

# Towns County Herald

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## Towns County Schools celebrates new Literacy Bus

By Shelly Knight  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Towns County School District certainly knows how to recycle. On Thursday, July 11, Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and Curriculum & Personnel Director Stephanie Moss hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on campus for the new STEM Literacy Bus.

Using one of the district's surplus buses and proceeds from the Literacy for Learning, Living, and Leading in Georgia grant, aka L4GA, Moss and the school system have created a unique and engaging mobile classroom.

The grant aims to improve literacy across the spectrum from birth through grade 12. The goal is to reach

preschool-age children with as many resources as possible, in the hope of creating life-long learners.

Every educator knows literacy is all about getting the right book into the right hands. Uniquely, this grant calls for community-school partnerships to improve literacy. The mobile classroom will be used at events, preschools, day-cares, the local library and any other opportunities they can imagine.

"We have been doing many things to promote literacy in Towns County," Moss said. "As a culminating project of this grant, we created the STEM Literacy Bus, because all subjects are connected to literacy."

"We wanted to tie lit-  
See Literacy Bus, Page 6



The new Towns County Schools STEM Literacy Bus enjoyed a ribbon cutting led by Curriculum Director Stephanie Moss and other stakeholders on Thursday, July 11. Photo by Shelly Knight

## Young Harris temporarily tables apartment ordinance

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

In their July 9 regular meeting, Young Harris City Council members had to table the planned second reading of an ordinance detailing the annexation, zoning, rezoning, special use permitting and variance granting for the upcoming Valley Trail Apartments.

As to the reasoning, Mayor Andrea Gibby revealed that the sign marking the new zoning was not posted in a timely manner at the proposed site.

"The sign's downstairs (in City Hall); we still forgot," said Gibby, adding that to ensure full legality, the sign will have to be posted and another public hearing scheduled for next month.

City Attorney Marvin Harkins explained that, by law, zoning signage must be out for



Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby and City Attorney Marvin Harkins during a July 9 discussion of the ordinance pertaining to the new apartments coming to town. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

at least 15 days but no more than 45 days before the public hearing regarding the posted property.

The council decided to host another public hearing re-

garding rezoning at 6:15 p.m. on Aug. 6, immediately before the next regular monthly meeting.

Councilman Steve Clark  
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## Council approves backup mayor pro tem, ordinances

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The City of Hiawasse continued to address administrative changes in the regular meeting of the Acting Mayor and City Council on July 2.

With Councilman and Mayor Pro Tempore Jay "Junior" Chastain Jr. currently serving as the acting mayor following the resignation of former mayor Liz Ordiales last month, a new mayor pro tem needed to be named as a backup.

Councilwoman Amy Barrett, who has previously held the mayor pro tem title, nominated fellow Councilwoman Nancy Noblet to the role, and the council unanimously approved.

The decision to name Noblet as a secondary mayor pro tem was, in essence, a precaution in case a circumstance arises such that Chastain is un-



Acting Hiawasse Mayor Junior Chastain with City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick in the July regular city meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

able to fulfill his duties as acting mayor.

Technically speaking, both Chastain and Noblet have the same title, but Chastain serves "in the office" as the "active" mayor pro tem, while Noblet is on standby.

"I just wanted to step in

and help out," Noblet said. "I feel like that since Amy just came off of (mayor pro tem) that she had rather do something else with her life ... It's not just because I want my turn, you know; this ain't a 'turn' thing."

See City of Hiawasse, Page 6

## Towns County FBLA students win in national competition

News Special

Six Towns County High School Future Business Leaders of America students competed in national-level competition in Orlando, Florida, from June 28-July 2 after advancing from state competitions to the National Leadership Conference.

The students were Analeigh Hardin and Eli Phillips, Word Processing; Dhriti Patel, Computer Applications; Laura Mauldin and Kade McConnell, Spreadsheet Applications; and Loftin Turpin, Social Media Marketing.

Four of the students fin-

ished in the Top 10 in the nation in their respective events: Kade McConnell, Third Place in Spreadsheet Applications; Laura Mauldin, 10th Place in Spreadsheet Applications; Eli Phillips, Fourth Place in Word Processing; and Analeigh Hardin, Sixth Place in Word Processing.

Future Business Leaders of America is the largest business Career and Technical Student Organization in the world, each year helping over 230,000 student members prepare for careers in business, according to www.fbla-pbl.org. Georgia has the largest student member-

ship in the nation.

The FBLA mission is to inspire and prepare students "to become community-minded business leaders in a global society through relevant career preparation and leadership experiences."

Towns County FBLA students regularly excel in regional, state, and national competition.

"This is such a huge accomplishment to even place in Georgia, much less to be a national winner," FBLA Adviser Ruth Taylor said. "We are so proud of our students! Congratulations to all!"



These six talented students did Towns County proud during the recent FBLA National Leadership Conference.

## Butternut Creek Festival to return with 25th anniversary event



The Butternut Creek Festival will headline Meeks Park this weekend – a local tradition for 26 years.

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – The Butternut Creek Festival has been a staple in the community for over two decades now, giving artists a beautiful vista inside Meeks Park to sell their wares and meet like-minded creatives.

And this year marks the event's 25th anniversary, and everyone is invited to come out to Blairsville to enjoy the festival on Saturday, July 20, and Sunday, July 21, starting at 10 a.m. both days.

The 501(c)(3) group High Country Artisans, Inc. got its start 26 years ago, and organizers have run the festival since the nonprofit's inception, so it is no wonder that the two are so deeply intertwined.

"A small group of artists got together to decide that they wanted to put on a quality show where local artists could display their work, and that the art they were selling was handmade by them and not something from overseas and resold to the public," said key organizer Helena Grossman.

Despite many of the original members having retired or passed away, Grossman reports feedback from the vendors through the years has been positive. Generally, they are pleased with a "quality" event that doubles as a show for their crafts.

As a matter of fact, the Butternut Creek Festival placed 64th out of Sunshine Artist's 200 Best last year, as voted on by vendors. Sunshine Artist touts itself as "Ameri-

ca's Premier Art & Craft Show Resource," listing off the "best shows for artists and makers to sell arts and crafts."

But it's not just about reputation. The Butternut Creek Festival gives back locally in a big way, Grossman said, because the entry fees artists pay to participate eventually end up back in the community as donations to the art programs at Union County Schools.

In the last two years, this has amounted to some \$6,000 to split between the Elementary School, Middle School, High School and Woody Gap.

These funds help teachers purchase supplies for the classroom and in turn provide artistically inclined kids a way to explore a potentially lucrative field.  
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United  
Community

# Literacy Bus...from Page 1

eracy to science, technology, engineering and math, which is what STEM stands for.

“Our hope is that the Future Teachers class offered in the high school will take the bus to daycares and preschools in the county. Those future teachers will be planning and teaching little lessons and center activities for preschool-age children.”

Moss got the idea for the bus last September but said that most of the work to refurbish the bus as a recreational and educational vehicle was done by the end of April.

“I designed the aesthetic of the bus for the younger students, but I see all students K-12 using it,” Moss said. “The materials in the bus have been selected for all grade levels.”

“Eventually there will be a screen on the outside of the bus under the awning so it can serve as an outdoor classroom as well. This is probably my most favorite project in my 29 years as an educator.”

“Between our partnership with Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library abundance and our STEM bus, we

are thrilled we will be able to reach so many children in the county.

“We signed on to Parton’s program, which targets preschool-age children, last May. There are around 75 children already enrolled. All children receive a free book in the mail each month. It’s important that children are reading at home, too. The goal is to get children reading before they come to school.”

Teacher Maureen McClure prepares future educators through the Teaching Pathway program, and she is excited to use the new bus.

“Part of the Teaching Pathway is that students get

firsthand knowledge of what being in the classroom is like and working with kids,” McClure said. “This will be an extension of that.”

“I think the students will really like this. The pathway program is growing, which is important because we have such a teacher shortage.”

Outgoing Elementary School Principal Shannon Moss shared that he believes the new bus program is “fantastic,” as he is “a big fan of literacy.”

Superintendent Berrong said that the system looked at a lot of literacy buses during the planning stage, always with the mindset of “if you’re going to do it, do it right.”

“I feel like this one blows everyone else’s out of the water,” Berrong said. “Mrs. Moss did an excellent job with this.”

Emily Winn, director of the McConnell Baptist Church Preschool Program, said the bus was “the sweetest thing I’ve ever seen.”

“It’s precious, and it will be so good for the community. It will be so good for children who are homeschooled,” Winn said. “It’s an exciting way to get the children interested in reading. I look forward to having the bus come for our kids.”

People who would like information on the STEM bus, including how to interact with the new learning tool as a member of the community, may contact [stephaniemoss@townscountyschools.org](mailto:stephaniemoss@townscountyschools.org).

# City of Hiawassee...from Page 1



A view from inside City Hall during the July 2 regular meeting of Hiawassee City Council. Not pictured: Councilman Jonathan Wilson, who attended via phone. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Along with her appointment, Noblet was authorized to sign checks for the city, with the council voting to have her name added to checking accounts. As Chastain put it, there simply needs to be another council member who can officially sanction financial decisions.

Chastain will serve as acting mayor at least through March, as the Towns County Board of Elections recently terminated its agreement to run city elections since this is a busy presidential election year, meaning there will be no special called election for the city this November.

Therefore, the earliest a mayoral election could be held is in the spring, traditionally on the third Tuesday in March, but because the state has yet to

issue the 2025 election calendar, there’s no confirmation on an exact date.

“At the first opportunity, (City Attorney Thomas) Mitchell is going to talk to (the Elections Board) and see if they’ll let us have an election in the spring,” Chastain said. The city has run its own elections in the past but has contracted with the Elections Board to do so in recent years.

The second reading of the Accessory Structure Ordinance was tabled for further discussion. Among other issues, there needs to be agreement on what can be considered a standalone building or an accessory structure versus other land ornamentation, such as lawn decorations.

Following review of the Building-Planning Ordinance

at the last work session, reworks to the section regarding mobile homes received their second reading and enactment on July 2.

In addition to ironing out the definitions and designs of pre-built homes, the main change is that they can only be placed on land measuring half an acre as opposed to the previously allowed third of an acre.

The council also held the second reading and enactment of the Sign Ordinance addressing temporary signs, banners and enforcement.

Essentially, the content of the ordinance goes over signs permitted within city limits and how business owners are allowed to use them, including when they can and cannot be displayed.



The new Literacy Bus has been ornamented to appeal to children, painted with a colorful outdoors scene on the outside and whimsically decorated inside. For a picture tour of the bus, visit the Towns County Schools Facebook page. Photo by Shelly Knight

# Rep. Clyde secures amendment to force Attorney General Garland to release Biden-Hur Tapes

This week, the House Appropriations Committee met to consider the Fiscal Year 2025 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) Appropriations Act. During the markup, the Committee adopted Rep. Andrew Clyde’s (GA-09) amendment to reduce Attorney General Merrick Garland’s salary until he releases all records related to Special Counsel Robert Hur’s investigation of President Biden’s mishandling of classified documents.

Rep. Clyde’s amendment, which was adopted by a voice vote, reduces Attorney General Garland’s salary to \$1

until all requested records — including audio files — related to Special Counsel Hur’s investigation of President Biden are provided to Congress. The Oversight and Judiciary Committees issued duly authorized, legal subpoenas to Garland for these documents. Yet the Attorney General has refused to produce these materials, prompting House Republicans to hold Garland in contempt of Congress.

“If Attorney General Garland refuses to comply with legitimate congressional subpoenas, then he shouldn’t receive his taxpayer-funded salary,” said Clyde. “Ameri-

cans deserve to hear the Biden-Hur tapes to validate the Special Counsel’s transcript and to gain a better understanding of the President’s mental state. Clearly, the White House and the Department of Justice are desperately trying to hide this information from the public. Yet Garland cannot disregard lawful congressional subpoenas — especially to cover up the truth about President Biden’s criminal misconduct and cognitive health. By slashing the Attorney General’s salary, Congress can employ the power of the purse to deliver transparency and accountability to the American people.”

# City of Young Harris...from Page 1

suggested that, moving forward, such sign postings be handled by developers.

“In Atlanta, the responsibility for putting up the signs (the developer’s),” said

Clark, who has extensive development experience. “Part of our (zoning) application (was) once that it’s approved, (the city) contacts the applicant and says, ‘Your sign’s up

here. You need to get it, put it up, take a picture of it and bring us a photograph.”

Fellow Councilman Dr. John Kelley voiced approval for the proposal, as did Gibby.

“We’ve got to have a process that the developer knows it’s his responsibility ... It needs to be clearly communicated,” Kelley said, with Gibby noting that it would be added to the city’s policy as “part of the process.”

Later in the meeting, an update was offered on the long-awaited Timberline booster pump fix, which requires one more part before construction can begin.

In other water news, 659 of the city’s new water meters have been installed for customers. Around 160 are left, with most of them planned for placement on the Young Harris College campus within the next month.

The council and city staff are gearing up to get the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget finalized, with a deadline of September to get all documents in and all questions to Finance Director Ana Hess.

Main Street Director Rosemary Royston revealed that her program’s bylaws had changed to include some new rules for those looking to join the board. Applicants must be a Young Harris or Towns County resident, or otherwise own property or a business in downtown Young Harris.

Turning to the in-prog-



**L-R: Young Harris City Councilmen Donald Keys and Steve Clark in their July 9 regular meeting at City Hall.**

Photo by Brittany Holbrook

ress Young Harris Bypass, it was discussed that most of the bypass property had been graveled as part of the Georgia 515 construction project, and the Department of Transportation “projected” moving water and sewer lines within the next couple of weeks.

Also discussed, Kelley and Attorney Harkins are looking into getting defibrillators and Narcan posted in local government buildings in the

event of emergencies. They must also coordinate with local EMS to ensure paramedics are aware of where supplies are located.

Mayor Gibby and the Young Harris City Council meet the first Tuesday of each month starting at 6:30 p.m. inside City Hall, located at 50 Irene Berry Drive. The July regular meeting was rescheduled due to the Fourth of July holiday week.

# Butternut Creek Fest...from Page 1

passion.

“You know, in today’s world, the poor teachers are pulling money out of their own pocket to pay for these things, so they’re very appreciative of what we do, and we hope to continue that this year,” Grossman said.

In 2024, Union County Primary has been added to the list of schools to receive money brought in by entry fees, because even the smallest students “should have a chance too” at exploring their creativity – a skill Grossman said has been easy to take note of with the schools’ art shows.

Grossman believes the students benefit from other aspects of showmanship, also.

“They use those skills in their life going forward in terms of spatial work, design aspects, solving problems,”

Grossman said. “So, those are basic skills that they learn through art.”

To a lesser degree, some festival proceeds go to local groups that are either art-oriented or could benefit from art. For example, the High Country Artisans’ most recent endeavor involves working with the Appalachian Veterans Memorial Park Project.

Along with the money made by mere participation, there’s also the revenue that comes into the area via the tourists who visit the festival or vendors who travel long distances. By utilizing local businesses like restaurants and hotels, they help bring money into the community.

“We’re a community-based event, and we’re so fortunate that the community supports us,” Grossman said.

“I’m just so enthused about this show.”

What sort of arts and crafts can one expect to see at the Butternut Creek Festival? This year, guests will find everything from jewelry and paintings to creations forged in the fires of a blacksmithing family.

Grossman mentioned that there are also several woodworkers who will be offering goods like bowls, hand-carved toys and table turners.

In addition to the main event, visitors can enjoy finding something to munch at one of the food trucks that will be available, and if patrons would like to take a break from browsing, there will be live music to sit and listen to as well.

On Saturday, July 20, the festival will be open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday, July 21, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Meeks Park is located about one mile west of Blairsville on Georgia 515.

## Citizens For A Better America

Are you happy about the way things are going in Cherokee County, NC, the U.S. and the world? Let’s work together to create change, peacefully & patriotically!

Payton McNabb will be our guest speaker. She was injured by a transgender male playing High School volleyball here in Cherokee County and has played a big part in Fairness In Womens Sports Act in NC and the country. Citizens for a Better America meets third Thursday of each month. Next meeting is Thursday, July 18 at Legends Steakhouse in the private meeting room, 42 Tennessee Street, downtown Murphy, NC. Meeting starts Promptly at 6-7:30.

This meeting is free & open to the public. For more information: Website: <http://www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com>; Email: [Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com](mailto:Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com); Call: (828) 494-7403.

## Betty Sue Rhinehardt Dyer Celebrates 90th Birthday



Betty Sue Rhinehardt Dyer celebrated her 90th Birthday on July 10, 2024 with family and many friends.

Betty was born in Towns County on July 10, 1934, was married to James Perry Dyer, had three children, Ricky, Jim, and Vicki Lynn (David) Owenby. Betty also has two grandchildren, Dustin (Kelci) Owenby, Lauren (Tyler) Odom.

*Love You and Wish You Many, Many More!*