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Berrong invites local leaders on school tour; students return Aug. 15

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw joined Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby and Chamber of Commerce President Candace Lee for a tour of the recently renovated facilities at Towns County Schools on Thursday, Aug. 1.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong invited the local officials to walk through the school campus to see the upgrades for themselves, and they were all thoroughly impressed.

The schools will hold a Community Open House on Wednesday, Aug. 7, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., and everyone is invited to come see the second year of completed

modernization projects at the middle/high school, along with the new \$1 million artificial turf football/soccer field.

With the second year of modernization projects having finished up before the start of school on Thursday, Aug. 15, the schools have also added a new afterschool program.

After learning that they would not be receiving federal funding for the afterschool program this year, the schools searched around for an alternative and found one in the Georgia Mountains YMCA Association.

The YMCA afterschool program offers parents a safe place for their children after school, on teacher workdays and during the summer, with children 5 years of age and older being eligible for the program.

Program hours will start

at the end of the school day at 3 p.m. and allow students to get help with homework, make-up work, test preparation, etc.

The afterschool program does require an annual family membership fee, plus weekly or monthly payments for each child to attend, though it does offer financial assistance for families to receive a discounted rate based on household income.

In Towns County High School news, Roy Perren will return as principal for the upcoming 2019-2020 school year after serving several years as the School Facilities Director and Federal Programs Director.

"We are going to be continuing a lot of the good things we've been doing in the past," Perren said. "So, it won't be so much new, it will be

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Local leaders celebrating the completion of recent school renovations with Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong. Photo by Chad Stack

Schools surprise Herald photographer with sign at Lowell Nicholson Field



"Welcome to Lowell Nicholson Field, Home of Lady Indians Softball" – July 31, 2019. Photo by Chad Stack

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Lowell Nicholson has spent more than 40 years of his life covering Towns County sports for newspapers in the mountains, and he's widely known for being the Indians' "No. 1 Fan."

That's why, in 2014,

school officials named the Lady Indians softball after Towns County Herald photographer Lowell Nicholson, who threw out the first pitch at the field when it was completed many years ago.

Nicholson received a plaque commemorating the field dedication in 2014, which hung in the dugout for years,

though the name of the field was never readily apparent to visitors.

On Wednesday, July 31, the Lady Indians, their coaches, Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, Athletic Director Jim Melton and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

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Fishermen Grimsley, Hooper highlight City Council work session

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales and the City Council invited the Towns County High School Bass Fishing Team to their July 29 work session.

Opening the meeting, the two-man bass fishing team of Mitchell Grimsley and Adrian Hooper explained how they qualified for nationals in their inaugural 2018-2019 season at Towns County High.

"We were one of the 300 boats that qualified out of more than 13,000 all over the country," Grimsley said. "We're excited for the chance to go up there to compete and hopefully win."

Together, the Indians and their boat captains/fathers started their journey to Paris, Tennessee, on Aug. 3 for the High School Bassmaster's



Mitchell Grimsley and Aidan Hooper of the Towns County High School Bass Fishing Team appeared in the July 29 Hiwassee City Council work session. Photo by Chad Stack

Fishing National Tournament, which runs Aug. 8-10.

Ordiales also talked about her recent trip to Spain, where she participated in the world-renowned 98-mile Camino de Santiago pilgrimage walk.

Moving on, the mayor

announced the payoff of another Georgia Environmental Finance Authority loan in the amount of \$285,054, which will allow the city to save \$72,554 over the life of the loan.

"I have been keeping my

See City Council, Page 6A

Heaton, Gowder facing Aug. 8 court proceeding; federal trial two months away

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor



The separate legal teams for Dr. Heaton and Mike Gowder are set to appear in a pretrial conference before U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story on Thursday, Aug. 8, in Gainesville.

As there are still a number of outstanding motions in the case, it's likely that Story will use the pretrial conference to settle various legal contentions brought by the attorneys for each defendant in anticipation of the Oct. 8, 2019, specially set jury trial.

The two men stand accused of many criminal charges – 213 for Heaton and 150 for Gowder – involving alleged illegal prescription drug activity in at least three states, though both men have pleaded not guilty to the charges against them.

Prior to their 2016 arrests and subsequent charges, Mike Gowder was the CEO of Union General Hospital and Dr. Heaton ran a family practice clinic in Blairsville.

Heaton also served as the director of the Union County Nursing Home and as a member of the hospital's Board of Directors, per court documents.

Last week, on July 29, both defendants once again petitioned the court to bar

evidence introduced by federal prosecutors earlier this year, with Heaton's legal team filing a "renewed motion" to bar the evidence, while Gowder's attorney filed a motion to adopt the same.

Prosecutors introduced the evidence on March 25, just two weeks prior to the then-trial date of April 8, immediately prompting the initial request by Heaton and Gowder's attorneys to bar the evidence that contained new allegations of past criminal activity.

At the time, the legal teams for the accused argued that "virtually all of the evidence relates to offenses that are outside the scope of the charged offenses in the indictment," and should therefore be considered inadmissible in court.

Both defense teams also took issue with the prosecution's attempt to introduce the evidence so close to the previously established April trial date, saying they didn't have enough time to prepare defenses to the new allegations.

Prosecutors, however, argued that the newly introduced evidence should be allowed in court because much of it was "inextricably intertwined with the conduct charged," such as the conspiracy to dispense and distribute controlled substances.

In light of the introduction of new evidence by federal prosecutors, and in response to the request by the attorneys for the two men, Judge Story ultimately decided to postpone the trial until Oct. 8, finding that continuing the trial to a later date would best serve the ends of justice.

It was the second time the trial had been rescheduled,

having initially been set for Feb. 11, 2019, before being reset to April 8, 2019, due to scheduling conflicts with Heaton's attorney.

The latest motion filed on July 29 recognizes that the defendants' previous objections concerning the lack of notice to prepare for the new evidence had been satisfied by the trial's continuance.

However, the motion contends that the court still needs to rule "on the admissibility of the evidence" and asks that the court schedule a hearing to do so.

Essentially, Heaton's legal team is arguing that much of the recently introduced evidence is too old to be relevant, while other portions "have no relevance whatsoever to any of the (current) charges and are simply an attempt by the government to impugn Dr. Heaton's character."

According to the July 29 motion by Heaton's attorneys, "The government seeks to introduce evidence that Dr. Heaton had a consensual adult relationship with several patients, however, there is no allegation that he was selling narcotics to these patients or that his medical treatment of them was anything outside of the standard practice of medicine."

"The government further alleges that other patients were essentially dispensing medication ... This claim is entirely too remote to Dr. Heaton. There is no allegation that the pain pills were prescribed by Dr Heaton or that Dr. Heaton knew about, much less profited from, any alleged transaction."

It is unknown at this time if the evidence in question

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Chief Smith attends annual police summer training conference

News Special
Towns County Herald

As part of his continuing education and training in the administration of law enforcement, Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith recently attended the 2019 Annual Summer Training Conference sponsored by the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police.

The Summer Training Conference was held at the Savannah International Trade & Convention Center July 21-24, with heads of law enforcement agencies from throughout the state participating in the four-day conference.

Chief Smith was among more than 550 heads of law enforcement agencies attending

the 51st Annual GACP Summer Training Conference.

The association is responsible for the delivery of training to the chiefs of Georgia's police departments and law enforcement agencies.

"In this new era of law enforcement, chiefs are constantly finding new ways to manage their departments," said GACP President Wesley Walker, chief of the Lyons Police Department. "From the type of officer we are hiring today, to the concerns of the public we serve, to the way we police has changed ever so drastically."

"This change has brought about new standards that are required of law enforcement. The GACP has done an



Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith

excellent job in keeping up with the times and providing the necessary training and

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Early morning crash claims life of Hayesville man over the weekend

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

A Hayesville man died following a single-vehicle crash on US 76 shortly before sunrise on Saturday, Aug. 3, authorities said Sunday.

The Georgia State Patrol is investigating the crash, and the identity of the crash victim was not available by press time.

According to authorities, the man was driving a box-type delivery truck eastbound on US 76 toward Hiwassee when his vehicle crossed into the westbound lane before leaving the road.

The accident occurred across from Papa's Pizza, where the vehicle crashed into a concrete power pole that prevented the truck from entering Lake Chatuge, authorities said.

No braking skid marks



A Hayesville man died after crashing his vehicle into this concrete power pole off US 76 on Saturday, Aug. 3.

were immediately apparent at the scene.

E911 dispatchers received the call about the accident at 6:28 a.m. on Saturday, and authorities were still investigating the cause of the crash at press time.

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