

# Towns County Herald

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Publication Number 635540 Volume 95 Number 49

Wednesday, October 2, 2024

## County escapes worst of Tropical Storm Helene

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The expected devastation from Hurricane Helene prompted Gov. Brian Kemp to declare a state of emergency on Thursday, Sept. 26, before the storm had even made landfall in Florida as a major Category 4 hurricane.

And Helene did devastate many parts of the state, causing the deaths of at least 25 Georgians, including two children and a first responder.

Helene weakened considerably after entering Georgia, but hurricane force winds were recorded as far north as Augusta – an incredible occurrence for remnants of a hurricane. The hardest hit area in Georgia was between Valdosta

and Augusta.

The storm ultimately claimed over a hundred lives and wreaked havoc with a long trail of destruction, washing away roads, flattening houses and leaving millions without power across the Southeast.

Fellow Appalachians in Western North Carolina and Tennessee received the kind of devastation Towns County officials were preparing for here, with entire neighborhoods wiped out in places and even cities cut off from communication with the outside world, like Asheville, North Carolina.

As of press time Monday, Ingles Supermarkets were operating on a cash-only basis due to major flooding and damage sustained at their Asheville headquarters, with

no known timeline on when cards would be accepted again.

And Saturday, the North Carolina Department of Transportation was telling motorists to consider all roads in Western North Carolina closed: "We cannot say this enough: DO NOT TRAVEL IN OR TO WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA."

Thankfully, Towns County escaped the worst of Tropical Storm Helene on Friday, Sept. 27, despite forecasts of up to 70 mph winds and widespread catastrophic rainfall that local officials anticipated could cause mass destruction from downed trees and flash flooding.

Instead, most of the county received about 8 inches

See Tropical Storm, Page 6



Several low-lying areas in the south end of the county experienced flooding, such as this property off Georgia 75, but no injuries were reported locally due to Tropical Storm Helene. Photo Lowell Nicholson

## TCSO arrests two for threats against schools

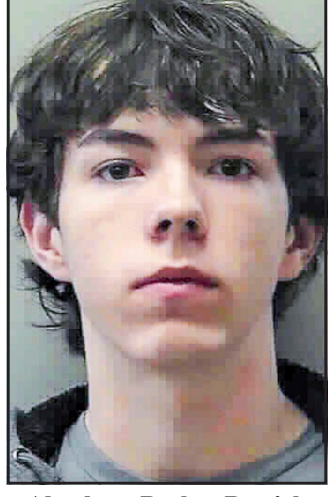
By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Last week, the Towns County Sheriff's Office arrested two area 17-year-olds for making separate threats against local schools. One was a student from Blairsville, and the other youth was out of Murphy, North Carolina, but staying in Hiwassee.

The threats involving the Blairsville student, Abraham Parker Patrick, came on Saturday, Sept. 21, at Brass-town Valley Resort during Union County High School's annual Homecoming Dance. Patrick reportedly directed threats toward his school to three juvenile students.

Union County Schools Police learned of the threats on Monday, Sept. 23, from a School Resource Officer at Winder-Barrow High School, which is in the same county as Apalachee High School where a deadly shooting took place last month.

According to the Winder officer, a student there had attended the dance in Young Harris, during which she received a direct personal threat from Patrick. The following

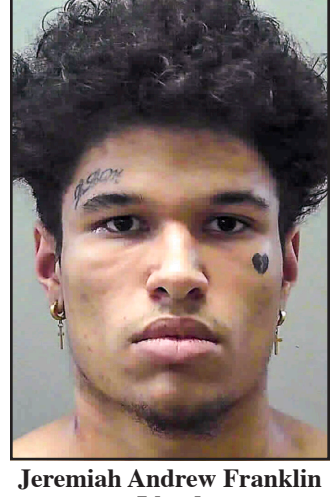


Abraham Parker Patrick

Monday, she notified school authorities in Barrow County.

Allegedly, Patrick had threatened to shoot the Winder student and, in the presence of other students, spoke about possessing a bomb and also said he had a gun he was going to use at Union County High, Union County School Resource Officer Josh McCuen said.

UCS Police Chief Scott Dayton said his department was unaware of any explosives or weapons in Patrick's possession.



Jeremiah Andrew Franklin Lloyd

Upon request, the Towns County Sheriff's Office responded to investigate due to the threat having been made in the neighboring jurisdiction. TCSO investigators interviewed witnesses in Union County and uncovered evidence of threats that were "terroristic in nature."

As a result, Patrick had to turn himself into the Towns County Sheriff's Office on Tuesday, Sept. 24, where he was arrested and charged with felony terroristic threats. He

See School Threats, Page 7

## Teacher caught stealing cash from colleagues

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The brand-new Towns County High School Chorus and Drama Teacher was arrested last week on 10 misdemeanor counts of theft by taking on campus, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

Adam Trotman, 29, of Hiwassee, began working halftime for the school system on Aug. 1, so he was just a short time into his tenure when the Sheriff's Office took him into custody on Wednesday, Sept. 25 – the same day he was caught stealing cash from a classroom.

According to Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, Trotman confessed to stealing money from around seven different teachers over a roughly six-week period: four teachers at the Elementary School, two at the Middle School, and one High School teacher.

Additionally, Trotman confessed to stealing from the School Store, the Future Business Leaders of America Store, and the Media Center Coffee/Cafe Funds.

The total amount of

stolen cash came to around \$1,200, mostly from teachers' purses and classroom desks, Berrong said.

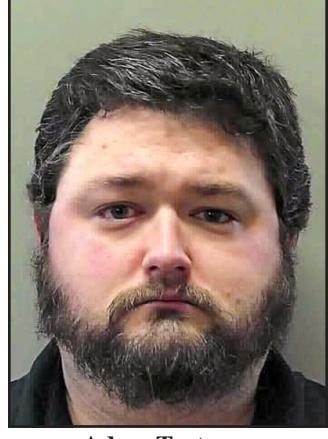
School officials were "not certain of the reason or intent" behind the alleged stealing spree, and there was no connection between the teachers from whom he stole, leading Berrong to believe that Trotman "apparently just looked for opportunities and took them when available."

"We will be using his next paycheck to reimburse everyone that was stolen from," Berrong said.

Importantly, Berrong noted that Trotman did not have access to any official school accounts, only cash that was within his physical reach on campus.

Trotman taught one chorus class and one theater class at the High School. The programs had been on hiatus for several years but were revived on a halftime basis for the 2024-25 school year when the School Board hired Trotman in May.

"We just don't have the student population right now to support a full-time person," Berrong said in May. "Our



Adam Trotman

hope is that Mr. Trotman will come in, get some excitement behind the program, get students enrolled, and we can hopefully, within the next year or two, make that a full-time job."

Unfortunately, chorus and drama are gone once more, and those students will be absorbed into other classrooms since their teacher no longer works for the system; after his arrest, Trotman submitted his resignation, which the School Board accepted in a Sept. 27 called meeting.

Prior to starting, Trot-

See Teacher Arrested, Page 6

## Indian Summer Festival to return this weekend



The Indian Summer Festival will feature a modified children's play to account for additional local history. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

SUCHES – The beloved Indian Summer Festival will return this weekend to the Valley Above the Clouds for its 47th year, and while organizers warn the field will probably still be wet from Tropical Storm Helene, they look for-

ward to bringing the community the fall favorite event.

Running Oct. 5-6 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Woody Gap School, folks can enjoy live music, an auction, browse craft vendors, and get a bite to eat. Whether guests have tastes leaning toward sweet or savory, there'll be plenty of funnel cakes, hotdogs and

hamburgers to last a while.

Parking is free, and admission is just \$5 for ages 13 and up, \$3 for ages 7-12, and ages 6 and under get in free.

Organized by the Woody Gap Sports Club, the Indian Summer Festival serves as the organization's biggest fundraiser, and put bluntly, the

See Indian Summer, Page 7

## Early voting starts soon; register to vote by Oct. 7

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Early voting starts this month for the 2024 General Election, and people who haven't registered to vote yet must do so by Monday, Oct. 7.

Local voter registration officials want people to know that they should ignore emails, text messages and mailed flyers warning them that they are not registered to vote.

Multiple complaints have come in from voters worried about their registration status after receiving unofficial notifications from third parties.

Some of the messages simply tell people they are not registered in an apparent "turn out the vote" effort, while others contain links to enter personal information, which is potentially a scam. Of course, voters should not use such links.

"(These messages) are disruptive," Elections Supervisor/Chief Registrar Rachel Edwards said. "I wish we could figure out who they were coming from so that we could



Early in-person voting will take place at the Towns County Civic Center starting Oct. 15.

report them to the Secretary of State in hopes of getting them stopped."

People curious about their registration status may call Towns County Voter Registration at 706-896-4353 to check. They can also visit the official "GA My Voter Page" with the Secretary of State's Office at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov>.

Residents may register inside the Board of Elections & Registration Office at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawas-

see, at any public library or at the Department of Driver Services. People may also register online at <http://registertovote.sos.ga.gov/GAOLVR>.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there will be three weeks of early voting running weekdays between Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

All in-person early vot-

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# Teacher Arrested...from Page 1

man was eager to join the staff at Towns County Schools, going so far as to appear before the School Board in February to pitch chorus and drama courses. He even presented mock syllabi and said he had prepared two years' worth of concert materials.

Wanting to provide those class offerings to stu-

dents at the High School and eventually the Middle School, school officials decided to take Trotman on board, though plans for these programs have obviously been upended, and it's too early to say when they might return.

According to past reports, Trotman is a Young Harris College graduate who

came to the new position with five years of experience teaching both chorus and drama.

Trotman made his \$10,000 bond at the end of last week to be released from custody at the Towns County Detention Center. He is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

# Early Voting...from Page 1

ing will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Towns County Civic Center, located in the same building as the Elections Office at 67 Lakeview Circle.

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their pre-determined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Towns County has two voting precincts: the Hiwassee Precinct at the Civic Center and the Young Harris Precinct in the Lodge Hall Building at 135 Murphy Street.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested at the Elections Of-

file now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Elections Office.

Absentee ballots will start to be mailed Oct. 7 and can be returned using the official Elections Office drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. Election Day.

In addition to voter registration status, residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on

file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there are no county-level seats up for grabs in the 2024 General Election.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap property assessments at a 3% annual increase.

For more information on the local Elections Office, visit <http://www.townscountyga.org/board-of-elections---registration.html>.

# Tropical Storm...from Page 1



With its proximity to the Hiwassee River, the Enchanted Valley RV Park has been known to flood in particularly rainy weather events, like Tropical Storm Helene.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

of rain over a three-day period, dropped by Helene and a separate weather system that preceded the tropical storm.

Minor flooding occurred in low-lying areas in the south end of the county where more rain did fall, and a small number of trees were toppled, with local wind gusts being less than half the higher predictions.

"We've been blessed," Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said. "The news for Towns County is a few downed trees, some power outages and one house that was hit with a tree. Thankfully, no one was hurt. Many areas were not so lucky."

As to why Towns County was spared the brunt of Helene, the actual path of the storm followed a more easterly trajectory than predicted, putting much of the North Georgia Mountains in the weaker part of the storm.

But that's why preparation is so important, because the unpredictability of the weather means that, next time, the county might not be so fortunate.

Towns County Schools proactively canceled on-

campus instruction Thursday and Friday in anticipation of complications from the storm. The Post Office closed, as did many local businesses, and people largely stayed home, demonstrating that the community was taking the storm seriously.

The county was also very well prepared. The Emergency Management Agency hosted multiple special briefings by the National Weather Service in the runup to the storm, with all local first responder agencies in attendance.

Towns County Sheriff's Deputies reported downed trees during the storm, which the Road Department promptly set out to clear, and the Fire Department and Emergency Medical Service remained on standby should they be needed for any emergency responses.

In situations such as this, like the various first responder agencies, the Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation is about having all hands on deck.

"Fortunately, we have fared very well," EMC Media and Communications Manager Kelly Crawford said. "We did

not get hit by the storm the way it was predicted, so we feel very blessed. Our numbers indicate that since midnight on Thursday, we had 139 outages affecting 8,850 members."

Nearly all of those power outages had been restored by Saturday evening, and there were just eight broken power poles in the entire service area that were immediately repaired. Compare this with Hurricane Opal in 1995, which snapped about 600 power poles.

"Our system held up very well," Crawford said. "In the past, we've had storms where power outages affected over 20,000 members. We are well prepared for these events. We have emergency plans in place and materials stored in our warehouses.

"Management meets and reviews plans, gets crews and trucks ready - everyone is here until power is restored to every customer. We meet with emergency and first responders here, we get continual weather updates, and we get information from TVA as a storm rages, so that we can respond immediately."



Towns County Emergency Management Agency hosted multiple special weather briefings for first responders in advance of Tropical Storm Helene last week. Photo/Facebook

# YHC President Dr. Drew Van Horn announces retirement after seven years

After serving seven years as the President of Young Harris College, Dr. Drew Van Horn informed the Board of Trustees of his decision to retire on Dec. 31.

"Given the addition of our first grandchild along with other personal aspirations, Camille and I feel that it is time for us to enter this next phase of our lives," Van Horn said.

Under Van Horn's tenure as president, the College has seen improvement in student persistence, YHC graduate placement, was reaffirmed by SACS(COC), improved unrestricted fundraising to over \$2 million a year, increased the College endowment to over \$60 million, began the College's first Master's Program, streamlined the College's op-



Dr. Drew Van Horn

tude for the opportunity to help this fine College and for the encouragement and support of the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and the Board of Trustees. Please know that we are forever Mountain Lions."

"We appreciate Drew's leadership, stewardship, and counsel as president of Young Harris College. He has been a steady hand during an extremely difficult time in higher education," said Bill Johnston, chairman of the YHC Board of Trustees. "We wish Camille and Drew all the best in the future."

A Presidential Search Committee is being formed and a search for the next President of Young Harris College will begin. NT10e225CA

erations, all while navigating the world-wide pandemic, and a personal battle with cancer.

Van Horn added, "Camille joins me in sharing our deep appreciation and grati-

# Young Harris Jamboree October 4th



(L-R): Wayne Owenby, Moriah Owenby and John Cochran

John Cochran and the Cowhands welcome Autumn with the Young Harris Jamboree on Friday, Oct. 4, at 6:30 p.m. at the Stephens Lodge Hall in Young Harris.

Come enjoy an evening of classic Western songs, Western swing, and gospel as sung by legends Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, the Sons of the Pioneers and other great West-

ern singers.

Congratulations to Moriah Owenby for her nomination by the International Western Music Association for the Liz Masterson Crescendo award. This award is for a young artist who has shown the most advancement during the past year. The award will be given at the International Convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in November.

Stephens Lodge will serve a meal at the Jamboree for a small fee to help fund their scholarship fund.

Come out and enjoy an evening of Western music made popular by the great singers Roy Rogers, Gene Autry, the Sons of the Pioneers and others. You are sure to be entertained.

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# School Threats...from Page 1

is being held without bond at the Towns County Detention Center.

TCSO shared that its investigation also determined that Patrick did not have access to either explosives or firearms.

As to why some students make these kinds of threats, regardless of intent, the schools say there is no room for jokes about such a serious and potentially deadly subject.

"Students need to think before they speak, because we're not going to take these threats lightly," McCuen said.

Likewise, Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson said that terroristic threats made against schools, students and staff will be taken seriously and appropriate action will be taken.

Regarding Patrick's status as a student at Union County Schools, Superintendent John Hill said federal privacy regulations in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA, prevented him from speaking about individual student discipline.

And while not commenting on this case or disciplinary actions for any specific student due to FERPA, Hill said school discipline can range from short-term suspension up to expulsion from campus.

"In general, Union County Schools takes any threat seriously, and our Code of Conduct is expected to be followed by all students," Hill said. "Disciplinary action has been and will be administered consistently across the board for students who violate our Code of Conduct."

Added Hill, "We do take this very seriously, and all

school discipline issues will be taken seriously. I want to reassure parents and citizens of that."

In a separate incident, the Towns County Sheriff's Office started an investigation last month pertaining to a threat rumor against Towns County Schools.

Investigators began monitoring the social media accounts of Jeremiah Andrew Franklin Lloyd, 17, of Murphy, as a suspect in the threat, and they detected a threat against Towns County Schools on Friday, Sept. 20.

Arrest and search warrants were executed for Lloyd, leading investigators to uncover multiple other crimes involving a 14-year-old female victim, the Sheriff's Office said.

Lloyd was arrested at a residence on Konahetah Road, which is immediately adjacent to Towns County Schools. He has been charged with felony terroristic threats, disrupting public school, felony sexual exploitation of children, felony enticing a child for indecent purposes, child molestation and statutory rape.

During an interview with investigators, Lloyd confessed to all charges and is being held without bond at the Towns County Detention Center.

Like Patrick, Lloyd was not found to be in possession of any weapons and was determined to have not had access to them, the Sheriff's Office said.

Lloyd was the subject of a previous investigation into a rumor of a "possible threat to the school" in August, weeks before the Sept. 4 shooting

at Apalachee High School in Winder that kicked off a nationwide uptick in shooting threats.

It was determined at the time there was not enough evidence to make an arrest for a threat, though Lloyd was barred from all properties of Towns County Schools out of an abundance of caution, according to the Sheriff's Office.

A TikTok account that appears to belong to Lloyd features numerous clips advocating for sympathy and understanding for the Apalachee High School shooter, whom the account portrays as a victim of society and mental health struggles.

However, several other recent videos posted to the account – including the day of Lloyd's arrest – depict school shooting scenes, though it was unclear at press time if these videos were related to the threat investigation that led to Lloyd's arrest.

The most recent social media posts that alarmed authorities, as well as those made about the Apalachee High School shooting, took place after the investigation that cleared Lloyd of making threats in August.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends investigators for their quick action and thorough investigation of Lloyd, reiterating that "threats against our schools, students, and faculty will not be tolerated."

"Any and all threats will be investigated thoroughly, and appropriate action taken," Henderson said.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

# Indian Summer...from Page 1

Sports Club supplements the education of local students.

Starting in the mid-1970s, the Sports Club started raising money to make sure Woody Gap students had supplies to play sports, to include uniforms, shoes and other necessities.

According to Larry Wood, an original Sports Club member and organizer of the Indian Summer Festival, there was a realization that the school at large could benefit from the fundraising.

So, the Festival found its start, gathering monetary aid that ensures every graduating senior receives at least some scholarship support, classrooms receive ample supplies, and, as Woody Gap Principal Wendy Reynolds points out, students can receive "wants" like organization shirts alongside their needs.

"They help with a wide array," Reynolds said of Sports Club volunteers.

Noteworthy this year is

that the entertainment will be slightly different. Woody Gap School's kindergarteners have traditionally put on a play themed around Union County's original people, the Cherokee, and while their history does feature in this year's story, there will be some changes.

"It's kind of a combination not only of the Cherokee, but it's also going to go into the history of Woody Gap School," Reynolds said. "We're going to do more where it's almost narrated and the kids are going to be acting the roles out more."

Reynolds said the changes were prompted by organizers wanting to try something new after covering "The ABCs of the Cherokees." Of course, this just adds another reason why the Festival is important; it continues to teach visitors of all ages about their home's past.

Another change comes in the form of a blood drive be-

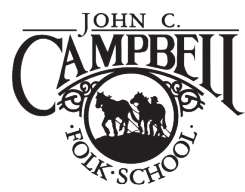
ing present, and this is the first year Blood Assurance specifically will be at the Indian Summer Festival.

"We've had the bloodmobile there several times in the past," Wood said, explaining that participation dropped off during the COVID-19 pandemic. Now he hopes to inspire more folks to give back – especially since Blood Assurance donations go to local populations.

Other than that, Wood and Reynolds said that the Indian Summer Festival will remain largely unchanged for 2024. The Woody Gap Band of Steel will be performing over the weekend along with Wood's very own granddaughter, Nealy Webster, and other musical offerings.

The Indian Summer Festival is always the first full weekend in October, so people can go ahead and mark their calendars for this weekend and future events.

# Campbell Folk School's 48th Fall Festival October 5th & 6th



The John C. Campbell Folk School's 48th annual Fall Festival returns this year on Saturday, October 5, and Sunday, October 6, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. each day. A premiere destination since 1974, the Folk School's Fall Festival attracts thousands from across the region to the school's scenic Brasstown, North Carolina campus for an extraordinary celebration of Appalachian craft, culture, and heritage.

Festivalgoers will stroll several wooded paths, visiting a wide variety of fine craft exhibitors showcasing quality works for sale. Talented artisans will demonstrate traditional and contemporary crafts for appreciative audiences throughout the day on our Demonstrator's Stage and in some studios. Spirited music and dance performances will fill the air with delightful energy continuously over the weekend on two stages. Regional artists will share old-time, bluegrass, folk, and roots music, and dancers will entertain the crowds with clogging and Morris performances.

We will have over 20 food vendors, including the Folk School's famed barbecue, so come hungry! Kids activities, including hands-on crafts and face painting from the Cherokee County Arts Council, will also be available.

The Fall Festival Banner, a colorful tradition celebrating the school's rich his-



tory and enlivening future, is made by quilter and beloved instructor Dana Bolyard this year. Fall Festival commemorative t-shirts and items will be available to purchase from the school's Craft Shop.

The Fall Festival offers plentiful free parking along with a free on-campus shuttle bus and handicapped golf carts. The festival can be challenging for pets because of the crowds and the heat. We encourage those who bring their pets to seek out water stations, keep their pet on a leash, clean up after your pet, and be respectful of attendees. Handicapped parking is available in the Keith House gravel lot. The John C. Campbell Folk School is only two hours from Asheville, Atlanta, Chattanooga, and Knoxville and a day's drive for half of the residents of the U.S.

Online tickets are now available for purchase on the Folk School's website. Regular admission tickets are \$12 for adults (18 and up), \$10 for ages 12-17, \$10 for Seniors (65+) and veterans, and free for children 12 and under. Single-day and multi-day flex

passes will be available. Tickets will also be available for purchase at the festival gates with cash or card. ATMs are available on campus.

Interested in volunteering? Visit [folkschool.org/fallfestival](https://folkschool.org/fallfestival) and fill out a volunteer application. Fall Festival volunteers work in approximately 2-2.5-hour time slots based on their availability and preferences. There are many opportunities across the festival, and a position for everyone!

For complete event details, visit [folkschool.org/fallfestival](https://folkschool.org/fallfestival) or call 1-800-365-5724. We look forward to seeing you there!

Thank you to our 2024 Fall Festival Sponsors: Harrah's Cherokee Casinos; Cherokee County Tourism; US Foods; Young Harris College; Erlanger – Western Carolina Hospital; United Community Bank; Bankers Insurance; Blue Ridge Mountain EMC; Ameriprise Financial; Nantahala Bank and Trust; McGuires Millrace Farm/Weddings by the Foster Sisters; Blue Ridge Public Radio; and Visual Outdoor Advertising.