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As summer ends, schools return to smooth sailing

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

For Towns County Darren Berrong, the biggest surprise from the first day of school on Aug. 3 was that there were no surprises.

"The first day was extremely smooth," said Dr. Berrong. "I think it's because we've actually had some stability in our administration over the past three years now, so all the principals and assistant principals and athletic directors and facility directors, everyone is the same."

"We haven't had any turnover as far as administration goes, so everything seemed to run extremely smooth yesterday, much smoother than any day I can remember being a first day of school."

And Dr. Berrong would know about first days of

school from an administrative standpoint – he's now starting his third full school year as superintendent, and he served five years as principal of Towns County Middle School.

"Typically, on the first day of school, and especially at the end of the school day, we have issues with students in terms of what bus to get on," said Dr. Berrong. "We typically don't get our buses rolling until at least 3:15 p.m."

"I think we rolled out at 3:08 that first day, and on a typical school day we roll out at 3:05. So literally, three minutes delay was all we had that day."

Of course, Dr. Berrong is looking forward to sports kicking off soon, as football, cross country, get ready for the fall season, and all students begin their studies.

"It feels like we almost never left," said Dr. Berrong.



First day of school for the 2017-2018 school year was Thursday, Aug. 3. Welcome back, students! Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"Like we just showed back up as if it were another day of school, like we've been doing it all year long even though we

had a summer break." As the school year progresses, Dr. Berrong said his office will be planning

for 2018 summer construction projects.

"We're trying to get all those things rolled out, and meeting with our architects and construction managers to make sure that that last day of school, we have people on campus the following day to start these construction projects the following year," said Dr. Berrong.

"The timeline's going to be extremely tight," continued Dr. Berrong. "We started school back a week early this year. I don't think we've ever started with teachers coming back in July before, because typically, we wouldn't be starting students until the next week."

"But our plan was to start a week earlier this year so that we got out a week earlier, and we plan to start late in the following year so that we give ourselves at least two extra weeks in the summer to get

these projects completed."

Construction projects include replacing the entire roof of the joint middle and high school building, plus the installation of new HVAC systems in the middle and high schools.

From there, the schools will be figuring out where they'll be able to do during construction next summer, such as replacing their lighting with all LED for reduction in energy footprint, and getting the whole building rewired while also installing a new fire alarm system to boot.

The comprehensive schools held Open House on Tuesday, Aug. 1, ahead of the first day of school.

Students of every elementary the halls of the walked, middle and high schools, meeting teachers and signing up for sports and

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EMC board nominates rejected candidates to ballot

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
Editor

Bert Rogers is now on the Board of Directors ballot of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's elections in September.

So are Preston Cabe, Karen Pirie, and Tommy White.

Surprised? Don't be.

An Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court judge granted an injunction to put a halt to the upcoming September elections at the request of Bert Rogers' attorney, Larry Sorgen, who previously served as legal counsel for the EMC board.

Rogers wasn't happy with the "members in good standing" interpretation by BRMEMC's legal counsel to the CREMEND's Committee, so he hired Sorgen, who promptly sought an injunction to halt the



Bert Rogers
Towns County, GA

election and let a superior court judge decide the "members in good standing" rule.

There is no such mention of the definition of that rule in the bylaws.

Results of that hearing were not available at press time.

So, back to the drawing board and four candidates added in the three counties represented in Georgia and



Karen Pirie
Union County, GA

North Carolina with seats up for election by the membership.

Again, two incumbents will face opposition on the Board of Directors ballot of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's elections in September.

And Jason Waldroup, a 15-year resident of Towns County, will now face Rogers in the seat that Vice Chairman Steven Phillips resigned from for personal reasons.



Preston Cabe
Clay County, NC

Danny Henson will seek to unseat Incumbent Charles Jenkins as one of the Union County representatives on the BRMEMC board. However, he now has two other candidates seeking that seat.

And Jeff Ledford hopes to unseat Incumbent Chris Logan as one of the Clay County, North Carolina, representatives on the BRMEMC board. He also



Tommy White
Union County, GA

must beat Preston Cabe.

Henson was a board member for a short while in 2015. The BRMEMC Board of Directors disqualified him because of a business partnership with then fellow board member Greg Owenby.

Henson had been appointed to replace Union County board member Bob Enslley, because of Enslley's failing health. He made the

relationship with Owenby before he was appointed.

The BRMEMC bylaws prohibit board members from serving if they have a business partnership with another board member.

"I didn't try to hide anything," Henson said. "I guess the board members thought that everyone had done their due diligence. The ball was dropped somewhere, however."

The board apologized to Henson that his appointment was not vetted out before he was appointed to the board, stating that it was nothing personal, "it was just the bylaws."

Henson said he harbored no ill.

Henson gained enough

See EMC, Page 6A

Paul Smith sworn in as Hiawassee Police Chief

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Hiawassee's new top cop has a familiar face – Police Chief Paul Smith.

Michelle Smith, Chief Smith's wife, held a Bible for him as Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley swore him in during the Aug. 1 regular Hiawassee City Council meeting.

"This has been a goal of mine, and it came sooner in my career than I expected, though I feel that I am prepared for the task," said Chief Smith. "I'm honored and I'm humbled."

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Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith with Michelle Smith, his wife, during his swearing in ceremony on Tuesday, Aug. 1. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Berrong takes over from Ordiales as Mayor Pro Tem

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiawassee City Councilmember Kris Berrong is now Hiawassee Mayor Pro Tem, effective Saturday, Aug. 5.

Berrong replaces fellow Councilmember Liz Ordiales as mayor pro tem, a move approved by his fellow council members in the Aug. 1 regular council meeting.

From now until a new mayor takes office, Berrong will be responsible for making sure the business of the city carries on, though Ordiales has said she plans to continue volunteering at City Hall for

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Kris Berrong with Liz Ordiales. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Gowder indicted 50 times by White County Grand Jury

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
Editor

A White County Grand Jury handed up a 50-count indictment against former hospital CEO Mike Gowder on Aug. 1, White County Superior Court records show.

Gowder was indicted on 25 counts of fraud in obtaining a controlled substance, and 25 counts of Violation of Georgia's Controlled Substance Act for illegal possession of oxycodone, the indictments show.

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley presented the case for indictment last week before grand jurors in White County, White County Superior Court records show.

It brings the number of

indictments in North Georgia and North Carolina to 91 against the former hospital CEO, according to court records in both states.

On July 10, a Union County Grand Jury handed up a four-count indictment against Gowder.

In addition, the same grand jury handed up a 45-count indictment against Dr. James Heaton, who is alleged to have written the prescriptions used by Gowder in Union, Towns, and White counties in Georgia, and in North Carolina, court records in both states show.

Meanwhile, Gowder was indicted July 5 in Towns County on charges that include 16 counts of fraud in obtaining a controlled substance, and 16 counts of Violation of Georgia's Controlled Substance Act,



Mike Gowder

Towns County Superior Court records show.

Heaton did not face any charges in Towns County, according to arrest warrants. That also was the case in White

County.

Heaton and Gowder both were arrested in Union County on Feb. 4, 2016, Gowder for three counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, one count of conspiracy; and Heaton for 40 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances, one count of conspiracy.

In Union County, Gowder was indicted for two counts fraud in obtaining controlled substance, and two counts Violation of Georgia's Controlled Substance Act for illegally possessing hydrocodone and oxycodone, respectively, the indictments show.

Heaton was indicted on 43 counts of unauthorized

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County millage rate to remain same; property values up

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw will set the county millage rate during the August regular commission meeting.

The meeting will take place at 5:30 p.m. inside the Towns County Courthouse on Tuesday, Aug. 15.

The 2017 county millage rate will remain the same as last year at 5.375 mills. This will result in a collection of \$3,912,100 in property taxes toward the county budget.

Total county property values have increased by nearly \$16 million net over 2016, accounting for a larger tax digest.

Since the millage



Towns County Sole Commissioner
Cliff Bradshaw

rate is staying the same and property values have gone up – significantly in real and personal property – the county will be collecting \$85,435

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Chatuge 1,923.58
Nottely 1,772.62

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