

Happy New Year 2021

Towns County Herald

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Local vaccinations against COVID-19 begin in earnest

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

It appeared to the North Georgia medical community last week that Santa had come early, as hundreds of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine doses began arriving just days before Christmas.

And with more than 300,000 Americans already having died with the disease in 2020, hopefully, the vaccine will start to have a protective effect against COVID-19 in these and other communities as soon as possible.

The first vaccines were administered Wednesday, Dec. 23, at the Union County Health Department, Synergy Health in Hiawassee, and at

Union General Health System, including its two hospitals in Union and Towns counties.

Chatuge Regional Nursing Home staff and residents also began vaccinations that Wednesday, with shots being administered to Union County Nursing Home staff and residents on Christmas Eve.

Additionally, the Towns County Health Department received doses last week, and moving forward, the vaccine will be given in phases, starting with health care workers and long-term care residents before expanding to others and the general public as vaccine supplies increase.

After demonstrating 95% effectiveness, the Moderna

vaccine received emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration on Dec. 18, becoming only the second EUA-approved COVID-19 vaccine behind Pfizer-BioNTech's offering.

Over at the Union County Health Department, to celebrate having received their doses the day before, Office Manager Glenda McGill and Nurse Tiffany Zimmerman organized a last-minute drive-thru vaccination for Wednesday morning, inoculating 20 area health care providers.

McGill, who got her shot Wednesday, and Zimmerman are relieved to be able to offer the vaccine as peace of mind for frontline medical workers who are at greater risk both

of personal exposure and potentially passing the infection on to vulnerable people.

Certified Medical Assistant Lisa Loudermilk was vaccinated during the drive-thru clinic, and she said having access to the vaccine means the world to many health care workers who "see COVID coming in every day."

"And we want our patients to know that this vaccine is safe to take, so when they come and ask us, we can say, yes, we've had it, so it's safe to take," Loudermilk said.

The Health Department will continue this week giving the Moderna vaccine, which is administered in two doses 28 days apart, so everyone who

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Dr. Samuel L. Church of Synergy Health got his vaccine Dec. 23, administered by Certified Medical Assistant Jessica Grooms. It was a celebratory environment in Dr. Church's office that day. Photo by Larson Church

Debbie Phillips honored for 30-year career in county meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In his December regular meeting at the Towns County Courthouse, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw bid a fond farewell to Debbie Phillips, who will officially retire Jan. 15 with 30 years as Branch Manager of Hiawassee's Towns County Public Library.

Family, friends and coworkers attended the special recognition in the Dec. 15 meeting, which was opened with an invocation by Phillip's son Eli, 14, whose twin sister Zoe would normally have led the Pledge of Allegiance, but she was away at a Fall Sports Banquet that evening.

"I know her personally, I know her professionally, and she has done a wonderful job. We are going to miss her, there is no doubt," Bradshaw said, before calling on Donna Howell to say a few words.

Howell is the former director of the Mountain Regional Library System. She retired in 2014, having served as director for 10 years and as assistant director for 15 years



Debbie Phillips received a plaque in Commissioner Bradshaw's December regular meeting in recognition for her years of service as the local Library Branch Manager – the same position she was hired to fill nearly three decades ago.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

prior to that, so she knew Phillips all throughout her career.

"I just want to congratulate Debbie, she's been an outstanding public servant," Howell said. "A lot of people just see her at the desk over here, but she's also done a lot of

other things. She served on the statewide (PINES Circulation Subcommittee) and was on my Advisory Council as a branch manager.

"She also served as the bookkeeper for the system for a time, and in fact, when

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North Georgia Mountains get snow for Christmas

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Being the evening of Christmas Eve, it was perhaps the best-case scenario for snow – fewer people out and about, kids home from school, and just in time to make a White Christmas.

Everywhere one looked in Towns County was a picturesque scene, with snow gently blanketing the area to provide pristine views in an already naturally pristine countryside.

Unfortunately, the roughly 3 inches of snow was preceded by nearly 2 inches of rain, so when temperatures dropped to 21 degrees overnight, the fluffy white stuff was thoroughly overlaid with a hard layer of ice.

This made for nearly undrivable road conditions Christmas Eve night and the early part of Christmas Day, which saw a bit more snowfall in the morning and four-wheel drive vehicles making their way around town Friday.

Blairsville resident Roger



Sisters Winter and Jasmine Rose couldn't resist playing in the remaining Hiawassee snow Saturday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Beal was on his way back from a Christmas Eve service in Hiawassee Thursday evening when he experienced trouble on Swanson Mountain.

"(It was) 50 degrees and raining when we entered the church, 31 degrees and

snowing hard an hour and a half later," Beal said. "We got about halfway up the mountain between Hiawassee and Young Harris valley and encountered nearly impassable black ice conditions."

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Early in-person voting ends Thursday, Dec. 31

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Early in-person voting for the General and Special Election Runoffs ends Thursday, Dec. 31, with Election Day set for next Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021.

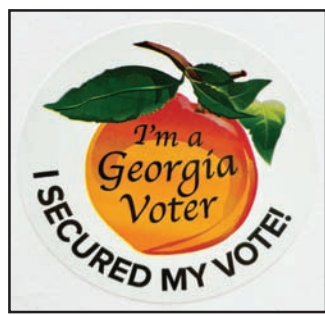
Voters are deciding who will win Georgia's two U.S. Senate seats and, at the state level, who will serve as the next District 4 Public Service Commissioner.

In-person early voting occurs 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 was no in-person voting Christmas Eve and Day, there will also be no voting on New Year's Day, as county facilities are closed for these weekday holidays. So, Thursday, Dec. 31, will be the last day of early in-person voting.

For the runoffs, voters are encouraged to make every attempt to cast their ballots early, as the possibility of bad winter weather may impact the electorate's ability to make it to the polls on Jan. 5 Election Day.

Absentee ballots are being automatically mailed to voters



who informed the Board Office they were elderly or disabled on a previous application, though all others need to apply to get their mail-in absentee ballot for the runoffs.

People may request mail-in absentee ballots by visiting <https://ballotrequest.sos.ga.gov>, calling the local Board Office at 706-896-4353 or swinging by the office at Lakeview Circle.

After requesting a mailed ballot, voters can track the progress of their ballot – before and after voting – by signing up at <https://georgia.ballottrax.net/voter/>. Those who receive an absentee ballot but decide to vote in person should bring their mailed ballot to the polls for canceling.

Completed absentee ballots/applications may be mailed or dropped off in person either with Board Office personnel or using the security-

monitored drop box located against the building outside the left main entrance.

Voters can also access the My Voter Page at mvp.sos.ga.gov ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though Dec. 7 was the registration deadline for residents looking to participate in the runoff elections.

Election Day is Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. That day, voters should report to one of the pre-assigned Towns County voting precincts: Hiawassee at the Civic Center; Young Harris at the Lodge Hall Building, aka Stephens Lodge; and Macedonia at Macedonia Baptist Church.

People are not required to bring their mailed precinct cards, but they must show a valid photo ID to vote.

Voters will want to keep in mind that photography inside polling places is expressly prohibited, including at early voting locations and at precincts on Election Day.

Fairgrounds hosting inaugural New Year's Fireworks Show

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

New Year's Eve is rapidly approaching, so naturally, many people in the community will be looking for a way to ring in the new year with family and friends.

Fortunately, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is hosting a brand-new fireworks show in Hiawassee that will be free for the public to attend.

Guests will be able to buy hot chocolate, barbecue and hotdogs as they wait for the after-dark show to begin, and Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said she hopes people show up early to get a good spot.

Though the Fairgrounds is no stranger to fireworks, with its annual Fourth of July Extravaganza, "this is the first time we have had a fireworks show on New Year's Eve," Thomason said.

"The weather the way it is looking right now, we don't know what we will do, but we will have to get a rain date if we don't get to have (the show)," Thomason said, noting a chance of rain later in the week. "Since we can't have anything indoors right now, we are doing more outdoors."



"We will have a few vendors that will come and set up in front of the office, and we will have the Blairsville Cruisers that are going to come and do a cruise-in there in the (Pioneer Village) from 4-7 p.m."

Food vendors and other activities will be set up at 5:30 p.m., with the fireworks ready to go around 8:45 p.m.

"We will shoot the fireworks out of the ballfield so people can park in the parking lot and see them," Thomason said. "I want to give a big shoutout to all the sponsors we have gotten for the event. The event is free, and we want everyone to come out and have fun with their families."

"We have always talked about something going on for New Year's, and there needs to

be because there are so many people in the county during the holidays. We have 57 campsites that weekend and a lot of people in the area, and I think there needs to be something going on."

For more information and to check out other upcoming events, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.

People hoping for a late-night celebration should look no further than the Sand Bar & Grill in Hiawassee, which is hosting its annual New Year's Eve Party with live music and fun times for adults, according to owner Manny Carrion.

"We have got a DJ from 4-7 p.m., then we have the Southern Band from

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Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,670.38
Chatuge 1,917.64
Nottely 1,761.00

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SPORTS BASKETBALL
12/30
vs. Social Circle
2 PM (Girls Only)

Runoff Election Results will be available Jan. 6 at townscountyherald.net and on our Facebook Page

