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Henderson thankful for voter support; Osborn asks for recount

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

When the dust settled from the Aug. 11 General Primary Runoff Elections, it appeared that Kenneth "Ode" Henderson was the victor in the race for Towns County Sheriff. After all, Henderson had defeated challenger Daren "Bear" Osborn by 40 votes on Election Day, receiving 1,880 votes to Osborn's 1,840 — a winning margin of 0.54 percent.

Towns County Elections Board Chair Janet Oliva said at the end of last week, however, that Osborn had filed a recount petition and several challenges to voter registrations.

Oliva said her office

would be teleconferencing with the Secretary of State's Office on Monday, after press time, and then working directly with the county attorney to plan for next steps in the process.

In the meantime, Henderson is set to appear unopposed on the Nov. 3 General Election Ballot, which would make him the sheriff-elect ahead of swearing in January 2021.

As previously reported, Henderson and Osborn went head to head in the Aug. 11 runoff as the top two vote-getters from the June 9 General Primary, as none of the five candidates initially vying for local top cop earned a majority vote. Osborn held a lead of

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Kenneth "Ode" Henderson sharing a celebratory moment with supporters recently. Henderson won the Aug. 11 runoff race for Towns County Sheriff. Photo/Facebook

Schools welcome back students for new year amid pandemic

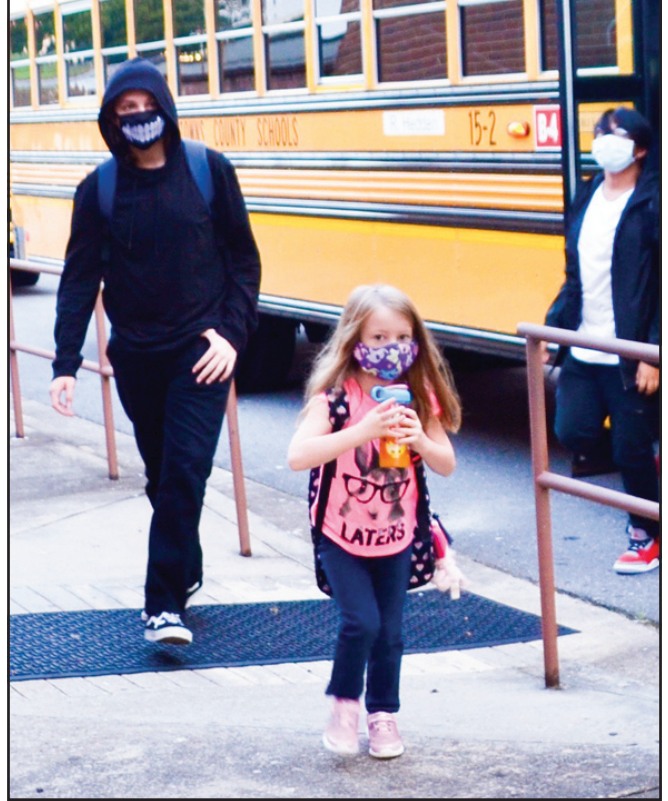
By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

After more than five months of closed doors, Towns County Schools reopened for the first day of the 2020-2021 year on Monday, Aug. 17.

And this school year, students will be taking extra precautions to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic. Precautions include, but are not limited to, having temperatures checked in the mornings and wearing masks in areas of the building where social distancing is less of an option.

With special procedures in place, Middle School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs said she's looking forward to an in-person school year where students and teachers can be in the classroom.

"I'm just thankful that we are able to come on campus at all," Hobbs said. "We are going to try and get back to a little bit of normalcy. Even under these conditions, it is nice to get students back on campus. It has been a long time since March." See Schools Reopen, Page 6A



Towns County children were happy to return to campus Monday, with roughly 75 percent of the student body opting for in-class instruction. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Deputies Forsyth, Phillips earn Lifesaving Awards for brave actions



L-R: Deputy Ryan Forsyth, Sheriff Chris Clinton and Deputy Matthew Phillips at the deputies' Life Saving Award presentations on Aug. 5. Photo/Submitted

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Earlier this month, the Towns County Sheriff's Office presented deputies Ryan Forsyth and Matthew Phillips with Lifesaving Awards for their extraordinary actions in saving a man's life in July.

"We do this to recognize the deputies for above and beyond and outstanding job performance," TCSO Chief Deputy Terry Conner said. "These two have done that, and we want to recognize them for it." The incident that earned Forsyth and Phillips their

awards occurred on July 16 and involved a male subject threatening to take his life with a loaded gun. Fortunately for him, the deputies decided to put their own lives in danger to protect his.

"We responded to a call out on Cunningham Road, 3A." See Lifesaving Award, Page 3A

Department of Public Health shines light on COVID-19 trends

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As COVID-19 numbers continue to rise in Towns County, with a 30 percent increase in cases in the last two weeks alone, the Georgia Department of Public Health seems to be seeing light at the end of the tunnel.

According to a press statement released Friday, the department said that, statewide, COVID-19 appears to be in decline, both in terms of overall cases and hospitalizations.

"During 8/3-8/9, Georgia's weekly statewide

case numbers decreased by 7 percent," Georgia DPH said. "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that Georgia has experienced a 22 percent decrease in case numbers over the past two weeks relative to the two weeks prior to that, and that we have seen a downward trajectory of cases for two weeks now."

"The highest percentage of case numbers still come from the high population counties in metro Atlanta — Fulton, Gwinnett, DeKalb, Cobb have the highest case numbers — but these counties are actually experiencing decreases now."

Additionally, as of Aug. 13, the state was reporting over 1.9 million COVID-19 tests in all, with eight of the last nine days at time reporting witnessing more than 25,000

tests per day, including private tests and more than 750,000 tests from 180 DPH specimen collection sites in Georgia.

"Positivity rates are decreasing from 11.86 percent on July 27 to 10.98 percent on Aug. 9," DPH said. "Daily hospitalizations have decreased 6.62 percent in the past seven days (as of Aug. 14)."

Still, as cases increase locally above the 1-percent of population threshold, people continue to have questions about the state of the virus and how best to perceive it.

Enter Public Information Officer Dave Palmer with District 2 Public Health, who says residents should concentrate on staying safe as the virus continues its

See COVID Trends, Page 6A

SAR awards Hiwassee Police Department for protecting community



L-R: Local SAR members Sid Turner and Jared Ogden; Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith and Officers Pam Henderson, Brandon Barrett and Tracy James; and Georgia Society SAR President Bill Dobbs at City Hall on Monday, Aug. 10. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As it has done in recent weeks with area law enforcement agencies, the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons

of the American Revolution presented the Hiwassee Police Department with a pair of awards on Aug. 10.

One award was for general appreciation for the

public service they provide as first responders, and Hiwassee PD received an additional award for proper display and maintenance of the American

See SAR Awards, Page 6A

Residents, staff tested after outbreak in Union County Nursing Home



The Department of Public Health announced Friday that 23 long-term care facilities statewide experienced outbreaks from Aug. 6-12. This would include Union County Nursing Home. Photo/Union General Health

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Union General Health System is dealing with a COVID-19 outbreak at the Union County Nursing Home after 20 residents, or about 15 percent of the population, tested positive on a single hall.

The outbreak has resulted in the nursing home's first resident death from COVID. A second resident is being hospitalized currently, with the 18 other known positive residents remaining well enough to stay in the nursing home under observation.

All residents and employees have since been tested, and results are pending.

Most of the positive residents are not experiencing any symptoms, and all are being isolated together on a specially prepared hall inside the nursing home per Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention guidelines, Union General Chief Nursing Office Julia Barnett said.

The outbreak is occurring at a time when community spread has become more common among area residents, with the hospital itself — the largest employer in Union County — having seen a systemwide increase in positive cases among employees and patient admissions since July.

Additionally, recent data from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and Johns Hopkins University have shown corresponding upticks in nursing home and community spread cases nationwide, also since July, though deaths have remained relatively flat in long-term care facilities.

The local outbreak began about two weeks ago when a new resident at the nursing home suddenly developed symptoms before quickly requiring hospitalization, Barnett said, noting that this

same individual had tested negative twice before being admitted as a resident.

A second resident started exhibiting COVID symptoms soon after, prompting the nursing home to test everyone on that hall for the virus on Friday, Aug. 7. When 20 tests came back positive Aug. 12, the hospital made the call to test all residents and staff in the building, Barnett said.

Test results illuminating the extent of the outbreak were unavailable at press time, though Barnett did say five employees had tested positive in the last two weeks, with more potentially pending, and she emphasized the impossibility of knowing exactly how the virus entered the building.

"When we talk to epidemiologists who have dealt with these (outbreaks) all over the state ... they tell us that, despite your best efforts, and even if you're doing everything," See COVID Outbreak, Page 6A

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WWII Veteran receives Quilt of Valor

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