

# Towns County Herald

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## 'Light Up Hiawassee' to welcome families Dec. 3

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Holiday spirit has been infusing the North Georgia Mountains lately, as evidenced by the Hiawassee Town Square, which has filled up with colorful Christmas displays that are waiting to be plugged in as part of "Light Up Hiawassee!" on Dec. 3.

Activities will take place from 2-5 p.m. this Saturday, with plenty for families and children to do as a community thanks to multiple local sponsors and volunteers.

Folks can expect Christmas music, face painting, cookie decorating, the always-delicious hamburgers and hot dogs cooked up by the local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #7807, and a Letters to Santa

station and mailbox.

The American Red Cross will also be preparing hot chocolate, and people can find s'mores, ornament decorating and more.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Christmas affair without a visit from Santa Claus, who will be escorted to the square by the Towns County Fire Department before he has to depart to participate in the Towns

County Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade later that evening.

Community volunteers and city officials teamed up on Saturday, Nov. 19, to get all the decorations installed and ready for the big event.

"We are really excited," Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales said that Saturday. "It is our most fun event on the square because it gets us ready for the holiday season.

"We are doing things a little differently this year by starting at 2 p.m., with Santa showing up around 3 p.m. and leaving between 5-5:30 to be in the parade.

"Today's big effort was to put out lights and make the square look more beautiful. We have about 20-25 people here (volunteering), which is great to get the community involved and have them work together to do something so great for the kids and their families."

Added Ordiales, "The Sheriff's parade will be starting at about 5:30 p.m. or so from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and ending here at the square, and this is just a big, fun



Volunteers gathered recently to decorate the Hiawassee Town Square for this weekend's "Light Up Hiawassee!" Photo by Jeremy Foster



About two dozen community members assisted in getting the Hiawassee Square ready for the Dec. 3 family-friendly lighting extravaganza. Photo by Jeremy Foster

event where everybody gets together, brings their family and has a good time."

The Christmas lights on the square will be plugged in around 5 p.m. on Dec. 3 and will stay up through Jan. 6, a day known as "Epiphany," which signifies the Three Kings' visit to the newborn Baby Jesus in

Bethlehem.

Light Up Hiawassee originated in 2017, organized by the city shortly after Ordiales won election to her first term as mayor and the council saw the election of three new members who retain their seats to this day: Amy Barrett, Patsy Owens and Nancy Noblet.

## Young Harris to light up Mayor's Park Dec. 2

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The longtime tradition of the Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting will take place this Friday, Dec. 2, beginning at 6 p.m. at the pavilion in Mayor's Park.

Hosted by the Enotah Garden Club, the annual event "is going to be a fantastic and family-oriented event again," said Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby.

"We are going to have the kindergarten children sing, we'll have the (Towns County High School) band playing," Gibby said, "and the band parents will be selling coffee, hot chocolate and some baked goods.

"Santa Claus will be coming in on a fire truck, and everyone will be able to take pictures with him, and just all kinds of fun things. It's always about family and community, so in that regard, that has never changed about this event.

"I have been coming



Under the direction of Allison Judd, the Towns County High School Band always plays an entertaining variety of Christmas music during the Young Harris Tree Lighting Ceremony. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks/2021

members more and will honestly spend over half of what they are allotted on their family members.

"So, it's heartbreaking and heartwarming at the same time. Sometimes you don't realize that some kids in school don't have enough food, clothes to wear, shoes or supplies for school."

Moved by Edwards-Ellis' words that morning, the Movers & Shakers members in attendance passed around a "Collection Hat," garnering \$500 in donations in support of Shop With The Sheriff.

"Other things that we have coming up will be a 5K run to help pay for kids' lunchroom dues," she continued, "because there's a lot of kids who might be embarrassed to go through the line and ask for the free tray, which is different from what all the other kids are

"(And thanks to) the city staff for decorating the outside of the pavilion and to Dana Ca-

See Tree Lighting, Page 6A

(City Hall), and we want to say a big thank you to the Enotah Garden Club for being the ones to plan it, decorate it to get ready, and host it.

"It's such a joy watching the kids go up and down the aisles, but they don't really care about themselves, they care about their other family

See Sheriff's Parade, Page 6A

## Sheriff's Parade to roll thru town Saturday

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The annual Towns County Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade will roll through town on Saturday, Dec. 3, starting out from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds at 5:30 p.m. and continuing through Hiawassee, and spectators are encouraged to line Main Street for the festive offering.

This year's theme is "Walking in a Winter Wonderland," and parade participants will need to start lining up at 4 p.m. in the upper parking lots of the Fairgrounds.

Santa Claus will be joining the parade again this year, making the event all the more exciting for boys and girls hoping to make his "Nice List." Just be sure to dress warmly for the parade, which promises to be a jolly good time for all.

The Sheriff's Office has been staying busy this holiday season, as related by Chief Deputy Gene Moss at a meeting of the Mountain Movers & Shakers on Friday, Nov. 18.

Moss stopped into the breakfast meeting with some of his crew to provide updates for the public, including information from TCSO Administrative Supervisor Vicki Edwards-Ellis about the Shop With The Sheriff Christmas Program.

"This will be our Second Annual Shop With The Sheriff coming up on Dec. 13," she said. "It's always just so much fun when we pick the kids up, feed them and take them on buses to (Walmart in Blairsville), and then we shop for about two hours.

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See Sheriff's Parade, Page 6A

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See Sheriff's Parade, Page 6A

## Fairgrounds decorates State Visitor Center tree

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

A great honor was recently bestowed upon the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds that culminated on Friday, Nov. 18, when Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason and some of her staff got to decorate the Christmas tree in one of Georgia's Visitor Information Centers.

The state operates nine such centers around Georgia's border, with the one in question being located at the Georgia/South Carolina state line off I-85 in Lavonia.

In addition to decorating the tree with a Fairgrounds theme, Thomason, along with Peggy Sellars, Miranda Burnett and Peggy Underwood, stocked the center with informational booklets and brochures to promote the Fairgrounds to the many travelers who stop there.

"Jeannie Bottler, the General Manager of the State Visitors Center, called me looking for someone within tourism and entertainment," Thomason said. "She asked if I would like to decorate their 7-foot Christmas tree in the lobby.

"The tree will stay up until after New Year's to advertise our Mountain Country Christmas in Lights and the Dailey



Hilda Thomason and her crew from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds traveled this month to the State Visitor Center in Lavonia to decorate the Christmas tree there. Photo/Submitted

& Vincent Christmas Festival, so of course, I told her I would love to.

"She has already contacted me back and said that several people have stopped to look and get our brochures and went to the counter asking information about it, and I just thought it was a great way to get the word out to people com-

ing up and down 85."

Bottler said that Thomason and her staff "did a wonderful job on the decorating, and we are very happy to establish a partnership with the Fairgrounds and are excited for the future."

Added Thomason, "It is quite an honor for the Georgia

See GMF Visitor Center, Page 6A



A view from a past Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Runoff early voting began Monday; Election Day Dec. 6

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Early in-person voting for the U.S. Senate Runoff Election between Republican Herschel Walker and Democratic Incumbent Raphael Warnock started Monday and will continue through Friday, Dec. 2.

In-person early voting is occurring in the Towns County Board of Elections Office at Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee, with voting hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Runoff Election Day voting will take place Tuesday, Dec. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Hiawassee and Young Harris precincts of Towns County.



Voters must possess an acceptable form of identification to cast ballots, such as a government-issued driver's license or identification card.

The deadline to request mail-in absentee ballots was Monday, Nov. 28.

Folks wanting to utilize the official drop box to turn in their absentee ballots can find

in the Elections Office during early voting hours. Completed absentee ballots may also be dropped off at the Elections Office up to 7 p.m. on Election Day.

By accessing the "My Voter Page" at <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/>, voters may find their registration status, precinct information, mailed absentee ballot status, voter participation history and more.

Nov. 7 was the voter registration deadline to be eligible to participate in the federal runoff.

Coverage of local results from the Dec. 6 Senate Runoff Election will be made available on Wednesday, Dec. 7, online via the Towns County Herald website at [www.townscountyherald.net](http://www.townscountyherald.net).

2 Sections 12 Pages  
Lake Levels  
Blue Ridge 1,669.27  
Chatuge 1,917.90  
Nottely 1,761.27

Inside  
Arrests 2A  
Church 3B  
Classifieds 5B  
Opinion 4A  
Legals 5B  
Obits 4B  
Sports 2B

**SPORTS BASKETBALL**  
Friday, December 2  
@ Andrews, NC  
6 PM

Love Light Scholarship Donations

Cowboy Christmas Concert Dec. 2

Georgia Mountain Fair Christmas @ the Fairgrounds

See page 3A

See page 6B

See page 1B

# Residents, visitors grateful during holiday season



Koo, Noi and Devon Lim of Asiano Restaurant are grateful to be members of this vibrant and growing community.  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Thanksgiving heralds the beginning of a particularly festive season; despite the chill in the air, hearts around the nation grow warm as loved ones draw close to focus on what matters most.

And Towns County is no exception, with people all across Hiawassee and Young Harris occupying themselves with thoughts of past, present and future.

For example, Callahan Koontz was at the Towns County Recreation Center last week with his son-in-law to get some exercise in the present so he could enjoy more food in the very near future. The pair dribbled basketballs and shot hoops, already covered in sweat from an intense workout.

“Thanksgiving’s my favorite because of all the good food,” Koontz admitted with a laugh. “We can come in here and be able to go to the Rec Center and stuff and at least get some exercise in with all that food we’re going to eat.”

That wasn’t the only thing to look forward to, however, as the pair had traveled to Georgia to visit the family of Koontz’ son-in-law, with whom

they were immensely enjoying spending time.

“I come from a big Native American family in Oklahoma, so Thanksgiving’s always been our big gathering,” Koontz added, elaborating that with seven aunts, the house was usually packed.

On the other side of the court, Kelly Norville and his two young children had lowered some of the nets so their balls could more easily reach the baskets. Jasper, the younger of the duo, had just started playing basketball while his sister Charlie had already been involved in the sport.

While the kids played, Norville killed two birds with one stone by spending some quality time with his children and, similar to Koontz, working in a little bit of exercise into his schedule. In fact, it was paramount due to a recent diabetes diagnosis.

“There’s a whole little section revolved around me this year,” Norville said, realizing that he would need to supplement the coveted Thanksgiving ham with more veggies.

Moving forward, the dietary changes will be an adjustment, but he feels confident in his ability to tackle the challenge given past struggles that he and his family have over-

come: “They’re a blessing,” Norville said, proudly looking on at his athletic pair of miracle babies.

Returning from a jog along the upper walkway, Young Harris College Spanish Professor Dianna Santiago could identify with others in the Rec Center, especially when it came to the deeper meaning of the holiday and the importance it had to coming together and counting blessings.

“Thanksgiving is giving thanks for all the good things that we have, and for me, Thanksgiving is all about family and friends and neighbors and welcoming into our house everyone we can invite,” Santiago explained.

And while she has family in Puerto Rico and a son living in France, she believes love and support should be shown to all on Thanksgiving especially.

“(I) just wish the best for everyone,” said Santiago about end-of-the-year celebrations, although she is especially looking forward to returning to see her parents on the island for Christmas.

Just a few minutes down the road at Asiano, restaurant owner Koo Lim was gearing up for a busy season ahead. That said, Lim could offer some insight into hopes for the future

from the perspective of a business owner.

“I hope that either we’re going to go into recession or not go into recession so we don’t have to be in limbo anymore,” he said, though he had a secondary wish for the New Year, and that was to see the end of the war currently being waged in Ukraine.

But with things picking up both at work and at home, Lim focused on what he could

do at the present moment, admitting, “I just want to make people laugh. I don’t want to hurt people.”

That love for others shines through in his advice to fellow Towns Countians: “I wish everybody a great holiday, a safe holiday, and don’t worry about the future. Enjoy today, because we don’t know what the future may hold.”

It’s no secret that folks everywhere come from dif-

ferent backgrounds and cultivate a myriad of creeds. Some may treasure the memories of past holidays made bright with loved ones while others must rebuild a better present after unforeseen loss.

One thing that unites everybody in Towns County, however, is the hope for a better future in local, national and global aspects, along with showing peace and goodwill toward their fellow man.

## Tree Lighting...from Page 1A

ble for donating her nine-foot Christmas tree for pictures with Santa.”

Mrs. Claus will also be attending to speak with children. People will want to dress warmly and are encouraged to bring folding chairs for the occasion. The Enotah Garden Club will be providing cookies, juice boxes and bottled water for children and guests.

As alluded to by Mayor Gibby, the Young Harris Tree Lighting dates back to the year 1970, when the first one occurred across from the Post Office on College Street.

The lighting continued there for several years, though it eventually moved from its point of origin to various trees along Main Street.

Finally, in the late 1980s,

the lighting found its permanent home in Young Harris Mayor’s Park after City Hall was built on the land that former Young Harris Mayor Irene Berry left to the city.

Mayor’s Park is located at 50 Irene Berry Drive. Visit [www.youngharrisga.net](http://www.youngharrisga.net) for more information on the city and to keep an eye out for future events.

## Sheriff’s Parade...from Page 1A

eating, so we want to make sure those kids don’t have to be segregated.”

The 5K run will tentatively be held at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds or possibly Young Harris College, though the details are still being finalized.

Next up, Detention Center Capt. James Baldwin delivered a “State of the Jail Address.”

“The outside looks good, and we are slowly working on the inside as well,” he said. “We have a brand-new camera system, brand-new control room system and touchscreen controls to open doors instead of push buttons.

“So, we have really mod-

ernized a lot of things to increase safety of our officers and inmates, and it did not inflate our budget, as it came through a COVID grant that we got.”

Baldwin said it costs about \$55 per day to keep an inmate in the jail, and he noted that, “although Sheriff Ken Henderson could not be there today, he is relentless on crime.”

Turning things back over to Moss for a local drug activity report, the chief deputy said that, to date this year, “we have arrested 84 people for drugs, and we cannot have a society or community based on that.”

As for additional updates, Moss said the Sheriff’s Office Summer Heat Festival was a

major success, raising \$15,000 to go toward laptops and software in patrol cars.

“The laptops are very expensive, and we are buying 12,” he said. “We got a \$26,000 grant to put laptops in our cars, as well as getting a \$50,000 drone soon through another donation.

“And we have used drug seizure money to purchase four vehicles so far this year, as well as another vehicle that was awarded to us from the (Governor’s Office of Highway Safety) at no expense to our budget.”

A nonpartisan civic-minded group, the Mountain Movers & Shakers welcome guest speakers most Fridays at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee.

## GMF Visitor Center...from Page 1A

Mountain Fairgrounds to be selected to have the opportunity to be in the State Visitor Center for the tree project and have our

information in there.

“We have had a very wonderful year so far, so this really blesses us even more. This has

been the biggest year we have ever had with lots of concerts, new and special events, more people bringing campers to the campgrounds – we have just been slammed the whole year.

“We are full this weekend also after Thanksgiving with the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, and we are expecting a big crowd for that, and I certainly believe that 2023 is already shaping up to be a bigger and better year,” she concluded.

The 2022 Mountain Country Christmas in Lights kicked off on Thursday, Nov. 24, and will run through Dec. 10 every Thursday and Friday from 6-9 p.m., and on Saturdays from 4-9 p.m.

Closer to Christmas, the lights will be available every night from Dec. 15 through Dec. 23, to include additional holiday shopping opportunities with the Outdoor Craft Market. Admission is \$7 per person, with children 12 and under getting in free.

For more information, visit [www.georgiamountain-fairgrounds.com](http://www.georgiamountain-fairgrounds.com).

