

Towns County Herald

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Publication Number 635540 Volume 86 Number 18

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thurs: Rain	37 27
Fri: Clouds	50 30
Sat: Clouds	57 34
Sun: Rain	58 36
Mon: Clouds	58 31
Tue: Sunny	62 33
Wed: Sunny	61 37



Upstream Elevation Predicted 03/04/2015	
Lake Chatuge	1,916.64
Lake Nottely	1,762.67
Blue Ridge	1,673.11

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SPORTS

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Daylight Saving Time Begins
Sunday March 8th



Kindergarten Registration
March 2nd-6th

Head Start/Pre-K Registration begins
March 2nd
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Mobile Career Coach coming to Hiawassee
March 12th
See Page 5A



AARP Driving Course
See page 3A



Baseball
Mar 3 vs. Fannin Co 6 PM
Mar 4 @ Fannin Co 6 PM

T-Ball and Farm League Registration
Rec Department
Week of March 9th
See Page 3A

Towns gets 6-8 inches of snow

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Last week, Towns County residents experienced between 6 and 8 inches of snow, which kept many departments within the county busy and on call.

Roads Superintendent Clyde Shook was out with his crew, salting the roads and laying down gravel, and also using the county's motor graders to scrape snow from the roads.

A motor grader is a large vehicle with blades capable of moving snow out of its path, effectively clearing roads.

"We've been busy, we had a lot of snow," said Shook. "We didn't have any trees down this last one, but we've sure been busy cleaning the snow off the roads."

During the snow storm, calls from residents to the commissioner's office were forwarded to office staff. Even though the commissioner's office delayed opening Wednesday and was closed Thursday, staff fielded calls day and night in order to relay vital road conditions to Shook and his crew.

"We've had a lot of calls,"

See *Snowzilla*, Page 6A



Copeland: 'Beautiful weather; we dodged a bullet in Towns'

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland just completed his first month wearing the chief's hat, and the winter weather of late, thankfully, didn't pose much of a challenge.

"It was just a beautiful snow with no catastrophic events," said Chief Copeland. "It was probably the smoothest significant snow I've ever seen here in this county in 30 years."

The role of Towns County Fire & Rescue is the same during a snow event as it is any other time in the year.

"It's life safety and property conservation," said Chief Copeland. "This last snow was a heavy snow, and we knew it was going to be a heavy snow, wetter. We dodged a bullet with the wind - we didn't have any wind with it. That would have had an effect on trees. When trees go down, we work with the road department. We have hazards, my men do, worrying about the electrical lines, but we're subject to help cut just enough for emergency vehicles to get by, which we



Chief Harold Copeland

didn't have to do that." Other than a sledding accident that occurred after the heaviest snowfall, there was really only one emergency event that required help from the fire department.

"We did extricate one lady," said Chief Copeland. "The ambulance wasn't able to get to her. We deployed our Gator and had it ready, and we extricated one lady during this with our EMS Gator on Highway 75 South. Other than that, it's just business as usual except for the time element - it extends our time."

Time was extended for

See *Dodged*, Page 6A

Thomason leads GAAF

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiawassee - Hilda Thomason, manager of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, was named president of the Georgia Association of Agricultural Fairs at the 2015 joint Georgia-South Carolina Annual Convention in Atlanta in January.

"The Georgia Association of Agricultural Fairs and the South Carolina Fair Association is all the fairs in Georgia and all the fairs in South Carolina, and they get together and have an annual convention each year," said Thomason.

Thomason became president by serving first as a board member, then moving up the ranks through second and first vice president of the GAAF.

As president, Thomason will be responsible for conducting the quarterly board meetings of the GAAF, and she will play a large role in the annual meetings, heading up the association meeting and introducing speakers at that time. Overall, she will serve in an advisory role to the GAAF Board of Directors.

"It is an honor to serve," said Thomason. "If you're around all the other fairs and you get involved with the fairs, it helps you to learn from other fairs, too."

Several years ago, the International Association of Fairs and Expositions certi-



Hilda Thomason, left, with GAAF Past President Don Garrett.

fied Thomason as a certified fair executive. She traveled to Salt Lake City to become certified after having met all of the qualifications, which required that she attend many hours of classes and meetings.

All of this taken together - Thomason's CFE credentials and now presidency of the GAAF - means that the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is under the proper care to stay in a position to provide Towns County with plenty of tourism, which boosts the local economy.

As previously reported, according to the latest data from the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourism in Towns County brought in \$42.01 million in

direct tourist spending for 2013.

Also in 2013, tourism supported 410 jobs, generated \$1.72 million in state tax revenue and created \$1.21 million in local tax revenues.

This number has been on the rise since the start of the recession, increasing to the \$42 million mark from around \$34 million in direct tourist spending in 2009.

Furthermore, each household in Towns County received \$649.67 in tax relief thanks to the 2013 figures, a direct result of the taxes generated by tourist activity, according to GDECD reports.

The 2015 convention acted as a means for the fairs of

See *Thomason*, Page 6A

UGH part of rural pilot program

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Gov. Nathan Deal announced on Monday, Feb. 23, that Union General Hospital will take part in a four-hospital pilot program designed to stabilize rural health care infrastructure around the state.

The announcement came with a final report of recommendations from his Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee, which he created last April "to identify and provide solutions for the needs of Georgia's rural hospital community," according to a press release from the governor's office.

"When a rural hospital struggles, a community struggles," said Gov. Deal in the release. "Back in April, we stood at a critical juncture for some of our state's rural health care systems, and this committee was just one of the paths taken to ensure that Georgians, no matter where they live, have the ability to receive adequate care."

"These recommendations, a result of countless hours of dedicated analysis and review of a system that affects not only our citizens' wellbeing, but also our local economies, will serve as a strong starting



Mike Gowder

point toward providing high-quality health care throughout rural Georgia."

In its report, the committee found that "four rural hospitals have closed in recent months with total of eight having closed or attempted to reconfigure in last two to three years. Additionally, fifteen rural hospitals are considered financially fragile, with six operating on a day-to-day basis."

And in order to combat this growing trend in rural hospital failure, the committee recommended the four-site "Hub and Spoke" pilot program.

"The Georgia Department of Community Health,

State Office of Rural Health will be designated as the oversight entity for the proposed pilot program implementation and monitoring," according to the report. "This pilot seeks to build out an integrated 'Hub and Spoke' model to prevent the over-utilization of the ED (emergency department) as a primary care access point. Rural hospitals often see over-utilization in patients with congestive heart failure, chronic illnesses (diabetes) and social disease states. The 'Hub' systems have, in addition to the hospital, nursing home, home health and rural health clinic components."

The hub-like quality already found at Union General Hospital Inc., which is currently operating debt-free, is one of the reasons the Rural Hospital Stabilization Committee selected it as one of the four participants in this pilot program.

"We're very honored to be picked for the pilot program," said Union General Hospital Inc. CEO Mike Gowder.

UGH Inc. is responsible for the operation of many facilities in the surrounding

See *Pilot*, Page 6A

Sheriff: 'we've been blessed'

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The general consensus on the latest bout of snowy weather is that it was scenic yet uneventful.

"The snow has been pretty uneventful," said Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton. "We had a power line down in Young Harris, and a 20-year-old fella slipped and hurt his back Thursday. That's been pretty much the extent of it."

There was a single car accident Tuesday on 75 North and a two-car accident Wednesday on 75 South, but neither of the accidents resulted in injuries and both were due to the weather.

"The DOT has worked really hard to try to keep the roads cleaned off, and people have stayed put pretty well, so that's a good sign," said Sheriff Clinton.

Such a big snow, which brought nearly 8 inches of snow to the county, ended up being pretty routine for most deputies on the road.

"We came through this one pretty well," said Sheriff Clinton. "I think a lot of people stayed put due to the size of the snow, and of course about everything was shut down anyways. Our guys got out, and we made sure we patrolled



Sheriff Chris Clinton

all the secondary roads and everything, and just kind of kept a check on people."

The week before last, Towns County experienced more ice than it did snow, which resulted in bad road conditions and schools and local government delays and closings.

"We had four accidents," said Sheriff Clinton concerning the first round of wintry weather. "Of course, two of those were overruns, no serious injuries involved. This one, there was just a lot of people staying put. You get about 9 inches of snow, and people are going to stay in for the most part. You can't get traction on ice, that's

See *Blessed*, Page 6A

Berrong: two days to make up

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Darren Berrong had an easy decision to make last week - with snow that culminated in depths approaching 8 inches, school was closed.

"We had school Monday, and the snow came in Monday night, so we were off Tuesday," said Dr. Berrong. "We had a teacher work day on Wednesday, the kids were at home. Nobody came in Thursday because of all the snow, and then, we had a teacher work day Friday, as well, which teachers still had a hard time getting out of their driveways just to get in, because the snow didn't melt at all Thursday. So, we had one day of school and two teacher work days."

In a 180 day school year, the state allows students to miss up to four days without having to make them up. The current tally shows students having missed six days, which means that two of those days do have to be made up before graduation.

Spring break is the first week in April, and the Thursday and Friday preceding that week were marked on the calendar as emergency make-up days.

"We will more than likely be taking the two days before the April spring break, so that Thursday and Friday, we're leaning toward making those student days," said Dr. Berrong. "The students currently have missed six days, and teachers, then, have missed four, because they came in for two work days. So, when they make those two days up, the



Dr. Darren Berrong

students then will have missed four, and the teachers will have only missed two."

Teachers still have to make those two days up at the end of the year, but with the current situation being that make-up days are needed for students, the pre-spring break solution looks to likely solve any issues moving forward.

"We will have to look and see if we're going to miss any more days," said Dr. Berrong. "We do have the four days we can miss without making up, so we will just have to keep monitoring that and see how we have, so I'm not sure how many more days we may have to make up. If we don't have any more snow, then those two days will be the only days we have to make up as far as students go."

See *Make Up Days*, Page 6A

TOWNS COUNTY HERALD

