

Indians Quarantined...from Page 1A

students is our No. 1 priority, and we're doing everything we can to keep our students safe."

This is only the second large quarantine the system has had to undertake since the school year started in mid-August. The first quarantine involved two elementary classes over a month ago, after which the district implemented a systemwide seating chart regime to improve contact tracing.

Despite the large quarantine, as of press time Monday, the system only had four active COVID-19 positives among all three schools: two students and a staff member at the high school, and one elementary school staff member, with no active middle or elementary student cases.

At this time, it appears the district has had just one positive case linked to potential on-campus transmission; all other cases are thought to have been acquired outside the school system, Berrong said.

Currently, the football coaching staff is not having to quarantine based on staff exposure guidelines the school system is following, and Berrong said the schools

will soon be expanding those guidelines to include student contacts.

"We are using the federal Homeland Security guidelines that educators are essential employees and the school is critical infrastructure, which means the coaches may continue to work as long as they have face coverings the entire day and social distance at all times," Berrong said.

"Unfortunately, in these situations, one case can quarantine a lot of people and make it look worse than it is," he continued. "We have had very few cases in the system since the start of school and will continue to keep the safety of our students first."

"We have lots of data now from ours and other school systems showing that students labeled a close contact by the Department of Public Health are testing positive at a below 1% rate.

"In light of this data, we are going to change our procedures starting Monday, Oct. 19, that close-contact students will not have to quarantine if the students were wearing their face coverings all day.

"This will significantly decrease the number of our students having to quarantine and give them the opportunity to stay at school to continue to receive their education.

"I have spoken with school board members about this, and they are in agreement, as it will hopefully be incentive for more students to wear face coverings throughout the day."

This is in line with what other Georgia school districts have begun doing, including Bulloch County Schools. The school board there voted Oct. 8 to enact the following:

"Reconsider the Department of Public Health guidelines, and if a student is exposed to a COVID-19 positive person, if the student that is exposed is wearing a mask, and it has been documented, they do not have to follow those guidelines of quarantining for 14 days."

Quarantines for non-sick children are incredibly disruptive for learning and extracurricular activities, and Bulloch County Schools made its decision after observing data similar to Berrong's, that only 1.5% of 900 kids quarantined for COVID-19 went on to test positive there.

Of course, as with any contagious pathogen, the goal is to prevent outbreaks as much as possible using sensible measures that keep children in desks.

That's why the schools host yearly Health Department influenza vaccination clinics, for example, and why they're

following through on COVID best practices on campus, including social distancing, masking wearing and regular sanitization.

Thankfully, school-aged children are significantly less likely to be harmed by SARS-CoV-2 infections than adults, per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

And according to recent data and studies, it appears kids may be less likely to spread the virus as well, evidenced locally by the low level of positive staff and student tests a full two months into the school year.

Towns County numbers have seen a precipitous rise in recent weeks, however, driven largely by the outbreak in Chatuge Regional Nursing Home – a congregate setting filled with COVID-vulnerable residents.

The outbreak corresponded with an uptick in community prevalence last month, and though countywide numbers appear to be on a downward trend once more, it's only after the nursing home experienced more than 120 positive tests among residents and staff in September.

This translates to fully 1/3 of the county's total number of COVID positives being chronicled at the nursing home, which is a serious issue faced by many such facilities in surrounding counties.

The good news is that, as of press time, the Hiwassee-based long-term care facility

hadn't had a single new resident or employee test positive since the end of September, according to the Department of Community Health.

Five of Towns' 10 COVID-related deaths have been linked to the nursing home. Unfortunately, this makes sense, as viruses of all kinds are known to have a disproportionate impact in long-term care facilities, which house the most immunocompromised members of society.

Devastating spread of COVID-19 in nursing homes is a regional, state and national issue, with long-term care facilities nationwide making up roughly 29% of all COVID-related deaths in the U.S., per the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

For even more perspective, nationally through Oct. 7, the CDC was reporting that 80% of the 200,000 Americans who had died with COVID were 65 or older with multiple pre-existing conditions, while only 72 deaths had occurred in children between the ages of 0 and 14.

Since the pandemic started in Georgia, five school-aged children have died with the disease; four had pre-existing conditions, and the fifth drowned in the bathtub after suffering a seizure common among kids with fevers.

Drug Arrests...from Page 1A

Upon further investigation, the driver, Tommy Gibson, 42, of Hiwassee, was arrested and charged with possession of a Schedule II drug, possession of prescription drugs not in their original container, driving on a suspended license, and having defective equipment.

On Monday, Sept. 7, a deputy made a traffic stop on a Volkswagen passenger vehicle on US 76 in Hiwassee.

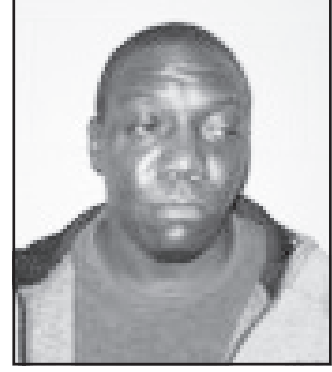
Upon further investigation, a passenger in the vehicle, Michael Davis, 59, of Hayesville, North Carolina, was arrested and charged with possession of meth with intent to distribute, possession of meth, and possession of drug-related objects.

On Friday, Oct. 2, a deputy made a traffic stop on an Acura passenger car on Georgia 17 in Young Harris.

Upon further investigation, a passenger, Samantha McCormack, 35, of Buckhead, was arrested and charged with possession of meth, possession of marijuana and possession of drug-related objects.

On Friday, Oct. 2, a deputy made a traffic stop on a Pontiac passenger car on Georgia 75 South in Hiwassee.

Upon further



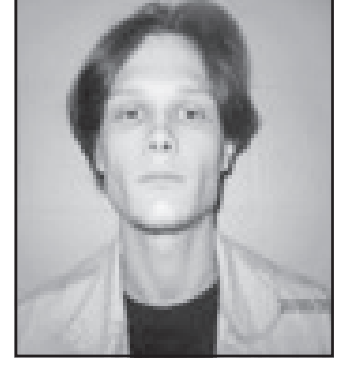
Alphonso Cloud



Shannon Austin



Brandy Martin



Steven McLain

investigation, the driver, Alphonso Cloud, 36, of Murrayville, was arrested and charged with possession of meth with intent to distribute, possession of a Schedule II drug, possession of drug-related objects, and having defective

equipment. A passenger in the vehicle, Shannon Austin, 36, of Hiwassee, was also arrested and charged with possession of meth with intent to distribute, possession of a Schedule II drug, and possession of drug-

related objects.

On Thursday, Oct. 8, a Hiwassee Police Officer made a traffic stop in the city and requested assistance from Towns County deputies.

Upon further investigation, Brandy Martin, 32, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with possession of meth and crossing the guard line with illegal drugs.

On Thursday, Oct. 8, a deputy made a traffic stop on a Cadillac passenger vehicle on US 76 in Young Harris.

Upon further investigation, the driver, Steven McLain, 19, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with possession of THC Oil, driving under the influence and speeding.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office will continue its strong pursuit of drug suspects in the community. Citizens are encouraged to call the Sheriff's Office at 706-896-4444 to report any suspicious activity believed to be related to drugs. All information will be kept confidential.

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

Oridales...from Page 1A

on Oct. 15 to hold the second reading and adoption of the Millage Rate Ordinance.

Also in the Oct. 6 meeting, the council voted to table the second reading of the updated Alcohol Ordinance, pending further revision.

Additionally, the council approved a \$13,400 contract with Source Urbanism to design structural schematics for the two Paris Buildings the city hopes to use to attract businesses to the downtown area.

"The (Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority) put out a bid (statewide) to get people interested in doing the design and architecture and reviewing for those buildings," Ordiales said Sept. 28. "These folks were the only ones that bid ... they seem to really have their

ducks in a row, and they work with a lot of cities."

Ordiales said she called around and learned that the contract cost was reasonable, and that once the schematics are complete, the city will apply for essentially a reimbursement grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission to cover the cost.

Continuing last week, the council gave the go-ahead for the city to commence work on the Thurman Drive galvanized pipe project, "not to exceed \$15,500."

"We have six or seven spots throughout our water system that still have galvanized pipes," Ordiales said Sept. 28. "Those galvanized pipes are treacherous, they're a mess. They have pinhole leaks all the time and they get corroded. They've been in the ground

over 30 years."

The mayor said the city will fix the worst of these areas first at Thurman Drive, which features over a 1,100 feet of galvanized pipe and 15 connections, before moving on to the remaining repairs.

"It's above our paygrade to do that, because you've got to break concrete, asphalt, driveways, and it's very complicated," Ordiales in the work session. "So, we've looked around for quotes on boring underneath ... (Thurman Drive) is the most expensive and the worst one in the city, so it's going to be all downhill from there."

In other action items, council members voted to accept a resolution approving the "Towns County Water Authority Settlement" and the first reading of the ordinance to

repeal the moratorium on new city sewer accounts at locations where the Water Authority provides water.

These last two action items reflect recent work to finalize an agreement in the longstanding "commercial corridor" dispute between the City of Hiwassee and the Towns County Water Authority, and more information will be made available in next week's edition of the Towns County Herald.

The second reading of the ordinance repealing the Sewer Moratorium will take place in the Oct. 15 called meeting.

North Georgia Motorcycle Show

The North Georgia Motorcycle Show scheduled for Saturday, October 17th at the North Georgia Technical College campus, Blairsville, has been cancelled due to concerns with the Corona Virus.

American Red Cross Volunteers



Make a difference in your community! As a volunteer with the American Red Cross, you can help families recover after a home fire, train individuals in first aid and CPR, support America's military families, or take on any number of other roles that make our communities safer, stronger and more resilient. Get started at <https://www.redcross.org/local/georgia/volunteer.html> or call your NWGA chapter office to ask about volunteer opportunities 844-536-6226.