

Towns County Herald

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75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 91 Number 25

Wednesday, April 22, 2020

Bradshaw announces local drive-through COVID-19 testing

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As novel coronavirus cases hit double digits in Towns County last week, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw received some positive news with the announcement that the Towns County Health Department would soon house a COVID-19 drive-through testing facility.

Bradshaw broke the news during a livestreamed press conference Friday, in which he provided an update on the status of the county while imploring the community to keep the faith as they continue to follow Gov. Brian Kemp's shelter-in-place order.

That shelter-in-place order is set to expire after April 30 unless extended.

According to District 2 Public Information Officer Dave Palmer of the Georgia Department of Public Health, the Towns County testing site, slated to open this week, will serve both Towns and Union counties.

Testing at the site is not available to the public without a referral, which can be obtained at the local health department, from a health care professional or a physician, Palmer said. Additional information is available at <https://dph.georgia.gov>.

In the meantime, Bradshaw remains confident that Towns County will soon reopen for business, and he's beginning to see a light at the end of the tunnel.

"Every day, we're getting closer to putting this

thing behind us," Bradshaw said. "We're starting to see and hear good things on the national news, and I'm very optimistic."

As the statewide shelter-in-place order enters its third full week, Bradshaw, Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales and Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby are proud of the community's understanding and patience during this unprecedented period.

According to Bradshaw, inspirational stories of Towns County residents coming to the aid of their neighbors far outweigh the barrage of negativity surrounding the virus.

"I have heard many positive stories about our citizens," Bradshaw said. "Everyone, even the businesses,

have been so supportive, and their attitude has been great. We have a loving, caring and very understanding community.

"I've heard about acts of kindness all over the county. We have people and churches that are taking food to our public safety workers. They are taking food to shut-ins and the elderly – we are just really coming together in a time of need."

In Hiwassee, Mayor Ordiales has utilized social media to keep her constituents in the loop regarding all the latest virus updates, which she shares every day as soon as they're available.

"We have weekly conference calls with Dr. Kathleen Toomey of the Georgia Department of Public Health. See *COVID Testing*, Page 6A



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw held a livestreamed press conference Friday to update the community on the state of Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

President unveils guidelines for 'Opening Up America Again'

By Shaw Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On Thursday, April 16, President Donald Trump and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention outlined their vision for opening the American economy back up in the wake of COVID-19.

There is no firm timeline on when reopening will occur, as it is to be a gradual, three-phase process informed by specific guidelines meant to aid the decision-making of every state's governor in bringing various parts of public life back online.

At this point, all governors have declared states of emergency and enacted varying coronavirus mitigation measures tailored to the needs of their respective states to limit the spread of the virus and flatten the curve of infection, thereby keeping hospitals from becoming overwhelmed.

These measures have included shelter-in-place orders and the closure of schools and many businesses, which, when coupled with consumers everywhere staying home to follow recommended social distancing practices, has put millions of Americans out of work.

Fortunately, these measures appear to be working on the whole, with Trump reporting last week that America had "passed the peak" in terms of new infections, potentially providing a chance for states to take stock of their individual situations and encourage citizens to resume their lives.

"While we must remain vigilant, it is clear



Dr. Anthony Fauci is an infectious disease expert and top member of the president's Coronavirus Task Force, speaking here in an April 16 press conference.

that our aggressive strategy is working," Trump said. "The battle continues, but the data suggests that, nationwide, we have passed the peak on new cases. Hopefully, that will continue, and we will continue to make great progress."

Adjusted figures released Friday as part of the oft-cited COVID-19 modeling by the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation show that Georgia hit its "peak" number of daily virus deaths on April 7 with 100 deaths that day, just four days after Gov. Brian Kemp imposed a shelter-in-place order for state residents on April 3.

This new data suggests that the worst may be behind Georgia thanks to people following the recommended health and safety guidelines, though widespread testing still needs to be conducted before a clearer picture of COVID-

19 transmission in the state can emerge, including testing for both active infections and antibodies illuminating past infections.

Already, Gov. Kemp has said he is examining ways to open things back up as soon as possible.

"Georgia will utilize the administration's guidelines and collaborate with health and emergency management officials to develop a plan for safely returning to more routine operations," Kemp said Thursday. "The Peach State will continue to prioritize our citizenry's health and wellbeing. In the coming days, I will outline how Georgia will move forward."

"Many Georgians are ready to get back to work, and the fundamentals of our economy remain strong. I am confident that we will

See *Opening Up America*, Page 3A

Regular instruction to end one week early, Berrong says

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Last week, Towns County Board of Education members held their first regular meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic forced school closings across the state in mid-March.

On the agenda during the livestreamed April 13 session was an update to the 2019-2020 school calendar. Despite May 22 originally being marked as the final day of classes, the Board of Education determined that all new instruction should conclude one week early on May 15.

As outlined in an April 16 memorandum from Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, the final week will allow students that have fallen behind to make up classwork. The week of May 18-22 will also be used to assist students who need to raise their grades to a passing level.

Any student who possesses a passing grade and whose assignments are up to date will not be required to participate during the final week of school.

Furthermore, the school system will use the last week to allow students to turn in their laptops, hot spots, books and any school property in their possession. Students may also use that time to clean

out lockers and pick up any belongings still at school.

During last Monday's board meeting, Berrong also brought up graduation, saying one of the suggestions put forth by staff was forming a senior panel to discuss the alternatives.

Two possibilities introduced were holding a virtual graduation ceremony or waiting until later in the summer to hold a traditional ceremony, with Berrong saying he was hopeful that this year's seniors could at some point walk across the stage to receive their diplomas.

Following the board meeting, Towns County High School Principal Roy Perren announced via Facebook that the school had decided to hold graduation exercises on Friday, July 31.

"We asked for input from our seniors," Perren said. "While we did not hear from all of them, it became quickly clear how important it is to those who responded to have a real graduation ceremony where all family and friends can attend."

"We set this date so that hopefully the shelter-in-place and social distancing will be behind us. We want to get the date to our families and communities far in advance so you can plan accordingly."

Also in the April 13



Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong

meeting, the board approved Matt Pawlowski as a new assistant football coach. Pawlowski was recommended by Towns County High Athletic Director Jim Melton, and he will serve as a community coach during the upcoming 2020 football season.

Recently retired after serving as Assumption College's defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach in 2018 and 2019, Pawlowski brings 30-plus years of coaching experience to Hiwassee, along with consecutive Division II National Championships at Grand Valley State, 2006-2007.

Prior to Assumption, Pawlowski spent four years at the FBS level, where he served

See *Board of Education*, Page 3A

Towns County Food Pantry continues to serve people in need

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

To help families make it through the difficult times the virus is imposing on everybody, the Towns County Food Pantry has been working hard to keep people in need fed and stocked up on supplies.

"We haven't had much of an increase in participation as far as the distributions go," Food Pantry Coordinator Richard Thomas said. "We have only done one distribution since the pandemic started, and the numbers haven't changed."

"We did about as many as we were doing before the pandemic. We have boxed up an extra 100 boxes in anticipation of our distribution being livelier this time compared to the last couple of weeks."

People's access to the pantry has not been hindered by the pandemic to this point, and the supply chains used by the pantry remain stocked.

"So far, the stores we get our food from have not run into many problems," Thomas said. "Every time we have ordered since the pandemic hit, we have gotten our orders on time, with



Volunteers with the Towns County Food Pantry met for their regular bi-monthly food distribution wearing masks on Tuesday, April 14. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

no interference whatsoever that I have seen."

Of course, monetary donations go a long way toward keeping the pantry adequately stocked, as the pantry picks and purchases much of the food it stocks in the facility.

Food donations are acceptable, but monetary donations go further, Thomas said; when the pantry does the purchasing, it doesn't have to worry about expiration dates or other problems that may arise with foods donated by the

community.

"The need for us is mostly monetary," Thomas said. "We do get some food donations from people and boxes."

"I would like people to know that the monetary donations go a lot further, because we can purchase food much cheaper than individuals going to Ingles or the store. I would strongly suggest or recommend monetary donations in lieu of food donations."

The pantry's internal See *Food Pantry*, Page 6A

By Jarrett Whitener
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With the COVID-19 pandemic deranging public life for well over a month now, people in the area have been embracing hobbies to keep themselves busy while maintaining social distance.

"Well, I was out today buying some part for the car," said Eric Tate last week while shopping at Carquest Auto Parts. "I have been trying to find a lot of hands-on stuff to do around the house and getting that sort of stuff done."

"It has been kind of an opportunity to get the checklist out and fixing things that need to be fixed. I hate to say it, but I tend to put things around the house off until I forget about them, and now, the wife has been really reminding me since I have all this free time."

"I think at first we were worried, just as everyone else would be. I lost my job for the time being, and that is scary, because that is something that I never would have considered happening when I started there years ago."

"I'm lucky that my wife is conscientious about finances, because she has been putting some money back for a rainy day, and it is pouring right now."

"We have been fortunate to have been able to save



The Hiwassee Fruit and Vegetable Market has experienced a good deal of foot traffic during the pandemic, as people embrace gardening and the outdoors. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

money, but I know a lot of folks that aren't in that boat, and my heart goes out to them, it really does. I hope this all ends pretty soon, because people need to have a living and support their families."

Still other people are turning to gardening to stay outdoors and enjoy the weather while summer is approaching, all while getting their mind off of the novel coronavirus.

"I think you see a lot of people at places like this because we have had the time to focus on our gardens more," said Wanda Edwards at the Hiwassee Fruit and Vegetable Market. "Gardening in the area has always been pretty popular, and these stores are always

busy this time of year, but I feel like there are more people here than there normally are."

"That could just be me not getting out for a while, but I believe that people are getting new hobbies just to keep them entertained. I live over in Warner (North Carolina), so we don't get a lot of entertainment often, but gardening is my favorite hobby."

"I think we have done all the worrying that we can about this thing. I know I am tired of this worrying, and I am tired of staying indoors all day. I don't want to put anyone at risk, so I still keep my distance and all that stuff, but it has been weeks of this, and it doesn't look like

See *Staying Busy*, Page 6A

2 Sections 12 Pages

Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,685.27
Chatuge 1,923.47
Nottely 1,773.38

Inside
Arrests 2A
Church 2B
Classifieds 5B
Opinion 4A
Legals 5B
Obits 3B

April is
Child Abuse
Awareness
Month

See page 6B

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We Are Closed On Wednesdays, But Available By Email

We Are
Towns
County
Schools

See page 2A