

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, May 4, 2022

Bradshaw celebrates Nicholson, talks courthouse renovation

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Denise Nicholson, who came aboard with the Towns County Tax Commissioner's Office in 1998, announced her retirement at the regular meeting of Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw on Tuesday, April 19. Nicholson said she had been planning to retire at the end of May but was dealing with some unexpected medical issues. "I have really enjoyed working for the county," Nicholson said. "It's been my second family. I hated to leave them, but it was time to retire. I've had three commissioners sign my checks (and) three tax commissioners stand beside me, and I miss the office - I miss the people."

Upon being presented with an appreciation plaque by Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson, Nicholson said, "I appreciate this very much and will always honor it and cherish it for the rest of my life." In other news, Towns County Parks and Recreation Director Stuart Nichols gave an update on the many things going on in his department in advance of the 2022 summer season. The baseball field to the left of the entrance at Foster Park is being rejuvenated. That field has been replanted and "it is my hope that, by the end of the season, we'll be able to have some practices on that field," Nichols said. Also, the indoor basketball court at Foster Park has a new floor, so Towns County is again eligible to host tournaments.

Nichols said he initiated the "Be Fit" walking club at the Rec Center's indoor track in February and that, since its inception, people have logged 786 miles as of April 19. Also under way at Foster Park is the construction of a one-half-mile outdoor jogging trail. There are new Towns County Indians blue benches, mulch, and swings at the Towns County Beach. The mulch has mitigated some safety issues, Nichols said. And security cameras have been installed there. Wireless, lighted scoreboards have been installed and are now operational at the baseball fields next to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds entrance, Nichols said. Finally, Nichols said he is working on initiating a football program this year.

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Denise Nicholson, holding the appreciation plaque, surrounded by family and friends during her retirement recognition in the April county meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

Rhododendron Festival to run three more weekends in May

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hamilton Gardens Head Curator Catherine Luckenbach said she is glad to be working at the 43-acre Hamilton Gardens again, even though it's just her and Co-Curator Charles "Charlie" Smith right now. Bringing Fred Hamilton's original vision to life is an enormous job, Luckenbach said during the beautiful bloom-filled kickoff of the second weekend of the Rhododendron Festival on Friday, April 29. Both Luckenbach and Smith said they couldn't have accomplished all they have without the help of Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. And, since Hamilton Gardens is now part of Towns County Parks and Recreation, Hamilton Gardens is eligible for the help of county detainees all of the county detainees for large jobs. "(Hamilton Gardens) is the only garden of its sort in



Hamilton Gardens Co-Curators Catherine Luckenbach and Charlie Smith have been having a blast hosting visitors during the return of the annual Rhododendron Festival.

Photo by Mark Smith
of the Southeast," Luckenbach said. "We are the only state-certified botanical garden

See Rhododendron Fest, Page 8A

Classic Car Show a nostalgic drive down Memory Lane

By Todd Forrester
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Gearheads, car owners and enthusiasts flocked to Hiawassee last weekend for the Second Annual Memory Lane Classic Car Show, hosted by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in partnership with Memory Lane Classic Car Museum of Young Harris. The two-day event April 29-30, which included a swap meet and live music, attracted several hundred classic cars, trucks and hot rods while providing family-friendly entertainment to the thousands of visitors passing through the gates.

"Turnout has been

great," Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said. "We had over 200 cars on Saturday, and it's been wide open (on Saturday), so we expect over 300 cars by the end of the day." "The proceeds from this car show are going toward the new seating at the Anderson Music Hall, which is a million-dollar project that we're trying to raise money for to offset some of the costs." Punctuating the weekend's events, Grammy nominee and platinum-selling country music recording artist Josh Turner sold 2,200 tickets for his Saturday night performance at the Music Hall. Two visitors who came for the car show and stayed for

the concert were first-time attendees Jerry and Diane Gore of Lexington. "We wanted to miss out on last year's car show because we've attended other car shows here in the past and absolutely love this area," Jerry said. "My wife and I are big Josh Turner fans since his 'Long Black Train' song, so we thought, why not make a weekend of it and attend the car show and concert both?" The weekend's events also attracted entries from across the Southeast, including Terry Stroud of Hayesville, North Carolina, who is the proud owner of a 1958 Chevrolet Corvete and a 1970 Dodge Super Bee.

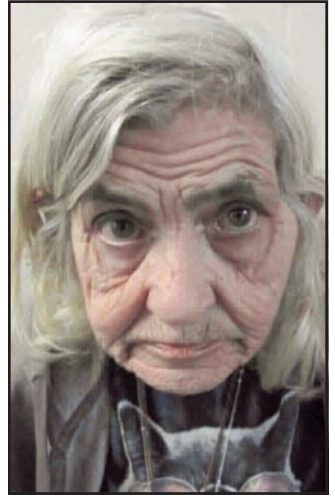
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Hiawassee resident arrested in school bus hit-and-run

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The driver alleged to be responsible for an early morning hit-and-run of a Towns County School Bus April 25 was arrested last week following an investigation by the Towns County Sheriff's Office and Georgia State Patrol. Sheila Smith, 68, of Hiawassee, was taken into custody at her residence early on Thursday, April 28, according to the Sheriff's Office. She has been charged with failure to maintain lane, failure to report an accident and failure to provide assistance.

The accident occurred on Georgia 17 near Owl Creek Road when Smith's northbound



Sheila Smith

2009 Nissan Altima crossed the centerline and struck the left front of the school bus, which

was traveling south on SR 17. "After impact, the Nissan left the scene, continuing to travel north towards Hiawassee," GSP said, adding that no students were on the bus, and no one was injured in the crash. "On April 27, information was provided to the Georgia State Patrol by the Towns County Sheriff's Office regarding the location of the suspected driver from tips they received from the public," GSP said. Based on information generated by the Sheriff's Office regarding stops Smith made following the accident, the Hiawassee Police Department was able to assist the investigation by using its tag reader technology.

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The Memory Lane Classic Car Show was a huge hit inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds over the weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

TCSO confiscates meth laced with fentanyl and morphine

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office continues to take drugs off the streets with "Operation Sting," last week confiscating a half pound of methamphetamine laced with fentanyl and morphine, as well as making an arrest in a separate drug incident. Confiscation of the meth took place April 25, and Sheriff Ken Henderson has expressed his relief that "these dangerous drugs were intercepted before they reached our community." "Our Drug Investigations Unit did an outstanding job," Sheriff Henderson said, noting that the case is still under investigation. And during a Safety Road Check along Fodder Creek Road on April 27, the Sheriff's Office confiscated illegal prescription drugs and marijuana. During the operation, a K-9 Deputy alerted on a vehicle that resulted in the arrest of Joy Noel Wood, 34, of Warne, North Carolina, on the following charges: possession of marijuana, less than an ounce;

See Operation Sting, Page 8A



Sheriff Ken Henderson posing with a half-pound of confiscated methamphetamine laced with fentanyl and morphine. Photo/Facebook

Early voting began Monday ahead of May 24 elections

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Advanced in-person voting for the General Primary Election and Nonpartisan General Election began this week in the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office, located inside Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee. Early voting will run weekdays now through Friday, May 20, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime. People too busy to cast in-person ballots during the three weeks of weekday early voting will get a chance to participate in one of two weekend early voting opportunities: Saturday, May 7, and Saturday, May 14, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Elections Office.



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Chatuge	1,924.34
Nottely	1,774.23

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Hiawassee Night Market Returns
May 6

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Let Us Never Forget Our Solemn Pledge

We must believe in our ability to work together to solve our toughest problems.



Joe Regan,
Director of Military
& Veteran Outreach,
Retired US Army Captain

On Memorial Day, 1945, the war in Europe had ended but the fighting in the Pacific continued, Lt. Gen. Lucian Truscott voiced remarks at the Sicily-Rome American Cemetery at Nettuno, Italy. Turning his back on the assembled VIP's he faced the rows upon rows of headstones and apologized to the 20,000 fallen Americans who had been laid to rest far from home. He was quoted as saying, "All over the world our soldiers sleep beneath the crosses. It is a challenge to us - all allied nations - to ensure that they do not and have not died in vain."

Fast forward to Memorial Day 2022, and the familiar voices of brothers in arms begin to call one another on the phone. People usually think of reconnecting with former military buddies as a joyous happening. However, for this Memorial Day, the topic of conversation was not an armistice, a promotion, or even a daughter's wedding or new addition to a home, it was about the latest in a string of suicides that silence the voice of our brothers but brought renewed connections from other familiar voices. One desperately said, "Sir, I needed to call someone who could understand this."

Everyone in the greatest generation understood war. At home they experienced rationing, schoolchildren collected scrap, and women took up factory jobs while overseas

the troops endured combat and were witness to some of the largest and most brutal atrocities in the modern age. When the war was over, they followed the lead of Lt. Gen Truscott and committed their lives to ensure that they "have not died in vain." The shared sacrifice of a generation united them and helped them solve tough problems.

In subsequent wars, such as the Korean and Vietnam era, Veterans did not experience the same level of understanding and thus either turned their voice inward or used their voice to fight for one another on subjects that varied from Agent Orange, PTSD, and other once-silent conditions.

The War on Terror introduced a unique time in our nation's collective history as acts of war played out in real-time on our media devices. Although only one percent of Americans served post 9/11, it seems 100 percent of the country used their voice to express their opinions of this shared history as it unfolded.

For Korea and Vietnam Veterans, war was not a shared experience and therefore various voices having various opinions helped further the national conversation regarding the treatment of veterans leading to safer and more thoughtful approaches. Unlike the veterans of Korea and Vietnam, the veterans of the last several decades did not return home to the voices of dissent that could be addressed directly, instead, they returned to a polite nation that creates media of dissent and very little opportunity for honest, open dialog.

This new era of media, learning, and personal discussions bring rise to the question, "Do people really remember why we hold our veterans in a place of honor?" For years, voices saying meaningless phrases like "the enemy gets a vote" or "there's nothing you could have done" were meant to comfort those of us who have held the heavy responsibility of leading troops in com-

bat. However, many people seem to lack the understanding that our hearts have been forever scarred by the invisible wounds of war, scarred by guilt and grief, and by the longing for forgiveness that will never come. Even if forgiveness was offered, it would be hard to accept as no mere words can undo a life experience and because of this, we often feel isolated, misunderstood, and undervalued therefore our voices remain silent.

As conversations with the voice on the other end of the phone come to its inevitable conclusion, I am reminded that to remain silent is a betrayal of my obligation to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. As Horace Bushnell once said, the best thing for us to do is to remember "what they have put it on us to do for the dear common country to which they sold their life." As we gather as one nation this Memorial Day, my hope is that instead of directing shallow words of gratitude at each other, we do as Lt. Gen. Truscott did and direct our gratitude directly towards those who made the ultimate sacrifice. In both our words and actions, let us all commit ourselves to serve the country to which they gave their lives.

While there is still much work to be done, the generation of Veterans from this century have access to vast resources, life-saving technology, and increased information. This same generation of Veterans is just now starting to define our post-service legacy and like our grandparents, return home with a deep commitment to service, and a desire to address the many problems that we face.

One such issue needing to be addressed is helping Veterans find purpose in their post-service lives. Truscott's apology to the dead are not empty words, but a strong voice reminding us that we have an obligation to choose resilience and purpose when faced with guilt or grief. As an example, Gold Star Families, who have experienced tremendous loss, continue to serve their communities to maintain the legacy of the loved one they lost. I often



recall a colleague of mine responding to the question "why do you do so much to help Veterans?" he simply held up his finger, choking back tears he responded, "for the one I couldn't save." By choosing to use his voice to advocate for other veterans, he not only helped them find their purpose - he found his own.

It's often said that for those who have served "every day is Memorial Day," a traditionally silent observance in the Veteran's mind that can best be described as an impossible trinity made up of an overwhelming sense of guilt, grief, and grit. Usually, a moment of silence on this day is a welcomed and solemn way to honor the voices from our past, but for myself, after losing three former soldiers to suicide in the past few months, silence is no longer an option and the freedom to use our voice is the greatest gift that our veterans have to offer this Memorial Day.

Joseph Regan is the Director of Military and Veterans Outreach for Wreaths Across America. He has almost 20 years experience working with leaders within Government, non-profit, and Fortune 500 companies to develop sustainable strategies supporting National Security, and Veterans' Health. He served 8 years on active duty as an officer in the U.S. Army including two tours to Afghanistan with the 10th Mountain Division. He is the recipient of multiple awards and decorations including the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart.

To view resources for service members, veterans, and their families, please visit learn.wreathscrossamerica.org/veteranresources.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

Election Day voting for both the General Primary and the Nonpartisan General Election will take place Tuesday, May 24, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Hiwassee and Young Harris precincts of Towns County.

All voters will need to have an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots, such as a government-issued driver's license or identification card.

Voters looking to mail their ballots may pick up the two-sided "Application for Georgia Official Absentee Ballot" from the Elections Office or print one by accessing the "My Voter Page" at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>.

The "My Voter Page" website contains other valuable information, such as registration status, precinct information, downloadable sample ballots, mailed absentee ballot status and voter participation history.

"Absentee ballots may be requested any time between 78 and 11 calendar days prior to Election Day," per georgia.gov. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, email as an attachment, or in-person to the Elections Office no later than Friday, May 13.

People who have voted absentee-by-mail in the past will need to submit a new application this election cycle if they want to receive an absentee ballot in the mail.

Voters are encouraged to request and return their absentee

Anderson makes High Honor Roll

Rabun Gap - Nacoochee School is proud to announce its 2021-2022 Honor Roll for Trimester 2. Congratulations to Dustin Anderson of Hiwassee, GA for making the high honor roll.

Head of School's High Honors recognizes students who earned an average no lower than 4.0 with no grade below B+, and no effort rating below satisfactory in Grades 9-12, and recognizes students who have all A's with no grade below an A- in Grades 4-8.

tee ballots early to give them ballot "enough time to travel through the mail and resolve any issues that may arise when voting by absentee ballot," per georgia.gov.

Folks wanting to utilize the official drop box to turn in their absentee ballots can find it in the Elections Office during early voting hours. Voters may also drop completed absentee ballots off at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

April 25 was the voter registration deadline to participate in the May 24 elections.

The 2022 General Election will be held on Nov. 8 and will feature the election of political party candidates who clear the primary round of voting this month.

Valley River Arts Guild Classes

Have you visited the Murphy Art Center lately? Not only have you missed the treat of browsing our gallery. You may not have seen the Miniature Log Cabin we are raffling to benefit Valley River

Arts Guild educational programs and promotion of community art. It is a gorgeous work of art completely handmade. Tickets are available at Murphy Art Center in downtown Murphy. The drawing will be held at the first Art Walk of the year, Friday, May 6. Tickets will be sold until 7:29 PM with the drawing held at 7:30 PM. You do not have to be present to win.

Join Valley River Arts Guild for the first Art Walk of the season, Friday, May 6, 5 - 8 PM in downtown Murphy. Art Walks will continue throughout summer and fall seasons.

Valley River Arts Guild is offering a class for children to make Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day Cards, Saturday, May 7, 10:30 AM - 12 PM at Murphy Art Center. Class is appropriate for ages 6 and up.

For details call 828-360-3038 or visit Murphy Art Center, Valley River Avenue in downtown Murphy. NT(May4)JH

71st Annual Georgia Mountain Fair

It's time to celebrate the 71st year of the Georgia Mountain Fair and we want you to be part of the festivities!

The Georgia Mountain Fair has many new and exciting additions for 2022. While honoring our mountain heritage we are looking forward to a bright future. With this in mind, our theme for the 2022 Georgia Mountain Fair Parade is "Surfin' USA".

The parade will take place on Saturday, August 20, 2022. We are offering cash prizes, awards and lots of fun! Prize money for floats: 1st Place - \$4,000; 2nd Place - \$2,500; 3rd Place-\$1,500.

Please pre-register to ensure you are entered in the contest and that you have the best placement possible. Enclosed is the entry form for the Parade and a copy of the rules. Make your plans now; this is going to be an eventful year!

Sincerely,
Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee

REGULATIONS GEORGIA MOUNTAIN FAIR PARADE

*Due to the outstanding number of vintage vehicles we have participating in our parade, it makes judging in this category impossible! However, we do GREATLY appreciate your participation. The vintage vehicles are a huge crowd pleaser.

- Parade begins forming at 9:30 a.m. behind the South State Bank
- Judging will begin promptly at 9:45 a.m. Those who wish to be judged must arrive prior to 9:30 a.m. If not, your float will not be judged.
- Floats should reflect the theme of the parade.
- Parade starting time: 10:55 a.m. - rain or shine
- Moving and motorized vehicles of all types must be kept away from the horses.
- Position of entries in the parade will be determined by the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee.
- Parade marshals will maintain a 20-foot distance between entrants in order for the parade announcer to identify floats and category winners.
- Alcoholic beverages will not be permitted on the parade route or on the parade grounds. Violators will be referred to law enforcement officials. Motorized vehicles must keep in pace with the parade and will not be allowed to "stay back" and then use non-parade friendly speeds to catch up.

71st Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Entry Form

Theme: "Surfin' USA"
Parade Entry Form

Organization / Business / Family _____
Contact Person _____
Telephone _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mail completed entry form to Georgia Mountain Fair:
Georgia Mountain Fair, Inc.
PO Box 444
Hiwassee, Ga. 30546
4 Ways to enter:

- (1) In Person: Take completed entry form to the GMF office located at 1311 Music Hall Road, Hiwassee, GA
 - (2) Email: gamtfair@windstream.net
 - (3) Fax: (706) 896-4209
 - (4) Mail: Georgia Mountain Fair, PO Box 444, Hiwassee, GA 30546
- August 20, 2022
Parade starts at 11:00 A.M.
All entrants are requested to pre-register
Arrive before 9:30 A.M.

WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT®

Boots to Boats - Warrior Fishing

Local Boots to Boats Warrior Fishing plans its inaugural fishing event on Lake Nottely for May 13 - 15. The event will host seven Combat Veterans and seven volunteer bass boat Captains for a full day of fishing and camaraderie.

"As a Combat Veteran myself, I was able to attend this type of event in southern Georgia and thought one could be held here," explained TJ Anderson, director of Boots to Boats and event coordinator. "We've been able to secure a lake house to accommodate the Veterans and currently have five volunteer Captains for this event," he added.

The Veterans and volunteer Captains will meet Friday evening for a dinner and boat assignments. An early Saturday breakfast will then lead to boat launching for fishing until about 3 p.m. There will be an awards dinner that evening provided by Smoking E'E BBQ. Veterans will depart

Local students participate in Fourth Annual Piedmont Symposium

The 4th Annual Piedmont Symposium showcased the undergraduate research and creative inquiry projects of 389 students on April 6. Their findings were presented across the Demorest and Athens campuses through oral and poster presentations.

Blairsville student presenters included Rebecca Wood and Anna Owenby.

Appalachian Duplicate Bridge Club News

On Monday, April 18, three and one half tables played a Mitchell movement at All Saints Lutheran Church in Blairsville, GA. Ray Ferree and Jim Bell finished in first place with a score of 31.0 and earned 0.70 black points. They were followed by Ray Berry and Joe Wald in second place with a score of 27.50 and earned 0.49 black points. Frank Fulford and Bobbie Mace were third with a score of 26.0 and 0.40 black points. Joyce Geiger and Sue Wall rounded out the day's winners with a score of 25.50 and 0.28 black points.

On Thursday, April 21,

Sunday following breakfast, according to Anderson.

"We intend to develop this as at least an annual event to serve Combat, and possibly other Veterans, in this area," Anderson continued. This is a project in alignment with the David Allen Ellen Compound project currently taking form in North Georgia. We are so appreciative of those already stepping up to help, but we need others to join us, especially two more boat Captains for this first event. In future years we would like to increase those participating in the event," Anderson concluded.

This event is being held in memory of local Veterans Irv Rae, US Coast Guard and Cary Kincade Smith, US Marine.

For more information, please contact Anderson at (678) 246-8522 TJAnderson22@yahoo.com or Paige Thornton (706) 897-5128 LPaigeThornton@gmail.com. N(May4)Z20)CA

is an exciting day when the entire university comes together to celebrate the work of our students," said President James F. Mellichamp. "I know I speak for everyone at Piedmont when I say that we are proud and inspired by our students, who are proving they are ready to confront complex issues and make meaningful contributions to their fields, communities, and the world."

three full tables were in play. Once again, the Howell movement was in play. Frank Fulford and Judy Aube finished in first place with a score of 32.0 and earned 0.60 black points. They were followed by Joyce Geiger and Karen Miller in second place with a score of 27.0 and earned 0.42 black points.

The club plays every Monday and Thursday, as long as there are enough participants, at All Saints Lutheran Church beginning at 12:30 p.m. Masks are no longer a requirement for the Monday and Thursday games. If you would like more information about the games or need a partner, contact Ray Ferree by email at rayfer1430@gmail.com or phone him at 85-384-3642.

BLAIRSVILLE HEAVEN'S SAINTS M/M PRESENTS OUR MONTHLY BIKE NIGHT

2nd SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH

ABIDE COFFEE SHOP
Parking lot
214C Young Harris Street
Blairsville, GA 30512

Starting:
Saturday Night April 9th
4pm---???

ALL riders are welcome

Bike nights will continue until October.
Come out and join us.
Get to know some of our local Bikers.

Rhododendron Fest...from Page 1A



Beauty is in full bloom at the Hamilton Gardens, which is welcoming guests for the Rhododendron Festival over the next three weekends.

Photo by Mark Smith

that is solely a rhododendron garden in the Southeast that's a public garden.

"So, it's got a lot of different aspects of why I think it's important for people to visit. But the No. 1 reason is our large collection of rhododendrons. We have over a thousand of them in the garden, so that's quite a claim to fame.

"There is no other garden park in the whole Southeast that can claim that. There are a couple of private entities that have that going for them, but no public ones."

Going into the history of the gardens, Luckenbach said the original name was "The Fred Hamilton Rhododendron Gardens" dating back 40 years ago, though over the decades, "it's kind of remarked itself to the abbreviated 'Hamilton Gardens.'"

"It really wasn't Fred Hamilton's idea to establish this garden," she said. "It was Terry Taylor's idea, who was a big engineer here in Hiawassee at the time and was part of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' incorporated board ... which was entrusted with this property by the Tennessee Valley Authority years ago."

Luckenbach said Taylor was the overseer of the property back then and, knowing that Fred Hamilton was a rhododendron collector, showed him the property and said something to the effect of, "Fred, look at this piece of property. Imagine what we could do with it if only we had your rhododendrons."

"That's how it all started," said Luckenbach. "So, Fred had 900 (rhododendrons) in his collection, and they brought

them all over. Terry Taylor and his crew of volunteers terraced the hillside. It was clear-cut, terraced, and one by one, those 900 rhododendrons went in the ground.

"And to this day, have they all survived the last 40 years? No, though I think we've only lost maybe a dozen of them. But these are part of (Fred's) original collection. And, of course, it wasn't just the rhododendrons. He did donate a bunch of azaleas as well, some pieris shrubs.

"But the claim to fame for our garden is that it is a rhododendron botanical garden. It is a state registered botanical garden, which is what my goal is as a curator ... to get it back what it was meant to be.

"And you have to have someone with a major vision to keep the rest of the crew focused. My vision is actually Fred Hamilton's vision; he wanted this to be a showcase for the rhododendrons."

More on the history, Luckenbach said Hamilton and Taylor went to Atlanta to get the garden officially recognized as a state botanical garden, which opens doors for state and federal grants.

"(Hamilton) really wanted this to thrive as a unique destination in the North Georgia Mountains, and the No. 1 compliment we got (during the festival opening weekend) was, 'Oh my God, what did you do to the gardens? They look fabulous!'" said Luckenbach, adding that they have a variety of rhododendrons and other plants for sale on-site as well.

Luckenbach went on to say that the first weekend of the

2022 Rhododendron Festival, April 22-24, saw a record number of visitors to the gardens – about 2,000 people – which brought in roughly \$4,000 at the gate and donations of approximately \$10,000.

"Ninety percent of our traffic in the last week has been from Atlanta, South Carolina, Tennessee, other states," Smith said. "A lot of people said they thought we were closing the gardens.

"It would be nice to let people know that we're not only open – we're thriving. We are definitely not closed," he said, adding that they are looking for local volunteers who want to be a part of Hamilton's and Taylor's vision for a lakeside botanical garden.

Smith said they already have reservations for weddings, and with an open-air pavilion, a stage with a North Georgia Mountain backdrop, and a thousand rhododendrons, what better place is there for the betrothed to take their vows or for a family to reunite?

Hamilton Gardens features about a mile of walking trails, has golf cart tours, and the Gardens are pet friendly. It's a beautiful place to bring a takeout lunch and sit and enjoy the peace and serenity of the North Georgia Mountains.

The Rhododendron Festival continues every Friday, Saturday and Sunday for the next three weekends, featuring "crafters, live music, food, drinks, a plant sale, daily seminars and more!" Admission is \$5 per person.

For more information on Hamilton Gardens, to reserve the pavilion or to volunteer, call 706-896-4191.

Memory Lane...from Page 1A



Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason with local singing sensation Summer Rahn, who performed the National Anthem at the car show on Saturday, and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

"I work out of town but still try to make it to as many of these local car shows as possible," he said. "I have about 10 different cars that I try to bring over here each year.

"I have a 1970 (Corvette) Sting Ray, a couple of (Ford Mustang) Mach 1s, and one of the new (Dodge Challenger) Hellcat Redeyes. I'm looking for a 1964 Ford with a 396 (engine). I had one once

before and my wife loved it, but I ended up selling it. Turned out that was the one she liked to ride around with me in."

Among the vehicles attracting the most attention on Saturday was Bill and Joanne Testa's Backdraft Racing Custom Cobra RT3 Roadster, a replica of the iconic 1965 Shelby Cobra Roadster.

"Some people would

call it a 'kit car,' but it's made on a production line in South Africa, so you can't just buy one – they build the car," Bill said. "What they do is, they don't put the motor, transmission or the wheels on it, because if they did, when they (arrive in the U.S.), the Department of Transportation would make them crash test a bunch of cars.

"So, you design the car from the wheels up; every single thing is designed by you, and my wife designed this one. The entire suspension is from BMW, and it took me five months to sort out the motor, because Ford wouldn't sell me a Boss 302, so I bought the Coyote block and all the Boss 302 parts to put on it.

"Right now, it weighs 2,200 pounds and is 440 horsepower at the rear tires."

Next week, the fairgrounds will transition from the smells of high-octane gasoline to more laid-back aromatic fare with the Hiawassee Highlands Wine Festival, beginning at 11 a.m. on Saturday, May 7.

For additional information on future events, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com>.

Hit-and-Run...from Page 1A

ogy to identify the hit-and-run vehicle, after which GSP identified the driver.

"On April 28, the Georgia State Patrol located Ms. Sheila Smith in Towns County," GSP said. "Ms. Smith was read her Miranda Warning Rights and questioned about the crash. Ms. Smith admitted to driving, hit-

ting the school bus and leaving the scene of the crash.

"Ms. Smith was arrested and transported to the Towns County Jail where she was released to jail staff."

Added GSP, "These are the preliminary investigative results, and this crash is still under investigation."

Smith has since bonded out of jail, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the Georgia State Patrol, Hiawassee Police Department, Towns County Sheriff's Office deputies and the public for their diligence in helping to identify the suspect.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

For more information about these programs and other Parks and Rec activities in Towns County, call 706-896-2600.

In his Commissioner's Report, Bradshaw said that the county's finances "are very good."

"Our collections are still on target as far as sales tax and the SPLOST. Everything is still on target," he said. "I know we have a lot of inflation, but we haven't seen anything drop off as of yet. It is my hope that inflation will level out, hopefully decline."

Turning to the major courthouse renovation and addition project, Bradshaw said that his office was "so excited – we're getting very, very close."

"Reeves and Young (construction company) – we're working on the pre-construction contract right now," he said. "So, we may have to do a called meeting to sign that contract. We're ready to get the ball rolling."

Bradshaw said Reeves and Young presented a contract that County Attorney Robb Kiker reviewed and revised. The contract is now back with Reeves and Young for their approval. Hopefully, the company will approve the revised contract so "we can get the ball rolling."

Cubicles have been ordered to transition courthouse staff to the Old Rec Gym during construction, and everything is finally moving toward construction starting, Bradshaw said, reiterating that a special meeting will be called as soon as the contract is agreed upon by all parties.

And though it's been a long time coming, Bradshaw said the residential/commercial garbage separation project at the

Transfer Station is almost complete. Labor problems and materials shortages have been a drag on the project, but it is finally nearing completion.

Bradshaw announced that Towns County Clerk Linda Hedden is retiring and will be training her replacement, Brenda McKinney, full-time as of Monday, April 25. An appreciation ceremony for Hedden will be forthcoming.

Hedden said she has been working in Towns County government for a lot of years and wants to spend her winters in a warmer climate for a change.

Continuing, Bradshaw said he had participated in a meeting that same day with several other commissioners in Union County "just to talk about the challenges that counties face – growth, things that are changing, rental properties, Airbnbs – all these things we talked about."

"We're going to meet again in about three or four weeks, and we're going to start going over ordinances, what they're doing, what we're doing," Bradshaw said. "That was

one of the best meetings I've had since I've been in office.

"To talk to other counties and see the problems that they're facing are the very same problems we're facing – it's all pretty much the same. From parks and rec to roads and bridges, transfer station – it's all the same issues."

Bradshaw concluded his comments with an announcement that the county had received a check for \$41,347 from the Association County Commissioners of Georgia as a reimbursement from the ACCG insurance pool. The reimbursement last year, he said, was about \$24,000.

Moving along, Bradshaw signed a lease renewal for the property the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce occupies in the amount of \$1 per year, and he appointed Rachel Mathis as the AVITA Community Partners Board of Directors, replacing Deena Hardy.

The commissioner holds his regular meetings on the third Tuesday of each month beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Operation Sting

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possession of a controlled substance; and possession of a dangerous drug.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that the Safety Road Checks "are a proactive initiative to keep our community safe."

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