

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, September 20, 2023

Floyd, Chastain crowned Homecoming Royalty

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Congratulations to 2023 Towns County High School Homecoming King Zane Floyd and Queen Hope Chastain, who were crowned during the halftime of Friday's home football game against Coosa High School.

2022 Queen Sarah Shook returned in a "homecoming" of her own to crown the seniors.

The end of a week of activities known as Spirit Week, Homecoming culminated with underclassmen ladies and senior gentlemen being escorted onto the field in their formal homecoming attire Sept. 15, after which Floyd was announced King.

Following his crowning, the senior ladies of Homecoming Court made their way across the field, one at a time, before Chastain was declared

2023 royalty.

"Oh my gosh, it's amazing," said Queen Chastain, breath-taken by receiving the crown. "I had no idea I was going to win. It's such an honor. I want to first thank my family and all the amazing teachers I've had in the past four years."

Chastain has played softball for the Lady Indians all throughout high school and shared that she will miss the sport and her friends more than anything after graduation in May. Although leaving behind her high school legacy will be bittersweet, she looks forward to what's ahead.

"I definitely want to go to college and possibly study education," she said.

Homecoming King Floyd, also a star athlete for the school, was ecstatic as well after receiving the honor from his peers, but more than anything, he was happy to have been a

part of the Homecoming Court alongside his friends.

"I was shocked," Floyd said. "It's pretty cool, but I view it as all of the boys' trophy. It was all my friends out there, so I didn't really care who won."

Floyd thanks God, his family and his parents for always supporting him and helping him succeed in high school. After graduation, he plans to pursue college basketball.

The 2023 Girls Homecoming Court was Anabella Wilson, Maycee Garrison, Hope Chastain, Emma Lalletment, Brelan Sieveking, Cece Pizzaro, Raegen Rogers, Scotlyn Fain and Bella Childs.

Representing the young men on Homecoming Court were Jay Grimsley, Connor Chastain, Brant Youngblood, Tanner Cunningham, Zane Floyd and Kade McConnell.

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TCHS Seniors Zane Floyd and Hope Chastain are grateful for all their peers who voted for them to be Homecoming King and Queen, as announced in the Sept. 15 football game.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Local Firefighters don gear for 9/11 Memorial Walk



Led by Hiawasse Police Chief/Firefighter Jeremy Parker, local firefighters once again walked 9.11 miles in honor of 9/11. The memorial walk has become an annual tradition.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Jeremy Parker
Guest Contributor

9/11 – wow, what a day! I am Towns County Fire Lieutenant/EMT Jeremy Parker, and I also serve as your Hiawasse Police Chief.

On Sept. 11, 2001, I remember rushing home from a chaotic uncertain day to find my mother sitting quietly in the living room, watching the news

broadcast of the World Trade Center being struck by two airplanes. I was confused, but the images I watched painted a very clear picture: our beloved country had just been attacked.

This was no coincidence – these were directed attacks on those two buildings by very bad people. I remember watching the silence in my home, I remember the sadness that my

family and I felt as we knew the fate of those there that day.

Growing up in the home of a firefighter and becoming one as early as I could, I couldn't imagine what those 343 firefighters who perished that day felt as they entered those buildings.

Being a firefighter for 21 years, I have seen situations

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Towns County honors fallen heroes, victims of Sept. 11

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Twenty-two years ago, the nation watched in horror as the tragedies of 9/11 unfolded, becoming moments in time that would change so much about the way Americans lived – moments that will dwell in so many memories for lifetimes to come.

On Monday, Sept. 11, 2023, community members

gathered at the Hiawasse Town Square for the fifth annual local remembrance ceremony, hosted by Towns County, Hiawasse and Young Harris, to honor the heroes and victims of that day.

The ceremony commenced at 9:45 a.m. with a patriotic performance by Appalachian St. Andrews Pipes & Drums, followed by the presentation of the colors by the North Georgia Honor Guard.

Hiawasse Mayor Liz Ordiales, who served as the Master of Ceremonies, led the crowd through the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance with the help of singer Bill Rinaldo.

McConnell Baptist Church Pastor Danny Byers delivered a prayer before Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby gave a few welcoming remarks.

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Many patriotic residents made their way to the Hiawasse Town Square this year to commemorate the victims and lessons of the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Elections Board talks security, possibility of 'dual counting'

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In its regular meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 13, the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration heard from Elections Supervisor Diandra Southern about a visit from the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency.

As part of a statewide effort, a representative from GEMA/HS visited the Elections Office the day before to conduct a physical security check of the facility, producing a list of recommendations for the office to implement.

The biggest suggestion was getting security cameras in certain office areas, which is already in the works ahead of the Nov. 7 elections to fill a Hiawasse City Council seat and for the countywide Education Special Purpose Local Options Sales Tax referendum.

Board Vice Chair Jeff Pierot has been coordinating the procurement of camera



Towns County Board of Elections Members Jeff Pierot and Betsy Young discussed the upcoming elections in their Sept. 13 regular meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

equipment and said it would be ready for installation after the Commissioner's Office completes the purchase order, which is expected to happen soon.

Also in the meeting, the board said it was investigating the possibility of conducting a dual counting of ballots

after the Nov. 7 elections. The machine count would provide the official tally, but the board hopes to be able to do a local hand count to audit the results.

According to the bipartisan board, the goal of a dual count would be to provide transparency and some reassuring

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TCSO makes multiple arrests in ongoing 'war on drugs'

News Special
Towns County Herald

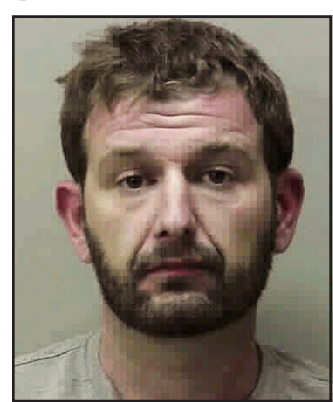
In the early morning of Thursday, Sept. 14, Towns County Sheriff's Sgt. Bryan Forsyth was working concentrated patrols of local businesses and churches when he observed a suspicious vehicle and activity in the parking lot of Cornerstone Baptist Church on Crane Creek Road.

Deputy Darringer Barrett and K-9 Xena were called to assist. When Xena conducted a free-air sniff of the vehicle, she gave a positive alert beside the passenger door, establishing probable cause for a search.

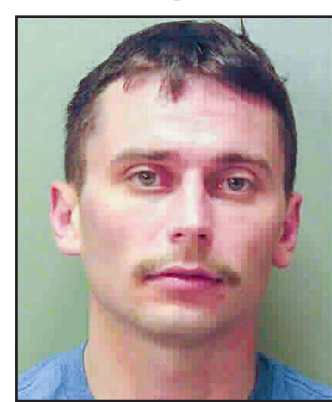
The search revealed an amount of crystal-like substance that field-tested positive for methamphetamine, drug-related objects, scales, illegally obtained prescription medication called Baclofen, as well as a large amount of cash, which was confiscated.

Further investigation revealed this may have been the location of a drug transaction

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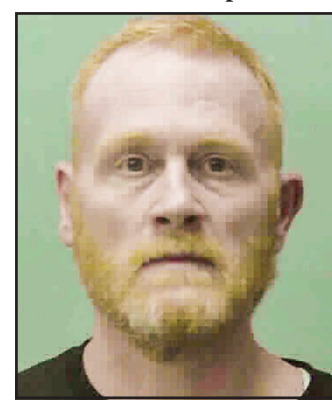
Mark Anthony Roberson



Blaze Zee Szczepanski



Jessica Lynn Parsons



Bobby Joe Neace

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Lake Levels

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Chatuge 1,921.98
Nottely 1,769.48

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9/21 5 PM

@ Lake Oconee

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TCSO Arrests...from Page 1A

that was interrupted by Sgt. Forsyth.

Mark Anthony Roberson, 36, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possession and use of drug-related objects, and dangerous drugs (Baclofen).

Sheriff Ken Henderson commended the hard work of the deputies, concentrated patrols, and business and church checks in the early morning hours.

In a separate incident this month, Sgt. Forsyth and K-9 Deputy Barrett received a tip of drug activity in the area of the Citgo gas station on US 76.

A suspicious person

in a vehicle was located, and K-9 Xena conducted a free air search and alerted positive for narcotics. A search resulted in the discovery of marijuana packaged for sale, scales, and drug paraphernalia.

Blaze Zee Szczepanski, 29, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with felony possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, felony possession of marijuana, possession and use of drug-related objects, and driving while license suspended/revoked.

Sheriff Henderson stated he was proud of his deputies for their continued efforts to keep illegal drugs from being distributed in Towns County.

Also separate, Deputy Barrett and Sgt. Forsyth conducted a traffic stop the eve-

ning of Sept. 8 on an Ohio vehicle traveling on US 76 West. During the stop, probable cause was established, and the vehicle was searched.

A plastic bag containing heroin, which field-tested positive, was located on Jessica Lynn Parsons, a passenger in the vehicle.

Parsons, 35, of Portsmouth, Ohio, was arrested and charged with felony possession of heroin and possession of marijuana.

Also arrested was Bobby Joe Neace, 48, of Wheelersburg, Ohio. He was charged with dangerous drugs.

Sheriff Ken Henderson said concentrated patrols will continue.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Towns County Lions Club welcome new Member Heidi Holmes



On Sept. 12, the Towns County Lions inducted Heidi Holmes who was sponsored by Lion Matt Turpin.

Club Pres. Danny Meeks presided over the brief ceremony and encouraged those in attendance to continue looking for possible new members to grow and strengthen the club, adding that Membership Chair Sybil Davis has recently received inquiries and interest from local citizens.

Since the Lions first began in 1917, our clubs are places where individual members join together to give their valuable effort, resources and time toward improving their communities.

The Lions Mission is to empower clubs, partners and volunteers to improve health and well-being, strengthen communities, and support those in need through humanitarian services and grants that impact lives locally and globally.

The Lions Vision is to be the local and global leader



Newest Lion Heidi Holmes with Sponsor Matt Turpin

in community and humanitarian service.

In other club business, Lion Jeff Myers thanked his team of helpers in the funnel cake trailer for their outstanding performance during the Labor Day weekend Hiawassee Rodeo. Lion Julie Payne also thanked and praised her team of workers in the Gate area. Lion Janie McConnell

likewise provided the same appreciation to her close-knit group working the Auto-

graphed Guitar raffle ticket sales table in the Anderson Music Hall. Plans were discussed for the upcoming GMF Fall Festival Oct. 6-14.

The Towns County Lions are proud to add and welcome Heidi Holmes to the club! TSep20.F5/CA

Elections Board...from Page 1A

ance to voters who have come to question the use of machines to mark and tally votes versus straight paper ballot elections.

The board should know by next month's regular meeting if it is legally allowed to do a dual count as a compromise of sorts for people who wish to see hand-marked paper ballot elections that are prohibited by state law.

"(A dual count would be) just for transparency, not because of anything else," Board Member Betsy Young said. "But because of people saying they don't trust the machines."

"Whether you're Re-

publican or a Democrat, or green or purple – whatever – voter integrity is the key thing for Towns County, and we have always, always done it right."

Added Elections Board Chair Roy Perren, "We want folks to be confident, because you've got to have confidence in the election or the whole process is bad for the country."

Perren has started up a new Facebook page at "Towns County Board of Elections" to provide election information to the public. Perren is the only one with access to making changes on the Facebook page.

Board members are

working to get the Elections Board page removed from the county website, as the board no longer has access to editing the page, which contains out-of-date information.

The Board Office held poll worker training Sept. 9 and enjoyed "a great turnout." Two more training days will be scheduled prior to the elections, one for the new voter check-in poll pads that have yet to arrive, and the other regarding paperwork to be completed by poll managers.

Pertaining to parking at the Elections Office during the upcoming elections, Southern said the county had informed her that the materials and equipment from the adjacent construction going on at the Towns County Courthouse would be "cleaned up and taken care of."

The next regular board meeting will be Wednesday, Oct. 11, at 4 p.m. inside the Elections Office located at 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite A, in Hiawassee.



Masonic Meeting
 Unicorn Lodge #259 F & AM meets every 2nd Monday, 7:30 PM. Meals @ 6:30 PM. 60 N. Main Street, Hiawassee, GA 30546. All qualified Brothers urged to attend.

Gabe Eller competed in FFA Tractor Driving Contest

The FFA Tractor Driving contest consists of driving a Tractor with an implement through a timed driving course and a general knowledge test as well as a problem solving test.

Gabe Eller placed 3rd in the area II tractor driving CDE yesterday out of 19 contestants. He missed second place by 2/10 of a pt. Which would have given him a spot in the State FFA Tractor Driving competition.

A Big Congratulations to Gabe Eller for a fantastic job! So proud of his persistence and hard work. TSep20.A2/JH



Gabe Eller

Ribbon Cutting for Blairsville's Indoor Play and Lounge for children and The Gathering Space for events



Blairsville's Indoor Play and Lounge and The Gathering Space Ribbon Cutting

Blairsville has a new play place for children and a new rental space right in downtown! Both are located in the Season's Inn Plaza, just down the strip from Papa's Pizza To-Go.

Rebecca and Jeffrey Brendle own Blairsville's Ice Cream and Mini Golf, and this year they have opened two new places for our com-

munity. They are Blairsville's Indoor Play and Lounge and The Gathering Space.

The play place is a membership-driven, family-oriented space for children to play (\$8 per day or \$40 for unlimited monthly play per family), while the rental space is a \$10 per hour place to gather for fellowship, meetings, events, etc. (the rental holds

42 people at max capacity). (Prices are subject to change.)

Jeffrey and Rebecca began in ministry in 2016, when they began their 501©3. Change in our World. Their businesses have been a blessing to the ministry and funded their work with young people in our community. Contact them for more information at 706-994-2305. NTSep20.Z5/CA

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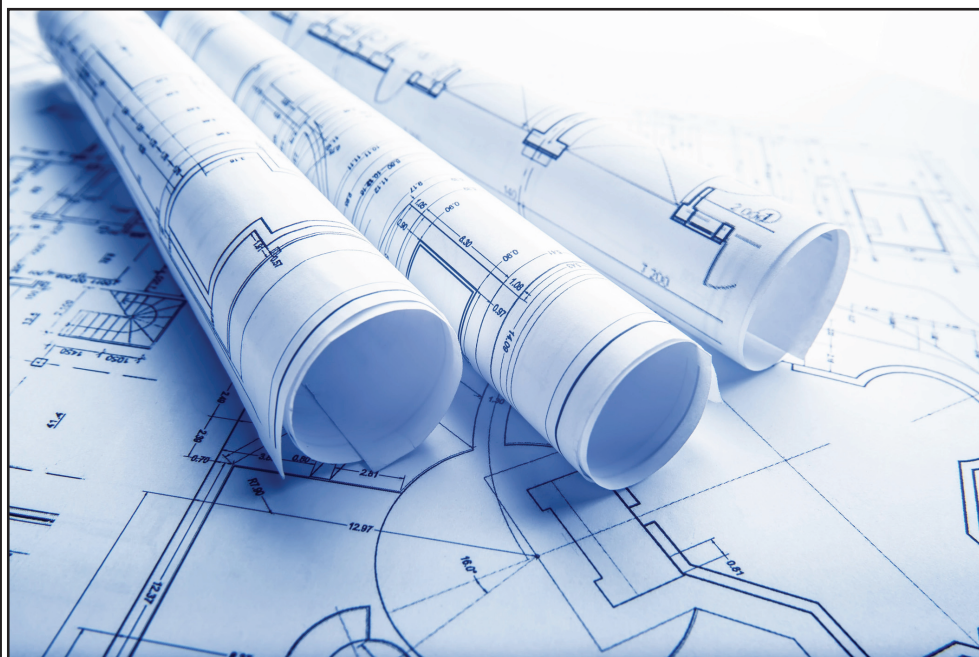
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Homecoming...from Page 1A



Forming the TCHS Homecoming Senior Girls Court for 2023 were Maycee Garrison, Anabella Wilson, Cece Pizzaro, Brelan Sieveking, Hope Chastain and Emma Lalletment. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Honoring 9/11...from Page 1A

The community was then honored with a speech from keynote speaker Chuck Frisk, a retired U.S. Marine Corps Master Sergeant who spoke "with a heavy heart" on the events of September 11, 2001.

Frisk recounted how he was in a military training exercise when an instructor came in to say what had happened. Everyone was in disbelief at first, but as the TVs came on and people made calls to loved ones near the World Trade Center, disbelief turned to shock and realization.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, one thing became clear, Frisk said: "For the first time in a long time, we as a nation came together."

"No one cared about race, sex, political affiliation, or any of the other things that we use daily to separate 'us' from 'them,'" he said. "We were Americans, and there were people that wanted to destroy us."

"They proved that by killing almost 3,000 people and injuring thousands more simply for the fact that we are Americans ... In fact, the death toll keeps rising even 22 years later. Just this past weekend, two more victims were identified through DNA that lost their lives that day in New York."

Frisk memorialized the fallen from Benghazi, too, who were killed in an assault that commenced on the 11th anniversary of 9/11, on Sept. 11, 2012, when, "once again, we were attacked because we were Americans."

His remarks drove home the message of why Americans must remain united and never forget what happened on these terrible occasions.

"As you look around at everyone gathered here for this memorial and remembrance, do not look at each other with only your eyes, but with your heart," Frisk said. "Someone once referenced America as a salad. A tomato doesn't stop being a tomato just because it's added to a salad, it just enhances the flavor."

"We are all different in our own special way, but we are all Americans. There are groups and individuals that want to not only harm you, but kill you, your family, your friends, and your fellow Americans just because of where you live and our common bond."

"We must stay strong not just as the City of Hiawassee, the City of Young Harris,



North Georgia Honor Guard members retiring the colors during the 9/11 ceremony in Hiawassee last week. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

the County of Towns, but as a nation. Thank you, and Never Forget!"

Led by Chief Harold Copeland, the Towns County Fire Department rang a bell in four sets of five rings – a tradition of New York City firefighters saluting their 343 comrades who died when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed.

The North Georgia Honor Guard then played taps, followed by a bagpipe performance of "Amazing Grace" before Mayor Ordiales retired 10 Heroes Banners from the square and welcomed nine new banners for 2023.

Ordiales started the Hometown Heroes Banner Program five years ago to honor local veterans and active duty service members. The Lake Chatuge Rotary Club assisted with Hometown Heroes.

For the next year, Hometown Heroes banners will adorn the square for Bob Dixon, U.S. Navy; David Dossier, U.S. Army; Ron Schott, U.S. Air Force; Aaron Whalen, active Army; Jose Carvajal, Army; Edward Dedmon, Army; Tim McKenna, Navy; Jeff Walker, Army; and Cory Ingraham, Army.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

gave the closing remarks, thanking everyone for gathering in honor of those who lost their lives and gave their all on that tragic day 22 years ago.

The Honor Guard retrieved the colors, and Rinaldo gave one last performance of "God Bless the U.S.A" before the crowd began filtering out to more patriotic bagpipe music.

Towns County, Hiawassee and Young Harris hold a 9/11 event each year to remind the community of the losses and heroics witnessed on that fateful morning.

"9/11 is always a tough event because it's just such sorrow," Ordiales said. "Even today, after 22 years, we are still finding ashes and identifying victims of that tragic day."

"It's a horrible thing. Originally on 9/11 we had 343 firefighters that passed away, and since then we've added another 331 that passed away with issues or ailments from the 9/11 tragedy."

Added Ordiales, "This is such a small tribute because we're such a small town, but we honor them. I plan on continuing to do this as long as I possibly can here on the square, to continue to keep that tragic memory unforgotten so that we can continue to honor those that passed away."

Memorial Walk...from Page 1A



Towns County Firefighters walking up Main Street in Hiawassee on Saturday, Sept. 9, to commemorate the fallen firefighters from 9/11. Photo by Grace Photography

that were dangerous, scary, and sometimes looked impossible to handle. I reflect back on September 11th, 2001, and I can't even imagine what it would have felt like looking up at those buildings as they entered.

The smoke billowing from the top, the fire shooting out from the sides – those firefighters were there to save lives. Those firefighters were there to serve their city. Those firefighters were there to lay it all on the line for those people in those buildings that tragic day.

Now 22 years later, we know the story. We've seen every detailed diagram, story, conspiracy theory, and news article on September 11th, 2001. We've read books and watched movies, but for those who lost their lives, how do we carry their legacy on for generations to come?

Well, three years ago, I decided to put together a memorial walk. We started at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and began our journey. The goal was to walk 9.11 miles to honor those lost that day and

those who have suffered since that day. I also wanted to do something a little more for the firefighters.

After completing the first 7 miles, those in attendance would don their fire gear and we would start towards the square in Hiawassee. Those last 2.11 miles would have been roughly equivalent to the 110 flights of stairs the New York firefighters would have climbed that day.

Hot and sweaty, we grabbed our American flags and headed towards town. People were blowing their horns, waving, taking pictures, and a multitude of thank-you's were sent our way. So, I decided to continue that tradition.

With the assistance of the Towns County Fire Department as our vehicle escort, eight firefighters began our journey this year on Saturday, Sept. 9, striking out on our third year celebrating the lives of those lost.

Four of us completed the first 7 miles, and then we were joined by four more fellow firemen who were there to walk the last 2.11 miles with us to town.

I reflect on the conversations between the firemen as we walked, tired and feeling the weight of our gear. We weren't climbing stairs with hundreds of people coming at us. We didn't have extra hose or extra air tanks over our shoulders.

We all began to reflect on the feelings of looking up at the chaos, and the fear that would have been in those people's faces. We reflected on the feelings that those firefighters may have felt as we pushed on toward our destination.

I personally want to thank those who were there this year and those who have been there in the years before, and certainly those who have been beside me every year. We hope to continue this tradition for generations to come, because We Will Never Forget!

Joining me for the 2023 observance were Capt. Royce Nicholson, Lt. Rick Stamper, Clay County Fire Chief Brian Anderson, Firefighter Ryan Green, Firefighter Dominick Barbanera, Firefighter Randy New, and Explorer Silas Nicholson.