

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

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50 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 90 Number 07

Wednesday, December 19, 2018

BOE bids farewell to outgoing Board Member Jerry Taylor

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The members of the Towns County Board of Education met for their final regular meeting of 2018 on Monday, Dec. 10, and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong started things off with a tribute to outgoing Board Member Jerry Taylor.

“Mr. Jerry Taylor – it’s his last board meeting on the Towns County Board of Education,” said Berrong. “This is his eighth year serving on the school board, and before being a board member, was a teacher in our school system for 33 years and 7 months. But he said, ‘Who’s counting?’

“So, we have a few things to give him in appreciation of the service he has given for us.” Berrong presented Taylor with a plaque bearing the following inscription:

“To honor our service to the children of our school. The school and the children have truly been enriched by

your dedication to serve. With sincere appreciation to Jerry Taylor for eight years of service to the Towns County Board of Education.”

A round of applause from Berrong and the other board members followed the presentation, and fellow Board Member Dr. Kilee Smith presented Taylor with a daily history calendar as well.

“Jerry was my ninth-grade Georgia history teacher,” said Berrong. “Then, I went to (college) and came back and actually got to teach alongside Jerry. And now, to have been able to work with you as a board member, it’s been a pleasure. We really appreciate everything you’ve done for our school.”

Also in the meeting, all lead school administrators delivered their last Principals’ Reports to the board leading up to the 2018 Winter Break.

Elementary School Principal Dr. Sandy Page thanked Taylor for his service

to Towns County Schools and encouraged him to continue using all of his talents, before moving on to give a shout-out to the Parent Teacher Student Organization for its Secret Santa program.

She reported that Crissy Figg, formerly a paraprofessional at the Elementary School, had taken over leadership of the 4-H Program.

Page reported that there are 416 students currently enrolled in the Elementary School.

Middle School Principal Erica Chastain, another of Taylor’s former students, thanked Taylor for his service to Towns County Schools and presented him with a gift.

She also reported that the online learning system through Google Classroom is up and running, which will mitigate student downtime associated with weather.

Chastain reported that there are 231 students currently

enrolled at the Middle School.

High School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs also thanked Taylor for his service to Towns County Schools and said that, though she had not been a former student of his, she’d heard many great stories of him in the classroom.

She then reported that nearly 50 students had passed their Career Technical and Agricultural Education End-of-Pathway Assessments to complete their CTAE Pathways. A pathway in high school is much like a major in college.

Hobbs also said that the seniors were already preparing for graduation, and that all seniors had had the opportunity to apply to the college of their choice on “Apply to College Day.”

Board Members Laura Banister and Dr. Smith were approved to assume the Chair and Vice Chair positions respectively on the Towns County Board of Education for 2019.



Jerry Taylor in his last regular meeting as a member of the Towns County Board of Education on Dec. 10. Tamie Bradley will be sworn in to fill the seat in January. Photo by Mark Smith

Tennessean earthquake felt throughout North Georgia

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Many residents of the North Georgia Mountains experienced the rumbling of an earthquake in the early morning hours of Wednesday, Dec. 12.

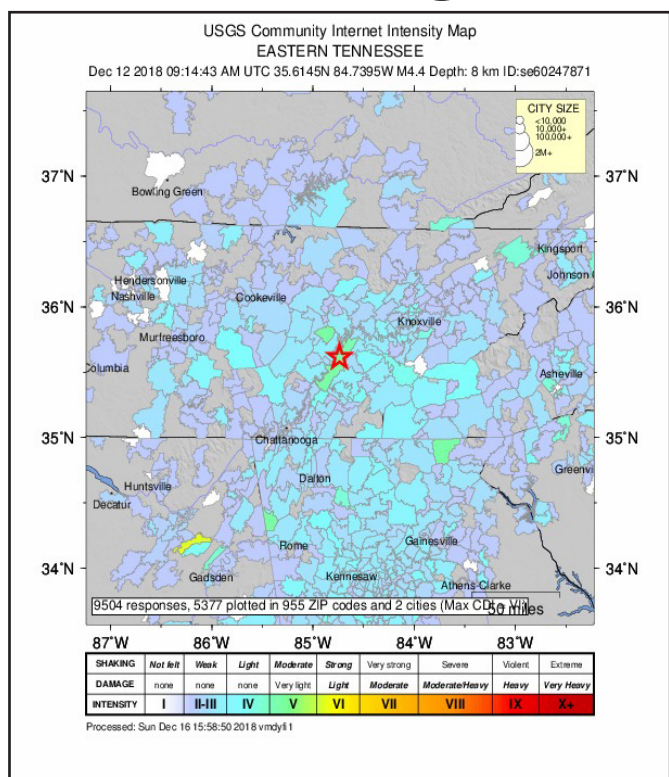
The National Earthquake Information Center of the U.S. Geological Survey recorded the 4.4 magnitude quake at 4:14 a.m. some 100 miles away in Decatur, Tennessee, and its effects were felt by folks even in the Atlanta area.

Fortunately, the quake was short-lived and resulted in no injuries or significant property damage.

Those who experienced the quake locally said it was about 10 to 15 seconds of minor shaking that briefly disturbed wall hangings, coupled with a low rumbling sound.

One person called the Towns County 911 Dispatch Center after the earthquake moved through the area, and the dispatchers themselves felt the quake as it occurred.

Others in Towns County and the surrounding area also felt the earthquake, with reports coming in from all over the



A map produced by the U.S. Geological Survey showing the varying levels of intensity and reach of the Dec. 12 earthquake in Eastern Tennessee.

county via social media later that day.

And the same general area in Eastern Tennessee experienced at least three

more earthquakes in the days following the Dec. 12 incident, though none of those – two 3.0s and a 2.7 magnitude

See *Earthquake*, Page 6A

Rec Center evacuated, searched following ‘hoax’ bomb threat

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – The Towns County Recreation and Conference Center had to be evacuated and searched after an employee at the facility received an emailed bomb threat around 3 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 13.

Ultimately, the threat was determined not to be credible, though local authorities handled the situation as if it were the real deal.

“While we take all threats seriously, there is no risk to Towns County citizens,” said Sheriff Chris Clinton in a written statement. “This is part of a nationwide hoax.

“We have informed and are working closely with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigation.”

Tyler Garrett, assistant director of the Towns County Recreation Department, was the one who received the email, and he described it as seeming “like it was a scam,” revealing that the sender had demanded money in exchange for people’s lives.

After receiving the email,



he called the Towns County Commissioner’s Office, which immediately shut down the Rec Center at Foster Park and alerted authorities to the threat.

Members of the Towns County Sheriff’s Office and the Fire & Rescue Department responded immediately to the scene, locking everything down and calling in a bomb-sniffing dog from the neighboring

Habersham County Sheriff’s

Office.

“Upon the completion of the search of the Towns County Recreation Center by Towns County Sheriff’s Office personnel, along with the bomb K-9, the building was cleared and turned back over to Towns County recreational personnel,” according to a TCSO statement.

The Sheriff’s Office remained in touch with

See *Bomb Threat*, Page 6A

Historical Society hosts Ralph Nichols and the Hiawassee Opry Band



Ralph Nichols, center, with his fellow musicians, the Hiawassee Opry Band, in the Dec. 10 meeting of the Towns County Historical Society. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Towns County Historical Society hosted local musicians Ralph Nichols and the Hiawassee Opry Band for some Christmas cheer at their last meeting of the year on Monday, Dec. 10.

Historical Society President Sandra Green brought the meeting to order with several announcements, not the least of which was that voting for new

officers for 2019 will take place at the next monthly meeting on Jan. 14, 2019.

Following business as usual, Ralph Nichols and bandmates picked up their instruments and began playing both Christmas songs and gospel music to a packed room of about 75 people.

The band members are not only musicians, but a voice quintet as well.

Alongside Nichols, the members of the Hiawassee Opry Band include Truett Spiva,

Mack Dendy, Wayne Satterfield and Ken Conner.

“The band, all but one of us, has been together for almost 20 years – more than 20, I guess,” said Nichols.

Nichols said he left Hiawassee when he was a young man and worked as far away as Maryland, as well as Kentucky, North Carolina, Florida and elsewhere in Georgia, before returning to Hiawassee in 1959.

In 1961, Nichols and his

See *Nichols*, Page 6A

Heaton expected to face new charges in prescription drug case

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor



Blairsville-based physician Dr. James Heaton could be facing additional charges in his federal prescription drug case following grand jury deliberations that are expected to occur sometime this month, according to court documents.

“The government has indicated that it will supersede the indictment against Dr. Heaton and will be adding substantive counts against which Dr. Heaton must defend,” said Donald F. Samuel, Heaton’s attorney, in a recent court filing.

A superseding indictment would replace Heaton’s original indictment and could include different and new charges. And according to Samuel, this process was “scheduled to be presented to the grand jury in early December.”

Samuel’s court filing – specifically, a “Consent Motion

to Continue Trial” – was likely a topic of conversation at a pretrial conference that occurred after press time on Dec. 19, featuring discussions between the judge and attorneys involved in the criminal case.

Set to join Heaton for the Dec. 19 pretrial conference at the U.S. Courthouse in Gainesville were Mike Gowder and Dr. David Gowder, with U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story presiding.

Heaton and the Gowder brothers are co-defendants in the federal prescription drug case, which stems from a multiagency investigation originating out of the Union County Sheriff’s Office in 2015.

Essentially, legal counsel for Heaton is using the consent motion to ask the court to postpone Heaton’s trial due to a number of conflicts that have arisen since the court, in October, scheduled a Feb. 11, 2019, jury trial for all three co-defendants.

In the consent motion, Samuel offers a glimpse into the nature of the new charges Heaton could be up against.

“Because there will be no charges involving the prescription of additional controlled substances to people not previously identified, as well as allegations of exchanging sex for drugs, Dr. Heaton will

not be prepared for trial in early February 2019,” writes Samuel.

Compounding the issue, Samuel says in the motion, is that he has two other trials that will “likely conflict” with the start and end of Heaton’s trial.

One of these conflicting trials is another federal case out of Kentucky that is expected to last longer than initially thought. The other is that of the State of Georgia v. Olsen involving “a police officer charged with murder” that “may be delayed due to Judge (J.P.) Boulee’s imminent appointment to the federal bench.”

“At the time that case was set,” continues Samuel, “this case (Heaton) was expected to last no more than two weeks.”

“Now, however, with the superseding indictment, the government anticipates that the trial will last longer than two weeks, thus extending into the first date of the Olsen specially set trial.”

Samuel concludes the motion by affirming that both the U.S. government and Heaton’s co-defendants consent to the motion to continue, or postpone, Heaton’s trial.

“Dr. Heaton requests that a later date in the interest of justice,” writes Samuel.

U.S. Magistrate Judge

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Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,669.80
Chatuge 1,918.43
Nottely 1,761.72



SPORTS

BASKETBALL
Dec. 20
@ Hiwassee Dam 7 PM

2018 Christmas Section Inside

Towns County EMA Blood Drive January 3rd

WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT
AN AMERICAN CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION
DECEMBER 20TH

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