

Henderson...from Page 1A

more than 600 votes in the June election.

Overall, the runoff elections experienced a terrific turnout of nearly 40 percent in Towns County, likely driven by the local sheriff's contest, though there were three other runoffs for races undecided in the June 9 primary.

For District 50 State Senator, Republican Stacy Hall won in Towns County with 1,872 votes, while challenger Bo Hatchett took 1,678 votes.

The Gainesville Times reported over the weekend that the districtwide vote to decide the ultimate winner of the District 50 race was simply too close to call at press time, with Hall a mere 40 votes behind Hatchett in a race featuring nearly 25,000 votes.

"While no recount has been set yet, county elections officials will speak with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office Monday about the possibility of a recount due to the close margin in the race," the Times said Saturday.

On the Democratic ticket, Dee Daley ran unopposed for the 150th District State Senator in the General Primary, meaning Daley and the Republican nominee - whoever it may be - will go head to head for the seat on Nov. 3.

Stemming from their

victories last week, Republican Andrew Clyde and Democrat Devin Pandey will square off in November for the office of U.S. Representative in the 117th Congress for Georgia's 9th Congressional District.

Districtwide, Clyde beat opponent Matt Gurtler by more than 11,000 votes. Gurtler - a Republican who has served as District 8 State Representative for the last four years - won the contest in Towns County with 2,032 votes to Clyde's 1,589.

The Democratic ticket for the 9th Congressional seat featured Pandey and Brooke Siskin, and Pandey won the district handily with 68.46 percent of the vote. Pandey took the contest in Towns County also, securing 239 votes to Siskin's 129.

Interestingly, voters in the 9th Congressional race were overwhelmingly represented by Republicans, who cast 88,905 ballots compared to the Democrats' 11,704.

Since this was a primary runoff, voters had to choose a political party ballot to vote, but there will be just one ballot for the upcoming General Election in November.

Early in-person voting for the November election will take place at the Towns County Board of Elections Office during the three weeks prior to Election

Day, which is Tuesday, Nov. 3, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, with Oct. 5 being the registration deadline for voters looking to participate in the Nov. 3 election.

On Election Day, voters should report to one of the three pre-assigned Towns County voting precincts: Hiawassee at the Civic Center; Young Harris at the Lodge Hall Building, aka Stephens Lodge; and Macedonia at Macedonia Baptist Church.

According to the Secretary of State's Office, Aug. 14 was the last day "for an Independent or a Political Body Candidate to file their Nomination Petition to have his/her name placed on the General Election Ballot," and Oliva said no one had qualified as of Friday afternoon.

Additionally, Sept. 8 is the deadline "to file the notice of intention to be a write-in candidate and have notice published in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 21-2-133."

All local elections are carefully carried out by the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration, along with myriad poll workers, all of whom work together to make local elections possible.

Food Pantry seeks volunteers

The Towns County Food Pantry is in need of (2) Backup/on call delivery drivers to deliver food boxes to our home-bound residents in Hiawassee and Young Harris. Interested parties please contact Richard Thomas at (706) 896-0040 and leave a message, your call will be returned. T(Aug19,G1)SH

VFW Karaoke Night



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

VFW Post #7807 on Sunnyside Rd., Hiawassee hosts Karaoke at the VFW every Friday at 7 p.m. Come join us! T(Aug19,F1)SH

Unofficial Towns County Nonpartisan General Election Runoff

Primary Election Ballot • August 11, 2020 • Votes By Precinct*

Candidate	Young Harris	Macedonia	Hiawassee	Absentee and Advance Voting included in Precinct Totals	TOTALS	Percentage
REP - US House Dist 9						
Andrew Clyde	158	197	139	738	357	1589 43.88%
Matt Gurtler	196	227	167	854	588	2032 56.12%
DEM - US House Dist 9						
Devin Pandey	13	5	7	26	188	239 64.95%
Brooke Siskin	5	6	7	28	83	129 35.05%
REP - State Senate Dist 50						
Stacy Hall	181	166	122	878	878	1872 52.73%
Bo Hatchett	164	247	177	688	402	1678 47.27%
REP - Sheriff						
Kenneth "Ode" Henderson	206	188	155	785	546	1880 50.54%
Daren "Bear" Osborn	154	249	159	860	418	1840 49.46%

Covid Trends...from Page 1A

community spread. "People should be concerned and take precautions to avoid COVID infection," he said. "This includes wearing a face covering when around other people, social distancing, washing your hands often, cleaning high-touch surfaces, and staying home if you are sick."

Because the virus is a new kind of coronavirus, it is difficult for scientists to determine if the virus acts on a seasonal basis or lives primarily year-round, which is why it's too early to say whether the virus will die down before reappearing in a second wave; continue unabated; or do something else, Palmer said.

Risk for severe illness increases with age, with the greatest risk being among those aged 85 or older, according to the CDC, which also reports that 8 in 10 COVID-19-related deaths occur in people over 65 years of age. Also at risk are people with chronic health conditions.

"COVID-19 is a virus that can cause serious illness in some people," Palmer said. "In the majority of people, it only causes mild illness. This is why it is important to follow all of the precautions that experts

recommend." Added Palmer, "Those who are healthy must help protect those who have compromised immune systems, so following precautions is a must."

Because so much is still unknown about COVID-19, many people seem to be holding onto an incorrect notion that catching the virus is the equivalent of a death sentence or will definitely cause lifelong side effects.

But as Palmer points out, while the virus is deadly for some, most people generally do not suffer major complications after catching the disease.

"It seems that people who are in good health, except in rare cases, have mild symptoms," Palmer said. "It is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle - eating healthy, exercising and getting the appropriate amount of rest can help you recover if you get COVID-19."

For people wondering how this virus compares to another virus that kills tens of thousands of people in the US every year, namely influenza, Palmer says people should not get them confused, as there are important distinctions between the two.

"Influenza viruses and

coronaviruses are different in their composition, so they are different viruses," Palmer said. "They do have similarities such as causing respiratory illness, ease of spread, and have many of the same symptoms: fever, chills, muscle aches/headaches and breathing difficulty."

"However, COVID-19 has been found to cause additional symptoms such as blood clots, COVID toes and loss of taste and smell."

Added Palmer, "As with any new disease, there is still much to learn. People should read and learn about the disease from trusted sources like CDC, Department of Health and Human Services and World Health Organization."

People with COVID symptoms or possible exposures should contact their doctor or local Health Department about getting tested.

Area residents can get tested for free on Fridays at the Towns County Health Department, which has partnered with the Union County Health Department to conduct contact tracing.

To stay updated on COVID-19 in Georgia, visit DPH.Georgia.gov/covid-19-daily-status-report.

COVID Outbreak...from Page 1A

perfect, sometimes (the virus) still gets in - and I believe that," Barnett said.

Viral outbreaks are not unheard of in nursing homes, with influenza and stomach bugs regularly affecting large percentages of long-term care residents nationwide, including in the past at Union County Nursing Home.

However, this is the first COVID-19 outbreak in the local facility, and as such, the nursing home has increased its surveillance of residents for COVID symptoms, with Barnett saying the facility remains on lockdown to outside visitors, as it has since mid-March.

"I'm confident that we will contain and protect the nursing home residents to the best of our ability," Barnett said.

As of Friday, the hospital was near capacity in its two COVID-dedicated units of Union General, with 15 of 19 beds occupied by positive or suspected positive individuals, plus three virus patients in the ICU. Hospitalizations regularly include local patients, people from neighboring counties and visitors to the area.

The hospital underwent

an initial coronavirus surge toward the onset of the pandemic in April, but that quickly abated, producing a lull in new hospitalizations until July - that's when cases picked up dramatically and caused a steady influx of COVID patients at Union General.

Prior to the July increase in cases and hospitalizations statewide, the nursing home went above and beyond CDC and Department of Public Health recommendations by transferring positive residents for observation and treatment at Union General, including asymptomatic patients.

But since the discovery of this outbreak and the increased community spread, the hospital system has been segregating COVID-positive residents in the nursing home to keep Union General from running out of beds.

Chatuge Regional Hospital in Towns County has been designated a clean hospital but is able to house COVID patients should the need arise.

To date, Chatuge Regional Nursing Home has had five residents and one employee test positive for the virus, with full recoveries

all around. Barnett said the families of all nursing home residents are alerted each time new cases crop up in one of the system's long-term care facilities.

Examining the bigger local picture at Union County Nursing Home, from Jan. 1-Aug. 11 of 2019, 34 residents died. For the exact same time period in 2020, 35 residents died, demonstrating that COVID-19 has not appreciably contributed to excess deaths inside the facility to date.

Following the hospital's announcement of the outbreak on Facebook last Thursday, the health system experienced an outpouring of community support and concern, for which Barnett and the rest of the nursing home staff were grateful.

"Our nursing home personnel love these people, and they work so hard," Barnett said. "(COVID-19) has been taxing on our health system."

"I'm thankful that we've got the staff and the physicians that we have who have maintained and stuck with us to take care of these patients tirelessly, because it's been hard on everybody."

SAR Awards...from Page 1A



L-R: David Cook and Jared Ogden of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons of the American Revolution showed Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith and his officers some appreciation last week. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

flag.

Georgia Society SAR President Bill Dobbs also attended the awards presentation at City Hall, lending support from the entire organization in highlighting the invaluable service officers provide to communities around the state.

According to local Chapter President Jared Ogden, these awards are also a way of showing the police department appreciation during times when police are facing negativity nationwide.

Further, SAR uses such awards presentations as an outreach effort promoting education and reminding the community what the country's Founding Fathers did to make this country independent.

"We have to educate our citizens about the importance of representative republics," Ogden said. "We need to vote. These concepts were well thought out a century before. The Constitution, Bill of Rights and Declaration of Independence are echoes of those thoughts and that period of enlightenment."

Added Ogden, "The purpose of the law enforcement is to enforce and keep others

from infringing on that pursuit of happiness. We want to celebrate them, because people aren't happy with them and they should be."

Ideals like these motivate patriots such as local SAR Vice President Sid Turner, who served in the Vietnam War and as a police officer to protect American freedoms.

"I got almost reckless and thought that I didn't care if I live or die," Turner said. "Then I got to thinking about why I want to stay alive, and I started dreaming about all this stuff that I want to do when I get home and pursue happiness."

"Then I got to thinking that we better have a good police department that will protect me while I am in this pursuit of happiness. Then it wasn't but a step from there when I was thinking, how could I expect them to do that for me when I couldn't do that for myself? And that is why I decided to be a policeman."

For his part, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said it was the goal of his department to protect the people's rights while enabling the community to feel safe.

"Taking an oath as an

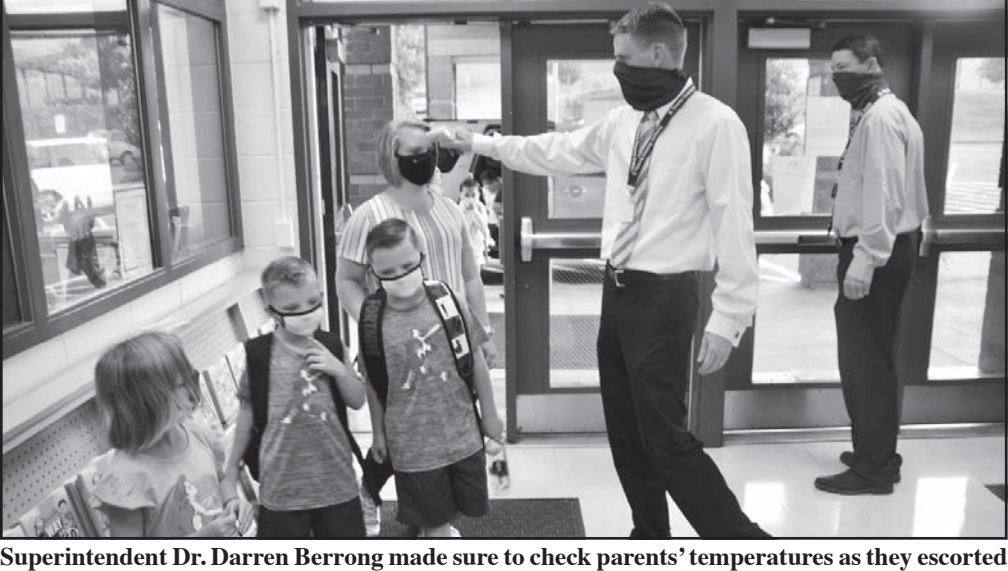
officer, we swear to uphold the Constitution and all the ideals behind the Constitution, which is what we fought the Revolutionary War for," Smith said. "We are here for peace and order and to serve our community. Our patch has 'Service and Justice,' and that is what we want to see every day, is service and justice for our community."

And according to Smith, having community support from residents and groups like the Sons of the American Revolution encourages members of local law enforcement by helping them to feel appreciated for the hard work they are doing.

"We see in the news daily the negativity towards our local law enforcement and our state and federal agencies, and that gets you down," Smith said. "When you are literally going out and putting your life on the line, sometimes it makes you question whether it is worth it in the end."

"Having support like this from our community organizations really means the world to us. It makes such a difference."

Schools Reopen...from Page 1A



Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong made sure to check parents' temperatures as they escorted their children into the elementary school for the first day of school Aug. 17. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

13. "We have some good guidelines in place with social distancing and students wearing masks. Our class sizes are down because we gave them the option to do online or on-campus learning. I think this will be a good year."

High School Principal Roy Perren is excited to see students back in the halls as well, and

he is feeling confident that the procedures and safety guidelines will be followed.

"We are very excited to be starting back," Perren said. "I did the announcements this morning, and I almost got emotional because I was so proud that we were able to do this and be here today."

"I expect that everybody will follow the procedures that we have put in place and we will

get through the year as best as we can."

While some may think that elementary students are less likely to follow procedures due to their age, Principal Shannon Moss believes the younger kids of Towns County will adapt to the changes and be able to learn in a safe environment.

"We have some here with



Welcoming students back, High School Assistant Principal Jim Melton also informed them that they were to report directly to their homerooms as they entered the building Monday morning. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

us and some that are at home and have chosen online," Moss said. "We are excited about school in general, being able to be here and trying to find a new kind of normal so that our kids can learn and be safe."

"Our students are very resilient and overall are great students, and they are going to adjust to whatever our teachers

model and encourage."

As for the remaining students, around 25 percent of children in the school system are partaking in the completely online learning program, according to Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong.

"I am feeling really good about the school year," Berrong said. "Out of every kid that came

in the building this morning, I might have seen two kids in the entire school that didn't have a face covering on."

"This tells me that the kids want to be at school, and they will do whatever they need to do to stay here. As long as everybody is on board and tries to be as safe as possible, I think we will have a great school year."