

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, June 18, 2014

Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thu: T-Storms	86 64
Fri: Clouds	89 66
Sat: T-Storms	87 65
Sun: T-Storms	84 65
Mon: Clouds	82 63
Tue: T-Storms	82 65
Wed: T-Storms	78 63



Upstream Elevation Predicted	06/18/14
Lake Chatuge	1,925.32
Lake Nottely	1,776.41
Blue Ridge	1,686.32

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The Towns County Board of Education Regular Board Meetings scheduled for Monday, July 14, Will be Relocated to the Towns County Board of Education Central Office.

For questions or directions, please call 706-896-2279



Food Distribution
Food Pantry
Tues, Jun 24th
2-5 PM
Mt. Zion Church
Thurs, June 19th
10-Noon

GEORGIA MOUNTAIN RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER SUMMER LAUNCH PARTY & FUNDRAISER! JUNE 21ST

RECREATION DEPARTMENT'S JULY 4TH ACTIVITY DAY THE TOWNS COUNTY RECREATION DEPARTMENT'S ANNUAL JULY 4TH ACTIVITY DAY WILL BE ON FRIDAY JULY 4TH, 2014 AT THE RECREATION DEPARTMENT BALL FIELDS. THE RECREATION DEPARTMENT INVITES EVERYONE TO COME OUT AND HAVE FUN IN THE SUN!!
 See page 5A

Wine and Jazz Fest draws 1,200

By Matthew Jarrard
 Towns County Herald
 Staff Writer

The First Appalachian Wine and Jazz Festival found an audience in Hiawassee.

The festival kicked off on Friday June 13 and stayed around through Saturday at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Wine cellars and art sellers opened their doors to dispense love of their craft to patrons traveling both far and wide throughout the North Georgia Mountains.

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said the debut of the first-year event was incredible.

"Our paid attendance was 704 people," Thomason said. "When you take all the vendors, all the volunteers, and everybody under 12, we probably had 1,200 people."

"It was very good for a first-year event," she said. "We sold \$15,000 worth of wine."

"It was successful, enough where we will have it again next year," Thomason said. "We'll set the dates real soon."



Hilda Thomason and Commissioner Bill Kendall kick off the first Appalachian Wine and Jazz Festival. Photo/Scott Newton

Tom and June Koulermos from Jacksonville, FL enjoyed their share of spirits and fine art as they celebrated their sixth year wedding anniversary in Hiawassee for the entire week, starting off their Friday afternoon with the locally owned and operated Hightower Creek Vineyards.

"Today is our anniversary and Sunday is June's birthday," said Tom. "We're spending the week in this very wonderful, very mountainous area. On Monday we're going to go on Lake Chatuge and rent a pontoon boat."

"They started us off with

See Festival, Page 10

Kendall: 'no tax hike this year'

By Charles Duncan
 Towns County Herald
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Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall told members of the Towns County Homeowners Association that he would continue to hold the line on taxes for next year.

Speaking at the Association's Annual Meeting at the Mountain Community Senior Center, Kendall said he would continue to hold a tight grip on the county's purse strings.

"Our budget is based on a calendar year," Kendall said. "We go from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31. We set our taxes around October or November. We have preliminary figures on the Tax Digest."

"Last year's Digest went down many millions of dollars, I think the figure was \$77 million on a 40 percent assessment," Kendall said. "The assessors told me this week that it looks like the value is up \$7



Commissioner Bill Kendall million.

"This process of losing value has stopped and the values will start going back up," he said. "Every time the banks foreclose and sell some property off for pennies on the dollar, it impacts your property."

"That's what has been happening to Towns County's Tax Digest," Kendall said. "We'll soon get a true figure on what the Tax Digest is, and

I don't anticipate the county tax going up next year. We're going to continue to be very careful with spending."

Kendall told the group that collections from the county's Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax have been way down. However, things are rebounding, he said.

"Things are looking good on that front too," he said. "That's good news."

Meanwhile, Kendall told the group that he continues to monitor noise issues from the Blue Otter and the Sand Bar.

Kendall had complaints from homeowners last year about the amount of noise coming from the two business establishments.

Kendall said three weeks ago, the noise level from the Blue Otter was quite loud. He asked them to get the noise down and management complied.

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Georgia cans CRCT, EOCT testing

By Charles Duncan
 Towns County Herald
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State School Superintendent Dr. John Barge has announced a new assessment system aimed at replacing CRCT and EOCT testing.

Georgia Milestones will be aligned to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards and will require more from students than the CRCT and EOCT it replaces, according to Dr. Barge.

Georgia Milestones will provide a more realistic picture of academic progress, according to Dr. Barge.

A major benefit of the new system is that it is one consistent testing program across grades 3-12, whereas previously students took a series of individual tests. The increased expectations for student learning reflected in Georgia Milestones may mean initially lower scores than the previous years' CRCT or EOCT scores.

"We need to know that students are being prepared, not at a



Dr. John Barge minimum-competency level but with rigorous, relevant education, to enter college, the workforce or the military at a level that makes them competitive with students from other states," Dr. Barge said.

The new assessment system will be a comprehensive single program and not a series of tests as has been the norm. It will combine Reading, English/Language Arts and Writing into a single test. The new system also will be a more coherent measure providing consistent expectations

and rigor to position Georgia students to compete with peers nationally and internationally.

The Georgia Milestones will also be a consistent signal about student preparedness for the next level, be it the next grade, course, and or college and career. The new system also will provide a standard measure of student achievement both within system — across grades and courses — and with external measures — NAEP; PSAT; SAT; ACT.

The new testing system will include open-ended questions to better gauge students' mastery of content.

With some exceptions for special education students with specific testing accommodations, Georgia Milestones will be administered entirely online by the fifth year of implementation, compared to 35 percent online administration of the EOCT in 2013-2014.

The State of Georgia awarded a bid on Wednesday, May 28 to CTB/McGraw-Hill to

See Testing, Page 10

Expansion planned at Hamilton Gardens

By Charles Duncan
 Towns County Herald
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Hamilton Gardens Curator Paul Hansen unveiled a \$10 million enhancement project for the future of The Gardens at the Towns County Homeowners Association Annual Meeting on Friday.

The plan includes a two-car tram, a pedestrian trail, a mountain-themed Pioneer Area, a pedestrian boardwalk, a tree top canopy walk and redevelopment of the Memorial Garden.

It also includes a Garden Gazebo for weddings, concerts and special events, as well as plans to build an 8,000-square foot Visitors Center. The plans also include a remodeled Paris Pavilion.

"We're trying to make The Gardens a destination,"



Hansen said. "This project is about \$10 million. We're in the process of writing a letter of intent for \$10 million. We're trying to get the funding for this developed in the next two-to-three years."

"We're also in the process of seeking money for a core staff. We think this is a great project for this area,"

Hansen said. "We're trying to bring in 350,000 to 500,000 visitors to this area."

"The economic impact of that is \$50 million in the local economy," he said.

Over the last four years, Hansen and his wife Catherine have been putting plans on paper regarding the future of the Gardens.

The idea is to get people excited about Hamilton Gardens.

Paul Hansen bases the premise of the revamped Gardens as the key to bringing families and increased tourism back to The Gardens and Towns County.

The Garden Clubs of Young Harris and Hiawassee have helped with funding the business planning for the 33-acre Gardens, Hansen said.

See Gardens, Page 10

Fun World to close its doors on June 21

Towns County Herald
 News Special

The following is an official release from Ken and Dana Merritt, owners of Fun World.

For 10 years, Fun World at Fieldstone Resort has been a staple for youth and young at heart in Towns County and the surrounding area.

Due to lack of interest in the venue, we have decided to cease operation after the close of business on June 21st, 2014.

We are grateful for your support and patronage over the years and we look forward to continuing to serve you at Fieldstone Cinemas 6, Water Crest Condominiums, Cafe Portofino, and Sand Bar.

Our decision was difficult and not without careful consideration of the lives Fun World has touched since we began operation.

Many of you had your first job and earned your first paycheck with us; we've celebrated your birthdays and seen many of you grown into adults and have children of your own.

While we have a certain amount of sadness in our decision, we are confident that the facility will reopen in the near future with a new venture that will be beneficial to the area.

Thank you and God Bless,
 Ken & Dana Merritt and the Fieldstone Resort Family

Harrah's Valley River Casino and Hotel could open by spring

By Charles Duncan
 Towns County Herald
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The \$110 million Harrah's Valley River Casino and Hotel Phase I Project in Cherokee County, NC could be completed by spring to mid 2015, said Paula Wojtkowski, regional vice president of talent development and external relations.

Wojtkowski, speaking at the annual Towns County Homeowners Association meeting on Friday, said the project could be completed by no later than July.

The casino will be owned by the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians and will be managed by Caesars Entertainment Corp.

The Eastern Band of Cherokees already owns Harrah's Cherokee Casino Resort in Cherokee, NC, about an hour's drive from the new casino location.

The Valley River Casino and Hotel, which includes 300 rooms, will be located about 30 minutes from Union County, and just a slightly longer drive from Hiawassee. Basically, just past Wal-Mart in Murphy on Highway 74.

It also will target patrons from Knoxville and Chattanooga, Tenn., and the Metro Atlanta area. The future of additional projects is likely. The Eastern Band of Cherokee has access to 600 additional acres adjacent to the Phase I Project.



Paula Wojtkowski

Wojtkowski, a member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee, told the group that the decision to build the casino in Murphy was because it was closer to the feeder market of Atlanta.

"It's closer to those customers known and unknown," she added. "There's tremendous geographical potential of putting our gaming closer to the largest concentration of adult population. The adult population within 150 miles of Murphy is 26 percent greater than Cherokee."

The Cherokee Casino's Total Rewards program boasts 2.3 million members within 180 miles of Cherokee, with only 497,000 visiting that facility today, Wojtkowski said.

"We knew there was a tremendous upside with customers that are already in our database today. Our winning partnership with Caesars Entertainment gives us a proven

See Casino, Page 10

Missing Wisconsin man seen on Trail in NC

By Charles Duncan
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A 50-year-old Wisconsin man believed missing on the Appalachian Trail, and last seen in Union County, is alive, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Paul D. Paur, of West Allis, WI, a suburb of Milwaukee, was last seen Tuesday, June 10, at the Standing Indian Shelter on the Appalachian Trail in Macon County, NC, Sheriff Mason said.

"We've got a positive ID that he was in Macon County, NC," Sheriff Mason said.

The Union County Sheriff's Office also received reports that on June 7, Paur was seen at the Deep Gap Shelter on the Trail in Towns County, and at the Plum Orchard Shelter, also in Towns County on June 8.

"We had a report that on June 7 that he ate super with a Boy Scout troop," Sheriff Mason said. "He was seen the next day at the Plum Orchard Shelter. He was positively identified. The folks that knew it was him had read the Towns County Herald."

Law enforcement first became concerned about Paur when his backpack was discovered in the middle of the Appalachian Trail on June 5 in Union County, Sheriff Mason said.

"We got a report of a backpack on the trail just beyond Walasi-Yi," Sheriff Mason said. "The trail isn't more than 3 feet wide, and hikers were having to walk around it. It was still there when they returned from their hike."

Sheriff's deputies retrieved the backpack. Inside the pack, they discovered Paur's



Paul Paur

belongings, his wallet and other items. Included among those other items was a substantial amount of money.

Sheriff Mason, deputies, firefighters and Emergency Management personnel searched an area just off the Appalachian Trail near Walasi-Yi to no avail.

"He's 6-foot, 1-inch, 230 pounds, brown hair and blue eyes," Sheriff Mason said.

Paur left his vehicle at Walasi-Yi and paid \$200 for those at the Interpretive Center to watch it for him, Sheriff Mason said.

Paur is still listed as a missing and endangered person in Union County, Detective SSGt. Darren Osborn said.

Contact information on the backpack led authorities to call family members in Wisconsin.

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