

School board approves budget, YMCA afterschool program in meeting

**By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer**

The Towns County Board of Education has approved the school system's Fiscal Year 2020 Budget, which features revenues and expenditures balancing to \$23,749,524.

Board members voted to approve the 2020 budget during their Monday, June 10, regular meeting.

New this upcoming school year, the budget includes state-mandated pay raises of \$3,000 for all teachers and other qualifying school employees, plus a 2% pay raise for all state employees.

Also in the meeting, Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong recommended that the board approve the Georgia Mountains YMCA Association's afterschool program to take the place of the 21st Century Afterschool Program.

The schools learned recently that, for the first time ever, state funding for Towns County's 21st Century Afterschool Program had been cut, resulting in a \$310,000 loss in funds for each of the next five years.

As such, 21st Century Program Director Jenny Stowers has been working

with Berrong and the board to find an alternative to the current afterschool program – enter the YMCA.

Stowers met with Georgia Mountains YMCA Association CEO Amy Kienle at the end of May to discuss her organization's afterschool program, after which Stowers decided to approach the board to recommend the program to replace 21st Century.

Kienle joined board members to talk about and answer any questions concerning the program in their June 3 work session.

And in their June 10 regular meeting, members approved the YMCA afterschool program starting the 2019-2020 school year.

Next steps for the program include researching program costs for families, as there will be an expected family contribution associated with participation in the program.

Fortunately, the YMCA is able to conduct fundraisers to help lower-income families send their students to afterschool, and some families may qualify for a discounted rate based on number of family members and household income.

The YMCA Afterschool Program also holds an annual campaign effort to raise funds

to provide financial assistance to families in the afterschool/summer day camp programs in Towns County.

The new afterschool program will begin at the end of each school day and run until 6 p.m. And during most official school holidays, vacation breaks and teacher workdays, it will run from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m.

The school district will provide all the transportation during the camps for students to attend field trips.

Currently, the program is set to run for two years, after which it will auto-renew for five years.

In other school news, for the second summer in a row, the district is in full swing with construction on its modernization projects, including a number of renovations at the middle/high school building.

Construction of the new \$1 million artificial turf football/soccer field has also begun since school let out in May.

"Yesterday (June 9), when I went through, they had just dug out around where the draining system is," said Berrong. "They were supposed to start digging dirt out today so they can start to bring in the



Towns County Board of Education Chairperson Laura Banister in her final meeting as a school board member on June 10, with Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong.

Photo by Chad Stack

gravel base."

Board members also approved several coaches for the upcoming school year, including Shane Riley as a middle school girls' soccer coach, Ezekiel Gribble as high school assistant softball coach, Rollie Thomas as middle

school girls' basketball coach, and Jordan Hyatt as volunteer community coach for Lady Indians Soccer.

Board members also accepted the resignation of one of their own, as Laura Banister stepped down from the Towns County Board of Education to

take a teaching position at the elementary school.

The school board will meet again on Monday, July 1, at 7 p.m. at the board office for their regular monthly meeting, with no work session scheduled for July.

A Kind of Cinderella Story coming to Hayesville



Left to right: Jed Elmore, Hayden Stancil, Emma Elmore, Maya Polk, Dalton Hunt, Ashly Parrish, Saige Polk, Dream Ledford, Ayduh Judd, Luke Spillane, Micah Clarida, Lilly Moody.

Music Man has marched out of town and Cinderella's carriage is rolling in at the Peacock Performing Arts Center. 47 children are enjoying doing theater camp with Robbie Dernehl, the Director, and are working on an original production of "Cinderella" by Ms. Robbie. The children work with a professional choreographer and singing coach and Ms. Robbie shares her 30 years of acting experience.

Children from 5 years thru 15 years attend classes and rehearsals daily for 2 weeks and then perform in a full scale 2 hour musical production complete with lights, sets, costumes and song and dance routines.

It definitely has given many children the acting bug over the last 12 years that Ms. Robbie has done the camp, as she has some who have been with her 5 or more years.

"A Kind of Cinderella Story" will be performed by these children on Saturday, June 22nd at 7 p.m. and Sunday, June 23rd at 2:30 p.m. at the Peacock Performing Arts Center in Hayesville, North Carolina. Tickets can be purchased by calling the theater, 828-389-2787 or at Tiger's Store on the Hayesville Square. They may also be purchased on the website, "thepeacocknc.org".

Sheriff's Office continues hot pursuit of area drug suspects

**News Special
Towns County Herald**

YOUNG HARRIS – On Friday, June 14, a deputy with the Towns County Sheriff's Office stopped a Ford Escape on Georgia 339 due to a traffic violation.

Upon further investigation, two suspects were arrested on drug-related offenses.

Joe William Strain, 49, of Young Harris, was arrested and charged with possession of methamphetamine and obstruction of a law enforcement officer.

Perry Green, 56, of Young Harris, was arrested and charged with two counts possession of methamphetamine and improper tag dis-



Perry Green



Joe Strain

play. These cases are still active, with additional drug arrests and charges likely.

The cases will be forwarded to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution.

Banister...from Page 1A

"we wanted to see and have happen."

She plans to resign from her current position as a credit analyst with United Community Bank in Hiwassee at the end of July before reporting to school on Aug. 7.

In the meantime, the board will be looking for a potential appointee to fill Banister's at-large position on the school board, which is a seat that has about a year and a half

left in the term.

Anyone interested in serving as a member of the Towns County Board of Education should contact the board office at 706-896-2279.

Banister is the second board member to resign from the school board this year, after Robert Williams resigned in April shortly after his reelection last November.

Williams resigned because he moved out of

his district in Macedonia, though he said at the time he hadn't planned on moving prior to running for his second consecutive term on the school board.

The board appointed Brandon Grimsley in April to fill Williams' vacated Macedonia seat, and Grimsley has already announced his intention to run in a special election to be held next year to fill the remainder of the term ending in 2022.

Fishing Team...from Page 1A

"It's like a dream come true to be able to qualify for Nationals in our first year as a team," said Hooper. "Me and Mitch have always been pretty good friends, and we both love to fish, and for us to be where we are right now is amazing."

A Sixth-Place finish is a remarkable achievement, especially since they did it in a lake they had never fished before, though they've had plenty of practice all year long fishing in lakes for the first time.

With a solid foundation in the team's inaugural season, Hooper and Grimsley made their fathers proud and earned the overwhelming support of the community with their passion for fishing.

"Chad and I wanted our

boys to make the national stage, but truthfully, we didn't think this could happen in their first year of heavy competition," said Brandon Grimsley. "Mitchell and Adrian surprised us both with their will to win."

"We are very proud of them and all the work they have put into getting the team started and trying to learn everything they can about the lakes they are fishing."

Of course, the two Indians have had the pleasure of sharing their amazing experiences right alongside their fathers, who have served as their coaches and boat captains this season.

"To compete at this level requires year-round practice, preparation and great boat captains," said Mitchell Grimsley. "You have to study

the water, the weather and what the fish are biting.

"I couldn't ask for a better boat captain between my dad and Chad Hooper. It's been great. They are a lot of fun out on the water."

The team is currently preparing for the three-day national tournament in Kentucky come August.

Together, the Indians and their boat captains/fathers will start their journey to Paris, Tennessee, on Aug. 3 for the High School Bassmaster's Fishing National Tournament, which runs Aug. 8 through Aug. 10.

The Indians Fishing Team is supported and funded by several local businesses and personal donations from the community.

Fair Parade...from Page 1A

"Anything with the youth groups or schools we are willing to help in any way we can. Anything we can do to work with the community, that's why we're here. The Gun Club tries to stay involved in the community."

Speaking to Hiwassee City Councilman Kris Berrong, Thomason said it would be great if he – a known clogger in the community – could put together a float to honor the local clogging heritage.

"If I can find a few people that would be willing to join me, I will definitely build a float for the parade," Berrong said.

Thomason is bringing back Georgia's Official State Clogging Convention to the Fairgrounds on Oct. 5.

In other Parade Committee news, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw reached out to Gov. Brian Kemp earlier this year to see if he would be able to serve as the parade grand marshal. Unfortunately, Kemp was not available, but Bradshaw is currently speaking with Georgia's 9th District Congressman Doug Collins.

Last year, Towns County native Bob Cloer donated \$5,000 in prize money for float builders, which sparked much interest among businesses and individuals in the community to get involved building floats for the parade.

And thanks to a great parade turnout in 2018, Cloer committed another donation this year, upping the amount

to \$6,000 for the 69th annual parade.

"We are really just trying to build it up, and Bob Cloer really has the Georgia Mountain Fair and the parade in his heart," said Thomason. "He wants to see the parade come back like it used to be many, many years ago."

With the parade just over a month away, Thomason is delighted with the number of entries that have already been submitted.

Anyone looking to build a float for this year's parade can find a parade entry form at www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com or go to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' main office.

Gardens...from Page 1A



Ward leading lecture attendees on a walkthrough of Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge.

Photo by Chad Stack

originally brought to the United States in the late 1800s to control erosion and to feed cattle, is one of the most infamous non-native invasive plants in the Southeast, said Ward.

"We are going to be working this summer with Hamilton Gardens, and we are going to attack the kudzu monster affecting Hamilton Gardens," said Ward. "It's going to be a huge undertaking, but it's slowly creeping into the gardens every year. It will take a few years, but we hope to get it out of the picture completely."

Ward discussed Transline, which is a water-soluble herbicide designed to

kill such non-native invasive plant species like kudzu.

"Now, I know that some of you don't like to spray chemicals, but let me just say one thing about chemicals," said Ward. "If you are battling invasive plants with a huge will to fight back, you really don't have a choice, unless you just have a very small garden and you're going to stay out there all summer with a shovel digging up weeds."

In his lecture, Ward talked about 10 different invasive plant species, but he stuck mainly to the ones that are currently affecting Hamilton Gardens, namely Japanese honeysuckle, English ivy, Chinese privet, tallow tree, mimosa, poison ivy

and kudzu.

Following Ward's lecture, he took attendees on a walkthrough of the Hamilton Gardens to identify the invasive plants from his presentation.

Also during the walkthrough, Ward gave a demonstration of the treatment to remove kudzu, and he was able to show the guests where he and the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition plan to start their kudzu removal.

Vicky and David Best from Master Gardeners will talk worms and vermiculture for the second lecture of the "Let's Get Growing" summer series, which will take place on Friday, June 21, at the Hamilton Gardens at 11 a.m.

Flag Day...from Page 1A

contest with his entry in 1918.

Creed also passed around several other pamphlets and visual aids designed for students in their early learning years to be used by teachers to impart knowledge about America, its flag and its heritage, today she said is sorely lacking in today's schools.

All of these pamphlets and learning aids are available through the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

In describing the proper way to retire a flag, Creel mentioned that there are lyrics to "Taps," a part of today's flag retirement ceremony, which may be found by a

sample search on the internet. "Taps" was also known as "Butterfield's Lullaby."

Most people are aware that each stripe, star and color that make up the American Flag have meaning.

However, not so many are aware that there is meaning to each fold of the flag when it is folded into a triangle that resembles a cocked hat worn by the soldiers serving under Gen. George Washington and the sailors serving under Capt. John Paul Jones.

Most adults would need a refresher on all of those meanings and the history behind them, and young people in

America haven't been exposed to them, said Creel.

"There's history in the United States Flag," said Creel. "Every thread, every color shows our history as its intricately woven through our own heritage. And that's something we need to be aware of. There have been people fighting over this very thing, our country, for a very long time."

"I'm going to challenge you to learn more, not only about our flag, but about this country. We are not too old to learn."