

# Vaccinations...from Page 1A

outweigh known potential risks in people 18 and older; and the vaccine is effective in preventing COVID-19.

Risks of what the CDC is calling thrombosis-thrombocytopenia syndrome, which causes blood clots and low platelets, is thought to be low, and providers are being asked to inform people of those risks prior to administering the one-shot vaccine.

After a thorough review of available data, thrombosis-thrombocytopenia syndrome, or TTS, was ultimately discovered in 15 Johnson & Johnson vaccine recipients.

All cases occurred in women between the ages of 18 and 59, with a median age of 37 and symptom onset occurring between 6 and 15 days after vaccination. This suggests women ages 18 to 59 may be at increased risk for TTS with the J&J vaccine compared to other demographics.

"Safety is our top priority," said Acting FDA Commissioner Dr. Janet Woodcock. "This pause was an example of our extensive safety monitoring working as they were designed to work –

identifying even these small number of cases.

"We've lifted the pause based on the FDA and CDC's review of all available data and in consultation with medical experts and based on recommendations from the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices."

Reports of adverse events following vaccination can be made to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System at <https://vaers.hhs.gov/reportevent.html>.

"The surveillance systems that are in place to monitor the safety of COVID-19 vaccines authorized for emergency use are working, as demonstrated by both agencies' quick work to identify and investigate these rare but serious adverse events," the CDC said. "The FDA and CDC will continue with these efforts to closely monitor the safety of these vaccines."

More than 124,000 doses of J&J vaccine "have been safely administered in Georgia," with the local Health Departments having administered 221 doses in Union and 50 doses in Towns prior to the pause, including

teacher and staff vaccination clinics at the school systems.

The Department of Public Health continues to urge people to get vaccinated using one of the three emergency use authorized vaccines, saying there is now plenty of supply for everyone who wants one.

People may sign up for vaccinations at the Union County Health Department by visiting <http://phdistrict2.org> or calling 1-888-426-5073.

Beginning May 4, vaccination hours will be Tuesday from 8 a.m. to 5:45 p.m., Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., and Thursday from 8 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Walk-ins will be welcome.

The Towns County Health Department is scheduling appointment-only COVID vaccinations for Wednesdays at the Health Department, and people may call 706-896-2265 to make an appointment.

In addition to the Health Departments, many local pharmacies are administering the vaccine, and people need only call around to check availability. Synergy Health of Hiwassee is still accepting new signups at [ngvax.com](http://ngvax.com).

# Heaton...from Page 1A

wording to the motion filed in December that resulted in U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story granting the current delayed reporting date.

Additionally, Heaton's motion asks that he be remanded to the federal prison at Maxwell Air Force Base near Montgomery, Alabama, rather than a Georgia prison, so that he may be near family members. The MAFB prison is a minimum-security camp.

In a 2009 list of the 10 "cushiest prisons" in the U.S.,

Forbes Magazine ranked the MAFB camp as third, behind the women's prison in West Virginia at which Martha Stewart served, and a prison in Pensacola, Florida. The article admitted, however, that no prisons are actually "cushy."

As previously reported, Heaton, along with former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder, was convicted of multiple counts of prescription fraud in an October 2019 federal trial.

The two were arrested

along with David Gowder, brother to Mike, in February 2016. David pleaded guilty in March 2019 to a single count of prescribing oxycodone without a legitimate medical purpose and began serving his 18-month sentence in July 2020.

Heaton has appealed his conviction to the U.S. Court of Appeals, 11th District. A date has yet to be set for the court to hear that appeal.

On April 8, Mike Gowder filed a motion to have his sentence and conviction vacated. Judge Story had not ruled on that request by press time.

# Bradshaw...from Page 1A

to upkeeping the other county properties.

Areas to be maintained includes Chatuge Woods Campground, the Child Development Center, the E-911/Health Department building, all of Foster Park and the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center grounds, the Old Rec Department and more.

The commissioner is optimistic he will be able to contract for a third crew from Colwell Probation by January 2022 to bring the total number of inmate crews working in the county to four – three from the state and one consisting of the local inmates.

Making sure to thank Sheriff Henderson for his commitment to the project, Bradshaw also thanked his Road Department employees, who have shouldered more than their fair share over the last year performing maintenance duties usually undertaken by Colwell detainees.

Additionally, the commissioner is bringing an employee over from the County Transfer Station to work part of his weekly shift cleaning the interior of the courthouse. This employee will maintain a presence at both locations.

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw adopted the Joint Resolution with Hiwassee and Young Harris to approve the unified 2021 Economic Development Strategy, molded over the course of about two years with assistance from the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission.

This strategy will help the local municipalities remain on the same page toward controlled growth and provide a framework for the Joint Development Authority to promote economic development and attract desirable businesses to Towns County.

The Young Harris City Council adopted the joint resolution in a recent meeting, and now that Bradshaw has done the same, the resolution is set for enactment once Hiwassee City Council members take it up in their May meeting.

In other business, Bradshaw appointed Marty Roberts as Safety Coordinator for the county. Marty also serves as director for the county's Emergency Management Agency, E-911 Center and 911 Mapping Office.

Prior to Roberts, former EMA directors Brandon Walls and Rickey Mathis served as safety coordinators.

Having a safety coordinator nets the county a discount of about \$20,000 or more on liability insurance through the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

Safety coordinators are responsible for conducting departmental safety training for other county employees.

"More than the savings, it keeps people safe," Bradshaw said. "The money's great, but

we want to keep our employees healthy."

In Fire Department news, Bradshaw said he would be scheduling a grand opening for the new Fire Station No. 2 in Young Harris "later this summer," as soon as it becomes abundantly clear that doing so is safe amid COVID-19.

"We did build it for a full-time Fire Department, and as we grow, in the future we will need that," Bradshaw said. "So, it is plumbed and wired for a kitchen and living spaces, with a full bathroom and shower."

Currently, the county is expecting parking lot paving there to take place any day now, and Bradshaw is accepting bids on the concrete work for the helipad landing zone at Station 2, which he hopes can be installed by next month, weather pending.

Bradshaw opened two bids on a new fire truck the county is hoping to buy after SPLOST funds build up over time. A bid by Fouts Bros came in at \$140,732.99, while the other bid was actually a no bid, with the company Ten-8 asking to be kept on file for future opportunities.

"This is a special type of brush truck – we're not accepting these bids," Bradshaw said. "We put this out to get a description of the truck. We are going to eventually buy the truck; SPLOST money will pay for it, but we're going to let the SPLOST money continue to build up before we start spending too much of it."

Fire Chief Harold Copeland explained the apparatus is called a brush rescue, which is a mini pumper designed to fight brush fires. The vehicle would have other applications, too, including responses to car crashes, with hydraulic rescue equipment and other tools stored on board.

The county beach across from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has been entertaining area families and guests for months now, but it will officially open May 15 with concessions and bathrooms available to the public starting that day.

In other business, Bradshaw held the second reading and adoption of the Credit Card Ordinance regarding the Sheriff Credit Card Policy, which he reviewed for attendees that evening.

The card will only be used when the sheriff is on official business, allowing him, for example, to attend out-of-town trainings or conferences as sheriff without having to use his personal forms of payment.

A key point highlighted in the meeting was that costs covered by such a county-issued credit card would need to have been previously budgeted, and Sheriff Henderson, who attended the meeting, said his office would be fully responsible for all charges accruing in this way.



**Historical Society President Sandra Green reminded people in the April 20 county meeting that regular meetings of the society would resume the second Monday in May.**

Photo by Shawn Jarrard  
Transactions for credit cards issued to elected officials are not to exceed \$750 per transaction or \$5,000 per month.

Hamilton Gardens Board President Gordy Jones offered some updates on the gardens in the meeting, saying that the annual "A Blooming Affair," which runs through at least mid-May, enjoyed a terrific opening April 17, the same day they held a highly successful giant plant sale.

Plants are still on sale as supplies last, including native rhododendrons and azaleas, every Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Hamilton Gardens inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds at the very top of the large parking area.

People should mark their calendars for two April 29 events at the gardens: "A Wedding Affair" from 4-6 p.m. showcasing the newly painted Paris Pavilion and beautiful gardens as a wedding venue; and the Moonlight Music Concert Series featuring Dr. Paul from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Speaking on behalf of the Historical Society, President Sandra Green said the society would be returning to meetings on May 10 at 6 p.m. at the Historical Society headquarters inside the Old Rec Building. It will be the group's first meeting back since March 9, 2020.

As far as the Old Rock Jail, the society anticipates opening to the public perhaps the week after the May 10 meeting, and group volunteers are excited for people to see some new exhibits there.

Resident Ken Manwaring, an electric vehicle owner, attended the meeting to ask if the commissioner had given any thought to installing charging stations for electric cars in the county.

Bradshaw said that Manwaring was the first person to ask him about it, and that while the county was not involved in energy sales to the public, he would happily support any such endeavors moving forward.

# Board of Ed...from Page 1A

Eligible students start the program in the eighth grade, and with the assistance of an academic coach and mentor, students who complete the program requirements receive the scholarship after high school graduation for use toward "any component of the cost of attendance" in college.

Jenna Colvin is a parent in the school system as well as a member of the REACH Georgia Board of Directors, and she attended the April 12 meeting to provide information and to answer questions about the scholarship program.

Colvin has helped to renew local interest in the program, which past School Board members discussed, though they declined at the time to participate because the local match amount was much higher then and therefore a greater burden on local fundraising efforts.

Immediately preceding the April 12 work session and regular meeting, the board held a public hearing to receive input on the tentative Fiscal Year 2022 operating budget, which is \$19,099,822. No one from the public attended the meeting.

The main difference between the FY21 and FY22 budgets is the level of CARES Act funding, with the schools set to receive a second payment of \$942,623 from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, or ESSER Fund, in FY22 as part of the CARES Act.

"We will also be receiving ESSER III funds in the amount of \$2,116,998 to be used during FY2022, FY2023 and FY2024 if needed, to help offset General Fund expenses," School Finance Director Myra Underwood said.

At the time of the meeting, those funds were not listed on the Tentative Budget, but as soon as the system

has submitted the budget to the Georgia Department of Education and gotten the final approval, "we will increase the overall budget to include receiving the additional federal funds."

"This should be completed before the May 3 meeting and reflect in the Tentative Budget that we plan to get approval to advertise in May for approval in June," Underwood said, noting no change for the General Fund in FY22, which will remain the same as FY21 at \$14,503,440.

Underwood discussed an FY21 Budget Amendment of \$1,199,873 for special revenue funds due primarily to CARES Act monies, resulting in an amended budget totaling \$19,607,191 for FY21.

According to the most recent financial reports, Underwood said the schools continue to outperform recent years in sales and property tax collections, which bodes well for the upcoming budget that will not require a property tax increase for FY22.

In other business, the board entertained several staff changes, including the resignation of Elementary School P.E. Teacher Tamara Sandler, who is taking a new position at Union County Schools. Sandler has served as the longtime athletic trainer for Towns County.

Board members approved the resignation of Jeff Stowers as head coach of the Indians Wrestling Team, and a search is underway for in-house candidates to take that position.

Stowers, who teaches social studies at the High School, started the system's middle and high school wrestling teams more than 15 years ago, but he's ready to concentrate on his busy schedule, Superintendent Berrong said that evening.

Also citing scheduling

reasons, Berrong said Elementary School Paraprofessional Jessica Walls was resigning as assistant coach for the High School Girls Basketball Team, which is seeking a new head coach as well after the board approved Brian Hunnicutt to helm Boys Basketball next year.

Board members accepted Coach Rob Benson's retirement as a High School math teacher and Boys Basketball head coach in their March regular meeting. Benson is ending his career on a high note, with his team having won the Class A Public State Championship on March 13.

Hunnicutt was one of several potential candidates to replace Benson as head coach, and the Board Office will follow the same procedure, to include a parent input panel, in selecting Hunnicutt's replacement as head coach for the girls.

During their reports to the board April 12, Elementary Principal Shannon Moss, Middle Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs and High School Principal Roy Perren reported zero recent COVID positive cases on campus, to which Superintendent Berrong added there hadn't been a case in weeks.

Current COVID metrics are looking so favorable that Berrong is confident the system will be able to return safely to campus in August, including for students currently taking online classes, "unless there's some sort of serious medical condition that we can look at on a separate basis."

Berrong presented the principals with Certificates of Accreditation, which serve as proof positive that the schools are continuing to perform at the highest level. Accreditation is a process that takes place once every five years, having occurred this go-round in fall 2020.

# TCSO Uniforms...from Page 1A

and ease of maintenance.

Furthermore, the outer vest carrier is quickly removable, making it convenient for deputies to remove while in the office writing reports.

The new patch is a gold on black patch that boldly proclaims "we are Towns County."

Blauer is committed to

keeping these uniforms in stock so that inventory will shrink locally, saving the Sheriff's Office money by having less inventory to maintain.

The updated, top of the line uniforms perfectly complement the newly detailed black and white patrol cars to complete the image change of the Towns County Sheriff's

Office.

Sheriff Henderson and deputies have all received an overwhelming number of compliments on the rollout of the new uniforms and would like to thank the citizens of Towns County for being supportive of the new agency goals.