

Bonds...from Page 1A

bonds and they can get them cheaper.”

The Towers project, on Bald Mountain Road, on the backside of the campus, provides on-campus housing for up to 236 students, including many from the local communities, Kendall said.

Students moved into the complex on Aug. 19th, when students returned to the YHC campus.

YHC has a student population of 1,135 this fall, of which more than 160 reside in Fannin, Towns and Union counties. More than 300 total are from throughout the region.

Commissioner Paris, also the chairman of the Joint Development Authority, said that the entire JDA board appreciated the opportunity to assist Young Harris College with this financing process.

All three counties have students attending the college and the success of these students and the surrounding areas are directly related to the success of Young Harris College.

“This financing in no way obligates any of our counties and we are honored to be able to assist this fine institution,” Paris said. “The Joint Development Authority is set up to assist with projects in Union, Towns and Fannin counties. The JDA helped with the Byron Herbert Reece Farm and Heritage Center. This just allows Young Harris College to get tax-free financing for their residence hall.

“The folks that buy their bonds don’t have to pay taxes because it comes through the JDA,” Paris said. “Each county

in the JDA have students with ties to Young Harris College. Like Commissioner Kendall said, it really was a no-brainer for us to help Young Harris College.”

The bonds being issued will have a face amount of \$10 million and are tax-exempt. The holder of the bonds will be exempt from paying income taxes on the earnings of these bonds in most circumstances, allowing for the bonds to have lower interest rates than commercially available financing.

Once finalized, the bonds will be “direct placed” with State Bank and Trust at a predetermined rate for a seven-year term.

“That college was founded to help poor mountain students,” Commissioner Kendall said. “I wouldn’t have had an education if it hadn’t been for Young Harris College. It’s still a huge part of our community and a good deal for our kids.”

The bonds will also be issued as “pass-through bonds.”

In the unlikely event of a default, there is no liability to the Joint Development Authority, the governments of Towns, Union or Fannin counties, nor the taxpayers of those counties.

Members of the Joint Development Authority include Paris, Chairman and Sole Commissioner of Union County, Kendall, Sole Commissioner of Towns County, Chair of the Fannin County Board of Commissioners Bill Simonds, Secretary Mitch Griggs, Stan Helton, Vice Secretary Stephanie Searcy, Bud Parker, Morris Philips, W.C. Nelson, Jr., and Robert Head.

Tomato Fest...from Page 1A

yards started small.

A former military man, Eric was stationed in Italy, where his love for wine developed.

Although he and Deanne were originally from Atlanta, they moved to Towns County and bought the 1886 farmhouse that is now the center of their operation.

They planted the first grape variety, seyval, in 1995. Now the vineyards have 22.5 acres “under vine” with 13 different grape varieties.

An interesting thing about the festival is that it allows people the chance to sample the produce from other farms.

The cheeses that Crane Creek featured this year were from Sweetwater Valley, in Philadelphia, Tenn., and the jams originated from Stonewall Kitchen in Maine.

Tasting Room Manager, Jill Espalin shared a little about the tradition of Crane Creek festivals.

Jill grew up local, attending school for a time at Young Harris College.

“We do a Mountain and Wine Country Festival, where nine other wineries came in and participated this year,” she said. “We also do a Harvest Festival, which is in October.”

She added that the Harvest Festival was her favorite festival, possibly because of the

grape-stomping.

The excitement surrounding the Tomato Festival, as well as all the produce and samples available to taste and buy, often lead people to get the wrong impression.

“People think that we have a big tomato garden somewhere,” Espalin said. “We do have a tomato garden, however, it’s basically just seasonal. So we have a lunch that features tomatoes; green tomato pie, salad.

“There was another vendor out there that was tasting, and he was featuring succotash and grits,” she said.

Crane Creek is primarily a vineyard, Espalin said.

“We have an herb garden, small things that are for our tapas menu, events that we do, that we cater,” Espalin admits. “But primarily grapes.”

The Crane Creek festivals are part of a tradition that has shown no signs of faltering, as each event brings a sizeable crowd every year.

Though the Tomato Festival ended at 6 p.m. on Saturday, the Harvest Festival is right around the corner.

It will take place Oct. 26th, and is an excellent opportunity for those who missed the celebrated Crane Creek produce firsthand.

Chili...from Page 1A

it out and unrolled it.

Bush, always trying to be helpful, could not help but laugh at himself.

He had brought a ladder in his truck, but shaking his head he said, “I should have known the fire department would have a ladder.”

Harold Copeland, Towns County assistant Fire Chief, stood in for Towns County Fire Chief Mitch Floyd, instructing the men on how to hang the banner properly.

After ensuring there was no sagging, the men secured the zip ties, cut off the excess rope, removed the ladders and looked at what they had done, no doubt feeling a slight rumbling in their stomachs, hungry for homemade chili.

Fire in the Mountains Chili Cook-Off returns after a two-year hiatus on Saturday, Sept. 7th on the Downtown Square in Hiawassee.

There will be live entertainment, a raffle for a firearm, live music, a bounce house, dunk tank, silent auction, meet and greet with the firefight-

ers, an equipment setup, and of course, plenty of delicious chili.

At 10 a.m. that day, former Georgia Secretary of State and current President of Young Harris College, Cathy Cox will give opening remarks.

At 11 a.m., stoves will be shut off, and judging will begin at noon. There will be five judges, all with a culinary background of some kind.

First place chili wins \$300, second place will receive \$150, and third place earns \$100.

A People’s Choice winner also will be named. Be sure to come out and support the Towns County Fire & Rescue, and fill up on great, homemade chili.

For more details on the event, visit the Web at www.tcfirecorps.org, or call Perry Bush, (706) 896-6875. To pick up an application to be a chili chef, drop by any Towns County Fire & Rescue station or the Towns County Chamber of Commerce.

Firewise...from Page 1A

happen to us. Last year alone, there were 5,420 permit burns in Towns County. With such a high number of known fires, imagine how many went without permits.

Notifying the fire department about a controlled fire is imperative, as it allows firefighters to know when to take calls seriously, and also helps them pinpoint fires easily if they were to get out of hand.

If that is not incentive enough, know this, if a non-permitted burn were to spread and destroy a neighboring home, even if you had homeowners insurance that included fire damage, that insurance would become null and void.

Choosing between out-of-pocket expenses versus insurance becomes a very easy decision, especially since the permit is free.

Another reason it is so important to keep fire risk low is water-related. Naturally, the community wants to preserve as much water as possible in case of a fire.

The city of Atlanta gets all of their drinking water from the Chattahoochee River. That

river starts in Hiawassee. If we had to use up much of that water supply to contain a fire, it would bring a whole new meaning to the term, “Hot-lanta.”

Luckily, the Towns County Fire and Rescue, with the help of Harkins and Riley, have already made strides in protecting our community.

Towns County started the Firewise program, making it the first one in Georgia. Along with that program came the Ready, Set, Go evacuation plan that Riley encourages every family to take part in. The effort did not go unnoticed. In fact, so many people realized how hard Towns County was working, we have become number 1 in the nation for safety, so all eyes are on us.

So far, Brasstown Valley Resort, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and Towns County Comprehensive Schools have taken part in assessments that evaluate how prepared they would be, should a fire break out.

The team is hopeful that Young Harris College is next on the list. Any community can be Firewise. The group promises that they do not want

to do anything to your home, they simply want to make you aware of how easy it can be to overlook something.

For instance, dried leaves left in a gutter or lawn furniture spread out around the property can act as a powder keg, putting you, your family and your property at risk.

Towns has six Firewise programs as opposed to one, like every other county in Georgia. The county is also one of eight fire adaptive counties in the entire United States.

This means Towns County has neighborhoods located in wildfire-prone areas that can survive fire with little or no assistance from firefighters. This is impressive, considering the team explained that we are a poster child for fires, since everyone lives near the woods.

Because firefighters’ priorities put life before property, they go through neighborhoods and mark safe streets and unsafe streets.

If your neighborhood is deemed unsafe, they will not come to your home in the event of a wildfire. Because

like Floyd said, “You can’t outrun a fire.”

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall encourages the community to “shop around” when it comes to insurance.

Because we are currently so successful with fire safety, as of December 2012, we are a Class 5 Fire Rating. Class ranking works on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being the best.

While it may not seem like a large scale, it makes a big difference.

If you live in an area with a Class 9 rating, the cost of a fire is 65 percent higher than if you live in an area with a Fire Class 5 rating.

Therefore, we should all feel motivated to continue lower our number. Commissioner Kendall also suggested calling your current insurance provider and making sure they are aware that Towns County is a Class 5 Fire Rating.

For a burn permit, visit Gatrees.org, or call (877) 652-2876. To talk to the Fire Department about assessing the safety of your home or neighborhood, call (706) 896-2090.

Hires ...from Page 1A

hound new to the K-9 force. He will be working alongside German Malinois, Sarge.

Copper is only 11 weeks old, but as soon as he turns 10 months, he will officially begin his job.

Sarge has taken a liking to the adorable puppy, as have all of the Elementary school students, according to Sheriff Clinton.

The Elementary school has been visited by the K-9 force before, but they only recently met the puppy. Naturally, they all adored him.

While Malinois are certainly used for tracking, a majority of them, Sarge included, are trained to sniff out narcotics.

Copper will focus more on specific people.

Bloodhounds have been known to track a trail that is 10 days old.

Sheriff Clinton pointed out that because we live in the mountains, it can occasionally be all too easy to get



Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton swears in Colton Stroud, above, and Josh Barnes, below as new detention officers.

turned around in the woods and struggle to find your way back. If this were to happen, Copper would be the pup most likely used to locate you.

Sheriff Clinton also explained that Copper will be especially helpful should a child ever go missing.

A father himself, Sheriff Clinton said one of the worst scenarios he could ever imagine would be something happening to his kids.

He had a special interest in Copper’s skills, since he would easily be able to put himself in the shoes of a parent dealing with that personal situation.

Copper will no doubt have plenty of training, too.

The Towns County Sheriff’s Office already doubles the state standard for training, and still, the K-9 unit receives even more training than the humans.

Sarge and Copper are sure to be fast friends with that many scheduled training dates.

Wilkinson...from Page 1A

ing for upgrades to the Towns County Library is more humble in person than as he appears on the State Senate Floor.

On the Senate Floor, Sen. Wilkinson is a fighter for those who he represents in the 50th Senate District.

Bringing home almost \$1 million isn’t easy.

To set the stage, it was the final days of the Legislative Session in March.

House District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison called Sen. Wilkinson and told him that Gov. Nathan Deal had taken library money out of the state’s more than \$19 billion budget.

Rep. Allison was adamant that neither he, nor Sen. Wilkinson could go back home to the North Georgia Mountains without library money.

Rep. Allison asked Sen. Wilkinson if he could do anything on the Senate side to open a door to get library funding for Towns County back on the table.

Sen. Wilkinson began working the Senate side of the aisle and was able to get dialogue started to get money for library upgrades in Towns County back on the table.

Given the odds, what Sen. Wilkinson was able to do was remarkable.

There were only three



Sen. John Wilkinson

libraries that made it on the final state list out of 11 library requests and Towns County made the final cut.

When the measure came back to the State House, Rep. Allison was able to get on it like a dog on a bone and \$900,000 in library funding made its way back to Hiawassee.

The secret was Sen. Wilkinson, who presented the Towns County project, supported it, made sure all the documentation was there.

He followed it all the way through like a blood hound.

Sen. Wilkinson told the crowd at Mary’s Southern Grill that he appreciated the opportunity to be there.

“Nothing happens and you don’t have this kind of suc-

cess without a lot of support and a lot of work,” Sen. Wilkinson said, referring to being able to secure the library funding.

“I’ve not been in the General Assembly that long, but since I’ve been there, I can assure you that I’ve heard from the Friends of the Library staff here in Hiawassee,” he said.

“You can just get a lot more done when you have a team that can work together and Rep. Stephen Allison and I did meet on several occasions and he had a lot to do with this project and I know Commissioner Bill Kendall worked hard on the county end to make it happen as well.”

Sen. Wilkinson may not live in Towns County, but he is a “mountain man” at heart.

Over a breakfast of scrambled eggs and toast, he spoke to a couple members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers about growing up in the South, and his ties to Northeast Georgia.

He even spoke about an attempt made a while back to create a “Mountain Committee” in the State Senate and House.

A humble man, Sen. Wilkinson did not make a big deal out of bringing home \$900,000 for library expansion, even though all in attendance were impressed by his dedication to our community.

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton was scheduled to speak before Sen. Wilkinson, but was unable to attend.

Largely, because of that, House Bill 1 and House Bill 1176 were not discussed as much as expected.

Sen. Wilkinson did explain he only had so much impact on those bills saying, “You see that HB on it? That is the House. I work in the Senate.”

He did mention that he has some reservations about the bills.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall thanked Sen. Wilkinson for attending the weekly Movers and Shakers event, saying it was a pleasure to have him there.

“The Senator is a friend of education. I appreciate John being here,” Commissioner Kendall said.

Georgia Peters will speak to the Shakers on Friday, Aug. 30. She will present the Georgia 1.69 project.

It is an effort to get each county in Georgia to lose 10,000 pounds, and it will start in Towns County.

The Mountain Movers and Shakers invite everyone to come to Mary’s Southern Grill and eat breakfast. Mary’s is located at 1615 Georgia 17, in Young Harris.

Excellence...from Page 1A

these schools really shine,” he said. “Their focus on areas that impact student success is

Speech...from Page 1A

important for everyday tasks saying, “From buying a car to buying a house to buying groceries, it is important to be able to communicate with people.”

Being a good speaker also is imperative for anyone who may be interested in politics one day.

After all, no public figure can get out of speaking in front of a large crowd of judgmental people. And they do not even get cash rewards for participating.

Some well known public figures are expected to be judges at the competition, which would certainly motivate the students to give it their all.

In the past, the GOP and the Shakers have been judges, but this year, House District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison and Gov. Nathan Deal are just two of the possible panelists of judges possibly taking on

evident across the board. I offer my congratulations to our 2012 Georgia Schools of Excellence

and my appreciation to Georgia Natural Gas and United Healthcare for continued support of our schools.”

“I join with Dr. Berrong in congratulating the students, faculty and staff at Towns County Middle School on receiving this outstanding honor,” Towns County Schools Superintendent Melissa Williams said. “This is a testament to the entire community and the value Towns County places on providing a quality education for our students. These teachers and students have worked hard. What a fitting reward for their dedication and diligence.”

The Georgia Schools of Excellence are chosen from each Congressional District in the following categories – highest performing schools represent the top performance schools within each Congressional District on the College and Career-Ready Performance Index; highest progress schools represent the school making the greatest gains within each Congressional District on the College and Career-Ready

Performance Index.

TCMS received this honor in Highest Performance by having the highest CCRPI score in the 9th Congressional District.

When the new College and Career Readiness Index scores were released several months ago Towns County Middle School ranked No. 1 in the state when compared to 180 other middle school systems in Georgia with an overall score of 99.4.

When compared to an estimated 400 individual middle schools, TCMS ranked 2nd overall only one tenth of a point below the top school.

“Our student achievement was without a doubt, very high in 2012,” Dr. Berrong said. “When you win something in education, it’s not like winning a state championship.

“In sports, you know what you’ve done,” he said. “In education, it takes a while to soak in. Soon though, our students will understand how big of an accomplishment that this really is.”



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