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State Sens. Gooch, Wilkinson talk Georgia politics in local GOP meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch of the Georgia General Assembly served as the featured speaker in the monthly meeting of the Towns County GOP on Thursday, Aug. 15. Gooch, of Dahlonega, represents a number of North Georgia counties, including Union, and he enjoys a close working relationship with District 50 State Sen. John Wilkinson, who represents Towns County and who also spoke in the meeting last Thursday.

Addressing a standing room-only crowd at Daniel's Steakhouse in Hiwassee that evening, Gooch talked about changes at the capital this

year before touching on his concerns about the future of state politics.

"The governor's office had a total changeover, almost every employee," Gooch said. "In fact, every person in the capital that worked for (Gov. Nathan Deal) left, and a new crew came in."

"Of course, Gov. (Brian) Kemp was sworn in on the second Monday of January, and then, we had a new lieutenant governor that was also sworn in that same day."

"So, we've all had to sort of get to know each other, just like your first day of school - you've got to go in and figure out who your classmates are and who your teachers are."

And when it came to the first legislative session in the

two-year 2019-2020 regular session cycle, Gooch said it was a good year for Georgia politics.

"We didn't pass as many bills this year as we have in the past, and that's a good thing, in my opinion. I think less is better," Gooch said. "We were very careful on a lot of the legislation that we passed, and some of it we didn't pass will carry over to next year."

Gooch said the General Assembly passed "good, conservative legislation" earlier this year, and he credited Gov. Kemp for his leadership during and after the 2018 election.

"Gov. Kemp, led on a lot of those key issues," Gooch said. "He talked about them in his campaign last year, and he

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L-R: State Sen. John Wilkinson, student Samantha Church, State Sen. Steve Gooch, Crissy Figg of Towns 4-H, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and student Gabriel Moody.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Schools welcome students back; BOE votes to advertise rollback millage rate

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Summer break officially ended for students last week, as classes started back on Thursday, Aug. 15.

The 40-year-old middle/high school building occurred mostly in out-of-sight areas, such as the complete roof replacement and HVAC overhaul with all new ductwork and units.

Unlike last year's projects, however, the second year of renovations completed this summer offered students and teachers plenty of highly visible upgrades when they returned to school last week, including new flooring, ceilings, a revamped media center and more.

"The students and staff love the renovations, and it has brought a renewed excitement and positive atmosphere to our schools," said Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong at the end of last week. "We have had a fantastic first two days of school."

"Student drop-off in the mornings has gone smoothly. The afternoon student pick-up is always slower than usual the first two days, but we expect that to speed up next week."

"I honestly couldn't ask



Towns County students were excited to return for the first day of the 2019-2020 school year on Thursday, Aug. 15.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

for a better start to the school year."

Also last week, the Towns County Board of Education held its regular monthly meeting inside the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium on Monday, Aug. 12, just days before the start of the 2019-2020 school year.

The week prior, in the board's Aug. 5 work session, Berrong recommended that the schools use the rollback millage rate of 7.477 to assess the school system's portion of property taxes in 2019.

The 2018 millage rate was 7.671, which was calculated to

generate \$5,793,266 in total tax revenues at 100% collections, and the rollback rate of 7.477 will collect \$32,693 more than last year due to growth in the tax digest.

"The board and I are confident that we can operate the system this year with an increase in the millage rate, and hopefully, for several years to come," Berrong said.

School board members signaled their approval of Berrong's recommendation to accept the rollback rate by voting to advertise the rate with

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Family, friends of Marsha Elliott meet for memorial garden dedication

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Saturday, Aug. 10, the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge hosted a special dedication for Marsha Elliott, a founding board member of the nonprofit who passed away nearly a year ago on Sept. 7, 2018.

Elliott's family and friends gathered there that Saturday to dedicate "Marsha's Garden" in her honor and to remember the hard work that she put in to helping Hamilton Gardens and other organizations in the community.

She was a tremendous volunteer in life, having taken part in more than a dozen different projects and organizations over the years, according to her husband Robert Elliott.

"I'd have to get a list of all the things that she was involved in," Robert Elliott said that day. "She was a Master Gardener - that's an organization for the state. You have to do so much work to get into it."

"She got involved with the experiment farm doing tours and that kind of thing. She was involved in the church, the Enotah Garden Club, and the Retired Teachers here and in Cobb County. She really wanted to give back to the community, and she was really passionate about what she did."

"It's great to have all this community support and people here to honor Marsha."

The new Marsha Elliott Garden is located at the entrance of the Hamilton Gardens near the Paris Pavilion, and during the dedication event, several people who knew Elliott offered words of kindness to express their gratitude for her.

"Just looking around and seeing everyone here, we are just overwhelmed," said Marla Sellers, Elliott's sister-in-law. "This is beautiful, and if you knew Marsha, you know she loved gardening."

"There's probably a trail of daylilies that go from Albany all the way up here. We just thank everyone for being here."

It's Marsha, and like I said, we are overwhelmed with all this beauty here, and I hope people will be here to remember her."

Frank Riley of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council talked about the contributions Elliott made heading up the local Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition.

"Marsha was a tireless leader of anything she got involved with, and I don't know how she did it," Riley said. "It's an honor to be here today."

"She's taken our Firewise program to national heights and shifted it on to the next leaders. It is known nationally, and I can talk to people in Colorado and Oregon about Marsha and they would know who I'm talking about."

Pastor David Tinsley, former of Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church, said that Elliott was "an energy field."

"She was a force of nature," Tinsley said. "When Robert and Marsha retired and moved up here to the mountains, Marsha was an educator, and she put that word behind her. They built that beautiful house, and then she went to work."

"Robert has estimated that she was a part of more than a dozen community organizations and charities in the area, lending that energy,



Marsha Elliott

love and passion to all of them, and this community has changed because of her."

Elliott was also instrumental in the progress of Hamilton Gardens and helped get the Gardens to where they are today.

"Marsha actually started up here way before we had this entity (Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge), and she and I were Master Gardeners together," said her friend Grace Howard. "She was one of our original band of five who thought we needed to see about doing something different here at the gardens."

Added Howard, "She worked over here tirelessly as a volunteer and on our new board when we finally got off the ground, and she was a force

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Marsha's Garden at Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge, located inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Roadside domestic incident results in drug arrest by TCSO

New Special
Towns County Herald

On Tuesday, Aug. 13, an officer with the Hiwassee Police Department reached out to the Towns County Sheriff's Office about a possible domestic incident on the shoulder of Georgia 75 South.

The officer had observed a vehicle pulled over on the shoulder of the roadway with a male and female appearing to be involved in a domestic incident.

Deputies responded to meet with the city officer. Upon their arrival, the female subject appeared and acted as if she was under the influence of some type of drug.

Further investigation revealed the female to be Anna Damewood, 20, of Gainesville, and she was arrested and charged with possession of methamphetamine and possession of drug-related objects.



Anna Damewood



Anthony Stephenson

The male subject was identified as Anthony Stephenson, 37, of Dacula, and he was arrested and charged with giving a false name to an officer and obstruction of a law enforcement officer.

It was also discovered that Stephenson was wanted on warrants out of two other counties, including Gwinnett County on a probation violation

warrant and Cobb County on a bench warrant for failure to appear on a possession of a controlled substance charge.

The Towns County charges will be forwarded to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution. All suspects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Hiwassee, Young Harris hold city council qualifying this week

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Both Hiwassee and Young Harris will hold elections on Nov. 5 to fill council posts, and qualifying for each city's upcoming elections takes place this week.

In Hiwassee, council member posts 3, 4 and 5 are up for election for terms starting in 2020, with a qualifying fee of \$45 for each post.

Hiwassee city residents can pick up qualifying packets at Hiwassee City Hall, which must be turned in during the Hiwassee qualifying period of Wednesday, Aug. 21, through Friday, Aug. 23, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day.

Over in Young Harris, council member posts 1, 2 and 3 are up for election for terms starting in 2020, with a qualifying fee of \$36 for each post.

Young Harris city residents can pick up qualifying packets at Young Harris City Hall, which must be turned in between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. each day of the Young Harris qualifying period.

The Young Harris qualifying period started on Monday, Aug. 19, and will run through Wednesday, Aug. 21.

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Chatuge 1,923.48
Nottely 1,772.34

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SPORTS FOOTBALL
Aug 23 vs. Hayesville 7:30 pm

SOFTBALL
Aug 20 vs. Commerce 4:30 pm

The Homegrown Benefit Concert
September 13

Steven Phillips • Roy Perren
The Andrew Chastain Band

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We Are Towns County Schools

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TCHS Fishing Team Says THANK YOU!

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