

# Towns County Herald

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## All Georgians ordered to 'shelter in place' by Gov. Kemp Local ordinances suspended; state parks remain open

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Towns County joined most of Georgia's 159 counties last week on the Department of Public Health COVID-19 Daily Status Report with two confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus by press time Monday, and it's just a matter of time before the entire map fills in.

Regardless of confirmation, people should assume the deadly virus is everywhere and spreading throughout the community.

To put things into perspective, the first known case of the virus was documented some 7,700 miles away on Nov. 17. Fast forward a mere five months, and COVID-19 has infected hundreds of thousands of Americans alone, with cases in every U.S. state

and territory.

That's why following the guidelines established by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Georgia Department of Public Health is so important.

The highly contagious disease requires that everyone do their part by washing their hands, staying home, and wearing some form of facial covering like a mask, scarf or bandana when they go out in public, even when healthy, to avoid asymptomatic transmission.

Gov. Brian Kemp took another step forward last week to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Georgia, issuing a statewide shelter-in-place order that went into effect Friday, April 3, to last through Monday, April 13, unless extended.

So, how does the shelter-in-place order apply to individuals and families? For

the duration of the order, all Georgians must follow what Kemp is calling the "Basic Rule."

The Basic Rule requires residents and visitors of the state to remain in their residences and take "every possible precaution to limit social interaction to prevent the spread or infection of COVID-19."

There are four exceptions to the Basic Rule allowing travel as long as people are: engaging in "Essential Services"; working in "Critical Infrastructure"; conducting "Minimum Basic Operations" for businesses, organizations, etc.; and performing "Necessary Travel," or travel related to the other three Basic Rule exceptions.

"Essential Services" consist of things like supply runs for groceries, pharmaceuticals or restaurant food pickup, as well as trips for medical

appointments and outdoor exercise, though people must practice social distancing if they leave their homes, i.e. be able to maintain at least 6 feet between themselves and others with whom they do not live.

Among other things, "Essential Services" also include trips to support dependent family members and for children to gain access to public internet to meet "educational obligations."

Intriguingly, there appear to be no distance restrictions on "Necessary Travel," including for exercise-related activities, which seemingly translates to a tacit encouragement of discretionary travel between counties and across the state to beaches, parks and other outdoor public spaces not required for personal exercise.

Adding to this impression, the Department of Natural Resources State Parks Division



Gov. Brian Kemp on April 2 discussing his decision to put a shelter-in-place order in effect.

has decided to keep state parks open to all visitors, and parks were still open by press time Monday.

Social distancing is

being enforced, and officials are now advising people to "please consider staying in your community and visiting your

See Kemp, Page 3A

## County, city embrace tighter tourism controls amid virus

By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

When Gov. Brian Kemp's shelter-in-place order went into effect last Friday, all local ordinances designed to counteract the spread of COVID-19 went out the window.

This included the many measures undertaken by Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw to slow down transmission of the virus at the local level, though Bradshaw's measures will go back into effect as soon as the statewide order expires after April 13, unless Kemp extends his order.

Prior to Kemp announcing this order last week, in a special called meeting on March 31, Bradshaw implemented a strong first amendment to his original March 26 Emergency Administrative Order.

Bradshaw has extended



Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw presented his ordinance cracking down on tourism during the pandemic in his March 31 called meeting.

Photo by Todd Forrest

his original order through April 30 and deemed all hotels, bed and breakfast businesses,

campgrounds or any short-term tourism rental as "nonessential"

See Towns County, Page 3A

## Local churches keep the faith with digital platforms

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Many local churches have moved to digital platforms exclusively in the past month to keep their communities safe while still offering people opportunities for virtual church attendance.

"We have been live streaming our services for years on Facebook," said Pastor Steven Taylor at McCannell Baptist Church. "By the time we found out we were going to a digital format strictly, we already had a well-established presence on Facebook, and our services are already on the local television station, a week delayed.

"In that aspect, we were ahead of the game, and our digital technician had recommended a couple of weeks prior to the outbreak here taking out an additional service on YouTube just in case



Pastor Steven Taylor

something like that happened.

"We were live streaming on March 15, and we were streaming on two platforms at that point. Right now, one of the biggest challenges is staying in touch with all of

your people. Our youth services have been streaming all of their live services as well, so they were already used to reaching out in that way, but we have added our children's ministry

See Churches, Page 6A

## Small businesses have options in face of economic woes

By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

With the highly contagious COVID-19 infecting people in cities and counties across the nation, local government officials are trying to stay ahead of a situation that changes on a daily basis, and sometimes by the hour.

The ever-evolving pandemic has forced Towns County, the cities of Young Harris and Hiawassee, and now, Gov. Brian Kemp, to walk a tightrope between protecting the public health and the local economy.

And on the economic front, no one has endured more than small business owners.

Enter Denise McKay, the Economic Development Director for Towns County, Hiawassee and Young Harris. McKay attended last week's called commission meeting to answer the difficult questions troubling local business owners and their employees.

"Businesses, employers, employees, contract workers and residents are encouraged to visit the Lake Chatuge Chamber (www.golakechatuge.com) or the city of Hiawassee websites (www.hiawassee.gov) for COVID-19 resources," she said. "Both websites have a COVID-19 resource page with links to the available resources on the homepage. These sites are updated as

information or new resources become available."

According to McKay, resources and financial assistance are available for qualifying small businesses through the federal CARES Act, which stands for Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

One of these resources is called the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Emergency Advance, which "will provide up to \$10,000 of economic relief to businesses that are currently experiencing temporary difficulties," according to the Small Business Administration.

This loan can be used to

See Small Businesses, Page 1B



Kris Berrong of Berrong's Barber Shop cutting a customer's hair last year, well before the word "coronavirus" entered into the collective conscience.

Photo/Facebook

## New Superior Court Judge Levins pledges 'open, fair courtroom'

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE – The Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court welcomed its newest member, Judge Buck Levins, in a unique swearing-in ceremony at the Union County Courthouse on Tuesday, March 31.

Usually, the ceremony to swear in a new Superior Court judge occurs in the Capitol with the governor presiding. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to fill the busy circuit's vacant seat, the swearing-in took place locally last week instead of in Atlanta at a later date.

Superior Court Chief Judge Raymond George performed the ceremony, and Levins' wife, Jaime, held the Bible upon which the new judge swore in, as friends, local stakeholders and

See Levins, Page 3A



New Superior Court Judge Raymond George with his wife Jaime holding Chief Judge Raymond George's "Sword of Justice," which Levins signed during his swearing-in ceremony last week at the Union County Courthouse.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Every voter to receive absentee ballot application in mail

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Attention all active Georgia voters: that "Application for Official Absentee Ballot" you received in the mail is not a scam – it's the real deal.

Last week, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Secretary of State's Office began mailing absentee ballots for the May 19 General Primary Election to every active voter in the state, to the tune of about 6.9 million voters.

Applications are prefilled with some information specific to individual voters, like their name and address, and voters will need to fill out the rest, affix postage and mail the pre-addressed form to receive an

See Absentee Ballots, Page 6A



Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger

2 Sections 12 Pages

Arrests 2A  
Church 2B  
Classifieds 5B  
Opinions 4A  
Legals 5B  
Obits 3B

Inside

Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,679.98  
Chatuge 1,921.52  
Nottely 1,771.38



**Hamilton Gardens Delays Opening**  
See page 2A

**New Release - Those Days In January The Story Of Meredith Emerson**  
See page 4B

**We Will Prevail Against the Pandemic**  
By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald Editor  
See page 4A

**Cohen Bryson Memorial Fund**  
See page 3B