

# Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, April 30, 2014

## Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thu: Clouds	65 42
Fri: Clouds	65 42
Sat: Clouds	66 44
Sun: Clouds	76 51
Mon: Clouds	78 48
Tue: Sunny	80 52
Wed: Sunny	80 54



Upstream Elevation Predicted 04/30/14	
Lake Chatuge	1,923.70
Lake Nottely	1,772.84
Blue Ridge	1,684.01

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## FREE

Vessel Safety Check  
May 10th  
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**Food Distribution**  
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## Annual Meeting

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## Annual Health Fair

Chatuge Regional Hospital  
Sat. May 3rd  
7 AM - 10 AM

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## SOCCER:

## STATE TOURNAMENT

Girls' Soccer  
Friday May 2nd  
@ Pace Academy 6 PM

## Wine and Jazz Fest top GMRC meeting

Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Young Harris – The Georgia Mountain Regional Commission meeting was held in front of a full house at The Ridges Resort and Marina last week.

The GMRC discussed business as usual and Ron Simmons provided an insightful look into his job as area director of the University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center.

In local news, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason, President of the Georgia Wine Growers Association, from Crane Creek Vineyards in Young Harris, Eric Seifarh, and Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall were able to plug the upcoming Appalachian Wine, Jazz, and Art Festival to be held at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in June.

"I believe it was the Clampett family, who was out shooting at a rabbit and hit



Fairgrounds GM Hilda Thomason talks wine and Jazz at the monthly GMRC meeting last week at The Ridges Resort & Marina. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

black gold." Commissioner Kendall said. "And I think Eric will tell you, that if we play our cards right, in North Georgia, red wine could be red gold."

Thomason followed Kendall and gave some background

details on how, after visiting several wineries, and taking part in the Wine Highways, the idea for the Wine, Jazz, and Art festival took root, and will

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## Coalition Trout Dinner a huge success



Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition Executive Director Callie Moore and Patrick Fix cook up a bunch of trout for the Coalition's 10th Annual Trout Dinner Fundraiser at Meeks Park. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
cduncan.tch@windstream.net

Blairsville – They had a feast at Meeks Park on Friday.

Mountain trout, baked beans, coleslaw, potato salad, mountain cornbread, hot dogs for those not accustomed to trout, and all kinds of sweet treats.

What was the occasion? The 10th Annual Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition Trout Dinner and it attracted more than 250 people.

The Watershed was well represented by members from Towns and Union counties in Georgia, and from Cherokee and

Clay counties in North Carolina. The food wasn't free. The event serves as a fundraiser for the Coalition.

The event also brings together residents from the entire watershed. The upper Hiwassee River watershed boundary includes almost all of a four-county area, Cherokee and Clay counties in North Carolina and Towns and Union counties in North Georgia.

There were no speeches by politicians, in fact, the only time those said politicians opened their mouths, it was to insert a fork or spoonful of food.

No, Friday was an op-

portunity to feast and enjoy the fellowship of those who help protect "God's" watershed.

"Water is about the most precious commodity we have," said John Kay, president of the Byron Herbert Reece Society. "The day is coming that a gallon of water will cost more than a gallon of gas. Anything we can do to make sure we have a water supply that is pure, and, suitable for human use, we better be supportive."

Blairsville's Bud Hill, a proactive member of the Coalition, said the Coalition was

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## Hansen: 'Rhodendron Festival continues'

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

April showers bring May flowers, the old saying goes, and Catherine Hansen knows all about flowers.

Hansen, a volunteer at Hamilton Gardens, is working the current Rhodendron Festival, but the weather and other events have conspired to make her job difficult.

Unfortunately, April showers also bring lots of rain, and when it rains, artists are less inclined to sit outside to show their art.

That's exactly what happened on the festival's opening weekend.

"It was a wash," Hansen said. "It rained everywhere."

Over the weekend, the festival faced another problem: boycotts.



"They're boycotting today because they found out about The Bankers' Hour," Hansen explained.

The Bankers' Hour is one of the largest and best-received

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## Three charged with damaging EMC building

Towns County Herald  
News Special

Three men have been arrested and charged with breaking into a vacant building owned by Blue Ridge EMC late last week and doing as much as \$3,000 worth of damage, Towns County Sheriff's reports show.

Kylus Robert Hart, 22, of Lafayette, Daniel Allen Willis, 22, of Acworth and Ray Paul Lambert, 22, of Young Harris, were arrested and charged with Criminal Trespass. All three have posted bond.

According to the Towns

County Sheriff's Office, the incident happened on Wednesday, April 23 when the utility company called deputies to report damage to the building in Young Harris.

Investigators said a number of solid interior doors, bathrooms stall panels and desk tops had been removed from their prospective locations and were being used for skateboard ramps.

Investigators also discovered plastic bags containing suspected marijuana residue and empty alcoholic beverage containers, sheriff's reports show.

The three suspects were tracked the next night when Towns County dispatchers notified deputies that a call had come in regarding what appeared to be three teenagers possibly trespassing and skateboarding in a warehouse in Young Harris.

Deputies were able to make a traffic stop on a red Jeep Cherokee at approximately 11:30 p.m.

The three persons in the car were interviewed, and authorities said they admitted to

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## EMC chairman resigns; vows to repay \$48,643.53 in unpaid utility bills

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
cduncan.tch@windstream.net

The longtime chairman of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors has stepped down amid controversy.

Channel 2 Action News Investigative Reporter Richard Belcher is reporting that BRMEMC's legal counsel has confirmed that Terry Taylor is no longer on the utility company's Board of Directors.

The utility company's legal counsel also says that Taylor, who is in control of a now defunct Taylor and Taylor Construction, will pay the electric bill of \$48,643.53 that Taylor's construction firm owes in unpaid utility bills.

According to a copy of Taylor's bill, the last payment made to BRMEMC was March 22, 2012.

Taylor, one of two Towns County representatives on the BRMEMC Board of Directors, resigned last week, according to Belcher's report.

"A hand-written note on the bill left no doubt who owned the company with the unpaid bill," according to Belcher's report.



Terry Taylor

That note said that the company was owned by Terry Taylor, chairman of the EMC Board of Directors.

BRMEMC's attorney confirmed on Monday that Taylor is no longer a member of the utility company's Board of Directors, that he has chaired for several years.

BRMEMC's attorney told Belcher that Taylor is making arrangements to pay the well overdue utility bill.

Belcher reports that the EMC attorney told him that

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## Deal declares state of emergency

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
cduncan.tch@windstream.net

As Towns County braces for possible severe weather that could include tornado activity and flooding, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal has declared a blanket state of emergency for the entire state.

At press time, Towns County was under a flood watch. Severe weather is likely to impact the region through Wednesday, according to the National Weather Service.

Towns County emergency management officials urge locals to be prepared for power outages in the event of severe weather. Take time and make sure your flashlights have batteries, your weather radio is programmed and functioning if you have one, and your cell phones are charged.

Stay alert for rapidly changing weather through Wednesday. Remember, a basement is the safest location during a tornado watch, or warning. If you do not have a basement, the lowest level of your house is the best place to seek shelter, in an interior closet or bathroom. Keep pillows handy for head cover.

If you live in an area likely to flood, be aware of your surroundings and keep an eye out for flooding. It is not safe to drive through a flooded street.



Gov. Nathan Deal

The National Weather Service is predicting 2 to 4 inches of rain in the area. As much as 3 to 5 inches of rain is possible.

Meanwhile, Gov. Deal, in anticipation of the storm, declared a state of emergency Monday night, which frees up all state resources needed for both preparation and response in the hardest hit counties.

"At this juncture, we've declared the emergency for the entire state because it's impossible to pinpoint where the weather will hit," Gov. Deal said. "Georgia is threatened at least through tomorrow and perhaps into Wednesday. We're prepared now and we'll be ready for recovery should we, God forbid, experience tornado damage or flooding."

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## Mountain Home Show a hit with patrons, businesses



Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Blairsville – Since 1999 The Mountain Home Show has showcased local businesses, and builders.

The two-day show provides seminars and exhibitions, as well as providing educational tools and everything you need for a first-time home builder, a remodeling novice, to even something for housing industry professionals.

Whatever the case, all of the above were offered under

one roof at North Georgia Technical College over the weekend.

Set up just outside the doors was the recognizable orange symbol of The Home Depot – a tent promoting the free estimates that they are of-

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TOWNS COUNTY HERALD





# Home Show...from Page 1

fering on any job. Inside the air conditioned building was another familiar name among Union Countians, and that is Builders First Source, who were making their first appearance at the Mountain Home Show. However, Builder's First Source General Manager Eric Sebring said that this wouldn't be the last time they set up shop at the annual event.

"This is our first year at The Home Show and we plan on being here for years to come," Sebring said. "We've had a lot of activity with new people coming into our community wanting to build new homes or remodeling. In just a day and a half we've had multiple leads and a lot of people interested in building right now. We feel that the building industry is really taking a turn and is coming back here in Union County."

Show Organizer Richard MacCrea is also confident that a turnaround is already taking place. He says that these shows contribute to and energize

the housing and construction market in Union County and surrounding communities. At this year's Home Show approximately 32 businesses set up booths, an increase from 2013.

"Things are picking up," MacCrea said. "We have more exhibitors this year than we had last year. "We're just trying to help the whole housing industry in this area get some work."

On Sunday, free seminars were presented by MacCrea and open to anyone in attendance. The first one focused on how to remodel and get more for less cost. The second one focused on how to save the most energy for the least cost. Patrick Construction presented a third seminar on saving energy.

David Lewis of North Georgia Outdoor Wood Furnaces in Blue Ridge is a veteran to The Mountain Home Show and has been to the last four.

He spoke about the importance of these events and the benefits they offer for local businesses.

"I've gotten returns as far as three years back from cus-

tomers who picked up a brochure or something and they contacted us when they needed us," Lewis said. "I like this Home Show because it brings me into this particular area. I'm from Blue Ridge and this gets me some exposure over here. It gives people a chance to get to see my product and we get to talk to people."

Ronald Reagan once said that "a rising tide lifts all boats" and according to Sebring, that is the consensus among all of the exhibitors at The Mountain Home Show.

When the housing industry begins to gain steam, each one of these local businesses will reap the benefits, as will the economy as a whole. And that's the reason for the friendly atmosphere amongst everyone at this event.

"These shows are very important for name recognition and to commiserate with the other vendors here at the show," Sebring said. "We all try to help each other out. If they don't offer a certain product then we will help them out. Beyond the Home Show we work with each other to try and grow business here in Union and Towns counties."

## Unpaid... continued from Page 1

BRMEMC acted promptly when it learned of the unpaid bill owed by the now former board president.

The EMC's legal counsel told WSB-TV that the utility company will take a closer look to determine if there are any other unpaid bills that may have been overlooked.

Taylor's payment is expected to be formalized in a consent judgment, according to the EMC's legal counsel.

The news report aired Monday evening as rumors of the unpaid utility bills and Taylor's resignation from the EMC Board of Directors swirled about among the utility company's more than 43,000 customers with more than 49,000 electric meters.

It's unclear how long the bill has been overdue, overlooked and gone unpaid.

## Weather... continued from Page 1

"The state is sending the latest weather information we have available to affected schools districts, so that they can make informed decisions as they plan for tomorrow," Gov. Deal said. "The state of emergency will extend until the threat subsides."

## Arrests... continued from Page 1

the damage at the Blue Ridge EMC building.

Meanwhile, in an unrelated incident, Towns County deputies and an agent with the Appalachian Drug Task Force assisted by the Hiwassee Police Department executed a 4th Amendment waiver search on a 21-year-old Blairsville man at Lake Chatuge Lodge in Hiwassee.

Upon further investigation, agents found quantities of marijuana and drug related objects.

Joshua Allen Wasko allegedly resisted arrest. Wasko was charged with distribution, possession, and obstruction.

Wasko was on probation and his probation officer was notified. Wasko Bonded out on April 17.

Subsequently, a probation violation warrant was issued, and he was spotted by Towns County sheriff's deputies at a Sunoco gas station on April 26.

During the interview with authorities, Wasko fled the scene on foot, and was apprehended quickly at a nearby cemetery.

Wasko was charged with Probation Violation (original warrant), and one count of obstruction. He is currently in custody in the Towns County Detention Center.

# Rhodendron...from Page 1

productions that the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds hosts, and sells out nearly every year.

"It's the best show that we do," said Hansen, but she added that the popularity of The Bankers' Hour meant that the artists who would otherwise have come to show off at the festival were disinclined to do so, because they would have nowhere to park.

Fortunately, most of the artists, who come from the John C. Campbell School, will be up next weekend. The artists include folk artist Jo Kilmer, who uses natural Appalachian materials to craft most of her works, and Ron Salzer, sculptor and founder of "Bridges to the Other Side."

Hansen said that the weekends are for the artists, but the

weekdays are reserved for selling the plants. Most of the Garden's money comes from its plant sales.

"We have native azaleas, and really rare hard-to-find, you can't find these rhododendrons anywhere. We pride ourselves on those," said Hansen.

The Hamilton Gardens span 33 acres, so there's plenty of room for, for example, the fire colored flame azaleas, which Hansen said were her favorite of the azaleas.

However, it takes hard work to tend to 33 acres, and the Gardens only have one core staff member.

"It's tough," said Hanson. "But we're at the point where we're pushing for a core staff and to get the county behind us."

Since the Hamilton Gardens are the only registered botanical garden in Northeast Georgia, besides the state-sponsored University of Georgia gardens, Hansen feels that they could benefit from some more support.

"If you're going to support the parks and recreations here, we're a botanical garden, why wouldn't you support a botanical garden?" she said.

She also said that she hadn't yet been able to talk Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall into seeing the importance of the gardens.

"We're trying our darndest," she joked. "We're trying to turn this place around."

The festival continues through May 17.

# Watershed...from Page 1

working hard to make sure the watershed was safe and protected in a manner it should be.

"People need to be aware of the protections for our waterways," Hill said. "The Coalition's mission is to protect the watershed, protect our valuable natural resource, and improving the stream bank buffers that filters the runoff that goes into our streams. They also reshape the water right of ways to what they used to be."

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said the Coalition and its mission is important to the four-county watershed.

"A lot of people still don't know about the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition, but they've been around since 1995," Paris said. "The interesting part is they work Towns and Union counties in Georgia and Cherokee and Clay counties in North Carolina."

"They've been real good to work with the county on stream protection, buffer protection, planting buffers, giving us advice on stream buffers, and they do that in all four counties," Paris said. "They also do a lot of work around our lakes, they do water quality testing, and give us an indication if there is a problem with our water quality."

"They are a real asset to all four counties in the watershed," Paris said.

Callie Moore, executive director of the Coalition, said the event was a rousing success.

"It was a great crowd," Moore said. "There were lots of people from all four counties in the watershed here tonight."



Friday was a feast for more than 250 members of the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition as they dined outdoors at Meeks Park. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"This event really gives people from all over the watershed the opportunity to interact with one another," Moore said. "People came here to support the Watershed Coalition. Folks get to talk, get to know one another and they realize they all support the same ideals."

The major watersheds covered by the Coalition include Brasstown Creek, Valley River, Tusquitee Creek, Nottely River and Lake Nottely, Hiwassee

River and Lake Chatuge in Clay County, NC and Towns County.

Over the past 10 years, the Coalition has brought \$6 million in grant funding into the upper Hiwassee River watershed.

More than 92 percent of these funds were spent for on-the-ground projects and programs to facilitate water quality and aquatic habitat improvements in areas where it has declined.

# Festival...from Page 1

become a reality in a matter of weeks.

"I see what a great tourist attraction that the wineries are becoming and I think, 'if they can do all of this at the wineries, why can't we have it at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds?'"

Following a conversation with Seifarth, the idea was born and Thomason and Seifarth became the first members of the Festival committee. According to Thomason, 15 wineries from across Georgia and Western North Carolina have been confirmed as of last Thursday's Festival Committee meeting.

"There will also be a fine arts show that will be invitation only," Thomason said. "We're also going to have jazz bands, we've got about five or six different jazz bands that are booked for both days. They're coming all the way from Atlanta to Asheville, NC."

Thomason indicated that at least seven restaurants would participate during the festival.

"We've got the Copper Door from Hayesville, NC, The Ridges Resort, Brothers Restau-

rant, Café Portofino, The Chop House, Cowboys and Angels out of Helen, we've got Bowl of Asia, we've got different restaurants to offer fine foods," she said. "We've got lobster, we've got shrimp, prime rib, and all kinds of neat stuff as far as foods are concerned."

The price for the festival will be \$30 a day that includes a free wine glass and tastings from each of the vineyards. Children 12 and under get in free. Festivities run from noon to 7 p.m. each day. Wine by the glass and wine by the bottle will also be for sale.

"When I first started Crane Creek Vineyards there was seven wineries in Georgia," President Seifarth said. "The last count I took as president of the association, there were 42 wineries, and growing. I can't keep up with the new wineries, they are like mushrooms, and it's not only making an impact on the northern part of the state, but throughout the state."

Seifarth named off each of the 15 wineries that are committed to the festival - Crane

Creek Vineyards and Hightower Creek Vineyards from Towns County, Odom Springs Vineyards from neighboring Union County, Habersham Winery from just the other side of Unicoi Gap in Helen, Ellijay's Cartecay Vineyards, Montaluce Winery and Estates in Dahlonega, and Calaboose Cellars in Andrews, NC.

"Right now we have 15 wineries signed up, but my goal is to get to 20," Seifarth said. "That would be almost half the wineries in the state."

The next scheduled GMRC meeting will be May 29th at the Dawson County Middle School.

A full delegation of Towns County, City of Hiwassee, and City of Young Harris government was in attendance at the monthly council meeting. Commissioner Kendall opened the meeting by introducing each of the elected officials starting with Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis and three of five Hiwassee City Council members - Stephen Smith, Pat Smith, and Janet Allen.