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Bradshaw appoints Walls as EMA Director; Gibson receives 'Welcome Home'

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw appointed Brandon Walls as the county's new Emergency Management Agency Director during the Tuesday, June 18, county meeting.

Walls has served in recent years as Deputy EMA Director, and he is inheriting the top job from his boss, longtime EMA Director Ricky Mathis, who retired in May after working 42 years in Towns County public safety.

Bradshaw said Walls was more than qualified for the position, having acquired years of emergency medical know-how with various agencies around the state, including leadership roles in the Department of Natural Resources and Georgia National Guard.

"These assignments allowed me to gain experience at the field operations level

and in management positions," said Walls. "I also developed working relationships with local, state and federal agencies and gained an understanding of incident response and management protocols, procedures and administration throughout my career."

On top of his EMA duties, Walls is also a paramedic with Towns County Emergency Medical Services, and he serves with the Fire Department as a firefighter and special operations coordinator in charge of search and rescue operations.

The Emergency Management Agency handles the planning, preparation and support for all public safety agencies and functions within the county, while simultaneously coordinating with state and federal agencies for funding, response and hazard mitigation.

"I have one primary goal, to make sure Towns County is prepared for anything that may happen," said Walls. "That's

my job, to think of everything and try to plan and provide for a response and recovery strategy."

Added Walls, "I have worked toward this position for several years and worked with Mr. Mathis closely before his retirement. I am proud to be able to serve here at home, and I want to thank Mr. Bradshaw for the opportunity."

Joining the commissioner for an emotional presentation that Tuesday were local veterans Jim McKeral, Charley Andrews, John Richards and Bart Rodgers.

Together, they recognized Barry and Pat Gibson, who recently moved to the county from Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Bradshaw, McKeral, Andrews, Richards and Rodgers presented Barry – a Vietnam Veteran – with a Certificate of Appreciation and "Welcome Home" from "We the People of Towns County," honoring his service in the United States Air Force.



New Towns County EMA Director Brandon Walls with Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw in the June 18 county meeting.
Photo by Chad Stack

Moving forward, Bradshaw said he plans to recognize local veterans in his monthly meetings to honor them for their service and let

them know that Towns County appreciates them.

Also in the June 18 meeting, Bradshaw formally introduced Economic

Development Director Denise McKay to those in attendance.

McKay was hired in January to pursue economic
See County Meeting, Page 8A

Fairgrounds seeking participants for Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason is looking for entrants for the annual Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant that will take place this year on Monday, July 22.

This pageant has been going on for more than 60 years, being an attraction for young women to participate in for pageant experience with the possibility of becoming Miss Georgia Mountain Fair.

"Whoever wins the Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant gets to go on to compete for Miss Fairest of the Fairs in Atlanta at the Georgia Association of Agricultural Fair," said Thomason. "That represents the Georgia fairs and our area."

"In the pageant, there will be 12 girls that enter from all the fairs in the state of Georgia, and our queen will enter."

"They also represent us for the Georgia on My Mind days at the state visitor



Past participants of the Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant on the Towns County Lions Club float in 2014.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

centers, they ride in the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade, and any kind of function the Towns County Lions Club is doing, like giving away gifts for Christmas, we always try to get the queen involved in that."

Before a queen can be named, however, local

young women must apply to the pageant and compete for the title through a variety of contests and interviews that will be judged to determine a winner.

The requirements to enter the pageant are that the entrant
See Fair Pageant, Page 3A

Mitchell joins EMC Board for rate discussion; TVA may forgo rate hike

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – The Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation Board of Directors welcomed consultant Chris Mitchell in the June 17 regular EMC Board meeting.

Mitchell is a former employee of the Tennessee Valley Authority – the federal agency that sells power to the EMC – and he runs a private management consulting company that counts BRMEMC and 77 other local power companies as clients.

In his presentation, Mitchell made the case for board members to start thinking

about adjusting the EMC's power rates, though he took care to stress that immediate action was not necessary.

The EMC is growing, said Mitchell, just not at a rate that will protect the nonprofit co-op against inflation, i.e. the rising cost of goods and services over time.

And even though the co-op as a whole is experiencing a growth trend, the EMC is facing yearly declines in individual power sales, as energy efficient technologies continue to make up an ever-increasing share of the marketplace.

As a result, several years from now, inflation will begin to overtake the rate of growth the EMC has been enjoying.



Jeremy Nelms
Compounding inflationary concerns is the fact that much of the EMC's fixed
See BRMEMC, Page 3A

Rep. Gurtler visits local Republicans, highlights conservative principles

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Towns County GOP hosted District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler as a featured speaker in their monthly meeting on Thursday, June 20.

Gurtler, a native of Rabun County, won his first District 8 election as a Republican in 2016, and he was re-elected for a second term last year.

The young representative spoke on a variety of issues in the GOP meeting last week, including the state budget, his voting record, and other matters from the State Capitol.

"A lot of stuff happened
See Gurtler, Page 8A



District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler speaking with fellow Republicans at the June 20 Towns County GOP meeting.
Photo by Chad Stack

Perren talks return as high school principal in Towns GOP meeting

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County High School Principal Roy Perren spoke to members of the Towns County GOP in their Thursday, June 20, meeting at Daniel's Steakhouse.

Perren originally served as principal of Towns County High from 2004 to 2013 before accepting the positions of Facilities Director and Federal Programs Director at Towns County Schools.

And since the 2019-2020 school year, Perren will return as high school principal.

Former High School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs will be heading up the middle school as principal in the new school year, while former Middle School Principal Erica Chastain will be taking over from Perren as Facilities Director and Federal Programs Director.

Perren also became Union Site Administrator at Mountain Education Charter High School in 2013, though he stepped down from that position recently due to his new role at Towns County.

The Mountain Education Charter High School is a second-chance school for



Roy Perren visited with the Towns County GOP for a talk on local education on June 20.
Photo by Chad Stack

students to get their diplomas while attending night school, said Perren, who, for whatever reason, were unable to finish day school.

"I have been really, really blessed to work with those students over there," Perren said.

Perren joined the U.S. Marine Corps after high school and served his country for eight years before starting his quest to become an educator and principal.

He attended the University of West Georgia and began his career as a teacher and

assistant principal at Paulding County Middle School.

Of course, Perren didn't take the usual route toward his career. He started college when he was 33, and he graduated just three years later.

"I proved what can be done by faith and by determination," said Perren. "The Lord has been good to me and blessed me so much, and I'm thankful to be able to stand here today."

Added Perren, "Because of my experience, it helps me to relate to these students that we work with, these children
See Perren, Page 8A

S.A.F.E. honors volunteers with Sock Hop-themed appreciation dinner



S.A.F.E. volunteers dancing to the rockin' tunes of Elvis Presley in their June 21 appreciation dinner at G&G Bakery and Cafe.
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, Inc. of Towns and Union counties hosted its annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on Friday, June 21, at G&G Bakery and Cafe.

"Once a year we do something to honor our volunteers," said S.A.F.E.

Volunteer Coordinator Vicki Franklin. "We try every year to do some sort of theme to change it up a bit."

The theme of the dinner this year was a '50s-style Sock Hop, which brought out volunteers who dressed for the era as they prepared for an evening of milkshakes, burgers and dancing.

Members of the Blairsville Cruisers drove some

of their classic cars to park in front of the building to further highlight the '50s feel of the evening.

Of course, the scene would not have been complete without music from that time period, which was provided by local Elvis impersonator extraordinaire Roy Perren, who performed spot-on renditions of "Hound Dog," "Love Me
See S.A.F.E., Page 8A

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