



Towns County Herald

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The late Sheriff Chastain honored in county meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held a pair of special tributes in his June regular meeting, honoring the lives of two gone but not forgotten residents who deeply impacted their communities in life.

The first was former Towns County Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr., who was gunned down in cold blood on Dec. 8, 1974, while in the line of duty working a traffic stop. He was just 47 years old.

In honor of his service to the county and lasting legacy as a man of courage and integrity, the late Chastain has been recognized with an official intersection dedication near the area where he was shot, at US 76 and Georgia 288.

Commissioner Bradshaw highlighted the dedication in his June 20 meeting, welcoming Chastain's family and friends before offering comments on the project and the late sheriff himself.

"We started this several years ago, and then COVID hit," Bradshaw said, explain-

ing the more recent delay in what everyone agreed should have happened years ago. He then acknowledged Willene Haigler and Betty Phillips for leading the effort "to do something for Jay Chastain."

While he was too young to really know Sheriff Chastain, Bradshaw definitely remembers him and said that his father "always spoke very highly of Jay Chastain - I've heard his name all my life."

The commissioner thanked Georgia House District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter for making the dedication pos-

sible and for generally being very responsive to the needs of the county.

Gunter, who attended that evening, read the resolution he helped pass in the Georgia General Assembly officially declaring that area of local highway as the Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr. Memorial Intersection.

"The State of Georgia lost one of its finest citizens and most dedicated law enforcement officers with the untimely passing of Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr. on Dec. 8, 1974," the proclamation reads.

"Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr. was born on Feb. 22, 1927, a beloved son of William Joseph Chastain and Nola Jane Shook Chastain," the proclamation continues. "Sheriff Chastain was highly regarded by the citizens of his community and the state and by local government officials as a person of unquestioned integrity and dedication to the sound principles of law enforcement."

"He served with honor and distinction as Towns County Sheriff, and his life See Sheriff Chastain, Page 6A



Jay Vernon Chastain Sr.
Former Towns County Sheriff

GMF Parade Committee talks details ahead of Aug. 19



Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason speaking with fellow members of the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee in a meeting last week. Photo by Natalie Mintz

By Natalie Mintz
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fair Parade will return this year on Saturday, Aug. 19, for its 72nd annual outing, embracing a patriotic theme of "Stars, Stripes and Summer Nights" and featuring District 50 State Sen. Bo Hatchett as Parade

Grand Marshal. An essential aspect of the Georgia Mountain Fair, the parade will see floats designed by local businesses and organizations riding through Hiawassee to augment the many vendors, carnival games and music performances at the 2023 fair, to run Aug. 18-26. The parade will begin at

11 a.m. that Saturday, making its way from SouthState Bank in town all the way to the fairgrounds, and as always, residents and families are encouraged to show up and support the longtime local tradition.

On Wednesday, June 28, the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee met in the See Parade Committee, Page 6A

2023 Made in Georgia Fest supports small businesses

By Natalie Mintz
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Over 90 small businesses from all over Georgia showcased their wares at the annual Made in Georgia Festival June 24-25, bringing in residents and tourists alike to support the local economy.

Held at the Towns

County Recreation & Conference Center and sponsored by the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, the event featured products for people of all ages and interests, including families.

Guests enjoyed shopping for products ranging from candles and skin care to jewelry and clothing. There were

also items for kids, like doll clothes, children's books and teddy bears. Home goods such as pillows, knitted blankets, and decorations could also be found. Local food trucks and bakeries sold goods as well.

Chamber Membership Coordinator Mary Ann Miller said that participating busi- See Made in Georgia, Page 6A



The Made in Georgia Festival filled Foster Park June 24-25 with vendors and visitors thanks to careful planning by the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Fiddlers Convention makes triumphant return in 2023

By Natalie Mintz
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE - On Saturday, June 24, the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention returned to the North Georgia Mountains after a three-year hiatus following COVID-19, bringing musicians from all over the Southeast and beyond to the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Playing dulcimers, banjos and dobros, fiddles, mandolins and guitars, dozens of talented musicians competed in 12 categories for the opportunity to win titles, prize money and bragging rights, and for one particularly brilliant competitor, a chance to be crowned Fiddle King or Queen.

This year, 14-year-old Noah Goebel was crowned Fiddle King in the bluegrass-style contest.

Goebel began playing around five years ago in his hometown of Elkton, Kentucky. He was introduced to



Noah Goebel of Kentucky won the big title of Fiddle King at the 2023 Georgia State Fiddlers Convention on June 24. Photo/Facebook

Dan Kelly, who played for country stars like Alan Jackson and Faith Hill, and began taking private lessons.

Now, Goebel enjoys the opportunity to travel "almost every weekend" and plays both solo and with a band. The night before the convention was held,

he had the opportunity to play at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville.

"As long as I'm playing, I'm happy," the young man said that evening, adding that he enjoys the "social aspect" of these kinds of conventions See Fiddlers Convention, Page 3A

Whiskers Project celebrates 20 years of caring for cats



Whiskers Project volunteers and supporters had a great time inside the Union County Community Center recently, breaking bread and boogying down in celebration of the organization's 20th anniversary. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE - Feline fanciers of all breeds gathered at the Union County Commu-

nity Center on June 24 to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Whiskers Project.

Whiskers is an organization that aims to shrink the number of homeless cats in Union,

Towns and other nearby communities by following trap, neuter/spay and release protocols.

Victoria Lindsey founded the project in 2003 from the See Whiskers Project, Page 3A

2 Sections 12 Pages



Vol. 94 No. 36

Arrests - 2A
Chamber - 5A
Church - 2B
Classifieds - 5B
Opinion - 4A
Legals - 5B
Obits - 3B
Sports - 4B

Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,686.28
Chatuge 1,925.28
Nottely 1,776.37

Young Harris Jamboree July 7

See page 2A

Hiawassee Night Market July 7

See page 6A

Butternut Creek Fest July 15-16

See page 6A



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Fiddlers Convention...from Page 1A



For many families, bluegrass is a way of life, and judging by the turnout of participants for the return of the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention to North Georgia, the Appalachian tradition is here to stay.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

as well. Goebel, who also plays mandolin, plans to “make a career” out of his love of music, and the newspaper wishes him well on his journey.

The last Fiddlers Convention took place at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in 2019. When it was decided that the fairgrounds would no longer host the convention, organizers set out to find a new location and make sure the historic competition could continue.

Now, Martha Cunningham, who helped organize the event, is focused on the importance of “moving forward” with the convention.

“There’s still a big interest in this kind of competition,” she explained. Like Goebel, many of the contestants started playing and competing young, and the convention gives them a chance to be noticed. Former contestants, for instance, have gone on to tour with country artists.

The Georgia State Fiddlers Convention has been around for 50 years, explained perennial emcee Barry Palmer. However, conventions like it have been going on all over the country since

the 1800s.

Like Cunningham, Palmer pointed out how many young people have taken an interest in playing bluegrass music, which is integral to keeping the tradition alive.

“The people who play here will be the next stars of country music, or will be playing with the next stars of country music,” he said.

Palmer also described the importance of letting young people come together to learn from each other, something that can always be seen – and heard – backstage.

Taking a break from playing, Ben Collins discussed how the music is “in your blood.” For him, this rings particularly true.

Collins was introduced to bluegrass by his musician father, and now he brings his own four children to bluegrass festivals and conventions. His son, Carson, has been playing since he was around 6 and competed this year.

Similarly, the Lindbloms have made bluegrass a family tradition. Lucy Lindblom explained how she and her siblings became interested in the style of music and intro-

duced it to their parents. Now, they all travel and play together full-time.

Another competitor, Elizabeth Coleman, started out on classical violin but was encouraged by her husband to start learning the fiddle. Today, she and her children compete, though she said her daughters are better than she is at the fiddle.

Judging the competition were bluegrass heavyweights who have been involved in the industry for years, both professionally and in competition: Red Henry, Allen Shadd, Sharon Bounds and Bill Cunningham. Their considerable backgrounds can be found at <https://georgiastatefiddlersconvention.org/>.

Of course, the convention relies on tax-deductible donations from the community to keep going. To support the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention, please make checks payable to the GA State Fiddlers Convention and mail to P.O. Box 370 Hiawassee, GA 30546.

For a full list of winners, check out the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention on Facebook or email marthacunningham7@gmail.com.

Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild Children’s Art Program

Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild is excited to announce the 2023 children’s summer art program! Classes will start the week of June 6 and go thru the week of July 13. The cost per child, per class is \$10 and includes all supplies. Classes will be held at ArtWorks Artisan Center, 243 Big Sky Drive, Hiawassee, GA. The children’s summer arts program is part of our community outreach pro-

gram.
July 11 - 10:30 AM to Noon – Make a polymer clay necklace.
July 11 - 1 PM to 2:30 PM – Acrylic painting – cartoon character or superhero.
July 13 - 10:30 AM to Noon - Kumihimo Bracelet/Key Chain.
July 13 - 1pm to 2:30 PM – Acrylic painting – Paint a nighttime mountain scene.

To register your child or grandchild, please visit our web-

site www.mountainartsandcrafts.org and click on events and classes and upcoming classes page for a registration form. You can drop off the registration form at the store. Please call for ArtWorks Artisan Center at 706-896-0932 for more information. Classes are small and fill quickly.

Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild/Artworks Artisan Gallery is a 501 (c)3 non-profit charitable organization.

Whiskers Project...from Page 1A

ground up, slowly but surely enlisting help from friends along the way to build the Whiskers Project into what it is today.

“I moved to Blairsville in 1998 from Atlanta, and I’d never owned a cat, never wanted a cat, never had a dog,” Lindsey recalled, saying she was more interested in travel than caring for pets.

And she wasn’t an animal person until one fateful day when a call for volunteers from the Humane Society Mountain Shelter caught her attention.

“One thing I know about rescue groups now – don’t say you’re going to volunteer unless you really mean it, because we will come after you,” Lindsey said with a smile. “So, I went into Mountain Shelter Humane Society, and I was amazed. I had never seen so many kittens in one place in all my life.”

Lindsey wanted to find out where all those kittens were coming from, and she soon received her answer with a little digging. All over the region, feral cat colonies roam wherever they can to find food, whether that be on private property or behind downtown buildings.

With no one to care for or monitor them, wild cats quickly breed out of control, and while life is difficult for an adult cat, the odds of survival for kittens are dismally low. Opportunistic opossums, raccoons, hawks, owls, coyotes, foxes and other predators don’t think twice about killing and eating a kitten.

That’s not even taking the weather into account. Just as humans can overheat or freeze, cats can easily succumb to the elements. Like human infants, newborn kittens cannot regulate their own body temperature, and a totally wild environment can easily spell death for an entire litter.

“I started feeding a cat colony at a local establishment, and it was Christmas morning,” Lindsey said. “I woke up, and the first thing I thought about were those kittens. It was so cold outside; I knew at that establishment, there wasn’t anybody there. Those kittens didn’t have anything to eat.”

As the saying goes, the rest was history. Over the course of two decades, the Whiskers Project has spayed and neutered over 3,000 cats and educated the many humans who care for them. Lindsey shared some tips with those in



Those who support the Whiskers Project do so out of a passion for making sure cats do not suffer needlessly, pictured here in the June 24 anniversary banquet. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

the audience, both about trapping and how best to help.

For example, plenty of folks use Havahart live traps to catch wild cats, but Lindsey suggests using the sturdier Wisconsin Tomahawk trap. And be sure to line the bottom with newspaper, considering the cats must spend the night in the trap for observation.

Also, bait with mackerel instead of regular cat food, and ensure the trap is frequently cleaned to wash away the scent of other cats and vet offices. Cover the trap with a sheet to keep the cat as calm as possible, lowering the risk of self-injury or human harm.

At the celebration, raffles, a silent auction and a specialty seafood dinner catered by The View Bar and Grill helped raise funds for the organization. When all was said and done, about \$750 was gathered up by the 50-50 Raffle alone, and the silent auction proved to be a big hit.

As fellow rescuers and owners of the Wonderland Animal Sanctuary in Hayesville, North Carolina, Robbin Sinay and her husband Mike Avery were invited to the shindig by Lindsey. The two organizations have worked together in the past, and that evening they celebrated together also.

“We aren’t good at trapping. We’re good at rescuing and we’re good at homing – and loving, all that good stuff,” said Sinay, talking about how Whiskers and Wonderland worked to combine their strengths in securing a brighter future for homeless cats.

“We’ve been in Hayesville for 13 years, but we’re just now getting to know all the good people in rescue,” she added, recognizing that “to catch feral cats is not easy,” and looking forward to working with Lindsey and her volunteers in the future.

Bobbie and Mike Forster had a personal connection to the Whiskers Project, having befriended a fearful stray that they lovingly named Tippy.

“We were just pet lovers – cat lovers, dog lovers. Then we had a stray that was pretty feral that came to our house, and Whiskers Project helped us to trap her and get her taken care of,” Bobbie Forster detailed. “We’re slowly getting her tamed.”

“She’s beginning to keep us,” joked Mike Forster. “We found out she had already been spayed, but she had a collar around her neck, and she wouldn’t let us get near. And we couldn’t get the collar off her, so Whiskers really helped us there.”

“When, after time, (you) finally win the heart of a cat that just doesn’t like people – scared to death, you know, this timid little creature that just doesn’t like anybody – and finally they melt, that’s just the best part right there,” posited Mike Avery, describing why folks in the rescue and animal aid business do what they do.

The Whiskers Project is always looking for volunteers, especially those who are willing to bottle-feed newborn kittens or foster cats looking for a new home. If that isn’t up your alley, there’s also a need for people willing to trap and transport.

All donations and other contributions are tax-deductible, as the Whiskers Project is a 501(c)3 organization.

To get involved, call 888-872-9330 or email info@whiskersproject.org. Also check out www.whiskersproject.org. For a wider view, look up the Feral Friends Network as part of Alley Cat Allies, based in Bethesda, Maryland, which can be reached at 240-482-1980.

Parade Committee...from Page 1A

lobby of Anderson Music Hall to discuss plans for the parade. Right now, the focus is on making sure local businesses continue to sign up to be a part of it.

So far, parade attendees can expect floats from the Blue Ridge Mountain Chapter Sons of the American Revolution, the Blairsville Cruisers, Hiwassee Park Senior Living, Osborn Farms, the U.S. Forest Service, Shriners Hospital and many other organizations.

Local first responders will also be in the parade lineup to boost local participation, and the Lions Club of Towns County will have a float featuring contestants in the ever-popular Georgia Mountain Fair Beauty Pageant.

Both Towns County High School and Union County High School will be involved in the parade as well.

Floats registered in the parade will be entered into a contest to determine which is best. The float that wins Third Place will receive \$1,500, Second Place \$2,500 and First Place \$4,000.

Alvin Gibson has provided a donation of \$5,000 in total to the Georgia Mountain Fair, with \$4,000 going toward prize money and \$1,000 to aid in Towns County High's involvement in the parade.

The public should also look forward to a vintage car show provided by the Peach State Challengers and the Georgia Model A Restorers Club.

All local businesses and organizations are encouraged to participate. Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason



Alvin Gibson, right, presenting a donation to Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee Member Shannon Floyd on June 28.

Photo by Natalie Mintz

said the parade is meant to be "a community event," and with all these groups and more joining in on the fun, a community event it will be for another year running.

Of course, the parade is not the only thing the fairgrounds has going on that day. Anyone who attends the parade can also enjoy the fair itself, with live performances and access to all the family fun people have come to know over the years.

Alongside local performers, the Brotherly Love Tour featuring John Michael Montgomery and Eddie Montgomery will be putting on a concert that night. Amusements of America will be providing carnival rides and games at the fairgrounds also.

Thomason hopes people

"come out to support the community, make memories, and have fun."

Businesses wanting to get involved should fill out an application to pre-register for the parade. By filling out an application, businesses can be sure that their floats are entered to be judged in the contest and given a place in the parade.

Applications can be found at georgiamountainfairgrounds.com and should either be emailed to [gmtfair@windstream.net](mailto:gamtfair@windstream.net), faxed to 706-896-4209, mailed to Georgia Mountain Fair, P.O. Box 444, Hiwassee, GA 30546, or taken in person to the GMF office at 1311 Music Hall Road.

A full schedule for the nine-day 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair can be found on the website.

Food Pantry Food Distribution

The Food Pantry hours are Monday - Thursday 9 AM- 12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM - 2 PM.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomas at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.

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Sheriff Chastain...from Page 1A



The family of Jay Vernon Chastain Sr. gathered with Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Rep. Stan Gunter to recognize the late sheriff's memorial intersection dedication in the June county meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

was tragically taken in the line of duty while he heroically carried out the difficult responsibilities of his vocation.

"Sheriff Chastain exhibited extraordinary devotion to public service, outstanding loyalty, fine leadership and meticulous attention to detail in all of his duties.

"He will long be remembered for his inspiring commitment to the welfare of others, which stands as a shining example of the positive effect law enforcement professionals have on the lives and wellbeing of others.

"It is abundantly fitting and proper that this remarkable and distinguished Georgian be recognized appropriately by dedicating an intersection in his memory.

"Now, therefore, be it resolved and enacted by the General Assembly of Georgia that the intersection at US 76 and State Route 288 south of

the Hiwassee River in Towns County is dedicated as the Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr. Memorial Intersection.

"Be it further resolved that the Department of Transportation is authorized and directed to erect and maintain appropriate signs dedicating the Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr. Memorial Intersection."

With that, family and friends of the sheriff joined Bradshaw and Gunter at the front of the meeting room inside the Temporary Courthouse Offices at the Old Rec Gym to take a photo commemorating the occasion, receiving a copy of the resolution and several signs matching the one that now resides at the intersection.

Speaking on behalf of the family, Jay Vernon Chastain Jr., who was 5 years old when his father died and has "vivid memories of the huge turnout to his funeral," said the

dedication and public recognition was "such an honor."

"I was very young when he was killed," Chastain said. "I have heard throughout my entire life of how much he was liked not only as a sheriff but as a person. My family being there was also a huge honor."

Like Bradshaw, Chastain thanked Willene Haigler and Betty Phillips "for their part in getting this done," as it has been a long time coming.

Additionally, Chastain - known by many as "Junior" - expressed gratitude for everyone who played a role in the project, and he also thanked his wife, Annette Chastain, for contributing much to seeing the dedication through.

The Towns County Herald will continue its coverage of the meeting in next week's edition, to include details of the Rev. Jimmy Rogers Memorial Bridge dedication on Georgia 66 in Young Harris.

Made in Georgia...from Page 1A

nesses must be based in Georgia to be a part of the festival, which has been going on for five years now, with some businesses having attended for all five years.

Miller added that the organizers try to have a variety of businesses attend, which explained the crafting events and demonstrations for guests to join. One of these was presented by Georgia Mountain Falconry.

Owned by Buster Brown, Falconry educated people on the birds and how to hunt with them. At the festival, the group displayed a falcon, a red-tail hawk and a Eurasian eagle owl for people to see and learn about.

The company does this regularly, traveling to different fairs and festivals. Brown, a retired teacher, also offers classes for people interested in falconry.

Greg Ames, who works for the company, teaches classes where people can learn how to hunt using falcons. He explained that those who take the class are required to pass a test and become certified to hunt. Afterward, he takes them out to either trap or hunt, depending on the season.

The Lake Chatuge Rotary Club also attended the event, bringing plants grown hydroponically and educating anyone interested in the process. Using hydroponic methods, crops can be grown in a greenhouse using 10 times less water than regular crops, with considerably faster results.

Produce grown by the club is donated to local food banks and Meals on Wheels. Often, the people who rely on food from these sources do not have access to fresh produce, and member Jack Payne explained how Rotary is seeking to change this.

Anyone interested in getting involved is welcome to come to meetings at the Brass-town Valley Resort on Tues-



Georgia Mountain Falconry wowed crowds with birds of prey at the annual Made in Georgia Festival last month.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

days at noon.

Pastor Kelly Beckley of Hiwassee United Methodist Church was also there selling handmade goods from the congregation to raise money for the church.

Local winery Hightower Creek had a booth selling wine and advertising the weekly events held at the vineyard.

Another class offered at the festival was on shrubs, and not the kind typically found in yards. Founder of Farm 2 Cocktail, Carlton Chamblin, was introduced to shrubs while he was bartending.

Shrubs, which date back as far as colonial times, are made of fruit preserved in vinegar. They can be diluted with water and imbibed, used as a marinade or as a cocktail mixer.

Yvonne Sams, owner of Nana's Designs, attended Made in Georgia to sell her handmade doll clothes. Sams came up with the idea when her granddaughter asked for an American Girl Doll but she could not afford one.

To make the money,

Sams began creating and selling clothes for dolls. When she raised enough funds this way, she bought her granddaughter a doll. Now, she has bought her two other granddaughters dolls by traveling to festivals and flea markets to sell her designs.

She also pointed out how her clothes are "unique" compared to what someone might find in an American Girl store.

Coming from Fairburn, George and Selemma Hastings were there with their company Bless Somebody Soaps and Candles.

Selemma came up with the idea for the company after making soaps for her grandson, who struggled with allergies to certain soaps and skin-care products. She also works as a nurse and made shower steamers for her patients with COVID-19.

She focuses on crafting "products with therapeutic value," and makes and packages everything herself.

The Made in Georgia Festival takes place annually, and any Georgia-based small business can apply to attend.