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Teachers of Year honored in inaugural banquet

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Each year, the Towns County School District honors an exceptional teacher at each school with the title of Teacher of the Year.

Teachers are nominated by the colleagues they work with day in and day out. Certainly, the academic performance of their students is a consideration, but importantly, qualities such as patience, compassion and teamwork are also a part of the equation for selection.

On Tuesday, Aug. 27, the district, School Board members and people of the community celebrated the outstanding educators chosen this year: Susan Poston of the Elementary School, Shea Taylor of the Middle School, and Tim

Skinner of the High School.

A banquet sponsored by Peach State Federal Credit Union was held in honor of the 2024 Teachers of the Year at Brother's Restaurant in Young Harris.

"We started Peach State as a teachers' credit union, and we highly value what teachers do every day," said Scott Roland of Peach State. "We serve school districts around the state, and we were very excited when Human Resources Director Ms. Stephanie Moss approached us with the opportunity to celebrate these educators."

For her part, Moss said the banquet – in its first year as a vehicle to congratulate Teachers of the Year – was inspired by what she has seen her counterparts do in other districts, "and I wanted Towns County to emulate that."

"But we couldn't do this without our sponsor," Moss said, expressing gratitude for Peach State. "We're very excited to be here."

Elementary School Principal Dr. Crystal Beach introduced Poston and congratulated her on her patience, which she said is a requirement for a kindergarten teacher.

Middle School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs introduced Taylor and praised the student engagement she sees in his science classroom every day.

And High School Principal Bryan Thomason introduced Skinner's incredible musical talent as band director to those in attendance.

When asked about the criteria for selecting a Teacher of the Year, Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said the process "wasn't based on popularity or friendships" but on

feedback from an independent committee of educators who work outside the district.

"Each teacher was observed for 30 minutes and then was interviewed for 30 minutes," Berrong said. "The committee had a difficult time selecting the winners and immediately afterward told me what a great bunch of educators I had."

"Then they had the further dilemma of choosing the district winner, who will then go on to compete with 240 other teachers of the year for the ultimate honor of being named the Georgia Teacher of the Year. They chose Mr. Tim Skinner."

District Teacher of the Year Skinner has been teaching for over 50 years and playing violin at least that long. He and his wife, who is also



TCHS Band Director Tim Skinner, left, was surprised to learn in the Aug. 27 banquet that he had been named District Teacher of the Year, pictured here with Principal Bryan Thomason. Photo by Shelly Knight

Annual Patriot Day event planned for September 11th

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In recognition of Patriot Day and the 2,977 people murdered and lost in the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Towns County will host its memorable annual ceremony honoring the victims and heroes of that hideous day in American history 23 years ago.

The remembrance ceremony will begin at 9:45 a.m. on the Hiwassee Town Square Sept. 11, starting with the Appalachian St. Andrew's Pipes and Drums, and the North Georgia Honor Guard will present the Colors.

Local singer and patriot Becky Jake will perform the National Anthem, and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw will lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dr. Wade Lott of the Macedonia Baptist Church will offer the invocation, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby will make opening remarks, and Veterans of For-



Smoke rises from the site of the World Trade Center in New York City, September 11, 2001. Photo by Paul Morse; National Archives Catalog ID 5997250

eign Wars Post 7807 Chaplain Dwight Moss will be the featured guest speaker.

Fire Chief Harold Copeland will follow the tradition of

the New York City firefighters' salute to fallen comrades. Service member banners will be retired, and new banners will

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Property values, Food Pantry & more highlight meeting

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The regular meeting of Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw featured multiple guest speakers in August, to include discussions of ongoing commercial property reassessments, financial struggles at the Towns County Food Pantry and more.

First, Frank Riley, Executive Director of the Chatahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council, shared information on the local Community Wildfire Protection Plan, which helps the county receive grants based on local wildfire preparedness initiatives.

According to Riley, 90% of Georgia's fires are started by "careless people," and while there's no way of accounting for the behavior of others, there are ways of mitigating the damage.

Luckily, the Wildfire Protection Plan means the county is eligible for a grant of up to \$10 million to help



In the August county meeting, Teresa Stephens of Ninth District Opportunity discussed the dire financial situation facing the Towns County Food Pantry. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

of support. Specifically, the issue boils down to a shortage of food at the Northeast Georgia Food Bank, inflation and a decrease in donations. As it stands, there's no immediate danger of the local

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TCSO service call results in Young Harris drug bust

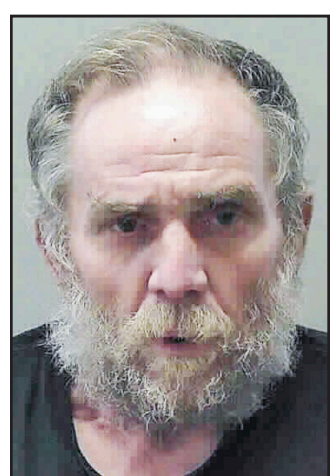
News Special

YOUNG HARRIS – When the Towns County Sheriff's Office arrived at the scene of an Aug. 12 service call regarding a possible intruder at a residence off Georgia 66, patrol deputies smelled the odor of marijuana and saw drugs in plain view.

Towns County drug in-

vestigators were called to the location and probable cause was developed, resulting in a search of the residence. No intruder was found, but an amount of marijuana and methamphetamine that field-tested positive were confiscated.

After a two-weeklong narcotics investigation, the



David Lee Thomas

primary resident of the home, David Lee Thomas, 69, was arrested on Aug. 27 and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, felony possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, felony possession of methamphetamine, and felony possession of marijuana.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that this was a huge drug bust and that the Sheriff's Office will continue its fight against drugs.

The investigation into this case continues, and Thomas is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.



The Towns County Sheriff's Office arrested Thomas for possession of these illegal drugs. Photo/Facebook

City Council tees up votes on ordinances in work session

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In the Aug. 26 work session of the Hiwassee City Council, members discussed updates on ongoing business, such as the Accessory Structure Ordinance, the sewer line leak at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the Paris Business Center and mobile home regulation within city limits.

Seeing as the main

"hangup" of the Accessory Structure Ordinance has been a lack of definition for what exactly an accessory structure is, a completely new document has been drafted.

Now dubbed the Ornamental Structure Ordinance, Councilman Jonathan Wilson penned the proposal, which was expected to get a first reading in the Sept. 3 regular city meeting that occurred after press time.

The document offers clear-cut examples of what structure types are and aren't permitted and includes guidelines for their measurements and proximity to property lines. Councilwoman Amy Barrett added the stipulation that property line distance be universally set to 10 feet to match setback requirements.

The new ordinance should address issues arising

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Hiwassee City Councilwomen Patsy Owens, Amy Barrett and Nancy Noblet reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in their August work session.

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Chatuge 1,921.89
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Teachers of Year ...from Page 1



The 2024 Teachers of the Year for Towns County Schools are Tim Skinner of the High School, Susan Poston of the Elementary School and Shea Taylor of the Middle School.

Photo by Shelly Knight

a lifelong musician, came to Hiawassee to retire two years ago and found themselves right back in the mix of things almost immediately.

"He is actively recruiting and growing the band and color guard and took a fledgling program and made it something special, all within a year," said Principal Thomason. "He is incredible. The

kids love him."

Skinner admitted to being "overwhelmed" by the recognition, saying it was not something he ever expected.

"It's an honor, but I'm not about accolades," Skinner said. "It is about the kids. It's always been about the kids."

Peach State awarded Skinner \$500 and both Poston and Taylor \$100 for their ac-

complishments, and the Towns County Parent Teacher Organization provided beautiful gift baskets with treats and gifts to make the occasion even more of a night to remember.

Look for Director Skinner playing base guitar at home football games with his band members – another one of his creative ways to grow the Towns County band.

Patriot Day ...from Page 1

be hoisted around the square. Commissioner Bradshaw will offer the closing remarks.

Patriot Day was enacted in 2001 to serve as a national day of mourning and prayer, with the first official observance in 2002.

In addition to the thousands of innocent bystanders who died for simply reporting to work that day, many first responders gave their lives when the Twin Towers fell, and other heroes also voluntarily sacrificed their lives to prevent further tragedy.

In New York City, firefighters and emergency first responders rushed into the

burning buildings that thousands were rushing out of, and in the end gave their all to save as many victims as they could.

Even days after the explosions and collapse, those brave men and women worked tirelessly searching for survivors and eventually victims.

Passengers and crew members of United Airlines Flight 93 courageously banded together to save countless others by overtaking that plane from terrorists intent on destroying this country, in the end offering their lives in a nearly unfathomable act of selflessness.

There are some events

that, no matter how horrific, must be remembered and, indeed, honored, because many innocent people are irrevocably harmed and, even in the midst of tragedy, give their lives to protect others and American freedom.

That is what the Towns County ceremony commemorates each year in the town square, and it is the patriotic citizenry's way of saying that 9/11 will never be forgotten.

Everyone in the community is invited and encouraged to attend. For more information, contact the Towns County Commissioner's Office at 706-896-2276.

Hiawassee Pro Rodeo rides high Labor Day Weekend



The Hiawassee Pro Rodeo returned for its second outing in 2024, bringing two full days of bull-riding action to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds over Labor Day Weekend.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Rodeo fans were not disappointed Aug. 31-Sept. 1, as the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds delivered on the promised world class contestants competing from all over the United States and Canada.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Thousands of people attended the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo Saturday and Sunday, which was, as always, a highly patriotic affair with plenty of American flags, bull riding, bronc bucking and more favorite national traditions inside the Fairgrounds.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

County Meeting ...from Page 1

pantry shutting down, but one important program has had to be put on hold indefinitely. Local elementary students were previously able to take home food as needed, and using statistics from 2023, Stephens estimates the cost to keep it up would total about \$27,180.

But to continue serving local low-income families twice per month as usual, Stephens has had to cut the "Backpack Program." Stephens revealed that, in general, the Food Pantry is "running out of money" after a budget cut of \$1 million last year.

"To be honest, I've never seen it like this, and I've been doing this job ... for 24 years," Stephens said.

In other business from the Aug. 20 meeting, Commissioner Bradshaw revealed that, with the help of tax assessors Sonya Young Neil and Michael West, commercial properties are undergoing reassessments.

West explained that an outside company called Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions & Services, aka GMASS, is handling appraisals because "we don't have people on staff that are very familiar with commercial sales and doing commercial re-evaluations."

GMASS is also handling "rural" evaluations, or any property that doesn't fit under the residential or commercial label. When 2024 assessments come out soon, they'll detail commercial and residential evaluations.

With prompting from Bradshaw, West also explained

what might happen without the partnership with GMASS, as local commercial property values need to be brought more in line with what the state requires them to be.

"We (would) continue to go backwards, and the state requires us to stay between a 36% and a 44% sales (ratio relative to fair market values)," West said. "A 40% would be dead-on for sales in our county. If we get out of those parameters for a couple years ... then we get penalized as a county."

Penalties include fines, and Bradshaw made a point of adding that the re-evaluations were a necessary move to avoid such an outcome.

"I want the public to understand that this is not something that the county commissioner has ordered to be done just because we were trying to get more money," Bradshaw said.

Towns County Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson attended so Bradshaw could delegate authority to him to waive late payment interest amounts, at his discretion, in certain situations.

The change was made via resolution, and Anderson said after the meeting that it was essentially just a formality.

"Georgia code allows the Board of Commissioners, or in our case Sole Commissioner, to give the tax commissioner the power to reduce interest or penalties on the property tax side in certain situations," Anderson said. "Never the actual tax itself,

just late interest or penalties.

"It is something that is done when certain circumstances arise like maybe on a new owner that may have not gotten the bill forwarded to them in a timely manner or when something comes in the mail that may be postmarked before the interest date, which is the 10th of every month, or any reason that might be deemed enough to waive some interest."

"It has been done for years here as well as I'm sure a lot of other counties do. I realized that for it to be properly done, I needed a resolution stating so to protect myself as well as Commissioner Bradshaw."

Toward the end of the meeting, Bradshaw revealed that, as a result of unpermitted construction at the Enchanted Valley recreational vehicle park, the moratorium previously listed for 180 days was being extended by 30 days.

The first issue involves an influx of residents building rooms onto trailers and making other additions without permits. Additionally, questions have been raised about sewer capacity and density of vehicles and trailers within the park.

"They have got the state involved, the (homeowner's association) ... looking at all their water and sewer down there, which is good – we want them to do that," said Bradshaw, believing that an understanding can be reached within another month thanks to a new attorney on the case.

Hiawassee City Council...from Page 1

from controversial structures, such as the previously proposed massive dragon statue that was ultimately rescinded by the property owner.

On the topic of the large Fairgrounds water leak that remains under investigation, representatives from the site attended the work session to provide updates and offer potential reasons why the problem may have cropped up.

Georgia Mountain Fair Authority Board Member Terry Taylor, as the original engineer of the site, had some insight into the history of the Fairgrounds' plumbing layout, and current Fairgrounds Supervisor Richard Harper shared that he had discovered deteriorating O-rings. The results are leaky faucets, but Harper said maintenance

is in the process of repairing them.

Along with that, the installation of cut-off valves has determined that no leaks are occurring under the Anderson Music Hall.

The next step involves moving the Fairgrounds' water meter, and now that the Georgia Mountain Fair is over, the meter will be moved across the street to be on the same side as the Fairgrounds.

A concerning update on the Paris Business Center revealed that the rear wall is bowed by about 8 inches, and to be repaired, the brick must be removed and replaced with Hardie board. The replacement will cost \$26,337.50, and the subsequent new facade at the front of the building will be \$26,577.53 for a total of

\$52,915.03. The decision was to be voted on at the September meeting.

The City of Hiawassee owns the Paris Buildings, which are in the process of being renovated into a regional business incubation center set for construction completion this fall.

Paving patches might soon start on Chatuge Way and Oakmont Street inspired by the discussion of recent water runoff into the Farm Bureau building on River Street.

Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. suggested the construction of a berm to properly direct water to the storm drain located at the corner of River Street and Frank Street, which would cost approximately \$1,100.

Council approval is re-

quired for the decision considering it involves a contract with Hogged Paving, so the repairs were proposed for a vote at the Sept. 3 meeting.

Following the mobile home density discussion that has returned for a couple of months now, the council has added a provision to the pro-

posed city ordinance outlining a limit of four manufactured homes on any parcel, and that land cannot be subdivided to avoid the limit.

Extensive discussion during the Public Comment section of the meeting saw Noel Turner asking that the council return the stop signs

located on Tater Ridge, Sims Circle and Hiawassee Estates Road.

Following agreement by Marsha Dow, Councilwoman Nancy Noblet suggested a compromise; rather than replacing the signs, a mirror could be placed to allow for better road visualization.

Hiawassee Garden Club Pumpkin decorating

Fall and Thanksgiving will soon be here and how clever to decorate your own pumpkins for a dinner table centerpiece or an outside decoration.

Cheri Erickson will be holding a pumpkin decoupage class at the Hiawassee Garden Clubhouse on Saturday, September 14, 2024 at 1:30 PM. Bring a white resin or plastic pumpkin (or several) to decorate and a pair of scissors.

The cost of the class is \$25; we accept cash or checks, but no credit cards. The Clubhouse is located directly behind the Towns County Courthouse in Hiawassee—34 River St. You can park at the Courthouse Annex across the street or on the lawn. Remember, the more the merrier, so bring a friend and have a fun and productive afternoon.



Beautifully decorated pumpkins can be yours with just a little class at the Hiawassee Garden Clubhouse.

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