

Taco Bell...from Page 1A

you have the unknown of sales. You don't know what the sales are going to be. You can project and you can estimate and you can calculate it, but until you open up your door, you never know what they're going to do. And so that's the riskier part of building a store versus buying an existing store."

But Augustine has faith in a Hiawassee Taco Bell, and has a good feeling that residents will, too.

"I think they should be excited simply because there's not a Taco Bell in the area,"

said Augustine. "Taco Bell has done just a remarkable job with the advertising and the product quality and the product launch of new items. You've got the Doritos Locos Tacos that are phenomenal, and the neat thing about Taco Bell is they've got a pipeline of new products, so they're always innovative, always elevating."

Patrons of the new restaurant will be treated to the latest in Taco Bell building design.

"Taco Bell's new tagline or new slogan is Live Mas,

which says amazing things about the brand," said Augustine. "It's, let's live more, let's have fun. And so, this building is actually called Live Mas."

Site work begins Feb. 1 at the location off Long View Drive and South Main Street.

"Our goal is the end of May," said Augustine. "God willing and hopefully Mother Nature be kind to us, we'll be serving tacos. Memorial Day weekend is our goal."

Greg Blosser of Paragon Development, the company that will be constructing the

restaurant, has been studying weather trends of the past several years. He believes that as long as the ground stays above freezing, even if the air is freezing, then he can start building, and holds to February as the month to start.

When the store is finally completed, there will be jobs that need filling.

"My thoughts are that we're going to probably have anywhere from 25 to 40, maybe even closer to 50 people on staff in the summer months," said Augustine. "We're look-

ing forward to having a decent volume store and employing a lot of people here."

And when that store opens, what will Augustine be having?

"The Burrito Supreme and the Taco Supreme are my two favorites," said Augustine. "Every time I go to Taco Bell, although I'll try something different, I always include a Burrito Supreme or a Taco Supreme with my order because I grew up eating it, and it's just my go-to."



Doug Augustine

FBLA...from Page 1A

to state level competition: The team of Kevin McConnell, Gabe Gilliland and Nick Shook in Entrepreneurship (first place), and the team of Emily Ledford and Courtney Stephens in Desktop Publishing (first place).

FBLA competitors that also competed at region level were: Chase Williams, Andy Chambers and Sara Beth Hobbs in Introduction to Business Communications; Carly Gilfilian in Economics, Brianna Shook and Courtney Stephens in Business Communications; the team of Gabe Gilliland, Zyndel Payne and Sara Scott in Business Presentation; and Jessie Poole in Impromptu Speaking.

The Towns County High School FBLA BATTLE of the CHAPTERS team, Jessie Poole, Alyson Nelson and Nick McConnell will advance to state level competition this spring.

Additionally, Towns County FBLA was given two chapter awards.

President Alana Calhoun accepted the Region 13 Largest Chapter Award, which recognizes the chapter with the most

members.

Towns FBLA also received a third place award in the FBLA Sweepstakes, a trophy given to the chapters who have the most "wins" at region competition, was accepted by Advisers Melissa McConnell and Billy Barnhart.

The following students served as Conference Assistants: Alana Calhoun, Ashley Abrahamson, Carly Gilfilian, Alyson Nelson, Nick McConnell, Brianna Shook and Devin Wheeler.

Congratulations to all competitors who gave generously of their time and dedicated themselves to representing our chapter with excellence. Your academic preparation and effort is reflected in your success. The FBLA State Leadership Conference and Competitions will be held March 20-22 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta.

Fourteen additional competitors from TCHS FBLA will be joining these regional winners to compete in events that begin at state level.

Good luck, Towns County FBLA from the *Towns County Herald*.

Libraries...from Page 1A

County \$15.75 per capita, Fannin County \$8.37 per capita and Union County \$9.86 per capita," said Commissioner Kendall.

Commissioner Kendall hopes that the state legislature that is now in session will reinstate a portion of the \$155,000 that it has cut from the library funding over the years, from \$436,000 in 1999 to \$281,000 last year.

"Over the last several

years, the state has reduced the funding to the libraries by 35.55 percent," said Commissioner Kendall. "Towns County, however, during this period of time, including this \$7,500 grant, has increased the library's funding by 46.47 percent."

This funding from the commissioner's office will help Towns County Public Library and Mountain Regional Library avoid the furlough days which have been depriving the public

of the use of these facilities.

And the state level budget cuts have been contributing to other problems over the years, such as no state materials funds in seven years, no state system services funds to provide basic regional services in seven years, and no raises for state-paid staff in five years, plus salary reductions in the form of unpaid furlough days – up to 32 per year – for state-paid staff for the past

seven years, according to the libraries.

The libraries of Towns County are hopeful that the economic bounce-back from the recession will help to make funds available at the state level.

The libraries are currently lobbying the state for more funding, and urging residents of the county to write legislators and Gov. Nathan Deal regarding the budget cuts.

Robotics...from Page 1A

ability to complete challenges. Out of 32 teams, *Praetoria Nave* finished sixth in the Robot Performance category at the Super Regional and tied for first place at the previous qualifier in Gwinnett.

All scores for the day were then collected and tabulated for teams to advance.

On Wednesday of the following week it was confirmed that the team would advance to the *UGA FLL State Championship*, which is the highest level of FLL competition here in Georgia.

TCMS Praetoria Nave would like to thank its principal

David Turner, Superintendent Darren Berrong, faculty, staff, students and community for all of their support.

They would also like to thank Brown Haven Builders and Fast Fab Set-up and Design for their sponsorship.

Finally, we would like to thank team mentor Jo Ray Van Vliet and her family for all of their assistance.

The current roster for the TCMS Robotics competition team is Dougie Cox, Connor Kelley, Kaitlyn Crowder, and Sylvan Schuette, with Dr. Daren King as coach.

Plan...from Page 1A

to make sure we do in a more timely manner."

According to the auditor, "several adjustments to the financial statements were required at year-end to state the financial position of the governmental activities, the business-type activities, and each major fund of the City of Hiawassee in a fair manner."

"This includes accrual entries and certain issues regarding capital assets, such as recording capital outlay correctly, correctly capitalizing costs related to capital projects, recording revenues and expenditures for hotel/motel taxes, adjusting grant receivables, and classifying revenues and expenditures/expenses correctly," the audit showed.

The effect of this finding is that "this could result in internal and interim financial statements being misstated and unfairly presenting the city's financial position," according to the report. "This may cause management decisions to be misguided due to the incorrect presentation."

The cause of the finding was that "the transactions described above were not

currently recorded correctly and timely," according to the report.

"We recommend that the necessary adjustments should be made timely as the events occur and that the appropriate schedules or information be maintained throughout the year to making these adjustments," according to the auditor. "Also, the financial statements and supporting information should be reviewed routinely during the year to ensure pertinent items are included."

As for corrective actions, Stancil's plan and response to the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts highlights several key steps he and the city are going to take to correct this finding – which was the only finding of the auditor – for the next audit.

"The City of Hiawassee has taken actions over recent years to address the deficiencies in this audit finding," said Stancil in his response. "We will continue to make improvements until this condition is fully addressed. This deficiency is due in part because the city cannot afford full-time staff for an accounting position. The city

contracts accounting services, and they provide adjustments as necessary."

Stancil asserted that the city believes it has made progress on this recurring issue, as the finding has been present for several audit cycles.

"Corrective action already implemented includes formal adoption of a Financial Policy by the city council. The city will review its Financial Policy and update as necessary," said Stancil. "The city council, mayor, city manager, and CPA/bookkeeper have been involved in acquisitions of and/or dedication of and acceptance of major capital items and capitalization of costs. This action is being done in a timely manner; however, the city recognizes that improved action is still needed."

The corrective action plan also states that the city will meet quarterly with its CPA/bookkeeper.

"Additionally, the city has implemented a purchase order system to assist in preventing the need for year-end adjustments between ordinary and capital expenses," said Stancil in his report. "The city

has also implemented a Draw Request, Review and Payment System on state and federal grant and loan funds overseen by the city manager."

"These changes have helped to identify and classify capital issues and funding sources. The city council has made ongoing, midyear and end of year budget adjustments. We will continue to act timelier."

Furthermore, the city has granted its CPA firm access to its online banking to allow for timely review of expenses, income and bank statements, as well as the improved ability of the CPA to review accounts, according to the report.

"The city is updating its payment processing system for use in the daily issuance of checks by the clerk," said Stancil. "The city and/or our CPAs will retroactively enter data beginning July 1, 2014. The city will then have data recorded for the entire FY 2014-15 year. This will assist the mayor, clerk and city manager with timely onsite reports. The use of this system should also assist the city CPAs and auditors in their work and reviews."

Generator...from Page 1A

down into deeper water, below algae blooms, making the water easier to treat with fewer chemicals.

This latest upgrade with the newer generator means protection from anything that may cause a power outage – snow, lightning, a downed line.

"It's not that we don't have confidence in Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, but as important as water is during critical or emergency times, if we get into a situation where power's off – I know during the blizzard about 15 years ago, power was hit and miss, on and off, and we just want to make sure we've got the capacity to run the plant during times when the power goes out," said Hiawassee City Manager Rick Stancil.

An interruption in water service can be dangerous in situations where lots of people are stuck in their homes with no power for long periods of time, like in the event of snow.

"People automatically go and turn on their faucet, they automatically flush," said Stancil. "Those are things that people do unconsciously, and they don't think about all of the steps that have to be taken care of prior to that simple event happening."

The sewer plant has enough portable generators in place to ensure its continued operation in the event of prolonged power outage, and now, so does the water plant.

"It will run the whole plant," said Warner. "The gen-

erator we replaced would only run half of the plant, so we'd have to run one pump, produce a little water, shut the pump down, then pump water out of the system. The new generator will run everything in the plant as long as we have fuel to run it, and we have about eight hours' worth of fuel sitting there."

During the blizzard of 1993, the plant experienced a period of 24 hours without power and no generator to act as backup.

But 20 years ago, the military selected the water treatment plant in Hiawassee to receive an old generator – 1974 Vietnam era – which was a 100 kW generator. The new generator boasts much more power capability at 200 kW.

"Power goes out, fire the generator up, and we'll keep right on pumping water," said Warner. "At least people can flush their toilets and that kind of thing if the power was out. At least the lower elevations. I can keep all of our tanks full, but if the power was out, we wouldn't be able to run booster pumps to get the higher elevations. The majority of the county would be fine."

Not that people should worry, as the water treatment plant, along with other facilities like the hospital and nursing homes, is on a priority list for getting power turned back on by the electric company.

"And with that substation in right here, that helps us," said Warner.

Happy (belated) Birthday, Recreation Center

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Dec. 14, the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park turned 1 year old, and the new facility is still growing.

The new building offers a much more quality facility over the old rec center, according to Wes Hooper, who has been the recreation director in Towns County for 37 years.

"It has much more space," said Hooper. "Two gym floors instead of one, a huge conference area. The exercise area is about the same. Matter of fact, we got most of the equipment from down there, we moved it on into here, plus we've added on about eight or 10 new pieces, mostly cardio equipment."

The only downside to the new facility is that the lakefront view is gone.

"But up here, you've got a different view, which is beautiful as well, overlooking the mountains," said Hooper. "We were really lucky to get this property how we got it, how it came about, the price it was purchased for. It is Towns County's property. That's something down there that wasn't Towns County's property. It belonged to TVA and was leased to Towns County for 100 years."

And since the recreation facility and the property on which it sits belongs to the county, residents can take a certain pride in owning a piece of the county that will serve them and the county's children in perpetuity.

"It was SPLOST funded, voted on by the taxpayers – 90 percent approval," said Hooper, highlighting the mandate from the public that this facility was what it wanted.

Part of the old rec center, as well as the ball fields located at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, will still be operated and maintained by the county, but residents have newer attractions to look forward to.

"We're building three new fields here for softball and baseball, a football field, and some overflow areas here that we'll use for soccer practice, soccer games, football practice," said Hooper. "Three tennis courts we'll have here, and they'll all have pickleball courts on them, which is a big



sport now for a lot of people in the county."

And according to Hooper, pickleball – which is a combination of tennis, badminton and Ping-Pong – is fast becoming a favorite pastime of residents of Towns County.

When Hooper first started as rec director, his department was run out of a trailer at the campground on the beach side of the road near Hiawassee Beach. From there, the rec department moved to a wooden building just inside the turn-in for Hiawassee Beach, where it remained until 1996, when the old rec center was built.

And now, Hooper is in a state-of-the-art facility.

"What we've done here is try to provide a facility to reach the most people and create interest for the most people to come where they'll participate in what we have to offer," said Hooper. "And we always try to take people's advice on what they would like to have or their interests, and try to look at it from that standpoint."

In attempting to reach the most people possible, Hooper has made sure to offer recreational activities that are both

active and passive. Passive activities include providing space for card players and other hobbyists, like square dancers.

The rec center is also home to exercise classes, and houses a large mirrored room for those looking to practice dancing, yoga or tai chi, for example.

"The way we've designed it, we are able to accommodate 10 or 1,000 in the building at one time," said Hooper. "We've designed the conference room to where it will open up into the gymnasium area and become one larger area in a sense – it's not totally separated. It's a flowing from one to the other so we can accommodate and seat up to 1,000 people for any event that anyone might wish to come in and have that we can provide for them."

Eventually, Hooper wants to host conventions to the rec center, which would bring people into the community to stimulate the local economy.

"We designed this as an economic boost factor for Towns County," said Hooper.

The vision of the new center is for young and old, with active and passive activities, and aims to provide any type of recreation that anyone may wish to partake in, said Hooper.

And Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall couldn't agree more.

"Some of the things we've got coming up this year is, we've got the state 10 and under recreation tournament here, which we hope will bring some people up and help the restaurants and the motels and hotels," said Commissioner Kendall.

This basketball tournament will take place the first full weekend in March.

"It's a two-day tournament, and there will be eight teams participating in that from seven districts in the state of Georgia," said Alan Rogers, assistant director for athletics at the rec center. "Our team from Towns County is automatically in that tournament, being that we are hosting that tournament."

Looking ahead, the county plans to get a lot of work done on all of the fields outside of the facility, including the tennis courts, by the summertime.



The newest generator replaces this Vietnam-era model that is now retired from service. Photo/Shawn Jarrard