

# Towns County Herald

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## Commissioner, fire chief lift burn ban thanks to rain

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Towns County residents will be glad to hear that the countywide burn ban has been lifted due to improved fire danger levels from recent bouts of rain.

On Monday, Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall, with a recommendation from Fire Chief Harold Copeland, lifted the ban on burning.

The ban had been in place since Nov. 4.

Of course, the recent drought means that Towns County has escaped drought conditions or the Level 1 drought designation made by Gov. Nathan Deal last month.

As long as the county continues to experience drought, even with some rain, there's still a danger of wildfires.

Should the county go through another dry period in the coming weeks, ground vegetation could dry out again with the lack of rainfall, thereby creating potentially more wildfire fuel.

If this were to happen, and fire danger levels once more rise to unsafe levels, the commissioner and fire chief would need to put another burn ban in place at a later date.

In light of the burn ban being lifted, residents will still need to obtain a burning permit if they wish to burn. Burning permits are issued for the burning of natural vegetation only, like brush piles – it is still illegal to burn trash, mail and other household items.

"All outdoor burning must have a permit and is good only for natural vegetative materials," according to the Georgia Forestry Commission website. "It is unlawful to burn manmade materials such as

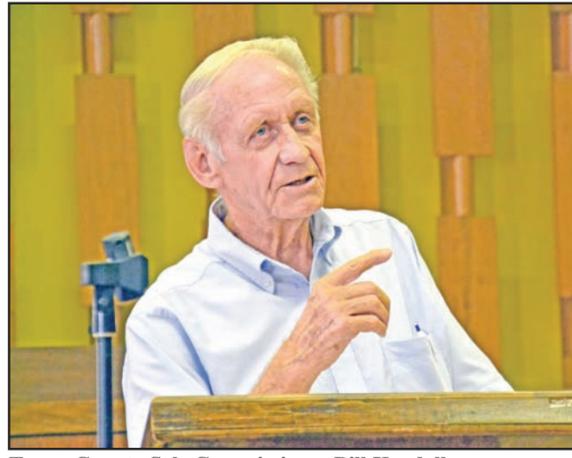
tires, shingles, plastics, lumber, household garbage, etc."

Residents can obtain a burn permit from the Georgia Forestry Commission by navigating to the GFC online permit system at [www.gfc.state.ga.us/online-permits/index.cfm](http://www.gfc.state.ga.us/online-permits/index.cfm), or by calling 1-877-OK2-BURN (652-2876).

Should residents decide to burn without a permit and accidentally start a wildfire or structure fire, they could be held liable for the cost of putting the fire out, as well as any damages caused by the fire.

The GFC is expected to begin issuing burning permits this week, which is something it wasn't doing prior to last week's rainfall, though the continued issuance of burning permits depends entirely on daily conditions.

"There is no statewide burn ban," according to a Dec. 1 GFC Facebook post. "Many counties imposed local bans,



Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall

and GFC will recognize those as long as they are in place. If your county isn't in a burn ban, we will issue permits when we feel that it is safe to do so.

"We understand that it may be inconvenient not being

able to burn, but hopefully these wildfires have taught us all a lesson about what can happen. The rain has helped our fire danger levels, but we aren't out of the woods just yet! Please understand that safety

of our GFC professionals, Georgia's citizens and their property is our top priority."

Gov. Nathan Deal's Nov. 14 executive order banning the use of fireworks will remain in effect until the drought declaration for Towns County has been lifted.

As of press time Monday, a total fire ban was still in place for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, though residents are urged to check back with the U.S. Forest Service website on a regular basis.

"Southern Area Coordination Center advises there are currently 18 large fires burning in the Southeast for a total of 143,973 acres," according to a recent update on the USFS website. "Wildfires have burned an estimated 54,211 acres on the Chattahoochee-Oconee

See Burn Ban, Page 6A

## Local vendors set up shop for Christmas at Fairgrounds

By Lily Avery  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

'Tis the season for spreading holiday cheer, and one way of doing so is by showing appreciation to friends and family through the gift of handmade items, which can be found at the "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights," hosted at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

While the event may sound like a place to be dazzled by sparkling Christmas lights – which it most certainly is – crafts and homemade goods are available in the dozens, filling the Pioneer Village and booths all throughout the fairgrounds.

Everything from candied apples to specialty knives to uniquely designed fibers arts are available, proving to offer a little something for everyone.



"Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!" at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

One vendor, Joy Garcia, located at the beginning of the lightshow tour, is showcasing her machine embroidery towels, featuring various designs that include, but are

not limited to, holiday themed, nature-themed and sports-themed pieces. Garcia offers various handmade Christmas

See Fairgrounds, Page 6A

## Buchanans spread Christmas cheer with annual lights

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

For those who aren't Buchanan Family Christmas Lights, it all began when Robert Buchanan was 4 years old.

A family friend gave the young boy a single strand of lights back then – it was a modest Christmas for Robert that year, but the spark of fascination had been lit.

Since that time, Robert has grown his collection of lights to more than 100,000, and for the past 20 years he's run a Christmas lights show at his house on Scataway Road that has, over time, become something wondrous to behold.

Usually, Robert gets

See Buchanans, Page 1B



Santa Claus (Mike West) with little Edwina from Blairsville. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

## TCHS band continues tradition of excellence with Winter Concert



The Towns County High School Indian Raider Marching Band placed First in Class at the 2016 White Columns Invitational in November. See Band, Page 1B

## Hospital auxiliary carries on Love Light tradition

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

For decades, the Chatuge Regional Auxiliary has hosted an annual tree lighting at the hospital known as the Love Light Celebration.

This year's Love Light Celebration took place on Dec. 1, in the lobby of the Chatuge Regional Hospital.

The Celebration is meant to highlight the auxiliary's scholarship drive, made possible by donations in memory of or in honor of loved ones.

Scholarship money goes toward helping students of Towns County High School

See Love Light, Page 6A



Dr. Robert Stahlkuppe and Golda Sanders with the Love Light Tree. Sanders was a nurse at Chatuge Regional Hospital for more than 30 years, and Dr. Stahlkuppe has been a doctor there for more than 30 years also. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

## Young Harris celebrates 46th year of tree lighting

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Despite the fact that Mayor Andrea Gibby has hosted her fair share of Annual Christmas Tree Lightings in Mayor's Park, she never fails to be impressed with the community spectacle.

Dozens of residents showed up with their children for the event that's always filled with music, laughter, Christmas lights, Santa's knee, and plenty of cookies.

Starting things off, Mayor Gibby addressed the crowd with comments about the origins of the tradition. Due to the fog of time, some



Santa Claus appears here after year, just after the tree is lit, to lead the gathered children into Young Harris City Hall for snacks and the imparting of Christmas wishes. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

## Sheriff gives updates on Empty Stocking Fund

By Lily Avery  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton shared words of thanks and updates on the Empty Stocking Fund with area residents at the Mountain Movers and Shakers weekly meeting at Mary's Southern Grill on Friday, Dec. 2.

With the end of recent elections, Sheriff Clinton thanked all of his constituents for re-electing him into office, pledging that he hopes to continue to make them proud and do what he feels is best for the people of Towns County.

"I care very deeply about this county and I care

See Empty Stocking, Page 7A



The Mountain Movers and Shakers donated \$644 to the sheriff's Empty Stocking Fund. Photo/Lily Avery

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**NATIONAL PEARL HARBOR Remembrance Day**  
75th Anniversary  
DECEMBER 7

**Basketball**  
Tues Dec 6 @ Tallulah Falls  
6 & 7:30 PM  
Fri Dec 9 @ Riverside Military  
6 PM Boys Only  
Sat Dec 10 @ Fannin Co  
6 & 7:30 PM