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Ledford named System Teacher of the Year at Towns County Schools

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Lisa Ledford of Towns County Elementary School has been named System Teacher of the Year for the 2018-2019 school year.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong made the announcement at the Oct. 8 meeting of the Towns County Board of Education.

Ledford qualified as System Teacher of the Year after being named the 2018-2019 Teacher of the Year for Towns County Elementary.

Also announced in the Oct. 8 meeting were 2018-2019 Teachers of the Year John

Cornett at the high school and Kerry Rogers at the middle school.

"I am a believer in lifelong learning," said Ledford when reaching for the award after the meeting. "I also believe that everyone has special gifts and talents and can succeed in some way."

"We all need to feel successful. It is my goal as an educator to be a facilitator for that learning with my students."

Ledford is a math and science teacher in the STEM Lab at the elementary school, Rogers is a math teacher at the middle school, and Cornett is a math teacher at the high

school.

Berrong explained that, when it came to choosing a System Teacher of the Year, the teachers were evaluated by an outside, independent panel.

And as System Teacher of the Year, Ledford is now in the running for Georgia Teacher of the Year.

In other news, Berrong said that his office was informed by the Georgia Department of Education that Towns County Schools will be reimbursed about \$2.3 million for the recent modernization project that took place over the summer.

Berrong added that they are expecting an additional reimbursement for



Lisa Ledford

a later payment on the project, which should bring the total

reimbursement to about \$2.5 million, or around 70 percent of project costs.

"So, literally, we were able to do all of that work for 30 percent of the cost," said Berrong. "That is great news for us going into next summer, because we weren't sure what we would be able to do (concerning Phase 2) next summer."

Considering the news regarding the modernization reimbursement, Berrong recommended that the board approve a resolution to move forward on a tax anticipation note with United Community Bank in the amount of \$1 million.

The money would be used to cover school system expenses until the reimbursement could come in, at which point the board office would "pay that back immediately," said Berrong.

The resolution passed, and Berrong reiterated that the tax anticipation note would strictly be used as a way to avoid possible disruption of school operations in the future and would not be used for any other purpose.

Moving on, High School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs said the Class of 2018 had the highest graduation rate in the Pioneer RESA, at 97.7

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Jury trial set in federal case against Gowder brothers, Heaton

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

GAINESVILLE – A trial date has been set in the federal prescription drug case against former hospital CEO Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton, according to court documents filed Oct. 10.

The jury trial will take place on Feb. 11, 2019, at 9:30 a.m. in Courtroom 303 of the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville, before U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story of the Northern District of Georgia.

U.S. Magistrate Judge J. Clay Fuller of the Northern District of Georgia had previously certified the case as ready for trial on Aug. 28,

according to court documents.

All three men pleaded not guilty to federal charges on April 9, after a federal grand jury handed up a 212-count indictment listing the Gowder brothers and Dr. Heaton as defendants on April 4.

Each defendant is presumed innocent of the charges, according to the U.S. District Attorney's Office, "and it will be the government's burden to prove each defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial."

The men were indicted as part of Operation SCOPE, allegedly for "illegally prescribing and obtaining thousands of doses of prescription pain medications outside the usual course of

professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose," according to an April 6 news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

At the time of their alleged crimes, Mike Gowder was the CEO of Union General Hospital, Dr. David Gowder was the emergency room director at Union General Hospital, and Dr. Heaton ran a family practice clinic in Blairsville.

"These defendants allegedly abused their positions as medical professionals to obtain illegitimately thousands of doses of prescription pain medications and now face serious federal charges," said U.S. Attorney Byung J. "BJay" Pak on April 6. "The Department of Justice



Mike Gowder

is committed to fighting the opioid epidemic through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of licensed medical



David Gowder

practitioners who abuse their positions of trust to engage in illegal conduct."

Operation SCOPE stands



James Heaton

for "Strategically Combatting Opioids through Prosecution and Enforcement."

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Early voting has begun; vote now through November 2

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Early voting began Monday and will run for three weeks leading up to the big General Election on Tuesday, Nov. 6.

Every weekday between now and Friday, Nov. 2, during the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., registered Towns County voters will be able to walk into the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration Office to cast their votes.

The board office is located in Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee, and it will remain open to voters even during lunchtime.

There is one weekend day set aside for voters at the board office, which will be Saturday, Oct. 27, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., for those who find themselves too busy to vote during the scheduled weekdays of voting.

Election Day will be on Tuesday, Nov. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and that day, voters

should report to one of the four pre-assigned Towns County voting precincts.

The Macedonia Precinct has changed from the campus of Towns County Schools to Macedonia Baptist Church.

A sample ballot can be obtained at the board office and at www.mvp.sos.ga.gov, which also features valuable voter information personalized to each resident.

"Georgia law requires registered voters to show photo identification in order to vote in person," according to the Georgia Secretary of State's Office. "When you vote in person, you must show one of the following photo IDs:

"A Georgia driver's license, even if expired; any valid state or federal government issued photo ID, including one issued by the Department of Driver Services or your Voter Registrar; valid U.S. passport; valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency, or entity of the U.S. Government, this state, or any

county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state; valid U.S. military photo ID; valid tribal photo ID."

Voters looking for absentee ballots will need to contact the board office, which is situated next to the Towns County Courthouse, or call (706) 896-4353.

Each of the Nov. 6 General Election candidates will appear on the ballot.

For Governor, Republican Brian Kemp, Democrat Stacey Abrams and Libertarian Ted Metz.

For Lieutenant Governor, Republican Geoff Duncan and Democrat Sarah Riggs Amico.

For Secretary of State, Republican Brad Raffensperger, Democrat Josh Barrow and Libertarian Smythe Duval.

For Attorney General, Republican Incumbent Chris Carr and Democrat

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EMC Board talks Hurricane Michael, tax credits, fiber and more

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – Hurricane Michael wreaked havoc across a good portion of the Southeast, proving deadly in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia.

Fortunately, the storm only marginally affected the North Georgia Mountains, and aside from a two-hour power outage that occurred overnight in the northern end of Union County, the most that many residents experienced from the hurricane was about 2 inches of rain and mild winds.

And though the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC didn't have a whole lot of damage to address here in the mountains, the staff remained ready at a moment's notice throughout the storm.

On Tuesday, Oct. 9, during the regular BRMEMC Board Meeting and on the eve of the storm, EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms announced that, should this area

remain largely unaffected, the EMC would be responding to requests for aid from other local power companies impacted by the storm.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Michael, the EMC sent two line crews to help out Grady EMC down in Cairo, which is right near the Georgia/Florida state line, and a crew to Washington EMC in Sandersville, located in central Georgia.

Also in the Oct. 9 meeting, the board heard from Myriam Simmons of Ryan LLC, a global tax services firm specializing in tax advisory and consulting services.

Simmons' presentation focused on an investment tool called New Markets Tax Credits, a federal program that would ultimately allow the EMC to complete a \$10 million project for a little more than \$8 million, and board members signaled that they were willing to take a deeper look into the program.

Also in the meeting,



Jeremy Nelms

Nelms discussed a problem that's stricken up concerning the system's Advanced Metering Infrastructure.

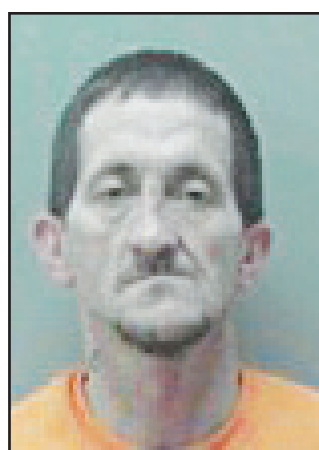
About eight years ago, the EMC undertook a systemwide replacement of meters, and now, the company that makes those meters has announced that it will stop producing them

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Arrests continue in Young Harris; TCSO seizes \$13,500 in marijuana



Jennifer Max



Carl Merritt



Candie Merritt

News Special
Towns County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – The Towns County Sheriff's Office in recent weeks has continued to execute search warrants in pursuit of illegal drugs as well as stolen property.

Investigators and deputies executed two search warrants in the Young Harris area during the past week. The search warrants executed were in reference to separate

information developed by investigators.

The first search warrant was executed on Thursday, Oct. 11, at a residence on Red Fox Farm Road. Investigators seized a quantity of marijuana with a street value of \$13,500 during their search.

Investigators arrested Jennifer Ann Max, 52, of Young Harris, charging her with manufacturing marijuana, felony possession of marijuana,

and possession of drug-related objects.

The second search warrant was executed on Friday, Oct. 12, at a residence on Meadow Lane. Investigators arrested two suspects during the course of executing the warrant, Carl Wallace Merritt, 47, and Candie Sue Merritt, 44, both of Young Harris, and both on charges of possession of methamphetamine.

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July Term 2018 Grand Jury Indictments continued

The following individuals, who are presumed innocent until proven guilty, were indicted during the July Term 2018 of the Towns County Grand Jury, which met for a second time in September:

Abelino Ramirez Molinos, rape; three counts aggravated child molestation; aggravated sodomy; child molestation.

Rickie Derell Wrenn, sexual exploitation of children; computer pornography; criminal attempt to commit a felony.

Daniel Caden Smith, statutory rape.

Michael Richard Collins, exploitation and intimidation of disabled adult, elder person or resident; battery, Family Violence (felony); battery, Family Violence (misdemeanor); simple battery; obstruction of an officer (felony); two counts obstruction of an officer (misdemeanor).

Joshua Dustin Carnes,

exploitation and intimidation of disabled adult, elder person or resident; battery, Family Violence.

James Robert Gregory, distribution of methamphetamine; possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; theft by receiving stolen property; interfering with public utility property; possession of drug-related objects.

Shaun Keith Ewing, burglary in the first degree; 16 counts theft by receiving stolen property; obstruction of an officer.

Sandi Hope Pate, 17 counts theft by receiving stolen property; two counts theft by deception; obstruction of an officer.

Bobbie LeAnn Saxon, possession of methamphetamine; fleecing or attempting to elude a police officer; possession of drug-related objects; failure to maintain lane; failure to wear a seat safety belt.

Sarah Eliza Payne, aka Sarah Weaver, criminal damage to property in the second degree; obstruction of an officer; public drunkenness.

Michelle Renee Harper, criminal attempt to commit a felony; criminal damage to property in the second degree; loitering or prowling.

Wayne Edward Patrick, theft by taking; driving under the influence (alcohol); driving while license suspended.

Audrey Fay Culpepper,

theft by taking. Michael Bailey, aka Michael Jon Bailey, aka Michael Anthony Bailey, aka Michael J Bailey, aka Michael Jon Bailey Sr., entering an automobile; theft by taking.

Mary Frances Coleman, possession of a controlled substance; possession of firearm during commission of a felony; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; driving while license suspended; possession of drug-related objects; failure to maintain lane.

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