

Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thur: Cloudy	76 44
Fri: Sunny	75 49
Sat: Showers	71 54
Sun: Showers	77 48
Mon: Cloudy	77 47
Tue: Sunny	71 45
Wed: Sunny	68 46



Upstream Elevation Predicted 03/28/12	
Lake Chatuge	1919.91
Lake Nottely	1765.54
Blue Ridge	1670.72

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Log onto our Web site

Log onto Towns County Herald.net to keep up with breaking news that impacts Towns County. If you haven't noticed, we've got the Legal Advertisements online. Feel free to take a look.



Love the Lake

Turn to Page 7 to find out more about how you can play a pivotal role in the Love Our Lake campaign.

A community cleanup effort is in the works for Saturday to help make the county's 136 miles of shoreline along Lake Chatuge a bit more pristine.

Call Candace Lee at the Chamber of Commerce for more details. That number is (706) 896-4966.



Stookey on 20/20



Russell Stookey

A record \$404,000 defamation suit judgment brought ABC News' 20/20 crew to town to interview the lawyer who represented the defamed Blairsville man who filed suit.

Hiwassee attorney Russell Stookey admits he didn't know a whole lot about TOPIX before he took Gene Cooley's defamation case in 2009. Over the course of two years, he learned why his client was borderline suicidal.

A six-member Union County jury awarded \$404,000 in

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Rescuers save young boy lost in wilderness

Sheriff, Towns County Fire and Rescue draw high praise in finding 7-year-old autistic boy

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
cduncan.tch@windstream.net

What do Connell Russell and the Georgia National Guard have in common? The two almost got to meet in person.

Almost . . . The 7-year-old Towns County youth wandered from his home in the Soapstone Community into the Chattahoochee National Forest on Tuesday, March 20th. Connell presented a rare challenge for almost 100 organized members of a search party – he's autistic, nonverbal.

Prior to his adventure in the wilderness, Connell had just arrived home from school. His mother Kim Russell had just brought Connell and his twin brother Christian inside their home in the Soapstone Community. They entered the home through the garage.

Customarily, Kim checks all the doors, making sure that the "thumb bolt" locks at the top of the doors are engaged. On this day, she missed one.

While Connell and Christian were supposed to be eating snacks and Kim was in the bedroom arranging teddy bears, an eerie silence caught Kim's attention.

"It was just too quiet, I got one of those feelings," she said. "Normally, he makes what we call his 'happy sounds' or he's dropping stuff. There is usually a sound about every minute."

Kim quickly made her way back into the living room. The front door was wide open and Connell was no where to be found. She screamed for Christian, who was occupied with his iPad.

Instinctively, she jumped in her truck and did a scan of the immediate neighborhood. She called the

neighbor for assistance. She drove almost to the top of the mountain to no avail in her search for Connell.

"I realized if he's not in the immediate area, we were going to need some help," Kim Russell said.

She dialed 911, explained the situation and waited for help.

"They got here pretty quick," Kim Russell said. "When Sheriff Chris Clinton arrived and learned that Connell was autistic and nonverbal, he knew exactly what to do; he called in the helicopter and K-9s."

Sheriff Clinton and Towns County Assistant Fire Chief Harold Copeland established the search command. In a matter of what seemed like sheer moments, almost 100 volunteers had already arrived. Eight agencies, local, state and federal were on hand. Gen. Jim

See Rescue, page 14



Seven-year-old Connell Russell is home safe and sound following an almost three-hour ordeal in the Chattahoochee National Forest last Tuesday. Photo/Charles Duncan

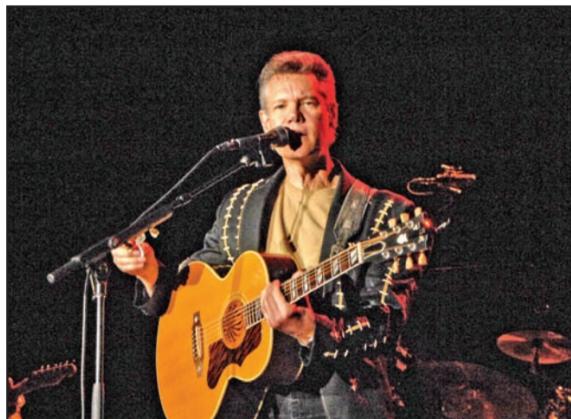
Randy Travis packs The Hall

By James Reese
Towns County Herald
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Randy Travis packed Anderson Music Hall Saturday night as he arrived touting his exclusive 25th Anniversary Tour before a large crowd of partisan fans.

The seven-time Grammy award-winning artist's performance was a celebration of his new album that marks his 25-plus years in the music industry. His career was launched

See Randy Travis, page 14



Randy Travis thrilled fans at The Hall. Photo/James Reese

Entrepreneurship alive and well in Towns County

Main Street Consignment branches out to Bell Creek Road

By Charles Duncan
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On April 1st, Priscilla Stilwell won't be trying to fool anybody. In fact, she's a serious business woman.

Stilwell will open her latest business venture, *The Red Barn Antique and Furniture Store* on Georgia 75, better known as 1088 Bell Creek Road, on April Fool's Day with free hot dogs, refreshments and a local Blue Grass band.

The big day is Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. The Georgia Highlanders will play from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Stilwell says to bring a lawn chair, an appetite and a thirst that needs quenching. Oh, and don't forget the folding money, she'll be open for business.

"I've got a lot of an-



Priscilla Stilwell opens *The Red Barn* on Sunday at noon. Photo/Charles Duncan

tiques, artwork, furniture, mantles, lamps," she said. "We've got a lot of high-end antiques, home décor, rugs and we've even got a stuffed

See Red Barn, page 14

Sixth graders earn high honors

Special to Towns County Herald
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Kyra Tallent and Hannah Whitehead have returned from Clayton State University in Morrow with a whole lot of hardware.

The sixth grade students, part of Sherri Behrens' sixth grade Social Studies class, captured state honors for their research project: *Hiwassee Down*

See Champions page 14



Kyra Tallent and Hannah Whitehead claimed top honors at the state Social Studies Fair in Morrow. Photo/Sherri Behrens

Diehl leads Indians to first win

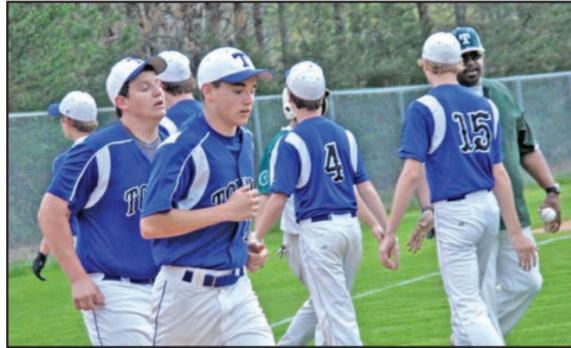
Junior pitches, hits, helps Tribe snap 10-game losing streak

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
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Tallulah Falls – The Towns County Indians' first win of 2012 was bound to happen.

But who knew that it would be a three-hit shutout and that the starting pitcher would finish what he started and drive in three of the team's four runs.

Junior Dillon Diehl was almost unhittable on the mound, was unstoppable at the plate and the Indians triumphed 4-0 in a Region 8 match up over Tallulah Falls in Habersham County.



Dillon Diehl and the Indians have a monkey off their backs. They won their first game of the season. Photo/Charles Duncan

Afterward, Diehl admitted that it felt like he was on cruise control for seven innings.

"Yes sir," he said. "It

was a heck of a game, I had great defense behind me. It really helped out a lot."

See Indians, page 14

Mary Groza heads to state

Ms. Chatuge Nursing Home vies for Ms. Georgia Nursing Home crown

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
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Chatuge Regional Nursing Home's *little spitfire* has been chosen to compete in the Ms. Georgia Nursing Home pageant at Evergreen Resort in Stone Mountain on April 21st.

Mary Groza was crowned Ms. Chatuge Regional Nursing Home on Feb. 9th. And now, not only has she won at the local level, Mary has been selected as a semi-finalist in the 2012 state pageant.

Mary said that she



Mary Groza

"could not believe that at 98 years old, who would have thought I would be in a beauty pageant, much less win."

Not only has she won a pageant, she's well on her way to being crowned Ms.

Georgia Nursing Home.

Each year the Georgia Health Care Association chooses 23 contestants from more than 200 nursing homes across the state to compete in the annual pageant.

The folks at Chatuge Regional Nursing Home say "congratulations Mary on being selected as a semi-finalist in the 2012 pageant. We are so proud of you and we look forward to our *little spitfire* bringing home the crown."

Good luck Mary from Chatuge Regional Nursing Home and the Towns County Herald.

Versatile Baldwin lands tournament's Big Fish

Football, wrestling and baseball star can fish too

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
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The Third Annual Towns County Touchdown Club Bass Tournament was full of surprises.

The biggest surprise was who caught the Big Fish.

Vonya Baldwin and his grandfather Charles Baldwin took part in the tournament. The younger Baldwin of course plays football, wrestles and is the catcher on the baseball team.

And, he's also a pretty darn good fisherman.

Vonya Baldwin is credited with catching the Big Fish in the tournament, a 6.8 pound largemouth that was the envy of the 40 other anglers competing in the tournament.

The closest fish to Vonya Baldwin's big catch weighed in at just over 4 pounds. Baldwin and Baldwin also finished third in the tournament, netting just over 11 pounds of bass.

Twenty-one teams came out in support of the annual tournament that benefits the football team with necessary equipment purchases and helps pay for football camp.



Coach Langford presents Vonya Baldwin with the check for the Big Fish. Photo/James Reese

After the payouts, Indians' Head Football Coach Kyle Langford said the Indians' football team netted some cash that will help in the upcoming football season.

"It was a good day for us," Coach Langford said. "The turnout was good considering we had a downpour the day before, and, it was about as good a day weather-wise as you could ask for."

Coach Langford thanked the anglers and the volunteers, including some of his players, for helping to make the third-year effort a

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