

# Towns County Herald

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## Towns County Schools the safest place for kids

**By Shelly Knight**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**

After the school shooting tragedy in Winder last week, Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong wants to reassure all students, parents and community members that, while a shooting can occur anywhere, Towns County is doing all it can to ensure the safety of local students.

"A lot of school districts don't think about these things until a tragedy like this occurs, but we have been working proactively to secure our students and staff for some time," Berrong said. "We did get grant money this year for safety and security, so we have someone coming out next week to begin a project in the front office of

the Middle School and High School because we have a safety concern there.

"You do have to get buzzed in to get down the halls, but if you went straight through the offices, you could get into the school. So, what we're going to do is put security glass that will separate that foyer from the offices so nobody can actually get into the school that way.

"Last year we used that grant money to put security film on all of our windows. They are not bulletproof, but they are shatterproof, and it would require multiple shots to penetrate a window, and that would give our personnel plenty of time to respond.

"Everyone is praising the security program with the badges that all of the teach-

ers had in Barrow County that had just been implemented this school year. This is our third year with that exact same technology, and you can do a staff alert or an active shooter alert. Our campus is small enough we can get to a situation within 30 seconds.

"We have a School Resource Officer in each building. Towns County School District pays 75% of the salaries for the SROs, which have been in place here for over 20 years. About five years ago we added a second officer, so we have one in each building.

"We have a fluid motion camera system in place. There are 25 cameras so that if there is a situation that someone is in our school, we can follow them down the hall and get on



Towns County School System is always looking for additional ways to make campus even safer for students. Photo by Shelly Knight

## Traffic violation leads to drug arrest in Young Harris

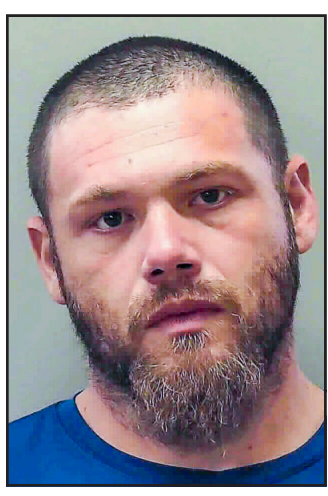


The Towns County Sheriff's Office confiscated these drugs following a traffic stop on Aug. 31. Photo/Facebook

**News Special**  
**YOUNG HARRIS** – Towns County Drug Investigators along with the Georgia State Patrol initiated a traffic stop on Saturday, Aug. 31, regarding a traffic violation on Georgia 66 near the Clay County, North Carolina, line. Probable cause was de-

veloped, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the confiscation of an amount of methamphetamine that field-tested positive.

Robert Curtis Parker, 32, of Brasstown, North Carolina, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, no insurance, driv-



Robert Curtis Parker

ing while license suspended or revoked, adult restraint law seat belt violation, expired vehicle tag or decal, and unsafe tires.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that he is proud of the Sheriff's Office and the Georgia State Patrol for working together, and he wants to stress the importance of agencies working together to impact the fight against drugs in this community.

## Council holds first readings of two new city ordinances



Officials with the City of Hiwassee are happy with the much-needed replacement vehicles in the Hiwassee Police Department fleet. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

**By Brittany Holbrooks**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**

The Sept. 3 regular meeting of the Hiwassee City Council saw updates to long-standing business items such as the Ornamental Structure Ordinance – once known as the Accessory Structure Ordinance – and the Mobile Home

Density Ordinance.

As re-introduced during last month's work session, the Ornamental Structure Ordinance had its first reading. Originally the Accessory Structure Ordinance, the document underwent language changes to more clearly define accessory structures, or rather, ornamental structures.

Along with offering guidelines to measurements, the ordinance also states where on one's property an "ornamental structure" can go. At the previous work session, Councilwoman Amy Barrett suggested that all structures should be placed no less than 10 feet from property lines.

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## Night Market ends summer season with successful event

**By Shelly Knight**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**

The Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority has been hosting "First Fridays," aka the Hiwassee Night Market, for the last five years. Last Friday, Sept. 6, marked the end of another summer season.

"We have music and local vendors and food trucks and invite the community and visitors to gather together and enjoy an evening out," said Economic Development Director Denise McKay. "The music is a big part of the evening."

Joining the 25 artisan vendors for the 5-9 p.m. monthly summer event was the band Joe Ensley Project to perform popular '70s and '80s hits "with acoustic and mandolin vibes.

"(First Friday) is not a concert, but (music) is a great addition to the evening," McKay said. "Some people say they come just for the music. Sometimes it's local musicians and sometimes we reach out to others who haven't been here before.

"We knew people wanted things to do in the evening, and so we wanted to show that Hiwassee is alive at night. People wanted something to eat and do a little shopping and listen to music and just to socialize. It was something you could bring the kids to, or just to have a date night out.

"It's a nice thing to bring the community together."

Likewise, DDA Board Member Tamela Cooper described First Fridays as "a way to bring the community and visitors together in the square, to enjoy an evening out," whether that's locals or arti-

sans who "just do night markets and fairs and such."

"We host this event on the first Friday of each month from May through September," Cooper said. "We used to host it through October, but it's a little bit hard to compete with high school football.

"We get a big mixture of people. With Hiwassee being a tourist destination, a lot of people see us set up here and just pop in. This year has been a really good one. We've only been rained out once."

A mockup blueprint of the Paris Business Center – a downtown-based regional development center that's currently under construction – was also on display as McKay explained the center's purpose.

"The mission of the DDA is to revitalize Downtown Hiwassee and make it a hub of activity for the com-



The Hiwassee Night Market will return next year on the first Friday of each month from May through September. Photo by Shelly Knight

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# School Safety ...from Page 1

the intercom system and give information to everyone on where the person is at any time. We have that in all our schools as well.

"We have a table-top meeting with all of our EMS and sheriff's department personnel at the end of this month, but that's been planned since this summer. I can't talk about what we discuss in those types of meetings, but the gist is that we are ready.

"No school shooter has ever breached a locked door. We have automatic locking doors. There are classroom phones in every room. Teachers are given multiple trainings throughout the school year so that they know how to respond in any given situation. One of the critical things we constantly talk about is the importance of keeping every door closed and locked.

"(The Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency) comes up and trains teachers about when to get the children out of the building and when to keep them in place. I teach them each year how and when to use their electronic badges.

"We know that mental health plays a part in the tragedies. Each year we give every student a PASS survey (People's Attitudes to Self and School), and it helps us recognize which students might need mental health resources and community support.

"What I want people to know is that we aren't reactive; we're always trying to put preventative measures in place.

"Towns County is a great place to live. We are very blessed that regardless of differing opinions and perceptions, everyone rallies around our school. The safety of our kids is the No. 1 priority, in my opinion, for me and for our community.

"I believe our community trusts our schools. Our teachers build relationships with our students, and you just can't get that kind of thing in a larger system. I feel very pleased with what we've done regarding security for our schools.

"I think we are as safe as we can be. If I was going to ask for anything, I would ask that the state fund an SRO for

a school system. It's a commonsense thing. The state should fund SROs in every school," Berrong concluded.

Nicole Lonano is a parent in the school system, and she agrees that her children "are safer in Towns County Schools than almost anywhere else."

"My kids have so many more opportunities here than you would think because the district is so small," Lonano said. "But it's also because it's small that we're lucky to have teachers that build relationships with kids. They really care about the kids.

"Do I think the sheriff would come in guns a-blazing if he needed to? Absolutely. I have complete faith in them."

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson said last week that Lonano's assessment was absolutely correct.

"In an active shooter situation, you've got to respond to that shooter, go to where that shooter is and take him out," Henderson said. "You storm that building. The first officers on the scene are in that building and take that shooter out at all costs. The quicker we get there, the more lives will be saved.

"I, like everybody else in this country, am totally shocked that these kinds of things are happening. It's just hard for me to imagine what happened in Barrow County just a few days ago, that a 14-year-old could commit such a horrible, horrible crime.

"Mental issues and issues that many people have in their lives are what cause them to do these horrible things. I do not believe taking weapons away from good people is the answer. The criminals will always have guns.

"Sane people don't shoot up schools. Mental illness is the biggest problem of them all. My jail is full of mentally ill people because there's nowhere for them to go. And my jail is the wrong place for them. They can't get what they need in jail. Somehow, we've got to ensure that we're improving our facilities for the mentally ill.

"But given the fact that it's happening, and it's been happening, we've got to make sure that we are doing everything humanly possible here

at the Sheriff's Office to make sure that we're ready.

"We get all the necessary training in making sure that we're as best prepared as we can possibly be in the event that something like that were to occur here. We cannot get in the false sense that it won't happen here. We've got a college to protect here as well.

"So, we train together with all of our counterparts – first responders, EMS, Fire Department – and I'm certain that if we had a school shooter situation, we would have surrounding counties also respond.

"We can talk to all the surrounding counties; we have interoperability. We have immediate contact with GBI if we need them. We meet monthly, and we're all working together. In any given event, law enforcement will be pulling together.

"The school district is very proactive. We have a great relationship with our superintendent and the School Board, and we try to participate in and support everything our kids are doing. I believe they have one of the best systems in the state of Georgia. I am very pleased with how they are set up and their management plan."

School shootings are tragic and deeply concerning events. While they do happen, it's critical to note that they are statistically rare.

There are 97,568 public schools nationwide, and 2,306 in Georgia alone. The annual odds that an American child will die in a mass shooting at a school are nearly 10 million to 1, which is about the same odds as dying in an earthquake or by lightning strike.

In light of recent area threats, Towns County Schools took to Facebook Monday to reassure the community about local school safety.

"If you pass by our campus, you may see additional police cars in our parking lot. We have increased police presence to enhance the sense of security within our schools and to provide extra patrols for added safety.

"Please note that Towns County Schools has not received any threats at this time. We take all potential threats seriously, and if any concerns arise, we will notify you promptly. The safety of our students and staff remains our top priority."

## Pumpkin decorating at the Hiawassee Garden Club Sept. 14



Beautifully decorated pumpkins can be yours with just a little class at the Hiawassee Garden Clubhouse.

Fall and Thanksgiving will soon be here and how clever to decorate your own pumpkins for a dinner table centerpiece or an outside decoration. Cheri Erickson will be holding a pumpkin decoupage class at the Hiawassee Garden Clubhouse on Saturday, September 14, 2024 at 1:30 PM. Bring a white resin or plastic pumpkin (or several) to decorate and a pair of scissors.

The cost of the class is \$25; we accept cash or checks, but no credit cards. The Clubhouse is located directly behind the Towns County Courthouse in Hiawassee—34 River St. You can park at the Courthouse Annex across the street or on the lawn. Remember, the more the merrier, so bring a friend and have a fun and productive afternoon.

## Join us for the 18th Annual Ag Day and Tractor Parade in Clay County, NC

Clay County Center is gearing up for the 18th Annual Ag Day & Tractor parade to celebrate our local agriculture community. This year's event will be held on September 28th at Hayesville Square and will be a day packed with games, informative displays, 4-H Livestock exhibits, and most importantly, a captivating array of tractors – both modern and cherished classics.

In addition to the fun,

Clay County Tractor Club will be raffling off a 1951 Ford 8N. Funds raised from the event will go towards the Tractor Club's community programs and scholarships for local seniors. You can purchase your tickets for this piece of agricultural history on the day of the event and the lucky winner will be announced following the parade.

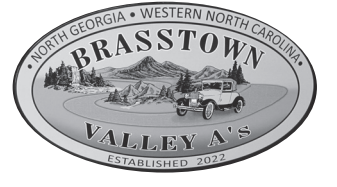
The event will start at 10 AM, with the parade kicking off at 12 PM. If you wish to participate in the tractor parade, meet at the Hayesville

High School parking lot with a \$15 entry fee.

If you are an agriculture vendor or agriculture-related organization, there is still time to be part of the fun. Visit clay.ncsu.edu or stop by our office at 25 Riverside Circle, Hayesville, to learn how you can be part of the event.

Don't forget to mark your calendar for September 28 and join us at Hayesville Square for a day that promises fun, community bonding, and an appreciation for our area's deep agricultural roots.

## Local Model A Club meeting



The Brasstown Valley A's local chapter of the Ford Model A Club of America will hold their monthly meeting Thursday, September 12th at the United Community Bank in Hayesville. The meeting will be in the community room at 11 AM with lunch following the meeting. Lunch location will be at an area restaurant to be determined by majority vote. All Model A owners and enthusiasts are encouraged to attend.

Curious about Model A's? Come and join us and learn about these amazing automobiles.

## 2024 Love Light Scholarship Program

The Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home Auxiliary is requesting donations to fund our Love Light Scholarship Program. We accept donations in memory or honor of individuals throughout the year. The scholarships are awarded to deserving Towns County High School Seniors who will be enter-

ing the medical field. We also award Chatuge Hospital/Nursing Home employees working to further their education.

Please return this form with your donation to: Love Light Scholarship, PO Box 986, Hiawassee, GA 30546. (checks payable to Chatuge Regional Hospital Auxiliary).

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 Acknowledgement to be sent to: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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*I believe our flag is more than just cloth and ink. It is a universally recognized symbol that stands for liberty, and freedom. It is the history of our nation, and it's marked by the blood of those who died defending it.*

John Thune

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# 2024

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 DAY 10 Stoeger Uplander Field .410 Side-by-Side	 DAY 11 Taurus 357 Revolver 6" Barrel	 DAY 12 Winchester XPR Strata Rifle 6.8 Western
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 DAY 22 Henry Lever Action 22 WMR	 DAY 23 Taurus Revolver Judge Public Defender 45	 DAY 24 Ruger .300 BK American Rifle Predator
 DAY 25 Stoeger 9MM Pistol	 DAY 26 Ruger American Rifle Predator .308	 DAY 27 S&W M&P 22 WMR Pistol
 DAY 28 Henry Shotgun 410/20/25	 DAY 29 Springfield Armory 9MM Pistol	 DAY 30 Diamondback Firearms .556 Rifle

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# City Council...from Page 1



A handful of residents attended the regular meeting of the Hiwassee City Council last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

The ordinance, which should receive a second reading and enactment in the October regular meeting, is largely inspired by a controversy that ended last summer when, after public outcry, a private property owner canceled his plans to erect a large dragon statue near a city ridgeline.

Council members also voted to approve changing the Paris Business Center's front facade from brick to Hardie Board for a total of \$52,915.03, and the council greenlit paving repairs on patches of Chatuge Way and Oakmont Street following a leak at the Farm Bureau building.

The council held a first reading of the Mobile Home Density Ordinance following previous discussion about mobile home requirements within the city. The document states that no more than four manufactured homes can be placed on any parcel, and that land cannot be subdivided to "get

around" the limit.

"The state's making us dig up a foot in front (and) a foot behind everything looking for lead lines," explained Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. regarding city water infrastructure and the Lead Service Line Inventory project.

The city has entered into a contract with Michael Denton of QGE, LLC to perform the work. As mentioned during the work session, this includes digging holes to monitor the pipes with photographs to eliminate any potential lead in the water distribution system.

After the meeting, Hiwassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker showed the council the two new vehicles purchased for the Police Department.

With flashing lights on, the cars were parked outside City Hall in front of the mural for a photo op before the council and members of the public were allowed to size them up.

As a whole, the council was pleased with the new vehicles.

Hiwassee City Council meets the first Tuesday each month at 6 p.m. in City Hall.

## Night Market...from Page 1

community, and this is one part of what we're doing," McKay said. "The Business Center that we're creating will be open by the end of October.

"We have incubator spaces for two small businesses. In addition, the center renovation also preserved two historic buildings that would have been demolished.

"Programs are offered to help new business startups with things from writing a business plan to bookkeeping. We work with entrepreneurs, those who want to revital-

ize their businesses and those looking to expand.

"We partner with North Georgia Technical College, University of North Georgia and the Small Business Association, to name a few. They help businesses do what they need to do so they can open their doors and be successful."

Though last Friday was the end of the 2024 season, the Night Market will return next year as a popular ongoing attraction in Hiwassee. For more information, visit [www.downtownhiwassee.com](http://www.downtownhiwassee.com).

## Celebrate Cupid Falls new Walking Bridge and Gazebo



Come on out to Cupid Falls on Sunday, September 15, 2 PM, to celebrate the new walking bridge and gazebo. The brainchild of the Enotah Garden Club, the new walking bridge was built by Mountain Beautification & Revitalization Association (MBRA)

volunteers. MBRA also built the gazebo that covers the picnic table overlooking the falls. Now visitors to the park may enjoy their picnic while viewing Cupid Falls. MBRA volunteers, City officials, Garden Club members will all be present, and the community at large is encouraged to attend.

Raffle for prizes will also be held. Must be present to win. Hope to see you there!

## The Alzheimer's Association Caregiver Support Group Meeting



The Alzheimer's Association will hold its Caregiver Support Group on Monday, September 16, 1:30-2:30 p.m. at St. Clare's Episcopal Church, 777 Ledford Road, in Blairsville. Caregivers of anyone diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease or any other dementia are invited to learn

from other caregivers' experiences, identify area resources, and speak freely about their emotional journey in a safe, caring place.

The meetings are held the third Monday of every month at the same time and location.

For more information, please visit [alz.org](http://alz.org), call 800-272-3900 or email the Volunteer Facilitator, Harriet Hoke, at [hhoke1234@gmail.com](mailto:hhoke1234@gmail.com).

## ARFS Offers Help to Stop Cycle of Abandoned Kittens at Red House

The red house in Hiwassee has become a hotspot for dropping abandoned kittens, and ARFS is hoping to put an end to the cycle of emergency kitten situations.

If you are the person responsible for leaving kittens at the red house, ARFS would like to offer its assistance in trapping and fixing the cats to prevent further unwanted litters.

By spaying and neutering the cats, it will help decrease the number of kittens in need of rescue and fostering.

If you are the individual leaving the kittens or know who is, please call 1-762-294-9467 to arrange for someone to help trap the cats.

Let's work together to ensure the well-being of these animals and prevent further over population issues in our community.

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### Feline Feeder

An "early riser" is needed for one morning a week to feed homeless cats in Towns County. These friendly felines are in six cat colonies, all off a 2-mile stretch of Route 76. The colonies are easy to get to, and feeding takes about 35-45 minutes. Training is provided, but feeding is not difficult. Feline Feeders is an activity of ARFS, Animal Rescue Financial Support, Inc.

If you have a heart for disadvantaged cats and would like to join our team of dedicated volunteers, please contact Sheila at [mcdevitt@sheilamcdevitt.com](mailto:mcdevitt@sheilamcdevitt.com).