

Towns County Herald

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75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 91 Number 33

Wednesday, June 17, 2020

Osborn, Henderson headed for Aug. 11 runoff in sheriff's race County SPLOST passes; Hiwassee says 'NO' to fluoride; Rogers to face challenger

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On Aug. 11, voters will have four runoff races before them, one to decide the Republican nominee for Towns County Sheriff and the others to decide both the Democratic and Republican candidates for the 9th Congressional District, and the Republican candidate for the 50th District State Senate seat.

According to state law, a candidate may only be nominated for or elected to public office after receiving a majority of the vote, or at least 50 percent plus 1 vote. If no one receives a majority vote, the top two vote getters must square off

in a runoff election.

Locally, Daren "Bear" Osborn and Kenneth "Ode" Henderson will be on the ballot for the Republican Party Primary Runoff for the office of Towns County Sheriff, and the Aug. 11 race will include three weeks of early voting in the leadup to Election Day.

A runoff was almost inevitable in Towns County, as the Republican Party ballot featured five candidates vying to be the county's next top cop: Jim Couch, Linda J. Curtis, Kenneth "Ode" Henderson, Lissa Osborn and Daren "Bear" Osborn.

Osborn received 43.82 percent of the vote with 1,697 votes, followed by Henderson

27.78 percent with 1,076 votes, Couch's 19.47 percent with 754 votes, Curtis' 5.45 percent with 211, and Joseph's 3.49 percent with 135 votes, according to the unofficial election results.

No Democrats qualified for Towns County Sheriff in March, so unless Independent and/or Political Body (i.e. Libertarian Party) candidates qualify for the November General Election via petition nomination or write-in candidacy later this summer, the winner of the Aug. 11 runoff will run unopposed in the Nov. 3 General Election to become the next sheriff of Towns County.

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Security officials stopped new line entrants at the Hiwassee Precinct at 7 p.m. on Election Day. This is the line at 7:30 p.m., which makes sense considering all three Towns County precincts voted in Hiwassee June 9, as previously reported. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Young Harris, Blairsville welcome peaceful BLM demonstrations

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Grassroots solidarity protests for the Black Lives Matter movement are sprouting up all over the country, even in areas where few racial minorities live.

Here in Towns County, the population is 96.5 percent white according to census data, with only 1.3 percent of the population being represented by black people. And it's a similar story in surrounding mountain counties.

But that hasn't stopped local folks from organizing protests across the region in support of black lives here and everywhere. From Gilmer County through to Rabun in North Georgia, including the big protest in Murphy, North Carolina, people have been coming together in recent weeks to loudly proclaim that black lives matter.

In Young Harris, nearly 60 demonstrators showed up Saturday, June 13, to showcase a peaceful outpouring of solidarity for black Americans everywhere.

Dr. Mary Slavkin and Angela Harkins, both employees of Young Harris College, organized the event after seeing the Murphy protest.

Specifically, they wanted to give people the option of protesting while social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, which they accomplished by holding the event in front of the college



More than 60 protesters turned out to support the June 13 Black Lives Matter solidarity protest in Young Harris. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

along US 76.

"The other reason was, I really wanted to show support to all of our black students who often come up from other areas and sometimes have very negative experiences around here," Slavkin said. "So, I wanted to get people together to show support for them."

Added Slavkin, "I'm really happy with the number (of people in attendance). Angela started a Facebook group that I think really helped: Black Lives Matter - North Georgia. She's been using it to also post all of the other protests."

Following the protest, Harkins posted to the group about a white mother and her two biracial sons who had

stopped in to talk after seeing the demonstration while driving by.

"The youngest, who was about 5, thanked me for protecting his life," Harkins said. "A 5-year-old. He had tears in his eyes."

"His older brother had tears streaming down his face as he spoke about their living situation with his racist grandpa, a situation they hope to remedy soon. As we were walking to our cars, the mother said something striking: 'The color of my skin cannot protect them.'"

"They shouldn't need protecting! Skin color shouldn't be a shield or a detriment. A

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Luckenbach paints community mural to liven up Main Street buildings

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County High School Class of 2020 graduate Corrina Luckenbach teamed up with the city recently to paint a mural reflective of the natural beauty of the area on a pair of window panels at one of the Paris buildings in Downtown Hiwassee.

The mural can be found with a picnic table at the building next to Victoria's Attic. Both Paris buildings are in the process of receiving grant funds for restoration, which will take some time, so Mayor Liz Ordiales decided to have them decorated in the meantime.

"When we first purchased those buildings (at the end of 2019), we realized that it would be at least a year out before we start restoring them," Ordiales said. "We have applied for grants through the USDA Rural Development and the Appalachian Regional Commission."

"That is at least a year



Corrina Luckenbach painted this mural highlighting the beauty of Hiwassee, which can be found out front of the soon-to-be renovated building next to Victoria's Attic. Photo Submitted

away, so we thought maybe we could dress it up a little bit and make it like a pocket park where people could start and have lunch. This all started prior to the coronavirus episodes. So, we measured the windows, and

there are six windows.

"(Towns County Schools) were going to do one for each school, elementary, middle and high. Then, Young Harris College was going to do two

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Former ER director Gowder to serve 18 months following guilty plea

By Linda Erbele
Towns County Herald

GAINESVILLE - Former Union General Hospital emergency room director David Gowder has been sentenced to 18 months in federal confinement with a \$5,000 fine.

In the sentencing hearing on Wednesday, June 10, at the federal courthouse in Gainesville, U.S. District Judge Richard Story included a two-year period of supervision to follow Gowder's release from prison.

The Federal Bureau of Prisons will monitor Gowder when and where he is to report to begin his period of incarceration. Story said he would recommend a location near North Georgia.

Gowder pleaded guilty

to a single count of prescribing oxycodone to a patient for no medical reason in March 2019, after which he surrendered his Georgia medical license and began sentencing.

The former doctor was originally indicted on more than 50 federal charges stemming from a multi-jurisdictional investigation dating back to 2015.

His wife, daughters, sons-in-law and several close friends attended the June 10 hearing to offer their support.

Andy Williams, former president of United Community Bank in Blairsville, told Judge Story that Gowder was a good and decent man who blamed no one but himself for his addiction, and that he had aggressively sought and obtained help.

"He has lost \$2



David Gowder

million in salary, he has lost credibility among his peers and the community, and he has lost the ability to practice," Williams said. The two men served together on the United

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Southern Rodeo Company to bring 'mystique of the cowboy' to GMF

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds will host its first rodeo ever when the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo comes to town June 26-27.

Produced by Southern Rodeo Company out of Rockmart, the event will feature everyone's favorite family-friendly rodeo events and contests.

"The company was founded in 2007, and it is a family-owned business," said Rodeo Owner Robin Brooks, a former rodeo contestant himself. "We go all across the Southeastern United States putting on rodeos, about eight to 12 events a year. We try to provide family entertainment that is action-packed and fun for everybody."

Due to COVID-19, the rodeo will be the first major event at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in 2020, which will hopefully help the fabled site return to a more normal state of business with the public before kicking off more events later in the summer.

The rodeo was originally scheduled to take place in May before having to be pushed back because of the virus, though



The Southern Rodeo Company will be bringing the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds June 26-27. Photo/Facebook

organizers feel confident that now is the time to host the event.

"We have had several rodeos postponed and canceled, but this will be our first one back," Brooks said. "We have contestants coming from all across the United States, and at Hiwassee, we will be with the Southeastern Rodeo Association, which is based out of Alabama."

"There will be bareback riding with bucking horse, saddleback riding, which is the first event in the rodeo,

or as some call it, the classic event. Then, we have got steer wrestling and girls breakaway roping.

"We try to do our event between two and two and a half hours. We are kind of playing it by ear. We are seeing what the regulations are and that kind of stuff. I don't think we will have a problem being safe, but the rodeo is a place for family fun. I want people to come, but I don't want people to come if they feel that it will be unsafe."

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Shake Rag Road homeowners ask for Bell Mountain Park relief

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Three Shake Rag Road property owners met with Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw Friday afternoon to express several concerns they say have gone unaddressed for over four years.

Shake Rag Road is the only entrance and exit to and from the popular Bell Mountain Park, which former sole commissioner Bill Kendall built up and opened as a county park and historical site in 2016, after the Herrin family donated the land to the county.

For years, the previously private Shake Rag Road had



Shake Rag Road homeowners Catherine Luckenbach-Hansen and Kaaren Nelsen met with Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw last week to talk out their issues regarding Bell Mountain Park. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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