

Towns County Herald

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Marching Band earns Superior rating, trophies

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Under the bright lights of Fannin County Rebel Stadium Saturday, Oct. 14, the student officers of Towns County Marching Band experienced a historic moment for their program, receiving a Superior ranking for the first time in 11 years and the First Place Silver Division Award.

At 6:30 the morning of the Blue Ridge Mountain Marching Festival, band members gathered at Towns County High to practice their show, entitled "Bond, James Bond," one more time before taking it to the field for judging at 1:15 p.m.

"All of us were tired, but it was during that practice that we had one of the best performances we've had, and then later that day it was even better than that," Drum Major Bella

Rose Childs said, thankful that they took the extra time to rehearse.

For the next eight hours after performing at Fannin County, they eagerly awaited their results and enjoyed watching other bands. Finally, at 9:20 p.m., the judges thrilled everyone when they announced Towns County's historic ranking and placement.

"They live-videoed it, and when we were getting our second trophy, they zoomed in on my face and I was bawling," Childs said. "All of our officers were in waterworks when our name was called because we've never even heard our name called over the announcements for something that isn't a participation award."

They were so surprised, Childs even thought that it may have been a mistake at first.

"We saw (Band Director See TCHS Marching Band, Page 14



TCHS Marching Band students Willow Shaw, Jaedyn Giordano, Bella Rose Childs, Max Barron, Emory Hardin, Marshall McClure and Payten Wolf showing off their trophies. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

Halloween at Fairgrounds to receive trick-or-treaters



The Force was strong with this family during last year's "Fangtastic Halloween at the Fairgrounds," slated to return next week. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Calling all ghosts, goblins, ghouls and witches – the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds will be bustling with "fangtastic" family-friendly activity on Tuesday, Oct. 31, bringing plenty of spooktacular tricks and treats Halloween night.

Parking and entry are free, and everything kicks off around 5 p.m. By the time the event wraps up at 9 p.m., families will have had the chance to check out all the new additions to the traditional creepy-fun ex-

perience.

Along with carnival games, one of 2023's biggest additions will be the hayride, which will start at Eller Hollar and continue along the lakeside road to run behind the Anderson Music Hall and back again.

Towns County Fire Rescue and the Towns County Road Department will be on site with a fire truck also.

Food trucks will be available, and the grub will be the only part of the experience that requires payment. Should families wish, they can purchase dinner and eat before

resuming their Halloween-themed exploration, or they can just grab some snacks and call it a night.

This year's costume contest is sponsored by the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce and will start at 6 p.m. on the "Hootenanny Stage." Four age groups will compete for First, Second and Third places in each category.

For folks interested in handing out candy, it's free to participate, and there are still open booths ready to be filled by any businesses wanting to

See Halloween, Page 14

First Responders to host Trunk-or-Treat on Saturday

News Special
Towns County Herald

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson is proud to announce and host the First Annual First Responders Trunk or Treat this weekend. All residents and families are invited to join in this "spooktacular" event for local children.

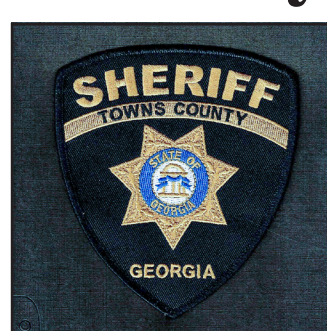
First Responders will be handing out candy and treats from 5:30 p.m. until 8 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 28, at the Towns

County Recreation and Conference Center, located at 150 Foster Park in Young Harris.

Come by for free candy, popcorn and treat bags!

This will be a drive-thru only event where attendees will drive through the Halloween-themed path decorated with lots of spooky fun, stopping at each trunk-or-treat car or tent to receive candy from First Responder volunteers.

So, be sure to make plans



today to attend this fun-filled event on Saturday.

Early voting continues for ESPLOST, Hiawassee election

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Advanced in-person voting for the Hiawassee General Election and the countywide Special Election for the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax Referendum is continuing weekdays between now and Friday, Nov. 3.

The second and final day of weekend voting is set for this Saturday, Oct. 28, with all early voting taking place between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. inside the Towns County Board of Elections Office located at 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite A, in Hiawassee.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 7, with voting from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. On Election Day, people will need to report to

their designated precinct either in Hiawassee or Young Harris for the countywide election, and municipal election voting will occur inside the Elections Office.

Only registered city residents may vote in the municipal election, while the ESPLOST referendum is open to all eligible county residents. The registration deadline to cast ballots in the elections was Oct. 10.

Requested absentee ballots started hitting the mail on Oct. 16, and the deadline to request an absentee ballot from the Elections Office is this Friday, Oct. 27.

In the Hiawassee election, one City Council seat will appear on the ballot in a contest between Jonathan Wilson and Elizabeth "Babette" Dunn.



City voters will also see the ESPLOST referendum on their ballot.

Regarding the 1-cent Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum, the Towns County Board of Education has put

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Bradshaw welcomes pickleball champs, Lago of Enotah CASA

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In his regular monthly meeting on Oct. 17 at the Towns County Temporary Courthouse Offices, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw shared plenty of positive news and welcomed guests.

Offering an update on the courthouse remodeling, Bradshaw said construction crews were working "very, very fast," noting that the courthouse "looks so nice" after its recent paint job.

The parking lot is due to be reconfigured to offer more spaces, and Bradshaw said Reid Dyer of Hussey Gay Bell engineering, architecture and design firm will handle that part of the project.

Bradshaw noted that the estimated completion time for the renovation and addition was still projected to be around

January or February of 2024, so right around the corner.

The Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce is undergoing a makeover after the removal of some overgrown plant life thanks to the Road Department. And a recent inspection revealed "several of the window seals were starting to rot and some were rotten," so new windows have been ordered.

Having recently established official representation for the Georgia Recreation and Park Association's Pickleball Tournament, Towns County Recreation Director Stuart Nichols attended the meeting to recognize some local champions for their achievements.

Towns County's first-ever contingent for the state tournament – all members of the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club – traveled down to Macon

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Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw welcomed Rec Director Stuart Nichols and Towns County's own champion pickleball players in last week's county meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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Chatuge 1,919.65
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10/20 7:30 PM @
Washington
Wilkes

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United
Community
Advisors

Parks, Outreach Coordinator of CASA, discusses advocating for local children

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers and Shakers welcomed Enotah CASA Outreach Coordinator Fran Parks on the morning of Friday, Oct. 20. Parks offered some general information on her organization along with local statistics.

To understand Enotah CASA is to know that the acronym stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates, who serve as volunteers.

“Our mission is to make sure every child within the foster system has an advocate on their side, because a lot of times, when a child is snatched from their home, they’re leaving that home with nothing but what they can tote in a little bag,” explained Parks, offering some insight into the kinds of cases CASA advocates see every day.

To put that into perspective, between 2021 and 2022, 15,838 children in Georgia had to be removed from their homes for abuse and neglect. And more than 9,000 of them were supported by 2,592 CASA volunteers.

In the Enotah Judicial Circuit, there were 652 reports of child abuse or neglect, and 206 of those children were supported by 82 CASA volunteers. Over 5,800 advocate case hours were provided, and volunteers drove 44,468 miles on behalf of the children they champion.

Locally, 28 children in Towns County entered the

foster system last year. Over 1,500 volunteer hours were put into improving their lives via advocacy, and 4,500 miles went into traveling to and from court or visiting children and their families.

“Because they did not have to hire an attorney ... that saved your county \$121,000 last year. So, it’s very impactful to your community,” added Parks, clarifying that while attorneys fill important courtroom roles, it’s difficult for them to focus on the needs of individual children.

CASA Board Member Liz Ruf, who attended to support Parks, found a very specific way to explain her stance: “The attorney is responsible for representing the child’s interests, and the CASA, the child’s best interest.”

Abuse and neglect can take many different forms, but for 62% of the cases in White, Lumpkin, Union and Towns – the counties that make up the Enotah Circuit – minors are separated from their parents due to substance abuse.

CASA advocates are appointed to children in court hearings, and no matter how many times their assigned child passes from foster home to foster home, the CASA acts as one stable aspect in their life. Sometimes, this means following a child’s case for years.

Of course, the main goal of a CASA is to pursue the best interest of the child being advocated for, which means gathering information. Parks said the job can be boiled down to talking, whether that



Fran Parks
CASA Outreach Coordinator

means hearing from their charge or speaking with parents and family members.

“We’re going to gather information and we’re going to meet with that child,” Parks said. “We’re going to speak with that family, we’re going to talk with their school, we’re going to get medical records. We’re going to do all of these things to make sure that the best interest of that child is always being looked at first.”

For Parks, and indeed for CASA volunteers, the most rewarding aspect of the job is to watch the miraculous changes that parents make to better themselves and piece their families back together.

In fact, she said, it hits close to home because she became a mother at 19, and

imagining herself in the shoes of some of those struggling parents has made her empathetic toward not just the kids, but the adults locked in a struggle to prove themselves worthy of being a parent.

To learn more about volunteering as an advocate or to become a CASA, reach out to Parks via email at outreach@enotahcasa.org, or call her at 706-969-8837. The Enotah CASA office can be reached at 706-864-0300.

The Movers and Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee. They invite local figures and community leaders, often with Q&A sessions following presentations. The public is invited and encouraged to attend.

Twenty Students Participated in Industry Tours to Snap On Tools and MOOG, both in Murphy, NC



(L-R): Kylie Thurman, Leah Bradley, Brianna Deaton, Nathan Garrett, Hailey Williams, Kirsten Smith, Bryton Dye, Randall Cannon, Carson Moss, Dalton Hicks, Miles Donaldson, Kolby Hughes, Logan Dills, Braydon Smith, Grayson Tallent, Chris Bechtol, Cameron Lively, Caleb Israel, Riley Nichols, Dakota Shelton

The high school agricultural education department took 20 students on a field trip to Snap On Tools and Moog Industries in Murphy, NC. The students got to tour both of these large industries, learn about their history and product line, as well as career opportunities for both workforce ready students as well as degree field jobs like engineering, marketing, product design and precision machinists.

Early Voting...from Page 1

another ESPLOST before voters to raise money for needed capital improvement projects at the schools, like floor replacements, HVAC and more.

At the Elementary School alone, ESPLOST would pay for new flooring, playground restrooms, school-wide restroom renovations,

roof and HVAC renovations, and new technology, software and educational supplies.

As previously reported, should voters approve the referendum next month, the local sales tax rate would increase in April 2024 by one penny on the dollar to 8%, replacing the longstanding 7%

sales tax on eligible goods and services.

If passed, the local sales tax rate would remain 8% for at least two and a half years starting next April, and the Commissioner’s Office would have to decide in 2026 whether to seek renewal of the county SPLOST.

County Meeting...from Page 1



Members of the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club posing with a new banner commemorating their recent state championship victories. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

to test their athleticism from Sept. 15-17, and they returned victorious.

“I felt like because our pickleball community is so strong and vibrant that we could do OK, but man, did they blow my mind,” Nichols said. “Of the groups that went down, we had one Third Place finish, which is tremendous, right? That is awesome. But we had four State Champions come back.”

While competing, the players were paired up as follows:

Mary Lynn Miller and Steve Puett won the gold medal playing in mixed doubles 4.0 in the 60+ age bracket.

Ellyn Balthrop and Miller won the gold medal playing in women’s doubles 4.0 in the 60+ age bracket.

Married couple Jojo and John Henderson went undefeated in the tournament, winning the gold medal playing in mixed doubles 4.5 in the 30+ age bracket. Their kids joined them that evening to accept the honor.

And Nancy Woods and Cynthia Cornelius won the gold medal playing in women’s doubles 3.0 in the 60+ age bracket.

Additionally, Puett and Alan Woods won the bronze medal playing in men’s doubles 4.0 in the 60+ age bracket.

Earlier this month, Nichols unveiled a banner at the Towns County Pickleball Courts & Complex to commemorate the four championships.

During the Oct. 10 banner reveal celebrating the cham-

pions, Nichols said, “We’ve got a thriving pickleball community here in the county. It’s grown to be such a huge sport. If you haven’t tried pickleball, you need to come try it.”

Presenting at the county meeting last week was Enotah CASA Executive Director Della Lago. CASA’s main goal is contained in the name itself – Court Appointed Special Advocates.

In Lago’s words, CASA “empowers” people to advocate for the best interests of abused and neglected children in the foster system, particularly in their own communities.

In 2022, 28 children in Towns County alone were removed from their homes for various reasons, whether related to substance abuse, abandonment, parental incarceration, sexual or physical abuse and other traumas.

Over the entire Enotah Judicial Circuit, which includes White, Lumpkin, Union and Towns counties, 62% of foster children went into the system due to parental substance abuse. That said, vulnerable children unfortunately often experience “multiple levels of trauma.”

“Just because a child has come in because their parent has been found to be abusing substances, oftentimes, there’s a secondary or tertiary reason (for intake),” Lago said. “It could be sexual abuse; it could be physical abuse.”

CASA only has seven salaried staff members, but numerous volunteers fight for the rights of local children over the four counties, including 208

in 2022. Towns County volunteers specifically clocked in over 1,500 volunteer hours and drove more than 4,500 miles last year.

To receive funding through victim help grants, CASA must provide proof that its communities support the organization’s efforts, and while the overwhelming outpouring of care has been helpful, Lago said CASA’s most dire need is for more volunteers.

“We have children right now that need an advocate. So, what that means is, this child is going to be removed from everything they know, and they need somebody who’s going to stand up for them and what is in their best interest (in legal proceedings),” Lago said, noting that evidence shows children lead happier, more stable lives with an advocate than without.

Over the entire circuit, there are 30 children who still need an advocate of their own. Those who are interested in volunteering must be at least 21 years old, take a 30-hour training course, pass a background check and undergo 10 hours of in-court observation.

Advocate advisors are there to help at every step if needed, and once approved, advocates must visit their child at least once a month. Visit www.enotahcasa.org for more information. Lago can be reached by phone at 706-864-0300 or by email at director@enotahcasa.org.

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw announced a moratorium on construction in the Enchanted Valley RV Park due to repeated building violations.

Towns County High School Marching Band...from Page 1

(Tim Skinner) on the phone pacing back and forth, and we were like, 'Is he calling the judges to make sure papers weren't switched or something?'" she said.

But Skinner, just in his first year as the local band director, clarified: "I was actually calling my daughter and saying, 'We just won First Place! Can you believe it?'" I was so shocked. It was a pleasant surprise."

Of course, the awards really were intended for the TCHS Marching Band – and they were well deserved.

"I spend so much time at practice, at this point I basically live at the school," joked trombone soloist Lily Ward.

After practicing a full season from 5:30-8:30 p.m. every Monday and Thursday, for several hours on Fridays during football bye weeks, and an extra hour afterschool on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for students not in the class, the band was certainly due for some recognition.

"One of the judges even said that our band was the talk of the press box," Skinner said, grinning. "We're just a little band, and because of that it's really, really big that we utilize every kid's potential because it's all one on a part. So, we do what we can do, and I'm really proud of them."

The last time the TCHS Marching Band received a Superior rating or placed in a competition was in 2012 under the direction of Frank McKinney, making a win like this unprecedented for all of the current students.

Marshall McClure, the only senior in the group, was ecstatic to have accomplished

such a feat in one of his last high school marching performances.

"I'm just so proud of everybody and happy with what we did," McClure said. "I mean, after my whole six years of watching the band not get anything, and then to suddenly have that – I was in tears, man."

Band Captain Max Barron was also astonished by the results of that Saturday's competition.

"I kind of have the same feeling as (Marshall), because it's just been so long, and it's been basically a pipe dream for our band for as long as I can remember," Barron said last week. "So, to finally get that, it feels like everything that I've ever done in this program has come together just this last weekend. It's such a hard feeling to describe. I can't believe it."

"It's just a recognition for our band that's long overdue," he continued. "Like, even if we didn't earn awards in the past year, I would not be nearly the marcher or player I am today without the people who have already graduated who taught me how to do all that stuff so that I can now teach other people."

"To finally get recognized for that after five or six years – it's been way overdue."

Barron also complimented the Color Guard and thanked them for helping to make their success possible, demonstrating the camaraderie present in the band. Many marching bands have a culture that excludes the Color Guard, but not so at Towns County.

"One of my proudest moments was being able to be drum major of the band and



Towns County Marching Band at the recent Northeast Georgia Marching Exhibition.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

look through the marching season and see the fact that I've tried to implement, most of all, that all of us are family," Drum Major Childs said. "We're not separate at all."

"This year in the year book, it's one page, not the Color Guard separate. All of our members, (even though they might not be in marching band, are still a part of our fam-

ily that we create."

This week, the band will take a much-needed break from practice only to jump right back into the swing of things for their last competition of the

season on Oct. 28. On Saturday, they will travel to Barron Stadium in Rome, Georgia, to perform in the Peach State Marching Festival.

Go Indians!

Halloween...from Page 1

join the fun. Participants should bring plenty of candy for the costumed masses, and just call the fairgrounds at 706-896-4191 to reserve a spot.

The chamber wants to thank this year's sponsors: Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason; County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw; Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales; Hiwassee Police Chief Jer-

emy Parker; and Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson.

In the event of inclement weather, the rain date for the "Fangtastic Halloween at the Fairgrounds" will be Nov. 2, as spooky shenanigans are coming to the fairgrounds rain or shine. Management asks that guests avoid bringing pets, but certified service animals are welcome.

Mountain Coin Club next monthly meeting Nov. 14



Member of both the American Numismatic Association (ANA) and Georgia Numismatic Association (GNA)

Have old coins or currency? Are some of the coins gold or silver? Not sure what they are worth? Interested in collecting for investment or hobby? The Mountain Coin Club is dedicated to increasing knowledge of numismatics (Coin Collecting) at all levels.

Mountain Coin Club meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. in the Conference Center of North Georgia Technical College. The Mountain Coin Club will hold their next monthly meeting on Nov. 14th.

Every month members receive information on current

numismatic trends, a precious metals report, current and upcoming coin shows, plus an educational program. This month's program is about Part 2 of the history of the U.S.A. three cent coin. The program presented by club member Jeffrey S. covers the coin shortage during the civil war and the use of tokens, stamps, and paper as substitutes for coins.

Visitors are always welcome to club meetings. As a visitor you will have a chance to learn about both ancient and modern as well as domestic and foreign coins and currencies. Also you will be up to date on the value of your gold and silver. Visitors can also learn about the different club activities conducted during the year and can join the club to become an active member.

There will be items presented at the meeting by individual members to view and to purchase along with door prizes to be won for those attending.

S.A.F.E.'s Holiday Shopping Expo



Get a jump start on your holiday shopping at S.A.F.E.'s Holiday Shopping Expo Saturday, November 18th from 10 AM - 4 PM at the Conference Center located at 150 Foster Park Road, Young Harris, GA 30582.

For more information, or to rent a booth at the event, please contact Vicki Franklin at 706-379-1901 or email: vfranklin@safeservices.org.