

Towns County Herald

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Young woman struck, killed crossing US 76 at night

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Coroner's Office, Sheriff's Office and Georgia State Patrol responded to a car versus pedestrian fatality around 11:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 12.

Alexandria Richbourg, 22, formerly of Hayesville, North Carolina, but residing in Marietta, was up here celebrating her birthday from June 8, according to authorities.

Her parents had reportedly thrown a birthday party at their house earlier in the day, after which she had gone out celebrating with friends. She ended up drinking alcohol at the Sand Bar & Grille, which cut her off for service shortly before the accident, according

to authorities.

Richbourg then told a friend she would be returning to her car parked at the Ridges Marina to lay down, which required her to cross the road, according to authorities.

She made her way on foot, but it was a particularly dark night, and a passing vehicle traveling west on US 76 toward Blairsville struck her in the roadway, killing her on impact, according to authorities.

Next of kin had been notified by press time, and the driver, who is not facing charges, was uninjured in the accident, according to authorities.

Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper said Sunday that the highway there was not intended for pedestrians to walk across "and has been a

concern from day one."

"In the best of circumstances, crossing the five-lane highway in front of the bar is dangerous," Cooper said. "In the summer months, we see people regularly crossing that area, day and night. There is virtually no lighting provided by the bar, and streetlights in that area, and on Saturday night, there was only a sliver of moon.

"As a mother of young adults near the age of the victim, I have a heavy heart and cannot imagine what her parents are going through. As the Coroner, I have a reinforced fear of that area, as I myself have witnessed the dangers of people coming off their boats and darting across a busy highway.

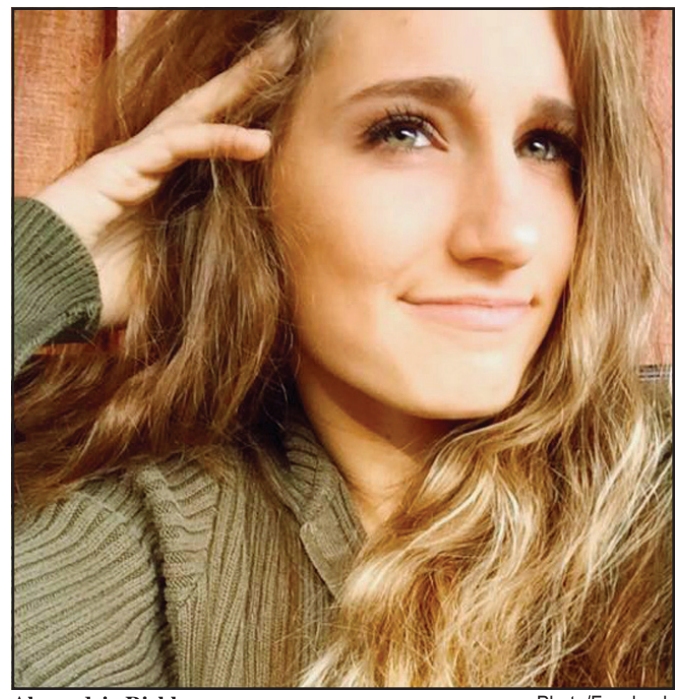
"It has always been in the back of my mind that

one day there would be lives claimed due to the poor location of the road and the discouragement for pedestrians to cross that highway.

"The Towns County Coroner's Office takes the safety of our citizens very seriously, with myself and both deputy coroners responding to the Hwy 76 scene to ensure we could gather every detail pertaining to the incident."

Cooper would like to thank the Towns County Volunteer Firefighters, EMS, Sheriff's Office Road Patrol, and the GSP Trooper for "working amazingly" with the Coroner's Office.

"They used their vehicles and hand-held barriers to maintain the decedent's dignity, allowing us to do our duty and keep us all safe, and that is huge for us," she said.



Alexandria Richbourg

Photo/Facebook

Iwo Jima Vet Bud Johnson honored with Memorial Ride



Local veterans donned their patches and hopped on their motorcycles in support of the First Annual Bud Johnson Memorial Ride Saturday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

U.S. Navy Chief Petty Officer Third Class Clarence "Bud" Johnson was keeping a watchful eye on a porkchop-shaped speck of land in the middle of the southwest Pacific from aboard the destroyer escort USS Silverstein as

six U.S. Marines raised Old Glory atop the 554-foot Mount Suribachi. Just as they lifted the flag, their combined effort lifted the spirits of their fellow sailors, soldiers and marines locked in ferocious battle below for the Japanese-controlled volcanic island of Iwo Jima.

The Pulitzer Prize-

winning image of the Feb. 23, 1945, flag-raising captured by Associated Press Photographer Joe Rosenthal during the final months of World War II remains forever linked to the Marine Corps and is one of the most recognizable images of the 20th century.

More than three-quarters
See Johnson, Page 8A

70th Annual Fair Parade to feature hot air balloons, prizes

By Allison Youngblood
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee met June 8 at Anderson Music Hall to talk through new ventures involving the Fair and Parade coming up Aug. 13-21.

Hilda Thomason, who has overseen the Fairgrounds as general manager for 40 years, said she was happy to have "a committee that is excited and motivated" as they prepare to

make the 70th Annual Fair and Parade special from beginning to end.

Due to concerns over the spread of COVID-19 last year, these events were postponed until 2021.

Committee discussions began with a proposal to arrange hot air balloons along the parade route, with three balloons now being confirmed for tethered ride opportunities for a fee on Saturday, Aug. 14.

One will be stationed

on the ballfield next to the carnival at the Fairgrounds and another in the parking lot beside the ballfield where Dr. Cliff Revell's office used to reside. The third location and additional details will be announced soon.

Lee Thorne, representing both the statewide car club Peach State Challengers and the Georgia Chapter of the worldwide Challenger Demos Car Club, hopes to have roughly

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Blue Ridge EMC Board votes to re-open meetings to members

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

It's official – for the first time since the onset of the pandemic last spring, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors will be welcoming back members to the monthly meetings.

The 5-4 vote to reinstate Policy No. 228, named "Member Attendance & Petition to Present at Board Meetings," occurred in the directors' June 8 regular meeting, and the breakdown of the vote will be available when the meeting minutes are published online

next month.

Members may return to board meetings starting Thursday, July 15, and on every second Tuesday of each month thereafter, with meetings beginning at 6 p.m. inside EMC Headquarters in Young Harris.

Policy No. 228 was originally suspended out of concern over COVID-19, with the decision to reinstate resting largely on the fact that the rationale to keep meetings closed had all but disappeared, considering improved COVID metrics this spring and the lifting of restrictions inside



Ray Cook
BRMEMC Board President

Sheriff's Office, GSP confiscate pound of methamphetamine

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office and the Georgia State Patrol confiscated about a pound of methamphetamine in a vital drug bust June 6.

GSP initiated a traffic stop that Sunday, resulting in the arrest of Jennifer Lynn Williams, 31, of Crumpler, North Carolina.

The Drug Unit of the Sheriff's Office, in conjunction with the Georgia State Patrol, took up the investigation and confiscated the vehicle.

On the street, methamphetamine sells for between \$80 and \$120 a gram, depending on how it's cut. If a pound is sold by the gram, the

lower end estimate of the total street value would be about \$36,000.

According to Sheriff Ken Henderson, the arrest is part of an ongoing investigation impacting the supply chain and large amounts of dangerous drugs coming into the community and potentially into the hands of local youth.

"Based on our investigation, Jennifer Lynn Williams is a major supplier of drugs into our area," Sheriff Henderson said.

Jennifer Lynn Williams is being charged with possession of drug-related objects, damage to government property, drugs not in original container, trafficking in methamphetamine, giving

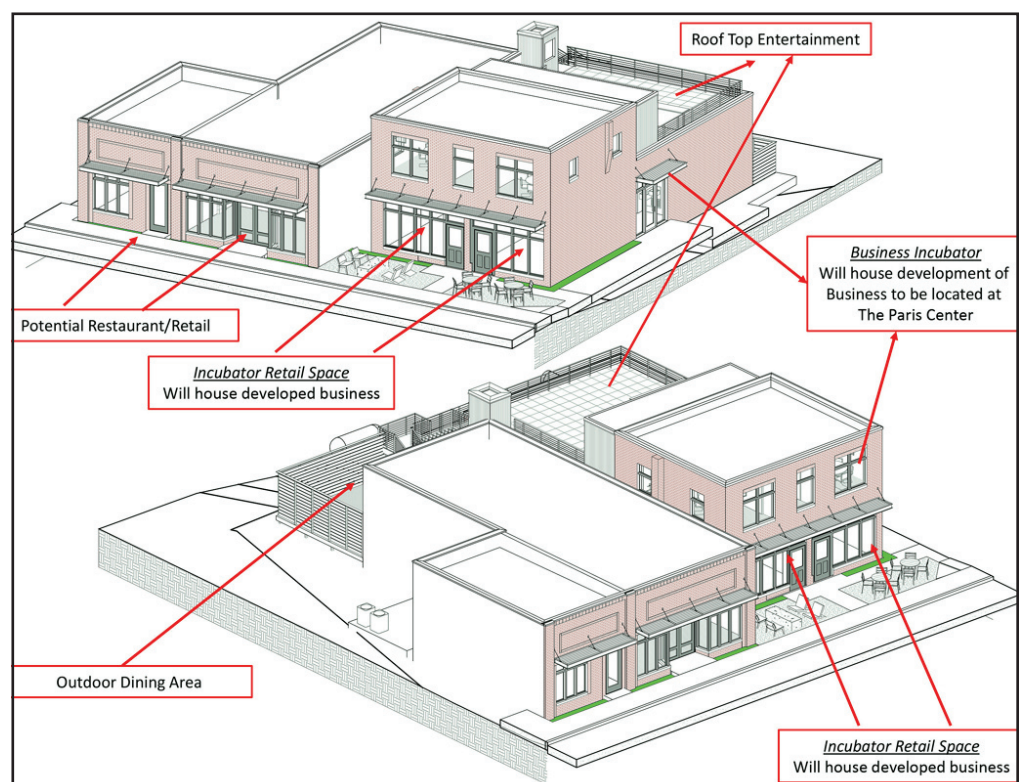


Jennifer Lynn Williams
a false name, possession of a Schedule II controlled substance, possession of
See Methamphetamine, Page 8A



TCHS Principal Roy Perren and Chest-Chatt RC&D Council Executive Director Frank Riley are two members on the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee. Photo by Allison Youngblood

Hiawassee scores \$600,000 grant for Paris Buildings renovation



These designs for the Paris Center have been enlarged and posted in the windows of the Paris Buildings on Main Street in Hiawassee.

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Ever since Liz Ordiales first entered local politics, she has known that one of the big keys to the City of Hiawassee's future success was the downtown pair of Paris Buildings on Main Street.

And now that the city

has been awarded a major \$600,000 grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission to renovate the buildings, Ordiales is confident that the future she glimpsed is fast approaching, and with it, an impending developmental boom for the city.

"When I ran for City Council (in 2016), standing

out there with the 'Liz' sign, I would walk up and down that block, thinking, 'Jeez, man, this is the catalyst that could turn this city around.'"

Ordiales ended up winning election to City Council, and the very next year, she resigned from the council to run for mayor following the

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MADE IN GEORGIA
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Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Entry Form
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Blairsville Pro RODEO
www.BlairsvilleProRodeo.com
This Weekend!
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Paris Buildings...from Page 1A

retirement of Barbara Mathis. She won that election, too, and for the last five years, she has been advancing her specific vision for Hiawassee.

Downtown development has taken many steps in that time. For starters, Ordiales applied for and earned an ARC grant in 2017 to develop a Downtown Strategic Plan with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, featuring an abundance of input from local stakeholders and others.

Published in 2018, the plan outlines numerous points of development within the city, including specific areas for prioritization such as revitalization of the historic town center, the Town Square, and fostering local economic and workforce development. Enter the Paris Buildings.

As two of the oldest buildings in Hiawassee, the Paris Buildings have been sitting unused and dilapidated for years. When Ordiales heard that owner Dan Paris was thinking of tearing them down, she called and made him an offer, with the city purchasing both for \$99,000 in 2019.

The city has also established a dedicated Downtown Development Authority and worked with joint Towns County, Hiawassee and Young Harris Economic Development Director Denise McKay and DDA Chair Steve Harper to apply for grant funding to help restore the buildings.

As part of the recent ARC grant process, Ordiales, McKay and Harper formulated a grand idea: if awarded funding, the city would renovate the buildings and collectively call them the

Paris Center, to feature a staffed incubator to help locals develop business plans to implement in town.

With oversight by the DDA, the Business Incubator would bring volunteer resources to bear – attorneys, accountants, marketers and more – to help would-be entrepreneurs get started, and the center would provide affordable rental storefronts to temporarily house the new businesses.

As incubated businesses become successful, the city would ask them to move into another vacant storefront within city limits – currently there are 10 – to make room for other starter businesses as a pipeline to increase local development.

Use of the incubator would not cost anything to potential business owners, and any residents would be able to utilize the incubator, not just people looking to move into the Paris Center after establishing a plan.

Should a business end up renting there, as the city is in full control of the buildings and is looking not to make money but to spur development, rental spaces inside the buildings would be much more affordable than going through the commercial rental market.

“My goal is to fill every open storefront that we have in Hiawassee,” Ordiales said. “No new ones – just whatever you have there that’s empty right now, fill it with something viable. And I think this is going to be the first step to make that happen.”

“If we fill those two buildings – and we have an opportunity to put at least three businesses there – then we can

expand, take one business out of there that’s already successful, put it in an empty storefront, bring in another business, and keep revolving that so we can become more vibrant.”

All told, the Paris Center will house: the Business Incubator to fill the various empty storefronts in town and build up the local economy; several retail spaces for prospective new businesses; potentially a restaurant complete with outdoor dining; and a rooftop entertainment area.

“The whole turning-around of those buildings is great on many points,” Ordiales said. “No. 1, we’ll have retail stores, we’ll have a restaurant, and the Business Incubator sets us up for future good growth throughout the city.”

“So, when you leave the incubator, you’re going to have a solid business plan that you can take out. A lot of folks that open up businesses now don’t have that, so this will give you a good structure to follow.”

The project has been estimated to cost around \$1.2 million, though construction costs have increased in the last year so could be higher. The \$600,000 grant comes with a \$180,000 local match, and there’s a USDA grant for about \$70,000 that will go toward the project as well.

That brings total project monies to roughly \$850,000, and the Downtown Development Authority is hard at work raising money from donations to fill in the rest of the funding gap.

Work on the buildings will be extensive, as they have sat empty and in disrepair for decades, but with so many resources at their

EMC Meetings...from Page 1A

the EMC.

EMC Headquarters opened back to members for the purpose of paying bills and conducting other business in May 2020, and the mask mandate for members and employees inside EMC buildings was lifted last month.

According to brmemc.com, Policy No. 228 establishes “appropriate procedures to accommodate Member requests to attend meetings of the Board of Directors of the Cooperative and/or to present information to the Board of Directors at such meetings.”

As such, “members in good standing” are eligible to attend the regular monthly meetings, “except for the portions of said meetings conducted in Executive Session,” and they may present information if such presentations do not interfere with the work of the board.

The membership voted in 2018 to amend the bylaws to define “member in good standing” as any member who has not lost his or her right to receive electric service from the cooperative.

In order to attend, members must fill out the requisite form titled “Member Notice of Intent to Attend a Board Meeting,” which can be found at <https://www.brmemc.com/my-cooperative/board-meetings/>.

This form may be filled out and submitted directly online within 48 hours of the board meeting to be attended. There’s also a separate form called the “Member Petition to Present at Board Meeting” people will need to complete if they wish to address the board during meetings.

EMC Board President Ray Cook raised the issue of member attendance at the end of the June 8 meeting, as

outlined in the board meeting summary. Several members had been in touch with Cook and other directors about re-opening meetings, including representatives from local press organizations.

“The only reason we voted to close them was because of the COVID,” Cook said. “So, now that everything is back fully open at the EMC for the most part, there’s really no need to single that one thing out.”

Added Cook, “All the staff at the EMC, their biggest concern through the whole deal was, if we had a storm, would we have our employees healthy enough to cover and keep the lights on? That was the primary goal, and I think that they did that.”

“The managers, all the staff and everybody that’s been involved have done a great job of doing that balancing act. That was the key thing.”

The Hogsed Brothers at The Old Courthouse on the Square in Blairsville Friday evening, June 18th

The Hogsed Brothers will debut at The Old Courthouse on the Square in Blairsville on Friday evening, June 18 at 7 PM. Although they have been very popular in the north Georgia and western North Carolina for over sixty-eight years, this is the first time they have performed in the old courthouse.

The brothers first sang together at the age of five. They were raised by their Aunt Addie and her husband, Fred Ledford, in Hayesville, NC.

Their Uncle Fred sang and traveled with his brothers, “The Ledford Quartet.” Jimmy and Johnny went to church, and also heard the quartet in practice sessions. After hearing their uncle and his brothers, Jimmy and Johnny decided they wanted to try singing.

So, at the age of five, they sang “Dry Bones” which was the song that launched a long and enjoyable time singing for the Lord. “Dry



The Hogsed Brothers

Bones” became their signature song, and is one of their most requested today.

The Friday night concerts are presented by The Union County Historical Society as a public service, and to keep alive the tradition of live acoustic music in the beloved

old building.

There is no admission charge to the concerts presented by The Union County Historical Society. The musicians donate their time and talents. Voluntary donations to the maintenance costs are always welcome and appreciated.

NJum16.Z10CA

Towns County Lions Club inducts new members



The Towns County Lions Club is growing! New members induction was held on June 8. Jeff Myers, President, Sheila Norris and Barbara Savas with their sponsor Lion Janie McConnell/Suzanne Wilson and Jerry Wilson with their sponsor Lion Dianne Williams. TJum16.F4JSH

Johnson...from Page 1A

of a century removed from the stars and stripes flapping in the ocean breeze over the blackened surface of "Sulfur Island," June 14 Flag Day will forever more be synonymous with Johnson in Towns County, offering locals an opportunity to honor the 36-year Navy veteran, who passed away earlier this year at the age of 98, with a fundraiser benefiting local veterans' groups, a cause near and dear to Johnson's heart.

Saturday, June 12, marked the First Annual Bud Johnson Memorial Ride, a law enforcement-escorted motorcycle and vehicle procession between Hiwassee, Young Harris and Hayesville, North Carolina.

American Legion Riders of Post 23 and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807 sponsored the event.

After retiring from the navy as a Chief Petty Officer Quartermaster, Johnson remained a strong advocate for local veterans until he passed away following a brief illness on Jan. 1. Now, Towns County's grateful veterans have found a way to return the favor.

"(Johnson) witnessed the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima, so it's appropriate to hold this ride on Flag Day," event organizer Dr. Dan Eichenbaum said. "This is going to become an annual event on the weekend of Flag Day, every single year. We're going to add this as an amendment to our (VFW and American Legion) by-laws, so this event will always take place."

The riders set out Saturday morning from Towns County Veterans Memorial Park following a performance of Taps by bugler Madison Hickey, who recently graduated from Towns County High and performed at each of the day's stops, and comments by VFW



Like CPO Johnson, retired U.S. Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Maria Britt is a heavily decorated veteran. She was honored to pay tribute to his memory at Foster Park's Iwo Jima Memorial June 12.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Sr. Cmdr. Mel Halfon.

"When he put that uniform on, no one looked sharper than Bud Johnson, and he did more for our veterans in Towns County than anybody," Halfon told the riders gathered at Veterans Memorial Park. "He told me once, he said, 'Mel, I've been put on this earth to help veterans.' And he did that, until his very last day."

Led by a police escort, approximately 30 riders departed from the memorial park at noon and traveled to the Clay County Veterans Memorial on Hayesville's Old Courthouse Square in North Carolina.

After Cmdr. Joe Buckner of the American Legion George Lee Post 532 addressed the riders, the motorcade traveled to the Iwo Jima Memorial at Foster Park in Young Harris, where retired U.S. Army National Guard Maj. Gen. Maria Britt offered a few words before the event came full

circle at 2 p.m. at Hiwassee's American Legion Post 23/VFW Post 7807 for food, fellowship and refreshments.

Originally commissioned by former Commissioner Bill Kendall in 2015, the one-of-a-kind monument at Foster Park was sculpted by area artist Al Garnto with special input from Johnson and his friend, the late Todd Kimsey, also an Iwo Jima Veteran.

"Bud served for 36 years, and after retirement, he moved (to Towns County) and was always active in veterans' affairs in this entire area, and there was nothing he wouldn't do," Eichenbaum said. "He was instrumental in getting the Iwo Jima memorial at Foster Park, and there are only three (Iwo Jima memorials) in the country, and one of them is in Towns County thanks to Bud."

Proceeds from the event will benefit local American Legion and VFW groups.

Methamphetamine...from Page 1A



Sheriff Ken Henderson is proud of his deputies and their work with the Georgia State Patrol in taking custody of this roughly 1 pound of meth, illegally possessed firearm and more.

Photo/Facebook

methamphetamine, obstruction of an officer and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

She has been charged

only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Sheriff Henderson would like to thank the Georgia

State Patrol, Towns County Sheriff's Office Deputies and Drug Unit for their "continued commitment to combating drugs in our great county."

Fair Parade...from Page 1A

20-25 cars in the parade.

Gibson Dental Design Owner Al Gibson donated \$4,000 as prize money for the float contest, which is in addition to the previous \$6,000 donated by local philanthropist Bob Cloer for the winners: First Place will receive \$4,000; Second Place, \$2,500; and Third Place, \$1,500.

Formation of the parade will begin at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 14, behind the South State Bank. Mr. and Mrs. Jody Adams and Madison Cloer will begin judging the floats at 9:45 a.m. The parade is set to begin at 10:55 a.m., rain or shine, to head down Hiwassee Main Street.

This year's parade theme is "Reelin' in the Years," and anyone from the community can try their hand at building a float and entering it into the contest. People will get the chance to win some prize

money while engaging in a family-friendly community event.

For more information about applying or for an application form, check the newspaper for an insert, or stop by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in person. All floats must pre-register to be in the parade.

Thomason is on the lookout for more parade applicants, which can be businesses, organizations or individuals, with just nine applications having been received by the end of the June 8 meeting.

She is also seeking lots of volunteers to help run the ice cream shop, the souvenir shop, the concessions stand and food booths on the grounds, as well as the gates and security, for all nine days of the Fair.

The public is encouraged to come out and bring their

families in August to enjoy the brand-new Carnival, too, to feature the "Amusements of America" carnival company with over 100 rides and attractions for adults and children alike.

Arts and crafts will be Monday-Saturday, 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. The Fair opens at 12 p.m. on Saturdays, 1 p.m. on Sundays, and 2 p.m. during the week. Daily musical performances will be at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.

Fair and Carnival tickets are sold separately, but Monday, Aug. 16, will be a \$2 day, with \$2 entry to the Fair and \$2 rides, as well as promotional offers for local students closer to August.

For additional information about the Fair, Parade and Carnival, or to purchase tickets once they are available, visit georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.