

Fireworks...from Page 1A

it, and all lives that were lost over the years fighting for the freedoms we have," Melon said.

Kinsey Wood of Cumming travels to Hiawasse each year with her family to enjoy the holiday, as well.

"This is our seventh year making this trip," Wood said. "We love coming to the mountains, renting a boat for the weekend and just spending time together. My brother and I love getting to watch the fireworks from the lake, and the fireworks show is always good."

After simply viewing the boat parade for several years, Wood said her family decorated a boat of their own to enter in the parade this year.

"It was a lot of fun decorating the boat and getting to be in the parade," Wood said. "That was a first for us, but we are already talking about what to do next year."

In addition to the spectators parked and tailgating inside the fairgrounds, hundreds of people lined Main Street and filled the beach, hoping to find the right spot to catch the fireworks.



Families and friends gather every year for a good time and patriotic expressions at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on Independence Day.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Another tailgater from Cumming, Jordan Hobbs, said it was nice to see everyone just having fun and enjoying the day with family and friends.

"The Vintage Vixens put on a rocking show, and they had people dancing for hours," Hobbs said. "We love visiting Hiawasse. Everyone is always so nice here."

As darkness fell Saturday, spectators hurried to get in place for the Fairgrounds Annual Fireworks Show to celebrate America. With fireworks launching from the fairgrounds' baseball fields, patriots clapped and cheered as the sky lit up, and by the end, it was another successful annual display in the books.

July 4th...from Page 1A

felt COVID-19 shouldn't stop people from having fun, since social distancing could be easily accomplished while viewing fireworks.

"I am one of those people that is terrified of the virus," Bennett said. "I wear a mask everywhere I go and make sure to social distance, but I am still going to see some fireworks with my family over at the (Georgia Mountain) Fairgrounds. This is something that I don't think should be canceled. People can sit in their cars and they don't even have to come into contact with each other."

"Today is about our country, which is something more than us. I still think the

virus is a threat and that safety is a priority, but people need to enjoy themselves. We have been worrying too long. Now, we can worry while being proactive about our situation."

Towns County local Charles Casey was shopping at Red Barn Log Furniture on Friday, July 3, and he shared his view that the Fourth of July was a day where people could put aside their worries and concentrate on the future.

"I think you could ask anybody around here and they will tell you that the Fourth of July is a staple American holiday for everybody," Casey said. "It is not something that we can ignore and go without celebrating. That virus has

kept us locked up for a while now, and we need to get over it. I think it is time to move forward."

"Celebrating the Fourth of July is an American tradition that we need right now. People have a moment to be with their families and stop and see the positives of the world. There is nothing like sitting outside and enjoying the fireworks with loved ones."

"This country may be in a sticky situation right now, and it is confusing; I know I sure am confused. But now is not the time to worry. Put on your masks and do what you need to do, but enjoy the day and celebrate."

Monument...from Page 1A

of a Towns County veteran who passed away after Jan. 1, 2012; 2) service in one of the major branches of the U.S. Armed Forces; 3) in-person delivery of proof of honorable discharge and/or DD-214 (or appropriate form); 4) proof of residency at time of passing; and 5) death certificate reflecting Towns County residency at time of passing.

With guidance from former Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall, a mixed group of local veterans started the Memorial Wall inscription practice in 2012, having formed a committee with U.S. Coast Guard Veteran Scott Drummond always participating.

Usually, on the first Saturday of each month through September, Drummond said the committee accepts applications of deceased Towns County veterans for review. Due to COVID-19 and other reasons, however, Drummond said things have had to change.

Before the virus hit, committee members held their monthly meetings at Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807 on the first Saturday of each month, but because of the virus and convenience purposes, Drummond said members had to postpone public meetings.

With the help of Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Drummond said they were able to change the meeting to

the first Friday of each month instead, and that they've gained access to the old Towns County Rec Gym.

Moving to the Old Rec Gym has made finding the meetings much easier for people who said they'd had trouble locating VFW Post 7807 off Sunnyside Road and consequently doubled their trips.

Of course, the Veterans Memorial Wall is a dedication to veterans and their families that live here in Towns County, with names of local brave servicemen and women having been engraved on almost half of the new previously unused granite monument since 2012.

Again, the eligibility requirements to have names added to the monument include an honorable discharge, proof of Towns County residency, and a \$60 check made payable to Matthew Barton, WNC Marble & Granite, to cover the cost of engraving.

One of the goals is to not duplicate any names that are already inscribed, Drummond said, so duplicate entries are not permitted.

With assistance from Banister-Cooper Funeral Home, Drummond said each year they average six names added to the wall, all of which are unveiled every Nov. 11.

Each year, there is an annual Veterans Day service

that is held on Nov. 11 at the Towns County Veterans Park in front of the High School, where local veterans' organizations gather with members of the community to honor all veterans.

During that ceremony, Drummond said the new names are also honored. The spouses and families of the veterans added to the wall sit in front as they announce the newly added names and present a flower to each family.

"Before and after the ceremony, they are able to go and see their loved one's name inscribed on the wall just like they asked for it to be," Drummond said.

With so many veterans and their families calling Towns County home, Drummond said it's important to support this county project honoring the local veterans of Towns County who have passed on.

Fortunately, Drummond said there seems to be a real appreciation for veterans these days compared to in years past, especially given the current prevalence of organizations devoted to veterans.

"There are a lot of veterans organizations that exist today that didn't exist back then," Drummond said. "All in all, I would say that veterans are doing a lot better."

Parade...from Page 1A

both the community and the visitors together to celebrate our independence."

Participants in the annual parade consider the event to be a fun tradition to celebrate the holiday and the unity of the country, like Russ Collins of Jonesboro, whose involvement with the parade goes back more than 25 years.

Collins has been part of the community for more than 30 years, with his wife Deb Collins owning a shop in Hiawasse and Russ being a former marshal for the boat parade.

"We started in the boat parade in I think '91," Collins said. "We were in it for 10 years, then in 2000, I took over as the parade marshal and did that for 15 years. We had just not participated for the last three or four years, so we thought we would try it one last time."

"We were very pleased with the turnout today, too. It looked like there were close to 50 boats, so it was really good. I think with it being on a Saturday was a big plus. The local people and the ones that have participated in this for so long all look forward to it. Even when I was the parade marshal, we would have so many people



As always, residents and visitors to the area showed off their extreme patriotism with red, white and blue on Saturday, July 4.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

come from out of town and look forward to it."

Spectators of the event cheered the parade on as it went by, with many playing celebratory music to mark the occasion. One spectator, Jimmy Jimmerson of Alpharetta, was enjoying his first year at the parade by waving an American flag and applauding the boats as they passed.

"This is our first time at the boat parade, and we loved

it, it was awesome," Jimmerson said. "Today is a day that means we live in the greatest country of all. It is a day to celebrate liberty, freedom and justice for all. It is a day for us as a country to unite behind those truths."

"A lot of times we are told other things that are not true, but the truth is that we live in the greatest country of all, and we do celebrate and strive for that liberty, freedom and justice for all."

Graffiti...from Page 1A



A graffitied message reading "Death 2 Amerikkka" appeared on the side of this building off US 76 near Hiawasse early Sunday morning.

Photo/Submitted

Bradshaw...from Page 1A

everything," Bradshaw said, "the architect, bond referendum, attorney fees, gutting the interior, the addition - everything can be done for that amount. We're going to watch it closely to make sure if there's any room to save money, we're going to."

Bradshaw said previously that, due to inflation, borrowing the money now to totally renovate the old courthouse and build an addition with multiple courtrooms would be cheaper than saving up SPLOST money for construction later.

The county has the option to hire out parts of the project to contractors other than CPL if work of equal quality can be done for less cost, Bradshaw said, adding that the county would not be held liable for the 7-percent CPL fee on any work not done by CPL.

He also said the drawings from CPL will take about five

months to complete, which will be near the end of 2020 or the beginning of 2021. Once the drawings are done, the requests for proposals or bidding process for construction can start, and CPL will assist Towns County in that process.

Once a builder is secured, construction will occur in two phases: a nine-month period to build a brand-new add-on with multiple courtrooms, then another nine-month period to completely renovate the existing building.

"I want to thank Towns County voters again for approving the SPLOST," Bradshaw said, adding that without their approval, the much-needed renovations and addition would not be possible.

Other business conducted in the July 1 called meeting was the approval by the commissioner of a "memorandum of

understanding" with the University of Georgia for Extension Office services.

Historically, UGA Extension Office employees' paychecks have been split between UGA and Towns County. However, UGA will now pay extension employees in full and bill Towns County for its share. There will be no increase in Towns County's share.

In his Commissioner's Report, Bradshaw said he will not require county residents and visitors to wear face masks because he feels that people are smart enough to recognize that there is a danger of contracting the coronavirus when out in public and act accordingly.

He strongly advises residents and visitors to follow guidelines from the Governor's Office and use precautions when out in public: "As commissioner, I just want to urge people to please be careful."

Bradshaw said that, per state guidelines, masks are required when inside the courthouse and are available at the door for those who do not have one. Forehead thermometers have been ordered, and courthouse visitors will be temperature-checked at the door.

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