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Johnny Ray Watts crowned Fiddle King in 2019 Fiddlers' Convention

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The 2019 finale of Georgia's Official State Fiddlers' Convention took place on Saturday, Oct. 19, and ended with the crowning of Johnny Ray Watts as Fiddle King.

Lasting two days and serving as the closing event of this year's Georgia Mountain Fall Festival, the convention saw terrific involvement Friday and Saturday, with longtime emcee Barry Palmer entertaining those gathered throughout the competition inside Anderson Music Hall.

Friday, participants competed in beginning fiddler, harmonica, buck dancing,

dulcimer, dobro and old-time banjo.

Saturday's leg of the convention welcomed competitors in mandolin, banjo, flat pick guitar, finger style guitar, bluegrass band, junior fiddle and senior fiddle.

The finalists in each category picked two songs they hoped would impress the judges enough to get them chosen as state champions.

Tyler Andale of Nashville, Tennessee, won the state champion title in three categories, including Mandolin, Flat Pick Guitar, and Junior Fiddle.

"I want to thank everybody for coming out with us and having fun, help us keep this going," Andale said. "Barry

has been an awesome emcee to help us run this thing and past events.

"I'm thankful for everyone showing up and supporting this contest despite the bad weather we had all day."

To no one's surprise, past Fiddle King Johnny Ray Watts of the Senior Fiddle title.

"I've been doing this for a long, long time, and God gave me this gift," Watts said. "I literally crawled and started playing, and I thank God for this gift he gave me. You know, I got out of contests for around six years, and I missed it.

"My wife knew it and the group I was playing with knew it. But I got all that

worked out now. Now, I can just play and sing on Sundays and Wednesdays for my Lord, and on my weekends, I can go and do my contests, because it's something I love and it's a tradition I want to go on for as long as this world lasts, because it is worth having around."

Watts and Andale competed in one final competition to see who would take home the Fiddle King crown, and the two state champions didn't disappoint, each taking a few minutes to pick two songs and prepare for the showdown in front of the judges.

While both played hard, the scores came in with a
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Fiddle King Johnny Ray Watts embracing emcee Barry Palmer after earning the coveted title in this year's Official State Fiddlers' Convention. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

BOE honors Sandler, Melton and Floyd as Teachers of the Year



Congratulations to Christie Melton, Tamara Sandler and Shannon Floyd for each making 2019-2020 Teacher of the Year, pictured here in the Oct. 14 Towns County Board of Education meeting. Photo by Chad Stack

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Towns County Board of Education recognized 2019-2020 Teachers of the Year Tamara Sandler, Christie Melton and Shannon Floyd during their monthly meeting on Monday, Oct. 14.

On top of serving as Elementary School Teacher of the Year, Sandler also received the additional honor of being named Towns County Scholastic Teacher of the

Year. She is a P.E. teacher at the elementary school and the head athletic trainer for Towns County Schools.

Originally from Venice, Florida, Sandler attended the University of South Florida and earned a bachelor's degree in sports medicine and athletic training. Later, she attended Columbus State University, achieving a master's degree in health and physical education.

Sandler is at the start of her 12th year of teaching. She

began her education career at Muscogee County, where she taught elementary physical education for six years and also served as the athletic trainer at one of the local high schools for eight years.

She and her family moved to Towns County in 2014, which is when she began to teach P.E. and conduct athletic training for varsity sports here.

"It is such an honor to be selected as the 2019-
See Teachers, Page 6A

Wood, Sparks to host senior projects that benefit fellow classmates

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

For their senior class projects, Jamison Wood and Shane Sparks are hosting upcoming special events at Towns County High to raise money for worthy causes at the school.

Wood is hosting the first-ever Miss Towns County High School Pageant this Saturday, Oct. 26, at 7 p.m. inside the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium on school campus.

"I wanted to do something that kind of involved the whole community and the school together," Wood said. "And I also wanted to give a scholarship to one of my 2020 students in the class of 2020."

"I thought of this event because I was actually in the Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant over the summer, and



TCHS Seniors Shane Sparks and Jamison Wood. Photo by Chad Stack

when I saw the community come together with an event like that, I thought, what a great idea for my project."

The event will be free to attend thanks to the generous support of local business sponsors in the community, for which Wood said she was

truly grateful.

Judging for the pageant will be Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby and United Community Bank Branch Manager Cheryl Barrett.

See Senior Projects, Page 3A

Library board casts unanimous vote to terminate director's employment



L-R: Vicki Adkison, Joan Crothers, Paula Whitehead, Dionne Berrong and Claudia Gibson of the Mountain Regional Library System. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE – The Mountain Regional Library System Board of Trustees voted unanimously last week to terminate the employment of Vince Stone as director of the three-county library system effective Oct. 15.

Library board trustees decided Stone's fate in a called meeting at the Union County Public Library on Tuesday, Oct. 15, making the motion to separate Stone as director "in an effort to move the system in a direction that better meets the needs of our communities."

At the time of the board's decision, the departing library director had been away from the job for several months for personal reasons, according to the board, with Interim Regional Director Claudia Gibson having served in that capacity since Aug. 1.

"The trustees, the library staff and our communities have expressed the desire for MRLS to emphasize traditional library services that are responsive to each community's needs," Board Chair Paula Whitehead said following the meeting.

Continued Whitehead, "It was the consensus of the trustees that Mr. Stone is not the best person to lead the system in this direction. We appreciate

his service and enthusiasm and wish him all the best in his future endeavors."

Stone has helmed the libraries of Union, Towns and Fannin counties since March 2015, and he was notified that he had been let go from his position "as soon as possible," the board said last week.

In recent years, Stone had pursued a number of new ventures at the libraries, including the creation of the "Mountain Regional Library Puppet Company" and the making of YouTube videos and audio podcasts.

Comments from Stone
See Library, Page 3A

Witnesses recount thousands of pills, sex-for-drugs in federal court case

By Linda Erbele
Towns County Herald

GAINESVILLE – Flanked by their lawyers, Dr. James Heaton and former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder faced off against Assistant U.S. Attorney William McKinnon Jr. and Laurel Boatright in U.S. District Judge Richard Story's courtroom starting Tuesday, Oct. 15.

Both men are accused of crimes involving prescription drugs, including conspiracy to dispense and distribute controlled substances "outside the usual course of professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose."

The 103 charges against them include allegations by the government of "misrepresentation, fraud, forgery, deception



Mike Gowder



James Heaton

and subterfuge" involving oxycodone and hydrocodone, with Heaton facing dozens of additional charges related to issuing prescriptions to several other patients.

Jury selection occurred on Oct. 15 and opening statements

began Wednesday, Oct. 16, with McKinnon insisting that evidence would show that Heaton issued prescriptions "for no legitimate medical purpose and outside the usual course of professional medical
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Crash on Georgia 75 likely caused by fatal heart attack, authorities say

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Authorities believe that Hiawassee resident Glyn "Dale" Pollard, 83, suffered a fatal cardiac event while driving his vehicle up Georgia 75 the evening of Oct. 16.

Towns County E-911 received a call around 8 p.m. that Wednesday from a motorist who'd seen what turned out to be Pollard's vehicle about 30 feet down the side of Unicoi Mountain.

Pollard had been making his way north toward Hiawassee when his vehicle suddenly left the road and went over an embankment about a mile from the Towns/White County line, according to authorities.

Given Pollard's age and the fact that it appeared as though he never attempted to avoid the accident by swerving or applying his brakes, authorities have determined that Pollard likely died from a

heart attack before his vehicle ever exited the roadway.

An official report by the Georgia State Patrol is expected this week.

Funeral services for Pollard took place on Monday, Oct. 21, at Macedonia Baptist Church, with Revs. Wade Lott and Bradley Thomas officiating.

According to his obituary, Pollard was a family man who built a career in sales, including time with Atlanta Gas Light, and he served as a long standing member of Macedonia Baptist Church.

"He was a talented woodworker, and he used that God-given gift to make over 280 footstools for the children of Macedonia over the years," according to his obituary. "In his younger years, he enjoyed golfing and playing pool, at which he won many tournaments."

"Dale loved people; he was funny and fun to be around.
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Glyn "Dale" Pollard

He was known to say, 'You may not like me, but you will never forget me.'

Pollard is preceded in death by his parents, daughter DeAnn O'Kelley, three brothers and two sisters.

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