

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

50 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 89 Number 23

Wednesday, April 11, 2018

Hunting, fishing, falcons and more at Outdoor Expo

By Jarrett Whitener
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – The family-friendly Lake Chatuge “Get Outdoors! Expo” was a huge success at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on Saturday, April 7, and Sunday, April 8.

Hosted by the Towns County Chamber of Commerce, the event featured vendors and activities focused around fishing, hunting, hiking, boating, camping and more.

During the Expo, Georgia Wildlife Federation member Sam Stowe taught kids about animal calls and how to make their own duck calls in the children’s tent.

“We wanted a little something for the kids to

do while they’re here,” said Stowe. “And we want to teach them about the outdoors and wildlife while having a bit of fun.”

Attendees of the Expo also had the opportunity to participate in multiple classes offered throughout the duration of the event.

These classes included Outdoor Survival, Basic First Aid, 10 tips for Hiking the Appalachian Trail, Cooking on the Trail, Fly-Rod Casting, Fly-Tying, Aquatic Life, How to Hike the Camino de Santiago, Nature Writing 101, Packing for a Day Hike, Staying Found, Navigation 101, Icebreakers & More, Introduction to Falconry, Spotted Bass Research and Basic Backpacking.

The Spotted Bass Research session at the event

covered the trends in bass populations in Lake Chatuge, the mixing of similar bass species, and the importance of conserving the sickle fin redhorse in local waters.

“We didn’t want an endangered species in our streams,” said Johnathan Davis, the instructor of the class. “Many groups came together to raise the money to help preserve this species.”

One of the most popular classes and presentations during the event was the class and demonstration on falconry presented by Buster Brown.

Brown and his colleagues brought in a variety of birds to show off to the crowd, and they described how each of the birds hunt and how long it may take

See Expo, Page 10A



Towns County resident Michael Courcy speaking with folks about the benefits of being Firewise at the Get Outdoors Expo on Saturday, April 7.

Former hospital CEO, physicians indicted in federal court

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Assistant Editor

Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton have been brought up on federal charges in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, Gainesville Division.

The three men have been indicted as part of Operation SCOPE, “for illegally prescribing and obtaining thousands of doses of prescription pain medications outside the usual course of professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose,” per a news release from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Atlanta.

A federal grand jury handed up the 212-count

indictment on Wednesday, April 4, and the document was unsealed on Friday, April 6.

The Gowder brothers and Dr. Heaton were expected to appear in federal court in Gainesville after press time on Monday, April 9, to be arraigned on the charges.

“These defendants allegedly abused their positions as medical professionals to obtain illegitimately thousands of doses of prescription pain medications and now face serious federal charges,” said U.S. Attorney Byung J. “BJay” Pak. “The Department of Justice is committed to fighting the opioid epidemic through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of licensed medical practitioners who abuse their positions of trust to

engage in illegal conduct.”

Robert J. Murphy, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division, also commented on the indictment.

“Americans rely on healthcare providers, many of whom are medical doctors, to use their training to help patients and to ‘do no harm,’” said Murphy. “The physicians and the hospital CEO in this case violated the law and betrayed their responsibilities by unlawfully obtaining and dispensing prescription opioids.”

“The moment these individuals decided to engage in this criminal behavior, they became nothing more than traditional drug traffickers. DEA, its law enforcement partners and the U.S. Attorney’s



Mike Gowder

Office are committed to stemming the tide against the current opioid epidemic.”

The following information comes directly from the April 6 news release.



Dr. David Gowder

According to U.S. Attorney Pak, the indictment, and other information presented in court:

From 2011 to 2015 John Michael “Mike” Gowder was the Chief Executive Officer



Dr. James Heaton

of Union General Hospital in Blairsville. Dr. David Gowder was the Emergency Room Director and Union General, and Dr. James Heaton operated

See Physicians, Page 6A

Felony drug arrests down in Hiwassee City Limits

By Mark Novak
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith had some good news for the Hiwassee City Council and Mayor Liz Ordiales in the regular city meeting on April 3.

“I’m happy to say that in February we had only one felony drug arrest,” said Chief Smith. “That’s a new low for us. For a while I was counting these high numbers, and one month, we had 14 felony drug arrests. February, we had one. That’s a big plus.”

“It’s not that we’re not doing the work, it’s that there is less of it to do. We’ve actually arrested people that said, ‘I knew I should have avoided Hiwassee.’”

Added Smith: “Word has gotten out that we’re out there stopping cars, doing this work.”

Hiwassee City Clerk



Photo by Mark Novak

Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith giving a report during the regular meeting of the Hiwassee City Council on April 3.

Bonnie Kendrick was named the new pension secretary for the city by unanimous council vote that April 3.

The Georgia Municipal Association manages the city’s

pension plan, and Kendrick will be the city’s new contact person to handle the plan.

“We currently have everyone on a pension plan,”

See Drug Arrests, Page 6A

Tallent to retire after leading United Community Bank for decades

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Assistant Editor

Under Jimmy Tallent’s leadership, a single community bank founded in Blairsville grew to become the third largest Georgia-based bank and a \$12.3 billion holding company with more than 150 banking locations spread across four Southern states.

Now, after a nearly 35-year career that began at Union County Bank in 1984, the chief executive officer of United Community Bank Inc. is ready to retire.

“I had two goals in mind that I put in place two years ago,” said Tallent. “One is, I wanted to see this company back in a very strong position financially, and we’re there.”

“Secondly, I wanted to make sure that we had a senior management team in place that can carry this company



Jimmy Tallent

forward for well into the future. Honestly, both of those goals are checked. United is in a great, great place today, so the time is just right.”

Tallent will remain in his current position until June 30, at which point he will transition to leading the company’s board of directors as chairman.

He will continue to reside in Blairsville and work out of his offices here, though he said that, nowadays, technology has made it easy to work anywhere he may be needed.

“This is where it was birthed, and I’m very proud of that,” said Tallent of the company. “It’s not so much about being in any one location. We have a videoconferencing system that’s used all the time every day.”

Known as “The Bank That Service Built,” UCBI creed fast to a specific creed that emphasizes the customer-first approach at United Community Banks, and Tallent believes strongly in what he calls the Golden Rule of Banking, “treating our customers the way we would want to be treated.”

He has returned to this rule time and again over the years to build a large network

See Tallent, Page 6A

Callie Moore talks HRWC history in meeting

By Mark Novak
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition works hard to keep the lakes, rivers and streams clean in Towns, Union and neighboring counties.

HRWC Executive Director Callie Moore spoke about the watershed during the weekly meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, April 6, at the Sundance Grill.

“A watershed is an area of land that drains to a common point,” said Moore. “All the rivers and streams in Towns County, almost every single one of them ends up in Lake Chatuge.”

“Then, when the river goes out of the Chatuge Dam, it continues on past Hayesville and over into Cherokee County in North Carolina.”

“In Union County, you have the Nottely River that’s flowing north similar to the Hiwassee River, and it ends up in North Carolina as well. And



Photo by Mark Novak

Syler Church, Callie Moore, Michael Borkman and J.C. Berrong at the Friday, April 6, meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers.

all of these waters in pretty much all of Towns, Union, Cherokee and Clay counties end up in the Hiwassee River.”

Added Moore: “We’re part of this huge Mississippi

River Basin that drains two-thirds of the United States. That provides drinking water and water for recreation and all the other uses that we need water for.”

The HWRC sees its job

as fighting water pollution and protecting local waters, and it was formed more than two decades ago after a growing concern by landowners and farmers.

See Moore, Page 6A

Young Harris to address water leak on Main Street

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

Attentive residents and passersby in Young Harris may have noticed the steady stream of water running at street level in front of the Dollar General.

The water is coming from a leaking pipe in the ground, and it has been an issue for a little while now.

“The problem with fixing the leak is, we do not have any shut-off valves on that end of town,” said Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby in the April 3 regular city council meeting.

Continued the mayor: “And if they are going to fix the leak without a valve, everybody’s water on one end of town. So, I instructed (Water Superintendent Gary Willer) to get some quotes.”



Photo by Shawn Jarrard
Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby in the April 3 regular city council meeting.

To avoid having to shut off everyone’s water on that side of town, Willer went in search of quotes for the purchase and installation of

See Water Leak, Page 6A

2 Sections 20 Pages
Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,681.00
Chatuge 1,921.32
Nottely 1,767.98

Arrests	2A
Church	4B
Classifieds	6B
Opinion	4A
Legals	7B
Obits	5B

Baseball
Apr 11 @ Tallulah Falls 4:30 PM
Apr 12 @ Athens Christ. 5:55 PM

Soccer
Apr 10 vs. Highlands 5 PM
Apr 12 @ Hebron 5 & 7 PM

FREE Food Distribution
N. Mt. Zion Church
April 19th

See page 4B

Enotah Garden Club Plant & Bake Sale

See page 5A

S.A.F.E. KIDS FISHING DERBY

See page 3B