

# Towns County Herald

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## TCHS to host Homecoming festivities this week

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Homecoming is always a special time of year when alumni return to their alma mater to watch the big game and witness the passing of the proverbial torch, or in this case, the crown and title of homecoming king and queen.

And this year, Towns County High will wrap up a week's worth of celebrations with the big Homecoming Football Game on Friday, Sept. 17, as the Indians take on Lakeview Academy at 7:30 p.m. in Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

High School Principal Roy Perren began his second stint as the high school principal three years ago, and with this return, he brought back the enjoyment of the students and community spectators alike with the annual Homecoming Parade in Downtown Hiawassee.

Perren said the parade is not only special for the students but also for the community to get more involved with Homecoming.

Towns is a small county, with many of its residents having attended Towns County High School during their years, and Perren said what he loves most about homecoming is when those students who have graduated and moved on return.

The overarching theme for both the parade and week of celebratory festivities is "Hippie Homecoming."

Students, teachers and parents have been working on floats for the past few weeks, and Wednesday, Sept. 15, will be the last day for students to decorate them to make the parade on Thursday, Sept. 16, at 6 p.m.

This year's "Hippie Homecoming" Parade will start at the Old Rec Gym and head

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(L-R) Back Row: Sophomores Court Zack Franklin, Kyle Oakes, Dade Joyner, Jesse Allen, True Youngblood and Collin Crowder. Front Row: Sophomore Princess Laura Mauldin, Senior Girls Court Bria Chastain, Eva Donaldson, Ashlyn Atrey, Rylie Livingston, Kayla Peacock and Macy Brinson; Junior Princess Josie King; and Freshman Princess MaKaylee Bradley. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Sheriff's Office receives 2021 'Agency of the Year Award'

Henderson earns 'Sheriff of the Year'

News Special  
Towns County Herald

Over 300 people were on hand for the 2021 Governor's Office of Highway Safety Quad Network Banquet when the Towns County Sheriff's Office received the 2021 "Agency of the Year Award" in McCaysville on Sept. 9.

The Governor's Office of Highway Safety bestowed the honor in recognition of the Towns County department's initiatives in drug intervention, crime and substance suppression, community involvement and proactive approaches.

Furthermore, the agency was recognized as having ex-

ceeded a level of excellence for the citizens of Towns County and for being an invaluable asset to the community and safety on the roadways.

Also that evening, Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson won the "Sheriff of the Year Award," presented for his outstanding and exemplary performance in the discharge of his

See TCSO Awards, Page 8A



The Towns County Sheriff's Office personnel along with Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw in the Sept. 9 Georgia GOHS banquet. Photo/Facebook

## YHC President Van Horn withdraws from mayor's race

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Young Harris College President Dr. Drew Van Horn has withdrawn his candidacy for the office of mayor of the City of Young Harris.

He entered a withdrawal affidavit on Wednesday, Sept. 8, to officially remove himself for consideration in the upcoming Nov. 2, 2021, Municipal Election, leaving Incumbent Mayor Andrea Gibby as the sole candidate in the race.

Last month, Councilmen Donald Keys and Dr. John Kelley qualified unopposed for re-election to their posts. Resulting from Van Horn's withdrawal and in accordance with state law, the city is canceling the Nov. 2 election, as there are no contested elections this



Dr. Drew Van Horn  
YHC President

year.

"The above unopposed candidates shall be deemed to have voted for himself/herself," per the election cancellation notice.

As previously reported, both Van Horn and Gibby qualified for mayor in August to set up a head-to-head in November. At the time, Van Horn said a desire for improved relations between the college and the city was one of the several reasons he had chosen to run for elective office.

Young Harris City Hall and the college have disagreed multiple times in recent years regarding utility rates that Van Horn believes are unfavorable to the college, and this disagreement informed at least part of why the college president decided to seek the mayor's seat.

"The water and sewer rate disagreement demonstrated that dialogue and discussion of alternative solutions were

See Mayor's Race, Page 2A

## Towns County residents vow to 'Never Forget' on 9/11

Towns County Firefighters commemorated their fallen brethren from Sept. 11, 2001, by walking in full turnout gear from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to the Hiawassee Town Square for Saturday's remembrance.



Towns County Firefighters commemorated their fallen brethren from Sept. 11, 2001, by walking in full turnout gear from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to the Hiawassee Town Square for Saturday's remembrance. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Patriotic residents of Towns and other nearby counties gathered at the Hiawassee Town Square on Saturday, Sept. 11, to commemorate the

2,977 innocent people and first responders who were murdered in the 9/11 terrorist attacks that changed the world.

Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales welcomed attendees as the Master of Ceremonies for the occasion, which she organized in concert with

the City of Young Harris and Towns County Government.

Twenty years have passed since the attacks of that morning in 2001, with the 20-year Global War on Terrorism having finally come to an end, at least in Afghanistan.

See Never Forget, Page 8A

## Dr. Church talks COVID hospitalizations, vaccination

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Dr. Samuel "Le" Church of Synergy Health in Hiawassee has admitting privileges at Union General Hospital System, Northeast Georgia Medical, and elsewhere, and he has been observing many more sick patients and hospitalizations currently than in any previous COVID-19 surge.

"Locally, we are seeing multiple cases per day, and sometimes per hour, in our parking lot," Dr. Church said. "And the hospitals are basically full here."

"Most of those hospitalized related to COVID are unvaccinated folks, but there are a few who have been vaccinated that are in the hospital as well. We're also seeing hospital follow-ups of

some people who were extra sick.

"On top of all those things, we have the other illnesses that we normally see anyway, so it's been unexpected and quite a burden on the list of things to care for."

Conducting some rural training out of Dr. Church's office is Dr. Macy Tabb, a resident physician at Northeast Georgia Health System. What she has been seeing in the region's largest hospital is dismaying, to say the least.

"Things at Northeast Georgia Medical Center, in terms of COVID, I believe we're at max capacity," Dr. Tabb said. "At this point, patients are sharing rooms or in hallways. It's overfull, and we're all staff on (deck)."

"For example, I'm supposed to be with Dr. Church for a whole month. But I'm a



Dr. Samuel "Le" Church

resident that can be utilized, so I'll be pulled to work in the hospital with COVID patients starting (this) week, and that is across the board for residences and extra staff everywhere.

See Dr. Church, Page 5A

## Towns County Jail faces minor COVID outbreak

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Four inmates and one employee of the Towns County Jail have tested positive for COVID-19 to become the first confirmed cases at the jail since a single inmate tested positive in April 2020, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Health care professionals at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer

a working definition of "outbreak" as being "two or more contacts identified as having active COVID-19."

The first inmate in the apparent outbreak developed symptoms before testing positive on Sept. 3. This inmate was thought to be an isolated case until three other inmates and a detention officer came down with symptoms and tested positive on Sept. 9.

As of Friday, all four

positive-testing inmates and the jail employee were quarantined with symptoms consistent with head colds. By press time, no fevers were being reported, oxygen levels were normal, and no one required hospitalization, TCSO Detention Maj. James Baldwin said.

It remains unclear how COVID entered the jail, as the first inmate had been incarcerated since April 2021, and at this point, it can only be assumed

that the other three inmates and jailer caught the infection from the initial case.

The same COVID mitigations have been in place for the last year and a half, including stepped up sanitation, no community visitations, automatic 10-day quarantines for new inmates, diligent monitoring for symptoms and more.

"We've got a nurse on staff, and these inmates are being treated for their illness,"

TCSO Chief Deputy Gene Moss said.

All four affected inmates were unvaccinated, and the remaining of 41 total inmates received the opportunity last week to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Three inmates took the jail up on the offer, which had been made previously with similar low levels of uptake.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office  
See COVID Outbreak, Page 8A



2 Sections 16 Pages

Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,680.92
Chatuge	1,922.79
Nottely	1,770.57

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**SPORTS**

FOOTBALL  
9/17 vs. Lakeview 7:30 PM

SOFTBALL  
9/18 vs. Commerce 5 PM  
9/18 @ Lincoln Co. NOON

Board of  
Education  
Millage Rate  
Notice

See page 3A

Hamilton  
Gardens Final  
Lecture  
Sept. 17

See page 7A

EMC Annual  
Meeting  
Sept. 23

See page 1B

## Happy Birthday!



Yes, it's that time of year again. Look who's having another birthday - and we hope it's a really fantastic one! TSep15.F1)SH

## AARP Driver Safety Courses cancelled

AARP has made the difficult decision to extend our cancellation of all in-person courses until January 1, 2022, as we continue our precautions against COVID-19 and the emerging variants.

In the meantime, participants who may not be able to renew their car insurance discount are urged to enroll in the Smart Driver online course. AARP will continue to offer a special 25% off discount through the end of the year.

Go to the website: [www.aarpdriversafety.org](http://www.aarpdriversafety.org). Promo code for 25% off discount: **DRIVINGSKILLS**

If you have any questions, please contact AARP Volunteer John Daniel at 706-400-9957.

We apologize for the inconvenience this may cause, but please know this decision was not taken lightly. Thank you for your continued understanding and flexibility.

We are thankful for your continued support and look forward to resuming in-person events in 2022.

NT(Sep15.Z4)CA

## VFW Fish Fry

Another new season has begun for us at VFW Post 7807 here in Hiawassee, we hope you will come and enjoy our Fish Fry. We are open from 4:30 to 7 p.m. every 2nd and 4th Friday of the month. Remember it's all you can eat for just \$10 and no tax no tip plus it's the best fish in town!

TSep15.F1)SH

## Pet Celebration September 18

Saturday, September 18, 2021 on the Historic Hayesville Square, there is an all day party entitled Celebration of All Animals Great and Small. The festivities start at 8:30 a.m. with a reduced cost vaccine clinic and just keep going with one fun and informative event after another until afternoon.

A number of regional rescue groups will be attending, some with small ones for adoption. This will be a full day of entertainment with an educational focus celebrating the many joys and gifts provided by animals and the human/pet bond. Everyone is cordially invited, and please bring your pets. See you there!

TSep15.F3)SH

## Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff's Office.

### ARREST REPORT

*Towns County Jail Sheriff Ken Henderson*

- 9/10/21 Pamala Dawn Smith, age 67  
Serve 180 days
- 9/7/21 Gregory Shawn Bethea, age 57  
Hit and run
- 9/7/21 Jimmy Owen Goodwin, age 63  
Serve 10 days
- 9/7/21 Christopher Curtis Johnson, age 33  
Drivers to exercise due care, Driving while license suspended or revoked

### TC Fire Department

RESPONSE REPORT

From: Fire Chief Harold Copeland



- 8/27/21 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3)  
Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS (2)  
Excessive heat, scorch burns with no ignition  
Fire Inspection/Pre-plan
- 8/28/21 Dispatched and cancelled en route  
Medical assist, assist EMS crew (5)  
Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS (3)
- 8/29/21 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (7)  
Dispatched and cancelled en route (2)
- 8/30/21 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (7)  
Assist police or other governmental agency  
Motor vehicle accident with injuries
- 8/31/21 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3)  
Assist police or other governmental agency (2)  
Gas leak (natural gas or LPG)  
Dispatched and cancelled en route (2)
- 9/1/21 Motor vehicle accident with injuries (2)  
Medical assist, assist EMS crew (7)  
Dispatched and cancelled en route
- 9/2/21 Unintentional transmission of alarm, other  
Medical assist, assist EMS crew (6)  
Motor vehicle accident with injuries  
Dispatched and cancelled en route
- 9/3/21 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (5)  
Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS  
Motor vehicle accident with injuries  
Dispatched and cancelled en route

TSep15.H1)SH

## Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month:		
School Board	HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
First Tuesday of each month:		
Hiaw. City Council	City Hall	6 pm
Young Harris City Council	YH City Hall	7 pm
Second Tuesday of each month:		
Conventions & Visitors Board	Civic Center	8 am
Second Wednesday every other month:		
Board of Elections	Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month:		
Planning Commission	Civic Center	6 pm
Water Board	Water Office	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month:		
Commissioner's Mtg.	Courthouse	5:30 pm

## Misty Mountain Quilters Guild September Meeting: "All About Feet"

By Kathleen Traylor

The Misty Mountain Quilters Guild's September meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, September 28, at the First Methodist Church of Union County, on Highway 515 in Blairsville. Social time begins at 12:30 PM, with the business meeting commencing at 1 PM. The guest speaker this month will be Jennie Priven, who was a Bernina ambassador, and has vast knowledge of all aspects of sewing and quilting. She is going to talk about the feet you can use (for any brand of machine) to enhance your quilting and sew out embellishments on them. She is bringing many different feet for you to look at up close, as well as explain what each foot can do.

Our previously scheduled speaker, Vickie Clontz,

is unable to be here and her workshop will be rescheduled for a later date.

The mission of the Misty Mountain Quilters Guild is to educate, share, promote and keep alive the art and traditions of quilt making here in North Georgia and Western North Carolina, and new members are always welcome! We have a variety of outreach programs, including Quilts of Valor, that makes quilts for military members and veterans; Heart 2 Heart, that creates quilts and other items for local nursing home residents; and Hugs and Kisses, that makes small quilts for children in need. For more information, please visit the Guild website at <https://www.mistymountainquiltguild.org/> or email [mmqginfo@gmail.com](mailto:mmqginfo@gmail.com).

NT(Sep15.Z8)CA

## Mayor's Race...from Page 1A

not welcome," Van Horn said in the Aug. 25, 2021, edition of the newspaper. "In leading a municipality, especially one the size of the City of Young Harris, dialogue has to occur more than at committee meetings and community hearings.

"The city leadership must initiate dialogue, and in some cases, require more investigation and conversation. With that said, there are many reasons that I have chosen to seek to be mayor of Young Harris."

After qualifying, Van Horn found himself in an impromptu meeting with Shirley Miller, who sits on the city's Ethics Committee, and City Councilman Dr. John Kelley.

Conversationally, the three agreed to approach the Young Harris College Board of Trustees to accomplish two goals: 1) explain the ins and outs of the city's water and sewer rate structures, and 2) establish a liaison position between the college and city to promote ongoing dialogue.

This meeting subsequently occurred and was successful, putting at ease some of Van Horn's concerns that prompted him to qualify in the first place.

"A major reason for my running for Mayor of Young Harris was the perceived notion that the City leadership was not seeking the College's voice on decisions directly impacting the college," Van Horn said Friday. "This perception was fueled by the strained relationship be-

tween the College and the City before my arrival as President.

"Since qualifying as a candidate for Mayor of Young Harris, meaningful conversations between the College's Board of Trustees and City officials have occurred. These conversations have fostered greater understanding between the two groups and a renewed commitment to communication and trust.

"Believing that the College and City can work together to better our city and region, I decided to withdraw my candidacy for the Mayor of Young Harris."

Attending the meeting to discuss the abovementioned goals were four YHC Trustees, Van Horn, Councilmen Kelley and Steve Clark, City Attorney Marvin Harkins, Shirley Miller and others, and Dr. Kelley described the encounter as "a very productive, informative, valuable meeting."

"As a result of that gathering, which lasted about an hour and a half, I personally feel that we now have the foundation that we need in order to build trust and cooperation rather than distrust and disunity," Kelley said. "Everyone in attendance came out feeling much better and more confident about our future relationship as we go forward."

Added Kelley, "On our end, we endeavor to do a better job of communication with them regarding any changes in utility rates. In return, they agree that they need to become

more involved in the monthly meetings of the City Council."

Additionally, Kelley said that, down the road, "if events occur that allow us to modify/reduce rates in the future, we'll do so, because our goal and our purpose in our charter as a municipality is that we're not a profit maker, we're a service delivery organization.

"Our goal is to stay in business and deliver a good product for the least cost possible. And the two products we sell are the water and sewer service, (for which Young Harris College is the city's largest customer)."

Concerning Van Horn's decision to withdraw, Kelley said he thought it "a wise choice, because I, too, love Young Harris College and feel that it needs a full-time president working on behalf of the college."

Now that she no longer has opposition, Incumbent Mayor Andrea Gibby is set to be sworn in for yet another term as mayor, a post in which she has served since first being elected in 2008.

When reached for comment on the situation, Gibby said that being mayor "demands commitment and passion."

"To be effective, it requires trust between the mayor, staff, council and the community," Gibby said. "I am continually thankful to the City Council for working together and with me. The community is the winner. As mayor, I will continue working toward our community goals for building our beloved Enchanted Valley into something for everyone."

# Local Health Departments to offer drive-thru flu vaccines



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

District 2 Public Health wants to make getting a flu vaccine easier for county residents by providing fast and easy flu shots while they remain seated in their cars. Every year since 2007, the district has provided an opportunity to avoid the flu and drive thru for a flu vaccine, and the Union County Health Department is offering its drive-thru flu clinic on Sept. 28.

Each county will either host a drive-thru flu clinic on-site at their respective health department or they will use an off-site drive-thru location to provide flu shots to the public. Individuals who would like to receive their flu shot at the drive-

thru must be 18 and older, must remain in their vehicles, and are asked to wear a mask.

This year, the quadrivalent vaccine (four-in-one) will serve as the regular flu vaccine, and will protect against four different strains of flu, both A and B strains of the influenza viruses. The high-dose vaccine, which is also a quadrivalent vaccine, will be available for persons 65 and older.

The flu vaccine is no-cost to anyone who has Medicare, Medicaid and most commercial insurances.

If an individual chooses to pay out of pocket, the cost is \$30 for the regular flu vaccine and \$66 for the high-dose.

While the drive-thru clinics offer a convenient way for the community to get their flu shot, it serves another purpose for public health as well. The drive-thru flu clinics allow the emergency preparedness team and the county health department a chance to exer-

cise their emergency drive-thru plans to dispense a lot of medication in a short amount of time during a public health crisis, known as a point of distribution (P.O.D.).

“Each year, we aim to improve our response in being able to reach the people in our community quickly, and serving those who are unable to leave their vehicles,” explained Mark Palen, District 2 Director of Emergency Preparedness.

Getting vaccinated against the flu is the best thing you can do to protect yourself and others from illness. The fastest and easiest way to avoid the flu is to drive-thru your local health department and get your flu shot.

To learn more about how to protect yourself against the flu visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.

For additional details about the drive-thru flu shot clinic in your area, contact your county health department.

## Homecoming...from Page 1A

east through Downtown Hiawassee on Main Street to end at Towns County Schools.

Returning after cancellation last year due to COVID-19 will be the annual Homecoming Bonfire, to be held in front of the High School with concessions, games and other activities for students and members of the community.

The annual Homecoming Bonfire has been a tradition for many, many years, and Perren said both he and the students are excited to be bringing back the event.

On Friday, Sept. 17, the high school will gather on the football field after school for the annual Homecoming Pep Rally, where the 2021 Homecoming King will be crowned.

Last year's Homecoming King was Kolby Moss, a student athlete who is now playing basketball and pursuing an outdoor leadership degree at Young Harris College. He is expected to return and crown this year's 2021 Homecoming King.

Alongside the senior girls, the Homecoming Court will feature one girl each from the freshmen, sophomore and junior classes. Adding underclassmen to Homecoming allows for the whole school to participate, and not just the

seniors, Perren said.

The girls will take part in a time-honored tradition Friday wherein the Homecoming Court is treated to a special afternoon before taking the field at halftime of the football game, at which point one of them will be crowned 2021 Homecoming Queen in a packed stadium.

2020 Homecoming Queen Vanessa Floyd is expected to return from Athens, where she attends college at the University of Georgia, to pass down her crown to this year's Homecoming Queen after the big, anticipated announcement.

The 2021 Senior Girls Homecoming Court includes Macy Brinson, Bria Chastain, Ashlyn Awtrey, Kayla Peacock, Rylie Livingston and Eva Donaldson.

Joining the six senior girls this year are freshman Makaylee Bradley, sophomore Laura Mauldin and junior Jozie King.

The 2021 Senior Boys Homecoming Court consists of Collin Crowder, Kyle Oakes, True Youngblood, Dade Joyner, Jesse Allen and Zack Franklin.

Like most years at Towns County High, the Homecoming Court is filled with student

athletes who not only excel on the field but in the classroom also.

They are tremendous kids who are more than just great students, Perren said, adding that several of them are involved with multiple activities at the school and volunteer in the community, too, all while maintaining their grades.

Students will participate in other fun and competitive activities this week, including games geared toward promoting school spirit and friendly competition between the classes.

From the freshmen class to the senior class, every high school student is encouraged to dress up to match their class with a different theme each day of the week, Perren said, as Homecoming Week is really for the entire student body.

It's fun to see each grade level not only take pride in its class but try to compete and outdo the other classes, Perren said. Friday, of course, will be Spirit Day, and each of the separate student classes will wear a specific color in the hopes of out-spiriting their fellow classes.

Following the Friday Pep Rally, the Boys in Blue will get ready and suit up for taking the field in their Home Opener as they look to defeat the Lakeview Academy Lions to improve to a 3-1 record on the year.

## Reece Heritage Farm presents The Wilderness Pickers



The Wilderness Pickers

Reece Heritage Farm presents The Wilderness Pickers! Two hours of original & cover songs. with a nine-member band! They will be performing Saturday, September 18th 2021 from 1 until 3 p.m. Bring your lawn chairs and enjoy music! Free! Donation's welcome!

Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer, and his books are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him & his family with exhibits, farm animals, local books, and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park. Open Wednesday through Saturday 10 until 4, Free admission. FB: Reece Heritage Farm, [www.reecefarm.org](http://www.reecefarm.org) [bhrrfarm@uniongov.com](mailto:bhrrfarm@uniongov.com); 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville GA; 706-745-2034. NT(Sep15Z6)CA

## Booster vaccines offered starting September 20

The Towns County Health Department is offering COVID Booster Vaccines each Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 1-4:30 p.m., beginning September 20th, at the Towns Co. Recreation Center located at 150 Foster Park. T(Sep15-Oct27F2)SH

## Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center

The Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center offers free first Trimester ultrasound, pregnancy test, and counseling.

The center is located at 136 Hospital Drive Road, Suite A, Blairsville, GA; (706)994-3364; [gmpcmedical.org](http://gmpcmedical.org) NT(Sep15Z1)CA

**CLASSIFIED ADS SELL!**  
Call 706-896-4454 or [tcherald@windstream.net](mailto:tcherald@windstream.net)

# Dr. Church...from Page 1A

just being pulled to try to meet the demand that we have right now.

“I also work in our clinic, and I know from the outpatient side, we send multiple patients – at least one, if not more, to the hospital almost daily from our sick clinic. We’re testing for COVID daily with multiple positives daily. So, yes, the system’s pretty overwhelmed right now.”

Dr. Tabb said Northeast Georgia Medical began to recognize an alarming trend toward the middle and end of August.

“Our staff who runs our numbers and looks at our predictions called a meeting and said, ‘By the beginning/middle of September, if we don’t do something, we’re expected to peak above much higher than where we were at the last peak earlier this year,’ she said.

Continuing, “So, that is when we started to try different things to help counteract that, hopefully. For example, we’re doing a lot of the Regeneron antibody infusions at our outpatient clinics. We’ve come up with a way to do it without having to (conduct) an IV infusion to try to take some of the burden off the urgent cares and the ER in the hospital itself and keep some folks out of the hospital.”

Dr. Church said that patients receiving monoclonal antibody treatments are proving to be much less likely to require hospitalization, “so I’m thankful that particular treatment option is available.” Still, the overall situation among area hospitals remains dire.

“There are people who ought to be in the hospital but there’s just no room,” Dr. Church said. “So, we’re forced to do almost pseudo-hospital stuff as an outpatient, and that’s been difficult for some.

“The hospitals in the region have been notified that there are no critical care beds available for transfers, so if we need help putting up local patients for people needing a higher level of care, they have a few spaces for us for strokes and traumas and a few heart attacks, but everything else, they’re on diversion for, at least at Northeast Georgia.

“But this is really all over a larger area – Chattanooga, Asheville, etc.”

Ambulances are also having to be staged outside of emergency rooms waiting for beds to become available, Dr. Church said, “and this is really something that I have never witnessed before.”

“We have studied about triaging, but our definition of triage in the past was which room do they go to, basically,” Dr. Church said. “But now it’s who can we see? It’s almost like a warzone at times. Not quite so bad in the office setting, but certainly in the hospital setting it’s kind of like that.”

Dr. Church’s office was responsible for administering thousands of Moderna COVID-19 vaccinations from the moment they came online through to wider availability, and he continues to advise that everyone who is eligible receive vaccination.

He does not suggest people rely on antibody tests to tell them whether they have immunity, as higher or lower levels of circulating antibodies in a person’s bloodstream do not provide the full picture of an individual’s immune response.

In addition to antibodies, immune systems have multiple layers of immunity, including

## Alcoholics Anonymous meetings/times

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to solve their common problem and help others to recover from Alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Blairsville: Lutheran Church, 83 Earl Shelton: Monday 5:30 PM, open meeting; Friday Ladies noon meeting (open). Mountain Presbyterian Church, 2945 Hwy 76: Monday 7 PM, open meeting; Tuesday Ladies (closed) meeting at 7 PM, Wednesday 7 AM, open meeting; Saturday 8 AM, open meeting. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Hwy 76 next to Presbyterian Church: Tuesday 7 PM, Ladies Meeting; Wednesday noon, open meeting.

Young Harris: Sharp Memorial Methodist Church on College Campus: Tuesday 7 PM, Men’s Meeting.

Hiawassee: Methodist Church, 1139 Hwy 76: Wednesday, noon, open meeting. 1298 Jack Deyton Circle: Friday 7 PM, open meeting; Sunday 7 PM, open meeting.

For more meeting info, call 828-837-4440. NTS(Sept15)ZJCA

specialized cells that retain the memory of pathogens the body has encountered in the past, and these memory cells are known to trigger the production of additional antibodies when needed.

“We know that there’s plenty else that’s involved with our immune response, including T cells and B cells,” Dr. Church said. “We know that, in general, six months after Moderna vaccines, there is 94% protection.

“That was just filed a couple of weeks ago with the full FDA approval application. I also met with Moderna and heard that from them personally. Those numbers are very reassuring, and we know that there’s more to the story than just an antibody level.

“So, it is not recommended to get antibody tests to determine whether you have vaccine protection or not.”

The Pfizer vaccine has already received full approval from the Food and Drug Administration, with the Moderna vaccine expected to follow suit in the weeks ahead. And currently, there is a question of booster shot necessity for both, with federal regulators working with vaccine manufacturers to iron out those details.

“Moderna is not quite sure what date they will be recommending (boosters), but right now, their numbers are very reassuring as far as duration of protection,” Dr. Church said. “That’s kind of what’s holding things up at the FDA, as they’re trying to find the right date to recommend, and they’re not there yet.”

Added Dr. Church, “I think there’s a sense of urgency to do something, but I think we need to be careful about doing something without good evidence to support it. I have confidence that the vaccine is still working well, and I’m waiting on that data to help us know when we will need to have a booster.”

When a Moderna booster is available, Dr. Church said it is likely to consist of a smaller dose, and he implores people not to be in a big rush to get a booster vaccination until an official recommendation is forthcoming.

In terms of first-time vaccinations among the unvaccinated, Dr. Church understands that people have concerns they feel are not being heard among the tremendous push to get 100% of eligible people vaccinated.

He simply urges those who are vaccine hesitant to consider the known risks associated with COVID-19, and he wants people to know that he has full confidence that the vaccines are both safe and effective for the overwhelming majority of people receiving them.

Last Thursday, President Joe Biden announced a six-pronged “COVID-19 Action Plan,” which includes items like increased vaccination uptake and masking adoption, wider availability of rapid testing, and greater access to life-saving treatments like monoclonal antibodies.

Much of the plan still needs fleshing out, like the imposition of vaccine mandates on many in the nation’s workforce, including a constitutionally questionable mandate on large private businesses, all aimed at vaccinating more of the nearly 80 million eligible unvaccinated Americans.

The Biden administration is also openly threatening Medicare and Medicaid funding for hospitals and employers in other health care settings that refuse to force COVID vaccines on their workers.

It remains to be seen when these mandates will take effect and what the consequences will be for the more than 17

million employees working in an already understaffed health care environment, including at Union General Health System and Northeast Georgia Medical Center.

Dr. Church believes that losing patience with people who have chosen not to get the vaccine is not the best strategy, and he hopes that the rhetoric out of Washington, D.C. begins to reflect the fact that “these are people that we all know and love.”

“Everybody has their own rationale for why they’re holding up (for vaccination),” he said. “But I think, hopefully, with additional education, that people will warm up to the idea of how well (the vaccines) are working.

“The challenge is, a lot of things that have been happening have caused distrust, and if you were already distrusting, then the data (showing how well the vaccines work) – people don’t trust that, either.

“Small influences with genuine care and concern among people that are trustworthy, I think that’s what’s going to make a difference. And I did have the opportunity recently to give the White House that message at a meeting I was a part of with about 10 doctors in Atlanta.

“My message was that, when you start talking about people not being informed or being dumb and just talking down to people – that’s not the people that are around me. These are smart people.

“They are getting information from lots of sources, and you need to earn their trust. That’s what’s going to make the difference. I have some people that I’m very close to who, only because they’re being told to do something is why they’re not getting a vaccine.

“I know that doesn’t make sense, but there are a lot of people who are kind of wired that way, that they would rather do things on their own choosing. Some of those freedoms are what our country is based on as well.

“I hate to have to see my loved ones, friends and patients get sick, but for (some people), that’s worth it to them to be able to exercise those freedoms.

“Unfortunately, my mes-

sage wasn’t heard completely loud, or (the White House) wouldn’t have had that announcement (Sept. 9). The people that you say you’re trying to reach – that is not the way to reach them.

“In my clinic, I have some folks that have strongly held beliefs for not getting the vaccine, and some of the same things that they have concerns and trust issues about, I have some of those same concerns, yet I am still recommending vaccines.

“We need transparency, we need consistent messaging

on what these recommendations are, we need evidence to support the recommendations. So, I think those criticisms

that people are having are well founded; I just don’t think they are adequate to keep yourself from getting vaccinated.”

# TCSO Awards...from Page 1A



Chief Deputy Gene Moss, Sheriff Ken Henderson and Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw proudly display the "Agency of the Year Award" in McCaysville last week. Photo/Facebook

duties, and for achieving a level of excellence that far exceeds the acceptable standard.

Sheriff Henderson stated he was humbled to accept the award and wanted to thank his

entire staff and agency for their commitment, dedication and support.

Additionally, he and Chief Deputy Gene Moss would like to thank the entire

staff for all their hard work. The awards recognize and reflect highly on the image of the Towns County Sheriff's Office and are something of which the community can be proud.

# Never Forget...from Page 1A

And many Americans who endured that tragic day now have children and grandchildren who are unaware of what happened, Ordiales said.

"This is something that the City of Young Harris, City of Hiawassee and the county refuse to forget," Ordiales said, referencing the national motto for 9/11. "We are going to remember this every year on this day forever."

"That day of destruction not only devastated our country, but we became stronger for it I believe, and it created a spirit of service and hearts for our people. We now observe Patriots Day on Sept. 11 as a national day of service and remembrance for the thousands of lives that were lost on 9/11."

"We lost 2,977 lives 20 years ago. We affected 343 firefighter families that were lost that day. We affected 78 countries during this tragic event."

Following her opening remarks, Ordiales called for a moment of silence to honor not just those killed, but all those as well who were impacted on that horrible Tuesday 20 years ago.

The North Georgia Honor Guard presented the colors, Grace Worley sang the National Anthem, and Pastor Danny Byers of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church asked all in attendance to join him in prayer for those who lost their lives on 9/11 and their families.

Retired Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, Police Chief Fred Maas, who served in law enforcement for more than 44 years in the Sunshine State, delivered comments in the memorial gathering.

"Most of you will remember exactly where you were that morning," Maas said. "Others have to rely on video footage or stories, as they were too young to remember or simply had not been born yet."

"For the past 15 years I have had the privilege of reading the roll call of honor for the 417 of the police, firefighters and emergency personnel who gave their lives that day in the line of duty. Since then,



In the Sept. 11, 2021, anniversary remembrance in Hiawassee, retired Sunny Isles Beach, Florida, Police Chief Fred Maas urged people to keep hope alive during these particularly uncertain times. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

many more have died due to diseases sustained."

He went on to speak about rare radio footage recorded from those who ran into the falling buildings to save the people who were trapped, and of the first recorded victim, Robert Emmett Judge, who was a Catholic priest serving as a chaplain to the New York City Fire Department.

Judge, who responded with his battalion that day, had the opportunity to get out of the lobby of the North Tower where his men were, but Maas said the firefighter chaplain chose to stay with his men.

"He was alongside them when the tower collapsed," Maas said. "He remained with them at all costs."

To Maas, Judge's actions were not surprising, as he noted an undeniable bond between people who have devoted themselves to a life of service to others.

Given the uncertain times the country has been facing and unsure as to where the nation is heading, Maas said people must not lose hope.

"For if we lose hope, all is lost," he said. "We must have hope. We must have prayer. We must confirm our support of each other and our beliefs and our faith. And yes, support of our first responders."

Fire Chief Harold Copeland rang the traditional bells signifying those first respond-

ers who lost their lives on 9/11, and he spoke on the initiative that both the City of Hiawassee and Towns County have joined in becoming a Purple Heart City and County respectively – an important recognition of the contributions of veterans who are Purple Heart recipients.

The Appalachian Saint Andrew's Pipes & Drums performed "Amazing Grace" in the ceremony, and Mayor Ordiales presented retired Hometown Hero Banners that were displayed on the square over the last year, showing pride in the local veterans and residents currently enlisted.

Retired Banner recipients were Scott Drummond, U.S. Coast Guard; Chuck Frisk, U.S. Marines; Bill Lyon, USM; Bart Rodgers, U.S. Army; Lydia Moss, U.S. Air Force; Brody Graper, Army National Guard; Tyler Guss, USAF; and Walker Guss, USAF.

2021 Hometown Hero Banner recipients were Dillion Walls, U.S. Army; William Travis, USM; Asher Todd, USM; Mike Brown, USM; Brent Jones, USM; Ashly Billings, ROTC Commander; Keith Wooden, U.S. Army; Mel Halfon, U.S. Army; and Jim Powell, U.S. Navy.

These local Hometown Heroes will be displayed proudly on the square over the next year.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw delivered closing remarks for the event, touching on a special tribute that took place just prior to the ceremony Saturday.

"This morning, the Towns County Fire Department went up to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and did a (several) mile hike (in their turnout gear) to remember all those who lost their lives during 9/11," he said.

After praising the Fire Department for their remembrance walk, Bradshaw spoke on all the innocent people who lost their lives two decades ago.

"Let us not forget them," he said. "I can't help but think about all the public safety members from the New York Firefighters, the New York Police Department and the health care workers who sacrificed their lives to help others."

"It's amazing – that's what America is all about, ladies and gentlemen. That's what sets us apart from any country in the world, right there."

Looking out into the crowd of onlookers, Bradshaw asked those gathered to remember the country's service men and women who have sacrificed their lives not only for their country but for the love of their fellow man.

"And always remember this: freedom is not free," Bradshaw said.

# COVID Outbreak...from Page 1A

iff's Office remains committed to keeping inmates and staff safe by continuing to enforce strict COVID mitigation protocols, offering vaccines, and monitoring everyone inside its facilities for symptoms.

COVID is known to spread in congregate settings like carceral facilities, so it is unsurprising that the Towns County Jail is seeing some level of contagion presently, especially amid the national, statewide, regional and local spread of the highly infectious SARS-CoV-2 delta variant.

According to statistics compiled by the Bureau of Prisons for federal facilities specifically, there are 131,010 federal inmates in Bureau of Prison-managed institutions

and 14,486 in community-based facilities, with approximately 36,000 federal staff.

"There are 566 federal inmates and 562 BOP staff who have confirmed positive test results for COVID-19 nationwide (as of Sept. 10)," per BOP.gov. "Currently, 42,862 inmates and 7,360 staff have recovered."

"There have been 252 federal inmate deaths and five BOP staff member deaths attributed to COVID-19 disease. Of the inmate deaths, seven occurred while on home confinement."

Importantly, the Bureau of Prisons notes that it is conducting additional testing of asymptomatic inmates "to assist in slowing transmissions

within a correctional setting."

"As such, our data reflects an increase in the number of COVID-19 positive tests," per BOP.gov.

Of course, no COVID-19 deaths have been recorded at the local Towns County Jail.

# Booster vaccines offered starting September 20

The Towns County Health Department is offering COVID Booster Vaccines each Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 1-4:30 p.m., beginning September 20th, at the Towns Co. Recreation Center located at 150 Foster Park. T(Sep15-Oct27,F2)SH

# Shred Day scheduled for Sept. 25

The Towns County Commissioners Office, City of Hiawassee, and the T.C. Lions Club have scheduled another Shred Day Event to be held in the parking lot of the GA Mountain Fairgrounds on September 25th from 9 - 11 a.m. Document Destruction will have a truck working to shred all paper material on site. Lion Members will be on hand to help unload the materials.

This service will be provided at no charge to the

public, however, donations will be accepted to benefit the Give-A-Christmas Program. This program helps provide Christmas to needy families in the area. The Lions try to help 100 families each year and this is one of their fundraising projects that benefits not only those families but also the community and the environment.

Kudos to the city and county for their help with this project! T(Sep15,F3)SH

# Towns Republicans to meet Sept. 16

The Towns County Republican Party will meet on Thursday, September 16 at the Towns County Senior Center. The doors will open at 5:15 PM with the meeting beginning promptly at 5:45 PM. After opening exercises, an 8-minute timed discussion, "Pierot's Points", as we call it, addressing certain parts of the Constitution always takes place; pocket Constitutions will be available, until we run out, to refresh your minds. In today's world it is most important for us to read and understand this important document as it shapes our lives. Can the 9/9 Biden mandate be constitutional? Kelvin King will be our

guest speaker for this September monthly meeting.

Please join us as he enlightens us on his views about the situation in Georgia, Washington DC and the world; a great supporter of the previous President, a graduate of the US Air Force Academy and small business owner, Mr. King and his beautiful wife Janelle will share their vision on how they can help make positive changes in Washington DC. Come listen, bring your questions, and hear the answers without media interpreters and the like.

For further information contact Betsy Young at 904-382-1912 or TCGOPChair@gmail.com. T(Sep15,F4)SH