

Towns County Herald

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Official State Fiddlers' Convention returns to Fairgrounds Friday

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fall Festival may be well underway, but there's still plenty of performances left in the music lineup inside Anderson Music Hall between now and Saturday, Oct. 19.

First to perform during the 2019 Fall Festival were local favorites Jim Wood & The Georgia Mountain Fair Band, which played country music on Oct. 11 to get attendees ready for the week ahead.

Following the GMF Band were The Gatlin Brothers, whose fans were eager to see

them opening night.

"I love The Gatlin Brothers," said fan Judy Jacobs. "I have listened to their music for so long now, and I remember listening to them when my kids were still young. I think it's great that this place has a band like that. I didn't know this place was here until this week."

"This is my first year at the festival, and I came to see The Gatlin Brothers in concert mostly, but we have really enjoyed our stay so far. There is a lot of good music playing that I look forward to, and I can't wait for it."

Other favorites to perform at the 2019 Fall Festival have

included Ronnie McDowell on Monday, Oct. 14, and Crystal Gayle on Tuesday, Oct. 15.

Coming up, Gary Puckett and Union Gap will play two shows on Wednesday, Oct. 16, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., and the Earls of Leicester and Wyatt Espalin will perform on Thursday, Oct. 17, at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Then, on Friday, Oct. 18, the hotly anticipated annual Official State Fiddlers' Convention will begin, lasting two nights through the end of the festival.

"The Fiddlers' Convention starts at 7 p.m., and we've got categories

including beginning fiddlers, harmonica, buck dancing, dulcimer, and other groups that will be competing," said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. "All that is on our brochure and website for people who want to know every category, but it will continue on Saturday at 10:30 a.m., with the finals being on Saturday night."

"We give away prize money and plaques, and people come from all over the Southeast to compete in it. We try to do a variety of music, so we have bluegrass, country, gospel, and other music to try to have something for everyone."

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Ivy Phillips has earned the title of Fiddle Queen for the past two years, pictured here in the 2018 competition. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Fire Department reads to children, offers fire safety education at library

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland and Lt. Tyler Hayes paid a visit to Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris to read to children on Wednesday, Oct. 9.

Marlene Cannon of the Mountain Regional Library System loves to read, which is why she started a storytelling hour at the library every Wednesday at 11 a.m.

And with October serving as Fire Prevention Month, Cannon figured, who better to come and read to the children than members of the Towns County Fire Department?

Both Copeland and Hayes found books about firefighters in the library, and for 45 minutes, they took turns reading and talking about the



Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland and Lt. Tyler Hayes reading to children at the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris on Wednesday, Oct. 9. Photo by Chad Stack

pictures in the books.

After they were done reading, Hayes spoke with the children about fire prevention and what to do if their clothes

ever caught on fire.

"Stop, drop and roll," Hayes said, repeating the familiar fire safety mantra

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Nichols to resign as elections supervisor; Oliva to helm 2020 election effort

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Board of Elections and Registration is looking to hire a new full-time elections supervisor following the departure of Tonya Nichols, who currently holds the position.

Nichols submitted her letter of resignation to both the elections board and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, and board members and Bradshaw met to discuss the vacancy on Monday, Oct. 7, at the board office. The letter from Nichols did not specify reasons for resigning.

She began her tenure with the elections board in 2016 following the retirement of longtime Elections Supervisor Irma Nichols, and her last day as supervisor of elections and



Janet Oliva registration will be Friday, Oct. 18.

Despite the departure of the county's elections supervisor in the leadup to the big 2020 presidential election, which will feature the use of brand-new voting equipment, the board wants voters to know

that the election is still in good hands.

"The Towns County Board of Elections and Registration has been working diligently for months to prepare for the upcoming elections in 2020 and is optimistic about expanding their team in the near future," said Board Chair Dr. Janet Oliva.

Oliva is certified by the Georgia Secretary of State to hold the county's elections and has managed county elections in years past, and she will lead the board office as elections supervisor beginning Monday, Oct. 21, until a suitable replacement can be trained.

Other board members experienced in holding elections will be working with Oliva to manage upcoming elections and train new staff, and Oliva

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Schools set to receive more state modernization reimbursement funds

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Schools will soon receive more reimbursement funds from the state for modernization improvements completed at the schools over the summer months.

School Finance Director Myra Underwood delivered details on the upcoming reimbursement in the Oct. 7 work session of the Towns County Board of Education.

The first reimbursement for \$295,493.14 came in August, and Underwood said the state had recently committed to making another reimbursement for \$1,133,524.

"(On Oct. 2), I contacted the lady on the finance side that cuts the checks, and she told me, 'Ironically, we've just received a packet and we will be cutting you a check within



The Towns County Board of Education met for its regular monthly work session on Monday, Oct. 7. Photo by Mark Smith

the next 10 days," Underwood said.

Now, Underwood has submitted a third reimbursement request for approximately \$1.5 million, and she said in the October work session that, given the timeframe of the

second reimbursement, the schools could receive the third reimbursement as soon as December.

Modernization grant funds play a major part in making it possible for the board

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Georgia Mountain Fall Festival continues through this weekend

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The 2019 Georgia Mountain Fall Festival kicked off Friday, Oct. 11, bringing with it a cornucopia of vendors, musicians and authentic mountain demonstrations to entertain thousands of guests for nine straight days at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

One of the many attractions that's been heavily attended so far is Chase's Racing and Swimming Pigs, which is a pig race wherein the audience is encouraged to select the winning pig.

This event is run by Pamela Chase, who trained the pigs to run around a track and swim through a small pool of water.

"We have four races total, two dry races and two wet races," Chase said. "The way this works is, they get



Chase's Racing & Swimming Pigs is just one of the many exciting attractions at this year's Georgia Mountain Fall Festival. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

fast they move around. "These are mini potbelly pigs. They are about a year old, and they are all boys. We did

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July Term 2019 Towns County Grand Jury Indictments continued

The following individuals were indicted during the July Term 2019 of the Towns County Grand Jury, which met again in October:

Orville Benjamin Jordy, failure to register as sex offender.

Johannie Harris Jones Jr., aggravated assault.

Steve Delzince, criminal damage to property in the second degree.

Hubert Doyle Gibson, burglary in the first degree; two counts criminal trespass.

Gwendolyn Diane Rogers, seven counts exploitation and intimidation of disabled adult, elder person or resident; seven counts financial transaction card fraud.

Charles Wayne Grier, burglary in the first degree; burglary in the second degree; two counts criminal trespass.

Joseph Larry Maney, possession of methamphetamine; obstruction of drug-related objects.

Patrick Ryan Oakes, aggravated assault; possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; interference with government property; fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; obstruction of an officer; possession of drug-related objects; reckless driving; window tint violation; failure to carry license; failure to maintain lane.

Jamison Chadwick Williams, seven counts possession of firearm by convicted felon; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects.

Brittany Marie Wright, violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act; possession of drug-related objects; drugs not in original container.

Peggy Ann Mulkey, aka Peggy Blanton, possession of methamphetamine; possession of firearm by convicted felon; possession of drug-related objects; four counts possession of dangerous drugs.

Allen Davidson Bell, obstruction of an officer; possession of drug-related objects.

Christina Sueann Canterbury, obstruction of an officer; possession of drug-related objects.

Amanda Jo Wade, obstruction of an officer.

Joseph Fredrick Llorens, trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of marijuana with intent to distribute; possession of marijuana, more than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects; driving while license suspended; distracted driving.

William Rayford Blich, four counts sale of methamphetamine.

Wendy Ree Carroll, three counts sale of methamphetamine.

Michael Robert Cone, two counts sale of methamphetamine.

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Gowder, Heaton trial delayed again; jury selection still expected this week

By Linda Erbele
Towns County Herald



The official start of the federal prosecution trial against former hospital CEO Mike Gowder and Blairville-based physician Dr. James Heaton was once again delayed last week.

As Monday, Oct. 14, was Columbus Day – a federal holiday – court officials indicated on Friday that the trial could begin as early as Tuesday, Oct. 15, after press time.

Jury selection was supposed to begin on Tuesday, Oct. 8, though the court decided to delay after it became apparent that a separate trial involving Heaton's attorney, Don Samuel, would not be ending in time for

Samuel to be present at the start of Heaton's trial.

Samuel is currently defending a client in the high-profile DeKalb County murder trial involving a former cop who shot and killed an unarmed naked man in the line of duty, and the jury in that trial was still deliberating at press time.

In the meantime, the U.S. attorneys prosecuting the case against co-defendants the delay to continue their investigation.

On Wednesday, Oct. 9, the government sent a request to the presiding judge in the case, U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story, asking him to reconsider his recent decision not to allow the testimony of a certain potential witness in the case.

According to the motion, the witness was re-interviewed by law enforcement on Oct. 9 and changed her previous testimony.

Gowder's attorney, Steven Sadow, responded with a motion of his own on

Thursday, Oct. 10, arguing that the new testimony was based on "hearsay" or the report of someone else's words by a witness, and therefore should be considered inadmissible.

Story had not ruled on the issue by press time Monday.

The October trial date, set in August, was the third trial date set in the case.

First scheduled for February 2019, the trial was moved to April due to a revision of the indictment that added new allegations against Heaton.

The April date was postponed after the defense filed a joint motion to either prevent the jury from hearing new evidence introduced by the government two weeks before the April trial date, or to allow the defense teams more time to prepare against the new allegations.

In response, Judge Story postponed the trial until Oct. 8, and now, the trial start date will likely coincide with the ending of the DeKalb County murder

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