

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, October 12, 2022

Fall Festival continues thru Saturday, Oct. 15

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

The regionally renowned annual tradition of the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival returned to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in full force last week, debuting in 2022 on Friday, Oct. 7, to kick off nine full days of family-friendly fun that attracts thousands of visitors each year.

Through Saturday, Oct. 15, guests can enjoy dozens of vendor booths featuring talented local arts & crafters, tasty foods and other fall treats, as well as new carnival rides, historical exhibits, terrific performances from the Cowboy Circus as well as the Royal Bengal Tigers, and first-rate musical shows. A full schedule

can be found at georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

Fairgrounds Event Coordinator Shannon Baldwin-Nguyen was certainly impressed with how well the opening-day ceremonies went, and she remains optimistic that the rest of the festival will follow suit.

"It's been an amazing kickoff day already," Baldwin-Nguyen said. "We had so many eager vendors who wanted to join us here that all of the permit booths, porches, and any other space we have is completely filled up."

"We can't wait for everyone to keep coming out this week, because there is definitely no shortage of things to do and to get early fall and Christmas decorations and gift ideas. You've got a little bit

of everything here, and it's a great way to start the fall/winter season spirit."

Gloria Kempf has resided in Blue Ridge for 20 years, and she has been a booth vendor at various Fairgrounds events with her business Gloria's Creations for nearly nine years, providing handmade school team, military, holiday and other themed lighted bottle and block artwork.

"I love it here, and the people are so friendly," Kempf said. "Fall and winter are my favorite seasons, and you just can't beat these mountain views."

"My favorite part about being involved here is the other vendors that come, and just always meeting new people. The customers are always nice, and I have made several

great friends over the years."

As always, the Fall Festival offers many of the beloved activities people have grown accustomed to in the decades that the event has been offered to the public, along with plenty of new attractions, vendors and sights to enjoy.

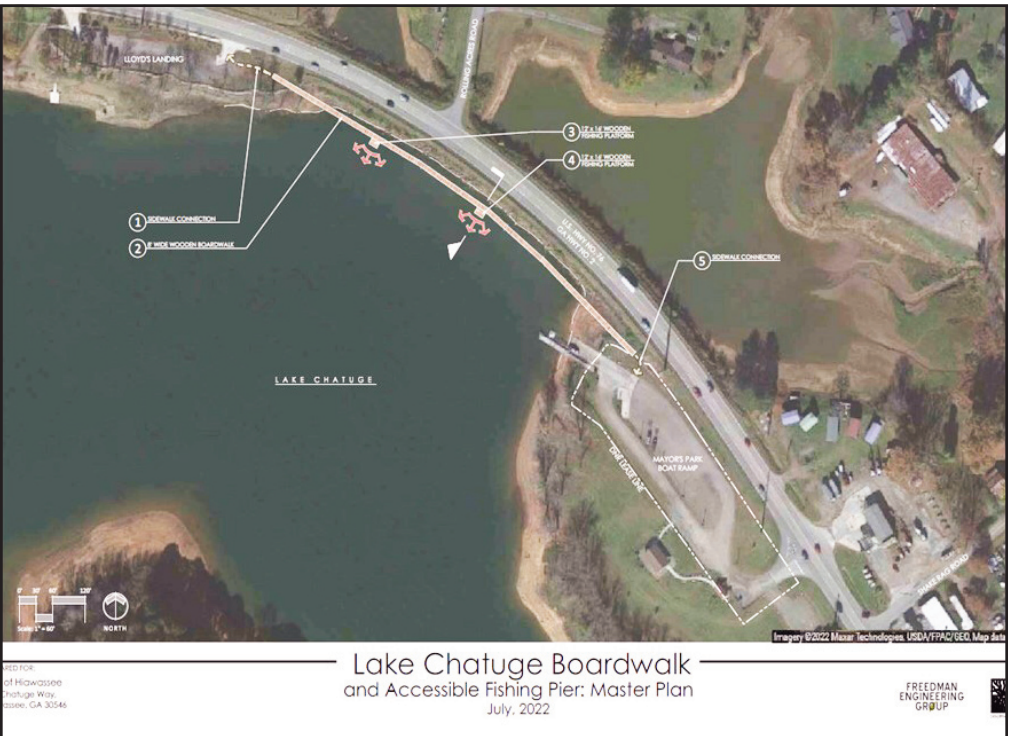
Live music is as integral to the festival as any other aspect, and Anderson Music Hall will continue to open its doors at 6 p.m. every evening, with music to begin around 7 p.m. featuring two musical groups to take the stage during each of the nightly performances.

Apart from the Ashley McBryde concert requiring a hard-ticket purchase this Saturday, music shows are included in the price of admission. See *GA Mtn. Fall Festival*, Page 6A



Third-generation animal trainer Brunon Blaszak is offering his famous tiger show twice daily through Friday, with three shows Saturday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Boardwalk project receives \$690,000 in grant funding



Lake Chatuge Boardwalk and Accessible Fishing Pier: Master Plan July, 2022

When constructed, the Lake Chatuge Boardwalk will feature two fishing piers and will make the entire City of Hiawassee walkable.

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

Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales made a major announcement in the regular council meeting on Oct. 4 at City Hall, divulging that the lion's share of the funding to build a boardwalk bridging Lloyd's Landing and Mayor's

Park was finally arriving.

The boardwalk project has been in the works for three years now, and thanks to a grant approval by the Appalachian Regional Commission, which Ordiales received word of the previous Thursday, the project can begin to move forward.

Measuring 8 feet wide and 815 feet long, the boardwalk will include the addition

of two fishing piers, leaving 12-by-16 each, leaving plenty of room for multiple families or individuals to walk over the water or enjoy the aquatic scenery.

The total cost for the boardwalk and fishing piers sits at approximately \$980,000, and the grant will cover 70%, or \$690,000.

See *Boardwalk*, Page 5A

Whidden to be remembered for leaving positive mark

By **Shawn Jarrard**
Towns County Herald
Editor

A young community member's life was tragically cut short last week when a crash on Sunnyside Road resulted in the death of Trent Whidden, 23, of Hiawassee.

"On Oct. 4, at approximately 7:50 a.m., Georgia State Patrol Post 27 Blue Ridge was requested to investigate a single vehicle crash on State Route 288 near Gibson Hill in Towns County," GSP said. "The investigation shows that a Chevrolet Silverado was traveling east on State Route 288."

"The driver, 23-year-old Mr. Trent Wayne Whidden, failed to maintain his lane and crossed the center line. The Chevrolet traveled off the roadway, down an embankment and struck a tree."

As to why the vehicle left the roadway, authorities think Whidden fell asleep while on his way home. He had been working third shifts for the last few months as well as keeping up with friends and family.

Moving forward, Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper, who responded to the scene with Deputy Coroner Ken Nicholson, encourages all motorists to be mindful of their level of sleepiness, especially in combination with big schedule changes that can affect them for



Trent Whidden

months as they adjust to sleeping during the day.

"Trent was a dedicated worker and a helper who stayed on the go," Cooper said in admiration of the young man's character. "We have all felt invincible at some point in our lives regardless of age, and I urge people of all ages to be aware of the signs of exhaustion."

Many area residents were understandably devastated to hear the news, as by all accounts, the Towns County High Class of 2017 graduate was a productive member of the community with a big heart and wide circle of friends.

Unfortunately, the See *Whidden*, Page 6A

Bradshaw holds last meeting before temporary move

By **Mark Smith**
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held his last official meeting to take place inside the Towns County Courthouse on Wednesday, Oct. 5 — at least until the courthouse is fully renovated.

In the meantime, the move to the temporary offices at the Old Rec Gym in preparation for courthouse construction should be completed this week, with the Temporary Courthouse & Administrative Offices to be located at 900 Main Street in Hiawassee for the foreseeable future.

In the called meeting last week, Bradshaw renewed a contract with the Georgia Department of Transportation to purchase a new van for the Towns County Transit Service.

"This van we ordered in 2020, and we still haven't received it," said County Finance Director Andrea Anderson. "So, we're having to redesign the contract because it's been so long (without being executed)."

Anderson said the delay is due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"When we have to tell the vans when the state tells us to," she said, adding that after a certain amount of time, the state requires a replacement ve-



One of the courtrooms set up inside the Old Rec Gym, which will house the Temporary Courthouse & Administrative Offices during upcoming renovations of the courthouse building. Photo by Mark Smith

hicle. Anderson said they will likely have to order another van, which will be covered in the upcoming county meeting Oct. 18.

"The state pays 90% and we pay 10%. It's a very good deal for the county," she said, adding that the estimated cost of the van is about \$59,000, so

Towns County will pay about \$5,900.

Both Anderson and Bradshaw said that they want to highlight the fact that Towns County does have a transit service and they encourage residents to take advantage of it. Details of the program, includ-

See *County Offices*, Page 6A

Hiawassee rolls back millage, increases hotel-motel tax



Members of the Hiawassee City Council during their most recent work session in City Hall. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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

The Hiawassee City Council and Mayor Liz Ordiales have addressed multiple big-ticket issues in their most recent meetings, including setting the 2022 millage rate, enacting a hotel-motel tax increase and continuing discussions about restricting the issuance of liquor store licenses.

In their regular monthly

meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 4, the council voted 4-1 to adopt the 2022 rollback millage rate of 1.972, with Councilwoman Anne Mitchell being the lone dissenting vote.

Each year, property tax levying authorities like the City of Hiawassee calculate millage rates based on budgetary needs for offering services to the community.

When inflation causes property values to go up, the state requires that a rollback

rate be calculated to offset such increases, unless a municipality wants to raise taxes, in which case officials would need to call public hearings and advertise that such an increase was taking place.

The City of Hiawassee has a longstanding tradition of accepting the rollback rate year after year. This limits the amount of property tax revenues generated, especially over time, which explains why Council-

See *Hiawassee City Hall*, Page 6A

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Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,673.72
Chatuge 1,919.67
Nottely 1,764.88

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SPORTS
SOFTBALL
Oct. 12 vs. LOA 4 PM
FOOTBALL
Oct. 14 @ Johnson
7:30 PM

Every **VOTE** COUNTS!
Early In-Person Voting Starts Monday!
See page 6A

The OFFICE of the TOWNS COUNTY HERALD will REOPEN
Wednesdays from 8 AM to Noon
Beginning Oct. 19th

Quilt of Valor Recipient
See page 1B



Chamber Chronicles

The official source of Towns County Chamber News

Wednesday, October 12, 2022



Loaded Cow's ribbon-cutting was held on October 5. The homemade ice cream shop has lots of lots of delicious flavors.

A Shepherd's Life is an online Bible study. www.ashepherdslife.org

Cass Clinical Spa provides medical skincare, body contouring, and general services for a healthy lifestyle. They are located at 144 North Main Street in Hiawassee. 844-422-7722

Thrifter's Paradise is a non-profit thrift store that donated to many area charities located at 225 South Main Street in Hiawassee, GA. 828-340-0420.

Red Bird Ridge, LLC - Lake front tiny house rental with private dock, great sunset views, and an amazing screen porch on Lake Chatuge. 404-683-0612.

Lunch 'n Learn Class - Google My Business - Changes in Google. Does Google sometimes confuse you with all their new changes? We will have a class on Wednesday, November 9 that can give you the solutions. The Small Business Development Center (University of Georgia) will be giving a

class to explain the changes in Google. The class will be held at the Towns County Rec Center from 12pm - 1:30pm. Chamber members only pay \$15, and for all non-chamber members, the price is \$39. Please call the chamber office at 706-896-4966 or email at lcchamber2021@gmail.com

Holiday Bazaar - Christmas is only a few months away, so make plans to attend our Holiday Bazaar on November 5-6. This will be a new event for the chamber. It will be very similar to our successful Made in Georgia Festival, but we will accept vendors from all the local area. The event will kick off the holiday season and will feature many holiday items as well as hand made products. There will be new vendors as well as some of the same vendors from the Made in Georgia. If you are interested in becoming a vendor, please stop by the Lake Chatuge Visitors Center in Young Harris or give us a call at 706-896-4966. Application forms may be downloaded at <https://bit.ly/3TgjzUC>.

If you are a Facebook user, stay up on community news by liking Lake Chatuge Chamber and Community page. Updated information is shared regarding events, area businesses, "feel good" stories and much more about the Lake Chatuge community.

Thanks to all our members for their continued support! Additionally, we'd like to thank these Platinum and Gold Members: **PLATINUM MEMBERS:** Blue Ridge Mountain EMC; Century 21 Black Bear Realty; Lake Chatuge Lodge; Majestic Mountain Getaways, Inc.; Mountain Realty; The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge; United Community Bank; Windstream Communications. **GOLD MEMBERS:** Blairsville Printing; Brasstown Manor; Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa; Brother's Restaurant at Willow Ranch; Chatuge Regional Hospital; Chick-fil-A of Blairsville; Dharam Auto Sales; Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital; Hiawassee Package Store; Homestead Hospice; Hughes Accounting; K. Boyer Photography; Men on the Move; Mahan Family Chiropractic; NeuroSport Physical Therapy LLC; Northeast GA Health System; Paradise Bar and Grill, LLC; Peach State Federal Credit Union; Regency SouthernCare Hospice; Sanre Organic Skinfood; South State Bank; Stone Wall 66 LLC; Tri-County Office Supply, and, Young Harris College.

For information on becoming a member of the Towns County Chamber, visit www.golakechatuge.com or call Mary Ann at (706) 896-4966 or email her at LCCChamber2021@gmail.com.

Richard (Dick) Lewis Celebrates 100th Birthday



Wishing a Happy 100th Birthday to **Richard (Dick) Lewis WWII Veteran** Thursday, October 13th

Towns County Republican Party October Monthly Meeting

The October meeting of the Towns County Republican Party will be held at the Main Street Grill, S Main Street, Hiawassee, GA on Thursday, October 20. The doors open at 5:15 PM for socializing and enjoying items from a special menu created just for us with the meeting beginning at 5:45 PM, sharp.

Our special guest speaker this month is our great Commissioner, Cliff Bradshaw. The Commissioner will share with us where things stand, as far as the addition to the Courthouse, the logistics of the temporary County Courthouse offices, what to expect in the months to come with regard to the new addition to the building, and answer your respectful questions.

Prior to the Commissioner addressing us, Jeff Pierot, with "Pierot's Points" will enlighten us, as only he can do it, about pertinent is-

ues regarding our upcoming elections, and why we MUST VOTE! He is a newly appointed Republican member of the TC Election Board.

We will also be discussing the upcoming Multi-county Chili Cook Off on Saturday, October 22 at Meeks Park 12-4; need for volunteering and importance of selling our drawing tickets for donations of \$5 for one and \$20 for 5, for a fantastic fire pit with all the trimmings, and we mean all the trimmings, as our county offering.

Other counties will offer other items.

Live music by "Elvis" and the Rick Stone Band of Brothers. Taste, judge, food and fun!

For further information, please contact Betsy Young at TCGOPChair@gmail.com or 904-382-1912. Bring a chair, or blanket and appetite, and to get in free just pledge to vote!

TI(Oct12F)gg

VFW and American Legion Golf Tournament October 20th



The VFW and American Legion is having a Golf Tournament on Thursday, October 20 at 10 a.m. at Chatuge Shores Golf Course. Join fellow Veterans and supporters for a day of fun and golf. Cost is \$55 per person. Winning team will receive \$200 in cash! Call 404-295-6462 for more information. TI(Oct12A)JCA

Boardwalk...from Page 1A

"We'll take it - we'll put in the 30%," Ordiales said, holding up a map outlining the boardwalk plan and detailing the positive impact the walkway will have on public safety.

"Right now, it's very scary, because people go down into these rocks to fish, and that is very, very dangerous," noted Ordiales, pointing to a gap between the proposed boardwalk and the highway. The steep, rocky banks should be much less accessible after construction. "I mean, it's very steep, and it's rock - it's really easy to slip."

Here, Councilwoman Anne Mitchell suggested erecting warning signs along the edge of the bank, and Ordiales hopes that completion of the boardwalk will deter such behavior.

Worthy of note is that the inclusion of the boardwalk will "allow for the entire city to be walkable," which could benefit

the health of residents and provide more accessibility for the 2,000-odd yearly visitors hiking the Appalachian Trail.

"It's a wonderful place to walk," Mitchell said. "It will give you access to walk from town to all the way down to Mayor's Park."

Lloyd's Landing has enjoyed cleanup efforts in the wake of the Daffodil Project, which also benefits the boardwalk. Before construction can begin, environmental studies and land surveys must find the location adequate.

Taking that into consideration, Ordiales suspects that folks should be able to enjoy the boardwalk by fall of 2023.

Also in the meeting was a vote to raise local hotel-motel taxes from 5% to 8%, and a majority of the council voted to accept the rollback millage rate for 2022 property taxes; these items are covered in a separate article in this week's edition of the Towns County Herald.

The Hiawassee City Council meets the first Tuesday of every month at 6 p.m. inside City Hall at 50 River Street. The meetings are open to the public and streamed live on Facebook.



The VFW Post 7807 in Hiawassee is starting bingo every Saturday night. Doors open at 5:30 PM, games start at 6:30 PM. Highway 288 Sunnyside Road, Hiawassee, GA. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us.

VFW Fish Fry October 14 & 28

Join us for last two Fish Fry's of the season Friday, October 14th, 4:30-7 PM and Friday, October 28th, 4:30 -7 PM at the VFW Post 7807, Hiawassee, GA. \$12 includes: Fish, Coleslaw, Hush Puppies, Beans, Fries and Drink. No tip and no tax. NT(Oct12A)JH

Veterans Thrift Store Volunteers

Veterans Thrift Store, a product of Club 66, 2641 Hwy. 66, Young Harris, GA is open from 10 AM to 4 PM, Wednesday thru Saturday, helping local veterans in our community. We are looking for volunteers to help with the thrift store.

We are accepting gently used items: furniture, appliances, toys, clothes, etc. For details call 706-379-3774. NT(Oct12Z)CA

RESCHEDULED!

Shredding Event

Go Green! All shredded material will be recycled.

TOWNS COUNTY SHRED DAY

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5TH

9AM-11AM

GEORGIA MOUNTAIN FAIRGROUNDS

PARKING LOT

Brought to you by:

You are invited to attend

S.A.F.E.'s

Remember My Name

Ceremony



October 21st • 6 PM
Union County Farmers Market
Covered Bridge

This is a candlelight vigil to honor Georgia victims that lost their lives to Domestic Violence this past year.

GA Mtn. Fall Festival...from Page 1A

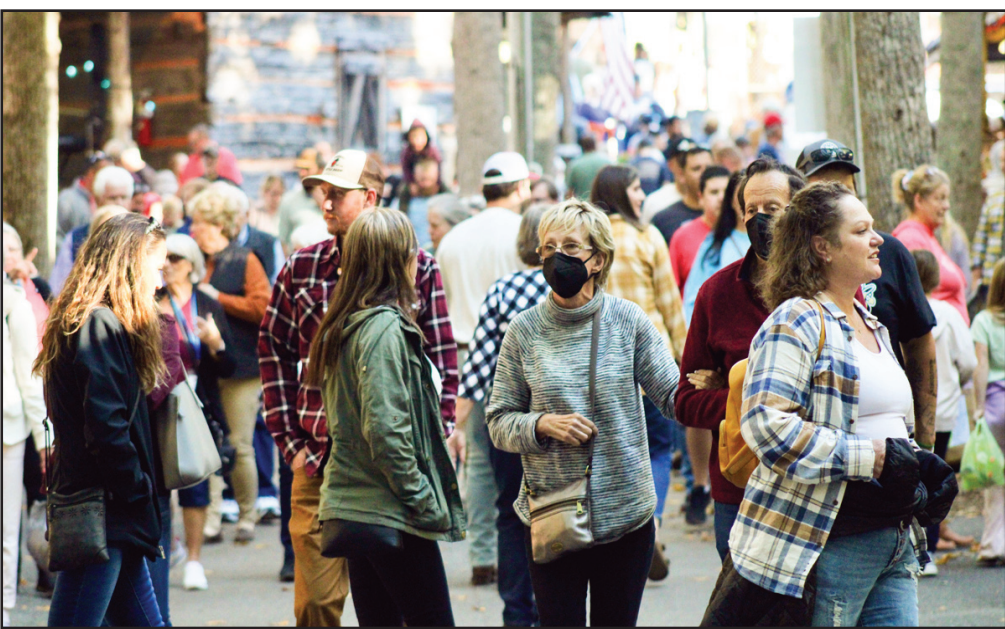


The fan-favorite Oak Ridge Boys returned to The Hall on Saturday, Oct. 8, for a packed show during the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

tion, which is \$12 for a one-day pass, and children under 12 get in for free. Just as it has been in years past, parking is

free. So, be sure to check out the Fall Festival for all it has to offer, from the Pioneer Village

to jewelry and clothing, home décor, sports memorabilia and more, by the final day on Saturday, Oct. 15.



The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has been hosting throngs of visitors from far and wide for the Fall Festival, which will conclude this Saturday until its return in 2023. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

County Offices...from Page 1A

ing ride costs, can be found at <http://www.townscountyga.org/transit.html>.

Moving along, Bradshaw approved an amendment to the Association County Commissioners of Georgia retirement plan for county employees to add new fund choices, effectively increasing the number of investment options for employees.

“The ACCG administers our retirement plan,” Anderson said. “We have two parts to our plan. We have a 457 (account), which the employees contribute to. The county matches

(employee contributions) in a 401(a) (account),” Anderson said.

Added Bradshaw, “Anytime we give more options to our employees that benefit them and their families, then we support that.”

“Other than that, we’re just very, very busy trying to get everything moved out of here and getting everything set up (at the Old Rec Gym),” continued Bradshaw, noting that the move, so far, is going well. And with the help of detainee crews, moving costs have been kept very low.

All is going well with Reeves & Young, the contractor that will oversee construction of the SPLOST-funded renovation/addition at the courthouse, Bradshaw said, and the project contract should be finalized by the Oct. 18 county meeting set for 5:30 p.m. in the temporary offices.

A firm construction start date has yet to be finalized, but Bradshaw said he has been informed that work on the major courthouse project could begin in the next three to four weeks, with an 18-month rough estimated timeline for completion.

Hiawassee City Hall...from Page 1A

woman Mitchell believes the city should seriously consider raising the millage rate.

“We shouldn’t go around bragging about the fact that we have the lowest millage rate in the entire world – you know, that is not a good thing,” Mitchell said in the city’s Sept. 26 work session. “We have to do a lot with our (property tax revenues), and we can’t do it.”

Also discussed in the Sept. 26 work session was the ongoing nature of Local Option Sales Tax negotiations.

Nearly every municipality in the state receives LOST revenues as part of total sales tax collections. Once collected, LOST revenues are split between a county and its incorporated cities.

Currently, the City of Hiawassee gets 11% of LOST revenues, while the City of Young Harris receives 9.5% and Towns County Government gets 79.5%. All told, the collections work out to well over \$2 million, which greatly augments local budgetary needs.

Per state law, within two years of every new censusing, counties and cities must renegotiate the percentages they receive. Oftentimes, like in neighboring Union County, renegotiations result in a simple continuation of the terms from the previous negotiation period.

This time, however, it appears that the cities are wanting to increase their share of LOST revenues, so all parties are in mediation presently to work through the issue, which must be settled by Dec. 30 or LOST collections will cease until a new local referendum is passed.

Should the city and county not come to an agreement, the Hiawassee millage rate would have to be increased dramatically to at least 4.651 mills to compensate, Ordiales said in the Sept. 26 work session.

With 221 businesses operating in Hiawassee, Ordiales said recently she feels the city is generating around 70% of total LOST revenues, meaning she believes the city deserves a larger share.

Conversely, county government is responsible for providing emergency and other ser-

vices to the majority of residents in the county and therefore takes on larger budgetary concerns, so the issue must be worked out in mediation.

Ordiales has proposed a 70/30 split with the county, where Hiawassee and Young Harris would share 30%, she said.

Another hot topic of late has been the city’s proposal to raise the local hotel-motel tax from 5% to 8%, and while Councilwoman Amy Barrett remarked that she “(wasn’t) thrilled with raising taxes,” the increase passed unanimously in the Oct. 4 meeting.

In the run-up to the vote, Barrett reminded the council of the situation faced by Michael Redd, the General Manager of Holiday Inn Express & Suites Hiawassee.

Redd argued in the Aug. 29 work session that business – already at an all-time low – would drastically slow down due to a tax that further raises room rates. In short, he felt customers would be unwilling to pay a higher fee for a stay at his hotel, making for even more financial losses.

“Don’t you think if this wasn’t going to adversely affect him, he wouldn’t have been in here?” Barrett asked in the Sept. 26 meeting. “I feel like we’re penalizing businesses to be in this city instead of attracting them.”

The 3% increase in the tax works out to 60% additional hotel-motel tax revenues above current collections, to be spent on promoting tourism with things like fishing preserves, more parks and other “sightseeing” attractions, greater involvement of performing arts, installing more wayfinding signs, etc.

Also on Sept. 26, an update was offered on the controversial status of package stores in Hiawassee. The moratorium on license issuing remains in place until Jan. 17, 2023, unless repealed or renewed.

A dedicated committee will meet this month to review the current ordinance pertaining to liquor store licensing, with the understanding that the three currently licensed stores will not be affected by any upcoming changes.

ing changes.

In a recent meeting, the mayor and committee members met to discuss research that will influence the anticipated Alcohol Ordinance amendments.

“First of all, we looked at all the surrounding areas ... that have package stores,” Ordiales said, noting that Hiawassee could choose to emulate a similar strategy as other cities and adopt either zoning or distance requirements between liquor stores.

Among the list of potential recommendations so far are a one-mile distance between package stores; waiting to permit additional stores until the county reaches a certain population; a point system to decide among multiple future applicants; parking requirements; and more.

In other business, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith touched on the roadside dispute between his department and the Towns County Sheriff’s Office that made international headlines over the summer.

“A couple of months ago, the Hiawassee Police Department was quite publicly accused of making illegal traffic stops,” explained Smith, who went on to say that an official investigation into the department was conducted by Dunwoody Police Chief Billy Grogan after the Georgia Bureau of Investigation declined looking into the accusations.

Grogan had previously “offered to help agencies with internal affairs investigations.” After taking a day to review traffic policies, procedures and camera footage, tour the city, and get an overall idea of how HPD operates, Grogan sent Smith a two-and-a-half-page report on his findings.

“Basically, he found no wrongdoing on our part,” revealed Smith. “He did make a couple recommendations that we addressed.

“One of them (that’s) already been addressed was about our body camera policy and strengthening that, and the other one is to create a policy going over traffic stops that start in the city but end outside the city limits.”

Early in-person voting runs three weeks starting Monday

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Advanced in-person voting for the Nov. 8 General Election will begin next week at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office located in Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee.

Early voting will run weekdays Monday, Oct. 17, through Friday, Nov. 4, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime. There will also be two weekend early voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 22, and Saturday, Oct. 29, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Elections Office.

Upcoming construction for the major renovation and addition project at the neighboring Towns County Courthouse is not expected to interfere with operations at the Elections Board Office.

The last day to register to vote in the General Election and any subsequent runoff election was Tuesday, Oct. 11.

Election Day voting for the General Election will take place Tuesday, Nov. 8, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Hiawassee and Young Harris Precincts of

Towns County.

All voters will need to have an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots, such as a government-issued driver’s license or identification card.

Residents have been able to apply for a mailed absentee ballot since Aug. 22. Absentee ballot requests may be made at the local Elections Office or by accessing the “My Voter Page” at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>.

The deadline to request an absentee ballot is Oct. 28. Ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, email as an attachment, or in-person to the Elections Office.

Due to the Columbus Day holiday, the earliest day for absentee ballots to be mailed to voters was Tuesday, Oct. 11.

People who have voted absentee-by-mail in a past election cycle will need to submit a new application for this cycle if they want to receive an absentee ballot in the mail.

Folks can mail their completed ballots back or utilize the official drop box inside the Elections Office during early voting hours. Voters may also drop completed absentee ballots off

at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Voters are encouraged to request and return their absentee ballots early to give their ballot “enough time to travel through the mail and resolve any issues that may arise when voting by absentee ballot,” per georgia.gov.

Mentioned above, the “My Voter Page” website contains much valuable information, such as registration status, precinct information, sample ballots, mailed absentee ballot status and voter participation history.

Ballots will include political party candidates running in the General Election as well as four statewide ballot questions: two potential amendments to the Georgia Constitution and two referendums to approve acts recently passed by the Georgia General Assembly.

To review the ballot questions and candidates up for election, check out the sample ballot on the “My Voter Page.”

People may also contact the local Elections Office at 706-896-4353 if they have any questions.

Whidden...from Page 1A

family of Whidden learned of the terrible accident before they could be properly alerted by local authorities, which prompted Coroner Cooper to make a public statement last week.

“In tragic circumstances like these, we always work as quickly and safely as possible so we can responsibly notify next of kin,” Cooper said Oct. 5. “We were not able to do that yesterday; yesterday a family lost their child and heard rumors before we could clear the scene and locate them.

“I am extending the opportunity to protect the very last ‘first to know’ we can give a family by asking you to let news like that stop with you and/or text or call the coroner if you have information that will help us locate next of kin quickly. I ask that we give the family the privacy they deserve.”

After the Towns County Herald shared Coroner Cooper’s request on Facebook,

more than a thousand people reacted to, commented on and shared the post, serving as a testament to the shock and sadness felt by so many in the area following Whidden’s sudden passing.

“Trent was not your average young man,” his obituary reads. “He didn’t want to spend his time with people who were happy, rather he wanted to make the people around him happy.”

“He was full of life and lived life to its fullest; his mama always said ‘the boy couldn’t sit still; he was always go, go, go.’

“It was impossible to feel down around him because he simply refused to allow that. He was bigger than life, the friend everyone needed and the light of his parents’ eyes.

“Trent looked up to his big brother Tyler and lovingly nicknamed himself ‘lil Baker.’ He was softhearted, bringing

small gifts to brighten a friend’s day, being the hug when someone needed comforted, being the friend who showed up when no one else did – that was Trent.

“He had a God-given gift to sing and he shared that gift generously. He auditioned for ‘The Voice,’ sang at friends’ weddings, sang karaoke and, of course, in the shower.

“Trent also enjoyed watching the Georgia Bulldogs, rice-burner cars and his jeep. To know Trent meant you knew a few things: his hair had to be perfect; his family was his world; once a friend, always a friend; and if you ever ran out of gas he was on his way.

“Trent made an impact on the world, he left his mark in a positive way. He will be missed and loved always.”

Banister-Cooper Funeral Home had charge of Whidden’s funeral arrangements over the weekend. Read his full obituary in this week’s edition of the Towns County Herald.