

Qualifying...from Page 1A

In the District 50 State Senate race, Incumbent John Wilkinson, a Toccoa Republican, qualified for reelection. Sen. Wilkinson faces Roy Benfield of Martin, in the May 24 Republican Primary.

In the race for the 9th

Congressional District seat, Incumbent U.S. Rep. Doug Collins, the Gainesville Republican, has Republican opposition.

From Gainesville, Paul Broun, from Cumming, Mike Scupin, from Suches, Bernie Fontaine, and from Cleveland,

Roger Fitzpatrick. Republican U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson, has opposition from both parties.

Republicans Derrick Grayson, and Mary Kay Bacallao; Democrats Cheryl Copeland, James Knox, and Jim Barksdale.

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Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, and many more.

"These reunions are important, because it gives us a chance to recount stories," said Beard, reflecting on the stories and history he'd already heard and shared that evening. "That's all that we have, our Seabee heritage, what we've done and when we started. And our individual stories are important."

"I'm sure some of you probably have relatives that served in World War II, some who served in Vietnam. You can't get them to talk about their service. They don't want to talk or they don't think it's significant, that what they did wasn't important. Or they don't think people will believe them when they tell their stories. But those stories are important - if they don't tell them, those stories will get lost or forgotten."

Beard discussed post-traumatic stress disorder, which is all too common among veterans, and he spoke about the high suicide rate of veterans - upwards of 22 veterans a day, according to a recent report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"They come back, and they don't feel like they can talk about what happened," said Beard. "If you think about it, the times that you did sit down and talk to someone about your service, you felt a whole lot better inside after you got done talking."

His message of veterans sharing their stories and experiences with others dovetailed seamlessly with the reason for the occasion - the celebration and remembrance of the creation of the Navy Seabees 74 years earlier.

For Ruback, who was one of the Seabees involved in the first amphibious landing in Vietnam in 1965, the evening was bittersweet.

"It's sad and happy both," said Ruback. "Sad memories - you lost your comrades. And happy, for all these fine, fine sailors with us tonight."

Island X-3 Chaplain Paul



Command Master Chief (Ret.) U.S. Navy Neal Beard shares words of wisdom on Saturday, March 5 at Seabee Ball

Brown began the evening's ceremony with an invocation, followed by the posting of the colors by the North Georgia Honor Guard. Hoibraten, who is commander of Island X-3, led those gathered in the Pledge of Allegiance, before Jerry Cannon conducted the Missing Man ceremony.

Crenshaw, secretary of Island X-3, introduced the keynote speaker, and following Beard's address Hoibraten conducted the ceremonial cutting of the Seabees' 74th Birthday Cake.

Music for the event was provided by Mountain Resort Entertainment, and the night ended with dancing after dinner and closing comments from Hoibraten.

Many special guests were present that evening, including CPO (Ret.) U.S. Navy C.E. "Bud" Johnson, Island X-1 Secretary/Treasurer LTJG (Ret.) U.S. Navy Rick Conn out of Atlanta, and Union County Sheriff Mack Mason.

According to literature made available that evening, "as the United States entered World War II, it quickly became

obvious that we would need to build as well as fight our way across Europe and the Pacific to attain victory.

"With the Pacific being a Naval War, the Navy needed construction capabilities. To fill this need, Naval Construction forces were formed and organized into Construction Battalions, CBs. These Seabee forces, trained to fight and build, performed splendidly in both theaters of war.

"Since that time, Seabees have made major contributions in all of America's military conflicts. In addition, Seabees have conducted many people-to-people construction projects to build good will and cement friendships for our country. Special note should be made of their disaster recovery efforts around the world."

It should also be noted that Island X-3 of Blairsville and the North Georgia Mountains region plans to hold an even bigger Seabee Ball next year, in celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Navy Seabees.

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situations - ISIS and what could happen to them. I think they're getting to the realization that, especially if they're juniors and seniors, that this is only a year or two away from them. So it was a good morning."

One of the more pressing concerns for many of his constituents for many years now has been the underperforming Internet service provided by Windstream.

Congressman Collins has made an effort over the last several years to get answers from Windstream, most recently calling the company out for slow service and outdated infrastructure.

"I was very disappointed in their response," said Rep. Collins, speaking on Windstream's response to his inquiry earlier this year. "It's frustrating, because they just basically regurgitated their talking points, and they never got to the issue."

The congressman made sure to draw a clear distinction between local Windstream employees and the corporate entity, saying that the local

workers are doing the best job they can with the current infrastructure.

Moving forward, Rep. Collins has pledged to continue to hold Windstream accountable, and one of the next steps will be a meeting between the congressman and Windstream, in which Rep. Collins, a lawyer by trade, plans to put the complaints to Windstream in a case format.

"One of the things I want to emphasize for folks up here is, this is not a last three month thing for us," said Rep. Collins. "We've been dealing with Windstream for three years. And we gave them almost two years of, let's work behind the scenes, let's see if you can work it out - and every time we would call them, they would give me half answers or they would never set a meeting."

Furthermore, the congressman has been in talks with the Federal Communications Commission and other agencies, and is trying to get the state more involved.

On news from Washington, Rep. Collins said it's time to start thinking about an appropriations bill, in which he would like to see "some lower spending numbers," including analysis of defense and discretionary spending.

Criminal justice reform will also be up for debate, and the congressman hopes to see the Apple/FBI phone unlocking issue come up for major discussion in the House of Representatives.

"It's a very scary slope that you're on, to say, well, we just want to do this phone," said Rep. Collins. "Well, what happens next time, when you're forcing a private company to make a backdoor key - there are a lot of questions that need to be answered there."

The congressman visited with several businesses in the area, a radio station, as well as the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

Traveling with Rep. Collins that Wednesday were his son, Copelan Collins, who was on Spring Break from the University of Georgia, as well as the congressman's district director, Joel Katz.

ask FEMA if there are any red flags early on in the game, let them know right away."

Initial estimates put the amount of monetary aid available at \$500,000, but that number was later re-evaluated and placed at closer to \$150,000.

"The money goes to the state and the state sends it to the counties if you document and verify that you have damage and the damage occurred during that incident period, and it was caused by whatever, flooding or high," said Jim Zavoral, a FEMA representative.

If the projects that Towns County submits are approved, FEMA will then come and determine how much funding is necessary.

"What's going to happen, when we get fully staffed, we'll have project specialists working in the county," said Zavoral. "They'll contact you and set up a date to go out and look at your damage and gather the information that we don't have already, and prepare the project worksheet and get that into the system to review. They'll take measurements, pictures, photos."

Mattee meets Movers and Shakers

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Melissa Mattee spoke on a variety of agricultural topics in a meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers at Mary's Southern Grill on Friday, March 11.

Mattee began her job as the UGA extension agent for both Towns and Union counties back in January, and in fact, her public speaking engagement last Friday was her first since taking on the dual-county role.

As an icebreaker with a new audience, she told those gathered a little bit about herself.

"I'm kind of a good example of you never know where you're going to be in 10 years," said Mattee, who has both bachelor's and master's degrees in entomology, or the study of insects. "I had planned to go to the University of Georgia for the vet school, and then I ended up falling in love with insects, of all things."

Of course, having a general grasp of entomology comes in really handy when dealing with agricultural issues, and as the self-professed "resident bug lady" with a penchant for learning, Mattee has already helped many with their concerns since starting in January, handling both insect and non-insect related queries.

"Throughout the state, pretty much everybody has an extension office, and our job is to get information from those who produce it to those who need it," said Mattee, highlighting the vast resources that are at her disposal from UGA. "So, to the farmers, the growers, even the homeowners and just gardeners in general."

"In an ideal circumstance, every county would have three extension agents. That's because there are three program areas - there's agriculture and natural resources, which is me; there's family and consumer sciences, which we used to know as home economics;



Union County Extension Agent Melissa Mattee

and then there's also 4-H, that's our youth development program, where youth learn leadership skills and teamwork skills through participating in different teams."

Circumstances not being ideal, as it were, Towns and Union counties don't have six agents between them - instead, they have Mattee and her boss, Timothy Jennings, who is the County Extension Coordinator and runs the 4-H programs.

But the pair are more than capable of doing the job, which is exactly what they've been doing, along with very capable office staff.

Mattee also gave the Mountain Movers and Shakers a brief history lesson on UGA Extension itself.

"It started as what's called the 'College on Wheels,'" said Mattee. "The University of Georgia, every year, would load up a train with professors and exhibits and livestock, and all the agricultural related things that you can imagine, and the train would go on a tour of Georgia, just like a carnival or a circus."

"And it would be just as exciting to people all around the state. They would learn the latest and greatest in agriculture. This would be one of the main ways that they would disseminate information. Now, we have it a little bit easier, where we can

have a representative in every county."

Various and sundry services are available through county extension offices, and Mattee gave a general overview of some of the services she can offer to residents, such as a \$10 soil sample test (all tests that involve the sending of physical samples cost money), and just being there to take a phone call and get an answer to a question about a home garden or pest or whatever may be plaguing the inquirer.

Over the last few years, the offering of local programs has become a growing domain of UGA Extension, and Mattee informed those in attendance that the next program to be delivered by her office would be on high tunnels.

"A high tunnel, or a hoop house, is like a greenhouse that you can put over your rows of crops, but the sides roll up," said Mattee. "This allows you one month before the normal growing season and one month after, because it shields it from the cold weather. And when it gets too hot, you roll up the sides and ventilation can come through."

"So it's a really great opportunity to extend your growing season, and you can apply to get one through the state government. This program is going to tell you how to do that, what to grow in your high tunnel, how to manage pests within it."

Private pesticide applicators will be able to get pesticide credit in the Northeast Georgia High Tunnel Meeting, which will be on Monday, March 21, from 1 p.m. until 3:30 p.m. at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center, also known as the Experiment Station.

To RSVP for the meeting, or for more information, call the Union County Extension Office at (706) 439-6030.

Mattee was invited back after her Mountain Movers and Shakers debut, and will be speaking again in front of the group on Friday, March 18.

Casting Crowns sells out The Hall



Lead guitarist Josh Mix and singer Megan Garrett perform *Who Am I*; the band's first chart-topping hit

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

It had been three-and-a-half years since Georgia's own Contemporary Christian band Casting Crowns performed at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' Anderson Music Hall.

But when the announcement was made that the Thrive Tour would be making a stop in Hiawassee, it became crystal clear that Hiawassee and Northeast Georgia were still in love with the Grammy award-winning band - the show sold out in just under two weeks.

"I love coming to Hiawassee, and I really enjoy the family friendly atmosphere here at the fairgrounds," said lead vocalist Mark Hall. "Last time we played here we took a boat out for the day, but this time, my daughter Reagan and I went antique shopping around town."

Throughout the show, Hall provided the packed house a look into the background of the band and what their life was like off the stage.

"From Sunday to Wednesday we work with the youth in our churches, but now, my daughter is in my youth group, and that's how I know I'm getting old," Hall said with a laugh. "Working in youth ministries is how I got my start, and a lot of the songs we play were first performed at our home church."

The band hit the stage with its No. 1 hit *Lifesong*, the title track off the 2006 Grammy award-winning and platinum selling album of the same name.

Other songs that followed included 2004's No. 1 hit, *Who Am I*, from their 2003 eponymous debut album. That was followed by *East to West*, a



Lead vocalist Mark Hall gets the crowd on its feet when Casting Crowns hits the stage with their Number 1 hit *Lifesong*

No. 1 hit from the 2007 album, *The Altar and the Door*.

Last weekend's show also marked an anniversary in Hall's life, as one year earlier, on March 11, 2015, an operation to remove a cancerous mass from his right kidney was a success.

"My doctor told me that if you could take every type of cancer there is and lay them all out on a table, my type of cancer was the one you would choose," Hall said. "I said, 'Doc, isn't there another table?'"

Following Hall's story, Crowns performed *Just Be Held* and *Praise You in the Storm*, songs that according to Hall were written for the trials of life, though he never expected the songs would have such an impact on his own life.

"We had two weeks of shows left after I was diagnosed, and I was up there singing these songs to myself."

Hall said.

Later in the show, Crowns' set list included *Until the Whole World Hears* and *Glorious Day*, both No. 1 hits from the 2009 album also known as *Until the Whole World Hears*.

Prior to the show, the band held a Meet-and-Greet to allow the fans an opportunity to meet with members of the band, get autographs, pose for pictures, or just to chat.

Since 2003, Casting Crowns has sold more than 5 million records worldwide, won 15 Dove Awards with 38 nominations. The GMA Dove Awards honor artists in the genres of Christian and Gospel music.

They have won four American Music Awards with eight nominations. They won two Billboard Music Awards with five nominations. They've also tallied five Grammy nominations with one win coming in 2009.

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addressed Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall and several of the county's first responders regarding an application for reimbursement.

"The Federal Emergency Management Agency has to deem projects eligible, so that's why they're here, and they're going to be here for a little bit," said Teuta. "We can write a real beautiful project, all day long. But it's going to go through headquarters, and headquarters reviews it."

Environmental specialists are going to have several conditions and acts that need to be complied with. Then when we pass that, and you get approved, then you will see some funding."

Environmental considerations include whether or not the county will be expanding its impact on the environment when it replaces or upgrades culverts. Danger to fish and wildlife will have to be assessed.

Towns County will

submit plans to undergo projects that will repair damages done by the storms. If the plans are approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, then the county will qualify for reimbursement. The standards that Towns County must meet in order to qualify for reimbursement are rigorous and require heavy review.

"FEMA has to deem it approved, so every guideline that we talked about is put on the table according to the projects, has to be processed and approved," said Teuta. "Ask the right questions while they're here."

"If you think that you may not pass the condition, ask how you can meet the condition. If you want to see some funding, make sure you're dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' when it comes to getting funding for these projects."

"You should receive reimbursement within six months, if everything goes well, if there are no red flags. And I do