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BOE approves \$1 million turf field; parents, students speak in meeting

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Towns County Board of Education heard from two concerned parents during their March 11 regular meeting in the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium at the schools.

The parents wanted to express the need for renovations on the soccer/football field that is now plagued with similar water-logged, mushy conditions as last year's baseball field.

They asked that the board consider installing an artificial turf playing surface so the field could be used year-round without interruptions to game schedules.

Multiple home games were canceled last year and have been canceled already this season due to poor field conditions, and an artificial turf field would fix that problem.

Their concerns fit right in with the big item on the agenda that evening, which was soccer/

football field renovations.

Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong recommended to the board that they contract with a cooperative purchasing group to turf the soccer/football field using the company FieldTurf.

"FieldTurf is a highly reputable company that has installed turf fields all over the United States," said Berrong. "The Atlanta Falcons contracted with this group to install turf in the new Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta."

Berrong said that most turf fields come with a seven to eight-year warranty.

"FieldTurf has developed a new turf product that they call CORE," said Berrong. "This product comes with a 10-year warranty and is considered the best turf product on the market today."

Currently, the project is estimated to cost roughly \$1 million and is on track to be paid using SPLOST funds. Furthermore, the board office believes it can get that number

down under a million after \$25,000 in grant money and lowering site prep costs.

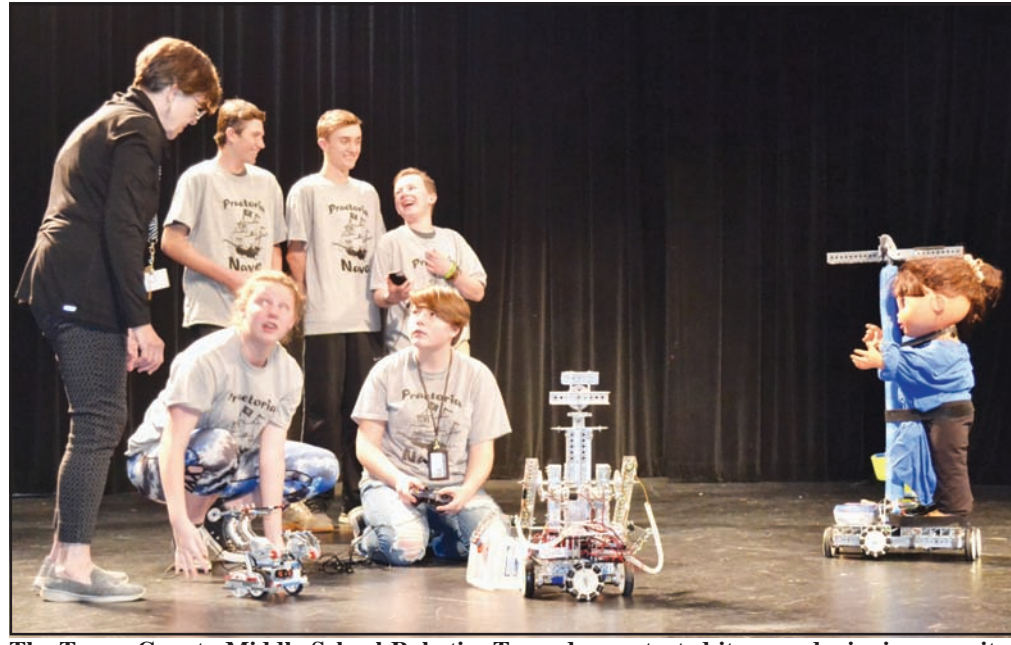
The recommendation passed unanimously that night, though Board Members Dr. Kilee Smith and Robert Williams could not be present for the March 11 meeting.

According to Berrong, the schools plan to begin construction of the new field as soon as soccer season is over in May so that the field will be ready for the first football game in August.

Also in the meeting, the board entertained two special presentations from both Middle School and Elementary School students.

The Middle School Robotics Team gave its award-winning team presentation that consisted of their idea to help astronauts stay physically fit in zero gravity. Members of the Robotics Team were Laura Mauldin, Erin Page, Bentley Floyd, Tanner Cunningham and Drew Sofield.

Two Elementary School



The Towns County Middle School Robotics Team demonstrated its award-winning, gravity-simulating robot to the Board of Education on Monday, March 11. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

students also read their award-winning stories from the Young Georgia Authors writing competition.

Jacely McClure,

kindergarten winner, read to the board her story called "I Like Unicorn," as she wore her unicorn sweatshirt and unicorn headband.

Christopher Houser, the third-grade winner, read his story called "The Siblings and the Well."

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Hiawassee PD receives vehicle donated from Sunny Isles Beach, Florida



Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, City Manager Christopher Russo, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith, Mayor Liz Ordiales and Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, Deputy City Manager Stan Morris with the recently donated police vehicle at Hiawassee City Hall. Photo by Stan Smith

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith and Mayor Liz Ordiales met with Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, City Manager Christopher Russo and Deputy City Manager Stan Morris at Hiawassee City Hall on Thursday, March 14.

There, they transferred ownership of a 2010 Ford Explorer with only 53,000 miles on it, a former Sunny Isles Beach police vehicle, to the Hiawassee Police Department.

"I go to church with a gentleman by the name of Fred Maas, who is a retired police chief for the City of Sunny Isles Beach," said Ordiales. "And while I was at church one morning (last summer), he came up behind me and asked if I was the mayor of

Hiawassee. I said yes." Maas told Ordiales that he had just retired here and was looking forward to getting involved with the community, and that he wanted to help out the city police department.

"So, a few months ago, he called me a said, 'We've got a car for you, and it's free to the city,'" said Ordiales. "It's a used car, of course, but it's the lowest mileage of any of the vehicles we have in our fleet right now. So, we're very, very happy to have it." The new-to-Hiawassee vehicle is fully loaded with lights and a siren, and there's even a lockbox in the back of the vehicle that, upon arrival, contained six laser speed guns. They're used, but even so, Chief Smith said they are worth about \$1,500 each.

A Sunny Isles Beach police officer drove the vehicle up on Tuesday, March 12, all

the way from Florida.

"The only investment we'll have to do is lettering and a (prisoner partition) behind the front seat," said Ordiales. "We're very, very happy and appreciative of him thinking about us and getting us that vehicle."

After the meeting to transfer ownership, Chief Smith contacted the Towns County Sheriff's Office to see if they might have a spare prisoner partition that they'd be willing to sell to Hiawassee PD for the vehicle.

The Sheriff's Office not only had one that wasn't being used but also graciously donated it to the Hiawassee Police Department.

Chief Fred Maas is a 43-year veteran of law enforcement in South Florida, and he now makes his home in the North Georgia mountains.

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Ralston continues to fend off allegations of 'leave law' wrongdoing

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Georgia's embattled House Speaker David Ralston continues to face bipartisan calls to resign amid a growing controversy surrounding his alleged abuse of the so-called "legislative leave law."

Essentially, the law allows for attorney members of the Georgia General Assembly to delay cases they're involved in indefinitely, or at least as long as they remain elected to the state's legislative body.

Ralston, a criminal defense attorney by trade, has rebuffed calls to resign, insisting that he has not done anything wrong in utilizing the law, which he helped to expand as a member of the state legislature in 2006.



Georgia House Speaker David Ralston

"No action I have taken has been illegal, wrong, unethical or immoral," said Ralston in the state capital recently.

The origin of the law in question dates back to over 100 years ago, when Georgia legislators passed a law to conduct attorney members to conduct state business without having to worry about the dispositions of their cases during 40-day regular sessions and special sessions.

As such, the law allows lawyer-legislators to delay all aspects of their cases during regular and special legislative sessions, plus three weeks after the close of such state business to enable them to catch up on the details of delayed cases.

The legislative leave law was amended in 2006, however, when Ralston and a majority of his fellow legislators succeeded in passing two bills regarding continuances in criminal and

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Dr. David Gowder pleads guilty in federal prescription drug case

By Linda Erbele
Towns County Herald

GAINESVILLE – Former Union General Hospital ER Director Dr. David Gowder appeared in federal court on Friday, March 15, to plead guilty to a single count of prescribing oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose in his federal prescription drug case.

Dr. Gowder, 62, of Blairsville, entered his guilty plea in a U.S. District Court Hearing before U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story in federal court in Gainesville.

He understood that, by entering a guilty plea, he would be giving



Dr. David Gowder

up his right to a trial by jury, his right to be considered innocent until proven otherwise, and, with few exceptions, his right to appeal.

"Yes, sir," Dr. Gowder said.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys William McKinnon and Laurel Boatright.

McKinnon told the court that the maximum sentence for the crime Dr. Gowder was pleading guilty to was 20 years in prison. He said the prosecution may recommend a downward adjustment of that sentence, which could come with a fine of up to \$1

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Sheriff's Office arrests two drug suspects in Young Harris

News Special
Towns County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – On Tuesday, March 12, Towns County Sheriff's Deputies and Investigators arrested two suspects on drug charges following a traffic stop.

Deputies stopped a white Chevy Astro van on SR 17 in Young Harris on a traffic offense, after which the driver provided the deputies with a false name.

Upon further investigation, two suspects were arrested and charged subsequent to the traffic stop.

Emily Ann Silkknitter, 35, of Murphy, North Carolina, is facing one count possession of methamphetamine, one count possession of drug-related objects, one count violation of tail light requirement, two counts seatbelt violation



Emily Ann Silkknitter

(juvenile), and one count giving a false name to law enforcement.

Andrew Chase Hogsed, 23, also of Murphy, is facing one count possession of methamphetamine and one count possession of drug-



Andrew Chase Hogsed

related objects.

The investigation is active and ongoing. The case will be referred to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution.

Dawson County man killed in boating accident on Lake Chatuge

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Danny Duff, 59, of Dawsonville, died in a tragic boating accident that occurred just off the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds boat ramp on Saturday, March 16, according to Towns County Coroner Harold Copeland.

"On behalf of Towns County, I extend my deepest sympathies to the family of Mr. Duff," said Copeland.

The accident took place as boats from a White County fishing club were making their way onto Lake Chatuge for a fishing tournament.

Officers with the Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division arrived at the scene to conduct an investigation.

"This morning, Georgia Game Wardens responded to



Danny Duff of Dawsonville

a fatal boating incident that occurred at approximately 7:15, on the Georgia side of Lake Chatuge in Towns County," said DNR's Mark McKinnon. "The

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