

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 93 Number 33

Wednesday, June 15, 2022

Schools gear up for 2022-23 over summer break

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

With the onset of summer break, the Towns County School District has begun the daunting task of preparing for the 2022-2023 school year. With that said, several school matters were addressed at the June Board of Education meeting on Monday, June 6.

Among those matters was Student Drug Screening Procedures for the Middle and High School Student Handbooks, the concern being how the school should deal with students who test positive for the first time in random drug testing.

All students who participate in extracurricular activities or drive on campus are subject to random drug screenings.

“On the first offense for a positive drug test, originally, before these proposed changes, there were no consequences as far as the school goes,” Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said. “If a student tests positive, and there’s literally no consequences at all, it sends a bad message.”

The proposed change is for students to be docked 10% of their participation in extracurricular activities, and to not be allowed to go on overnight trips with their respective activity groups.

For example, a positive-testing basketball player would be suspended from playing two games in a 20-game season,

though this change would apply to all school extracurricular activities, not just athletics.

Also, students who have a vehicle would not be allowed to drive on campus and would have to arrange a ride to and from school for 15 school days.

These changes, if approved at the July regular board meeting, would be added to the Middle and High School Student Handbooks.

Moving along, the board approved a trial of the Fanning Institute Leadership Curriculum through the University of Georgia for third and ninth grades.

“We would like to start next school year with third grade and ninth grade as a trial year for the school year and try

to expand on that as we can,” Berrong said. “This teaches leadership skills and good citizenship to our students.”

School Finance Director Underwood said that the Final 2022-23 Budget “remains the same.”

“The only thing that will be added is the schedule and supplements,” she said. “The change for this is we did increase the non-certified scales – all scales beginning pay increased 75 cents (per hour).”

Continuing, “For the month of April, we ended the month at 83% of the year. We have collected 100 percent of the revenue that was budgeted.

“On the property tax, See School Board, Page 8A



Newly elected Towns County School Board Member David Phillips attended the June meeting. Phillips will swear in at the start of 2023. Photo by Mark Smith

Farmers Market continues to ‘produce’ great food, fun

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Saturday, June 11, the Towns County Farmers Market opened for its second weekend of the season, which will continue every Saturday through October from 9 a.m. to noon at the entrance to the Towns County Beach, directly across from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

The Farmers Market is all about community coming together for locally grown produce and handmade food items, as well as arts and crafts and the making of lasting memories by vendors and patrons alike.

Local vendors and couple Herb Schneider and Susan Maguire have enjoyed their mountain life here for nearly six years, having moved up from South Florida.

Schneider retired as a construction project manager, and he and his wife have been working on their homemade



The Towns County Farmers Market features everything from fresh produce and household plants to jams and art.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

crafts for the last five years, including capturing the beautiful local landscape and wood box making along with bee traps.

“After retirement, I wanted to start making practical things for people to have,” Schneider said. “I have always liked working with my hands and craftsmanship, so I chose to start making wood-finished boxes to keep in your home to store collectibles and whatever

See Farmers Market, Page 8A

Chatuge Anglers reel in First Place at state tourney

News Special
Towns County Herald

It is truly a pleasure to congratulate local Chatuge Anglers River Huffman and Robbie Barter for successfully achieving First Place to become champions of the Georgia BASS Nation Junior Division State Classic Tournament on Lake Hartwell June 3-4.

Huffman and Barter reeled in their 10-fish limit for a total of 35.03 pounds of bass to clinch the state tourney.

Now, their loyalty and dedication to the sport have given them the opportunity to compete at the 2022 Bassmaster Junior National Tournament in Tennessee July 29-30.

As many as 70 youth teams consisting of anglers in grades second through eighth are expected to compete for the junior championship title after qualifying for the tournament.

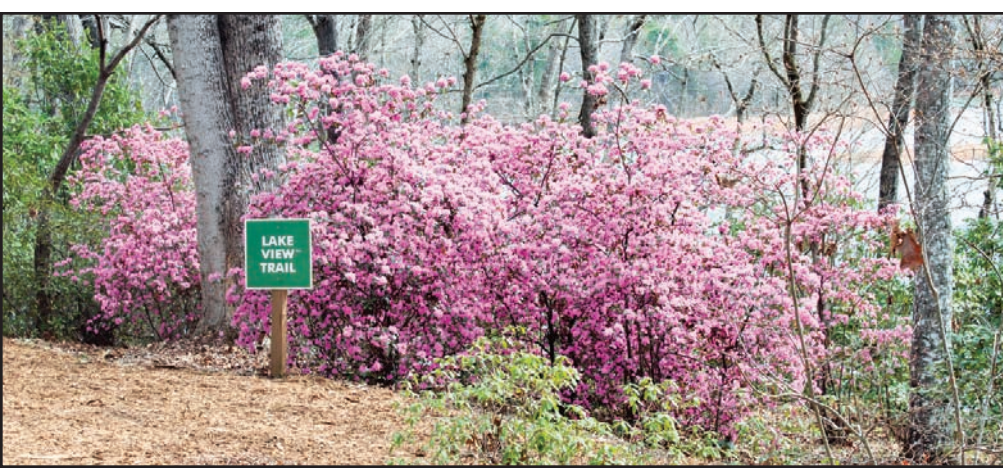
“Please join us in our kind and sincere appreciation to everyone who has supported and guided these young anglers in their performance and perseverance,” the team said last week. “If any individual and/or business would like to sponsor Chatuge Anglers as they ‘Cast Their Way To Nationals,’ we



Chatuge Anglers River Huffman and Robbie Barter showing off their loot for winning the Georgia BASS Nation Junior Division State Classic Tournament this month. Photo/Submitted

would be honored to print your logo or name on the banner that will fly as they represent the State of Georgia at Nationals.” To sponsor the Chatuge Anglers, please call 706-994-2217 or email huffmanblue08@yahoo.com.

‘Acoustic Sunset’ concerts coming to Hamilton Gardens



Hamilton Gardens is known for its native rhododendrons and azaleas, which bloom for several weeks each spring.

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Business has been picking up at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, with the county family friendly fun on offer this summer, to include the upcoming “Acoustic Sunset” concert series at the Hamilton Gardens.

Already this year, folks have enjoyed a number of events at the fairgrounds, from the rodeo to festivals and live music, and people can look forward to a slew of other exciting attractions to come amid great weather and beautiful mountain views.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason de-

scribed the “Acoustic Sunset” concert series as “something new we are trying this year in the Hamilton Gardens.”

The series will be debuting June 30, to run each Thursday from 6-9 p.m. through July 28. Food trucks and art vendors will be available throughout each evening, with live music

See Hamilton Gardens, Page 8A

Council discusses runoff mitigation at Cupid Falls Park

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The June 7 meeting of the Young Harris City Council and Mayor Andrea Gibby featured important updates on sewer line repairs and included talk of another option for the development of Cupid Falls Park, despite the recent cancellation of the ramp project.

Tony Ward of regional environmental organization MountainTrue spoke about Cupid Falls in the meeting.

Some will remember Ward from his former position as the Restoration Program coordinator for the now defunct Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition.

Ward brought his knowledge of invasive plant species and riverbank erosion to the meeting, sharing with city officials a document detailing the construction of bioretention facilities as a possible solution to concerns regarding toxic runoff.

“I was asked to advise on stormwater drains at Cupid Falls,” explained Ward. “The

most logical thing to do and the easiest and least expensive thing to do, is the rain garden.”

Such bioretention facilities, otherwise known as rain gardens and often mistaken for flower beds, are indentions in the ground at an unassuming depth of about 6 inches.

The depressions are lined with gravel over a layer of absorbent soil mixture. The layout would ensure collection of rainwater and the absorption of toxic runoff in a bid to pro-

See City Council, Page 8A

South Carolina man suffers fatal motorcycle accident

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On Saturday, June 4, a man out of Easley, South Carolina, crashed his motorcycle on Georgia 2 and later succumbed to his injuries, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

The accident occurred around 12:45 p.m. as Gary Gibson, 66, was traveling west on Georgia 2. About a quarter of a mile east of Cassie Lane, Gibson failed to maintain his



lane while negotiating a curve and “traveled off the right side of the road,” according to GSP. “After leaving the road,

(Gibson’s Kawasaki motorcycle) struck a guardrail face with its right side,” GSP said. “After initial impact with the guardrail, (the motorcycle) continued traveling west along the guardrail ... then traveled back into the westbound lane and overturned.”

Gibson was transported to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville by Towns County EMS, where he later died from injuries sustained in the accident, according to GSP.



Tony Ward of MountainTrue spoke with the Young Harris City Council last week about stormwater mitigation at Cupid Falls. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

2 Sections 16 Pages

Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,686.80
Chatuge	1,925.68
Nottely	1,776.85

Inside

Arrests	2A
Church	4B
Classifieds	6B
Opinion	4A
Legals	7B
Obits	5B
Sports	2B

See page 2A

Civic Association Meeting June 16

See page 2A

Runoff Early Voting Ends Friday

See page 3A

MADE IN GEORGIA

Jun 25-26

See page 2A

Blairsville Pro RODEO

June 17 & 18

See page 6A

School Board...from Page 1A

we budgeted \$6.3 million. We have collected \$6.4 million. On the (Title Ad Valorem Tax), we budgeted \$300,000. We've collected \$767,000 so far.

"And then on the sales tax, we have collected through the end of May \$2.4 million, and we budgeted \$1.9 million. Compared to this time last year, we're up \$324,000.

"So, we have collected 100% of the revenue that we budgeted, and then our expenditures – we're still under budget on our expenditures."

The School Board approved a Memorandum of Understanding between Towns County Schools and Mountain Regional Library for Pines Library Access Cards, or PLAY cards, for student use in the upcoming school year.

"There's no cost to the (school) system," Berrong said. "This just allows the local library to access our information systems so that students don't actually have (to get a library card). They can use their ID number from the school, and they get access to online materials."

The board approved the renewal of the Fiscal Year 2023 contract in the amount of \$13,133 between Towns County Board of Education and the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension for salary and benefits for the program. Towns County pays into this as well.

Also approved by the board was the annual contract with Family Connection.

"We have a contract with Family Connection where we are their fiscal agent," said

Berrong, adding that there's no cost to the schools for that service, as it is paid through a quarterly state grant.

High School Principal Roy Perren recommended the rehiring of retired math teacher Rob Benson to replace Chris Drury, who is taking an assistant principal position at another school.

Perren also recommended Chick Peterman for Athletic Trainer. Peterman has accepted the position contingent upon finding affordable living arrangements.

Special Education Director Michelle Pyrlik recommended Holly Garrett, Mary Fortenberry, and Shannon Gober for Special Education Paraprofessionals.

All recommendations were approved by the board.

The board also approved the surplus of several iPads and about 300 Chromebooks that have exceeded their useful life with the school due to state testing requirements.

Rather than just recycling them, Berrong said the school would like to distribute these machines to senior citizen groups or others who might be able to use them. For more information, call 706-896-4131, ext. 1021.

In his Superintendent's Report, Berrong said that the End of Grade testing scores for grades three through eight and the End of Course testing scores for grades nine through 12 appear to be in line for another great year for Towns County students.

However, later comparisons with other schools in the

Pioneer RESA district will ultimately tell the story.

With all the unbudgeted, surplus income and grants the district has taken in this year, Berrong said that now is the time to invest in some upgrades.

"I've allotted \$100,000 to all math and science (departments) across the system," Berrong said.

Also, Berrong said Towns County Schools was informed by the State of Georgia recently that the district had been allotted five additional buses at \$85,000 each, for a total of \$440,000, and that the district has until 2025 to use the allotment.

As a result, the district is in the process of pricing additional buses, two of which will be coach buses for student activity trips.

The middle, high and elementary school cafeteria tables will be replaced over the summer with café-type tables displaying the school colors and logo.

The elementary school will be getting a new, much nicer sign, and the elementary media center will be getting upgraded furniture this summer.

And finally, the new maintenance building, where all school maintenance equipment will be consolidated on campus, should be erected before the next board meeting, Berrong said.

The School Board meets the first Monday of each month starting at 6 p.m. in the Middle/High School Media Center on campus. However, the board will hold its next regular meeting on Tuesday, July 5, to accommodate the Fourth of July holiday falling on a Monday.

Farmers Market...from Page 1A

things people value in them.

"I have really enjoyed the life and community here since we have come. It is easy to meet nice people, and I am extremely proud to be able to come here to the market and talk with many people who have the same interests."

Maguire, the water colorist, exclaimed that, "It's just so beautiful here, which is the main inspiration for my artwork."

"The people are wonderful, and so is the Farmers Market," she continued. "I think it is extra special to have these kinds of events so everyone can enjoy the local varieties of foods that our farmers grow."

Another notable booth was helmed by retiree and former Hampton Mayor Steve

Hutchison with "Papa Steve's Jams, Jellies, And More." Hutchison has lived here for about a year.

"I have been making this since I was a kid," Hutchison said. "It was something my grandmother taught me early on growing up when I would spend the summers with her."

"I love this small-town community. It is one of those where if I need to borrow a stick of butter, then you go to your neighbor's house; it feels like, if you need something, someone is always there, a really good old-time feeling."

Market spokesperson Joan Crothers was there on Saturday, as usual, and she expanded upon how much the Towns County Farmers Market has grown over time.

"We started this nearly seven years ago and have been growing strong and seeing it continue to get more popular," Crothers said. "People enjoy the fresher foods versus the grocery store, and we have a lot of plants in addition to the vegetables as well, so I think that really adds something extra for the people to enjoy."

"We had a very great opening weekend last week. We usually have nine to 12 vendors, and of course, the products change as the seasons change. That is what is so great about it here – you will always find different selection choices."

People wanting to get involved or to find out more general information may contact Crothers at 706-896-6240.

City Council...from Page 1A

tect the surrounding environment.

As far as Cupid Falls is concerned, the rain garden would be placed at the lower end of the parking lot, as Ward had already staked out a location where the runoff was particularly severe. The problem arises when the runoff, heated by asphalt and carrying toxins from the parking lot, is introduced into the cool-water stream below.

"If it's constructed properly, rain gardens are very, very easy to maintain," said Ward, taking the time to dispel some myths about the upkeep of retention facilities before offering some solutions to riverbank washouts.

Councilman Dr. John Kelley posed the question of reinforcing the banks with rocks, to which Ward responded that the use of stones should be avoided "as much as possible" due to the potential of altering the current.

Rather, the ideal setup would involve creating reinforcement of natural, organic material by planting vegetation along the bank. The root systems would intertwine and serve as a sort of "buffer," as described by Ward, and lessen the chance of sloughing and collapse.

An additional perk would be the shade, which can be enjoyed by man and wildlife alike.

It was decided that City

Public Works Supervisor Dean Stanley would go out to survey the area along with Kelley and Ward, after which further changes and specifics would be decided.

Down the road, the mayor would like to get the help of Towns-Union Master Gardener Mark Franza and Gordy Jones of the Towns County Civic Association. Both would bring extensive environmental development experience to the table, and in the case of Jones, physical structures like converting bench-tables.

The Department of Natural Resources grant that would have covered the construction of the ramp running from the top to bottom of the falls does not allow for the redesign that was proposed earlier in the year.

For now, the ramp project has been scrapped officially, but after meeting with DNR, Kelley proposed pursuing other grant opportunities that would aid mobility, to which the rest of the council agreed.

"We've got a single bid on Enota right now (from Atlanta-based Federal EC LLC)," said Councilman Steve Clark, providing an update on the project to repair faulty and outdated sewer lines in the city.

One attractive method of repair known as a cured-in-place pipe, or CIPP, which

is much cheaper than simply replacing the pipe.

This method is appealing because it is "trenchless" and requires no additional digging. The process involves running new lining down the pipe needing to be repaired. Once exposed to a curing agent, the resin within the lining attaches to the original pipeline.

Overall, the undertaking will cost \$38,350 and was approved unanimously by the council, and City Attorney Marvin Harkins will be drawing up a contract with Federal EC to reflect an Aug. 31 completion timeline.

Briefly mentioned was an update on the Timberline booster pump. Hayes-James, the engineering company on the project, has merged with Hussey Gay Bell and has proposed to redesign the pump station, which would cost an additional \$80,000. The total estimate rounds out at about \$180,000. This option was accepted unanimously, as opposed to the alternative fix of adding a bladder to the existing pump.

Young Harris City Council members meet on the first Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. inside City Hall at 50 Irene Berry Drive. Meetings are open to the public, and residents may call 706-379-3171 to get answers to questions any time or reserve the chance to speak at a meeting.

Hamilton Gardens...from Page 1A

starting at 7 p.m.

Music lovers will be able to enjoy the distinct sounds of Wyatt Espalin & Friends on June 30, Somebody's Child on July 7, Robbie Litt on July 14, Mark Miller on July 21 and Surrender Hill on July 28.

This will be a rain or shine event with free admission, so bring a chair and a blanket and enjoy a night full of music, food and fun. Donations are accepted and appreciated.

"We want to offer some great entertainment once again for the community," Thomason said. "After the two-year long COVID pandemic, people are

asking for more events all of the time because they are happy to be out again and value not being on lockdown anymore.

"We hope everybody comes out to enjoy the greatness of our area overlooking the gorgeous sunset with great music and things for all ages to enjoy, and I can never thank everyone enough, because the Fairgrounds would not be possible without you."

Additionally, Thomason wanted to thank and recognize the sponsors of the concert series: Dan Paris, Jerry Smith, Preston Haliburton and Atlanta Paving Company.

Thomason was also excited to announce that Ashley McBryde will be performing at the fairgrounds on Oct. 15.

McBryde is a Grammy Award-nominated country music artist who has won multiple awards from the Country Music Association, including New Artist of the Year in 2018. She is responsible for hits like "A Little Dive Bar in Dahlonega" and "One Night Standards."

Tickets for McBryde go on sale this week, so be sure to purchase one before they sell out, either at georgiamountainfairgrounds.com or in person at 1311 Music Hall Road in Hiwassee.