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In 3-2 vote, Hiawassee to go with rollback millage rate

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

After three public hearings, the Hiawassee City Council has decided to accept the rollback millage rate of 2.170 mills.

As previously reported, Mayor Liz Ordiales had proposed that the council maintain the 2017 millage rate of 2.258 mills in 2018.

Instead, councilmembers Kris Berrong, Amy Barrett and Nancy Noblet against the mayor's proposal in a called meeting to set the millage rate on Tuesday, Sept. 11.

Councilmembers Anne Mitchell and Patsy Owens voted for the mayor's millage rate proposal, which failed to carry that Tuesday.

Next steps include acceptance of the rollback rate in a called meeting on Monday, Sept. 24, at 6 p.m. inside Hiawassee City Hall.

The rollback rate is a decrease of 0.088 mills over the 2017 millage rate and will result in a total levy of \$174,605 in city property taxes for 2018.

Due to a combination of factors, accepting the rollback rate will still net the city an additional \$2,123 in property tax revenues over 2017 if all taxes are collected.

These factors include growth to the city, reassessment of some property values, and the addition of several million dollars' worth of properties to the tax digest that were historically excluded in error.

Based on these factors,

the taxable portion of the city digest increased by more than \$4 million between 2017 and 2018.

Considering the increased digest, the mayor's proposal to keep the tax rate the same would have netted an additional \$7,081 in tax collections over the 2018 rollback rate. This is why, according to state law, Ordiales had to treat her proposal as a tax increase.

For property owners whose values remained the same as last year, going with the mayor's proposal would have resulted in identical tax bills between 2017 and 2018.

On the other hand, people whose property values went up due to reassessments with or without improvements would

See Millage Rate, Page 6A



Members of the Hiawassee City Council in their Sept. 11 millage rate public hearing. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

BOE approves line of credit ahead of state reimbursements

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Board of Education has approved a motion to allow Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong to apply for a line of credit with a bank on behalf of the school system.

Board members made the decision in their Sept. 10 regular meeting, during which Dr. Berrong explained that reimbursement from the state for campus renovations completed over the summer will take some time.

The earliest he expects reimbursement to occur is the middle of October.

"We've had to cover every bit of the cost of the construction of this building," said Dr. Berrong. "Even though the Modernization Grant is supposed to pay a huge percentage of that, we will not



Towns County Board of Education Member Stan Chastain and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in the Sept. 10 regular board meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

get any of that back until they look over all the receipts and make sure all the work that was done qualifies.

"We're supposed to

hear something back from them this month, and we'll get that (reimbursement) back in

See BOE, Page 6A

96-year-old Belle Nichols discusses yardwork and life

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Many Towns County residents are probably familiar with the wonderful assortment of flowers in the yard of the house going up Georgia 17 toward Hayesville.

What people probably don't know is that this house is owned and kept up by 96-year-old Belle Nichols, who works in her garden and flowerbeds every day.

Nichols has managed her own yardwork for about 70 years, but her green thumb goes back even further than that.

"My mother used to be really into flowers," said Nichols. "I think that's what started my hobby and passion for them and the garden."

"As far back as I remember, I have worked on my yard, and it's one of those



Belle Nichols, 96, of Towns County, in her beautiful front yard with her nephew Jerry Kendall. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

that I have always done." Her gardening days in Towns County began in 1952, when she and her husband settled into the house after moving from Ohio. And prior to moving to

Ohio and back again, Nichols was a resident of Towns County the majority of her life up until her marriage.

She grew up in a area long ago covered by an lake. See Nichols, Page 6A

Planning Commission makes sign ordinance proposal

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Planning Commission met Tuesday, Sept. 11, at the Towns County Civic Center, with the primary goal of reaching an agreement on a proposed new sign ordinance.

A 90-day moratorium on off-premises signage enacted by Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw on July 17 will expire on or about Oct. 15, so the commission has about a month left to propose, agree on and enact a strengthened county sign ordinance.

At first blush, a sign ordinance might seem like an easy thing to muster. However, when one delves into the matter and discovers all the intricacies involved, it's revealed to be a difficult undertaking.



Steven Phillips attended the Sept. 11 planning commission meeting to share his views on the proposed sign ordinance update. Photo by Mark Smith

The State of Georgia has enacted some general guidelines, like maximum height, size and

setback requirements, that help to simplify things, but See Planning, Page 6A

Cybercrime, audit and fiber expansion highlight EMC Board meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – In the Sept. 11 regular meeting of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors, EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms delivered an update concerning the recent cybercrime committed against the co-op.

During his Manager's Report, Nelms told the board that he had posted a statement on the attack to BRMEMC.com.

"At our annual meeting on Sept. 8, we shared with members that Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was the victim of a cybercrime this past July," reads the statement. "Since the incident, our leadership has worked diligently with our attorneys, insurance company,



Jeremy Nelms

bank, IT experts and federal law enforcement to determine exactly what happened, its impact, and the appropriate

next steps.

"Based upon what we know to date, this crime appears to have been focused on the bank accounts of the EMC, not personal or financial member information."

"At this point in our investigation, we are confident that none of our members' personal or financial information has been compromised."

"We also want to ensure our members that this incident has not impacted our ability to deliver service."

"BRMEMC maintains crime loss insurance coverage for situations such as this, so there will be no financial impact to our membership."

"In addition, while we have and always will adhere to best practices with regard to cyber security, we are also

See BRMEMC, Page 5A

Brasstown Manor residents, veterans and staff dedicate flagpole

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Thursday, Sept. 6, was a great day for the residents and staff of Brasstown Manor Senior Living in Hiawassee, as they celebrated the dedication of their long-awaited flagpole.

It was a rather warm day, but the residents, among them several former U.S. military service members like Iwo Jima Veterans Todd Kimsey and Clarence E. "Bud" Johnson, came out to pay tribute to their new "Old Glory."

Scott Drummond of Hiawassee's American Legion Post 23, who served as Master of Ceremonies for the event and is a U.S. Coast Guard veteran, introduced Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw that day, who spoke briefly.

In his introduction of Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales, Drummond touched on the fact that she is the daughter of



Iwo Jima Veterans Bud Johnson and Todd Kimsey share a heartfelt moment at the recent dedication of the newly installed flagpole at Brasstown Manor. Photo by Mark Smith

parents who escaped communist Cuba with their lives, and that they started over in the United States, under the American flag of freedom.

Bill McLane, a Brasstown Manor resident, delivered

the invocation, and Dwight Moss, chaplain of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807, gave the Benediction.

Drummond then deferred to several veterans to address the See Brasstown Manor, Page 6A

Memorial ride honors 9/11 terror victims in NYC, Benghazi



Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton, center, with a number of local patriots, veterans and bikers for the annual Benghazi-Twin Towers Memorial Ride and Veterans Appreciation Event on Saturday, Sept. 15, in front of Hiawassee City Hall. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Patriot bikers from four

area counties participated in the Sixth Annual Benghazi-Twin Towers Memorial Ride and Veterans Appreciation Event

on Saturday, Sept. 15.

The ride – sponsored by the Sons of Liberty Riders, See Memorial Ride, Page 6A

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