

Clinton...from Page 1

and committed. The number one crime in the county is substance abuse, while property crime demonstrates the lowest crime rate.

"The first most abused substance is alcohol, followed closely by marijuana," said Sheriff Clinton. "So, it's not really a big surprise that the number one crime involving persons is domestic violence related issues - battery, family violence, cruelty to children, obstructing officers. Because they get drunk, they beat up their wife and kids, and when the deputies get there they want to fight with them, too."

Sheriff Clinton gives credit for the relatively low incidents of crime in large part to the residents of Towns County who have chosen to become more aware about what goes on in their community.

"The thing about a neighborhood watch program, it can be as involved as you want it to

be," said Sheriff Clinton. "We have one neighborhood watch program that does everything but write traffic citations. They are extremely involved and organized."

Other neighborhoods would rather maintain a lower profile, putting up signs that are provided at no charge to the community.

"It makes me sleep a little better at night to realize that citizens are learning more about what they can do to be aware of what's going on," said Sheriff Clinton.

The sheriff believes strongly in a see something, say something policy, and takes his office seriously as one of the people, by the people, and for the people.

"We work for you all, we're here to serve you," said Sheriff Clinton. "We appreciate the opportunity to do that, and anything that we can do to help, that's what I want to do."

Scores...from Page 1

Taking second place in the Pioneer RESA just behind Habersham County, which had a passing percentage of 52.32, Towns County ninth-graders surpassed the state average of 40 for coordinate algebra with a passing percentage of 52.13.

Passing only 52 percent of students may seem like a low average, but Towns County students improved 14.83 percentage points over the previous school year, which is a huge margin, and progress is just as important as passing.

"Last year we came in second to last in our RESA in coordinate algebra," said Principal Gibson. "We moved from second to last to second to the top."

In analytic geometry, the state average was 35, and Towns County, while it beat that average with a 39.74, came in ninth in its RESA.

"Geometry, we're still above state average," said Gibson. "We've got some work to do there - we're not excited about that, but we'll get that fixed."

The remaining scores, however, were something to be excited about, as Towns County High School students averaged 93.15 versus the state's average of 75 in biology, coming second in the Pioneer RESA and improving 19.65 percentage points over the previous school year.

And in physical science, Towns County children averaged a 91.86 to the state's 85.

U.S. history was another category in which Towns County kids excelled, coming in second of 15 in the RESA with an average of 87.5 to the state's 73, and showing a 16.4 percent improvement over previous results.

Last but not least, Towns County scored another academic victory with economics, beating the state average of 81

by 11 points with a 92, which was a previous year improvement of 14.1 percent.

"These scores speak volumes to the kids and teachers that we have in this building," said Principal Gibson. "And I would like to encourage everybody in the community, when you see these teachers or kids in the community, to tell them you're proud of them, and to tell these teachers that you're thankful for what they've done."

One way the school recognizes student success is by designating Indian Students of the Week for each grade level. So far this year, this award has gone to freshmen Faith Kimsey and Zandra Churchill, sophomore Jordyn Gurley, who was nominated on two separate occasions by different teachers, juniors Dylan Roberts and Daulton Rogers, and seniors Boone Moss and Carly Gilfilian.

For Towns County, test data is processed through Pioneer RESA, or Regional Educational Service Agency. RESAs act as support agencies for certain geographical locations of schools.

Pioneer RESA out of Cleveland, serves Towns County and its 14 neighboring counties, with a board consisting of "the superintendents of each system in our region, the president of the colleges and universities in our region, the president of the Technical Colleges and one representative from the public libraries," according to its website.

"Typically, this Pioneer RESA has some of the top performing schools in the state of Georgia," said Principal Gibson. "Therefore, if you score well in this Pioneer RESA, you're really doing well, because this RESA's that good."

Nicholson...from Page 1

ture the hanging of a special plaque on the Lady Indians' dugout.

Gibson refers to the field dedication as a return of community affection to Nicholson.

"It's the least we can do to give back to him and thank him for all he's done for us," said Gibson.

A native of Towns County, Nicholson attended Towns County Schools as a youth, and he was involved in sports even then.

"I played some basketball, I played some football, but mostly I ran Cross Country and Track," said Nicholson.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall coached Nicholson as a teen in Cross Country and basketball, and up until a few years ago, Nicholson held the fastest time for Cross Country, running the three-mile in about 18 minutes.

After graduating high school, Nicholson helped announce Towns County football games, and was actively involved in basketball and youth football.

"Then I got into the newspaper business," said Nicholson, who worked 14 years for another newspaper before joining publisher Kenneth West in 1990 with the



Lowell Nicholson proudly wears his No. 1 Fan T-shirt on the Indians' sideline earlier this football season. Photo/Tava Bradshaw

Towns County Herald.

"Lowell Nicholson is the face of the Towns County Herald," West said. "He's broke more news in Towns County than any reporter I've ever had. Almost everyone in Towns and Union counties know Lowell. I'm proud to have known him and have him be a part of the newspapers all these years."

And Nicholson's favorite part of being a photojournalist? Covering sports.

"In 1988, the Towns County baseball team won

a state championship," said Nicholson. "That's my biggest highlight, going to the state baseball tournament."

Nicholson also treasures the moments he spent covering Lady Indians' basketball when the team started going to state tournaments, and he still remembers photographing football players who are now respected men in the community.

"Now, I'm watching some of their kids play," said Nicholson.

When it comes to a favorite sport, Nicholson defers to the young people and not the game.

"Softball, football, basketball, soccer, tennis, or golf - all the kids that play sports, I'm proud of them."

Nicholson covers general news in addition to sports for both Union and Towns counties, where he has been a photographer for the same newspapers going on a quarter of a century.

"Kenneth West and Charles Duncan are two good guys to work with, and I appreciate what they've done for me," said Nicholson of the publisher and editor of the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald.

"Carl Vanzura retired before Charlie took over, and he was a good guy to work with," said Nicholson. "And Jimmy Powell was editor when I first started working with the Herald."

Times change, and kids grow up. Athletes become governing officials and editors come and go. But one thing has remained constant through all of Nicholson's years, both as an Indian and covering them.

"When I bleed, I bleed blue and white," said Nicholson. "Go Indians."

Fire Adapted...from Page 1

sociation based in Denver, Colorado. It came to Towns County in 2008 when the U.S. Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission and Towns County Fire Department met to discuss the wildfire that burned 800 acres in Young Harris.

When a community decides to become a Firewise Community, the Georgia Forestry Commission will inspect each home at no charge and make recommendations on what needs work to make the

home a Firewise home.

The Towns County FAC distributes literature promoting its safety and fire prevention programs, such as a checklist of steps residents can take to make their houses Firewise homes.

And Riley has turned over control of the Towns County FAC to a nine member citizen's coalition, which will disseminate information and recruit neighborhoods while he is busy setting up other Fire Adapted Communities in North-

east Georgia, which will in turn receive their own coalitions of citizens to run their programs locally.

"We're kind of like Johnny Appleseed going around planting seeds, and then we'll keep going around and helping them, supporting them," said Riley.

One of the programs under the FAC umbrella is Ready, Set, Go!, designed to help people establish an action plan in the event of a wildfire,

and "begins with a house that firefighters can defend."

The initiative outlines zones around homes, where removing dead or dying vegetation and keeping gutters clear, for example, will limit the spread of a wildfire.

Burning litter and leaves is the number one cause of fires in Towns County, and Riley emphasizes the importance of burn permits to all residents who plan on burning anything.

BOE...from Page 1

students have done in the last few years, the superintendent is the leader in bringing students and teachers to that point where they want to teach," said board member Bob Gibby.

And board member Emily Phillips expressed her wishes to have the next superintendent focus on technology.

As a group, the board came up with a list of qualifi-

cations that included financial experience with a reputation of thrift, principal and broad administrative experience, the need to have an educational background in Common Core and more.

Traits and characteristics the board will be using to screen applicants is a lengthy one. Candidates must be community-oriented with an outgoing person-

ality, a good spokesperson and representative with excellent communication skills, must represent the direction of the board of education, be a team player and have good judgment, among other things.

Melissa Williams' name came up a handful of times by several board members as someone who exemplified the kind of person they wish to

hold the position.

After discussing and building the superintendent profile, the board held a closed executive session to talk over the candidates who have thus far submitted applications.

King-Cooper and Associates are in the process of calling applicant references and completing a finalized version of the profile.

Dr. Berndt...from Page 1

the people are great. We love being here. My husband has established a church here," said Dr. Berndt. Karl Berndt is pastor of Calvary Chapel Hiawassee, and the two have a 4-year-old daughter named Maddie.

When she first arrived in the county, Dr. Berndt found a home with both Chatuge Family Care and Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home. She is a partner at Chatuge Family Care and medical director for the nursing home.

"It's been an awesome experience for me in learning and just seeing the high quality of care that's provided there," said Dr. Berndt of Chatuge Regional. "I feel so confident

in the nursing home services that are provided for our community."

Last October, Chatuge Regional Hospital initiated a hospitalist program that utilizes physician's assistants under the supervision of ER doctors to monitor inpatients. This program has enabled Dr. Berndt to spend more time with her family, as well as maintain her outpatient services and role as medical director.

"All the patients that are inpatient there get two sets of eyes looking at them every day, and so I felt very confident that our skilled ER providers could supervise the very skilled PAs and provide very good inpatient hospitalist services to

my patients," said Dr. Berndt. "That was one of the reasons I felt really confident that it was okay for me to move out of the inpatient service and focus on my outpatient practice."

And while Dr. Berndt no longer sees hospital inpatients, she retains an important place at Chatuge Regional Hospital.

"I do a lot of education for the hospital, like if they want somebody to talk about diabetes to the community," said Dr. Berndt. "I love educating, I love teaching. I do take a big teaching role, and as medical director of the nursing home, that's one of the roles the medical director plays."

Chatuge Family Care is currently undergoing some

exciting changes, bringing new medical talent to the area.

"Daniel Jans (PA) has been with me since May, and he's accepting new patients and doing a really good job," said Dr. Berndt. "And we're having a new partner join us this month, Dr. Keith Sipsy."

Dr. Sipsy also specializes in internal medicine, and Chatuge Family Care can see adults and adolescents.

Chatuge Regional Hospital, too, is experiencing some excitement of its own.

"I'm specifically very excited and planning to use the geriatric psychiatric unit, because I have several patients I feel would benefit from those services," said Dr. Berndt.

Towns firefighters complete training

On Sept. 13, two groups of Towns County Fire & Rescue members completed additional training that will enhance their capability to provide service to the community.

Firefighters Justin Ledford, Trey Moore, Marty Roberts and Mark Wright completed a 30-hour Apparatus Operator Class that included classroom training in fire pump operations, hydraulic friction loss calculations, roles, responsibilities and due regard for emergency vehicle operation.

The course concluded with a written and practical testing session that included a hands-on driving and pump operation drill.

All Department members who drive and operate fire apparatus are required to complete this course. All members participating in the program passed, and will now be referred to their respective Station Officers to be checked out on the specific apparatus in their assigned apparatus.

On that same Saturday, Brian Caldwell, Gary Cunningham, Evan Keyes, Jason Moore and Cody Shelton completed an eight hour Structural Fire Control class at the Baldwin Fire Department burn facility. This course exposed the individuals to a number of drills involving live fire in a controlled environment that would replicate real life fire scenarios.

This was the final class needed by these individuals



Chief Mitch Floyd

to be fully certified a National Professional Qualification 1 (NPQ 1) firefighters. These individuals join the ranks of a cadre of TCFRD firefighters that possess State Certification to battle structure fires.

"The completion of these programs is yet another example of the dedication and commitment our Department members make to protect Towns County's citizens," Fire Chief Mitch Floyd said.

"Our current volunteer roster is at 59. We would like to start our fall recruitment program next month so that we can start another recruit class in January," Chief Floyd said.

The group all received Certificates of Completion in front of their peers from Chief Floyd at a County-wide Training Session on Tuesday Sept. 16.

Elizabeth Wiles returns to her family roots

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Blairsville - Welcome home, Dr. Elizabeth Wiles.

Elizabeth, the daughter of Blairsville's own Dr. Mary Beth Wiles, left home seven years ago to pursue a medical education, and now returns to join her mother in practice as an Internal Medicine physician.

The mother and daughter duo currently hold their practices at Blairsville Internal Medicine off Pat Haralson Drive. They specialize in primary care and the treatment of adult disease. Each provider has privileges at Union General Hospital and Nursing Home.

The Wiles family moved to Blairsville in 1979, when Mary Beth was fresh out of residency at Emory and Elizabeth was less than a year old. Mary Beth credits then hospital administrator Leon Davenport, hospital board member Edith Paris, Mayor Howard Thomas and Director of Nursing Patsy Efirid with providing open arms in bringing her and her family to Union County.

"These were Blairsville's finest," said Mary Beth. "I knew there was no better place in the world to practice medicine."

Medicine might seem a Wiles family tradition, as the two now treat patients out of the same office. But Elizabeth's original plan was to become a powerful business executive to embrace her love of travel.

She joint enrolled at Young Harris College while at Union County High School,



Dr. Elizabeth Wiles, left, is proudly accompanied by her mother Dr. Mary Beth Wiles as Elizabeth graduates from medical school. The mother/daughter duo now share a medical practice in Blairsville.

and attended the University of Georgia where she graduated Cum Laude with a bachelor's degree in international business.

But jobs were scarce at the time, and Elizabeth took a sales position with a natural gas company instead of traveling the globe.

"She was in Philadelphia when 9/11 happened, and they evacuated Philadelphia," said Mary Beth. "She called and said, 'I've packed my car and I'm on my way home. Family should be together.'"

Impressed with her knowledge and sales experience, the home health care company Care-South offered Elizabeth a marketing position as area representative. Part of the orientation program called for her to shadow health care professionals to learn how to better communicate what they do.

"That's what made me want to go to med school, was riding around with a nurse and seeing that interaction in how she took care of patients," said Elizabeth. "From the moment I

decided to become a doctor, I knew I wanted to come back here and join my mother as a primary care doctor - I never wavered from that."

She graduated with honors from the Georgia campus of the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Suwanee, and received the Excellence in Primary Care Award. After graduation, she began her three-year residency in the same elite program as her mother years ago, and received the Patient and Family Centered Care & Teamwork Award.

"While at Emory, I was able to train under some of the same physicians who trained my mother," said Elizabeth. "I frequently heard stories of what a great resident she had been, which made me proud to be walking in her footsteps."

Outside of medicine, Elizabeth loves to travel, hike, kayak and play softball.

"I played T-ball from the time I was 4, then played boys baseball until they cre-

ated a girls softball team for my age bracket in the recreation department," said Elizabeth. "I played rec softball every year through high school, played on the high school team and a traveling team."

Elizabeth enjoyed much success with the Lady Panthers, as they went to the state tournament nearly every year she played.

"I won the .500 plus batting average in 1993, and in 1995 the .550 plus batting average and the offensive award," said Elizabeth. "I continued to play coed softball after high school and throughout med school. During residency, I was just too busy, but I'd really like to get back into that."

Elizabeth traveled the globe with her family while growing up. She remembers trips to the UK, Germany, Spain, Greece, and throughout the United States in the family pop up camper. As an adult she remains an avid traveler. Some of her favorite locations include Turkey, Ireland, Costa Rica, New Zealand and the Galapagos Islands, and she recently completed a tour of U.S. National Parks.

"She's wonderful," said Mary Beth. "She takes the bull by the horns, she's a very strong personality and she's extremely methodical - you can always count on her. She checks the ins and outs of everything, leaves no stone untouched. That's my Elizabeth."

"I just think this is a gorgeous area," said Elizabeth. "I love the mountains - you can pretty much go in any direction and find a place to spend a whole weekend."

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