

TCSO continues to arrest suspects on drug-related charges



Cody Crane



Georgia McFalls



Jonathan Campbell



Joseph Farist



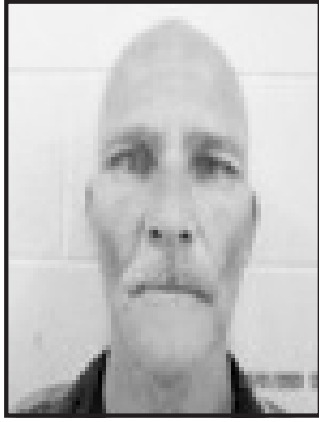
Julian Fuller



Levi Peterson



Michael Beeman



Michael McKinney



Ramona Montgomery



Sonia Taylor



Terry Smith



Tracey Smith

News Special Towns County Herald

In the last month, the Towns County Sheriff's Office has continued to make good on its promise to pursue drug suspects in the community, with more traffic stops and searches producing arrests.

All the issues surrounding COVID-19 and the changes to daily operational procedures have not stopped investigators and deputies from arresting suspects on drug-related charges.

On Saturday, April 18, investigators and deputies searched a residence off Mill Creek Road in Hiwassee. Upon completion of the search, the following drug suspects

were arrested:

Jonathan Campbell, 28, of Blairsville, on charges of trafficking methamphetamine and possession of drug-related objects.

Joseph Levi Farist, 25, of Blairsville, on charges of trafficking methamphetamine, possession of a Schedule II drug, crossing a guard line with drugs, and possession of drug-related objects.

Sonia Renee Taylor, 44, of Hiwassee, on charges of trafficking methamphetamine and possession of drug-related objects.

Julian Marc Fuller, 24, of Hiwassee, on charges of trafficking methamphetamine and possession of drug-related

objects.

On Friday, May 1, investigators and deputies went to a residence located off Georgia 288 in Hiwassee to serve an arrest warrant. Upon further investigation at the residence, the Sheriff's Office arrested the following drug suspects, all of Hiwassee:

Levi James Peterson, 37, on charges of possession of marijuana and possession of drug-related objects.

Michael Wayne McKinney, 50, on charges of possession of methamphetamine, possession of marijuana, obstruction of a law enforcement officer, and crossing a guard line with drugs.

Ramona Lynn Montgomery, 51, on charges of possession of Marijuana and possession of drug-related objects.

On Monday, May 4, deputies searched a residence off Cunningham Road in Young Harris. Upon completion of the search, deputies arrested Michael Henry Beeman, 56, of Young Harris, on charges of possession of methamphetamine, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon, and possession of drug-related objects.

On Saturday, May 9, during the early morning hours, Towns County deputies were dispatched to a residence off Drayton Way in Young Harris

in reference to a 911 hang-up call.

Upon arrival and further investigation, deputies discovered those living at the residence to be in possession of marijuana.

Warrants were obtained and the following Young Harris suspects were arrested and charged with possession of marijuana and possession of drug-related objects: Terry Allen Smith, 56, and Tracey Durkin Smith, 56.

On Monday, May 11, a deputy made a traffic stop on a GMC pickup on Konahetah Road in Hiwassee. Upon further investigation, Cody Michael Crane, 32, of Hiwassee, was arrested for

possession of a Schedule IV drug and possession of drug-related objects.

On Friday, May 15, a deputy made a traffic stop on a Ford Crown Vic on Georgia 288 in Hiwassee. Upon further investigation, the driver, identified as Georgia Mae McFalls, 59, of Helen, was arrested for possession of marijuana.

The Sheriff's Office said more drug arrests will be forthcoming soon. All of the above cases are still active and ongoing and will be forwarded to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution. All suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Reopening...from Page 1A

extending current coronavirus safety measures, like keeping live performance venues, bars and nightclubs closed through at least May 31.

Most business owners, however, now have the choice of opening their doors back up to the public if they want, including hairdressers, restaurants and movie theaters, provided they follow the required mitigation efforts,

such as frequent sanitation and social distancing guidelines.

In turn, the careful loosening of restrictions has allowed many employees to return to gainful employment should they so choose, and consumers may decide whether or not they want to frequent reopened businesses in a time that Kemp says is advantageous from a data perspective.

"This order is issued

as COVID-19 positive hospitalizations, ventilator use, and the percentage of positive cases continue to drop," Kemp said.

Despite a phased-in approach that appears to be working, over the last few weeks, many national media outlets have attempted to portray Georgia's re-opening process as rushed, dangerous, and somehow evilly profit-driven and designed to keep people from drawing unemployment.

Kemp, on the other hand, maintains that his decisions have all been based on "data, science and the advice of our public health officials."

As such, the governor continues to outline plans to safely transition to "a new normal" with many precautions in place, and he repeated his call for people to adhere to COVID-19 best practices last week.

"All Georgians must continue to follow social distancing, and gatherings of more than 10 people remain banned unless there is at least 6 feet between each person," Kemp said. "The gatherings ban applies to all non-critical infrastructure businesses, local governments, and organizations of all types, including social groups, informal get-togethers, and recreational sports, just to name a few.

"We continue to strongly encourage people to wear face coverings when out in public, and we thank everyone for their willingness to do the right thing. The shelter in place provision for medically fragile and Georgians aged 65 and older remains in effect through June 12, 2020.

"Mandatory restrictions for sanitation and social distancing will remain in place for all non-critical infrastructure businesses, and for recently reopened businesses, we are extending industry-specific restrictions. Those will remain in place through the end of the month.

"As businesses slowly reopen and some enhance capacity, we know that many are safely returning to their place of employment."

The executive order also attempts to assist parents with childcare efforts, as many families with two working parents have been hurt by the shutdown of schools and limiting of daycare operations around the state.

In consultation with the Departments of Early Care and Learning and Public Health, Kemp has upped the number of people allowed in a single classroom of a childcare facility

from 10 to 20.

"Childcare facilities must continue to adhere to 13 minimum, mandatory criteria to be able to operate, including strict screening procedures and sanitation mandates for frequently touched items and surfaces," Kemp said.

He has made a number of revisions to mandatory criteria for other industries as well, including gyms and restaurants, with his latest order outlining 39 safety measures restaurants must comply with to keep dining areas open.

With the initial reopening of dining interiors on Monday, April 27, restaurant owners were only allowed to seat 10 customers per 500 square feet.

"Moving forward, we will allow 10 patrons per 300 square feet of public space in restaurants and dining rooms and increase the party size per table from six to 10 people," Kemp said.

Some of the in-state criticism of Kemp's COVID-19 response has centered on his reopening of businesses but not state offices, leaving many residents in the lurch when it comes to essential services normally provided by the state.

Offices with altered operations have included the Department of Driver Services for driver's licenses and the Department of Labor for in-person visits to clear up unemployment issues.

"I'm proud of the thousands of state employees who have done an incredible job teleworking and adapting to the new normal. To ensure that quality of service continues, starting May 18, specific divisions of state agencies will begin to phase back into limited, in-person operations," Kemp said, though it was unclear at press time which divisions would be resuming limited operations.

Also on May 12, Gov. Kemp noted the importance of staying on top of COVID-19 in nursing homes, as it has become abundantly clear that the overwhelming majority of virus victims are older

people with chronic health conditions.

"As we aggressively test more nursing homes and long-term care facilities, we may see a sharper increase in positive test results," Kemp said. "By doing this, it will allow medical providers to intervene earlier and try to mitigate adverse outcomes among vulnerable Georgians.

"Right now, nursing home, assisted living, and personal care home residents and staff make up 18.5 percent of our total positive cases, and 49 percent of total deaths involve nursing home, assisted living and personal care home residents.

"We ask everyone to continue to protect the elderly and medically fragile, and we will continue to work around the clock to ensure quick, convenient testing is available for all Georgians."

In closing, the governor once again appealed to residents to follow the COVID-19 best practices disseminated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Georgia Department of Public Health, which include frequent handwashing and the wearing of facial coverings.

Facial coverings do provide limited protection against the virus, according to health officials, but the more important reason to wear a mask is to prevent transmission in public spaces, both by people with symptoms and by asymptomatic individuals who don't know they're infected.

Also last week, President Donald Trump announced Operation Warp Speed, "the administration's national program to accelerate the development, manufacturing and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics (medical countermeasures)."

"Among its other objectives, Operation Warp Speed aims to have substantial quantities of a safe and effective vaccine available for Americans by January 2021," according to the Health & Human Services website.

TCHS Parade...from Page 1A

really hard over at the high school, and we really tried to stay on top of students who may have been getting behind on stuff.

"We are very lenient in taking late work so they can get it done. I'm fairly positive that we will have every senior graduate this year, and to my knowledge, there were no failing seniors, but we are still putting grades in.

"I feel really good about the work that our seniors have been doing and our underclassmen as well - they have all been working hard. I am pleased to say that we have made the best of a bad situation.

"We have communicated

with the kids every day. I used digital software to do video announcements every morning to send out to them, and I was getting around 100 hits a day on them. That dropped off some as seniors started being done with school."

Making it through the school year took a team effort, Perren said, including community resources for students such as Blue Ridge Mountain EMC hot spots at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds enabling online access for students without home internet to complete assignments.

"We appreciate the support of the community," Perren said. "We really appreciate all the support that we have had with

the signs on the square and the support from the parents helping us communicate with the students.

"It has been a team effort to get the school year finished, and we are thankful for the help to end the school year right. We just want to do whatever we can for these seniors and let them know we are thinking about them."

The school is planning to hold a traditional graduation ceremony on July 31, with school officials remaining hopeful that, by then, things will return to normal enough for families and students to come together in celebration.