

Veterans...from Page 1A



Veterans salute the flag during the national anthem. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Georgia. In 1979, Fontaine transferred to the Georgia National Guard where he worked until retirement.

Fontaine began with recalling the Gettysburg Address, what many refer to as the first Memorial Day as President Abraham Lincoln rode to honor those brave men who had fallen in Pennsylvania.

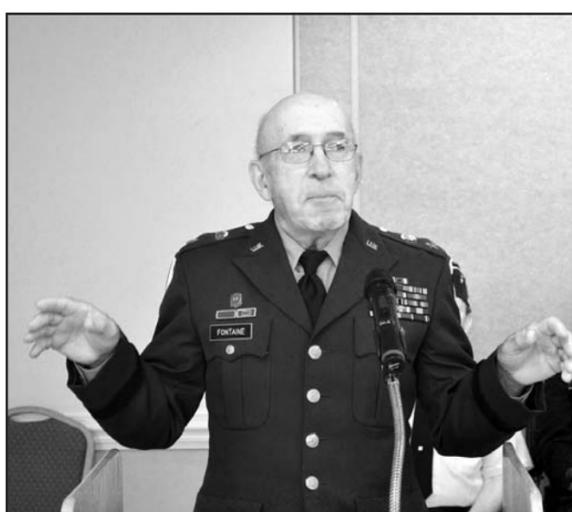
"When I was thinking about this Memorial Day service, I thought about a Memorial Day service that took place 154 years ago," said Fontaine. "There were two speakers, one who was verbose and the other was quiet and intelligent. You probably know who the second one was. What he said was, the world will not note or remember what we say here, but they will never forget what those men did."

"And that applies here, now just as much as it did then. The world remembers. We remember and that's what this is about."

Fontaine addressed his audience in two parts - the civilians and the veterans. To civilians, he explained that honoring and remembering those who fought and who continue to fight is one of the most important things that people can do and he urged those in attendance to continue with such reverence.

To veterans, Fontaine's message was more personal, bringing tears to many around the room as he confronted the question that haunts many returning veterans: "Why am I still here?"

"This is what I call a difficult nagging guilt," said Fontaine. "It's a feeling that just goes on. There are people who I felt were better people than I that didn't make it, and I'm sure there are plenty of you



Retired Army Brig. Gen. Bernie Fontaine. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

here who know this feeling. "We all want to know why, well, God isn't finished with you yet. He still has work for you to do."

In closing, Fontaine asked all veterans, and civilians, in attendance to continue to honor those who gave their lives by continuing to give back to the community and stay involved.

"We all can do more," said Fontaine. "So, get involved and find something to do in your community. There are plenty of things that we can do in our communities to give back and make America great again."

Before the event came to a close, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw spoke with the group, sharing words of respect and gratitude for all those who have fought, all those who continue to fight and all those who paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving these great United States of America.

"Memorial Day is such a special day," said

Commissioner Bradshaw. "We're here today to honor our heroes and to remember their courage, their achievement and their dedication, and to say thank you for their sacrifices."

"Thinking of the heroes in this group who join us today and those who are here only in spirit, a person can't help but feel in awe of the enormity of what we encounter."

"We stand in the midst of patriots and family and friends who have served nobly."

"They didn't go to war because they loved fighting, they were called to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They were ordinary people who responded in extraordinary ways in extreme times."

"Those rose to the nation's call because they wanted to protect the nation that has given them so much. We're so thankful for that."

American Legion members held a courtesy luncheon at the VFW Post #7807 after the service for all who wanted to attend.

county, and a county building broken into recently, but those incidents may be isolated, as there is currently no evidence connecting any of those crimes to the suspects in the A to Z Outlet trailer theft.

Last month, the Hiawassee Police Department asked the public for assistance with these cases via social media and the *Towns County Herald*.

Smith said he was impressed with the community response.

However, if one of the children decides to go to college, the Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Homes will continue to support them even after reaching the age of 18 and will pay for these kids to receive an education.

After being moved to one of the five homes across the state, these children oftentimes receive more support and encouragement than they did prior to moving to the homes. And, according to Denton, after these children pursue a post-secondary education, many come back to work in the homes because, to them, it will always be home.

"This is just an example of how beneficial these homes are," said Denton. "There were three boys whose mother overdosed. So, they went through the homes. They graduated from high school. They went to college."

"One of the boys went into the military, got married, had kids, got out of the military and came back to the home and became parents at one of these homes. So, these success stories truly make it worth every penny."

Tickets for the event are \$25 and can be purchased at either the Towns County Sheriff's Office in Young Harris or the Sheriff's Office in the Towns County Courthouse.

Those who wish to donate in other ways to help the Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Homes may do so through either the Towns County Sheriff's Office or on the Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Homes website, www.georgiasheriffsyouth.org

E-SPLOST...from Page 1A



Board of education members Stan Chastain, Laura Banister and Dr. Kilee Smith.

million needed for General Fund expenditures will come from the school system's Fund Equity, or monetary reserves.

The system expects its reserves to be around \$3.5 million at the end of the current fiscal year, up from \$2.3 million when Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong took over as superintendent in January 2015, which was right after the board of education increased the school millage rate by 1.5 mills.

Such a healthy level of reserves will allow the system to maintain a balanced budget in FY18.

The FY18 budget is considerably higher than the current year FY17 budget, as FY17 total expenditures and revenues balance to \$14,508,925.

On its face, the difference between the current FY17 budget and the upcoming budget is about \$3.6 million, an amount accounted for with state monies and local E-SPLOST collections.

The FY18 budget features \$1 million in Capital Outlay reimbursement money from the state to go toward school construction projects, and more than \$600,000 in state-mandated teacher raises, the money for which will also be coming from the state.

Per Gov. Nathan Deal's office, teachers statewide will be receiving a 2 percent pay increase in FY18, which will cause other teacher benefits connected to pay to go up, such

as teacher retirement.

Taken together, this extra money from the state comes to more than \$1.6 million, and accounts for the differences in FY17 and FY18 General Fund amounts.

In the All Other Funds category of the budget, which includes SPLOST and food service funds, as well as some federal monies, the FY18 budget consists of \$2 million in E-SPLOST monies that don't appear in the FY17 budget.

Breaking down the \$2 million, the board office expects to collect about \$1.6 million in E-SPLOST monies during FY18, thanks to the voter-approved referendum in last year's May General Primary.

The system also has right around \$389,000 in SPLOST reserves that are being carried over from FY17, which it has saved for the upcoming budget in order to maintain a pay-as-you-go model of funding construction projects and school enhancements.

So, the \$3.6 million difference between the FY17 and FY18 budgets comes from the additional \$1.6 million in FY18 General Fund monies from the state, coupled with \$2 million in SPLOST funds from FY18 collections and FY17 reserves.

Upcoming FY18 construction and school enhancement projects include the installation of a new roof and HVAC system at the high school and middle school, new

textbooks and technology for the students, as well as ground maintenance and athletic building upgrades.

For all intents and purposes, the school system is playing a game of catchup for its students, in order to get closer to a 1:1 technology/student ratio, for example, which is important because state-mandated testing must now be done online.

"After this coming up year, we will be about 75 percent of the way to being one to one," said Dr. Berrong. "I've talked with the counties around us, and they're already one to one. Like, Union County has a computer for every single kid, so they went ahead and spent that money up front, where we're trying to phase that in."

"Right now, we're about 50 percent, so when the elementary and middle (schools) test, we borrow all the high school computers, and we test everybody by borrowing from each school currently."

Incidentally, the county's SPLOST will expire after June 30 this year, and countywide sales tax collection should go back to 7 percent starting July 1.

The FY18 budget runs on a school fiscal year, and will be adopted on June 12 ahead of its July 1 effective date.

The June 12 meeting of the Towns County Board of Education will begin at 7 p.m. inside the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium at the high school.

Trailer...from Page 1A

were found inside the truck, according to Smith.

"A search warrant was obtained to search the truck, and after the search warrant was done, we found some items in there that tied it back to that trailer," said Smith.

The owner of the truck has been interviewed, according to Smith, and the next step in the case is to locate the suspects.

Acting Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales is extremely pleased with the city's most recent law enforcement hire.

"I would like to commend Brandon Barrett for such great policework in his first couple of weeks on the job," said Ordiales. "We're very happy to have him be part of our police department."

There have been other trailers stolen around the

county, and a county building broken into recently, but those incidents may be isolated, as there is currently no evidence connecting any of those crimes to the suspects in the A to Z Outlet trailer theft.

Last month, the Hiawassee Police Department asked the public for assistance with these cases via social media and the *Towns County Herald*.

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CLEA...from Page 1A

over \$15,000 and all those involved hope that this year will bring in even more.

While the event was able to raise a significant amount of funds last year, CLEA Volunteer Anna Denton said that she hopes it will be bigger than ever, especially since Towns County has one of its own benefiting from the youth homes.

"We have a child from Towns County in one of those homes," said Denton. "She's thriving and she's doing so much better than she was before."

"It's such a wonderful thing to know that a child from our community is benefiting and doing well because of this."

The need for youth homes became a concern for Georgia sheriffs during the late 1950s, leading to the opening of the first youth home in Hahira in 1960. From there, the organization continued to expand and grow, giving children from all across the state a place to feel safe, receive love and affection and live in a nurturing environment that

would better aid their future success.

Now, there are five Georgia Sheriff's Youth Homes across the state: Boys Ranch in Hahira, Pineland in LaGrange, Cherokee Estate in Dalton, Mountain View in Chatsworth and Herrington Homestead in Nunez.

According to the Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Homes philosophy, "the homes are not reform schools, correctional institutions or for adjudicated delinquents, but are for children who need a good home because they are innocent victims of neglect or abuse."

"We have all these children who are in situations not of their own making," said Denton. "These are good kids. The homes don't take delinquents. These are just good kids who just come from bad situations. And these homes really do make all the difference in their lives."

"These homes are so much better than foster homes because these kids don't feel like outsiders. They don't feel like foster children."

"These children that go into these homes are with other children who come from similar situations so they understand one another and truly become family."

Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Homes accepts children between the ages of 6 and 17, without severe emotional or physical handicaps and who have not been affirmed delinquents.

Seafood...from Page 1A

needy families.

"This year we had more vendors, larger crowds, and we just offered a little bit of everything, more decorations, more Americana, it's been a really nice weekend," said blacksmiths and festival vendors Judy Zeigler and Lance Zeigler. "The community support has been great and the volunteers have done a wonderful job. We couldn't have an event like this without all of the volunteers. They are extremely beneficial."

The first two days of the festival saw plenty of sunshine and beautiful weather, unfortunately, Sunday brought showers and scattered thunderstorms, but the festival continued on without a hiccup.

"I heard about it from my mother and we really wanted to come last year but we didn't get to, so we weren't going to miss it this time," said Michelle Aulet of Blairsville, who was joined by her family on Sunday. "It's been really great, the food is good, and we've had fun despite the rain."

According to the ladies of "In Sister's Kitchen" in Downtown Blairsville, who were one of the 10 vendors serving up seafood at the festival, lobster sliders and Low Country Boil were their most popular dishes of the weekend.

It wasn't just seafood and music, the festival also featured a little bit of everything for everyone. As soon as you entered the gates, one of the first tents you pass was that of Glenda Jones, an author from Eufaula, Alabama.

"I'm not stocked in bookstores yet, so I'm a starving author right now," Jones said with a laugh. "The weekend has been great until (Sunday) when it did rain a little bit, but God sent it, so I'm not complaining."

"I love the people, this is a beautiful area, and as a matter of fact, my husband always talks about moving up here because he just loves all the lakes and mountains. But I would love to come back to this event next year. I love the area and you meet some very interesting people."

Next year's Seafood Festival will be the first weekend of June in Young Harris, and according to Judy Zeigler, the 2018 edition will



Ahoy, matey! A pirate on stilts! Photo/Todd Forrest



Mmm... Lobster tails. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

be even bigger and better.

"We're going to have some new bands, more

vendors, more artists and I'm looking forward to it and I'll be here."

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