

# Towns County Herald

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## First responders talk public safety in meeting

By **Jeremy Foster**  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers & Shakers hosted a special forum at the Towns County Civic Center on Friday, July 15, welcoming an impressive panel of guest speakers who were particularly qualified to present on the topic at hand: public safety. Public safety has been a subject of regular discussion on the national, state and local levels lately due to several high-profile shootings in the U.S. this year, including a tragic Texas school shooting in May and a Fourth of July parade shooting in Illinois.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw led the meeting and introduced each speaker, nearly all of whom were local first responders with expertise in public safety, saying it was “a blessing to have this many servicemen in our community with a wealth of knowledge to share with us all.” Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong spoke on school policy considerations in light of the recent shootings but said he wanted to first express his gratitude for the “great communication” between local first responder agencies and the public “for everyone’s safety.” “We have cameras inside

and outside of the school recording at all times so we know when and where someone is at or approaching the campus,” Berrong said, “and we can promptly be able to spot a dangerous situation potentially being created.” “We are trying to evolve our current measures, so we are currently looking at a new program that would be designed to have a button on our name badges that would send out an emergency signal to all agencies that something was happening, because we all have to have our name badges on at all times, but not everyone may have their phones on them at all



The Movers & Shakers forum on July 14 was a “who’s who” of local public safety. Photo by Jeremy Foster

## Towns County FBLA student wins first in nation

News Special  
Towns County Herald

Five Towns County High School Future Business Leaders of America students competed in national level competition in Chicago, Illinois, from June 28-July 2 after advancing from state competitions. The students were: Eden Hill, Spreadsheet Applications; Kade McConnell, Introduction to FBLA; Will McConnell, Computer Applications; Brooke Murrell, Word Processing; and Dhriti Patel, Word Processing. Two of the students finished in the Top 10 in the nation in their respective events: Dhriti Patel, First Place in Word Processing; and Brooke Murrell, Fifth Place in Word Processing. Future Business Leaders of America is the largest business Career and Technical Student Organization in the world. See FBLA Wins, Page 6A



Dhriti Patel and Brooke Murrell won first and fifth place, respectively, in the Word Processing competition at the FBLA National Leadership Conference earlier this month. Photo/Submitted

## Latest COVID-19 surge causing less severe illness

By **Shawn Jarrard**  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The United States appears to be in the middle of another COVID-19 wave spurred by the latest variant of the Omicron strain known as “BA.5,” with many municipalities in central north Georgia experiencing an uptick in cases, including Union and Towns counties. BA.5 is proving to be more capable of evading established immunity, be that from vaccination, prior infection or both. Fortunately, the current surge is producing less severe illness and requiring many fewer hospitalizations than previous surges, potentially offering a view of what “living with COVID” might look like. In the past, the number of COVID inpatients in the 45-bed Union General Hospital has

swelled to as many as 56, with Chatuge Regional Hospital in Towns having to house COVID sick as well. As of last week, more than a month into the latest surge, the maximum number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 at one time was just 11, and a couple of those were incidental positives, meaning COVID was not the primary reason for hospitalization but was discovered after admission. And though the frequency of emergency room visits for any number of medical emergencies has been breaking local records lately amid a growing population, still, the number of people being admitted for COVID has been far less than in past surges. “The surge started around the beginning of June,” Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett of Union General Health said last week. “That’s when we first



**Julia Barnett**  
UGH Chief Nursing Officer started seeing a few more admissions and an increase in ER COVID-related visits. “We saw it start to taper off around the end of June, and then after the (Fourth of July) holiday – we’re assuming See COVID-19 Surge, Page 3A

## Home & Garden Show a ‘must-see’ for homeowners

From Staff Reports  
Towns County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – The Western North Carolina Home & Garden Show returns this weekend to the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center, to run Saturday and Sunday, July 23-24. From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and 12-5 p.m. on Sunday, visitors will be able to browse vendors specializing in all areas of home improvement and repair, essential services, and decoration for homes and gardens. Dozens of booths will line the roughly 15,000-square-foot space inside the Conference Center facility at Foster Park, with each booth filled with advanced services and unique products for the local market for a show that’s been put on by Expo Management Inc. for more than 35 years. During last year’s out-



Many vendors choose to set up highly illustrative home improvement displays at the annual Home & Garden Show, returning this weekend at Foster Park in Young Harris. Expo Management President Bill Anderson estimated that about 4,000 people made their way through the numerous displays over the two-day event, perfectly augmenting the many other H&G Shows held from Knoxville, Tennessee, to Naples, Florida. As always, the goal of the expo is to bring home improvement businesses with quality products to an area with inter-

## Isaiah 117 House holds home site groundbreaking

By **Jeremy Foster**  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On the morning of Thursday, July 14, an amazing blessing was bestowed upon the community, and more importantly, innocent foster children, as a groundbreaking ceremony took place at the site of the upcoming Isaiah 117 House, which has a tentative comple-

tion date of Fall 2023. Isaiah 117 House got its name from Isaiah Chapter 1, Verse 17, which calls on people to “defend the cause of the fatherless,” and the organization focuses on providing a safe, welcoming environment to ease a child’s transition into foster care during the traumatic “removal day” process. Due to the sensitive nature of the Isaiah 117 House

mission to assist children in navigating foster care placement, the newspaper will not be disclosing the home’s location in Union County. In pursuance of that mission, the land for the facility, which was generously donated by an anonymous party, will serve a grand purpose once the local Isaiah 117 House is up and running, with children See Isaiah 117 House, Page 6A



Stakeholders of the Isaiah 117 House effort celebrated last week’s groundbreaking by tossing some dirt at the site of the future facility. Photo by Jeremy Foster

## City Council focuses on water in regular monthly meeting

By **Brittany Holbrooks**  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The July 12 regular meeting of Young Harris City Council saw Mayor Andrea Gibby and Mayor Andrea Gibby saw a full room of guests and no small amount of business to attend to – especially pertaining to water. While meetings are typically held on the first Tuesday of each month, which this month would have been July 5, the meeting was previously rescheduled for July 12 to accommodate the proximity of the Fourth of July holiday. Dennis Brown and Jimmy Matthews of the Georgia Rural Water Association were the first guests invited to speak in the meeting, and, as it turns out, they were no strangers to

Young Harris. “We work really closely with Georgia Rural Water,” said Mayor Gibby, offering some background on the city’s involvement with the company. Georgia Rural Water offers free water and wastewater management assistance to rural communities with fewer than 10,000 residents. This may come in the form of training for water maintenance workers, water quality testing, emergency generator installation and more. As for the connection between the nonprofit association and the City of Young Harris, Brown explained that Gibby had expressed interest in an energy efficiency program introduced three years ago. When Brown first visited in 2019, Young Harris was

spending over \$30,000 a year on electricity to operate the sewer plant, so Brown worked with city employees throughout 2020 and 2021 to optimize energy efficiency. By 2020, the overall power bill had been covered by about \$5,000, or roughly 15% of the entire cost, which totaled out to \$26,280 for the year. In 2021, costs dropped another 15% compared to 2019, to \$21,900. And the consultation on greater efficiency came with another benefit – greater output. In 2019, the local plant processed about 126,000 gallons of water per day. By 2021, the plant was processing 165,000 gallons per day, all at lower energy costs. Brown didn’t offer official numbers for 2022, as he has yet to reevaluate the sys-

tem, but when he visited the wastewater tank recently, he was blown away by the dedication of city employees regarding maintenance and how much things have improved at the sewer plant. “I was really impressed with the amount of effort and the amount of savings that you guys have accomplished out there at the wastewater treatment plant,” Brown said before offering an award to Gibby and the city. “What we decided to do was recognize the city for your efforts.” The plaque presented congratulates Young Harris Wastewater Treatment staff for their outstanding service, commending their “legacy of dedication and enthusiasm.” Gibby accepted the plaque on behalf



On behalf of wastewater treatment workers July 12, Mayor Andrea Gibby received an award for “Outstanding Public Service” from Dennis Brown of the Georgia Rural Water Association. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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# COVID-19 Surge...from Page 1A

that's what's bumped it back up again. Now, this week, we're starting to see a little bit of an increase again for both Towns and Union counties."

Added Barnett, "We can certainly tell by presentation, prognosis, outcome, response to treatment – all of that – that this is a different variant than we saw with the really bad surges we had in the fall and winter."

By press time, Union General was averaging about 10 ER visits per day related to COVID, and thankfully, "they are not all just extremely ill like they have been in the past."

"With this surge that we're experiencing right now, the oxygen demands and overall pulmonary status are not as severe as they were with the other surges," Barnett said. "And we're not seeing all the bilateral pneumonias and all that that we were seeing before."

"We still occasionally have that, but most patients that we see in the ER, the vast majority are able to be treated and discharged with just a handful needing admission. And the length of stay is not nearly as long as it was with previous surges, either; where we would have some patients for 60 to 80 days, we're not seeing that this time."

Outbreaks in both the Union County Nursing Home

and Chatuge Regional Nursing Home over the last month or so have been linked to the recent increase in community transmission, though those outbreaks appear to be contained.

To date, there have been two current-surge COVID deaths in the two counties, both having been nursing home residents who suffered from multiple comorbidities.

Barnett said that morale in the Health System is holding up, with staff being encouraged by the lack of "severe illness and death that we have experienced before."

"It does put everybody on edge when we start having a surge, though, because I think that they don't know what to anticipate," Barnett said. "So, it's still tough on morale; they've got a little bit of trauma from all of the severe surges that we've had in the last couple of years."

As to the timing of this wave of COVID-19, it remains unclear what exactly is contributing to yet another variant spreading among the masses, though seasonal influences and continuing evolution toward greater transmissibility are certainly factors to consider.

"I have no confidence that we will ever be entirely rid of COVID," Barnett said. "I would love to say that I

thought so, but I don't believe that's probably the case.

"Anything that you read or hear from the scientists and folks that are studying all this, they seem to think that it's going to become endemic and something that we have to deal with like regular flu.

"Now, what it's going to look like once we're through (the pandemic) – is it going to be similar to what we're seeing now, that this is the type of illness it'll cause and this severity of illness? I guess that's yet to be seen.

"I hope that it settles down and we can anticipate, just like with the flu, when we will see surges rather than kind of being year-round, waiting and wondering when it's coming. Oddly enough, we've seen flu almost year-round this year, so that's different."

Added Barnett, "We don't normally see any flu this time of year or RSV – all those respiratory viruses you think of in the winter months, we have continued to see all of those on into early summer, which is just really odd."

In terms of COVID-19, Barnett is hopeful that the region has seen the peak of the present surge but noted that only time will tell.

Local disease management options have changed somewhat in recent months, with more outpatients be-

ing prescribed antivirals that have entered the market, though fewer inpatients are requiring the more intensive treatments used in previous surges.

COVID-19 vaccines are available at pharmacies and Health Departments around the area, and the Georgia Department of Public Health continues to offer free drive-thru testing Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Union General Hospital in Blairsville (35 Hospital Road).

For more information and to monitor the prevalence of COVID in the community, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-19-status-report>.

## Georgia Mountain Fair Annual Photography Contest



The Annual Photography Contest at the August 2022 Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee, GA, begins on Tuesday, August 22 and lasts during the remainder of the Fair, August 27, Saturday. There is no entrance fee but money-prizes are given in several categories, covering 31 winning photos. This year, prize money totals \$1,075. Most of the exhibitors and many winners over the years have not been professionals, although professional photographers are welcomed to participate. Leaders of the Contest are always looking for new talent, so new exhibitors

are highly welcomed.

Those who wish to exhibit their pictures are requested to sign up by August 5th by filling out a Registration Form, which can be obtained (with the Rules) at the main office of the Fairgrounds in Hiawassee on U.S. Highway 76. Or, participants can print them from the web site: <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/pageserver/fairforms>.

Some new rules for exhibiting photos are in place for this year. Judges will strictly follow the new exhibiting rules, so please be sure to refer to the instructions on the Application form.

Setting up photos is only from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Monday, August 22. Judging starts promptly after set-up on Monday afternoon and may last all afternoon. Therefore, par-

ticipants can learn about the winning pictures after 5 p.m. that same day. Prize money is awarded on the final day of the contest. Judges' names are not revealed but each one is an experienced photographer who comes to the Fair from several cities and states. Photos may not be removed early and will remain in the exhibition hall until the end of the last day of the Fair.

The photo exhibit opens to the public on Tuesday morning, August 23rd at 10 AM.

After reading the Registration Form and the Guidelines, participants can have questions answered by directly contacting the Contest Director, Janet Cosby through email only at [janetcosby@gmail.com](mailto:janetcosby@gmail.com). Please do not call the Office at the Georgia Mountain Fair. NT(Jul20.Z10)CA

## Lake Chatuge Rotary Club Meeting

The Lake Chatuge Rotary Club met at Brasstown Valley Resort, at noon, on Tuesday, September 12.

The speaker for the day was Kathryn Nelson, who is the Program Director of the Isaiah 117 House in Blairsville.

Isaiah 117 is a registered 501C3 non-profit. Houses are built and staffed by workers from the Department of Family and Children's Services. When children are removed from their homes due to a bad situation, the search begins for a foster home for those children. Sometimes this takes a while, and the displaced children end up in a DFACS office, sleeping on the sofa, surrounded by strangers. Isaiah 117 House is a place for these children to go for up to three days. It is a loving, home environment. There are people there from DFACS,

and also adult volunteers, to take care of the children. Most of the time, these kids have not had time to pack their clothes, their favorite blanket, or a favorite toy. At this home, all of that is provided. Each child receives enough clothing for 3 days. The children are well-fed, clean, and most of all, loved! Volunteers can do things from housekeeping, yard work, reading to the children, cooking meals, playing catch, or playing dress-up (as a few examples).

There are 33 Isaiah 117 houses in the USA, but the one in Blairsville will be the first one in Georgia. The official groundbreaking was Thursday, July 11. The land was donated by a generous person, and construction of the house should begin soon.

If you would like more information, or you would like



**Kathryn Nelson**

to donate or volunteer, please contact Kathryn Nelson at [Kathryn.Nelson@Isaiah117-house.com](mailto:Kathryn.Nelson@Isaiah117-house.com). Help of any kind would be appreciated!

The meeting was closed by a quote from the Rotary President, David Tinsley. George Burns said, "There's an old saying that says life begins at 40. That's silly. Life begins every morning that you wake up" T(July20.F2)JH

## Young Harris College announces Spring 2022 Honors Lists

Young Harris College is pleased to announce the names of the undergraduate students who have been named to the President's and Dean's Lists for the Spring 2022 semester. Congratulations to these students on this outstanding academic achievement!

President's List Honors include: Emily Birnbaum, Jonathan Everett, Julien Fleming, Thomas Mellendorf, Abigail Studebaker, Madeline Studebaker, Sloan Sutton, Mary Thigpen all of Blairsville; Liam King, Kimberly Petty, Madalynn Thomas, Alyssa Bantum all of Young Harris; and Shelby Belt of Morganton.

Dean's List Honors include: Gabriel Bowman, Kayla Bowman, Marena Brown, Emma Hambrick, William Harkins, Joseph Hensley, Wright Hogsed, Cody Hunter, Charles Kelley, Spencer Mathis, Summer Ribas, Isabella Zamora all of Blairsville; Zandra Churchill, Benjamin Edwards, Makenzie Glass, Madison Hickey, Tyler Kasten, Kolby Moss, Merritt Turner, Alec Youngblood all of Young Harris; Lakota Graham of Suches; and Eli Smith-Foot of Morganton. NT(Jul20.Z14)CA

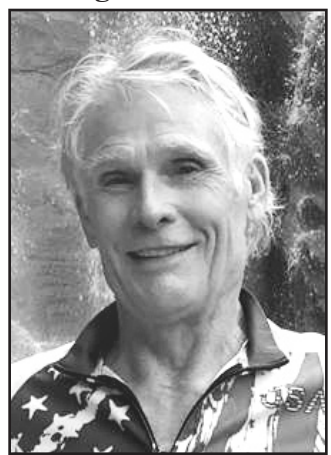
## Mountain Movers and Shakers Welcome Chaplain Dwight Moss

Mountain Movers and Shakers welcome Dwight Moss, July 22 at 8 AM.

We are honored to welcome Chaplain Dwight Moss of VFW Post 7807 to the Sundance Grill this Friday, July 22. He comes to us with his testimony, of his service as a foot soldier in the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam. As a 20-year-old Marine, he was exposed to death and near-death daily. He began his tour as an atheist and came home wounded and with new-found faith.

Among the topics he will review: A day with a foot soldier, being near death – with no faith, and being thankful and our flag.

Well known to our neighbors in Clay County, Chaplain Moss says "I know what it feels like when you know you are dying. The hard



**Chaplain Dwight Moss**

part of life is not the dying, but to live the best you can to the last second and not allow fear to be your master. Allow the eternal man Jesus to show you the way of truth, light and life." Get there early to get a good seat to know more about this outstanding Man of Faith. T(July20.F2)JH

# Public Safety...from Page 1A



Nearly every seat in the Civic Center was filled with residents interested in hearing all about public safety in the Movers & Shakers forum on Friday. Photo by Jeremy Foster

times. “We are always continuing to learn and think about what we can do better to protect everyone here, and I want to thank everyone for being the kind of community that truly cares about one another,” he concluded.

Marty Roberts of the Towns County Emergency Management Agency and 911 Center spoke about the importance of planning “for everything you can’t think of, anything that you think may not happen, so to prepare for extreme situations that can arise out of nowhere.”

“We have a new system that we upgraded to that automatically can notify every public safety serviceman or woman with one call at one time, of an emergency, as well as shelters in various places such as different churches and the Rec Center,” Roberts said.

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson talked in detail about active shooter situations

and the “extra training and practice seminars” his office has been undertaking “to plan on what we would do in that scenario.”

“We are making sure that we are continuing to be effective for all emergencies so we can always be ready for anything to happen, and our mission is to just practice, practice, practice,” Henderson said.

Continuing, “We were fortunate to have an active shooter training seminar recently at Young Harris College from a guest who trained in the Israeli Strike Force, and it was amazing to gain more knowledge from that.”

“We are committed to our community for top-level protection. We have also recently acquired a drone through a generous donation from a couple who wishes to remain anonymous to help us more for target finding and accuracy.”

Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith touch on the fact

that law enforcement is typically the first to arrive on the scene for many emergency calls, including active shooter scenarios.

“The job for the first officer on the scene is to go in and try to stop the situation and try to find (a resolution) while awaiting backup,” Smith said. “Our training has been ongoing nonstop since last year’s shooting (at the Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation & Wellness Center) in Hiwassee, and it will continue to never stop to protect our people and children.”

Young Harris College Police Chief Robbie Rich said that “nearly every day it seems we all hear about a shooting on a school campus.”

“We believe you can never have enough training, so we work with all of these departments and respond with them immediately on emergency calls and situations, and even training ideas,” Rich said. “Our ultimate goal is

not only for the safety of every staff (member) and student at Young Harris College, but for their families and everyone in our community, and to protect and serve all,” he said.

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland noted that his firefighters have “unequivocally been upping our training, and we keep our accountability side-by-side each department when there is an emergency.”

“While focusing on fire training and prevention, we are also there to help take away people alongside the EMTs if there are many victims when there is a shooter involved, and, of course, massive building fires and wherever there is great damage,” Copeland said.

Towns County EMS Director Ken Nicholson said that, “thanks to the commissioner, right now, we have some of the best ambulances that we could ask for, and most of the time I can staff three ambulances that can be on the way to any emergency.”

“Sometimes it is enough, sometimes it is not – you never know,” Nicholson said. “But we do have helicopter capabilities, weather permitting, so we are very blessed for all that we have and an amazing group of talented workers in all of these departments that we work side by side together with.”

A Q&A session with attendees from the public followed the remarks by the above officials, and the meeting was adjourned.

This Friday, July 22, the Shakers will be back at

the Sundance Grill at 8 a.m. to welcome Chaplain Dwight Moss of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #7807 to share his testimony of service as a soldier in the jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam.

For more information on getting involved or to be added to the civic organization’s email list, contact Movers & Shakers Emcee William “Scotty” Scott at wgschatuge@yahoo.com.

# City Council...from Page 1A

of the city’s workers, being honored to accept the acknowledgement.

“Most of our public work staff have gone to training with Georgia Rural Water,” Gibby said. “We appreciate it.”

In other business, Brandon Sprouse and Gary Carter of water meter company Mueller attended to speak with the council. Back in April, the mayor revealed that the city’s automatic water meters and the laptop that reads them needed replacing.

Together, the Mueller representatives pitched a new service in which Mueller would replace, own and maintain all the metering equipment to be used. Annually, the cost to upkeep the water meters would be between \$65,000 and \$80,000 and require a 10-year lease agreement.

“The benefit of it is that metering is a service (we provide) that takes the responsibility away from you and the utility to do the reads and get the information, so we’re going to provide that for you. If the equipment breaks, we’re going to come out and fix it,” Carter said.

“I think there’s enough interest here that we want to continue the conversation for sure,” said Mayor Gibby, confirming that the Mueller reps would return with a proposal.

It will take about 16 weeks to receive the meters and two more months to fully adjust to the new system.

On the subject of the city’s water management, the council is putting its foot down when it comes to the long overdue project to fix or replace the Timberline booster pump, which has not seen meaningful progress for months on end.

“We’re pretty deep in this, unfortunately,” Councilman Steve Clark said. “I have



Brandon Sprouse and Gary Carter of Mueller Systems made a presentation to the City Council on a new water metering service available through the company. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

given Hayes James leeway; I haven’t babysat them. That’s going to change, OK? I’m fixing to become a thorn in somebody’s side. We’re going to finish this up, and I’m going to get this out. In the meantime, I want more choices.

“We need choices that respond to us. I’m going to solve this one because we’re pretty deep, and when we’re done, they may not like me, but if I have to call them every day, we’re going to get this finished.”

Gibby said that the subject was “a larger discussion than tonight” and suggested that a meeting could be called to specifically discuss the status and future of the Timberline project.

“There are other things to consider, like do you want to start over on Timberline?” Gibby asked.

Councilman Dr. John Kelley said the council should think about contacting another engineering firm. Currently, the project is under bid by Hussey Gay Bell, which acquired the Hayes, James and Associates engineering firm that originally laid claim to the project.

No other firm names

were mentioned that evening, but Clark, who has extensive experience in water and sewer engineering, made a recommendation for the plan moving forward.

“I would like to see us go back to the marketplace and do another standby in community services request and get at least a couple more engineering firms in here (so) we don’t have to go through a full-blown process,” Clark said.

The mayor accepted, citing the idea as fair, while City Attorney Marvin Harkins agreed to look into the legality of hiring another engineering firm or adding others to the bid list.

In other news, Joint Economic Development Director Denise McKay said she had submitted a grant request for up to \$2.5 million for Young Harris to expand its sewer infrastructure. The request is being reviewed at the federal level, with word expected by September.

Young Harris City Council members and Mayor Gibby meet publicly at 7 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month at City Hall, located at 50 Irene Berry Drive.

# The Class of 1960 Towns County High School Reunion



The Towns County High School Class of 1960 Reunion

The Towns County High School Class of 1960 finally got to have our 60 year class reunion (62nd) at the beautiful Hamilton Gardens in the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

At the upper pavilion, we had a large blue banner, printed by Mountain Graphics, which celebrated our class and school colors. The decorations included coordinating tablecloths and centerpieces of lovely white flowers from the reunion committee. Everyone enjoyed the family gathering atmosphere with

picnic lunches catered by Happy Hawg Bar-B-Que.

We were happy to have fifty-nine, including twenty classmates and their various guests, in attendance. It was special for us to have seven family members of deceased classmates in attendance also. A very special guest at the celebration was Mr. James Moreland, the only living TCHS teacher from our time at the school. He was a great teacher to us all and continues to be an amazing human being. We enjoyed his company so much and really appreci-

ated his son, Joe for bringing him to the reunion.

Thank you to all who made this very special day happen for us. We’d like to extend our appreciation to the fairgrounds staff, especially Catherine Luckenbach, curator of the gardens. Catherine went out of her way to make our day and event very special for each and every one of us. If you haven’t visited Hamilton Gardens lately, you really should have it on your to do list. The grounds and facility are fantastic and the view from up there is breathtaking!

# Isaiah 117 House...from Page 1A

from Union, Towns and Fannin counties to benefit.

Additionally, the facility, now two years in the making, will act as a storage location to stock up on necessary items such as food, socks, diapers, formulas and other things that may be needed by children as they move on to foster homes.

The transition home would not be possible without the generous support of area businesses, individuals, organizations and churches, including numerous volunteers, who have helped and continue to help with fundraising to build the home.

In the leadup to the groundbreaking ceremony, Harmony Grove Baptist Pastor Scotty Jarrard said the nonprofit aimed to accomplish three things: "reduce trauma of the child on the day of placement; be a helping hand to our case workers; and, lastly, help our foster families as well."

"Foster care is one of the hardest things that someone can do, and a lot of times when the foster family gets a call that a child needs placement, they normally have between 30 minutes to one hour to get prepared, so this house will be a transition home to help with the process and any material things needed," Jarrard said.

The ceremony began with opening remarks by Union County Program Coordinator for Isaiah 117 House Kathryn Nelson, who said she felt called by God to lead the effort to bring the much-needed facility to aid children going through removal from their family homes.

"Children have always captured a special place in my heart," Nelson said, noting their innocence and the heartbreaking reality that they sometimes have to go through difficult situations like foster placement.

But those situations will be made easier thanks to this endeavor, which Nelson called a testament to God's faithfulness in bringing together so many people and organizations to make the groundbreaking and subsequent home build a reality.

"So, thank you," she said to those gathered. "Every one of you has played a vital role in making today possible. As we move forward with the construction process, may we watch for (God's) strength as we change the way foster care begins."

Speaking next was Yvette Hansen, the Social Services Specialist Case Manager for Union and Towns County Division of Family & Children



**Isaiah 117 House of Blairsville Program Coordinator Kathryn Nelson speaking onstage during the July 14 groundbreaking ceremony.**  
Photo by Jeremy Foster

Services. "Taking a child from a home is very hard," Hansen said. "It's hard for the case worker, even though they have to put on a straight face; it's hard on the families, the parents or parent or whoever the caregiver is at that time; and definitely the children."

"Sometimes, they only have just a few moments to get their favorite toy or a blanket and maybe some clothes, and we always want them to take something from home so they don't feel totally alone during this transition."

"Sometimes, it's not so easy to find placement for them. We've had to sit with them, whether in a hospital or in our office, because there's no placement for them at that given time. We've had to take on shifts between us because it's taken that long sometimes."

Added Hansen, "This (facility) is going to be so amazing ... I am so grateful that we're going to have it in

our county ... This is really going to help for us to be able to either find, whether it's a family member who is willing, even if they're out of state, or just a foster home."

Hansen then introduced Kenneth Johnson, who has 23 years of home building experience and will serve as the general contractor for the upcoming construction of Union County Isaiah 117 House, in partnership with Mountain Life Builders.

Johnson said he felt blessed to be involved with such a worthwhile project and that he's sure this home will be one of his most memorable of the more 1,500 he has built over two decades in home construction.

Next up, Isaiah 117 House Cofounder and Development Director Corey Paulson of Elizabethton, Tennessee, announced that the Union County facility marked the 23rd groundbreaking in the nation since the idea for the nonprofit sparked to life in 2014.

"We're ready to break ground on this project that will change the lives and change the story for kids in Union County and Towns County and wherever they might come from," Paulson said. "So, we thank you all for being here, and thank you for your support; we're so grateful."

In closing, little sisters Lydia and Angel Stafford adorably sang "Jesus Loves the Little Children," and Pastor Jarrard led a prayer before project stakeholders and community leaders, with shovels in hand, posed for pictures of the groundbreaking's official "dirt turning."

For more information and regular updates, follow the "Isaiah 117 House Union County GA" Facebook page.

# FBLA Wins...from Page 1A



**Towns County FBLA students Will McConnell, Kade McConnell, Eden Hill, Brooke Murrell and Dhriti Patel at the recent FBLA Nationals in Chicago.**  
Photo/Submitted

each year helping over 230,000 student members prepare for careers in business, according to [www.fbla-pbl.org](http://www.fbla-pbl.org).

The FBLA mission is to inspire and prepare students "to become community-minded

business leaders in a global society through relevant career preparation and leadership experiences."

Towns County FBLA students regularly excel in regional, state and national com-

petition.

"These young people represented our school and community well," said Business Instructor and FBLA Advisor Ruth Taylor. "Congratulations to all!"

# Home & Garden...from Page 1A

Interested customers, in the process of attracting people to the region who do not wish to travel to Atlanta or Knoxville for the products and services they need around the home.

"Your home is the greatest asset most people own. It's really important to them to make their house comfortable, pretty and enjoyable," Anderson said.

And this year will feature no shortage of great companies focused on helping people improve their homes, with top to bottom services from roofing to foundations, gutter guards to hot tubs, yard art to kitchen wares, antiques to jewelry, furniture, snacks, solar panel installation,

professional cleaning services and more.

Parking and admission are free, so be sure to head on over to 150 Foster Park Road in Young Harris this weekend to take care of all your home improvement needs.

For more information on

the ever-popular Home & Garden Shows in North Georgia and Western North Carolina, including a schedule of next year's shows in both Blairsville and Young Harris, visit <https://expomanagementinc.com/>.

# The Georgia Mountain Fair Beauty Pageant



The Georgia Mountain Fair is looking for young ladies 17-24 to participate in this year's Miss GMF Pageant.

The Pageant will be held Thursday, August 18. Entry forms and Pageant rules are available on the Georgia Mountain Fair website. Deadline to enter is August 11. Great experience and cash prizes!

## VFW Bingo

The VFW in Hiawassee is starting bingo every Saturday at our post at 1329 Sunnyside Rd. Doors open at 5:30 PM, games start at 6:30 PM. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us.

## VFW Fish Fry

Due to the rising cost of fish and all other goods that we have at the fish fry, we are sad to say we are having to raise our prices to \$12 and \$15, all you can eat. The nights of the fish fry is still the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month. Remember, no tax and no tip. We hope to see you there!

## Veterans Thrift Store Volunteers



Veterans Thrift Store, a product of Club 66, 2641 Hwy. 66, Young Harris, GA is open from 10 AM to 4 PM, Wednesday thru Saturday, helping local veterans in our community. We are looking for volunteers to help with the thrift store.

We are accepting gently used items: furniture, appliances, toys, clothes, etc. For details call 706-379-3774.

## Food Pantry food distribution

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

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

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