

# Towns County Herald

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## Class of 2021 to begin new journey after graduation

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The 75 members of the Towns County High School Class of 2021 celebrated the end of their journey in secondary schooling with graduation on Saturday, May 22, on the field of Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

Ellee King, Historian for 2021, spoke to her class on the conclusion of their Towns County adventure and the memories they have made. "It seems like yesterday we were graduating kindergarten, and now we are graduating high school," Ellee said. "You have all accomplished so much already, and you should be proud of yourselves for making it here today."

"I know you will all do great things and accomplish so much more, whether you choose

to continue your education, enter the military or go into the workforce. As you go out into the world, I hope you never forget where you came from or where your roots lie."

Class of 2021 Salutatorian Liam King discussed the importance of time as well as the changes before him and his classmates.

"The present is the middle ground between two popular things people dwell on, the future and the past," Liam said. "Instead of focusing on what could be and what could have been, I challenge every person to reflect and focus on the now."

"We all should do this because the seeds of our future are sown into our past. Our history is defined by what occurs in the present. 2021 has been the year of an ever-changing present with many

events shaping the foundation of their future."

Liam expressed gratitude for the dedication of his classmates and school staff to staying open amid COVID-19, allowing the Class of 2021 to have all the important senior-year experiences.

"This school year became a year of adaptation," Liam said. "We constantly had to be aware of those sitting next to us if quarantine was warranted. At first, all those around the exposed person would have to go home, but then it changed to where you were safe if you had on a mask."

"These constant changes and updates to regulations never left a dull moment at school and required the administrators, teachers, staff, administrators, and parents to be vigilant if we wanted the school to stay

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TCHS Class of '21 graduates were overjoyed to be completing their high school education last week by finally earning their diplomas. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds saddles up for rodeo May 28-29

By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The "most dangerous 8 seconds in sports" returns to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Memorial Day Weekend, with two days of edge-of-your-seat, family-friendly entertainment featuring bucking horses, bulls, specialty acts and world-class contestants.

Boots, buckles and cowboy hats will take Hiwassee by storm May 28-29 as contestants from across North America show off their skills in the International Professional Rodeo Association and Southeastern Professional Rodeo Association competition.

Despite a wealth of talent and personalities filling the weekend lineup, including Miss Rodeo U.S.A. Kylee Campbell, there's no doubt who'll earn the loudest round of applause.



Hiwassee's own Andrew Turpin will be competing in the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo May 29 at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo Submitted

Towns County's own Andrew Turpin will certainly be a fan-favorite when he rolls into the Fairgrounds Saturday night. The 26-year-old Hiwassee

native has already made a name for himself on the SPRA circuit, claiming the association's 2020 Rookie of the Year honors last

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## US Rep. Clyde to speak at Memorial Day Ceremony

News Special  
Towns County Herald

Veterans of Foreign Wars Garrett-Owenby Post 7807 will host a special guest for the Monday, May 31, Memorial Day Ceremony in Towns County Veterans Park - U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde of Georgia's Ninth Congressional District.

"We are honored this year to have Congressman Andrew Clyde, who is a retired Navy veteran, as our keynote speaker," said Mel Keyton of the VFW. "All veterans are encouraged to attend and be recognized."

The ceremony is set to take place at 11 a.m. In the event of inclement weather, the location will be changed to the VFW building on Sunnyside Road.

Congressman Clyde is a combat veteran, small business

owner and a proud Georgian.

After earning his commission from the University of Notre Dame, he served as a U.S. Navy officer for 28 years, which included three combat deployments to Kuwait and Iraq.

Upon receiving an honorable discharge, Congressman Clyde made his home in Athens, Georgia, and earned a master's degree in Corporate Finance and Entrepreneurship from the University of Georgia.

He established Clyde Army in 1991 and grew the company into a nationwide firearms business that currently operates two brick-and-mortar locations in Georgia.

Congressman Clyde was elected to the 117th Congress in November 2020 as the representative for Georgia's Ninth Congressional District. He and his wife Jennifer



Congressman Andrew Clyde are residents of Jackson County and members of the Prince Avenue Baptist Church, where Congressman Clyde serves as a deacon.

Presently, Congressman Clyde serves on the House Committee on Oversight and Reform and the Homeland Security Committee.

## Kennedi Henson signs to play YHC Mountain Lions basketball



Kennedi Henson's fellow Lady Indians joined her May 12 in celebrating her commitment to becoming a Mountain Lion in the fall. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Lady Indian Kennedy Henson will take on a new look in the fall when she dons

a Mountain Lions uniform to play on the Young Harris College Women's Basketball Team.

Henson, who graduated with the Class of 2021 on

Saturday, May 22, gathered with family and friends for refreshments at the Middle/High School Media Center

May 12 in celebration of her

See Henson, Page 8A

## Man suffers rattlesnake bite on Appalachian Trail Saturday

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

A rattlesnake bite victim was transported from Towns County to a nearby trauma center via the Blairsville-based Air Life Georgia 14 medical helicopter on Saturday, May 22.

The bite occurred around 10 a.m. that day, affecting the leg of a 31-year-old male in the vicinity of the Appalachian Trail near Hiwassee.

Rescuers mobilized off Georgia 75 South at Mill Creek to bring the bite victim out, with the Georgia State Patrol attempting to airlift him from the trail.

He was reportedly unconscious at the time of his evacuation, though his present condition and other details were not known at press time.

Towns County Sheriff's Office, Emergency Medical Service, Fire Department, Search & Rescue, and GSP personnel responded to the scene, along with Air Life Georgia.

According to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources,



This Timber Rattlesnake was used to conduct a class on venomous snakebites and first aid for emergency responders at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on Jan. 6, 2015. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

sources, there are two venomous snake species in this region: Copperheads and Timber Rattlesnakes.

Timber Rattlesnakes are "large, heavy-bodied snakes reaching a maximum length of nearly 6 feet in the Coastal Plain and about 5 feet in the mountains, but most range from

3-5 feet in length," per Georgia DNR.

"The background color ranges through various shades of pink, yellow, tan, gray, brown and olive to velvety black," DNR continued. "A series of brown to black chevron-shaped crossbands (15-34) typically

See Rattlesnake, Page 8A

## Bradshaw joins Movers & Shakers for first post-COVID meeting

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The Mountain Movers and Shakers civic group reconvened following a long year-and-nine-week break caused by COVID-19, meeting at the Sundance Grill May 21 to welcome special guest speaker Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

It's been a long pause for the shakers, who have avoided meetings out of an abundance of caution for COVID. Fortunately, public health



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw was happy to join William "Scotty" Scott and Michael Borkman for the May 21 return of the Mountain Movers and Shakers. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Sheriff's Office busts 'major drug supplier' with meth, heroin

News Special  
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office and Georgia State Patrol arrested a "major drug supplier" on Wednesday, May 19.

In connection with the arrest, Samuel Elton Moss, 43, of Hiwassee, has been charged with trafficking methamphetamine, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possession of heroin, possession of a controlled substance, and possession of THC oil.

The arrest was made

following a traffic stop initiated by the Georgia State Patrol, during which Moss allegedly attempted to throw drugs out of the vehicle, according to the Sheriff's Office.

Moss' arrest was the result of a two-month investigation by the Sheriff's Office Drug Investigations Unit. He was being investigated as a "major drug supplier" responsible for distributing drugs to street dealers in Towns and other surrounding counties.

The large quantity of drugs confiscated from Moss



Samuel Elton Moss

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# MEMORIAL DAY

REMEMBER & HONOR

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# Bradshaw...from Page 1A

metrics have been improving for a while now, including a high vaccination rate and low community spread in Towns County.

And the Movers and Shakers plan on resuming their weekly meeting schedule of guests and announcements every Friday at 8 a.m., this week featuring District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter May 28.

In the packed-out meeting, co-emcees Michael Borkman and William “Scotty” Scott kicked things off with an invocation, the Pledge of Allegiance, and an introduction of Commissioner Bradshaw.

For his part, Bradshaw expressed excitement over the return of the weekly meetings before offering a “State of the County” address in which he touched on COVID and other topics.

“I never thought when I ran for this office that I would be faced with some of the decisions that had to be made – I mean, it was mind boggling,” Bradshaw said. “You’re telling people to close their business, their hotel, their rental cabins, their dining rooms in the restaurants.

“You’ve got people calling, saying, ‘I can’t pay my bills, I’m going to lose my business – don’t do this to me.’ Then, you’ve got people calling and saying, ‘You have got to shut down everything.’ It was a terrible position to be in.

“But I’ll tell you what, through prayer and faith and the help of many people supporting me, we made the decisions.”

Bradshaw said the decisions to protect the public were actually easy to make, but seeing people struggling because of those decisions, made at the national, state and local levels, was the hard part.

“We acted very aggressively at that time based on the information that we were

receiving on the coronavirus,” Bradshaw said.

One of the immediate effects of COVID-19 on county government specifically was the loss of three Colwell Probation Detention Center detainee crews, Bradshaw said. These crews typically keep up lawn maintenance at county properties, which temporarily fell to the Road Department.

The commissioner has been grateful for Sheriff Ken Henderson forming a volunteer detainee crew out of the Towns County Jail to alleviate the Road Department, which needed to get back to focusing on roadwork.

Bradshaw also highlighted the fact that his office had been able to secure a public testing site at the Towns County Health Department not long after the start of the pandemic, back when the only other place to get tested was in Gainesville.

Further, he spoke about the county’s vaccine partnerships, including local government lending the Recreation and Conference Center as a mass vaccination site for the public through the efforts of both the Health Department and Synergy Health of Hiawassee.

An unforeseen consequence of the pandemic was the increase in local spending via an influx of visitors to the area, as people, unable to fly, got out of the cities by driving to the less densely populated mountains.

Anticipating the worst, Bradshaw had enacted a strict spending freeze at the onset of the pandemic, and while he will maintain a conservative approach moving forward, sales taxes and other revenues have done exceptionally well in the aftermath of COVID.

Bradshaw reminded the Movers and Shakers that there are many events coming up in

Towns County this summer, including at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, noting that “tourism dollars spent in this county saves each taxpayer over \$800 out of your property taxes.”

Moving on, Bradshaw discussed the upcoming \$8 million renovation at the courthouse using SPLOST-backed bonds. He expects the renovations to be done in no sooner than two years, to include a brand-new addition on the backside and a complete redesign of the main building.

“The architects are drawing the plans right now,” Bradshaw said. “We will look at those as soon as they get done, then we are going to (start) interviewing construction companies and going through that process. And we hope to break ground late summer or early fall.”

Bradshaw pointed out that materials and other building costs have increased dramatically in the last year, so he’s looking at ways of being “very frugal and very careful in how we do everything, because we know that you’re not going to do it for \$8 million.”

“But we do have money in the bank, we’re in good shape, and we thank God for that,” Bradshaw said.

Among other announcements, Bradshaw said his office was preparing to separate commercial and residential garbage at the Transfer Station to give residents an easier, cleaner experience, and that he had renewed the Air Methods contract covering residents for medical helicopter transport.

Additionally, the commissioner informed those gathered of the recently designated animal control officer through the Towns County Sheriff’s Office, as well as the new Young Harris Fire Station on Georgia 66, which has been operational for more than half a year.

Having the new station there “helps lower the homeowners’ insurance of people that live in that area,”

and it features a new helipad for easy access to life-saving medical helicopter transports. Now that COVID has receded,

Bradshaw hopes to host a grand opening there potentially in July.

# Graduation...from Page 1A

open. “Thankfully, by the grace of God and the cooperation of all groups involved in the school system, we were successfully able to have an entire school year.”

Valedictorian Laura Kate Gleaton spoke on the Class of 2021’s experiences over the last four years and the accomplishments of her fellow students.

“One thousand, three hundred and seventy-five days ago, we walked into Towns County High School not knowing who or what we would become over the next four years,” Gleaton said. “It was by both the support around us and our own determination that the Class of 2021 rose to the top in many areas of school involvement.

“Together, we won championships; we made playoffs; we survived online school; we adapted to a world we never imagined at the beginning of freshman year. Plainly stated, we made history.”

While the Class of 2021 will miss certainly Towns County High, Gleaton encouraged them to look toward their bright futures and opportunities outside the halls of the school.

“Sitting on this field, our emotions swimming, bittersweet is the only word to describe the feeling,” Gleaton said. “This is it. You yelled ‘Go Blue’ for the last time at a Friday night football game. You ate your last slice of cheesy crust pizza in the cafeteria. You watched your last



The Towns County scoreboard was appropriately set prior to Saturday’s graduation ceremony for the Class of 2021.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Towns County highlight video. And you walked the halls for the last time surrounded by your friends. The list of lasts this year has brought is almost never ending. However, this end to an era marks the beginning of a new one.”

High School Principal Roy Perren congratulated students and families on their dedication to completing school during a challenging time of much uncertainty.

“I want to begin by saying I did not and still do not take COVID lightly,” Perren said. “Many of us lost friends and loved ones to this virus. Many of us have had COVID ourselves, me included. I faithfully wore my mask until two weeks after I received my J&J shot on March 18.”

Added Perren, “We saw a pattern that was later confirmed by the CDC. Students are less likely to develop COVID. There may have been one case

at the high school that was transmitted from student to student.

“In fact, out of 150 high school students quarantined throughout the year, there were 20 positive cases among students.”

Also in the ceremony, Class President Vanessa Floyd welcomed guests, Summer Rahn sang “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Maddie Nichols performed “The Climb” as Special Music, Abby Mauldin offered the Benediction, and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong assisted in awarding diplomas.

By the end of commencement exercises, each diploma had been handed out, students had tossed their caps to the sky, and these Indians had entered the next phases of their lives as they said goodbye to teachers and friends that Saturday morning.

# Rodeo...from Page 1A

fall. “I always enjoy coming back home, even if performing in front of friends and family puts a little more stress on you, especially since so much of this sport is mental,” Turpin said. “But I love the rodeo; it’s a passion.

“I’m competing somewhere every weekend. I actually have another event in Tennessee on Friday, but I’ll be back here on Saturday.”

Turpin’s career began in the ninth grade as part of a roping team, but his focus turned to calf roping here recently, and he hasn’t looked back.

“The past two years I’ve really put a lot of extra work into (calf roping);” he said, “and last year, I set a goal to (attend all the SPRA events) and try to make the finals.”

Turpin’s shiny new Rookie of the Year belt buckle isn’t the only locally claimed hardware. Last summer’s show at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds attracted more than 4,500 fans and went on to claim the SPRA’s Best New

Outdoor Rodeo of 2020.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason knows it won’t be easy, but she believes this year’s event will top the 2020 edition. Unlike last year’s once-postponed rodeo, at least a dozen food vendors are expected this weekend, along with approximately 15 arts and crafts vendors.

Special edition Hiawassee Pro Rodeo shirts will be on sale, too, with mechanical bulls and pony rides headlining the children’s entertainment.

“None of this would be possible without our wonderful sponsors,” Thomason said. “We wouldn’t be able to do what we do here without them. We just hope that everyone comes out this weekend and enjoys the rodeo.

“We’ve added new bleachers because we had such a large crowd last year, and we believe this year is going to be just as big, if not bigger.”

While the number of competitors won’t be determined until early in the week, last year’s show brought in more than 200 contestants,

and Southern Pro Rodeo Company Owner Robin Brooks expects a similar number.

“We’ll have no way of knowing until after call-in, but I would think we’ll have at least 200 again,” he said. “One thing I do know is, this weekend we’re going to put on a professional rodeo and provide good family fun with cowboys from all over the United States.”

All COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted at the Fairgrounds, Thomason said, and Brooks’ company doesn’t plan on bringing any mandates with them.

“We still ask that people be mindful and courteous, but we’re going to rodeo, we’re going to have fun, and we’re going to do it without masks,” Brooks declared.

Advance tickets are available online or at the Fairgrounds Office. Tickets are \$15 per day for adults and \$10 for children ages 6-12. Admission is free for children 5 and under. Gates open at 6 p.m. each day, and the action gets underway at 8 p.m.

## Henson...from Page 1A

accomplishment in signing to play collegiate ball.

To say Henson is a talented athlete is an understatement; for example, she managed to reach the coveted 1,000-point milestone in her high school career even after suffering two ACL tears during games as a freshman and junior, resulting in her missing about one and a half seasons of play.

And though she lost precious time on the court, the star athlete trained hard to get back in the game. This required many hours of physical therapy, workouts and adjustments in her playing style.

The determined Henson never took her eyes off the ball, however, and made it back to play after each injury, assisting the team in progressing to the State Tournament Sweet 16 both her sophomore and senior years.

Henson simply loves the game, the competition and the camaraderie, which made her the perfect point guard and shooting guard for the Lady Indians and allowed her to develop a rock-solid reputation as an all-around team player.

"Kennedi is just very caring of her teammates, and very, very unselfish," said mother Robyn Henson. "It was kind of a tearjerker on Senior Night, because instead of her racking up points, as the ball handler she made sure that every senior had their moment."

"She does it naturally; when she was little, me and half the parents would be like, 'Why didn't you pass that ball? Why didn't you take it on yourself because you had a better shot at making those last two points and tying the game?' And she wouldn't."

"My three words for this kid are: very unselfish, very self-motivated, and persevering to the highest. She's always taken good with bad and stayed positive."

Thanks to the commitment of her parents, Henson has received plenty of playing time over the years, including on travel teams and regular season play at Towns County Middle and High School.

She got her start playing basketball around the age of 4 with the Upward Sports Basketball Team at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church. Since those early days, Henson has played nonstop year-round, racking up many a mile on the family car with off-season travel ball.

In addition to her basketball prowess, Henson commanded the softball diamond as a pitcher with incredible batting abilities. She holds the record for being the youngest Towns County player to hit a home run, as a seventh-grader, and the ball is still on display at the Middle School.

Henson has always wanted to do something in the medical



Class of 2021 graduate Kennedi Henson posing with her historic home run softball that remains on display at Towns County Middle.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

field and plans to study biology for a potential career as a nurse anesthetist, an occupation that caught her attention following interactions with multiple medical professionals during treatment for her basketball injuries.

One of the reasons she chose to attend Young Harris College is so "the community that supported me all these years can watch me play."

"It means a lot to be able to play as a Mountain Lion, especially with everything that I've been through," Henson said. "I wasn't sure if I would even be able to make it, but I am."

In light of her continued success as a student-athlete, Henson said she would like to thank her family, coaches and teammates, both at Towns County Schools and the various travel teams she participated in as a young player.

She's also grateful for her big sister Kristen, with whom she got to scrimmage and play together at camps as an eighth-grader on the High School JV team, when Kristen was a varsity senior.

Kennedi has seen Kristen as a role model and a source of competition for as long as she can remember – "I always wanted to beat her at everything she did" – with both wearing the No. 10 jersey in the Towns County basketball and softball programs, which their grandfather also wore.

Kristen is now a senior at Young Harris College who will be graduating this fall, so the sisters will be getting a little overlap together in college as well.

Additionally, the Class of 2021 graduate wanted to thank the community for coming out to see her over the years, and she expressed gratitude for her

family and friends at the May 12 signing ceremony.

"I definitely couldn't have done all my achievements without their support," Henson said. "And I definitely wouldn't be where I am today without my parents and all the coaches that I've had, who have all had a huge impact on my life and my life choices."

"I just hope everything goes back to normal next year (with COVID-19) so everyone who did like to come watch Young Harris games and support me can still do that."

For his part, TCHS Girls Basketball Head Coach Brian Hunnicutt is incredibly proud of Henson. He started as assistant coach the year she joined JV, and he head coached her all four years of high school. He has no doubts she will succeed in both college academics and athletics.

"Kennedi is an exemplary student, works very hard, is Top 10% of her class, takes advanced courses and has already taken several college courses," Hunnicutt said. "As a player, her knowledge of the game is very good – she understands the game like a coach."

"And she's tough-minded, having to come through two injuries and change her game somewhat to fit the injury until she could rehab back. She's a deadly shooter, she sees the court well, she rebounds hard, and she fights hard as well."

Attending that day were members of the Lady Indians Basketball Team, Henson's family – father Chris, mother Robyn, and sister Kristen – High School administrators Roy Perren and Jim Melton, and School Resource Officer Donnie Jarrard.

## Rattlesnake...from Page 1A

cross the body. The tail is black and tipped by a segmented rattle.

"Very dark or solid black individuals are common in higher mountains of the northeastern part of the state but are rare elsewhere."

According to the Smithsonian's National Zoo & Con-

servation Biology Institute, "the Timber Rattlesnake is venomous with venom potent enough to kill a human," and though these bites are rare, they are considered medical emergencies.

"Loose sections of the tail made of keratin – the same substance as human hair and fingernails – form the characteristic

rattles or 'buttons' at the tip of the Timber Rattlesnake's tail," per the Smithsonian. "When threatened, it props itself up and shakes its rattle, which presses the buttons together producing a rapid, crisp rattling sound (that) serves as a warning before the snake strikes."

## First Piedmont University Graduation

Spring commencement services were held May 14 for the first-ever graduating class of Piedmont University. Piedmont officially changed its name from Piedmont College to Piedmont University in April. About 16 percent of the more than 400 undergraduate and graduate students earned cum laude, magna cum laude, and summa cum laude honors.

Among the graduates were: Luis Dunn and Alvin Wells both of Hiawassee, GA.

## SNHU announces President's List

It is with great pleasure that Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) congratulates the following students on being named to the Winter 2021 President's List. The winter term runs from January to May.

Full-time students who have earned a minimum grade-point average of 3.700 and above are named to the President's List. Local students include Gary Duncan of Young Harris.

## S.A.F.E. Board Meeting

The next meeting of the Board of Directors of S.A.F.E. (Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, Inc.) will be May 18, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. Call 706-379-1901 for location.

## Drug Bust...from Page 1A



Sheriff Ken Henderson is thankful to his investigators and deputies for carrying out his mission of getting drugs off the streets of Towns County.

Photo/Facebook

was in the process of being delivered for sales in the area, according to the Sheriff's Office, which noted additionally that the bust interrupted the supply chain to keep a large quantity of meth, heroin and pills from being sold in the community.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that he and the Sheriff's

Office remain committed to impacting and eradicating drugs in Towns County.

He would like to commend the Georgia State Patrol, Towns County Sheriff's Office Investigators and Deputies on a great job and their commitment to fighting against drugs.