

# Food Pantry grateful for local business donation



Teresa Stephens of Towns County Food Pantry hosted Crystal Wagner of Lake Chatuge Chamber and representatives from ServiceMaster for a check donation Dec. 3. Not pictured: Chamber President Candace Lee. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

**By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer**  
The Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce met with the Towns County Food Pantry on Thursday, Dec. 3, to receive a check donation for \$375 by ServiceMaster Cleaning & Restoration Services. Ninth District Opportunity and the Food Pantry will

use the funds to help support local programs to benefit local people, according to Community Resource Coordinator Teresa Stephens.  
"It helps us to feed the families in the community that need it, it helps with the Backpack Program, and it helps make everybody's Christmas a little better," Stephens said.

"Any donations, we can stretch your dollar, because we can get food for 18 cents a pound."  
"We get about 250 to 300 families every two weeks. That equates to about 650 individuals, and most of those are elderly who are living on a fixed income."  
"The need for us is, it is hard to get proteins and fresh

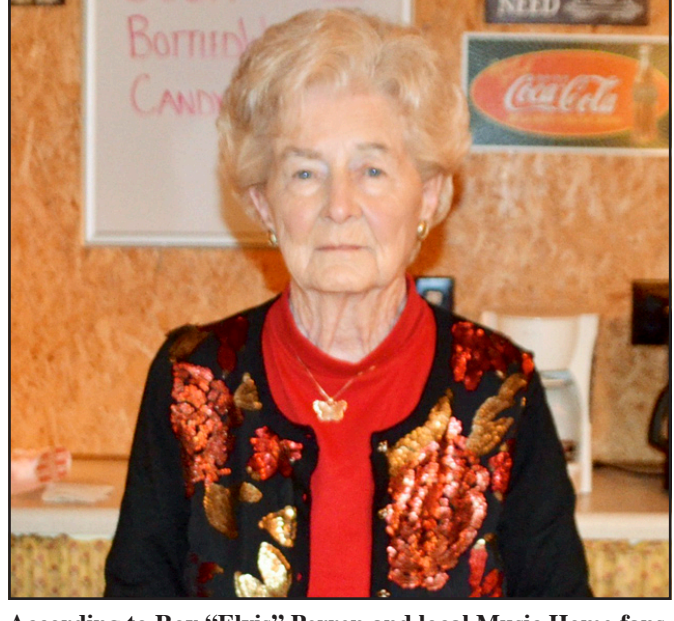
meat and that kind of thing. Donations can help us go a long way, and we can get what we need for these families."  
One way in which donations are raised is through the Scarecrow Invasion Halloween event that the Chamber puts on every year around the Hiwassee Town Square.  
Local businesses and groups pay the \$25 entry fee to put their scarecrows up, and that money goes to the Food Pantry.  
This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, many local businesses were unable to pay that entry fee and expend extra budget money, so ServiceMaster stepped up and paid that fee for them.  
Chamber President Candace Lee said she was happy to see businesses in the community taking care of each other and working to make their hometown a better place.  
"This is great, and I think you only see it in the small towns," Lee said. "I have lived in larger towns, and you don't see it as much. People around

here help the locals that need it and go above and beyond."  
"(ServiceMaster of Hiwassee) knew to reach out to us and how to ask who needed the help. We get that question all the time from people that want to volunteer in the community, and that is because it is a small community that cares."  
According to Account Manager Landon Harris, ServiceMaster is working this year to play a larger role in the community.  
"Not only has the Food Pantry helped me personally, but with the new ownership in this company, we have really revamped our culture," Harris said. "We are putting people before our profit this time, and we haven't been in our community like we used to be."  
"Now that we stretch from Blue Ridge to Gwinnett, we have to start at the center, because we live here."  
ServiceMaster was both a participant and benefactor in the #Squarecrow endeavor in 2020, and the locally based division is looking forward to

continuing to better connect with the people they serve.  
"We were the first ones up there with our scarecrow," Harris said. "We have been in the Hiwassee location for about 20 years, and we were very involved with the community (initially), doing the parades and all."  
"As it went on, the ownership didn't care to participate anymore, and the company went to a point where we weren't involved. We are trying to bring that back."  
"We were the No. 1 ServiceMaster for the whole nation in 2008, 2009 and 2010. They only hand out one award from our leader, and we got it three years in a row. Our goal here is to revamp and come with a quality of service and community."  
People wanting to help the Food Pantry may donate at the Ninth District Opportunity Office at 1294 Jack Dayton Circle in Young Harris. For more information on donating or volunteering on distribution days, call 706-896-0040.

## Mountain Home...from Page 1A

conclude the venue's mission with a Christmas Show.  
"I want to thank everyone for coming in to support us," Berrong said. "With my health and all, it is just too hard on me, but I thank everybody and all the bands that have played for me."  
Fans of the venue such as friends Eva Robinson and Ida Holmes of Hayesville, North Carolina, said they will cherish all the memories they have made there together.  
"We have been coming every Saturday night," Robinson said. "We have probably been coming since it has been open, and she has added a lot to this place."  
"It will be sad to see it go. We had some good memories, and it is hard to think where two women will go on a Saturday night. It makes a difference to us, because we enjoyed it."



According to Roy "Elvis" Perren and local Music Home fans, Stella Berrong and her theatre will be greatly missed after closing following the Dec. 12 Christmas Show. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Richard Coker receives Quilt of Valor



**Korean War Veteran Richard Coker**  
On December 3rd, Homestead Hospice of Blairsville, presented Richard Coker of Blairsville with a Quilt of Valor for his service in the Army during the Korean War. The Quilt and Pillowcase were donated by the Quilt of Valor Foundation and locally made by the Misty Mountain Quilters Guild.  
The ceremony was held at his home in Blairsville surrounded by his family. Shannon Larsen of Homestead Hospice, read about the Quilts of Valor; sharing their meaning and their history and quilted Mr. Coker.  
Congratulations to Mr. Coker and we thank him deeply for his service!

## Gowder...from Page 1A

As previously reported, Gowder and former Blairsville-based physician James Heaton were publicly arrested in February 2016, after which they became co-defendants later convicted for prescription drug fraud in a nearly two-week trial in October 2019.  
For his crimes, Heaton was

sentenced to five years behind bars and is due to report to the medium-security U.S. penitentiary in Atlanta on Jan. 2, 2021, to begin his sentence.  
Heaton's attorneys have filed an appeal in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Legal briefs for each side are due Jan. 12, 2021, so a hearing will be scheduled at some point after that.  
Mike's brother David is

currently serving an 18-month sentence at the same low-security federal prison facility in Jesup, to which he reported in July after sentencing in June 2020.  
David was a former co-defendant in the case, though he avoided trial by entering a guilty plea in March 2019 to one count of prescribing oxycodone to a patient without a legitimate medical purpose.

## AskUSDA to streamline customer service



On November 23, 2020, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced the official launch of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) AskUSDA Contact Center program. The AskUSDA Contact Center will serve as the "one front door" for phone, chat, and web inquires, transforming how the public interacts with USDA and providing an enhanced experience for the public.  
"Part of our work here at USDA is to be the most efficient, effective, and customer-focused agency in the federal government is to ensure our customers and Americans across the country can easily get support from our Department and answers to their questions," said Secretary Perdue. "The AskUSDA Contact Center will act as one, centralized front door, ensuring good customer service is given to everyone who interacts with USDA."

The public can contact AskUSDA by phone at (833) ONE-USDA with representatives available 9 AM - 5:30 PM EST weekdays. The website (<https://ask.usda.gov/>) is available 24/7 and includes live chat agents available 10 AM - 6 PM EST on weekdays. Inquiries can also be sent via email at any time to [askusda@usda.gov](mailto:askusda@usda.gov). NT(Dec9/25)CA