

Sen. Wilkinson...from Page 1A

The Junction to join a group of local stakeholders and friends for a special presentation.

Those gathered included Bradshaw, Fire Chief Harold Copeland, District Attorney Jeff Langley, Sheriff-Elect Kenneth "Ode" Henderson, Tax Commissioner Republican Nominee Michael Anderson, District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch, District 50 State Senate Republican Nominee Bo Hatchett, House District 8 Republican Nominee Stan Gunter, and Ed Henderson from Rabun County, among others.

On behalf of the Republican Party of Towns County, local GOP Chair Betsy Young honored Wilkinson with a Certificate of Recognition "for nine years of servant leadership," and several people offered comments remarking on the bittersweet nature of the occasion.

Wilkinson thanked everyone present for their support over the years, giving a special shout-out to local Sam Fullerton before recognizing local high school senior Summer Rahn, who sang and played guitar for those in attendance.

A reception with refreshments inside the GOP Headquarters followed the certificate presentation, after which those gathered parted ways for the evening.

In terms of what's next for Wilkinson, he said that while he will no longer be serving in his capacity as a state legislator, he believed in the wisdom of Romans 8:28, and that he would be looking to pursue whatever calling God has for him moving forward.

Wilkinson was first elected to the 50th District State Senate seat during a special election in 2011, representing Towns, Banks, Franklin, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens and portions of Hall and Jackson counties.

In 2014, Wilkinson was elected by his colleagues to serve as the Majority Caucus Secretary, and he has served as the Chairman of the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee and as Vice-Chairman of the Education and Youth Committee.

Additionally, the senator has served as a member of the Committee on Assignments and the Administrative Affairs Committee, as well as the Appropriations and Natural Resources and the Environment Committees.

Sen. Wilkinson is an Ex-Officio member of the Rules Committee and was appointed



John Wilkinson joined the Towns County Republican Party and GOP Chair Betsy Young Oct. 20 for a certificate of appreciation presentation celebrating his commitment as a state senator.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



TCHS Senior Summer Rahn is a known singing talent in the area, and she opened for Sen. Wilkinson's farewell recognition on Oct. 20.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

to serve on the COPS Task Force in 2017.

In October 2017, the Peace Officers Association of Georgia awarded Wilkinson with an honorary lifetime membership for his dedication to public safety and support of law enforcement officers across Georgia.

The senator has earned various other accolades for his service over the years, including a July 2017 presentation of the Outstanding Service Award by the Georgia Vocational Agriculture Teachers Association, and later, the Region V national award by the National Association of Agricultural Educators.

The University of Geor-

gia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences honored Wilkinson with an Award of Excellence in 2009, and he is a member of the Georgia Agricultural Education Hall of Fame for his career in ag education.

Wilkinson formerly worked as a program manager at the Georgia Department of Education overseeing the state's agricultural education programs, and he also worked as the executive secretary for the Georgia FFA Association.

He received his bachelor's degree in agriculture and master's in education at the University of Georgia.

Beer Festival...from Page 1A



The 2020 iteration of the festival was the biggest ever, even during a pandemic, showing that people are ready to take advantage of events – especially those occurring outdoors.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

best we have ever had people wise," Thomason said of the Fifth Annual Festival. "The reason for that is because there haven't been any beer festivals anywhere in North Georgia, and everybody is ready to get out and go to a craft beer festival. The weather is great; it rained a little this morning, but it is absolutely wonderful now."

Appearing alongside the craft beer were craft vendors and live entertainers, which gave the event the traditional festival feel that families have come to enjoy in the North Georgia Mountains.

The festival attracted many first-time visitors to the Fairgrounds, such as Grace Harris of Kentucky, who travels around the country for craft festivals.

"My husband and I have been retired for some time now," Harris said. "We really like to go to different craft festivals and try all the breweries. We usually do one up in Nashville (Tennessee) and

go there every year.

"This year we were really worried about not being able to go to one because of all this COVID stuff. We have never been to this one, but one of the breweries we like, D9 Brewing Company, was going to be here, so we thought we would come give it a try.

"It's honestly more than I expected. There are so many breweries here and so many people from all over coming to try. This is probably the most fun I have had all year, and I might come back next year."

Other visitors such as Shane Baldwin of Kennesaw have attended the festival before and were likewise looking forward to the event as something fun to do outdoors.

"We have been itching for something to do for the longest time," Baldwin said. "We came here once last year, and we love this area. This is a wonderful festival with great beer and great food. Our favorite brewery I would say is Burnt Hickory Brewing.

"The people that weren't here missed out on all this fun stuff. This is one day out of the year, and it is a great time. I like it more than going to Helen for their festival. It is just something for the family to enjoy. I know beer is the center of it, but the music and everything is great for families, too."

With the postponing of the Georgia Mountain Fair and the Fall Festival earlier this year, the Appalachian Brew, Stew & Que festival was among the only major festivals that did not get changed or postponed.

And though the Fairgrounds will not have any more festivals this year, folks will want to mark their calendars for the annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights! walking Christmas lights show, which will make a return this year after Thanksgiving.

For more information on upcoming events, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.

Fire Station Flag...from Page 1A

great job. So, we're very proud of the way it turned out."

For several years now, Towns County has been operating its Young Harris firefighting efforts out of the old Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Headquarters, and the new custom-built Station 2 will allow firefighters to continue their duties from a more centralized location for many residents.

The flagpole next to the main sign at the roadway came to be after Chief Copeland reached out to Toups recently, and while the property still has work to be completed, the flagpole installation served as the final piece of the project before firefighters moved into the building.

"Our flag means everything to me," Chief Copeland said last week. "By accident, I had the pleasure of being in school at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland, on the 10th anniversary of 9/11. The National Fire Academy houses the 9/11 Memorial statue of firefighters raising the flag after the Twin Towers fell.

"So, it means a lot. I've always been a patriotic guy from the very beginning, from my ancestors and all the great veterans that we have in this county. The flag is everything – it should be everything to everybody in this country."

A Grand Opening in the spring will feature a celebration marking the completion of the helipad the county plans to install at Station 2 to accommodate emergency life flights.

The helipad is currently awaiting installation, as the ground needs to settle after recent grading, but Copeland said it will be yet another benefit of moving to the current location on Georgia 66. Another benefit is cost savings to more homeowners.

"If you're 5 miles from a station and 1,000 feet from a hydrant, you get a lower insurance rating on your home," Copeland said. "So, where we are right here, we're



Wendell Caver and Billy "The Flag Guy" Toups of Mountain Fire are seen attaching Old Glory to the newly installed pole at Station 2 in Young Harris last Thursday.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

able to cover all the way back into Towns County and Plott Town, and we're able to give better insurance ratings to the homeowners down this way."

Referring to the new station as "the community's building," Copeland said the two-bay station will easily house all the necessary fire apparatus, and that looking ahead, the building will be able to accommodate bunks for a full-time crew of dedicated firefighters.

"This Fire Station is no different than any other fire station in the country," Copeland said. "Whether it's Union County or California, fire stations are everything to their communities. Saving lives and saving property is what we do, and the community backs us immensely.

"It is the citizens' building; we just work out of it for them. Whether it's a structure fire, a medical call, a car wreck, wildland fire or storm – as real, true-hearted firemen, when that alarm sounds, we're coming, because that's what we do.

"We're real grateful to the citizens of Towns County for providing us that building to work out of, and further, we're thankful for the SPLOST our voters passed, which allows the

visitors who come to the county to pitch in for our services."

According to Copeland, SPLOST money enables the Fire Department to update firefighting and life safety equipment as needed, and Bradshaw said about \$120,000 in SPLOST funds went toward Station 2 construction.

Others in attendance for the flag raising were 911 Director Marty Roberts and Bud Dyer of the Fire Board – Dyer was Copeland's first Fire Chief 38 years ago – local Fire Lieutenants Tyler Keyes and Scott Shattles, Young Harris College Assistant Police Chief Robbie Rich, Michael Courey of Towns County Firewise and more.

"This new station is a dramatic improvement to what existed," Courey said. "It's a lot of planning and a lot of execution of the planning by Chief Copeland and Commissioner Bradshaw. This didn't just happen on its own – this was planned out well for a long time's future use.

"The community needs to appreciate exactly what went into this, the economics of it being done at a realistic cost. It's an improvement to safety and fire control in the community and county."



Towns County Fire & Rescue Station No. 2 is located just up Georgia 66 in Young Harris.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson