

Towns County Herald

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Water Authority takes aim at hydrant water theft

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Water Authority is combatting water theft from fire hydrants.

In their July 16 monthly meeting, Water Board members voted to acquire two cameras to be placed "in areas of reported hydrant water theft activity." These cameras will be rotated throughout the system to make would-be thieves think again.

"Hopefully, this will not only act as a deterrent to future tampering with our hydrants but also allow us to have concrete proof of anyone who is currently taking water without permission," Water Authority Manager Jennifer Nichols

said.

Additionally, the board voted to assess a \$500 fine to "anyone caught stealing water out of one of our fire hydrants."

"Of course, we will need photographic proof to accuse anyone of theft," Nichols said, requesting that members of the public also take pictures of anyone they suspect is stealing water and submit those to townscountywater@gmail.com.

Ideally, photos will include identifying information displayed on vehicles used in suspected thefts, such as company names and associated phone numbers.

"We would greatly appreciate any tips from our con-

cerned citizens," Nichols said.

Water theft at hydrants has been an issue for years, and all over the system, from Gumlog to the Hiwassee River and Hightower areas, the Water Authority said July 16. And it's not a problem specific to Towns County.

"It happens all around the county (and region)," Nichols said. "The (City of Hiwassee) has to deal with it, North Carolina has to deal with it ... it's a bad problem everywhere. We hear from water authorities everywhere that they have this issue."

The issue received renewed attention recently when customers started calling to

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Towns County Water Authority Board Chair Nathan Noblet and Manager Jennifer Nichols in the July 16 Water Board meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Family honored for help capturing absconded inmate

News Special

The Towns County Sheriff's Office presented an appreciation plaque and a \$500 reward to a local family - and their dog - on Friday, July 19, in recognition of their assistance in apprehending a Detention Center inmate who fled his work detail last week.

It all started around 2:30 p.m. on Monday, July 15, when 39-year-old Bruce Douglas Partin Jr., a trustee with the Sheriff's Office inmate work detail, walked into the woods while working at the Transfer Station on Georgia 288.

At the time, Partin, of Hiwassee, was being housed at the Detention Center awaiting his court appearance for

the purchase, possession, manufacture, distribution or sale of marijuana; theft by taking; two counts of burglary; and probation violation.

Investigators deployed a drone and K-9 tracking dog with no success that first day, and issued a \$500 reward for information leading to Partin's arrest.

The very next day, at approximately 1:20 p.m. on Tuesday, July 16, Partin was spotted on a trail camera at the end of Ivy Mountain Road in the Fodder Creek area.

Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Natural Resources utilized every resource to locate him,



Bruce Douglas Partin

including aerial patrol and K-9 units to assist with the search and capture of Partin, but he remained at large.

On the fourth day of Par-

tin's escape, at approximately 5:15 p.m. on Thursday, July 18, a resident on Fodder Creek Road in the Gander Gap area spotted him in his orange jail uniform and called 911. Towns County deputies saturated the area searching for the suspect.

And this is where the Kirby Family came in. About two hours after Partin was spotted, Steven Kirby, a resident on Vester Road, also in the Fodder Creek area, was inside his home when Odie, his Labradoodle, began aggressively alerting to a person outside the residence.

Kirby retrieved his weapon, went outside and was immediately confronted by

See Partin Captured, Page 7



Sheriff Ken Henderson with Kirby family members Steven, Amy, Cale and Odie. Photo/Facebook

Bradshaw signs contracts, welcomes Mountain Shelter

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Much of the July 16 regular meeting of Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw focused on "house-keeping" issues, including the signing of the annual cooperative lease agreement with the Georgia Forestry Commission.

"It's just an understanding between them and us of if there's a forest fire or something like that, who does what," explained Bradshaw, adding that Fire Chief Harold Copeland had looked over the agreement.

Next, Bradshaw signed an agreement with Cintas for uniform rentals, primarily for



Humane Society Mountain Shelter Adam Payne spoke in the July 16 commission meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Commissioner talks new courthouse, tourism & more

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers & Shakers welcomed Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw back to their weekly breakfast meeting on July 12 to offer various updates on county business.

"Everything for the county is going really, really good, it's just really busy," Bradshaw said. "No negative things."

As of that morning, it was about a month on from the grand opening of the renovated Towns County Courthouse, and Bradshaw said that all the county offices had finished moving in, "and we love it."

"If you haven't seen it, come on over; if I can't take you through it, just make yourselves at home," Brad-



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw addressed the Mountain Movers & Shakers in one of their breakfast meetings this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

See County Meeting, Page 3

Home & Garden Shows provide one-stop shopping

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS - The 10th Annual Home & Garden Show, presented by Expo Management Inc., attracted 61 vendors and more than 2,500 visitors to the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center over the weekend to showcase home improvement products and services.

"Any company that has something to do with a house, whether it's the roof, floor, back yard, front yard or anything in between, they are the types of businesses that are here," said Bill Anderson, president of Expo Management Inc. "What the homeowners like about this is, it's one-stop shopping. They can find everything they need in one place."

The two-day event on July 20-21 showcased the lat-

See Home & Garden Show, Page 7



Creativity took centerstage at the annual Butternut Creek Festival over the weekend, featuring tons of fun artwork like these metal woodland creatures inside Meeks Park. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Towns County Grand Jury Indictments for July Term 2024

The following individuals were indicted during the July Term 2024 of the Towns County Grand Jury, which met earlier this month:

Rebeka Renee Eichholz, trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Kevin Ray Jones, trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Richard Lee Hall, bur-

glary in the second degree.

Kayla Renee Campbell, violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act; possession of a controlled substance; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Timothy John Gavin, possession of a controlled substance; failure to wear a seat safety belt.

Tanner Trimble Boyd, seven counts of aggravated child molestation; child molestation.

Anthony Howard Holcombe, possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm during the commis-

sion of a felony; possession of drug-related objects.

Joshua Michael Runge-Koss, possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; possession of drug-related objects; three counts possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Jonathon Clay Pursley, impersonating an officer; burglary in the first degree; criminal attempt to commit a felony; three counts criminal trespass; loitering or prowling.

Anthony James Smith, two counts obstruction of an officer.

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Lake Levels

Speakers from Towns Co. Schools 7/26 See Page 2



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Blue Ridge 1,685.46
Chatuge 1,924.87
Nottely 1,774.90

Glass Recycling at Transfer Station See Page 3

GA Mtn. Fair Laser Light Show 7/27 See Page 7



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Hydrant Water Theft...from Page 1

report what they believed to be theft, particularly on the outskirts of the 400-plus mile water system.

As it turned out, one of the suspected thieves was a contractor who had received authorization to obtain water from hydrants serviced by the Water Authority.

The Water Board wants the public to know that some individuals are permitted to access hydrants via the issuance of hydrant meters – usu-

ally to companies involved in construction or other commercial activity– to enable water use tracking for payment purposes.

Initially, the contractor mentioned above had not been using a meter but was paying for his use based on personal estimates, though Water Board Chair Nathan Noblet said that has been “rectified.”

Some contractors, however, may be using the hydrants without permission, and

the Water Authority hopes the new cameras and fine will encourage them to come forward to acquire a hydrant meter to account for their water use.

“Any of the contractors that want to use hydrants throughout the system, we can work with them on either getting them to purchase a meter, or if we have a meter we can loan them until they can get one,” Noblet said.

Of course, the primary purpose of fire hydrants is to

provide adequate water supplies in the event of structure fires, wildfires, etc., so it is in the best interest of the public that only people authorized to use the hydrants have access to them to prevent damage.

Fire hydrants can be locked, but doing so increases the time it takes firefighters to access needed water supplies, including out-of-county mutual aid partners who respond to the area. That’s why, for the Water Board, disincentivizing theft is a better alternative to locking hydrants.

Towns County Fire & Rescue inspects the hydrants on a scheduled basis, according to Nichols, who added that the Water Authority is in full compliance with the state from an inspection standpoint.

In addition to safeguarding fire protection, another reason to curb water theft at hydrants is because the illegal activity adds to loss metrics, which imposes a financial burden on the Water Authority.

The Water Board meets the third Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m. inside the Water Office at 1224 Jack Dayton Circle. These meetings are open to the public. For questions and concerns, people may call 706-896-4372.

County Meeting...from Page 1

employees of places like the Transfer Station and Road Department. Per Bradshaw, it’s \$35 per delivery, and as Finance Director Andrea Anderson added, the agreement is based on a state contract.

The decision to work with Cintas is not a new one, but between Bradshaw and Anderson, the two revealed that the agreement helps save the county money thanks to lower rates.

A regular intergovernmental agreement was also signed in regard to the Towns County School Board for School Resource Officer services. Essentially, the document confirms that the school pays 75% of each officer’s salary while the county covers the remaining 25%.

Additionally, Bradshaw accepted a sales agreement from longtime service provider Suburban Propane for purchasing underground tanks for \$10,250. The cost is “a lot less” now than it would have been in years past, so an installation bid package was put out in a June 29 called meeting.

When Towns County Superior Court Clerk Cecil Dye retires at the end of his 10th term this year, so will his staff, prompting Bradshaw to sign an amendment for the FY24 Budget to allow for new employees under Court Clerk-Elect Eric Barrett.

At least four people will be hired soon so that Dye’s staff can help train them. To cover their salaries, the budget went up by \$26,000, to include \$2,000 paid for with Federal Insurance Contributions Act funds.

In an update from last month, Bradshaw shared information about a meeting he called on June 26 to discuss an amendment to the FY23 Budget. Due to an excess of \$164,000 in the Towns County Jail budget, there was a request to move \$95,000 of those funds to the Sheriff’s Office.

“We are not increasing the budget, just moving the excess money from the jail’s budget to the Sheriff’s Department budget,” Bradshaw said.

Resident Bena Ball was officially appointed to the Towns County Library Board of Trustees. In Bradshaw’s words, Ball has “the wisdom and the talents” to handle the new position in the wake of Barbara Hale’s passing.

Bradshaw also revealed that William “Scotty” Scott – known for his involvement as the leader of the Mountain Movers & Shakers and as a prominent member of the community – suffered a stroke on July 15 and was taken to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville.

“Keep him in your thoughts and prayers,” Bradshaw said. “He and his wife (Sue) are great folks, and what an asset to have in our community.”

The Movers & Shakers offered an update on Scott in their July 19 weekly meeting, saying Scott had been flown out in time to prevent much damage and was recovering at home. In fact, Scott wanted to attend the breakfast meeting as he normally does but his doctor – and wife – advised against it.

Also in the July 16 commission meeting, Mountain Shelter Humane Society Director Adam Payne introduced himself to guests and offered a bit of information about his organization.

Though Payne hasn’t been in the position long, he is not new to animal welfare and has taken strides to learning what the critters in Towns and Union counties need most.

Despite being a rural community, the population is steadily climbing, and with more people comes more animals. Payne shared a disturbing social media trend where pets are being dropped off at state lines, and he suspects it may be partially to blame for

so many stray cats and dogs.

“A lot of times, animals are discarded in this area,” Payne said. “In the last three weeks, we’ve opened up our shelter two separate times to find a dog chained to our front gate that was just abandoned overnight.”

So far this year, the Mountain Shelter has taken in 210 animals. Inversely, there have been 197 adoptions. Approximately 15 calls come in per day regarding drop-offs, whether they involve owner surrenders, found strays or even legal situations such as hoarding rescues.

Payne estimates that two or three times as many creatures could have been taken in with greater infrastructure and more kennels, and he said the primary goal of his presentation was to raise awareness of the dire need facing local animals and rescue groups and ways the public can help.

All funds made at both Mountain Shelter thrift stores go directly toward the animals, whether that means paying for food, life-saving medical care or building upkeep that enables them to have a roof over their heads. In 2023 alone, the shelter spent \$74,000 in veterinary bills.

“We’re at a point now where we’ve exceeded our maximum capacity at the shelter, so we’re about to start a program in the community asking for foster homes,” said Payne, who hopes that folks will consider opening their home to an animal in need, if only temporarily.

“We’re just looking forward to getting to meet some more people and getting out in the community more.”

The Hiwassee-based Mountain Shelter Thrift Store is located at 1620 Hwy 76, Suite 10, open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The other thrift store is located on Wellborn Street in Blairsville and operates on the same schedule.

Movers & Shakers...from Page 1

Bradshaw said. “I can sit in my office now, work, and it’s quiet. We’ve got central heating and air. What year is this? The building is almost 60 years old and never had anything done to it, so it was really time.”

Transitioning to other county news, Bradshaw said that revenues are continuing to come in favorably, noting that, “You always worry about the budget, but everything is going good.”

“There is a laser light show coming on July 27 at the ballfields at the (Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds), and I’m really excited about it,” Bradshaw said. “When I was running for commissioner, I told you my goal was to bring as much money into the county as we can get through tourism.”

“I think Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds should have activities every weekend during the good weather. I love to bring activities for children and families here, and this is one of them.”

Bradshaw touched on some of the day-to-day functions of the county that all add up to a fully operational administration of business.

“Everything that you see going on in the county government, you are paying for,” Bradshaw said. “Everything you buy in your household, we also have to buy. We have to buy food; inmates have to eat. We have to buy water.

“We work very hard every day to save our citizens money, without sacrificing our quality of services.”

Continued Bradshaw, “I also want to talk about our EMS. Did you know a new ambulance costs \$306,000? Think about that. Once it comes to the county, it is running all the time. So, they don’t last long.

“We had to buy a new tar truck to fix potholes and roads. We had one and it went bad. That cost \$268,000. Can you believe that? Inflation is terrible.”

Currently, the Commis-

sioner’s Office is working with a Midwest-based company to make a portable, multipurpose sign for use by the Sheriff’s Office.

“It will tell you the speed you’re going, but we could also use it to inform drivers about a road closure or an accident, just so we can make the roads a little safer,” Bradshaw said. “We’re not going to pay what they ask, of course, but we are going to negotiate.

“Another thing we’ve been working on for two years is a grant for a splash pad down here at the beach for the children. It would also have a really nice pavilion and working bathrooms right near the pickleball courts.

“This actually ties back to parrot-feather. Even if we get a grant, it isn’t going to happen immediately. It takes years. So, we started taking donations right away. The work needs to start now.”

After delivering his remarks, Bradshaw fielded a Q&A session, including questions about the apartments being built in Young Harris and how the county is preparing for “wokeism.”

“The company building the apartments can annex the land, but they can’t build anything over 35 feet; we are sticking to our guns on that,” Bradshaw said, referencing the development height restriction for fire protection purposes. “I haven’t heard anything from them lately.

“Wokeism? We don’t need to prepare. We just say no. Some of the requests we get in that office, you would not believe. It would blow your mind. I want to preserve your property value. I want to preserve my property value. I want to preserve our way of life.

“Anyway, I want to thank you all for your time. I appreciate you all. My door is always open.”

Residents with questions and/or concerns about the county may reach out to Bradshaw at tccommissioner@yahoo.com.

Towns County now Recycling Glass

The idea of recycling is to keep these items out of landfills and to reuse them in different ways. The County pays to transfer our trash to a landfill in another county, and recycling items cuts down on taxpayer dollars spent.

Hopefully, we have a lot of recycling enthusiasts in Towns County. We have a Recycling Center at the Transfer Station on Sunnyside Rd. that now has a glass recycling, closed dumpster parked on your way in or out of the recycling center. Deposit your glass bottles through the small open windows in the dumpster.

The other recycling bins are located just a few hundred feet from the residents’ dumpster bins in a covered, open-side area to the right. The recycling area takes plastics #1-#2 (numbers are in a triangle on

the bottom of the item), aluminum cans only, cardboard, and paper (white based items, newspapers, all magazines, but no brown bags, cereal or other brown boxes).

The cost for a small 13 Gal. bag is \$1 and a big, black bag is \$1.50; \$4/100#, going down as weight goes up, \$5.75/200#. Most commercial garbage companies do not recycle here, but if you use one of these companies for garbage pickup, you can take recycling to the Transfer Station by telling the scales operator that you only have recycling and then separating it at the Recycling Center.

The hours are 8 AM-4:45 PM on Monday-Thursday, 8 AM-12 noon on Friday and Saturday, and closed on Sunday and holidays. Thank you for recycling!

Home & Garden Show...from Page 1



Chef Graham Skardon of Kitchen Craft Cookware enjoyed putting on a live cooking show for Home & Garden guests on Saturday and Sunday.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

est furnishings, accessories, decorating and remodeling ideas, marketing opportunities, raffles and door prizes.

While Expo Management has hosted Home & Garden Shows for nearly four decades, the 2024 edition marked the 10th year in Towns, coming on the heels of the third annual Blairsville show in April.

And over the last decade, Kitchen Craft Cookware, represented by Chef Graham Skardon, has been a staple at the Towns County shows.

"It's the quality of the show and the location," Skardon said when asked what brings the business back year after year. "Good people live in the mountains, and they love good Southern cooking."

"So, every time we're in an area like this, we get a lot of positive feedback, and when

people own our cookware, it acts as an endorsement for the cookware.

"We love being in the mountains. Our owner has a home in Blairsville, and there is no place like North Georgia. That's what keeps us coming back. I moved to North Georgia in 2008 and found no reason to leave."

These events offer businesses an opportunity to meet face-to-face with potential clients and allow them to promote their products and services all under one roof. While hosting these events, Expo Management collaborates with local businesses and promotes the event to the public.

Originating in Southwest Florida, Anderson's Expo Management operates Home & Garden shows in Tennessee, South Carolina, Florida and

Georgia.

"We started in Florida but then I moved to Western North Carolina, and that's what started (this show)," Anderson said. "We have shows from Naples (Florida) to Knoxville (Tennessee). In all, we've been doing this for 38 years with 671 shows."

Another vendor at the show in Young Harris was Adam Bash of Renewal by Andersen Windows.

"We love coming here and meeting people," Bash said. "Everyone is talkative, in good spirits and super polite, and that is what keeps us coming back."

For more information, and to keep an eye on the events calendar to see when the shows will be returning to the area in 2025, visit <https://expomanagementinc.com/>.

Partin Captured...from Page 1

Partin. He ordered Partin to the ground with his weapon drawn, and Partin complied.

Kirby's wife Amy called 911, and sheriff's deputies were on the scene quickly thereafter to take Partin into custody at approximately 7:10 p.m.

Following the arrest, Kirby stated that he is committed to protecting his family and property from harm.

Sheriff Ken Henderson extended his deepest gratitude to the amazing members of the Fodder Creek community for their vigilance and assistance, but most of all to Steven Kirby for his courage and willingness to act.

"It is truly a pleasure to work in a community where we can count on the ongoing support of citizens like Mr. Kirby to stand behind us and, in cases like this, even physically aid us when necessary," Sheriff Henderson said.

The sheriff was pleased to honor the Kirby Family on Friday, July 19, as they came into the Sheriff's Office to accept the \$500 reward money along with a well-deserved



Bruce Douglas Partin lying face down with his hands behind his back and legs crossed as Steven Kirby holds him at gunpoint for authorities.
Photo/Facebook

commendation for Steven Kirby and Odie.

Sheriff Henderson strongly supports the Second Amendment and the right to bear arms and was thankful that Kirby's instincts kicked in.

"He went above and be-

yond to not only protect his family and property but his community as well," Henderson said.

Attending the award presentation were Sheriff Ken Henderson and members of the Kirby Family: Steven, Amy, son Cale and pet Odie.

Grand Jury Indictments...from Page 1

Thomas Roberts Leech, burglary in the first degree; criminal damage to property in the second degree; criminal trespass; theft by taking.

Renee Michelle MacCrea, burglary in the first degree; criminal damage to property in the second degree; criminal trespass; theft by taking.

Dorothy Maria Aman, possession of methamphetamine; driving under the influence (controlled substance); driving under the influence (less safe) (combined influence); nine counts driving under the influence (less safe) (drugs); sale, distribution, possession of dangerous drugs; driving with an expired license.

John Richard Beni III,

driving under the influence (per se); driving under the influence (less safe) (alcohol); obstruction of an officer; failure to maintain lane; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects; two counts making a false statement.

Nicholas James Lunsford, failure to register as a sex offender.

Graham Phillip McKay, arson in the first degree; criminal damage to property in the second degree.

Timothy Isaac Mitchell Jr., three counts theft by taking.

James Mitchell Peppers, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute.

Kimberly Ann Young,

possession of a controlled substance.

Victor Yamayans, two counts violating family violence order.

Eric Jackson Martin, aggravated assault; battery.

Blayne William Swafford, aka Blayne William Swafford, aggravated battery; two counts aggravated assault; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

William Patrick Swafford, aka William Patrick Swafford, aggravated battery; two counts aggravated assault; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

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