

Towns County Herald

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BOE nominates Rogers as replacement board member

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Board of Education has appointed retired educator Sara Rogers to serve in the Young Harris post for the School Board, which was recently vacated by Tamie Bradley.

Rogers is a lifelong educator who taught at Towns County Elementary for 35 years, offered swimming lessons to countless children at her personal pool during summer breaks, and worked as a substitute teacher after retiring.

Next steps for Rogers will be to swear in and begin attending meetings as a member

of the board, to serve out the remainder of the term through December 2022.

Bradley won election to the School Board in 2018, officially succeeding former board member Jerry Taylor in the Young Harris seat when she took her position in January 2019. The post came open last month when Bradley had to relinquish the seat after moving out of the county.

The Georgia Department of Transportation acquired Bradley's property a couple of years ago for the widening and relocation of Georgia 515. She moved into a local rental at the time, which served her family's purposes for a while, but she recently moved to

Union County.

When board members knew that Bradley would be leaving, they all began "racking (their) brains to think of somebody that would be interested," said Board Member Stephanie McConnell, which is how Rogers' name came up for consideration.

McConnell said she always looked up to Rogers during her own days as an Elementary School student, and she credits the retired teacher with greatly assisting her son's academic progress. And for people who never got to know her as an educator, Rogers' reputation precedes her.

So, when McConnell nominated Rogers to the

appointment of the Young Harris post in Monday, July 5, School Board meeting, her motion was quickly seconded and approved by her fellow board members. Stan Chastain could not be there that night.

"She's very level-headed, she's been in education her whole life - I think we couldn't go wrong, and if she's willing to do it, I say we snap her up," McConnell said in the leadup to the vote to appoint Rogers.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, a former second grade student of Rogers, said he had already spoken with her prior to her appointment by the board.

"When her name was



Stephanie McConnell and Brandon Grimsley began their service as Vice Chair and Chair respectively on the Towns County Board of Education following the July regular meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Home & Garden Show offers 'one-stop shop' for improvement

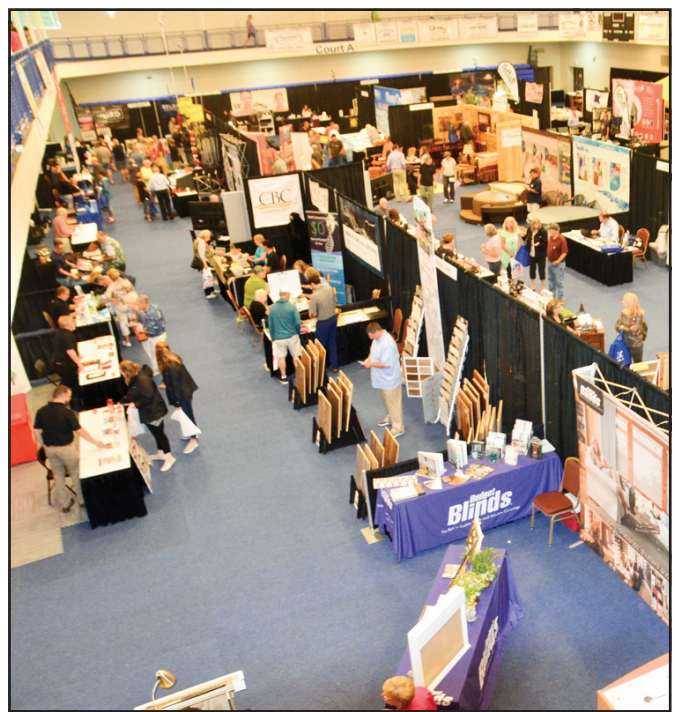
By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS - After missing last year due to the pandemic, industry leader Expo Management Inc. will return with its Seventh Annual Northeast Georgia and Western North Carolina Home & Garden Show this weekend.

The home improvement expo will run Saturday, July 24, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, July 25, from 12-5 p.m. at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park in Young Harris. Admission and parking are free.

Expo Management President Bill Anderson is thrilled to be returning to North Georgia, saying that the Home & Garden Show will have safety measures in place for guests concerned about COVID-19.

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The Home & Garden Show returns to Foster Park this weekend, with free attendance and parking for all.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

DDA welcomes Osborn, discusses Paris Center progress

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, July 13, members of the Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority welcomed new Board Member Tyler Osborn to their regular meeting. The Hiwassee City Council approved the Osborn as the newest DDA member the previous week.

Having worked with Osborn in his capacity as an officer on the Towns County Historical Society Board, DDA Chairperson Steven Harper said he was excited to have the 25-year-old on the team. Osborn is expected to bring his youth to bear in helping the DDA come up with fresh ideas.

After nearly two years of fundraising, grants, and building up membership and volunteers, the Hiwassee DDA can begin its major project of restoring

the historic Paris buildings on Main Street, Economic Development Director Denise McKay said.

Renovation will result in the "Paris Center," a business incubator made possible in large part by a \$600,000 grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission, which became a firm believer in the impact the new center will have not only on the city but in the greater area.

In her Director's Report, McKay updated board members on the Paris building stabilization process, which started Tuesday, July 13, and was expected to be completed the same day.

Once the single-story building has been completely stabilized, McKay said the same process will begin on the two-story building.

She also spoke on the



Tyler Osborn enjoyed his first meeting as a member of the Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority at City Hall on July 13.

Photo by Chad Stack

Bradshaw contracts with Colwell PDC for detainee crews

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw has contracted with the state-run Colwell Probation Detention Center for additional detainee crews to maintain county properties.

Per the Georgia Department of Corrections, "a probation detention center is a minimum-security facility for confining probationers up to 180 days."

It is from the inmates sentenced to the Blairsville-based Colwell Probation Detention Center that state detainee crews working locally find their members.

A single crew returned to the county in May, with a second crew added this month.

See Colwell PDC, Page 8A



Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held a special called meeting July 2 to contract with Colwell PDC for detainee crews.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Towns EMA welcomes first responders to low country boil

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS - Towns County Emergency Management Agency Director Marty Roberts invited local first responders and their families to a Low Country Boil and Barbecue earlier this month at the 911 Building.

"We try to do something like this a couple times a year, but because of COVID-19, last year we were not able to," Roberts said of the July 10 gathering. "I'm glad things are slowly getting back to normal where we can all come together with our families and spend time

See Low Country Boil, Page 8A



Marty Roberts of Towns EMA brought local first responders together for a Low Country Boil on Saturday, July 10, at the 911 Building in Young Harris.

Photo by Chad Stack

Coroner, Tax Commissioner talk 'death and taxes' at MMS

By Allison Youngblood
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers welcomed Coroner and Shakers Cooper and Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson to their weekly meeting on Friday, July 16, to talk about the only guarantees in life: death and taxes.

Recently elected Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper spoke about her experiences as coroner, what the job means to her, and what challenges and changes have occurred in the past few years as she has worked with the Coroner's Office.

Coroners have the duty of examining the bodies of the deceased and determining their causes of death, and, if

See MMS Meeting, Page 8A



Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper and Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson, both local elected officials, shared the spotlight in last week's Mountain Movers & Shakers meeting.

Photo by Allison Youngblood

TCSO makes arrests for drugs, animal cruelty, porch piracy

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office received a tip recently in reference to a marijuana grow on Fodder Creek Road, resulting in the arrest of a suspect in Sunday, July 18.

Uniform patrol information and had enough information to call in a Sheriff's Office Narcotics Unit to investigate.

Jonathan Moses Underwood, 37, was arrested and charged with manufacturing marijuana, possession of marijuana and tampering with evidence.

In a separate incident on July 13, the Sheriff's Office received a report of a theft of UPS packages from the porch of a residence off Sunnyside Road in Hiwassee.

The victim advised that a Ring doorbell video system showed a white male taking the packages from the front porch. Once the video was put on social media, the suspect was positively identified, and warrants were obtained for his arrest.

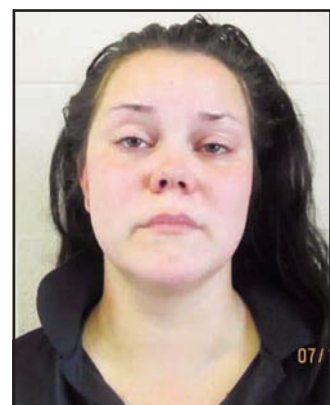
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Jonathan Moses Underwood



Bruce Douglas Partin Jr.



Katie May Barrington



Benjamin Gibson

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Investigator Conway and Family
July 23rd

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Health
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July 22nd

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Board of Ed...from Page 1A

brought up, I wanted to make sure that was something she was interested in, and she was," Berrong said.

Bradley was serving as board chairperson when she left, so the board had to reappoint the position from among its ranks, deciding on Brandon Grimsley as chair and McConnell as vice chair. Grimsley had been serving as vice chair prior to that meeting.

Also in the July 5 meeting, the board heard from Career, Technical and Agricultural Education Director Melissa McConnell, who outlined the "FY22 CTAE and Perkins Local Plan & Budget."

The CTAE program at Towns County High has received nine grants to implement this year to assist the school's 16 "Career Pathways." New in

2021 is the Cybersecurity Pathway that will give students an introduction to careers in this increasingly important sector.

Available pathways run the gamut from horticulture to forestry, agriculture and computer programming. Students who complete pathways may earn certifications making them workplace ready for specialized professions in the medical field, for example, or in metal fabrication.

In his Superintendent's Report, Berrong announced that the 40-year-old campus entrance sign was finally being replaced. The sign will be made of rock to better fit the aesthetic of nearby building choices along US 76.

Noted in the June board meeting, the School District

will not be offering an online option for students not wanting to attend in person this year, as data have shown that many students who opted for online-only classes due to COVID-19 struggled to keep up with their coursework.

As such, all students will be required to return to campus for traditional in-person instruction during the 2021-22 school year, with few exceptions to be granted for individuals with medical conditions.

The schools will be closely monitoring the status of COVID-19 in the state and county, with online contingency plans in place should the campus need to close, though this was unnecessary last year, even before vaccinations were available to the public.

Home & Garden...from Page 1A

Masks will be provided for anyone wanting to wear one, and there will be social distancing and hand sanitizing stations throughout the event, Anderson said.

"We have been doing Home & Garden Shows throughout the year, and we have not had any issues whatsoever," Anderson said. "We weren't able to do the show last year because of COVID, so we are excited about this year's show."

"We will be safe, and I hope that the public will feel safe, because this year's show is going to be a great one."

As far as what people can expect, the two days of shows will feature some of the newest products and services in home improvement, along with furnishings, accessories, decorations and remodeling ideas.

From floor to roof and

patio to pool, both inside and outside the home, including with landscaping and more, these Home & Garden Show will have it all.

"This is just a big, big popular event for anyone who needs anything in their home," Anderson said. "Whether it's inside the house, outside the house, on the roof, in the backyard, in the front yard, and everywhere in between."

With so many high-tech homes being built today, Anderson said people can look forward to some of the best accessories and ideas for remodeling, or they can simply ask questions about upgrades to make homes more modern.

In celebrating the seventh time coming to the North Georgia area, the Home & Garden Show will house a seemingly endless display of garden landscapes, water features, home products and

more at Foster Park this weekend.

Additionally, the show will feature several local businesses to help educate, inform, demonstrate and explain their products ranging from flooring, decorations, roofing, gardening and more.

"It's a one-stop shop," Anderson said. "They can find just about anything and everything they need for their home."

"And with the recent pandemic making more people spend time and money inside their homes, people may want to make it as nice and comfortable and livable (as possible), and that's another reason they should come to the show."

The show is free for the public to attend and will be welcoming vendors selling food and drinks to guests both days.

MMS Meeting...from Page 1A

necessary, calling upon the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to conduct autopsies.

Cooper has seen a lot of death over the years, having worked as a deputy coroner prior to her election while also owning Banister-Cooper Funeral Home. So, she feels it is her responsibility to warn her community of areas where she sees patterns of fatalities occur.

She shared one example of a treacherous stretch of highway dubbed "Motorcycle Curve" that saw a handful of fatal motorcycle crashes within a short period of time. She stayed on the Department of Transportation about that area until the state agreed to repave the curve.

"I won't be silent about preventable deaths," Cooper said, noting her optimism that highlighting problematic and potentially dangerous conditions in the county may help to keep people from experiencing untimely appointments with herself and deputy coroners.

Some recent observations from inside the Coroner's Office have included a rise in suicides, drug overdoses, and a delayed return on autopsy reports. The rise in suicides, Cooper said, could be attributed to social isolation or to post traumatic stress disorder diagnoses.

As noted above, the Coroner's Office has seen a

rise in overdoses in the county as well, and Cooper, the Police Department and Sheriff's Office suspect that the cause of this trend may be drugs that are cut with other substances in order to "stretch" the sale of drugs, she said.

In the case of delayed autopsy reports, historically, the GBI has returned reports in two to three months, though six or seven months has become the new average. Cooper said the GBI has seen a decline in the number of medical professionals employed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Speaking of the pandemic, Cooper said the Federal Emergency Management Agency reimburses funeral expenses up to \$9,000 for families whose relatives died due to COVID-19, explaining that this funding is for the benefit of Towns County families affected by the pandemic.

During his portion of the meeting, Michael Anderson said that when he decided to run for tax commissioner last year, he knew he wanted "to do the best I can do," so once elected and sworn into office, he set about making some key changes within the Tax Commissioner's Office.

Now, three windows are open at the office for faster service, and he's made the experience more convenient by ending the hour-long lunch

closing. Anderson said these changes were put into place to streamline transactions for constituents, particularly phone call service.

Additionally, Towns Countians can now access and pay their property taxes online at www.townscountypay.com, which is part of Anderson's plan to make paying taxes an easier and more open process.

He encourages eligible residents to apply for tax exemptions, including senior and homestead exemptions. The homestead exemption is open for applicants between Jan. 1 and April 1. Unfortunately, many people miss out on money-saving exemptions, Anderson said.

Another mistake people often make is forgetting to notify the tax commissioner of the sale of large taxable equipment such as Bobcats or Caterpillars valued at \$7,500 or above, he said.

Since Anderson has been serving as tax commissioner, collection rates have remained in the upper 90th percentile for the most recent tax years of 2018, 2019 and 2020. There have been 14,104 actions completed in his office since his term began in January.

Join the Mountain Movers and Shakers this week as the group welcomes Towns County School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and High School Principal Roy Perren on Friday at 8 a.m. inside Sundance Grill in Hiawassee.

Low Country Boil...from Page 1A

together."

The county's emergency services have faced new challenges over the past year with COVID, and Roberts, who also serves as director of the 911 Mapping Office and the 911 Call Center, said he was very pleased with how everyone has been showing up ready for work.

From law enforcement, paramedics, EMTs and firefighters to dispatch services and EMA personnel, all first responders are vital to keeping the community and its people safe, Roberts said, which is why he's glad to host get-togethers celebrating that interconnectedness.

"Having events like today allows all of us to come together as a family, and as the EMA director, it allows me to serve them and their families food and to thank all of them for everything they do," Roberts said.



Delicious, delectable, scrumptious, mouthwatering – the list of adjectives describing the July 10 First Responder Low Country Boil is endless. Photo by Chad Stack

Unfortunately, with the varying hours they keep and the multiple different agencies working at the same time, first responders rarely have the occasion to fellowship as one among friends and family, Roberts said, which is why he tries to bring everyone together from time to time.

That Saturday's cookout included first responders from the Georgia State Patrol, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Hiawassee Police Department, EMS, Fire Department, 911 Dispatch, U.S. Forest Service, and family members spending the evening together as one big family.

Throughout the evening, first responders enjoyed a delicious spread of crawfish, shrimp, chicken, mashed potatoes, corn on the cobb, and so much more.

EMT Michael Lovingood

said emergency workers have been experiencing a heavy volume of calls, even though things have calmed down with COVID specifically, because Towns County attracts lots of people as a prime tourist destination.

Lovingood said Towns is a special place and that first responders try to do whatever they can to help other departments. That's why, when they come to one of Roberts' cookouts, it really is like a family gathering.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw attended the dinner, making sure to thank all the first responders for the amazing job they have done over the past

year with COVID.

"I am very proud of our EMS and first responders," Bradshaw said. "They always do a great job, but I am very proud of all of them for their dedicated work during the past year with COVID. Our first responders do a wonderful job, and we have some of the best."

"It's nice to see them have the chance to take a little break and to get together, because with so many of them working different shifts, they don't really get a chance to spend time together and fellowship."

"So, this is a great thing, and I am happy to see so many of our first responders and their families here tonight."

Colwell PDC...from Page 1A

Depending on the COVID-19 situation, Bradshaw is hopeful a third crew will return in January 2022 to bring the total number of state detainee crews working here to its previous level.

"One crew out of Colwell cannot do it all," Bradshaw said. "It takes three crews to keep the buildings clean, maintenance done, and the landscaping up."

Prior to COVID-19, the Colwell crews worked to mow grass, weed eat and assist in cleaning and maintaining county facilities. At the onset of the pandemic, the Detention Center withdrew its detainees for labor due to the threat of the coronavirus entering the congregate setting.

With no Colwell crews, Road Department employees had to do much of the work detainees had been doing last year. This was only meant as a temporary solution, because cutting grass and weed eating took the county employees away from their official duties maintaining roadways.

Fortunately, Sheriff Ken Henderson was able to commit a small detainee crew out of the Towns County Jail that has been able to pick up some of the slack since mid-March, and Bradshaw

announced in April that the Sheriff's Inmate Work Program would become permanent.

The local crew consists of three to five minor offenders who volunteer to man the detail weekdays, with a focus on grounds maintenance of county properties, and on bad weather days, cleaning the interiors of county facilities.

"After Jan. 1, we're going to have what I call three and a half crews," Bradshaw said. "We're going to have three full crews out of Colwell's detention center, and then a small crew out of our local crew."

County properties being maintained include Foster Park and the Recreation and Conference Center, the Courthouse, County Beach, the Sheriff's Office, the 911 Building, Daycare, Ballfields, Old Rec Gym, Senior Center, EMS buildings, the Transfer Station and more.

Detainee crews also help to offset maintenance costs by painting and repairing facilities, and they lower construction costs when the county needs to add onto or build new facilities, like the framing, painting and trim work at the Young Harris Fire Station.

And utilizing three and a half crews, as Bradshaw says, will enable the county to do more roadside trash pickup as well.

The commissioner signed two Colwell PDC contracts in a July 2 called meeting: one coinciding with the two crews now working in the county, and the other in anticipation of the third crew starting in January.

At \$49,316 per crew, considering that one of the crews will only be available for half of the county's fiscal year, the total cost for the three crews will be \$123,290 over the next year, which will go toward paying the guards who watch over the detainees.

"This is a savings to the taxpayers," Bradshaw said. "If we had to contract this out with private companies to do all this, it would cost a lot more, because these guys do so much in the county. Not only do they cut grass and weed eat, but they do anything you can think of."

"They clean out culverts with the Road Department, they pick up trash. They built the fieldhouse at the Foster Park Football Field. Painting. If we need a sign that needs to be put up – just whatever we need, we call them, and they do it."

TCSO Arrests...from Page 1A

On July 14, Bruce Douglas Partin Jr. was taken into custody. During the execution of the warrants, it was discovered there was marijuana growing inside his residence.

Partin is being charged with possession of marijuana, manufacturing marijuana, possession of drug-related objects, two counts of criminal trespass, theft by taking, and probation violation.

Katie May Barrington was also arrested at the same residence and has been charged with possession of marijuana,

possession of drug-related objects, and manufacturing marijuana.

On July 11, in yet another separate incident, the Sheriff's Office received information in reference to a cruelty to animals complaint on Wildwood Lane in Young Harris.

Deputies responded, and on further investigation, it was revealed that there was no electricity or running water and the home had been completely vacated.

Responding officers heard a dog whimpering and

discovered a mother dog with two pups located in a bedroom with a window open barely enough for a breeze to blow and not enough for them to escape.

All three dogs showed signs of severe neglect and were extremely emaciated and had been abandoned with no food or water. They were removed from the home and turned over to the Humane Society Mountain Shelter.

As a result, Benjamin Gibson was arrested and charged with cruelty to animals.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

DDA...from Page 1A

recent triple ribbon cutting for three new businesses that have opened their doors in Hiawassee. With the newly added businesses, McKay said the strip mall off Big Sky Drive is now full.

"Hiawassee is happening," McKay said. "It really is, and I am really pleased with where we are at." With the addition of these three new businesses, McKay said the city currently has 11 move-in ready spaces available for ongoing development.

Moving along, DDA members discussed another successful project – the launching of the "First Friday" Hiawassee Night Market almost a year ago.

The Night Market is not something the DDA is looking to profit from, Secretary/Treasurer Maggie Oliver said, noting that the goal has been to bring people into downtown and allow the DDA to get its message across to the public.

This message, according to Oliver, is that the DDA "is here to provide opportunities and encourage economic growth and development while preserving our mountain and lake paradise."

In other business, the DDA has completed the organization's logo, and during the next Night Market, McKay said the DDA booth will have a banner featuring the logo proudly displayed for guests to see.

Board members then discussed the inaugural implementation of the Facade Grant Program for local businesses in Hiawassee.

McKay said the program will allow Hiawassee-based businesses to apply for grant funds to spruce up storefronts to make them more inviting, with the DDA matching grant monies up to \$1,000 with a \$5,000 cap on grant expenditures.

"If we do not use all of the \$5,000 this year, the

remaining amount will roll over to the next year and add another \$5,000 to it," McKay said.

Businesses applying for the grant program should be aware that the money will only be available for doors, windows, paint, and anything attached to the facade of their building, Chairperson Harper said. The grant program will not help with funding for signs, logos, or banners.

At the end of June, the DDA's account balance was \$9,386.27. Being below \$10,000, Chairperson Steven Harper asked Mayor Liz Ordiales when the city would be approving its yearly \$10,000 disbursement to support the DDA.

Previously, Ordiales and the City Council had agreed to give the DDA a yearly disbursement of \$10,000 until the nearly 2-year-old DDA was able to maintain and stay above a \$10,000 balance, the mayor said.



Benefit for Telida Lovell

July 30th ~ Plate Pick-Up Starts at 10:30 AM
in O'Reilly's Parking Lot
Tickets are \$10 a Plate
Pre-Sales call 706-897-5503



Bar-B-Que Plate:
BBQ, Slaw
Brunswick Stew
Dessert

