

Civic Association cancels June meeting

The Board of Directors of the Towns County Civic Association (TCCA) regrets to inform members that our June General Membership Meeting has been cancelled. Due to the circumstances caused by the Covid-19 pandemic it is felt it would be difficult to adhere to the current State rules and recommendations of distancing, etc. in a dinner meeting with that many people.

However, certain business activities for the Association have continued. We have conducted a vote process by email earlier this month to amend the Bylaws which has instituted a two year term for all Association Board Officers

and will cause all Directors and Officers positions to be elected every two years. The ballot for Officers and Directors has been emailed to all members. Please return as soon as possible with your vote through the email process.

Each vote is very important, please make yours count. Thank you from your Civic Association Board of Directors. T(Jun17,F2)JSH

Conservation District meeting

The regular meeting of the Blue Ridge Mountain Conservation District will be held Friday June 19, 2020 at 10 a.m. at Meeks Park Pavilion located at: 490 Meeks Park Rd., Blairsville, GA 30512. (Upon entrance the pavilion will be on your left, just beyond the basketball courts).

For additional information, please call 706-745-2794 X3. T(Jun17,F1)JSH

VFW resumes Friday Fish Fry

VFW Post 7807 on Hwy. 288 in Hiawassee will be holding all you can eat Fish Fry for \$10 per person on the second and fourth Friday of each month 4:30 to 7 PM.

Come see us and get the best fish in town. T(Jun17,F1)JSH

Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff's Office.



- 6/13/20 Jason Harley Kloepfer, age 41
Simple Battery
- 6/11/20 Autumn Dawn Martin, age 24
Probation violation
- 6/8/20 Lessie Eugene Montgomery, age 21
Marijuana - possess less than 1 oz., Possession & use of drug-related objects, Possession of meth, Violation of bond conditions
- 6/8/20 Ramona Lynn Montgomery, age 51
Possession of meth, Possession & use of drug-related objects, Violation of bond conditions
- 6/14/20 Joshua Kyle Smith, age 27
Marijuana - possess less than 1 oz., Possession of meth, Possession of meth w/ intent to distribute, Purchase, possess, manu., distrib. or sale of marijuana
- 6/9/20 Cody Michael Crane, age 32
Possession of meth, Possession of untaxed alcoholic beverage
- 6/8/20 Brittney Angeline Gilbert, age 28
Possession of meth, Possession & use of drug-related objects
- 6/14/20 Jose Adrian Lara, age 27
Driving w/out valid license, Windshields/wipers
- 6/13/20 Luis Orlando Miranda-Ramirez, age 24
DUI - alcohol, Improper passing
- 6/9/20 Darren Cole Reeves, age 22
Probation violation
- 6/8/20 Danny Lee Shook, age 66
Possession of methamphetamine
- 6/14/20 Robert Arthur Sir, II, age 37
Driving w/ suspended or revoked DL, Speeding
- 6/10/20 Peyton Ryleigh White, age 19
DUI - drugs, Failure to drive w/in single lane, Illegal possession of controlled substance

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Community Bank Board.

Laura Williams, Gowder's daughter, spoke on behalf of her family, saying that, as an emergency physician herself, she especially understood his pain at no longer being able to practice.

"The job is in his blood and spirit," she said.

Defense attorney Jeff Brickman reminded the judge of the many support letters written for Gowder by community members. Brickman had asked that his client serve in home confinement with 300 hours of community service related to speaking to people with substance addiction.

"He has the ability, willingness and desire to do that," Brickman said. "He did many things he should not have done, but he was an addict."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Laurel Boatright spoke in the hearing as well, reminding the court that the conduct took place over three and a half to four years, and that Gowder had benefited from his position at the hospital to compel people working under him to do what he wanted.

"Addiction does not excuse the fact that he stole people's names and IDs, forged other people's signatures and stole pills from his patients," she said. "He was able to do this because of who he was. He was able to continue this conduct because people (particularly hospital employees) felt pressured - that they did not have a choice or they might be fired."

"I recognize that David Gowder never personally intimidated anyone, but you would have to be naive to not consider the environment in Blairsville and at Union General Hospital five years ago. The court has to take into account that it was because of who he was, the power and influence wielded by him and his family, that the crime could take place."

Expanding on this, she said it had become painfully clear in interviews with multiple witnesses that many people in the community believed nothing would happen to him because

of his family's longstanding connections to the hospital and status within the community.

"This crime has eaten away confidence in the rule of law in this community," she said. "The law applies to everyone. Even if you are a doctor and a good person, it applies to you, too."

Speaking to the courtroom, Gowder expressed remorse for his crime, observing that he'd let himself and his family down in the process.

He also apologized to the judge and prosecutors for his actions requiring their presence that Wednesday, and he spoke at length about his faith in God and his gratitude for the support of family and friends in recent years.

"I am completely guilty of what I have been charged with," he said. "I look in the mirror and know there is no way to justify my actions and no one else to blame."

He told the judge of the pain reflected in the mirror, saying that he was not the man he wanted to be - not the man his family thought he was or the man his father expected him to be. And briefly, Gowder explained how his addiction developed.

"It happened very slowly," he said. "It's not a line you know is coming; not a line you know you've crossed. Most people call it a moral failure. I believe it's much more complex. It quits being a decision you can purposely make."

Gowder said that, even after he realized he had become addicted, he hid it from everyone.

"I did things I would never have conceived I would do. I was just unable to allow anyone to know or to seek help," he said, noting that, for addicts, life becomes a repeating series of "this is the last time."

"As I stand here, I wonder how someone could do that - and yet I did," Gowder said, before adding that he was ultimately grateful for his arrest, which helped bring him out of his addiction.

When it came time to deliver the sentence, Judge

Story said there were several factors that went into his determination.

"I read all the letters," he said. "You cooperated with the government. All of those things matter. It's my view that this system would not be a system of justice if a person's good works were not weighed in the scales of justice."

The judge added that Gowder had suffered an inordinate delay with the case - from his arrest in 2015 to being told in 2018 that he was under federal indictment.

"There is a strong likelihood he would have served his sentence by now," he said. "He has been prevented from rebuilding his life."

Story said he hoped that Gowder would be able to get his medical license back down the road because, based on the letters he had read, "we need doctors like that."

Continuing, Story said he understood addiction to be an illness and didn't believe in sending people to prison for being addicts, but that "it is the conduct associated with addictions that requires a response."

"Sometimes, you wrote prescriptions for people who did not exist," Story said. "Sometimes, you forged other people's names. You stole people's drugs. I don't think you threatened anyone, but you did put people in fear for their jobs."

As previously reported, U.S. attorneys said that Gowder had "engaged in the ongoing and continuous illegal procurement of more than 130,000 opiate pills over ... four years," but Gowder said in the hearing it was actually 130,000 mg, and not individual pills.

Gowder's former co-defendants - brother Mike Gowder and James Heaton - both have hearings scheduled June 24 for sentencing following their October 2019 convictions on more than 100 counts apiece involving federal prescription drug crimes.

Sentencing for all three men has been delayed multiple times due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

PPN President Mary Lightner speaks to Rotary Club

The Lake Chatuge/Hiawassee Rotary Club continued its regular weekly meetings on the Zoom virtual meeting platform on Tuesday, June 9, featuring a presentation by Mary Lightner, President of the Public Policy Network of Western North Carolina and Northeast Georgia.

Ms. Lightner had an extensive career in public policy as a Sr. Policy Analyst in the Virginia state government, focusing on healthcare and public health issues. For the last three years, since its founding, she has served as President of the PPN, a local civic organization that monitors state and national policy proposals that affect local communities and individuals. The Public Policy Network is an all-volunteer group that provides data, information, and resources to enable local citizens to make informed decisions about policies that affect them.

The network has historically held regular meetings at the Hinton Center in Clay



Mary Lightner, PPN President

County, NC, but more recently has met utilizing the Zoom platform. It also holds special town halls on specific topics important to locals, including recent forums on COVID 19, the opioid crisis, Medicaid expansion, climate change, and water quality.

The next regular meeting will be in August 2020, and Ms. Lightner suggested that those interested in learning more about the organization should visit the group's

website, publicpolicynetwork.net.

In other business, Rotary President Gerry Gutenstein announced that the annual turnover meeting with installation of new officers will occur on June 30, outdoors at the Paris Pavilion at Hamilton Gardens. In addition, plans are underway for a potentially modified approach so that the club can still hold the popular annual Reverse Auction event, in the fall.

Over the last seven years, more than \$100,000 has been raised during this annual event, with all funds raised going to service projects in the local community.

The Lake Chatuge/Hiawassee Rotary Club is one of 35,000 Rotary Clubs, now located in almost every country in the world, with a total of over 1.2 million members worldwide. The organization's motto is Service Above Self, and the local club strives to serve the community in as many ways as possible.