

Towns celebrates 154th birthday

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Towns County celebrated its 154th birthday on Saturday with arts and crafts, music, dancing and cake.

The Fifth Annual Arts and Heritage Festival was a rousing success as locals and passersby alike came out to enjoy the festivities that included the rededication of the historic Presley, GA Post Office.

Thousands came from near and far to enjoy the sounds of the Parker Brothers Band, fellowship of locals and sell or barter their arts and crafts on the downtown square in Hiawassee.

Maureen Boudrot of Blairsville said the festival was a grand experience.

"I love the people, the music, the arts and the food," she said.

Despite a blustery day with wind gusts of up to 25 mph, Boudrot was enjoying herself and the event.

"I wouldn't miss this for the world, absolutely not," she said. "The Parker Band is great. They make so much music for just a couple of guys."

The Rev. Dwayne Patterson was busy grilling burgers and hot dogs for Pine Grove Baptist Church's benefit for the church's Youth Fund. He loved the sounds of the festival as he flipped hamburgers on the grill.

"It's a privilege for us to be here," he said. "We have an

opportunity to raise a little money for our Youth Fund and church. It's great to be a part of all of this.

"This festival is very important for the community. It gives people an opportunity for fellowship, a chance to experience different things and get in touch with their heritage."

The 117th county formed in Georgia, Towns County was crafted in 1856 from parts of Union and Rabun counties. It was named for George Washington Bonaparte Towns, who was Georgia governor from 1847 to 1851.

Its county seat, Hiawassee, the Cherokee word for 'meadow.'

Saturday afternoon, members of the county's historical society celebrated the day with a birthday cake commemorating the county's 154th birthday.

Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis was thrilled to be a part of the celebration.

"I've been a native all of my life and it's just great to be a part of this," she said. "I love to see all of the people taking a part in this. We're working hard to preserve our mountain heritage and our mountain way of life."

Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby said history was an interesting word.

"It's about what has been; we mark it in time, we mark it in words; in stories. It's important and obviously it's emotional," Gibby said. "We are attached to our history. Sometimes, we're not real crazy

about our history. Sometimes, we rewrite history, which I think is interesting.

"I also think about the history that we are creating," she said. "What we do today is history for the people who are coming after us. Those individuals will be able to look back on what we do here today."

Gibby said it was important to protect heritage, which includes our mountains, streams and lakes.

"We're preserving memories, we're preserving how we got to where we are today," she said. "I think it's also important for us to think about how we are going to be remembered. What we do going forward is going to mark who we are as a people."

Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall said that it's time to record the words and thoughts of area old timers for future generations to understand the county's early days.

"Our prized possessions are vanishing fast across the county," Commissioner Kendall said. "I want to commend the Historical Society for videoing our old timers. We lost a lot before we ever got started."

"I'd like to see you get some of these people who know these mountains and record them on how these mountains were named," he said. "There's a history behind the coves and the streams. We need to continue to preserve our heritage in as many mediums as possible."



Folks were dancing in the streets of Downtown Hiawassee on Saturday as the county celebrated the fifth Heritage Festival. The county turned 154 years old this year. Photo/Lowell Nicholson