

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 91 Number 37

Wednesday, July 15, 2020

Georgia Mountain Fair Committee plans 70th anniversary party

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fair Committee met Thursday, July 9, to discuss an upcoming 70th anniversary party in celebration of the ever-popular Georgia Mountain Fair, scheduled to run Aug. 14-22 this year.

Committee members are looking to host the anniversary party on Thursday, Aug. 13, starting at 6 p.m. inside the Anderson Music Hall. The party will feature live music and a free meal for attendees as well as a small fireworks show to conclude the evening.

The fairgrounds hosted a more formal celebratory event for the 50th anniversary, and Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason

said she would like the 70th anniversary celebration to be less of a program and more of an occasion for people to have fun.

"When we had 50 years, we put all the Board of Directors on the stage and did a lot of speaking," Thomason said. "I feel like this is the time to celebrate and have a party, because everybody has been in the house."

"We just need to have fun. I asked Jim Wood with the Georgia Mountain Fair Band to come and be the entertainment for us. I have no idea how many people to plan for this time. It is so hard to figure out everything this year."

"We had 1,200 people before (for the 50th anniversary celebration), and when we did it, we filled the lobby with balloons and had cupcakes,

speeches and talks."

On top of live music and food, the celebration will feature historical information about the Georgia Mountain Fair sprinkled throughout, with an emphasis on how it has changed over the years.

Health and safety are top priorities for the upcoming celebration, so committee members put their heads together July 9 to brainstorm a variety of ways to serve a large group of people in the safest way possible.

Some of the precautions discussed in the meeting included setting up the food in a place where people will not be in direct contact with servers, having packaged drinks instead of open cups, wrapping the desserts, and having packaged condiments.

See *Fair Committee*, Page 6A



The 2020 Georgia Mountain Fair Committee, L-R: Ronnie Whelchel, Diane Williams, Brenda Swanson, Hilda Thomason, Matt Turpin and Jim Wood.
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Concerns rise alongside positive COVID-19 cases in region



The boat ramp at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds was bustling with people having fun in the sun over the weekend.
Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As the positive case rate for COVID-19 continues to increase throughout the region and elsewhere, people are naturally wondering what will happen next.

Some, like David Everett

of South Carolina, believe that another shelter-in-place order may permanently destroy local economies.

"To be quite honest, I'm not so sure what is going on anymore," Everett said at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Boat Ramp last Thursday. "The world is a weird and crazy place

right now, and we just have to figure it all out."

"They say that the virus is making a lot, and that worries a lot of people. The first closing really hurt a lot of jobs; I hate to see what another closing might do. That is really

See *COVID-19*, Page 6A

Schools ask parents to choose between traditional and online learning

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Amid continued COVID-19 concerns, Towns County Schools announced July 9 that parents must choose between online and traditional on-campus learning options for students for the 2020-2021 school year, to start Aug. 13.

"To help parents make the best choice for their child, we have developed a back-to-school plan outlining the safety measures that will be in place to keep students and staff safe within the school building," according to the announcement.

The district will be emailing forms to all parents this week asking them to indicate their choice between online and traditional learning "so we can plan and allocate staff for the number of traditional and online students that we will need to serve." Forms are due back no later than July 27.

According to plan details, it was developed "by the administration team of Towns County Schools with consideration of Georgia's Path to Recovery for K-12 Schools (guidelines)," which



Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong wore his face mask in the July 6 regular school board meeting.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

in turn were developed by the Department of Education in partnership with the Department of Public Health.

"This plan has been made in the interest of keeping all students and staff as safe as possible while providing the best educational experience we can given the current situation," listed in this plan. "The items to change due to changes in

circumstances such as virus spread or guidance from state officials."

Among the plan's many measures are temperature checks, social distancing guidance, situational mask wearing, increased sanitation efforts, new infection protocols to include contact tracing, hand sanitizing stations, no communal water fountains, no

See *Schools*, Page 6A

Ordiales, council members address crosswalk concerns in meeting

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Department of Transportation's recently constructed South Main Street crosswalk at Chatuge Regional Hospital highlighted the agenda during the Tuesday, July 7, Hiwassee City Council Meeting broadcast via Facebook Live.

"I know there's been a lot of controversy (regarding) the crosswalk," Mayor Liz Ordiales said, referencing complaints she'd fielded recently about traffic concerns there. "Keep in mind that the intent of the crosswalk, for many, many years, was to prevent accidents."

"Just last year, we had someone who was hit by a car and ended up with some pretty serious head trauma. The hospital has been asking for this crosswalk for many, many years, and it's the responsibility of the council and (the mayor's) office to keep citizens' safety first and foremost."



The new GDOT crosswalk at Chatuge Regional Hospital on Main Street was completed Wednesday, July 8.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Towns EMS workers have raised concerns over potential difficulties turning left out of the hospital when traffic is backed up, the mayor said, but noted that GDOT and Towns EMS have since addressed traffic concerns and don't foresee the crosswalk

hindering emergency vehicles there.

Concerning another complaint about turning left at Berrong Street, Ordiales said that the 212-foot distance between the crosswalk and Berrong Street should provide

See *Crosswalk*, Page 6A

Early in-person voting for Aug. 11 primary runoffs begins Monday



Keep an eye out for this Early Voting sign outside the Towns County Courthouse starting Monday next week.
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Advanced in-person voting for the Aug. 11 Republican and Democratic Primary Runoff Elections begins Monday, July 20, and will continue through Friday, Aug. 7.

Early voting will take

place weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office located in Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiwassee next to the courthouse.

Voters will be able to cast ballots during lunchtime, though importantly, there is no required Saturday scheduled

for weekend early voting due to the runoff nature of the election.

The election will feature four runoff contests, including three Republican races to decide party nominees for the offices of Towns County Sheriff, District 50 State Senator and U.S. Representative in the 117th Congress from the 9th Congressional District; and one Democratic race for 9th Congressional District.

For Towns County Sheriff, Kenneth "Ode" Henderson will square off against Daren "Bear" Osborn for the Republican nomination, with the Aug. 11 runoff winner currently being set to appear unchallenged on the Nov. 3 General Election ballot.

For District 50 State Senator, Republicans Vay Hall and Bo Hatcher will vie for their party's nomination, with

See *Early Voting*, Page 6A

Ex-doctor Heaton appeals six-year federal prison sentence

David Gowder to begin 18-month stint at FCI Jesup July 28

By Linda Erbele
Towns County Herald

Attorneys for former local physician James Heaton have filed an appeal of his six-year prison sentence with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit.

The appeal was filed July 7 and had not been scheduled for a hearing by press time.

Heaton, who operated a family medical practice in Blairsville for more than 20

years, received his sentence from U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story on June 24 following his October 2019 conviction on more than 100 counts of prescription drug fraud.

In a separate June 24 hearing, Story sentenced Heaton's co-defendant in the case, former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder, to a year and a day in prison. Gowder was also convicted

on more than 100 counts of prescription fraud.

Both men have been allowed voluntary surrender and do not have to report to prison before Jan. 2, 2021, in consideration of the novel coronavirus.

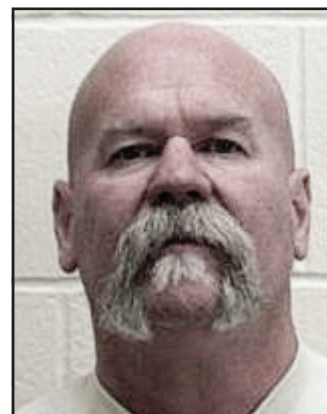
Former Union General ER director David Gowder – brother to Mike – was originally a co-defendant in the case that began with his April 1, 2015, arrest and was

followed by the arrest of all three men in February 2016. A 2018 federal indictment featuring 212 charges named them as co-conspirators.

David avoided trial by entering a negotiated guilty plea in March 2019 to a single charge of dispensing a controlled substance outside professional practice, resulting in dozens of dismissed charges. Last month – more than five years after his initial arrest

– Story sentenced him to 18 months in prison.

He will begin his sentence at a low-security satellite camp of the federal correctional institution in Jesup, Georgia, on July 28. Judge Story allowed voluntary surrender in his case as well but noted that David had expressed a desire to get his sentence over with, hence the earlier reporting date.



James Heaton

2 Sections 16 Pages
Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,685.96
Chatuge 1,925.03
Nottely 1,775.56

Inside
Arrests 2A
Chamber 2B
Church 4B
Classifieds 6B
Opinion 4A
Legals 6B
Obits 5B

Back to School
Vaccinations
See page 2A

Pollinators
Lecture at Hamilton Gardens
July 17
See page 7A

GEORGIA MOUNTAIN FAIR
GMF Parade Entry Form
See page 2A

Board of Education
Public Budget Meeting
July 28
See page 2B