

Residents learn how to preserve Native history

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To understand history is to understand the past, and to work hard to preserve it, a key function of the Towns County Historical Society.

The society learned about the Native inhabitants of the area, the Cherokee and Creek Tribes, at its monthly meeting at the Old Rec Center on Monday, Nov. 14.

The society welcomed the Georgia Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association at the meeting, where Georgia Chapter President Leslie Barker Thomas provided information on the Trail of Tears route, important Native American landmarks throughout Northern Georgia, and shared ways for residents to take care of such local attractions.

The Trail of Tears Association is a nonprofit membership-based organization with a mission to support the development and recognition of the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. Georgia is one of nine states represented in this effort.

According to Thomas, the Trail of Tears Association was developed in 1993 with the National Park Service, beginning in Oklahoma and Arkansas. Since then, the association has worked vigorously to not only preserve the history of the trail but to provide historically accurate information concerning the trail and the removal of the tribes.

"The removal story has many facets in that people don't really realize that there were 23 different tribes living in the state of Georgia at one time," said Thomas. "The Trail of Tears is often referred to as the long walk. The actual Trail of Tears in Georgia began the last week of May and the first two weeks of June.

"They collected 16,000 Cherokee. They had points and round-up forts during that time. There are actually only five actual points, 15 to 17 gathering points. A lot of these have been identified. We have found them and marked them."

Throughout the duration of the journey, close to 4,000 Cherokee people died due to the extreme climate conditions and lack of food and water. Many of that died were small children and the elderly.

"Part of the problem was that these people were gathered up at their front door with no notice," said Thomas. "They couldn't pack anything. They couldn't gather up their cooking tools. They couldn't gather any food.

"They left their animals in the fields and they were marched up over the hills into the internment camps in Tennessee, North Carolina and parts of North Georgia and Alabama."

While historical documents record the beginning



Meetings of the Towns County Historical Society are always well attended, and take place on the second Mondays of every month in the Old Rec Building.



Sandra Green is the president of the Towns County Historical Society.



Leslie Thomas is with the Georgia Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association.

of the removal of the Cherokee as taking place in Chattanooga, it actually began further east, in Georgia and North Carolina.

In 2009, the Wamp Bill was passed, pushed through by U.S. Sen. Zach Wamp of Tennessee. This bill extended the recognition of the Trail of Tears into parts of Alabama, Georgia and North Carolina.

"What we have been doing since 2009, was getting all the documentation we could for the sites," said Thomas. "We have been putting all of it together to have it certified and signed as what is known as the Trail of Tears in Georgia."

As of right now, the association has been able to receive recognition for seven sites in Georgia alone. Most

of these sites have been industrialized or demolished, though the association still established signage at the grounds. Some of the sites have been designated as either a State Historic Park or a National Park.

According to Thomas, there are 23 Cherokee and Creek heritage sites within Towns County, many of which still need to be recognized as a historical ground. Some of these sites include locations on Bearmeat Road, Fodder Creek, Tater Ridge Road and Shake Rag Road.

For more information on how to get involved with the Georgia Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association, visit www.gatrailoftears.org.

4-H...from Page 1A

through the educational materials produced for in-classroom use.

One way 4-H accomplishes this is through its public speaking program, which is the foundation of 4-H project achievement.

Before these brave Cloverleaf 4-H'ers make their way to the district competition, they must first complete individual County Project Achievements, where they compete with their peers in the classroom.

While the CPAs also count as a grade, 4-H leaders judge the projects. From there, a First, Second and Third Place winner is determined for each subject category. Those lucky winners have the opportunity to compete at the district level.

Students develop a four- to six-minute long speech on the topic of their choice, becoming an expert on the subject matter. It is their responsibility to develop the speech, the poster, visual aids and props, and then present that speech, first in front of their peers, and later to a room of judges.

Upon making it to the district level, students are broken up into groups based on their project areas, only competing against students with speeches of similar subject.

At Saturday's competition, 60 different topic groups were represented. These included archaeology, food for fitness, human development, veterinary science, outdoors survival skills, paleontology and many more.

While a First, Second and Third Place winner was determined for each category, many areas had ties among the winners because of how well-developed the students' speeches were.



Close to 500 kids participated in the speaking contest, which took place at the Union County Middle School.

"Towns County is thrilled to make a presence here today," said Andrew Smith, Towns County Extension Associate. "In the past, Towns has not had a very active 4-H program. It was kind of on the downhill slope and we had maybe one to two kids coming to this event over the last couple of years.

"But this year we introduced the CPA, the county project, into the classrooms and made it a classroom requirement where the students would be graded on it. We did that about a week and a half ago."

Due to the lack of interest in previous years, Smith said that they did not expect a large turnout from kids wanting to compete, but he was happily surprised when far more than he could have hoped for were eager to hop on a bus and represent Towns County at the district level.

"I really didn't know how many kids were going to want to come today, since the idea of it is so new to them and the program is still fresh and the kids aren't that familiar with it," said Smith. "But, we had 35 kids who decided to come and stand in front of a

group of people and give a speech, as a volunteer action. It's quite a large increase from what we've had in the past."

"I would hate to say that they aren't excited about getting to come and participate and be a part of something. Since this is a public speaking competition that they chose to come and do on a Saturday morning, it leads me to believe that they are pretty excited about this new 4-H program that they've never really heard anything about."

Towns County 4-H'ers certainly represented the county well, bringing in many First, Second and Third Place ribbons. The program as a whole brought home a prize of its own, being named as having the largest annual growth out of the entire Northeast district, something Smith hopes to see continue.

"They're already asking me about other opportunities that they can be a part of too," said Smith. "It makes me really proud of them and for them. If they get into it this young, it's going to open up a whole new world for them."

Gratitude...from Page 1A

the community has been bringing donations to us," said 911 Mapping Director Marty Roberts, who headed up the Hightower Command Post at Mount Pleasant Church of God. "They have brought all kinds of stuff, and before we needed it, we were sending it to Hayesville, North Carolina, with the (Boteler) fire."

Food, water, socks, warm hats – firefighters around the region have been continually resupplied for weeks now thanks to the giving spirit of the residents of Towns County and others.

When it came time to set up a command post in Towns County, to fight the fire heading toward Tate City and Upper Hightower, Roberts said the location of the church parking lot just made sense strategically.

He reached out to the pastor there, Glen Eller, who gladly opened the church doors and provided food, water, power, internet, places for indoor cots, showers and anything else the command post might need.

And the giving just kept coming. One nearby resident brought a gas-powered free standing heater to keep the firefighters warm outside the command post in the Mount Pleasant Church parking lot, which Roberts made his home during the fight.

Local firefighters, their spouses and others prepared and served home-cooked meals for the firefighters.

At night, residents of the area could see wildfire burning on the mountain across from the church, and Chief Copeland manned the Tate City Command Post, which successfully defended Tate City with back-burning and a lot of help from windy conditions beneficial to Towns County.

For now, both command posts have been taken down because Towns County, as of press time, was in the clear for wildfire.

Lloyd Massey, known affectionately as the unofficial mayor of Tate City, aided firefighting efforts in his area, as did several other residents in making firefighters welcome.

It should be noted that, although the Rock Mountain Fire no longer burned in Towns County as of press time, there is still serious threat of fire due to horrible and persistent drought conditions.

Wildfire could happen again at any moment, and residents/guests of Towns County are urged to heed the burn ban that's been in place since Nov. 4. There is to be no outdoor open flame burning of any kind, lest offenders wish to face potential jail time and a fine of up to \$1,000.



From the start of the local effort to contain the Rock Mountain Fire in Towns County, firefighters used the facilities at Mount Pleasant Church of God. Members of the community regularly brought supplies to the church, such as water, food, socks and warm hats.



Firefighting crews from around the state and country have taken turns fighting the Tate City fire crisis. Here are men from fire departments out of the City of Covington, Walton County and Athens-Clarke County.



Here, Josh Dyer fights wildfire raging on Rock Mountain near Tate City. Josh is a Florida resident who has given his time to fight wildfire in the North Georgia Mountains and beyond. Josh's older brother Joe lives in Blairsville. In fighting fires up here, Josh will miss Thanksgiving with his family back home in Florida.

BOE...from Page 1A

school.

"There is still going to be smoke outside at their homes, but I haven't been able to smell smoke inside the buildings. The air quality of these buildings is more than likely better than most anywhere.

"I believe that the students will be absolutely safe at the school. We have no plans to cancel school at this time, unless for some reason it becomes a safety issue."

Towns County Elementary School Principal Dr. Sandy Page has decided that, in light of these wildfires, the students need to not only better understand the situation, but also fire safety in general. "To accomplish this, Dr. Page invited the Georgia Forestry Commission to speak to the student body last Thursday, Nov. 17.

"We've been trying to be proactive with our students concerning the fires," said Dr. Page. "We started last week with not allowing our students to go out. We've had calls from parents about children who might have asthma or respiratory problems, and we're trying to make sure no one gets sick from the smoke.

"We have masks available if students and employees need those, and a nebulizer available for students who are having breathing problems."

At Towns County Middle School, Principal Erica Chastain and her staff



Young Josh Cornett presented his speech on basketball player Nate Robinson at the November BOE meeting.

have begun assisting the students in writing thank-you letters to the many firefighters who have come to the area from out of the state.

Principal Chastain feels this is the best way to address the situation of the fires to her students, by reinforcing fire safety by way of understanding what these men and women are doing and how to express gratitude for their service.

"We had several teachers and students who wanted to do something for the firefighters," said Chastain. "Because of the outpouring of support from the community, there isn't currently a need for volunteers to serve food or anything like that, so we decided to write letters instead.

"We're going to finish those up this week and get those over to all those brave

men and women who are working so hard on the fires to keep us safe."

In other BOE news, the board and Dr. Berrong approved a new procedure for alternative education students in terms of graduation. With the new procedure, if a student in that program is to complete all requirements for graduation before the January semester, they will be eligible to proceed into the workforce.

The student will return in May to officially graduate, but will be allowed to work during the months in between. However, these students will not be able to participate in school-related activities, such as sports, because they will no longer be on campus. This new procedure is entirely optional and not a regulation.