

Stars align at Fall Festival... continued from page 1

Fair hours are from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekdays. Be sure to go take a helicopter ride, check out some great food and crafts, or catch one of the many oncoming acts this week, including Patty Loveless at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 14; Earl Thomas Conley at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 15; and LeeRoy Troy at 2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 16.

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said whatever activity festival goers decide to take part in, everyone should come celebrate the beginning of fall at the fairgrounds.

The festival includes the crafts that make Northeast Georgia so special along with another 2009 feature, "the Great Bear Show."

"It's a chance for our visitors to experience the old-

est and longest running animal educational show in the country," Thomason said. "That sums up the Great Bear Show."

And for those whose feet are literally aching, event scooters are available this year.

"The event scooters will be available throughout the entire Fall Festival," Thomason said.

On Oct. 16 and 17, the state Fiddler's Convention takes center stage at Anderson Music Hall, Thomason said.

The competition includes Senior Fiddler, Junior Fiddler, Bluegrass Band, Finger Style Guitar, Flat Pick Guitar, Banjo, and Mandolin, Thomason said.

"This could be the most exciting Fall Festival ever," Thomason said. "We're excited and looking forward to wonderful days of fun, food, crafts and musical entertainment."



Neal McCoy serenades the crowd on Monday at the 2009 Fall Festival at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Crystal Gayle, Aaron Tippin, The Isaacs, The Diplomats and Chuck Wagon Gang entertained weekend crowds at the Fairgrounds. The festival continues through Saturday as it concludes with the annual Georgia Fiddlers' Convention at Anderson Music Hall. Patty Loveless, Earl Thomas Conley and LeeRoy Troy are scheduled to perform Wednesday, Thursday and Friday respectively. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

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basically, a 15-minute drive. According to Towns County sheriff's reports, cellular phone service, when available, sends 911 calls to Rabun County emergency dispatchers. The alleged perpetrator, Bobby Dale Littrell, 54, of Tate City, was already in the custody of Rabun County authorities, sheriff's reports show. He was turned over to Towns County law enforcement authorities, who spent more than two hours investigating the incident scene, Towns County sheriff's reports show. Towns County jail records show that Littrell was arrested and charged with aggravated assault. The case remains under investigation and additional charges are pending. The shooting victim, who was not at the scene at the time of law enforcement arrival, was treated at Mountain Lakes Medical Center in Clayton for a single gunshot wound to the shoulder, Towns County sheriff's reports show.

According to the best information available, the victim was released later that evening. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, sheriff's deputies were dispatched to Davis Road off Bearmeat Village at approximately 5:12 p.m. The caller told authorities that a woman was lying in the roadway. Sheriff's deputies Marshall, Smith and Chief Deputy Jeff Edge, along with Sheriff Chris Clinton, arrived on the scene to find a woman lying on the edge of Davis Road. The woman appeared to be unconscious and deputies called for an ambulance. The woman was transported to Helen, where a helicopter was waiting to life flight the victim to an Atlanta hospital. Detectives are trying to determine exactly what happened to the woman, and the investigation is ongoing. The sheriff's office asks anyone who has information regarding this incident to contact the Towns County Sheriff's Office at (706) 896-4444.

BOE forced to raise millage rates...continued from page 1

Towns County Middle School among the most innovative middle schools in the country.

Behrens cut until it hurt and it wasn't easy cutting from an almost already bare bones budget.

State budget shortfalls and an increased load in the Local Fair Share put the Towns County BOE between a rock and a hard place. The board was forced to raise the educational millage rate by 1.24 mills to help generate \$4.4 million to pay for educating Towns County's 1,132 students.

Under Georgia's QBE formula, the state takes the first 5 mills in taxes from each county. The amount returned to the local school boards is based on the value of the local tax digest. Because of the value of property throughout the county, the money the state keeps and sends to poorer school districts throughout the state is substantial.

In 2009-2010, the state will take an estimated \$7.13 million off the top of the local tax pie. Based on the value of the county's tax digest, the state will only return \$3.03 million for local education. That's a cost of \$4.1 million to local taxpayers to help pay for education needs in Georgia's poorer

counties.

"We've tried to get the state to also weigh the personal incomes in that equation," Dr. Behrens said. "So far, we've been unsuccessful. State Rep. Steven Allison and State Sen. Jim Butterworth are well aware of our plight. They're working hard to change things."

"In the meantime, we have to find a way to pay for the educations of our children," he said.

The additional 1.24 mills generates the approximately \$1.19 million needed to offset state funding shortfalls and QBE costs. Even with the millage increase, Towns County would continue to have one of the lowest millage rates in the state.

The 2009-2010 budget is \$11.6 million, down from \$12.06 million in 2008-2009, Dr. Behrens said.

"We've trimmed the budget considerably," he said.

The rising millage rate comes as the state continues to put the burden of education on the backs of local school systems.

Constitutionally, the state is obligated to bear the burden of educating Georgia's students. In Towns County, that obligation only amounts to 26 percent or \$3.03 million of

the local education budget while local property taxes foot the bill for 38 percent or \$4.4 million.

Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax funds can only be used for Capital Outlay projects such as building construction or maintenance, technology costs, buying textbooks or buying school buses.

SPLOST funds cannot be used to pay for the day-to-day operations of our school system, Dr. Behrens said.

The state recently cut funding to the local school system by \$125,617. The net loss to the school system is \$5,959,211 following implementation of three days of unpaid leave.

As part of the state cut-backs, the school system lost half a day early in the school year, the first of the scheduled unpaid leaves for teachers and administrators. A full day of unpaid leave happened last week and another half day is planned for Dec. 18. The final day of unpaid leave for teachers and administrators is scheduled for Dec. 21.

"It's gotten to the point where we have to start balancing what is best for the children," Dr. Behrens said. "We're grappling with new issues every year."

YHCC talks growth, business...continued from page 1

ing a final document and hope to start the adoption process in January. A motion was made by David Sellers, seconded by Terry Ingram to pay the invoice from Jenkins, Olson & Bowen, P.C. for \$5,750 which is half of the total bill of \$11,500 (\$5,750 was paid in December 2007); all in favor.

Dress For Less Consignment Shop License: A motion was made by Terry Ingram, seconded by Donald Keys to approve Alicia King's Business License application; all in favor.

Water System Update: Chris Poje stated that both contractors broke ground Oct. 6, the water lines at Track Rock and Plott Town have an end of contract date of Jan. 3 but should be done before the holidays.

The College tank completion date is scheduled for March 20 and is expected to be done in January or early February.

Poje stated that Water and Sewer Standards specifications will be a good guide for developers so they will know the standards they must meet. He will submit the standards to the Environmental Protection Division. He said that as long as the specifications are met, the city will not have to go through the submittal process.

Poje is working through some issues at Brasstown Creek in planning the expansion at the Waste Water Plant. He met with the Assistant Branch Chief about their research on their new rules and also talked to Steve Gonyea at the Brasstown Golf Course who is very open to reused waste water.

A larger tank and other issues have been worked out at the College Tank.

Poje recommended building a water model to show Young Harris' service area and to put down boundaries. A

motion was made by Kelley, seconded by Ingram to have Poje build a computer model with support data; all in favor.

Water System Project Costs: The city's current water system project costs are: A 5 percent contingency of \$37,700, the total estimated cost is \$920,365; the city's loan is \$1,025,100 so the city should have \$104,735 left over.

David Sellers mentioned that Corn Creek had muddy water running through his property. Young Harris College is taking care of their part, the problem may be upstream. Attorney Cox recommended the City call Jackie Huff to come out the next time it rains.

Some special guests were in attendance on Tuesday evening. Local members of the Boy Scouts of America attended the meeting, earning merit badges and learning the upclose inner workings of local city government.



Young Harris City Council members discussed taxes, development and muddy waters during last week's council meeting at City Hall in Young Harris. Photo/Jessica Keaton

City could service NC campground... continued from page 1

placing the current facility.

Stancil said that under the initial proposal, the city would receive almost \$1 million in federal funds to expand the city's sewer infrastructure. Additionally, service fees from new water and sewer billings would generate immediate income to the city enterprise funds.

"If approved, the sewer line expansion would also provide for improved protection and clean up of Lake Chatuge," Stancil said. "Importantly, \$1 million in new federal funding would reduce future costs to local governments and to city water and sewer customers. This joint venture is a rare opportunity for federal and local government cooperation and partnership."

During last week's meeting, city council members expressed concerns to Stancil regarding declining sewer capacity. The project will be evaluated by the City Planning Committee to determine if the federal funding and immediate cash flow will offset the loss of city reserve capacity in its

wastewater treatment plant.

Council member Joan Crothers made a motion to approve a resolution to authorize Mayor Barbara Mathis, City Attorney Stephanie McConnell and Stancil to negotiate with the U. S. Government on the expansion, to continue with planning and design, and to seek appropriate local, state and interstate approvals.

The motion passed 3-2, with council members Junior Chastain and Janet Allen voting against the resolution. Council members Howard Cunningham, Crothers and Annie Johnson voted to approve the resolution.

According to a press release issued by the city, the City Planning Committee recommendation and final City Council approval would be subject to the outcome of the negotiations with U.S. Forest Service officials and the terms of an intergovernmental agreement. The sewer line expansion will also be subject to county and state approvals, the press release indicated.

Meanwhile, the city

learned that the Towns County Water & Sewer Authority has revised its proposal for expansion of the Hiwassee Water Treatment Plant.

Chairman Gene Mitchell recently made an overture to the City of Hiwassee to join together to build future water capacity. Initially, Mitchell stressed the authority must receive an equal ownership share of the plant.

After much thought, Mitchell revised that proposal to eliminate the request for joint ownership of the expanded facility during the Oct. 6 City Council meeting.

The City Council didn't take action on the proposal, however, it was "favorably received." According to Mayor Mathis, city staffers will review the revised proposal and make a recommendation to council.

Originally, the city received a letter from the Authority Chairman Mitchell letting city leaders know that as the county continues to grow, so will the need for more water. That need will soon exceed the amount the authority presently

is contracted for with the city and more water than the present treatment facility can produce, according to Mitchell's letter.

Mayor Mathis said that the City Council would take the revised offer into deep consideration.

"It's definitely something that the City Council will explore," Mayor Mathis said.

Currently, the Authority is obligated to pay 40 percent of the bonded indebtedness on the City treatment plant. According to Mitchell's letter, the Authority has been paying 45 percent under the present contract.

An agreement between the two entities is a must as the county continues to grow, Commissioner Kendall said.

Kendall feels that the amount paid by the Authority for expansion should guarantee water for the county's future growth.

"The Authority should have some say in how they distribute water," Kendall said. "The people that are paying for the fees for the service deserve that much."

Sheriff's Review Board Update

By Joe Spellman
Special to Towns County Herald

The Sheriff's Review Board met for their monthly meeting on Sept. 10 from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the sheriff's office. Members in attendance included Nancy Church, Michael Anderson, Joe Spellman and Rick Robinson along with Chief Deputy Jeff Edge and Sheriff Chris Clinton. Members not able to attend were Rudy Patton and Steve Gerdes. Sheriff Clinton opened the meeting discussing the proposed 2010 Sheriff's Office Budget and the need for more deputies on the road and at the courthouse. Currently two deputies are on the road during a shift and Sheriff Clinton believes, considering the size and growing population of the county, that another deputy needs to be added per shift to ensure the safety of the residents of Towns County. According to Sheriff Clinton the courthouse is not in compliance with state mandated security guidelines. The sheriff acknowledged the tough economic circumstances in the

county and gave two recent examples how he is keeping expenditures down. Updated equipment including ballistic vests, shotguns and stinger guns (Tasers) were acquired for the deputies. These items were received in exchange for a camper and pickup truck that were seized in a 2008 drug arrest. Also mentioned were the availability of part time deputies and jailers in place in order to avoid paying overtime to full time employees.

Sheriff Clinton informed us that a female trainee has been selected to attend mandate school (deputy training school) and he hopes to hire more female deputies in the future.

The sheriff also announced the *Refuse To Be A Victim* classes held Sept. 14 and Sept. 15 at the Towns County High School and said he plans to schedule more victim awareness and self defense classes in the future. In closing the sheriff emphasized his commitment to running a transparent office with an open door policy, devoted to the residents of Towns County.

X-Country...continued from page 1

schools that were top notch competitors in Class AA, becoming a stacked region. Last year's success included a first ever win over Athens Christian.

To sum it up, it was just an unbelievable day for Towns County Cross Country.

Coach Ledford is expecting big things from both the girls and boys squads in 2009.

Recently in the Murphy Invitational, the Varsity Boys finished fifth as a team with Walker Gus, Ethan Burch, Rylan Albach, Dakota Barrett and Zach Whitehead the top five finishers for the Indians.

As for the Varsity girls, the team of Vardeman, Conrad, Buck, Walls and Fuhs paced the Lady Indians.