

# Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, January 15, 2025

## County spared worst of winter weather impacts

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The winter storm that moved through the region Friday, Jan. 10, ended up being a best-case scenario for residents, dropping just 1 to 3 inches of snow while causing minimal power outages, downed trees and wrecks in Towns County.

Fortunately, the forecast of 30-plus mph wind gusts never materialized, but impacts from the storm continued over the weekend as temperatures stayed below freezing from the onset into Sunday morning, with icy backroads being the main concern.

Snow moved in after

daylight Friday, dropping fluffy flakes into the afternoon before transitioning to a brief period of sleet. A wintry mix resumed overnight Friday, contributing to backroads remaining icy, but main roads were clear – albeit slushy – as early as Saturday morning.

As always, county public safety agencies and the Road Department were prepared for worse. The Towns County Emergency Management Agency monitored the situation throughout, and all agencies had additional personnel on standby.

First responders attended two National Weather Service briefings in the run-up to the snow, acting accordingly

to make sure all personnel, vehicles and equipment were ready to respond.

EMA Director Marty Roberts commended residents for largely staying home, noting that the county experienced just a few wrecks.

“We fared well,” Roberts said. “We didn’t get the freezing rain and didn’t get the high winds. Our power loss was minimal. It was an inconvenience for everybody, but no major injuries; we had a few small accidents.”

“Our EMS, Fire Department, E-911 Center and Sheriff’s Office were able to handle all calls, and we were able to get to all of them and take care

See *Winter Weather*, Page 7



Minimal local impacts from Friday’s snowstorm added to the local appreciation for nature’s beauty.  
Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## BOE welcomes new chair, Perren; Thomas promoted

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Towns County Board of Education had a busy first meeting of 2025 on Jan. 6, welcoming a familiar face in new School Board Member Roy Perren while selecting School Board Member David Phillips to serve as the new chairperson, who presided over his first meeting with aplomb.

Phillips has been a board member for three years and is honored to lead the meetings as chair.

“I graduated from TCHS in 1981 and have lived here all my life,” Phillips said. “I wanted to serve my community in some way, and when I heard there was an opening for a board member, I decided to run for it.”

“I put a notice on Facebook and told everyone I wasn’t spending money but that if it was God’s will then it would happen. And it happened.”

“I want to do everything we can for the children in this community growing up, to

give them the best education we can for the best possible price. Education is the key to everything.”

“We have a great School Board, terrific teachers, and (Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong) does a great job here. We all work together for the good of the kids and the community.”

Joining the board was newest member Roy Perren. As a retired employee of the Central Office and former principal of the high school,

Perren has long been involved with Towns County Schools. He retired in 2023 with 31 years in education, 19 of which he committed here.

“Spending all that time with the district, I’m really invested in the community and the school system,” Perren said. “I like being involved, so I ran for school board. This is my first official board meeting, but I’ve been to more of them than anybody here, except maybe (Finance Director

See *Board of Education*, Page 7



Towns County School Board Chair David Phillips and new Board Member Roy Perren in their regular meeting on Jan. 6.  
Photo by Shelly Knight

## Georgia’s own Jimmy Carter remembered around nation

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter was laid to rest on Thursday, Jan. 9, in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. He died at the age of 100 on Dec. 29.

A private memorial and burial capped six days of official funeral services for the 39th president, starting with the transport of Carter’s remains from Phoebe Sumter Medical Center in Americus to his hometown on Jan. 4.

The motorcade made its way through Plains with a brief pause in front of Carter’s boyhood home and farm. During the pause, the National Park Service saluted the late president by ringing the historic farm bell 39 times.

From there it was on to Atlanta, with a stop at the State Capitol for a moment of silence before heading to the Carter Presidential Center for a private service, after which Carter lay in repose “for mourners to come and pay their respects continuously until 6 a.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 7.”

Public visitations there ended last Tuesday, at which point the deceased president left his namesake center “for the final time with a departure ceremony.”



Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter in 2014. Photo/LBJ Library

Carter and his family then traveled to Dobbs Air Reserve Base and departed for Washington to the U.S. Navy Memorial, where his remains were transferred to a horse-drawn caisson for a procession to the U.S. Capitol for visitation by members of Congress and the public.

Last Thursday, Carter

was taken to the Washington National Cathedral for his National Funeral Service, with five current and former presidents attending. Afterward, he was flown back to Georgia to return to his hometown for a private service at Maranatha Baptist Church.

People lined the mo-  
See *Jimmy Carter*, Page 6

## Young Harris conducts housekeeping, talks HB 581



Young Harris City Councilman John Kelley with Main Street Director Rosemary Royston and Economic Development Director Denise McKay in last week’s city meeting.  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Among new business in their Jan. 7 regular meeting, the Young Harris City Council and Mayor Andrea Gibby undertook first-of-the-year organizational housekeeping.

The council re-appointed one of its own, Matt Miller, as Mayor Pro Tempore for

2025. Mayor pro tem is a position filled by a council member to lead the city should the duly elected mayor become unable, for any reason, to perform his or her official duties.

Liaison positions on the city’s Water and Sewer Committee, Administrative Committee, Tree Board and Street Committee, and Ethics Commission all remained the same

as 2024.

Councilmen John Kelley, Steve Clark and Terry Ingram will continue as the Water/Sewer Committee. All council members will serve on the Administrative Committee; the Tree Board/Street Committee is Ingram, Donald Keys and Miller; and Clark is the Planning Commission liaison.  
See *Young Harris Council*, Page 12

## Union General Hospital welcomes first baby of 2025

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Little miss Oakleigh Ellamae Payne rang in the new year with her birth as Union General Hospital’s first baby of 2025.

She entered the world at 11:56 a.m. on Jan. 2, delivered by Dr. Kimberly Denton. Weighing in at 7 pounds, 3 ounces, the healthy baby girl is home and settling in nicely.

Parents Tori and Evan Payne of Hiwassee Dam, North Carolina, couldn’t be prouder, and their two sons – Danner, 10, and Waylon, 3 – are excited about their new status as big brothers.

“They absolutely love her,” Tori said. “It’s like that’s all they care about. ‘What’s she doing? How’s she doing? Is she eating good? Is she sleeping good?’ They just want to love on her all day long.”

Tori said her pregnancy was thankfully uneventful, and the delivery went smoothly. She had nothing but praise for the Union General Labor & Delivery team that helped to usher in the family’s newest addition.

And Tori was especially grateful for the care of nursing staff, who pleasantly surprised



Proud parents Evan and Tori Payne with newborn daughter Oakleigh Ellamae.  
Photo/Submitted

12 Pages

Vol. 96 No. 12

Lake Levels

Top of GA Speech Contest Applications See Page 3



Arrests - 2  
Opinion - 4  
Chamber - 5  
Legals - 11  
Church - 8  
Obits - 9  
Classifieds - 11

Blue Ridge 1,668.18  
Chatuge 1,917.70  
Nottely 1,761.56

Win Signed Copy of “Hearthstones” See Page 5

Commissioner Bradshaw to Speak See Page 5



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United  
Community



# Chamber Chronicles

The official source of Towns County Chamber News

Wednesday, January 15, 2025

## Welcome to our Newest Members!

**Project Chimps**- 2031 Lowery Road, Morganton, GA 30513 (706) 374-3675 Facebook: Project Chimps; Website: www.projectchimps.org Project Chimps is the newest chimpanzee sanctuary in the United States and was founded to provide lifelong exemplary care to 200 former research chimpanzees at its sanctuary on 230+ acres of forested land in the Blue Ridge Mountains of north Georgia. Today, Project Chimps is home to 95 chimpanzees and we are working to move nearly 100 more to permanent sanctuary. The sanctuary is occasionally open to the public for special events and group tours.

**Dairy Queen Grill & Chill** - Hiwassee 231 S Main Street, Hiwassee, GA (706) 896-8153 Facebook: Dairy Queen Grill & Chill (231 S Main St, Hiwassee, GA) - Soft-serve ice cream & signature shakes, top the menu at this classic burger & fries fast-food chain. Home of the Blizzard!

## Chamber Events & Programs

**Members:** Make sure you check out our weekly email blasts for the latest events! Next up Burgers, Brew & Basketball at Young Harris College on Monday, January 20. RSVP now!

**Coming soon:** Lake Chatuge Burger Week Plus! Ten days of wonderful burgers from our awesome restaurant partners. Restaurants- want to participate? Call 706-896-4966 for details.

Check out our calendar at www.golakechatuge.com for all our member sponsored and community events.

Follow us: Facebook & Instagram: Visit Lake Chatuge & Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce

Thanks to all our members for their continued support!

Additionally, we'd like to thank these Platinum and Gold Members:

**PLATINUM MEMBERS:** Blue Ridge Mountain EMC; Century 21 Black Bear Realty; Hiwassee Holiday KOA, Lake Chatuge Lodge; Mountain Realty; Peach State Federal Credit Union; SouthState Bank, N.A.; The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge; United Community Bank; Veteran Contracting LLC; Windstream Communications.

**GOLD MEMBERS:** Bennett Equipment; Brasstown Manor; Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa; Brother's Restaurant at Willow Ranch; Chatuge Regional Hospital; Chick-fil-A of Blairsville; Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital; Holiday Inn Express & Suites-Hiwassee; Hughes Accounting; K. Boyer Photography; Little Bear Rentals & Property Management; Men on The Move; NeuroSport Physical Therapy LLC; Ridgeline Exteriors & Roofing; ServiceMaster Restoration; Tri-County Office Supply, and Young Harris College.

For information on becoming a member of the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, visit www.golakechatuge.com or call Mary Ann at (706) 896-4966 or email her at LCChamber2021@gmail.com.

## Sparky and Rhonda Rucker to Play at the Folk School



Join us Mondya, January 27, at 7 PM for a concert with Sparky and Rhonda Rucker.

Together they perform throughout the U.S. as well as overseas, singing songs and telling stories from the American folk tradition. They are internationally recognized as leading musicians, authors, and storytellers. They accompany themselves with finger-style picking and bottleneck blues guitar, blues harmonica, old-time banjo, piano, spoons, and bones.

Sparky and Rhonda are sure to deliver an uplifting presentation of toe-tapping music spiced with humor, history, and tall tales. They take their audience on an educational and emotional journey that ranges from poignant stories of slavery and war to an amusing rendition of a Brer Rabbit tale or their witty commentaries on current events. Their music includes a variety of old-time blues, Appalachian music, slave songs, Civil War music, spirituals, work songs, ballads, civil rights music, and



Sparky and Rhonda Rucker

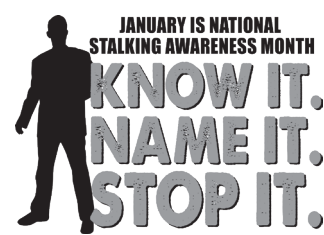
their own original compositions.

You will hear soulful blues licks, heart-rending gospel, knee-slapping good rhythms, and bottleneck guitar slide. Over fifty years of performing, Sparky and Rhonda have performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. and the Smithsonian Folklife

Festival as well as NPR's All Things Considered, Prairie Home Companion, Mountain Stage, and Morning Edition.

Their recording, Treasures & Tears, was nominated for a W.C. Handy Award, and their music is also included on the Grammy-nominated anthology, Singing Through the Hard Times.

## S.A.F.E. - January is Stalking Awareness Month



It is critical for personal safety that we raise awareness about the warning signs of stalking and recognize the violating nature of this crime. Stalking can occur in many different forms, including making repeated unsolicited phone calls or texts, following victims or going to their workplace or home; or sending unwanted items to the victim. The advancement of technology creates additional forms of stalking for victims, through online methods and social media. Cyberstalking is a form of threatening behavior including but not limited to unwanted emails, messaging or comments on the victim's social media posts. Stalking can cause fear, stress and anxiety that can be debilitating to a victim.

In the United States, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men experience stalking at some point in their lifetimes. Approximately 13.5 million people are stalked in a 1-year period.

Stalkers can be from a variety of contacts. SPARC studies provide statistics about stalkers that include:

Stalkers are 42% Acquaintances, 40% intimate partners (current or former), 19% strangers, 8% brief encounters, 8% family members and 4% persons of authority. 1 in 3 stalkers have stalked before. Stalking cases can go on for years and 1 in 7 stalking victims relocate.

In Georgia, Stalking is defined as when someone: Follows you; Places you under surveillance; Contacts you in person, by phone, email, computer or another electronic device.

A judge can issue a no contact order, which restrains the accused person from harassing, stalking, or threaten-

ing the physical safety of the petitioner. There is no cost to file a petition for a protective order under the state's Family Violence Act.

Be aware of your surroundings and those you encounter. If you are experiencing stalking in Georgia, you can get help from a variety of resources, including: Call your local police or sheriff's department or file a police report with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation; Georgia Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-334-2836; S.A.F.E. - Support in Abusive Family Emergencies, Inc Crisis Hotline: 706-379-3000 24/7. NT(Jan15Z7)CA

## We Welcome Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw at the Movers & Shakers



After the storm! How did you fare? The Mountain Movers and Shakers belatedly welcome Towns County Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw to the exceptional Sundance Grill this Friday, January 17 at 8 AM.

He will expound on the recently adopted budget and new hires, including firefighters and tax assessors. Commissioner Bradshaw will speak of his plans for the future of our slice of mountain heaven. All are welcome to ring in the



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

New Year and hear directly from your Commissioner.

Get there early to get a good seat to ask questions and get answers from our top elected official. T(Jan15M)JH

## First Baby Oakleigh...from Page 1

the parents by informing them that they would have the hospital's New Year Baby because of her Jan. 2 labor.

The family has a history of boys, Tori said, and even though she was hoping for a girl, she was shocked to learn her new baby's gender due to the well-established pattern of sons.

And so far, Oakleigh has been a quiet bundle of joy, only crying when she gets hungry or needs a diaper change.

Originally, Tori had suggested the name "Oaklynn," but husband Evan was more partial to "Oakleigh." Tori

conceded, agreeing that the name was a beautiful fit for their little one.

As for the middle name, Ellamae, it was inspired by Evan's love for "The Andy Griffith Show."

"It was just a name that we liked, but it reminded him of his favorite show," Tori explained with a laugh. "We didn't know her middle name until I was eight months pregnant."

Tori said everyone eagerly welcomed them home after Oakleigh's arrival, and the rest of the family just "loves her to death."

As part of their good fortune for having delivered the first local baby of the year, the Paynes received a special gift basket at the hospital.

"We sincerely thank River City Bank in Blairsville for their thoughtful generosity in providing a beautiful gift basket to the first baby born at Union General Hospital in 2025," the hospital shared. "Your kindness and community spirit are deeply appreciated!"

Presenting the gift basket was River City Bank Vice President, Director of Human Resources, Katie Mashburn.

## 2025 Season begins with Author Susan Posey to be Mountain Wordsmiths' Featured Reader for January

Mountain Wordsmiths will begin our 2025 season of featured writers on Thursday, January 23, at 10:30 a.m. via Zoom. The monthly event is sponsored by North Carolina Writers' Network-West.

The gatherings will begin with our guest reader, Susan Posey, author of two books of historical fiction. Posey is a native of Asheville, NC, where she now lives with her husband Bill Jacobs, their two cats, and their dog for most of the year, and in Cashiers, NC, the rest of the year. She and her husband lived for many years in Atlanta, where they raised a son and daughter. From 2002-2013, she lived in Cashiers full-time, making treasured friends and starting the Blue Ridge Free Dental Clinic, as well as continuing a practice of psychotherapy.

From an early age, Posey loved the woods of Western North Carolina and their wild plants. While in Cashiers, she learned from a cousin about the family history on her mother's side. The Welsh family of Reeses in this area are descendants of David Reese, a planter in Anson, now



Susan Posey

Mecklenburg County. A family story recalls the journey of her many-times great-aunts who came down the primitive trail, later called The Great Wagon Road, alone. They were herb women and collected plants of the New World as they traveled in the 1750s to North Carolina's frontier to see their brother David.

Posey greatly admired the courage and fortitude it took to do this. When she retired, she wrote a historical fiction book imagining what the two sisters and their adventures must have been like.

After six years of writing and research, this became A Home on Wilder Shores, her first novel. At the request of readers, she wrote a sequel, A Weave of Old and New.

Posey is a graduate of Duke University and has a master's degree from the Catholic University of America.

NCWN-West continues to stay in touch by using technology to share our writing. We offer writing events and writing classes both online and in person. Mountain Wordsmiths gatherings always take place on Zoom. Attendees are welcome to bring a poem or short prose piece to read during Open Mic. Please limit the reading to 3-5 minutes.

Those wishing to attend Mountain Wordsmiths may contact Carroll Taylor at vibiperpetua@gmail.com or ncwngeorgiarep@gmail.com to receive the Zoom link.

Our group is informal, and we welcome those who would simply like to listen to the beauty of wordsmithing. All who attend are encouraged to enjoy their morning cup of coffee or tea as we share our thoughts about writing. NT(Jan15,F1)JH

## Towns County Recreation Department Senior (60+) 3 on 3 Basketball League

The Towns County Recreation Department is starting a Senior (60+), 3 on 3 league. Thursday Mornings at 9 AM. \$40 per person.

The number of games are to be determined by the number of teams in the league.

Sign-up individually, but the teams can be made. Please email tcrecchris@gmail.com for more details. T(Jan15,A2)JH



## Shop with a Cop Bass Tournament Fundraiser

Shop With a Cop Bass Tournament Fundraiser on March 29th at Ledfords Chapel Boat Ramp. Entry fee: \$70 prior to March 29th or \$90 at the ramp. Register by emailing Bronson.Kirby@andrewsnc.gov. T(Jan15,A2)JH

## Volunteers Needed at Regency Hospice

Join Regency SouthernCare Hospice as a volunteer and become an agent of change. As a hospice volunteer, you become a valuable part of our care team and play a vital role in improving the quality of life for those in our care. Please contact us at 706-896-1251 for more information.

Regency Hospice has been serving the mountain region of Northeast Georgia with hospice care for over 20 years. T(Jan15,A2)JH

## Pieceful Mountain Quilt Guild meeting

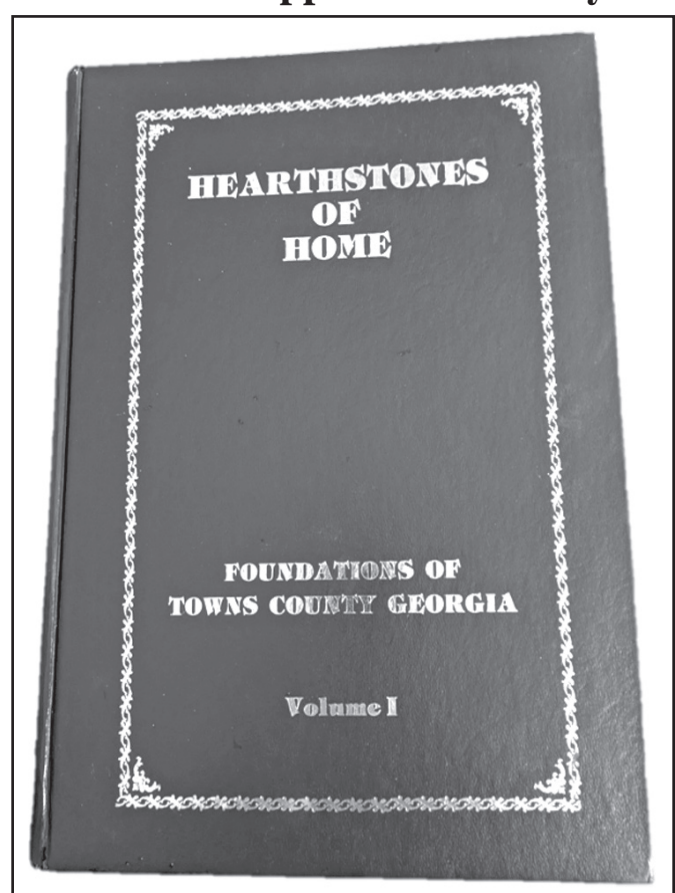
The Pieceful Mountain Quilt Guild meets every third Thursday at 5:30 PM at the Blue Ridge Methodist Church at 235 Orvin Lance Road. The meeting begins at 6 PM. The church is located behind the Blue Ridge Post Office.

Call Jennie Priven 706-781-8495 for more information. NT(Jan15,Z7)CA

## VFW VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS. VFW Karaoke

Karaoke every Friday night from 7 PM until 10 PM at the VFW Post on Sunnyside Rd in Hiwassee. Come join us for some fun! It is open to the public. T(Jan15,A1)JH

## Win a signed copy of "Hearthstones of Home" & support local history



"Heartstones of Home" Foundations of Towns County Georgia, Volume I.

History enthusiasts and supporters of Towns County, now is your chance to own a signed copy of *Hearthstones of Home, Foundations of Towns County, GA: Volume I* by County Historian Jerry Taylor!

This mint-condition treasure was generously donated by Syble Plott Blackstock for a raffle. All proceeds will go toward the restoration of the historic Berrong-Oakley House.

Out of print and with no plans for reproduction, this coveted book offers an unpar-

alleled glimpse into the histories and families that built our cherished county. Owning a copy is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

Tickets are \$5 each, 5 for \$20, or 10 for \$40. You can purchase your chances by visiting bit.ly/hearthstonesaffle to secure your chance to win. Drawing for this popular book will be held February 28.

Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity to own a piece of history while contributing to the preservation of a vital part of our community's heritage. T(Jan15,Z17)JH

# Jimmy Carter ...from Page 1

torcade route during Carter's last trip through town. After arriving at his residence for a private interment ceremony, the Navy conducted a "Missing Man" formation flyover "in honor of former President Carter's naval service and time as commander in chief."

President Joe Biden has ordered that U.S. flags be flown at half-staff at the White House and all public buildings for 30 days from Carter's date of death, and many businesses and residents across the country have joined in the recognition.

For weeks now, Americans have been contemplating Carter's legacy in light of his death.

Carter, who served as the 39th U.S. president from 1977 to 1981, is seen by many as the embodiment of the American Dream, having grown up on a peanut farm before joining the military and rising to the top political office in the land.

As president, the former Democratic governor of Georgia struggled on both the national stage and internationally.

"Jimmy Carter aspired to make Government 'competent and compassionate,' responsive to the American people and their expectations," according to his biography at whitehouse.gov. "His achievements were notable, but in an era of rising energy costs, mounting inflation, and continuing tensions, it was impossible for his administration to meet these high expectations."

In many ways, Carter hit his stride after his presidency, becoming synonymous with humanitarian work by championing efforts like Habitat for Humanity, which makes affordable housing a reality for families facing financial hardships - including in this very community.

Regarded for his honesty and integrity, Carter exuded an "everyman" aura that belied his station in life. He was seemingly most at home amid a rural backdrop, even as president, taking part in ways of life cherished in regions like the North Georgia Mountains.

The farmer turned president famously visited this area for two days in July 1980, arriving via helicopter on the Hiwassee farm of Reuben Walls as chronicled in the Towns



**Richard Haigler holding a framed copy of the Towns County Herald's coverage of President Jimmy Carter's 1980 visit to Hiwassee. The president and friends went trout fishing here and his Secret Service stayed in the Deer Lodge cabins owned by Richard and his wife Willene.**

Photo by Becky Long/Clay County Progress

County Herald.

"He was met at the field by a crowd of about 300 spectators, some of whom had waited in the heat for as long as four hours," per past reporting. "After waving to the crowd, Carter and his tourage drove from the landing site to the farm of family friend Don Carter, no relation, where he plans to do some serious trout fishing."

At the time, local couple Richard and Willene Haigler welcomed Carter's Secret Service detail to stay in cabins at their Deer Lodge in Towns County. The event still holds significance to the Haiglers all these years later.

"I've got a check from the White House that's never been cashed," Richard told the Clay County Progress shortly

after Carter's death, joking that he was saving the \$267 check "for hard times."

Willene, a fan of the president's, wrote him a letter, and Carter sent her a signed picture of him and former First Lady Rosalynn.

The Haiglers have collected other Carter-era memorabilia over the years, including a framed photograph of the Carters landing via helicopter in Hiwassee.

"I liked Jimmy Carter," Richard said. "He was a working man. He came home and worked the peanut farm. After he retired, he built houses for the needy. He was always on the go. I will remember him as a good man."

*Clay County Progress Publisher Becky Long contributed to this reporting.*

# YHC shines spotlight on hardworking Blairsville native

Teresa Kelley began working at Young Harris College in December 1993 as the administrative assistant to the director of institutional advancement. She started her career assisting with fundraising initiatives, special events, and press releases for YHC events and students' accomplishments. After transitioning to the administrative assistant to the president in 2002, her responsibilities expanded to cover nearly every aspect of the College.

From assisting with Commencement, the Clay Dotson Open, Alumni Weekend, and many other special events throughout the year, to scheduling hundreds of meetings and recording countless pages of meeting notes, Kelley always ensures that things at YHC are running smoothly. She also works with the Board of Trustees as the assistant secretary to the Board, which she says is a very enjoyable experience as they all care deeply about YHC and are always working to improve the college experience for students.

Kelley has witnessed many changes throughout her time at YHC, including the physical transformation of the campus with renovations to the construction of new buildings, to the academic transition to a four-year college and master's program. She has been a part of many special events on campus, including Gov. Zell Miller's kickoff for his gubernatorial re-election campaign in the Susan B. Harris Chapel, special programs with U.S. Congressman John Lewis and conservationist Jane Goodall, town hall meetings with U.S. Senators Johnny Isakson and Saxby Chambliss, and getting to meet Henry "Hank" Aaron and YHC alumni Ronnie Milap, 1964, and Trisha Yearwood, 1984.

During her 30 years at YHC, she has worked for five presidents and three interim presidents, as well as six different chairmen of the Board of Trustees. Each president and board chair are different with their own management styles, which has made her position very interesting with no two presidents or board chairs alike!



**Teresa Kelley**

"While some people believe that the president is the catalyst for the success of a college, over my 36 years in higher education leadership, I have learned that the president's success depends on detail, institutional memory, and relationship connections," said Drew Van Horn, former president. Van horn retired in December 2024, with Dr. John Wells taking the reins at YHC Jan.1, 2025.

"Teresa Kelley is the epitome of those qualifications. I jokingly tell people that Teresa runs the College, but she lets me sit in the big office. In many aspects, that statement has truth. Teresa has kept me from stepping on things better left alone and directed me regarding practices and processes appreciated by the Board, alumni, and campus community."

A native of Blairsville, GA, and the daughter of Susie and Jim Kelley, and granddaughter of Mack and Merner Kelley, she came to YHC as an elementary school student to see the children's plays performed by Theatre Young Harris - not knowing at the time that years later, she would be working at YHC and be hon-

ored with a building bearing her name: The Teresa Kelley Band Building, per the generosity of Trustee Pam Rollins in her ongoing efforts to improve the educational opportunities for YHC students. The name of the building is just one testament to Kelley's years of dedication, service, and unwavering support of the College.

One of Kelley's favorite parts about her position in the President's Office is that it is a rewarding and exciting mix - from trustees' and administration's operation of the College to getting to know and interact with students.

"I have greatly enjoyed my 30+ years at YHC and I've have met so many amazing people, from students, alumni, staff, faculty, emeriti, and trustees who have become friends and feel like family," Kelley said. "Spending so much time working together has been a blessing in many ways. Seeing students mature, graduate, and reach their goals is a very rewarding experience. Working at YHC has been a great part of my life and I hope to continue serving the YHC community for years to come!"

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# Winter Weather...from Page 1



**On Friday, the Towns County Courthouse had its first snow closure since being renovated. The courthouse was expected to have a delayed opening on Monday.** Photo by Lowell Nicholson

of everybody. That's always a concern when you have really slick roads."

Pretty much all county roadways were blanketed with snow on Friday, and the Road Department responded by spreading salt and gravel mixtures from trucks affixed with scrape blades, which continued over the weekend.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw remarked that Towns County weathered the storm better than expected given the initial forecasts of high winds and freezing rain, and he praised road crews for their hard work throughout the winter event.

"I want to thank the Road Department – they were 100% prepared," Bradshaw said. "On Thursday, they prepared all the trucks, putting snow chains on their back tires, getting all the snowplows hooked up and all the salt and chat ready, and chainsaws in case we had a lot of trees down."

"They were at the Road Department early Friday morning ready to rock 'n' roll. And then, they just kind of had to wait on the snow to get here, because we didn't know what time it would arrive on Friday."

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was all hands on deck as well, quickly restoring the relatively few power outages reported across the system. A lack of ice accumulations from being spared freezing rain reduced damage to powerlines and trees, keeping most homes powered and warm.

Towns County Government closed county buildings

on Friday, and Towns County Schools announced the day before that classes would be virtual the day of the storm. Many local businesses closed on Friday, too, with several gradually re-opening over the weekend.

Some of the lingering snow and ice melted Sunday as the sun came out and temperatures climbed above 40 degrees, but black ice into Monday remained a concern at press time, as temperatures once again dropped well below freezing Sunday night.

Citing ongoing road conditions, Towns County

Schools announced Sunday that students would have another online learning day Monday, and Towns County Government was expected to open public buildings at 1 p.m. on Jan. 13 for employees who felt safe driving to work.

County officials are monitoring the potential for additional winter weather coming up this weekend and/or early next week, though it was still too early at press time to say with certainty what, if any, impacts were on the way.

Unrelated to the weather, the City of Hiawasse suf-

ferred a water main break on US 76 in front of Sundance Grill before sunrise Sunday, necessitating service disruption between Tater Ridge in town and the Friendship end of Sunnyside Road.

Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. said the break occurred because of aging infrastructure and not due to the extended sub-freezing temperatures.

Hiawasse lost several thousand gallons of water before getting all the valves shut off, and in addition to the customers in the shut-off area, Towns County Water Authority customers were affected by the break.

The Water Authority receives water from the city treatment facility, and many of its customers experienced low water pressure from having to rely on storage tanks during the repair.

Working together, the City of Hiawasse, Water Authority and Bill Allen Construction had the break fixed by early Sunday afternoon. It was an extensive repair, with the broken main buried under snow, approximately 18 inches of asphalt and 6 feet of frozen ground, Chastain said.

Towns County issued a CodeRED Alert Sunday morning to let residents know about the water main break, and CodeRED was also used several times to inform people about the winter storm and precau-



**Cleo had the right idea on Friday, building this fun-loving snowman with family in Hiawasse.** Photo by Jordan Hyatt

tions they should take.

The Water Authority asks people to try their best to conserve water during and for a short time after major leaks, and Water Authority Manager Jennifer Nichols provided the newspaper with some helpful cold weather tips for preventing frozen pipes at home.

"During extended cold temperatures, as long as there are no large leaks, dripping your water is one of the ways to prevent frozen lines and meters," Nichols said. "We also ask that you put insulation around the inside of your meter box to help prevent your

meter from freezing.

"Also keep in mind, if you live in a higher elevation area and your power is out, your water more than likely will be out as well since the majority of our booster pumps cannot run without power.

"Please report any sightings of water main leaks or outages to our emergency number at 706-379-3622, but do not leave multiple messages since this will slow down response times. You can also visit our website at townscountywater.com for any updates on any current large leaks that might be happening."

## Board of Education...from Page 1

Myra Underwood).

"I think our kids are great. They graduate from here and go on to be entrepreneurs, pilots, lawyers, doctors, college professors, you name it. It is exciting to see what these young people from this little school go on and do."

In other business, the board approved a middle school girls soccer head coach, a substitute teacher and a one-on-one special education paraprofessional, and Underwood gave an update on district finances.

"We got our first property tax payment today (for 2024 taxes), \$1.3 million," Underwood said. The district has budgeted to receive about \$7.4 million in property taxes. "Over the next several months, we will see what we are actually going to be getting in property taxes."

Turning to the under-construction Agriculture Fa-

cility, Underwood said the state had sent \$250,000 of the \$1.7 million in grant monies the system will be getting for the project.

"That money will continue coming in over the next several months," she said. "Sales tax for the month of December was down a little from this time last year, but we are under budget for our expenditures for the year. If you have any questions, just let me know."

Pam Greene of the local Daughters of the American Revolution presented an award in the meeting.

"Our chapter of DAR is the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter, which includes Towns, Union and Fannin counties," Green said. "One of the awards our organization offers is Literacy Champion. This is the first time our chapter has given this award."

"Tonight, I am honored

to present Ms. Stephanie Moss with that award in recognition of all of her work on the Towns County Literacy Bus."

Moss retired Nov. 29 from her position as Curriculum and Staff Development Director after three decades in education, and attending with her was husband Shannon Moss, who retired as well as Elementary School principal at the end of September, also with 30 years in education.

"It's a good thing we have Mr. Moss here tonight as well," Superintendent Berong said. "We have an award to present to the Elementary School for being named a 2024 Title I Report School."

"Title I Report Schools are those that rank in the Top 5% of Title I schools in the state making the most progress improving student achievement as measured by the statewide assessment from the 2022-2023 data. So, congratu-



**Retired local educator Stephanie Moss attended the Jan. 6 School Board meeting to receive a literacy award from Pam Greene on behalf of the Old Unicoi Trail Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution.** Photo by Shelly Knight

lations."

Also in the meeting, Rollie Thomas was officially welcomed as the new Middle School principal following the announcement last semester that Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs would be replacing

Stephanie Moss as curriculum/personnel director for the schools.

Thomas previously served as assistant principal for Towns County High, and he looks forward to filling his new role.

# Young Harris Council...from Page 1

son. The Ethics Commission has remained Shirley Miller and Clint Hobbs, while City Clerk Nicolette Wade is continuing as the Young Harris Superintendent of Elections.

Councilman Clark revealed that there were talks of creating a Building and Development Committee to serve as a liaison between the council and Economic Development Director Denise McKay. The idea was received positively, and the council voted to create the new committee.

"The way we envisioned this was to give Denise more support as Denise is doing her job," Gibby said. "The valley and our city are growing - Denise has a lot to do, as does (Main Street Program Director Rosemary Royston).

"This is a way of us assuming responsibility and helping out with the process moving forward."

The process in question referred to the Master Plan, to ensure that growth happens responsibly. Royston said that "a lot of the focus" for Main Street's endeavors this year will be on further development and implementation of the plan.

In other business, Bobby Brumley of Brasstown Valley Resort attended about a water/sewer bill that was higher than normal due to a leak that resulted in water loss. Ultimately, Brumley asked for bill forgiveness because, to his understanding, none of that water ended up in the city sewer.

With the explanation from Gibby that the city only provides sewer to the resort - the county Water Authority supplies the water - a brief discussion followed and resulted in a decision that credit would be added to the upcoming month's bill.

Gibby said City Hall would "be in touch" with Brumley regarding the decision and a total.

The new year has also heralded new laws, as with the introduction of House Bill 581. Described as a statewide "floating homestead exemption," the document puts in place an assessment cap meant to limit tax increases due to inflation in the real estate market.

As outlined by City At-



**Bobby Brumley attended the Jan. 7 council meeting to ask for a break in Brasstown Valley Resort's sewer bill after a water leak there.**  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

orney Marvin Harkins, there is an option to opt out of HB 581, though the decision must be agreed upon by the city and the county. Additionally, the decision must be finalized by the end of March.

"I would suspect that if this is draconian as it seems to be for some of the jurisdictions, then you would have (lawmakers) come back in a couple of years and say, 'OK, let's dial it down a little bit,'" said Harkins, recalling adjustments made after the enactment of the Title Ad Valorem Tax.

Gibby suggested scheduling public hearings "just in case" the council leans more toward opting out of HB 581; there must be three public hearings to legally opt out. The first was scheduled for Feb. 4.

A majority of Towns County voters supported the floating homestead exemption in the General Election on Nov. 5.


Also in the meeting, Public Works Supervisor Dean Stanley offered an update on the long-running Timberline booster pump project. All the parts are in, and the old controls will be torn down and a new electrical system installed.

Stanley also said that, for a fee of \$2,250 each, the city's two water tanks are due to be inspected and cleaned out.

No official date has been set yet for the continuation of

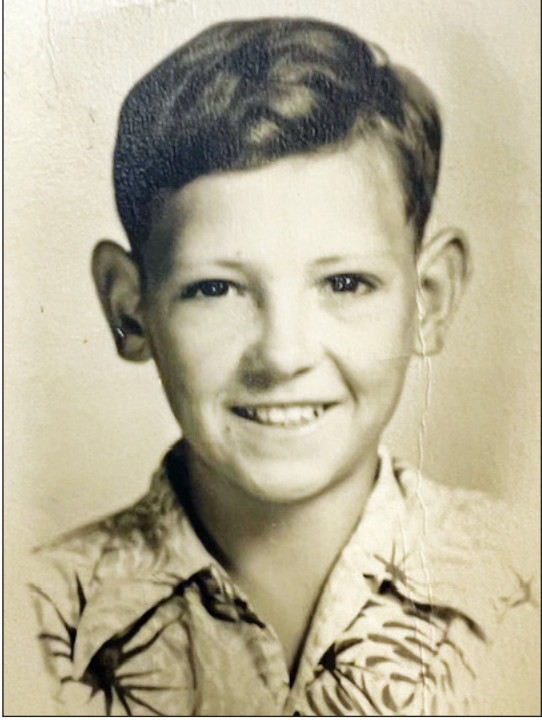
the booster pump project or the tank maintenance, but Stanley agreed to keep the council and mayor updated.

Young Harris City Council meets the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. inside City Hall at 50 Irene Berry Drive.



**Happy Birthday**

**Gene Youngblood**  
Celebrated his 85th Birthday



Gene Youngblood turned 85 on January 13th. His birthday was celebrated with his family and friends.  
Happy Birthday Dad!  
I love you.  
- Gina and Cline

JOIN AS WE CELEBRATE

*Lena Mae Coleman's*

90TH BIRTHDAY

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30546

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