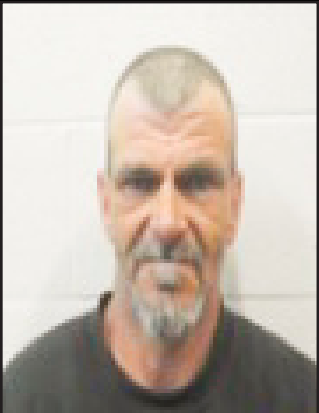
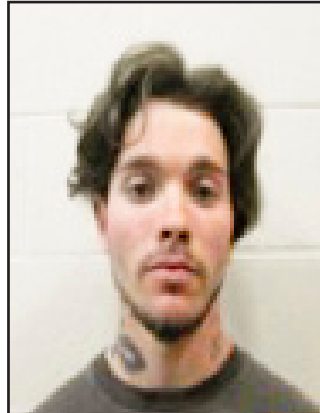


Towns County Sheriff's Office nabs three suspects in Tate City burglary



James Willimon



Brandon McDonald



Michelle Singleton

News Special Towns County Herald

TATE CITY – On Thursday, April 16, a burglary was reported at a residence on Tate City Road to Towns County 911.

The victim said he had returned to his residence to find that it had been broken into and some of his property inside had been stolen.

Towns County Sheriff's Office deputies and investigators responded to the residence, while Rabun County Sheriff's

Office deputies set up a perimeter at the intersection of Tallulah River Road and Persimmon Road in an attempt to prevent the suspects from leaving the area.

Upon arrival and after completing an initial investigation, deputies and investigators located three suspects at a nearby residence. Investigators recovered most of the property that had been reported stolen.

The following suspects were arrested and charged with burglary: James Sanders Wil-

limon, 39, of Hodges, South Carolina; Brandon Michael McDonald, 23, of Greenwood, South Carolina; and Michelle Singleton, 21, of Greenwood, South Carolina.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office would like to thank the Rabun County Sheriff's Office for its assistance.

These cases are still active and under further investigation. They will be forwarded to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution.

COVID Testing...from Page 1A

Health, so I believe it's essential to let everyone know the facts of what's being reported for our area," she said. "Each day around noon, the Department of Public Health puts out the updated numbers for cases and deaths by county, and I feel like it's up to us to make sure the public is aware of how bad things really are.

"Social media is an excellent tool for times like these. First of all, it's free, so it's easy for everyone to have access to. It's also quick. As soon as I get the updates, I put them out there, and we get a pretty good response. We have over 2,000 followers for the city of Hiawassee. So, it's a free, easy and quick way of making information available to our citizens."

According to Ordiales, this worldwide pandemic was something for which no one was prepared; regardless, everyone has maintained focus on their primary responsibilities of protecting the residents.

"This was so unexpected it feels like it was something out of a movie," she said. "But we're trying to do the best we can to keep our people safe and put in restrictions that we feel are absolutely necessary.

"I've been working with the commissioner, and we've been in sync with every action we've taken. We must work together, because it doesn't do any good to close a restaurant in the city, then have restaurants in the county remain open. We work closely and speak every day, even on the weekend, to make sure we stay in sync with what we're doing."

While no one could predict the impact of COVID-19 on the community, residents can take comfort knowing their elected officials have been doing everything they can to stay in front of the situation and avoid any last-second curveballs thrown Towns County's way.

"Once we started seeing



**Mayor
Liz Ordiales**

all of these things come up, Liz, Cliff and I had a meeting, and I really appreciated that," Mayor Gibby said. "I like that we try to work together and put out the same message. It makes it easier than some other places that don't necessarily have that same relationship.

"The three of us have made it a point to have conversations regularly, and we try to have lunch once a quarter or so. We may not agree on everything, but we try to stay on the same page."

During Friday's press conference, Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland also provided the community with an update, letting everyone know the Fire Department was there to help.

"Not only is your Fire Department here for your medical calls and fire emergencies, but at a time like this during a pandemic, we are also here for your special needs as well," Chief Copeland said.

Fire Stations are open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., but if assistance is required at night or on the weekend, people may call the following numbers: 706-896-2090 for Station 1 and 706-994-4934 for Copeland's cellphone.

The fire chief said he monitors the voicemail at



**Fire Chief
Harold Copeland**

Station 1 regularly, adding that his cellphone is on at all times for people struggling to obtain medical supplies, food and other necessities.

"If you've sheltered in place and need your prescriptions because you're in a wheelchair, use a walker or just can't get out – if the battery is dead in your car, or your friends and family are gone, or (if people are) just having a hard time themselves – then call those numbers," Copeland said.

"If we can pick up your prescriptions or any essentials from a local store or assist in any way, we'll do it, even if we have to take from our own supplies," he continued. "If you're at home and you haven't eaten, or you know someone that hasn't, call me, and we'll go to the drive-through for you."

Copeland said people contacting the Fire Department for assistance should expect some illness screening questions, and that, if help is provided, items will be left outside people's front doors or wherever is convenient.

"We're here for you," Copeland said. "The same way you've been here for us over the years."

Reflections from Hamilton Gardens

Hamilton Gardens is approaching its fortieth birthday; a good time to look back at how and when it came to be. Hazel and Fred Hamilton lived in Atlanta where he was an executive with Sears, Roebuck and Company and they had a second home in Towns County. The Hamilton's loved native azaleas and rhododendrons and collected specimens from locations around the globe and propagated many varieties in their greenhouse. A number of those were eventually planted on their two properties and now reside in Hamilton Gardens. Mr. Hamilton was an active member of the American Rhododendron Society for many years.

The Hamilton's knew the day would come when they could no longer manage the huge gardens they had so lovingly created. In an effort to preserve the plants and save them from eventually being destroyed by a bulldozer, their vision was to give their entire collection of native azaleas



and rhododendrons to the citizens of Towns County if they could find a suitable location. Mr. Hamilton discovered the perfect home on the slopes of Lake Chatuge atop the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds campus, and GMF and the county welcomed this gift for the newly created Towns County Park.

Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge is the largest rhododendron garden in the southeast and houses specimen plants which grow only in this location. There are approximately 1,500 plants and per-

haps as many as 300 hundred varieties of native azaleas and rhododendrons. It was designated a state botanical garden by the Georgia legislature in 2003, a distinction earned by the diversity of its flora and unique ecosystem. This legacy gift to Towns County is to be treasured and preserved for future generations.

In the words of Ansel Adams, Let us leave a splendid legacy for our children. Let us turn to them and say, 'this you inherit: guard it well, for it is far more precious than money; and once destroyed, nature's beauty cannot be repurchased at any price.'

The Gardens are open daily for walking; CDC social distancing rules are in place, bathrooms are closed. Come to the Gardens and introduce your children to this magical place that is blooming now.

More on the Gardens story in the near future. For more information call 706-970-0011, check our Facebook page. NT(Apr22.G1)SH

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Food Pantry...from Page 1A

offices have closed due to the pandemic, but Thomas and volunteers are still available to residents for regular and emergency food distributions, allowing people to take full advantage of the pantry in their time of need.

As usual, food distributions will continue to be held every other Tuesday, and the pantry will continue to take calls for those needing emergency food or other products. Callers are encouraged to leave voicemails that the food pantry will check daily.

"We normally do a distribution every other Tuesday, but we do have our phone lines set up to accept voicemails if someone needs emergency food," Thomas said. "I live very close by, and I come to check the voicemail on a daily basis.

"If people can come and get it, then I let them do that. We have had a few, very few that could not come, so I would bring the food to them."

For emergency food rations or to ask a question of the Food Pantry, call 706-896-4783.



Crucial during the pandemic, people who rely on the Food Pantry for supplies can continue to expect great service and assistance from the volunteers there. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Staying Busy...from Page 1A



The Wash Tub Coin Laundry seems to be doing steady business amid COVID-19 concerns, since people still have to wash their clothes, even while social distancing. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

it is getting better.

"I know some people are just forgetting about it and trying to put it behind them, and that is the attitude we need. We just have to trust that it will end soon, and that this all gets back to normal."

Not everyone can afford to embrace hobbies, however, as unfortunately, some people have found themselves falling on hard enough times requiring them to concentrate fully on survival.

"I actually lost my house a few weeks back and have been living in my car," said

Jacob Payne at Wash Tub Coin Laundry. "I've been driving around trying to get home to my parents down in South Georgia.

"It has been really hard for some people. I had a pretty good job, but I was living paycheck to paycheck and I had to make some decisions. I didn't get evicted or anything, but I knew that my financial situation would not cover what I needed – couldn't pay electricity or water and rent. I decided that it was time to pack it up and move on with it.

"I've been driving for a couple of days. Should be home in a day or so depending on how many more stops I make. I just want this thing to be over. People are going through the same thing I am, and some aren't fortunate enough to have a place to go.

"After this is over, I will be out trying to get a job again and back on my feet, but for now, I am stuck in a place where I can't support myself."

This pandemic has had different impacts on everyone, and all are hoping that things will return to some state of normal before too long.