

BOE meets Disaster Masters

By Azure Welch
For The Herald

The regular meeting of the Towns County Board of Education was an evening of resignations, plans, approvals, reports and even a presentation.

The monthly meeting began, and the first item on the agenda was a presentation from the Towns County Middle School Robotics Team.

The robotics team is in the "third year of operation and in those three years, the team has been twice to the state competition level," according to TCMS Principal Dr. Darren Berrong.

Dr. Berrong also praised the robotics team for their wins during those trips to the state, which included an award for programming and robot performance.

Four members of the Disaster Masters, which is their team name, and their coach, Dr. Darren King attended the board meeting and presented the project they used for this year's FIRST Lego League (FLL) contest objectives relating to the furries of nature.

As a team, the Disaster Masters built and preprogrammed their robot to complete a course of obstacles related to their choice to study tornados and the current state of warning systems, and the team provided a great demonstration of their objectives for the school board members.

Immediately following the presentation, the school board launched into the items on the evening's agenda.

Beginning, first and foremost with a request from Towns County Schools Superintendent Melissa Williams to add an additional item to the agenda.

This item was taken care of prior to the remaining items of the agenda, and Superintendent Williams requested that the board make a motion for, and approve a make-up day due to the several days missed by students during this winter.

School was in session on Monday, Feb. 17, an otherwise off day because of the President's Day holiday.

Not to mention, the call that went out prior to the meeting tonight "calling school off for the following day due to the impending winter weather," Superintendent Williams said.

Superintendent Williams said that "it is a difficult decision" calling off school, but the potential risk to the safety of the students "is most important."

Following the motion and approval of the make-up day were agenda items for the



Disaster Masters put on a demonstration for the BOE.

discussion and approval of the resignation of two teachers and two para-professionals.

According to Superintendent Williams, these resignations will be effective at the end of this school year, and the reasons for the requests are due to retirement and relocation.

Elementary school teacher, Lynn Abernathy and para-pro Rosie Moss will both be retiring, while elementary school teacher, Whitney McClure and para-pro Kathleen Chiri will be moving at the end of this year.

All four resignations were approved by the school board, along with the discussion and approval for volunteers to the 21st Century Program.

The agenda also provided the approval needed for the Towns County High School to go ahead with their plans to have graduation test remediation classes for students who may be having difficulties.

The approvals will also allow the schools to proceed with the district's SACS accreditation participation.

Prior to the various school reports provided to the board, the board had one additional approval to make, and that was in regards to the Superintendent's contract, and the continuation of Superintendent Williams' contract was unanimously approved by the members of the board.

Following the contract approval was the various school and committee reports made monthly to the board.

Roy Perren's report, the Facility Report & Federal Program Updates, focused on

safety guidelines following the extreme weather plaguing the area and the false alarm with the security system last month.

Aundrea Wilson, followed with her Curriculum Report which informed the board that hopefully by the next meeting the test results for the Gifted Program will be back for discussion then along with a possible request for the approval of new educational resources that some of the elementary teachers have been requesting.

In addition, reports were given to the board regarding the highlight of happenings within the Elementary, Middle, and High Schools by Dr. Sandy Page, Dr. Berrong, and Jonathan Gibson, respectively.

All three school principals reported on the different required assessments, whether for students or for teachers, and additionally, the high school and middle school reports also included a glance at the various sport programs ending and beginning, including an announcement that all Spring sport pictures will be taken on Wednesday, Feb. 19.

Superintendent Williams closed out the meeting by thanking the board members for their continued confidence in her abilities to continue as the superintendent of the school system.

Superintendent Williams told the board that she "appreciated this because this is a job that I truly enjoy, so thank you all for allowing me to continue helping the students of Towns County."

Council Members...from Page 1

"I'm excited about that," she said. "It's a lot of making sure that we have trees in our city and we are keeping our landscaping pretty. And when people want to come in and build that we are allowing places for new trees."

In this case, the work is its own reward. Martin is a bit of a nature-lover.

"I love trees," she admitted. "They're very inspiring to me."

For Martin and fellow Councilman Sam Leslie, both of whom were voted in by a wide margin in the last elections, this has only been the second regularly scheduled council meeting.

"It's been a good experience so far," said Martin. "I think I can learn a lot from people who have been on council for more years than I have."

But progress tends to

come slowly.

Martin has been excited about the possibility of offering the city further growth and expansion targeted especially at its young people, but that may take a while.

"That's something that's one of those big projects," she said. "I've heard that it's been talked about previously, but there are some issues that are a little more pressing right now."

Snow...from Page 1

sioner Kendall said earlier last week.

For the most part, people did just that.

On Monday and Tuesday, concerned people flocked to nearby stores to stock up on the essentials, like medicine, bread, milk, and chocolates and flowers for their significant others.

One store worker, who opted to remain anonymous, noted that buyers seemed more prepared this time than they were a few years ago.

"This whole season, it feels like anytime there's been a good weather scare, people are preparing themselves because they don't

want to get caught up like they did two years ago," the worker said. "They said it was going to be a light snow, and it turned out to be a foot and a half deep."

In past years, the unprepared were left without water if the pipes froze, or, in some cases, even heat.

But never let it be said that Towns County doesn't learn from its mistakes.

This year, everyone seemed determined to be ready, including the animals.

Pet owners made sure to stock up on canned cat and dog food, just to be safe.

Unfortunately, those who

ordered last-minute gifts online for Valentine's Day may have been a little disappointed.

Some of the mail planes were unable to take off due to inclement weather, delaying packages until well past Friday.

But who needs commercial air service when you have love?

The snow may have cleared by Friday, but for those with wives, husbands, or boyfriends and girlfriends, it was still a perfect week for sipping hot chocolate and sitting by a fire, which is what Valentine's Day is all about.

Gary Black speaks to Shakers

By Azure Welch
For The Herald

Early in the morning on Valentine's Day, Georgia's Agriculture Commissioner, Gary Black, spoke to all those who attended the breakfast meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers, at Mary's Southern Grill.

Introducing the commissioner was Towns County High School student, Adam Penland, who also reprised his informative and award-winning speech on the state of the nation's agricultural market.

Commissioner Black is hugely supportive of agricultural programs that aim at developing opportunities for young people, and continues to serve in an advisory capacity for the 4H and the FFA school organizations.

Commissioner Black reiterated some of the points that Penland referred to in his speech, mostly having to do with the economic importance of agriculture for the state.

Commissioner Black's most indisputable fact is that Georgia's agriculture industry is the state's primary economic contributor, just "passing \$77 billion" in 2012, and that amount is projected to rise annually.

Not to mention that Georgia's agriculture industry is the "primary source of employment in the state," according to Commissioner Black.

The employment opportunities in agriculture stem from "tremendously diverse" industries across the state.

These include areas such as, urban agriculture, Green Industry Agribusiness, and Forestry in addition to traditional and production agriculture.

Similarly, Commissioner Black points out that our "state tax dollars have been used amply in the areas of agricultural research."

On the bright side, Commissioner Black believes that agricultural industries, research, production, and increased accountability at the state government level, have all combined "making this a good time for our state's agriculture industries."

However, Commissioner Black revealed that there is an



Commissioner Gary Black

"imminent threat to agriculture," not just in our state, but across the Nation.

Recent legislative proposals, stemming from the passage of the Farm Bill Act, will implement federal food safety regulations that will be, as Commissioner Black says, a direct and complete "assault on the farming industry."

Commissioner Black's chief concern with the regulations of safe guards the Food and Drug Administration is going to implement under the guise of the Food Safety Modernization Act, is the toll these guidelines are going to take on the farmers throughout the state, more significantly, the state's small farmers.

According to Commissioner Black's estimates, in the wake of these new federal guidelines, the cost to implement and sustain these guidelines "will be onerous and expensive," and is likely to put many small farms out of operation.

In addition to the eco-

nomical impact expected, if and when, these regulations commence, there are those whose primary argument is whether or not these federal regulations are in direct opposition of the 10th Amendment.

According to the Organic Consumer's Association, the King Amendment to the 2013 Farm Bill "takes away important authorities from the states and gives them exclusively to the federal government."

Whereas, the 10th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution firmly delegates the rights of each state.

The state's Department of Agriculture is charged with the regulation and the promotion of the produce from Georgia's agricultural industry, and according to Commissioner Black he intends to fight to keep the federal government from implementing these regulations.

According to an FDA Preliminary Regulatory Impact Analysis report, "facilities with less than 20 employees will bear a large portion of the costs, and the agency tentatively concludes that the proposed rule will have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities."

The same report from the FDA also expects that "some farm operators will seek off-farm jobs to offset the regulatory costs," and for Commissioner Black this is simply not acceptable.

This essentially is about "the FDA entering farms where they have no business being," according to Black who also vows to "continue fighting this."

Democratic Party to Host Panel on Immigration Reform

The Democratic Party of White County will host a panel discussion and dinner on Immigration Reform: Why and How, 5:30 pm Thursday, March 13 at Western Sizzlin' on highway 75 between Cleveland and Helen.

The panelists will include Larry Pellegrini, Executive Director of the Georgia Rural Urban Summit, Jessica Colot, a DREAMER with Kuck Immigration Partners law firm,

Mary Lasris, with the Faith in Action Committee of the Georgia Mountains Unitarian Universalist Church, and Dottie Foster, who is Coordinator of North Georgia Immigrant Justice.

There will be ample time for audience questions and discussion. The public is invited to come and get involved in this timely and important issue. For more information, call 706-878-2526.

Warmer temps on the way

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
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Could spring be just around the corner?

The state's resident ground hog, Gen. Beauregard Lee predicted on Feb. 2 that spring was just around the corner.

Given that March is the month for snow in North Georgia, the General's predication might not be on target.

But according to the National Weather Service, at least the next few days have warmer temperatures projected in the local forecast.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall had his fingers crossed as he checked the forecast on Monday for the rest of the week.

According to the National Weather Service, temperatures were scheduled to be at or above freezing through Saturday.

Precipitation is in the forecast, but not of the frozen variety.

"We sure could use a break," Commissioner Kendall said.

Commissioner Kendall believes the county has enough salt to last a while.

Just to be sure, he's looking for a good deal on salt to help keep Towns County's salt supply sufficient.



Commissioner Bill Kendall hopes the county has seen the last of the snow in 2014. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"The price of salt is out of sight," he said. "We're checking around. We still have plenty of salt."

Temperatures forecast this week for Towns County call for highs in the low 60s and upper 50s. The forecast also calls for rain through Friday. The good news is that lows are projected between 39 degrees and 55 degrees through Thursday. Low temperatures are expected to dip to 32 degrees on Friday, but, rise again on Saturday to 41 degrees.

At press time, no fro-

zen precipitation was in the forecast.

Commissioner Kendall hopes the cold weather has passed us by, but, he's not counting on it.

"March is usually a pretty cold month in the mountains," Kendall said. "We're just going to have to hold out until spring arrives, and I hope that is sooner than later."

"We were fortunate not to have a lot of emergencies this time around," Kendall said. "We're ready for the bad weather if it comes again."

U.S. Rep. Kingston to speak to Shakers

U.S. Rep. Jack Kingston, a candidate to fill the seat currently held by U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss, will speak to the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday at 8 a.m. at Mary's Southern Grill in Young Harris.

Rep. Kingston, a Savannah Republican, represents Georgia's 1st Congressional District in Washington, D.C.

In 1992, Kingston gave up his seat in the Georgia House to pursue a Congressional run in Georgia's 1st Congressional District after five-term



U.S. Rep. Jack Kingston

Rep. Kingston sits on the House Committee on Appropriations, he chairs the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies; he is a member of the Subcommittee on Defense; and a member of the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs.

Rep. Kingston also will be in Union County on Friday at 11 AM at the Grinds 'n' Glazes Bakery and Café at 262 Highway 515 East, in Blairsville.

Snowballs and snowmen at YHC

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.

Or, to put it in more relevant terms, when life snows on you, make an igloo.

That's exactly what some Towns County residents did during what quickly became known as Snowpocalypse 2014.

At Young Harris College, the creativity was endless as students, some of whom had never even seen snow, enjoyed two and a half days off from class.

One favorite pastime was sledding; students took sleds to the surrounding snow covered hills.

Those without sleds had to improvise. One group of students used a large cardboard box to slide down the snow.

Snowmen sprang up everywhere. The words "Do you wanna build a snowman?" inspired by a song in the recent Disney movie *Frozen*, quickly became a catchphrase.

Very few, however, were as creative as Allison Missler and Logan Edgeman, who took the opportunity to make a dream come true.

They began to scoop up snow into blocks and build an igloo.

Unfortunately, they quickly grew bored, turned the igloo into a bunch of snowballs and had a snowball fight



Snow covered the Young Harris College campus last week.

instead.

Not everyone was as excited about the snow.

Nicole Drake, a Florida native who never saw snow until her first year at Young Harris, had some choice words to say.

"It was cold. I didn't really like it. It was really cold," she emphasized. "I mean, it's fun. This is our second experience of the snow this semester, and so it was fun the first time, and then it was fun for another 20 minutes, and then after that I wanted it to go away."

Like any good student, Drake, an honors student taking 19 hours this semester, took the opportunity to catch up on her homework.

"I did so much homework. I think a lot of students did all their homework, surprisingly," she said.

She added that her snow days included having snowball fights and watching movies on Netflix.

The Young Harris students have coined a unique term for the unusually heavy snow and ice.

"Snowpocalypse," Drake said. "We call it Snowpocalypse."

The word "Snowpocalypse," is, of course, a reference to the end of the world, but no such event occurred.

The snowmen and igloos melted, the last snowballs were thrown, and the ice disappeared from the roads.

But some people, no doubt, look forward to the next big snowfall.

They should make sure to keep their cardboard boxes and their Netflix close to hand, just in case.