

Towns County Herald

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Stephanie Moss to retire; Connie Hobbs promoted

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

After three decades in education, Towns County Schools Curriculum and Staff Development Director Stephanie Moss is retiring, effective Nov. 29. School Board members accepted her resignation in their regular monthly meeting on Monday, Oct. 7.

Moss said she is retiring to spend more time with family – especially as “Gigi” to her 9-month-old grandchild – and to pursue other interests with

her newfound free time, like continuing to write children’s books and being an adjunct literacy instructor at Young Harris College.

She is happy to be joining her husband in retirement, former Elementary School Principal Shannon Moss, who retired at the end of September with 30 years in education as well, though she will certainly miss her time with students and fellow educators.

“I’ve enjoyed my time at Towns County Schools,” Moss said. “My favorite part

has been the literacy work that I’ve been able to do the last four years – the Literacy Bus and doing the Book Club for preschool children, and things of that nature.

“It’s a good school system, and I think they’ll do great things moving forward.”

Moss has worked at every level of the system, from teaching in the classroom to school administration and the Central Office, and much has changed in the 30 years since she started her education career, most notably the technol-

ogy in schools that will undoubtedly keep evolving.

She said incorporating online computer work has allowed teachers to focus less on worksheet instruction but noted there’s a balance that must be maintained to keep students from spending too much time in front of screens.

And after 30 years, her colleagues agree that her leadership and experience will be missed.

“She’s done an amazing job and has worn many hats,” Superintendent Dr. Darren

Berrong said. “It will be very hard to replace her, and we’re going to miss her. However, she just had a new grandbaby, and she can’t resist her.”

The curriculum director is responsible for ensuring quality instruction, selecting instructional materials, and shaping the educational landscape within the district. This is a critical position affecting every student in the system.

A personnel director is responsible for strategic planning and the execution of poli-



Stephanie Moss

See Moss Retiring, Page 7

2024 Halloween events plentiful for local families



For the last several years, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has hosted Towns County’s big Halloween event.

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Calling all ghosts, ghouls, goblins and the like – Halloween’s coming to Towns County, and there are all sorts of ways to ring in the spooky season. Whether looking for a festive night out or a quiet evening among friends, many organizations are offering a

variety of tricks and treats. The City of Hiwassee and Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce are partnering with the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for the big annual “Fangtastic Halloween.”

From 5-8 p.m. on Halloween night, families can enjoy collecting candy from local businesses and organizations at booths set up around

the spooky, winding path inside the fairgrounds.

Food trucks will be available for anyone who wants to purchase dinner on the grounds and stick around for train rides, kids’ games, photo ops and even a costume contest with prizes up for grabs. Just in case the weather gets testy, the Fangtastic Hal-

See Halloween Festivities, Page 6

Chastain talks city water, relationship with TCSO

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers and Shakers’ usual haunt at the Sundance Grill was packed the morning of Friday, Oct. 11, to listen to Hiwassee Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr.

His presentation mostly focused on water management and city infrastructure, though the last part of his talk featured a conversation between himself, the public and Hiwassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker regarding the apparent ongoing feud with the Towns County Sheriff’s Office.

First, Chastain made folks aware of a critical misunderstanding regarding water treatment capabilities and the long-planned third filter upgrade. Despite public belief,



Jay Chastain Jr.
Acting Hiwassee Mayor

the new filter is not designed to increase water treatment capacity but provide redundancy to the filtration system.

Water treatment is a major issue for the city, which has

been dealing with a longstanding water loss issue. Currently, the Water Treatment Facility is “losing about 53% of the water that we produce.”

See Movers & Shakers, Page 12

Sons of the Pioneers live in concert Sunday, Oct. 27



By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Back by popular demand, the legendary Sons of the Pioneers are performing their annual Ferst Readers literacy benefit concert on Sunday, Oct. 27, at

2 p.m. inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center at 926 Panther Overlook in Blairsville.

“We do many benefit concerts, but this one is special,” said baritone vocalist and rhythm guitarist John Fullerton. “This is our third year

to come down and support Ferst Literacy. We were introduced to it through John and Janice Cochran.

“They told us what Ferst Literacy does with getting books into the hands of preschool-aged children, and

See Sons of the Pioneers, Page 6

Early voting breaks local, state records in Week 1

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Advance voting for the 2024 General Election is breaking records around the state, including right here in Towns County.

Georgia is considered a “battleground state” in this year’s presidential election, and voter enthusiasm is high, demonstrated by the Secretary of State’s Office reporting last week that over 1 million votes had already been cast as of Friday around noon.

Towns County Elections Supervisor Rachel Edwards said this is the busiest start to in-person early voting she has ever seen, which is saying something, because Towns County is always one of the

See Early Voting Record, Page 3



In-person early voting is incredibly popular now that it is in full swing through Nov. 1.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

TCSO arrests ‘major dealer’ in drug bust at residence

News Special

The Towns County Sheriff’s Office and the Clay County Sheriff’s Office in North Carolina shared information and conducted an intense weeklong investigation with surveillance that led to a search warrant being executed on a Streak Hill Road residence last week.

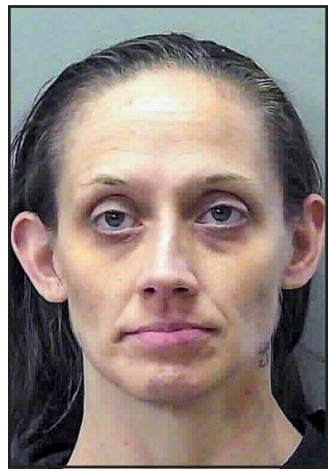
The search resulted in a large amount of drugs being confiscated, including methamphetamine that field-tested positive, marijuana, various pills, and drug-related objects.

Various amounts of drugs were packaged for sale, and the joint investigation revealed the suspect had been selling drugs since May 2024.

Tiffany Nicole McNabb, 39, of Hiwassee, was arrested Oct. 14 and charged with the following felonies: trafficking in methamphetamine; possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; two counts possession of a controlled substance; possession of marijuana with intent to distribute; and possession of marijuana.

McNabb was also charged with misdemeanor possession of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the dedication of county drug agents, uniform patrol and K-9 “for the hard work in busting a major drug operation in our commu-



Tiffany Nicole McNabb

He also commends the Clay County Sheriff’s Office. See Major Drug Bust, Page 7

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Blue Ridge 1,671.76
Chatuge 1,919.67
Nottely 1,764.88

Fall Festival Says Goodbye for ‘24 See Page 6

TCSO Kids’ Christmas Applications See Page 6

Love Light Scholarship Program See Page 12



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July Term 2024 Grand Jury Indictments, continued

The following individuals were indicted during the July Term 2024 of the Towns County Grand Jury, which met again this month:

Dustin Wade Holcomb, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Ella Siobahn Nichols, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Roger Elbert Norton, interference with government property.

Tricia Leigh Ingalsbe, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Sharon Lynn Allman, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Dennis Lee Wheeler, two counts terroristic threats; possession of a controlled substance; false report of a crime; two counts possession

of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Amanda Lester, aka Amanda Marie Grassi, Amanda Marie Murphy, two counts possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects.

Abraham Parker Patrick, two counts terroristic threats.

Mandy Jane Fortner, trafficking in illegal drugs.

Tyler Kane Moss, trafficking in illegal drugs; possession of drug-related objects; failure to maintain brake lights in good working condition.

Kelsey Grace Phillips, trafficking in illegal drugs.

John Terrell Youngblood, false imprisonment; battery, Family Violence.

Nathan Allen Lemay, crossing the guard lines with drugs; possession of metham-

phetamine.

Bruce Douglas Partin Jr., escape; recidivist.

Lance Edward Alexander, possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; driving under the influence (controlled substance); driving under the influence (less safe) (combined influence); two counts driving under the influence (less safe) (drugs); possession of drug-related objects; failure to maintain lane.

David August Gott, two counts terroristic threats; two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

Daniel Ian Akins, criminal damage to property in the second degree.

Caitlin Anne Robertson, aka Caitlin Leech, two counts theft by receiving stolen property; possession of illegal weapon; theft by bring-

ing stolen property into state; theft by receiving property stolen in another state.

Christopher Darrell

Morgan, two counts terroristic threats; driving under the influence (less safe) (alcohol); simple battery.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Early Voting Record...from Page 1

highest voter turnout counties in the state.

By the end of Week 1 voting, 3,143 Towns Countians had cast in-person ballots — more than a quarter of the electorate and a roughly 73% increase from 2022 in-person early voting over the same period, and more even than the first-week totals for the busy 2020 presidential election.

Election Day is Tuesday, Nov. 5, and there are three weeks of early in-person voting running weekdays between Tuesday, Oct. 15, and Friday, Nov. 1. Early voting also includes two weekend voting opportunities: Saturday, Oct. 19, and Saturday, Oct. 26.

All in-person early voting takes place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. inside the Towns County Civic Center, located in the same building as the Elections Office at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiwassee.

General Election voters who decide to wait until Election Day to cast their ballots will need to head to their predetermined voting precincts between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. on Nov. 5.

Towns County has two voting precincts: the Hiwassee Precinct at the Civic Center and the Young Harris Precinct in the Lodge Hall Building at 135 Murphy Street.

For people voting absentee-by-mail, ballots may be requested at the Elections Office now through Friday, Oct. 25. Absentee ballot applications can be returned by mail, fax, as an email attachment, or in person at the Elections Office.

Absentee ballots began mailing Oct. 7. They can be returned using the official Elections Office drop box during early voting hours; mailed back in plenty of time to be counted after polls close on Election Day; or dropped off at the Elections Office through 7 p.m. Election Day.

The deadline to register to vote in this election was Monday, Oct. 7.

Residents may visit <https://mvp.sos.ga.gov> for mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county, sample ballots for upcoming elections, provisional ballot status and more.

As this is a presidential election year, voters will be

choosing the next president of the United States as well as several state positions, but there are no contested county-level seats up for grabs in the 2024 General Election.

Voters will also be deciding the fate of a state Constitutional Amendment to cap annual property assessment increases for taxing purposes.

If passed, the proposed constitutional amendment would create a new homestead exemption to cap assessment increases on homesteaded properties at 3% annually beginning on Jan. 1, 2025.

State lawmakers enabled the referendum this year by passing House Bill 581 and House Resolution 1022, with an “opt-out” provision for local governments.

The proposed cap comes as welcome news to many homeowners, who have seen the values of their properties rise dramatically in recent years due largely to an inflated real estate market driven by COVID-19 pandemic-era relocations to the area.

For homes receiving the exemption starting next year, 2024 would stand as the base-year assessed value. Moving forward, the home would then reflect two values: the homesteaded value that is capped for taxing purposes, and the actual fair market value as it changes over time.

“The base year value may increase each year up to the inflationary rate determined by the State Revenue Commissioner, which may utilize the Consumer Price Index,” according to information from the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

So, annual values could increase from north of 0% to the 3% cap for homesteaded properties, though assessed values would still be subject to accounting for “substantial property changes,” which could result in increases or decreases in value depending on what has changed.

If a homestead-exempted property is subsequently sold, then the base-year assessed value for the new homesteader would be set at the assessed value for the year immediately preceding the sale.

A homestead exemption reduces the amount of property taxes a homeowner owes on

his or her legal residence, and according to ACCG, “this new floating homestead exemption is in addition to and not in lieu of all non-floating homestead exemptions.”

HB 581 also creates a new 1% local option sales tax that could be imposed for property tax relief. But for the new tax to be put in place, it would have to be supported by voters in a local referendum.

The bill does several other things related to property and sales tax reform, such as improving the sales ratio study methodology by the Department of Audits and Accounts, removing confusing tax estimates from annual assessment notices and more.

General Election ballots also feature a statewide referendum on raising the amount of tangible personal property tax exemption from \$7,500 to \$20,000. If passed, state law would be amended effective Jan. 1, 2025, to apply to all tax years beginning on or after that date.

State Rep. Mike Cheokas (R-Americus) sponsored the bill that created this referendum, saying, “I hope this will be the first step in reducing the burden of high taxes and prohibitive regulations that adversely affect businesses in Georgia.”

Proponents of these measures believe they would provide much-needed taxpayer relief in an era of prolonged inflation, while opponents have expressed concern that they could make it more difficult to raise revenues needed to effectively operate local governments and school systems.

Another Constitutional Amendment appears on ballots to ask voters whether they want to create a Georgia Tax Court, which would change the jurisdiction for settling tax cases from the executive branch of state government to the judicial branch of state government.

All but one state legislator supported the measure at the Georgia General Assembly this year, with proponents arguing the change would enable a separation of powers in matters of taxes and streamline the appeals process, which currently runs through Fulton County for all such matters.

“Stage Fright” features ghost stories at the Peacock



Peacock stage, adorned for “Stage Fright,” awaits ghoulish visitors.

Costume up and bring the whole family to the Peacock Performing Arts Center in Hayesville for an evening of ghoulish (but wholesome) entertainment. Stage Fright is the Halloween edition of the popular Scribes on Stage series, featuring ten performers from southwest North Carolina and northeast Georgia—all local favorites.

“Ghosts and goblins of all ages will have a howling good time,” says event host

Kanute Rarey.

Storytellers and authors Brenda Kay Leford, Denise and Mike Mount, Nancy Reeder, Melanie Knauff, Sandy Benson, Laurel Adams, and Leslie Shelley will treat the audience to ghostly and ghastly tales. Cash Kirby, Rob Tiger, and Paul Constantine will provide spooky music. Jim Oliver will be on hand to furnish his widely-acclaimed creepy sound and lighting effects.

Kids can trick or treat in the lobby during intermission, followed by a costume parade on stage.

Join the fun on October 25, 7:30 p.m. Children under eight get in free. For details, call the office 828-389-2787 Tuesday-Friday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. or visit the website: the-peacocknc.org.

The Peacock is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and an equal opportunity provider and employer.

GA Mountain Fall Festival says goodbye until 2025



The Georgia Mountain Fall Festival welcomed guests over two full weekends this month, featuring dozens of hand-picked vendors, a carnival, live music and plenty of entertainment, like the Cowboy Circus that was a big hit with families. Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Old-ways demonstrations are always a part of the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival to showcase the heritage of the area for guests from nearby and far away inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Halloween Festivities...from Page 1

Halloween will have a Nov. 1 rain date.

In the run-up to Halloween, there's the Towns County First Responders "Trunk or Treat" set for Saturday, Oct. 26, from 5:30-7 p.m. at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park.

Sheriff Ken Henderson is excited to be partnering with local first responders to offer this family-friendly event again in 2024.

The Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation will be hosting its own trunk-or-treat courtesy of the Broadband Department on Oct. 24 from 4:30-7:30 p.m. This event will be going on the same night as the Towns County Elementary School

Fright Night.

Fright Night will last from 5-6 p.m., with children's activities like "Minute to Win It" carnival games, plus snacks like hot dogs, popcorn, and of course candy. At 6:45 p.m., some of Towns County's musically inclined first-graders will perform spooky songs in the cafeteria.

Morganton-based non-profit Project Chimps is opening its doors to the public Oct. 26-27 for the annual "Chimp or Treat" Halloween bash. Tickets are available between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Admission is \$10 per child, though kids 2 and under are free. Each additional adult is \$35.

Outreach Coordinator Nancy Page suggests coming

in costume to give the chimps something to ponder from their habitats, which guests will be able to peer into from one of the sanctuary's viewing windows.

Tours around the facility last about 45-60 minutes each, and kids will receive special treat bags filled with vegan and palm-oil free candies as well as non-food goodies.

Young Harris College will be hosting its Fall Fest on Oct. 29, running from 5-7 p.m. Costumes are encouraged, and the festivities – to include fun games and tasty treats – will be held out on the plaza.

On Oct. 26, North Mt. Zion Church of God members will be holding their Third Annual Fall Festival on the Hiwassee Square. Featuring more than 40 vendors, plenty of food complete with a chili cook-off and bake sale, live entertainment and free children's activities, the family-friendly atmosphere can be enjoyed from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Happy Fall, and Happy Halloween!

Food Pantry Food Distribution

The Food Pantry hours are Monday – Thursday 9 AM–12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM – 2 PM.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomas at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.



Tracy Lawrence offered a premium music show inside Anderson Music Hall on Thursday, Oct. 17, during the 2024 Georgia Mountain Fall Festival. Photo by Derek Storm

Sons of the Pioneers...from Page 1

when we found out that something on the order of 40,000 books had been sent out to young children, we thought this was something super special and were honored to be a part of it."

Now in their 90th year as the Sons of the Pioneers, the Country Western giants have been performing locally to help raise money for First Readers of Union County since 2022.

"The Sons of the Pioneers came to be thanks to Roy Rogers wanting to get a vocal group off the ground and go into radio," Fullerton said. "All in all, the Sons have done over 100 total film appearances since their inception in 1933.

"There have been 47 members in the band, and what is so unique is the vocal arrangements, as each song is known for celebrating the beauty and grandeur of the American West and the working cowboy.

"The vocal arrangements have hardly changed at all. We still use that beautiful polished three-part harmony vocal blend that Roy was so eager to include. Tommy Nallie joined the band in 1983 and is the trail boss of the group and sings lead voice and plays lead guitar.

"I met Tommy when I was 7 years old, and I caught the bug. I was impressed with the musicianship, and I recognized that those guys were the real deal. We have maintained this great integrity in our sound for over 90 years through radio, films and personal appearances.

"I joined the band in 2018, and I've been with them ever since. It was a childhood dream come true to go from being in the audience to being a part of the band. It's quite an honor."

Like his bandmates, Fullerton believes literacy is "critically important" in today's day and age to help children achieve the ability to comprehend the written word, no matter the presentation.

"To get books into the hands of youngsters is huge; we're living in such a digital age," Fullerton said. "I'm blown away at the number of kiddos that even in their teenage years do not have the reading abilities that they should because of the digital age that we're in.

"I talk to students on the West Coast all the time, and they have removed all textbooks from their classrooms. They don't physically read like you and I did when we were in school. It's quite sad.

"I think reading is more important than it has ever been, and as far as teaching reading and proper reading etiquette, I don't think it's happening. Everything is digital."

Fullerton is on to something with that concept. While the data is still coming in, educators know there are considerable drawbacks to digital learning, including heavy reliance on expensive technology and the internet as well as decreased comprehension.

Education in this country began with the Founding Fathers, who knew and understood the critical importance of a well-informed voting constituency. They knew that the fragile American republic was dependent upon the competency of its citizens.

They believed strongly that preserving democracy would require a population that could understand political and social issues. They wanted men who would participate in civic life, vote wisely, protect their rights and freedoms, and resist oppressors and demagogues.

While voting was initially limited to white males, many of the early leaders understood that girls must also be educated, as they would become mothers responsible for teaching their children.

In the ensuing years since public education's inception, the American people have learned the vital importance of literacy. Simply put, without literacy, all other learning is impossible.

First Readers has taken literacy learning a step further by providing quality books for children and their families to use at home during the earliest stages of human development, all at no cost to households receiving the books.

The organization's vision is "to create better learners, brighter futures, and stronger communities by giving

every child under 5 access to quality books in their homes," which requires fundraising to enact, hence the annual concert.

And focus on literacy is especially crucial right now. Since the onset of COVID, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that test scores have slipped to their lowest levels in decades. Students in lower economic groups are significantly impacted. But that's not all.

According to the National Literacy Institute, on average, 79% of adults are literate in 2024, 21% are illiterate, and 54% of adults have a literacy rate below the sixth-grade level.

First Readers data shows that 61% of children in the lower economic subgroup do not have a single book suitable for children in their home. First Readers "wants every child to have the best start in life – and nothing helps a baby's brain develop more than exposure to rich language and loving interactions. The key is having books in the home and being read to from birth."

Children in the First Readers literacy program receive a bookstore-quality, age-specific book mailed to them at home every month until their fifth birthday. This access to print helps to create a language-rich environment in the home.

"I really hope many people come out and join us," Fullerton said, promising an afternoon of high entertainment. "It's such a great cause, and it's a great afternoon with a chance to spend some time with some American icons. It just doesn't get any better than that."

Tickets for the locally hosted iconic Western music show can be purchased at <https://eventbrite.com/first-readers-concert-with-sons-of-the-pioneers-tickets-933312973227>.

TC Sheriff's Office accepting Applications for Children in Need



Towns County Sheriff's Office is pleased to begin accepting applications for assistance for Towns County children in need during the 2024 Christmas season!

Towns County Sheriff's Office has been able to provide Christmas each year for decades to children in Towns County and this year is no different. This is a competitive process, and we are not able to select every child that applies.

To obtain an application you can do so through our Towns County Sheriff's Office website townscountysheriff.org or by coming by our office at 4070 State Hwy. 339 Young Harris, GA 30582 or by calling our office and we can email it to you.

Hiawassee resident Boorn has ridden 1.4 Million Miles on a Harley Davidson

Hiawassee resident Frank Boorn was recently recognized by Harley-Davidson Motorcycle Company for having ridden 1,400,000 fully documented miles. All mileage reports were done on a monthly basis by Hellbender Harley Davidson in Marietta, GA.

Frank and his wife, Teresa, have ridden a Harley in all 50 states, Mexico, Canada, Australia, Holland, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Frank told Teresa that he had a little trip planned northwest of town and took her on the back of his bike to Alaska! Frank was heavily involved in the State Harley Owners Group rally, having been here in Hiawassee three different times.

Frank has received



Frank Boorn and his Harley Davidson Motorcycle

many awards and recognition from several different bike organizations around the world. Frank is involved with many bike clubs around the world and has brought a wide variety of riders to our beautiful mountains to ride with him. 150 riders from around the world have come to ride with and stay with Frank and Teresa.



Frank and Teresa Boorn

Moss Retiring...from Page 1

cies related to hiring, training, development and employee retention.

And in Towns County, this director also oversees state and federal assessments. These are three separate positions in most school districts, and someone with experienced leadership is a must to maximum success.

"I would like to ask the board to approve the promotion of Dr. (Connie) Hobbs, who is currently the Middle School Principal, to the curriculum/personnel director of the Towns County School System," Dr. Berrong said.

"She has been a successful administrator in all three schools," Berrong continued. "There is no one else in our system who has this amount of experience with curriculum at all three levels. She will do a tremendous job, and so I'm excited to bring her to the administrative offices."

Should Hobbs have any questions about the multifaceted position she is inheriting, Moss said she will be available to answer any questions in retirement.

Hobbs' promotion to the Central Office means that her position at the Middle School needs filling, and that evening, Berrong recommended "that we promote Mr. Rollie Thomas from High School Assistant Principal to Middle School Principal."

"He has been a successful teacher at both the Elementary School and the Middle School and has done a tremendous job as high school assistant principal the last year and a half," Berrong said. "I am confident that he's ready to take on this role."

Additionally, the board hired more substitute teachers, a Head Start assistant teacher, a part-time maintenance worker, a nutrition food assistant and substitute, volunteer community wrestling coach and boys' basketball coach, and an assistant baseball coach.

The board also approved a salary schedule change to include academic bonuses granted to educators helping students make significant scores on the Georgia Milestones tests. The thought would be \$500 granted to any teacher who comes in First Place.

"We want to show the teacher how much we value their hard work," Berrong said.

In other business, Berrong detailed that the new agriculture facility should have concrete poured this month, "with the metal building coming the end of October."

"It is coming along," he said. "We meet each month with our construction manager and the architects, so we're still hopeful that we can get it done by the end of February, weather permitting."

"The (E-SPLOST) projects for Summer 2025 and Summer of 2026 are being discussed, and we have some preliminary plans. For instance, this summer we're planning school flooring in all buildings and in some classrooms.

"We also want to do the air conditioning in the high school gym. Baseball parking lot needs security lighting and pavement. We're looking at a football stand renovation.

"We collect over \$3 million a year on SPLOST, but I'm trying to keep (the budget for other projects) lower be-

cause of the ag center. As you know, we're paying as we go, and I don't want to overspend.

"Middle School and High School courtyards should be renovated. We'd like to get rid of the grass, as we have to take equipment in there and rocks keep breaking the windows. Perhaps artificial turf, but a renovation of some sort.

"The parking lot needs paving, and we have a lot of parking. If you all look through this and feel like there's something that needs to be replaced, something you feel is more important to be done, let me know, because I can change that before I send out the referendum."

Concerning the "referendum," Berrong was referring to a bid process the system must do every two years for a construction manager on SPLOST projects, in this case to handle construction in Summer 2025 and Summer 2026 that will be paid for under the current E-SPLOST.

Also in the meeting, local radio station owner Jeff Batten presented a \$17,583 fundraising check to the Towns County Food Pantry, which, with other community donations, is helping to bring back the "Backpack Program" for Elementary School students to take home food as needed.

"Thank you guys so much," Berrong said. "There are so many kids that rely on that program over the weekends, and we really appreciate all that you've done to get that program up and running."

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

Major Drug Bust...from Page 1



Various illegal drugs packaged for distribution.

Photo/Facebook

Clay County Sheriff's Office and Towns County Sheriff's Office provided, noting that "Towns County Sheriff's Office and Clay County Sheriff's Office Narcotics working together makes a difference." Individuals are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

Movers & Shakers...from Page 1

That loss is attributed to numerous hard-to-find leaks in the system, causing a metaphorical “death to a thousand cuts.” Chastain used an adage to describe attempts to solve the problem, saying that he’s approaching the situation “like eating an elephant – one bite at a time.”

“The first thing we’re going to do is basically put SCADA meters down on all of our main lines,” explained Chastain, adding that the new meters will reveal surges in the lines and more accurately record where the flow ends up.

SCADA stands for Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition. It’s a computerized system that controls and monitors water treatment infrastructure from a central location to provide all kinds of data that could help to pinpoint the issues.

A big concern of the public is whether the massive leak problem will have any bearing on water rates. Point blank, Chastain said it will, but there’s no way of calculating how individual bills will be affected. Based on treatment costs, volume and different meters, the sums may increase or decrease.

Chastain assured attendees that since he took office in June, many leaks have been recorded and repaired. Still, the public can help in the endeavor by keeping an eye out for tell-tale signs of leaks, such as patches of greener grass or structural damage, and reporting them.

When asked about changes in the city, Chastain said he recognized a need for workforce housing, but any action depended on the sway of the market after the first of next year.

In other news, the Hiawassee Police Department is in the process of being outfitted with non-lethal de-escalation options such as tasers and has two new vehicles.

Offering an update on the Paris Business Center, Chastain said that due to bowing, the back wall of the building had to be torn down. Durable Hardie board has been placed to help stabilize the structure as it’s being rebuilt.

Construction on the project has had to turn in a different direction anyway thanks to a requirement from the grant; the anchor building, known previously as the restaurant, must be finished. At the very least, focus must turn to completing the flooring and functioning restrooms.

“We’re shooting on a ‘move-in date’ of March, which is going to put us at finishing everything, if I am not misquoting the date, on February 7 and February 9,” Chastain said. “As I find updates on that, I will pass it on.”

In the Q&A portion of the breakfast meeting, Towns County Civic Association President John Clemens asked if Chastain was going to try to repair the relationship between the Hiawassee Police Department and the Towns County Sheriff’s Office.

“The one thing I am going to say about that is you have to have both sides wanting to fix said relationship,” Chastain said. “I’ve offered to call (and facilitate discussion). There’s been letters sent back and forth between the two departments. There’s nothing more that I would like (than to) just sit down and talk.”

Police Chief Parker also contributed to the conversation: “I will be the first one

to say I am on board with the mayor. I want to work with the Sheriff’s Office, and we work. My guys and their deputies work well together.”

Regarding concerns for public safety, Parker clarified, “It’s not a feud and it’s not a dispute, because if you have a feud and you have a dispute, you have both parties that are fighting each other. We are not fighting against them ... We are open for any suggestions that we can get past this.”

Parker said that the issue originated from disputes over police chases that originally took place “three and four years ago,” but added that new procedures eliminated the practice. Safety is still the main focus, and “on the working level, we are good.” As far as the animosity goes, Parker admitted that there was a “standstill.”

Towns County GOP Chair Betsy Young suggested Sheriff Ken Henderson and Parker have a “sit-down” and “talk it out” in front of the community at the Towns County Civic Center. Parker said he was receptive to the idea.

Bible Education comes to Georgia and North Carolina Public High Schools



Bible education for public high school students during the school day is becoming a reality for Towns and Union Counties in Georgia and Clay and Cherokee Counties in North Carolina.

The Appalachian Christian Leadership Council, a newly organized, local, IRS-approved 501(c)3 non-profit organization, will offer a constitutionally approved program called Released Time Bible Education (RTBE).

The first RTBE program will start this January in Towns County. Already in place is a Board of directors and a coordinating committee, the backing of the Towns County School Board and high school

administrators, financial support, an off-campus classroom less than a quarter mile from the high school, and a bus to transport the students.

The AppCLC is ready to select a paid, part-time teacher and administrator. According to Jeff Langley, the AppCLC Board chair, “We are looking for someone who loves the Lord, loves working with high schoolers, and is an upstanding community citizen. Initially, we anticipate one small class meeting for approximately 90 minutes daily, five days a week from 9:40 to 11:10 am. We expect the number of students and classes to increase as the program matures.”

If you want to learn more about this unique and promising opportunity, please get in touch with Jim Yohe, AppCLC deputy chair, by phone at 940-867-4392 or email appclcg@gmail.com.

Beta Epsilon Future Key Woman Educator 2024 \$1000 Scholarship



Are you a female resident of Fannin, Towns, or Union County who is a rising junior or senior at the college or university level OR who is pursuing an advanced degree in education? Have you demonstrated high academic achievement and a commitment to pursue a degree in education at the college or university level?

If so, consider applying for the \$1000 Beta Epsilon Future Key Woman Educator Scholarship.

Apply online at <https://bit.ly/452mEwc> or scan the QR code. *Applications are due no later than 11/15/24.



ARFS: Give Your Pain Purpose

If you have lost a dearly loved pet and your heart is grieving, why not “give your pain purpose” by making a donation to Animal Rescue Financial Support (ARFS) in honor of your cherished fur friend.

ARFS will use your donation to provide medical care for an animal that is suffering and has an owner who cannot afford veterinary expenses.

Memorials can be made

to ARFS, P.O. Box 972, Hiawassee, GA 30546 or on ARFS website (www.arfs-inc.org) by clicking the DONATE button. Please indicate that your donation is a memorial and provide the name of your pet. Memorials will be posted on ARFS’s website, unless you request otherwise.

Let’s not forget that precious pet that gave you so much joy. Let’s give your pain purpose!

2024 Love Light Scholarship Program

The Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home Auxiliary is requesting donations to fund our Love Light Scholarship Program. We accept donations in memory or honor of individuals throughout the year. The scholarships are awarded to deserving Towns County High School Seniors who will be enter-

ing the medical field. We also award Chatuge Hospital/Nursing Home employees working to further their education.

Please return this form with your donation to:

Love Light Scholarship, PO Box 986, Hiawassee, GA 30546. (checks payable to Chatuge Regional Hospital Auxiliary).

Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Given in MEMORY of: _____
 Given in HONOR of: _____
 Acknowledgement to be sent to:
 Name: _____
 Address: _____
