

# MEMORIAL DAY 2022

Remember and Honor All Who Served

# Towns County Herald

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## TCHS bids farewell to Class of 2022 Indians

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Graduation is a time-honored rite of passage in which students, matured after more than a decade of education leading up to adulthood, move out into the world to become masters of their own destinies.

And for the 67 seniors of the Towns County High School Class of 2022, that tradition took place on Saturday morning, May 21, with Commencement Exercises on the football field of Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

Class of 2022 Officers were Macy Brinson, Collin Crowder, Zachary Franklin, Rylie Livingston, and President Kayla Peacock, with High Honors going to Riley Livingston as Class Historian, Alison Markham as Class Salutatorian and Bazya Smith as Class Valedictorian.

The procession began with music introduction by the Towns County School Band to lead the students out onto the field, and as all took their seats, the National Anthem was sung by Bria Chastain.

Principal Roy Perren then introduced Class President Peacock, who welcomed ceremony guests, saying, "Thank you to everyone joined here today to see a monumental turning point in life as we say goodbye to our graduating Class of 2022."

In turn, Peacock introduced Class Historian Livingston, who delivered a message focused on fond and fun memories forged by the close-knit group of students over years of working together and being there for one another.

"I will never be able to truly express how thankful I am to this group of people for accepting me and giving me a chance to become a true

member of Towns County," Livingston said. "I know that every person here will have a fulfilling life, and I am beyond excited to see how we all grow even though we will be apart."

Next up was the Salutatory Address from Alison Markham, who stressed the importance of never giving up on anything, despite having fears and doubts along the way.

"I am very thankful for everyone here in Towns County, from my parents to my friends and peers, and to the faculty and staff," Markham said. "I want to encourage everyone to follow what their hearts tell them and never let anyone stop you or make you believe you cannot do it. We are all a product of our success, and the success does not stop at graduation, it only starts."

In her Valedictory Address, Bazya Smith advised people, including her fellow

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The TCHS Class of 2022 enthusiastically took part in the hat throwing tradition following graduation over the weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Patriotic traveling tribute headed for county June 3-5

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

In his regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, May 17, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw was excited to share the news that a very special traveling exhibit is coming to town June 3-5: the Cost of Freedom Tribute.

The patriotic display will be viewable at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at 150 Foster Park Road in Young Harris, with an opening ceremony set for Friday, June 3, at 10 a.m.

Dozens of panels will be featured in the exhibit recognizing heroes in America's wars and conflicts, including an Afghanistan & Iraq Warrior Tribute; a 9/11 Tribute; and tributes to World War I, World War II, the Korean War, Vietnam War, Cold War, Desert Storm/Shield, Somalia, and various attacks and invasions of the past.

Sponsored by the American Veterans Traveling Trib-



Cliff Bradshaw  
Sole Commissioner

ute, the mission statement of the nonprofit organization is to "travel the United States of America showcasing the ... Cost of Freedom Tribute to Honor, Respect and Remember

those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice."

Additionally, the tribute hopes to "educate the present and future generations of

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## Hiawasse Pro Rodeo to ride into fairgrounds May 27-29

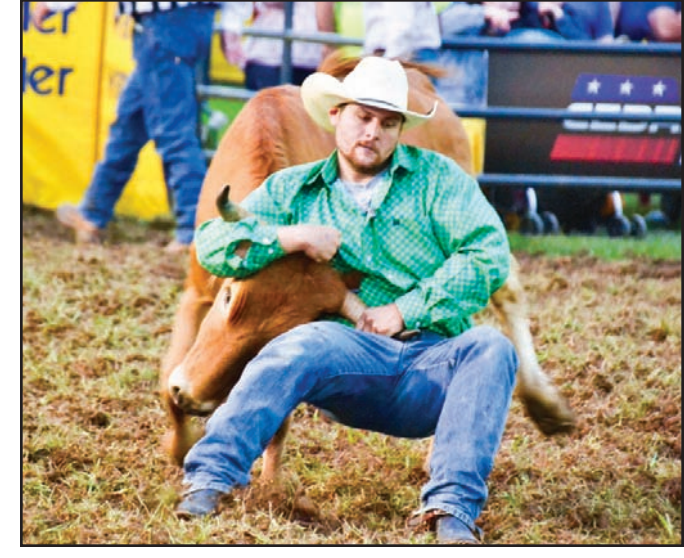
By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Listen up, cowboys and cowgirls – it's time to get your finest bull horn belt buckles ready, grab your straw hats, pull on your boots and strap in, because the Third Annual Hiawasse Pro Rodeo is coming back to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Memorial Day Weekend May 27-29.

The past two outings have been two-day extravaganzas, but this third installment will be seeing one extra day added for the entire community to enjoy the festivities with great weather in the beautiful mountain environs.

Spotlighted will be special guest and favorite local rising artist Summer Rahn singing The National Anthem alongside the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #7807 Color Guard presenting the flags in the arena.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason shared her excitement for the



Get ready for a bronc riding, bull bucking, calf roping, barrel racing and steer wrestling good time as the Hiawasse Pro Rodeo heads to town this weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

upcoming show last week, saying, "We added an extra day this year because it has grown so much in the last two years."

In partnership with Southern Rodeo Company of Rockmart and over 30 sponsors

aiding in the action, the entertainment will kick off Friday and Saturday with the gates opening at 6 p.m. and the rodeo beginning at 8 p.m. Sunday, the gates will open at 4 p.m. with a

See Hiawasse Rodeo, Page 3A

## Towns County Sheriff's Office graduates inaugural Sheriff's Auxiliary class



Eighteen residents attended a 10-week class by the Towns County Sheriff's Office to graduate as volunteer members of the Sheriff's Auxiliary last week. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, May 17, the first class of the Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary's 10-week

Law Enforcement Academy was treated to a graduation ceremony in the Family Life Center Gym of McConnell Baptist Church.

The Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary was established

"to extend the services it provides to the community without expanding the Sheriff's Office Budget, thus creating a property tax savings for the citizens of Towns County."

So, the Sheriff's Auxilia-

ry members are all volunteers, residents who have taken the phrase "give back to the community" to heart.

As such, auxiliary members are not sworn peace

See TCSO Auxiliary, Page 8A

## Traffic stop, pursuit leads to 2 arrests in 'Operation Sting'

News Special  
Towns County Herald

After a weeklong investigation by the Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug and K-9 Units, a traffic stop was initiated at approximately 10 p.m. on Saturday, May 14, along Georgia 75 South near the

White County line. The driver refused to stop and a pursuit ensued, traveling northbound on Georgia 75 South.

During the pursuit, a deputy observed the passenger throwing suspected drugs out

See Operation Sting, Page 3A



The Towns County Sheriff's Office confiscated drugs and cash in a pair of "Operation Sting" arrests May 14. Photo/Facebook

2 Sections 16 Pages	Arrests	5A
Lake Levels	Chamber	3B
Blue Ridge 1,687.01	Church	4B
Chatuge 1,926.31	Classifieds	6B
Nottely 1,776.28	Opinion	4A
	Legals	7B
	Obits	5B
	Sports	2B

**See Election Results Insert**  
**Inside This Week's Towns County Herald**

# 'Fun Day' a spectacular success at Middle School

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

As the 2021-22 school year approached its end last week, Towns County Middle School students enjoyed the rewards of a year committed to studies with "Fun Day" in the school gym on May 18.

"It started just a couple of years ago when I became the Middle School Principal," Dr. Connie Hobbs said. "It's just a fun way to celebrate the end of the school year and send the students off into summer."

"We finished testing and they did really well; they've worked really hard this year, and so have the teachers, so we just wanted to do something that was fun for them."

Originally, the event started out as a field day, but with no way of truly predicting weather conditions, the idea was pitched to move it inside to the Middle School Gym.

"We tried to do something that was indoors so we don't have to worry about weather and all three grades

can do it in the same day," Hobbs said. "They really love it out there, and they rotate their time."

There were initial concerns that the event wouldn't quite take off like the traditional end-of-year field day, but students slipped easily into the celebration whether they were indoors or out.

And the consensus appeared the same this year, with sixth, seventh and eighth graders running wild between the various stations on offer.

One of the main attractions was the bouncy house, which kept a constant line of students waiting out front for a turn to hop around inside. Just as popular were the inflatable obstacle tunnel and slide, both having students lingering around even after playing so they could have another turn.

Others yet were content to sit on the sidelines from the relative quiet of the bleachers, taking a moment for one-on-one talks with friends or to engage in artistic endeavors like sketchbook drawing. One or two browsed phones, but all seemed to interact with each



The Middle School gym was converted to an inflatable wonderland during Fun Day on May 18. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

other eventually.

Gina Chambers was one of the teachers keeping watch over the controlled chaos, and she firmly believes in the positive impact Fun Day has on her class.

"Oh, I think it's great for the kids," Chambers said. "It's a celebration of the end of the year. They worked hard, our state testing is over - it's a reward for the hard work they've done all year long. Some of the kids who might not be here for the end of the school year come back for this."

As for the students themselves, sixth grader Caleb Vardo was familiar with Fun Day from the Elementary School's iteration. Vardo was out having fun with friends as they coalesced around their favorite.

"I like the baseball (the most)," he indicated, referring to the inflatable baseball set positioned in one corner of the gym.

All in all, the event succeeded in being a fun post-test bash, and after all classes had rotated through, there was a cookout at the front of the campus.

Hobbs herself, along with several strong volunteers, carried water out to the Parent-Teacher-Student Organization, whose members assisted "Fun Day" by providing hot dogs, popcorn and snow cones.

"It's just to reward them for their hard work this year," reiterated Hobbs, hoping that the message was loud and clear: Towns County educators care deeply for their students and staff.



School may be out for the summer, but that doesn't mean kids won't miss campus over the next couple of months - particularly school activities like Fun Day at Towns County Middle. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Operation Sting...from Page 1A

of the vehicle, and after a six-mile pursuit, the driver stopped and was taken into custody along with the passenger.

The bag of suspected drugs that was thrown from the vehicle was recovered along the roadway.

Cordarius Ja'Kharri Alford, 28, of Fayetteville, was arrested and charged with improper stopping in the roadway; fleeing and eluding law; possession of methamphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of heroin; trafficking heroin; possession of heroin with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of MDMA (Ecstasy); possession of MDMA (Ecstasy) with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of fentanyl; possession of fentanyl with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of marijuana; possession of marijuana with the intent to sale or distribute; and possession of drug-related objects.

Also arrested was Twan-shun Mikole Coachman, 26, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, charged with possession of methamphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of heroin; trafficking heroin; possession of heroin with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of MDMA (Ecstasy); possession of MDMA (Ecstasy) with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of fentanyl; possession of fentanyl with the intent to sale or distribute; possession of marijuana; possession of marijuana with the intent to sale or distribute; and possession of drug-related objects.

were field tested and tested positive, and a considerable amount of cash was confiscated during the investigation.

These dangerous drugs were headed to Towns County for sale and distribution, the Sheriff's Office said.

Sheriff Ken Henderson was pleased that the pursuit was brought to a safe conclusion. He commends the Drug Investigative Unit and K-9 Unit for their commitment and hard work of keeping dangerous drugs off county streets and for keeping the community a safe place to live.

In a separate incident on May 10, Sheriff's Deputies conducted a traffic stop that resulted in possession of methamphetamine and drug-related objects charges for Courtney Bryce West, 44, of Blairsville; John Richard McBride, 59, of Blue Ridge; and Barry Joe King, 36, of Cumming.

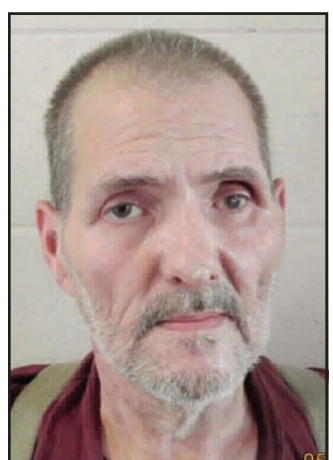
Stemming from another separate investigation at the beginning of the month on May 5, the Sheriff's Office executed a search warrant at a residence in Hiawassee, where there was evidence to indicate that illegal prescription drugs were being sold.

Jason Michael Wheeler, 47, of Hiawassee, was arrested and illegal prescription drugs were confiscated. Wheeler was charged with possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime; possession of a controlled substance; and sale of a controlled substance.

As stated previously by Sheriff Henderson, a portion of "Operation Sting" involves initiatives that are proactive approaches to keeping the local community and roadways safe.



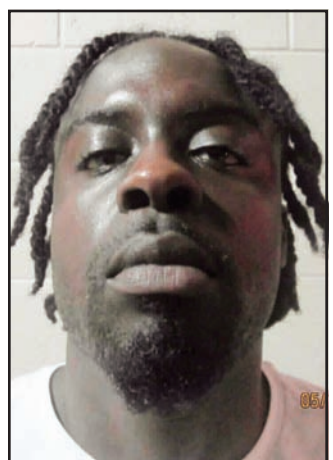
Twan-shun Mikole Coachman



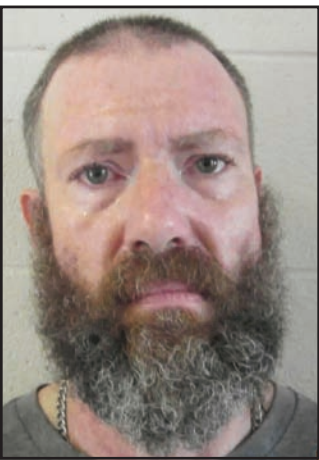
John Richard McBride



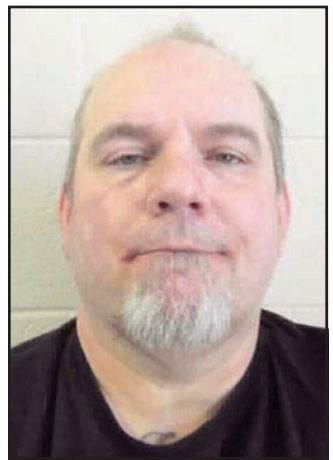
Barry Joe King



Cordarius Ja'Kharri Alford



Courtney Bryce West



Jason Michael Wheeler

## Hiawassee Rodeo...from Page 1A

rodeo start time of 6 p.m.

Tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for children 6-12 years old, while parents will be able to save a little more money for the various delicious food vendors and arts and crafts with kids 5 and under entering free.

People can also look forward to testing their bucking mettle with the ever-popular mechanical bull attraction.

"We think this will be the biggest rodeo that we have had," Thomason said, "because we have a lot more contestants coming this year from various regions and states, including Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia and Iowa so far, as well as already having almost 200 more seats added in our availability."

"We are really excited that people are enjoying this rodeo event, and all of our events for that matter. We could not

have the fairgrounds without our wonderful community, so we want to let everyone know how grateful we are for all of you, and we cannot wait to see you there."

Thomason also wanted to inform people ahead of time about the upcoming Happy Together Tour arriving the following weekend on Saturday, June 4, inside the Anderson Music Hall, for which over 1,600 tickets have already been sold.

The concert will feature six musical acts starring The Turtles, Gary Puckett & Union Gap, The Association, The Buckingham, The Vogues and The Cowsills.

To purchase tickets or gather event information, visit [www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com](http://www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com), or stop by in person at 1311 Music Hall Road in Hiawassee or call the office at 706-896-4191.

# TCHS Class of 2022...from Page 1A

classmates. "to not be afraid to be yourself."

"If unforeseen circumstances come about, just try to keep going and stay optimistic about the future," she said. "No matter what happens in our lives, I know we will all get through it. I hope the best for everyone, and I am very grateful and thankful you chose me to represent our class. Good luck to you all."

Principal Perren then awarded diplomas alongside Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, which was followed by the classic "Turning of the Tassels" and the timeless tossing of the graduation hats.

Perren performed the Alma Mater before turning the program over to Peacock one last time for the benediction.

"Life is not linear," Peacock said. "Life goes all sorts of crazy ways, and almost never according to plan, but the special thing about us is that we always make it work. We always get it done, and we do it very well."

"I want to give thanks to everyone here in the stands today for supporting us, the administration and entire staff, and the beautiful students in front of us. But ultimately, we give thanks to God for being the light to our path."

After a closing prayer from Peacock, the ceremony concluded, and the 2022 Indi-



**Towns County High School Class President Kayla Peacock welcomed guests and closed the May 21 Commencement Exercises.**

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

ans were officially high school graduates. When spectating family and friends rushed onto the field to congratulate the graduates, Berrong reiterated that he was "excited and sad to see this group of kids go."

"At the same time, you see how much they have grown over the years, and you see what they are going to do with their lives and the accomplishments that they have achieved already, and that is just a feeling you can barely describe into words," he said.

"There is no question that these kids are going to be successful in life no matter what they choose to do. They may go in different paths, but they are going to find their own way."

The student body of 67 as a collective garnered \$215,000 in scholarships from 54 different local organizations, businesses, internal school programs and colleges. Congratulations to the Towns County High School Senior Class of 2022, and best of luck in the future. Go Indians!

# TCSO Auxiliary...from Page 1A

officers and have no law enforcement authority. They do, however, have the ability to summon law enforcement or emergency medical personnel via direct radio communication with Towns County 911 Dispatch.

And, with the completion of the course of study through the Law Enforcement Academy, auxiliary members have a much better understanding of how the Towns County system of law enforcement works.

Appropriately trained auxiliary volunteers help with public events at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Anderson Music Hall, Young Harris College, Towns County festivals, special community events and parades.

Additionally, auxiliary members are eligible to volunteer as clerical assistants in the Towns County Sheriff's Office or Detention Center when the need arises.

The 10-week Sheriff's Law Enforcement Academy course consists of nine specific units: Introduction of Command Staff, Jail Responsibilities, Patrol Stats/Responsibilities, Narcotics & Criminal Investigations/K-9 Demonstration, School Resource Officer/CHAMPS Program, State Certification/Technical Assistance Center/Administrative Services, Partnerships with Georgia State Patrol/Georgia Bureau of Investigation/Department of Natural Resources, Court Services/Responsibilities, and 911 Dispatch Center.

Each unit was presented by specialists within the Sheriff's Office from their respective areas of responsibility.

"We gave participants a snapshot of the Sheriff's Office," Chief Deputy Gene Moss said. "We basically opened the Sheriff's Office up to them and let them look at what we do, how we do it, and why."

Moss added that the policy of Sheriff Ken Henderson's office is transparency, not only to the participants in the Law Enforcement Academy, but to all Towns County residents, as the academy is open to every-



**Towns County Sheriff's Chief Deputy Gene Moss with Jill Gittens in the May 17 Sheriff's Auxiliary graduation.**

Photo by Mark Smith

one, not just those who join the auxiliary.

"We also did some fun stuff, some scenarios, like eyewitness identification," Moss said, alluding to having someone walk into a room unannounced with an item of some kind, acting out, then leaving, and then querying each class member on what they observed.

Moss said the class, in that exercise, saw firsthand how eyewitness perceptions can vary wildly.

"It was extremely informative. I really enjoyed it and learned a lot," said class member Ann Chotiner, echoing the sentiments of all 18 people in the class.

Class member Leta Reeves said, "There are so many departments that are attached that we as individuals outside law enforcement don't think about. The school, the court, the 911 Center – all these are attached to (the Sheriff's Office), and those are not things that we thought about (before the class)."

Moss and TCSO Com-

munity Relations Coordinator Jill Gittens said there will be another class this year but have not set a firm date yet, as they want to review the feedback from class members and presenters to determine if they need to make any adjustments going forward.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office wishes to sincerely thank Lead Pastor Steven Taylor and the staff at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church for opening their doors to the Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary to conduct classes on their campus.

Auxiliary Director Anna Denton said additional training for auxiliary members is in the works and just needs to be coordinated, including Basic and Advanced First Aid, CPR, AED, how to stop bleeding/wound care, self-defense, crowd control and active shooter training.

For more information about the next class or the Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary in general, call the TCSO non-emergency number at 706-896-7460.

# County Meeting...from Page 1A

Americans about our historical past while supporting Veterans, their family members and Veteran causes."

"What a blessing and honor it is to bring this tribute of war veterans to Towns County," Bradshaw said. "We have been working on this for quite a while, and now we finally get to present this for everyone to enjoy in beautiful weather."

"(We will be honoring) those who fought for our freedoms that we are blessed with today and all of the sacrifices they made to their families and for each and every one of us in our nation, and we want to welcome everyone to come and hope to see you there."

For more information, including on the origins of the organization bringing the tribute, visit <https://www.americanveteranstravelingtribute.com/>.

In other news, Bradshaw said that SPLOST sales tax collections were "still coming in as predicted ... so we are on target to meet our goals, so we are thankful for that."

"So far, the economy is holding its own as far as tourism and people coming to the county to visit," he said.

In new business, Bradshaw reviewed signing a new service agreement with ETC Communications for phone service by county officials and departments.

"We switched phone companies about four years ago now, and our two reasons we did that was, for one, it saved you, the taxpayers, nearly \$18,000 per year, and the second reason is, the service is just incredible," Bradshaw said. "If we need a problem fixed, they are right on it with speedy service."

The new service agreement sees a discounted service credit at 20% for a savings of nearly \$200 per month.

Next up, Bradshaw signed the Air Methods Community Partnership Agreement to cover Towns County residents for medically necessary emergency helicopter services.

The agreement guarantees that all full-time residents of Towns County are automatically covered expense wise should they need to be transported via Air Methods life flight.

In the public comments portion of the meeting, active local resident Joan Crothers announced the Towns County Farmer's Market will be opening on Saturday, June 4.

Bradshaw also revealed local renovations that have happened or are in the works, including new benches at the Veterans Park and the addition of rubberized mulch to the playground at Towns County Beach, which will also be receiving a commercial swing set within weeks.

The commissioner holds his regular meetings every third Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the Towns County Courthouse. Those interested in learning more about what is happening in the county can stop by Bradshaw's office in the courthouse or call 706-896-2276.