



Towns County Herald

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School Board makes hires, hears from principals

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In their August monthly meeting, Towns County School Board members focused heavily on last minute hires for the start of the new school year.

Possibly the most critical hire was that of Jeff Stowers, who retired in May as a social studies teacher at the High School after 22 years with the system. He will be a substitute bus driver, the middle school head coach for football and wrestling, and the assistant high school community wrestling coach.

Other hires included a part-time math teacher, an

assistant pre-K teacher, two special education paraprofessionals, a school nutrition food assistant, and a new custodian. It takes many professionals to run a school district.

All employee recommendations were approved unanimously in the Aug. 5 meeting.

New Elementary School Principal Dr. Crystal Beach reported on the state of the school for the 2024-25 year.

"It was a phenomenal day back on campus with all of our folks, lots of smiles and lots of energy, and it was just great to see everybody all at once for my first time this year," Beach said of staff returning. "I wanted to thank the

Vertical Church – they brought in a great breakfast.

"Our custodial and maintenance departments have been phenomenal, working hard to get our building ready. We've had some movement downstairs, and they've made sure everyone has everything they need. I'm very grateful for them.

"One of the important things for me was to establish a leadership team that included folks from all across our campus so that all voices are represented, and they've been really instrumental in providing feedback to me working with colleagues to set our focus for the year.

"So, this was created by

all of the stakeholders at the elementary school. It will be connections, communication and consistency, so everything we do will come back to that.

"As you all know, the new literacy laws are now in effect, so we are actively working on our curricular training. There are lots of questions coming up, but as I told them, we have the resources and support to sit down so that everybody feels comfortable moving forward.

"I know test scores have come in and I'm super proud to see the tremendous work that folks did last year. We had three First Place finishes in Pioneer RESA. Scores across the

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In the August School Board meeting, new TCES Principal Dr. Crystal Beach was happy to report that the first day back for teachers went very well Aug. 5. Photo by Shelly Knight

Valley Trail Apartments headline hearing, meeting



Young Harris City Councilman John Kelley, Main Street Director Rosemary Royston and Economic Development Director Denise McKay in the August regular city meeting.

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Young Harris City Council meeting was preceded this month by a public hearing to handle the legalities of the property slated to become the site of the upcoming Valley Trail Apartments.

Specifically, this meant annexing the territory into city limits and zoning it along with rezoning the strip already located within city limits as a

residential space. Lowcountry Housing developers Ben Elbe and Rob Haley attended the Aug. 6 hearing, reminding the sizable audience of the basic statistics of the apartments. In total, the property measures 33 acres, with 10 acres subdivided for the apartments adjacent to the Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation.

Elbe and Haley intend for the complex to hold eight one-bedroom units, 24 two-

bedroom units and 12 three-bedroom units, but the total of 44 slightly overshoots the current R1 Zoning density limit of 43 units. Along with that, the developers requested a parking variance to allow for 77 parking spaces.

Three members of the community signed up for public comment, starting with a woman who shared her concerns that the property she purchased to enjoy a closer prox-

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73rd Annual Georgia Mountain Fair concludes

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The 73rd Annual Georgia Mountain Fair ended on Aug. 24, though it marked the beginning of at least one change to the usual experience. According to Fairgrounds Manager Hilda Thomason, the new schedule – having the main Fair just on weekends – worked out great.

"It's gone really, really well," Thomason said, though she admits that the rain hurt the carnival during its first weekend in town. That said, things certainly picked back up before the finale.

"People are seeming to really like it as well, and they understand that through the week it's slower," Thomason said of the 2024 schedule adjustment. "It gives the crafters

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The super talented Disc-Connected K9s performed multiple shows at the Georgia Mountain Fair this year.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

McCampbell of CASA named 'Volunteer of Year'

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Congratulations to Enotah CASA Volunteer Pamela McCampbell, who has been named the Georgia Court Appointed Special Advocate of 2024.

Established in 1999, Enotah CASA serves children and families navigating the legal system in Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin counties.

CASA is a nationwide effort that began in 1977, however, when Seattle Superior Court Judge David Soukup became concerned about ruling on child abuse and neglect cases without having enough information to make just decisions.

Soukup called for community volunteers to help by becoming involved in the lives of the children in foster care, and some 50 people responded.

Today, there are over 59,000 CASAs around the country, including the new

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Georgia CASA of the Year Pam McCampbell, front, with her CASA leadership family.

TCSO makes drug arrest after citizen complaint

News Special

YOUNG HARRIS – Towns County Drug Investigators recently received citizen complaints about a residence on Chicken Pit Road.

During the investigation, probable cause was developed to initiate a search of the residence, which resulted in the confiscation of an amount of methamphetamine that field-tested positive, along with marijuana.

Lenord James Fields, 50, of Young Harris, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, possession of marijuana, and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the citizen reporting the drug activity, noting that law enforcement and the community working together can make a difference.



Lenord James Fields

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United Community

New Mural on Garden Club/Photography Exhibit Building just in time to make the August Fair



Photography Exhibit/Garden Club at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds



Barbara Keyes

Members of the Regional Arts and Crafts Guild recently volunteered their time and talent to the exterior painting of the Garden Club and Photography building at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

This mural was a won-

derful collaboration of some of our best local artists. The barn quilt on the gable was painted by Margaret Windham. Pam Coste's sunflowers and butterflies frame the entrance. Hydrangea blooms, painted by Barbara Schiend, gracefully accent the landscaped bed of

hydrangea. And lastly, Barbara Keyes encompassed the service window with a wandering vine of impatiens and bumble bees.

Additional smaller works of art and crafts can be seen at ArtWorks Artisan Gallery on Big Sky Drive, in Hiawasse.

CASA Award...from Page 1

statewide CASA Volunteer of the Year Pam McCampbell.

The role of a CASA is to be the voice of a child in court. A CASA serves at the behest of the judge and is assigned to cases involving children in foster care. The CASA meets with the family, the child, social services, teachers, counselors, doctors, extended family members and even the judge, to help determine what is truly in the best interest of the child.

Children are placed in foster care for numerous reasons surrounding home life – drug abuse, neglect, physical abuse, safety concerns, and so on. Sometimes, a tragedy such as a car accident leaves a child with no parent or guardian at all.

In most cases, the best outcome for the child is to be reunited with his or her parent. Social services and CASA work with parents and families to prepare them for reunification.

Parents are offered counseling services, rehabilitation and parental education services, and are given all the tools they need to be successful. When reunification is not possible, these organizations work diligently to ensure children are given a safe and nurturing permanent placement.

The criteria for a CASA to be named Advocate of the Year typically includes several key factors: dedication and commitment, a significant positive impact on the lives of the children they serve, professionalism and integrity, continuing education and collaboration.

These criteria help ensure that the CASA of the Year is someone who has gone above and beyond in their role

to make a meaningful difference in the lives of children.

McCampbell meets all of the criteria and then some. She has been a CASA for nearly a decade and has helped over 23 children and their families.

"It's a great opportunity to work with families and help them straighten out their problems," McCampbell said. "When I take a new case, I meet the parent, and I tell them I make recommendations to the judge about what the best place for the child to be is.

"In most cases it's best for the children to go back to their parents. As long as the parents work their case plan, I will help the parents as much as possible.

"When a child is placed in foster care, social services develops a case plan for the parents. It outlines the things they need to do to get their children back, such as providing a safe living environment, getting safe transportation, maintaining a job for a certain amount of time and so on.

"I help parents work on that case plan, providing recommendations about counseling or parenting classes, or resources for drug abuse and rehabilitation, and giving them the direction they need to go and where to help them get there. But my priority is always the child.

"The most cases I've ever had at a time is six. I have three right now, but they are all spread out. I work mostly in White County, but that encompasses a large area. The time commitment varies, but it usually takes about 10 hours a month.

"I don't necessarily visit the parents each time, but I visit the children each week.

Unfortunately, we don't have enough foster parents. We really need more to help the children.

"I've been doing this for eight years. My sons were in college, my husband was still working, and I needed something to do. I was doing other volunteer work, and it filled my time but didn't fill my heart.

"I don't have any background in childcare or anything, but I had a really close family growing up. The one thing I always realized was that I had unconditional love, and through the years I've met people who I realized didn't have that and it was very unfortunate.

"I think every child needs that, unconditional love – to know that there's somebody who cares about them even when they do something wrong. And that's what I like to do for the kids I work with. I think our children are God's greatest blessing and we need to protect them."

McCampbell received recognition for her achievement at the annual Georgia CASA Conference held on Saturday, Aug. 24, in Atlanta. The group assembly included over 500 people dedicated to speaking for the best interest of children in foster care.

Advocate Supervisor Katie Dunlap, who submitted McCampbell's nomination for consideration, described her as exhibiting "high standards in every facet of her advocacy," noting that she "consistently pours everything she can into improving the lives of each child and family she serves."

There are over 11,000 children in foster care in the state of Georgia. For information on how to help, visit <https://enotahcasa.org>.

Check the weather in the solar system at the O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium at Young Harris College

It seems weather is a topic of conversation whether you're on Earth or Jupiter. Stop by the O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium at Young Harris College in August for the Wildest Weather in the Solar System show.

"Crazy weather is not something limited to our planet," said Lauren Albain, Planetarium director. "From magnetic storms to liquid methane, there are weather patterns on planets throughout our solar system."

Wildest Weather in the Solar System, 8 p.m., Friday, Aug. 30.

You'll fly through the thick atmosphere of Venus, magnetic storms on the sun, liquid methane showers on Titan and a 400-year-old hurricane whirling at hundreds of miles per hour on Jupiter. After seeing a storm with the power of a 100-megaton hydrogen bomb and a dust storm that can engulf an entire planet, you'll be glad you live on Earth.



O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium features shows for the general public on select Friday evenings. Tickets for shows can be purchased at the door with cash or check. Observatory open houses do not require tickets.

Planetarium tickets can also be purchased online via Eventbrite at: <https://www.yhc.edu/academics/math-science/rollins-planetarium/public-shows>

Purchasing tickets online in advance is recommended since planetarium shows often sell out. For planetarium

shows, guests are encouraged to arrive early for the best seats.

Public planetarium shows, with the exception of Cosmic Concerts, include a live-narrated "season stargazing" segment in addition to the featured full-dome program.

Planetarium Admission: \$5 Adults per show; \$3 Children per show; Free for Children under 4 years of age; Free with YHC ID.

Any remaining tickets will be available for purchase at the door 30 minutes before showtime.

Tri County British Car Club meeting

On Sunday, August 25th, 37 members of the Tri County British Car Club, attended their monthly luncheon at the Sundance Grille, in Hiawasse.

The weather was perfect, and so everyone drove their British cars to the meeting. Three events were announced for September and October, including a luncheon at the Hamilton Gardens, at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, and a ride to Benton, Tennessee, for a club picnic.

The TCBC was organized 11 years ago, for the purpose of bringing together people in Northeast Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. People who own or have a strong interest in classic British automobiles.

Anyone interested in joining the club, that has no dues, can contact them by email. tricitybritishcarclub@yahoo.com

The McLaughlin's Celebrate Wedding Anniversary



To My Sweet David,

On our paper anniversary, where better to declare my love than in the very paper we read each week? As we flip through the pages of our lives together, I look forward to filling the chapters yet to come. Happy Anniversary!

Love, Tu esposa, Fernanda

Georgia Mountain Fair ...from Page 1

a break, too; nine straight days is hard.”

In years past, all aspects of the Fair were available for nine consecutive days. For 2024, only the rides were open every day, and during the week, special deals on rides were available.

Vendors, some forms of live entertainment, demonstrations and reenactments, and places like the Exhibit Hall, Pioneer Village and other “extras” were only available on the weekend.

That meant that when guests could enjoy them, they were popular. The Exhibit Hall, for example, received a few changes for the season.

One display, set up to resemble the typical back porch of an early 20th century cabin, showed how laundry was kept tidy with the help of a Maytag washer dating back to the 1930s. Outside, a machine made to help churn butter sat beside a running water pump engine.

Jeff King dressed the part of the traditional storekeeper from the early 1900s, adding a level of immersion for the folks who took a stroll through a museum of farm tools.

In those days, the farmer had to order from catalogs or handcraft what he and his

family needed to survive, and thanks to the isolated nature of mountain addresses and the difficult terrain that surrounded them, the more practical option was to make do with what was already on hand.

Items like old wagons, chicken pens, bee houses and primitive threshers were just a portion of the preserved history on display that served to honor the hard work that went into simply surviving in small Appalachian settler communities.

Many of the artifacts in the Exhibit Hall have been donated, typically by a descendant of the family or someone old enough to remember a different era of farming.

Across from the Exhibit Hall stood the annual Photography Exhibit, taking up the space used by the Flower Show in the previous week. Photographers of all skill levels were encouraged to enter, and the competition ended up drawing entries from across the Southeast.

Likewise, the hundreds of photos covered a variety of subjects, from flora and fauna to people and landscapes. From Morocco and Greece to Atlanta and Blairsville, guests perused thought-provoking pieces originating from across the globe.

Photography Contest Organizer Janet Cosby theorizes that a lot of the new contestants found out about the event either through online searches or, despite previous doubts about its reach, social media. Of course, there were also veterans who had participated or even won in past years, so word of mouth was also an option.

2024’s First Place Photography Contest Winner was Skip Lowry, a seasoned photographer with more than a dozen years of experience. With an eye for artistic shots, his work has notably been featured on the cover of Georgia Backwoods Magazine.

The piece that earned him the Best in Show ribbon depicts a still, foggy scene punctuated by the ghostly silhouettes of horses in Ocala, Florida.

Even though last week marked the end of this year’s season of the Georgia Mountain Fair, the Fairgrounds themselves will be far from quiet. The Hiawassee Pro Rodeo is set to start at 6 p.m. on Aug. 31 and run over Labor Day Weekend.

The ball field will serve as the grounds to see bucking broncos and bulls bested by world class champions hailing from across the United States



Live music plays an integral role in the Georgia Mountain Fair each year, connected to the porch-pickin’ roots of the area. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

and Canada. Admission is \$20 per person, but children 5 and under get in for free.

Country music legend Emmylou Harris will be performing at the Anderson Music Hall on Sept. 14 at 7 p.m., providing a first for Hiawassee, as she’s never played at the Fairgrounds before.

Shortly after that, Dailey and Vincent’s American Made Music Festival will start on Sept. 19 at 2 p.m. and run until Sept. 21 at 9 p.m.

For more information on these and other upcoming events, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/>.



Jeff King and Jerry Taylor both entertained and informed guests of the Exhibit Hall at this year’s Georgia Mountain Fair. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Young Harris Council...from Page 1

ximity with nature would soon be surrounded by concrete and noise.

An Asheland Cove resident asked how rent would work for Valley Trail tenants, questioning how residential property with ownership based on income would not qualify as low-rent housing, which would bring the potential for increased noise, crime, etc.

And for his part, former General Manager of Brasstown Valley Resort Charles Burton expressed concerns about safety on the basis of the height variance developers have sought for the buildings.

Not only that, but Burton shared that he, too, was worried about the potential for increased crime connected to low-rent housing. And he expressed that while workforce housing would be great, he was concerned about environmental impacts at Brasstown Valley due to the proximity of the proposed development.

Haley and Elbe responded by explaining the tax credit

system. Developers receive these credits from state and federal governments, which limit the amount of rent that can be charged, as calculated by tenant income. Renters do not receive checks from the government as with housing projects, meaning that they must work like the rest of the community in order to pay for rent and utilities.

As an additional security measure, all tenants receive criminal background checks, and Lowcountry will hire a full-time property manager and a maintenance position. The surroundings will be kept in check by once-weekly landscaping.

Mayor Andrea Gibby reassured the community that Lowcountry Housing has been vetted by the city for more than two years, and the property between the EMC and Brasstown Valley – where the apartments will be located – was specifically chosen by the Georgia Initiative for Community Housing.

In the subsequent regular meeting that evening, the council voted in favor of the zoning ordinance for the Valley Trail Apartments, which also approved two parking spaces per unit and the acceptance of a Special Use Permit for developers.

The ordinance did not include a height variance, so Lowcountry Housing must return to the Planning Commission in order to move on to the next phase of development.

Later, Towns County Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson briefly addressed the meeting to propose adding the city tax bills to county tax bills in order to reduce mailing and printing costs.

The county would collect 2.5% of collections if they oversaw them for the City of Young Harris, and total payments would be received by the middle of each month. No definitive action was taken for the offer, but Gibby reassured Anderson that they would “keep in touch.”

Later, Councilman Steve Clark revealed the results of a recent sewer capacity study. The lift station located behind North Mt. Zion Church of God is operating at 62% capacity due to a damaged pump, and some options for how to move forward were presented to the council.

“We have to be mindful of the vacant tracks that are left in this basin, that there is a tipping point in there,” stated Clark, warning that the city must be mindful of density in the area for development purposes, as a new pump would mean an expense of \$150,000 to \$250,000.

It’s important to note that, along with the church, the pump currently serves Enrico’s Italian Restaurant, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, Brasstown Valley Resort and the Garden Apartments. In the future, it will also handle the Valley Trail Apartments.

“We don’t have to make any changes until the next (development) occurs, but we need to be mindful as we’re talking about development ... that we’ve got things that have to happen to make those work,” Clark added, with Gibby saying that an engineering firm would handle repairs to the pump in question.



Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson made a presentation on tax bills in the Young Harris City Council meeting this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

School Board...from Page 1

board were very promising.

“And I did remind them this is a norming year for math, so comparing this year’s math scores with last year’s scores will look different.

“Looking ahead, we will have new literacy standards which are coming right around the corner. Super excited to be here.”

As of the meeting, enrollment at the Elementary School was 444, and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said that number put the district up about 30 kids from last year.

Middle School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs spoke next, starting off by reiterating gratitude for custodial staff “for everything they’ve done over the summer to get us ready” for the first day back for students, which was Aug. 9.

“Teachers reported back this morning (Aug. 5) with their arms full of supplies and smiles on their faces,” Hobbs said. “I just want to say again I am very blessed to work with such a great group of people.”

“Meeting with teachers

this morning, we celebrated our Teacher of the Year, Mr. Shea Taylor, and we will continue to embarrass him all year long. The middle school football team is up and running, softball and cheerleading started practicing and cross country followed.

“We will do our first round of (Measures of Academic Progress) testing next week and go straight into our first fire drill. The Milestone test scores are in except for math, and the middle captured six First Place scores.

“Middle school enrollment ended last year at 205, and the last time I checked we are at 212 this year.”

High School Principal Bryan Thomason rounded out the evening, and he seconded many of the comments about great staff members and community support.

“I was tickled by our test scores,” Thomason said. “American Literature captured First Place in RESA scores. We really celebrated our scores this morning and repeated the fact

that the expectations of the entire school made that success happen. I am very proud of our teachers.

“As we focus on rigor this year, we’re going to emphasize the importance of student engagement. We also welcomed five new staff members this morning. Teachers worked in their departments planning for the upcoming year.

“Football got started with Copper Basin last Friday night and they got a win over there. Softball is playing as we speak. Cheerleading has started, cross country has started, and the band put on a preview show last Thursday night. I will say kudos to that bunch. Mr. Skinner has done a fabulous job with that group.

“We will hold a clubs interest day at the end of the month to give students a glimpse of all that we have to offer. Our enrollment is currently 288, and we’re ready to start the year.”

The Towns County School Board meets the first Monday of each month starting at 6 p.m. in the High School Media Center, and the public is encouraged to attend.

Towns Co. High School’s CTSO Float took First Place in Georgia Mountain Fair Parade



Towns County High School CTSO Float in the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade

The Georgia Mountain Fair Parade is a beloved local tradition, and Towns County High School is always proud to support the event. What made the day even better, besides the somewhat cooler weather and the camaraderie of the other parade participants, was the first-place ribbon won by Towns County High School’s Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs).

“CTSO” is an umbrella term for a host of student organizations better known at TCHS as FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America), FFA (Future Farmers of America), HOSA (HOSA - Future Health Professionals), and FGE (Future Georgia Educators, a PAGE-sponsored student organization).

Students and sponsors from these organizations banded together to design and decorate the camping scene



Sabrina Garrett smiling proud with the First-Place Blue Ribbon presented on the float, with the highlight of not one but two mini-Airstreams! Involvement in the parade created an opportunity for teamwork, leadership, and community outreach – all key components in helping students make a positive difference while developing their innate potential.