

# Towns County Herald

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## Georgia Mountain Fair arrives; carnival opens Aug. 17

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Get ready for nine full days of family friendly festivities at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Aug. 18-26, though the fun will actually start early with a couple of awesome community events this Thursday.

Now in its 72nd year of operation and still going strong, the 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair is expected to draw thousands of folks from all over the country for the many attractions this season has to offer.

The carnival by Amusements of America Midway opens a day early on Aug. 17 at 4 p.m., and \$10 will buy an unlimited ride wristband on that first day. For presale and on-line pricing specials throughout the fair, visit <https://geor>

[giamountainfairgrounds.com/pageserver/carnival-rides](https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/pageserver/carnival-rides).

Touted by the Guinness Book of World Records as "the largest traveling amusement park in the world," Amusements of America will be "open daily with clean, safe family rides and games, as well as additional guest amenities throughout the carnival area."

Then there's the annual local youth talent exhibition known as the Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Beauty Pageant. For \$5, guests can gain admission to the Aug. 17 pageant at 7 p.m. inside Anderson Music Hall, and contestants will earn points for different outfits along with their personalities.

Specifically, 30% of the total score will rely on personal interviews with the judges, 20% on the ladies' overall pre-

sentation, 20% on stage questions, 20% on their display of evening gowns, and 10% on their active wear.

An optional talent show will follow the official judging portion and "will be based on pure talent and showmanship," as the judges will have no idea which of the girls plans to perform.

The overall winner will take home \$2,000 and "merchandise prizes," not to mention yearlong bragging rights as Miss Georgia Mountain Fair. First and second runners-up will receive \$300 and \$200 respectively, with more prizes available for Miss Congeniality and winning the talent show.

Hiawassee Garden Club will host a Flower Show Aug. 18 beginning at 10 a.m. with the patriotic theme "Plants America the Beautiful." If  
See *GA Mtn. Fair Fun*, Page 8A



Families from all over will be flocking to the 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair for many reasons, including the massive carnival that opens Thursday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2022

## Hiawassee, Young Harris qualifying begins next week

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

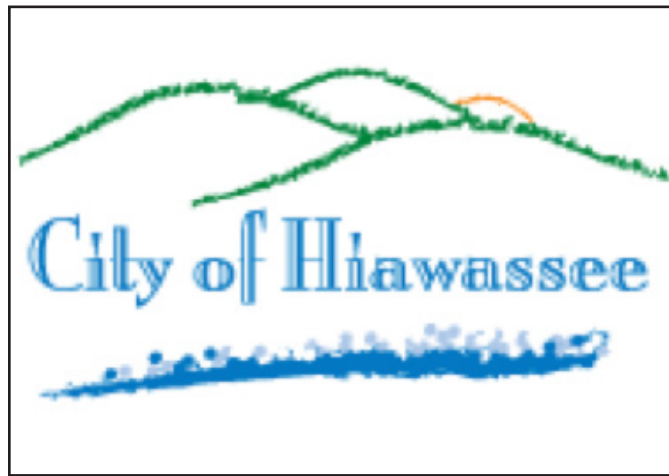
It's municipal election season once again, meaning eligible residents of Hiawassee and Young Harris can run for local office in their respective city governments.

Three council seats are up for grabs in this year's Hiawassee General Election coming up on Nov. 7, with those positions currently being held by council members Jay Chastain, Nancy Noblet and Anne Mitchell. Their terms expire in December.

To make the ballot, Hiawassee residents will need to fill out the appropriate qualifying paperwork and pay a fee, which is \$72 for a council seat. Qualifying packets can be picked up now during regular business hours inside Hiawassee City Hall located at 50 River Street.

People may submit their qualifying paperwork and fee payments at Hiawassee City Hall starting Monday, Aug. 21, through Wednesday, Aug. 23, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. each day, excluding the hour from 1-2 p.m.

In Young Harris, three council seats are up for elec-



tion also, currently held by Matt Miller, Donald Keys and Steve Clark. Interested and eligible residents of Young Harris will need to pick up qualifying packets at Young Harris City Hall located at 50 Irene Berry Drive. The fee is \$72.

Completed candidate qualifying paperwork and fee payments may be turned into Young Harris City Hall starting at 8:30 a.m. on Aug. 21 and will be accepted through 4:30 p.m. on Aug. 23.

A person is eligible to qualify for and hold city office if they are 21 years or older, a resident of their respective city for at least a year immediately

prior to the election date, and a registered and qualified voter in their municipal election. He or she must also continue to reside in their city during the term of office.

All terms of office will begin Jan. 1, 2024, and run through Dec. 31, 2027.

Early voting will run weekdays for three weeks prior to Election Day, starting Monday, Oct. 16, and ending on Friday, Nov. 3, with two days of weekend early voting on Saturday, Oct. 21, and Saturday, Oct. 27. Election Day voting will be Tuesday, Nov. 7.

In Hiawassee, all in-  
See *Municipal Qualifying*, Page 8A

## Elections Board talks voting machine concerns, ESPLOST

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Towns County Board of Elections & Registration heard from concerned county residents in its regular meeting last week on Wednesday, Aug. 9, at the Board Office inside the Civic Center.

Young Harris resident Larry Chandler spoke in the Public Forum portion of the meeting, first introducing himself and his wife Carol. The Chandlers expressed their concern "that the county is going with the Dominion voting machines as opposed to paper ballots."

Chandler clarified that he did not believe Towns County would be subject to any foul play but said that other precincts using ballot scanning machines had faced "problems" with voter integrity. In addition, he said, paper ballots are less expensive.

A few reasons for using electronic voting were discussed. A 5.4% error rate in hand counting allowed for considerations into ways to alleviate human error, in addition to correcting the tendency of some people to mark ballots incorrectly, hence electronic



Members of the Towns County Board of Elections in their Aug. 9 regular meeting at Election HQ in Hiawassee. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

voting and tabulation.

Elections Board Member Betsy Young, who also serves as Towns GOP Chair, argued that many voters "don't trust the machines" or have trouble operating them or understanding how to use QR codes.

Ultimately, Young sympathized with the Chandlers, saying, "We want people to have a feeling (that they) can trust what's here."

See *Elections Board*, Page 8A



## Detention Officer arrested for smuggling cellphone to inmate

News Special  
Towns County Herald

On Monday, Aug. 7, Towns County Sheriff's Office Investigators Lt. Ryan Forsyth and Sgt. Mike Franklin received a tip that a cellphone had been smuggled into the Towns County Detention Center.

Detention Center Maj. James Baldwin ordered an immediate lockdown of the inmates, a search was conducted, and a cellphone was located.

Investigators revealed that a Detention Center employee had smuggled the cellphone to a specific inmate in the Detention Center.

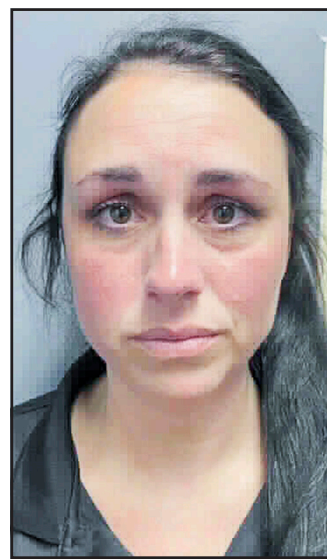
Erin Ashley Brown, 36,

of Young Harris, was arrested and charged with violation of oath by a public officer as well as obtaining, procuring, or giving an inmate prohibited items without authorization.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the quick action and investigation into locating the cellphone and ultimately identifying the detention officer responsible.

The sheriff wants it to be known that this type of behavior will not be tolerated, that detention center security is very important, and that Brown is facing serious charges.

All subjects are innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



Erin Ashley Brown

## Board of Education continues ongoing MECHS discussions

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Towns County Board of Education met on Monday, Aug. 7, after the new school year successfully kicked off on Aug. 4.

Between the 6 p.m. work session and 6:45 p.m. regular meeting, the most discussed topic by far was the change to the Mountain Education Center's graduation protocol and how it relates to Towns County Schools.

Made effective on May 4 of this year, House Bill 87, aka the Nontraditional Special Schools Act, changed the relationship between public schools and alternative schools like Mountain Education Charter High.

Previously, students could attend and earn a diploma from MECHS, considering it was treated as its own school system. Now that the new law has gone into effect, students enrolled after July 1, 2023, are to be counted as members of their local system.

This means that a student



Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and TCHS Principal Bryan Thomason will be following up on the implications for high school students regarding the new changes at MECHS in 2023. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

enrolled in Towns County High School may attend and graduate from MECHS, but their diploma will be the same as those from TCHS.

"Mountain Ed's going to still have ceremonies for now because they have all the grandfathered-in students, but

once that's all done, I guess there won't be any ceremonies; (their students) would actually walk with our students," said Towns County Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong.

Currently, students require a total of 28 credits to  
See *MECHS Discussions*, Page 8A

2 Sections 16 Pages

Vol. 94 No. 42

Lake Levels

FOOTBALL

GA Mtn. Fair Special Section See Inside



Arrests - 2A  
Chamber - 7A  
Church - 2B  
Classifieds - 7B

Blue Ridge 1,683.97  
Chatuge 1,924.16  
Nottely 1,773.48

8/18 7:30 PM  
vs. Hayesville

Gospel Music Fest Aug. 18-19 See page 3B  
Pro Rodeo Returns Sept. 2-3 See page 3A



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# GA Mtn. Fair Fun...from Page 1A

anyone misses the initial showing, they can catch the fantastic flowers on Aug. 19 from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., or on Aug. 20 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Of course, folks will want to line either side of Main Street in Hiawassee on Saturday, Aug. 19, for the 72nd Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade, which will roll through town beginning at 11 a.m.

The 2023 parade theme is "Stars, Stripes, and Summer Nights," to feature big cash prizes for winning float entries. The parade will start at SouthState Bank and works its way to and through the Fair-

grounds and around Anderson Music Hall.

This year's Photography Exhibit and Contest will welcome participation from amateur and professional photographers, with categories of people, scenery, flora, fauna and abstracts. There is no fee to view the gallery, and monetary prizes will be awarded to 31 winning photos.

Sunday, Aug. 20, will feature an interfaith worship service beginning at 11 a.m., and guests are encouraged to attend the Gospel Music Show in the Music Hall starting at 2 p.m.

There's a full schedule

at the Music Hall this year, with returning artists and big-name performers. The Vintage Vixens and none other than Peter Noone and Herman's Hermits will be there on Aug. 18, with the first performance beginning at 6 p.m.

Montgomery Gentry will perform on Aug. 19 at 7 p.m. as part of the Brotherly Love Tour, but keep in mind that a hard ticket is required for entry. Afterwards, on Aug. 20 at 2 p.m., Gospel Day will feature Inspirations, Down East Boys and Chris Rumpfelt and Family.

Kicking off the next week on Aug. 21 at 6 p.m.

will be Chris Stalcup & The Grange along with T. Graham Brown, and 6 p.m. on Aug. 22 will see Destin Bennett and Larry, Steve and Rudy: The Gatlin Brothers perform. Veterans and first responders have free admission on Aug. 22.

On Aug. 23 at 6 p.m., the Kurt Wheeler Band and Lee Greenwood will take to the stage. Bluegrass Day is Aug. 24, and the lineup starting at 6 p.m. will include the Kody Norris Show, Little Roy & Lizzy and Dan Tyminski.

The Jim Wood Band and Crystal Gale will perform on Aug. 25 starting at 6 p.m., and to close out the 2023 season, Casting Crowns will perform

at 7 p.m. on Aug. 26, with a hard ticket required to enter the latter's showing.

Remember that admission for children 12 and under is free along with parking. Pets are not allowed.

A 1-Day Pass for \$16 will grant people access to the dozens of arts & crafts and food vendors, live music and entertainment performed throughout the Fairgrounds, entry to the carnival and an Anderson Music Hall performance – except the two Saturday hard-ticket shows.

A \$6 Carnival Pass will cover arts and crafts along with other Fairgrounds features, like the rejuvenated

Exhibit Hall and Pioneer Village showcasing old mountain ways and local heritage, plus access to the carnival, but it will not cover music performances at Anderson Music Hall.

For music lovers, \$10 will buy a ticket to any of the Anderson Music Hall performances except for the premium Saturday shows. These will be available in-person after 5 p.m., located at the Music Hall and Handicap Gates.

Check out the official website at [www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com](http://www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com) for more details or give a ring to 706-896-4191 for answers to any questions.



People can look forward to a revamped Pioneer Village at the 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair, where they can learn all about local heritage and the people who helped make the community what it is today. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

## Elections Board...from Page 1A

I get emotional about this, I'm sorry – 'I'm not going to vote because I don't trust the machines.'"

Young proposed that paper ballots make a return for ESPLOST voting in November, but the topic was met with equal amounts disagreement and discourse.

"I think y'all already got it said that you'll go with the machine, so we'll just let y'all have that," said Chandler, frustrated, before Board Chair Roy Perren made the motion to seek legal advice for the compromise set forth by Young.

The motion was agreed upon unanimously, with more discussion expected at a later date.

"(We) appreciate you bringing that question up and bringing it to us today," Perren said to the Chandlers.

The board also talked about the Nov. 7 countywide

referendum in which voters will decide whether to impose another Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, which would result in another 1-cent local sales tax to benefit Towns County Schools.

Also, the Elections Office will be running the Hiawassee General Election for three council seats that are up for grabs in 2023. Qualifying for the municipal election takes place next week and is open to residents of Hiawassee only.

"(We're) getting ready for the ESPLOST," Registrar Diandra Southern said. "(And) we've been getting all our paperwork together, waiting to see if there's going to be anyone qualifying for the City of Hiawassee, to see if there's anybody who's going to be against the people who are going to be running."

Additionally Southern revealed that the office had set

aside Sept. 9 for poll worker training, which will run from 9 a.m. to noon. An "extra day" of training will fall on Oct. 3, to begin at 2 p.m. for two poll workers who will not be available for the September date.

Early voting for the upcoming elections will be held weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Civic Center between Oct. 16 and Nov. 3, with two Saturday voting days as well to give people a chance to vote on the weekend.

Perren said that November preparations are being made ahead of time in the election center. For example, new poll pads, that is, electronic replacements for voter sign-in books, are expected to arrive sometime next month.

Sept. 13 will be the next Board of Elections & Registration meeting, and the group will gather in the same location at 4 p.m.

## Municipal Qualifying...from Page 1A

person voting will take place at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office at 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite A. Young Harris General Election voters will need to vote at Young Harris City Hall.

For both municipal elections, the registration deadline to cast a ballot is Oct. 10, so

people who have yet to register should do so at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office in Hiawassee.

Only registered city residents may vote in their respective municipal elections.

The deadline to request absentee ballots is Oct. 27. If requested, absentee ballots

will be mailed at the earliest beginning Oct. 16.

In addition to the municipal elections this year, there will be a countywide special election Nov. 7 to decide the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum put on the ballot by the Towns County Board of Education.

## MECHS Discussions...from Page 1A

graduate from TCHS, while previously, their MECHS counterparts needed only 23, presenting an apparent conflict moving forward.

"I feel very strongly if they're going to get a diploma from Towns County High School, they should do the same thing that every other student at Towns County High School does," stated Board Chair Stephanie McConnell.

Continuing, "Just because they want to go to the Mountain Ed Center and try to speed along their graduation – they can do that, I have no problem with them going over there. It's just that, again, it's not fair to students who are here (at TCHS) to take five extra classes to get their diploma when (MECHS students take) five less."

Some clarification was needed on what MECHS does for students. Per Board Member Sara Rogers and Berrong, MECHS allows students to follow a "different path" when they can't benefit from the traditional high school experience for whatever reason.

For example, a student may become pregnant and be unable to raise a child while

attending day classes, or they may need to work to help support their family. Cases like these are common stories at MECHS, whose students have benefited from the more flexible night school hours.

But, according to McConnell, there have been rumors that some students attending MECHS have changed schools to avoid a teacher they dislike, or they believe fewer required credits equal less work to graduate.

On top of that, there are other factors to consider. MECHS does not have a strict attendance policy, and board members cannot screen educators who work at the facility in the same way they can at their own.

"Keep them over here," McConnell suggested. "Get them with a teacher that cares about them. We know our high school teachers care about these kids who are getting left behind."

Board Vice Chair Caroleen Woods said, "What I would rather see is that we exhausted all of our resources in-house before we rubber-stamp the approval to send them over there."

And while, in the past, students could enroll at the Mountain Education Center on their own, they must now go through a committee to be approved. McConnell suggested that the principal, vice principal and school counselor be involved.

The Aug. 7 meeting confirmed that it will be a requirement for MECHS students from Towns County to graduate with 28 credits, but the board has decided there should be more discussion about what MECHS students can participate in as far as social events like prom or extracurriculars like sports and band.

This is an ongoing question that Berrong agreed to revisit throughout the month with new TCHS Principal Bryan Thomason.

"We've just got to do this in the best interest of our students," McConnell said. "If we see kids are falling through the cracks and we need to do something, we can discuss it again."

The Towns County Board of Education meets on the first Monday of every month at the Towns County Middle and High School Library.