

Towns County Herald

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Hoax caller reports active shooter at school

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County High School was the subject of a hoax active shooter call to 911 on Friday, March 24.

The call came shortly after lunchtime that a student had been shot in a bathroom at the High School, leaving a bloody scene.

This prompted a swift response from the Sheriff's Office, but fortunately, school officials were able to quickly determine that the threat had been fabricated.

The hoax determination was made so quickly, in fact, that administrators decided not to issue a lockdown, as described by Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in a message to School Board members.

"I've been asked by

some people why we didn't go into lockdown," Berrong said. "There were a few reasons, but these are the main two.

"We knew that if a gun had actually been fired on campus, our crisis alert system would have been activated by a staff member before any actual 911 call could have been made. And since it had not been activated, we were confident this call wasn't true.

"Also, our (school resource officer), school administrators, as well as myself were in close proximity to the location (where) the call claimed someone had been shot.

"Within 15 seconds of getting information the call was made, we had already physically checked the bathroom locations and determined that there was no threat.

"With all of this informa-

tion, I decided not to lock down and cause campuswide panic."

The Towns County Sheriff's Office made a post on Facebook Friday afternoon telling people that the call was "found to be a false alarm."

Upon investigating the matter, the Sheriff's Office learned that the call appeared to have originated in Nova Scotia, and the caller had a foreign accent, TCSO Chief Deputy Gene Moss said.

Information pertaining to the call has been turned over to the Department of Homeland Security.

The hoax call was the second false alarm at the school this month after a staff member accidentally activated the new Centigex Alert System while setting up the app, which triggered a hard lockdown on campus March 2.



New ambulance debuted in March county meeting Body of wanted man located in Lake Chatuge



(L-R) Towns EMS Director Ken Nicholson, EMT Jim Shirley II, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Paramedic Ben Dills with the newest ambulance in the Towns County EMS fleet. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In his March 21 regular meeting, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw proudly announced that Towns County Emergency Medical Services had just that day put its brand-new, top-of-the-line

ambulance into service.

Described by Bradshaw as "the Cadillac" of ambulances in terms of features, the new vehicle brings the total number of ambulances available for use at one time to five should the need ever arise.

There are currently 19 full-time and 16 part-time

EMTs answering medical calls in the county, running two ambulances per shift. Two EMTs staff each ambulance, and a fifth person runs a supervisor shift to be available should an extra hand be needed or if someone can't make a shift.

Bradshaw praised EMS See County Meeting, Page 6A

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation responded to Lake Chatuge in Hiawassee on March 26 to investigate the death of a man wanted locally since March 9 for suspicion of theft.

Brandon Scott Anderson, 35, of South Carolina, was identified from the driver's license he was carrying as the deceased man found in the lake Sunday, per the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

He had been wanted and missing for over two weeks when his body was discovered near where he was last seen by law enforcement.

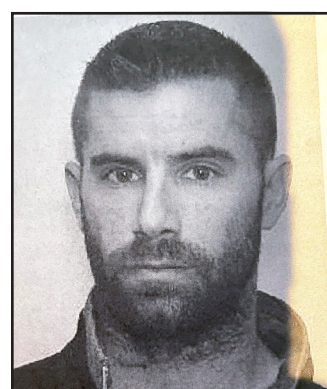
An official cause of death is pending autopsy by the GBI Crime Lab, but no foul play is suspected at this time, the Sheriff's Office said Monday.

Next of kin had been notified by press time.

On Sunday afternoon, a boater found a man's body floating close to the water's edge near a dock belonging to property located across the highway from Denton's Grocery on US 76, and the Sheriff's Office called the GBI for assistance.

Following an initial investigation, the man was identified as the fugitive from justice in a stolen equipment case from earlier this month.

Anderson was recently named as a suspect in the



Brandon Scott Anderson

felony theft of a Cat 305E excavator stolen out of Spartanburg, South Carolina. Until the discovery of his body, he was wanted in connection with the

See Body Identified, Page 6A

Sheriff's Office issues alert for deadly street drug 'tranq'

News Special
Towns County Herald

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson is sounding the alarm on a uniquely harmful drug that has been making the rounds in American communities.

The drug goes by the street name "tranq," and while the potentially lethal cocktail has yet to be discovered in Towns County, it is likely just a matter of time before its presence is known.

Officials with the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration issued a rare "Public Safety Alert" last week concerning the veterinary tranquilizer xylazine.

Xylazine is not approved for use by humans and is being added to fentanyl in an effort to extend the duration of the "high" produced by ingesting fentanyl.

These two drugs have the street name "tranq" and can easily lead to a fatal overdose. In non-fatal instances, the drug can create open flesh wounds that require amputation.

"Xylazine is making the deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced, fentanyl,



even deadlier," said DEA Administrator Anne Milgram. "DEA has seized xylazine and fentanyl mixtures in 48 of 50 States.

"The DEA Laboratory System is reporting that in 2022 approximately 23% of fentanyl powder and 7% of fentanyl pills seized by the DEA contained xylazine."

Xylazine and fentanyl drug mixtures place users at a higher risk of suffering fatal drug poisoning. Because xylazine is not an opioid, naloxone (Narcan) does not reverse its effects. Still, experts recommend administering naloxone if someone might be suffering drug poisoning.

People who inject drug mixtures containing xylazine also can develop severe wounds, including necrosis – the rotting of human tissue – that may lead to amputation, as noted above.

Sheriff Henderson reiterated that the Sheriff's Office has yet to encounter this deadly combination here in Towns County but will remain ever vigilant to any and all threats to the citizens of Towns County.

In a March 9 arrest, the Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office seized a substance that later tested positive for xylazine. Reportedly, this was the first known seizure of the substance in the neighboring community. Another substance seized in the arrest tested positive for fentanyl.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, xylazine "has been linked to an increasing number of overdose deaths nationwide in the evolving drug addiction and overdose crisis."

"Studies show people exposed to xylazine often knowingly or unknowingly used it in combination with other drugs, particularly illicit fentanyl," per https://nida.nih.gov/.

TCHS hosts career fair, Be Pro Be Proud Workshop



A group of Towns County High School students with Reggie LaGrone and Matthew "Hutch" Hutcherson of the Be Pro Be Proud Mobile Workshop. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County High School dedicated March 20 and 21 to giving kids a chance to explore their options for the future in the form of both a career fair and the arrival of the Be Pro Be Proud program.

The career fair was only there for Monday, but it still offered a sense of direction for many local youths inside the Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium.

Towns County Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education Director Melissa McConnell said that, along with visits from local organizations like Towns County Sheriff's Office and Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, students interested in pursuing higher education could look at options like North Georgia Technical College, which had a booth set up among 13 other business and education repre-

sentatives.

This was not the High School's first career fair, but it was the first time the Be Pro Be Proud Mobile Workshop came to visit. Originally founded in Little Rock, Arkansas, Be Pro Be Proud's three-year-old Georgia offering is sponsored by the Cherokee Office of Economic Development.

Like the CTAE program, Be Pro Be Proud aims to show kids that there's value in trade skills. As a mobile learning experience, the trailer comes packed with a VR system that offers a preview of electrical linework, a commercial truck driving simulator, virtual welding and more.

In the past two years, almost 40,000 students have toured the bus, which made Towns County High its 202nd stop across the state. And for two days, it was set up on the tennis court of TCHS to let kids try out different careers in

a safe environment.

"Most of the students that we get to influence or that normally come out are a part of the CTAE program, but we're not only geared toward CTAE students," explained Tour Manager Coach Reggie LaGrone.

"Hopefully we're punching holes in the darkness when it comes to skill trades and giving students information to know that everybody's career or pathway is not going to take them to college or through college, that you can have just as good of a career in a skill trade that you could as having a college degree."

If a student decides to pursue a future in trade skills, Be Pro Be Proud refers them to any number of local businesses – or, around these parts, to their sponsor, Worksource Georgia.

"We need more spon- See Be Pro Be Proud, Page 6A

2 Sections 12 Pages

Vol. 94 No. 22

Arrests - 2A Legals - 5B
Church - 3B Obituaries - 4B
Classifieds - 5B Sports - 2B
Opinion - 4A



Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,678.64
Chatuge 1,920.41
Nottely 1,765.82

BASEBALL
3/28 vs. LOA 4 PM
3/29 @ Hiwassee Dam
4 PM

Sheriff's Law Enf. Academy See page 2A

TCHS Student of the Week See page 3A

Easter Egg Hunt April 8 See page 2B



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Body Identified...from Page 1A

case after allegedly fleeing on foot from local law enforcement Thursday, March 9.

The Sheriff's Office received a tip about the stolen equipment and responded to its location on Bugscuffle Road March 9, at which point Anderson reportedly ran from deputies into a wooded area.

At the time, TCSO utilized deputies and the department's new drone to conduct

an extensive search, including around the lake and Macedonia Bridge on US 76 East. Searchers were unable to find him, and it was believed Anderson may have escaped into the water where he later died.

A female suspect, Terrie Eugenia Miles, 27, of Liberty, South Carolina, was arrested at the scene of the excavator March 9 and charged with felony theft by receiving; felony

possession of meth; and felony possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

Her additional charges came after a vehicle search resulted in the confiscation of meth and a 9mm carbine. She is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

The stolen Cat 305E, valued at \$58,000, was returned to its owner by the Sheriff's Office.

This is a developing story and will be updated as additional information becomes available.

Love Light Scholarship Donations

The Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home Auxiliary is requesting donations to fund our Love Light Scholarship Program. While we accept donations in memory or honor of individuals

throughout the year, this is the time when we receive the most donations. The scholarships are awarded to deserving Towns County High School Seniors who will be entering the medical field. We also award

to Chatuge Hospital/Nursing Home employees working to further their education.

Please return this form with your donation to: Love Light Scholarship, P O Box 986, Hiawassee, GA 30546.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Given in MEMORY of: _____

Given in HONOR of: _____

Acknowledgement to be sent to: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Be Pro Be Proud...from Page 1A

sors in this part of the state, because we do quite a bit of service in this area (with the (high) schools, the middle schools and the Mountain Education programs," LaGrone said.

Primarily, Be Pro Be Proud serves high school students, but the target audience includes middle schoolers as young as 13. The setup appeals to all ages, with interactive stations that almost resemble arcade games with skills applicable to real life.

Be Pro Be Proud Tour Driver Matthew "Hutch" Hutcheson remembers being one of those kids not destined for college, so he can identify with the students who take the time to explore the program.

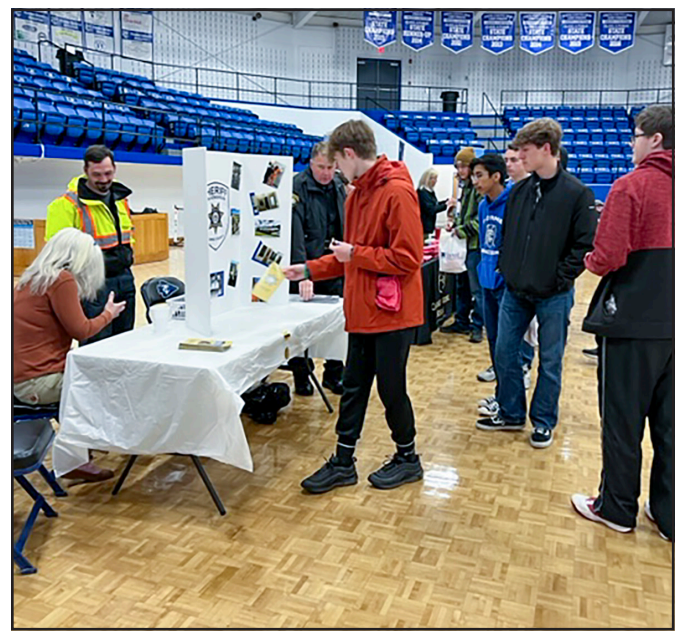
"I needed them much, much more than the military needed me," Hutch said. "I was not a good student; I wasn't very productive ... I was a kid who needed a trade.

"I'm guilty as well with my own kids (of saying), 'You've got to go through secondary education to be successful at life.' Well, no you don't."

And LaGrone is just as dedicated; the students touring the trailer are his "babies," and he's able to foster an immediate connection with his outgoing, supportive personality that gets kids interested in learning.

"That makes me feel good, when students find their passion," LaGrone admitted with a smile.

Overall, Be Pro Be Proud was a success last week. At any given moment, laughter



TCHS students checking out the Career Fair organized by the school last week. Photo/Submitted

and lively conversation could be heard from the trailer, where excited teens crowded around the truck driving simulator or slipped on the VR headset to give electrical work a go.

Outside on the tennis court, some friends took a miniature robot for a spin – figuratively and quite literally.

Tenth-grade buddies Aiden Stimons and Erik Sutton, for example, were pleased with their experience and found that, while they still had some important decisions to make regarding their futures, their day at the career fair and touring the Be Pro Be Proud trailer was nonetheless helpful.

"My old school didn't have this, so it's nice to see," Stimons said. "I got to see

what options are around here."

"We're very happy this all came together, even though it was so cold," said McConnell, who moved between the career fair and the mobile workshop that Monday. "They wanted to simultaneously have the career fair (with Be Pro Be Proud.)"

Hopefully by next year, there will be two Be Pro Be Proud trailers traveling the highways of Georgia, giving the organization more opportunities to visit other schools around the state – and to come up to Towns County more often.

To learn more about Be Pro Be Proud or to sponsor the movement, visit www.beproudbproudga.org.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

workers for their professionalism and life-saving efforts, saying, "With our guys here and with all of our public safety, they do a great job."

"Anything we can do to improve our public safety, as long as we can live within our means, we want to do that," Bradshaw said. "I think we've got the best personnel; we've got great EMTs and paramedics, firefighters, the Sheriff's Office – all of these guys, they care."

EMS Director Ken Nicholson said that, in addition to having top-of-the-line ambulances in service, Bradshaw has made sure the EMS possesses other updated technology, like electric stretchers that protect EMTs from potential injuries and provide greater stability for patients.

And the new ambulance comes equipped with a HAAS Alert System, which "connect(s) and protect(s) any vehicle or asset with real-time alerts to approaching drivers in millions of vehicles" via map apps used by motorists.

"I am really proud of the service," Nicholson said. "We've got a lot of good guys ... we've kept them through the pandemic. Really, we were only short a couple of months, and then we built up and pulled them from other places, so we are really proud of that."

Nicholson reported that EMS ran 2,312 calls in 2022, "which may not seem like a lot for a small county, but it's a lot for running two trucks (at a time)." Towns County EMS would like to thank the Jones and Ash families for their assistance in acquiring the ambulance.

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw signed a proclamation for April as Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month, welcoming Fran Parks of the volunteer-based legal advocacy organization for children, Enotah CASA; Sheila Boman of the Union/Towns Division of Family & Children Services; and Tammy Lester with Sup-

port in Abusive Family Emergencies Inc., aka S.A.F.E.

The proclamation – to be jointly signed by Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales this month – aims to bring awareness to the persistence of child abuse in Georgia and to promote the importance of "consistent, early and effective prevention strategies" in protecting children from abuse, which often has lifelong consequences, or worse.

People should keep an eye on the Hiawassee Town Square for blue pinwheels set out by Enotah CASA around April 1 in furtherance of child abuse awareness efforts.

Under Old Business, Bradshaw held a second reading and adoption of a resolution to amend the county Sign Ordinance. The amendment limits signs promoting off-premises businesses or activities to three per parcel, for example, on the side of a commercial building.

Separately, businesses and other organizations, like churches, now have the ability to install non-flashing digital text signs no higher than 10 feet off the ground and no larger than 32 square feet per side, which is about the area of a queen-sized bed.

For New Business, Bradshaw accepted a pair of contracts with Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions & Services, a company that specializes in property valuations.

The first contract for \$5,500 brings in GMASS to assist the Tax Assessor's Office with keeping personal property values up to date with the state while a new local employee trains to complete the task moving forward.

"We've always been able to do this ourselves in the past," Bradshaw said. "This is the first time since I've been commissioner that we've had to contract out (the personal property valuations) portion of it."

The second contract for \$40,000 is for GMASS to conduct commercial property as-

sessments over the next year.

"We used them for that last year, and we're using them for that again this year," Bradshaw said. "Once they get everything in the ratio that it's supposed to be in (for the state) – and we're already there – but it may be that they've got it so far along that our folks can take that over."

"We still may hire them and put them on something else and just flip flop so we keep everything up to date. I wouldn't say it would be for commercial every year, but ... more than likely, unless they don't perform their duties that we agree to, then we would hire them back again next year."

Added Bradshaw, "It's more cost effective (to just let GMASS do it) than us hiring somebody and training them and paying their benefits. It makes it easier on the county financially, plus they do a great job."

Bradshaw also reviewed a March 8 called meeting in which he opened four bids for a needed new backhoe at the Transfer Station. The winning bid was submitted by lowest bidder Nelson Tractor Co. for \$98,793, and the equipment is expected to be delivered soon.

In terms of courthouse remodeling progress, Bradshaw said everything should be on schedule for a 14-month completion timeline. Much of the old building has been gutted, most construction materials are in, and work has begun at the additional building site behind the courthouse.

Regarding sales tax collections, including SPLOST that is paying for the courthouse renovation and addition project, "We haven't seen it falter or lower any at all, so we're very thankful for that."

Commissioner Bradshaw holds his regular county meetings on the third Tuesday of each month beginning at 5:30 p.m. inside the Temporary Courthouse Offices located at the Old Rec Gym in Hiawassee.

Towns County Retired Educators Announce Scholarships

Towns County Retired Educators Association (TCREA) is committed to excellence in education and is pleased to announce the availability of two scholarships for Towns County college students and teachers to help them further their academic careers and fulfill their potential.

College students who are legal residents of Towns County currently enrolled in an accredited education program who will be at least a college junior in the 2023 academic year and have at least a 3.0 GPA are eligible for the TCREA Emerging Educators Scholarship. The amount of the scholarship varies by year; for 2023 the scholarship is \$1,000.

Current teachers who hold a Georgia teaching cer-

tificate and are legal residents of Towns County or employed at a school in Towns County and are pursuing an advanced degree or additional subject endorsement are eligible for the TCREA Advanced Degree Scholarship. Applicants must be enrolled in or accepted into an accredited advanced education degree program or an endorsement program for additional subject specialty during the year in which the scholarship is awarded. Currently enrolled applicants must have at least a 3.0 GPA and be in good academic standing with their college or university. The amount of the scholarship varies by year; for 2023 the scholarship is \$500.

For more information or to request an application for TCREA scholarships, please send an e-mail to TCREA.

SC@gmail.com. Applications will also be available at the Towns County Board of Education Office in January 2023. Completed applications for scholarships should be e-mailed to TCREA.SC@gmail.com or mailed to the address on the application form.

Applications must be received by April 3, 2023, to be considered. Scholarships will be awarded at the annual TCREA banquet in May.

Local Al-Anon meetings

Are you troubled by someone's drinking? Al-Anon Family Groups (for friends and family) meet every Tuesday at 12 noon at Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church, 1114 Main Street, Room 105, Young Harris, GA For details call 404-687-0467 or visit aa.org