

# Towns County Herald

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## TCES goes virtual this week after staff outbreak

### Online-only option to return for now

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Towns County Elementary School has transitioned to virtual instruction for the entirety of this week following a COVID-19 staff outbreak involving 12 employees that occurred in addition to six positive tests among students. In-person classes are set to resume next week.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong made the

announcement in a video posted to Facebook on Friday, Aug. 13, in which he provided an "update on the COVID situation in our school system" in an effort to dispel "rumors that are going around the county."

There are 72 employees at the Elementary School, with a total of 15 out as of Friday last week – 12 COVID positives and three for other reasons – meaning roughly 20% of the staff was not available to work.

For this reason, as well as

to arrest the spread of COVID connected to the outbreak and to give the school adequate opportunity to disinfect before staff and students return, Berrong decided to transition to virtual only for a week.

Positive-testing employees range from paraprofessionals to teachers, long-term substitute, administrator, and media center staff member. All 12 had symptoms and at least one third were fully vaccinated. Fortunately, none required

hospitalization by press time.

Transmission among the employees is thought to have occurred in "three or four isolated events" on campus, though the School District believes the student positives came primarily by way of off-campus transmission. The students were also doing well by press time.

These numbers reflect not only the greater infectiousness of what is likely the delta variant circulating in the community but also transmission patterns similar to last school year, when



Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong used social media last week to speak to the people of Towns County about the staff outbreak at the Elementary School. Photo/Screenshot

## Grand Marshal Otis Nixon leads 70th Fair Parade



Former Atlanta Braves center fielder Otis Nixon served as Grand Marshal for the 70th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade, pictured here with Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and young Eli Richards in Jerry Smith's 1957 Chevy. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

While the 70th edition of the Georgia Mountain Fair may have unofficially begun on Friday, Aug. 13, the official start took place on Saturday, Aug. 14, as hundreds of spectators lined Main Street to see the annual parade roll through Downtown Hiawasse.

The theme this year was

"Reelin' in the Years" in celebration of a tradition in the North Georgia Mountains that dates back more than 70 years. And with last year's fair and parade having to be canceled, everyone was excited to see things back in full swing in 2021.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, along with former Atlanta Braves player Otis Nixon as

this year's Grand Marshal, led the 1.6-mile journey through town to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, with floats featuring candy-tossing riders in tow.

Bradshaw drove Nixon in a '57 Chevy on loan from Memory Lane Classic Car Museum Owner Jerry Smith, who is friends with Nixon and invited him on behalf of

See GMF Parade, Page 8A

## Hospitalizations up as COVID surges across South

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Many parts of the United States are currently experiencing another wave of COVID-19, resulting in a rapid increase in community infection rates and hospitalizations, including in the North Georgia Mountains, according to Union General Hospital Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett.

The hospital system has seen a precipitous rise in admissions specifically for COVID-19, jumping from a handful of cases at the beginning of August to 42 from all over the region by Thursday last week – a hospital record for number of coronavirus patients being treated at once.

COVID has been making up about 25%-30% of emergency room visits here in recent weeks, Barnett said, with the number of inpatients fluctuating daily as new people are admitted and others go home primarily to the surrounding counties of Georgia and North Carolina.

"Our hope is that this will burn out quickly, as rapidly as it has gone up," Barnett said. "We really hope for our community's sake that that's the case, that it's just running its course really quickly, but it's too early to tell."



### Hospital Surge Capacity

As for capacity, the 45-bed hospital was housing about 70 inpatients last week, with as much as 50% of admissions being for COVID-19. Barnett said the hospital has been successfully implementing its surge plan, facilitated by the fact that surge has experience with past surges.

Seventy is well over capacity for Union General, though Barnett said they can take up to 20 more patients above recent max figures before

having to implement additional steps in the surge capacity plan, to include keeping patients in facilities other than the main hospital if necessary.

To accommodate the current level of admittance, in addition to re-opening the dedicated COVID units last used in the winter surge, the hospital is suspending some elective procedures as necessary to make more staff and space available to treat coronavirus patients.

This is different than the previous moratorium on elective procedures, as all paused procedures will resume once

See COVID Surge, Page 3A

## Qualify now for office in Hiawasse, Young Harris

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Qualifying for the upcoming General Municipal Elections for the cities of Hiawasse and Young Harris takes place this week, running now through Friday, Aug. 20.

In Hiawasse, 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 Hiawasse began Monday, Aug. 16, and runs 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 \$780, and the fee for each council seat is \$96. Payment of qualifying fees may be made via check, cash, money order or cashier's check. Amounts are updated from last week's article.

Qualifying packets may be picked up during regular business hours at Hiawasse

City Hall, which is where they must also be returned during the qualifying period.

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.

See Qualifying, Page 3A

## Hiawasse pays off another loan; old debt down 77%

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The City of Hiawasse has kept busy this year, gearing up for election qualifying that takes place this week, discussing the implications of housing density and zoning – and paying off old city debt.

In the most recent City Council work session, Mayor Liz Ordiales announced that the city would be paying off yet another old loan with the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority loan, with the early payoff amount to be made in August.

Ordiales has been prioritizing loan payoffs based on interest rate, with this most recent payoff clearing a loan

with seven years remaining at 3% interest, so settling the loan early is saving city taxpayers about \$200,000 in the long run, she said.

This latest payoff is a big deal for the city, which has been able to settle 77% of its old debts in just the last few years alone, all while saving many hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt service.

Currently, there remain roughly \$1 million in loan balances that have been around since long before Ordiales first ran for office in 2016. Old debt is down to about half the city's outstanding loans, with more recent loans having been secured at favorable rates to improve city infrastructure.

Ordiales also announced



Liz Ordiales  
Hiawasse Mayor

in the July work session that the city had exceeded \$200,000 in property tax collections this

See Debt Down, Page 8A

## Georgia Mountain Fair continues this week thru Saturday

By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

It took 13 months of nervous anticipation, but the Georgia Mountain Fair finally kicked off the 70th running of the Peach State tradition to extraordinary fanfare on Friday, Aug. 13.

Following a tumultuous pandemic-stricken year and a half that saw delays, restrictions and ultimately the Fair's 2020 cancellation, it was only appropriate the event made its return on Friday the 13th.

And despite 2021's late start combined with rainy weather and local high school football getting underway, the 2021 edition still produced the largest opening weekend turnout in almost a decade.

"We had the best Saturday that we have had since 2013," Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomas said. "There was a great turnout. People are having fun at the Fair, and I enjoy seeing all the happy faces."

The gates opened Friday morning with all the tried-and-true favorites at guests' disposal, most notably the always-popular Pioneer Village, an old mountain town replica with a merchant store, a one-room schoolhouse, a furnished log home with a smokehouse, a barn and a corn crib.

The "Old Ways" Demonstrations are provided daily as well, offering a glimpse of 19th century mountain life with moonshine stills, blacksmithing, soap making and more.

Additionally, arts and craft exhibits, a flower show, vendors and live music have all returned to the Fairgrounds, encompassing a wide variety of fan favorites that make the Fair a summertime staple in North Georgia.

The Midway opened at 2 p.m. Friday with rides, games and heart-stopping entertainment for youngsters seeking one last gasp of summer before settling into another school year.

Unfortunately, heavy rain and thunderstorms pushed through Towns County just shy of 7 p.m. Saturday, resulting in carnival-goers seeking shelter wherever feasible.

"(The rain) was on us so fast (that) we weren't able to get to the car in time," said Jasper

See Fair Time, Page 8A



Amusement of America is the midway provider at this year's Georgia Mountain Fair, noted in the Guinness Book as the "largest traveling amusement park in the world." Photo by Lowell Nicholson

2 Sections 16 Pages	Arrests 2A
Lake Levels	Church 4B
Blue Ridge 1,683.01	Classifieds 6B
Chatsuge 1,923.89	Opinion 4A
Nottely 1,772.47	Legals 7B
	Obits 5B
	Sports 3B

**SPORTS FOOTBALL**  
8/20 vs. Pinecrest  
7:30 PM  
**SOFTBALL**  
8/19 @ Rabun 4:30 PM

Absentee Ballot Application NOTICE  
See page 5A

Mayor Gibby at Movers & Shakers Aug 20.  
See page 2A

FBLA Towns FBLA Elects New Officers  
See page 5A

# Cooper gets probation after plea in stalking charge

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The Ninth Circuit Court of Orange County, Florida, has dropped two felony extortion charges against Union County resident Norman Cooper, accepting instead a Nolo Contendere plea to a stalking charge and requiring him to serve a year on probation, according to court documents.

As previously reported, the Union County Sheriff's Office arrested Cooper, 67, for the State of Florida on Oct. 14, 2020, and he remained in custody at the Union County Jail for nearly two weeks before being transported to face the extortion charges in the Sunshine State.

According to the Orange County Sheriff's Office arrest affidavit dated Oct. 14, 2019, the original extortion charges stemmed from a 2019 dispute between Cooper and a relative in which he alleged that \$4,000 had been wrongfully withheld from him following a death in the family.

The arrest affidavit further stated that, per emails and other communications obtained in the investigation, the Sheriff's Office determined that Cooper had been threatening his relative and her hus-

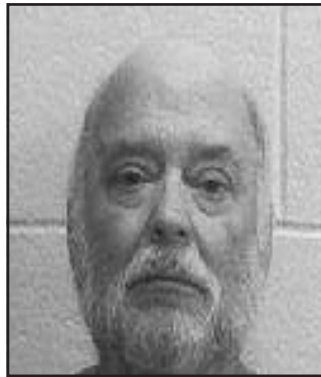
band with public accusations of criminal fraud unless they paid him, thereby forming the basis for the extortion charges to which Cooper pleaded not guilty.

On July 12, 2021, the Florida State Attorney's Office filed an amended charging document bringing an additional charge of first-degree stalking, a misdemeanor in which Cooper was accused of "knowingly, willfully, maliciously and repeatedly" following, harassing or cyberstalking the victims in the case.

The prosecution filed its intent to drop the extortion charges on July 14, 2021, allowing Cooper to plea "Nolo Contendere" to the single charge of stalking. By court order that day, he received a disposition of "Adjudication Withheld" pending successful completion of his probationary period.

According to attorneys writing for floridabar.org, with such a disposition, "the defendant consents to the payment of fines and a term of probation in exchange for the state's acquiescence of a withhold of adjudication. Once the term of probation is successfully completed, the court is divested of jurisdiction and there is no adjudication of guilt."

Cooper is to serve a one-



Norman Cooper

year term of supervised probation under the Department of Corrections, during which he has been instructed to have "no contact (direct or indirect) with the victim or the victim's family during the period of supervision," per the court order.

Another condition of his probation was that he pay in nine months a sum totaling \$1,586.70 covering various court costs and fees associated with the case, including for his legal representation by the Public Defender's Office and transportation costs, per another court order dated July 14, 2021.

In addition to a \$50 payment made in November 2020, court records indicate Cooper paid the remainder of that balance on July 15, 2021.

## COVID Surge...from Page 1A

Once hospitalizations return to normal levels, Barnett said, adding that everyone with an emergency should feel comfortable coming to the ER and hospital no matter their malady.

Compared with the winter wave, testing is now being done completely in-house and on symptomatic patients only, speeding diagnoses along to get the right care to patients needing treatment for COVID-19.

### Delta Variant

It remains unclear at this time whether the local rise in illness is attributable to the much-covered "delta variant" that many people have seen covered in state and national news, as local testing only determines a simple positive or negative result presently.

But based on the rapidly rising levels of transmission and all that is known about delta, including analysis by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that delta makes up most of the tested samples in the nation, Barnett believes it is safe to assume the variant is here and spreading, with early indications that patients may be experiencing more severe illness than in prior surges.

### Vaccine Efficacy & Boosters

For anyone wondering if vaccinations have been making a difference amid the current upswing, Barnett said the data favoring the vaccines speaks for itself, with greater than 90% of local hospitalizations so far having occurred in unvaccinated people.

There have been "breakthrough infections" in fully vaccinated individuals requiring hospitalization here, Barnett said, but so far, those are solidly in the minority of patients, serving as more strong evidence the vaccines provide significant protection against COVID infection.

Members of the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices met Friday, Aug. 13, to talk Moderna and Pfizer boosters for immunocompromised individuals, recommending third shots for this group. The CDC accepted that recommendation later Friday.

Natasha Young, public information officer for Georgia's District 2 Public Health that oversees the health departments of Union and

Towns counties, said last week that booster shots will be made available to eligible residents at the local Health Department as soon as the CDC provides official guidance "that clearly defines what conditions make an individual eligible for an additional dose of vaccine."

### No Child Hospitalizations

By press time, there had been no pediatric COVID cases requiring hospitalization locally due to this or any previous surge, and older people and those with health conditions still appeared to be most vulnerable to severe illness, though CNO Barnett said the hospital was treating a small number of younger and otherwise healthy adults.

At present, Barnett said she was not aware of any cases of re-infection requiring hospitalization in people with a past diagnosis of COVID-19, regardless of vaccination status.

In terms of deaths, Barnett said the impact of this latest surge will become more apparent in the weeks ahead, though she added that local, state and national efforts thus far to get more and more susceptible people vaccinated are hopefully going to make a big difference in those figures.

### Challenges Ahead

Union General is serving as the main facility treating the region's COVID-19 patients, with Chatuge Regional Hospital in Towns County also treating several positive cases.

In normal times, exceedingly sick patients would likely be transferred to larger hospital systems, though this is becoming increasingly difficult as hospitals everywhere begin to fill up due to COVID-19.

Another complication is the fact that staff shortages for health care workers are occurring everywhere, even at Union General, so the immediate concern should hospitalizations continue to rise would be in terms of personnel and not necessarily space.

Despite these difficulties, Barnett said the local hospitals continue to have an incredible staff of medical professionals who, though overworked during stressful surge conditions like the present, are now experienced in treating COVID and remain committed to serving their communities.

Barnett hopes everyone will take common sense precautions like staying

home when sick to decrease community spread but noted that, nearly a year and a half past the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, it is important for people to carry on with their lives as normally as possible.

To this end, the hospitals are allowing visitations under specific guidelines, to include the wearing of masks. Visitation is being limited for patients admitted for COVID-19, but even then, visitors will be permitted in the event of end-of-life circumstances.

Regarding the Union County and Chatuge Regional Nursing Homes, Barnett said staff and residents there are doing well, with no outbreaks by press time.

Vaccinations are not being mandated in any of the hospital system's facilities, and rates are above 50% for employees and higher for residents in the nursing homes.

### Get Vaccinated Locally

District 2 Public Health continues to offer all three of the COVID-19 vaccines to eligible residents, free of charge and five days a week at the local Health Department, with walk-ins welcome.

"The district is again seeing a surge in COVID-19 cases, the hospitals are filling up, and it is necessary to remind residents that vaccination is important for the health of the community," District 2 Public Information Officer Young said Aug. 12.

"No matter your vaccination status, wear a mask if indoors and social distance," she continued. "Vaccination is the key to getting out of this pandemic. Vaccination lessens your risk of infection from the virus by three and a half times, your risk from getting ill from COVID-19 is eight times lower, and the risk of hospitalization or death is 25 times lower."

"If you still need a COVID-19 vaccine, today is the day, walk into your county health department and get your vaccine. Visit [phdistrict2.org](http://phdistrict2.org) and click on locations or use the vaccine finder at [vaccines.gov](http://vaccines.gov) to find a vaccination site near you."

"If you are feeling sick and wish to be tested, District 2 has free testing available every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (from) 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. located at 2500 Allen Creek Road, Gainesville, GA 30507, at the Allen Creek Soccer Complex."

## Qualifying...from Page 1A

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 Hiwassee Municipal Election

will begin Oct. 11 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.

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.

# TCES Outbreak...from Page 1A

COVID spread among staff while students experienced no discernable outbreaks.

"We do have in our community 48 cases in the past two weeks, but as you can also see, there are 23 cases in the last three days," Berrong said of the latest Public Health data in the video. "I've been in contact with the hospitals around us in Union General and at Chatuge.

"I've also been looking at information at Murphy Medical, and the situation is not looking good in our hospitals and our community. There are a lot of people who are currently in the hospitals, and the hospitals are currently being overran with COVID cases."

At press time, the Middle and High Schools each had a single positive student case and none among staff; the Middle School student was in class the first two days of school prior to testing positive, and the High Schooler had been quarantined since before the year started on Aug. 5.

Due to the sudden uptick in community transmission of COVID-19 and in light of the Elementary School staff outbreak, the district has decided to offer parents and students of all grade levels the opportunity to switch to virtual learning through December, after which school officials will evaluate whether to continue offering an online-only option

in the spring.

"At this time in the community and with our hospital situation and what's happening in our Elementary School, we do feel it is wise to give parents the option, once again, to choose an online learning option for your child (effective Aug. 23)," Berrong said.

Occurring a mere week into the start of a new school year, these developments are a setback for the district, which had planned 100% in-person classes for 2021-22 to get the many students who struggled online at home over the last year and a half back into classrooms.

The plan was to start

this school year as normally as possible without implementing the various COVID restrictions that were in place last year, such as one-way hall traffic, masking, the option for virtual learning and more.

School leaders knew they would have to be flexible this year, but getting hit immediately with an outbreak has required Berrong and his administrative staff to adjust to worsening conditions almost as quickly as the onset of the pandemic back in March 2020.

Fortunately, plans are solidly in place from all the experience gained over the course of the pandemic, and the district will continue to monitor the situation and adjust accordingly.

"We're going to start doing some things differently in the morning so that kids aren't congregated in the cafeteria," Berrong added. "We will be encouraging masks but want to ease back in and see what works."

Moving forward, positive cases must quarantine at home and may return to school after 10 days as long as they have no symptoms or have gone 24 hours without a fever and are not taking fever-reducing medications.

Students identified as close contacts with COVID positive individuals will need to quarantine for seven calendar days, to return on Day 8; and in-school close contacts will vary, with students not needing to quarantine as long as they are wearing a mask at the time of a potential exposure.

"We are also going to stop allowing visitors in the school system once again, just as we did last year," Berrong said. "These are steps we feel like we need to take at this time until we can get more data to make better decisions."

In closing, Berrong said that, should the district see outbreaks among the study body, "then there will be more changes that we will make going forward."

Last school year, the Towns County School District was one of a select few systems in Georgia that did not have to close a single day due to COVID. And while that track record has gone by the wayside this new semester, at least at the elementary, Berrong is optimistic about the future.

"We're going to do everything we can to keep our doors open," he said.

## Girl Scouts rock! Ice Cream Social recruitment event August 24th

girl scouts of historic georgia

The 2021/2022 Girl Scout Year kicks off with an ice cream social recruitment event on Tuesday, August 24th, 4-7 PM, in the upper level east wing at First United Methodist Church, Hwy 515, Blairsville GA, across from Meeks Park, adjacent to North Georgia Technical College. Girls may re-up or join on that night. Membership and a portion of the uniform cost may be taken care of if you have Certain insurance companies like Amerigroup, Peach State\*\*. Caresource will cover the \$30 membership fee. You may request more information at <https://gshg.wufoo.com/forms/insurance-assistance-for-membership-fee/>. Adult membership assistance is also available through CareSource. Parents are encouraged to join the basic membership so that

they may participate when parent/girl events take place, or an instance happens when extra adults are required for girl safety.

Financial aid is also available on a limited basis. Get your bid in early at <https://gshg.wufoo.com/forms/k4115yz1ai681p/> Currently .

We plan on meeting 1st, 3rd, and 5th Tuesdays at the church in the lower level of the east wing from 5:15 - 7 PM starting the first Tuesday in September, the 7th. The 2021 September - December schedule has been set and will be available to attendees on the night of the recruitment. Tuesday, October 5 will be bridging and investiture, and there are plans to hold a fall product booth on the Blairsville Square on Saturday, October 23rd, and our annual Christmas party/cookie rally is planned for Tuesday, December 21st. Save those dates!

For more information please contact Janice at 706-745-1854. NT(Aug18.21)CA

## August 19th meeting of the VALOR Veteran Support Group

The August meeting of the VALOR Veterans support group will take place on Thursday, August 19th, at 5:30 PM. It will be held at the House of Prayer, 1400 Pat Colwell Road, in the basement of the building closest to the highway on the north side as a special adjunct to the semi-annual VALOR clinic that will be meeting there the week of August 16-21. Please plan on arriving between 5-5:30, so

the meal and the support session may begin promptly.

This is a perfect opportunity to continue with the support group, learn more about the retreat program, as well as meet the instructors, and Mark Baylis, the founder and impetus behind this extremely successful program.

The retreat program is open to all veterans, first responders, and their significant others. And, it is not too late to get in last minute on the week long program. You may read more about the elements of the program at [www.valorclinic.org](http://www.valorclinic.org).

Please contact Janice Walters at 706-400-9048 for more information.



Hi! My name is Herbie! I'm a 1.5 year old Redbone Coonhound Mix, and the girls at the shelter call me a Gentle Giant. When I first arrived at the shelter I was very timid and scared. Since I've adjusted, I've come out of my shell and now I want all the love and attention I can get! I am very dog friendly, clean, easy to walk on a leash, and I'm very gentle with my toys. Best of all - I'm half off this week! Give the shelter a call to come meet me!



Hello! My name is Sheba! I'm a 6.5 year old lady here at the shelter, and don't let my Resting Grumpy Face fool you, I'm very loving and I would love a home of my own! Since I'm a little older, I'm the perfect match for someone that just wants a very laid-back cat. I'm friendly and affectionate, but also very happy to lounge around all day and watch you go about your business. If you think we could be a good match, give the shelter a call! For this week only, I'm 50% off!

All of the animals adopted from the Mountain Shelter are spayed/neutered, microchipped, have received preventative deworming and flea treatments, and all vaccinations (including rabies) appropriate for their age, as well as any other medical care required to make happy, healthy, pets. Please be sure to check out our website, [www.pawsga.org](http://www.pawsga.org)



Hi there, my name is Reagan. I am the cutest little spiffire you ever did see!

I'm not sure what my DNA would show but my shelter friends thinks I'm a mixture of Bassett hound, terrier and beagle. Whatever! I'm just sure I'm a happy girl. I am already housebroken and know several commands. I love people and I've been known to get along with other dogs. I'm not sure about cats, they scare me a little because sometimes they're bigger than me! I am approximately a year and a half old and weigh about 24 pounds. I'm totally vetted and ready to find the perfect home. Don't let my short little legs fool you. I could jump up on the couch in a single bound. Not to mention, I can leap into a lap in a split second. When you first meet me I'm a little shy but give me about 15 minutes and I'll be cuddling up next to you, especially if you have liverwurst, peanut butter or a pupperoni. Come meet me at Castoff!

If you are interested in meeting Reagan, please call Castoff Pet Rescue at (706) 487-4539 to schedule a visit or check out our webpage, [CastoffPetRescue.org](http://CastoffPetRescue.org), for more information or to find our Adoption Application.

Castoff Pet Rescue is a 501(c)3, no-kill rescue, located in Blairsville, GA. All animals adopted from Castoff are spayed or neutered and microchipped. They have received vaccines and medical care appropriate for their age and any health conditions.



## Gold Wing Road Riders Association

Chapter J of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRA) meets on the third Saturday of each month (excluding December) at Daniels Steakhouse, Hiawassee. Fellowship/food at 11 a.m. with the meeting at noon. We welcome riders of all motorcycle brands located in the north Georgia area. We focus on friends, fun, riding safety, and knowledge. Check our website for ride schedule.

For further information, you may contact Bill and Barbara Schleicher at 706-379-3018. [www.chapterj.gwr-ra-ga.com](http://www.chapterj.gwr-ra-ga.com).

## Bagpipe instruction

The Appalachian Saint Andrew's Pipes and Drums Bagpipe Band offers free instruction to all who want to play the Great Highland Bagpipe or Scottish Drums.

The band meets each Saturday from 9 AM until 11:30 AM for instruction and practice. Please call for location and further information: 770-833-5411, 678-670-2757, or 828-557-3812.

## Local Al-Anon meetings

Are you troubled by someone's drinking? Al-Anon Family Groups (for friends and family) meet every Tuesday at 12 noon at Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church, 1114 Main Street, Room 105, Young Harris, GA. For details call 404-687-0467 or visit [ga-al-anon.org](http://ga-al-anon.org)

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## Towns County Herald

Located in the Mall,  
Hiawassee, GA

706-896-4454

# Fair Time...from Page 1A



The Gatlin Brothers entertained crowds with two live shows inside Anderson Music Hall over the weekend, as will plenty of other amazing music acts during the remaining days of the Georgia Mountain Fair. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Cindy Cousins, who, alongside her two children, joined close to two dozen patrons huddled under an awning near the front gate. "Luckily, it waited until we were ready to leave before the bottom fell out," she said. "But we had an amazing time, and we're just glad we were able to enjoy the Fair this year. Summers aren't the same without (the Georgia Mountain Fair)."

According to Thomason, Saturday's showers briefly stifled the carnival crowd on what was otherwise an overall suc-

cessful weekend. "The rain hurt the carnival," she said. "It limited the attendance, but other than (Saturday night), it's been a very busy first three days."

Sunday's slate featured an interfaith worship service at 11 a.m. before carnival rides were up and running at 1 p.m. Music acts included The Primitives, Inspirations and The Rumpfelt Family.

Balsam Ridge and Wyatt Espalin provided Friday's musical entertainment, while Andrew Chastain and The Gatlin Brothers headlined the Saturday

acts. This week, gates open at 10 a.m., with the carnival getting underway at 2 p.m. each day through the Fair's conclusion on Saturday, Aug. 21. Unfortunately, the Grizzly Experience educational show featuring bears had to be canceled due to logistical problems by the owner of the show.

For further details, a list of daily music acts, an updated Fair schedule and more, including information on the Aug. 20 Million Dollar Reunion, visit [georgiamountainfairgrounds.com](http://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com).



Rain put a literal damper on activities at the Fair Saturday evening, but overall, it was an incredibly successful opening weekend. Photo by Todd Forrest

# GMF Parade...from Page 1A



Contestants of the 2021 Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant enjoyed a ride accompanying the Lions Club Float during the parade on Saturday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Also riding was 6-year-old Eli Richards.

Following the classic Chevy was the Towns County Lions Club Float featuring the 69th Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant Queen Carly Woodard, along with this year's pageant contestants.

"We are so glad to see the Fair and the Parade back in town," spectator Jaymie Barrett said. "We love the Fair and the Parade. My kids and I were so excited to hear that the Fairgrounds was going to have the Fair this year."

"With the COVID-19 pandemic putting a hold on everything in the country last year, we were scared that it could be canceled again this year, too, as the virus is starting to ramp back up.

"I am so happy things

are back in full swing. It's nice being able to watch the kids race to the edge of the sidewalk trying to get as much candy as their little hands can hold, with smiles on their faces."

This year's parade featured several athletic teams from Towns County High and Middle Schools riding down Main Street, players waving to the crowds of people and pelting the sidewalks with candy.

And crowds of parade fans shouted and waved in excitement right back as the Lady Indians Fast-Pitch Softball Team and Indians High School and Middle School Football teams passed by.

The parade acted as a reminder to the public that both Lady Indians Softball and Indians Football seasons are currently underway, and it also allowed for players and coaches

to thank the community for all their support.

This year's First Place Float – and for the second time in a row – was none other than the Lady Indians Softball Team, winning \$4,000 in prize money given by local donors Bob Cloer, Jerry Smith and Alvin Gibson.

Second Place went to Mt. Zion Baptist Church, which took home \$2,500 in prize money, while the Peach State Credit Union float finished in Third Place with \$1,500.

The 70th Georgia Mountain Fair will be open every day from now through Saturday, Aug. 21, from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. A one-day pass is \$12 with children under 12 free, and the three-day pass is \$33. Music shows are included in ticket prices, with midway rides for an additional \$25.



The Lady Indians Softball Team claimed First Place with their float design that creatively embraced the theme "Reelin' in the Years." Photo by Lowell Nicholson

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# Debt Down...from Page 1A

year, noting that there were only six properties with back-due taxes totaling a mere \$334 needing to be paid.

In other news, the city entered into a sales tax recovery contract to collect overpaid sales taxes from the recent \$1.2 million project at the sewer plant. After paying 20% of the taxes collected, Ordiales said the city was able to bank more than \$21,000 in overpaid sales taxes.

In other business, Ordiales opened discussions on the July 15 class for "Planning and Land Use," aka zoning, that she and City Council members attended with Economic Development Director Denise McKay and members of the Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority.

"I didn't hear anything threatening or negative," Councilwoman Anne Mitchell said. "It seemed like it was presenting us with a way to direct the growth, and I believe it needs a little direction. I was impressed with the information that we got and excited about the possibilities."

Ordiales asked council members their thoughts on implementing a zoning-type policy to allow the city to better enforce rules and regulations governing planning and land use inside city limits.

Councilman Jay Chastain Jr. said it was a very good class but noted that it was a lot of information to take in in a short amount of time, and he said he believed they should take more time to discuss the policy and perhaps even leave it up to the residents of Hiwassee to vote on.

"If it ever does get to that point, make a referendum and let the people decide," he said.

Councilwoman Amy Barrett agreed with Chastain, saying it is going to take more involvement from the community and additional research before they are ready to implement a planning and land use policy.

If councilmembers do decide to go through with a zoning-type policy, Councilwoman Nancy Noblet said it should be worded as "Planning and Land Use," which would more accurately reflect the aims of the policy.

Mitchell added that the word "zoning" should be in-

cluded so that it doesn't look as if the city is trying to slip something past the public, which might needlessly create opposition.

Broaching a point of pushback, Chastain said people don't want to be told what to do with the land they own, and that if residents are not educated about such a policy, people would not vote for it.

Moving forward, council members committed that evening to informing the public with open discussions regarding planning and land use to ensure people are educated on the subject and able to make an informed decision on the matter.

Also in the meeting, Ordiales introduced Union County resident and Purple Heart Recipient Ryan McPherson, who has been traveling to nearby municipalities to speak with elected officials about signing on to a Purple Heart Proclamation.

The proclamation recognizes and honors those Americans wounded in combat, and McPherson hopes to raise even more awareness by bringing the Purple Heart Trail to more cities and counties in the mountains. For more information, visit <https://www.purpleheart.org>.

Ordiales signed the proclamation, officially designating Hiwassee a "Purple Heart City," and she asked McPherson to join her on the Town Square for the anniversary of Sept. 11, when she and council members will unveil the new Hometown Heroes Banners.

In his police report, Chief Paul Smith said the solar-pow-

ered tag readers at each end of city limits on US 76 had provided approximately \$8,500 in fines for things like not having insurance and expired registrations. First installed in December 2020, each reader costs \$2,000 a year.

Additionally, the readers count vehicles and relay information on cars known to be involved in gang or terrorist activity. They also alert the Hiwassee Police Department when stolen vehicles enter the city.

The Aug. 3 regular city meeting was short and sweet, including a motion to approve a change to the upcoming Alcohol Referendum that will be a part of the General Municipal Election in November.

A resolution for the Alcohol Referendum was initially adopted in June to ask Hiwassee voters, "Shall the issuance of licenses for the package sale of distilled spirits be approved?"

The Aug. 3 change adds two clarifying sentences to the referendum: "Those desiring to vote in favor of the issuance of the licenses shall vote 'Yes.' Those desiring to vote against the issuance of the licenses shall vote 'No.'"

Council members also approved Peggy Gardner to serve on the Hiwassee DDA Board as a replacement for Lindie Wright.

The mayor and City Council will meet for another work session on Monday, Aug. 30, at 6 p.m. inside City Hall. People can still tune in from home via Facebook Live, which may be preferable for some given the regional increase in COVID cases.