

Towns County Herald

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Cross county athlete signs with Young Harris College

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County High School held a special recognition on Dec. 8 in the media center to honor an upcoming student-athlete graduate who has signed a scholarship to attend Young Harris College.

Alison Markham is a senior at Towns County and will be attending Young Harris College as a Mountain Lion next fall semester. The Lady Indian received a full scholarship based on excellent academic performance and athletic prowess as a cross country runner.

"My passion for running started in middle school, and

at first, I was not very fast," Markham said. "I was one of the slowest kids on the team, and it continued that way going on into early high school.

"After my freshman season, I really bought in and started putting in the work, and since then I was able to shave off around 13 minutes of my 5K time in the past three years, and I just really love to run now."

Markham said she decided to pursue her postsecondary education at Young Harris College for several reasons, as her dad worked there, she loves the campus, and she has friends who attend the college.

"And it is just a great program," she said. "I plan on studying marketing because I

want to go full-time with photography after school, and I feel like that will help me tremendously to market myself.

"I have also chosen to live on-campus instead of with my parents so I can get that true college experience."

Cross Country Head Coach Tim Rosser was very honored to be there for Alison on this monumental occasion.

"You cannot ask for a better student-athlete than Alison," he said. "I taught her in middle school, and she was a great student then and has always maintained awesome grades throughout her high school tenure as well.

"The main ingredient she brought to the team was

tremendous work ethic, as she would run extra after practice and continue running and training in the off-season summer months, and it was dedication like that that helped her become leaps and bounds greater than when she initially began.

"Unfortunately, she did have some injuries throughout her high school career that slowed her down, but that did not stop her. She just kept trucking along, and here we are."

Proud father Lance Markham worked at Young Harris College as the sports medicine director for 10 years, between 2001 and 2011, and he certainly showered praise upon his hard-working daughter last week.

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Lady Indian Senior Alison Markham will become a Mountain Lion runner next year after accepting a full scholarship to Young Harris College. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Kids receive kindness, gifts at VFW Christmas party

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Dec. 11, volunteers with the Veterans of Foreign Wars Garrett-Owenby Post No. 7807 hosted their first ever Christmas party for local children, located at 1329 Sunnyside Road in Hiwassee.

The event was designed for less fortunate kids and families to come and enjoy fun activities with snacks and Santa.

There, they discussed Christmas wish lists with the Jolly Old Elf, who made sure all the boys and girls were good this year, after which Mrs. Claus escorted each child around to pick out a toy to take home.

Children were presented with three rows of tables chock-



Santa responded to an invitation by the local VFW Auxiliary to visit with Towns County youngsters on Saturday, Dec. 11, at the VFW Building on Sunnyside Road.

full of toys suiting various age groups, and delicious pigs-in-a-blanket were served alongside water and Coke.

Kids also enjoyed deco-

rating freshly made cookies and participating in various fun games. There was an arts

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School system awarded major \$398,000 literacy grant

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Schools Curriculum Director Stephanie Moss announced in the Dec. 6 School Board meeting that the system had been awarded the L4GA ESSER III Supplemental Grant in the amount of \$398,000.

L4GA is the Georgia Literacy for Learning, Living and Leading Program, a state Department of Education initiative funded through the American Rescue Plan Act via the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund.

Moss said the monies are split into four \$99,500 grants, each dedicated to a specific demographic, to be spent over the

next three years. Those demographics are pre-K, kindergarten through fifth grade, Middle School, and High School.

"So, I have four \$99,500 grants. One thing that is different than what I normally do is working with pre-school," said Moss, adding that she would be partnering with the Towns County Head Start Pre-K program to help preschool children develop reading skills.

In other news, Finance Director Myra Underwood was excited to report that property tax, title ad valorem tax, and sales tax collections are all, again, coming in much higher than projected. But it's not understood why.

"Our first big payment that we're going to get will be for November collections



Stephanie Moss
Curriculum Director

... (for) \$1.425 million," Underwood said, adding that, going all the way back to the

See Literacy Grant, Page 6A

Commissioner adopts amended Joint Comprehensive Plan

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

A 10-Year Joint Comprehensive Plan for Towns County and the cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris has been in place for many years, with local officials attempting on a recurring basis to clarify and direct the development goals of these communities over time.

In Georgia, cities and counties must maintain planning documents to "retain eligibility for various funding, permitting and incentive programs administered by the state," according to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, or DCA.

The DCA requires such documents to be updated every five years for municipalities that do not collect impact fees, which are designed to defray

the costs of providing public services to newly developed areas. Neither Towns nor Hiwassee or Young Harris collects impact fees.

Under the five-year update requirement, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw adopted a new 10-Year Joint Comprehensive Plan for Towns County at a called meeting on Thursday, Dec. 9, in his office at the courthouse.

The city councils for Hiwassee and Young Harris adopted their respective resolutions approving the updated plan in their Dec. 7 regular meetings, and the plan has been submitted to the state by the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, which facilitated the entire process.

Once all the resolutions are executed and received by the DCA, then the updated Joint

Comprehensive Plan can be fully approved and will become the official joint planning document until the process begins again in another five years.

"The Towns County Joint Comprehensive Plan serves as the general strategy guide for the governments of Towns County and the Cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris," the introduction page reads.

Continuing, "(This) 2021 edition represents the mandated five-year update to this plan, both to satisfy a State of Georgia requirement and to ensure the document remains current, reflecting the present conditions and concerns of Towns County and its Cities."

Bradshaw said updating the Joint Comprehensive Plan has been a lot of work for his office staff, which has coordinated the effort with the cities and the

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, to include community input from local survey data and multiple public meetings.

"And we thank all the citizens that participated in the survey that was put out, and the committee members from the cities and the county that participated," Bradshaw said. "We love to hear from our citizens on what direction they think the county should go, what they want the county to be."

All told, the plan incorporated approximately 500 online survey responses as well as research collected by a 15-member Advisory Committee of locals.

"One thing that's been constant all the way through the Comprehensive Plan meetings and other meetings since I've been (sole commissioner) is, they don't want to see us



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw adopting the 2021 Joint Comprehensive Plan update on behalf of the county in a called meeting last week.

Photo by Mark Smith

lose the 'small-town feeling,'" Bradshaw said. "We have a very safe, down-home place to live and work and raise our families. We do not want to lose that. Period."

As noted above, the governments of Towns County, Hiwassee and Young Harris worked in collaboration with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission.

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Florida transport driver killed in tragic forklift accident

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

A tragic accident involving a forklift claimed the life of a family man out of Fort Pierce, Florida, the evening of Thursday, Dec. 9, in Hiwassee.

Kejuan Ramale Nedd, 32, perished in the accident, according to the Towns County Coroner's Office.

Nedd, of Ruffin Truck-in transport company, was in town to deliver a forklift to the Holiday Inn Express & Suites on Big Sky Drive for upcoming renovations, said Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith.

Around 10 p.m. that Thursday, Nedd parked his Ford F-350 truck facing uphill on Big Sky Drive, just past the entrance to the Holiday Inn, Smith said. The truck was hauling a flatbed gooseneck trailer carrying a car and the forklift.

Due to the steep grade of the road, the hotel manager on duty asked Nedd to pull into the hotel to unload the forklift, which he declined, Smith said.

There were no direct wit-

nesses to the accident, but somehow, as Nedd was backing the forklift off the trailer, it slipped off the ramp, causing him to tumble out of the driver's seat of the industrial vehicle, which then fell on top of him in the road, Smith said.

Forklifts weigh about 9,000 pounds on average – more than twice the average weight of a car – and Smith said Nedd died instantly as a result of his injuries.

Several bystanders heard the accident and arrived quickly at the scene, and Nedd's fiancée, who had accompanied him on the delivery, called 911, Smith said.

"I wish we could have done something to help," Smith said. "But there was no suffering on his part as far as we could tell based on the various injuries there. The Hiwassee Police Department sends our deepest condolences to the family."

Afterward, the Holiday Inn offered complimentary stays for the fiancée and any arriving family members as they worked on making arrangements for



Kejuan Nedd

Nedd and his truck, Smith said.

Responding that evening were the Hiwassee Police Department, Towns County EMS, the Fire Department, the Coroner's Office and Turpin's Wrecker Service.

"This was an unfortunate accident by a young man trying to make a living, and we are keeping his family in our thoughts and prayers," Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper said.

See Forklift Accident, Page 6A

Fentanyl, cocaine and heroin mailed to Young Harris home

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office has received information through various sources that drugs are being delivered through the U.S. Postal Service to Towns County.

On Dec. 6, the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office received a call to report that a North Carolina State Trooper had turned in drugs that had been mailed to a residence in Young Harris.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation and U.S. Postal Inspectors were called to assist with the investigation, which revealed that, on Nov. 6, an envelope containing drugs was delivered to a Young Harris home.

A female living in the residence was the intended recipient, though she was in drug rehabilitation. The mother of the female opened the envelope and discovered it contained drugs. She contacted and delivered the drugs to a



Sheriff Ken Henderson's office is actively investigating the mailing of drugs via the U.S. Postal Service in Towns County

Photo/Facebook

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Markham...from Page 1A



Towns County Cross Country Coach Tim Rosser and Lady Indian runners joined Alison Markham for her signing ceremony in the Media Center last week. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

“We love it that she is close to home, and Young Harris is a great college,” he said. “I am familiar with the school and coaches, so we can go watch stuff as well, and we are just so proud of her for doing so well all on her own without really having to be pushed. “She received money not only through athletics, but for her academics as well, and we know she will go and do amazing things in any category of her life.”

Forklift Accident...from Page 1A



Kejuan Nedd of Florida drove this F-350/gooseneck trailer combo to Hiawassee last week before suffering from a fatal forklift accident.

USPS Drugs...from Page 1A

North Carolina State Trooper. That trooper took the drugs to the Cherokee County, North Carolina, Sheriff’s Office, which then contacted Towns County and turned the drugs over to Towns County Sheriff’s Office.

The drugs were field-tested and discovered to be vials and needles loaded with fentanyl, cocaine and heroin, and the postal mangers in Hiawassee and Young Har-

ris were notified regarding the issue of dangerous drugs passing through their facilities.

Fentanyl is a dangerous drug that is 50 to 100 times stronger than morphine. The drug can be absorbed through the skin and hands, therefore, simply handling fentanyl can cause an adverse medical effect.

This case is the first confirmation of previously devel-

oped information pertaining to the mailing of dangerous drugs to addresses in Towns County. There is currently an active investigation into the origins of the package.

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that the Sheriff’s Office is taking this case very seriously, as he is deeply concerned about fentanyl and heroin being in the area and wants to make the community aware.

Literacy Grant...from Page 1A

year 2000, this will be the first time the schools have received more than \$1 million in property taxes in any December.

“In the past, the most that we have received in the month of December was \$945,000,” she said, surmising that it could be that the online system of electronic payments is making the process easier, as opposed to physically going to a payment center or mailing in a check.

Still, she said, it was a surprise to receive that much property tax money in December, and it’s likely that property tax collections will begin to level off in the next couple of months as people get their bills paid.

“And it’s amazing that people are still buying vehicles,” Underwood said. The budget allowed for \$25,000 per month income from title ad valorem taxes, or \$300,000 for the year, she said, which is at \$307,000 already for the fiscal year ending in June.

“At some point it’s going to start decreasing, though, so it would be a mistake to assume it will continue at this pace,” she said.

Underwood said sales tax income for the months of September, October and November were well over \$200,000 per month, more than budgeted for, but, there again, she said it would be a mistake to assume collections would continue to be that high.

The October financial

statements for all funds were approved, and so far, “we’re doing well,” Underwood said.

Moving along, the board approved the sale of a 16-acre tract of land on Plottown Road in Young Harris for \$168,000. The system acquired the land 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.

The tract was approved to be put on the market at the monthly meeting in November because Towns County Schools had no foreseeable use for the Young Harris property.

However, a property bordering the existing school grounds in Hiawassee, an approximately 10-acre tract on Bugscuffle Road, was much more attractive for future use, so the board approved its purchase in the amount of \$195,000. Closings on both properties are anticipated in January.

The board approved administering a Georgia State-wide Youth Survey, which was presented at the November meeting by Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, to be administered at the same time as the Georgia State Health Climate Survey.

Board members approved the retirement of Dr. Daren King, a 28-year veteran teacher at Towns County Schools. King teaches robotics and Spanish at the Middle

School and will retire at the end of the 2021-22 school year.

Madison Landress-Denton, Caryn Diebolt and Kimberly Petty were all approved to join Towns County Schools as substitute teachers.

In his Superintendent’s Report, Dr. Darren Berrong said the schools would be getting some new signage.

“When you come in, the old white signs that have the arrows that say where to go, they’re getting very old, so we’re replacing all of those all throughout the campus,” he said. “We’re also getting banners that will go on all the strategic light poles.”

These banners will read “TC” and “Go Indians,” and will “up the school spirit around campus,” Berrong said, adding that the inside of the Bill P. Kendall Gymnasium will have a new look as well.

Consideration of a new maintenance facility next summer behind the first set of tennis courts is underway, Berrong said, as well as updating classroom equipment that teachers need to stay abreast of modern academia, such as in the sciences, for example.

“If we’re going to buy something, now’s really the time,” he said. “We’re getting all this influx of money, so we need to do something with it to make it beneficial for our kids.”

Finally, other than a few primary school students quarantined due to family exposures, there were no current cases of COVID reported by any of the school principals within their staffs or student bodies.

The Towns County Board of Education meets the first Monday of each month inside the Middle/High School Media Center, beginning at 6 p.m.

VFW Christmas...from Page 1A



Members of VFW Auxiliary 7807 posing with Santa and Mrs. Claus Saturday for the inaugural VFW Christmas Party for local children. Photo by Jeremy Foster

and crafts area in which children designed goodie bags that looked like reindeer, as well as a ring toss game where the object was to land the rings on “reindeer” antlers.

The VFW Auxiliary also held a fun raffle wherein people could pay \$5 to enter for a chance to win a new 58” 4K ultra-HD Roku Smart TV.

Local VFW Auxiliary President John J. Whalen had much praise and joy for the event that featured thousands of dollars’ worth of generously donated toys.

“The age groups represented are from infant until age 12, and we put a ton of effort into this,” he said. “This took many months in the making to make this project possible.

“We had about six people here in the previous night from about 9 in the morning until 6 in the evening setting up, and besides our tables here full of toys, we still have a full trailer of bicycles as well.

“We went on Lake 97 radio to help put the word out for this event, as well as putting out fliers over the town in businesses and schools and newspaper ads.

“It is truly a great joy to be able to do this with a group of people with so much cohesiveness (while leaving) the kids with smiles on their faces for the day.”

Despite heavy rain and harsh weather putting a damper on people wanting to leave their

homes to drive in the messy conditions, the Christmas party was a tremendous success, with a steady stream of folks coming in and out of the post building on Saturday.

District Auxiliary President Mel White and wife Susanna took the reins in making several trips back and forth to Florida to pick up and transport the donated toys to town, and the local auxiliary has plans to make the event an annual tradition.

“We were fortunate to be able to accumulate between 2,200 and 2,300 toys for the children, and the value for all of them is around \$35,000,” White said. “There is a chance next year that we may have this at Foster Park to provide more space for our community.”

10-Year Plan...from Page 1A

al Commission in updating the 10-Year Comprehensive Plan, keeping that “small-town” ideal foremost in mind.

“The county is going to grow,” Bradshaw said. “You can’t stop it. So, our plan is to control the growth so that we don’t lose that small-town, down-home feeling. The Com-

prehensive Plan is just to help counties make sure that they know the path that they’re on going forward.

“Some people may not want industry. Some people may not want economic growth. Some people may not want more traffic. Some people may say, ‘We’ve had enough.

We want to keep it like it is.’

“So, it’s just to create a path for our county so that the people will know what direction the county is headed in.”

The stated purpose of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission is “to locally promote and guide development of human, natural, physical, social, and economic resources in the Georgia Mountains Region,” according to gmrc.ga.gov.