

County Leaders...from Page 1A



Towns County EMA Director Brandon Walls

Photo by Todd Forrest

Daycare Center. The Senior Center has also closed its doors, though the Meals on Wheels program will remain operational for county seniors.

Anyone in need of Food Pantry services should call 706-896-4783 and leave a message, according to Bradshaw; someone will return the call and provide help.

On the economic end of the COVID-19 spectrum, tourism and revenues from sales tax collections, fees for service, etc., will inevitably take a hit, Bradshaw said, but he assured the community that the county was prepared.

"I have no idea what this is going to cost because I have no idea how long this is going to last, so we are implementing our rainy-day fund," he said of the county's healthy reserves. "We're not hitting the panic button, but it is time to start watching our money."

As such, all expenditures not imperative to operations are being suspended until the pandemic is under control and the economy is on the uptick. That includes all out-of-town training and unnecessary items that have already been budgeted.

Mayor Ordiales has closed Hiwassee City Hall to the public, but officials will be available by appointment. As for paying bills, the drop box is still available, and paying by phone remains an option.

In Young Harris, City Hall remained open last week but closed effective March 23, and Mayor Gibby said residents

can pay bills by mail, drop box, phone or online.

According to EMA Director Walls, local small business owners are anxious about the current economic climate, "and some of the local restaurants are already feeling a pretty good pinch."

"Some are estimating financial losses in the range of \$20,000 just over the last couple of weeks," Walls said.

He discussed the importance of information during a crisis, urging people not to spread rumors.

"If it doesn't come from a very credible source, as in one of us, the CDC, the Georgia Department of Public Health, we ask the public to please not spread it," Walls said. "It causes panic, undue fear and irrational action."

"We also took some heat for announcing that someone was getting tested. But if I put that information out there, then I have verified it and know it's true. If it comes out on the county Facebook page, then it's not a rumor."

Walls said one of his biggest jobs during the pandemic is equipping public safety workers with proper protective gear.

"My main concern is the citizens, but I can't take care of them without taking care of public safety," he said. "They are on the frontlines out there, getting things done."

According to Fire Chief Copeland, a recent grant has allowed the Fire Department to purchase self-contained breathing apparatuses,

which will allow local first responders greater protection when answering medical calls featuring COVID-19 symptoms.

"We don't want our public safety people sick or in quarantine," Copeland said. "We want them out in the field answering calls."

Roberts explained E-911 center changes and the challenges of employees working in such close proximity to one another.

Along with closing the building to outsiders and using an air purification system, the center is cleaning and sanitizing four times a day, compared to twice a day in the past. The duties consist of wiping down counters, keyboards, monitors and cleaning the bathrooms.

As for EMS, the employees have started having their temperatures checked before and after each shift.

"Our ambulances are (cleaned and sanitized) after every call, and we're trying to limit exposure to people coming in the building," Director Nicholson said, noting the importance of keeping first responders well.

EMS is also limiting the number of personnel entering residences or buildings on emergency calls. Initially, only one first responder will enter in hopes they can get the person to the ambulance without additional help.

In Hiwassee, Police Chief Smith said he is looking for ways to limit contact with the public for everyone's sake.

"We can run the tags on a car and don't have to ask for a license," he said. "If we need identification, we will have them read their (license) number to us. We're also not asking people to sign their ticket if they need to be issued a citation."

Also in the meeting, Police Chief Henderson offered the services of his campus police department to any local agencies in need during the downtime at Young Harris College.

"We're sitting at the college, and the only person we're watching is the tumbleweeds, so anything that we can do to help, please let us know, and we will be glad to help," he said.

Top of Georgia...from Page 1A



Eastgate Life Academy student Brody Barrett accepting his award for winning First Place in the middle school division of this year's Top of Georgia speech contest.

said the contest and training help students to develop public speaking and communication skills that aid them throughout their lives.

Of course, organizing the competition was a lot of work, Church said, "but all the people that I've been working with are really great. It's really a team effort organizing this. It couldn't just be done by one person."

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw led the opening invocation and Pledge of Allegiance, and TCHS senior Summer Rahn performed the "Star-Spangled Banner."

Senior Corrina Luckenbach of Towns County High took home top honors in her division, displaying a genuine passion for the fashion industry while informing the audience about how their favorite clothes are made.

In her speech, Luckenbach spoke about the estimated 250 million children worldwide forced to work in sweatshops. She also touched on the unpleasant realities of the industry here in the U.S.

"Within the past decade, Americans have been begging for more American-made industry to produce more ethically made goods, and to produce more jobs," Luckenbach said. "But because of consumers' want for more affordable U.S.-made products, these big-name brands have been forced to compete with each other."

"So, they're developing these domestic small factories, where they hire illegal workers, and they pay them illegal wages."

Rounding out the high school division were Sarah Parrish, who won Second Place and \$300; Syler Church, who won Third Place and \$200; and Alexis Osborn, who finished Fourth Place and won \$100.

Eastgate Life Academy fifth-grade student Brody Barrett won First Place and a



**Corrina Luckenbach
1st Place – High School
Top of Georgia Contest**

\$400 prize in the middle school division with his speech on football.

"I am here today to talk about the world's favorite sport: football," Barrett said. "No, I am not talking about the sport that barely uses your feet that is so adored here in America today; I'm talking about soccer."

After making the audience chuckle with his introduction, Barrett, using a soccer ball, recounted the history of soccer, how the game is played, and discussed its popularity around the globe.

He ended his speech talking about his older sister Brooke, a Towns County High graduate who plays collegiate soccer for a Division I college in Statesboro – a goal he wants to achieve some day as well.

In Second Place for the middle school division was Alana Paradis, winning \$300; Memphis Smith took home \$200 at Third Place; and Bella Rose Childs finished Fourth,

winning \$100.

Competition organizers presented \$20 to each participant who did not win one of the big prizes, as well as certificates for completing the training and taking part in the competition.

An additional \$200 was awarded to each of the following: Towns County 4-H, Towns County Future Business Leaders of America and Eastgate Life Academy, in appreciation for their support over the years.

At the end of the competition, training and contest founder Sam Fullerton received a plaque for his dedication and hard work championing student development over the years.

Young Harris College Professor Dr. Richard Stafford served as master of ceremonies for the event. The six contest judges were Jeff Langley, Chad Houser, Cecil Dye, Gale Thompson, Hayden Betsill and Bob Sleczkowski.

30th Infantry Division receives Presidential Unit Citation



Statement from the President

At my direction, the United States Army will award the Presidential Unit Citation to the 30th Infantry Division. More than 75 years ago, Soldiers of the 30th Infantry Division slept in their foxholes after hastily taking defensive positions around the small town of Mortain, France. They woke to find themselves under attack by an entire German Panzer Corps. Through this assault, Adolf Hitler gambled to keep American forces from breaking out of the Normandy beachhead and into the open countryside. The Nazi plan required the Panzer forces to cut through the 30th Infantry Division en route to the sea. However, the

actions of the 30th Infantry Division would prove to be decisive in blunting this attack.

Nicknamed the "Old Hickory Division" because its Soldiers hailed from National Guard units from North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia – all States closely associated with President Andrew Jackson – the 30th Division Soldiers proved as tough as their unit's namesake. The situation they faced on August 6, 1944, was dire. They found themselves confronted by overwhelming enemy armor, and the German Panzers broke through their lines. The Old Hickory Division, however, did not stop fighting. It pressed its cooks, clerks, and drivers into service as riflemen. The Division's artillery protected its encircled and isolated elements with a constant barrage of fire. At daybreak, American and British close air support arrived to help. By

the afternoon of August 7th, the German attack stalled and the Division quickly counter-attacked to relieve its trapped elements, through another five days of fierce fighting. More than 2,000 Old Hickory Soldiers were killed or wounded during the weeklong battle, but their efforts and sacrifice would have a profound impact on the course of history.

After the War, eight units within the 30th Infantry Division were recognized with the Presidential Unit Citation. Today, I am proud to direct the Army to honor the remainder of the Division and attached units with the Presidential Unit Citation for their heroic stand at Mortain. This action rightfully recognizes our Veterans who triumphed against incredible odds, as well as those who died during a critical battle that helped ensure the Allied victory in Europe.

A message from Mountain Regional Library System Director Heath Lee

Out of concern for our patrons, staff, and the community at large during this public health emergency, the Mountain Regional Library System will continue to be closed to the public until further notice. During this time, we ask that all materials currently checked out please not be returned. Our book returns will not be closely monitored, and items currently checked out will not accrue

any fines while the libraries are closed.

Even though our doors are closed, library staff is working hard to make our services as accessible as possible. This is a great time to explore digital magazines via GALILEO, eBooks, digital learning platforms, and more!

We will continue to engage with the public through our website and social media,

so please visit www.mountain-regionallibrary.org or follow us on Facebook for updates and announcements. If you need to reach library staff, please submit questions via email. Email addresses for all local branches can be found on our website.

We greatly look forward to being able to serve our community in this current limited capacity and at full capacity in the near future.