

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, February 4, 2015

Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thurs: Snow	39 22
Fri: Sunny	49 28
Sat: Sunny	55 39
Sun: Rain	54 37
Mon: Clouds	51 32
Tue: Sunny	55 33
Wed: Sunny	58 33



Upstream Elevation Predicted 02/04/2015	
Lake Chatuge	1,914.69
Lake Nottely	1,762.15
Blue Ridge	1,670.17

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No Greater LOVE to benefit Tricia Spear Feb 14th

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Explore Hiawassee & Young Harris Georgia
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FREE Red Maple Seedlings See Chamber Chronicles on Page 5



Towns County Historical Society PHOTO PARADE See Page 2



AARP Driver's Safety Course Feb. 16th See Page 3



Basketball Tues. Feb 3 @ Hebron 6 PM Fri. Feb 6 SENIOR NIGHT vs. Tallulah Falls 7 PM

WRESTLING Sat. Feb 7 SECTIONALS @ George Walton

Lake Chatuge drawdowns finally complete

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Good news, Towns County – the Tennessee Valley Authority is no longer imposing a drawdown of Lake Chatuge.

According to a press release issued by the North Carolina Department of Transportation in August, the NCDOT was working with TVA “to draw down the levels of the Chatuge Reservoir in Clay County during the final stages of a bridge replacement project.”

The timeline for the project had the drawdown lasting until mid-January, which was when TVA began allowing Lake Chatuge to fill up again toward normal winter levels.

“We have since released that restriction and are filling Chatuge back up to a more normal winter level, but that will be depending on how much rainfall and runoff we get,” said James Everett of TVA.

The drawdown of the lake began in September, and took the lake down to about 1,913 feet above sea level, which was roughly 4-5 feet below normal winter levels.

“They were aware that we couldn’t hold it down indefinitely because we’ve got other objectives that we’re trying to meet,” said Everett. “That’s been several weeks ago, I guess, that we started holding back as much flow as we could to try to get our winter pool back up to a more normal level.”

A new bridge was con-



The new High Bridge is open, and the old bridge is almost history. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

structed between August of 2013 and October of last year to replace the old NC Highway 175 Bridge in Clay County, NC, and the drawdown was to assist in the demolition of the old bridge.

“The bridge over the Chatuge Reservoir was built in 1942 and is considered functionally obsolete and structurally deficient,” according to the August press release. “This means that although the bridge is safe, it doesn’t meet current or future traffic demands and requires costly maintenance to remain functional.”

Demolition on the old bridge is still underway, but no longer requires the lowered lake level.

“The contractor is still working to remove the old bridge,” said NCDOT Communications Officer Jordan-Ashley Walker. “They have almost completed removal of the superstructure and all but one of the bents (supports). They are going to hire divers to aid in the removal of some of the footings, which are underwater. TVA has brought the lake elevation back to ‘normal’ winter pool level. We anticipate the contractor to complete total removal of the old bridge within the next couple of weeks.”

Looking ahead, the lake will fill to normal winter levels for the time being.

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Tax dollars coming in on time

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Property tax bills came due Jan. 10, and while it’s still too early for meaningful numbers, collection efforts have already taken in a vast majority of 2014 taxes.

“It seems to me as though the money is coming in better this year than, say, in past years, when we were dealing with the recession,” said Towns County Tax Commissioner Bruce Rogers.

Towns County, being a mountain vacation spot, has many residents who own property here but spend the winters in warmer climates.

“This early after the due date, we always have people that spend their winters away, and they actually come in to pay whenever they return back to their summer homes,” said Rogers.

Tax bills for 2014 went out Oct. 17, but getting those bills together is a process that requires much intergovernmental teamwork.

“First of all, we begin by the assessor’s office compiling figures on existing parcels in the county,” said Rogers. “They work with it to assign values to these properties. And then, of course, it is up to the other entities, such as the commissioner, the school and the cities to assign a millage rate. And that is how the amount of the tax bill is derived.”

All of this must be completed by this first of August each year.



Bruce Rogers

“After that, it is my responsibility to submit this to the state for approval,” said Rogers. “And on approval from the state, they issue us an order to collect. At that time, then we’re legal to generate bills and put them on the street.”

The tax digest for 2014 is \$9,736,142, a number that is derived from the assessment of various types of property.

“Real property is considered as your land,” said Rogers. “Now, there is a marine personal property, which is tax on people’s boats. There is a personal property tax for business owners on the contents of their businesses.”

Also, there is a tax on mobile homes, and while it is not a large percentage of the digest, it can be difficult to collect due to the mobile nature of the property.

“They’re mobile, and that means that they enter and leave this county, which makes it tough keeping up with

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MRLS awaits candidate’s decision

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Regional Library System Board of Trustees has selected another candidate to serve as director of the system.

This applicant was recommended by the board of trustees’ search committee tasked with finding a replacement for now retired Donna Howell in a called meeting at the Union County Public Library on Tuesday, Jan. 27.

Howell, the former MRLS director, officially retired at the end of December, and Union County Public Library Branch Manager Susie Brendle has been acting as interim director until the position is filled.

This will be the second candidate offered the job, as the first candidate declined the position after being selected on Oct. 30.

The board of trustees voted unanimously to offer this candidate the position, with the stipulation that the candidate undergo a three-month evaluation, followed by a six-month evaluation of job performance.

As of now, the current candidate must pass a background check and accept the position before becoming director of the MRLS.



The Mountain Regional Library System Board of Directors met last week to discuss the hiring of a new director. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

“If anything changes between now and the board meeting, I’ll let you know, because we were in this same position last time, and then the job was turned down,” said Interim Director Brendle in the called meeting.

The next MRLS Board of Trustees meeting will be held at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 4, at the Fannin County Public Library in Blue Ridge.

This time around, the search committee was responsible for fielding three applications. One of the applicants backed out of the process for personal reasons, and the committee chose not to interview the

third applicant, who was from Oregon, because of the distance involved.

“We felt like he was the person for the job,” said Regional Board Chair Teresa Moore of the selected applicant.

The candidate has a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in communications, as well as a master’s degree in library science. He currently works in a public school system library, has owned his own business in graphic design and is a published author.

And so far, it seems as

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Four weeks in, Berrong feels like a veteran superintendent

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Roughly four weeks ago, on Jan. 1, Dr. Darren Berrong started his post as superintendent of Towns County Schools.

And four weeks in, how does he feel about the position?

“I feel like a veteran,” said Dr. Berrong, joking.

But seriously, things are going really well with Dr. Berrong at the helm of Towns County Schools.

“I expected there to be more of a learning curve, but what I’ve discovered is, being in this system for as long as I’ve been in this system, it’s not been as much of a learning curve as I was expecting it to be,” said Dr. Berrong.

“I feel like if I had gone to another school system for this same job, there would have been a lot of answers that I wouldn’t have had already,



Dr. Darren Berrong

that I would have to be going out and seeking the advice of other people,” continued Dr. Berrong. “But since I’m here and I know what’s already going on in our school system, I feel like the transition has been a fairly smooth one.”

The board of education has retained the services of Dr. Richard Behrens on a tempo-

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Manto’s project draws a crowd



By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Children were laughing and learning at Mia Manto’s STEM Lab Open House on Tuesday, Jan. 27, at Towns County Elementary.

The elementary school students wandered in wonder from table to table, eyeing the scientific goodies made available to them as part of the lab.

One station had everyone on their toes, as children attempted to pierce air-filled balloons with wooden skewers without popping their would-be prizes. It was an exercise testing where on the balloons the latex

molecules were under the least amount of stress.

Another area of the lab served as an art studio of sorts, as Manto’s teammates from the FTC robotics team at the high school, Dragons and Tiaras, demonstrated robots that had been built to create spin art.

A Bee-Bot buzzed along its course to commands entered by children on the back of the little bot, telling it where they wanted it to go and teaching the basics of robotic programming.

Michael Austin of the high school robotics team led an infrared-seeking robot around like a dog on a leash as it followed a ball that produced an infrared light.

Adults joined in the delight of the children. Parents stood alongside their kids, equally amazed at a glass of water turned upside down that seemingly defied gravity, a simple cloth holding the water inside the glass like a lid on a jar.

Simply put, the lab is whiz kid heaven.

“Welcome to the STEM Lab,” said lab architect Manto as a new group of kids came into the room.

She gave these children a verbal tour before letting them loose to learn, going over the robotic elements of the class,

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TCES students visit Gold Dome

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

George Washington once said that a primary object should be the education of our youth in the science of government.

Fast forward to today, and one can see just such a principle in practice at Towns County Elementary School.

Third, fourth and fifth-grade members of student council at the elementary school recently took a trip to the Georgia State Capitol, its gold dome glistening in the bright morning light.

“They were very excited, and it was a bit of a culture shock for them, seeing the big city,” said third-grade reading and language arts teacher Hillary Tallent. “A lot of these kids have never even seen the city. So, getting into traffic, it was very different. But they all loved it. They seemed to be excited. As soon as they saw it, they knew that was the capitol because we had looked at pictures, and they knew. They were like, ‘There it is! There it is!’”

Students learn about the branches of government in the third grade, and get a chance to enact their own little republic of sorts at the elementary school by running for student council.

“At the beginning of the year, we have a permission form,” said Tallent. “Your parents have to sign it. You have to have maintained passing grades, a B average preferably, but you have to pass. Your behavior has to be good – you can’t have bad behavior.”



“They make posters, just like any other election,” continued Tallent. “They make posters and they try to convince their classmates to vote for them, and we have an election. Third through fifth-grade votes. The people who are running for president, vice president, treasurer, they give a speech. And then we all vote.”

Each homeroom acts as a county, in a way, electing its own delegates to serve in the student council. But the homerooms together must vote for those who will represent the group in the offices of president, vice president, treasurer and secretary.

“You get voted in in the beginning of the year, and they’re in it all year and we do it

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