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Outbreak slows in Union, accelerates in Hiawassee nursing home

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor



CHATUGE REGIONAL NURSING HOME

Ten residents have now died in connection with the COVID-19 outbreak at Union County Nursing Home, and Chatuge Regional Nursing Home in Towns County experienced its first COVID-

related death last week, according to the Department of Community Health.

The death total in Union County is up one from the week before, though new positive cases among residents only increased by three from the previous week that saw 44 new cases in an outbreak that has infected more than 2/3 of the nursing home population.

Such a significant decline in new positive test results – especially amid increased federal testing requirements for outbreaks – is a good indication that COVID-19 has largely been contained inside the Blairsville nursing home.

“None of us have a crystal ball, but when you talk to the

staff and the administrators down there, they’re very encouraged,” Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said. “It seems that the residents are starting to perk up.”

“I’m cautiously encouraged that things are starting to turn around and look better than here. So, that makes my heart happy.”

No Union County Nursing Home residents were hospitalized at press time, and Barnett said all of the 23 residents still experiencing symptoms were improving.

“The rest of the positives have very mild symptoms or are completely asymptomatic,” Barnett said.

Unfortunately, it appears the outbreak in the Hiawassee facility is continuing to spread there, with Chatuge Regional picking up 17 new cases last week alone, bringing the total number of residents infected in the outbreak to 27, or about 28% of the population.

“It’s very difficult to say exactly how it entered the nursing home,” Barnett said of the Chatuge Regional outbreak that began roughly two weeks ago. “We had a resident who was randomly tested (after exhibiting atypical) symptoms.”

“The resident came back positive and was sent to us at Union General to be hospitalized. That resident is

back at the nursing home and doing well, but that seemed to be the start.”

Added Barnett, “Very similar to Union, with the increase in prevalence in both communities, we saw an increase in prevalence with staff, and it all kind of coincided with that surge. So, we started monitoring residents more closely and tested all the residents, all the staff.”

“It does seem to be a little bit less significant than what we saw initially at Union. Maybe because the resident wasn’t quite as ill as that first resident was at Union. The spread seems to be much worse the sicker (patient) is.”

Chatuge Regional has

implemented similar measures to Union County, including negative pressure units and dedicated COVID hallways to keep positive residents safely isolated.

Currently, there are two residents from the Towns County facility being hospitalized at Union General and two residents in the nursing home with mild symptoms, with the rest of the resident cases being mostly asymptomatic or recovered.

Positive tests among employees are up in both facilities, from 42 to 60 in Union County and 9 to 24 in Towns County over the week before.

So far, only one employee

See Nursing Homes, Page 8A

Sheriff Clinton meets Sheriff-Elect Henderson for transition talks

News Special
Towns County Herald

On Friday, Sept. 18, Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton and Sheriff-Elect Kenneth Henderson had an opportunity to meet and discuss the future of the Office of Sheriff in Towns County.

Also participating in the meeting were Gene Moss and John Case, who are assisting the Sheriff-Elect with all the administrative work involved in preparation for assuming control of a public office.

Sheriff Clinton and

Sheriff-Elect Henderson plan to take advantage of an opportunity to begin working together in order to ensure a smooth transition on New Year’s Day.

The Sept. 18 meeting was the first in what is expected to be a series of regular meetings over the next three months as the Sheriff’s Office prepares for a new sheriff in Towns County.

This meeting provided an opportunity for the two sheriffs to discuss the various challenges facing the office, the resources currently available,

and many other topics.

There are a multitude of responsibilities and tasks to be completed whenever a new sheriff assumes office. Some of those tasks include inventorying assets, transferring control of warrants, establishing key control, tool control, assigning personnel, implementing policies for various high liability areas, etc.

The Georgia Sheriffs’ Association provides a checklist to newly elected sheriffs during Sheriffs’ Elect Academy, containing a long

See Transition Talks, Page 8A

High school to celebrate Homecoming with town parade Thursday night



The 2020 Towns County Football Homecoming Court

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As Towns County Schools continues COVID-19 precautions on campus, the high school has been preparing for Homecoming Week to give students more of a normal school feel in a decidedly abnormal year, with the annual Homecoming Football Game taking place Friday.

With nearly 3/4 of the student body returning for in-class instruction this fall, Principal Roy Perren is satisfied with the work kids have been

putting in to stay safe, and he is confident that the rest of the school year will run smoothly.

“This year is better than we could have imagined,” Perren said. “We have no major or even minor outbreaks.”

Homecoming celebrations this week will include activities for students every day, allowing them ample opportunities to show their school spirit by dressing up daily to fit specific fun themes.

A 2020-21 difference in the celebration will be

the reduction of schoolwide decorations, which usually run up and down the halls to add to the festivity. Decorations will instead be limited to classroom doors so that students can stay safe while celebrating.

“It will be toned down a little bit because of COVID,” Perren said. “We have to do the social distancing. We are decorating the doors to the classroom instead of the whole building so that we don’t have everybody out in the hallways decorating.”

The main event for

See Homecoming, Page 8A



L-R: Gene Moss, Sheriff Chris Clinton, Sheriff-Elect Kenneth “Ode” Henderson and John Case will be taking place in January 2021.

Towns Elections Board adopts electronic adjudication; Osborn withdraws challenges

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Board of Elections members voted unanimously in their September regular meeting to run their new in-2020 Dominion Voting Systems ballot scanners on a more sensitive setting for the Nov. 3 General Election, including the three-week early voting period that starts Oct. 12.

Using this setting as the default for elections requires a vote by local elections boards, according to Board Chair Dr. Janet Oliva, who added that the board was unaware of the setting differences prior to the Aug. 31 District 50 State Senate race recount that brought the issue to light.



Towns County Elections Board Member Betsy Young, left, discussing informational outreach efforts in the board’s September meeting. Pictured here with Ballot Adjudicator Charlotte Sleczkowski.

Previously, the machines were operated primarily under manual adjudication mode, meaning hand-filled

provisional and absentee-by-mail ballots recognized by scanners as having stray

See Elections Board, Page 8A

Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to host Mile Long Yard Sale this weekend

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer



For the first time, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds will be hosting the Mile Long Yard Sale on Friday, Sept. 25, and Saturday, Sept. 26. The event was rescheduled from the spring due to COVID-19.

Hours for the massive yard sale run 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, and from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday.

“We are just letting

people bring their yard sale items and come in and set up,” Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said. “It will be free parking and free admission to the public.”

“This is something new that we are doing this year, and we are hoping that people will come and see what we have. It’s an opportunity to give back to the community and give them something to do while letting them sell some of their stuff.”

“Every booth is full, and we are letting people bring tents or 10 people who are bringing tents because we have run out of booths.”

The Fairgrounds will be selling hamburgers and hotdogs for attendees to fill up on as they browse the various items

offered by folks at the sale.

According to Thomason, this idea has been popular among members of the community she’s spoken with, and she hopes that it will be an event that people enjoy.

And despite COVID-19 derailing larger events like the 2020 Georgia Mountain Fair and Fall Festival, the Fairgrounds plans on having an active end to the year, with new and returning events in the coming months.

“Oct. 2-3, we have the Northeast Georgia Annual Club Presents the 47th Annual Fall Regional Shelby/Mustang and Ford Meet,” Thomason said. “The Meet & Greet party will be held down at the Memory Lane Museum on Friday night.”

See GMF Yard Sale, Page 8A

County, community come together to support local law enforcement

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County partnered with Wayne Hollis and Bill and Gina Frisbey to provide a barbecue meal for local law enforcement officers at Hollis’ property off US 76 on Saturday, Sept. 19.

Hollis believes law enforcement needs to see support from the community, especially in a time when officers everywhere are facing attempts at the national level to discredit their efforts.

“I have been thinking about doing this for some time,” Hollis said. “In today’s

climate, I thought we better do it now, because these guys need to know that we support them as well. I know they support us, but we just wanted to reach out to them and let them know that we have their back if they need us.”

“We have got to have law enforcement. I know there’s a certain group of people that don’t think we do, but eventually, they are going to change their minds. We have to have them, and we need to support them.”

“We are fortunate they do a good job here, and we want it to stay that way. I think by doing something like

this, maybe it will bring some awareness to those that don’t think about it as often.”

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw approved the payment of the meal and came out to the event to show his support and appreciation.

“It is nice to know that we have citizens that back the police and the Sheriff’s Department,” Bradshaw said. “They understand that they lay their lives on the line every day to protect us and serve us. They want to go home safe to their families, yet they go out and protect us.”

“Without them, it would

See Law Enforcement, Page 8A



Local law enforcement officers were feeling the love Saturday in an appreciation barbecue sponsored by the county and residents Wayne Hollis and Bill and Gina Frisbey.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,678.04
Chatuge	1,922.00
Nottely	1,769.20

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SPORTS FOOTBALL
9/25 vs. Mt. Zion 7:30 PM

Homecoming SOFTBALL
9/22 vs. Social Circle (DH)
3:30 & 5:30 PM

Shop with a Hero Fundraiser

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Operation P.U.P. Selling Mums on the Square

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Blairsville Pro RODEO
www.BlairsvilleProRodeo.com

THIS WEEKEND SEPT. 25 & 26

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