

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, February 14, 2024

Boardwalk Project no longer moving forward

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The City of Hiawassee's Boardwalk Project to connect Lloyd's Landing and Mayor's Park over Lake Chatuge will apparently not be happening after all.

In the Feb. 6 regular city meeting, Hiawassee City Council members voted unanimously to remove an agenda item to approve a contract with BAK Builders for \$785,000 to construct the boardwalk.

They did this on advice from City Attorney Thomas Mitchell, who pointed to a provision in the recently reached mediation agreement

that settled an unrelated dispute between the council and Mayor Liz Ordiales regarding the mayor having signed city contracts without proper approval.

That provision reads, "Further work on the Boardwalk Project shall be suspended until the Paris Business Center is completed and sufficient funds are identified and available for the Boardwalk Project without incurring any City debt."

The Paris Business Center is not slated to be completed until the summer. And therein lies the rub: failure to move forward with the project soon means the \$690,000 in

federal grant funding – which has already received an extension – will expire unused.

"The funds (for boardwalk construction) are there and accounted for," Ordiales said to the council. "If we don't do it within the timespan that we have due to the lake levels, we will lose the grant."

"They only gave us a six-month extension on the grant, so we will lose that grant and we would just not do the project altogether. Is that what I'm hearing?"

Council members remained united in voting to remove the boardwalk from the agenda, seeming to have their hands tied based on the city at-

torney's belief that acting on the project before completion of the Paris Business Center would violate the mediation agreement.

Ordiales expressed dissatisfaction with the project not moving forward, acknowledging having signed the mediation agreement with everyone else but noting that she thought it was clear that the project would still be undertaken since "this money had been allocated years ago."

"I think we are losing a lot of money and making a pretty big mistake, but if that is the will of the council, that is how we shall proceed," Ordiales said.

See Boardwalk Project, Page 14



Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales in the Feb. 6 regular city meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Retired Police Lt. Lopez talks elder fraud, scams

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Retired Miami-Dade Police Lt. Efren Lopez met with the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, Feb. 9, to discuss the looming threat of elder fraud and how seniors can protect their finances from scammers.

Lopez spent nearly 30 years as an officer in Miami, mostly focusing on fraud crimes. He assures citizens that they do not want to become victims of fraud.

"Older individuals become victims of crime every 30 seconds," he said, adding that only one in 12 reports it.

That is an issue he hopes to deal with head-on by meeting with groups, like the Movers and Shakers, to educate older individuals on how to not only avoid fraud but properly report it.

Scammers are skilled at what they do and can impersonate family, friends or fa-



Retired Miami-Dade Police Lt. Efren Lopez spoke at the Movers and Shakers' breakfast meeting Friday about how seniors can protect themselves from financial fraud.

Photo by Daysha Pandolph

miliar organizations, disguise their phone numbers and even replicate official websites and documents. This makes it incredibly difficult for victims to identify what is legitimate and what is fraud.

"They have reported \$6.1 billion in losses to individuals in fraud," shared Lopez, "but that's not the full number. As I mentioned earlier, (not everyone reports

See Elder Fraud & Scams, Page 2

EMA hosts training for county first responders

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency hosted a series of classes for first responders Feb. 6-7 at the Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park. Four classes were held at different times to offer coverage for different shifts.

The event primarily benefited teams from Towns County Fire Rescue, Young Harris College Police, Towns County Sheriff's Office and Towns County EMS, but any county employee was admitted.

Indeed, a few county workers from other departments were spotted taking advantage of the course.

"Back several months ago, I started talking to the commissioner about respirators, maybe putting them in the patrol cars and putting them on some units so if they went into



Local first responders lined up last week to receive kits with gear pertaining to the training class they attended courtesy of Towns County EMA.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

a house and there was fentanyl, it would give some protection (from) it," said EMA Director Marty Roberts.

That conversation grew to include questions about what else could be done to better protect and prepare Towns County's first responders and

See EMA Training, Page 7

Officers get body cameras at Towns Detention Center

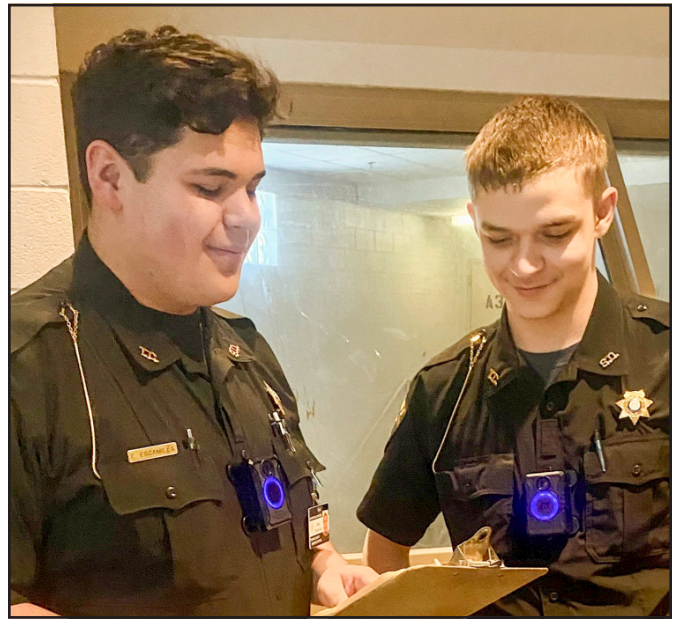
News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office Detention Center has implemented body-worn cameras for detention officers.

The most common reasons for implementing body cameras are to improve officer safety, improve training and supervision, and reduce agency liability.

Studies have shown that body cameras are very effective and deter individuals from making bad choices.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that body cameras offer more transparency. The detention center has stationary cameras throughout the facility. Body cameras document incidents and establish culpability to discourage unwanted aggression.



Towns County Detention Officers Eliel Escamilla and Isaiah Boykin wearing the new body cams at the jail. Photo/Facebook

Corey Smith returns to GA Mountain Fairgrounds

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

No stranger to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Peach State native country star Corey Smith will be returning to Anderson Music Hall on Saturday, Feb. 17, to perform a concert that will begin at 7 p.m.

Having released 10 albums, Smith has grown a broad fanbase for "telling it like it is." Smith, who hails from Jefferson, writes his own music and has produced all but one of his albums, which includes a Top 20 Release from 2011, "The Broken Record."

Particular fan favorites include songs "Twenty-One," "If I Could Do It Again" and "I Love Everyone."

See Corey Smith, Page 5



Corey Smith

TCSO joins forces with Clay County for drug arrest

News Special
Towns County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – The Towns County Sheriff's Office and Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office recently raided a residence on Byron Road.

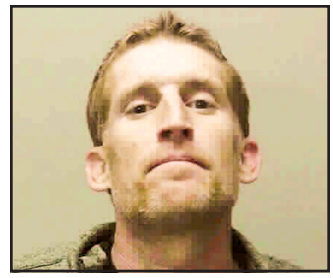
Drug investigators from both agencies met and have been working together on drug

information received that focused on a specific individual at a residence in Towns County.

Follow-up by investigators resulted in probable cause being established, and Towns County Sheriff's Investigators secured a search warrant for the residence on Byron Road.

Towns County Investigator

See Drug Arrest, Page 14



Gregory Thomas Breitenbach

Early voting starts Monday for Presidential Preference Primary

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
editor@nganews.com



In-person early voting for the Presidential Preference Primary begins Monday to give active registered voters the chance to select political party candidates for the office of President of the United States.

Election Day for the upcoming primary is Tuesday, March 12. There will be three weeks of early voting for this election running weekdays between Monday, Feb. 19, and Fri-

day, March 8.

Early voting will also include two weekend voting opportunities on Saturday, Feb. 24, and Saturday, March 2.

All in-person early voting will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Towns County Civic Center, located in the same building as the Board of Elections & Registration Office at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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Chatuge 1,919.04
Nottely 1,763.97

BOYS REGION 8-A

@ WARREN CO. 2/13-2/16

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Iwo Jima Remembrance See page 12



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United
Community
Advisors

2024 Night to Shine welcomes 92 kings and queens

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Night to Shine 2024 was a huge success, especially considering the outpouring of support from the community.

The annual event was held at its usual venue at the First United Methodist Church of Union County on the evening of Feb. 9 to celebrate individuals with special needs across five counties: Union, Towns and Fannin in Georgia, and Clay and Cherokee of North Carolina.

While commonly referred to as a “prom,” all ages are invited to attend. Indeed, the main event is the dance, but guests also enjoyed a karaoke room and party bus rides, and caretakers were offered a special Caregiver Dinner.

For two years now, Scott and Elizabeth Terry have organized the event, and in 2024, they were joined by more than 270 volunteers who helped set up decorations, chaperone guests, direct traffic and parking, serve food, shine shoes, style hair and more.

“It is amazing to us how the community just comes out and supports us both financially and volunteer-wise,” Elizabeth said.

But not everyone who plays a part in making the Night to Shine is “stationed” at the church. Stephanie Conner was out on the Blairsville Square with family and friends,



The 92 guests of the 2024 Night to Shine enjoyed dancing amid a balloon drop in their honor on Friday.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

ready to greet the buses as they made their rounds around the Union County Historic Courthouse around 7 p.m.

She and her group were among many others who stood at all corners of the square that night, waiting at the ready with noisemakers and posters to cheer when the buses made their circuit.

“I think it’s great that the community comes together to bring joy and smiles and love to the faces of these participants for Night to Shine. It’s all about them,” Conner said, beaming. “I just love that our community always comes together for things like this.”

Even a retinue of cheerleaders from Young Harris College gathered on either side of the streets, occasionally moving positions when the traffic was safe to cheer on the kings and queens riding in buses.

With a flashing drone flying overhead and some residents shaking cowbells, the atmosphere was just as befitting of a party outside as it was inside.

Upon returning to the church, attendees enjoyed dancing to – and singing – upbeat songs like Whitney Houston’s “I Want to Dance With Somebody” and Village People’s “Y.M.C.A.,” but couples embraced each other and swayed for Elvis Presley’s “Unchained Melody.”

Mimi Myers celebrated her 21st birthday that night and was having tons of fun just hanging out with her buddy, Samantha Godwin. After the caregivers made their way to the upper track above the church’s gym, Myers waved to her family and made hearts with her hands.

Just a few tables away, Sydney Davenport was sitting



Samantha Godwin and Mimi Myers were dressed to the nines during the Night to Shine event at FUMC on Feb. 9. Happy Birthday to Mimi!

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

with her buddy, Layne Colwell. The pair watched as some 92 kings and queens – including Davenport herself – received crowns, and the same number of caregivers cheered from around them during the magical moment when blue and silver balloons were later released atop the dancing royalty.

While Tabitha Richardson may have attended the Night to Shine as part of the Cherokee and Clay County Chapter of The Arc – a nonprofit that advocates for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities – the event means a lot to her on a personal level.

“(Volunteers and organizers) are very compassionate to the things that we have to do on a daily basis,” said Richardson, adding that “they acknowledge that we work hard.”

Richardson raised a non-verbal son with autism and is very passionate in her belief that all people should be celebrated and lifted up as part of the community.

“A lot of times, people with disabilities are not able to get out and do stuff, so this is a good thing. It really is,” Richardson said. “(The Night to Shine) is all about them.”

And the guests themselves were reminded of that one last time on their way out around 9 p.m., as local Scouts handed them “goody bags” that included a commemorative T-shirt. As they filed out, the Terrys were quick to ask them if they had a good time.

The overwhelming response was yes, and that they would return next year.

Night to Shine is sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation. It was created in 2015 as a worldwide prom for people with special needs, ages 14 and older. This year, Night to Shine was hosted by 725 churches across the U.S. and in 56 countries around the world, on six continents.

Elder Fraud & Scams...from Page 1

these crimes), so they have a rough estimate of \$48 billion in losses.”

Scammers use several different methods to steal money from people, ranging from investment scams to romance scams, financial institution verification fraud, mortgage scams, Medicare scams, impersonation and even financial elder abuse from in-home caregivers.

“Investment scams are serious,” said Lopez, who shared that there are \$404 million in estimated losses from this type of fraud. “I’ve seen it down in south Florida where we have individuals lose as little as \$50,000 – which is significant to them – and as high as \$5 million to \$10 million.”

Another popular method is business impersonation. Scammers will usually pose as a tech support company to send notifications to phones or computers about viruses. They will provide a link or phone number to access the cure, and eventually, gain access to financial accounts.

Other scammers try to lure victims in with the promise of more money at the expense of a proportionally smaller payment. For instance, someone might get an email about winning millions of dollars in another country but must first pay several thousand dollars in taxes to access it.

A form of fraud that continues to grow even more popular is the romance scheme. Scammers will pose as ideal partners and build trust with their victims. After time, they will start requesting money for bills or visits.

Another type of fraud that continues to grow in popularity is the financial institution verification scam where people will receive an email, phone call or letter from what appears to be their bank or the IRS.

Lopez warns that people

should not respond directly to those messages, just like with every other fraud situation. Instead, he encourages people to contact their bank or institution from a verified phone number they can look up themselves.

Even if the number calling appears to be legitimate, it could be an imposter.

“When they call you, tell them you are going to call them back and don’t give them any information,” he warned.

He also advised people not to engage with telemarketers in any way. Giving them any feedback or interaction will only result in being added to more call lists and potentially enable access to personal accounts.

“If it sounds too good, it’s a scam,” he said plainly.

Other forms of fraud include mortgage or foreclosure scams, where the scammer will access that information about people and capitalize on their misfortune. Oftentimes, victims will end up handing over the titles to their homes and putting themselves in even deeper debt.

Many scammers can access loads of information on victims online through social media. They can learn specific details about someone, their situation and even their family. With that information, they can impersonate loved ones and trick people into signing over money.

“If your Facebook account is not private, make it private, because there is so much information they can obtain through your Facebook account,” shared Lopez.

Fraud criminals will also go after medical information to get the most money out of victims. They will even go dumpster diving in hospital garbage cans to access information that was not properly shredded. Around \$60 billion are lost in medical and Medi-

care scams.

This kind of paper trail at any institution – medical, financial, etc. – leaves people at risk for fraud. That being said, Lopez advises residents to do as much electronically as possible and avoid getting paper statements.

He also suggests that people keep their passwords and personal information in a secure physical location or on a computer, not a phone. The information on cellphones is all too easy for criminals to access.

Lastly, Lopez touched on a sensitive subject – financial elder abuse by caregivers.

“A lot of victims won’t report this because, one, they depend on their caregiver, or two, they fear them or they have been threatened by them,” he said.

“One of the biggest factors is that they are afraid to report it or tell a family member because then all of a sudden your children will think that you are vulnerable and can’t take care of yourself. (They will think that) you can’t be trusted with your stuff.”

“The last thing that we want is to have our kids think we’re vulnerable,” he commented.

Only 26% of these cases are reported, which Lopez hopes to change.

But rather than try to clean up the problem once it has occurred, he suggests that seniors take preventative action.

“If (your caregiver) is making purchases for you, ask for a receipt,” Lopez said. “Don’t give them your debit card. If you read the fine print on your debit card, (it says that) if you give that out to someone with your pin, the bank is not going to reimburse you.”

“It’s on you to protect your information. It is your identity. It is your home.”

Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff's Office.

ARREST REPORT

Towns County Jail
Sheriff Ken Henderson

- 02/09/24 Hannah Jo Barajas, age 25, Homeless Bribery, expired or no drivers license, giving false name, address, or birthdate to law enforcement officer, willful obstruction of law enforcement officers- misdemeanor (3)
- 02/07/24 Gregory Thomas Breitenbach, age 44, Young Harris, GA Distribution of schedule I and II substances, possession and use of drug related objects, possession of a schedule III controlled substance
- 02/08/24 Christopher Thomas Fulton, age 39, Hayesville, NC Serve 5 days
- 02/09/24 James Rockwell Chilton, age 69, Hiawassee, GA Driving without valid license (misdemeanor), DUI- driving under the influence of alcohol, failure to drive within single lane, tires
- 02/06/24 Imanol Ojeda Hernandez, age 23, Hiawassee, GA DUI-driving under the influence of alcohol
- 02/07/24 Jesse Oliver Maier, age 43, Morganton, GA To serve 12 months
- 02/05/24 Timothy Isaac Mitchell, Jr., age 32, Hiawassee, GA Driving while license suspended or revoked (misdemeanor), expired vehicle tag or decal
- 02/05/24 Bernabe Reynoso, age 25, Blue Ridge, GA Driving without a valid license (misdemeanor), no insurance, remove or affix plate to conceal vehicle identification
- 02/04/24 Amanda Denise Williamson, age 41, Gainesville, GA Driving without a valid license (misdemeanor), failure to drive within single lane, open container in vehicle

FIRE DEPARTMENT

RESPONSE REPORT
From: Fire Chief Harold Copeland

- 02/05/24 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (4) Grass fire
- 02/06/24 Fire Inspection/Pre-plan Dispatched and cancelled en route (3) Motor vehicle accident with no injuries Smoke detector activation, no fire - unintentional Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS
- 02/07/24 Motor vehicle accident with injuries Medical assist, assist EMS crew Search for person on land Alarm system activation, no fire - unintentional Dispatched and cancelled en route
- 02/08/24 Dispatched and cancelled en route (2) Fire Inspection/Pre-plan Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS Alarm system sounded due to malfunction
- 02/09/24 Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3) Dispatched and cancelled en route (3)
- 02/10/24 False alarm or false call, other Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3) Smoke scare, odor of smoke

Two for One; Two great speakers at One Meeting February 15th

The Towns County Republican Party February Monthly meeting will be held Thursday, February 15 at the Towns County Senior Center on Main Street, Hiawassee, GA 30546; doors open at 5:15 and meeting begins at 5:45 PM. All are welcome.

Join us and hear important information about our county from two great men: our guest speakers, Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Fire Chief Harold "Big H" Copeland. Both will enlighten us about what is going on in our county now and in the future, going forward into a busy 2024.

We all know Towns County is growing, look at the traffic. The voter rolls have increased by over a thousand people since 2020. We now have rush hour! Who would think.

Please come, bring a friend or two, listen to what

they have to say and bring your questions; this is not a debate, and the Chair will not allow any personal attacks or rude questions from the attendees.

During this local election cycle the TCGOP will feature a Forum for any office that has more than one Republican vying for the position. It will be based totally on policy and no personal "gotcha" questions will be allowed. The date has not been chosen as of now but will be announced after March 8 when Qualifying ends.

Please remember that all candidates must contact the Supervisor of Elections and fill out the required forms before accepting any donations to your campaign.

Should you want further information, feel free to contact me at tcgopchair@gmail.com or 904-382-1912. T(Feb14,21)CA

Registering Prospective Voters



(L-R): Betsy Young and Charlotte Sleczkowski

With important county, state, and federal elections in 2024, local political party chairs were at Towns County High School on February 6th registering seniors to vote.

Betsy Young, chair of the Towns County Republicans, and Charlotte Sleczkowski, chair of the Towns County Democrats, registered prospective voters during the school's two lunch periods. March 12 is the presidential preference primary in Georgia, and early voting starts February 19th and runs through March 8th. T(Feb14,21)CA

AARP Tax Aide Free Tax Preparation

Other AARP Tax Aide locations are: Blue Ridge on Fridays from 10:00 - 2:00, February 9 - April 12 at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 7 Ewing Street, Blue Ridge; Ellijay on Mondays from 10:00 - 2:00, February 12 - April 8 at the Gilmer County Library, 268 Calvin Jackson Drive, Ellijay.

Blue Ridge and Ellijay are also by appointment only. Please call (770) 312-2258 for reservations at these locations.

AARP Tax Aide is providing free tax preparation in Blairsville on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. beginning February 7 through April 10. Location is the Brackett Community Room, behind United Community Bank, 177 GA-515, Blairsville, GA.

This service is by appointment only. Please call (770) 403-7959 for reservations.

Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge February 7, 2024 meeting



Rosemary Royston

The Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge met on Tuesday, February 7, 2024, at noon at Brasstown Valley Resort. After an excellent lunch, Rotarians were treated to an exciting presentation by Rosemary Royston, who is the Director of "Main Street" in Young Harris.

Main Street is a nationwide program that focuses on Economic Vitality, Promotion, Design, and Organization of communities.

Economic Development is a very important part of the Main Street Program. Ms. Royston can work with existing businesses to help them bring in jobs, and be more successful. She and Denise McCay (from the Downtown Development Authority) work closely together to support businesses and encourage growth.

Through the Main Street Program, residents and businesses can pick up brochures and maps of the area, and connect with potential customers. Main Street has a very active Facebook page, and shares local information also on the radio, and through a newsletter. Several small parks are also planned for the area. Main Street also helps with the Seafood Festival, Porchfest, the Christmas Tree Lighting, and works closely with The Garden Club to beautify the area.

If you would like to get involved, you can find information at youngharrisga.net, or you can come to one of their meetings on the third Thursday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall.

McConnell earns Faculty Honors at Georgia Tech

William McConnell of Hiawassee, GA, earned the distinction of Faculty Honors for Fall 2023 at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

This designation is awarded to undergraduate students who have earned a 4.0 academic average for the semester.

Food Pantry Food Distribution

The Food Pantry hours are Monday - Thursday 9 AM- 12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM - 2 PM.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomas at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.

Mountain Shelter Board meeting

Humane Society's Mountain Shelter Board of Directors will meet in the conference room of the Civic Center at 5 PM, February 21.

Citizens For A Better America meeting

Candidates in the upcoming Primary Election will be speaking at the next meeting of Citizens For A Better America. Are you happy about the way things are going in Cherokee County, NC & the USA? Be an informed voter! Everyone is welcome and bring a friend.

Citizens For A Better America are uniting to promote freedom & constitutional rights, peacefully & patriotically. Monthly meetings are the third Thursday of the month.

Next meeting is February 15, at the Legends Steak House in the large private meeting room, 42 Tennessee Street, Downtown Murphy, NC. Meal orders at 5:00, meeting is 6:00-7:30. This meeting is free & open to the public. United We Stand!

For more information: Website: <http://www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com>; Email: Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com; Call: (828) 361-5422.

Corey Smith...from Page 1

Joining Smith is special guest and fellow singer/songwriter Jeb Gipson, who comes from Lakemont, Georgia.

Gipson has experience working in Nashville dating back to 2016, but even before that, he gathered experience.

Growing up, Gipson credits church choir and traveling with his father's bluegrass group as important influences in his own career

while he looks to artists such as Keith Urban, John Mayer, Ricky Skaggs and Brooks & Dunn for musical inspiration.

The gates open at 6 p.m., and admission is \$40 plus handling. VIP packages are available for \$150 and include a concert ticket, merchandise bundle, and special meet-and-greet with Corey Smith.

Tickets may be purchased at www.georgiamountainfairground.thundertix.com/events/222162.

Keep an eye out on the Fairgrounds for other Music Hall concerts like Aaron Lewis' visit as part of The American Patriot Tour on March 2 and The Frontmen performing March 23.

To celebrate spring, the Rhododendron Festival will be in full bloom by April 12, and the Georgia Mountain Fair Spring Yard Sale kicks off April 19.

Young Harris hosts final Master Planning meeting



Young Harris Main Street Program Director Rosemary Royston delivering a summary of the city's Master Planning document at City Hall on Jan. 30. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The City of Young Harris held its third and final public Master Planning meeting on Jan. 30 to provide residents with a summary of how the months-long planning process has gone, with a draft expected next month showcasing planning participants' desired aesthetic for the city.

Joe Rothwell of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission and Young Harris Main Street Director Rosemary Royston worked together to present the findings of community input of past meetings from October and November.

At the November meeting, some pictures of potential

designs of everything from benches and bike racks to signs and waste receptacles were set out for attendees to vote on.

As it turned out, most people supported aesthetics that leaned toward nature, like welcome boards constructed of wood and stone or light fixtures with extra prongs to support potted plants.

Forty-five people attended the January meeting, split over two sessions, and Rothwell opened the floor to public comment toward the end, with the general reception to ideas like "Food Truck Fridays" and thoughtfully placed pocket parks being very positive.

The idea for "Food Truck Fridays" came from

the eponymous Dawsonville event, and Rothwell cited how popular the phenomenon has become in the presentation.

"It's a growing industry," Rothwell said, sharing an article from 2019 where the city's residents considered the return of the vehicles a "news-worthy event."

Similar sentiment seems to be spreading locally, albeit on a smaller scale, as Royston recalled how popular the food trucks were during 2023's Porch Fest, making a note that cuisine options weren't typical run-of-the-mill choices.

"I was surprised at how well they did," Royston said. "The Caribbean one was huge, and you don't get that (in this region)."

Food trucks not only draw in consumers during festivals and other events but can also pave the way for new businesses. One point Rothwell mentioned was that if an eatery grows successful enough, food trucks might give way to more brick-and-mortar restaurants.

For options normally not available – like the example Royston used – that can mean positive changes for the economy and more options for tourism.

Another point of discussion was the new city park. At the end of Meadow Lane sits land given to the city in 1988 by the Miller family, and now, with proper planning underway, it will soon become a new park.

While yet unnamed, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby said there will be conversations with the Millers before opening the property, giving them a chance to name the property.

But why hold Master Planning meetings in the first place? It all centers around the idea of responsible growth. It's a given that populations rise, and the development that comes with more people can either be dreaded and handled irresponsibly or embraced and planned.

The Main Street Project chooses to pursue the latter path, holding talks just like the Master Planning meetings and pushing for community outreach that aims to spotlight feedback from Young Harris residents. That responsibility, Royston said, comes down to

personal agency.

Responsibility includes safety, and Towns County resident Chuck Luca voiced concerns about walking trails and bike paths.

"That bypass needs a minimum of two underpasses for trails and bike paths, OK? I mean, maybe not right now you don't see anything right there, but in the future, you will," Luca said, alluding to future growth.

MountainTrue Western

Regional Director Callie Moore kept the conversation going and shared the idea of natural "land bridges." Following an uptick of vehicle accidents involving bears, the North Carolina Department of Transportation installed overpasses covered with sod and greenery.

Moore said the structures have cut down on the amount of vehicle collisions with animals and have not only saved the lives of bears and other wildlife but have

saved motorists thousands of dollars in repairs.

"We have had amazing community support throughout this process," said Mayor Gibby, expressing contentment that the planning meetings have been so well-attended. "The community is excited about the future of our city and valley."

The final plan will be released soon, so keep an eye on the City of Young Harris Facebook page for updates.

EMA Training...from Page 1

the people relying on them.

Roberts said Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw made funds available for the class through the EMA, which also served to introduce new safety methods and devices to those who attended.

The primary focus was split between "Stop the Bleed," an initiative designed to teach first responders how to tie tourniquets and pack wounds, and the administration of Narcan, the brand name of naloxone that counteracts the effects of opioid overdose.

Before they left, attendees received a package including a tourniquet kit, respirator, N-95 facemask, Narcan, and a LifeVac kit for dislodging food and other objects from airways.

"We've got a grant right now we're pretty sure we're going to get to buy those and put them in the buildings and patrol cars and restaurants," Roberts said of the latter.

Two videos were shared with the class, the first from the "Stop the Bleed" course. Uncontrolled bleeding is the most common cause of preventable death in trauma, accounting for 40% of all trauma-related deaths, so treating such injuries quickly is of the essence.

Applying pressure, wound packing, and tourniquets are used to treat injuries in the field. Most discussed were tourniquets, which face occasional backlash due to the fairly common concern that limbs might be lost due to the application of tourniquets.

Roberts said the average time between a patient receiving a tourniquet and its removal is 30 minutes, and the video reminded the audience to inform patients that loss of



Towns County EMA hosted multiple well-attended classes for first responders Feb. 6-7 focusing on "Stop the Bleed" and Narcan information. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

limbs trumps loss of life.

Narcan can mean the difference between life or death when it comes to opioid overdoses. The life-saving drug can be administered as a nasal spray, as an intramuscular injection, intravenously or subcutaneously, though the spray is the most common form.

Endogenous opiates exist in the body already, serving to, among other tasks, alleviate pain or regulate breathing. To send messages throughout the body, they bind to receptors in a part of the brain known as the medulla.

Opioids from drugs bind to these same receptors, causing a more extreme reaction than natural opiates. They dull pain, but in the pursuit of chasing a high, an addict may go overboard and cause too many opioids to bind to the brain's receptors, which slows and eventually stops breathing.

As an opiate antagonist, Narcan "replaces" the opioids inhabiting those receptors, temporarily reversing an overdose and restoring normal respiration within minutes. This

buys time to get the patient to medical personnel.

Accidental overdose deaths exceed motor vehicle deaths in the U.S., and according to research, the most common reason emergency medical intervention doesn't arrive in time for overdose victims is because witnesses are too frightened to call for help.

Fear of arrest or other legal repercussions keeps many people from dialing 911, but thanks to Georgia's 911 Medical Amnesty Law, overdose witnesses are exempt from punishment for minor drug and alcohol offenses as long as they act in good faith to save the life of the victim.

As for what the average citizen can do, Roberts said everyone can benefit from learning proper CPR training.

For the moment, the EMA is concerning itself with offering certifications for those who need to know the maneuver for their occupation or need their certifications renewed, but Roberts said future public classes were certainly a possibility.

The 29th year for Arbor Day Planting in Towns County

The 29th year for Arbor Day Planting in Towns County

The Mayor of Hiawassee, Liz Ordialis, is seen signing a proclamation proclaiming the month of February as Arbor Day in Georgia because the month is a good one for planting in our zone.

For 28 years the Hiawassee Garden Club has celebrated Arbor Day and been a part of Tree City USA by planting a tree in the City or the County and encouraging others in the county to plant trees whenever possible, especially in February around Arbor Day. This year will be our 29th.

This year's Arbor Day planting will be at the newly renovated Courthouse when the cement work is done and landscaping will be started. The date will be announced in the paper.

Georgians have done a good job in the state in keeping most areas green by replacing trees that are lost to damage in storms, old age, or cut for other reasons. Trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and rain, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the tempera-



Hiawassee Mayor signs the 2024 Arbor Day Proclamation with Tree Board Chair and Garden Club member Joan Crothers looking on.

ture, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen, and provide habitats for wildlife. They are a renewable resource giving us paper, lumber for our homes, fuel for our fires, and they beautify our community, thus increasing property values and are a source of joy and spiritual renewal. Our Northeast Georgia Mountains are particularly attractive to resi-

dents and tourists because of our beautiful green trees.

The history of Arbor Day started in 1872 when J. Sterling Morton proposed to the Nebraska Board of Agriculture that a special day be set aside for the planting of trees and since then Arbor Day has been observed throughout the nation and now throughout the world. TIFeb14.Z13)CA

Early Voting...from Page 1

wassee.

Presidential Preference Primary voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on March 12.

Towns County has two voting precincts: the Hiawassee Precinct at the Civic Center and the Young Harris Precinct in the Lodge Hall Building at 135 Murphy Street.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested at the Elections Office now through Friday, March 1. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as

an email attachment, or in person at the Elections Office.

Voters returning absentee ballots can use the official drop box inside the Elections Office during early voting hours; mail them back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or drop them off in person at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. on Election Day.

Monday, Feb. 12, was the registration deadline to vote in this election. Voter registration takes place inside the Elections Office.

The 2024 election cycle will be a busy one, with federal, state and local elections up for voting this year.

Candidates for local elections will qualify the week of March 4 for the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, with a runoff date of June 18 if necessary.

The big General Election is slated for Tuesday, Nov. 5, with a runoff date set for Dec. 3.

April 22 is the voter registration deadline to participate in the May 21 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election, and Oct. 7 is the deadline to register for the Nov. 5 General Election.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov/s/> for voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

Lake Chatuge to be featured on cover of Georgia's 2024 Official State Travel Guide



Hayley at presentation for Travel Guide

Towns County Convention and Visitors Bureau, today announced that Lake Chatuge is featured as one of the four covers of Georgia's 2024 Official State Travel Guide. Produced annually by Explore Georgia, the tourism division of the Georgia Department of Economic Development, the guide is dedicated to inspiring travel to and within the state.

"The growth and evolution of our Official State Travel Guide has contributed to Georgia's strongest tourism economy ever," said Georgia Department of Economic Development Chief Marketing Officer Mark Jaronski. "The communities featured on the covers of our travel guide represent Georgia's unique and diverse range of experiences and geographies, and inspire travelers of various types and interests to discover so many more beach, mountain, small town, rural, and city destinations throughout the guide."

Informed by traveler sentiment research and visitor data, the travel guide's four covers showcase Georgia's small towns, cities, mountains, and beaches, representing the key types of destinations that

travelers are most interested in visiting. Featured cover destinations include the Downtown Square in Bainbridge, Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta, Bell Mountain Park and Historical Site in Hiawassee, and South Beach Pier and Pavilion on Tybee Island.

Aside from the various covers, each guide contains the same content, with nearly 130 pages of inspirational images and enticing trip ideas spanning the entire state.

"We are thrilled to be featured on the cover of the Georgia State Travel Guide and excited to share the hidden gem of Towns County, a place we believe is one of the most beautiful in the world," said Hayley Burch, Chairman of the Towns County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The free travel guide is available digitally on the Explore Georgia website, by phone at 1-800-VISIT-GA, on-site at the nine Georgia Visitor Information Centers, and through a statewide network of tourism partners.

For more information and to order a travel guide, visit ExploreGeorgia.org.

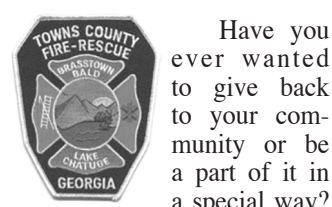
About Towns County

Convention and Visitor Bureau: Towns County CVB, is dedicated to showcasing the charm of our community and inviting visitors to stay, explore, and contribute to our local economy. Our goal is to boost overnight stays, increase revenue, and contribute to the overall economic prosperity of Towns County.

About Explore Georgia: Explore Georgia, the tourism division of the Georgia Department of Economic Development, is the state's official destination marketing organization. Through its home office in Atlanta, nine visitor information centers, and a network of representatives across the globe, Explore Georgia inspires travel to and within the state through marketing programs developed and executed in

partnership with the state's travel industry. Georgia travel and tourism generated \$73 billion in total economic impact and supported more than 442,600 jobs in 2022. The state welcomed 167.7 million domestic and international visitors in 2022 who brought in \$39.8 billion in spending. Learn more at ExploreGeorgia.org. TIFeb14.Z14)CA

Towns County Fire and 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?

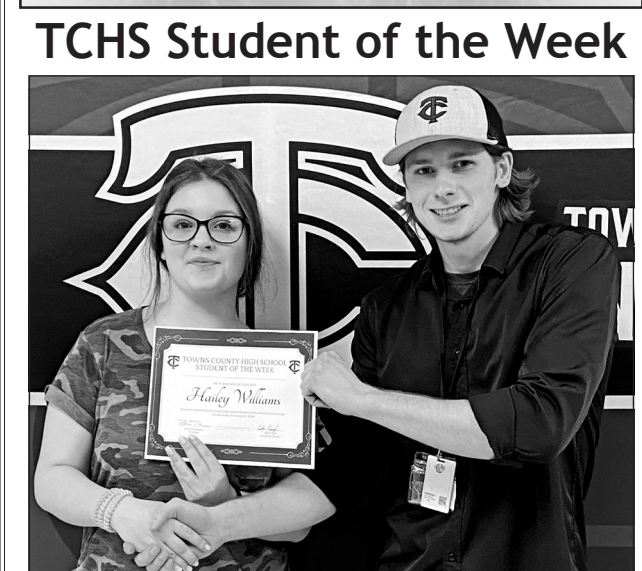
If so come join us at Towns County Fire and Rescue.

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 Hiawassee 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. TIFeb147.A1)JH

TCHS Student of the Week



Hailey Williams and Luke Kough

The TCHS Student of the Week is sophomore Hailey Williams. Math teacher and Robotics adviser Luke Kough states: "Even though Geometry can seem to be a daunting subject, Hailey rose up to the challenge and displayed each characteristic of the TRIBE acronym (teamwork, respect, integrity, bravery, and excellence). Nearly every day, she came in with a positive attitude and a smile, ready to learn and work hard. From tedious proofs, to trigonometry, Hailey never gave up. If she decides to continue pursuing a career in teaching, I think she will do a fine job if she continues with this diligence!"

Hailey's favorite subject in school is math as she likes a challenge when working out the problems. After graduation, she hopes to attend college and pursue a degree to become a math teacher. She loves math and wants to help kids prepare for their future. Outside of academics, she also is on both the football and basketball cheerleading squad. She enjoys the challenge of school and believes in always maintaining a positive attitude. Out of all the TRIBE characteristics, Hailey believes she represents respect as she has a kind heart and tries to never leave people out. She also believes she represents excellence as she strives to achieve and complete her assignments. Her proudest accomplishment is helping others.

Boardwalk Project...from Page 1

Ordiales said. According to Ordiales, the idea to build a boardwalk first appeared in the Hiwassee Strategic Plan in 2018, with work starting the next year to acquire project approval from the Tennessee Valley Authority, Georgia Department of Transportation and Department of Natural Resources.

Appropriate permissions were granted in 2021, and the city applied for and was awarded a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission in 2022 for \$690,148, which would have paid for the bulk of construction costs.

The grant featured an 80%/20% split, the latter being the city's match amount for the total project cost of \$862,685. The city's portion of the project — \$172,537 — was to be paid for entirely with SPLOST proceeds.

Ordiales said the favorable 80/20 split came by way of the county's "at-risk" economic designation at the time the grant was applied for, but "we no longer have that designation, and the match for grants is (now) 50/50," thus making revisiting the project in the future less financially feasible.

And while it may be possible to seek another extension on the current grant, Ordiales cast doubt on such an outcome after the meeting.

"The way I see it the project is truly done," she said. "The council does not want to budge on starting prior to the completion of the Paris Buildings, which would not allow proper timing to do the work."

Among other business, Councilwoman Nancy Noblet asked that consideration of two new board member appointments for the Downtown Development Authority be removed from the agenda. Noblet stated afterward that the



Tamela Cooper, left, swore back in to the Hiwassee DDA Board last week to finish the remainder of her term.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

council was still speaking with candidates for those positions.

Former DDA Board Member Tamela Cooper, who left the board last year in protest over the decision to go into debt to finish the Paris Business Center, decided recently to return to fill the remainder of her term that is set to expire in August 2025. She was sworn back in that evening.

"In the past few weeks, I have been asked by some members of both the DDA and the City Council to return to the board," Cooper said in a letter to the DDA and City Council last week.

Continuing, "My reason for saying yes and returning is to be a part of helping to heal the relationships that were hurt and to build stronger working relationships going forward."

"I know that we have the same common goals and vision and that by all of us working together our whole community will benefit."

Also in the meeting, the council voted to override the mayor's recent veto of the Home Rule Ordinance adding

procedures to enact already existing officer removal provisions in the City Charter.

While Ordiales again contended that she believed the procedures needed to be in place, she reiterated her position that such a charter amendment was outside the scope of the city's Home Rule Powers, instead requiring approval by the Georgia General Assembly.

Ordiales has pointed to Georgia law forbidding Home Rule actions "effecting the composition or form of municipal government authority, the procedure for election or appointment of the members thereof and the continuance in office and limitation thereon of such members."

Last month, City Attorney Mitchell disagreed with the mayor's interpretation, saying the charter already contained removal language and that the Home Rule change would simply add specific removal procedures. The council agreed, voting 4-1 to override the veto, with Councilwoman Patsy Owens voting no.

Drug Arrest...from Page 1

tors, assisted by Clay County, served the search warrant on the evening of Wednesday, Feb. 7.

Confiscated were 2.7 grams of fentanyl, which field-tested positive. Fentanyl is the most dangerous drug in the community, being 100 times stronger than morphine.

Gregory Thomas Breitenbach, 44, of Young Harris,

was arrested and charged with felony possession of fentanyl, felony possession of fentanyl with intent to distribute, and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that his office's war on drugs is continuing, and he commends the hard work of Towns County and Clay County Drug Inves-

tigators in working together to "get this dangerous drug out of our community."

The Towns County Sheriff's Office meets regularly and as needed with its law enforcement counterparts from the Clay County Sheriff's Office to share information and keep their adjoining communities safe.

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