in history – online.

Malone discussed the invaluable nature of census data as it relates to representation in government and the availability of federal dollars on the local level.

The census is used to determine the distribution of

billions of dollars in federal funds to local communities, with some \$675 billion being distributed each year to local, state and tribal governments for schools, roads, health care and social services.

Other purposes of the census are to reapportion congressional and state legislative districts based on population totals, to act as a historical record, and to be the basis for community services planning, business planning and expansion.

Towns County had the highest response rate in the state of Georgia for the last census, Malone said, with 87.3% of households responding in 2010.

“I think we can get beyond 95% this time around with the fact that it’s online,” Malone said.

In other business, Bradshaw approved a lease with dispatch communications company AVTEC for new radio console systems in the amount of \$2,983.60 per month, which will include maintenance on the equipment to be used at the Towns County E-911 Dispatch Center.

He also signed an agreement with Quality Recording for the purchase of a new E-911 audio recorder totaling \$18,000.

E-911 Director Marty Roberts addressed guests in the meeting, speaking about the ongoing public safety updates at the Dispatch Center.

“The dispatchers are really excited about the new upgrades,” Roberts said. “We’re ahead of schedule on going live

with our (new computer-aided dispatch system).

“We started our training last week, and we’re training for four days. We’ve got two more weeks of that, and then we’ll be cutting live on the 24th of March.”

All Dispatch Center renovations and upgrades are scheduled to be completed around July, and Bradshaw said that, once all is done, he and Roberts would host an open house for members of the community to see how their tax dollars were improving public safety in the county.

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw appointed David Plunkett to the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration. Plunkett will replace James Powell as the county’s representative on the board.

During the public comments portion of the meeting, Towns County Public Library Board Chairman Barbara Hale announced that the Mountain Regional Library System Board was set to hire a man named Heath Lee as library director.

Lee, who had been with the Sequoyah Regional Library in Gilmer County since 2014, was hired by the MRLS Board in a meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 19. He comes to the Mountain Regional Library System with 15 years of experience in library work.

The next commission meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 17, inside the courthouse at 5:30 p.m.

Sellers...from Page 1A

former Mayor Irene Berry to approach Sellers and others about helping to start a fire department in Young Harris.

Before things could get going in Young Harris, however, Sellers and his fellow volunteers had to become certified firefighters, so Berry contacted the Georgia Fire Academy, which sent instructors to Young Harris for training.

The Young Harris Fire Department began with a small pumper truck that could only hold 250 gallons of water, four sets of turnout gear, two breathing apparatus, and ladders and hoses, Sellers said.

1980 marked the first year for the Young Harris department, and it became apparent after several years that having one fire station serve as the only source of fire protection for the entire county was simply unsustainable.

In 1985, after consulting with other firefighters in Young Harris, Sellers decided to approach then-newly elected Commissioner Truman Barrett to see about solving the problem.

Barrett told Sellers that, if he would be the fire chief for the new county fire department, then he as commissioner would help him to raise the needed funds.

Sellers said he would be fire chief as long as he could bring along current-Fire Chief Harold Copeland – then a Young Harris volunteer – as the county’s first assistant fire chief.

Both men agreed, and Barrett contacted the governor and state legislators, managing to secure a \$115,000 grant to be used for a countywide fire service.

The grant money enabled Sellers and Copeland to strategically map out four locations throughout the county for fire stations, which ultimately helped maximize the Fire Department’s reach and lower the cost of fire insurance to the county.

Resulting from an ad in



Historical Society Vice President Jerry Taylor holding a stack of old Towns County Herald newspapers he discovered recently inside society headquarters.

Photo by Chad Stack

the Towns County Herald, Sellers said 65 candidates applied for firefighter training in January 1986, with 56 graduating six months later.

And with help from local churches and each community to be served by the four planned fire stations, residents and the county teamed up to build the firehouses on donated land and became a certified Georgia Fire Department on July 8, 1986, with a total of five stations countywide, including Young Harris.

Shortly after the Towns County Fire Department became state certified, Station No. 2 in Young Harris purchased a used rescue truck from Union County.

Each of the five stations also developed a local auxiliary group to help raise money for equipment for the firehouses, and that tradition continues to this day with the consolidated Towns County Fire Corps.

Fast forward to today and the Fire Department has tanker trucks and 1,000-gallon fire engines at all six stations in Towns, a 75-foot ladder truck, a Dive Team for search and rescue operations on Lake Chatuge, vehicle extrication tools in every rescue truck and much more.

While it took some time for everything to come together, Sellers said he was so glad to have been a part of fighting fires and helping to bring countywide fire rescue services to Towns County.

Also during the meeting, Society Vice President Taylor updated everyone on upcoming programs.

In March, Sid Turner of the Sons of the American Revolution will give an educational program, and in April, Rev. Delmer Chilton of Brasstown, North Carolina, will join the society for a presentation on Appalachian religion.

Come May, there will be a program featuring prominent women of Towns County, Taylor said.

In other news, while doing some cleaning inside Historical Society headquarters, Taylor said he discovered hundreds of old Towns County Herald newspapers. He asked members in the Feb. 10 meeting for ideas on how best to digitize the newspapers to save for posterity’s sake.

The Towns County Historical Society meets the second Monday of every month at 6 p.m. inside the Old Rec Gym in Hiawassee.



Towns County E-911 Director Marty Roberts spoke on recent 911 public safety upgrades in last week’s commission meeting.

Photo by Chad Stack