



Happy Thanksgiving

Towns County Herald

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Publication Number 635540 Volume 96 Number 05

Wednesday, November 27, 2024

Thanksgiving wishes given in county meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw wished "a very Happy Thanksgiving" to the attendees of his regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 19, at the courthouse.

It was a short meeting consisting of a General Election report, the appointment of a replacement member to the Board of Elections & Registration, a contract for county uniforms, approval of a couple homestead exemption refund checks, and a few "Commissioner's Comments."

On an invite from Brad-

shaw, Elections Superintendent Rachel Edwards took to the podium to discuss the General Election that included three weeks of early voting and Nov. 5 Election Day, all of which she said ran smoothly.

Edwards reported that early voting came in at 7,188 ballots cast, plus Election Day voting of 1,131, which, "of all the elections that I've held and conducted, that was a small turnout for Election Day."

Compared to the 2020 electoral turnout of 74.96%, Edwards said the 2024 Presidential Election ended up garnering votes from 83.2% of the Towns County electorate. "We broke records," Ed-

wards said. "Towns County was (the state) leader of advance voting for the whole three weeks - that makes me pretty proud."

Added Edwards, "We did have one incident where we had to get the first responders to come in. A man was dehydrated, he was 92 years old.

"They took him away on a gurney, gave him some fluids at the hospital, discharged him, and he came back that same day and voted. So, you've got to commend that dedication.

"(Our) elections wouldn't be as successful as they were if it hadn't been for the voters. I'm very proud of the voters, and super proud of

my poll workers ... because I truly could not do elections without the help of the poll workers."

Bradshaw approved \$228 in Board of Education Homestead Exemption Checks. The checks are part of an ongoing tax refund for local property owners who overpaid in recent years due to a billing vendor mistake discovered by Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson in 2022.

After finding the mistake, Anderson mailed roughly 2,500 refund applications regarding a countywide total of about \$267,000 in over-collected property taxes related

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Cliff Bradshaw
Towns County Sole Commissioner

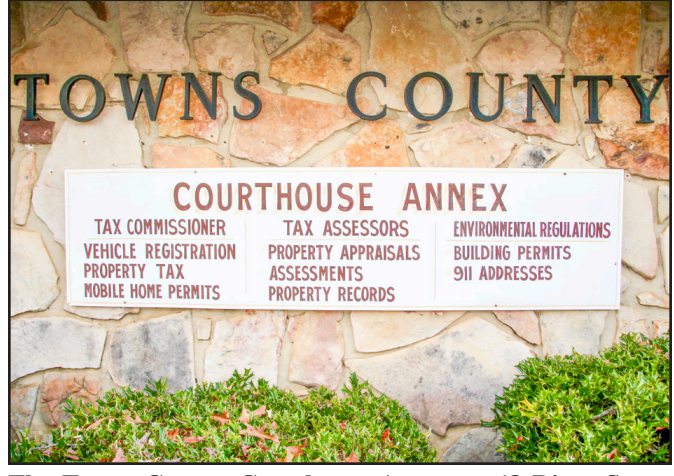
Property tax bills to hit mailboxes in December

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

2024 property tax bills will be arriving later than usual due to staffing issues that delayed the work of the Towns County Tax Assessors Office in updating countywide property values for annual taxing purposes.

The office has been experiencing a prolonged period of staffing challenges and has had to rely on third-party vendors in recent years to complete annual assessments for the property digest, and this year, those challenges weighed heavier than usual on the Tax Assessors Office.

Because of assessment delays, the digest was late getting to Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson, who runs a separate office, to calculate rollback millage rates for local taxing authorities to use to determine their property tax rates relative to their budgetary needs.



The Towns County Courthouse Annex at 48 River Street houses the separate offices of the Tax Assessors and the Tax Commissioner.

Towns County Government and the Towns County School Board received their rollback rates earlier this month and have now advertised their intent to set millage rates on Dec. 5.

The county will be accepting its rollback rate to offset inflationary increases

in local property values while the School Board will be giving a small tax break in 2024 by adopting a millage rate that is slightly lower than its rollback.

After the rates are set, Tax Commissioner Anderson will send the appropriate pa-

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Mtn. Country Christmas to bring holiday cheer



A scenic view from the past of the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The magical winter display known as the Mountain Country Christmas in Lights returns this year to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, bigger and better than ever, starting

Thanksgiving Night.

Along with the eponymous lights, guests can enjoy new features like train rides, a Coca-Cola-themed Christmas village and even a magic show.

There's a little bit of everything to enjoy at the holiday event, as, according

to Fairgrounds Manager Hilda Thomason, there's no age limit on enjoying Christmas lights. Adults and children alike are encouraged to attend, and families especially will find opportunities to make plenty of cheerful memories for the

See Country Christmas, Page 3

TCSO wins awards in annual GOHS Banquet



The Towns County Sheriff's Office represented the community well in this year's law enforcement banquet. Photo/Facebook

News Special

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson, Capt. Johnny McCoy, Maj. Eric Wood, Lt.

Ryan Forsyth, Sgt. Jake Forsyth and Deputy Tyler Strickland attended the 2024 Governor's Office of Highway

Safety Quad Network Banquet in Dahlonega Nov. 18.

Law Enforcement Offi-

See TCSO Awards, Page 3

Sheriff talks progress on drugs, Christmas events

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Last Friday, Nov. 22, the Mountain Movers & Shakers nonpartisan civic group welcomed Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson to speak about the goings-on of his office.

"I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the Sheriff's Office and what we're doing and where we've come from in the four years I've been here," Henderson said before starting in on a topic that brings mixed feelings for him in terms of its nature and the necessary response to it.

"I wish we had no drugs in our county, but we do," Henderson continued. "You're going to have to have a Sheriff's Office that is going to keep it cleaned up as much as we can, and it's pretty obvious that we have a problem.

"Over the last four years we have made over 350 felony drug arrests. We all know



Sheriff Ken Henderson speaking with the Movers & Shakers at the Sundance Grill Friday. Photo by Shelly Knight

if you have drug problems you've got all kinds of crimes. If we can keep drugs down, we can keep crime down.

"In the last year, we are down to zero murders. We

have had 14 thefts. We have had five burglaries. We have had nine aggravated assaults. Home invasions are zero. We have arrested 77 DUI cases.

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Property Tax Bills...from Page 1

perwork to the Georgia Department of Revenue for approval, at which point he can start the process of collecting property taxes.

Usually, property tax bills hit the mail Nov. 10 with a Jan. 10 due date, but this year, tax bills for real property likely won't be available for mailing until Dec. 13, to be due 60 days later in mid-February, though Anderson is hoping he can have them mailed as early as Dec. 10.

For the first time in recent memory, personal property tax bills will be mailed separately, as the required appeals deadline for personal property valuations is Dec. 21 due to an even longer delay in those assessments. Personal property tax bills should be mailed by early January and due in March.

Personal property valuations were late in coming after an appraiser who was assigned the task quit, according to the Tax Assessors Office, forcing the county to scramble to hire a third-party vendor to complete the job.

Since the overwhelming majority of the digest is composed of real property, the tax commissioner has decided to mail bills separately to enable people to get the bulk of their taxes paid sooner – and to collect taxes faster for county government and the School Board.

This will be the latest mailing of property tax bills since former Sole Commissioner Jack Dayton died in office in May 2005, which resulted in a situation where the county millage rate was not set until after an election was held.

Importantly, the Tax Assessors Office has been making meaningful progress toward preventing late assessments in the future; a new employee was hired last week, and a second applicant received an interview and could be hired in the coming days.

The role of a tax appraiser is complicated, with many facets to the job, so it will take a year or more until any new hires are fully trained

to handle all their duties. In the meantime, the county will continue to rely on third-party help, though the eventual goal is to do all assessing in-house.

“You know your market better than somebody who doesn't live here,” Chief Appraiser Sonya Neal said in speaking to her “ultimate goal” of appraising all properties with local staff, adding that doing so also makes it easier to answer the questions of property owners.

Fully staffed, the office has four appraisers who use strict state guidelines to assess and update property values every year. But recently, the office has had just two appraisers, including Neal, plus an appraiser-in-training.

With help from the Commissioner's Office, which exercises no control over assessor business but administers county funds for the office, Neal is hoping to staff up to five total appraisers to create a buffer against employee losses and ensure everything runs smoothly down the line.

Employee recruitment and retention is tough in the property assessment world because of how complex the job is and the level of required training. According to Neal, not only her office but the industry at large in Georgia has been experiencing staffing woes.

That's partly why Georgia Mass Appraisal Solutions & Services – the third-party vendor hired to help with rural land and commercial property assessments – was late in assessing values this year, which put the entire office behind schedule, Neal said.

After years of receiving assistance from GMASS, which appraises statewide, this was the first time the company has been late, and Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said he and Neal will be meeting with GMASS soon on how to avoid repeating this situation while the help is needed.

And even though rural and commercial property assessments were late, Neal said she is glad GMASS was able to conduct a thorough account-

ing and physically examine all of its assigned properties to make sure the overall digest reflects the most accurate values for the county.

There's another contributing factor in the difficulties of hiring and keeping appraisers – too often, it's a thankless position.

People tend to get upset when their values – and by extension, their tax bills – increase, a more common occurrence since the COVID-19 pandemic drove a spike in fair market values from move-ins flocking to more open, rural places like Towns and often paying above averages prices for the privilege of doing so.

The housing market appears to be stabilizing and perhaps even cooling, but inflation in the real estate market remained high last year, with real property here – land, buildings, etc. – inflating by about \$186 million versus actual growth of \$30 million, per Tax Commissioner Anderson.

Fortunately, Towns County has a 3% floating homestead cap, so property tax exemptions for homesteaded properties go up in relation to inflationary growth; exemptions increased by about 35% for this taxing year. And rollback rates also help to minimize the impact of inflation.

Chief Appraiser Neal is aware that some taxpayers believe values are being unfairly manipulated behind the scenes to advantage certain property owners over others, which she said is “absolutely false.”

She stressed that her office annually assesses all county properties in compliance with state regulations that strictly dictate the way assessments must be undertaken. There is very little discretion involved, as everything is tied to the real estate market, Neal said.

“We're fortunate to be in an area that people want to be in, and that drives our market,” Neal said. “People want to be here, and the way that the state evaluates property is based on sales of property ... and there are people willing to pay maybe over market value (just to

move here).”

Towns County remains in compliance with the state's required level of assessment but falls on the low end at 36%, which Commissioner Bradshaw sees as a double positive: that valuations are lower but in line, and that the Tax Assessors Office is doing its job right.

People unhappy with their valuations in any given year are welcome to file an appeal at the Tax Assessors Office within 45 days of their notices of assessment being mailed out each year.

For more information, visit <https://qpublic.net/ga/towns/>.

Additional coverage of millage rate discussions and property tax bills will be published in the coming weeks.

Country Christmas...from Page 1

holidays.

The outdoor craft market will be available to get some early Christmas shopping done, and folks can stop by one of the firepits for a hot dog or toasted marshmallow. Food vendors will offer the typical fair fare like funnel cakes, but be sure to head down to the Exhibit Hall for some cookies and punch.

Speaking of the Exhibit Hall, there'll be plenty to see there as well. Jerry Taylor of the Towns County Historical Society will be playing Christmas carols on the organ, setting the scene for the gorgeous new Coca-Cola Christmas Village donated by Greg and Lynnette Jones of Gainesville.

“It's from people that have always enjoyed coming to the Fair, and they were no longer able to put it up and tear it down each year,” Thomason said of the couple, who are getting older and wanted their village to continue to find purpose with others who will enjoy it for years to come.

Each one of the over 100 village pieces lights up, adding to the dazzling display available to walk through.

Also new this year is the Holiday Magic Show courtesy of Scott's World of Magic, an illusory magician act that will be on the books twice per evening on weekdays and three times per evening on weekends.

Shows will last 25 to 30 minutes and feature “grand illusions, comedy magic and cool special effects” at Eller Holler. There's a chance to be picked from the audience to participate in illusions such as floating in the air and being divided in half.

“We decided we'd change it up a bit and do a magic show ... It's something different; we're always coming up with new ideas,” explained Thomason.

One more big thing coming this year is the new train, which will of course allow the kiddos to take the scenic route around the Fairgrounds. Rides will be \$5 per person, set to take off every Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

The locomotive will also feature heavily in the Towns County Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade this Saturday, with a high-profile passenger in the form of a Coca-Cola polar bear standing alongside Miss Georgia Mountain Fair and local students.

Another attraction at the lights includes carolers thanks to Cornerstone Baptist Church, Macedonia Baptist Church, Enotah Baptist Church and other churches and individuals who would like to participate.

Macedonia will be performing a special Christmas cantata Dec. 14 at the Anderson Music Hall – free to visit with admission to see the

lights.

Thomason wants to give a shoutout to the Georgia Mountain Fair staff and volunteers helping in the arduous task of putting up the thousands of lights. The process is still ongoing and has required the help of not just staff and volunteers, but Lions Club members and detainees.

The extensive décor will be on display between Thanksgiving and Dec. 23, to run 6-9 p.m. every Thursday, Friday and Saturday from Nov. 28 to Dec. 7. The display will continue every night Dec. 12-23, closing for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Six-passenger golf carts are available to provide rides for folks in need of mobility assistance, and there are some special deals to keep an eye out for in the coming days.

Towns County residents can get in free on Dec. 5, and Dec. 10 is reserved as a drive-through night for buses and shuttles carrying passengers from local nursing homes and other handicapped folks, who will likewise pay no admission for the night.

General admission tickets are \$9 per person each night, though children 12 and under get in free. For more information on the annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevnts/christmas>.

TCSO Awards...from Page 1

cers from several North Georgia agencies were in attendance for fellowship with one another and came together to applaud each other on keeping their communities and highways safe.

Awards were presented for outstanding achievements

for individuals and agency recognition, with Sheriff Ken Henderson receiving an award for his outstanding and exemplary performance in the daily discharge of duties, and Deputy Tyler Strickland was presented with the Traffic Award.

Sheriff Henderson

would like to thank Appalachian Trail Traffic Enforcement Network Coordinator Michael Earley and his staff for their hard work in putting this event together, and he looks forward to their continued partnership in keeping local highways safe.

Sons of Confederate Veterans member David Junghans honored

At the November 14th meeting of the David W. Payne Camp 1633, Sons of Confederate Veterans, one of its members received the 128-year-old organization's “Meritorious Service Medal” for recognition of exceptional service.

David Junghans, a Vietnam War veteran and retired law enforcement officer, has belonged to the SCV for many years and has served as Camp 1633's commander and lieutenant-commander.



(L-R): SCV Georgia Division 2nd Brigade Commander Michael Dean and David Junghans

Henderson...from Page 1

"Those statistics show that what we're doing with the drug arrests is sending a message: you come to Towns County (with) your drugs, we're going to find you."

"I made promises to you, and I work for you, the citizens of Towns County, and I'm not going to forget that. But I'm very proud of the stats we have. And we're going to continue to work hard guys."

Henderson believes Towns is "among the safest counties, if not the safest county in Georgia," but he advised people Friday that drinking and driving - especially during busy holiday family and travel times - is something they should avoid and also watch out for on roadways.

"There is nothing wrong with having a drink and socializing with folks, but we've got to be smart enough to stay off of these roads," Henderson said. "Just look at these roads out here. It's bumper to bumper out here all the time."

"We're constantly seeing accidents. People say, 'Well, sheriff, I guess you're getting excited because it's cold weather and people are going to be leaving,' but they're not. That was the old days."

"Towns County is growing by leaps and bounds. I think we're all seeing that. And to be honest, at the Sheriff's Department, we are hurting because we're not growing with it. We have to grow with these times so that we can continue to do our job."

"But if we're operating a Sheriff's Department at the same pace it was 30 years ago, we have got to step up."

We must have the people and the equipment we need to do the job. We're going to need an extra officer in the new and improved courthouse, and we definitely need more officers on the road working the accidents.

"None of us want to see taxes go up, but it might come to that, and I think people will understand. My budget is in, and I've asked for additional officers. I have asked for equipment that we must have. For instance, after the first of the year, our TASERS and body cams will be obsolete."

Technology involved in police work is rapidly evolving. Even in just the last several years, improvements in artificial intelligence have provided officers with real-time situational awareness capabilities.

The advent of analytics capable of quickly and accurately recognizing colors, categorizing vehicles, reading license plates, and body-cam video that can be livestreamed and transcribed in real time make a tremendous difference for those brave officers on the job. In truth, the right technology is a force multiplier.

On the lighter side, the Sheriff's Office is readying for the "Shop With The Sheriff" Christmas spree for well-deserving local children, enabled each year by generous community donations. The 2024 experience is set for Dec. 7 at 8 a.m. at the Blairsville Walmart.

"It warms your heart," Henderson said. "It is the most rewarding thing I've ever done."

TCSO Administrative

Supervisor Vicki Edwards-Ellis said the effort involves "anywhere from 30 to 40 kids shopping for Christmas because we've got a community full of needs."

"Many people are not working," Edwards-Ellis continued. "They don't have childcare or job opportunities. But it's not about the parents, it's about the kids, because every child deserves a Christmas."

Henderson encouraged everyone "to come out and shop with the sheriff," guaranteeing it will "touch your heart when you look at these little kids that say I want to get something for my mom or my little brother."

People are also invited to line the streets of Downtown Hiawassee for the annual Sheriff's Office Christmas Parade this weekend, on Saturday, Nov. 30. The parade will pull out of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds around 5:30 p.m. to head down Main Street to the Town Square.

"The theme this year is 'Candy Canes on Main,'" Henderson said. "Line-up starts at 4, but if you want to be judged on your float, you need to be fully decorated by 5. Everyone is welcome."

"If you would like to receive our monthly newsletter, 'The Badge,' if you're not on the mailing list and would like to be, let Vicki know. We'll get it to you either by mail or email. It's part of my promise to you to be transparent. We're also on Facebook."

"I truly mean this when I say that it is an honor to serve as your sheriff, and I promise you that as long as I am in this office, I will give it 100% and do the very best that I can for the citizens of Towns County."

Georgia Beta Delta (Athens District) Chapter Of Alpha Delta Kappa Initiated Four New Members



The Georgia Beta Delta (Athens District) chapter of Alpha Delta Kappa is pleased to announce the initiation of new members. Welcome to Stacy Calhoun, Gloria Cartee, Janet Lewis and Rachael Queen. (Nov 27, 2024)

Old Unicoi Trail, DAR Lineage Research Workshop



Lineage Research Workshop participants



On November 18th Old Unicoi Trail Chapter, National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, sponsored a Lineage Research workshop. The workshop was conducted by Pamela Strother Downs, Georgia State Society's Lineage Research Committee Chair from the Fielding Lewis DAR Chapter, Marietta. Linda Carr, Registrar, Old Unicoi Trail Chapter who facilitated the workshop emphasized, "This was a great opportunity for members of Old Unicoi Trail and neighboring North Georgia chapters to prepare themselves to assist prospective members in the application process." Linda Carr of Blairsville is also a member of the State Society Application Team. The workshop was held at St. Claire's Episcopal Church, Blairsville.

According to Barbara Weaver of Murphy who serves as Regent, Old Unicoi Trail Chapter, "The first step towards a prospective DAR member's approval for membership is proving lineage to a Patriot ancestor. Our Registrar Linda Carr is very successful in facilitating the approval of prospective members as evidenced by our Chapter's ever-growing number of new members by application. The Lineage Research Committee



Linda Carr introduces Pam Downs; Patti Davis, Daughter, prepares for workshop.

solves problems with complicated applications, resulting in new members, teaches research skills and techniques leading to better applications, and provides solutions for applications that state researchers are unable to resolve."

Specifically, the Lineage Research Committee helps Chapters obtain verifiable documentation to support the application process of prospective members. It provides genealogical research and lineage documentation for applications and assists Registrars in responding to issues identified by the national society's genealogists. Committee members offer consultation and mentoring; provide boots-on-the-ground research in Georgia for those who cannot commute to locations where non-digitized records

are stored; and participate in genealogy workshops and encourage Registrar training. The committee encourages membership by Daughters across the state who have genealogy and research experience; supports networking by Chapter Chairs; provides links to resources, genealogy tools, and documentation sources and gets questions answered or provides a referral to someone with expert knowledge.

The DAR promotes historic preservation, education, and patriotism and represents over one million Daughters. A woman 18 years or older who can prove lineal descent from a patriot of the American Revolution is eligible to join.

If you are interested in membership or to attend a Chapter meeting email oldunicoitrail@gmail.com.

YHC students present at medieval renaissance conference

Speaking on a variety of topics related to the medieval and Renaissance eras, students from Young Harris College presented at the 36th University of Virginia-Wise Medieval Renaissance Conference.

Six students spoke at the academic conference in Wise, VA, a gathering of scholars based on disciplines - or fields of study - related to the medieval and Renaissance periods. The conferences are also often a ground-level for research scholarships.

"This event was significant because it allowed our Young Harris students an opportunity to present on some facet of research that they are working on," said Dr. Daniel Helbert, an assistant professor of English at Young Harris College. Helbert arranged and organized the trip for the students. "This, then, enables further conversation, networking, and ultimately publication of their research."

The students - Laci Thompson, Eli Smith-Foot, Allie Killer, Andrew Cowan, Megan Cothren, and Olivia Lamons - presented essays on different topics: Laci Thompson: "Morality in Marie de France: Looking beyond Gender Roles"; Eli Smith-Foot: "The Rulership of King Arthur in Lawman's Brut"; Allie Killer: "Airy Charms: Magic in Shakespeare's Richard III, Henry V, and The Tempest"; Andrew Cowan: "The role of women in Medieval/Arthurian society"; Megan Cothren: The Merging Symbols in "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"; Olivia Lamons: "A Comparison of Disability and Social Class in Shakespeare's Plays".

The UVA conference is an annual event based on



Laci Thompson, Eli Smith-Foot, Allie Killer, Andrew Cowan, Megan Cothren, and Olivia Lamons

research on the medieval and Renaissance periods.

"I went to the conference because it was an opportunity to put the things I learned in Dr. Helbert's Shakespeare class into practice," said Olivia Lamons. "It was my first time speaking at a conference setting and it introduced me to something that requires professional skills - public speaking, networking, etc. I learned how to modify a written paper to a format that is more acceptable for listeners and was able to listen to papers by other students and professors on interesting medieval topics."

The event is also interdisciplinary, meaning there were other English scholars as well as historians, art historians, and music historians.

"I believe I learned quite a bit, from supposed geographical locations concerning Amr's tomb, how crocheting relates to medieval literature, and how movies such as The Labyrinth are representative of the medieval period," Megan Cothren said. "My reason for going was to experience an academic conference among people interested in the same special topic as I am. It was a great experience that all schol-

ars should have the opportunity to do at least once in their academic career."

For Allie Killer, she appreciates the opportunity so much, she has gone twice: "I am so grateful for YHC's support which allowed me to attend the UVA-Wise Medieval Renaissance Conference for the second year in a row. I was truly amazed to see my own growth since last year's conference. This year, I was empowered to engage in discussions with professors and graduate students from other schools, building connections with them and broadening my knowledge of the field."

Conferences like this are often at the graduate level or higher, meaning the participants either have or are pursuing a graduate degree in the field.

"However, the UVA Wise Renaissance conference has a healthy undergraduate program every year as well. That's what our YHC students were presenting in and why it was such a great opportunity," Helbert said. "All the presentations were very well received by the academic community, and these young scholars represented Young Harris College very well."

Allegheny Masonic Lodge No. 114 8th Annual Golf Classic

ALLEGHENY MASONIC LODGE



On Saturday, September 21, 2024, Allegheny Masonic Lodge No. 114 held its 8th Annual Golf Classic at Chatuge Shores Golf Course in beautiful Hayesville, NC. "Bill Rinaldo, golf pro and course manager at Chatuge Shores Golf Course, has been great to us over the years and our annual event for the past four years," per Ivy Smith, Past Master of Allegheny Masonic Lodge and Event Coordinator. This year's Worshipful Master, Peyton Smith, stating proudly, "this year's golf classic was the most successful since its inception eight years ago," and I would like to thank everyone who participated in the event and all our individual and corporate sponsors that made this possible."

The events day began with registration at 7:30 AM on 9/21 with the annual event putting contest at 8 AM, consisting of 20 plus golfers, and a shotgun start of the four-man,

best ball scramble tournament at 9:30 am, that consisted of 19 four-man teams (76 golfers).

Worshipful Master, Peyton Smith wanted to personally thank all of the Allegheny Members that helped with the set-up on Friday afternoon, 9/20 and manning the registration stations and the tournament on Saturday, 9/21. "Without these guys, this tournament would not have been possible, and they have my utmost respect," exclaimed WM Peyton Smith.

Allegheny Masonic Lodge No. 114 would like to thank all the 2024-8th Annual Golf Classic Sponsors:

Title Sponsor: Chic-fil-A of Blairsville, Gold Level Sponsors: Alpha-Omega Inc., Brett Owenby Grading, LLC, Cochran-McDaniel Funeral Home, Lucky Dog Food Group - Lucky's Taqueria/Huddle House/Blairsville Grills & Greens/Smokeout BBQ/Blairsville Social, Nelson Tractor, Procom Sales, Service Plumbing, Shook's Welding, VFW-Hiawassee, Rolling Meadows Campground-Murphy, NC.

Silver Level Sponsors: Sushi Shack, Woodmen of The World (Woodmen Life) -

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Other Contributors: MWPGM Edgar Land, Brass-town Council No. 79 R&SM, Enotah Chapter No. 24 RAM, Lee Knight, Brasstown Drug & Gun.

December Garden Activities from your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - Trees, shrubs, and perennials can still be planted or transplanted to a new location this month if the ground is not too frozen to work properly.

Some trees and shrubs that will provide food for birds are dogwood, crabapple, holly, hawthorn, and pyracantha.

Continue raking leaves from your lawn and apply lime if your soil test indicates that it is needed. A handheld shredder that acts like a vacuum is an alternative to raking. The shredded, bagged leaves can then be deposited in your garden. If you have not already done so, mulch all trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs. A four to six-inch layer of mulch is good, placing the mulch close but not touching the stem or trunk of the plant.

Deciduous trees and shrubs can be pruned as needed when they are fully dormant. Rake and dispose of fruit and leaves around fruit trees to help minimize overwintering insects and diseases. If rain and snowfall are inadequate, water all new plantings and bulb beds.

Flower Beds - Cut chrysanthemums back to about two to three inches once blooming is complete.

To keep your pansies healthy and blooming, dead-head (remove faded blooms) and fertilize, following label directions.

Spring flowering bulbs can still be planted this month.

Clean up flowerbeds and remove annuals killed by frost. Work old mulch and organic matter into beds before the soil freezes. Apply pre-emergent herbicides to control winter weeds.

Vegetables - Plan ahead. Order gardening catalogs and start planning your spring vegetable and flower gardens.

Prepare next year's garden soil by turning it over and incorporating organic materials such as pine bark, compost, or shredded leaves.

Pull any weeds that remain in your garden. Cut any remaining tops off of asparagus plants and add a winter dressing of aged manure to the bed.

Houseplants - Do not over water houseplants during the winter months as this could lead to root rot.

Miscellaneous - As winter approaches, take time to review your past gardening year. Look at your successes and failures and make your next year's plans and goals accordingly.

If you decorate for the holidays with a cut Christmas tree, recycle the tree by pruning off boughs for use as frost and wind protection for tender and newly planted perennials and shrubs.

Prepare your garden tools for winter storage. Clean,

sharpen, and store them in a bucket filled with oiled, coarse sand. They will be ready for you when spring arrives.

If you have not already done so, shut down outdoor irrigation systems to prevent freezing and drain garden hoses and store indoors.

Don't forget to feed the birds because as winter approaches, they may not be able to find an adequate supply of food. Keep fresh water out for the birds as well.

Lightly trim evergreens in your garden to use for holiday decorations. Magnolia, euonymus, boxwood, laurel, holly, cypress, and juniper all make long-lasting cut stems indoors.

Look for after Christmas sales on garden tools and equipment. Make a wreath of dried herbs and flowers from your garden.

If you do not have a garden journal, get one and start keeping records of your garden. Record information such as future plans for design, plant and seed orders, planting schedules, insect appearances, garden highlights (like the date when you first see blooms on your spring bulbs), and more.

Celebrate the winter solstice (the arrival of winter) December 21st.

Jo Anne Allen
Master Gardener
Extension Volunteer
706-400-8139
NTNov27,2024

County Meeting...from Page 1



Hilda Thomason, right, informing guests of the November commissioner's meeting about the 2024 Mountain Country Christmas in Lights.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

to incorrect homestead exemption amounts, with reimbursement coming from Towns County Schools.

The refund period is likely nearing its end, though the lion's share of claims appears to have been made to date, as the rate of returned applications has markedly dwindled.

In other business, Bradshaw appointed Charlotte Sleczkowski to the Board of Elections & Registration. Sleczkowski is filling the unexpired term of Democratic Party representative David Plunkett, who has resigned from the position. The term lasts through Dec. 31, 2027.

The commissioner thanked both Plunkett and Sleczkowski for their service to the county.

Moving on, Bradshaw signed a contract with uniform rental company Cintas to provide uniforms for various county employees. He noted that the county already gets a discounted rate through state procurement, and that he has been able to negotiate an even better local rate over the years.

In his "Commissioner's Comments" following official business, Bradshaw reiterated his plan to broadcast regular county meetings to area TVs starting in January. The cost to the county is \$250 a month, and his office will be making cards available for people to scan to learn how to watch.

Bradshaw called on Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason to speak from the audience about the

upcoming Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, which opens to the public Thanksgiving Night.

The fairgrounds have been transformed into a winter wonderland, to run 6-9 p.m. every Thursday, Friday and Saturday between Nov. 28 and Dec. 7. The display will continue every night Dec. 12-23, closing for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Thomason said people come from all over the country to see the lights, a claim backed up by Towns County Historian Jerry Taylor, who entertains families every year with Christmas music played on his antique reed organ collection at the Exhibit Hall inside the fairgrounds.

Bradshaw noted the display also "brings a lot of happiness to our local people to be able to take their kids up there," who will be sure to enjoy a brand-new Magic Show

offering that features "futuristic elements that capture the attention and imagination of Kids from age 2 to 92."

Tickets are \$9 per person each night, though children 12 and under get in free. For more information on the annual Mountain Country Christmas in Lights, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/christmas>.

"I want to make sure to wish you all a very Happy Thanksgiving," Bradshaw said to the roughly dozen or so residents in attendance before closing the meeting. "I hope you have time to enjoy your family and your friends. Life is quick, life is short, as I find out every day."

Unless otherwise scheduled, commission meetings take place the third Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. inside the Towns County Courthouse at 48 River Street in Hiwassee.

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.