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Georgia Mountain Fair opens this weekend

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Boasting new events and a slight change in schedule, the 73rd Annual Georgia Mountain Fair promises to be a unique experience when it returns over the next two weekends, starting with the crowning of a new Miss Georgia Mountain Fair on Thursday, Aug. 15, for \$5 admission.

Fairgrounds Manager Hilda Thomason revealed that while the always-popular carnival section of the Fair will be open for all nine days between Aug. 16 and Aug. 24, craft vendors and live entertainment will only feature on the weekends.

For the first week, vendors and live entertainment will run on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, while the second week will see these offerings continue Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

"It's just not been profitable for us to have it Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays," Thomason said, emphasizing

that the carnival rides will be open every day.

Courtesy of the Hiawassee Garden Club, the historic Flower Show will also be coming back this year, showcasing a theme of "Elements and Weather on Earth." Visitors can view the displays during the first weekend of the Fair, from Aug. 16 through Aug. 18.

The second weekend, Aug. 22-24, will feature a different kind of public display through the Photography Exhibit & Contest, which welcomes amateur and professional photographers to submit their best pictures in the categories People, Scenery, Flora, Fauna and Abstracts.

There is no entry fee for the exhibit, which will feature cash prizes for the best photos in each category, amounting to 31 winners in total.

Train rides and new attractions at the carnival are just a couple of the additions scheduled for this year's return. Along with that, visitors can expect some new vendors and

food options.

Down at Eller's Holler, the kids can enjoy a petting zoo complete with goats, pigs and Highland cows, and if families arrive before 11 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 17, they can watch the annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade that is set to roll through Hiawassee.

Other entertainment at the beloved Fair tradition includes dog tricks, pony rides, clogging and square dancing.

Music fans can finish up their days by heading up to the Anderson Music Hall for concerts. Gene Watson and The Bellamy Brothers will start things out on Aug. 16, followed by Tommy James and The Shondells on Aug. 17.

As part of the worship service on Sunday, Aug. 18, The Inspirations, The Martins and The Perrys will be performing.

Picking back up on Aug. 22 will be the American Pop show, featuring The Grass Roots, The Buckinghams and The Box Tops.

Then, on Aug. 23, the Oak Ridge Boys will be visiting the Fairgrounds as part of their American Made Farewell Tour. Closing out the Fair on Saturday, Aug. 24, will be Crowder, a contemporary Christian band.

General admission for the Fair is \$7, but those who purchase concert tickets in advance can also enter and enjoy everything it has to offer. As always, children 12 and under have free admission.

By ordering tickets online at www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com, presale deals for unlimited carnival rides can save up to \$5 or \$40 for individual wristbands and family packs respectively. Otherwise, unlimited ride tickets are \$25, and on Saturdays after 5 p.m., \$30.

Monday, Aug. 19, is the special "\$2 Day," where all carnival rides are \$2, and Aug. 20-21, guests can pay \$25 for two unlimited ride passes.

For more information and full event details, visit the website of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.



The Georgia Mountain Fair returns this week for its 73rd outing, to include all the family-friendly fun and games of the annual carnival inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Student return celebrated alongside top test results



Students were excited to arrive at school for their first day back from Summer Break on Friday.

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Schools got underway in earnest on Friday, Aug. 9, and from all indications so far, students and parents can look forward to another great year of learning. The most recent annual test scores have been released, and the district has good reason to celebrate.

"As a system, we knocked the ball out of the park," said Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong.

Each year, the state requires academic achievement testing of all public-school students in grades 3-12. This summative assessment occurs at the end of the academic year to measure student learning and mastery of the state-adopted content area standards.

The ultimate goal is to improve teaching and learning. These tests are known as the Georgia Milestones. Georgia also participates in the National Assessment of Educational Progress testing program in grades 4, 8 and

12, which measures student achievement nationally.

Testing is a crucial part of the teaching/learning cycle. Georgia conducts formative assessments during the school year that are critical for teachers as they plan their instruction. The data teachers receive from the tests give feedback about instructional practices.

Furthermore, a summative assessment provides aggregated data for policymakers and school leaders to make informed decisions.

See Back to School, Page 6

Florida man dies from injuries in motorcycle crash

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

A Florida man who spent summers with his family in the North Georgia Mountains died last month from injuries sustained in a July 14 motorcycle crash on the Unicoi Turnpike.

Carol Bowling, 84, of Tallahassee, was traveling south on GA 17 inside Towns County while negotiating a curve to the right, according to Georgia State Patrol.

The 2003 Harley Davidson he was driving continued straight through the curve, traveling off the left side of the roadway before striking a standing tree head-on about a mile south of Indian Grave Gap Road, per GSP.

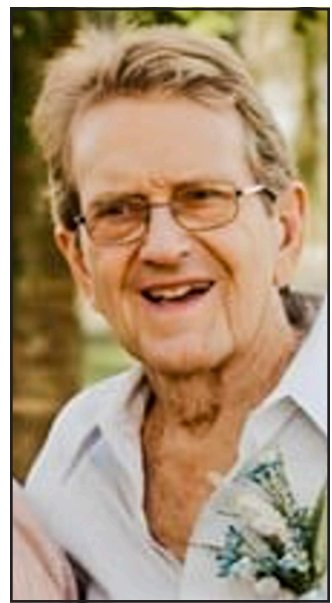
Bowling was flown via medical helicopter to Northeast Georgia Medical Center, where

he succumbed to his injuries on July 26.

He was born in 1940 about two hours away in Black Mountain, North Carolina. Bowling is survived by Joan, his wife of 66 years, as well as five adult children, 10 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.

"Carl's love for God and sharing the blessings God has given him was his greatest passion," his obituary reads. "He was quick to tell others of God's blessings in his life, including saving his life after crashing his private plane six years ago."

Bowling made his name in the racehorse business as "a respected horseman known for his knowledge of horses, his foresight promoting the racing industry, and his ability to choose top racing prospects ... Carl was an icon in the industry



Carl Bowling

and will be greatly missed by many."

Union General Hospital loses civil court jury trial



By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE — A Union County jury has found Union General Hospital Inc. at fault for medical malpractice and negligent credentialing regarding a civil action brought by a former patient.

As a result of the trial, Union General is on the hook for half of the \$47 million in damages awarded by the jury to the plaintiff — that's \$23.5 million — pending an appeals process.

The plaintiff, Anna Giacomini, required a double amputation after suffering a bacterial infection that spread during her stay at Union County Nursing Home and Union General Hospital nearly nine years ago, in December 2015.

Based on a lawsuit originally filed in 2017, the civil trial began last month and was conducted in two phases between July 15 and Aug. 5 at the Union County Courthouse, with Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge James E. Cornwell presiding.

Jury members handed down their first verdict on July 30, finding that medical malpractice had occurred, and their second verdict pertaining to negligent credentialing on Aug. 5.

As part of the verdict, the jury awarded \$47 million in damages to Giacomini, "for past and future pain and suffering," court records show.

The jury apportioned the damages as follows: 5% to Union General Hospital for the medical malpractice of mul-

iple employees; 45% to Union General for the negligent credentialing of Dr. James Heaton; 45% to Heaton himself; and 5% to Dr. Janaki Narravala, court records show.

Neither Heaton nor Narravala were parties to the case but were found to be "at fault" in the medical malpractice verdict, as state law allows parties to be apportioned part of the fault without having to be actual defendants in a case.

Under the Georgia Apportionment Statute, parties may have responsibility apportioned to them without being defendants so that defendants found liable are only held responsible for the percentage of the harm that each is determined to have caused.

It was unclear at press time if the case will be appealed. See Union General Trial, Page 6

TCSO confiscates meth, brings drug charge after tip

News Special

On July 31, the Towns County Sheriff's Office received a call regarding drug information at a residence on Dills Road in Hiawassee.

When deputies arrived, a family member of the residence produced an amount of methamphetamine in a plastic bag.

Drug Investigators were called to the scene. During the investigation, it was determined the drugs belonged to India Dawn Shelton, a resident at that location.

A warrant was obtained

for the arrest of Shelton for felony possession of methamphetamine.

On Thursday, Aug. 1, Shelton was arrested on drug charges in Cherokee County, North Carolina, and a hold has been placed on her for extradition to Towns County.

The investigation is ongoing.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the drug investigators for their hard work and for the confiscation of this amount of drugs to keep it out of the community.



India Dawn Shelton

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United
Community

Union General Trial...from Page 1

time if either of the nonparties – Heaton or Narravula – had settled with Giacomi prior to the trial.

Narravula was a hospitalist at Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville at the time of Giacomi's initial injuries in November 2015, when she had to be admitted for wounds sustained in a donkey attack, court records show.

Heaton was director of Union County Nursing Home when Giacomi was transferred there for physical rehabilitation about a week after first being admitted in Gainesville.

Giacomi's injuries resulted in a flesh-eating bacteria infection that worsened during her weeklong stay in Union County, which included being transferred to Union General Hospital after several days in the Nursing Home.

Because Union General "did not call a surgeon to evaluate and treat the infection," the progressing infection ultimately necessitated amputations of her left arm and leg after she was transported back to Northeast Georgia Medical in December 2015, per court documents.

Represented in the medi-

cal malpractice verdict, multiple alleged delays in proper medical evaluation and care by staff at both the Nursing Home and Union General caused Giacomi's infection to reach a "point of no return," amounting to negligence that led to her amputations.

Pertaining to Heaton, Giacomi's lawsuit said that, as Nursing Home medical director and her assigned physician during her time in Union County, he failed to evaluate her condition in a timely fashion, resulting in delayed infection intervention.

In an unrelated case, Heaton and then-Union General CEO Mike Gowder were arrested in February 2016, just two months after Giacomi's stay at the local nursing home and hospital, and the two men were later tried and found guilty of federal prescription drug crimes.

Giacomi argued that the hospital "at the very least had a reasonable suspicion" that Heaton was the subject of an investigation by the Drug Enforcement Administration when she was being treated and was therefore negligent in keeping him on as a credentialed physi-

cian.

And the jury agreed, finding in favor of Giacomi's separate negligent credentialing claim based on a "preponderance of the evidence" presented by her legal team at trial.

Former defendants Dr. Kathryn Blocker, The Southland Medical Group, LLC and Blocker Healthcare, LLC; and Dr. Jeffrey McIntire and Gainesville Imaging Associates, P.C. were successfully dismissed from the case, leaving Union General Hospital Inc. as the sole defendant.

In the leadup to and during the trial, Union General maintained that it had not committed medical malpractice nor negligent credentialing, and CEO Kevin Bierschenk said last week he could not comment on the outcome because "the legal proceedings are still ongoing."

"We're going back to doing our job and providing good quality care in our community, like we have been," Bierschenk said. "We're here to focus on our patient care and our quality outcomes."

The hospital will have a set period in the coming days to appeal the verdicts.

Back to School...from Page 1



Indians Head Coach Jason Roquemore speaking with parents about the upcoming football season during Open House on Aug. 6. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Georgia has adopted a very balanced approach to testing. Using both formative and summative assessments, educators have a unique tool to help all students reach their academic potential.

"We are typically one of the highest achieving schools in our region," Berrong said. "This year was no exception and is possibly the best systemwide scores we have had since I've been superintendent."

However, no program, curriculum, technology or test is a magic bullet. The magic bullet is the teacher. And Towns County Schools has some of the finest educators in the region, demonstrated in part through stellar testing results.

According to the Regional Education Service Agency, Towns County ex-

celled in many areas over its 13 counterparts in the Pioneer Region. Test scores are categorized as beginning, developing, proficient and proficient and above.

Among its excellent scores, Towns County came out on top in Third-Grade English Language Arts, Fifth-Grade Science, Seventh-Grade English Language Arts, Eighth-Grade Science, Eighth-Grade Social Studies, and American Literature for Developing Learners and above.

For Proficient Learners and above, Towns County finished first in Seventh-Grade and Eighth-Grade English Language Arts among its Pioneer RESA peers.

No math scores have been released yet, as this year's testing was new based on the new state math standards insti-

tuted last year. Scores are expected at the end of October. The state is currently working on new English Language Arts standards as well.

In light of these achievements, the superintendent and School Board Members welcomed teachers back Friday with applause and gratitude for the tremendous job they have been doing in their work with students.

Vertical Church provided breakfast, and Abide Coffee provided the caffeine needed to a grateful staff to start off another successful year.

All schools hosted open houses last week inviting parents and community members in to feel the excitement permeating the upcoming year.

For more information, including detailed school calendars, visit <https://towns.k12.ga.us>.



School Resource Officer Bryan Forsyth greeting a driving high school student on the first day of the 2024-25 school year. Sheriff's Deputies Forsyth and Christie Moody are the new SROs at Towns County Schools. Photo by Lowell Nicholson