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Shook, Edwards crowned Homecoming Royalty

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Congratulations to 2022 Towns County High School Football Homecoming King and Queen, seniors A.J. Edwards and Sarah Shook.

Last week was Homecoming Week at TCHS, and students got plenty of opportunities with various themed days to showcase their school spirit and Indian pride, with everything culminating in the crowning of new Homecoming Royalty on Thursday, Sept. 29.

Due to uncertainty over the path of Hurricane Ian coming up from Florida, to accommodate the moving of the Homecoming Football Game originally scheduled for Friday, Sept. 30, the PBIS Powderpuff Game that was to take place last Thursday had to be rescheduled to a later date.

Since Homecoming

King was supposed to be announced during the Powderpuff Game, TCHS decided to hold a special ceremony in the gym during school on Thursday, and A.J. Edwards was announced among his peers, teachers and coaches as the collective top choice for King.

"I was in awe when my name was announced," Edwards said. "I was definitely in shock, like my jaw had hit the floor. It was very humbling to know that my class chose me to represent them, and what hit me was that they really appreciate me enough to choose me as their King."

"For the rest of my senior year I am just striving toward goals. I want to get better in every place I want to get better at: academically, physically - I want to make it where I want to go."

Edwards is serving out his senior year by playing

football while working toward an ROTC Scholarship come graduation time to eventually become a JAG for the United States Navy.

Later that evening, during halftime of the Homecoming Football Game versus Greene County, another ceremony was held, this time for the female division of the Homecoming Court.

After the ladies were escorted onto the field dressed in their best formalwear, Sarah Shook was officially announced as having been chosen by her classmates to be the female face of TCHS as the 2022 Football Homecoming Queen, crowned by 2021 Queen Maci Brinson.

"I never expected in my life that I would ever be a Homecoming Queen," Shook said. "I had a lot of fun in the process and got to enjoy it with all of my friends, and it's such

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2022 Homecoming Queen Sarah Shook and Homecoming King A.J. Edwards took to the football field last week to celebrate the culmination of a week full of Homecoming activities. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Local levying authorities working on millage rates

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

It's tax time again, and city and county governments and the school district are all working to determine millage rates that will be sufficient to meet their budgetary needs without a tax increase.

Towns County Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson said the gross tax digest grew by about 19% from 2021 to 2022. From 2020 to 2021, it grew by only about 11%, and for years before that, the gross digest only grew an average of about 8.5%.

Anderson also said growth in Towns County has been greater since the pandemic began, as is evidenced



The Towns County School Board met last week to discuss its 2022 millage rate. Photo by Mark Smith

by the numbers. As to why, no one knows for sure, but one possibility is that people have figured out that they can work from home, so why not live somewhere pleasant?

Also, it seems that many

people have been wanting to get out of metro areas and even some states after the onset of COVID-19, and this rural region has looked remarkably attractive.

See Millage Rates, Page 6A

Georgia Mountain Fall Festival to run Oct. 7-15

From Staff Reports
Towns County Herald

The Georgia Mountain Fall Festival is heading to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Oct. 7-15 for nine days of live music, arts & crafts, delicious foods, "Old Ways" demonstrations, carnival rides and more.

Each day will run 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., and folks looking for something new in 2022 will want to be sure to check out third-generation animal trainer Brunon Blaszak, who will be bringing a troop of tigers to perform twice daily Monday through Friday, with three shows Saturday and Sunday.

Also new this year, carnival provider Midway Rides Unlimited will be heading to the Fairgrounds to bring an im-



Get ready for nine days of family-friendly fun at the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival starting Friday, Oct. 7. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2016

pressive roster of rides for both adults and children, including classic carnival crowd-pleasers such as carousels and Ferris wheels.

The carnival attractions o.p., and on Saturday starting at noon and on Sunday at

3 p.m.

Then there's the Cowboy Circus featuring "The World's Smallest Rodeo," which visited the Fairgrounds for the first time in 2021, coming back by popular demand. The Cowboy Circus will be available Oct.

See Fall Festival, Page 5A

Voter registration ends October 11

Early voting begins Oct. 17

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The last day to register to vote in the Nov. 8 General Election and any subsequent runoff election is Tuesday, Oct. 11.

Registration can be completed in person at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office located in Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiwassee, or residents may visit <https://georgia.gov/register-online> to fill out an application online or print one for mailing.

Advanced in-person voting for the General Election will begin in less than two weeks at the Elections Office.

Early voting will run weekdays Monday, Oct. 17, through Friday, Nov. 4, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime. There will also be



two weekend early voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 22, and Saturday, Oct. 29, also from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Elections Office.

Upcoming construction for the major renovation and addition project at the neighboring Towns County Courthouse is not expected to interfere with operations at the Elections Board Office.

Election Day voting for

See Election Dates, Page 6A

Inaugural Young Harris Porchfest a tremendous community success

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Sunday, Sept. 25, the first Young Harris Porchfest was introduced to the public along the strip directly across the street from Young Harris College.

The concert venues that day were Cables Fine Art Gallery and the Wing House, and guests enjoyed music from a variety of local talent: Rolie Thomas & the Roll Tights, Jack Stowers, Mountain Breeze Bluegrass, George Boggs & Friends, Tru Youngblood and GAS.

Quick Brown Fox was also a popular local act for the crowd with their exciting renditions of beloved classic rock songs. Front man guitarist and lead singer of the group, Joe Kirkpatrick, has only lived in the area for just over a year, be-

ing originally from Gwinnett County.

"It is great to be a part of the local community with a form of art like this; it's fantastic," Kirkpatrick said. "We play a lot of different venues and different sizes. We love the big crowds, but these smaller, intimate settings are special, too."

"For everybody in this band, it is just about having a good time and spreading our music so people are influenced to be happy. Our priority is to spread joy through music."

Added bassist Jeff Dodd, "Any of these outdoor festivals and comes together, we love it, so there should certainly be more of these throughout the year."

After the well-attended, four-hour concert series, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby shared what it took to get the Porchfest going and the fruits



Area residents enjoyed Young Harris Porchfest late last month, pictured here gathered for a performance by Quick Brown Fox. Photo by Jeremy Foster

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Patriotic motorcycle ride honors victims of Benghazi, 9/11

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

U.S. Army Veteran Dr. Dan Eichenbaum of the American Legion Riders led the 10th Annual Benghazi/Twin Towers Memorial Ride and Veterans Appreciation Event on Saturday, Sept. 24.

The terrorist attacks of both 2001 on American soil and in 2012 at American facilities in Benghazi occurred on Sept. 11 in their respective years, hence the ride to jointly commemorate the tragic losses every September.

Bikers formed up at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park in Hiwassee, then traveled to the Western Caro-

lina Regional Airport in Andrews, North Carolina, where an air show was taking place.

Well over 50 motorcycles, with many bikers riding with their wives, and two with their dogs, with lights on and American flags waving, and with a sheriff's escort, traveled through Hiwassee to Blairsville, then around the backside of Lake Nottely through to Murphy, North Carolina, ending at the airport in Andrews, a distance of about 61 miles.

Among the motorcycle clubs participating in the event were the American Legion Riders, Blue Angels, Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association, Nam Knights of America, and Heaven's Saints Motorcycle

Ministry, to name a few.

Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Marine Corps League were among the veterans service organizations represented at the event, as were most branches of U.S. military service.

"The purpose of this ride is to remember our heroes; men do not die until they are forgotten," Eichenbaum said. "We had four Americans killed in Benghazi. There was a (quick reaction force) that could have come and helped them out - probably could have saved their lives - but was not allowed to leave, not allowed to come and get them."

"The original ride started in Polk County, North Caro-

lina. The theme of that was 'Bikers for Justice.' And 'justice' means that those who were responsible for letting (those four Americans) die should be brought to justice."

"I took over this ride in 2016, and this is now the 10th annual ride. And since 2016, it's been in our area. What we do in this ride is plant memorial signs, and the signs say, 'Men do not die until they are forgotten.'"

"The purpose of this ride is to keep the memory and the honor of those who died, not just at Benghazi, Libya, but also in the Twin Towers attack in 2001. So, this is about remembering our heroes, honoring them, and never, ever



U.S. Army Veteran Dr. Dan Eichenbaum helps to organize the annual patriotic remembrance ride every year, pictured here at the Towns County Veterans Park Sept. 24. Photo by Mark Smith

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SPORTS
SOFTBALL
Oct. 6 @ GSIC 5 PM
FOOTBALL
Oct. 7 @ Aquinas
7:30 PM

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Fall Festival Special Section Inside

Porchfest...from Page 1A

of the labor. "We have always wanted to do something towards the end of the summer," Gibby said. "The inspiration came from the City of Athens, as they have been doing a porch fest for the last couple of years. So, I talked with their mayor (Kelly Girtz), and I thought it was such a cool concept, and we wanted to do a mini version of that. "We also thought it was a great location to be across

from the Young Harris campus because it pulls more of the community together, and we want to do things that include the college more and more and even have things on the campus. "I would love to plan to make this an annual event every year, if not more. Everyone has enjoyed it very much so far; this community loves getting together, and this was a nice way to celebrate our love for music and the arts."

Added Gibby, "We have a placemaking group that wants to help grow Young Harris and make a better community, so I would like to thank Dana Cable for being very instrumental, and Jo Ellen Thornton and her realty company for being a sponsor." Spectator Brooke Hanna, a Blairsville native and Young Harris College graduate herself, was there snapping some photos of the action for the school. "I think this is very necessary, awesome and amazing anytime our people

can get together," Hanna said. "Our town is adorable, and we need to do this all the time. "This is great for growth, gives people things to do and shows people who are visiting that it is certainly worth coming to the mountains. As a local and someone who has lived here my whole life, I am happy to see our towns grow and have more for everyone to participate in." For more information and to stay up to date on the goings-on of the city, visit www.youngharrisga.net.

Fall Festival...from Page 1A

10-15 at 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. each day. As always, the Pioneer Village will be open daily to showcase "Old Ways" demonstrations with historical reen-

actments of corn milling, pork skin frying, blacksmithing and more. Guests will be able to visit the historical schoolhouse, smoke house, corn crib

and barn, and can even explore a cabin furnished as it would have been in the 1800s. Jams, jellies and "all kinds of honey" will be for sale in the Antique Farm Museum. Arts & crafts wise, there's a bit of something for everyone, with plenty of jewelry and clothing, home décor, sports memorabilia and more to choose from. Strolling through the winding paths between the booths is an excellent way to support local artisans and other small businesses.

p.m., except for Sunday, which will feature a 2 p.m. gospel show with Jason Crabb, Gold City, and Jeff and Sheri Easter. Two musical groups will take the stage during the nightly performances, and the cost to attend is covered in the entry ticket price for the festival, though the Oak Ridge Boys on Saturday, Oct. 8, and Ashley McBryde on Saturday, Oct. 15, will require hard ticket purchases.

Variant-specific COVID-19 booster now available

An omicron-specific booster for COVID is available now that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration authorized the first redesign of the coronavirus vaccines since they became available in late 2020.

Everyone who is eligible - including those who are moderately to severely immunocompromised - is recommended to receive one dose of the updated bivalent booster at least two months after their most recent dose (either the final dose of the primary series or the last booster shot).

Food options will include tacos, barbecue and hamburgers, and the Towns County Lions Club will be returning to sell funnel cakes.

Admission to the Fall Festival is \$12 for a one-day pass, and children under 12 get in for free. Just as it has been in years past, parking is free. For more information, including music show schedules and to purchase tickets online, visit georgiamountainfairgrounds.com.

The updated COVID-19 booster provides protection against the original strain of the virus that causes COVID, as well as the BA.4 and BA.5 omicron subvariants, which are more contagious and better able to evade protection that your body might have against earlier subvariants, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Last year's booster has been replaced by the new bivalent one, and people can expect an annual COVID vaccine similar to how the influenza vaccine is updated yearly.

Music is always a popular attraction at the Fall Festival, and there will be plenty of live entertainment between the porch, gazebo and Anderson Music Hall.

This year's lineup includes the Earls of Leicester, Granny's Mason Jar, the Oak Ridge Boys, the South Wind Band, the Malpass Brothers, the Steve Bryson Band, Aaron Tippin, Hunt-r-Greene, Gene Watson, the Mountain Home Music Band, The Bellamy Brothers, Justin Terry, Mark Wills, the Jim Wood Band, and Ashley McBryde.

CDC recommends that everyone ages 12 years and older in the United States receive an updated COVID-19 booster. Like the original boosters, the updated doses help restore protection that might have gone down since your last dose.

Anyone may get the updated, bivalent shot at their local health department and other locations. Anyone who misplaced their original COVID vaccination card may get a new one with a state ID at the health department.

The Hall will open its doors at 6 p.m. each evening, with music to begin around 7

Your Patriot Reflection



Supreme Court and Christianity

In 1892 Supreme Court Justice David J. Brewer penned the courts' opinion in the case The Church of The Holy Trinity VS The United States. While this case was not about religion, the court considered America's Christian identity to be a strong support for its conclusion. Justice Brewer wrote, as part of a gratuitous statement, that the United States was a "Christian Nation." Here is what he said, "No purpose of action against religion can be imputed to any legislation, state or national, because this is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation...there is no dissonance in these declarations. There is a universal language pervading them all, having one meaning; they affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation. These are not individual sayings, declarations of private persons; they are organic utterances; they speak the voice of the entire people...These, and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation." Justice Brewer later clarified his position on a "Christian nation," stating the U.S. is "Christian" in that many of its traditions are rooted in Christianity, not that Christianity should receive legal privileges or is established to the exclusion of other religions or to the exclusion of irreligion.

Unfortunately, we have come to the point in this country that the voice of government wants us to believe that Christianity should be excluded from every arena of life. We were built on a foundation of Christian beliefs, and without that continuing foundation we will sink further and further into the abyss of depravity, lawlessness and immorality. Let us stand for Biblical values.

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by www.joshuaswarriors.org.

TCHS Student of the Week



Brooke Whitt and Bryton Dye

The PBIS Student of the Week for TCHS is sophomore Bryton Dye. English teacher Brooke Whitt stated: "Bryton embodies many of the TRIBE characteristics. He comes to class prepared and is a willing participant in all of our classroom activities. He treats his classmates (and his teacher!) with respect and courtesy. His integrity is above reproach; he works independently and he works hard. Finally, he has excellent attendance, an excellent attitude, and an excellent work ethic. He is a pleasure to have as a student!"

Bryton's favorite subject in school is history as he enjoys learning how far both society and the world has come and improved. After graduation, he hopes to attend Young Harris College to pursue a degree in social studies education. His aunt was the first college graduate in his family, and she is one of his inspirations. He also feels that many of his teachers have made significant impacts on his life. Outside of school, Bryton enjoys bowling, playing video games, and cooking. One of his proudest accomplishments is this honor - being chosen as PBIS Student of the Week as it shows that he demonstrates all of the TRIBE characteristics: teamwork, respect, integrity, bravery, and excellence.

Homecoming 2022...from Page 1A



(L-R) TCHS Homecoming Court seniors Quincy Rosser, Eden Hill, Brook Murrell, Queen Sarah Shook, King A.J. Edwards, Princess Tabitha Barnes and Jozie King posing for pictures last Thursday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

a great feeling to have everyone I am close to choose me to represent the school for my senior year.”

Shook has been relishing her senior year by being named 2022 Miss Georgia Mountain Fair in August and playing basketball and soccer while remaining on

a path to become either a traveling nurse or a physical therapist.

Also crowned that evening was senior Homecoming Princess Tabitha Barnes. Rounding out the 2022 Girls Homecoming Court were seniors Jozie King, Brook Murrell, Quincy Rosser and Eden

Hill, junior Emma Lallemt, sophomore Ansleigh Hardin and freshman Brelee Rowland.

In addition to Edwards, this year's Boys Homecoming Court consisted of seniors Ian Wood, Grant Ingram, Kemp Walker, Jonathan Dockery and Seth Gillis.

Election Dates...from Page 1A

The General Election will take place Tuesday, Nov. 8, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Hiawassee and Young Harris Precincts of Towns County.

All voters will need to have an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots, such as a government-issued driver's license or identification card.

Residents have been able to apply for a mailed absentee ballot since Aug. 22. Absentee ballot requests may be made at the local Elections Office or by accessing the "My Voter Page" at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>.

Due to the Columbus Day holiday, the earliest day for absentee ballots to be mailed to voters is Tuesday, Oct. 11, and the deadline to request an absentee ballot is Oct. 28. Ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, email as an attachment, or in-person to the Elections Office.

People who have voted absentee-by-mail in a past election cycle will need to submit a new application for this cycle if they want to receive an absentee ballot in the mail.

Folks can mail their completed ballots back or utilize the official drop box inside the Elections Office during early voting

hours. Voters may also drop completed absentee ballots off at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Voters are encouraged to request and return their absentee ballots early to give their ballot "enough time to travel through the mail and resolve any issues that may arise when voting by absentee ballot," per [ga.gov](https://www.sos.ga.gov/).

Mentioned above, the "My Voter Page" website contains much valuable information, such as registration status, precinct information, downloadable sample ballots, mailed absentee ballot status and voter participation history.

Ballots will include political party candidates running in the General Election as well as four statewide ballot questions: two potential amendments to the Georgia Constitution and two referendums to approve acts recently passed by the Georgia General Assembly.

To review the ballot questions and candidates up for election, check out the sample ballot on the "My Voter Page."

People may also contact the local Elections Office at 706-896-4353 if they have any questions.

Motorcycle Ride...from Page 1A



Blairsville served as a passthrough point for the annual Benghazi/Twin Towers Memorial Ride and Veterans Appreciation last month. Photo by Mark Smith

forgetting the greatness of our country.”

Retired U.S. Marine Andrew Turner was one of the first riders to arrive at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park on Saturday morning about 8 a.m.

“I think (these events)

need to be acknowledged and never forgotten,” Turner said. “Once it's forgotten, it's forgotten; it doesn't come back.”

Continuing, he said that, right after these events happened, everyone was patriotic and gung-ho, but 20 years later – a generation gone by – folks

in many areas don't even want to recognize them, and he believes these stories should be passed down as part of America's heritage.

“So, unless we pay homage and show honor to what has happened, between Benghazi and the Twin Towers, they'll be lost and forgotten forever,” Turner said. “And we can't have that. It's like destroying history.”

Retired U.S. Marine Ashford “Ash” Todd had this to say: “When we ride, I think about when those towers came down and where I was and what I was doing. And I think about the guys that were killed in Benghazi – four (Americans) that didn't need to die.”

“There were a whole lot of political issues that came up that caused that to happen, and it began to divide America at that time,” Todd added. “We need to get back and lose this divisiveness that we've got. We need to think about what Christ said, 'Love others as I have loved you.'”

“And that's what we need – we need to lose that (divisive) attitude. So, as I ride and I think about those days, I think about my attitude and where I need to be. That's what the ride means to me.”

Millage Rates...from Page 1A

For whatever reason, Towns County and its two cities, Hiawassee and Young Harris, have attracted a lot of people over the last two years, which has sparked high demand for housing that, in turn, has caused real estate prices to skyrocket.

Of course, with more people in more homes and businesses, the demand for city and county services and the stress on infrastructure has jumped as well.

So, there are more people paying taxes on higher valued properties than in previous years, the upshot being there was an almost \$200 million increase in the tax digest year over year since 2021.

Now, Towns County Government, Hiawassee, Young Harris and Towns County Schools are trying to decide on millage rates that will be acceptable to the residents while maintaining their high quality of services, infrastructure and attractive public properties.

Every year, the state requires property tax levying authorities to calculate a rollback rate to adjust for inflationary increases in property values. If a municipality decides not to accept the rollback rate or lower, then hearings must be called to advertise a tax increase.

Fortunately, at this time, it does not appear tax increases are on offer this cycle, as the local digest has experienced pure growth alongside inflationary increases, and local governments will be receiving additional tax revenues despite lowering their millage rates due to inflation.

The proposed new county millage rate is 4.729, a rollback from 4.753 in 2021. Assuming that the proposed rate isn't changed before the county

meeting on Oct. 18, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw will officially adopt that rate at that time.

Last year's school millage rate was 6.863, and the proposed new rate is 6.55, which is actually lower than the rollback calculation, meaning residents will be getting a cut in the school portion of their property tax bill.

School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said the tax commissioner deemed that the district could adopt the rollback rate of 6.829 without public hearings, but the schools are able to roll the rate back even further due to the excellent financial health of the school system.

Assuming that the proposed rate isn't changed before the Towns County Board of Education meets on Oct. 20, that 6.55 rate will be officially adopted at that time.

The proposed new City of Hiawassee millage rate is 1.972, the rollback from last year's 1.977 rate. At press time, Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales was advising the council to adopt that rate in their regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, Oct. 4, which occurred after press time.

However, the city is currently in negotiations with county government to adjust the percentage split of proceeds from the Local Option Sales Tax, or LOST, which makes up 1% of the 7% sales tax in Towns County.

The split is currently 79.5/20.5, where the county gets roughly 80%, and Hiawassee must split the remaining 20 percent with Young Harris. Ordiales said Hiawassee currently gets 11% and Young Harris gets 9.5%.

With 221 businesses operating in Hiawassee, Or-

diales feels the city is generating around 70% of LOST revenue in the county. Conversely, county government is responsible for providing emergency and other services to the majority of residents in the county, so it's a multilateral issue.

Ordiales is proposing a 70/30 split with the county, where Hiawassee and Young Harris would divvy up 30%. The parties are currently in mediation to work through the issue, which must be settled by Dec. 30 or LOST collections will cease until a new local referendum is passed.

Should the city and county not come to an agreement, then the Hiawassee millage rate would have to be increased to 4.651 mills to compensate, Ordiales said, and this would also cause the county to lose over \$2 million in yearly revenue.

The 2021 millage rate for Young Harris was 2.346. There was no announcement at press time of what the proposed 2022 millage rate would be for the Enchanted Valley, though the city is expected to announce its plans shortly.

Towns County has a separate millage rate for its fire services known as the fire millage. In 2021, the fire millage rate was 0.442, and Bradshaw has proposed accepting the 2022 rollback rate of 0.44 in the upcoming county meeting.

Due to impending construction at the Towns County Courthouse, until further notice, all county business will be conducted at the temporary location of the Old Rec Gym just outside the city limits of Hiawassee on the northwest end of town.

Tax Commissioner Anderson said that county tax bills, which will include school and county property taxes, will be mailed out by Nov. 10 and due by Jan. 10.