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Hiawassee liquor stores pass with 65% voter support

By Shawn Jarrard **Towns County Herald**

The electorate has spoken – package liquor stores are heading to the City of Hiawas-

Election Day voting on Nov. 2 saw a final tally of 169 votes cast in the Hiawassee Election, with 110 city voters supporting the referendum to allow the licensing of package liquor stores inside Hiawassee

It wasn't popular with everyone, as 59 voters rejected the measure, though the establishment of liquor stores ultimately won the day with 65%

topic, but I think it'll be good income for the city, which is really the driver for this, to bring in a source where you can maintain your (property) taxes low yet still have a revenue stream for the city," Mayor Liz Ordiales said.

Per the City of Hiawas-Alcohol Ordinance, all retail package store licenses come first serve basis with first consideration given to the first their "Tilted Bottle" package applicant(s) with 100% complete applications that demonstrate the applicant having met off Bell Creek Road. all the requirements."

liquor license application was calls about licenses, so interest

election were known, with the only remaining local hurdle being a second week of legal organ publication of the potential owners' intent to open a liquor store. successful

Following successful completion of the Hiawassee licensing process, Kristin Grier and Kitt Hock, owners of The Tilted Café, will need "shall be awarded on a first to get licensed by the state, at which point they may open store at an existing property on 757 Belle Aire Commons, just

Also the day after the One nearly completed election, Ordiales fielded three filed Wednesday, Nov. 3, about is high, and the city is posi-

"It's a very controversial 12 hours after the results of the tioned to bring in many thou- 200 yards of any school buildsands of dollars a month in additional alcohol excise taxes on top of the roughly \$100,000 a year Hiawassee is already receiving based on sales of onpremises alcohol and package

As defined in the city ordinance, "package" means "a bottle, can, keg, barrel, box or other original consumer container," and there are no limits on the geographic location or number of package liquor stores that can be established inside city limits except as provided by state law.

Georgia law stipulates that distilled spirits may not be sold within 100 yards of any church building or within

By Brittany Holbrooks

YOUNG HARRIS

Last month, Towns County res-

ident and native Stuart Nichols

became the new director of

the Towns County Recreation

Department, announced in the

Oct. 19 meeting of Sole Com-

mer Parks and Recreation Di-

rector Matthew Youngblood,

who served in the position for

four years before embracing a

change in career paths recent-

Stuart is replacing for-

missioner Cliff Bradshaw.

Towns County Herald

Staff Writer

ing. There are several churches within the 1-mile radius of Hiawassee and two schools, Eastgate Life Academy and at McConnell Baptist Church.

The city's alcohol ordinance does, however, outline specific requirements of would-be licensees, including a minimum wholesale inventory of \$300,000, at least 2,000 square feet per store location, and the provision of a surveyor's certificate enumerating distance to schools, etc.

Package liquor sales will be allowed between 8 a.m. and 11:59 p.m. Monday through Saturday, with no authorized Sunday sales.

See Liquor Stores, Page 2A

community ethic at Rec Center

Nichols ready to promote



Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales was present at the **Board of Elections for the** results of the successful city package store referendum Photo by Mark Smith

moving to a public sector line

gest challenge for me," he said.

"Previously, if I saw something

that needed to be addressed,

depending on what it was, I

would go to the hardware, buy

the part or material, and I'd go

fix it. It's not necessarily like

Nichols felt as if he was in the

midst of a culture shock, as he

used to work exclusively in the

ing docks on Lake Chatuge.

but in the aftermath the Great

Recession of 2008 and '09.

And it's no wonder

He spent 17 years build-

"There's a lot of moving parts; that's probably the big-

of work

that here.

private sector.

Ammons Sisters, area authors unveil new library mural

By Brittany Holbrooks **Towns County Herald**

YOUNG HARRIS-The magic of the North Georgia Mountains came alive Nov. 5 when the Mountain Regional Library unveiled its gorgeous new mural entitled "Storybook

The mural is one of more than a hundred stops on the Appalachian Mural Trail, which can be viewed in its entirety at muraltrail.com.

Visitors gathered Friday afternoon to watch the reveal of the vibrant work of art that featured scenes such as a bear cub peering through the window of a cabin and a boy sitting at the end of a dirt road with his dog.

An impressive storytelling show followed the mural unveiling inside the library. Complete with refreshments, the setup featured a massive easel, a CD player, and prints showcasing single illustrations from the mural.

Mural artist Doreyl Ammons Cain took about six

See Library Mural, Page 8A **BOE** considers **GSBA** student



the Spirit of Appalachia, Inc., and MRLS Public Services Coordinator Heather Welch posing with the Young Harris library's new "Storybook Lane" mural Nov. 5.

inclination to sports, Nichols however, as he got around the took to his new job immediate-learning curve that came with See Rec Center, Page 8A **Enotah CASA's Lonano speaks** with Movers and Shakers

Inspired by a natural ly. There was an initial hiccup,

Stuart Nichols

Recreation Director

however, as he got around the

By Mark Smith **Towns County Herald** Staff Writer

Nicole Lonano, Lead Advocate Supervisor and Trainer for the Court Appointed Special Advocates of the Enotah Judicial Circuit, spoke at the Mountain Movers and Shakers meeting on Friday, Nov. 5.

Enotah CASA serves Towns, Union, Lumpkin and White Counties, with Judge Jeremy Clough presiding over the Enotah Circuit Juvenile and Dependency Court.

Lonano's address Friday morning was a reminder of the extreme need for child advocates and foster parents/ homes in North Georgia, and an update on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected Dependency Court operations.

"So, when I grew up in foster care, there was no such thing as CASA; I was lucky to have a guardian ad litem at the time," said Lonano, adding that, unlike CASAs, guardians ad litem are paid through the court system with tax dollars.

ČASAs are unpaid volunteers, although they are greatly rewarded when they see cases come to fruition thanks to their advocacy efforts for children stuck in the legal system through no fault of their own. CASAs have the satisfaction of knowing that they have, literally, saved a life.

"I am a psychologist by trade," Lonano said. "I have always worked with children and foster care. I've dedicated and foster care. We (as CA-SAs) advocate for the best interest of the children.

These children end up in Dependency Court, not because of anything they have done wrong, but because their parents or legal guardians have either abandoned them or have abused them in some way – or both – mostly due to substance abuse.

But, make no mistake, taking on the responsibility of advocating for a child is no walk in the park. Because there is such a lack of foster care resources in North Georgia, many of these kids are placed in foster homes that are hours away from North Georgia, Lonano said.

Their lives are disrupted, friends and school left behind, parents possibly incarcerated, and they face new and difficult challenges in their new surroundings.

What these children need is someone in their lives who can be their rock, their anchor to hold on to; someone they can depend on, trust, and who takes the time to offer rectly by the judge to do this. dedication, patience, and love. For many of these children, that someone is a CASA.

Aside from the reports and evaluations required of a CASA for the court, and the visitations, it takes a lot of time and a lot of work, Lonano said.

But the rewards of watching over a child and helping that child grow into a well-adjusted, responsible, happy human being are unfathomable - far greater than anything money could ever

"We do our own invesmy whole career to children tigations," she said. "We talk to everybody in the puzzle. We talk to parents, we talk to attorneys, we talk to doctors, we



Having experienced foster care herself as a child, Eno-CASA's Nicole Lonano has extra insight into the circumstances of kids she's helping to advocate Photo by Mark Smith

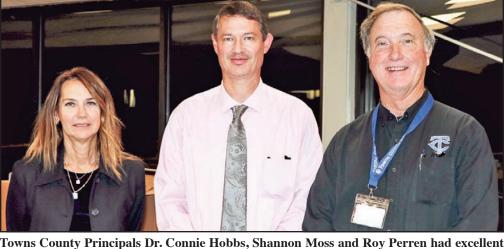
get hospital records, and we are, basically, the judge's eyes and ears in the community.

'We are appointed di-And our job is to ensure that the kids have safe, stable housing, that they're getting the medical attention that they need, and that they're getting the therapy that they need.

"A lot of times we are not aligned with anybody in the courtroom. We are our own (independent) entity, and the CASA is typically the only constant in the child's life. The case managers change, the attorneys change, everybody changes except that one CASA. That one CASA is usually with that child through the whole life of the case." That is, until they come

of age or are adopted. Incidentally, CASAs also participate See Enotah CASA, Page 8A





COVID news in the Nov. 1 Board of Education meeting – no positive cases among any of the students in their respective schools. Photo by Mark Smith By Mark Smith Towns County Schools. The

Towns County Herald Staff Writer

Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby addressed members of the Towns County Board of Education at their Nov. 1 meeting, asking that they consider and approve a request from the Georgia School Boards Association to allow high school seniors to participate in a survey.

In addition to being the Mayor of Young Harris, Gibby works in the mental health

Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1

2 Sections 16 Pages

field with children and young adults, and she serves on a Georgia School Boards Asso- advisement and will likely renciation committee that works with the Youth Advisory Council, which was formed by the GSBA.

The committee that Gibby is a member of is interested in finding out why high school students aren't more engaged with government and other ing that increase when the proporganizations outside their immediate realm.

Gibby said the survey generate valuable data come from Title Ad-Valorem both for the GSBA and for

Arrests Chamber

Church

board took the request under der a decision at the December Finance Director Myra Underwood said some proper-

ty tax money was beginning to come in from this year's levy. 'Possibly November, on into December, we'll start see-

erty taxes go out and we'll start the collections again," she said. Underwood said the in-

See School Board, Page 8A

SPORTS BASKETBALL 11/11 @ Stephens Co.

Veterans Day **Program** Nov. 11 @ 11 a.m. Towns County Veterans Park

TCHS Students of the Week

USMC Birthday Celebration Nov. 10

See page 8B

See page 5A

Classifieds 6B **Opinion** Legals Obits

Scrimmage 6 PM

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Liquor Stores...from Page 1A

package sales on the ballot have failed in recent years

Rotary Club Wreath Sale

The Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge again this year will be selling 22 inch Frazer fir Christmas wreaths, these are long-lasting, beautiful wreaths. The profits from the sales of the wreaths will be used to support three Christmas projects of Towns County, the Shop with a Hero, Sheriff's Empty Stocking and the Lion's Club Give A Christmas. The cost of the wreaths is \$25 each. Please contact Gerry Gutenstein at 706-835-5342. Orders will be taken until November 16. Wreaths will be available on November 22. T(Nov10,F3)SH

Several attempts to get due to a 35% of the electorate petition requirement in state law.

In 2021, however, the Georgia General Assembly changed the law to say a referendum may now be called via 'ordinance or resolution from the governing authority of any municipality or county," or by written petition containing the signatures of at least 20% of (the electorate)."

So, the Hiawassee City Council voted unanimously June 1 to add the liquor store referendum to the Nov. 2 ballot, with a major rationale being to keep tax dollars in the city that would otherwise be going to, say, the erty tax base for the city, so state-run Clay County ABC Store in Hayesville, North Carolina.

"During my due dili-

gence on this, I went to the ABC liquor store in Hayesville – many cars from Georgia there - and I asked the guy that was running the register, 'How much business do you get from Towns County?" she said. "His answer to me was, 'If it wasn't for Towns County, we'd be out of busi-

Ordiales said the city will need to wait until liquor stores are up and running to get a better idea of what alcohol excise tax collections will be, but based on an analysis the city did on the ABC store in Hayesville, she anticipates upward of \$150,000 to \$200,000 "That's the entire prop-

it's substantial," Ordiales said. "(In terms of how we will use that money), we're going to continue with our strategic plan, which is economic development within the city.

"Now, we'll have more opportunity to see what we can do with more parks and fix the roads. The Paris Buildings we're very excited about, I think that's going to be a game changer for the city. "It would be a general

fund income, so we can pretty

much do anything with it. It's not going to be water or sewer, but it will certainly help our Police Department.' In addition to provid-

ing additional tax revenues including sales taxes – Ordiales said liquor stores will assist the local tourism industry, as guests of the area are often looking to relax with distilled spirits.

As far as potential impact on crime and drunk driving, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said he did not anticipate that opening a package store would "cause an increase in intoxicated driving in the same way that a business with on-site drinking would.'

"Package stores are, however, often targets of robberies and burglaries," said. "The Hiawassee Police Department will routinely patrol these areas to discourage crime. I will also work with the owners of any business in town to identify safety concerns and advise on crime prevention solutions."

Running the 2021 Hiawassee Municipal Election was the Towns County Board of Elections, for which Ordiales said the city was grate-

Cothren named **Distinguished** Military Graduate

The University of North Georgia (UNG) is tied for the most Distinguished Military Graduates (DMG) among the nation's six senior military colleges for 2021-22, with 32 selected. Nine of those rank in the top 10% of their ROTC class nationally.

Thomas Cothren of Young Harris, GA, was one of the DMG cadets. NT(Nov10,Z10)CA

Cozy Country **Christmas Arts** & Crafts show

On Saturday, November 20th from 9 AM - 4 PM the halls and patio of North Georgia Technical College in Blairsville will be decked with 50+ local crafters at the Cozy Country Christmas Arts & Crafts show. Shop local and handmade for rustic wood items, quilts, soap, candles, pottery, holiday decor plus more. Free admission. NT(Nov10.Z10)CA

American Red **Cross Volunteers**

Make a difference in your community! As a volunteer with the American Red Cross, you can help families recover after a home fire, train individuals in first aid and CPR, support America's military families, or take on any number of other roles that make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient. Get started at https://www.redcross.org/local/georgia/volunteer.html or call your NWGA chapter office to ask about volunteer opportunities 844-536- $6226.\ _{NT(Nov10,Z1)CA}$

Georgia Mountain **Pregnancy Center**

The Georgia Mountain Pregnancy Center offers free first Trimester ultrasound, pregnancy test, and counseling.

The center is located at 136 Hospital Drive Road, Suite A, Blairsville, GA; (706)994-3364; gmpcmedical.org

Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff's Office.



11/2/21

ARREST REPORT

Towns County Jail Sheriff Ken Henderson

Jessica Chase Doan

Possession of THC oil, Possession of meth Austen Tyler Gagne-Martinez Failure to drive w/in single lane, Marijuana possess

less than 1 oz., Possession of drug-related objects, Possession of Schedule I controlled substance

Terry Lynn Nichols Sentenced

11/5/21 Jose Angel Villareal Theft by deception

Jason Joseph Williams

Probation violation 11/1/21 Gregory Shawn Bethea

Serve 24 hours

Richard Gregory Chapman Marijuana possess less than 1 oz.

11/5/21 Robert Edwin Jones DUI - alcohol, Failure to drive w/in single lane, Knowingly driving vehicle on suspended, cancelled

or revoked registration, Tires 11/1/21 Kaselyn Rose Martin

Marijuana possess less than 1 oz.

Bobby Dean Matheson Driving while license suspended or revoked, Expired vehicle tag or decal

Towns County Community Calendar

First Monday of each month:		
School Board	HŠ/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
First Tuesday of each month:		
Hiaw. City Council	City Hall	6 pm
Young Harris City Council	YH City Hall	7 pm
Second Tuesday of each month:		
Conventions & Visitors Board	Civic Center	8 am
Second Wednesday every other month:		
Board of Elections	Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month:		
Planning Commission	Civic Center	6 pm
Water Board	Water Office	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month:		
Commissioner's Mtg.	Courthouse	5:30 pm

Book Sale at library in Young Harris



Friends of the Libraries of Towns County (FOLTC) is holding an "Honor System" sale during the month of November in the FOLTC bookstore at Mountain Regional Library, 698 Miller St., Young Harris, GA. This sale will include the following items ONLY: Paperbacks - \$.50 each or 3/\$1. This includes trade, mass market, and large print paperback books. CDs - \$.50 each or 3/\$1. Jigsaw puzzles -\$.50 each.

The sale tables are located along the back wall of the bookstore. Paperbacks on the shelving to the right inside the door are also included in

the "Honor System." There is a red money box near the entrance to the bookstore for payment. Books will be replenished on a regular basis as space becomes available. MRL and the FOLTC bookstore are open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. though closed for Thanksgiving on November 24-28. All proceeds will benefit the Towns County libraries. Funds are used to purchase books and other library materials, provide funding for children's and adult programming, and assist in other ways as requested by staff of Mountain Regional Library and Towns County Public Library. Good libraries The sale will be held on need good friends! T(Nov10,F3)SH

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Rec Center...from Page 1A

Nichols was hit hard and found it no longer feasible to work in construction, at which point he transitioned to insurance. "I didn't like being in

an office all day, every day," Nichols said, though he admitted that it was a great career. Nine years later, he de-

cided to pursue an interest in home inspections, but that came to an end when Commissioner Bradshaw approached him and offered him the Towns County Parks and Rec director job. Bradshaw was drawn to

Nichols in no small part due to his outgoing personality and experience working with people, and he also took note of Nichols' desire to give back to a community that so readily took to him in return.

"We've got people who are 8 to 80 (years old) that we're quite literally trying to service and facilitate for," Nichols said. "I'm still learning a lot of things, but I like it. I love the engagement I've had with the people. They're fantastic: they've been overwhelmingly welcoming to me."

Moving forward, Nichols hopes to act as a steward of sorts regarding the recreational aspect of Towns County's wellbeing, which is playing a big role in driving him to actively pursue improvements at Foster Park – for everyone.

"One of the more eyeopening things I have found is that a lot of times when we think of the Rec Department, we're thinking of those 12and-under and 14-and-under kids," Nichols said. And while youth sports play a large part in how the community sees the Rec Center, they are actually just the tip of the iceberg.

in the adoption process, Lo-

served 245 kids throughout

the circuit in 2020, and Lo-

nano said she expects that

tion has 78 CASAs throughout

the circuit. According to their

2020-21 annual report, Eno-

tah CASA saved the taxpayers of

the four-county circuit \$472,000

and logged 33,500 volunteer

miles driven and 6,100 volun-

Fully 88% of the non-

teer casework hours.

Presently, the organiza-

number to increase this year.

Enotah Circuit

nano said.

The

Enotah CASA...from Page 1A

In the room just beside Nichols' office in the Rec Center, many elderly visitors get their exercise in by walking on treadmills, weightlifting, and using other exercise machines to build up and maintain endurance in a decidedly friendly

Nichols believes that "the older folks are definitely more involved" and "more community-minded," and they are one reason why he is focusing on offering more varied activities, like aerobics and yoga sessions.

example, pickleball, a relatively new sport gaining in popularity locally and abroad, is especially a hit among older residents because of its accessibility. Even still, senior citizens are far from the only ones who express interest in the Rec Center.

Basketball registration just wrapped up for younger participants, and Nichols is working on lining up coaches, referees, concession stand workers, and more. In his words, there are "many opportunities for people to get involved."

In fact, Nichols is looking for as much community investment as possible, revealing that 'the success of the Rec Center is 100% dependent upon the volunteers. Parents volunteer to bring their kids up here; kids are volunteering to play.'

As the interest in Towns County's Recreation Center of activities. And he wants to grows, so too do Nichols' am-

"I'm reaching out to other agencies, other counties, seeing different programs that maybe they have that we don't offer, and try to provide more opportunities," he said.

for direct services in 2020-21,

with just 12% going toward

counted for 66.4% of funding,

from state and local sources.

Fundraising, which was ham-

pered by the COVID pandem-

about 40 hours of training re-

quired to become a CASA,

which she is doing remotely on

Zoom at this time, plus about

10 hours of court observation.

Regarding

ic, added another 13.8%.

Grants in 2020-21 ac-

Lonano said there are

recent

administrative costs.

Specifically, one of those opportunities is more involvement in state pickleball tournaments, which could provide greater enrichment for the retirement community - or anyone else who wants to get involved, as the sport can be played by people of all ages.

"If you have things for people to do and places where they can have fun and be safe, that's attractive to people and will bring folks into the community," Nichols said of the new variety of activities he plans on introducing.

In terms of a specific philosophy, Nichols thinks sports and community engagement in recreation is important not just for the clear health benefits, but to teach the young how to be competitive in a healthy "I think that teambuild-

ing and camaraderie are huge,' Nichols said. "Learning how to win and to lose is huge, because nobody wins all the time. Nobody."

In short, the new rec director wants those who are interested in checking out the Rec Center to remember that sports aren't just about being healthy or winning a game.

"You win by being out

here. Friendly competition being fair and humble," he As for Nichols, he plans

to remain true to the community by continuing to find creative ways to be inclusive as well as offering a wide range do that while fostering a spirit of sportsmanship among Rec Center participants.

'You can have somebody who has a lot of skill, but if they don't have heart with it, you lose something in that translation," he said.

COVID, Lonano said Judge Clough was "operating (remotely) on Zoom for court. It has its benefits, it has its downfalls, but one of the benefits I have seen is that children are able to participate more."

For more information with another 19.8% coming on Enotah CASA and to find out how to get involved, connect online at www.enotahcasa.org, or call the office at 706-745-2272 or 706-864-0300.

The Mountain Movers and Shakers meet every Friday morning at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee. This Friday, the group will welcome veterans Brandy Creel, Ash Todd and Chuck Honaker profit's \$440,000 budget went changes in operations due to in honor of Veterans Day.

Library Mural...from Page 1A



the new "Storybook Lane" mural at Mountain Regional Library. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

months to complete the artwork that can now be viewed outside the library, and she attended the unveiling and storytelling presentation with her sister, Amy Ammons Garza.

At the beginning of the show, the four local authors whose children's books inspired the mural stood and spoke about their featured works. Ammons Cain produced the illustrations for each of the books, which were printed by nonprofit publisher Catch the Spirit of Appalachia,

Co-founded by the Ammons sisters to publish authors who need help releasing their own books, Catch the Spirit of Appalachia has been going strong for 30 years, putting more than 140 books into print with many more "in the works."

Author Marcia Hawley Barnes' "Tobijah" is based on the true story of a duck that frequented her backyard and interacted with other animals, including her own pet cat. The book was represented on the mural by a duck sitting with its animal friends on the lower left bend of the road that winds up the middle of the mural like

Carroll S. Taylor's "Feannag the Crow" tells the story of a young crow who is so eager to fly that he falls out of his nest and disobeys his parents' wishes for him to stay safe. Featured on the lower right side of the mural, Feannag considers his new tortoise friend who happens to be digging into a mess of strawber-

Brenda Kay Ledford's "The Singing Convention" takes up the upper left bend in the mural. Receiving inspiration from her father's stories of growing up in old Appalachia, the illustration fittingly features Ledford's father and his beloved pet. He can never seem to find enough time to

he's always busy with farm Finally, in the upper

right quadrant is an image of an inquisitive black bear cub peering out fearfully from behind a tree and catching a glimpse of the dangerous but curious cabin just up ahead. This art is featured in Ammons Garza's book "So and Oh," where a couple of bear twins try to wrap their heads around young Doreyl and Amy.

During the presentation, artist Ammons Cain told an audience of rapt children and adults about the beginning of her budding talent.

She learned to draw by watching her crippled grandfather put pencil to paper. And by carefully studying his hands and listening closely to him during stories, she learned many of his art techniques.

At the same time, a young Ammons Garza found her interests occupied more by her grandfather's storytelling, and she certainly followed in his footsteps by regaling the audience with stories of her childhood involving a cucumber doll and a friendly black snake living behind a calendar hanging in her bedroom.

As Ammons Garza told her stories, Ammons Cain stood beside her sister and drew on the canvas resting on the easel.

And with the CD player's fiddle music setting a truly Appalachia-flavored Ammons Cain captured the essence of her sister's storytelling perfectly: a stunning view of the mountains, their childhood home, the cucumber doll, the calendar, and even the black snake.

Harkening back to the beginning of the ceremony to the unveiling of the mural itself, Ammons Garza explained the significance of books to the imagination.

"So do me a favor," Am-

spend with the dog because mons Garza said to those gathered, "whenever you come to the library, just stand here and look around. Look at all those books, all those treasures, and just imagine to yourself - every one of those books is somebody's treasure."

Indeed, to the Ammons sisters, books have always been treasures. Ammons Garza has published 10 stories and collections of her own, with Ammons Cain producing the illustrations for each, including for the book represented in the mural.

"I'm hoping that there'll be more young people who will want to come see (the mural) and want to read, and the books are just a marvel-ous thing to have," Ammons Garza said. "A book to hold in your hand - the mural stands for that. It's the storytelling Toward the end of the

presentation, Ammons Cain walked everyone through the process of creating the work of art now prominently displayed outside the library. "It all started with illus-

trating the books," she said, gesturing to the individual prints featuring scenes from the books showcased on the "I took those and re-

vamped those, and then from those, it became a mural," she continued. "So, it was almost like research for the books went into the mural, and that's what I love about these library murals. You take books and have them come alive. It's

For their nonprofit publishing company, Ammons Cain offers illustrations, and Ammons Garza focuses on formatting. When not working on books, the pair travel and tell stories from their childhoods in multi-faceted presentations. Their act, unsurprisingly, is known as "The Ammons Sis-

SCHOOL BOARQ...from Page 1A

Tax, aka TAVT on sales and swaps of motor vehicles, was still "up there." Apparently, the automobile market remains strong, which is good for the schools, she said.

Regarding the 1% sales tax, Underwood said, "In August, we collected \$289,000, and in September, we collected \$244,000. August was \$59,000 more than this time last year, and in September, it's only \$2,000 (more than this time last year).'

still very pleased with, but it looks like everything is kind of leveling out compared to last year," she said. "The way it's starting out, hopefully, we'll have a good year like we did last year on the property and the sales tax.

'We've completed 25% of the (current fiscal) year. Our expenditures, unused, is 71%. That still is going to take another month or two to come in under a monthly budget just because of all the upfront expenses getting school started."

Towns County Schools is eligible for the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER, Grants. These funds are meant to address the impact that COVID-19 has had and continues to have on elementary and secondary schools across the nation.

Underwood said the district has received ESSER II, ESSER III, ESSER School Nurse, ESSER CARES Vocational Supervision, and ES-SER III Equipment Grants totaling \$1,177,564.

"We were approved

for four more ESSER III Literacy Grants in the amount of \$99,500 each," she said. ESSER II Grants run for

two years (FY22 and FY23). ESSER III Grants run for three years (FY22, FY23, FY24). 'Currently, the finances for the (school system) are

very stable, and we anticipate

coming in under budget,"

Underwood said, adding that

annual audit is underway and going well, and should be completed or near completion Dr. Connie Hobbs reported that by December. Moving along, the board

approved a request by Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong to surplus a 16-acre tract of land that was acquired years ago from Young Harris College in a swap for a property that used to be an elementary school in the Towns County School System. Berrong said the prop-

"Over \$200,000 we're erty "really is unusable to the school." It is located south of Georgia 515 near the Union County line on Plottown Road.

Also approved for surplus was a 2005 Kubota zeroturn lawnmower.

In other business, the board approved Andy Rowland to be the new Wrestling Community Coach. Andy is the brother of Brandon Rowland. who is serving as the new head coach for the wrestling team in 2021 after spending years as former Head Coach Jeff Stowers' assistant coach.

Jessica Beck, a licensed practical nurse, was approved to be the new school nurse assistant. The board also approved an updated salary schedule for school nurses.

Towns County Board of Education work sessions and board meetings for 2022 will be held on the first Monday of each month with the following exceptions: April 11, due to Spring Break; July 5, due to the Fourth of July holiday; and Sept. 6, due to Labor Day.

Elementary School Principal Shannon Moss reported that he currently has 444 students enrolled with zero positive student or staff COVID cases reported as of the meeting.

Moss said the Elementary School is preparing for Veterans Day with the "Stars Project," where students and staff will identify past and cur-

served in the military.

He described

rent family members who have

initiatives with a bent toward Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS. Middle School Principal

other ongoing projects and

she currently has 223 students enrolled with no COVID cases or quarantines reported. School activities are running smoothly, she said, and they are cutting back on some COVID precautions while ask-

ing that students continue to practice social distancing, frequent handwashing, and utilization of hand sanitizer. Cleaning protocols remain in place. High School Principal Roy Perren reported that he currently has 304 students enrolled, and that all student

activities, especially athletics, are going very well. The high school also had zero positive COVID cases or quarantines among staff/students as of the Nov. 1 meeting.

Both Hobbs and Perren complimented their students who participated in the Towns County Civic Association Drug Forum in October. In his Superintendent's

Report, Berrong also mentioned the drug forum, saying that same day in October was when they had the drug-sniffing K-9s come to the school and "pretty much just scanned the whole campus," including cars. "Zero drugs were found

on our campus," he said, adding that he couldn't recall the last time that drug dogs found any drugs at the schools. "And that is very unlikely for a school system (these days), I can tell you that. So, we have great kids that are making the right choices.'

Continuing, "We are currently at a 2% test rate in Towns County (for COVID). So, as quickly as it went up, it came back down," Berrong said.

As Dr. Hobbs described. Berrong said the district was lightening up on some COVID restrictions – letting all students eat in the cafeteria for breakfast again, resuming field trips, allowing events in the school auditorium, etc. - but still being several smart and going by the data.