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School board bids farewell to Dr. Kilee Smith in meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Dec. 7 meeting of the Towns County Board of Education was a bittersweet occasion, as board members, board official staff and school principals said goodbye to one of their own, Board Member Dr. Kilee Smith.

Smith ran for school board in 2016, defeating two opponents to win a four-year term from the end of 2017 through the end of this month, as she decided not to run for re-election.

For the past year, she has served as board chair, leading meetings and maintaining order during official proceedings, and the Dec. 7 regular meeting was her last as a member of the board.

In an emotional farewell meeting on the Monday meeting,

Smith said all her experiences over the last four years had changed her life for the better, transforming her into a more understanding and trusting person.

A parent to school-aged children herself, Smith told those gathered that she was "grateful," "wise-ful" and "hopeful" after serving her term, noting how much she had learned about the various dynamics at play between families, educators, and the school board, community and others.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve and the voters that trusted me, and the encouragers asking how (things were going)," Smith said. "And those that sincerely did not want me on the board motivated me to be more courageous and thick-skinned."

Continuing, she said her time as an elected official had

expanded her "Johari Window," referencing a technique that allows people to better understand themselves and their relationships with others, particularly in a group setting.

"I really do appreciate you guys all being part of my experience on the board and allowing me to make mistakes, not be perfect, and still be loved," Smith said through tears of gratitude.

Smith has participated in many important endeavors over her term, including a two-phase multimillion dollar school renovation project, major football/soccer field upgrade, and a measured COVID-19 response enabling families to choose between in-person and online-only classes.

All in all, Smith said she feels the schools, board office and school board have worked



School Board Chair Dr. Kilee Smith accepting an appreciation plaque from High School Principal Roy Perren for her "service to the children of Towns County" in her last meeting as an elected school official Dec. 7. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Lions Club welcomes children for annual Give-A-Christmas



The Towns County Lions helped 100 kids have an extra special Christmas in 2020 thanks to museum support from people like Jerry and June Smith of Memory Lane Classic Car Museum. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Towns County Lions Club volunteers hosted their annual Give-A-Christmas for local children at Memory Lane Classic Car Museum on Thursday, Dec. 10, and Friday, Dec. 11.

On top of hosting the event, Memory Lane Owners Jerry and June Smith donated

\$5,000 to the Lions Club, to go with other donations collected by the club throughout the year to provide less fortunate families with special Christmas experiences and a chance to visit Santa.

Lions Club Service Coordinator Dianne Williams said Give-A-Christmas has been ongoing for at least the last 40 years.

"We try to change it up a little bit each year," Williams

said. "Sometimes the Basketball Team from Young Harris comes and helps us, and sometimes we have more Leos that come and help. This year, the Smiths have really helped. We just want kids to keep coming back."

"We serve 100 kids. Each present and bag has some outfits, toys and whatever else we think they might need. We absolutely love to see these kids come in and do this."

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Gingerbread men hiding in local business windows

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

With Christmas fast approaching, many families are in search of activities to take part in while staying safe amid COVID-19.

Fortunately, Chelsea Berrong – aka The Paint Party Mommy – and the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce have partnered with local business to create a family-friendly Gingerbread Man Scavenger Hunt using festively painted windows around town.

The rules are simple: find all 10 gingerbread men located in painted storefronts in Downtown Hiwasees, then take selfies with the gingerbread men and post the photos to Facebook using the tag #ChatugeGingerbread-ManHunt. The winner will be announced Dec. 21 and awarded \$50.

Clues to the hunt can be found on the "Gingerbread Man Scavenger Hunt" Facebook



The Paint Party Mommy Chelsea Berrong and her Paint Party Daughter Clover at a Dec. 10 ribbon cutting, pictured here with their daughter's hay bale camper outside Berrong's Barbershop. Photo/Facebook

event page, where folks are instructed to "run, run as fast as you can" to find the Christmas-themed gingerbread men.

As to how the idea came about, Berrong is used to hosting paint parties, which are fun gatherings where attendees

get the opportunity to be social and complete a painting.

"I'm normally a paint party mom," Berrong said.

"But since all this stuff going on and not too many in-person parties, I got with the chamber, See Gingerbread Men, Page 6A

In-person early voting started Monday; runs through Dec. 31

GBI assisting Secretary of State with 'allegations of fraud'

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Early in-person voting for the General and Special Election Runoffs began Monday, Dec. 14, and will run weekdays through Thursday, Dec. 31.

Voters are going who will win Georgia's two U.S. Senate seats and, at the state level, who will serve as the next District 4 Public Service Commissioner.

The three weeks of early in-person voting will occur at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office, located inside Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in



Residents lined up to cast their ballots at the start of early in-person voting on Monday, Dec. 14. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

There will be no in-

person voting Christmas Eve, Christmas Day or New Year's Day, as county facilities will

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Area veterans reflect on timeless lessons of WWII

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

December 2020 marks the 79th anniversary of that fateful day in U.S. history – the surprise bombing of the United States Naval Base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

On Dec. 7, 1941, shortly before 8 a.m., Japanese airplanes screamed through the sky, engaging in a one hour and 15-minute attack that led to the deaths of more than 2,400 U.S. personnel.

It was what brought the U.S. directly into the fray of World War II, resulting in a declaration of war against Japan the very next day.

America had been involved in the war only indirectly up to that point, supplying Great Britain food and other supplies to aid in the fight against the Nazis.

Retired U.S. Navy Chief Quartermaster Clarence E. "Bud" Johnson of Hiwassee enlisted as an apprentice



A fireboat pours water onto the burning battleship USS Forrestal BB-48 following the attack by Japanese naval aircraft Dec. 7, 1941. The USS Tennessee is in the background. Photo/National Park Service

seaman in 1939, when he was just 17 years old. At the time of the Pearl Harbor bombing, he was serving in the Atlantic Ocean aiding in the pre-war effort.

The World War II Veteran, now 98, would go

on to take part in the Battle of Iwo Jima in the last year of the war, but on Dec. 7, 1941, Johnson was an up-and-coming seaman on watch aboard the USS Rhind.

"Even though I was not See WWII Lessons, Page 6A

Federal judge grants Heaton time to report due to COVID

By Linda Erbele
Towns County Herald

A federal judge has granted former Blairsville-based physician James Heaton's request for more time to report to prison, mere weeks before the Jan. 2 start date of his five-year stint in the medium-security U.S. penitentiary in Atlanta, court records show.

U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story issued the order Thursday in response to a request Heaton's attorneys filed Dec. 9, two days after Story postponed co-defendant Mike

Gowder's court reporting date by four months.

Both men are to report to prison no earlier than May 1, 2021, to give them a chance to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

In granting his request, Judge Story noted Heaton's age, 64, as positioning him on the "cusp of the 'older adult' age range," which puts people "at a significantly greater risk for hospitalization and death if COVID-19 is contracted," per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The CDC document referenced in the order states that adults aged 65-74 are five times more likely to require hospitalization for COVID-19 and 90 times more likely to die as a result of it.

In addition to asking for the delay in his prison reporting date, Heaton's attorneys requested that Heaton be allowed to "begin serving his sentence now on home confinement and remain on home confinement until he can be vaccinated," but Story did not address this issue.

Gowder, too, had been seeking re-sentencing to home confinement to avoid the "death trap" of prison due to COVID-19, which is known to spread in congregate settings like prisons and greatly impact people with underlying health conditions, of which Gowder reported several.

However, Judge Story denied his re-sentencing request, writing Dec. 7 that his medical conditions did not "rise to the level of extraordinary circumstances that justify compassionate

release."

Apparently, Gowder had lodged a similar request with the Bureau of Prisons, as Story said he could not override the bureau's "denial of home confinement," citing case law that "the Attorney General has exclusive jurisdiction to decide which prisoners to place in the home confinement program."

The judge went on to say that he could only grant home confinement in instances where a "compassionate release" was warranted, which he had

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James Heaton

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