

Community feels country more polarized than ever in 2020

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As September begins, contentious issues around the nation like the upcoming presidential election, the COVID-19 pandemic and responses to it, and months of mixed protesting and riots have made for a chaotic time in America – and people are feeling it locally.

Scott Dillard of Towns County finds it harder to simply relax amid all the chaos highlighted in the national media every day.

“The world is in a crazy place right now,” Dillard said while shopping at Trailful Saturday. “People are in the

street rioting and shooting each other, and nobody is doing anything about it. Every day you hear something new on the news about something bad going on in some city. I’m just tired of it.

“I don’t see why we can’t report good things. The virus isn’t even on those people’s minds anymore, because they have something new to scare us with. The state of America is in jeopardy, and it is time for the people to realize that. We have to take this seriously, because nobody else is.”

As November approaches, many people seem to be turning their attention to the election in anticipation of the next president, including

Shawn Baldwin of Floyd County, who believes the election is making each conflict worse because it takes the focus off other issues.

“It seems like election years are always full of conflict and bad things happen,” Baldwin said at Hiwassee Hardware Aug. 27. “In 2016, people thought the country was going to come to an end because of Trump being elected, and that is absurd.

“People think like that; they think the country will be ruined based on who wins. The country will only be ruined if we the people let it get ruined. We may not have an amazing government these next few years, but we do have people

that can make a difference.

“I still believe that this is the best country on the face of this earth. It won’t save itself, though.”

Jillian Dills of South Carolina agrees that the country is incredibly polarized at the moment, and that the division has only grown more apparent as the year has gone on.

“I don’t think I have seen

a time so divided,” said Dills, shopping at Always Christmas on Aug. 29. “People have let their beliefs get ahead of them, and we hate each other for it. I don’t know if COVID made the situation worse, but people are spiteful just to be spiteful.

“You can’t say anything anymore, and you have to keep opinions to yourself. Times are changing, and it is hard to tell

whether or not that is for the better or worse. I feel like the longer this year goes on, the more divided we get.

“I guess that is because of the election, though. It divides people. I think we need to get over ourselves and figure this out. COVID and the economy aren’t going to get fixed if we pick sides. This is an American issue.”

Fall Festival...from Page 1A

Mountain Fair for the first time in its 70-year history, which they’d hoped could coincide – parade and all – with the Fall Festival that has also been postponed now.

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing through the end of summer, Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said they’ve had to do what makes the most sense to keep people safe.

“I just feel like it would be really hard to social distance in the Music Hall,” Thomason said. “You can’t monitor the tickets and make someone come to the 2 o’clock show or make someone go to the 7 o’clock.

“You try to issue a ticket and say we will do 1,000 tickets and reserve a seat, but I don’t think you could come out financially.”

Furthermore, demonstrations in the Pioneer Village would be an expense that would hinder the group due to the loss of live entertainment.

“I wouldn’t pay somebody to go up there and demonstrate in the Pioneer Village unless

you are doing the whole thing,” Thomason said. “What I am going to try to do with all the jams, jellies and sauces and stuff that we got for the fair is sell them in the office.”

Towns County Lions Club Member Shannon Nguyen has worked with the board to organize vendors and crafters for both the Georgia Mountain Fair and Fall Festival, and she feels that a craft show would be successful and accepted among the vendors.

“This year, craft shows have really been slammed,” Nguyen said. “People are wanting to get out and do things outside. I think it would be a really good idea with the leaf-lookers and last minute lakegoers. I think it would do really well.”

Added Nguyen, “The vendors that I have spoken to are more than welcome to pay a fee just to get into the show. They have really been looking for shows.”

Around 80 vendors are supposed to be participating in the show, with the booths

already being near capacity inside the fairgrounds.

“I have some on the lower and top level,” Nguyen said. “I am utilizing the barn and using anything I can use as a booth. I already have people signed up, and the only time I put them down as a space is when they pay and are committed to coming.”

Alongside the vendors will be food and musicians who will play on the grounds for tips.

As a precaution against COVID, the fairgrounds will provide hand sanitizer and put signs up encouraging facial coverings while at the event.

The Georgia Mountain Fair Craft Show will be held on the weekend of Oct. 9-11 and the weekend of Oct. 16-18 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission will be \$5 at the gate, with children 12 and under admitted for free.

For more information on upcoming events, visit georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.



Customers had a good time at Always Christmas in Hiwassee Saturday. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

School Budget...from Page 1A

initial COVID drop, so it’s possible the schools won’t have to dip into reserve funds this coming year.

However, Underwood noted at the time the uncertainty around the economy and COVID-19, so the schools will be as conservative as possible over 2020-21, just in case using reserve money becomes

necessary.

“This year, if you look at the General Fund expenditures, the total of \$14,503,440 – that’s basically exactly what we budgeted last year,” Underwood had said. “We are on target to come in \$700,000 under that.

“We always try to put in a cushion for maintenance or transportation, (etc.), and

going into this next phase, we don’t know what we’re facing with a cost of making sure we can take care of everybody with the guidelines, with the online learning.”

The regular school board meeting will be taking place on Tuesday, Sept. 8, due to Monday being Labor Day.

City Council...from Page 1A

Halloween event.”

Council Member Amy Barrett felt torn at the thought of not having the event and hoped that an alternative could be put in place to give kids some form of Halloween.

“I like the fact that kids can trick or treat,” Barrett said. “But at the same time, with

COVID and social distancing, we would have so many requirements that it would be impossible. I would love to have it, and it kills me to think that we can’t.”

More discussion will be had on a possible alternative event over the next month.

Ordiales was also excited

about the kayak ramp at Lloyd’s Landing nearing completion, with the project being estimated to conclude within the next month or so.

The city encourages residents to complete the 2020 census before it comes to an end on Sept. 30.

Recount...from Page 1A

Districtwide recount results from the state senate race were not available by press time, though Hatchett held a lead of 37 votes prior to the recount.

The machine settings revelation could have implications statewide and beyond in races using Dominion equipment, though the Board Office said no other “no vote” ballots were discovered.

Board Chair Dr. Janet Oliva and the Board Office spent the weekend preparing for Monday’s recount, getting all ballots ready to be physically re-scanned.

“There’s a lot of work to prepare for that,” Oliva said previously. “I have to empty the bins where the ballots are stored and prepare them to be run through our scanning device.”

In other news, the Elections Board denied the recount petition filed by sheriff’s candidate Daren “Bear” Osborn in a called meeting on Saturday, Aug. 29, meaning the originally certified results declaring Kenneth “Ode” Henderson the next sheriff of Towns County will stand.

Oliva said the meeting occurred Saturday because local elections officials needed to decide the issue before the Aug. 31 recount in the District 50 State Senate race. The board office learned late last week that the state race recount was set to occur Monday after press time.

The board denied Osborn’s petition for two reasons, with the first being that state law requires recount petitions to be filed after official certification occurs, and Osborn filed the day before.

For the second reason, Oliva said that the board found no cause upon review to believe that a discrepancy or error had been made, apparent or otherwise, “on the face of the returns,” a finding that is also required by state law.

“The board members felt strongly that – with the presence of two monitors, one observer and two absentee judges, in addition to the counting of the absentee ballots about six times – elections officials had not miscounted,” Oliva said.

Oliva recused herself from the board vote Saturday because she oversaw the entire elections and voting tabulation process as chief elections official, wanting to ensure complete transparency in the canvassing review process during the meeting.

The sheriff’s race did not meet the requirements for an automatic recount, which is why Osborn petitioned for one.

It doesn’t seem the electronic adjudication issue would have affected the results of the sheriff’s race, as it appeared Monday that no additional “no votes” were discovered in the election.

Henderson was certified

Aug. 13 as the sheriff’s race victor in the Aug. 11 General Primary Runoff. The final certified results featured 10 provisional ballots – 6 for Osborn and 4 for Henderson – bringing Henderson’s lead to 38 in the close election.

He will appear unopposed on the Nov. 3 General Election Ballot, making him the sheriff-elect ahead of swearing in January 2021. In the meantime, Henderson said he will continue his post as chief of police for the Young Harris College Police Department.

Separately, Osborn also filed a number of challenges to voter registrations, which the board will hear in an upcoming meeting.

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: Hiwassee at the Civic Center; Young Harris at the Lodge Hall Building, aka Stephens Lodge; and Macedonia at Macedonia Baptist Church.

Cat Colonies...from Page 1A

“I basically feed five cats at one location in Towns County and three to four cats at another location every morning,” Hazen said. “It is a labor of love, and we all feel very responsible to continue feeding. Even if we are tired or the weather is bad, we still do it.”

Hundreds of cats have been tended to over the last 10 years with the help of volunteers and groups such as this, though the main difficulty is in finding the felines suitable homes, as stray cats are usually not as sociable and accepted by some animal shelters.

Each of the cats in the colonies is eventually captured and spayed and neutered before being put back in its colony.

People looking to perform a civic duty can help by volunteering to feed the cats or find foster homes for small kittens until they can be adopted, according to Scott.

“Cats are fed twice a day, at dawn and dusk,” Scott said. “It only takes about an hour or less to feed the colonies. All colonies are within a short driving distance and easy to get to. There are currently nine volunteers feeding cats. Volunteers pay for all expenses; we receive no county funding.”

For those unable to volunteer who still want to help, the group is asking for donations of Friskies canned



Caring volunteers feed and look after 10 cat colonies in Towns County. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

food and Friskies or Kit & Kaboodle dry food.

Donations can be dropped off at the Towns County Public Library and Walgreens in Hiwassee. For more information on volunteering for the group, contact Sue Scott at slaraines@zoho.com.

Sandy Hazen also works with local group Operation PUP, which aims to assist in finding low-cost spay and neuter opportunities.

“We have had past help from Puppy Patch Thrift Store in Hayesville (North Carolina),” Hazen said. “They have now closed, however, and we could no longer get anyone

to volunteer.

“They were also helping us with spay and neuters for Operation PUP. What we will do now is go back to fundraising and selling flowers. We are going to have a garage sale in September.

“We do Towns County cats and dogs and branch over to Clay County (North Carolina) if needed. We have discounted prices with Lake Chatuge Animal Hospital, but we do not trap.”

For more information on Operation PUP and volunteering, contact Sandy Hazen at 203-788-2038.