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Students return for second full year after COVID onset



Towns County students departing the bus on the very first day of a brand-new school year last week. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Schools are back in full swing, with students having returned to campus on Thursday, Aug. 5, and Friday, Aug. 6, to start the 2021-22 school year.

When classrooms reopened on Thursday following the end of summer break, students and teachers alike anticipated an enthusiastic return with some sense of normalcy in 2021.

And thanks to COVID-19 restrictions largely having been lifted, the schools are open once again for in-person classes five days a week, only this time without an online learning option or mask mandate.

Open House took place earlier last week on Tuesday, Aug. 3, setting the stage for the big return as parents, students

and teachers came together to meet one other and establish those initial relationships that carried over into the first days of school.

"Students were excited to see each other and anxious to move forward," Elementary School Principal Shannon Moss said. "(They were excited) hearing about all the things they would be learning this year and being able to go to play with each other on the playground."

The theme for the 2021-22 school year is "Safari for Success," according to Moss, which will even include a trip to the zoo for all elementary school students.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 hasn't simply gone away, so parents, teachers and staff are still bracing for the possibility of things going awry.

That's why the schools

are encouraging good hygiene practices to help keep germs generally at bay, ranging from handwashing and continually wiping down surfaces periodically, Moss said, adding that anyone choosing to wear a face mask may do so.

With several students coming back from a year and a half worth of online-only instruction, Moss said he and his staff will be focusing on identifying gaps in learning and ways to narrow them.

"I am excited about seeing each student grow socially, emotionally and academically," Moss said of the new school year. "Towns County Elementary School has a team of every day that go the extra mile to ensure our students receive the best overall education possible."

High School and Middle

School students, teachers and staff are also returning to in-person classes five days a week, with both schools resuming a full slate of athletics and other extracurricular activities, High School Principal Roy Perren said.

Much like the elementary school, Perren said the teachers and staff at both schools will be focusing on identifying learning gaps that were created with online learning during the pandemic.

Towns County's low population of students compared with other schools around the state will allow educators to work closely with kids on closing those gaps that were created last year, Perren said. And it will be a team effort, added Moss.

"All staff members play a crucial role in the lives of our students," Perren said. See Back to School, Page 8A

Board of Education talks masks, delta variant and CRT

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Last week, Towns County Schools returned to an intentionally normal first day of classes, without mask mandates, social distancing, online instruction or other COVID-19 mitigations in place for most students.

There are, however, protocols to address transmission of the respiratory illness should it become necessary, including measures for those who experience close contacts with positive individuals, and of course, mandatory home isolation for staff and students who test positive for COVID.

Complicating the matter has been the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's recent universal school masking recommendation, which applies a one-size-fits-all approach to communities facing different



School Board Member Stephanie McConnell asked her fellow members to consider implementing more on-campus COVID measures to start the school year amid the delta variant.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

rates of transmission. "For now, face coverings are completely voluntary and at the discretion of each student and teacher," Towns County

See Board of Education, Page 5A

BOE welcomes Rogers in August School Board meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On Monday, Aug. 2, retired educator Sara Rogers sat in for her first meeting as a newly minted member of

the Towns County Board of Education.

Magistrate/Probate Judge David Rogers – no relation – swore Rogers into the vacant position last month after she

fellow board members earlier in July, and she received a warm welcome in the August meeting.

The Towns County native is a lifelong educator who started

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L-R: Caroleen Woods, Sara Rogers, Darren Berrong, Stan Chastain, Brandon Grimsley and Stephanie McConnell immediately following their Aug. 2 School Board meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

'Million Dollar Reunion' captures rock 'n' roll history



The Million Dollar Reunion show coming to the Georgia Mountain Fair Aug. 20 recreates an iconic moment in rock 'n' roll, featuring the music of Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis.

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

HIWASSEE – This week will be the start of the 70th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair, which is scheduled

to begin on Friday, Aug. 13, to feature nine full days of entertainment at the historic Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Each year, thousands of visitors from all over travel to Hiwassee to experience

the excitement of the Fair, including the first-class musical performances, arts and crafts, carnival rides, other wonderful attractions, and a glimpse into Northeast Georgia's rich his-

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Rotary to grow fresh veggies for local food programs

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge welcomed several dozen guests and community leaders to their first Thankful Thursday event July 22, where the Rotarians' newest service project, the "Rick and Jan Dubois Community Garden," was officially introduced to the public.

"The purpose of this new Rotary project is to provide fresh green vegetables to local food pantries and other organizations that assist in ensuring food security for residents," Club President Jack Payne said.

Rotary Club members already deliver fresh lettuce on a regular basis to the Towns County Food Pantry, and Payne said they also plan on

See Rotary Garden, Page 8A



Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge is calling this project the "Rick and Jan Dubois Community Garden" in their honor. Rick, who donated the first six hydroponic towers, passed away in May.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Hiwassee, Young Harris qualifying to begin next week

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

It's municipal election season once again, meaning residents of Hiwassee and Young Harris can run for local office in their respective city governments.

In Hiwassee, the office of mayor and two city council seats are up for grabs in November, currently filled by Mayor Liz Ordiales and

Councilwomen Amy Barrett and Patsy Owens.

Qualifying in Hiwassee runs Monday, Aug. 16, through Friday, Aug. 20, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m., excluding the hour from 1-2 p.m. Eligible residents must file the appropriate qualifying paperwork, to include payment of a fee.

Fees are set by state law at "3% of the total gross salary of the office," so the qualifying

fee for mayor is \$708, and the fee for each council seat is \$102. Payment of qualifying fees may be made via check, cash, money order or cashier's check.

Qualifying packets may be picked up during regular business hours now at Hiwassee City Hall, which is where they must also be returned during the qualifying period.

See Qualifying, Page 8A

Williams faces murder charge in beating death of Hatchett

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

HAYESVILLE, N.C. – The charge against Darrell Dywayne Williams in the beating death of Sarai Hatchett, both of Blairsville, has been upgraded from assault with serious bodily injury to murder.

This occurred on Wednesday, Aug. 4, after a Clay County, North Carolina, grand jury found the evidence against Williams compelling enough to bring the more serious charge.

His bond remains the same at \$2 million, according to Clay County Sheriff Bobby Deese.

Williams, 47, was arrested on July 27 for the assault against Hatchett, during which she sustained severe injuries she would eventually succumb to later that same day at Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville.

Around 3:25 a.m. on Sunday, July 25, authorities responded to a 911 call alerting them to "an unconscious 43-

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Darrell Dywayne Williams

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Smith's Legion Chapter #2699, United Daughters Of The Confederacy®, Blairsville



Chapter President, Jeanette Earle, Blairsville, GA; Speaker Doris Durbin; and Chapter First Vice President, Elizabeth Salvatore, Murphy, NC

The Smith's Legion Chapter #2699 of the United Daughters of the Confederacy® (UDC), Blairsville, GA, invited Doris Durbin, writer of the "The Captain Takes a Wife" series, to speak. Doris spoke on some of her family history and the history of the area, which is what she researches for her historical novels – she wants to be true to the facts of the area and of the people. Doris started out with

an old quote from Ben Franklin, "Three can keep a secret if two of them are dead." She said there's no way that three people can keep a secret; the secret has already spread. So off Doris went on how to write historical murder mysteries.

Doris goes on to say, "Stories bring history to life and how history brings stories to life. Just as we have veterans from the War Between the

States we tend to be interested in, we would like to know the stories behind them. Instead of a dry collection of facts, the history becomes the story of your family. It's even better when you know someone older than you who can tell you stories he or she experienced, or stories they were told as a child."

When Doris came to the area in 1983, she met Mr. C.R. Collins of Choestoe, GA, who told stories of life in the area when he was a child, when people mostly walked. Mr. Collins made stories come to life. This makes historical fiction important – the story makes the historical facts meaningful to us. A good historical novel is not just another romance or suspense story or murder mystery. It is a doorway into another time and place and a way for us to know the people who lived in that time and place. When writing historical fiction, you use the power of story to reveal history, while you use the power of history to reveal your characters and tell

their stories." She believes in being accurate with the history of whatever she's writing; like making sure a farming implement you use in a story was the correct implement of that time; or buttons versus zippers being used.

She also reminds us that if you're writing, get the ideas written down and worry about the editing later, "Don't get it right, get it written, which is a reminder to write the story and worry about fixing all the mistakes in it later. Work out the problems in the story before you polish the fine details of style – just get the story written!"

After speaking, Doris showed the Chapter a hand spun and knitted shawl, and displaying her three books – she has a fourth one coming out soon.

The Smith's Legion Chapter meet most every 4th Saturday, 11am, at the Veteran's Building, Blairsville. Chapter members are from Towns, Union, and Fannin Counties of GA, and from Clay and Chero-

oke Counties of NC. Eligibility requirements for the UDC include women, 18 years of age and older, who have a Confederate Veteran in their blood line, lineal or collateral. If you are interested in joining the UDC or the Children of the Confederacy (CofC) and you are not sure of

your ancestry, we can help you search your family lineage.

For more information, please contact smithslegion@gmail.com. There is also a local Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp (SCV) in Blairsville, the David W. Payne Camp #1633.

Board of Education...from Page 1A

Schools posted to Facebook on Aug. 4. "We attempted to take the CDC guidelines and meet somewhere in the middle to better match what we currently know about the data in Towns County."

The above post came after an Aug. 2 School Board discussion broached by Board Member Stephanie McConnell, who said she was worried about the emergence of more infectious variants, including delta, and lower vaccination rates among eligible children and many adults.

McConnell suggested revisiting the possibility of instituting mitigations similar to the ones used last school year, like masking and social distancing, but she was the only board member vocally in favor of such precautions that evening.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said he understood McConnell's concerns but felt parents were comfortable proceeding as planned with a normal school year while keeping an eye not just on national trends but on local trends as well.

This method proved successful last year, Berrong said, with Towns remaining one of the only schools in the state not to close for a single day due to COVID-19, even after going more than half a year without vaccines.

McConnell pointed out that the schools had one-way halls, masking and more in place for 2020-21, and Berrong said that didn't seem to make a discernable difference in transmission rates, as many staff members got sick while students remained largely healthy.

All school employees have now had the chance to be vaccinated, as have children 12 and up, and Berrong said

the schools are prepared to implement stricter measures up to transitioning back to online learning should the need arise, though recent local data does not warrant this currently.

Board Member Caroleen Woods voiced opposition to school mask mandates, and Member Stan Chastain, who returned in August after missing the July meeting for being sick with a severe case of COVID that required hospitalization, said parents had the choice of sending their kids to school in masks.

For the moment, the schools will maintain course with a regular start to the year, featuring in-person only instruction and limited COVID mitigations, but Berrong said they were ready to "make changes on the fly" should the local situation begin to take a turn for the worse.

All school principals delivered their regular monthly updates to the board, expressing a desire to see the present school year be as successful or more than the last, and to start assessing where students are in their educational journeys and getting those needing help back on track.

In the public comments portion of the meeting, Towns County resident Mary Fletcher asked to speak to the board about her concerns regarding "Critical Race Theory," saying she wanted to make sure board members were aware of it and not planning to put its tenets into practice here.

"I just don't want anybody to be blindsided by it," Fletcher said, going on to call Critical Race Theory a "racist thing which tells our children to hate American and hate each other – and that's not right. We should love each other and take care of each other."

Critical Race Theory, aka CRT, and its many simplified ideological offshoots have become an overarching hot-button issue nationally, with many people taking sides for or against it in the ongoing culture war being waged primarily by outspoken members of rival political parties.

Critics, who seem to trend largely conservative, often charge that CRT and its principles are being implemented in a growing number of K-12 classrooms around the country to promote both anti-Americanism and divisive racial essentialism that stands in contrast to Martin Luther King Jr.'s ethic of focusing on personal character over skin color.

Many defenders of CRT and its principles, seemingly more likely to be left leaning in their politics, claim that anti-CRT advocates are exaggerating the extent this is an issue in classrooms, and that, besides, the goals of CRT are aimed at addressing systemic oppression and persistent disparities they believe are rooted in past and present racism.

Either way, the local School Board and Board Office contend they do not have a dog in the fight, because such things have yet to make an appearance at the local level aside from a couple of people raising concerns prematurely.

Stressing the point in the Aug. 2 meeting, Superintendent Berrong highlighted a recent action by the State Board of Education, which passed a resolution expressing opposition to the teaching of Critical Race Theory in K-12 classrooms in Georgia.

The School Board meets the first Monday of each month inside the Middle/High School Media Center on campus, starting at 6 p.m.

Murder...from Page 1A

year-old female" located inside a travel trailer at a campground off Gilberts Way on NC 175, southeast of Hayesville and just over the Georgia/North Carolina line, Deese said.

The 911 center actually received two calls regarding the situation, according to authorities, one from a member of her family and another from Williams himself, who had called the family member first to report Hatchett's condition. The family member urged him

to call 911, after which both did.

A Clay County deputy was first to arrive at the trailer and quickly secured the scene for EMS and investigators, and Hatchett was discovered inside the trailer, unconscious and visibly injured from "blunt force trauma," Deese said.

Williams' initial charging document for assault notes that Hatchett suffered from "multiple skull fractures, extensive bruising over the entire body, (and) missing teeth."

Deese said Hatchett's skull injuries extended all the way around the circumference of her head, and that the evidence pointed to Williams allegedly having used his hands to inflict the injuries that ultimately resulted in her death.

Hatchett did not regain consciousness prior to being transported for treatment at Northeast Georgia Medical, Deese said, and she passed away nearly 18 hours later at 9:07 p.m. in Gainesville.

Next steps in the case include receiving the official autopsy report and processing any remaining evidence, at which point the case will be ready for trial, Sheriff Deese said.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation assisted the Clay County Sheriff's Office with obtaining evidence in the case, GBI Region 8 Special Agent in Charge Kim Williams said.

Williams has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

As previously reported, Hatchett's sister Rachel Lindley made a social media post July 27 detailing the family's heartbreak over the tragedy and letting people know some of what happened to her sister in her final moments.

"Our baby sister, Sarai

Hatchett, has unexpectedly been taken from this life," Lindley posted. "She was strong and stubborn and mean, yet she had the biggest heart you can imagine. Even as a young girl, she provided shelter, food, and love to all people and creatures she found in need. This love was extended to so many throughout her life.

"During a domestic dispute, Sarai suffered major head trauma which resulted in brain hemorrhaging and a massive stroke, cutting off all oxygen to her brain. Sarai was pronounced brain dead at Northeast Georgia Medical Center on Sunday, July 25, 2021. Sarai's partner, Darrell Williams, remains in custody with Clay County NC Sheriff's Department.

"Sarai's departure leaves an immense void. We may see an abundance of missed opportunities, but I ask instead that each of us focuses on and celebrates the beautiful moments shared with her. I pray that we each find comfort in sweet memories, the love of our family and friends, and in our Heavenly Father who knows all things and has a plan for us all.

"If you have information that might assist law enforcement's investigation, please reach out to Lt. Heath Woodard with Clay County NC Sheriff's Office (828) 644-4217 and to Special Agent Derek Glasco of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (706) 348-4866.

"At this time, we ask that the family's privacy be respected. We welcome your love and prayers and offer ours in return."

A memorial service honoring Hatchett was held on Friday, Aug. 6, inside the Mountain View Chapel of Mountain View Funeral Home.

Rock 'n' Roll...from Page 1A

story and culture. This year, the Georgia Mountain Fair is thrilled to be celebrating 70 years with the "Million Dollar Reunion," featuring the former cast members of the Broadway and worldwide hit show "Million Dollar Quartet."

The Million Dollar Reunion show will take the audience on a high-spirited journey back in time, with dynamic performances of some of the greatest early hits of rock 'n' roll right inside Anderson Music Hall, Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said.

With last year's Fair having to be postponed due to COVID-19, Thomason said she wanted to make the 2021 entry bigger and better than ever.

In pursuit of this goal, Thomason reached out to some of her radio contacts and was able to get a group of talented actors who perform the Million Dollar Quartet Reunion in Las Vegas to come to Hiawassee.

The Broadway smash hit tells the amazing story of an extraordinary twist of fate that brought young Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins and Jerry Lee Lewis together at the Sun Records recording studio

for what would become one of the greatest jam sessions ever. This indelible performance features a fascinating storyline that will let the audience re-live that star-studded night in 1956 Tennessee with some of rock 'n' rolls biggest legends.

The members of the "Million Dollar Quartet Reunion" show will appear at the Georgia Mountain Fair on Friday, Aug. 20, to perform two shows, one at 2 p.m. and another at 7 p.m., with the Georgia Mountain Fair Band scheduled to play that day, too.

Of course, there's so much more to do at the Fair, including attending the 70th Georgia Mountain Fair Parade as it rolls through town on Saturday, Aug. 14, starting at 11 a.m. People won't want to miss the float contest entries, especially with \$10,000 in prize money on the line.

And folks should definitely make sure to attend the annual Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant on Monday, Aug. 16, starting at 8 p.m. to support local ladies vying for this year's title and prizes.

There's even a brand new to the Fair show called "A Grizzly Experience," which is an educational Grizzly Bear show and exhibit.

"Get an up close and personal look into the life of North America's most prestigious predator, the Alaskan Grizzly Bear," per georgiamountainfairgrounds.com. "Yogi, a 7-year-old, 600-pound Grizzly Bear and two juveniles, Dottie and Lea, delight crowds of all ages with their impressive sizes and amazing behaviors."

Plus, people can enjoy examples of bygone mountain living in the Pioneer Village and check out the many "Old Ways" demonstrations to see how people historically made moonshine, cider, quilts, soap, hominy and more, not to mention real-life blacksmithing and glass blowing demos.

One-day passes cost \$12, with children 12 and under getting in free. A three-day pass costs \$33 and will save people a few bucks, with the biggest savings available for the Fun Fair Pass at \$90, which covers all nine days of the Fair. Music shows are included in ticket prices.

Carnival rides are an additional charge of \$25 for wristbands or \$20 if purchased in advance, with free parking inside the Fairgrounds for all Georgia Mountain Fair attendees. For more information, including a full schedule for all days, visit the website.

Rogers...from Page 1A

her nearly 40-year career at Towns County Elementary the first year the school opened in 1977. She retired from teaching around 2015, only to return as a substitute.

In addition to teaching children in the classroom, for about 10 years and starting in the late '90s, Rogers hosted swimming classes at her home pool for students during summer break, instructing 50 or more kids each year in how to swim.

She also worked with the Mountain Education Center as a mentor for several years, though she retired from substituting two years ago and her mentoring duties last year, leaving her wide open to take on new responsibilities as a School Board member.

"I like kids, and I wanted to return what I had been given through the school system, because I did go to school here," Rogers said, explaining why she decided to go into

education in the first place. "It just was a glove that fit."

Rogers has enjoyed retirement playing pickleball, remaining active in her church and working with the youth there on Wednesday nights, gardening, and spending time with her grandchildren.

But the pull of education, which has never been far, brought Rogers back to Towns County Schools, this time in a completely new capacity.

"I felt that I could help the kids in Towns County," Rogers said of her decision to join the board. "I come from an elementary background, and I don't know that there has been a board member that has come from an elementary background."

"And I'm very strong in my belief that that's where the foundation is started, and you've got to have a good foundation to build to get to middle school and high school. So, that's what I want to center

on."

Quite a few vacancies have needed filling on the Board of Education in recent years, and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong asked Rogers multiple times in the past about filling those roles.

As to why she chose now to finally join, she said the timing was simply right, as she wasn't involved with education anywhere else when approached this go-round.

Unless she runs for and wins election to the Young Harris post next year, she will serve in the role until the unexpired term, vacated by Tamie Bradley who moved out of the district, runs out at the end of 2022.

"I just hope to help make Towns County Schools the best that it can be and provide the best education for the students that are here," she said. "My love in teaching is reading. I just feel like you've got to have a good foundation in reading, even to do math. You've got to read to function."

Back to School...from Page 1A

of our students," Moss said. "That includes our teachers and paraprofessionals along with the nurse's office, bus drivers, custodial, maintenance, cafeteria staff, to the support of our superintendent, Dr. (Darren) Berrong, along with the BOE and Central Office."

"I am truly excited to be a part of such a great team and to provide our students with every opportunity to reach their potential."



And just like that, the first day of the 2021-22 school year has come and gone for students – they grow up so fast, don't they? Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Rotary Garden...from Page 1A



The July 22 Thankful Thursday event presented Rotarians with a good reason to get together – to celebrate their club's ability to donate fresh produce to local food programs. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

starting delivery of fresh green vegetables to the local Meals on Wheels program.

The project concept came about roughly six months ago in a regular club meeting, and it quickly became a reality thanks to the generosity and hard work of Payne, his fellow Rotarians and others who made the project possible.

"When the idea for a community garden came up, one of our members, Dr. Rick Dubois, had experience in hydroponic gardening and recommended strongly that we move in that direction," Payne said. "Dr. Rick Dubois volunteered to purchase the club's first six hydroponic towers."

Next, the club needed to look for land and a building to house the hydroponic systems year-round. Fortunately, after hearing about the project, Rotarian Kerry Clem volunteered the use of his land and a building he owns off US 76 just outside Young Harris.

That's when the project really got off the ground – and into six hydroponic towers, which provide multiple benefits in the growing process.

"Hydroponic gardening requires approximately 10 times less water than traditional gardening, uses no pesticides, and results in zero soil erosion," Payne said. "The plants grown never touch soil."

To pay tribute to Rotarian Dr. Rick Dubois, who sadly passed away in early May after a long battle with cancer, Payne

said members of the club decided to name the community garden after Rick and his surviving wife, Jan Dubois.

And thanks to numerous additional contributions and commitments from Rotarians and others within the community, Payne said the Dubois Community Garden now has nine working hydroponic towers growing fresh green vegetables inside the building at the site.

Now, Rotarians are aiming to install a greenhouse at the site, which will allow production of even more vegetables, both pollinated and non-pollinated varieties, Payne said.

"The club plans to expand distribution to other food banks and pantries in the months and years ahead," Payne said. "Local food banks have proven to be an effective resource for reducing food insecurity."

"Local banks serving our communities are a critical link in providing food to lower and restricted-income residents. It has not been possible for them to deliver fresh greens or produce during on-site distribution days or when delivering to homebound clients."

"The nine hydroponic towers in the Rotary facility enable the club to grow fresh greens indoors in a climate-controlled environment on the schedule aligned with the food banks' distribution needs."

On the day before the Thankful Thursday event at the garden site, which has a Young

Harris address inside Union County, Payne said they were able to provide 56 bags of fresh greens for distribution at Towns County Food Pantry.

And during the event, Rotarian Clem unveiled a new sign at the garden site recognizing those who have contributed \$1,000 or more to the project.

"It is the generosity of all those within our community who have contributed to this project that makes us confident that we will continue to expand this operation and the reach of this project within our local communities," Payne said. "We are so grateful for the community's embrace of this project and the generosity of everyone who has helped it get off to a strong start."

Rotarians are about to celebrate the 27th year of the club, Payne said, noting that the Lake Chatuge Rotary Club sees this effort as a legacy project.

"In 27 more years, we feel this project will still be helping those in need within the community, and its scope and reach will be even greater," Payne said.

Moving forward, the club hopes to include local students in the project, as well as any community volunteers who desire to pitch in toward the cause, Payne said. Anyone interested should contact a Lake Chatuge Rotarian or leave a message on the club's Facebook page.

Qualifying...from Page 1A

Residents are eligible to qualify for and hold city office if they are at least 21 years old, a resident for at least a year immediately prior to the election date, a registered and qualified voter in the Municipal Election, and they must continue to reside in the city during the term of office.

The General Election will be held on Nov. 2, 2021, with terms of office to start Jan. 1, 2022, and run four years through Dec. 31, 2025.

People wishing to participate by voting in the election must register by

Oct. 4, 2021, at the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration Office.

Early voting for the Hiawassee Municipal Election will begin Oct. 12 and end on Oct. 29, to take place at the Board of Elections and Registration Office from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., including two Saturdays, Oct. 16 and Oct. 23.

Similarly, in Young Harris, the office of mayor and two city council seats are up for election, currently filled by Mayor Andrea Gibby and Councilmen Donald Keys and

John Kelley. The fee for mayor is \$252, with the fee for council being \$72.

Eligible residents must file the appropriate qualifying paperwork and fee payment between Wednesday, Aug. 18, and Friday, Aug. 20, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day. Qualifying packets may be picked up at Young Harris City Hall the week of qualifying.

Advanced voting at Young Harris City Hall will open at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 12, and close at 5 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 29, with two days of Saturday voting also, Oct. 16 and Oct. 23 from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m.