

Towns County Herald

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Band breaks school record with LGPE performance

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

DAWSONVILLE – For the first time in 14 years, the Towns County High School Concert Band earned Straight Superior scores at the Georgia Music Educators Association's annual Large Group Performance Evaluation on Thursday, March 14.

They also broke the school record by achieving straight A's in every judging subcategory for their presentation of "Newcastle March," "Moscow 1941" and "Tanchozuru," and an impromptu performance of one sight-reading piece.

Of the 60 A's given, only three were A-minuses and 12 were A-pluses – four of which were earned in the sight-reading room.

"This is the best that

(the current group of band students) has ever scored," said Tim Skinner, who attended LGPE as the TCHS Band Director for the first time this year.

"It's been a long time coming for them, and they worked hard to get this," Skinner added.

The band – which consists of one sixth-grader, one seventh-grader, five eighth-graders, six freshmen, five sophomores, five juniors and one senior – began preparing for the evaluation immediately after winter break.

Because of the wide range of ages, Skinner met with a mere 12 students for daily rehearsals in his high school class. The entire band assembled just twice a week for three-hour afternoon rehearsals.

"When we all get to-

gether, they have to come prepared, because it wastes other people's time if they are not," said Skinner, explaining that his students spend quite a bit of time practicing individually outside of the designated rehearsal hours.

Furthermore, the small size of the band makes individual musicianship crucial to the ensemble's success. With only one or two players per part, each individual can be picked out of the crowd.

"One of the judges said that nobody can hide behind anybody," Skinner said. "All year long, including the marching competitions, they have been saying that we maximize the potential of each individual player."

To make the most of the group he has, Skinner also made sure to pick music that

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Only about half of the ensemble attends the high school band class each day. Other members are either in middle school or unable to fit the class into their academic schedules.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

Development, insurance renewal highlight meeting

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The April 2 regular meeting of Young Harris City Council began with the swearing in of two re-elected council members, Terry Ingram and Steve Clark, who qualified unopposed last year for new terms.

In other business, the first of "several pieces" in constructing a new subdivision is underway. A land disturbance permit was approved for the Kelley/Gibson housing development.

Councilman Clark said the project must return to the city's Planning Commission for further review.

"This is the first phase of the land disturbing process, called land grading," explained Mayor Andrea Gibby, with Councilman Dr. John Kelley adding that this first step of his development will also help with soil erosion.

Also under New Business, the council considered the latest Georgia Interlocal Risk Management Agency invoice for the city's property and liability insurance.

Following a 20% price hike of \$4,320 over last year, the council felt it prudent to dis-



Young Harris City Councilmen Terry Ingram and Steve Clark swearing into new terms during last week's regular city meeting.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

cuss the cost with the company and/or look into other options. Kelley will be responsible for communicating with GIRMA.

"It was just barely \$26,000 last year, and it's \$31,000 now," Kelley said. "And it went up last year about 20% as well."

After years of planning, trial and error, the only thing now standing in the way of the Timberline water booster pump project's construction is waiting for the proper parts to

arrive. On a similar note, all new water meters and their components have come in and are being installed – about 80 of them are already up and running.

Clark introduced the idea of a "living document" for the sake of water and sewer policy for new developments. The goal is to establish a set of measurements and other guidelines for future projects. After

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Council OKs lift station study, PBC items & more

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Among the topics discussed in the Hiwassee City Council regular meeting on April 2 were resolutions regarding a lift station study proposal and the Paris Business Center payment process.

In the March work session, Mayor Liz Ordiales explained that rather than moving a sewer lift station located near the Sand Bar & Grille, safety concerns and responses from

companies unwilling to bid on the project called for a study of the surrounding area for best options.

At the regular meeting, the idea was accepted, and the council followed up with a unanimous vote. The company responsible for the study, Engineering Management, Inc., has a long history of partnering up with the city and will perform the service for \$28,800.

The council also voted to approve a payment plan for the Paris Business Center by Storm

Construction. Essentially, the project is divided into two parts – private use of the building and public use of the building.

The agreement holds that SPLOST funding would cover the restaurant and approximately 17.6% of the building, amounting to \$60,997.35. All of this is considered part of the "private" portion.

As for the public use portion, a combination of grant money and a line of credit will help cover those costs, estimated at \$100,000.

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L-R: Hiwassee City Council Members Jay Chastain Jr., Nancy Noblet, Amy Barrett, Patsy Owens and Jonathan Wilson in their April 2 regular meeting.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Shook births first triplets for Union General Hospital



Elissa and Brian Shook with their four adorable children.

Photo/Submitted

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On Jan. 12, 2024, Elissa and Brian Shook became the proud parents of the first triplets born in memorable history at Union General Hospital.

Now, following a rough start, little Lily, Daisy and Harper have settled in with their parents and big sister Annalise at their home in Blairsville.

The Shooks met in high school and have been together for eight years. Annalise came

along three years ago, and they decided to try for another baby. It was a shock, Elissa said, when her first ultrasound discovered there would be not one but three new additions to the family.

"I was shaking," admitted Elissa.

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Fairgrounds, Chamber excited for upcoming events

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County can expect a lot of tourism and excitement in the coming months, as the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce gear up to host a series of fun events from now until 2025.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason and Chamber President Julie Payne joined the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, April 5, to get the word out on what residents can expect.

Both organizations have been busy for months, putting together concerts, fundraisers and community events such as the beloved Chamber of Commerce Burger Week.

"Tourism is huge here in Towns County, and we do everything we can to bring people to the North Georgia Mountains, boost the economy and help the businesses here," Thomason said.

Coming up next, the Rhododendron Festival will return to Hiwassee from April



GMF General Manager Hilda Thomason shared that the fairgrounds already has events lined up from now until December.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

12 to May 12. The festival will not only show off the beautiful renovations at Hamilton Gardens, but also feature live music each weekend and several food trucks.

As the festival takes

place on one side of the hill, the Georgia Mountain Fair Yard Sale will run on the other from April 19-20. Dustin Lynch, a country singer from Tennessee, will also perform in Anderson

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BASEBALL

4/11 @ Bryan Co.
6 PM

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Young Harris Council...from Page 1A

analyzing those of other cities, Clark found inspiration in Gwinnett County.

"The cleanest, most sensible, logical, straightforward (specifications) ... come out of Gwinnett County," said Clark, expressing his desire for a similar "guidebook" for Young Harris.

Public Works Supervisor Dean Stanley agreed to study the example provided by Clark to adapt the same for Young Harris.

According to City Attorney Marvin Harkins, the benefit of such a document is that rather than a more static ordinance, guidelines for water and sewer construction would be considered a policy, making them easier to change as needed.

The council approved Ashley Hartzell as a new Main Street Board member and approved the Main Street by-laws. Director Rosemary Royston asked the council to be present at the April 23 Georgia Cities event at City Hall to "meet and greet" residents from 4-6 p.m.

Economic Development Director Denise McKay offered the council a sheet of design guidelines and introduced them to the idea of a Cottage Court Ordinance. Essentially, these would give the city de-



Young Harris City Councilmen Dr. John Kelley and Matt Miller discussing details of a document presented in their April 2 meeting.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

sign control over future projects to ensure aesthetic integrity and a proper layout.

"We have worked so hard to put good plans in place ... but there are still some more changes we could put into place to really protect what you're trying to bring into the city limits," explained McKay.

While there was some insistence on "keeping Young Harris the way it is," McKay informed the council that other businesses are looking to come into the area and develop; without a plan in place, there's no way to ensure Young Harris re-

tains its charm.

Kelley suggested holding a work session before the next regular meeting for further discussion after McKay does more research on the subject. The rest of the council agreed.

The Young Harris City Council meets on the first Tuesday of every month at 6:30 p.m. inside Young Harris City Hall, located at 50 Irene Berry Drive, barring delays or rescheduling for holidays. These meetings are open to the public, and the community is encouraged to attend.

Hiawassee City Council...from Page 1A

ed to total in at \$85,580.57.

Additionally, the council gave the go-ahead to reclassify prior expenses originally earmarked for SPLOST Economic Development on the canceled boardwalk project.

Economic Development Director Denise McKay pointed out at the work session that she believed the \$45,959.72 in SPLOST revenues should go toward the Paris Business Center, as it is a "Parks and Recreation development."

"The Budget Policy is basically the same, we've just added a resolution for the excess funds for SPLOST to go toward the PBC and the payment process we just approved," Ordiales explained regarding the council's vote to approve an update to the aforementioned document.

Along with that, the council approved the new plan for the Shook House's rental process. The Downtown Development Authority proposed that the building be offered to a client graduating from the PBC Incubator at a minimum of the current rental rate of \$800 per month.

The only stipulation is that, should a client decline the space, another would be found, though if not leased



As usual, Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales welcomed guests and led the regular city meeting last week.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

within three months, the DDA would consider other options for filling the house to ensure it remains viable as a property of the city.

Council members approved the DDA retaining \$42,166.74 paid to the city from the Appalachian Regional Commission Grant for grant administration and architectural work in 2022-2023, to cover private-use expenses at the Paris Business Center.

In other business, the first reading of the new Accessory

Structure Ordinance took place April 2. Conceptualized after the dragon statue controversy last year, the document defines accessory structure parameters and requires such structures be placed beside or behind principal buildings.

The Hiawassee City Council meets on the first Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m. for regular meetings inside City Hall at 50 River Street. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend, but if they can't, meetings are streamed live over Facebook.

Local Events...from Page 1A



Chamber of Commerce President Julie Payne gave updates on her organization and its plans for the rest of 2024.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

Music Hall on the April 20.

From April 26-27, the fourth annual Memory Lane Classic Car Show will commence at the fairgrounds. There will be a kickoff party for the event at Eller Holler on Thursday night, April 25, to feature the Knoxville musical group the Nathan Morgan Band.

The concert is a part of the Eller Holler Concert Series, which includes Run Katie Run on May 2, Jukebox Country on May 9, Charley Etheridge on May 16, and Dead Bread on May 23.

Saturday night, April 27, the rock band 38 Special will perform at Anderson Music Hall for \$47 a ticket, to be followed by Deana Carter on May 11.

That same day, the Hiawassee Highlands Wine Festival will take place from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. With the wine festival's roughly 30 North Georgia wineries, the Rhododendron Festival and the Deana Carter concert all happening simultaneously, Thomason feels it will be "a good weekend for Mother's Day."

From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, May 18, the Georgia Mountain Fire & Smoke Cooking Festival will come to the fairgrounds for the first time. While this event is new, it mimics the Big Green Egg-Fest, which took place at the fairgrounds for 10 years before recently phasing out.

With 35 Primo Ceramic

Grills, 35 Big Green Egg Grills and 125 cooks, the festival promises guests plenty of fun and delicious dishes. A kickoff party will take place on May 17 at the Exhibit Hall.

As usual, the fairgrounds will host two Hiawassee Pro Rodeos this year. The first will run from May 24-26 and the second from Aug. 31 to Sept. 1.

On June 7, the Happy Together Tour starring The Turtles, Jay & The Americans, The Associations, Badfinger, The Vogues and the Cowsills, will come to Anderson Music Hall for \$45 a ticket.

Soon after, on Saturday, June 15, a band of local high school seniors, Riverbend, will perform a free concert in the Anderson Music Hall. The next performance will be on June 18 by the comedian Bert Kreischer.

From Thursday, June 20, to Saturday, June 22, the Hiawassee Rod Run will be at the fairgrounds. On the second night, June 21, the Marshall Tucker Band will also be performing at Anderson Music Hall.

Other upcoming events at the fairgrounds include the annual July 4th Fireworks Show, a Neil Diamond tribute, the Appalachian Brew, Que & Stew Festival, and concerts by Gene Watson, the Bellamy Brothers, Tommy James & The Shondells, Crowder, Grass Roots, Box Tops, The Guess

Who, Emmylou Harris, Sara Evans, Dylan Scott, Joe Nichols, Malpass Brothers and Nate Smith.

On July 27, a Laser Show will come to Hiawassee for \$10 a person. Guests can bring their own chairs or watch from their cars. Riverbend will open the show for True Youngblood.

The 73rd Georgia Mountain Fair will take place from August 16-24, and only run on the weekends. The carnival will still be open throughout the week, however.

Another Georgia Mountain Fair Yard Sale will take place on September 13-14; the Dailey & Vincent's American Made Music Festival will take place on September 19-21; the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival will run from October 11-13, then again from October 17-19; and the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights will return on Thanksgiving night.

From the Chamber of Commerce, Towns County residents can expect the return of two big events in 2024: the Made In Georgia Festival and the Holiday Bazaar.

The sixth annual Made In Georgia Festival, which showcases Georgia crafters and vendors, will take place on June 29 and 30 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center.

The festival will feature the local bluegrass band Mountain Breeze, a chainsaw artist, birds of prey from Georgia Mountain Falconry and catering by civic organizations such as the Historical Society.

"We averaged about 1,700 people for those two days the last couple of years, and we have close to 90 vendors," said Payne, whose organization will host a similar event on November 2-3.

The Holiday Bazaar will feature even more crafters and vendors than the Made In Georgia Festival, as it is not exclusive to in-state manufacturers. It will also include a Christmas Tree Decorating Contest and several other holiday-themed aspects.

Shook Triplets...from Page 1A

ted Elissa, with Brian adding, "It was a big surprise."

Luckily, they weren't alone. Their families, particularly their parents, stepped in to help supply them with everything they needed. Clothing, diapers and wipes were common gifts to prepare them for the triplets' arrival.

As her pregnancy progressed, Elissa's initial concerns began to pass. Things were "easy for the most part" until she hit her 18th week, when she started experiencing slight bleeding. She "took it easy" for some time, and once again, her fears largely subsided.

But as time passed, carrying three growing humans proved to be an arduous task.

"I was just getting so large so quickly that I was in a lot of pain," she recalled. She was in so much pain, in fact, that at first she didn't feel the onset of contractions one night in her 32nd week.

"I began to bleed profusely. It was as if my water broke, and also, there was blood with it. And I was home by myself; I ended up calling my husband, and I told him to go ahead and leave work," Elissa said.

After calling 911, she was taken to Union General in an ambulance.

Lily, Daisy and Harper's entrance into the world was a harrowing experience. Elissa was diagnosed with placental abruption and was immediately taken back for a cesarean section.

"I was awake, but because of the blood loss and it

being so cold, just all of that, I was very out of it," Elissa said. "I was conscious, but in the moment, I wasn't talking or anything."

"She didn't really get to hold them for any (extended) amount of time," added Brian. "Just for the simple fact of what had been going on, they had to get the children stabilized to get them ready for transport."

When Lily, the first of the triplets, was born, blood was discovered in her mouth – it had been her placenta that ruptured. She had aspirated blood, requiring her to be intubated and sent by ambulance to Erlanger Hospital's T.C. Thompson Children's Hospital.

Harper was also having difficulty breathing, so she was intubated as well and sent with her sister. Daisy was the most stable, but she, too, was rushed away on the next available ambulance to Erlanger, as weather conditions proved too dangerous to fly the babies out.

From there, the little ones were treated in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at Erlanger. Much of that time was spent trying to support them into breathing on their own. Harper was weaned off the continuous positive airway pressure machine, though Lily had a more difficult time.

"Once they got (Lily) to the CPAP, they examined her lungs, and the right lung was completely collapsed. And so, they had to go in and do a bronchial procedure where they sucked out all the mucus plugs that were in (the lung)," explained Elissa.

Within the next three

days, Lily perked up. She continued on the CPAP for another week or two before graduating to a high-flow nasal cannula. By the end of February, she was able to breathe in "room air" on her own.

In total, Daisy stayed at Erlanger for 29 days, while Harper and Lily stayed for 49 days. On March 1, all three were reunited at home with the rest of the family.

"I was definitely ready to be home and have all my babies in one spot," admitted Elissa, laughing, though she and Brian agree it can be "chaotic" living with three newborns at once.

For the most part, Elissa handles the daily routine and takes care of the girls while Brian works and focuses on income, but family and friends have no problem coming over to help from time to time.

Looking back, the Shooks believe Union General and Erlanger "gave it 110%" when it came to ensuring the survival and health of their three new bundles of joy. A special thank-you from Elissa goes out to Dr. Cynthia Mercer for delivering the babies and providing swift care.

"You can tell that everyone really cared – it wasn't just a job. They were very sympathetic," said Elissa, with Brian concurring.

"I have to recognize all the staff that day," noted the babies' father. "To me, they all went above and beyond."

At birth, Lily weighed 4 pounds, 4 ounces, while Harper and Daisy both weighed 4 pounds, 2 ounces. All three have gotten past 6 pounds by this point, and they continue to attend doctor appointments for



Lily, Daisy and Harper are healthy and happy after spending more than a month each in the hospital following birth. Welcome to the world!

Photo/Submitted

regular weigh-ins every Monday.

Annalise has readily embraced her new role as a big sister. According to her mother,

she's always eager to help with the babies. Everyone is doing just fine, and there is no lasting damage to mom or the triplets.

The Shook Triplets are

in good company in Blairsville, joining the Turner Triplets Carolyn, Ava and Jillian, who celebrated their Sweet 16 birthdays last August.

April Is National Child Abuse Prevention Month



Towns County Courthouse Square Blue Pinwheels

The month of April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. During this time, it is important to continue working hard for the children of our communities, but to also celebrate the good things our communities have accomplished in promoting healthy child development, as well as preventing and reducing child abuse and neglect.

Preventing child abuse and neglect cannot be achieved by one group alone or one single strategy. To successfully work towards preventing child abuse, programs need to develop collaborative and comprehensive strategies at many different levels and with multiple sectors working together.

As you drive by the

This month and throughout the year, Enotah CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate), SAFE Services, Towns County DFCS, and Towns County Family Connection encourage all individuals and organizations to play a role in making Towns County a better place for children and families. By ensuring that parents have the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to care for their children, we can help prevent child abuse and neglect by creating strong and thriving children, youth, and families in our communities. Research shows that protective factors are present in healthy families.

Towns County Courthouse Square, remember each of the 208 blue pinwheels represents an abused and neglected child we served. You have the opportunity to participate in Towns County:

Get involved: I Am for the Child conference, 9 AM-2:30 PM, April 26, 2024, www.enotahcasa.org: Free.

Wear blue on Friday, April 12th, Wear Blue Day, to show support for children and families.

Enotah CASA, SAFE Services, Towns County Family Connection, and Towns County DFCS encourage everyone to help us ensure every child has a voice in this community.

LGPE Scores...from Page 1A

highlighted the ensemble's strengths. For example, his largest section is percussion, so he chose songs like "Moscov 1941" and "Tanchozuru" to showcase all eight of his talented drummers.

Other players from across the band were also featured in the more exposed sections of the pieces, and some students even switched instruments during the performance to cover necessary parts.

"We set a really high standard for them this year, and we're going to be pushing that on as we go," Skinner said. "These kids just don't quit.

"I'm changing the culture of the school, and the kids are just super excited about what is happening in the program," added Skinner, who plans to make these kinds of scores a tradition.

Additionally, he hopes to keep growing interest in the band by exposing the elementary and middle school students to the high school ensemble, adding a jazz combo group to the basketball pep band and focusing the football pep band on rock 'n' roll.

This process started on Saturday, March 30, when all sixth through 12th-grade students were invited to Band

Day in the high school gym from 8:45 a.m. to noon. The event, which teaches the basics of marching band and includes team-building games, will repeat on May 11.

The next band concert will be on April 18th and 19th at 6 p.m., to feature the high school ensemble alongside both the middle school band and the elementary school "Buckets and Garbage Cans" drum group.

Skinner also invites any interested students to Color Guard training and tryouts from 5:30-8:30 p.m. on Monday, May 13; Tuesday, May 14; Thursday, May 16; and Friday, May 17.