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Storms cause damage, power outages in region

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

A series of severe thunderstorms swept through the region on Saturday, June 23, and Sunday, June 24, toppling an untold number of trees and causing power outages to thousands of households in the North Georgia Mountains.

On Saturday, more than 10,000 members of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC lost power from the storms – nearly a fifth of the membership – though the excellent employees of the EMC worked around the clock to restore power to those homes.

The storms on Sunday caused about half that number of homes to lose electricity, and many telephone poles and downed powerlines needed replacing over the long

weekend.

In Hiawassee, the Sunday afternoon brought down a big oak tree that fell onto the fellowship hall of Friendship Baptist Church.

No one was injured in the incident, though the giant tree caused extensive damage to the building.

Also on Sunday afternoon, massive wind gusts blew down a big oak tree across Georgia 515 between Blairsville and Young Harris in Union County, right at the U.S. Forest Service Blue Ridge Ranger District Work Center.

A passing car was struck by the falling tree, which also took some power lines with it.

Fortunately, the driver was able to get free of the downed tree, and first responders with the Union County Fire Department and

Union County Sheriff's Office safely cleared the scene.

Severe thunderstorms are officially defined as storms capable of producing wind gusts over 58 mph, according to the National Weather Service.

"Wind this strong is able to break off large branches, knock over trees or cause structural damage to trees," according to the weather service. "Thunderstorms also produce tornadoes and dangerous lightning; heavy rain can cause flash flooding."

And no place outside is safe when a thunderstorm is in the area, according to the weather service.

"Get inside as soon as you hear thunder," according to the weather service. "Run to a substantial building or hard-topped metal vehicle as fast as See Storm Damage, Page 3A



Morris Phillips standing inside the fellowship hall of Friendship Baptist Church in Hiawassee, after a big tree wrecked the building on Sunday, June 24. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Celebrate July Fourth with boat parade, fireworks

By Mark Novak
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

It's that cherished American time of year again, when the most patriotic colors of red, white and blue fly proudly all over Towns County, this year in celebration of America's 242nd Independence Day.

Between the Towns County Chamber of Commerce and what's going on at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, there will be plenty of exciting activities leading up to the annual July Fourth fireworks grand finale at the fairgrounds.

Back by popular demand following a several-year hiatus is the patriotic Lake Chatuge Boat Parade on Wednesday, July 4.

"The chamber has

brought back the Fourth of July Boat Parade," said Chamber President Candace Lee. "That is on the Fourth of July starting at 10:30 a.m. out in front of the Ridges Resort and Marina, and it will run down to the old rec building.

"All boats have to be decorated to participate. They have to be red, white and blue in some way, and since we have had a lot of folks that missed it, we brought it back this year."

And while the boat parade is a great way for residents and visitors to kick off Independence Day, people have even more to look forward to with all the Fourth of July festivities at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Beginning at 5 p.m. inside the fairgrounds, North Mt. Zion Church of God will be providing tons of family-

friendly activities and games for the kids.

And running from 6 p.m. until the start of the fireworks, Raven and Red will entertain the masses in concert out front of the fairgrounds main office.

"On July 4, we will have the fireworks display at 9:45 p.m., and we'll shoot them off at the ballpark over the lake," said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. "It's open to the public, and the best view will be in the parking lot in front of the main office."

"There is no charge, the admission is free. We do ask for donations to offset the cost, and the Lions Club will be out with buckets to collect any donations."

Independence Day at the fairgrounds promises to be a one-stop shop for people See July Fourth, Page 6A



A view from the 2014 Lake Chatuge Fourth of July Boat Parade. Photo/Towns County Chamber of Commerce

TVA rate hike coming in October

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC power bills will be going up again this year, after the Tennessee Valley Authority implements its latest rate increase in October.

In August 2017, the TVA Board of Directors voted to implement what amounted to a 2.4 percent wholesale rate increase on electric rates "designed to produce an additional \$195 million during TVA fiscal year 2018," which is being used to "cover operations and service debts."

The TVA Board has implemented similar rate increases over the past several years and is expected to approve another 2.4 percent increase in wholesale power rates this August, said BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms in the Thursday, June 21, regular board meeting.

And since the EMC buys

power from TVA to sell to its cooperative membership, that means the EMC is facing unavoidable higher power prices starting in October despite not having raised its own rates in over five years.

This leaves the EMC with two options: one, it can absorb the cost of the rate hike and struggle to pay off its sizable long-term debts; or two, the members can pay the rate increase.

Nelms recommended in the June 21 board meeting that the rate hike be passed through to customer bills to keep the EMC "on its current path of financial stability, and to minimize the financial risk shifted to the cooperative from TVA."

Conflicted, the members of the BRMEMC Board of Directors voted 5-3 that Thursday to pass the increase on to the membership.

In dollars, moderate power users can expect to pay roughly \$27 more annually after



Jeremy Nelms

the increase goes into effect on Oct. 1, while larger households with greater electric needs are likely to see their annual bills increase by as much as \$40.

The TVA is the corporate agency of the United States that provides power to more than nine million people in seven Southeastern states, and it contends that the annual rate

See Rate Hike, Page 5A

Justin Moore to play Fairgrounds on Saturday

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Editor

Country Music Star Justin Moore is headlining Anderson Music Hall inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on Saturday, June 30.

Moore has charted 11 times in Billboard magazine's Hot Country Songs, and he has scored multiple No. 1 singles over the years, including "Small Town USA," "If Heaven Wasn't So Far Away," "Til My Last Day," "Lettin' the Night Roll," and more.

He's currently working on his fifth studio album, which will likely be coming out late 2017 or early 2018, though he's still enjoying success with 2016's "Kinda Don't Care."

"It's our goal every time we go out there to throw a party and make sure people feel like they got their money's worth,



Justin Moore

so we're going to go out and do that exact thing, hopefully," said Moore of his June 30 concert. "As far as the show goes, we're doing a lot of the hit records we've had over the last decade or so."

"We've been very fortunate thanks to the radio

and all the fans to have a show full of hit records. We've also thrown a couple of older things in the set that may have not been on the radio for us years ago, but ones that we really enjoy playing, so that's been fun for us."

See Moore, Page 6A

Blind American and British veterans take on the A.T.



Seven blinded veterans with volunteer trail guides during the BAT-1 Appalachian Trail expedition in early June. Photo/Facebook

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Seven blinded veterans made headlines earlier this month after hiking 74 miles

across the Georgia portion of the Appalachian Trail.

The journey served as the pilot run of a new project called the Blind Appalachian Trail program, or BAT.

This program is run by the Blinded Veterans Association Operation Peer Support, with a stated goal of encouraging visually impaired veterans of

See Veterans, Page 6A

Two arrested for trafficking methamphetamine

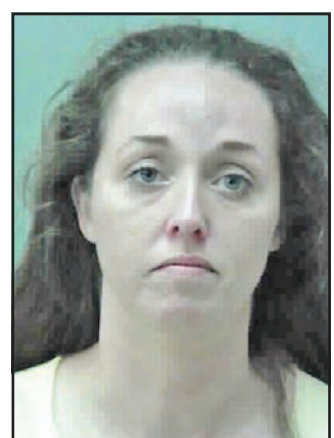
New Special
Towns County Herald

The Hiawassee Police Department stopped a 2003 Chevrolet Cavalier for operating without a license plate on Monday, June 18.

Towns County Dispatch had also given a "lookout" for the vehicle after it had been reported driving recklessly.

A subsequent search of the vehicle lead officers to locate approximately 77 grams of methamphetamine, syringes containing methamphetamine, marijuana, drug-related objects, and over \$700 in cash.

The driver of the vehicle, Phillip Goss of Gainesville, was arrested and charged with trafficking methamphetamine, possession of less than one ounce of marijuana, possession of drug-related objects, and operating an unregistered



Angelica Millwood



Phillip Goss

vehicle. The passenger, Angelica Millwood of Gainesville, was arrested and charged with trafficking methamphetamine, possession of less than one ounce of marijuana, and possession of drug-related objects.

They are both being held without bond at the Towns County Jail.

"This is the first drug trafficking arrest made in Hiawassee, and the largest amount of methamphetamine that we have seen," said See Drug Trafficking, Page 6A

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Chatuge 1,925.27
Nottely 1,776.46

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to benefit
Towns County Food Pantry
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The DEADLINE
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