

County Meeting...from Page 1A



The commissioner with Barry and Pat Gibson as he recognizes Barry for his military service during the Vietnam War. Photo by Chad Stack

development opportunities and grants for the county and the cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris.

She was brought on board to help fill the empty buildings and vacant lots around the county by, among other things, assisting in the creation of job opportunities in the community.

McKay said she loves the small town feel here, and she is working with both cities and the county to keep that small-town feel with controlled growth.

"That's a plus in a lot of ways – that's what makes us unique, that down-home, small, safe county," said Bradshaw. "But I do feel like it is our job as county government to try to promote businesses and try to promote growth so that we can provide job opportunities."

In other news, Bradshaw said the county continues to be in great shape financially.

"Right now, the sales tax collections are up around \$28,000 from what they were this time last year, so we are very thankful for that," said



Commissioner Bradshaw welcomed Economic Development Director Denise McKay in his county meeting last week. Photo by Chad Stack

Bradshaw. "We give that to a good economy. We give it to the many people trying to do many things to promote our county with events to try and bring people here."

Moving along, Bradshaw welcomed Top of Georgia Speech Contest winner Samantha Church, who delivered a speech about the benefits of dual enrollment.

Church, 16, spoke about her positive experiences as a high school student dually enrolled at North Georgia Technical College and the benefits of taking college classes that have prepared her for the workforce.

The next county meeting will be held on Tuesday, July 16, at 5:30 p.m. in the Towns County Courthouse.

Gurtler...from Page 1A

this session, more so than I've seen in the last seven sessions," said Gurtler. "When I first got involved with the state legislature, I was an aide for (former District 8 State Rep.) Stephen Allison, so I got to see about four sessions before I ran for office."

"That kind of inspired me to run, because I saw a lot of the principles lacking when it came to voting."

For years, Republicans have enjoyed a majority in the Georgia General Assembly – both the House of Representatives and Senate – with the governorship also being held by Republicans since 2003, though Gurtler said many of the bills passed in recent years have defied principles of fiscal conservatism.

During his time working as an aide, Gurtler said he witnessed freshmen lawmakers being told by party leadership how to vote, with people rarely standing up or speaking out, and he would later experience this treatment himself as a freshman legislator.

"When I ran for my first campaign in 2016, it was to bring principles back in politics, and to lead by example," said Gurtler. "That's what you have to do – you can't tell anybody to do anything unless you're willing to do it yourself."

One of the major points Gurtler touched on was the state's annual budget, which was around \$19 billion a year when he began studying it in 2013.

"Now, it's up to about \$28 billion," said Gurtler. "It's increased about \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion every single year. We are a balanced budget state, but we do have debt. We have about \$13 billion in debt."

Gurtler also spoke about his strong support for the Heartbeat Bill, which prevents abortion as soon as a fetal heartbeat can be detected, usually around six weeks of life.

Georgia's Heartbeat Bill passed during the 2019 Legislative Session with 91 Republican votes and one Democratic vote, and it was subsequently signed by Gov. Brian Kemp in May with a Jan 1, 2020, effective date.

The representative also mentioned that District 8 has had some of the highest voter turnouts in the state.



Local student Samantha Church delivered a speech on dual enrollment in the GOP meeting on June 20. Photo by Chad Stack

"We are in the Top Three, and one year we were No. 1, in 2016," he said.

With the 2020 election coming up, Gurtler expressed his concerns for the future of the Republican Party and the state.

"We lost 14 seats in the House last year," he said. "We went from 119 (of 180) seats in the House to 105 now."

Gurtler also discussed his position on the Georgia Hemp Farming Act, which passed without his support.

"I had to vote against this bill, even though I like the intention," said Gurtler. "This is medicine, and we know this now scientifically. It does help people with severe disabilities."

As it stands, the bill only allows for six privately licensed companies and two universities to grow hemp with "astronomical fees" to purchase a license, effectively preventing people from getting into the hemp farming business due to the strict control of the government, Gurtler said.

"I'm on the Agriculture Consumer Affairs Committee, and agriculture is one of the biggest industries in the state of Georgia," said Gurtler. "We could have created tens of thousands of new jobs perhaps with this, opening it up to a free

market."

Gurtler concluded his talk by expressing displeasure with current House leadership, which he characterized as ruling through "fear and intimidation."

He also cited recent allegations that, for years, House Speaker David Ralston has abused his powers as a lawyer-legislator to delay criminal cases for his clients.

In other news, Gurtler and his wife Marissa are expecting a baby in mid-July, and the Towns County GOP presented the couple – as she attended the meeting with her husband – with several gifts for Baby Gurtler.

Also serving as a guest speaker was Towns County High School Principal Roy Perren.

GOP member Sam Fullerton acted as master of ceremonies for the event, introducing local 4-H Coordinator Crissy Figg to those gathered.

Eastgate Life Academy student Gabriel Moody led the Pledge of Allegiance that Thursday, Summer Rahn of Towns County High performed "The Star-Spangled Banner," and home schooler Samantha Church talked about dual enrollment opportunities in the meeting.

Perren...from Page 1A

that we work with at Towns County."

The Marine Corps veteran and longtime educator said he was excited to return as high school principal this year.

"It's probably the most favorite job that I have ever had in my life," he said. "The nine years I was principal at Towns County High School was a blessing to me and my family."

Now that he's principal again, Perren said he wants to focus on providing more opportunities for students to help them with their journeys in life after high school.

For Perren, these opportunities include college, technical school, the military, or going straight into the workforce.

"I want them to be able to have that path and the confidence in what they're doing," Perren said.

He also touched on the renovations that are currently going on at the school as a part of the two-phase modernization projects that began last summer.

Several years ago, Perren attended a conference and learned about state grants that were available for funding school construction projects to modernize old buildings like the high/middle school building in Towns County.

"Because of this grant,



Kaitlyn Crowder receiving recognition in the June GOP meeting for her recent Senior Project. Photo by Chad Stack

the state of Georgia has covered about 70 cents on the dollar to this point for everything that we've done on that building," he said. "Your tax dollars, your 30 cents that came out of the SPLOST, we're trying to make a really good investment on that to totally renovate that building."

The modernization grant is helping to fund a two-year construction program for updates at the schools, including a new roof, wiring, and state-of-the-art heating and air systems.

This summer, the school district is putting in new floors, fresh paint and a new fire alarm system, along with new restrooms, at the high/middle school building.

Outside of his life in

education, Perren is a popular Elvis Presley impersonator. He is also secretary of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors, to which he won election in 2015 and re-election last year.

Also in the meeting, local Republican Party Chairwoman Betsy Young presented Towns County High School Class of 2019 graduate Kaitlyn Crowder with an award for her recently completed Senior Project in which she raised funds to help underprivileged classmates purchase yearbooks.

District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler spoke in the June 20 GOP meeting as well, which is covered in another article in this week's newspaper.

S.A.F.E...from Page 1A

Tender" and many more by the King of Rock.

"These volunteers do a lot, and without them, we couldn't function. They are the backbone of S.A.F.E.," Franklin said.

Volunteers give of their time and are dedicated to helping the organization assist others to escape abusive situations.

"To volunteer time is a sacrifice," said S.A.F.E. Executive Director Molly Cousin. "These particular volunteers all have a big heart, and some of them have a history, and they feel like they have a history and connect to what S.A.F.E. does."

"So, volunteering their time isn't just for S.A.F.E., it's a tribute for women who are victims of abuse."

Some of the volunteers for the organization have been around for years helping S.A.F.E. grow and develop into what it is today.

"I've been a volunteer going on 18 years for 40 hours a week," said Treva Farris. "I wanted to get involved with S.A.F.E. because I have been blessed, and I want to give back. It makes me feel good to give back to others."

"I was abused by my first husband, but God gave me a



Roy Perren as Elvis Presley in the S.A.F.E. Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on June 21. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

good man and good life, so I wanted to give back and help others. They say you don't get paid as a volunteer, but I get paid every day when I walk out to my car to do this."

Another volunteer, Sarah Rieke, has been with the organization for 25 years.

"My next-door neighbor brought me to one of the meetings, and it hadn't even been established into an outlet store yet," said Rieke. "It has such a valuable meaning for abused women and children, and I just fell in love with the organization and what they

do to help those that need the help."

Volunteers received gifts from the organization in the appreciation event, as well as prizes during a raffle in which they were all entered.

S.A.F.E. is always looking for more volunteers to help with the many aspects of the organization, including its Blairsville and Young Harris thrift stores.

For more information on becoming a volunteer, call S.A.F.E. at 706-379-1901.