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Voters flock to polls for first week of early voting

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Pamela Francis was one of nearly 1,700 active registered voters who cast a ballot in the first week of advanced in-person voting at the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration.

Francis usually votes on Election Day, but she had foot surgery scheduled for the end of last week, so she wanted to make sure to get her voting done early.

"I didn't know if by Nov. 3 I would be ready to stand for a long time, so I thought it would be best to get it done now," she said. "I have been voting since 1972, and from

that election until this one, I have always voted in the actual day for voting. It is just a sort of tradition for me."

For Francis and many others, this election is one that will determine the future of America and how the country will evolve in the coming years.

"Every voice counts, and I think we are in a very polarized environment right now in this country," Francis said. "We are really voting for the heart and soul of this country as it has always been."

"I chose to vote in person because it is what I have always done. There's also a lot of information about lost ballots and that sort of thing, and I am

just a little wary, so I wanted to come and make my vote count in person."

Resident Robbie Hillman takes pride in the American tradition and encourages every eligible voter in the community to come out and partake in the process.

"Voting is the greatest thing we can do as Americans," Hillman said. "It is important that we voice our opinions and let people know what we want in this country. We are where change starts, with the people. Without voting, this country would not be the same."

"I want everyone to vote, even if they are against my beliefs. We fought for this. See *Early Voting*, Page 8A



Early in-person voting was a popular activity last week, with local voters twice breaking the daily voting record. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Early voters break records in county, state; vote Saturday

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

When the dust settled and the lines cleared, two things were certain at the Towns County Board of Elections Office at the end of the first week of early in-person voting – voters had broken the single-day early voting record not once, but twice.

"We've had a larger turnout than I ever recall doing elections," Elections Board Chair Dr. Janet Oliva said Friday. "We've set records in most counties for the turnout, according to the Secretary of State."

"We had 328 voters the first day, which was a record, and we had 377 on Wednesday – those are records for us in Towns County, so yeah, this has been an unusual week."

All told, nearly 1,700 people voted in person for the first week of early voting, meaning that, counting the 1,259 mail-in ballots returned through

Friday, roughly 30% of the electorate had already voted with two weeks of early voting left before the big Nov. 3 General Election.

According to Oliva, high turnout and lines were consistent all week long, which is something the local scene shared with early in-person polling places all around the state.

"Week 1 has gone very well in that, compared to other counties that have had between six and 10-hour wait times, really in the metropolitan areas, the longest our wait time has been is between 45 minutes and an hour long," Oliva said. "We've averaged about a 30-minute wait time."

"Today, there's basically no wait time; it's moving along great. Monday and Tuesday were our busiest days, but now, there's just basically a five or 10-minute wait time, if that."

Oliva said that, at the beginning of the week, polling places everywhere were struggling to check in voters



Towns County's official absentee ballot/application drop box is located against the front of the Board of Elections & Registration office, just beneath the lettering on the building. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

See *Voters Break Record*, Page 8A

Young Harris discusses audit, sewer rate increase via Zoom



Mayor Andrea Gibby met with Young Harris City Council Members and others via Zoom on Oct. 6. Photo/Screenshot

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Young Harris City Council and Mayor Andrea Gibby welcomed Marvin Chance of RL Jennings & Associates to discuss the 2019 city audit in the Oct. 6 regular meeting, which convened

via Zoom. "It has been an interesting process this year," Chance said. "The city once again held a clean opinion, an unmodified opinion. We found no material internal control issues."

All in all, Chance said the city appears to be in good

financial shape, about breaking even on water but with debt still on the sewer side.

It was mentioned that Young Harris College consumes 50% of the city's sewer business, with Brasstown Valley Resort, taking another 20%, and

See *Young Harris*, Page 8A

Nix leaves legacy of music, giving in the mountains

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE – Local Country Music legend John Nix died Thursday, Oct. 15, following a year of illness.

To the legion of friends he made in his 85 years of life, Nix will be remembered as much for his generosity and good humor as for his decades of live music performances in the North Georgia Mountains.

Of course, Nix's name is synonymous with Country Music around these parts, which makes perfect sense considering that he started the fabled Country Cousers band with his brothers Homer, Clayton and Cranford 70 years ago.

Since the age of 15, Nix has played in more venues than can be counted, with some of his more recent appearances being at the Georgia Mountain Fair, Blairsville Sorghum Festival, Union County Historical Society, Byron Herbert Reece



Nix playing the fiddle during the Union County Historical Society's Annual Mountain Heritage Festival on Aug. 31, 2019. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Society and more.

For several years now, John was the last surviving brother of that original band, and he continued performing with countless other musical

"cousins" over the years.

"I hope to play a whole lot more," Nix said in 2016 during a proclamation presentation highlighting the importance of

See *Nix*, Page 8A

Brew, Stew & Que Festival to follow Craft Show success

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is ready to welcome a fresh round of patrons for the Appalachian Brew, Stew & Que Festival on Oct. 24.

Still, Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason was happy with the turnout for the two-weekend craft show, which featured plenty of attendees showing their support.

"This turned out really well," Thomason said. "We got rained on a little last week, but we still had over 2,500 paid attendants. The vendors are doing really well; I have seen a lot of people going out with products and all."

"This weekend has been much better because the weather is better. We have got some new vendors this weekend and people are happy. People are wanting to get out



The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is ready to welcome a fresh round of patrons for the Appalachian Brew, Stew & Que Festival on Oct. 24. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

and do something because we have been inside so long due to COVID."

The dozens of vendors also seemed pleased with the turnout, including Union County Debra Korngay, who creates homemade wreaths.

"I also do my little dolls, which I fix up and sell," she said.

"People that are interested can contact me and I can get them whatever they need a price for it. I usually do a few festivals in the area and am fixing to do the (Kris Kringle) Market on Dec. 5. This event has been a pretty good turnout."

For more information on See *Craft Show*, Page 8A

Rotary takes on flower bed project at Hamilton Gardens

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge-Hiawasse met at the Hamilton Gardens one last time Oct. 13 before resuming their usual meeting venue.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the organization has mixed virtual meetings with gatherings in the great outdoors to maintain social distance with fresh air, former Rotary President Gerry Gutenstein said.

"We have been having meetings different since about the 25th of March," Gutenstein said. "We started a hybrid meeting here since around June, and we have been on

Zoom, which has been working pretty good."

"Things have been going fairly well. We actually got two new members since this pandemic started. We are at 33 members right now, and our main projects have been the eradication and elimination of polio, and this happens to be October, which is PolioPlus month. We raise funds for that."

Rotary Club members took on a local project over the summer, too, to put in a new flower bed at the entrance of the Gardens to liven up that particular area for guests.

"We have presentations each week, and the Hamilton Gardens came and made a presentation on what they were

doing here," Gutenstein said. "This gave us an opportunity with three or four projects, and we selected this entry garden as our project and gave them the money to get this thing going."

"Another project that we will probably do with them this year is an education thing for the school. Students can come to the Gardens and learn about the rhododendrons and azaleas that are here."

Gardens Executive Director Grace Heward said she was pleased to have groups in the community that want to chip in to make a difference at the Gardens.

"We have several groups that put in beds for us, and it is absolutely fabulous," Howard said. See *Rotary Club*, Page 8A



The Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge-Hiawasse has been meeting at the Hamilton Gardens to accommodate COVID best practices. They resumed normal meetings this week. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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