

Berrong...from Page 1A

job consists of a couple of things," said Dr. Berrong. "Number one is budget and making sure we have enough money to fund what we're trying to do at the school system. Secondly, extracurricular activities and third is academics, not necessarily in that order."

As far as the budget goes, Dr. Berrong explained that when he first took the position as superintendent in January 2015, the school was only functioning on a starting fund balance of \$2.3 million. And while that may seem like a hefty amount, for a school system, it was barely scraping by after salaries and supplies were accounted for.

"When you hear \$2.3 million you might think that's a lot of money," said Dr. Berrong. "But actually \$2.3 million to start a school system at the beginning of the year is not a lot of money, that's getting to the point of saying, 'we may not make it to Christmas without taking out bonds to make payroll,' before the tax money comes in."

"As a school system, we don't start getting revenue until the land and income tax starts coming in November or December. So, you have to have a large amount of money to start the school year that will get you by until that income starts coming in."

At the end of the year last year, Towns County School System finished with \$3.5 million in fund balance. According to Dr. Berrong, this is the first time in known school records that the school system has increased its fund balance for three consecutive years.

As for SPLOST projects, Dr. Berrong and the Board of Education have been hard at

work making improvements for the students, from athletics to academics. Beginning with the renovations to the tennis court, other SPLOST projects have included a baseball locker room, the purchase of a school system tractor, handicap parking spaces for football, baseball and soccer games, a sign for the middle school gym and auditorium, the purchase of Chrome books and textbook adoptions.

"One of the things that we couldn't do was we didn't have enough money to purchase textbooks for every student," said Dr. Berrong. "So what we were doing was buying 30 textbooks that would stay in the classroom, so students weren't even able to take their textbooks home. They were only using the textbooks in the classroom."

"That wasn't just a Towns County issue, that was an issue across the state when all of the budget cuts started happening several years ago. Now that we have the SPLOST, we are able to purchase the textbooks."

"We have also been able to implement new smart boards into all of the classrooms."

As for the Chrome books, Towns County is well on its way to having a Chrome book for every one of its students, from kindergarten to seniors in high school. According to Dr. Berrong, having a Chrome book has become increasingly important since the state moved all standardized testing from paper tests to electronic, and most of the testing for all grade levels takes place during the same week.

"This is something that we have to do," said Dr. Berrong. "The state, several years ago, said that we're no longer going to test with paper

and pencil, that we have to test on a computer. "That means every student has to have a computer to test on because we test elementary through eighth grade during the same week, so we can't have just one set of computers that go from school to school."

"We are currently just a couple of hundred computers away from having a computer for every student. Next year we should be able to purchase the remainder of those Chrome books for every student to have."

In the coming years, Dr. Berrong hopes to use the SPLOST funds for a softball locker room and a gym divider to have multiple games in the gym at the same time. The school will have three more years of the SPLOST.

Dr. Berrong went on to explain that, with these SPLOST projects, modernization will play a large role in what this money is used for. While the school buildings are in good condition, they are in need of some upgrades.

"If your school building is over 40 years old, then you may qualify to get extra funds from the state to help," said Dr. Berrong. "Well, our building was built in 1976, so we currently are a 40-year-old building at the middle and high schools. So we do qualify for that modernization, which means that we now qualify for \$6 million worth of school projects."

"Now, to get that money, we have to put in a matching 25 percent. So, this is going to help us tremendously."

The school will have to pay for the renovations up front, and then provide receipts to the state for the money to be reimbursed. The school will begin modernization projects next summer with replacing the roof and electrical systems.

Dr. Berrong went on to share recent school successes, from high SAT and ACT scores to CCRPI scores to extracurricular achievements in athletics as well as clubs and organizations.

"If I were to list all of our school successes we'd be here all day," said Dr. Berrong. "I'm so incredibly proud of all of our students, our faculty and am excited for what the future holds for Towns County Schools."

Crash...from Page 1A

of getting someone there to help."

Once in a safe space, having called 911, the chief said that, if you feel so inclined as to leave your own vehicle and approach the scene of an accident, do so carefully and report what you find—condition of drivers and passengers—to the dispatcher.

"Whatever they're comfortable with," said Chief Smith. "Unless there is a reason to get the (car accident victim) out of the car, they should always leave them in the car in case there is a spinal injury."

"The first thing that the paramedics do when they arrive is, they put a (cervical) collar on a person's neck to prevent any further injuries."

"So, if the vehicles are safe, they're not on fire or they're not smoking or anything, they should encourage people to stay in the car. The last thing we want is for (car accident victims) to injure themselves further by trying to get out of the vehicle."

Of course, should bystanders decide to get involved at the scene, they'll do well to listen to what 911 dispatchers have to say.

"The dispatchers are trained to assist on things like that, just as they're trained to give CPR instructions over the phone," said Chief Smith. "Dispatchers will be able to walk you through what they need, and what you can do to help."

Another thing to consider as a bystander to an accident is, if an individual is a witness to the accident, try to remember details about the accident, such as the color of the light at an intersection for the cars involved.

"After ensuring your safety and everybody else's safety, if you can stay to give a witness statement to the police, that's very helpful," said Chief Smith. "We understand that people don't always have time to stick around... but if they can, stay to give a witness statement, it will only take a few minutes."

"They just have to tell us what they saw, and we write down their driver's license number and that's the end of it. It's just to help us determine who's at fault in the accident and how we can proceed from



Fortunately, there were no serious injuries sustained in the accident, though the driver of the van was taken to Chatuge Regional Hospital. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

there."

Furthermore, Chief Smith said that, even if you think someone else is calling 911, go ahead and call, just in case.

"If you see something, just call 911 and let them know what you saw or what is going on with the accident," said Chief Smith.

Another thing to consider is, if you're pulling up to an accident with first responders already at the scene, be wary not to rubberneck so much that you become distracted from your own driving.

"Please be careful and watch for emergency personnel," said Chief Smith. "They may be trying to render aid and not paying attention to their surroundings as much as they could be, so it's up to the

drivers who are going around these accidents to watch out for the first responders who are trying to help."

Of course, Georgia's "Move Over" law applies in the situation of emergency personnel at an accident, and also to tow trucks at the scene of an accident, according to Chief Smith.

"You either have to move over into another lane or slow down to below the speed limit to provide for safe passage," said Chief Smith.

As for drivers in general, Chief Smith implores people not to drive distracted, and to put away your cellphone any time you get behind the wheel. After all, it's illegal to text, type and read from cellphones while driving.

Fire & Rescue Smoke Alarm Boot Drive

Saturday, October 14th, the Towns County Fire Department will be out working with the Towns County Unit of the American Red Cross and ServPro to hold a Boot Drive to raise money to purchase smoke alarms for Towns Co. citizens in need. This is a great joint effort by these organizations to provide life saving alarms in homes that need them the most and can least afford them.

October is Fire Awareness Month and what better way to support fire awareness and safety than to make sure more homes in Towns County have smoke alarms.

Chief Harold would like you to know we will be out at a couple of main intersections Saturday, watch for us, dig deep, so more families will be protected this winter. Thank you for taking the time to take care of your neighbors.

If you'd like to drop off a donation, the Red Cross will also have a donation jar for this Smoke Alarm Boot Drive at their annual yard sale at 1298 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris, next to the EMA Building on Friday and Saturday.

Red Cross annual yard sale

Come on out for a good cause and get some good buys. Our local Red Cross Disaster Action Team is having its annual yard sale at its office at 1298 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris, right next to the EMA and Towns County Food Pantry, October 13 & 14th. This yard sale is amazing, many of your neighbors have been contributing things for this sale and we can't wait to share them with you. Don't

forget to come out and get some great buys and donate to a great organization. All funds raised will assist residents in Towns County in various disaster situations and preparedness. Your help and support would be greatly appreciated. Come on out and join us!

Giant Annual Yard Sale - Friday 10/13 and Saturday 10/14 (both days from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.).