

The staff of the Towns County Herald wishes you a very Merry Christmas!

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 92 Number 08

Wednesday, December 23, 2020

Shop with a Hero provides holiday cheer to 30 kids

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – The Hiawassee Police Department and other volunteers came together Friday, Dec. 18, to help underprivileged local schoolchildren have the best Christmas possible with the Shop with a Hero for Christmas Program.

This year, Shop with a Hero paired 30 kids with local “heroes,” or adult chaperones, to peruse Walmart in Blairsville for gifts for themselves and their families.

Individuals and organizations in the community donate to the program year-round, all with the goal of assisting the local heroes in providing the kids with experiences they’ll never forget.

Amy Rosser with Towns

County Family Connection said the event offered people a way to come together during the Christmas season to help the less fortunate.

“I have been involved since the beginning – it has been a long time,” Rosser said. “Chief (Paul) Smith and Family Connection have been partnering since he took leadership (from the late Chief Jimmy Wright of Hiawassee PD).”

“It is just wonderful. We love to do it, and we love the kids. They are just so happy to be here with us. It is so important for us that these kids get a good Christmas.”

“We’ve targeted that group of upper elementary to middle school kids and think it is important that they know they can have Christmas and be excited this time of year. A lot of times we see that they want

to shop for their siblings, and that really touches our heart.”

Before the shopping spree began, the kids enjoyed a pizza party on the last day of school before Christmas break, with the heroes in attendance so the students could get to know their chaperones a little better.

Building a connection with the kids is an important part of the program for Chief Smith, who has helped organize the shopping spree for the last 10 years.

“It has gone very smoothly,” Smith said. “We got a blue-light escort all the way over (to Walmart), so we didn’t have to stop one time, and we had people from Hiawassee Police, Dillard Police, Towns County Fire Department, the Department of Juvenile Justice, CASA and several other people from SERVPRO who were big

See Shop with a Hero, Page 6A



Towns County Schools Transportation Director Scott Hamilton and Family Connection Director Amy Rosser helped out big time during Shop with a Hero 2020. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

After three decades, Phillips will be missed at library



L-R: MRLS Director Heath Lee, Towns Library Branch Manager Debbie Phillips, and past MRLS Directors Donna Howell and Teresa Haymore gathered Dec. 18 to honor Phillips with a retirement reception. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Public Library Branch Manager Debbie Phillips is retiring after nearly 30 years of working to make the best library possible to serve the people of Hiawassee and Towns County.

Phillips has been with the Mountain Regional Library

System since 1992, where she has lovingly observed each progressive iteration of the libraries of Towns County that have grown so much over the years, including a \$1 million renovation at her Hiawassee location.

“I have seen a lot of change since I started,” Phillips said. “This building was 3,500

square feet, and we added 4,000, so we added more than we had.”

“When it started, the shelves had a little on them, and we only had around 20 patrons a day. Since then, collections have grown and attendance has grown. We can have upwards of 200 a day in the summer.

See Phillips, Page 6A

County budget to re-open library, add animal control

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Great news, Towns Countians – the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris will be opening back up once more for limited service in 2021.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw shared the news during a Dec. 16 meeting in his office to present the 2021 Tentative Budget, in which he included enough money to run the library three days a week.

Citing the financial burden of operating two libraries in the county, including the Towns County Public Library in Hiawassee, Mountain Regional Library Director Heath Lee announced last month that the Young Harris campus would temporarily close to the public Dec. 1.

Since then, Bradshaw has been meeting with library officials to figure out how to bring public library services back to the Enchanted Valley, and fortunately, he was able to allocate a sustainable \$49,700 to the library budget to bring things back online there.



Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw introduced some exciting additions in the 2021 Tentative Budget last week, reporting strong county financials despite COVID-19. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Library System Assistant Director/Business Manager Vicki Adkison attended the Dec. 16 budget presentation, in which she thanked Bradshaw for working so well with the system.

Adkison said the library would be opening as soon as they find someone for the job, as, incidentally, the Young Harris location lost its library

services staff to attrition in the leadup to the closure, so they need to hire a new employee.

“We’re taking applications now,” Adkison said. “We’ll be interviewing probably the first or second week of January. As soon as we can get them in place and trained – and that won’t take long – we’ll open up.”

See County Budget, Page 6A

Advanced in-person voting closed Christmas Eve & Day

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Early in-person voting for the General and Special Election Runoffs continues this week, though people should keep in mind that voting will not be available Christmas Eve and Day.

Voters are deciding 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 advanced in-person voting is taking place weekdays at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office, located inside Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., even during lunchtime.

Just as there will be no in-person voting Christmas Eve and Day, there will also be no voting on New Year’s Day, as county facilities will be closed for those weekday holidays. So, Thursday, Dec. 31, will be the last day of early in-person



Photo: georgia.gov/voting

voting, and there’s no Saturday voting this time.

Between the roughly 1,200 mail-in ballots received by Friday afternoon and the 2,000 people who showed up to vote at the Board Office last week, nearly a third of Towns County’s 10,400 active registered voters participated in the first week of runoff early voting.

Local elections officials

said everything ran smoothly last week, reporting no major problems and only about a 15-minute line wait time at most, with voting remaining steady throughout the week.

Early voting started Dec. 14, the same day the Electoral College met for state electors to cast their votes to determine the next president of the United States, formally selecting Joe

See Advanced Voting, Page 6A

Chamber, Hometown Pharmacy team up for Santa Claus visits

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In many places around the world, the need for social distancing for COVID-19 has shelved the tradition of children meeting Santa Claus to offer their Christmas wish lists.

But thanks to Hiawassee Hometown Pharmacy and the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, the pandemic would not deny local youngsters an opportunity to place a few last-minute gift ideas in the ear of old Saint Nick.

On the afternoon of Saturday, Dec. 12, the pharmacy opened its drive-thru for visits with Santa, who remained indoors behind a large window while using a microphone and outdoor speaker to converse with the children and their parents.

Meanwhile, the kids and parents were able to remain inside their vehicles, allowing for a safe, no-contact chat with



Santa Claus visited Hiawassee Hometown Pharmacy recently to take kids’ Christmas wishes while social distancing through the drive-thru window. Photo by Todd Forrest

the North Pole’s most famous resident.

“This event (has been in the works) for less than a

month,” Chamber President Candace Lee said. “We started putting it together after we

See Santa Visits, Page 6A

3 Sections 24 Pages
Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,670.39
Chatuge 1,917.73
Nottely 1,761.04

Inside
Arrests 2A
Church 2B
Classifieds 5B
Opinion 4A
Legals 5B
Obits 3B
Sports 4B

SPORTS BASKETBALL
12/28
@ Athens Academy
6 PM

2021 County Budget
See Page 3A

Mountain Country Christmas Lights
Dec. 26
See Page 6A

See Special Christmas Section
Inside this Paper