

Prescribed Fire Council holds first North Georgia meeting on June 6

By Mark Smith
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The Georgia Prescribed Fire Council has historically met in Tifton, though the group held its inaugural North Georgia meeting in Jasper on June 6.

Fire professionals nationwide use prescribed burning, or controlled burning, to get rid of underbrush and other vegetative fuels in and around wildland areas, which helps to mitigate potentially catastrophic wildfires and meet other land management objectives.

Frank Riley of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council said the June 6 meeting was the first time the Prescribed Fire Council had brought the U.S. Forest Service together with private landowners to talk about the practice of prescribed burning.

“Prescribed burning, as it applies to Union and Towns counties, means reduced fuel around neighborhoods and the forests around there,” said Riley, who also assists in administering the Firewise Program in the state.

Added Riley, “So, if you get a lightning strike or a camper leaves a campfire burning and a wildfire gets out, then we’ve already prescribe burned around the community in the area and the fire won’t have any fuel to burn.”

To illustrate his point, Riley spoke of an 11,000-acre wildfire in rural southern New Jersey that took place earlier this year.

About two weeks prior to that fire, the local fire warden had done some routine prescribed fire burning along a roadway about five miles north of where the wildfire started.

When the fire got to the roadway, because there was no fuel for it to burn, the fire went out, likely sparing approximately 1,300 homes located five miles further on thanks to routine prescribed fire burning in that area.

And not only is pre-



Frank Riley speaking on fire safety.

scribed burning a safety measure for communities, it is a tool used in forestry management to maintain biodiversity.

“Deer and turkey and all the wildlife in the forest subsist on forest grasses and flora,” said Riley. “If the forest grows up into briars and sticks and rhododendron and laurel thickets, there’s nothing for the wildlife to eat.”

“So, when you burn it, it kills all those briars and bushes, and then the young grasses come back up and the wildlife has food. This is a natural phenomenon.”

Riley said that water quality improves with prescribed burning as well, since leaves and groundcover are burned away, allowing for rain to penetrate the ground rather than be runoff.

According to the Georgia Prescribed Fire Council website, “Frequent fires, set by lightning strikes and Native Americans, have shaped Georgia’s ecosystems for thousands of years. Our forest systems

evolved with fire and continues to need the strategic application of fire that mimics this natural cycle.”

Prescribed fire managers conduct careful planning to minimize smoke impacts on public health and safety, including the consideration of weather conditions for optimal smoke dispersion.

That’s not to say there won’t be smoke in communities during controlled burns, but prescribed fires are conducted at times when they will have the least impact on surrounding areas.

Several websites may be accessed for more information on prescribed fire: www.garx-fire.com; www.GoodFires.org; www.appalachianfire.org; and www.frames.gov, just to name a few.

For information on protecting a residence against wildfire, contact the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council at 706-894-1591, or call the fire department for information on Firewise.

Union and Towns County Athletes make 2019 Special Olympics ‘amazingly successful event’

Monday, May 20th, was a day to celebrate the students from each school in the district to cheer on the athletes, play games and help keep everyone entertained.

The games began with the Union County High School band playing *The Olympic Fan Fare* medley, while Athletes carried the torch and banners around the track. Athletes span from Union and Towns County Schools and Avita Community Partners with their teachers and supporters. Next, the crowds were led in the singing of the National Anthem by 2016 Union County graduate, Trevor Tracy.

When the games finally began, The Union County High School Softball Team came out to the field and played soccer and corn hole with those waiting their turn to participate. Organizers for this event included the Local Coordinators for Special Olympics: Becky Tracy and Union County Coach Jessica Stewart; Amy Rosser, Erin Schuette, Sondra George and Michelle Pyrlk from Towns County; and Avita Community Partners Special Olympics Coordinator Tonia Weaver.

Special thanks are owed to so many community partners that it is tough to name them all. McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in Hiwassee donated lunch along with volunteers to help serve. Blairsville Kiwanis and Knights of



2019 Special Olympic Athletes

Columbus were proud sponsors of the event, along with a very generous donation from the “Dream Riders” Home Town Foundation. Chick-fil-A of Blairsville generously donated cookies to enjoy, along with their beloved Mascot and their Student Leadership Program participants to socialize and play games. Sav-a-Lot in Blairsville and Union County Recreation Department donated enough water to keep every athlete, supporter and community volunteer hydrated. Several tents for the event were donated by Union County Transportation Office Manager, Ashely Holland

and Dr. Fred Lodge donated his time and kindness to host this event. Towns and Union County Transportation departments both made special arrangements to ensure that all of the individuals served through Avita Community Partners and the schools made it to the games on time.

With insurmountable love and support from the community, schools, volunteers, parents, friends and family, along with the hard work of the athletes, the 2019 Spring Special Olympics was an amazingly successful event.

Submitted by Carly Anderson of Avita Community Partners

Towns County Head Start still has openings

The Towns County Head Start program still has openings for the 2019-2020 program year. The Towns County Head Start/Georgia Pre-K program is a high quality early childhood program that is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, is Day Care Licensed, and received 3 out of 3 stars from Georgia’s Quality Rated and Improvement System.

To complete an application for the Head Start Program call the Head Start Office to schedule an appointment. You must bring the following information to complete a Head Start application: 1) Copy of child’s Birth Certificate; 2) Income verification for the past 12 months for all household members; 3) Immunization record 3231.

Helpful Head Start information includes the following:

Copy of Medicaid, Peach, or Insurance Card; Copy of child’s Social Security Card.

Head Start service is provided for all children who qualify, regardless of race, sex, creed or religion. Head Start also serves children with disabilities. Children must be three or four years old by September 1, 2019 to be age-eligible for the Head Start program.

Georgia Pre-K slots are filled by a lottery drawing. You can stop by the Head Start/Pre-K office to put your child’s name on the wait list. A child must be age four by September 1, 2019.

No transportation is provided.

For more information please call the Towns County Head Start/Pre-K Office at (706) 896-4131, ext. # 4.

Civic Meeting...from Page 1A

Gardens.

Howard said they have instituted a new program for locals and natives of the area where one special day is set aside called “Mountain Wildflowers Day,” on which locals get free tours and discounted prices on plants.

The Full Moon concert series at Hamilton Gardens will occur during the summer months on the Tuesday or Thursday closest to the full moon each month.

The Summer Lecture Series began on June 7 and will continue the first and third Fridays of each month through the summer season.

Howard said a traffic counter had been installed at the gardens and that approximately 7,000 cars have come through since January, 3,000 of which came in the last 60 days.

Given a two-person per car average, that’s about 14,000 visitors so far this year to Hamilton Gardens.

Even with only 25% of visitors signing in, Howard has determined that visitors from 27 states and eight countries have visited Hamilton Gardens this year.

A need for financial sustainability has been identified, said Howard, so the board has instituted Hamilton Gardens memberships for \$25 per year. The admission fee for non-members is \$2 per person. For more information, see www.hamiltongardens.org.

The Hinton Center is a nonprofit United Methodist agency in Hayesville, North Carolina, which acts as a retreat and conference center that hosts about 1,000 guests each year, many of whom participate in mission outreach “making homes warmer, drier and safer for our neighbors in need.”

Guest speaker and Hinton Center President Jacqueline Gottlieb said the



Jacqueline Gottlieb of the Hinton Center in last week’s Towns County Civic Association Meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

center would be celebrating its 58th anniversary on June 7, and that she had been with the center for eight years.

Gottlieb said that the center spends tens of thousands of dollars each year with its home repair and housing ministry, and that, in order to maximize their impact, they’ve had to learn to be extremely selective in partnering with other nonprofits.

For more information on the Hinton Center, see www.hintoncenter.org.

Resident Liza Strub spoke briefly on the Clean Sweep/Adopt-a-Road program in Towns County, saying there will no longer be a one-mile restriction on the length of road a person or group adopts.

However, the responsible party must commit to four sweeps per year and submit a status report to Adopt-a-Road Coordinator Alisa Richards in the Towns County Commissioner’s Office.

Also in the meeting, Civic Association President Michael Courey presided over a vote on two proposed amendments to

the bylaws.

The first amendment was to allow non-residents who own or lease property or have a business in Towns County to become Civic Association members with full voting rights while restricting elected positions to members who reside full-time in the county.

The second amendment was to increase board membership from eight to nine members, with a minimum of seven and a maximum of nine.

Both amendments passed unanimously.

Lake clean up volunteers needed

“Friends of the Nottely and Toccoa” are looking for volunteer kayakers and canoeists for a lake clean up at Meeks Park II Canoe Launch June 15 from 9-11 a.m.

Trash bags will be provided. Please bring a hat, sunscreen, bottle of water, close toed shoes, life jacket and a trash picker if you have one. Don’t forget your kayak or canoe. River’s Alive will be sponsoring this event and have donated t-shirts to the first 28 volunteers.

For more information please contact Amber Jensen at 770-403-5975 or join “Friends

of the Nottely and Toccoa” Facebook page.

Thank you for volunteering to help keep Union County beautiful.

Opportunity to change a life

Do you know a loved one who struggles with addictions or strongholds?

Unity Farm, a biblically based, 12-step Men’s Recovery Home is located in Union County.

For more information please call 706-851-5390 or 706-455-9043.