

Towns County Herald

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75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 95 Number 50

Wednesday, October 9, 2024

TCHS students ready for Homecoming Week

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Homecoming is a time-honored tradition that high school students look forward to with anticipation and breathlessness.

Many schools claim the honor of hosting the first homecoming, but according to "Jeopardy," the University of Missouri hosted the first one in 1911 with an exciting football game against archrival the Kansas Jayhawks.

At Towns County High School, Homecoming runs now through Saturday starting with Spirit Week.

"Spirit Week is always the week of Homecoming, and it's always an exciting week," Principal Bryan Thomason said. "Each day has a theme. The Student Council got together and created a master list of ideas, and then the whole student body voted on the Top Four choices.

"Monday is America Day showcasing red, white

and blue. Tuesday is Pajama Day (with limits). Wednesday is Pink Day. Thursday is Dynamic Duo Day. And Friday is Indian Spirit Day. Hopefully, our kids will really buy in. They seem to really like these ideas.

"I've encouraged all staff to participate as well. I've even told them I will participate. Apparently, they like to see their principal dressed in something other than the usual attire."

There are numerous activities that are a part of Homecoming, one of the most important being the selection of a King and a Queen from among a varied Homecoming Court.

"The nominees are selected by the student body and then presented to the school," Thomason said. "This year the seniors got together, and we had a quick assembly at break and gave sashes and tiaras to all the young ladies and crowns to all the boys. It's a

See Homecoming, Page 5



The TCHS 2024 Football Homecoming Court is Chloe Sutton, Scotlyn Fain, Abby Smith, Kaleigh Beaver, Chloe Crowe, Alexis Sarafin, Ansleigh Hardin, Emma Wilson, Loftin Turpin, Max Baron, Edward Charles Williams III, Connor Williams and Blake Gleaton. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Local support strong for nearby Helene victims



Jordan Hyatt and Ansley Wiley accepting donations last week for people desperate to receive hurricane relief supplies in devastated Western North Carolina. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Hurricane Helene devastated communities across Western North Carolina Sept. 27, and it will take months and in some cases years to rebuild there. But that's a long way off for many folks who are fighting at this very moment to survive.

The widespread destruction of homes, businesses, roads, public facilities and utilities by catastrophic flooding has resulted in over half of Helene's death toll coming from the Tar Heel State, with hundreds still missing and many tens of thousands in desperate need of help.

And the people of the North Georgia Mountains, many of whom hail from or have loved ones living in the hard-hit neighboring areas, know this could have been their fate. So, with a spirit of mountain resilience and love for their fellow man, North Georgians have been helping in droves.

Individuals, businesses, churches, nonprofits of every stripe, and even local governments and first responder agencies have been working as quickly as they can to deliver aid and equipment to people still reeling from the storm.

Residents have been raiding their own homes for supplies - donations as small

as unused toothpaste and hand sanitizer help - and shoppers have been emptying local grocery stores of food, water and everyday items to send to the Appalachians who currently need it most.

Social media has been abuzz with local disaster relief efforts, and brick-and-mortar businesses and organizations have opened their doors to store and coordinate the delivery of life-saving necessities, much of which must be flown to where it's needed due to terrible road conditions.

After seeing a Facebook post by Catalyst Church in Hayesville, North Carolina, I reached out to them. See Helene Relief, Page 14

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Early in-person voting starts on Tuesday, Oct. 15

Statewide ballot measures target tax relief

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

It's ballot-casting time again, with early voting starting next week for the 2024 General Election.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there will be

three weeks of early in-person voting running weekdays between Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

See Early Voting, Page 11



Fall Festival opens with carnival rides Oct. 10

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Here in the North Georgia Mountains, autumn announces its arrival each year with vibrantly changing foliage, cool night air, and warm sunny days. Another indicator of the season is the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival, returning in 2024 with back-to-back weekends starting Friday.

The Fall Festival kicks off early at 5 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 10, with the carnival by Midway Rides Unlimited, though the full festival experience runs Oct. 11-13, and then again Oct. 17-19.

"With first-class music performances, arts & crafts,

fun carnival rides, unique attractions and a glimpse into

North Georgia's rich history and culture, the Fall Festival provides something for every member of the family," promises the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

The Fairgrounds has been hosting the Fall Festival

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Photo by Lowell Nicholson



A gorgeous snapshot from a past Georgia Mountain Fall Festival. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Remains ID'd as Missouri man; death ruled suicide

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS - The skeletal remains found on Gumlog Road New Year's Day have been identified as a Missouri man who died of suicide, according to information released by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Friday.

After receiving a tip, the Towns County Sheriff's Office discovered the remains of Timothy Proctor, 41, on Jan. 1, 2024.

Deputies found the remains outdoors on a property containing a vacant home in the 8000 block of Gumlog Road near the intersection of Barnard Road, and investigators believe Proctor's body might have been lying there for upwards of a year.

GBI took over the case and had his remains sent to its Medical Examiner's Office to



Back in January, the Towns County Sheriff's Office secured the scene of a GBI death investigation off Gumlog Road in Young Harris. The remains from the site have now been publicly identified. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

verify identity and cause of death, which the Sheriff's Office said appeared to be the result of a self-inflicted gunshot based on evidence at the scene.

Investigators are unsure how the Missouri man came to be in Towns County. He had no known local connections or means of transportation other

than walking.

Among Proctor's possessions was a backpack, but there was no established campsite indicating that he had been living in the area where he died.

The case and investigation are considered closed at this time.

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City talks NC aid efforts, enacts new ordinances



L-R: Hiawassee City Council Members Nancy Noblet, Amy Barrett, Patsy Owens and Jonathan Wilson with Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. in the Oct. 1 regular city meeting.

**By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer**

In the Oct. 1 regular meeting of the Hiawassee City Council, Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. spoke on the city's efforts to aid Hurricane Helene victims in Western North Carolina.

"I want everybody to know that the city is a point of drop-off for any donations," Chastain said, adding that along with those at City Hall, the Hiawassee Police Department and local churches have partnered up in the name of helping Georgia's neighbors devastated by the deadly storm.

Several trips are being made to Black Mountain near Asheville, with the first one having taken place on Thursday, Oct. 3. Chastain said that, after speaking with people who work in Buncombe County, there's a particular need for canned food and baby care items like diapers and formula.

"Y'all don't know how lucky we are that that storm shifted to the east just a little bit, because that could have very easily been (us)," Chastain said. "Please keep the people of Asheville, Black Mountain, all of (those) south of here, up in South Carolina — please keep them in your prayers."

In some good news, the city has finally received state permits for its third water filter. The project began back in 2009, but now, facing approval, the filter should be online by Oct. 10.

Once up and running, maintenance on the older water filters can begin, but Chastain warned that it might be another month out before that process begins.

Upkeep includes reworking the wiring between the old and new filters for them to work together, and Chastain added that the old filters would essentially need to be rebuilt. Specifically, they require installation of electronic valves at about \$18,000 each.

As a result of flooding from the storm, an increased amount of silt and trash in Lake Chatuge has required the Water Treatment Plant to backflush the water about every two hours to ensure clean-

liness. That said, there have been no reports of anyone running out of water yet, and mechanically, everything is working as it should.

On Oct. 2, a direct-read meter was installed at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Also known as a satellite-read meter, information from the device can be accessed from cellphones and make for quicker and easier surveying.

Killing two birds with one stone, the official water meter for the Fairgrounds is located on the property's side of the road, and the hope is that with the new technology, officials can come closer to finding out where the longtime leak at the Fairgrounds might be.

"It was to make sure the leak was not under the road on Hwy 76," Chastain explained after the meeting. Over the next few months, readings from the new meter will be compared to those of the old, which should offer even more insight.

Chastain added that he was trying to account for the city's major 53% water loss in the distribution system by making note of and tracking local leaks. The hope is to monitor the problem to cut down on water waste and become eligible to receive grants, which will in turn allow old pipes to be replaced.

The sewer plant, meanwhile, will be undergoing repairs after a cord broke and created more tension on the cables — and by proxy, the pumps they're attached to. During the storm, some trees also fell across the fence surrounding the plant. As of the meeting, Chastain said there was not yet a price estimate for how much it would cost to mend the damage.

Oct. 1 saw the council's second reading and enactment of both the Ornamental Structure Ordinance and the Manufactured Home Density Ordinance.

The Ornamental Structure Ordinance outlines the legalities of things like statues or other decorative lawn pieces following a property owner's controversial attempt to place a massive dragon statue at the top of a local mountain.

As for the Manufactured

Home Density Ordinance, it simply defines the number of mobile homes that can be placed on a property located within city limits.

One of the Hiawassee Police Department's recently replaced old vehicles will be sent off to auction. The council unanimously approved the "disposal" of the 2016 Ford Explorer. The money received will go back into police funding.

As for the city's license-plate recognition camera that had to be removed from the jurisdiction of the Towns County Sheriff's Office recently, Hiawassee City Attorney Thomas Mitchell shared with the newspaper his response to certain accusations made by the Sheriff's Office.

"I understand that an employee from Flock contacted the Sheriff, requesting that the devices remain," Mitchell wrote to the attorney of the Sheriff's Office the day of the camera's removal. "The Flock employee explained that the tag readers are important law enforcement tools that the Sheriff's office may use without paying any expense.

"Apparently, the Sheriff rejected Flock's request. It is my understanding that on Tuesday, September 24, 2024, the tag reader located west of the City has been removed from the location outside the city limits and will be relocated inside the City.

"Your letter, without any facts, accuses the City of potential criminal activity in the use of the tag reader. The relevant provision of the statute reads as follows:

"Any person who knowingly requests, uses, obtains, or attempts to obtain captured license plate data of a law enforcement agency under false pretenses or for any purpose other than for a law enforcement purpose shall for each such offense, upon conviction thereof, be guilty of a misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature. O.C.G.A. § 35-1-22(d)(1).

"There has been no improper use of the data obtained from that camera. (Data) has been used only for proper law enforcement purposes. If the Sheriff had information to the contrary, I am sure he would have provided it by now."

Homecoming...from Page 1A

...a little new tradition that we did.

"Eventually, the whole school will vote for the winners, who will be announced at the big game on Friday (Oct. 11). First, we'll have some great fun at the pep rally getting ready for it. We'll present all the court nominees on the field and do the biographies, and we'll have last year's winner crown this year's queen."

Of course, the grand finale for the week will be the Homecoming Dance.

"The dance will be on Saturday, Oct. 12, from 7-10 p.m.," Thomason said. "That is open for the whole student body. This year it is being held at the Recreation Center.

"Last year we had a very early Homecoming, and so we held it at the Hamilton Gardens, which was lovely; we couldn't work out the schedule for this year's homecoming, but we've got a committee decorating and making sure it will be a night to remember."

The young ladies repre-

sending the 2024 Homecoming Court are Ansleigh Hardin, Alexis Sarafin, Chloe Crowe, Abby Smith, Scotlyn Fain, Chloe Sutton, Kaleigh Beaver and Emma Willson. Young men are Loftin Turpin, Max Baron, Edward Charles Williams III, Connor Williams and Blake Gleaton.

"You could not ask for better kids," Thomason said. "The court is representative of the whole student body, and our kids support one another no matter who is being picked for what."



Hiawassee Mayor Chastain joins the Mountain Movers & Shakers

Hiawassee city government has gone through some changes recently. We welcome to the distinctive Sundance Grill this Friday, October 11 at 8 AM, Mayor Pro-Tem Jay Chastain to explain the changes and his vision for the city.

A few words about this lifelong resident and public servant. He has been an EMS in Towns County since 1987 and on the City Council since 2008, so he knows his constit-

uents. As you may know, the City of Hiawassee maintains the Water Treatment Plant on Lake Chatuge that supplies most of the residents of Towns County. That system needs to be upgraded and modernized to serve the growing population. Mayor Chastain will explain why the CPI is needed at the plant. He will also speak about new equipment for the Hiawassee Police Department and what is happening at the



Jay Chastain

Paris Buildings (next to Trailful on Highway 76).

Get there early to get a good seat to welcome Mayor Chastain, hear directly from the top elected official in Hiawassee, and ask him your questions directly.

Reece Farm presents Sara Preston on Friday, October 11th and Struck By Lightning 2 on Saturday, October 12th

Reece Farm presents Sara Preston! Friday, October 11th, 1-3 PM at the Pavilion.

Sarah Preston has been making music almost her whole life. Beginning at just 8 years old, she sang in the church choir and later began playing guitar in the youth group band. Since that early age, music has been the center of Sarah's life. Music has given her the opportunity to travel throughout the nation and refine her artistic abilities. She has stylistic experience and repertoire in the following genres; country, rock, top hits, blues, soul and alternatives.

Bring your lawn chairs to the pavilion to enjoy two hours of music! Free admission. Donations are greatly appreciated! We invite you to come enjoy the exhibits at the farm before the concert.

Reece Farm presents Struck By Lightning 2, Saturday, October 12, 2024 1-3 PM at the pavilion.

Bring your lawn chairs to the pavilion to enjoy two hours of music! Free admission and donations are greatly appreciated! We invite you to come enjoy the exhibits at the farm before the concert.

Originating as a trio in the fall of 2020, Struck by Lightning was no more than a few old guys that thought getting together to perform at a local open mic night might be fun to do.

A one and done sorta thing. The credit for the name goes to the original founder and lead singer of the group at the time, Mr. Brent Michael "Always in the Right" Key.

With Brent handling much of the vocals and acoustic guitar, drummer/percussionist/guitarist Bill Wilson handled the harmony vocals and Brent's longtime friend and keyboardist, "The Italian Cowboy" Steve 'O Fineo formed a successful sound all their own. They quickly began booking multiple venues throughout Young Harris, and Hiawassee, GA, as well as Murphy and Andrews, NC during their first 1½ years together.

When Brent decided to step down from the group to pursue other endeavors in Aug of 2022, Steve O' and Bill decided to carry on with the Struck by Lightning name as a duo Musical Group and became known as Struck by



**Sarah Preston
Lightning 2.**

Bill moved into the lead singer roll and began playing the acoustic guitar full time, while Steve'O continued to explore his creativity with the addition of a second keyboard and supplying the vocal harmonies. In doing so, they have more than doubled their song library to include multiple types of genres including a vast variety of toe-tapin', sing-along country, line-dance, pop, rock & easy listening favorites from as far back as the 1950s to present day. They can also be found dedicating their time to faith based Christian contemporary music venues, as well.

In addition to performing at the local pubs and wineries in the surrounding area, they also perform at various benefits & festivals, and love to provide their musical entertainment for private parties.

You can contact and follow them and their scheduled events on Facebook at: STRUCKBYLIGHTNING 2.



Byron Herbert Reece was a farmer and a writer, and his books are available in the gift shop. The farm is set up as a legacy to him & his family with exhibits, farm animals, local books and crafts. There is also a hiking trail from the farm to Vogel State Park.

The farm is also a beautiful venue for your special day with affordable rates. Check out our "BHR Farm Village" cabin rentals at www.reecefarm.org on VRBO! Farm exhibits are open Wednesday through Saturday 10 until 4. Free Admission. 8552 Gainesville Hwy., Blairsville, GA; 706-745-2034; FB: Reece Heritage Farm, www.reecefarm.org.

Raptor Rendezvous at Brasstown Bald - October 12th

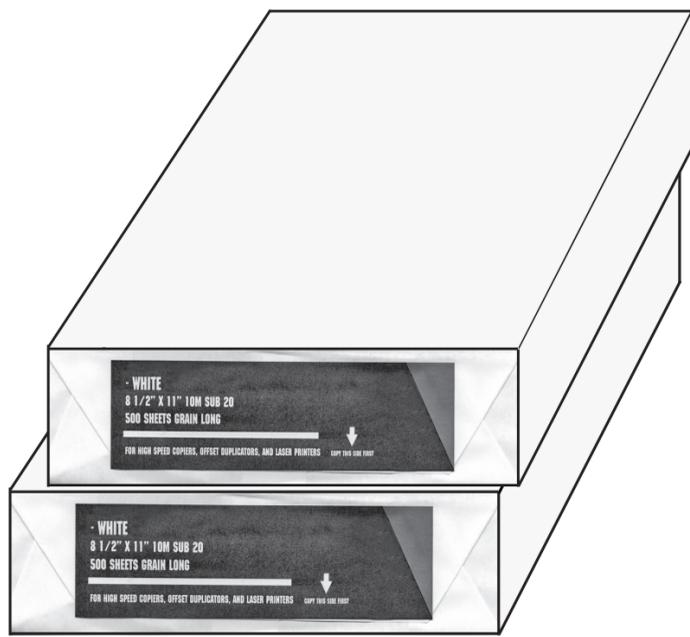
Saturday October 12th Georgia Mountain Falconry will be at the top of Brasstown Bald with 5 falcons accompanied by live Hawks, Falcons, Owls, and a Golden Eagle from Wyoming for folks to observe and ask questions about. They will also be showing a 45 minute multimedia presentation, "Falconry, an ancient sport in a Modern World", in the Brasstown Bald Theater.



There is no additional charge for the Raptor Rendezvous over and above the basic day use fee to visit Brasstown Bald.

Day use fees are \$8 per adult from 10 AM to 5 PM. Children under 16 are free. Please call us at 706-896-4137 for more information.

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Fall Festival...from Page 1

for about 60 years now, according to Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason, so the event itself is as much a tradition as the heritage it helps carry into the future.

And the local heritage is a huge reason visitors find the area so appealing, which in turns benefits everyone.

“We bring people to the mountains here during the fall to see the foliage and spend their money here,” Thomason said. “We promote tourism with this event. It’s our whole purpose.

“We’re grateful that there is no damage from Hurricane Helene and everything is at full operation. We have 68 craft vendors and have probably 25 others on a waiting

list. All the talent is coming as scheduled. We are very thankful that people are wanting to come.

“We have a lot of beautiful decorations on the grounds for photo opportunities. The school is getting involved doing a pumpkin contest, and those will be judged and prizes will be given. The carnival will be here the first weekend, Thursday through Sunday.

“Pioneer Village is up and running, and demonstrations are in full operation. Lots of mouth-watering food trucks and booths will be available, and there will be plenty of entertainment on the grounds with several stages throughout the festival. We

have some really good, regional talent who will be appearing.

“There is also a stunt show taking place several times throughout the days, and we will have the World’s Smallest Rodeo happening. It will be so much fun for children and adults alike.”

The Fall Festival has a new format and schedule this year. In the past, it has taken place over nine days. But like the Georgia Mountain Fair, this year’s event has been shortened to focus on weekend activities.

“Through the week it was slow when school started back, and there just wasn’t a whole lot of profit for us, so we had to cut back on the number of days we could host the event,” Thomason said. “We are paying a lot of money for musical talent, and it just wasn’t possible to host it through the week.”

But there will still be plenty to do and see and listen to, so come on out and enjoy the Fall Festival. People can check out all of the happenings at <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com>.

Alzheimer’s/Dementia Caregiver Support Group Meeting Oct. 17

October 17, 2024, at 2 PM. Hiwassee City Hall conference room.

This group is designed for caregivers of individuals diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of de-

mentia.

For more details contact 706-896-1251 or 762-295-1585. Meetings are the 3rd Thursday of each month. This meeting is sponsored by Regency Hospice.

N.E. Georgia Mustang Club donates to "Shop With The Sheriff"



(L-R): Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson receives a donation from N.E. Georgia Mustang Club representative Jeri Lynn Forrester and Chief Deputy Gene Moss



The N.E. Georgia Mustang Club donated to the Towns County "Shop with the Sheriff" program for our local children at Christmas. The "Shop with the Sheriff" program insures that no child goes without at Christmas.

Under the Mustang Club's "Hot Rodders Children's Charity" program the

Mustang club is pleased to make this donation to the Towns County Sheriff.

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee hosted the Mustang Club for the weekend event which concluded with a Car Show on Saturday for all Mustang, Shelby and Ford powered vehicle.

The fairgrounds is an ideal venue for the Car Show and is home for many of the Mustang Club's seasonal events. Thanks to all involved for helping the local children at this special time of need.

Towns County Fire and Rescue are Seeking New Volunteers



Have you ever wanted to give back to your community or be a part of it in a special way? If so come join us at Towns County Fire and Rescue.

We are seeking new volunteers to become a part of our family; we are also looking for Explorer Firefighters to be a part of our explorer program (ages 14-18). No experience is required. We will provide all equipment needed and all training needed which will consist of firefighting training and basic first aid and CPR. You will assist with special

events in our community and respond to a variety of emergency calls from fires to medical calls and search and rescue calls.

There is a job for everyone in the fire service so come be part of our great team of firefighters and family to help us better serve our community and county.

For more information and to meet us and check out our equipment come by Fire Station one in Hiawassee City limits at 156 Sims Circle or give us a call at 706-896-2090 anytime from 8 AM to 4 PM, Monday-Friday, we will be happy to speak to you and answer any questions you may have.

Learning To Live With Firearms: Basic Pistol Course

By Ed Jones, NRA Certified Firearms Instructor & Training Counselor

The Chatuge Gun Club will present a course titled "BASIC PISTOL", a 12-hour course demonstrating fundamental handling of handguns and the legal ownership, storage, and use of firearms and information pertaining to the citizen's right of self-defense will be presented by the Chatuge Gun Club, Inc., of Hiawassee, GA.

The course will be conducted on Saturday and Sunday, 26 & 27 October 2024. The course is a basic handgun course enhanced by emphasis on self-defense and the law, so it is suitable for experienced, as well as novice shooters. Ignorance and carelessness are the two leading causes of firearm accidents. Our aim is to eliminate both! Safe gun handling and storage techniques are paramount and are presented as a priority throughout the course.

Firearm Safety is the focus of the presentation. Other topics visited include selection of firearms, the anatomy of a handgun and its ammunition, loading and unloading of firearms, cleaning and maintenance of firearms. We also explore methods and techniques that may be used to prevent home invasion or other occurrences which might evolve into a life-threatening situation requiring the use of deadly force.

The 8-hour classroom portion of the course will be held on Saturday beginning at 8:30 a.m. Lunch will be included on this day. In addition to the course, questions and information pertaining to the legal, ownership, possession, transportation, and the use of firearms and deadly force will be fielded by a retired Georgia Attorney.

Supervised live firing will be conducted throughout the day on the follow-

ing Sunday at the Chatuge Gun Club's firing range. The single thing that makes this class unique is the fact that we can provide one-on-one coaching on the firing line. Having attended other courses over the years, although their content is generally excellent, they are not able to provide intensive firing line assistance. For safety and a more complete learning experience, the one-on-one experience is essential. This is made possible by qualified members of the Chatuge Gun Club who are willing to donate their time and expertise to afford a safe, entertaining, and rewarding experience.

Participants should provide a suitable handgun and 100 rounds of appropriate ammunition. A "suitable handgun" is defined as one capable of firing a minimum of five shots without reloading; it should also be capable of being fired without manual re-cocking. Single action revolvers are allowed but not recommended. High performance or magnum loads are not necessary nor are they desirable. A "target load" is adequate.

A certificate of attendance is awarded at the completion of the course.

The course is a "must" for anyone who has a handgun for personal protection. The minimum age for participation is 16; those under 18 must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

A nominal fee of \$40 will be charged to cover the cost of classroom materials, texts, snacks, Saturday lunch, targets, etc. (Yes, it says lunch).

The instructors, coaches, instructional personnel contributing to this course are strictly volunteers donating their time and efforts as a public service to educate and possibly quell some of the negative images being

given to firearms by the media for whatever reason.

Pre-registration is required for a class capacity of 30. For information and/

or registration, call Ed Jones at (706) 897-2306 between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and 8 p.m., or email: chatugememberships@brmeme.net

Early Voting...from Page 1A

There will be no in-person voting on Monday, Oct. 14, due to the federal and state holiday of Columbus Day.

All in-person early voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Towns County Civic Center, located in the same building as the Elections Office at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee.

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their pre-determined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Towns County has two voting precincts: the Hiawassee Precinct at the Civic Center and the Young Harris Precinct in the Lodge Hall Building at 135 Murphy Street.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested at the Elections Office now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Elections Office.

Absentee ballots began mailing Oct. 7. They can be returned using the official Elections Office drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote in this election was Monday, Oct. 7.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there are no county-level seats up for grabs in the 2024 General Election.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap annual property assessment increases for taxing purposes.

If passed, the proposed constitutional amendment would create a new homestead exemption to cap assessment increases on homesteaded properties at 3% annually beginning on Jan. 1, 2025.

State lawmakers enabled the referendum this year by passing House Bill 581 and House Resolution 1022, with an "opt-out" provision for local governments.

The proposed cap comes as welcome news to many homeowners, who have seen the values of their properties rise dramatically in recent years due largely to an inflated real estate market driven by COVID-19 pandemic-era relocations to the area.

For homes receiving the exemption starting next year, 2024 would stand as the base-year assessed value. Moving forward, the home would then reflect two values: the homesteaded value that is capped for taxing purposes, and the actual fair market value as it changes over time.

"The base year value may increase each year up to the inflationary rate determined by the State Revenue Commissioner, which may utilize the Consumer Price Index," according to information from the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

So, annual values could increase from north of 0% to the 3% cap for homesteaded properties, though assessed values would still be subject to accounting for "substantial property changes," which could result in increases or decreases in value depending on what has changed.

If a homestead exempted property is subsequently sold, then the base-year assessed value for the new homesteader would be set at the assessed value for the year immediately preceding the sale.

A homestead exemption reduces the amount of property taxes a homeowner owes on his or her legal residence, and according to ACCG, "this new

floating homestead exemption is in addition to and not in lieu of all non-floating homestead exemptions."

HB 581 also creates a new 1% local option sales tax that could be imposed for property tax relief. But for the new tax to be put in place, it would have to be supported by voters in a local referendum.

The bill does several other things related to property and sales tax reform, such as improving the sales ratio study methodology by the Department of Audits and Accounts, removing confusing tax estimates from annual assessment notices and more.

General Election ballots also feature a statewide referendum on raising the amount of tangible personal property tax exemption from \$7,500 to \$20,000. If passed, state law would be amended effective Jan. 1, 2025, to apply to all tax years beginning on or after that date.

State Rep. Mike Cheokas (R-Americus) sponsored the bill that created this referendum, saying, "I hope this will be the first step in reducing the burden of high taxes and prohibitive regulations that adversely affect businesses in Georgia."

Proponents of these measures believe they would provide much-needed taxpayer relief in an era of prolonged inflation, while opponents have expressed concern that they could make it more difficult to raise revenues needed to effectively operate local governments and school systems.



Question: It's Fall and my husband and I enjoy taking road trips to enjoy the Fall colors. This year we will be traveling with our two-year-old. Do you have any travel tips?

Answer: With careful planning, taking a road trip with your child can be a fun adventure. When planning your route, identify rest stops, parks and interesting sights where you can take breaks. You will want to stop every two to three hours to let your child stretch and play.

Another thing to consider is the time of day you will be traveling. If possible, plan your long stretches of travel during your child's usual nap times. Make sure to pack the

essentials. Bring plenty of diapers, wipes, snacks, drinks, bottled water and a change of clothes. Also pack their favorite toys, books or tablet with preloaded games and shows.

Other essentials include an emergency kit that contains a flashlight, batteries and basic tools. It's also good to have a list of emergency contacts and your child's medical information.

Even with careful planning however you can expect the unexpected. Keeping a positive attitude and being flexible will go a long way in dealing with unexpected delays or changes in plans.

To learn more visit www.healthychildren.org.

Helene Relief...from Page 1



First Free Will Baptist Church in Hayesville, North Carolina, has been a major organizer of area relief efforts to benefit those struggling to survive after Hurricane Helene destroyed much of Western North Carolina. Aid is also being coordinated elsewhere for the hard-hit areas of Florida, Georgia and Tennessee.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

lina, to supply Montreat and Black Mountain the Sunday following the storm, Seasons Inn of Blairsville owner Colleen Urbaniuk put out a call of her own for donations, kicking off a relief drive at the motel.

Since then, generous people looking for ways to help have brought in donations, which she and her husband Chris have been storing in one of their motel rooms until someone picks them up, and they plan to continue the donation drive until there is no longer a need.

Foodland Grocery has been working with the Urbaniuks to coordinate support like water, monetary and other supply donations by customers, as has Mountain Shelter Humane Society Thrift Store with pet food.

Others have assisted as well in Downtown Blairsville, like Granddaddy Mimm's Distilling Co., which has offered additional storage space and the use of its forklift for the cause.

And community members – total strangers to the Urbaniuks – have been showing up to help load supplies for transport.

“There’s no plan for any of this, it’s just all of us working together,” Colleen said. “People are great – they just want to help.”

Every little bit helps, too, Colleen said, because for areas like Western North Carolina that have seen so much destruction, the needs are all-encompassing.

“Somebody might have \$5,000 they can donate, somebody might have equipment, and somebody might only have \$3,” Colleen said. “You want to give people an opportunity to know how they can help, and if that’s their \$3 that they can help with, thank you so much. That helps.”

Urbaniuk lives in Hayesville, so she has been able to make solid connections to get supplies directly to the hardest hit communities, including the more out-of-the-way towns that are no less in need, and she advises people offering support to “make sure you know where it’s going.”

Many North Carolina communities have benefited from the Urbaniuks’ ongoing supply drive, like Marion, Burnsville and Spruce Pine. And supplies are often delivered within five to 12 hours, showcasing the impact volunteers can have in the lives of their fellow Americans.

In Towns County last week, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said the Fire Department drove 200 gallons of propane donated by Suburban Propane for use in and around Asheville, and the county was in the process of taking pallets of water to areas without active water treatment facilities.

“Everybody is just working together to try to take supplies up there,” Bradshaw said. “It could have been us, and thank God it wasn’t, but we pray for those that were hit so hard and the loss of life. So, we definitely want to do all we can to help.”

Union County 4-H and Youth Development Agent Katie Hayes is new to her job, having started in August. Already, she has found a worthy local community service project for the students in her program.

Last Thursday, multiple students from seventh-grade through senior year teamed up with Hayes to organize and load donations that have come in from all over thanks to individuals like retired principal Carol Knight and businesses like United Community Bank.

Hayes was born in Asheville, so she knows countless people, including family members, who have been devastated by Helene, and

she was particularly touched last week when Elementary School students donated their own snacks to go toward others in need.

“I’m just really thankful that it’s worked out the way that it has and that we’re able to show love to people who really need it right now,” Hayes said. “Thank you, thank you, thank you. It is so amazing to see y’all show up and bring things.”

“It’s going until Oct. 14, so we have plenty of time to bring more stuff in. If y’all have specific things that you’re not sure are accepted, reach out to me and we can figure out where those items need to go.”

The 4-H donation drive is accepting items from Union and Towns residents in Hayes’ office at the Haralson Memorial Civic Center at 165 Wellborn Street in Blairsville. For a list of requested items, visit the “UGA Extension - Union County Georgia” Facebook page or call 706-439-6030.

To date, thousands of individuals have done their part in donating money for necessary supplies or providing items from their own homes. And the list of needs is extensive: clothes, baby formula, toiletries, sunscreen, trash bags, first-aid kits and more, not to mention food and water.

Jordan Hyatt of the Towns County Herald is one of the many individuals who has gone the extra mile in also coordinating donations. She has heard from people as far away as Florida and Virginia who are now bringing supplies to nearby communities in need, like Black Mountain.

Donations can still be made at the Herald Office in Hiwassee, 518 N. Main Street Suite 3, and people can call 706-970-0999 to reach Hyatt, who is being assisted by her best friend Ansley Wiley.

“In times like these, our compassion and generosity can make a world of difference,” Hyatt said. “If you are able, please consider donating to help those affected by this catastrophe. Every little bit helps, whether it’s a small financial contribution, supplies, clothes, water, anything.”

Over in Union County, Brooke Ashman-Henzel has likewise organized an ongoing disaster relief effort. A list of supplies and donation times can be found at her Facebook page, with three drop-off locations in Blairsville:

Her church at World Harvest Church North, 135 Bud Franklin Drive; the Olive Tree Place Holistic Wellness Center at 563 Gainesville Hwy; and Victoria’s Antiques & More at 3196 SR- 515 E.

“I am so appreciative of all the support and outpouring of kindness,” Henzel said. “Let’s keep the donations coming as you can. These people really need our love and support right now.”

A major disaster relief effort is also being led at the First Free Will Baptist Church in Hayesville, and hundreds of other area churches are chipping in, too, like First Baptist Blairsville and McConnell Baptist Church in Hiwassee.

Then there’s the Girl Scouts of Union County, the local Christian group U.S. Men’s Academy, Towns County Schools, Union County Government and so many more – pretty much everywhere people turn, there’s someone, some group or some business showing neighborly care.

And in a time when many communities are still searching for missing loved ones while trying to survive in a world seemingly cut off from civilization, the support from areas that are able and willing to provide it is undoubtedly appreciated – and will likely save lives.

People may call 706-745-5789 to reach the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce for an updated list of businesses and organizations accepting donations.