

# Towns County Herald

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## County, cities spared major woes amid winter storms

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Mother Nature tried her best to wreak havoc last week, dropping several inches of rain and nearly half a foot of snow in a pair of winter storms that hit Towns County.

Fortunately, no major injuries resulted from that wild weather, as none were reported by press time.

Thunderstorms started rolling into the area late Wednesday into Thursday morning, ushering in flood conditions with heavy rainfall that caused local creeks to swell.

Emergency Management Agency Director Brandon Walls activated the county's Emergency Operations Center last Thursday,

Feb. 6, in preparation "for possible flooding, evacuation and sheltering that never happened."

Towns County School System closed its campus Friday, Feb. 7, due to icy conditions and early morning snowfall in parts of the county, choosing to implement its online learning system instead.

The schools were still evaluating road conditions by press time Monday to determine whether they would start school on a regular schedule.

Aspecial weather briefing by the Weather Service out of Peachtree City Friday afternoon forecast snow totals of between 1 and 3 inches for most of North Georgia on Saturday, Feb. 8, between 6 a.m. and noon.

Actual snow totals well exceeded Friday's forecast, with

most of the county – including Hiawassee and Young Harris – seeing an average of 5 to 6 inches of snow being quickly deposited between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

The fast-falling snow blanketed roads and caused a rapid deterioration in driving conditions, and though several vehicles ended up on the side of the road, thankfully no major damage was reported.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said he was extremely pleased with his Road Department and the Georgia Department of Transportation crews plowing and spreading salt/gravel to make the roads drivable.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office called in three additional deputies to work



Several vehicles ended up stranded or abandoned on the side of the road during Saturday's snowstorm, at least for a time. Photo/Submitted

## SPLOST would move courthouse into 21st century



By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Fifty-six years ago, local stakeholders came together to plan and erect a new building to replace the then 66-year-old Towns County Courthouse, which was torn down following completion of the "new"

courthouse that serves as the county seat to this day.

Of course, that was over half a century ago, in 1964, and the "new" courthouse had not been updated since, save for the installation of an elevator, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said.

"When I first came into

office," Bradshaw said, "when the judges came to have court, they would make comments like, what are you going to do about your courthouse, we need a holding cell for the prisoner, we need another courtroom."

These concerns are most visibly apparent to the public on especially busy court days, when court sessions have to be held at both the Civic Center and the courthouse.

"Also, our bathrooms are not handicap accessible," Bradshaw said. "So, that's why we had to put this new sidewalk in out here, because if somebody's here in a wheelchair and they need to use the bathroom, then they can use that sidewalk to go (from the courthouse) to the Civic Center."

"That, and just the appearance of the building – we could make it look better. The building represents Towns

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## GDOT still acquiring right of way for Georgia 515 project



This aerial map of Young Harris shows the proposed city bypass at Georgia 515, as illustrated in construction plans for the upcoming highway widening/relocation project.

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Georgia Department of Transportation has completed about 78% of the right of way acquisition phase ahead of construction on the Georgia 515 widening/relocation project for the upcoming corridor between

Blairsville and Young Harris.

Project investment, including design, right of way and construction, is \$130 million – "a very significant amount of funding for this region," GDOT Communications Specialist Katie Strickland said.

"Currently, the project is scheduled for advertisement to

contractors in December 2020, but that timing can be impacted by the remaining parcels in acquisition," Strickland said.

Things that can affect project scheduling include appraisal updates triggered by changes in property ownership; requests by property owners to

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## Chamber welcomes lottery officials for education presentation

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – In many ways, the Georgia Lottery Corporation began right here in Young Harris. After all, this is the birthplace of former late Gov. Zell Miller, who was responsible for starting the lottery to fund HOPE scholarships and Georgia's Pre-K.

To date in Towns County, the lottery has allowed 800 4-year-olds to attend Pre-K, an investment worth \$3 million; covered \$10 million in HOPE scholarships; awarded \$49 million in local prize money; and brought in \$5.5 million to retailers selling Georgia Lottery tickets.

Lottery officials traveled to Young Harris to discuss these figures and more on Jan. 30, joining the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce for a Power Hour Lunch at Brother's at Willow Ranch Restaurant.

Attending that day to discuss just how lottery funds support education in Georgia



Georgia Lottery Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs J.B. Landroche spoke with members of the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce at a recent Power Lunch. Photo by Chad Stack

were Lottery Communications Relations Director Carrie Wilder and Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs J.B. Landroche.

Landroche spoke on the special nature of Young Harris, highlighting the natural beauty of the area and the Enchanted Valley's connection to Gov. Miller, whose legacy is deeply

interwoven with education and the Georgia Lottery.

Because the lottery was set up to run like a corporation with no state appropriations, the Georgia Lottery had to take out a \$15 million loan to get up and running in 1992, Landroche said. Fortunately, the venture was so successful

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## City Council approves budget policy, JDA Board members

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Hiawassee City Council approved the 2020 Budget Policy Resolution during the Feb. 4 regular city meeting.

Mayor Liz Ordiales said the resolution confirms the process and the stipulations for the upcoming budget year, with the only change from the 2019 budget process being to clarify the need for the City Council to approve cross fund transfers.

These transfers will allow the city to allocate funds from one department to another, with the requirement that all transferred moneys be paid back to the originating fund in a timely fashion.

For example, if the city was to experience a budget shortfall and need to transfer money to the General Fund to make payroll, under the new policy, it could make funds available from the Water Fund with council approval.

Another example would be if the Wastewater Treatment



Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales

Plant experienced a major equipment malfunction and didn't have the necessary funds to undertake a swift repair, then the city could transfer funds from another department to fix the problem.

Ordiales said the city's finances are all in good shape, so there's no reason to use the policy in the foreseeable future. Ultimately, the policy is meant to serve as a funding safeguard

that would only ever need to be used in "extreme emergency" situations.

Council members also discussed and approved three members to serve on the nine-member Joint Development Authority Board, which has representation from the governing authorities of Towns County, Hiawassee and Young Harris.

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## Alternative Baseball Organization recruiting volunteers, coaches

By Chad Stack  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

A new baseball league is coming to the North Georgia Mountains, and it's pitched as being for people who may not have gotten the chance to play before. It's called Alternative Baseball.

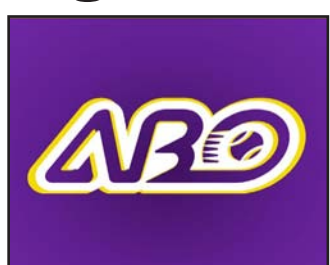
The Alternative Baseball Organization offers a competitive league for teens and adults ages 15 and over with autism and other special needs under the leadership of League Commissioner and Founder Taylor Duncan.

Being cut from his baseball team early in life due to his autism spurred Duncan to

set out to create a league of his own that would allow people with special needs to participate on the diamond.

Duncan, now 24, was diagnosed with autism at age 4, and he struggled to speak full sentences until he was about 7 years old. He also suffered from anxiety and sensory issues during childhood, and he couldn't attend baseball games for the longest time because of the loud noises.

That didn't stop his determination to play, however, as he overcame obstacles and grew his confidence in playing the game thanks to a youth baseball coach taking the time to show him the ropes and



believe in his abilities.

After a new coach took over the team just a year later, however, Duncan said preconceived notions and misunderstandings conspired against him, and he was told that he couldn't play anymore.

"I was crushed when they told me I was an injury risk and deemed me unable to play

traditional baseball," Duncan said. "After knowing how that made me feel, I wanted to do something to make sure that didn't happen to anyone else."

Not wanting others to experience the heartbreak of being told they couldn't play a game they loved because of a difference, Duncan started the nonprofit Alternative Baseball Organization in Dallas, Georgia.

When he began the league in 2016, they had seven players, and things started taking off thanks to word of mouth alone about the authentic baseball experience. Shortly after starting with just seven players, Duncan said they

eventually had enough to form a second team in Dallas.

Then, ESPN heard about what Duncan was doing, and the television sports network aired a special story on Alternative Baseball, causing things to really take shape after the story aired on TV. Other news outlets highlighted Duncan's league, and participation grew.

Since then, the Alternative Baseball Organization has exploded to more than a dozen cities across the United States, and Duncan is now looking to bring the league to the North Georgia Mountains.

America's pastime has so much to offer everyone involved, Duncan said, noting

that the sport provides players physical and social benefits to help them reach their full potential on the diamond and in life.

Furthermore, the game of baseball helps teach people how to deal with winning and losing on the field as well as off the field, Duncan said.

One of the issues Duncan has run into when it comes to expanding his league is finding coaches and volunteers to help, which is why Duncan said he can assist areas looking to start an Alternative Baseball Team in acquiring grant moneys to help fund the equipment to get started.

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