

Gibson...from Page 1A

from the Towns County superintendent post at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year for the superintendent's job in Rabun.

As for who will fill the position of athletic director, Dr. Berrong said he will leave that decision up to the next

principal.

"Mr. Gibson has done a tremendous job with the high school," said Dr. Berrong. "There's a lot of stability there. They've incorporated a lot of programs that now a lot of people are a little concerned — how much will things change

bringing somebody else in? Of course, everybody is afraid of change to begin with, so there's some nervousness amongst the staff. Who's going to be hired, what's their philosophy going to be? Are they going to come in and change a lot of things?"

Now, the only thing to do is to look forward and try to hire a competent replacement.

"This is the worst time of the year for any school system, because this is when jobs start opening up, this is when you start hearing the rumors of so and so is applying at other

places, or they're going for interviews," said Dr. Berrong. "And so, you're just kind of having to sit here and wait to figure out who's leaving, and who's staying."

"It's a very stressful time of year, because you want to keep all of the best teachers

you have, and if they leave, you're stressful trying to go through the process and find someone to replace them, and hopefully be as good or better. There are people rumoring all kinds of possibilities, and the only thing I tell everybody is those are all great options."

Stone...from Page 1A

decided it was time to make a career change. Five years ago, he went back to school to earn this second master's degree, this one in library sciences from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and he has since been the librarian of a large middle school and an elementary school.

"What got me this job was not just my librarian degree, but it was my business experience, because I had run large businesses in the past and had dealt with human resources things, had dealt with marketing issues, communications issues," said Stone.

Stone comes to the library system at a time of great

change. Donna Howell recently stepped down as director after 25 years of leadership experience within the system. She has maintained an active role in helping Stone to transition into his new position.

Also on the agenda for Stone is a massive \$1,000,000 renovation project at Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris.

Commissioner Bill Kendall championed the SPLOST referendum that allocated \$100,000 toward a local match incentive to secure the \$900,000 state grant to fund the rest of the renovation.

The Towns County Public Library was renovated last

year using the same match and grant program.

Currently, Stone hopes to have design plans and bids for architects accepted for Mountain Regional Library by the end of summer, in which case the library will move into a temporary facility so that construction can begin. Once begun, the renovation should take between six and eight months to complete.

"We've got faulty lighting, we're on a septic tank, because the building was built in 1978," said Stone. "So, we have to tie in to the city sewer. We've got some parking issues and some things like that that have to be renovated. And

when we're done, I think it's going to be wonderful.

"We've got some really cool ideas that I can't share now because I've got to get things approved through boards and whatnot, and they may change everything. But once we have our plan, we're really going to promote the plan to the community, post pictures of the designs on the website and things of that nature so everybody knows what's coming."

At the end of the day, Stone would like people to understand that he is not there to reinvent the wheel, but more to grease the bearings.

"What I have found out is that when things are running

smoothly, the last thing you want to do is come in there and shake things up — you want things to continue," said Stone. "So, I'm not here to as much change what they're already doing, but I want to enhance what they're already doing. That's a long process, to learn what kind of services we're already doing, what kind of services might we want to do in the future, which populations really are in the most need, and address those and try to be creative in how we do that."

Stone hails from Cleveland, Tenn., and is a family man with his wife, three children and two grandchildren. He is a successfully published

author, and his best-selling book, "Embracing Your Inner Mediocrity: Making Peace With Reality," landed him a couple of interviews on the FOX News Channel show FOX and Friends.

He has also written several novels based on the prophet Elijah from the Old Testament aimed at young adults.

Stone plans to utilize his creative talents to launch a brand new website for the MRLS in the next couple of months. The MRLS includes the two libraries in Towns County, Union County Public Library and Fannin County Public Library.

Wood...from Page 1A

She has even served two terms on the Towns County Library Board.

"We don't realize how much that library does for our community, and it's very much a necessity," said Wood. "It's very well utilized and something we all need to support. I enjoyed it and learned a lot, and was actually there during the construction time, and that was nice."

At MECHS, Wood will be assisting teachers and parents, as well as the two co-administrators on campus.

"I really wasn't looking, so to speak, but you always have to keep your eyes open,"

said Wood of her decision. "You just never know what's around the corner. When Dr. Behrens came here back as the interim after Ms. Williams left, we had the chance to talk about Mountain Ed, and it seemed like something I would be interested in if an opportunity became available. And when it did, we worked it out for me to make a change, and I'm excited about it."

The Rabun site of MECHS is housed with Rabun County Schools, even though they are separate entities, and Wood looks forward to seeing her friend Melissa Williams, Rabun County Superintendent

and former Towns County Superintendent of Schools.

"I'll be excited to at least be able to see her on occasion and exchange a pleasantry," said Wood. "She is one of the best folks that I've ever crossed paths with. Her integrity is above average, so I'll be glad to see her."

Hamilton, transportation director for the schools, said that he will miss Wood, with whom he worked for eight years.

"It's been a blast working with Beth," said Hamilton. "She's a good, homegrown, down-to-earth country girl. She understands my lingo,

which a lot of people can't understand. She's easy to get along with as a peanut butter sandwich. She's a dandy."

Towns County Board of Education Board Chairman Bob Gibby echoed Hamilton's sentiments, calling Wood a friend and commending the hard work she has put in at the board of education.

"We've been friends 30, 40 years, and I've watched her grow up," said Gibby. "She's just a fine lady, has done a wonderful job and we're going to miss her."

Towns County Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong has worked with Wood in many

different capacities in the past, including as a teacher, principal, friend and now superintendent.

"There is no question that she's going to be missed," said Dr. Berrong.

"It's going to be very hard to replace her, because anybody that comes in is going to have to go through the learning process again, where she had so much information and knowledge that it was just such a blessing to be able to go back there and say, well, this is the issue that's come up, what's happened in the past?" Dr. Berrong said. "Well, this is what happened in the past. So,

there's no question she's going to be missed."

Wood will continue to play a part in the community as a resident of Towns County, and she views this opportunity in Rabun as a stepping stone in her travels through life.

"I think God provides us the ability to look around and be alert and be aware of the next step or the next phase or the next whatever, and it's our responsibility to be tuned into that, watching for it, looking for it, listening for it," said Wood. "And I think He's very much always leading our paths."

Hike...from Page 1A

minizing the therapeutic effects of long-distance hiking, Sean created the "Walk Off The War" Program, which is designed to support veterans transitioning from their military service by thru-hiking America's National Scenic Trails."

Hiking the Appalachian Trail provides an environment in stark relief to the highly disciplined, often dangerous conditions of the military, all

while maintaining the sense of camaraderie experienced between troops and trail mates.

"It's almost like reverse boot camp," said Gobin. "Basically, undo all the stuff the military did over the course of six months, which is also very arduous, arduous activity. They had an intense week last week. The first week is always tough, just working out gear issues and body issues, and we had

a couple days of off weather. The first week is always the hardest, and then it gets easier every progressive week, and a lot more fun."

The demands of the trail, according to Gobin, are simple enough: "Be good people, have fun, hike."

"It's the most fun, grueling, rewarding experience of your life," said Gobin. "The hiking is grueling, but it's also

very therapeutic, and it's also a lot of fun. It's like the trifecta, all at once.

"It gives you six months to think, six months of not being on a cellphone, in front of a TV, in front of a computer, just to think," Gobin said. "And so, all that thinking and processing really helps decompress and come to terms with whatever you experienced while you were in the service."

Veterans can apply for a number of trail hikes, from the Arizona Trail all the way to the Ice Age Trail and Continental Divide Trail.

Marine Corps League Commandant Wayne Roshaven, VFW Commander Mel Halfon, World War II veteran Bud Johnson, Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall and his wife, Jean, were in attendance to offer a full

show of support for the warrior hikers.

"This gives our vets in Towns County the opportunity to thank them for their service, to pay them back," said Commander Halfon, a Vietnam veteran who vividly remembers the harassment of soldiers returning home from war. "These guys are heroes."

Council...from Page 1A

to know where the financials stand to date before getting too far along in the year. He made a motion for this report to be prepared, which carried unanimously.

Mayor Gibby informed the council that two students of Young Harris College had approached her concerning a legacy project they needed to undertake.

These students are looking for a place to conduct an outdoor classroom, and Mayor

Gibby has been meeting with them at the old shed on the city's recently acquired land at Cupid Falls. She told the council that the building needed to be checked for soundness of structure with an eye toward possibly replacing the roof, but that the site had potential for the students' plans.

Water Superintendent Gary Willer reported that the water department experienced three frozen meters and some branches on the road during the

recent snow.

City council adopted a Tobacco Free Parks Resolution aimed at keeping visitors to Young Harris parks from using any forms of tobacco while present at the parks, including Mayors Park and Cupid Falls.

Signs will be made up and posted around Mayors Park and Cupid Falls to deter park visitors from using tobacco products.

"The focus in Young Harris from the council's

standpoint, we want to have a friendly, eco-friendly environment," said Dr. Kelley outside of the meeting. "We want to encourage pedestrian utilization of our recreational facilities, and we want them to be respectful of our facility. And part of that respect will include no tobacco products."

"Hopefully, they will adhere to this request, and we expect people to look favorably on it, because most of us will go to extremes to protect our

children and our grandchildren, so hopefully people will understand that that's the main focus."

Councilmember Hilary Martin made a motion to hold a called meeting on Tuesday, April 7, at 6:40 p.m. in Mayors Park. The purpose of the meeting will be the planting of a Kwanzan Cherry Tree in order to celebrate with the public 20 years of Young Harris being a Tree City USA.

Toward the end of the

meeting, the mayor and city council went into closed session to discuss legal matters.

Upon returning from closed session, Councilmember Matthew Miller made a motion to adopt a resolution stating that all councilmembers were in agreement that nothing was discussed during the closed session other than legal matters. The resolution carried unanimously.

Shakers...from Page 1A

you no longer have your constitutional rights because you've acted up, and under the laws of this republic, we recognize that there's limits to my personal liberty — I can't interfere with yours," said Sheriff Clinton.

"In those situations, that's different, but aside from that, you ought to be able to carry a firearm as a citizen."

Sheriff Clinton talked about the places and situations in which a citizen is allowed to carry a firearm.

"In Georgia, not only do

you have to go get your permit to carry, there are some places you can carry without one: your home, your vehicle, your business," said Sheriff Clinton. "If you're hunting and you're on land that you have permission or is it's publicly owned, and you have a valid hunting license or don't have to have one for whatever reason, you can carry a pistol or a long gun. Aside from that, Georgia says you have to have a firearms carry permit."

He also talked about

House Bill 60, known as the Safe Carry Protection Act of 2014, which contained many provisions regarding weapons carry laws.

"Prior to that, you couldn't carry a firearm into any place that made half its money serving alcohol," said Sheriff Clinton. "Now, that's a hard thing to determine. If I go to a bar that's a bar, that would have been pretty clearly a bar. But if I went to a restaurant that served alcohol — you go into there, they make a lot of

money off serving alcohol. How much money do they make? Is it more off of that or is it more off of supper? Who knows, who cares — we got rid of that, so that was a good thing."

"Now in Georgia, if you have a weapons carry license, you can go into any bar or any place that serves alcohol unless the owner posts something saying that you can't carry in there, or specifically asks you to leave. Then, it would become a criminal trespass."

Sheriff Clinton said that

he did agree with that premise, citing again that the rights of one person cannot supersede those of another.

"When it comes to churches, a lot of times people ask me, can I carry to church — yes and no," said Sheriff Clinton. "No, unless the church has publicly announced in some way, either in a bulletin or the preacher from the pulpit, or somehow said that, yes, we will allow you to carry a firearm in the church. If you do so without that, it's a misdemeanor, it's a

small fine, and that's kind of where we're at with churches. Used to be those were completely off limits."

Another change that came from HB 60, if a resident is carrying a firearm, a law enforcement officer cannot ask for that resident's permit unless the resident is committing a crime.

The law also prohibits the creation of any multijurisdictional databases of people with weapons carry licenses.

BOE...from Page 1A

Going the IE2 route would require these criteria to be met by each individual school within the district, unlike the charter system, which would examine the criteria against the district taken as a whole. Furthermore, under the charter system, each school district would be able to determine

its own performance criteria instead of the state.

"There's a little bit of extra funding that goes into the charter system, but it's a much more complicated process," said Dr. Berrong. "Most school systems have chosen charter system at the beginning because of this extra funding,

but what people are starting to realize is, there's only one pool of funds. And the more schools that go charter, the smaller that pool of funds gets."

"So, you may get some funding the first year, but then, after three years, if every school in Georgia goes charter, well, there's not enough money

to give to every school, so that money would probably dry up and you wouldn't actually get any extra funding for it."

As of now, the school board is leaning toward the IE2 model, as it is easier to implement. This is important because the decision must be made by June 30, and next school year,

Towns County Schools will be busy undergoing accreditation, a process that takes place every five years.

The board will likely vote on this matter at the April meeting, which will be held on the third Monday of the month, April 20, instead of the usual second Monday.

"The positive thing about it is we can choose to go IE2 or charter, and then in two years, if we decide that the other system is better, we can put into the state, and we can actually change from one to the other," said Dr. Berrong.

Towns County renews state transit grant funding

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall held the regular County Meeting on Thursday, March 19.

In the meeting, Commissioner Kendall signed the annual "Agreement for Transit Operating Agreement between Department of Transportation State of Georgia and Towns County," which renewed funds for Towns County Transit to operate another year.

Section 5311 Funds provide

for transit operating assistance for public transportation services to non-urbanized areas.

These funds are appropriated according to the Federal Transit Act, and the state DOT is the agency that receives the funds for distribution.

The county is responsible for 50 percent of administrative and operating costs of the vehicles in the care of the transit service, while the rest of the funds come from federal money.

The budget estimate for the 2015-2016 agreement for transit

operating assistance is \$86,522, making Towns County's portion and the federal match \$43,261 each.

"Our transit program has been going since 2010, and what it is, it's federal money through the state, and they provide the vehicles," said Commissioner Kendall. "We got a new one this past year. They also fund a 50 percent match of the operating expense. And then, the county matches 50 percent, and we use the fees that the vehicles collect as part of that county's matching."

For 2013-2014, the agreement for the budget estimate was \$93,680, but the program came in under that total at \$68,388.83.

The budgeted portion of fees collected last year from patrons of the service was budgeted at \$9,000, and came in just shy of that mark at \$8,906.

"I think it's a good program," said Commissioner Kendall. "They're 10-passenger busses with a lift to take care of the handicap people, and they take them to dialysis Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

The transit service is available to all Towns residents and can be utilized for whatever reason, and patrons must give the transit service a 24-hour notice to arrange a ride.

The two vehicles of the transit service find further use when conventions take place around the county, as they can act as a shuttling service to and from events and parking.

Groups can book the use of the vehicles, like the veterans hiking the Appalachian Trail as a part of the Warrior Hike, who stopped

into town on Saturday, March 21, for a meal at the request of local veterans.

Towns County Transit is available to pick people up Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m., as long as the rides are scheduled in advance.

The rate in Towns County is \$2 for the first mile and 40 cents for each additional mile to a Transit Bus accessible location, and service is curb to curb.

For more information or to schedule a pickup, call the Transit Service at (706) 896-0925.