

Towns County Herald

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Matheson found guilty of attempted murder

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Shooting survivor Crystal Matheson breathed an emotional sigh of relief in the courtroom of the Towns County Courthouse Monday when a jury returned guilty verdicts against her estranged husband, Jason Matheson, who was on trial for attempting to murder her in January 2021.

Jurors spent a little over an hour deliberating on Monday, Sept. 12, returning around 2 p.m. on the fifth day of the trial with guilty verdicts for the charges of attempted murder, aggravated assault and aggravated stalking.

Following the verdicts, Superior Court Senior Judge Albert B. Collier sentenced Matheson to the maximum penalty of 30 years in prison, commenting how he could not believe "we're not sitting here trying a murder case" based on Crystal miraculously surviving being shot eight times.

In a pre-sentencing statement, Crystal thanked everyone who helped her to realize justice in the case, including the doctors and nurses who saved her life, and those involved in the prosecution, adding that she hoped she could forgive Jason someday for the crimes he had committed.

As described in the trial,

a potential motive for Jason Matheson's actions was a proposed downward spiral he experienced after separating from his wife in July 2020, the summer before the shooting.

At the time, Matheson had developed extreme jealousy based on instances of infidelity from a past marriage, and his distrust culminated in an alleged assault that resulted in criminal charges and a separation from Crystal, who for the next six months repeatedly demonstrated her desire to make the separation permanent up to and including the day before the shooting.

The trial started on Tuesday, Sept. 6, with jury selection.

Opening arguments took place on Wednesday, Sept. 7, and the trial progressed quickly, wrapping up with closing arguments followed by jury deliberations and sentencing.

Witness testimony began Sept. 7 with Crystal Matheson, who survived being shot eight times at her job on Tuesday, Jan. 26, 2021.

Crystal, who lives in Hayesville, North Carolina, described a nightmarish scenario that began when a man in a hoodie walked into her Hiwassee workplace at Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation & Wellness Center about 2 p.m. that Tuesday.

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Towns County Sheriff's Deputies handcuffing Jason Matheson Monday to begin serving his 30-year prison sentence.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Highway 515 project delayed but in progress



By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The start of construction on the multimillion-dollar project to widen and straighten Georgia 515 along an 8.5-mile stretch of highway between Blairsville and Young Harris has been delayed by six to nine months, according to the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Construction for the project was expected to begin later this fall, but when bids came back too high in May, the project was put on hold as engineers worked out how to proceed, GDOT said.

Last month, project leaders submitted a new plan to split construction into three separately budgeted phases to make it more manageable, with the bidding process to begin again in late Spring 2023 on the first phase of the project, which will

be the roughly 1-mile bypass of Downtown Young Harris.

The project has been in the works for more than two decades, with preliminary engineering dating back to 1999; engineering resumed in 2014, and right-of-way acquisitions began in 2017, according to the GDOT project page.

State officials said in 2019 the project would likely go to bid in June 2020 for probable construction beginning in Fall 2020 on a completion timeframe of no more than three years.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the derailing of not just GDOT's plans, but plans globally – for reasons of health, supply chain, inflation, etc. – resulting in bids not being let until May 2022.

The scope of the project spans Young Harris Street in Blairsville to Timberline Drive in Young Harris, with a purpose of straightening and widening the majority of that corridor of Georgia 515 from two and three lanes to four lanes to in-

crease safety and accessibility for commuters.

There will also be a two-lane bypass of Main Street in Roundabout Harris to include a roundabout at each end and two new bridge crossings over Brasstown Creek.

"This is a very important project for Georgia Department of Transportation," said GDOT District One Communications Officer Elizabeth Johnson. "We have spent a considerable amount of time and resources just to get here and will get this widening of 515 accomplished."

"To better understand the process, the original project was put out to bid on May 20, 2022. Upon review of the bids that came in, all were significantly in excess of the estimates determined by GDOT engineers, and the bids were rejected.

"The committee then discussed next steps and determined that the massive project should be divided into three phases. According to the project manager, a request was submitted to the Planning Office

See *Highway 515*, Page 3A

Dailey & Vincent Music Fest to run Sept. 15-17

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is returning this weekend with yet another epic event for area residents as the patriotic Dailey & Vincent's American Made Music Festival heads to Anderson Music Hall Sept. 15-17.

In addition to three amazing days of Country, Bluegrass and Gospel Music, festivalgoers can look forward to a slew of other attractions such as delicious food vendors, refreshing beverages, sweets and desserts, arts & crafts and so much more.

Acts this year include Riders In the Sky, The Singing Contractors, LoneStar, Bradley Walker, Rick Scarff & Kentucky Thunder, Primitive Quartet, Craig Morgan, Dailey & Vincent, of course, and this year's most honored guests, the U.S. Navy Band, aka Country Current.

Having been formed in 1973, The United States Navy Band Country Current



No strangers to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Jamie Dailey and Darrin Vincent will be bringing their popular American Made Music Festival to Anderson Music Hall this Thursday through Saturday.

Photo/Facebook

country as both an outreach and recruiting effort. Musician 1st Class See *Vincent & Dailey*, Page 3A

Georgia Mountain Pregnancy visits Movers & Shakers

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Friday, Sept. 9, the Mountain Movers and Shakers welcomed guest speaker Kathy Davis, Founder and Board Member of Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center located at 136A Hospital Drive in Blairsville.

The Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center is a nonprofit resource that describes itself as a "medical resource center for pregnancy options," according to gmpcmedical.org.

"Our intention is to meet the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of women with an unplanned pregnancy, as well as provide guidance for an informed healthy choice," the website continues, noting ultrasound services and other resources made available via the center.

Throughout her presentation, Davis spoke on con-



Kathy Davis and the Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center focus on providing women experiencing "unplanned pregnancies" with options for a healthy family. Photo by Jeremy Foster

cerns surrounding unplanned pregnancies and several issues surrounding the highly charged topic of abortion.

See *Movers & Shakers*, Page 6A

County remembers 9/11 victims despite weather

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The City of Hiwassee, along with the City of Young Harris and Towns County, conducted a Patriot Day Ceremony on Saturday, Sept. 10, at the Towns County Civic Center, the alternate site due to inclement weather. But the indoor ceremony by no means diminished its import.

Patriot Day is a tribute to and a remembrance of the human tragedy that happened on September 11, 2001.

Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales was master of ceremonies and opened with the statement that children and even teenagers of today weren't yet born when the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, occurred 21 years ago.

"We feel that it is our duty to maintain the remembrance

See *9/11 Remembrance*, Page 1B



Hiwassee resident Shirley Sonnenfeld, who enlisted in the WAVES of the U.S. Naval Reserve during World War II, was honored as a "Hometown Hero" Saturday. She turned 100 Monday. Happy Birthday, and thank you for your service, Shirley!

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Invasive, nonindigenous aquatic weeds threaten lake

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Lake Chatuge is one of the most beautiful lakes in North Georgia and one of the main draws of both visitors and relocated big metropolitan expats. The lake offers fishing, boating, lakeside camping, stunning views, and, for many residents, a stellar shore-side setting for a home.

The coveted lake is responsible for bringing millions of dollars into Towns County via tourism and other industry.

However, two invasive aquatic weeds now threaten shorelines and shallow areas

of the extreme south end of the lake and appear to be spreading exponentially.

Towns County High School Baseball Coach and Social Studies Teacher Shannon Floyd, who has lived in the area since 1970, and who lives near where Fodder Creek flows into Lake Chatuge across from the J. Truman Holmes Bridge/Macedonia Church Bridge, said he first noticed the aquatic weeds in July this year.

"Some of the kids were talking about something tickling their feet when swimming (just before leaving on a vacation in July)," Floyd said. "We left, went to Florida for a week. We

came home, and then we went down to the dock (and we surprised to see the lake weeds had grown to the surface all around the dock).

"We started seeing it pop up everywhere (in my cove), then we started seeing it from the (Macedonia) bridge," Floyd said, adding that in just a couple of months, the aquatic plant has now spread all along the shore in the south end of the lake.

After making multiple inquiries about the weed, Floyd was able to get samples to Western Regional Director Callie Moore of MountainTrue, an organization with a mission to "champion resilient forests,

clean waters, and healthy communities in the Southern Blue Ridge Mountains."

Moore said MountainTrue's Western Regional Program Coordinator Tony Ward first identified the aquatic weed as Parrot's-feather, also known as Brazilian watermilfoil, an invasive nonindigenous aquatic weed native to the Amazon River Basin.

Upon further inspection by David Brewster, who heads up the Tennessee Valley Authority's Aquatic Plant Management Team, it was discovered that there are actually two invasive nonindigenous aquatic weeds

See *Aquatic Weeds*, Page 6A



TCHS Baseball Coach Shannon Floyd pointing out some of the aquatic weed known as Parrot's-feather near a dock in Lake Chatuge.

Photo by Callie Moore

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Lake Levels

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Chatuge	1,922.35
Nottely	1,770.35

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SPORTS

SOFTBALL

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FOOTBALL

Sept. 16 @ Coosa

7:30 PM

Drive Thru Flu Clinic

Sept. 27th

8 AM - 6 PM

See page 2A

Community Shred Day

October 1st

See page 5A

Young Harris Porchfest

Sept. 25

See page 6A

Towns County Celebrates the Great American Experiment with Daughters of the American Revolution



Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw proclaimed U.S. Constitution Week, September 17-23.

Shelli Kelly of Hiawassee attended the signing representing Old Unicoi Trail (OUT) Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution. Commissioner Bradshaw's proclamation calls upon citizens of Towns County to read the Constitution and reaffirm their support for the ideals the Framers held in 1787. The proclamation additionally calls for citizens to vigilantly protect the freedoms guaranteed through this document - the guardian of our liberties that upholds and protects the freedoms central to our American way of life.

In 1776 the unique and improbably American experiment - a political miracle - declared independence from the most powerful nation on earth through the Declaration of Independence which forged our national identity. Then in 1787, the Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia's Independence Hall and hammered out the U.S. Constitution which set forth the framework for the



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Pam Greene

works with schools in Towns, Union, and Fannin Counties to provide pocket constitutions to all 10th grade students. A limited number of pocket copies will also be available through the public libraries."

One of the largest patriotic women's organizations in the world, DAR promotes historic preservation, education and patriotism via commemorative events, scholarships and educational initiatives, service to veterans, meaningful community service and more. For additional information about DAR and its relevant mission, visit www.dar.org. To attend an Old Unicoi Trail Chapter meeting, email oldunicoitrail@gmail.com. T(Sep14,A6)JH

The Daughters of the American Revolution work to promote and protect the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, their importance to American history, and their application to life today. "The framers created a Constitution that translates into law the ideals upon which our nation was built," said Chapter Regent Pam Greene of Hiawassee. "Their vision was so forward thinking that their words still guide us today. No education in American History is complete without a thorough understanding of the impact the Constitution has on the lives of American citizens. Each year, our DAR Chapter

needed over the three phases of construction. Considerable developmental planning by local government and private stakeholders has taken place around the widening and relocation, and while the delay is inconvenient, it should come as a relief to many that GDOT is still treating the project as a priority despite recent budgetary issues. Importantly, the project will be funded using federal and state monies with no local match required, and residents and visitors to the area will benefit from the increased safety of the roadway.

"Crash data reveals that the corridor has experienced higher incidents, rates of crashes, injuries and fatalities in comparing statewide averages for roadways of the same classification," GDOT said in 2019. "This is considered a rural, principal arterial. "So, that says, what can we do to fix it? Is there geometry of the roadway that we need to fix? Is there widening? Is there striping? Is there signage? With this project, we'll be able to go and do a lot of those things when we do new location and widening."

Georgia 515 is part of what's known as "Corridor A" of the Appalachian Development Highway System, or ADHS. "The ADHS was authorized by Congress in 1965 and was designed to generate economic development in the previously isolated Appalachian region," GDOT said previously. "SR 515/US 76 is designated as part of the Governor's Road Improvement Program (GRIP). "The purpose of the GRIP system is to provide transportation infrastructure necessary for economic growth by providing connectivity in rural areas of Georgia. The section of SR 515/US 76 from Young Harris Street in Blairsville to Timberline Drive north of Young Harris is one of two remaining segments of the ADHS Corridor A and the GRIP that is two lanes."

Highway 515...from Page 1A

on Aug. 8, 2022, to split the project into three phases.

"We are anticipating the first phase, which is the truck route bypass, to be put out for bid by late Spring 2023, and the other two phases put out to bid by end of 2023."

The total cost of the project is estimated at about \$162 million, which breaks down into \$40 million for right-of-way acquisition, \$17 million for preliminary engineering, and construction costs of around \$105 million, Johnson said.

After the project was put out for bid this past May, Johnson said the lowest option came in at \$192.5 million, or nearly double the estimated construction costs for the project, and "that is why the bid was rejected."

To undertake the massive project, GDOT has acquired more than 200 parcels of land along the 8.5-mile stretch to be completed, previously estimating the potential displacement of about 30 businesses and 15 residences, and it's likely more than a dozen detours will be

Vincent & Dailey...from Page 1A

Patrick McAvinue is the Unit Public Affairs Manager for Country Current, and he has been playing the fiddle and mandolin since the age of 6, performing both of those instruments for the band.

He has a history of playing with Dailey & Vincent prior to joining the Navy in 2020, and he shared his excitement for coming to perform his love for music while donning literal "fabrics of Americana."

"I feel such a pride, of course, and blessed to be able to continue utilizing my talents to represent the U.S. Navy," McAvinue said. "Representing the U.S. Navy to the public as a 24/7 protector of home and abroad, wearing the Navy Uniform cloth for my country, is a true honor.

"I cannot wait to meet everyone there because we are excited to bring the U.S. Navy

Band to the Fairgrounds."

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason shared her elation for the upcoming event and the prestige that follows with hosting the patriotic ensemble of servicemen and women who safeguard the nation's values and freedoms.

"It is very exciting to have the U.S. Navy Band here with us for two days during the festival," Thomason said. "It is going to be an awesome show for them to be here and enjoy the audience and the audience enjoy them. It will be very patriotic and honorable to have them be a part of the Fairgrounds.

"I am very thankful for everything they do for our country and for having them come here. Anytime we can have something extra patriotic here or anywhere for that

matter is a true blessing," she said.

Tickets for the American Made Music Fest are \$60 for a one-day reserved pass, \$165 for the three-day pass, and \$200 for VIP, with further information and scheduling for the event, including camping info, available at www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Each day of the festival opens at 12:30 p.m., with music shows at 2:30 p.m., 4 p.m., 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 8 p.m.

The Music Fest is sponsored by Springer Mountain Farms, Towns County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Union General Health System, The Ridges Resort On Lake Chatuge, Cattrell Motorsports and United Community Bank.

Melita Easters to speak on Women's Rights

Towns and Union County women - and men - are invited to hear a presentation on protecting women's rights sponsored by the Ninth District Democratic Women's Network. The forum will be held Tuesday, September 20, at 5 PM at the Towns County Civic Center, 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee.

Melita Easters, executive director of Georgia WIN (Win in November) List, will be the guest speaker. She will be introduced by June Krise, Ninth Congressional District Democratic chair. Light refreshments will be served.

During her speech, Ms. Easters will discuss the legislative push behind Georgia's six-week abortion ban - HB 481 - in 2019, changes to Georgia election laws, and what she believes is the flawed rationale behind Georgia's open-carry gun legislation.

As the founding chair of Georgia WIN List, Ms. Easters has served as executive director since 2015. WIN List is a 22-year-old political action committee (PAC) dedicated to electing Democratic women to statewide office and the Georgia General Assembly who are committed to reproductive freedom and economic, educational, and legal



Melita Easters

equality for all women.

Georgia WIN List has supported the election of more than 75 Democratic women, 46 of whom currently serve. Georgia currently ranks 19th in the nation for the percentage of women in its General Assembly and leads the nation for the percentage of Black women legislators.

Ms. Easters is a strategic thinker, political strategist and author/playwright with deep connections to Atlanta's civic, business, and political community. She combines fundraising, leadership, communications, event planning and organizational skills with her background as a former journalist and television producer. She has worked to raise millions for progressive causes and candidates and was the pioneer-

ing visionary behind Atlanta's two largest and most financially successful events for women: the Women's Foundation Numbers Luncheon and the WYCA's Salute to Women.

A University of Georgia graduate, during her professional career Ms. Easters served as state news editor of The Tifton Gazette and a political reporter for The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, winning several awards for her work. For seven years, she was a producer of "The Lawmakers" on Georgia Public Television and later served as press secretary for Roy Barnes during his first bid for governor. She is also a panelist on the highly rated Sunday-morning television program "The Georgia Gang" which airs on Fox 5.

She served in leadership roles on numerous non-profit boards, including the Atlanta Women's Foundation, the Atlanta International School, The Georgia Shakespeare Festival and as board chair for UGA's independent student newspaper, The Red & Black. She received the National Council of Jewish Women's 2021 Hannah G. Solomon Award for public service and was inducted into UGA's Grady School of Journalism Fellowship in 2018. NT(Sep14,F2)JH



VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

VFW Bingo

The VFW Post 7807 in Hiawassee is starting bingo every Saturday night. Doors open at 5:30 PM, games start at 6:30 PM. Highway 288 Sunnyside Road, Hiawassee, GA. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us.

VFW Fish Fry

Due to the rising cost of fish and all other goods that we have at the fish fry, we are sad to say we are having to raise our prices to \$12 and \$15, all you can eat. The nights of the fish fry is still the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month. Remember, no tax and no tip. We hope to see you there! NT(Sep14,A1)JH

Veterans Thrift Store Volunteers

Veterans Thrift Store, a product of Club 66, 2641 Hwy. 66, Young Harris, GA is open from 10 AM to 4 PM, Wednesday thru Saturday, helping local veterans in our community. We are looking for volunteers to help with the thrift store.

We are accepting gently used items: furniture, appliances, toys, clothes, etc. For details call 706-379-3774.

Matheson Trial...from Page 1A

As the front office manager, Crystal was not expecting any patients, since the 2 p.m. appointment had already arrived and was in the process of receiving physical therapy.

The dire nature of the situation became clear, however, when the man in the lobby turned toward the receptionist window and threw back his hood; Crystal said there was no doubt in her mind that the man she saw standing mere feet away was her estranged husband, Jason Matheson, who was legally barred from being near her due to a Domestic Violence Protective Order.

She saw him lift a handgun in the same moments the hood came back, and then she heard a gunshot as the glass window shattered and a bullet hit her in the stomach, she said during emotional testimony.

After getting shot a second time, Crystal said she pushed back from her desk to flee, and that Jason advanced to continue shooting, striking her what turned out to be eight times over her stomach, back, arms and legs, and she collapsed on the floor a short distance from her desk.

Coworkers began to administer life-saving aid after the shooter left the building. No one else saw the man directly, though one of Crystal's coworkers who was in the office room with her did see the gun protruding a short distance into the shattered window during the shooting.

A patient in the building went to lock the front door and witnessed a man with Jason's hair color entering and pulling away in a truck that generally matched the description of the defendant's vehicle, and another witness described a similar truck driving erratically in the parking lot earlier in the day.

While awaiting an ambulance for subsequent life flight, Crystal told her coworkers and local law enforcement the shooter was her husband, against whom she had an active protective order that had been extended multiple times, including the day before the shooting.

Crystal had received the protective order following an incident from July 11, 2020, that ended in Jason allegedly strangling her after a weekend spent arguing over his suspicions that she was being unfaithful in the marriage.

The couple were married in December 2017, and his suspicions, which she said were unfounded, had been building with increasing intensity for at least six months prior to the strangulation that was forceful enough for her to seek medical treatment for coughing up blood.

Jason was charged with aggravated assault in that July 2020 incident, and trial testimony last week alluded to an alleged request by his attorney asking Crystal's attorney at a Jan. 25, 2021, civil hearing to seek to drop the felony charge against him, which Crystal declined to do.

The request was reported to have happened the day before the shooting, and prosecutors argued this was the final straw in Jason's downward spiral that led him to commit his crimes.



Crystal Matheson explaining to the jury the layout of the Chatuge Rehab Center lobby from which the shooting took place, pictured here with Enotah Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorney Buster Landreau. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

All told, the "overwhelming evidence" presented by Enotah Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorneys Buster Landreau and Kelly Holloway came in the form of 100 pieces of evidence and testimony by 28 witnesses, including special agents with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

For the defense's part, no witnesses were called.

As outlined by the state, witness testimony from an extensive investigation painted a portrait of a man who went out of his way to procure the means to kill Crystal, having traded his guitar for a loaded 9 mm handgun just two weeks before the premeditated crime.

And while no handgun was recovered, the state presented evidence that indicated Jason had not only owned a handgun and the kinds of ammunition used in the shooting — unspent cartridges were found in his vehicle and room and a handgun cleaning brush was recovered from his residence — but that he had discharged a firearm near the time of the shooting.

The prosecution argued that Jason lied during the initial investigation when stating he had never owned a pistol and had not fired a gun in over a year, as a test for gunpowder residue on his hands following his arrest came back positive.

Additionally, a ballistics expert testified that the bullet casings from the scene were consistent with having been fired from either of two types of 9 mm handgun, one of which matched the firearm Jason reportedly received in a property trade with a coworker using his guitar.

The prosecution also pointed out that Matheson lied to investigators about why he hadn't gone to work the day of the shooting, noting that his alibi — that he'd spent the day drinking beer and was at his dad's house at the time of the shooting — could not be corroborated by his father on the witness stand.

Still more testimony highlighted troubling statements attributed to Jason Matheson, such as him telling Crystal the pair "would just kill each other" if their marriage did not work out, and commenting while watching a movie with her that the stomach is where a gunman should aim so their target bleeds out; Crystal was shot three times in the stomach.

Matheson previously pleaded not guilty to the charges against him related to the Jan. 26, 2021, shooting.

During the trial, Public Defender John Cloy said that, though "a lot of the stuff the prosecution told you is flat out true," he was concerned over "how the government operates," with an eye toward making sure "the Constitution is followed."

Cloy said he was not alleging the government had done anything wrong in its investigation, but he intimated that the state was biased against his defendant, and that initial information identifying Matheson as the shooter may be "incorrect," which would prevent the state from making a solid case.

In essence, Cloy attempted to introduce reasonable doubt regarding the reliability of key witness testimony, the identity of the shooter and subsequent "circumstantial evidence" used against him, and the ignoring of potentially exculpatory evidence because, in his mind, GBI agents had immediately singled out the only suspect they would be investigating after being told who the shooter was, and therefore made the evidence fit the suspect.

The public defender also noted multiple instances of what he believed amounted to procedural failures — not fingerprinting unspent cartridges, for example — in an investigation he said was biased from the outset against Jason Matheson because he was the estranged husband.

Ultimately, he asked jurors to "hold onto the presumption of innocence" as they deliberated on whether they had reasonable doubt about the case, though the jury found the state's case compelling and therefore reached a guilty verdict against Matheson on Monday.

The physical, psychological and emotional impacts on Crystal Matheson from that day may be impossible to quantify. She spent about a month in the hospital, then close to seven months in physical therapy, and she still has bullet fragments in her body doctors decided not to remove.

Further, while she has gotten better physically, she still suffers from a limp and other pain that may never go away, and the trauma from the shooting — Crystal testified that she truly believed she was going to die — will likely last a lifetime.

Her divorce from Jason Matheson, pending a yearlong separation required in North Carolina, should be finalized this week.

Movers & Shakers...from Page 1A

Georgia now has a Heartbeat Law in effect," Davis said. "And although there are always more things to consider and assess in each individual situation, women deserve choices."

Continuing, she said, "We want people to know about us and know that they have other choices, and they have people that are going to stand with them, whether it is adoption or other means."

"It seems there is an intense battle going on right now where certain things are being normalized that should be horrifying, because it is real, and it is true."

"We have found through

studies that show the majority of women — and men, too — who have had or experienced going through an abortion in her past suffer a very emotional and painful burden, often leading to depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicidal ideations.

"It is mind-boggling to me that there are some people out there who decide to terminate a life simply out of a convenience factor when there are thousands of people who would love to raise that baby."

Davis closed by saying, "We would like to encourage everyone to help us pray for the hearts of women and men in unplanned pregnancy and healing

for post-abortive women."

Services offered through the GMPC include free pregnancy testing, limited sonograms, STI testing, pre-abortion counseling, post-abortion support group, parenting and healthy relationship classes, outlets for adoption options and more.

Volunteering is graciously welcomed through means such as: board positions, fundraisers, housekeeping, IT assistance, nurses, patient advocates, sonographers and more.

Visit www.gmpcmedical.org, email gmpc@blairsville.com, or call the office at 706-745-0051 for more information and support.

Aquatic Weeds...from Page 1A

growing in Lake Chatuge, one of which is, in fact, Parrot's-feather.

The other invasive nonindigenous aquatic weed is Brazilian elodea, also known as Brazilian waterweed, or Anacharis.

"There is no health risk associated with these (weeds)," Moore said.

However, they can foul a boat prop or jet ski intake, clog pipes, prevent people from moving through the water, camouflage harmful flotsam, impact the aquatic ecosystem, and spoil lake views, which impact lakefront property values.

As to how the plants ended up spreading in Lake Chatuge, Moore and Floyd said it's likely that these aquatic weeds originally came from people dumping live home-aquarium plants.

Moore said the seasonal lake drawdown, which is normally about 10 feet below summer level and is done yearly in anticipation of heavy rainfall to stem flooding downstream, will expose a lot of the shallows where much of the aquatic weeds grow.

"The good news is that Brazilian elodea is particularly susceptible to both the drawdown and winter temperatures," Moore said. "We've had patches of it in the lake before, and it is typically gone the following season."

"The bad news is that while (TVA) hopes that the



Recreational lake users should be mindful not to disturb the aquatic weeds in various locations near the shoreline, as chopped up bits of the stuff can take root elsewhere and contribute to the spread. Photo by Mark Smith

drawdown and winter temps will also knock out the Parrot's-feather, that possibility is more tentative."

And if the Parrot's-feather does come back and spread next season, Moore continued, TVA will only chemically treat affected areas around public access points, of which there are none at this time.

"It would be up to individual homeowners to deal with (aquatic weeds) around their own docks," Moore said, adding that "TVA plans to come back for a few days next year to do a more thorough survey of

the whole Chatuge reservoir for aquatic plants."

Both Floyd and Moore emphasized that the most important thing they want to convey to boaters right now is to be mindful of the aquatic weed colonies to avoid further spread.

Water enthusiasts are heavily advised not to run boats, jet skis, or any other watercraft through patches of the weeds, because the fragments and pieces of it, especially the Parrot's-feather, will get picked up by the current, which will allow it to take root and spread elsewhere in the lake.

9/11 Remembrance...from Page 1A

of that tragedy at all times," the mayor opined. "There's no reason that we should allow that to happen again. So, we will do this every year.

"Twenty-one years ago, we lost 2,997 lives; 343 were firefighters trying to go in there and save lives. It involved 78 countries. So, we will continue to do this tribute to make sure that we never forget.

"The City of Hiwassee, the City of Young Harris, and Towns County will never forget, and we will preserve the legacy of those that we lost."

Members of the North Georgia Honor Guard conducted the Presentation of Colors, local resident Bill Renaldo sang the National Anthem, and Pastor Steve Awtrety of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church gave the invocation, after which Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby spoke.

"No matter where you were that day in 2001, I think everybody here is going to always remember that moment," Gibby said. "If you're old enough, you remember where you were. I think today is about that. Today is about remembering.

"(Sept. 11) changed our lives in so many ways. The way we travel; do you remember how we used to travel? We thought we were safe. That has changed, forever probably. How we communicate with one another. How we trust. Who we trust. A lot of that changed, shattered, in those moments."

Gibby said the COVID-19 pandemic of the last couple of years has brought back a lot of those feelings of fear and mistrust, but that the occasion at hand was about remembering and coming together, she said, and not allowing circumstances to divide the people.

Essentially, Patriot Day is about humanity, community and what people can do for each other, she said, and it's about remembering those who serve in the pursuit of keeping America safe and thanking them for it.

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland was asked to speak about the meaning of 9/11.

"Well, it's real simple," Copeland said. "We have hurt, grief, massive honor. We learned respect again. Courage. Massive pride ... and love. So, we look back 21 years ago. Don't forget about the real patriots on Flight 77. And remember the Pentagon; we lost 179 people there.

"Can it happen again, with our porous borders? How many have been caught? How many have gotten through? Could it



Retired U.S. Army Col. Walt Shumway delivered moving remarks on Saturday about the importance of remembering 9/11.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

happen again? Could there be a cyberattack? Could there be a solar flare or an EMP?"

Copeland went on to say, as Towns County Fire Chief, speaking for all first responders, that in any dire emergency, they would risk life and limb to save people, as those first responders who gave their lives on Sept. 11, 2001, did.

"Because that's what we do," said Copeland. "We're always ready."

Retired U.S. Army Col. Walt Shumway then spoke about what remembering means.

"We stand here today free, and we breathe this beautiful mountain air because of the people we honor today," Shumway said. "Those who perished in 9/11, those who fought the terrorists on the ground and in the air, the first responders that were there, and our men and women in uniform who have continued the fight against terrorism for over 20 years.

"Unfortunately, the threat remains. Threat assessments (indicate) that the threat will continue overseas, and that many (terrorists) have infiltrated our country. And they've done this to stay and await orders to destroy, to destroy our very lives if necessary.

"There were many acts of heroism that day," Shumway said, referring to those people on Flight 77 who thwarted the terrorists' attempt to crash their plane into yet another building, possibly the White House or the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., by rushing the terrorists in the cockpit, knowing they were going to be killed.

Shumway mentioned the little-known heroic acts of U.S. Coast Guard Lt. Michael Day,

who was stationed on Staten Island at the time, who put together an armada of about 200 private boats of all types, led them to Lower Manhattan, and evacuated over half a million people.

He also mentioned the heroics of the first responders, but he included the various hospital emergency room folks who saved a great number of lives that day.

"We've got to support (our first responders). They are our first defenders," Shumway said. "They stand between us and the terrorists."

"Taps" was played by the North Georgia Honor Guard bugler following Shumway's monolog.

Ordiales introduced Shirley Sonnenfeld, a U.S. Navy veteran who turned 100 years old on Monday, Sept. 12, who is one of this year's 10 Hiwassee Hometown Heroes honored for their service.

In closing, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said, "This is a day that the United States should never, ever erase from history. And we should learn from our mistakes ... from things that have happened in the past. We all know that freedom is not free."

The Appalachian St. Andrew's Pipes and Drums of Blairsville played American patriotic songs throughout the ceremony.

The takeaway from Patriot Day is to honor and remember those who perished on Sept. 11, 2001, remember the facts of what occurred and why, and keep vigilant, because, as Shumway said, the threat still exists. And as Bradshaw said, freedom is not free.