75 Cents

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# Fairgrounds Fireworks wow crowds New Year's Eve

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

Fireworks burst through the fog above Hiawassee on New Year's Eve, delighting attendees of the annual Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds event and lighting up the night sky just a few hours before mid-

The event is more than iust an annual tradition; it also serves to wrap up everything "I actually enjoy teach-that the Fairgrounds has seen ing," he said while heating and celebrated – throughout

In the run-up to the firefar gathered earlier that evening to take in one last view of the walkthrough Mountain never done it." Country Christmas in Lights and browse some homemade crafts from local vendors still doing business in a handful of

neer Village, blacksmith Ray Anderson offered previews of affordable blacksmithing classes by giving curious kids - and a few adults - chances to make their very own mementos by choosing from among many different iron shapes to brand into wood circles.

For Anderson, 2023 will be a chance to spread his passion to those willing to learn the same craft.

the brands in the forge to an orange glow. "I enjoy making stuff and selling it, but works, families from near and mostly I enjoy working with (novices) who have a desire to try (blacksmithing) and have

Eddie and Faye Jackson were visiting from Alto with their niece and her family. Now in their third year, they Inside the historic Pio- of coming to the Fairgrounds the campgrounds often, so we



Always free to attend, the annual New Year's Eve Fireworks at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds were as popular as ever over the weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

every New Year's Eve.

'We've been camping have made an annual tradition up here for years. We come to

come to the Fairgrounds and we come to the concerts; we just love it," Faye said. "Everyone here is so nice. They make

hometown people. That's why person (so) that I can help othwe love coming here.'

The Jacksons hoped for spread peace, the latter being a reflect on past difficulties. shared desire for Fairgrounds through the entrance.

"I'm very hopeful. things to happen (in 2022)," Garrison said, referring to a attendance and the gradual return to "normal life."

While acknowledging that there is plenty to look forward to in the coming year at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Garrison also to take them to see the firelooked inward when it came to thoughts about the New Year.

"I anticipate to better

you feel like you're one of the myself, to make myself a better ers more and put myself in the position so that if anyone ever academic success for their needs me, I can help them," he children along with wide- said, also taking a moment to

"There's a bigger plan staff member Luke Garrison, that we don't know about, and who was stationed at the front there is One who knows about to keep an eye on folks coming it. He has control over all of

Terry Sozcak was wait-There's been a lot of good ing just inside the entrance, watching skyward for the fireworks just like a great deal successful year at the Fair- many folks amid the occasiongrounds with record-breaking al sprinkle of rain. Since purchasing land in Towns County, Sozcak had passed by the Fairgrounds multiple times but never attended any events.

But with his granddaughters visiting, he decided works Saturday, and together, they wished for health and

See GMF Fireworks, Page 6A

## **Residents share thoughts** going into New Year '23

By Jeremy Foster **Towns County Herald Staff Writer** 

The start of a new year is always a universal time of self-reflection for people to take a few moments to examine their lives, the paths they have traveled, and ponder the future with a renewed sense of optimism.

Putting her groceries in her car at the Ingles parking lot in Hiawassee on Thursday, Dec. 29, local newcomer Gina said she transitioned to town from California about a month

"I have some friends that moved here," Gina said, "and they were talking about how it's a real cute area, and (my husband and I) were looking for a switch, so we just moved on in because we work from home (and thought it was a good fit)."

the least."

It is what you make it," she said of life's circumstanc- peace of mind. es. "We live in a very interesthave ever seen."

Added Gina, "Mov- hope, right?"



Barry Smith enjoyed some holiday vacation time at Tilted Café last week, playing arcade games there with his kids. Photo by Jeremy Foster

ing here to Georgia, to Towns County, will definitely assist, Year's Resolutions for 2023, Turning the subject to I am hoping, in that upswing Gina said she prethe world at large, Gina re- (post-COVID) regarding so them "intentions." marked that "things are in a many things like cost of livvery interesting place, to say ing, saving money and quality on with my education and acaof life. It's nice and quiet out demic career and hopefully gohere, and there's a little more

"2022 was less tumultuing time, and there is a lot of ous than I would say in 2020stuff going on that none of us 2021, but I feel like it is on the upswing for sure. I can only

As far as making New Gina said she preferred to call

"I would like to continue ing for a master's and maybe a Ph.D. in health care or health care administration and try to really buckle down," she said. Also out shopping that

day was a resident named

See Thoughts on 2023, Page 6A

# Chief Smith alleges mayor is seeking ticket quota

By Shawn Jarrard **Towns County Herald** 

going Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith to the five members of the Hiawassee City Council alleges that Mayor Liz Ordiales has for years attempted to implement a ticket-writing quota inside city limits to address budgetary shortfalls in the police department.

characterization provided in the email but told the Towns County Herald she would not have time to discuss the issue in detail until she returned in early January from a family vacation.

The email in question was composed during Chief Smith's last official week on the job, which culminated in his final day on Friday, Dec. 23.

Smith announced his resignation as police chief in the Dec. 6 regular council meeting, explaining his desire to spend plore other career opportuni-

The mayor has hired Jer-A leaked email from out- emy Parker to replace Smith as the new police chief. Parker previously served as police chief in Dillard and is a volunteer member of the Towns County Fire Department.

It was during the search for a new chief that Smith's concerns elevated to the point of drafting his email to the Ordiales has denied the council, reproduced in full be-

"I have shared my concerns with some of you but wanted to address the council as a whole regarding some of the things that have been going on recently. I feel the council deserves a heads-up before anything happens.

Since the mayor's election, she has made it very clear that the police department costs too much money to run and does not generate enough revenue to operate. She has told me directly that if it were her more time with family and ex- choice, she would eliminate the



**Paul Smith Former HPD Chief** 

department. She has said that it is too much trouble for what it's

"I have had many conversations with the mayor about this topic. Each time we have looked over the budget together, she has told me that the PD needed to write more tickets to offset the budget. I have told her repeatedly that I can encourage more traffic stops,

See Ticket Quota, Page 6A

## 'Ghostface Gangster' of Blairsville arrested in Towns

**News Special Towns County Herald** 

YOUNG HARRIS -On Monday, Dec. 26, Towns County Sheriff's Investigators initiated a traffic stop on 1400 Hwy 66.

Probable cause was established, the vehicle was searched, and approximately 8 ounces of methamphetamine laced with fentanyl – which field-tested positive on the scene - was found.

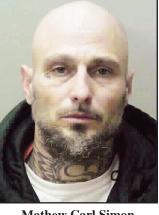
Mathew Carl Simon was arrested, and the investigation revealed that Simon is a member of the "Ghostface Attorney's Office said. "All Highway 66. An amount of Gangsters" out of Union

Simon, 48, of Blairsville, has been charged with felony possession of methamphetamine; felony possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; felony trafficking methamphetamine; and window tint violation.

The investigation is

According to the U.S. Attorney's Office of the North District of Georgia, Ghostface Gangsters, aka GFG, is a "whites-only gang" that was originally organized in or about 2000 in a Georgia county

"Within GFG, the seven founding members are



**Mathew Carl Simon** 

GFG members trace their gang bloodline' directly back to one of the pillars.

GFG members and associates (have) engaged in drug distribution and acts of violence involving murder, kidnapping, assault and witness intimidation," with operations "both within and outside the Georgia prison system.'

on Saturday, Dec. 24, the Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug Unit continued an intense investigation into a suspect for transporting illegal drugs. The suspect was identified as Randy Delain Ledford.

Drug Investigators, K-9 Deputies and Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office converged on the suspect at the known as 'pillars," the U.S. Windy Hill Gas Station on



Randy Delain Ledford

drugs field-tested positive for methamphetamine laced with a high amount of fentanyl, also containing cocaine.

Ledford, 34, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, with additional charges pending.

This is a highly dangerous cocktail for In a separate incident potential overdose," Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson said, adding a "thank you" to his investigators and K-9 deputies for working tirelessly during the Christmas Holiday "to get these highly dangerous drugs off the streets and out of

our community.' All persons are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of

## Freezing weather causes broken pipes, water issues

By Shawn Jarrard **Towns County Herald Editor** 

Mother Nature wreaked havoc on water systems across North Georgia over Christmas weekend, causing widespread breakage of pipes amid prolonged freezing temperatures and resulting in water loss for thousands of residents in the region and damage to homes and businesses alike.

Water providers started taking calls for loss of service as early as Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, however, the extent of the issue was not known until temperatures warmed up enough for previously frozen pipes to reveal breakage via leaks.

The lion's share of leaks occurred on the customer side of water meters, which in many cases were particularly hard to identify because no one was home to report them due to holiday and winter-related travel.

In terms of water loss and strain on production, it was the most significant event in recent memory for area providers that struggled to replenish losses from leaks and consumption from people running water in their homes to avoid freezing

To blame was an extended period of frigid temps that dipped into the single digits Dec. 23 through the morning of Dec. 26, and it was all-handson-deck for area plumbers and water department personnel to get the situation under control last week.



Pipes that bust from freezing are often hard to find until the weather warms up.

tiple water systems to plunge to rise and frozen broken pipes to critical levels, threatening widespread service disruptions for several days as treatment plants suddenly struggled to keep up with demand.

Water departments stayed in constant contact with one another throughout the ordeal and even teamed up to broadcast announcements via the CodeRED Alert System, asking mated hundreds of thousands the public's help to address the of gallons lost – at least. "low water issues" by locating leaks and conserving water.

your waterlines coming from your meter to your home," read one such alert. "If you locate a leak, please shut off your meter immediately.

The extent of burst pipes uation may get worse as air and caused reserve tanks in mul- ground temperatures continue

begin to thaw and flood your home or property." Thankfully, by end of

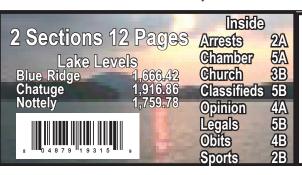
day Dec. 29, Union and Towns providers had isolated enough leaks so that sufficient water was being treated to replace losses; and though a full accounting may never be known, multiple providers each esti-

Notla Water Authority has over 575 miles of linear "Please visually inspect pipe delivering water to meters in Union County, and when employees got out looking for leaks, they found no breaks on their side of the system.

"Be advised that this sit-may get worse as air and completely full," Notla Water

"Going into this weath-

See Water Problems, Page 3A



### SPORTS

**BASKETBALL** 1/5 vs. Andrews, NC

6 PM 1/7 @ Warren County 3:30 PM

### **January Garden Chores**



Health **Board** Meeting Jan. 19

**Food Pantry Distribution Schedule** See page 2A

## Water Problems...from Page 1A

General Manager Jennifer treats water for thousands of said, noting the exception of a Maier said. "We had our wells going full-time, and we were well prepared for all this and had everyone on standby.

"What we didn't anticipate – and this is something I've not seen in my 20 years here, and some of the guys working at Notla Water that have been here for over 35 years have never seen it like this – but the biggest issue was all the breaks at customers' homes.

"As things started to thaw out, all the customers homes (with breaks) were being flooded, and all their supply lines going from the meter to the house, so that's what was draining all of our storage across the board.

"And that's pretty much what most of the water systems in the area were having issues with, too."

Exacerbating the issue, Maier said, was the volume of customers running water inside newer, properly insulated homes that "had no need to run their water."

"Everybody was so freaked out they were running water like crazy," Maier said. "Homes like trailers with insufficient insulation around their underpinning and older homes definitely need to run their water, but these new homes – they should not have had any issues with that.

"Outside spigots, yard hydrants and such that are exposed very close to the surface, where the waterline is going to it, you can work on covering up and insulating it during extreme weather, but the biggest portion of the issue here was the fact that we went so long with these cold temperatures.

"As far as our water system, everything went like clockwork. We just had to reach out to our customers and say, 'Hey, take a look at your waterline from the meter to the house and underneath your homes, and look for these leaks that are just draining everything we've got.""

Maier said that one of the biggest things that will help to mitigate similar situations in the future is for property owners who are going out of town in winter to shut their water meters off before traveling, "otherwise, they could just be flooding their homes and not even know it.'

"This was a strange situation," Maier said. "Most of North Georgia ended up having these issues. The Environmental Protection Division that oversees water systems sent out a bulletin saying that, look, we are aware that most of our water systems are in some serious trouble with pipes freezing.
"They reached out and

said that the governor had deavailable. So, it wasn't just our he said. little area here; most of North were having difficulties."

customers, including some people in North Carolina and those who receive water through the Towns County Water Authority, water issues affected the system and storage levels all last week.

The city had to implement rolling service interruptions to help identify leaks, and approximately 50 homes went without water from Christmas Eve until about midnight on

"The tanks are still not full, but most of the customers have had at least some water since midnight," City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick said Friday, Dec. 30. "We are continuing to refill the tanks as quickly as possible, but it will likely be several days of 24-hour operations at the Water Treatment Facility before all the tanks here and in the county are at full capacity again.'

Added Kendrick, "We are so appreciative of people who checked on neighbors' homes and called to alert us if they saw water. We had all hands on deck, but those extra eyes really helped. I would like to personally thank all those who have worked to restore City of Young Harris, which water to all our customers. You have gone above and beyond.

'We need to hear from people if they see water where there normally is no water. Please call City Hall at 706-896-2202 and report it. We would rather respond and check them to be sure than to miss something."

At the end of last week, Coosa Water Authority in Union was reporting that everything was basically under control after having to do some short, controlled service disruptions as well, mostly on Wednesday, Dec. 28.

"We are running pretty much back to normal as of yesterday afternoon," Coosa General Manager Cole Sullivan said Friday. "A lot of customers have second homes, so they're not full-time residents, Free GED Classes and a lot of them do not turn their water off when they leave to go back home.

'And a lot of them are rentals, so they don't turn (their meters) off every time somebody comes in and out. So, we had a lot of them freezing and busting on the customer side. We actually read meters twice this week to try to find all of them that had busted.'

Sullivan has been at Coosa for about 16 years, and like Notla, he has never seen it quite this bad in terms of system water loss; Coosa's three tanks are full at around 18 feet, and two of them dropped as low as 3-4 feet at times, putting major pressure on the authority's ability to meet demand.

"not a Fortunately, clared a state of emergency, so whole lot of (Coosa) customthere would be some help if ers were affected by outages,"

Georgia felt that freeze, so they there for a little while, but as preferable. far as us running out of water Over in Towns County, for customers, we really did where the City of Hiawassee not have that happen," Sullivan 828-557-5223. NT(Jan4.Z2)

frozen booster pump that kept some customers out of water for "a couple of hours until we were able to get it fixed."

Also impacted by the arctic blast was Blairsville City Water, though not to the same extent as some of the other providers.

'We're OK – we've got plenty of water," Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said Thursday. "Nottely River is where we get our fresh water from, so we've got the plant producing water every day even though we're losing water every day to leaks that we haven't found

Added Conley, "As soon as leaks are discovered, we take measures to fix them. As long as it stays warm, we're going to find more leaks – it's going to take it a while to get (completely) resolved. "We just ask people to

report any signs of any water leak, or if you have a pipe that's busted and you discover it, whatever water company that you're on, you need to contact that company immediately.' Least affected was the

experienced zero pressure issues, no significant drops in tank reserves, and suffered only two leaks as of Thursday afternoon.

"I will give a shout out to the city public works de-partment," Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby said. "They have been diligent in prepping for cold weather, checking all the equipment, and even taking care of some equipment by hand, because the extreme cold weather makes it impossible to use automation."

And while it's impossible to say whether the same conditions will be repeated over the coming winter months, people can rest assured that area water maintenance crews and plumbers who dealt with the

Are you ready to earn your high school equivalency diploma? North Georgia Technical College's Adult Education program is offering free day and evening courses. Classes are held in Blairsville at the Shirley Miller Building (behind the public library). Call 706-439-6342 to schedule your registration appointment. Our next enrollment date is January 8th & 23rd. NT(Jan4,Z2)

### **Beginners Clogging Lessons**

Beginners Clogging Lessons will be offered starting Monday, January 9, 2023. Classes are held every Monday from 5:30 to 6 PM in the Keith House at the John C. Camp bell Folk School, Brasstown, NC. Ages 6+, no experience "It was touch and go required. Hard soled shoes are

> For further information, please call 828-837-8090 or

### January Garden Chores from your **Master Gardener Extension Volunteers**

Trees and Shrubs - For winter interest in your landscape, birch trees, crape myrtle, deciduous magnolia, coral bark maple, kousa and redtwig dogwood, stewartia, and trident maple all have interesting bark.

For winter blooms, plant flowering quince, witch hazel, and leatherleaf mahonia.

Prune trees and shrubs while they are dormant with the exception of those that bloom in the spring. They should be pruned just after they bloom. Evergreen shrubs can also be pruned late this month.

Be sure to water evergreens before the soil freezes if severe weather is forecast, because the roots are not able to take up water when the soil is frozen.

When pruning, make sure that your tools are sharp. For large branches, first cut through the bark on the underside of the limb to be pruned to keep it from tearing the bark. Next, cut from the top, close but not flush with the trunk. The swelling at the base of each branch is the branch col-

lar and this should not be cut. Plant ornamental trees and shrubs this month if the

soil is not frozen.

Watch for borers, overwintering insects, and scale on broadleaf evergreen trees, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, and perennials. Apply dormant oil spray when these pests are detected, always following label direc-

Water trees and shrubs

during dry periods. Prune nandinas any time between now and early spring

by cutting out one third of the

oldest canes.

Shrubs such as forsythia, spirea, and kerria can be divided now.

poison ivy when working outdoors. Even though the vine is leafless this time of the year, perature when watering housethe branches can still cause a powerful reaction if accidentally touched.

If you have Helleborus orientalis (Lenten rose) planted in your garden – look for blooms beginning now to mid-spring.

To encourage new blooms, deadhead pansies (remove spent blossoms) and fertilize monthly with fertilizer that contains nitrate nitrogen (best for plants growing in cold soils).

Water outside containers planted with pansies and evergreens regularly.

Vegetables - If you have not already done so, prepare your vegetable garden area for spring planting when the ground is frost free and not soggy. Apply lime if your soil test indicates that you should. Contact your County Extension office for soil test direc-

The New Year is an exciting time to reevaluate your life and your garden. Cold days are great for sitting by a fire and planning your spring landscape changes and vegetable garden.

Request mail-order seed and plant catalogs and order seeds for starting indoors.

If the ground is dry, till soil in your vegetable garden to help eliminate insects and weeds and incorporate manure or compost to get the soil in good shape for spring plant-

Houseplants - Remove amaryllis stems with the faded blooms. Keep it indoors with Flowerbeds - Watch for your houseplants then plant it outdoors in May.

Use water at room templants. Spray houseplants with insecticidal soap if you detect spider mites, mealy bugs, or scale on the leaves, always following label directions.

Give houseplants a half turn every month so they do not become misshapen.

Repot houseplants as needed and fertilize using water-soluble fertilizer at eight-week intervals at half the recommended strength.

Miscellaneous - Now is a good time to install edgings around flowerbeds and construct walls, terraces, and walkways, when weather permits.

Instead of salt, use sand on icy walks and driveways. Salt can damage plants and

Have your lawnmower serviced so it will be ready when you are for spring grass Inventory your garden tools and replace or repair as

necessary. Sharpen your tools and clean rust from them with steel wool. Coat blades with a light oil and rub linseed oil on wooden handles to help preserve them. Chop unwanted bamboo

and English ivy to the ground. Follow up with weed killer on the leaves in April. More than one application of weed killer may be necessary, always follow label directions.

Jo Anne Allen Master Gardener Extension Volunteer 706-400-8139

recent freeze will be ready to resolve those issues if the time

The Christmas weekend weather caused electricity and heating issues as well, as the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC had to comply with a Tennessee Valley Authority order to implement rolling blackouts amid single digit temps that created record-breaking power demands.

Looking on the bright side, it is possible the arctic blast that ushered in "supercold temperatures and frozen ground was likely really good for killing off invasive aquatic weeds, especially Brazilian elodea, which is native to the Amazon River Watershed," according to Callie Moore of conservation nonprofit MountainTrue.

Two invasive aquatic

weeds – Brazilian elodea and hopefully their return with parrot's-feather - were found full pool in Summer 2023 will to be a growing issue in Lake be limited due to the winter Chatuge over the summer, and weather.

Page 6A THE TOWNS COUNTY HERALD **January 4, 2023** 

## GMF Fireworks...from Page 1A

"Life's too short to not be happy. (I'd like to) take care of my family, and all that kind of stuff," Sozcak said.

Food vendors were in attendance, too, with mini donuts being a popular snack as well as soft-baked pretzels, which some folks were rushing to grab even as the fireworks began at about 8:45 that night.

Although the fog had rolled in something heavy after rain earlier in the day, the gleaming show was visible above the tree line, and if nothing else, the lingering

precipitation created a haze of the property. color that flashed and crackled

When it all started, distant cries of "Happy New Year" and applause heralded the holiday's (early) arrival and the meaning behind it. Somewhere in the lowest parking lots, a vehicle blasted a rock rendition of tic about what you may be able "Auld Lang Syne." The fireworks contin-

ued even as the first headlights ture events like concerts and began to file out of the Fairgrounds, and plenty of families stuck around to watch the show in its entirety from the rises of the hills surrounding

A profound sense of togetherness brought to mind another one of Garrison's quotes, some advice for those who may be concerned going forward: "In the New Year, go in optimistic. Don't worry about what it may bring. Be optimis-Keep an eye out for fu-

springtime Mile-Long Yard Sale by checking www. georgiamountainfairgrounds. com or calling the office at



Foggy conditions New Year's Eve night didn't stop the fun at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, where families enjoyed a vendor's flying whirligig toys called "Whistlepops." Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

## Ticket Quota...from Page 1A

amount of tickets be written, and explained the legal issues that would arise from that.

"In October, the mayor showed me the latest financial reports and told me that the PD needed to write enough tickets to cover the salaries of the officers. I was told that if we could not do this that she would be forced to eliminate a position within the department.

"I told her that asking for a certain quantity or value of tickets was an illegal ticket quota. I told her that I would not ask that of the officers. She said that she would sit down with the officers and show them the budget, and I told her that that was a bad idea.

"That day, I spoke to Councilman (Jay Chastain Jr.) about the incident. I also spoke to (City Attorney Thomas Mitchell) following the October work session about the request made by the mayor.

"Of the applicants for the chief's position that I have spoken with, all have told me that the mayor has spoken about ticket revenue. One applicant, who has held the position elsewhere, told her that a department is not allowed to pay for itself through ticket revenue. He later told me that if a chief were to do what she is asking, she stated, 'I don't care what the law says,' when discussing

ticket quotas. made it known, but local media is calling me and have asked about ticket quotas. I have simply stated that Hiawassee has never had a ticket quota while I have been employed here. I do not believe there is any intention of the media running this media."

but cannot require a certain story, but I believe it is only go-

ing to grow and grow.
"There has already been talk about contacting the Capitol regarding the mayor. I believe that her actions are unethical and immoral, if not illegal. It is no secret in the front office of City Hall that she is insistent on the department covering its expenses. I was told that she has created spreadsheets and charts showing how many tickets would be needed by each officer to pay for their salaries.

"My concern is only for the City of Hiawassee and the officers. I did not want any of you to hear this first from the newspaper or radio or as rumors on the street. If you have has yet to learn if a ticket quota any questions, please feel free to call me.'

The Towns County Herald contacted Smith, who respectfully declined to comment for publication.

In researching the matter, the newspaper was unable to find any Georgia statutes or case law expressly prohibiting ticket quotas. The state did enact a law in 2015 governing speed traps that could result in a police department losing its speed detection permit, but there is no criminal penalty.

around the close of business on citations. the last day before the Christthat they would end up in jail. mas holiday, Mayor Ordiales cial concerns outlined above, Another applicant said that denied saying she would dis- the Hiawassee Police Departband the police department "if

it were her choice. "I do not know who has to City Attorney Mitchell to ask about the legality of quotas and by what process a city might municipal court fines have been disband its police department. Mitchell responded that his law firm "has a policy of not discussing on-going client matters with third parties including the



Liz Ordiales Hiawassee Mayor

And while the newspaper would indeed be illegal, it is reasonable to wonder – assuming the core allegation is true whether city residents and business owners would view a quota designed to cover officer salaries as being in the best interest of protecting and serving the community, even if such a quota were completely legal.

After all, one major concern with quotas is that they have the potential to increase the risk of creating perverse incentives for officers to conduct unconstitutional stops in order During a brief phone call to meet a specific number of

Pertaining to the finanment operates at an annual deficit, with an expected budgetary The Herald reached out shortfall of \$326,128 for Fiscal

Year 2022-23. In terms of revenues, budgeted at \$133,000 for the year, with annual salary costs projected at \$240,778, not including employee benefits like health care and retirement con-

### CROP Walk celebrates 2022 and thanks local sponsors

In this season of giving, CROP Walk 2022 thanks those who have already given. Especially, we thank our local sponsors whose financial donations have once again made this annual fundraiser for fighting hunger such a success.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the following:

In Blairsville, GA – Cone & Associates CPAs, LLC, Coosa Methodist Church, Foodland, Friendship Class of First UMC of Union County, General Supply, Inc., Harmony Grove Baptist Church, House of Prayer, Ingle's, Leon's Floors, Mike's Seafood Market & Grill, Mountain Building Supply, Rich Furniture & Cabinet Shop Inc., Sawmill Restaurant, Scott Carter Enterprises, Strickland and Associates, P.C., Sunrise Grocery, The Vacuum Store, Walmart;

In Gainesville, GA – Aldersgate Class of Gainesville First UMC, J. Geyer Advertising;

In Hayesville, NC – Goldhagen Art Glass Studio, Jackie Chrysler/Dodge/Jeep, Jones Moore Insurance Services, Inc.; In Helen, GA – Alpine Mini-golf;

In Hiawassee, GA – Asiano, Monte Alban Mexican Res-In Suches, GA - The

Church Without Walls; In Young Harris, GA -

Brasstown Valley Resort, Chris Servis, LLC, Employees of YH City Hall, Enrico's Italian Restaurant, Friends of YHC, In addition to outright

Heavenly Bake Shop, Mary's Southern Grill, Sharp Memorial



financial sponsorship, CROP Walk 2022 also raised significant funds through the sale of dozens of "Suches Life" tee shirts, and through two raffles, one for a Goldhagen Art Studio creation and the other for a "jar quilt" (see the photo) expertly stitched by a resident of Blairsville. The raffles took place December 17 at the Christmas candlelight service of the Church Without Walls (Rev. Fred Whitley, officiating). Out of over 5,000 tickets, Tommy Brown of Young Harris, GA, won the quilt and Brenda Platzer of Lexington, SC, won the Goldhagen objet d'art.

Many, many thanks to all who supported this year's CROP Walk (the 32nd annual walk), allowing CROP Walk to continue fulfilling its mission by "fighting Brenda Platzer of Lexington, SC, hunger one step at a time.



## Thoughts on 2023...from Page 1A

John, who retired and moved Florida. here from Cartersville five years ago with his wife. He has been enjoying his time in Towns greatly, with a love of "the mountains and seeing the lakes, and it just being peaceful and calm. "For me, 2022 was re-

ally not that bad," John said. "It seemed a lot more positive. Negatively, we have what's going on in politics, the partisanship of everything, but in terms of my life, it's been pretty good. Moving forward, I

would like to see voting rights firmed up and health insurance set up so that everybody can get it. I'm a Democrat, so I may be in the minority up here.

"My goals are just that I want to be able to live and enjoy my life, wife, family, and try to be happy and more health-conscious and active by walking and running more, and maybe kayaking, and live a more overall well-balanced life mentally, physically and emotionally.

Over at the Tilted Café, his wife were having lunch. The couple moved to Towns that he visits a few times a year County four years ago from on family outings, was play-

When asked about what he would like 2023 to bring, he said, "Well, how about the cure for cancer?'

In general, though, John had simple desires of "wanting to see the economic and housing markets, wages and inflation get better, and close the border."
"I would also like to see

the mainstream media get back to giving the unbiased facts on everything and stop with the propaganda to steer social agendas," he said. As for better things coming out of 2022, John said that

'people are finally waking up to the truth about COVID and doing away with all of it." "I've never worn a mask ever and I never will - you can't put one on me," he said. "I call it the 'scamdemic' on

purpose. I'm not a conspiracy theorist, I'm an occupational theorist. I used to work for the government; I know how corrupt they are, then they change their minds.' Tilted patron Barry, who another man named John and lives in Tampa, Florida, and owns a cabin in Hiawassee

ing arcade-style video games with his son and daughter on Wednesday, Dec. 28.

"As far as resolutions, I try not to make those," Barry said, looking ahead to New Year's. "I figure if I just keep doing what I'm supposed to be doing, I don't need to. I just take care of myself and family all the time. I don't need to make promises to myself; I set goals every day.

"There were challenges with the schools and lockdowns and other protocols and all that stuff, and local businesses suffered during COVID, but I think it turned out better and things are moving at a faster pace than ever in some ways.

"We can all get more things done digitally like Zoom meetings, for example, and other mobile connections. and more people are working from home. So, overall, I see things are in a good direction.

"For 2023, I want to see changes in the legitimacy of vote counting and with immigration and the Border Patrol. There are obviously problems there. All you have to do is turn on the TV and see what's happening.'