

Towns County Herald

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McConnell, Shook and Rouse earn Top Honors

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County High School Class of 2023 celebrated Senior Honors Day on Friday, May 12, to soak up all their well-deserved accolades before graduating this week.

That morning, proud family members, scholarship presenters, and school administrators gathered in the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium on campus to congratulate the upcoming graduates.

A special introduction by Principal Roy Perren marked the beginning of the event, with Perren expressing his pride in the young men and women "getting ready to go through

this milestone of life."

"We took a walk around the building this morning," Perren said. "We went through the Elementary School, the Middle School, and the High School, and many of them have been here the whole time of their school career. The greetings we got from everyone as we walked through was wonderful."

Comprised of 68 students, the Class of 2023 is notable for its athletes having "some of the highest GPAs in the school," outstanding role models, and being the class to leave TCHS alongside Perren, who will be retiring this year.

The Female Athlete of the Year, Sarah Shook, was

recognized earlier this school year as 2023's Homecoming and Prom Queen. Seth Gillis was named Male Athlete of the Year and completed the Sports Medicine and Advanced Academics Pathways.

Three students will be going into military service to bravely serve their country: A.J. Edwards, Kendall Henderson and Trevor Price.

Eight students qualified as Honor Graduates: Zion Calhoun, A.J. Edwards, Grace Giles, Michael Hires, Jozie King, Kata Kosovic, Curtis Markham and Morgan Pierson.

Graduating with High Honors will be Tabitha Barnes, Caleb Berrong, Eden Hill, Will See *Class of 2023 Honors, Page 8A*



TCHS Principal Roy Perren with 2023 Historian Layne Rouse, Salutatorian Sarah Shook and Valedictorian Will McConnell on Friday, May 12. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Special Olympics a positive experience for everyone



The 2023 edition of the Special Olympics featured a great turnout, both among athletes and supporters. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The sounds of children chanting their friends' names could be heard all over the Towns County High School Football Field the morning of Thursday, May 11, ringing in the annual tradition of the Special Olympics.

These earnest supporters went above and beyond to express their encouragement of the athletes, including making signs and hanging them up along the fence around the field's track.

2023 was the comeback year for Towns County hosting the event. Organizer

Becky Tracy, who also works as the Parent Mentor for Special Education at Union County Schools, confirmed that the games used to "flip-flop" sites between Union and Towns.

"But the two years before COVID, the Towns County fields had draining issues, so we hosted at Union back-to-back for several years," Tracy said. They called off the event for the pandemic, but after a triumphant return last year, the athletes and their supporters came back out in droves.

Now, with turf covering the Towns County field, it's safe to trade between the schools again, too, and the Special Olympics' "home site" is

expected to fall back into its regular rotation.

From the bleachers, parents held up their own homemade signs as Towns County students filed in beside them. Everyone was there to cheer on the athletes and meet new friends.

Alongside Towns County Schools, Union and Rabun students of all ages also participated in the event, as well as the Avita Masters Adult Division.

This year marked the beginning of a new trend as athletes and volunteers wore identical shirt designs. In the past, Towns, Union, Rabun, and Avita all sported different See *Special Olympics, Page 6A*

Young Harris franchise fee to appear on power bills soon

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In a split decision, the Young Harris City Council voted this month to approve a 4% franchise fee for the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC to use the city's right-of-way to deliver electricity.

The new franchise fee will be additional revenue for the City of Young Harris, augmenting the small amount of franchise fees the city already collects through Windstream Communications. Fee proceeds will go into the city's general fund to help cover operating and other expenses.

State law authorizes municipalities "to grant franchises to public utility companies for the use and occupancy of the streets of the city, for the purpose of rendering utility services," according to the newly adopted Franchise Fee Ordinance and Agreement.

Council members held the second reading and adoption of the ordinance in their May 2 meeting, which was preceded by a first reading in the April regu-

lar meeting and public discussions dating back to November.

The fee will be paid by EMC members, to appear as a new line-item amount on individual customer bills to account for 4% "of the gross sales of electric energy to customers served under residential, commercial, and industrial rate schedules within the corporate limits of the City."

In other words, the fee will be levied exclusively against the kWh usage on power bills of EMC members located inside city limits. Power bills fluctuate from month to month for a variety of reasons, so individual franchise fee amounts will also change monthly.

From the council's perspective, this franchise fee is something that has long been an avenue for increased revenue the city has failed to take advantage of that other municipalities have, like the City of Hiwassee, which enacted an EMC franchise fee in 2018.

The sticking point for Councilman Matt Miller, who voted against the fee, was not the imposition of the fee itself,



YHC President Van Horn attended this month's Young Harris City Council meeting to voice his opposition to the city's new Franchise Fee. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

which he referred to as a "tax" in the May 2 meeting, but the impact it would have on Young Harris College, which had campaigned against the fee in recent weeks.

According to City Attorney Marvin Harkins, EMC's Director of Administrative Services and External Relations Erik Brinke had informed him using See *Franchise Fee, Page 2A*

TCSO highlights new K-9s in fighting 'war on drugs'

News Special
Towns County Herald

Last week, the Towns County Sheriff's Office proudly introduced two additional K-9s and handlers to its K-9 team, with Zeus and his partner Deputy Tyler Davis and Xena and her partner Deputy Darringer Barrett joining Dakota and Lt. Tommy Shook.

"Our Towns County K-9s are a valuable asset to the Sheriff's Office," TCSO said on May 8. "These K-9s accompany their handler at all times while on duty."

K-9s have an incredible sense of smell, and these three K-9s assist their handlers in detecting illegal substances such as narcotics of all kinds. All of the Sheriff's K-9s and handlers are certified to meet state certification standards.

Towns County Sheriff's K-9 handlers are certified and trained in Criminal and Drug Interdiction for patrol deputies. These patrol deputies are

See *K-9 Team, Page 8A*



TCSO Deputy Davis with K-9 partner Zeus. Photo/Facebook

Junior Board convenes to learn about local government



The Towns County Junior Board of Government Officials. Back Row (L-R): Dren Green, Kade McConnell, Zane Floyd, Commissioner Bradshaw, Loftin Turpin, Nathan Garrett and Gabe Eller. Front Row (L-R): Abby Pate, Haley Merritt, Laura Mauldin, Jacey Wood, Callie Drew Livingston, Jayden Taylor and Anleigh Hardin.

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

For two years now, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw has been doing his best not only to educate the younger generations on how government works, but also to foster potential interest in one day joining the field of governance.

That's why he spearheaded the creation of the Towns County Junior Board of Government Officials.

"When I became commissioner, I realized a lot of our youth did not know anything about county government - what a commissioner does,

what a probate judge does or a clerk, and stuff like that," Bradshaw said. "I've always been very involved with the school because I've had three kids who grew up in this school and I've got family who works here in the school, too."

After getting the OK from Towns County High School Principal Roy Perren, Bradshaw's program took off, and now, there's involvement from outside of the Commissioner's Office.

Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Melissa McConnell helps direct Junior Board meetings from the school side of things, and sometimes, guest speakers

are invited to talk about their own occupations and experiences.

The board meets about once a month in the library before classes start to learn the responsibilities of government positions. There, they brainstorm common problems dealt with by government officials using examples provided by Bradshaw that get the kids thinking critically.

"I've had a good time with these folks giving them different scenarios that sometimes I find myself in, that there's not always a 'right' answer," Bradshaw said. "You think you know, but it depends

See *Junior Board, Page 6A*

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Nottely 1,775.67

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Summer Heat returns Saturday, June 17; Come and enjoy the day with our First Responders

This event is our way of supporting all paid employees and volunteers in good standing in the following agencies: Towns County Sheriff's Office, City of Hiwassee Police

Department, Young Harris College Police Department, Towns County Fire Department, Towns County EMS, and Towns County 911 Dispatch. Our goal is to provide



limited financial support for Towns County First Responders should they suffer a debilitating illness or injury after exhausting all vacation, sick leave, and other means of financial aid.

This event will be a Family Fun Day for everyone in the family. Free entry to the event. We will have activities galore.

There will be local bands and live music. Come and see: Roy Perren (Elvis), also our retiring High School Principal and popular local entertainer, True Youngblood, an up-and-coming talent who was born and raised in the North Georgia Mountains, Struck by

Lightning 2, a couple of local men performing a variety of music, including a lot of listening favorites. Cletus Way, well-known in the local area for playing classic rock, southern rock, and the blues.

There will be craft vendors, Fantastic food vendors, and more. In addition, there will be a great car show. The Blairsville Cruisers, along with All American Camaro/Firebird Association featuring Ironman and the Dragon Slayer. A special event will be a kickball game between the Sheriff's Dept. and the Fire Department (Guns versus Hoses) Also, weather permitting, the sheriff's office will have a live drone demonstration you want to attend. The drone is state of the art and will be a big help in fighting crime. There will be fire trucks, police cars, ambulances, and other first responder equipment along with a live 911 presentation.

We didn't forget the kids. There will be a lot of games and activities for their enjoyment—games like darts at balloons, floating ducks, ring toss, and many more—all with prizes. There will be a BB gun contest between the kids and the Sher-

iff's Dept.

We can achieve our goal with fundraising events, sponsors, and donations from our community. However, we need residents to help also. As mentioned, this is a fundraiser. There will be a silent auction for many items that local businesses have donated. There will be a Henry Golden Boy rifle raffle and a main fundraiser raffle donated by

The Ridges Resort. 2 night stay to include pontoon boat for each day. 4 gift cards for \$50 at Marina Station. 2 single-season passes for Splash Island. Tickets are \$5 each or 5 for \$20. The drawing will be on the day of the event.

For more information, visit our website www.summerheatoftownscounty.square.site or Facebook, Summer Heat of Towns County.

Donations will be applied to the Summer Heat of Towns County First Responder Assistance Fund. Saturday, June 17th, Rain or shine. Noon – 4ish. Towns County Recreation Center. 150 Forster Park Rd, Young Harris.

Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff's Office.



ARREST REPORT

Towns County Jail
Sheriff Ken Henderson

- 05/08/23 Robin Michele Gunnells, age 55
Housed for court
- 05/10/23 Raven Brianna Schuknecht, age 34
Probation violation (when probation terms are altered) for fingerprintable charge
- 05/09/23 Joshua Kyle Smith, age 30
State sentenced
- 05/09/23 James Thomas Stancil, age 23
Sentenced to state
- 05/12/23 Matthew Alexander Abernathy, age 33
To serve 72 hours
- 05/10/23 Jody Richard Anderson, age 42
Weekender-serving sentence
- 05/11/23 Jody Richard Anderson, age 42
Weekender-serving sentence
- 05/09/23 Nathan Robert James Anderson, age 20
Failure to appear for fingerprintable charge-misdemeanor
- 05/08/23 Michael Tyler Bookholt, age 30
Simple battery, theft by taking-felony
- 05/08/23 Gregory Allen Dean, age 59
Failure to drive within single lane, DUI-1st offense
- 05/12/23 Garrett Eugene Egan, age 30
Speeding, DUI-driving under the influence of alcohol
- 05/09/23 Mary Lynn McKenzie, age 61
Serve 48 hours court sentenced
- 05/12/23 Ashely Marie Reece, age 32
Driving with no license on person, failure to drive within single lane, possession of methamphetamine
- 05/12/23 Nicholas George Sherman, age 22
Court ordered 48 hours
- 05/10/23 Calvin William Taylor, age 46
Driving while license suspended or revoked (misdemeanor), expired vehicle tag or decal, possession and use of drug related objects, possession of firearm or knife during commission of or attempt to commit, possession of methamphetamine, use of firearm be convicted felon during commission of a crime

Franchise Fee...from Page 1A

a "back of the napkin calculation" that the fee would probably generate "around \$50,000 a year" in total additional revenue for the city.

However, YHC President Dr. Drew L. Van Horn, who attended the meeting, said the EMC told him that the 4% fee would result in over \$50,000 in extra annual costs to the college alone, which was at odds with the total fee collection estimate Harkins provided to the council.

Van Horn further backed up his estimate by saying that the college's electric bills came to roughly \$1.3 million in 2022, 4% of which would be more than \$50,000, and he believes this would cause an annual financial hardship for the college.

Councilman John Kelley said it sounded like the city and college were getting "two different messages," which Miller said made him "very uneasy."

Miller asked if the fee percentage could be reduced to lower the costs to be incurred by the college, saying that if the city was going into the fee adoption with a specific revenue estimate in mind – about \$50,000 – the council could adjust the fee downward to meet that estimate.

Harkins clarified the 4% figure was not based on receiving a set revenue total but came from the model ordinance obtained from the Georgia Municipal Association, with which the city is contracting to manage its franchise fees.

Kelley reiterated that it was appropriate for the city to seek the franchise fee, and that, actually, Young Harris was "late to the party" in terms of granting an electric franchise and levying the fee. He further stated that the "numbers are going to be what they are," based on usage.

"There's several things that utilities pass onto customers that aren't necessarily something that I enjoy either," Kelley said to Van Horn. "Utilities are recipients of significant grant money to expand internet, etc., but we still pay for that internet in a big, big way."

"You get out in rural parts of the county and you'll find that all they do is get it to the property, they don't get it to the customer, and their fees to get it to the customer are significant."

"So, it might be wise to have – and I'm sure you have –

month, which it will not.

The usage cost for 1,000 kWh in Brinke's calculation came to \$138.17 before accounting for the 4% fee. At that exact kWh usage, the fee would result in a \$4.55 increase in the example residential bill for the one month.

As for next steps, the Franchise Fee Ordinance, which grants a franchise to the EMC, went into effect last Friday after both the city and EMC had signed the Franchise Fee Agreement, starting a 45-day clock for the EMC to implement fee collections.

Also in the meeting, Van Horn said that Young Harris City Hall had failed to make the franchise fee as widely known to the public as possible.

In a statement he prepared for the meeting, Van Horn said that "in conversations with area businesses and residents about the proposed franchise fee, they were amazed to have heard it from me, another citizen, rather than this body."

Before its passage, Van Horn asked that the city pause its decision to enact the fee until a public hearing could be called to let people attend and speak to its potential impact.

Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby countered Van Horn's transparency claim by saying that the council had discussed the fee in multiple previous meetings via "open conversations for over six months about this very thing."

"Thank you for bringing this up ... we certainly appreciate it, and we want to hear from people," Gibby said. "We do meet every single month and talk about this out in the open. So, I'm sorry that somehow it was missed."

"And in the future, if we need to do something else, we can talk about it, but we have talked about it for six months."

Councilman Kelley apologized on behalf of the council if the college "did not get the appropriate communication," but he pointed out that the college should have had notice since YHC Chief Operations Officer Bo Wright has been attending all the regular meetings.

In the wake of the fee passing, Van Horn has vowed to "reach out to every citizen of Young Harris, residents, businesses and students, and reinforce the point that this council operates in secret by not notifying the residents of business that will impact their wallets."

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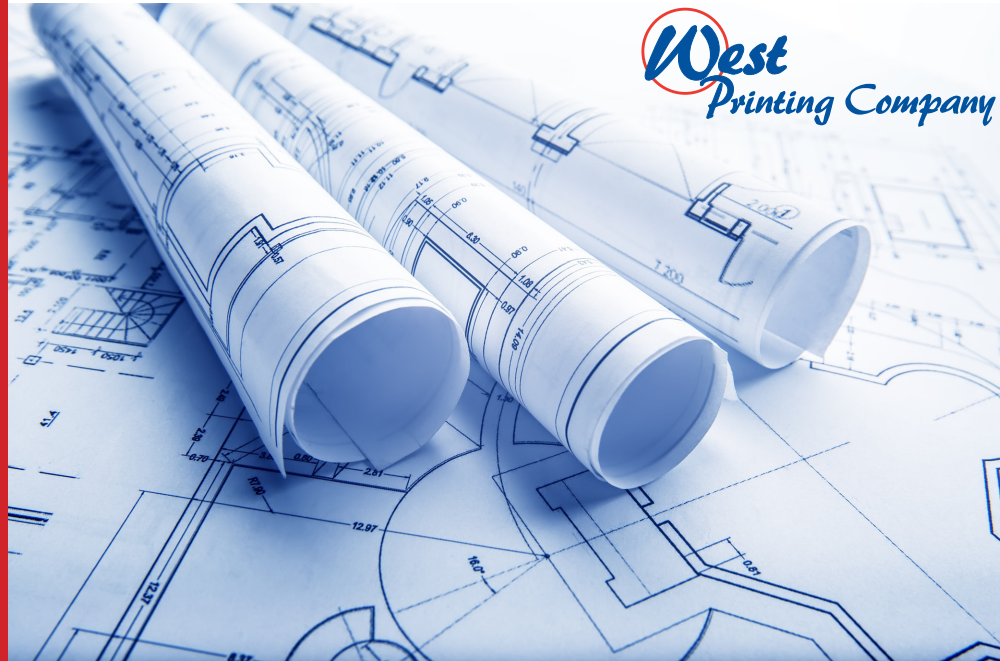
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Junior Board...from Page 1A

(on) the matter of opinion on what's right and what's wrong. "So, I've given them some scenarios just to hear how they would handle some of the situations," Bradshaw continued, admitting that hearing the diverse answers the students give is his favorite part of the meetings.

On the morning of Wednesday, May 3, several students in attendance were happy to talk about the impact the Junior Board has had on their lives.

Kade McConnell, son of Melissa McConnell, said he feels better prepared to "go out into the world," and he definitely has a stronger grasp on how local government works.

"(We) focus a lot on property rights, the rights of the landowner and rights of what the government can and can-

not control," McConnell said. "It's given me a different kind of point of view."

His buddy Zane Floyd agreed: "I'm just learning a whole lot about government; I really didn't think it controlled as much as it does."

McConnell and Floyd were both board members last year when they were sophomores, and now that they're juniors, they want to continue learning once they become seniors to take further advantage of the cumulative knowledge they have picked up thus far.

It's also gotten them thinking about their futures.

McConnell has found he doesn't think he'd want to go into government, but Floyd has a different outlook. In fact, Floyd's grandfather, Bill Kendall, was a former Hiawassee mayor, the school superintendent for 26 years, and Towns County's sole commissioner for 11 years.

"Maybe later down the road (I'll get involved) - let me get some age on me, though," said Floyd with a smile. Indeed, he has some big shoes to fill if he decides to take on the challenge.

That morning, each student received a certificate to commemorate everything they've learned on the board this year, and seniors received a blue cord to wear at graduation on May 19.

Another meeting was held on Tuesday, May 9, to wrap everything up with a bang, as Commissioner Bradshaw wanted to make the experience a "historical memory" before the Junior Board of Government Officials returns next school year.

Special Olympics...from Page 1A



Students from Union, Towns and Rabun counties competed in the Special Olympics May 11, which returned this year to Towns County Schools. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

"uniforms," but in 2023, everyone wore a bright turquoise shirt proudly displaying the 2023 Special Olympics logo on the front.

The change was symbolic of the idea that the gap between neurodivergent people and their neurotypical friends, family and community needed to be bridged. There's something to be said of finding common ground between everyone, whether child or adult, special needs or not.

"It really just showcases who God is and that we're all made in His image," noted Mandilyn Moore, who serves as a special education aide at Union County Schools. "Every person, every life, counts and matters."

"And even though we're not made all exactly the same with the same gifts and talents, we definitely have ... a purpose for being here."

Occupational Therapist Amy Kight agreed.

"This event brings the community together and lets everyone see just how fantastic these students are," Kight said. "This event is supported by so many people, and we want to thank all of the sponsors, of course."

"The schools that come here, the kids that participate - the joy on their faces is just absolutely phenomenal. It warms your heart. I love it so much."

Towns County High's Jenni Harper, mother of 8-year-old Haden Harper,

will always be grateful for her son's involvement in the Special Olympics. Haden enjoys riding "anything with a motor," but for that day, he participated in the softball throw and other activities.

"He did not walk for six months out of this (school) year," revealed Harper, who said Haden "has a rare genetic disorder, and it keeps him from walking a lot and he's nonverbal."

Harper was ready with her phone camera as Haden made his way across the track, accompanied by a paraprofessional: "And now he can walk, and he's going to come out here and do this, which is why I've been crying. It's awesome, isn't it?"

One of Harper's former students, Thomas Kosovic, stopped briefly to catch up with her before returning to watch the games. Kosovic has a history of participating in the Special Olympics himself and found it interesting going from being an athlete to a spectator.

"It gives a more different experience on the players themselves," Kosovic said, describing his years of participation as "fantastic." He was there to support his twin sister Kata, whom he rushed to sweep into an embrace when they met on the track.

Tristan Hayes, Union County High School senior, said he has lots of fun attending the Special Olympics. He enjoys the soccer kick, and as

a fan of sports outside of the Olympics, plays basketball.

Adaptive Physical Education Coach Buffy Chapman was there to help cheer athletes on as well, supporting them down in the tents between different sports stations. She can remember the Special Olympics being held when she was a child.

"Of course, it's a lot bigger now," Chapman said. "It's increased tremendously over the years, and a lot of that comes from just more awareness, probably, from the education side."

"One thing people struggle with - the general population in schools or in society - (is communicating) with kids with special needs. And it's not because they don't want to, but they're afraid that they'll say the wrong thing, or they don't know what things to say."

Chapman is working on pulling students from the general population into her PE classes to train and study alongside their special needs peers to help bridge that gap, and it's certainly thought evoking; in a few decades, what will the Special Olympics look like?

With fellow students participating by handing out temporary tattoos and helping to calculate the distances balls rolled or were thrown, there was certainly enough fun and friendship to go around that Thursday. One can hope things only go up from here.

Towns County Lions Club Welcome New Members



Lions Beth & William "Bill" Beasley with Sponsor Suzanne Wilson



The Towns County Lions roared into a new month by adding to their member ranks at the May 9 meeting at Daniel's Restaurant in Hiawassee.

William (Bill) & Beth Beasley were officially inducted & welcomed by the 83 year old club.

Local realtor & Lion Teresa Newell provided an informative, insightful & interesting program on the Towns, Union & Clay Counties real estate situation, describing inventory, prices & sales trends

for buyers & sellers, calling current conditions "a seller's market."

In other Club business, Lion Allen Saylor thanked the members for volunteering to help with the successful GA Mtn Fair Rhododendron Festival during weekends in April and May.

Lion Dianne Williams proudly reported the Towns County Lions was one of the top ranked clubs in the state for its recent contribution to the GA Lions Lighthouse For The Blind annual White Cane Campaign for vision surgeries & blindness prevention statewide.

Lions Danny & Martha Meeks encouraged the members to continue staffing the 2023 GMF Anderson Music Hall Concerts Season Autographed Guitar Raffle Ticket

sales table to support the annual TCHS College Scholarship Fund for the upcoming Class of 2024 to break last year's record donation.

Club President Ronnie Whelchel reminded the audience that their help is always needed with staffing the new mobile Funnel Cake Kitchen Trailer at the upcoming Memorial Day Weekend Hiawassee Pro Rodeo and the next Hiawassee First Friday Town Square Event June 2.

Please refer to the GMF website for the outstanding schedule of upcoming activities, concerts & events & don't forget the Towns County Lions Facebook page.

Towns County Lions Club meetings are on the 2nd & 4th Tuesday nights of each month at Daniel's Restaurant in Hiawassee.

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary to visit Lake Chatuge May 20-22 with a Public Affairs Tent

Now that the weather is warming and holidays are approaching, many boaters will be heading to Lake Chatuge for some cool water and picnics.

With the start of a new boating season, our local U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary will be hosting an information booth May 20th-22 (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday) from 10 AM to 4 PM at the Mayors Park boat ramp (in front of the Pavillion and Rest Rooms).

The week is supported by the National Safe Boating Week, NOAA, the National Council on Safe Boating, the National Weather Service, the USCG and the Mayor/Police Chief of Towns County.

Come and join us to



U.S. Coast Guardsmen Pope and Thomas walk from Vessel Exams at the boat ramp during NSBW in '22

meet and greet, chat, take pictures, have some cold water, free vessel exams and Q&A on boating laws.

We want everyone to have a great summer and please be SAFE on our waters in Georgia.

University of Georgia 2023 Graduates

The University of Georgia will recognize more than 7,000 candidates for graduation in the Class of 2023 Commencement exercises this week.

"We are delighted to celebrate the incredible achievements of our University of Georgia students in the Class of 2023," said President Jere W. Morehead. "Commencement offers students, friends and families an opportunity to recognize the tireless dedication UGA students have shown during their time on campus. We look forward to seeing all the great things these students will go on to do as alumni of the University of Georgia."

Kendall Reid Floyd of Hiawassee, GA, is a candidate for a MAT Middle Grades Education. Chase Avery Rodgers of Hiawassee, GA, is a candidate for a BSME Mechanical Engineering. Leah Ashley Davault of Hiawassee, GA, is a candidate for a AB Communication Studies and BS Psychology.

Berry College Dean's List

Elexia Ochoa of Hiawassee GA, was named to the Spring 2023 Dean's List at Berry College.

The Dean's List honors students who posted an academic average of 3.5 or better on a 4.0 scale while carrying a class load of at least 12 hours during the semester.

Food Pantry Food Distribution

The Food Pantry hours are Monday - Thursday 9 AM- 12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM - 2 PM.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomas at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.

Local students receive Degrees at Piedmont University

A total of 307 Piedmont University students received undergraduate and graduate degrees on Friday, May 5, during two commencement ceremonies.

The graduate ceremony was held at 10:30 a.m., with the undergraduate service fol-

lowing at 1:30 p.m. Both were held in the Johnny Mize Athletic Center on the Demorest campus.

Class of 2023 graduates include: Kelsey Tipton and Maggie Stubblefield of Blairsville, GA; and Amber Gibson of Young Harris, GA.

Brasstown Bald Recreation Area hosts a "Raptor Rendezvous"



Georgia Mountain Falconry 2022

Brasstown Bald Recreation Area will be hosting a "Raptor Rendezvous" with GA Mountain Falconry on Saturday, May 27th.

The folks from GA Mountain Falconry set up at the Visitors Center and display several live hawks, falcons, and owls. They answer questions and provide detailed information about native and non-native raptors. It is a really neat experience for nature lovers of all ages.

There is no additional charge to visitors for the event, regular day use fees for our site are \$8 per adult and anyone under 16 is free. Passholders who present their America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass may enter the site

free of charge. The birds of prey will be on display from 10 AM until 3 PM.

Other events and educational programs at Brasstown Bald this season featuring live animals native to North Georgia include: Snake Day on Friday June 16th, Creepy Crawlies on Friday July 14th, Bats of Georgia on Saturday September 9th, and a second Raptor Rendezvous on Saturday October 14th.

Folks can find more information on our website: <https://gofindoutdoors.org/sites/brasstown-bald/>. Or visit the US Forest Service, Blue Ridge Ranger Dist. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/conf/recarea/?recid=10520>.

The Cancer Foundation names Mr. Joseph "Joey" Tripp as Executive Director

The Cancer Foundation (TCF) announces that Joseph "Joey" Tripp has been named Executive Director of the organization effective April 24, 2023.

Last year, TCF provided \$543,000 of financial assistance to approximately 784 eligible cancer patients and their families, including \$3,000 to four families in Towns County. TCF makes payments within 24-48 hours directly to the creditor owed for housing, utilities, gas, and other treatment-related out of pocket expenses. On average, the annual household income of the families served is less than \$19,000. The annual cost of a first-year cancer diagnosis is \$42,000.

Mr. Tripp is responsible for overseeing the administration, fundraising, programs, and the strategic plan of the organization.

"Joey brings a wealth of knowledge to The Cancer Foundation and will play a key role as TCF continues executing its mission of providing financial assistance to cancer patients and their families," says Joel Gregory, TCF Board President. "Joey is closely connected to our mission. His understanding of the value of our mission paired with his experience and understanding of regional growth will be a tremendous asset to TCF going



Mr. Joseph "Joey" Tripp forward."

Mr. Tripp has a Master of Arts in Nonprofit Management from the University of Georgia and brings with him over 10 years of experience in the non-profit sector. Prior to joining The Cancer Foundation, Joey served as the Director of Development for The Warrior Alliance in Atlanta. From 2016 to 2019, he served in various roles for the American Red Cross in Gainesville. He is Board Secretary of the Rotary Club of Gainesville, Co-Chair for the Rotary District 6910 Awards, and a member of Out Georgia Business Alliance.

"I am honored to join The Cancer Foundation and work alongside of the dedicated staff and board members to support those impacted by cancer in Northeast Georgia."

says Mr. Tripp. "Cancer affects everyone, and I am committed to our mission."

Mr. Tripp is the third Executive Director in the 14-year history of the organization.

The Cancer Foundation is local nonprofit organization whose mission is to help alleviate the financial burden of cancer for eligible patients by providing emergency financial assistance for basic life needs for families facing cancer. Eligible families must have a referral from their health care provider, a current cancer diagnosis and reside in one of 25 counties we serve: Banks, Barrow, Clarke, Elbert, Franklin, Greene, Habersham, Hart, Jackson, Jasper, Lumpkin, Madison, Morgan, Newton, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Putnam, Rabun, Stephens, Taliaferro, Towns, Union, Walton, White and Wilkes. Eligible patients receive up to \$750 in assistance paid directly to the creditor owed for housing, utilities, gas, and other treatment related out of pocket expenses. Our top three requests include transportation at 50%, housing at 22%, and utilities at 19%. All other requests make up 9% of assistance provided. Since our inception in 2009, TCF has provided over \$4 million in financial assistance to more than 5,000 patients. For more information, visit www.cfnega.org.

Class of 2023 Honors Day ...from Page 1A

McConnell, Haley Merritt, Brooke Murrell, Abby Pate, Quincy Rosser, Layne Rouse, Sarah Shook, Jayden Taylor and Jacey Wood.

Many thousands of dollars in scholarships were awarded, with donors including local businesses, memorial funds, post-secondary educational institutions and various societies and organizations.

After scholarship presentations, every student was called up individually for recognition, with their name and accomplishments displayed on the wide screen at the back of the stage.

Each senior received a "graduation box" filled with cords, seals, and other honor awards and recognitions. They returned to their seats after pausing a moment at the end of the stage for an individual photo and brief presentation.

The Class of 2023's highest academic achievers – Valedictorian, Salutatorian and Historian – were then named by Perren, and each one had plenty on their mind, as stated after the ceremony.

Valedictorian Will McConnell, son of Towns County Board of Education Vice Chair Stephanie McConnell, was also named 2023 STAR Student. McConnell says he wasn't surprised he earned top class rank but admits that "the competition was tough" alongside Salutatorian Sarah Shook.

"Everyone in our class is going to do great," he said. "Wherever they go, they're going to do their own thing, they're going to find themselves. It's exciting."

"Seeing the work pay off in the end is really what made this all worth it," added McConnell, who is still working on his speech ahead of Friday's Commencement Exercises and looks forward to addressing his classmates and the futures that await them.

As for his own future, McConnell plans on attending Georgia Tech for computer science.

"It is a little sad (to graduate), but I'm also excited for the next chapter with college and the future coming up. It's all going to be here faster than we can blink," McConnell said.

Salutatorian Sarah Shook also wasn't shocked by her academic achievement, as she and McConnell have both been at the top of their class for "the past couple years." Nevertheless, she called the honorific "a rewarding accomplishment."

She, too, will be working this week to pen her speech focused on the bittersweet present facing her and her classmates, of whom she is proud and has hopes that everyone will stay in touch.

Her caring nature ensures that, post-graduation, Shook will attend the University of North Georgia in pursuit of a career in nursing.

"I knew I always loved helping people from a young



TCHS seniors acquired quite a bit of achievement loot in their special awards day Friday in advance of graduation this week.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

age, so nursing would allow me to help people and fellowship with them, and build better relationships with people," Shook explained.

On graduating, she added, "Oh, I'm sad; I'm sad just because you've gone to school with ... people and they've become your best friends and your family, and now you're all going in different directions. But that's just how life goes – next chapter is starting."

As for Historian Layne Rouse, he said he tried to keep the best grades he could, knowing he "was somewhere at the top." Although he hasn't completed his speech on the class's past, he admits that it's "bittersweet" to leave high school behind.

"I would need to either take two options: one, to summarize the history of the class, or two, take the history and make it a thematic speech, which is what I'm going to do," Rouse planned.

Looking forward, he is admittedly ready for "a break" over summer but is ready to get started on the next stage of his life. Rouse said he's always been drawn to engineering and architecture, so it's only natural that he will be seeking a profession in civil engineering.

"I like designing stuff like that," Rouse said. "I talked to my uncle – he's a civil engineer – and he was like, 'Yeah, that's what we do.' He showed me some pictures of stuff and let me shadow him one weekend. And yeah, that looks interesting, so I'm going to see how that goes."

Towns County High School Graduation will take place on Friday, May 19, at 8 p.m. in Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

K-9 Team ...from Page 1A



TCSO Lt. Shook with K-9 partner Dakota. Photo/Facebook



TCSO Deputy Barrett with K-9 partner Xena. Photo/Facebook

trained in techniques to detect and apprehend drug couriers, intoxicated drivers, fugitives and other alleged criminals.

"These deputies, partnered with a K-9, will impact criminal activity and keep our roadways and community safe," the Sheriff's Office said.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that he is pleased with

the commitment of these specialized deputies and K-9s.

"Their commitment to the extra training hours necessary reflects the quality and commitment of these deputies," he said, adding that he cannot emphasize enough the significant role these K-9s contribute to his office's ongoing war on drugs.