

School...from Page 1A

clubs.

Kamdyn Mooney, 8, went to open house with his mom, Nise. The third-grader spent much of the summer expressing his creativity through videogames like Minecraft, which ties in with his love of game design and engineering, and he's excited to see his teachers and friends again now that school is back in session.

Victoria Barker, who attended the open house with her mom Sharon and older sister Abby, will be joining Kamdyn in the third grade. The family is new to Towns County, having just moved in a month and a half ago from Austin, Texas, and they love it here in the North Georgia mountains.

Abby has already made several friends and is jazzed about playing for the middle school softball team, and she is looking forward to art class, too, which is being newly offered at the middle school this fall.

Middle School Principal Erica Chastain is glad to have both new and returning students in class after a long summer, including her own son, who starts middle school this year.

As well as art classes, the middle school will be getting its football team back.

"And this is exciting, too, our robotics team got a new 3D printer to use this



Buses are in full swing again, so watch out for students at bus stops. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

year," said Chastain. "We're just looking forward to a great school year, making sure student and teacher needs are met so that we can get the year started off right."

In its Aug. 14 regular monthly meeting, the Towns County Board of Education plans to accept the rollback millage rate of 7.956 – a reduction of 0.001 mills over the 2016 rate – which will result in a collection of \$5,753,240 in property taxes toward the schools' budget.

Due to an increase in property values in the county tax digest, the schools will be

collecting \$84,507 more than they did last year, after having dropped more than \$50,000 cumulatively in the past two years.

Dr. Berrong has recommended to the board to close schools on Monday, Aug. 21, for the Great American Eclipse, citing traffic and other concerns, and the board was expected to decide in its Aug. 7 work session after press time Monday.

Dr. Berrong also recommends parents and members of the community follow the school Facebook page for continuing updates.



Open House was on Tuesday, Aug. 1, and Towns County students turned out in force to get their schedules and meet with their teachers. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

EMC...from Page 1A

petition signatures to run for the seat in 2015, but opted not to run at that time.

Today, Henson is back, ready to seek another seat on the board. This time, Henson was nominated by the EMC's Nominating Committee to again earn a seat on the Board. He is joined on the ballot by Karen Pirie and Tommy White in the race for the Union County seat.

Jenkins rode the wave of petition ballot winners in 2014. He has almost completed his first term as a board member.

Pirie currently is a substitute teacher for Union County Schools. She and her family attend First Baptist Church of Blairsville, where she is a member of the choir and volunteers as the choir teacher for 3-year-olds.

White is a lifelong resident of Union County. He attended Woody Gap School, went to North Georgia College, and graduated from the University of Georgia.

He is past president of the Union County Saddle Club. He has managed consumer

finance offices for Chrysler First, NationsCredit, and TransAmerica. He is self-employed at Budget Propane in Suches. He and his wife Susan have two daughters.

In Towns County, Waldroup and his wife Sonya have two children, Alexis and Tristan. They attend Macedonia Baptist Church and have called Towns County home for the past 15 years. In 2010, Jason started working for the Clay County Water & Sewer Department where he now serves as director, overseeing all personnel and operations.

Rogers is a lifelong resident of Towns County. He and his wife Diane have two daughters and three grandchildren. They attend Macedonia Baptist Church. Rogers retired from the Georgia Department of Transportation as a heavy equipment operator, and later as a foreman with 34 years of service.

Meanwhile, in Clay County, Ledford, a life-long resident of Clay County, North Carolina, is currently the Used

Car Manager at Ware Chevrolet in Blairsville. He has over 30 years of experience in new and preowned vehicle sales and is skilled in negotiating transactions with customers to close on deals and increase sales.

Ledford has proven leadership skills that help team members achieve individual sales, enhance customer service, and drive business goals. He has dedicated his career to delivering high quality service and building relationships with his customers.

Cabe is a lifelong resident of Clay County, North Carolina. He graduated from Hayesville High School in 1994. He has been married to Amanda Smith from Blairsville for 15 years, and they have two daughters, Kaitlyn and Maci Cabe. They are members of Mountain Grace Baptist Church in Clay County, North Carolina.

Logan, who also won election by way of petition ballot in 2014, presently serves as treasurer of the BRMEMC, chairman of the Finance Committee, and serves on the North Georgia Network Board of Directors.

County Millage...from Page 1A

more in tax revenues this year than in 2016.

An increased digest is indicative of a healthy economy, and the Towns County tax digest has been steadily increasing year over

year since 2013, featuring investments in both real estate and industry in recent years.

Commissioner Bradshaw will also set the fire department millage rate in the Aug. 15 meeting, which every year is

0.500 mills.

Due to an increase in the digest, the fire department will bring in a modest \$7,948 more in tax revenue this year than in 2016.

Gowder...from Page 1A

distribution and dispensation of a Schedule II controlled substance.

According to the Union County indictments, from Dec. 15, 2011, until June 8, 2015, Heaton allegedly wrote 43 prescriptions for either hydrocodone or oxycodone for Gowder.

Heaton also was indicted in Union County on one count possession of less than an ounce of marijuana, and one count of Violation of Alcoholic Beverage Statute, the indictments show.

As previously reported, Gowder and Heaton's North Carolina criminal cases came up in June 26 administrative sessions at the Cherokee County Courthouse in Murphy, resulting in both receiving Dec. 11 continuance dates for future administrative sessions.

Heaton and Gowder were arrested in North Carolina on Wednesday, March 2, 2016, following indictment by a Cherokee County, North Carolina grand jury, both for five counts of trafficking in opiate medications, and five counts of obtaining a controlled substance by forgery, according to Cherokee County, North Carolina Sheriff Derrick Palmer at that time.

Previously, Gowder and Dr. Heaton received 2016 continuances in their North Carolina cases from March 28 to April 4, then from April 4 to July 11, and from July 11 to Nov. 7.

On Nov. 7, Gowder received a continuance to Feb. 27, 2017, while Heaton got a Jan. 3, 2017, court date to appear in front of a North Carolina Superior Court

Judge.

The result of that Jan. 3 appearance was a continuance for Heaton to a Feb. 27 administrative session, the same day as Gowder, and the two appeared again for administration sessions on June 26, resulting in their Dec. 11 continuance dates.

Dr. David Gowder, Mike's brother, was also arrested Feb. 4, 2016, in Union County on 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance and seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances. Three other Gowder family members were arrested that Feb. 4 in connection with the incidents in question.

David Gowder, Gail Gowder, Virginia Lou Harkins and Jamie Harkins were indicted in Union County during the April session of the Union County Grand Jury.

Chief...from Page 1A

take on this role, and I think that's a good spot for a police chief to be.

"I have to remember that I'm here to serve the people, and that's going to be my goal as chief."

Hiawassee Mayor Pro Tem Liz Ordiales recited Smith's rather lengthy qualifications prior to his swearing in that Tuesday, and she said she had no doubt that he was the best man for the job.

Chief Smith has been with the Hiawassee Police Department for seven years now, serving most recently as acting police chief since March, when former Police Chief Arvel Walls fell ill before retiring in May.

As previously reported, Smith graduated Towns County High School in 2003 and went on to study criminal justice at Kennesaw State University.

He joined the Cobb County Police Department in 2006, finishing top of his class at the police academy there.

Smith stayed with Cobb County for three years before moving back to Towns County in 2009 to be closer to home, since he was looking to start a family.

It was in 2009 that Smith worked as a deputy sheriff at the Towns County Sheriff's

Office, though late Hiawassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright hired Smith in 2010 to come work for the police department, where he's been ever since.

The young chief moved up several times in rank over the last seven years, first under Chief Wright, who promoted him from officer to corporal to sergeant, and then under Chief Walls, who promoted him to lieutenant, before former Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis named him acting chief in March.

And now, he's police chief, and he's excited to take on the job.

"I'm actually a bit relieved," said Chief Smith. "Being acting chief for the last few months, every time I talk to family or my church family, they're like, 'Are you the chief yet? Is it official yet?'"

"I'm like, 'No, not yet. Just hold on, we're just waiting.' I've gotten great support from my family and the officers in the department."

Chief Smith's wife and son were present for the ceremony, as well as his mom, brother, and other friends of the family.

Former Hiawassee Councilmember Stephen Smith, Paul's dad, could not be present for the meeting because he was traveling to

Uganda as part of his nonprofit called To The Nations.

Since taking a more active administrative role in the department following the untimely death of Chief Wright in 2015, Chief Smith has developed a reputation as being tough on drug crime in the city.

Through July of this year, his department has already exceeded all felony drug arrests from 2016 by six – that's 39 this year so far, with five months remaining in 2017, as opposed to 33 total felony drug arrests in 2016.

"Our focus will continue to be drug interdiction and community safety," said Chief Smith. "We're going to just keep up what we're doing."

Chief Smith helped to install the city's new speed reading sign, and since its installation in late May, more than 400,000 cars have passed its sensors. The average speed for traffic heading into town has been 26 miles per hour.

Some 39,000 cars passed by during the 2017 Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruise-In, and 155,000 cars passed through town in the nine days of the 2017 Georgia Mountain Fair.

The Hiawassee Police Department is made up of Chief Smith, Sgt. Tracy James, and officers Jordan Guffey, Brandon Barrett and part-timer Tony Verdone.



Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley, right, after swearing in Chief Smith in the August Hiawassee City Council meeting. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Berrong...from Page 1A

the time being.

Ordiales is running for mayor in November, and because Georgia has a resign-to-run law for switching between elective offices, she needed to resign her council seat before qualifying later this month.

She made clear in the Aug. 1 regular meeting that she would resign from Hiawassee City Council on Friday, Aug. 4, which is why Berrong was selected to replace her as mayor pro tem.

If she had waited until qualifying to resign her council seat instead of resigning on Aug. 4, the city would not have had time to get the post on the November ballot.

In turn, this would have required that a special election be held in March 2018.



L-R: Hiawassee City Council Member Anne Mitchell, Mayor Pro Tem Kris Berrong and Council Member Rayette Ross. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

To avoid the added expense of a separate special called election – upwards of \$9,000 to the city – Ordiales decided to leave the council early enough for the seat to be placed on the ballot for the upcoming municipal election on Nov. 7.

Because of her decision to depart the council, eligible Hiawassee residents will be able to qualify to fill the remaining two years of her council term during the regular qualifying period.

Qualifying for the Nov. 7 General/Special Election will run from Tuesday, Aug. 22, through Thursday, Aug. 24, each day from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Hiawassee City Hall.

Along with the office of mayor, a total of three council seats will be up for election on Tuesday, Nov. 7 – the seats currently held by Councilmembers Jay Chastain and Rayette Ross, and the partial term of former councilmember Liz Ordiales' seat.

The qualifying fee for the office of mayor will be \$1,278.23, while qualifying for each council post will be \$72, ahead of the November elections that will take place at Hiawassee City Hall.

Ordiales became mayor pro tem in May 2016, and took over control of the city when longtime Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis retired in April 2017 before the end of her term.

Should Ordiales be the only one to qualify as mayor, she could be sworn in as early as September, though the appearance of any other mayoral candidates would require the office to await the winner of the November

contest.

The current makeup of the Hiawassee City Council is: Anne Mitchell, Rayette Ross and Jay Chastain, with Kris Berrong as mayor pro tem.

Also in the meeting, the council approved second readings of the following: the city's 2017-2018 operating budget, approximately \$4.1 million; the grease trap ordinance; the new drug testing policy; and changes to the alcohol ordinance.

Council members also approved the first reading of the Planning-Expansion Ordinance, and residents should be aware that the 90-day building permit moratorium was lifted on Wednesday, Aug. 2.

The council also approved the purchase of a Kubota excavation track hoe from Nelson Tractor Co. to be used by the city water

department, totaling \$58,455, which was the lowest bid.

Ordiales gave an update in the Aug. 1 meeting on the city's expectations for the upcoming Great American Eclipse on Monday, Aug. 21.

"Of course, planning for the unknown, who knows, but there's a good opportunity that we'll have 30,000 people here that weekend or that day, so we've got to get our little ducks in a row and make sure that we're covered," said Ordiales.

"If you can stay home, I suggest you stay home," continued Ordiales. "Make sure you have plenty of food and gasoline in your car, because we don't know what's going to happen."

Stay tuned for an announcement from Hiawassee City Hall on whether it will be open on Monday, Aug. 21.