

Essay Contests...from Page 1A



L-R: Eighth-graders Gabe Eller, Madison Molina and Zoe Geraty earned Top Three honors for the Patriot's Pen essay contest.
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

And in Towns County, the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen contests have been held in the school system for over 20 years, with students participating each year for the opportunity to win scholarships and awards.

The Voice of Democracy topic for 2020-21 was, "Is This the Country the Founders Envisioned?"

Local First Place winner and freshman Kade McConnell embraced the topic with great enthusiasm as he attempted to inhabit the minds of those who created the country nearly 245 years ago.

"It made you think about what (the Founding Fathers) were envisioning," McConnell said, looking back on his entry. "Is this the country they wanted to set up in how progressive it has gotten? It meant a lot to think about it and develop an idea and get an opinion about it all."

Sophomore Will McConnell, Kade's cousin, won Second Place for Voice of Democracy, with sophomore Abby Pate coming in Third.

Over at the Middle School, the Patriot's Pen Contest asked students "to examine America's history, along with their own experiences in modern American society, by drafting a 300- to 400-word essay."

The Top Three finishers

for the Patriot's Pen contest this year were all eighth-graders writing on "What is Patriotism to Me?"

Zoe Geraty was excited to learn of her First-Place award, saying she really discovered the importance of patriotism through the competition.

"Writing the essay made me think about how we take our country for granted sometimes, and the importance of realizing how much it means to you," Geraty said. "I wasn't really expecting to come in first for the contest, but it feels really good."

Second Place for Patriot's Pen went to Madison Molina, and Third Place went to Gabe Eller.

Shannon Floyd teaches history and social studies at the high school, and he has helped to foster the contest over the years.

"(Our veterans) have always been very supportive of our kids, and I just want to personally thank the VFW and the Auxiliary and the other organizations that help us out," Floyd said.

VFW Post 7807 Senior Cmdr. Mel Halfon said the essay is all about the students' education and teaching them about history and appreciation for the United States.

"It is an opportunity for us to get into the schools and share about patriotism and the

things that are important in our country, particularly serving in the Armed Forces of the military," Halfon said. "We do this every year."

"First Place gets \$100 for Voice of Democracy and \$100 for Patriot's Pen. Second Place gets \$50 each, and Third Place gets \$25 each. We do a little program at the school to recognize them, and they get to read their essays."

Winners of the two competitions go on to compete at the district level, with winners there announced Nov. 11 Veterans Day. Students who succeed in the district competition advance to state and potentially the national level for a chance at some major scholarship money.

"We promote our local students to go to college," Halfon said. "By giving them a little bit of money and encouraging them, it gives them a little start and money to go and make something of themselves."

"We probably get 10 to 15 applications from the High School and the Middle School. Some of these things are just amazing that these kids write."

The VFW and schools are looking forward to maintaining the contest and hope to grow student participation in the years to come.

New Vaccine...from Page 1A

quantities of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine in our counties over the next few weeks," District 2 Public Information Officer Dave Palmer said Friday. "The less stringent storage and handling requirements made this a better choice for most of our health departments."

"The effectiveness of Moderna and Pfizer is very similar and is very high. The Pfizer vaccine has been used mostly in Hall and Forsyth, and for mass vaccination events in some of the other counties by Public Health."

"All of the vaccines – Pfizer, Moderna, Johnson & Johnson – are safe and effective. Public Health encourages all residents to get vaccinated when their time comes."

All three EUA-approved vaccines effectively do the same thing, triggering an immune response to SARS-CoV-2 without introducing the virus to people. The vaccines do this by getting the body's own cells to produce a part of the virus that causes COVID-19, giving the immune system something to safely make antibodies against.

Johnson & Johnson vaccines use a different technology from the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines, relying on DNA delivered via adenovirus instead of messenger RNA enveloped in lipid nanoparticles.

Adenoviruses can cause the common cold in human beings, though the one in the COVID vaccine has been modified to not make people sick. Adenovirus-based vaccine research has been ongoing for decades, with the FDA only recently approving the first one for use against Ebola.

According to the FDA, "Overall, the vaccine was approximately 67% effective in preventing moderate to severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least 14 days after vaccination and 66% effective in preventing moderate to severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least

28 days after vaccination."

Additionally, the vaccine was "approximately 77% effective in preventing severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least 14 days after vaccination and 85% effective in preventing severe/critical COVID-19 occurring at least 28 days after vaccination."

By comparison, according to initial study data, the Moderna vaccine delivered in two doses 28 days apart provides upwards of 94% protection against symptomatic COVID-19.

Presently, all vaccine supplies remain limited, though more and more options for getting vaccinated are coming online, which is a good thing, because the governor has been working to expand eligibility, e.g. allowing teachers and others access to vaccines starting March 8.

"Due to the limited initial quantity of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine that we will receive, the first doses will be offered to educators and school staff," District 2's Palmer said. "This will include teachers and school staff at public and private schools, Pre-K through 12th grade."

"Our health departments have arranged clinics with school administrators to vaccinate school employees. If teachers and school staff choose to get the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, it will be available for them at our public health vaccination sites."

"As we get more of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, it will be offered to others along with the Moderna and Pfizer."

Tentatively, Union County Schools will be holding a Johnson & Johnson vaccine clinic on March 12 pending vaccine availability, with about 60% of staff indicating interest in vaccination.

Similarly, Towns County Schools will host a Johnson & Johnson vaccine clinic on March 18, with about 55% of staff indicating interest in

vaccination.

Other vaccine avenues include Walgreens Pharmacy, which has started local vaccinations, and soon Walmart Pharmacy. These pharmacies are joining Ingles Pharmacy, which has been providing vaccines for more than two months now. Check each pharmacy's respective website for instructions on how to sign up.

As for District 2 Public Health, all vaccine-eligible individuals can attempt to sign up for an appointment at www.phdistrict2.org or call 1-888-426-5073.

Gov. Brian Kemp said his office will be looking later this month at the possibility of further expanding vaccination criteria "to include more Georgians with severe underlying health conditions who are not currently eligible."

Eligibility criteria are expanding as more supply comes online, and individuals can find their eligibility status by visiting <https://dph.georgia.gov>.

People may also register for the governor's vaccination effort at myvaccinegeorgia.com, or for local vaccination via Synergy Health of Hiawassee at the ngvax.com portal, with both sites accepting sign-ups by people who are not yet eligible in anticipation of expanded eligibility.

Synergy Health and the COVID-19 Vaccine Team continue to host mass clinics, last week vaccinating about 450 people at Foster Park, and Dr. Samuel "Le" Church asks people who have already been vaccinated to remove themselves from other wait lists if they signed up elsewhere.

COVID-19 numbers continue to decline in the area, state and nation, including local hospitalizations, deaths and testing rates. Health officials believe those numbers will continue to decline as increasingly more vulnerable people receive vaccination.

Zell Miller...from Page 1A

honor him by erecting a statue on the grounds of the state capitol. I am proud to be a sponsor of this effort. (Zell and I) had a lot in common due to the fact that we both represent the north Georgia mountains and the conservative values of the Appalachian culture."

Newly elected to serve in the same district as Miller's hometown of Young Harris in Towns County, District 50 State Sen. Bo Hatchett said he is proud to be a co-sponsor of the bill.

"Zell Miller was a leader in our state and a champion for education, creating the HOPE Scholarship, which has helped numerous people over the years get educated, myself included," Hatchett said. "It's a well-deserved tribute to him and his legacy."

Miller passed away at the age of 86 on March 23, 2018, after battling Parkinson's disease. As a politician, he was a highly influential man whose rich legacy will carry on well into the future thanks to his efforts at making the lives of his fellow Georgians better.

His crowning achievement as governor, the Georgia Lottery-funded HOPE Scholarship has broadened the horizons of many students by affording them opportunities to achieve advanced educations in Georgia.

"From Abbeville in Wilcox County to Zebulon in Pike County, Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally (HOPE) has provided more than \$10 billion of financial assistance for educational programs beyond high school," according to the Georgia Student Finance Commission.

"The legislation for this program was scripted in 1992 under the supervision of Gov. Zell Miller and launched a year later to provide assistance towards the cost of tuition at eligible Georgia postsecondary institutions to incent and reward Georgia's high achieving students."

Another of Miller's great accomplishments is Georgia's Pre-K Program, also instituted during his time as governor. Since its inception, the program has appropriated more than \$7 billion to send nearly 2 million 4-year-olds to Pre-K programs throughout the state.

HOPE Scholarship and Georgia's Pre-K Program were Miller's "proudest achievements in his 46-year career in public service," according to his family.

Once SB 140 passes the House, the monument will be designed, procured and placed by the Capitol

Art Standards Commission, "subject to final approval by a monument committee composed of (six) members of the General Assembly."

Additionally, the bill stipulates that funding for the monument is to come from private sources.

Drug Bust...from Page 1A

law enforcement for over 38 years, and most recently, I served as the Police Chief of the Young Harris College.

"As your sheriff, I will work hard to make Towns County a county we can be proud of, where our streets and communities are safe, and where you as a citizen can be

free from the fear of crime."

Also March 4, the Sheriff's Office conducted another Safety Road Check with Georgia State Patrol, this time on Byers Creek Road. The checks will continue as part of Sheriff Henderson's ongoing mission to keep residents and roads safe in Towns County.



The Sheriff's Office and GSP teamed up to conduct this Safety Road Check March 4 on Byers Creek Road. Photo/Submitted



Sheriff Ken Henderson posing with the latest haul from a March 4 bust that got more drugs off the streets of Towns County. Photo/Submitted

Taken together, the