

Benji...from Page 1A

to melt on Saturday, lines would snap up and down into each other, causing new or repeat outages.

"Despite the adversity of putting lines back on that end up going back on the next day, our line personnel and operations personnel have kept a very positive, enthusiastic attitude," said EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms, noting that it takes time to respond to so many outages. "They're really out there working hard for the members."

Compared to Hurricane Irma, which resulted in more than 60 broken power poles throughout the EMC, Winter Storm Benji caused only six broken poles.

And though Benji seems to have been less destructive than Irma, it affected a greater area than the September tropical storm.

At its peak, the winter storm caused power outages to more than 18,000 meters and tripped more than 700 protective devices throughout the five-county area of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, covering roughly twice the area of Irma.

Nelms was hopeful that all power would be turned back on by Tuesday, Dec. 12.

Considering the problems caused by this most recent winter storm, coupled with the inevitability of foul weather, it is important for people to implement best preparedness practices – residents should be ready for when the weather takes an unexpected turn for the worse.

The website www.Ready.gov is an excellent resource for emergency disaster preparedness, as it considers all kinds of disasters, including extreme winter weather.

For tons of information



American Red Cross volunteers inside the storm shelter they set up at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church over the weekend. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



The heavy, wet snow took a toll on trees all over the mountains. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

on winter safety and other types of emergency preparedness, please visit Ready.gov and carefully study the information therein – it just might save your life someday.

In addition to the Friday, Dec. 8, school closures, Towns County Schools also closed for students on Monday, Dec. 11, with a two-hour delay for all faculty and staff.

Save-A-Lot...from Page 1A

Verdone responded to the scene of the robbery at 8:25 p.m., within one minute of the 911 call that was placed by an employee of the Save-A-Lot after the robber had reportedly fled the scene, according to police.

Upon arrival, the two officers began an immediate search of the area, and Towns County Sheriff's K-9 Deputy Bloodhound Copper soon after attempted to track the suspect to no avail, according to police.

As reported by the Save-A-Lot employees at the scene, a slim white male approximately 6 feet 3 inches tall appeared from the rear of the store after it had closed that evening, according to police.

The man wore a mask and brandished a handgun, and after locking one employee in a cooler, he allegedly led the other at gunpoint to the store safe, where he stole an undisclosed amount of cash before fleeing on foot, according to police.

Fortunately, no one was hurt during the commission of the crime, though several nearby businesses went on

lockdown after the robbery, just in case.

Unfortunately, the assistant manager of the store, Alferink, had left out one major detail about the robbery – she had been in on it, according to police.

"On Wednesday, Nov. 29, we brought Chelsea Alferink in to question her about the robbery," said Hiawasse Police Chief Paul Smith. "By Monday (Dec. 4), we had enough evidence to show that she had given false statements during that interview, and we were able to take out an arrest warrant for her that Monday for making false statements."

For the employee locked in the cooler, the robbery was the real deal – they had no idea that the crime was an inside job, according to police.

"It was a legitimate armed robbery," said Chief Smith. "He came in with a gun, demanded money, took money from the safe, but he had help from his girlfriend, who was the assistant manager."

Thorough investigative efforts and corroboration of evidence led to the arrest of

Alferink on Dec. 4 for lying to investigators, and a day later, she and Walls were charged with the armed robbery, according to police.

"This investigation is still on-going, with the possibility of further charges being filed," per the Dec. 7 press release. "Anyone who has any information is asked to contact (Hiawasse Police) Detective Brandon Barrett at (706) 896-2888, ext. 3."

The case was cracked in large part due to the investigative efforts of Detective Barrett.

"This was Brandon's first big case," said Chief Smith. "I couldn't be prouder or more impressed by the amount of work and the quality of work he's been doing. He's worked pretty much all of his off days trying to solve this. It's taken just about two weeks, and we finally got it."

Chief Smith would like to thank the Towns County Sheriff's Office for its assistance in the investigation, as well as the Union County Sheriff's Office and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Foster...from Page 1A



Program volunteers, many of them current or former CASAs, wrapping presents inside the old Towns/Union Jail before Christmas last year. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

This year, the number of children being served is close to 150, which is up from last year, though more of the children are with foster parents closer to home.

Fortunately, the nonprofit has an extensive list of sponsors, all of whom take it upon themselves to give year after year, making gifts to foster children regular parts of their holiday traditions.

Sponsors receive the children's wish lists and go out to buy whatever is on the lists, and many people make cash donations, which enables program members to go out and buy gifts for the children.

The program was founded years ago by now ex-CASAs Elliott, Richard Paolillo and his wife Mary Jane, as well as Sherry Wendt, to fill a need for kids when other programs fell by the wayside.

Some of the main volunteers who work with

the program include former and current CASAs who have helped in years past to wrap presents and deliver them to families before Christmas.

And this year, the program is forgoing the wrapping paper, which will enable foster parents to know what the kids are getting so they don't double gift.

Monetary donations can be given year-round to the Towns & Union Foster Children's Enrichment Program, and those interested in contributing or becoming sponsors for next Christmas can contact Elliott at (706) 896-3749, or Paolillo at (706) 745-1190.

For convenience, donors can make checks payable to "The Foster Children's Christmas Program," and the checks can be dropped off at Park Sterling Bank for deposit.

Donations can also be made toward the program's Back to School initiative, which

is the other area in which Elliott, Paolillo and friends help to normalize the experiences of children in foster care.

The Back to School part of the program takes place before the start of each school year. Foster children are given the ability to go shopping for new school supplies and a new school outfit, just like all the other kids who start school each year with new clothes and materials.

Those involved with the program would like to thank the multitude of generous supporters who for years have made Christmas mornings special for the foster children of Towns and Union.

Also, program organizers would like to thank Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris for allowing them to store their hundreds of presents in the spare rooms of the old Towns/Union County Jail.

Love Light...from Page 1A



Dr. Robert Stahlkuppe and Golda Sanders lighting the Love Light Tree on Dec. 4. Also pictured, Brenda Hitchcock. Photo/Lily Avery

going to college in the medical profession.

"This past May we were able to give five scholarships to students in the community and we hope to be able to give more next year."

In addition to the scholarship and the Love Light Celebration, the auxiliary members work out of the Chatuge Regional Nursing Home, Chatuge Regional and volunteer countless hours throughout the year giving back to the community and raising funds for the hospital and their scholarship.

Each year, one of the biggest fundraising endeavors that the auxiliary undertakes is at the Georgia Mountain Fair in July, where the members work and operate the Fudge Booth. Through these acts of generosity and selflessness, the members of the auxiliary work to gather funds for not only their scholarship program, but to help supplement any needs the hospital and nursing home may have that might not fit in

the yearly budget.

At last year's celebration, Chatuge Regional Hospital Assistant Administrator Ryan Snow took time to formally thank all the members of the auxiliary for their hard work, their continued support and their obvious love for the hospital, nursing home and the patients.

"I want to welcome and thank everyone for being here and coming out to support our auxiliary," said Snow. "We appreciate them so much and everything that they do for us throughout the year. To sit around with these ladies who come in day in and day out and serve this hospital and are the smiling faces that you see when you walk in. We can't thank these women enough."

"Tonight, I just want to say thank you for what you do. We appreciate you and you make a difference to this hospital and to this nursing home. And the days that we don't have you here, you're very much missed. I just want

you to know that.

"We appreciate you so much."

During each year's program, a message is prepared and members of the community sing carols after the lighting of the tree. This year, the Rev. Danny Byers of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church provided the invocation before Chatuge Regional Hospital Chief of Medical Staff Dr. Robert Stahlkuppe lit the beautiful Love Light tree.

Once the lobby was filled with a soft glow, Rev. Byers provided entertainment for the evening with Christmas classics such as "Silent Night" and "Feliz Navidad," and also shared an uplifting Christmas message about forgiveness, understanding and acceptance.

Afterwards, the auxiliary members provided refreshments and all in attendance were invited to enjoy the good food, good company and the abundant holiday cheer.

Fairgrounds...from Page 1A

and it was real successful.

"It's just a way for us to give back and share our appreciation and a real treat for Towns County citizens."

While at the Fairgrounds, patrons will have a multitude of things to do as they walk through the beautifully lit grounds and listen to the holiday tunes play loud throughout the Pioneer Village.

For those who are still hunting for the perfect gift for that specific someone, check out the dozens of craft vendors who have set up shop at the Fairgrounds for the holiday season. With everything from Christmas ornaments to baby bibs, there is a little something for everyone to enjoy at the vendor booths this year.

Plenty of area groups and civic organizations have also made an appearance at the light

show this year, many of which decorated vendor booths with holiday photo scenes, Christmas hearth scenes and various other festive decorations.

And do not forget Eudora Animal Farms, offering a wide variety of animals to pet and feed, as well as camel and pony rides for kids. Plus, local Towns County Historian Jerry Taylor will continue to tear away at the organs with beautiful Christmas classics down at the Exhibit Hall.

There truly is something for all ages at the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights.

While the light show was not opened last weekend due to heavy snowfall and dangerous conditions, the Fairgrounds will reopen the show this week.

Mountain Country Christmas in Lights is open Thursday, Friday and Saturday

of each week, from now until Dec. 31, from 6 p.m. until 9 p.m.

For those who want to spend just a little more time at the Fairgrounds this week, in addition to the Towns County Citizens Day and the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, the Fairgrounds will be hosting a John Denver Christmas Show on Friday, Dec. 15.

Starring Chris Collins and Boulder Canyon, the show will start at 7 p.m. and will be headed off by The Beatles cover band, The Return.

Tickets from the show range from \$25 to \$35, and include free admission to the light show on the night of the concert.

"It's going to be a great show," said Thomason. "We're hoping for beautiful weather to enjoy the music and the lights. It's a wonderful time of year to come spend at the Fairgrounds."

Christmas Show at Mountain Home Music Theater

The Christmas season is here and Mountain Home Music Theater will present their Down Home Country Christmas Show on Saturday, December 16, beginning at 7 PM. The show includes all your favorites from traditional country Christmas to your favorite carols. This week will also bring a visitor all the way from the North Pole! Yes, Santa Claus will be making a stop at Mountain Home Music and he will be bringing a gift for all children under 10 years of age. These children will also be admitted free to the show!

This show features the Mountain Home Music Band which includes Danny and Tim Burch, Jimmy Hooper, Billy Nicholson, Dale Nichols, Jerry Nichols and Larry and Marilyn Berrong, who will provide some of the best in Christmas music that you could hope to hear and will get you "in the mood" to enjoy this wonderful season of celebration.

There may also be an opportunity for you to see a "buck-dancing" Santa! Kris "Kringle" Berrong has been known to cut a pretty sharp step in dancing!

Everyone at Mountain Home Music Theater hopes to see you for this show. It promises to be one of the best! Let's get in the Christmas spirit! This show will be the last show of the 2017 season. We plan to reopen on March 10, 2018.

Come on out to the new building located on Hwy. 76 2.5 miles west of Hiawasse next to Total Auto Parts and help us celebrate this wonderful season. Admission is only \$7 and children under 10 are admitted free. For more information call Stelly Berrong at 706-896-3624. NT(Dec13,F)SH

Towns County Elementary School Golden Ticket winners for October 2017



These students have shown an outstanding display of "Patience". They have been chosen by their home-room teacher as a student with great "Character." TCES is proud of the students and how they strive to become leaders in their community. Kindergarten - Gracie Dingler, Kendon Fulford, Raigan Mercer, Riley Meck. 1st Grade - Jayden Green, Lakota Woodrum, Jayden Bagley, Lorena Cruz. 2nd Grade - Emiline Plourde, Jayden Bates, Bailey Dyer, Livia Haney. 3rd Grade - Cidney Daws, Lupe Salazar, Jonah Vargas, Draven Kirkland. 4th Grade - Greyson Tallent, Gabe Yeomans, Megan Gary. 5th Grade - Kyla Smith, Bella Rose Childs, Nick Vargas, Lilly Cannon, Bailey Dyer. T(Dec13,F)SH