

# Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

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## Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thur: Sunny 40 20  
Fri: Sunny 45 30  
Sat: Rain/Snow 44 27  
Sun: Cloudy 47 29  
Mon: Showers 46 30  
Tue: Rain/Snow 48 28  
Wed: Cloudy 47 30



Upstream Elevation Predicted 2/17/10  
Lake Chatuge 1918.10  
Lake Nottely 1761.90  
Blue Ridge 1670.90

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### Subscribe

The Towns County Herald wants to make a difference during hard times.

For those currently unemployed, Senior Citizens and U.S. Military veterans, the Herald offers \$5 subscriptions for 1 year. That's a savings of \$21 off the newstand price.

This offer extends to residents of Towns and Union counties in Georgia and Clay County, NC.

Simply bring proof of unemployment status; a simple Photo ID will suffice for Senior Citizens.

Veterans must provide proof of U.S. Military service.

The Herald also offers \$10 subscriptions for new subscribers from Towns and Union counties in Georgia and Clay County, NC.

At the end of one year, those subscribers can renew at a rate of \$15.

Again, we hope to make a difference when folks need it the most.



### Prom Expo

The 2010 Prom Expo will be held at Designer Threads March 17-20. Dresses, shoes and accessories will be available at very low prices. Door prizes will include tanning, nail set, manicure, flowers, gift certificates and hair accessories. Register to win just by visiting Prom Expo. Proceeds benefit Towns County Family Connection.



### Food Distribution

There will be a free food distribution on Tuesday, Feb. 23. The distribution will be held at the Towns County Food Pantry from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. All that are in need of food assistance are encouraged to attend. If you are unable to pick up your food, please contact the Pantry at (706) 896-4783 prior to food distribution day so that arrangements can be properly made to deliver your food items. Rest assured that all clients and inquiries about food distribution are kept strictly confidential.

## County, cities explore SPLOST referendum

By Charles Duncan  
TOWNS COUNTY HERALD  
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Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall has begun the legal process of calling for a referendum for a Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax.

Commissioner Kendall said no decision has been reached to call for the referendum. However, since the existing education construction SPLOST expires Dec. 31, the legal clock to extend a sales tax collection is ticking, Commissioner Kendall said.

"A decision certainly has not been made to put this on the ballot, but simply to begin discussion to get a consensus of what the people want," Commissioner Kendall said. "We'll provide ample opportunity for public comment and involvement

should we decide to move forward with SPLOST."

To begin the process, Georgia law requires Commissioner Kendall to meet with local municipalities before moving forward with a call for a SPLOST referendum.

That being said, Commissioner Kendall was scheduled to meet Tuesday evening with Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis and Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby and their respective councils to discuss the prospects of putting the issue before voters during the July 20 Primary.

The discussion would include talks about percentage breakdown each government would receive if a SPLOST were pursued and successfully approved by voters. Each city government would receive an equal percentage share of the es-



Commissioner Bill Kendall

timated \$10 million in SPLOST proceeds based on population. The county would receive the remaining percentage of SPLOST proceeds.

According to Georgia law, the county must wait a minimum of 30 days after its meeting with the local municipalities before attempting to call for a SPLOST referendum.

At that time, approximately March 18, during the regular county meeting, a call for the election must also include having projects identified, an agreement with the cities in place and the specific language for the ballot completed.

"For the past four years, I've had requests from residents to implement a 1 percent sales tax on the ballot to be used by the cities and county to upgrade our infrastructure, recreational facilities and other projects," Commissioner Kendall said.

"I have declined to grant these requests because there has been a total of 7 percent sales tax for Towns County, which is the amount of all surrounding counties and most counties throughout the state," he said.

The local governments

have allowed the Towns County School system to collect a 1 percent sales tax to construct school facilities. Also, the school system has a unique 1 percent sales tax for maintenance and operation that continues without interruption.

The 1 percent sales tax for school construction concludes Dec. 31. Without voter approval for a new SPLOST collection, which would begin Jan. 1, 2011, a penny sales tax would come off the books.

To continue a 1 percent sales tax for special projects would be to take additional pressure off property taxpayers. Commissioner Kendall has stressed the importance of additional recreational facilities, funds for roads, streets and bridges.

See SPLOST, page 5A

## Old Man Winter closes schools

By Charles Duncan  
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It appears Punxsutawney Phil is a bit more astute when it comes to making weather predictions than General Beauregard Lee.

On Feb. 2, the Pennsylvania groundhog saw his shadow, indicating six more weeks of winter. His Georgia counterpart, General Lee, however, didn't see his silhouette, signaling that spring is just around the corner.

Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Richard Behrens hates nothing worse than a lying groundhog and the Georgia weather-prognosticating legend is no exception.

Dr. Behrens had more snow to worry about on Tuesday morning as the white powdery stuff combined with some really cold temperatures to give educators reason for pause to say the least. The snow quickly



Weekend snowboarding on Jack's Gap proved much more eventful than watching the 2010 Winter Olympics in balmy Vancouver, BC, Canada. Temperatures are 46 degrees at the site of the 2010 Winter Games. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

collected on local roads and bridges.

On days with a forecast of snow, Dr. Behrens is on the road at 4:30 a.m. checking out the county's slickest spots. He uses a hand-held laser device that reads the ground temperature. Snow and frozen ground temperatures spell a nasty mix.

Dr. Behrens takes absolutely no chances with the safety of Towns County's student population. He closed classes on Tuesday due to road conditions.

Flakes large and small fell early Tuesday as temperatures dipped into the

See Weather, page 2A

## Oxendine: 'jobs first'

By Charles Duncan  
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John Oxendine knows the issues that impact Georgians.

Oxendine, one of seven Republican candidates anxious to become Georgia's next governor, says jobs top the list of priorities for the state's next CEO.

After speaking to a professional medical group last week at Brasstown Valley Resort, Oxendine, Georgia's four-term Fire Safety and Insurance Commissioner, sat down with the Towns County Herald and discussed his approach to becoming Georgia's 82nd governor.

"There's really one main issue and that's jobs," Oxendine said.

Education also is a big concern statewide, Oxendine said.

"When our SAT scores are lower than Alabama, and we've got one of the highest dropout rates around and



Commissioner John Oxendine

now we're concerned that school teachers are actually cheating with the standardized tests that the students are taking, well, that's not a good Chamber of Commerce moment," he said. "That's not a way to attract jobs to our state."

Obviously there are other issues that include water and transportation.

See Oxendine, page 5A

## Cruise-In faithful geared up

By Charles Duncan  
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Chad Hooper can't hide his enthusiasm about moonshine.

Well, the Second Annual Mountain Moonshine Cruise-In that is.

Promoter Rakes Parrish came to town on Thursday and brought family with him. He says the 2010 event is going to be bigger and better than last year. Double the cars, double the enthusiasm and most businesses owners are banking on double the money they brought in during the fledgling event.

The 2010 event will



Tourism Association Board member Chad Hooper talks about the 2010 Kickoff for the Second Mountain Moonshine Cruise-In at The Ridges Resort. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

include a feature parade on Friday evening through downtown that leads to a stage on the Downtown Square, Parrish said.

The event also will feature increased shuttles to make sure everyone gets where they're wanting to go,

Hooper said.

"Last year, we had about 1,000 cars," he said. "I can't even begin to imagine how many we'll have this year. They're already doing

See Moonshine, page 7A

## USGS to pay for LiDAR flyover

By Charles Duncan  
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Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall brought home some good news late last week following a meeting in Gainesville with officials with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission and United States Geological Survey.

USGS will foot the bill for the entire \$150,000 cost of a flyover and acquiring Light Detection and Ranging Data for the county to use to provide accurate details for federally-mandated flood maps for Lake Chatuge.

The undertaking was included in USGS' collection of LiDAR readings for a neighboring project already in the works, Commissioner Kendall said.

Early last week Commissioner Kendall received approval from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and Federal Emergency Management Agency to temporarily delay the feds' completion of an updated Flood Insurance Study (FIS) and Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map (DFIRM) for Towns County.

Commissioner Kendall entered into a memorandum of agreement

with FEMA to schedule an aerial fly date within March to ensure that data is collected during a time when the leaves are still off the trees and while Lake Chatuge remains at its winter pool level.

He committed county financial resources if necessary to fund the project of updating data for the floodplain of Lake Chatuge until an alternative funding source could be achieved.

Commissioner Kendall expressed his appreciation and gave full credit to Towns County na-

See Floodplain, page 5A

## Stimulus funds Gum Log project

By Charles Duncan  
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Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall received good news this week.

Commissioner Kendall received confirmation from the Georgia Department of Transportation that \$137,441 is coming to Towns County to resurface Gum Log Road.

The thoroughfare has received two grants from the state's Local Assistance Road Project funds to pave two portions of the roadway, Commissioner Kendall said. The federal stimulus dollars will fund resurfacing of 3,934 miles. The project will complete the re-surfacing of the roadway from Georgia 66 through Towns and Union counties, Commissioner Kendall said.

## YHC a team player

Special to Towns County Herald

Young Harris College is more than a good neighbor to Towns County.

According to its 2009 Annual Report, the 124-year-old institution is an economic powerhouse.

The college, which employs more than 200 people, pumps almost \$12 million annually into the local economy in salaries and benefits alone.

According to the report, the college spent almost \$2 million in its day-to-day operations in 2009 with at least 130 area businesses on everything from office supplies to automobiles, auto repairs, video productions, hardware, plumbing supplies, cleaning services, carpeting, painting, printing and graphics and advertising.

Over and above that,



President Cathy Cox

the school spent an additional \$7 million in the on building materials, equipment and subcontractors as it continues to build its new facility.

See YHC, page 7A

TOWNS COUNTY HERALD

