

Suspicious structure fire under investigation, says Fire Chief Copeland

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Fire Rescue responded to an early morning blaze that destroyed a home off Michael's Way in the northeast corner of the county on Monday, Oct. 14.

Firefighters quickly responded to the scene after a neighbor reported the fire to E-911 Dispatch around 3:30 a.m. that Monday.

Upon arrival, firefighters discovered that the fire had completely enveloped the home. Fortunately, no one was inside the home as it burned, Fire Chief Harold Copeland said.

"The fire was extended into the woods some, and we were able to knock that down and bring the fire under control," Copeland said.

At press time, the cause of the fire was still under investigation, as there appeared to be suspicious circumstances surrounding the blaze.

Copeland, a state-certified Arson Investigator, noted several red flags while examining details of the fire, including the time of morning the fire occurred and the fact that no electricity was being supplied to the home.

Due to his observations, the fire chief opened an official investigation into the blaze that same day. He reached out to the State Fire Marshal's Office, which sent two representatives to assist him in his efforts.

Towns County Fire Engine 1, Tanker 1, and Engine 4 responded to the scene, as did firefighters from Clay County, North Carolina, for whom Chief

Copeland is grateful.

This is the first major structure fire to have occurred in Towns County recently, and though the origins of this particular fire remain in question, Chief Copeland said residents should start preparing for the reality of seasonal fires.

"With wintertime coming up and cold weather and everyone keeping their homes heated, it's that time of year when fires are more prominent," Copeland said.

The fire chief advises folks to make sure their chimneys are clean, to be mindful of operating electric heaters away from furniture and other household objects, and to use care when plugging lights and gadgets into power strips and extension cords during Christmastime.



This early morning structure fire at a residence off Michael's Way on Oct. 14 is currently under investigation.

Senior Projects...from Page 1A

The girls will be modeling their Sunday best as well as formal evening gowns, and each of the 23 contestants will answer a school-related question on stage.

Pageant prizes will include \$150 for Towns County High School Queen, \$100 for Runner-Up, and \$50 for Third Place, as well as other prizes.

One of the girls will have a chance to win a scholarship in May of 2020 during the annual Honors Day ceremony, Wood said.

"I hope that this will carry on and become a tradition," Wood said.

Seniors for Saturday night's pageant will be Jenni Arrowood, Kristen Ashe, Madison Griggs, Corrina Luckenbach, Amelia Kenlee Shook, Sophia Shook and Mackie Wallace.

Juniors will be Lelia Barnard, Ivie Davenport, Allie Dills, Vanessa Floyd, Kenzie Livingston, Abby Mauldin, Kaylea McClure, Summer Rahn, Cheyanne Shook and Maci Walls.

The sophomore girls will be Macy Brinson, Bria Chastain, Eva Donaldson and Rylie Livingston, and the freshmen representatives will

include Eden Hill and Morgan Pierson.

Over on the gridiron, senior Shane Sparks will be hosting a Powder Puff Flag Football game fundraiser after Halloween on Thursday, Oct. 31, at 7:30 p.m. inside Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

The game, which will double as Sparks' senior project, will feature any high school girls who want to participate, and each team will have eight players on the field during the match.

Sparks will serve as a coach, and Indians Assistant Football Coach Ken Camp will also coach the girls' teams.

An Indian football player himself, Sparks loves the game of football, and he wanted his senior project to give back to the Indians Football Program that he so dearly loves.

"I feel that this game has the potential to become a huge annual fundraiser and an awesome event for our whole community to come to show their support for both the football team and our incredibly hardworking female athletes in our school," Sparks said.

The concessions stand will be open during the game serving pizza and hot chocolate.

Kickoff starts at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 31. Attendance will cost \$5, with all proceeds going to the Towns County High School Football Program.

Energy Assistance funds for 2019

Ninth District Opportunity Energy Assistance Program. A one-time payment will be made to the home energy supplier on behalf of eligible households. Eligibility for the program is based on the income of everyone living in the home (please see income chart below for maximum annual income per household size). All eligible households must be responsible for their home heating bill.

Income guidelines for 2019 by Household Size/Annual Gross Income: 1 - \$23,776; 2 - \$31,092; 3 - \$38,408; 4 - \$45,724; 5 - \$53,040; 6 - \$60,356; 7 - \$61,727.

Elderly/Homebound Household ONLY: November

1, 2019. *All applicants must be age 65 or older - or - completely unable to leave the home due to health reasons

General Public: December 2, 2019.

When applying for assistance, the applicant will provide: Social Security Number verification for everyone in the home. Citizen Verification for the Applicant (photo ID). Verification of all household income for the past 30 days. Most recent home heating AND electric bill.

Towns and Union County call 855-636-3108. Must have an appointment!

For more information, visit us online at www.ndo.org. NT10623A11SH

Library...from Page 1A

concerning his separation as director were not available at press time.

Next steps for the Mountain Regional Library System include finding a new director, and the board plans to post the position at the state level with the guidance of the Georgia Public Library Service.

The board appointed Gibson interim director in August after reaching out to State Librarian Julie Walker for guidance, at which time she supplied the board with a list of potential interim directors.

"In order to receive state funds to operate a library system, there must be a licensed librarian handling the day-to-day operations of the system," Whitehead said.

Gibson will continue in her role as interim director until the libraries hire a new director.

"Ms. Gibson has worked in public libraries for 38 years," Whitehead said. "She has a Master of Library Science degree from Emporia State University in Kansas. She was the associate director of Chestatee Regional Library System in Dawsonville from

1998 to 2006.

"She was the director of Chestatee System until 2016 when she retired. Before coming to Georgia, she was the deputy director of a city library in Kansas."

Also new to the system is Vicki Adkison, who came aboard in July as business manager for the libraries, though the board expanded her position to include assistant directorship in September.

"Her responsibilities include all financial records, human resources, and overseeing the branches when the director is not available," Whitehead said.

As to whether Adkison's role as assistant director - a new title in the Mountain Regional Library System - will continue after a new director is hired, "that will be determined at a later date," according to the board.

In other library news, citing staffing and budgetary concerns, the regional board has decided to close the Young Harris library branch on Fridays starting Nov. 1.

Fortunately, Towns County has two libraries, and the Hiawassee branch will



Vince Stone

be able to serve local library patrons on Fridays.

Currently, the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris features two extended-hour days, with the library being open Tuesdays and Thursdays until 6 p.m.

Starting Nov. 1, however, the library will scale back to offering extended hours just on Thursdays.

The Mountain Regional Library Board of Trustees is made up of members from the local boards of trustees from each of the three counties participating in the system.

And starting in September, the board welcomed a new slate of leaders in Chair Paula Whitehead, Vice Chair Dionne Berrong and Secretary Joan Crothers, all of Towns County.