



Next week's newspaper will come out Wednesday, Aug. 12th, to include runoff election results. Also check www.townscountyherald.net.

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Class of 2020 members graduate together despite COVID-19

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

After more than two months of waiting, Towns County High Class of 2020 graduates finally got a proper chance to conclude their K-12 careers with a traditional commencement ceremony surrounded by family and friends on Friday, July 31, on the new football field in Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

With plenty of distance between graduates and others gathered for the occasion, Class President Jamison Wood welcomed everyone to the ceremony, thanking organizers and attendees for putting the time into making an actual

graduation a reality after COVID-19 derailed the end of the school year.

"Although our senior year ended abruptly and looked different than previous years, we want to thank every one of you for joining us to celebrate our accomplishments as a class one last time," Wood said. "On behalf of the senior class, I want to say thank you to the faculty, staff and administration of TCHS, as well as our family and friends for supporting us, encouraging us and loving us in these difficult and confusing times."

Class Historian Sophia Shook reflected on the various challenges she and her peers had gone through together over

the years, which she felt made the group more receptive to adaptation and change.

"The Class of 2020 was born into a world that was no longer simple times," Shook said. "Our lives began when America was evolving in many ways."

"From 2001 to 2013, we experienced more than our share of historic events, including the attack on 9/11, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Great Recession, the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, and the bombing at the Boston Marathon."

"Then at the closing of our senior year, we faced a pandemic that ended our senior



Most of the 59 graduates of the Towns County High Class of 2020 attended their July 31 special commencement exercises, postponed from May due to COVID-19. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Towns County Fire & Rescue knocks down blazes at two homes



Anyone with info regarding this basement fire at 1500 Sunnyside Road should contact Fire Chief Harold Copeland at 706-994-4934 for a potential reward. Photo/Submitted

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Fire & Rescue saved a home recently after lightning struck the property and traveled up a propane gas line to catch the interior of the house on fire.

The blaze occurred at a home off Chestnut Valley Road in the Hi River Country

subdivision on Tuesday, July 21, with firefighters being dispatched to the structure at 12:42 p.m. after the homeowner called 911.

Engine 5 was the first apparatus on the scene, and crews made "a swift knockdown to keep the fire at the origin of where it entered," Fire Chief Harold Copeland said. "It came in under the floor, and they

were able to cut some of the flooring out and extinguish the fire."

Ten firefighters responded to the blaze, bringing with them four apparatus, including Engine 5, Engine 2, Engine 1 and Tanker 1, all of which worked together to put the fire out and save the home for a grateful homeowner.

Chief Copeland said it's important that the public remain vigilant during thunderstorms.

"If lightning strikes in close proximity to your home," Copeland said, "it can run the ground and a lot of times enter your home by your propane tank via the copper tubing that runs into people's basements underneath their flooring, causing fires."

"I've seen that happen many, many times over the years, and that's exactly what happened here."

The cause of a separate house fire that occurred at 1500 Sunnyside Road around 7 p.m. on July 24 is currently under investigation, Copeland said.

"At the time of the fire, there was a 90-year-old female in the upper floor," Copeland said. "She was in the living

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School start changed to Aug. 17; board members discuss budget



R-L: Stan Chastain, Tamie Bradley, Darren Berrong and Dr. Kilee Smith in the Towns County Board of Education called meeting July 28. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Schools will start students back on Aug. 17, both online and on campus, following a unanimous vote by the Towns County Board of Education in a called meeting on Tuesday, July 28.

The originally proposed start date for students was Aug. 13, though Board Office staff determined that a school calendar revision would be necessary for budgetary

reasons.

Due to the economic impacts of COVID-19, the state will be contributing significantly less money for local education this school year, creating a budget shortfall of \$491,000 in Towns County.

To partly make up for this difference, the system has decided to reduce the 2020-21 school year by five calendar days, cutting instruction time from 176 to 174 days for students, and staff days from 190 to 185 days, effectively

shaving about \$250,000 in employee pay off the local budget.

Teachers will now be starting back Aug. 10 instead of Aug. 5, with an Aug. 17 student return date giving teachers more time to conduct planning with the reduced calendar.

Additionally, the state will be contributing about \$229,000 in federal CARES Act reimbursement monies, which, when combined with the savings from a shortened

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Early in-person voting concludes Friday; Election Day is Aug. 11

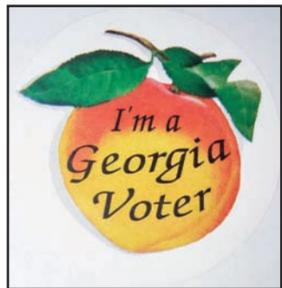
By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

At about 100 voters a day, early in-person voting for the Aug. 11 Republican and Democratic Primary Runoff Elections is outpacing early in-person voting from the June 9 General Primary, which only averaged between 60 and 80 people per day.

As of Friday, July 31, over 960 people had voted in person for the runoffs, and due to COVID-19, an above average 792 people had mailed in absentee ballots, bringing the total vote count to more than 1,750, or roughly 17 percent of the electorate, by the end of last week.

This is the last week for early in-person voting, which runs now through Friday, Aug. 7, between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. - even during lunchtime - at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office located in Suite A of 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiwassee next to the courthouse.

The election features four runoff contests that were undecided in the June 9 election, including three races to decide Republican nominees for the offices of Towns County



Sheriff, District 50 State Senator and U.S. Representative in the 117th Congress from the 9th Congressional District; and one Democratic race for 9th Congressional District.

For Towns County Sheriff, Kenneth "Ode" Henderson is squaring off against Daren "Bear" Osborn for the Republican nomination, with the Aug. 11 runoff winner currently being set to appear unchallenged on the Nov. 3 General Election ballot.

For District 50 State Senator, Republicans Stacy Hall and Bo Hatchett are vying for their party's nomination, with the Aug. 11 runoff winner also set to appear unchallenged by party opposition in November.

For the 9th Congressional District race, on the Republican side are Matt Gurtler and

Andrew Clyde, while the Democratic ticket features Devin Pandey and Brooke Siskin. Whoever wins their respective party nomination on Aug. 11 will face the other party nominee on Nov. 3.

Since this is a primary runoff, voters who participated in the June 9 election must vote with the same political party. People who selected nonpartisan ballots during the primary, as well as individuals who did not vote in the primary, must choose a party to vote in the runoff.

Election Day will be Tuesday, Aug. 11, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., and that day, voters should report to one of the three pre-assigned Towns County voting precincts: Hiwassee at the Civic Center; Young Harris at the Lodge Hall Building, aka Stephens Lodge; and Macedonia at Macedonia Baptist Church.

As previously reported, the Elections Board voted in May to move all precincts to Hiwassee for the June 9 election, as the private buildings hosting the Young Harris and Macedonia precincts had closed for COVID-19. The Board Office

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Moonshine Cruiz-In celebrates 12 years at GMF, even amid pandemic



Classic cars were the name of the game for the 12th Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Gearheads and car enthusiasts of all ages ignored the heat and dodged afternoon showers last weekend for a chance to take in the sights and sounds of the 12th Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In.

Hosted by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the event featured hundreds of classic cars and hot rods, live music, vendors, displays and more. And with most of the nation cooped up at home for the better part of 2020, spectators weren't the only ones itching to hit the road.

John Serou of Ponchatoula, Louisiana, attended his first Moonshine Cruiz-In, making the trip in his 2018 Dodge Challenger T/A 392.

According to Serou, last weekend marked his first car show of the year, and he said driving through the Occeo

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