

# Towns County Herald

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Publication Number 635540 Volume 96 Number 06

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

## School Board to give third annual tax break

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The Towns County Board of Education is expected to accept its 2024 property tax rate in a called meeting on Thursday, Dec. 5, and discussions leading up to the setting have centered not on whether to give a tax break but how much of a tax break to give.

Millage rate discussions took place during a called meeting on Monday, Nov. 18, inside the Board Office.

Nearly all board members were clearly on board with going below the rollback millage – the revenue-neutral, inflation-adjusting rate that must be calculated each year – and the board ultimately land-

ed on a millage rate of 5.380, which translates to a 0.79% cut in property taxes.

This will be the third year in a row the School Board has given a tax break, with the rationale being that while cuts do decrease the money used to run the schools, the board feels confident it can continue offering quality education for students and also save taxpayers some money.

Due to growth in the county, the School System will still be collecting about \$100,000 in additional tax revenues for 2024, but accepting the below-the-rollback rate will result in roughly \$60,000 in fewer collections from the tax break.

Of course, cutting taxes

impacts future years of collections. For example, the last two years of tax cuts equates to a loss of more than \$400,000 in property tax collections for the current fiscal year, said Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, though he still recommended a tax cut this year.

In the Nov. 18 meeting, Superintendent Berrong described a particularly big funding challenge the schools have been facing in recent years, with inflated property values causing year-over-year increases in the “local fair share” the state requires individual school systems to pay.

That means considerably less money from the state each year, with growing

See Tax Break, Page 5



The School Board met recently to choose a millage rate to meet the system’s budgetary needs, which will enable another tax break. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

## Holiday events take center stage at Christmastime

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Christmas is coming up fast, and the mountains are getting ready. Towns County in particular offers a handful of events, all themed around holiday cheer and sure to fit a variety of interests and ages.

Two of the main events are the annual Towns County Sheriff’s Office Christmas Parade and Light Up Hiwassee. Both fell on Nov. 30 this year, and though the chilly temperatures might have influenced the turnout, those who did show up enjoyed themselves.

Light Up Hiwassee occurs on the Town Square right outside City Hall. Local churches and other organizations set up booths for kids to come celebrate Christmas with activities like cookie decorating and of course visits with Santa.

Particularly popular this year was the bonfire on the square, which provided some warmth to stave off the biting wind. Families of all ages, including sightseeing young couples and even friendly pet parents, strolled around the ga-



Santa Claus made an appearance at Light Up Hiwassee, to the delight of children in attendance. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

zebo before wrapping up their stay by taking photos with Santa himself.

Around 5:30 p.m., right at sunset, the Christmas Parade pulled out of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and began to make its way through Hiwassee. Folks lined Main Street to watch the spectacle, though many stayed in the

comfort of their climate-controlled vehicles.

Excited kiddos braved the cold for handfuls of candy thrown generously from floats and vehicles decorated with a multitude of glittering lights. Like Light Up Hiwassee, notable local organizations and figures took part in the parade; See Christmastime, Page 6

## Building & Planning considers new development

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Building and Planning Committee of the City of Hiwassee met on Tuesday, Nov. 19, to discuss an early-stage housing development being considered for Whiskey Mountain on a 14.42-acre piece of land off Bel Aire Drive behind Chatuge Regional Hospital.

Committee members

are appointees designated by resolution of the City Council. The committee is composed of Council Members Nancy Noblet and Jonathan Wilson, as well as residents Ken Pollard, Paul Scherer and Matt Espalin.

“This is not a voting meeting tonight,” Noblet said. “(Developer Scott Denton) is going to be presenting us with his plans for Phase One so that we can all understand it. This is the only way we can all get

together, five of us or three of us, without quorum.

“This is one the of the biggest developments that we have had, except for glamping, but that did not go through the right process. So, we appreciate you coming tonight so that we can go through the right process.”

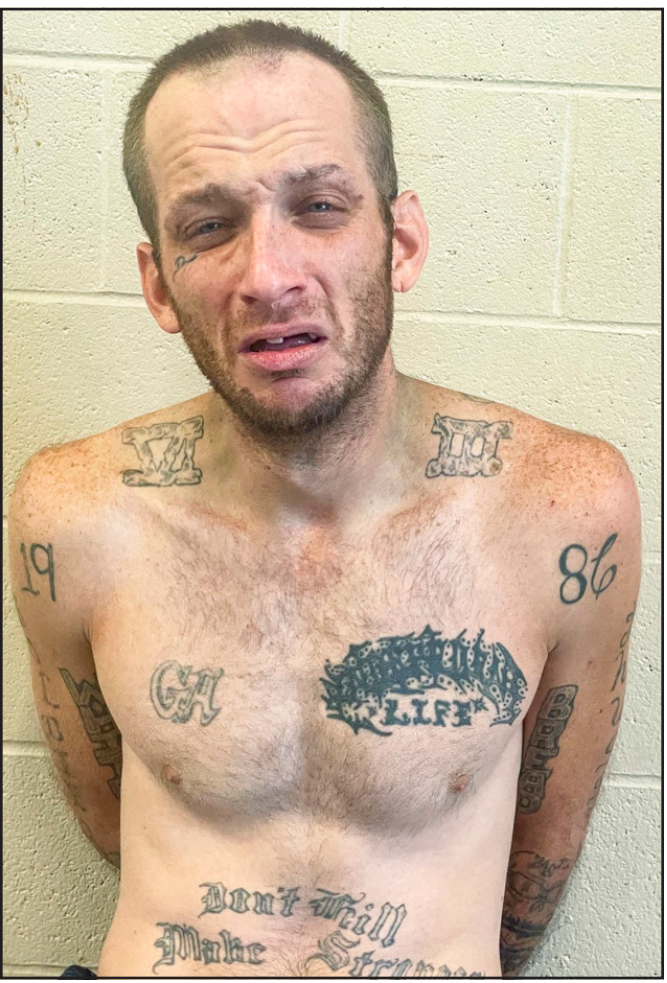
Denton opened by saying he had submitted four sets of plans to the city, noting

See Whiskey Mountain, Page 3



The man responsible for an upcoming housing development on Whiskey Mountain met with the Hiwassee Building and Planning Committee last month. Photo by Shelly Knight

## Man arrested for drugs member of notorious gang



Ronald Shane Lowary

### News Special

On Friday, Nov. 22, Towns County Sheriff’s Office Investigators received a call on Twin Mountain Road.

During the investigation, probable cause was developed and an amount of methamphetamine, which field-tested positive, was confiscated.

Ronald Shane Lowary, 38, and Christine Cardona, 49, both of Hiwassee, were arrested.

Lowary has been charged with felony possession of methamphetamine and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Cardona was charged with possession and use of drug-related objects.

It was also determined during the investigation that Lowary is a current member of the Ghost Face Gangsters, which is known to be a violent criminal gang, according to the Sheriff’s Office.

All individuals are innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

## Mtn. Country Christmas opens to record crowd

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds glistened and sparkled as the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights opened on Thanksgiving Night. Hundreds of visitors flocked to see the beautiful display, partake of the Christmas

goodies and visit the 60-plus vendors selling unique wares.

“It looks like a record crowd to me,” said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. “It’s a beautiful night – a little chilly, but it makes it feel like Christmas. We have 64 vendors, and all the booths are full. Scott’s Magical Illusion Show and the

train rides are new this year and are very popular.

“This is our 10th year to do this, and we add more lights every year. There must be 10 million lights. Last year we had over 30,000 people. We keep this event very reasonable for families.

“We’re very excited to

See Country Christmas, Page 6



Come on out to the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, which continues this weekend and throughout the month. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

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### Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,670.09
Chatuge	1,918.28
Nottely	1,762.63

Food Pantry Discussion Dec. 6

See Page 2

Gift the Gift of Food for Holidays

See Page 5

Santa Letters @ Presley Post Office

See Page 7



Arrests - 2 Opinion - 4  
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# Whiskey Mountain...from Page 1

that “these preliminary plans designate a Phase One and a Phase Two for the project.”

“What we are looking for now is a certificate of approval of the construction set,” Denton said. “That is issued by the land use officer, Jay Chastain. At that point, we can start doing some work on the property itself. It will either be pre-sales or spec houses, and we will go for permitting on those houses as we see lots become available.”

“The lower section marked as Phase One sits below 2,200 feet in elevation,

which is outside the Mountain Protection Act. The city would provide sewer and water. Above that, the city would provide water.

“We want to talk about a grant that’s available to do rural workforce housing. It could benefit the city, but that discussion probably needs to happen later with the City Council.”

Georgia rural workforce housing grants are awarded to small communities across the state where there is high demand for lower-cost housing.

“The grant awards \$2.5 million to the city to build all

of the infrastructure, the roads, sewer, all of that,” Denton said. “Plus, the city gets to make money. On every dollar spent, they get a 20% management fee.”

“The part of the grant that affects me is that I have to sell each tri-plex unit for less than \$290,000. They will be built below 2,200 feet in elevation. They will be two-story townhouses at about 1,400-square-feet that we will put on the market for \$289,999.”

“That makes it affordable for nurses and anybody

in the hospitality industry to not just work here but also to live here. The next set of lots, depending on the type and size of house built, will probably go for \$650,000 to \$700,000. I think for those at the top, \$1.5 million is possible.”

“On the Bel Aire side of the property there are no fire hydrants, and the city is pumping water from the bottom to the bladder at the top. I’ve offered to give an easement to the city so they can run a water line all the way down on the Bel Aire side so that fire hydrants can be installed.”

“I am trying to give back to the city. It also eliminates the need for the pump and bladder. It creates a loop for the city so that pump doesn’t have to operate.”

The Mountain Protection Act Denton referred to was passed by the state in 1991. The mountains of Georgia are characterized by steep slopes and thin soils. Due to the natural stresses placed on such environments, they require special protection.

Lawmakers determined that land-disturbing activity on the high-elevation, steep-slope mountains of Georgia could potentially threaten the public health, safety, welfare, and economic progress of the

state. Thus, they enacted the legislation.

“I’m not ready to build anything yet,” Denton said. “There are multiple steps to go through, but what I need is approval of the subdivision plans.”

“I need to have the construction plan approved so that if they decide to do it, the city can go in and run the water lines before I start cutting the roads, because I don’t want to put a road over the top of a water line.”

“I’m looking for approval for the overall conceptual layout. I have a preliminary plat approved where the lots break on the center line of the street. That was turned in when I received the land service permit that was approved back in May. We can approve the development off of that.”

City Attorney Thomas Mitchell had some questions and suggestions.

“When the committee actually votes on this,” Mitchell said, “I foresee there will be some sort of visual showing the preliminary plat based on contingent approval so that the roads are laid out and the property lines are established.”

“To make sure we’re all on the same page, at the minimum I’m going to need to

draft some language that outlines conditions indicating that the committee is approving off of the preliminary plat and is subject to slight modifications based on need.

“Because of the size and scope of this project, I don’t think it should be approved in a special meeting. It needs to be a regularly scheduled meeting of the Building Committee.”

While Denton wanted to know if there was a requirement for public approval, Mitchell assured him that there wasn’t any need for a hearing but there should not be a hint that anything was done outside of the scope of normal proceedings.

“The same intent that is on this preliminary drawing will be on the final plat,” Denton said. “Layout is basically the only thing that may be affected.”

“Prior to that meeting I can have a story board made up so people can visualize what it will look like. We want the input of the city. We want to enhance the town. We don’t want an eyesore or a nuisance or anything.”

The next Building and Planning Committee meeting is scheduled for Dec. 17 at 6 p.m. at City Hall. The public is encouraged to attend.

## Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) members receive National awards

The meeting of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), featured awards for chapter members’ outstanding work in making the chapter one of the most prominent chapters in the United States. Nationally, there are over 500 chapters, and the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter continues as one of the elites.

The National Society, SAR, recognized Jared Ogden of Blairsville for earning the 250th Anniversary Gold Medal from the National Society, SAR.

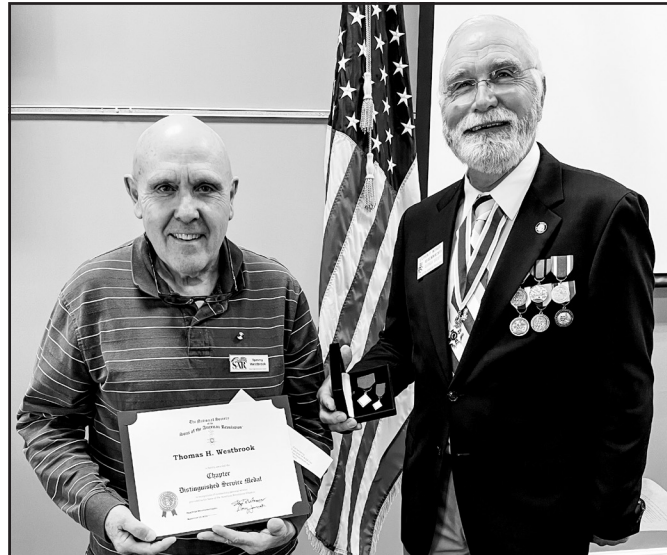
Members John Mays and Devon Turner were awarded the Henry Knox Achievement Medal. Revolutionary War General Henry Knox was George Washington’s Chief of Artillery. Before the Revolutionary War, Henry Knox was a bookseller. Early in the Revolutionary War, Knox volunteered to retrieve cannons the British abandoned at Fort Ticonderoga in upper New York. In a remarkable journey, he transported cannons with a total weight of 120,000 pounds over snow and ice over 300 miles, surprising the British in Boston and influencing their decision to abandon Boston in 1776.

Doug Jamison was recognized for serving as secretary for two years with the Roger Sherman Medal.

Jack Dugger received an Oak Leaf Cluster to the Liberty Medal for his work as Chapter Registrar. As chapter Registrar, Dugger assists and guides potential members in proving their Revolutionary ancestry.

Barbara Weaver, Regent of the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter National Society, Daughters of the American Revolution (NSDAR), was awarded the Martha Washington Medal for supporting SAR activities.

Tommy Westbrook was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his superior efforts as editor of The Mountaineer, the chapter newsletter. A chapter president can only award the prestigious Distinguished



Tommy Westbrook (L) was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal from Stephen Weaver, President (R)



Mark Medina receives Certificate Appreciation from Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter SAR (L-R): Sid Turner, VP, Mark Medina, Stephen Weaver, President

guished Service Medal once a year.

President of Texas Border Rescue, Mark Medina, spoke of his organization’s work rescuing human lives. The Mexican Border Cartels are ruthless. The news only reports a fraction of the deviant acts the cartels inflict. He explained that for the cartels, it is all about money. Human life and suffering are necessary incidentals.

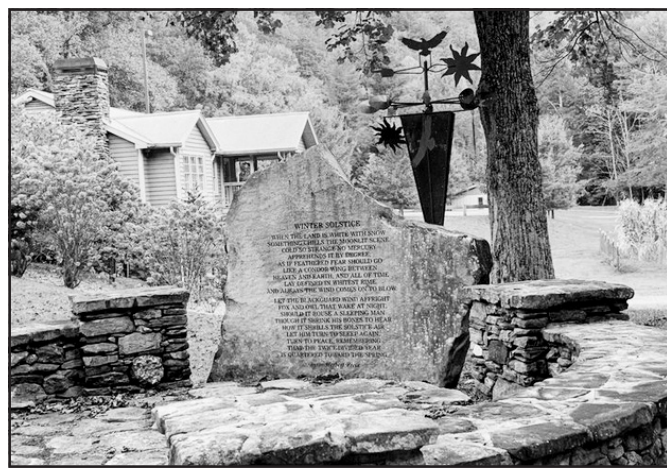
During illegal crossings, cartel guides (coyotes) abandon crossers who are unable to complete the harrowing journey. Those left behind are stripped of valuable provisions such as water, food, and clothing, which might increase their survival rate. The pur-

pose of the Texas Border Rescue is to search for and save those abandoned. He reported from personal observation or first-hand testimony it is not unusual for coyotes to steal the possessions of the healthy crossers and rape the women and girls. Children, both boys and girls, are frequently kidnapped from their parents and then sold to sex traffickers in the US. Sex trafficking is very profitable, and it is very probable with the sealing of the border, sex traffickers will abduct American youth from their neighborhoods to fulfill their evil demands. These hardened cartel criminals are increasingly entering the United States and continuing their depraved activities.

## Remembering Reece: Perceptions of Reality

Poets like Byron Herbert Reece see things the rest of us do not see. With their lines of words, they enable us to see and know what has been invisible to our eyes until we read their words. We all see the trees; but, the poet sees the veins in the leaves. We all see the stream like Wolf Creek; the poet sees the sound of moving water. We all see the mountains and the valleys; poets like Reece see home. What they see is what they bring forth for the rest of us to see. The invisible becomes visible, the mysterious unfolds, and the glory not seen by the rest of us is revealed to us in glimpses as pen touches white paper.

Byron Herbert Reece was such a man – ordinary like all of us; yet, unlike us, extraordinary in perception of reality. The world seen through the eyes of Reece is no different than the world we see, but then, he surprises us by the way he shows us the world seen through his heart. We see winter coming, but not as the poet sees it in his poem, “Wintery Shadow.” Looking again through the eyes and heart of Reece, we hear words pouring forth in the first stanza that open our spirits to feel more than just the changing temperature: “Hardly six months away from June, The bright and temperate afternoon was



Reece’s poem “Winter Solstice” (Seasons Garden, Historical Reece Farm and Heritage Center). Photo by Jerri Duncan Strickland

mild as spring’s or summer’s, still The air contained a certain chill.”

In another of his poem’s, “We Could Wish Them a Longer Stay,” Reece wrote of the taste and smell of plum, peach, and pear and the scented air only to conclude with a truth about life often missed, “Their tenure is bright and brief.”

Byron Herbert Reece, north Georgia’s Appalachian poet, enables us with his words to see beyond what is visible to the eye toward that which can only be seen by the heart within each one of us. It is a gift he gives to us even now after the passing of all these years since his brief walk among us.

Reece’s gift may seem hidden within the sometimes

perplexing words of poetry, but for all who sit a moment and take a look, there is always nourishment for the soul.

Article by Bill Strickland, Board Member, Byron Herbert Reece Society. The purpose of the Byron Herbert Reece Society is to preserve, perpetuate, and promote the literary and cultural legacy of the Georgia mountain poet/novelist, Byron Herbert Reece. In addition to enhancing both knowledge of and appreciation for his writings, efforts will be made to honor his way of life, with particular emphasis on his love of nature and his attachment to farming.

Jerri D. Gill Strickland, Chairman

## AARP Smart Driver Class Dec. 9th



A refresher driver course from AARP Driver Safety will be offered at the North Georgia Technical College in Blairsville. NGTC is located at 121 Meeks Ave. (off Highway 515). The class will be from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM on Monday, December 9, 2024.

The course explains how to navigate changes in physical and emotional health; how our vehicles, roads, and road markings have changed; how to handle difficult situations that challenge drivers (distractions, aggressive drivers, breakdowns, etc.); and how to decide when it is time to limit or stop driving and use alternative transportation. Participants are encour-

aged to check with their auto insurance agent and find out if they are eligible for a premium discount. Your Certificate of Completion is valid for 3 years. Note: There are no tests required to pass the course.

The course costs \$20 for AARP members and \$25 for non-members. Note: Bring your own lunch. Participants can pre-register for the class by calling Kelly Cherry @ 423-243-8146.



# American Legion Post 121 of Blairsville to host Wreaths Across America Ceremony Dec. 14

AMERICAN LEGION POST 121 PRESENTS  
**WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA**  
 AT 1000  
**14 DECEMBER 2024**  
 UNION COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL  
 FINE ARTS CENTER  
 ALL ARE WELCOME

The capstone event for American Legion Post 121 is the Wreaths Across America activities and you, our community, are invited. This year's event is December 14, 2024, at 10 AM in the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center. We will have participation from the Cub and Boy Scouts, Civil Air Patrol, FFA and the High School band. "There is nothing better than pairing our kids with our Veterans; it's good for both," stated Mike Merritt Post Commander. The past 2 year's ceremonies were phenomenal, and this year's will be even better. We'd like to see the whole community come out and join us for this event. After the ceremony or the following day depending on wreath delivery, we will fan out and lay the wreaths. Everyone is encouraged to participate in this part of the activity as well. It may be cold out there, but it warms the heart watching this ritual play out. The mission of Wreaths Across America is to Remember, Honor and Teach and this ceremony covers all aspects.

Every year, on the same day across the nation and throughout several overseas military cemeteries, volunteers of all backgrounds come together to honor those military members and veterans that have passed away. This all started in 1992 when the owner of a wreathmaking business had a surplus of wreaths towards the end of the holiday season. This man, Morrill Worcester, remembered a visit he made to Arlington National Cemetery when he was a boy years earlier and this gave him an idea. He contacted his then

senator, Olympia Snow of Maine to work with Arlington to arrange a delivery of his excess wreaths. Many of his local neighbors and business-ess volunteered to help. It remained a small operation until 2005 when the now iconic picture of wreaths in the snow on veterans' headstones went viral. This year over 3 million wreaths have been donated for this effort.

In Blairsville, the American Legion Post leads the way for Wreaths Across America. We hold a small but impactful ceremony with Veterans and children from around the community. This ceremony honors and remembers those that have passed before us, and it teaches our youth the importance of remembering. "The entire community is invited, and we hope to see a huge turnout of Union County and the surrounding area," stated Merritt. After the ceremony, if the wreaths have arrived, we will travel to Memory Garden to respectfully lay wreaths at the Veteran's gravesites. Unfortunately, Blairsville is at the end of the supply chain, so if the wreaths don't arrive on Saturday, we will meet at 1 PM on Sunday, December 15th instead.

Between Memory Garden and Holly Hills, there are 380 veteran graves; any excess wreaths go to the National Cemetery in Canton where they have over 30,000 graves. The North GA Honor Guard lays wreaths at Holly Hills and area churches also participate in Wreaths Across America. We encourage the members of the churches that are involved in Wreaths Across America

to attend the ceremony to really drive home the meaning of the actual wreath laying event. "The ceremony shows the purpose of the entire program lending understanding to those taking part in the wreath laying activities," continued Merritt.

You don't want to miss this ceremony, so come on out on December 14, at 10 AM in the Union County Fine Arts Center.

The American Legion is the largest and one of the oldest and most inclusive of all veterans' organizations worldwide and devotes itself to mutual helpfulness, mentoring youth, advocating patriotic honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to fellow service members and veterans.

All members, and interested veterans, are encouraged to attend our meetings on the third Tuesday of every month; the next meeting is 21 January. We meet at 6:30 PM in the Veteran's Center, 78 Old Blue Ridge Hwy. It's a great opportunity to become engaged in the community and to establish strong bonds with fellow Vets. The Auxiliary, an organization for spouses and daughters of Veterans, will begin its meeting at 6:30 PM in the same building on the same day. Additionally, the Sons of the American Legion and the Legion Riders will have their joint meeting beginning at 5 PM and 5:30, respectively.

For more information on the meeting or any Post activities email the Post at [apost121@gmail.com](mailto:apost121@gmail.com) or visit the website at [legionpost121.org](http://legionpost121.org).

# Tax Break...from Page 1

multi-year losses having to be absorbed locally each new budget cycle as long as property values keep rising, so the schools are having to supply more local dollars to teach students every year.

The compounding losses in state funding come out to over a million dollars each year compared with just a few years ago, and factoring this in, the added growth revenues for 2024 only slightly shrink the net loss the schools have experienced due to several years of rising property values.

Still, the system has succeeded in saving up a healthy reserve, and the board believes that a small tax break is manageable without having to sacrifice the programs, activities and excellent academic results families have become accustomed to at Towns County Schools.

Berrong said that even though three years of tax cuts isn't going to break the proverbial bank, everyone should understand that ongoing state funding losses will certainly affect future board decisions, and keeping taxes too low for too long could cause an eventual correction to be needed.

The final vote tally to advertise the 5.380 millage rate ahead of adoption was 3-1-1. Board Members Stephanie McConnell, Brandon Grimsley and Caroleen Woods voted in favor of the 0.79% tax break, citing their joint desire to lower taxes while not hamstringing future boards.

Board Member David Phillips voted no because he wanted an even larger tax cut, especially considering the recent passage of the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax that dramatically boosts revenues for capital outlay projects.

He cited higher cost of living as a reason to give property owners a larger break - Phillips was advocating a 1.35% tax cut - and he noted that the system would be able to make budget with a lower rate than what most of the board selected.

"I feel that we need to provide the best education as possible for the students of Towns County at the lowest cost to the taxpayers," said Phillips before recommending annual budget reviews for potential cuts moving forward.

McConnell, Grimsley and Woods agreed that they could make budget with an even lower rate but believed that going too low could put the system in a bind in the event of an emergency in which unforeseen - and therefore unbudgeted - expenses become needed for whatever reason.

"We can't be expected every year to do more with less," outgoing Board Member McConnell said. "And there are things within the quality of the education at Towns County Schools that we need to improve upon, not cut. So, I'm not going to go much lower than the rollback rate."

On top of decreased state funding, McConnell

cited rising school costs as another reason not to drop the tax rate further, as employee retention and recruitment - not to mention campus upkeep, improvements and equipment - have only been getting more expensive for the system.

For her part, McConnell said she would only entertain certain budget cuts, such as athletic programs, like coaching staff and supplements, and potentially school bus drivers.

"Academics should not be cut in this budget," she said, to which everyone agreed.

Board Member Sara Rogers abstained from voting Nov. 18 because she was undecided about which rate would be best for both the School System and taxpayers, "and I didn't want to vote for something that I wasn't sure about," though she was comfortable with the outcome.

Several people made a point in the meeting to highlight the fact that Towns County has the lowest property tax rate among school systems statewide by over a mill, made even more significant by the School Board deciding to cut taxes for the third straight year.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw has committed to accepting the rollback rate this year, also on Dec. 5, so people can certainly expect an overall lower tax rate on their combined county/school property tax bills.

2024 property tax bills should be mailed by Dec. 13, to be due in mid-February.

## Towns County Fire & Rescue are Seeking New Volunteers



Have you ever wanted to give back to your community or be a part of it in a special way? If so come join us at Towns County Fire and Rescue.

We are seeking new volunteers to become a part of our family; we are also looking for Explorer Firefighters to be a part of our explorer program

(ages 14-18). No experience is required. We will provide all equipment needed and all training needed which will consist of Firefighting training and basic first aid and CPR. You will assist with special events in our community and respond to a variety of emergency calls from fires to medical calls and search and rescue calls.

There is a job for everyone in the fire service so come be apart of our

great team of firefighters and family to help us better serve our community and county.

For more information and to meet us and check out our equipment come by Fire Station one in Hiwassee City limits at 156 Sims Circle or give us a call at 706-896-2090 anytime from 8 AM to 4 PM, Monday-Friday, we will be happy to speak to you and answer any questions you may have.

## John Cochran and The Cowhands present "A Cowboy Christmas"



(L-R): John Cochran, Moriah Owenby, Wayne Owenby

John Cochran and The Cowhands, Moriah Owenby, and her father Wayne Owenby present a Cowboy Christmas Show.

Come and listen to them perform classic Western and Western Swing Christmas classics along with Christmas Carols from the hymnal and other classic Christmas songs.

The show is family friendly and will remind you of Christmas around the radio

during the 1940s and '50s. The show begins at 6:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 6, at Stephens Masonic Lodge in Young Harris. The address is 135 Murphy Street.

Stephens Lodge will be serving a light meal for a small fee which goes to the Lodge Scholarship fund.

Admission is free, so bring your friends and family for an evening of great western Christmas classics.

## Your Patriot Reflection



### Defense of Liberties

Two hundred and forty-two years ago, in 1777, Samuel Adams encouraged the Colonist to persevere against England. He said, "The liberties of our country, the freedoms of our civil Constitution are worth defending at all hazards; it is our duty to defend them against all attacks. We have received them as a fair inheritance from our worthy ancestors. They purchased them for us with toil and danger and expense of treasure and blood. It will bring a mark of everlasting infamy on the present generation - enlightened as it is - if we should suffer them to be wrested from us by violence without a struggle, or to be cheated out of them by the artifices of designing men."

Shortly after this he wrote: "Nil desperandum, -- Never Despair. That is a motto for you and me. All are not dead; and where there is a spark of patriotic fire, we will rekindle it."

It would be easy to despair when we realize the deterioration of our liberties and the dismantling of all that our ancestors fought to preserve and protect. If we call ourselves patriots we must stand and use every means possible to protect what almighty God has bestowed on our great nation.

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by [www.joshuaswarriors.org](http://www.joshuaswarriors.org).

**wec**  
FAMILY RESOURCES

**Question:** My sister just had a baby and I don't know what to get her for Christmas. I want to get her something she can play with; but do babies that young really play with anything?

**Answer:** Absolutely. While they may not "play" or interact with toys like older children, they do engage with things in a manner that is crucial to their development. One of the things that infants love to do is to explore their environment. They love different textures, sounds and colors. Soft toys, rattles and sensory books are great for this. Motor skill development is also important. Look for toys like stacking rings, soft blocks and

activity gyms. Items such as plush toys and blankets offer a sense of security and also are important for emotional development. And don't forget the need for visual and auditory stimulation. Toys with bright colors, patterns, and gentle sounds can captivate an infant's attention. We also recommend sturdy board books with bright pictures and simple stories to stimulate their imagination.

If you would like more suggestions, you can do an internet search using the search phrase "appropriate gifts for..." and provide the age of the child you are shopping for. There are multiple websites with gift ideas.



# Christmastime...from Page 1



**There's nothing like a good parade to bring out community spirit, with a Christmas parade especially putting cheer in the air.**  
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Just one example included the organizers of the Summer Heat Festival dressed up as elves, smiling and waving from a trailer done up in the style of a winter wonderland.

Incidentally, Summer Heat of Towns County won First Place in the float contest, followed by Old Brasstown Baptist Church in Second Place and Mulkey's Wrecker Service in Third Place.

The magnificent new train and a herd of festive horses brought up the rear of the parade, marking the end of a jolly display of revelry that delighted old and young on-lookers.

Cries of "Merry Christmas" were commonplace as everyone cleared out, with a general feeling of good tidings of comfort and joy among neighbors and strangers alike.

That said, those who missed the parade or Light

Up Hiawassee don't have to despair; there are other things happening to herald the holidays. The Mountain Country Christmas in Lights can be enjoyed through December at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, but that's just one option.

Next up is another time-honored tradition in the form of the Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting, the decades-old annual gathering set to happen on Friday, Dec. 6. Co-sponsored by the Enotah Garden Club and City of Young Harris, the main event will start at 6 p.m.

Refreshments of holiday treats and coffee will be available, and music will include performances by the Towns County Kindergarten, solos from Elementary School students and even a few high schoolers. A certain jolly old elf will be the man of the hour.

And be sure to attend the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807's annual Candy Cane Christmas on Dec. 14 from 1-4 p.m. at the post on Sunnyside Road. Open to all children 12 and under from Towns and surrounding counties, little ones can enjoy festive fun like reindeer games and cookie decorating.

Of course, Towns County welcomes people of all faiths, and on Dec. 30, the City of Hiawassee will hold the annual Menorah Lighting on the square at 4:30 p.m. Organized by Chabad Rural Georgia, the event is meant to be informative as well as festive, and all are invited to attend and celebrate Chanukah as a community.

To view other local holiday happenings, visit the website of Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce at <https://www.golakechatuge.com/>.



**Light Up Hiawassee is an annual family-friendly event sponsored by the City of Hiawassee, complete with vendors and crafts for kids.**  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



**Summer Heat of Towns County won First Place in the TCSO Christmas Parade on Saturday.**  
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

# Country Christmas...from Page 1

be featured in Fairs & Expos Magazine this month. People are coming from everywhere. It's not just a tri-state event anymore. They're coming from all over the Southeast."

The magazine is distributed by the International Association of Fairs and Expositions and features information about trends, innovative ideas, and association activities. According to the magazine, the 12-acre display "mesmerizes and entertains thousands" and is not to be missed.

Jerry Larkins, owner of Scary Jerry's Mountain Fire Hot Sauce, was excited to have his wares on display for the first time.

"We make a handcraft-

ed, small-batch, all-natural hot sauce with peaches," Larkins said. "This is our first year here at the Christmas in Lights. I love the atmosphere the fairgrounds create, this lovely little village that they've got with the stalls that vendors can rent.

"People can just stroll through, and there's stuff to eat, there's usually good music. It's just a really good, family-oriented atmosphere."

Uptown Mirror Photo Booth Owner Terri McGee was ready to take unique photographs for visitors. People can dress up with lots of Christmas props and get a photo to take home.

"We were here for their

beer fest one weekend and they invited us back for this event," McGee said. "It's great exposure for our business."

Kiki's Hat Co. features wool-blend hats burned with many specialized designs, and they come with a Bible verse under every hat. Owner Kim Pardue said that events like the lights "make it much easier for me to sell product."

"We're camping over here," said visitor Carey Gunter of Silva, North Carolina. "I love these festivals. There's always lots of unique items from vendors here that I love looking at and buying stuff."

Susan Croft and her family came out from Cum-

ming to celebrate Thanksgiving locally, which prompted them to check out the lights for the first time. And they're glad they did, because "it's very beautiful, and there is a lot to see here."

The veritable winter

wonderland runs 6-9 p.m. this Thursday, Friday and Saturday and will continue every night Dec. 12-23 over the same hours, closing for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Tickets are \$9 per person each night, though chil-

dren 12 and under get in free. For more information on the annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, including special discount days and a full schedule, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/christmas>.



**The Grinch promises to be nice to kids at the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights.**  
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## TCSO accepting applications for local children in need

Towns County Sheriff's Office is pleased to begin accepting applications for assistance for Towns County children in need during the 2024 Christmas season!

Towns County Sheriff's Office has been able to provide Christmas each year for decades to children in Towns County and this year is no different. This is a competitive process, and we are not able to select every child that applies.

To obtain an application you can do so through our Towns County Sheriff's Office website [townscountysheriff.org](http://townscountysheriff.org) or by coming by our office at 4070 State Hwy. 339 Young Harris, GA 30582 or by calling our office and we can email it to you.



## Master Gardener Program

Master Gardener Extension Volunteers (MGEV's) make a difference in Towns and Union counties. Their mission is to support the University of Georgia College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences by providing horticultural information to homeowners and community members. They offer public education classes, design and maintain a variety of community gardens, manage the Ask a Master Gardener booth at the Union County Farmers market, sponsor a booth comprised of handmade natural ornaments at the Kris Kringle Christmas event, and support many other worthwhile gardening activities.

In 2023, Towns/Union MGEV's contributed over 4,700 hours for the betterment of this community. Every two years a training class is held and applications are now being accepted. The course consists of 50 hours of classroom instruction and

50 hours of volunteer work completed within the first year. After the first year, 25 hours of volunteer service are required to remain an active MGEV. The cost of the class is \$200.00, which includes the textbook and all class materials. Classes begin Jan 30 and continue for 10 weeks (one day per week) until April 24, 2025. Locations: North Georgia Technical College Campus, Blairsville, Town Civic Center, Hiawassee. Application deadline is December 18, 2024.

For more information or to obtain an application contact [jacob.williams@uga.edu](mailto:jacob.williams@uga.edu), or call 706-439-6030. The University of Georgia is an equal opportunity, affirmative action, veteran, disability institution. If you need reasonable accommodation or language access services, reach out using the contact information at least three weeks prior to the program date.