

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, March 6, 2024

GDOT sends Phase II of GA 515 project to bid

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Phase II of the Georgia 515 construction project is out for bid after gaining approval to proceed for letting in the State Transportation Board's Feb. 15 monthly meeting.

The project has been on the books for about 25 years now, initially consisting of a single construction phase to straighten and widen to four lanes a roughly 8.5-mile stretch of the highway between Blairsville and Young Harris city limits.

After bids came back too high last year, the Georgia Department of Transportation divided the project into three phases to bid out separately, with the same ultimate goal for the roadway.

"The project goal is to provide acceptable traffic levels of service for future traffic demands to reduce traffic, crash frequencies (and) severity along the corridor through Union and Towns County, and to provide better mobility through the additional bike lanes on the corridor and on the bypass," Project Manager and Transportation Engineer Jeff Middlebrooks said in a local meeting last summer.

Phase I of the project was awarded in 2023, and work has already begun to create a 1-mile, two-lane bypass around Downtown Young Harris to feature roundabouts at each end. This phase is estimated to conclude around Fall 2025.

The second phase that just went to bid will consist of 3.2 miles of widening and

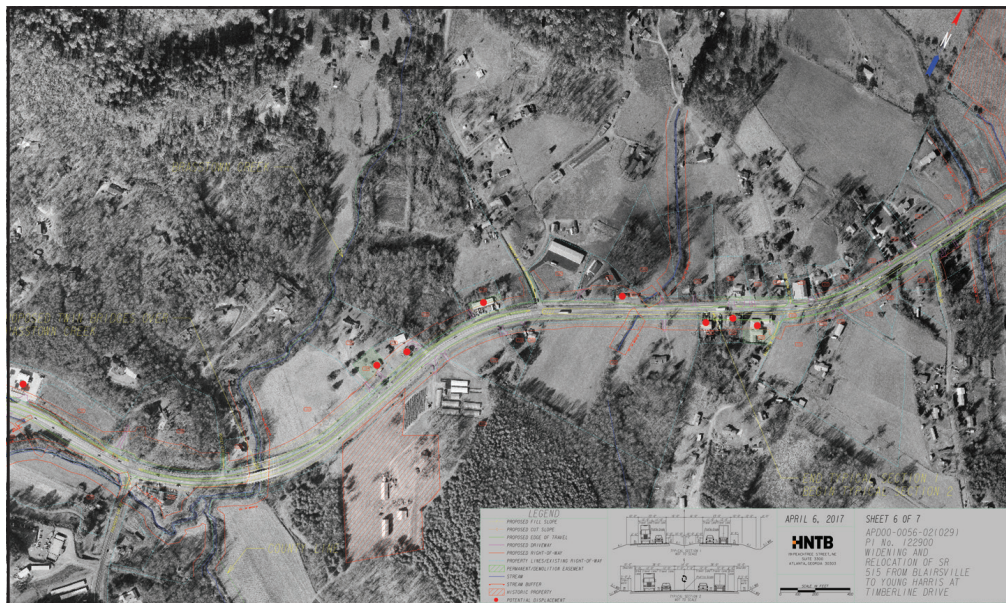
reconstruction of Georgia 515 from Swanson Road in Young Harris to Earl Shelton Road east of Blairsville in Union County, with four retaining walls planned.

Once a Phase II bid is awarded, construction will begin and is expected to last about two years, with a start date estimate of Spring/Summer 2024.

"This particular project will have the bridge we're replacing," Middlebrooks said previously. "We're building a parallel bridge and replacing the existing bridge at the county line."

To replace the existing bridge, GDOT will first build the parallel bridge, divert traffic to the new bridge, demolish the old bridge, and then build the replacement bridge to form

See GDOT 515 Project, Page 6



This layout map shows the proposed twin bridges over Brasstown Creek at the Union/Towns County line.

Movers and Shakers host 'Death and Taxes' talk

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

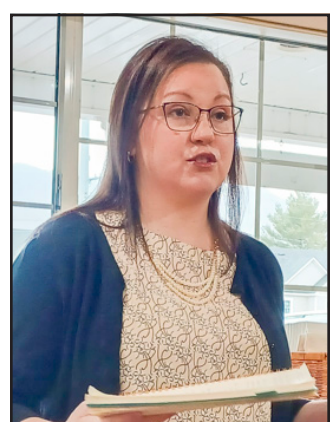
Members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers hosted their latest installment of "Death and Taxes" at the Sundance Grill March 1, ringing in the month by featuring Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper and Towns County Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson.

The floor first belonged to Anderson, who is in his fourth year as Tax Commissioner.

To start, he shared some statistics on auto and trailer sales. Last year's new titles and registrations numbered 3,116, with 17,301 decal renewals. The DMV registered 26,337



Michael Anderson
Tax Commissioner



Tamela Cooper
County Coroner

actions from the Tax Office, and \$3.1 million was collected in Title Ad Valorem Tax revenues.

"I can't imagine some of these numbers for Fulton County or something like that,"

See Death and Taxes, Page 3

TVA hosts parrot-feather 'open house' at Rec Center

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – On Feb. 27, the Tennessee Valley Authority held an open house inside the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park. The event came highly anticipated in the wake of the campaign to eradicate

the invasive parrot-feather weed from Lake Chatuge.

Media advisories from the TVA advertised an open house to "meet with citizens who have questions regarding potential treatment of invasive parrot-feather plant ... in public access areas on Lake Chatuge Reservoir."

While TVA delivered on

this promise, some residents were disappointed that the event featured information tables manned by various experts and not a formal presentation.

There's been a high level of concern among area residents, businesses and government officials over the threat the weed poses to the area's

See Parrot-feather, Page 6



The Tennessee Valley Authority welcomed more than a hundred members of the public for an informational open house last week concerning parrot-feather. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Murphy, NC, mom charged with murder of twin sons

News Special

On Saturday, March 2, the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office and Cherokee County Emergency Services responded to a 911 call at 75 Gooseberry Road in Murphy, North Carolina.

The reporting party was a Cherokee County father who had arrived at the home of his separated wife to exercise custody of his 4-year-old twin sons around 10 a.m. that day. Upon arrival, he discovered his twin sons deceased.

An investigation followed which included Cherokee County Sheriff's

Office Deputies and Detectives, Agents of the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation and Assistant District Attorneys from the Office of Ashley Welch.

Genevieve Ellen Springer, the mother of the deceased twins, was hospitalized in North Georgia and charged with two counts of First Degree Murder by the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office.

Upon release from the hospital on March 2, Springer was arrested in Union County, Georgia. She waived extradition and was transported to the

See Murphy, NC Murder, Page 7



Genevieve Ellen Springer

Illegal immigrant arrested on local felony drug charges

News Special

Towns County Herald

On Sunday, Feb. 25, Towns County Sheriff's Deputy Justin Osborn investigated a suspicious person at the Marathon Gas Station at 1883 Hwy. 76W.

Osborn was able to locate the subject, and during the investigation, probable cause was established, and the vehicle was searched.

During the investigation, an amount of methamphetamine that field-tested positive was located.

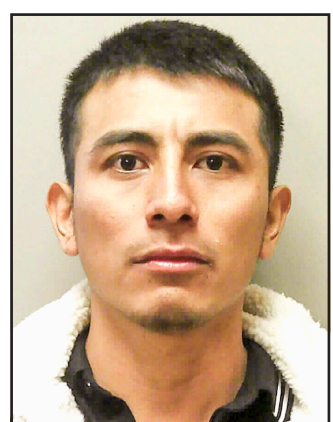
Carmelo Cruz Lopez, 28, of Hiawassee, was arrested and

charged with felony possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute and felony possession of methamphetamine.

It was determined Lopez was an illegal immigrant. Bond was set at \$2,000, and Lopez was released to I.C.E. on Feb. 26, 2024. Jail records reflect Lopez has been deported previously.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends Deputy Osborn for his actions getting these illegal drugs off the streets and is pleased to have I.C.E. working with Towns County Sheriff's Office to remove those who are here illegally from the county.

All individuals are pre-



Carmelo Cruz Lopez

sumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

In-person early voting comes to a close March 8

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
editor@nganews.com

In-person early voting for the Presidential Preference Primary ends this Friday as Towns Counties take to the polls to select political party candidates for the office of President of the United States.

When early voting closes on Friday, the electorate will have had three full weeks of weekday early voting plus two Saturdays, with the next opportunity to vote falling on Election Day next Tuesday, March 12.

As of Friday afternoon, March 1, 928 people had cast ballots in person at the Towns County Civic Center, and 89 absentee-by-mail ballots had been returned.

There are 11,731 total registered voters in the county, so combining the above in-person and absentee-by-mail voting totals, 8.7% of local voters had already cast ballots in this election by Friday afternoon.

All in-person early voting takes place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Towns County Civic Center, located in the same building as the Board of Elections & Registration Office at 67 Lake-



view Circle in Hiawassee.

Presidential Preference Primary voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on March 12.

Towns County has two voting precincts: the Hiawassee Precinct at the Civic Center and the Young Harris Precinct in the Lodge Hall Building at 135 Murphy Street.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, the deadline to request a ballot for this election was Friday, March 1.

Voters returning absentee ballots can use the official drop box inside the Elections Office during early voting hours; mail

them back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or drop them off in person at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Monday, Feb. 12, was the registration deadline to vote in this election. Voter registration takes place inside the Elections Office.

The 2024 election cycle will be a busy one, with federal, state and local elections up for voting this year.

Candidates for local elections will qualify this week for the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, with a runoff date of June 18 if necessary.

The big General Election is slated for Tuesday, Nov. 5, with a runoff date set for Dec. 3.

April 22 is the voter registration deadline to participate in the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, and Oct. 7 is the deadline to register for the Nov. 5 General Election.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/s/> for voter registration status, mail-in ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,675.71
Chatuge 1,918.83
Nottely 1,762.64

BASEBALL

2/5 @ Andrews, NC 4 PM
SOCCER
2/6 @ Greene Co 5:30 PM

Spring Forward
Sunday
March 10th
Don't forget to
set your clocks

Candidate
Qualifying

See page 5

Education
Scholarships
Available

See page 2

The support you need for your next big dream.
Talk to me today about your loan and line of credit options.

Tina Denton | 706-435-1104 | Hiawassee Main Office | NMLS #744611



© 2024 United Community Bank | NMLS #421841 | ucbi.com/borrowing
This is not a commitment to lend. Normal credit criteria apply.



United
Community

Death and Taxes...from Page 1

Anderson marveled, adding, "For a county this size, we like to trade vehicles is all I'm going to say."

As far as property taxes go, Towns County is already at 92.4% for 2023 collections. By comparison, 2022 saw 98.12%. The closest to 100% was in 2018, where 99.92% property tax has been collected, with collections for previous years increasing over time as people catch up.

"I'm trying to get it down to a four-year window instead of being seven years behind, because ... you can legally start losing the right to anything over seven years old," explained Anderson, noting that his goal is to be "reasonable" when it comes to collecting, as he believes "people can have hard times."

Folks should be aware of impending state law changes regarding homestead exemptions; according to Anderson, the Speaker of the House "is committed" to moving claim

limits from \$2,000 to \$4,000 in a new bill. Local jurisdiction adds another \$8,000, so Anderson expects the standard Towns County exemption of \$10,000 to raise to \$12,000.

Another bill suggests the removal of the sample bill from assessment notices and calls for a 3% cap on yearly inflationary increases for assessed property values when it comes to annual reassessments.

A 3% assessment cap would potentially increase the likelihood of local millage rates going up because counties would still have to collect "the same amount of money" to provide local government services each year while doing so without such inflated property values.

From there, Cooper took the reins and shifted the focus, providing insight into the life of someone working with death.

"We respond to any unattended death," Cooper said. "An unattended death is going to be whether it is at your home

and you're not on hospice, in a car accident, at your home where you've had a fall, tragic things such as suicides (and) anyone who's been in the hospital less than 24 hours."

One common misconception is that the decedent is sent for autopsy every time a coroner is called to a case. Not only is this inaccurate, but Cooper said that autopsies are relatively rare. In fact, sometimes the Georgia Bureau of Investigation turns down requests for autopsies.

To put that into perspective, the Towns County Coroner's Office responded to 78 cases last year. Of those, 22 were called in to the GBI, and only eight were actually sent for autopsy.

"Your coroner's office is going to determine your cause of death and the manner in which you passed," Cooper said. "We do not always get GBI to help us with that. When we do, we are so very, very grateful, but not all calls go to

the GBI."

Toxicology reports are separate from autopsies, but the entire body must still be sent to Atlanta for investigation. Previously, corpses were transported by funeral home workers, but more recently, a dedicated company has emerged to deliver the dead to their destination.

Cooper also provided tips to the audience. Always carry something that can be used as positive identification with a name and emergency contact numbers. Leave lists of medical conditions and active prescriptions on one's person or in the home.

In the latter case, this can involve keeping such lists up on the refrigerator in plain sight of emergency responders, but it also helps to have pertinent information in the glove compartment of a vehicle.

"When I stress to you about having something on you that says who you are and who your next of kin is, we truly need that. Law enforcement needs it, EMS need it, I need it - if I don't know who you belong to, it's really, really hard," Cooper said.

This Friday, March 8, at 8 a.m., the Movers and Shakers will welcome Vicki Franklin, who serves as the Volunteer Coordinator for S.A.F.E., which stands for Support in Abusive Family Emergencies.

"12 Angry Jurors" nearly ready for opening night

Get ready to visit the Peacock Performing Arts Center in Hayesville to see 12 Angry Jurors, Sherman L. Sergel's stage adaptation of the classic film, 12 Angry Men, starring Henry Fonda. The season opener features an all-local cast sequestered in a jury room as they weigh the seemingly open-and-shut case against a young man charged with murdering his father. When one juror opens the eyes of the others to the implications of making a decision affecting a person's life, tempers flare and arguments become heated in this PG-13 show.

The entire play takes place in the intimate setting of a small jury room, which provides the audience with a close-up opportunity to witness this high-stakes drama that is sure to have them on the edge of their seats. The setting presents unique challenges for both the cast and the set-builders.

"The cast is all onstage for the entirety of both acts," says Juror #2, Paul Keely, of Brasstown. "There's no leaving the stage because we're sequestered in a jury room for the duration."

"That means we can't sneak a peek at the script," adds Jury Foreman Ed Legue of Murphy.



(L-R) foreground: Jim Oliver, Joe Zang; back: Gary Dean (on ladder), Don Jones, and James "Sully" Sullivan (kneeling)

Set building crew chief, Jim "Sully" Sullivan of Murphy, says that the set was a fairly simple build, but the 12-seat, V-shaped, one-piece jurors' table was quite a task. "The span of the V is 12 feet from point to point with seating for two at the head of the table," he says. "The table is constructed so it can be moved as a single unit. It slopes upward from the end of the V to the head of the table to give the audience a better sense of depth perception."

The crew also modified

wall units to accommodate two windows, one of which had to be hinged so it could open.

If you enjoyed Henry Fonda in the movie, you'll be thrilled with this local rendition of the play. 12 Angry Jurors runs March 8-10 and 15-17. Further details are available on our website, the-peacocknc.org, or by calling the office, 828-389-2787 ext. 1, T-F, 10-4 p.m. The Peacock is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and an equal opportunity employer and provider.

"Hiawassee" secures sponsors for 2024 and a new sculpture featuring hiking poles on the Square



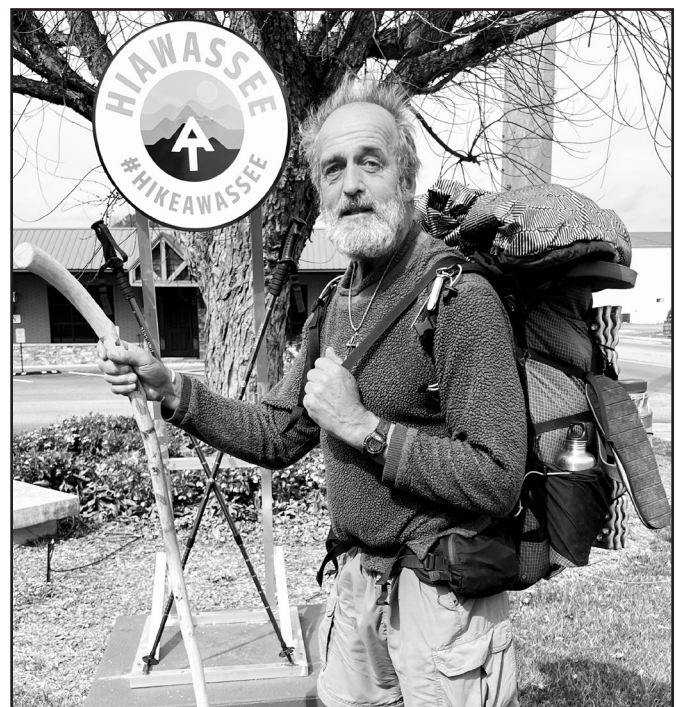
Mayors Monday cookout

Monday, February 26 began the first day of the #Hiawassee program with some new sponsors and a new attraction on the town square. Shuttle sponsors for 2024 include two new sponsors Goin' Postal and Dottie's Kitchen, plus returning sponsors The Retreat on the Lake, Ingles, Holiday Inn, Nature's Health & Body of Georgia, Trailful, and Georgia Mountain Pickleball.

In addition, a new sculpture featuring hiking poles and the #Hiawassee logo is on the town square, providing hikers a photo opportunity, which in turn helps spread the message about Hiawassee as a cool place for hikers to stop. The sculpture was created and built by volunteers from the Mountain Beautification and Revitalization Association, and was sponsored by Robin Herrin in honor of her late husband Dave Herrin.

"We are very grateful for the warm community support for #Hiawassee," said Monica McKenna, chair of the program. Monica, a former DDA board member and local realtor, has returned to lead this year's program once again, which is already off to a great start with volunteers ready for the Mayor's Monday cookouts each week as well as driving the shuttle bus Monday-Sunday.

More than 20 volunteers attended the shuttle bus driver kickoff but if someone



Hiker "Free" in front of the sculpture

would like to volunteer, please email dda@hiawasseeega.gov. No special requirements are needed other than a driver's license and a good driving record. Volunteers are also welcome to attend the cookouts, held each Monday from 2 - 4 PM on the town square, to welcome hikers and provide #trailmagic in the form of cookies, chips or other goodies popular with hikers.

The 2024 #Hiawassee program runs from Feb. 26 to May 3, and is a joint effort between the Hiawassee DDA and The City of Hiawassee. Part of the effort includes

education for hikers about the businesses in town plus other helpful information, such as where to charge a phone. The information is available on the DDA's website, Facebook and Instagram pages, and via a QR code. The short link to the info can be found at www.bit.ly/hikermap.

#Hiawassee stickers are available for businesses who would like to resell them. Stickers are sold at cost and the business can resell them at a suggested retail price of \$3.95. Contact the DDA at dda@hiawasseeega.org to order stickers. T1Mar6_A5JH

Earl Merck Named Lion Of The Year for 2023/2024



(L-R): Club President Danny Meeks, Lion Of The Year Earl Merck, Program Speaker Steve Williams



During their February 27th meeting at the Anderson Music Hall on the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the Towns County Lions announced their 2023/24 Lion Of The Year is Earl Merck.

Earl exemplifies the highest qualities of Lionism. He attends meetings regularly, is constantly involved in club activities, serves in many different areas and capacities with distinction, energy and resolve, works behind the scenes without attention, fanfare or recognition, achieves club goals wherever he's needed in different service areas such as the funnel cakes kitchen, golf carts and trolley transport, fireworks, Hamilton Garden and Fairgrounds maintenance. Earl is always dependable, humble, ready and willing to cooperate

and always shows a helpful, positive attitude.

Congratulations to Earl Merck from all the Towns County Lions!

The local Lions also welcomed Past District Governor and Forsyth County Lions leader Steve Williams who gave an enlightening initiation program on Lionism history, info and organization regionally, statewide, nationwide and worldwide.

There are more than 48,000 Lions Clubs in over 200 nations with over 1.4 million men and women members worldwide. The Lions Motto is "We Serve" and the Mission Statement is "to empower volunteers to serve their communities, meet humanitarian needs, encourage peace and promote understanding worldwide." The Vision Statement is "to be the global leader through community and human services worldwide."

There are four Lions Districts and 181 Lions Clubs in Georgia. The Towns County Lions are in District 18-I in the Northeast section of Georgia which has 50 clubs.

All Towns County Lions are encouraged to attend the next regular club meeting on March 12, 6 PM, at the Anderson Music Hall to hear Hamilton Rhododendron Garden's Catherine Luckenbach give her annual presentation, plans and update to the club, especially concerning the upcoming Rhododendron Festival in April and May.

Please also be reminded that the next Nashville Superstar concert is The Frontmen on March 23 at 7 PM at the Anderson Music Hall preceded by the Pancake Breakfast fundraiser at the Paris Picnic Pavilion to benefit the Hamilton Rhododendron Garden from 8 AM to 10:30 AM that morning. See y'all at the Fair!

Parrot-feather ...from Page 1

economic vitality and quality of life on the lake, and multiple attendees expected more from the federally owned corporation responsible for Chatuge.

"I am shocked," said Towns County Civic Association President John Clemens. "I am disappointed that it turned out this way, because it's not how I envisioned this would happen."

"I don't like it," concurred Hiawassee resident Joan Crothers. "I think that they should be doing more as far as the presentation goes. I wanted a presentation and a question-and-answer (session)."

Some local government representatives, on the other hand, were simply grateful that TVA took the time and initiative to meet with the public.

Recreation Department Director Stuart Nichols said he was "pleased that they wanted to come to the community and talk about this. This is their event; they did this, so we're happy they're here."

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw also expressed gratitude for TVA, adding, "They didn't have to do this. We're thankful that they're doing it. In years past, the TVA's been good to Towns County."

As noted above, the open house consisted of tables stationed with various lake-related organizations such as the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and, of course, environmental nonprofit Mountain-True.

Matthew Higdon, a specialist on the National Environmental Policy Act, shared that the TVA was "early" in its environmental survey process, and therefore still learning more about where the parrot-feather is growing in Lake Chatuge.

"We have not begun a specific review. TVA is still gathering information about the locations, and part of this effort tonight is to get the public's initial thoughts on – or at least introduce and communicate to folks – what we're thinking," explained Higdon, who said that public feedback was necessary before moving forward with any sort of plan.

TVA West Region Manager of Natural Resources Management David Brewster said that the environmental review process takes up the largest chunk of time when it comes to drawing up an "attack plan" to address an invasive weed like parrot-feather.

Things like local wildlife populations and species, other plants in the surrounding area of infestation, water quality, human activity and other factors go into determining the best mode of action.

And he projects TVA action starting around mid-summer, whether that means releasing sterile grass carp to eat the weed or treating public access points with herbicides approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

If TVA chooses the latter option, those focus areas will specifically include places like boat ramps, the beach and

campgrounds. TVA will not be responsible for clearing out private property, but fortunately, there's a plan for that as well.

"Save Lake Chatuge" has become a rallying cry in the fight against the invasive species, and for that, it's become the name of an organization dedicated to doing just that.

The group is represented online at www.savelakechatuge.org, where anyone concerned about the wellbeing of the lake can donate to the cause.

Recent efforts have resulted in phenomenal fundraising, with already more than \$330,000 pledged to treat the parrot-feather infestation starting this year.

Callie Moore, MountainTrue's Western Regional Director, said the funds will go toward hiring herbicide professionals to kill off the weed choking up private boat ramps and docks.

Outside of safety, Moore said the most important aspect of treatment is moving forward with a "coordinated effort" – which is exactly what this movement has entailed, with individuals, business owners, local governments and nonprofits coming together to tackle the problem.

"With parrot-feather, one little piece breaks off, you start a whole new plant," Moore said. "These sections are going to get treated all at the same time – all of it is going to get treated."

GDOT 515 Project...from Page 1

twin bridges at the county line over Brasstown Creek.

Added Middlebrooks, "This section will be the four-lane divided highway with a 32-foot depressed median and a 10-foot shoulder with a 6-foot paved shoulder to accommodate bikes from both directions."

All told, the 3.2-mile stretch defining Phase II will have about eight detours to tie sideroads back into the highway.

Phase III will go out to bid this year as well, with construction to encompass the 4 miles between Earl Shelton Road to the Home Depot area of Georgia 515 inside Blairsville city limits. Nine retaining walls are planned along this stretch.

Like Phase II, the third phase will feature a divided four-lane highway with a 32-foot depressed median, a 10-foot shoulder and 6-and-a-half-foot paved bike lane. It will include nine detours for

sideroads.

According to a timeline estimate provided last year, Phase III construction is expected to last two years as well, though the overall project timeline remains fluid, including construction start dates, per GDOT District 1 Communications Officer Elizabeth Johnson.

"The (bid letting) list is approved by the Georgia Transportation Board, and bids are solicited up to the next month when a new letting is issued," Johnson said last week. "If there are competitive bids made on the project, they are analyzed and a decision is made to accept, reject or defer the project based on the bids."

"If no bids were given, there usually is an investigation as to why there were no bids. All this takes time depending on the number of projects put out for letting."

"Some months have more projects, others do not. That also depends on funding

from the federal government, which is constantly having to approve funding of itself and raising the debt ceiling."

Added Johnson, "Once the contract is awarded, the contractor must sign the contract, have it notarized and send it back to Georgia DOT who reviews it."

"A preconstruction conference is held between GDOT and the contractor to review the contract parameters including full employment, starting dates, and a slew of details encompassing the project including the use of subcontractors and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises."

"Once the contractor has all the supplies he needs and any utilities that are involved in the project are moved and he receives the Notice to Proceed from GDOT, the project can begin. This is a very fluid timeline, and if one thing changes, the entire timeline of the project changes."

Towns County High School Agriculture Events



Gabe Eller, Hailey Gibson, Randall Cannon, and Greyson Tallent

The High School FFA Agricultural Mechanics team placed 8th in the Region. The Agricultural Mechanics Career Development Event consists of a team activity, skills activities in 5 different areas of agriculture as well as a welding positions skill. Hailey Gibson, Gabe Eller, Greyson Tallent and Randall Cannon did a great job representing TC FFA.

The Georgia Junior National Livestock Show recently concluded with an impressive display of talent and dedication from young livestock exhibitors across the state.

Among the standout participants was Hailey Gibson and her prize Heifer Pearl (1390 lbs), who clinched an admirable 2nd place in the highly competitive market heifer show category.

Hailey's dedication to raising and showcasing their heifer was evident throughout the competition. Her commitment to the well-being and training of the animal, along with her ever increasing knowledge of the beef and livestock industries best practices, set them apart as a top contender in the show.



Hailey Gibson and her prize Heifer Pearl

Congratulations to Hailey Gibson on her outstanding performance at the Georgia Junior National Livestock Show.

Murphy, NC Murder ...from Page 1

Cherokee County Detention Center on March 3, where she is currently held without bond.

The date and time of death are currently under investigation. Upon information and belief, the last time the Cherokee County father saw his twin sons alive was on Feb. 26, 2024. Accordingly, the date of the offense on the warrants is currently a range of Feb. 26 through March 2. The Cherokee County Sheriff's Office is hopeful that autopsies

will narrow down the date and time of the twins' passing.

In the wake of this tragedy, Cherokee County Sheriff Dustin D. Smith is asking for prayers for the victims' family, friends and all the first responders involved.

"Sheriff Smith would like to remind our County that our children are our most precious resource and our hope for the future," the Sheriff's Office said Sunday evening. "We all must stand united for their protection

and for justice."

A critical incident debriefing will be held for all first responders involved. A critical incident debriefing is a facilitator-led group process conducted soon after a traumatic event with individuals considered to be under stress from trauma exposure.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

United States Navy Veterans Mike and Pat Baldwin Awarded Quilts of Valor



US Navy veterans Pat and Mike Baldwin

Two Blairsville Naval Veterans were honored by the Appalachian Hospice Thursday, February 15, 2024 at their home, with many friends and Hospice representatives attending. Mike and Pat Baldwin both served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam era, for a combined total of 47 years of service.

Pat's field of work was in the ICU, Neuro and Urology departments. At her first duty station, she helped returning prisoners of war cope with their medical issues. She received a Meritorious Unit Commendation, M3-16 ribbon and a National Defense Medal. Pat met the love of her life at her third duty station in Adak, Alaska. After serving three months short of 26 years in 1998, she retired as a Commander.

Mike enlisted in the Naval Reserve in 1972 as a fully qualified Aviation cadet applicant. He started flight school in May 1973, and took advance training. After attending all required training schools, Mike accepted a commission as an officer. He was awarded a National Defense Service Medal during his enlistment. That medal was one of numerous medals, awards and commendations in his 22 years of service in the Reserves, which included: the Navy Commendation Medal, 2 Meritorious Unit Commendations, 6 Battle "E" Awards, 4 Coast Guard Operational - Navy Expeditionary Medal, Armed Forces

Defense Medal, 2 Sea Service Deployment Medals, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, South Asia Campaign Medal, United Nation Medal, Navy - Marine Overseas Ribbon, and the Navy Pistol Medal (Sharpshooter). Michael retired in February 1994 as a Lieutenant Commander.

Mike and Pat's beautiful quilts were made by the local Misty Mountain Quilters Guild Quilts of Valor group, based in Blairsville, GA. It is one of many QOV groups all over the 50 United States and some overseas groups making quilts to honor our hero veterans.

The Foundation was started by a military mom, Catherine Roberts, in Delaware in 2003. After making her first quilt, which was awarded to a wounded soldier returning from the battlefield to Walter Reed Army Hospital, she gathered some of her

quilting friends to help her construct more quilts now totaling over 375,000 awarded!

Anyone can nominate a veteran who has been touched by war for a Quilt of Valor by going online to <http://www.qovf.org/>. Click on the words "NOMINATIONS AND AWARDS" on the red banner at the top of the page, and then look for instructions to fill in the "Online Nomination Form".

If you are a quilter and would like to help the Misty Mountain QOV group make these quilts for heroic American veterans, please go to the following website: <http://www.mistymountainquiltguild.org/>, click on the word "Projects" on the left side of the homepage, and then look for the QOV group information. QOV quilters make it our mission to support our local veterans with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor.

Citizens For A Better America meeting

Are you happy about the way things are going in Cherokee County, NC, U.S. and the world? Lets work together for change! Citizens For A Better America are uniting to promote Freedom & Constitutional Rights, peacefully & patriotically.

Monthly meetings are the third Thursday of the month. Next meeting is March 21, at the Legends Steak

House in the private meeting room, 42 Tennessee Street, Downtown Murphy, NC. Meal orders at 5 PM, meeting is 6-7:30. This meeting is free & open to the public. United We Stand!

For more information: Website: <http://www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com>; Email: Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com; Call: (828) 361-5422. NT1Mar6,23)CA