

Shop with a Hero...from Page 1A

According to Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith, the event will look different in 2020 due to COVID-19, and measures will be taken to ensure the children's safety.

"Typically, we would go straight from the school and go Christmas shopping, and then to a restaurant and eat afterward," Smith said. "This year we are going to cater pizza to the cafeteria."

"So, after school, we will have a pizza party first then take some extra buses to Walmart. Usually, we have officers on the buses, too, but I don't think we will be doing that this year."

Donations for the event are typically raised through private donations, but this year, SERVPRO fire and water cleanup and restoration services partnered with the City of Hiawassee to host a fundraiser back in September that raised more than enough money for kids in the program.

With the extra funds, in addition to the usual allotted Christmas spending money,

each kid will be able to purchase a jacket and pair of shoes.

A bonus of Shop with a Hero is that it serves as a mentorship program of sorts, giving kids a chance to spend time with local heroes to build relationships and understanding with other adults in their community who care about their situations and wellbeing.

"We serve the underprivileged children in this shopping event," Smith said. "The school (with Family Connection) makes the decision who qualifies for it."

"Many of (these kids are from broken homes), and they may have had negative experiences with law enforcement in the past, whether it was from having a family member arrested for drug use or some other reason."

"They may see law enforcement as the bad guy. The police may be the person that took their neighbor to jail or their brother or something. We want to make sure that they know the community cares

about them and is there to help and support them.

"The police serve more than just law enforcement needs; we are servants in our community, and this is one way that we help build positive relationships with some kids that may otherwise have negative experiences."

A program like Shop with a Hero would not be possible without overwhelming help from the community, the members of which financially support the endeavor yearly.

"I want to thank everybody who has donated this year and every year," Smith said. "We have people who have donated every single year, and that is what keeps this program going. This is such a tight-knit community, and when someone is in need, the community helps them out."

"I am honored to serve in the position that I am in, and I know all my officers are honored to work here in Hiawassee and Towns County. It is just a great place to live and work."

Covid Testing...from Page 1A

significantly compared to recent years.

By the last week of November 2019, the percentage of specimens testing positive for influenza by clinical laboratories was 20.15%. In 2020? just 1.7%, per the Department of Public Health's Weekly Influenza Report.

And since the start of this year's "flu season" on Sept. 27, there have been zero flu outbreaks reported statewide, compared to 12 over the same period last year.

Regardless of what's circulating widely, people should continue to focus on improving their health generally, as well as following the recommended safety guidelines, which are likely to stay in place for some time even after a COVID-19 vaccine becomes available.

Speaking of, there's been a lot of buzz in recent weeks about the number of viable COVID-19 vaccines currently in development, with the Food and Drug Administration expected to start approving Emergency Use Authorizations for such vaccines any day now.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp met with hospital CEOs last week to discuss vaccine distribution plans in the state, according to WSB-TV Channel 2.

Kemp spoke of the upcoming Dec. 10 meeting of a special FDA Advisory Committee to decide the fate of the Emergency Use Authorization specifically for the "Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for the prevention of COVID-19 in individuals 16 years of age and older."

"We expect anytime within a few days following that meeting, we should start receiving the first shipments of the vaccine. So that is fast approaching," Kemp said, according to Channel 2 reporting.

Moving forward, once the FDA approves any vaccine, an Advisory Committee with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will "review all available data about that vaccine," after which it will "vote on whether to recommend the vaccine and, if so, who should receive it."

The CDC has already determined that approved vaccines should be offered in an initial phase to both health care personnel and residents of long-term care facilities.

After a vaccine makes it to this initial phase, the Georgia Department of Public Health will present a timeline for vaccine delivery to local health and long-term care establishments based on CDC guidance.

Additionally, the CDC has prioritized four categories of individuals for early access to the vaccine, including health care personnel; essential/critical industry workers; people at high risk for severe COVID-19 due to underlying medical conditions; and people 65 years and older.

"When a vaccine is authorized or approved in the United States, there may not be enough doses available for all adults," the CDC said. "Supplies will increase over time, and all adults should be able to get vaccinated later in 2021."

Vaccination in children is not currently being recommended due to lack of study, but the CDC has said "clinical trials continue to expand those recruited to participate," and that "the groups recommended to receive the vaccines could change in the future."

Fortunately, of all the age demographics, the health of children appears to be the least impacted by COVID-19.

In terms of cost to individuals, the CDC has said that vaccine doses purchased

using tax dollars will be provided without charge.

"However, vaccine providers will be able to charge administration fees for giving or administering the shot to someone," the CDC said. "Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient's public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Provider Relief Fund."

Another recent CDC development includes an adjustment to quarantine recommendations. CDC officials still advocate a 14-day quarantine after exposure to a positive-testing person or someone suspected of having COVID-19, but they've relaxed the guidance a bit.

"Reducing the length of quarantine may make it easier for people to quarantine by reducing the time they cannot work," the CDC said. "A shorter quarantine period also can lessen stress on the public health system, especially when new infections are rapidly rising."

Basically, people who have been exposed to a positive-testing person and do not develop symptoms may exit quarantine on Day 10 instead of after 14 days, or on Day 7 following exposure if the quarantining individual tests negative on Day 5 or later.

After stopping quarantine, people are advised to continue watching for symptoms until 14 days after exposure.

"If you have symptoms, immediately self-isolate and contact your local public health authority or healthcare provider," the CDC said. "Wear a mask, stay at least 6 feet from others, wash (your) hands, avoid crowds, and take other steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

The Vogel State Park Christmas Program and Drive Through Celebration December 12, 2020

The Vogel State Park Christmas Program and Lighting of the tree will be held on Saturday, December 12th. Due to Covid virus restrictions this year, it will be a little different. We are asking everyone to stay in their vehicle as much as possible. The program times are listed below:

4-5 PM: Parking in the main lots near Visitors Center (parking is limited so try to arrive between the hours listed above).

4:15-5 PM: Pre-session music on stage at Visitors Center (program will be transmitted via your vehicle radio, station announced on arrival).

5-6:30 PM: Main Program on stage at Visitors Center.



6:30-8 PM: Drive through around Joy Land at ball field to enjoy hot chocolate, cider, cookies, Santa and the Great Tree and a children's surprise. (Volunteers will come to your vehicle as you drive through.)

Program this year will

be presented by Justin Terry, Knoxville, TN, Debra Perry and Jaidyn's Call, Dahlonega, GA, Mike and Cheri Young, Dahlonega, GA, & Jim and Lydia Cox assisting and of course the Christmas Story.

Join us for the 18th annual state park Christmas Program and for an evening of fellowship and celebration of the true meaning of Christmas.

Please bring a flashlight, chair and blanket (if needed), and wear warm clothes. Also, bring an unwrapped gift for a child age 12 and under for the Sheriff's Department to be given to the children that need a blessed Christmas (no toy guns or knives please).

Hope to see you there!

A Christmas Thank You from Hamilton Gardens

Many wonderful things have been happening at the Gardens and we would like to say, "Thank you."

The Canadian chapter of the American Rhododendron Society plans to use our Gardens as a test site to see how well their native plants will grow here. John Kohli and Mike Bamford of the Azalea Chapter of Georgia, a member of the American Rhododendron Society, are helping us establish a new legacy garden. On a recent workday, Brother's at Willow Ranch provided a wonderful lunch for our volunteers. It is because of people like you that the Gardens will continue to grow. Thanks to all of you for your support and commitment to the Gardens.

We would also like to thank all who made our Christmas in the Greenhouse event a success. Our sponsors were South State Bank and the Wine Cottage. The silent auction items were donated by Goldhagen Art Glass, Hightower Creek Vineyards, Hiawassee Hardware, Two Country Hens, Artist Bill Herold, and BodySense. Deidre Shellinger, Anne Mitchell, Gayle Kusk and Linda & Gordy Jones also

donated auction items. Our borrowed tents were courtesy of The City of Hiawassee. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time for our Christmas in the Greenhouse night; it is inspiring to see how you are committed to keeping these Gardens going. Thank you for all your support and, most importantly, your friendship to the Gardens.

For those of you who came from the community to say 'Merry Christmas' and get your Holiday poinsettias, cyclamen and handmade wreaths, thank you. It was a fun and enjoyable evening with music, spiced cider, fire pits and holiday cheer.

If you'd like to become a volunteer or a member of Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge,



please visit our website at hamiltongardens.org, call 706-970-0011 or email info@hamiltongardens.org. We hope you have a safe and happy Holiday season. NT(Dec9,F3)SH

Love Light Tree...from Page 1A

has been a fairly long list, and the community has done a good job about helping us. It has been meaningful for us."

The event was formerly run by Brenda Hitchcock, who passed away earlier this year in February. Hitchcock helped to make Love Light into the success that it is today, Cornett said.

"Brenda Hitchcock has been in charge of it ever since I have been in it," Cornett said. "It is a big deal that we want to carry on for her in her memory, too."

"We feel like the children in this area need the extra encouragement, and even if they aren't big scholarships, they are an incentive to carry on. It is hard to make that commitment to go to the next

step.

"This gives students something to work towards, because we want the best of the best and to encourage people to go into the medical field, because it is a very important area."

Auxiliary members raise money for the scholarships year-round, and they believe the Love Light event and fund are especially needed now given the unique challenges of 2020.

"This year of all years, it is important to show our students our support," Cornett said. "It has been so hectic for them; they have given up so much. We need to show that we still care and have their interests in mind. We haven't forgotten them, and their education is still a top priority."

Chatuge Regional Administrator Ryan Snow said he was grateful for the commitment of the voluntary auxiliary members in the hospital and nursing home.

"While we can't have the ceremony this year, we will have the tree and get those ladies to decorate it," Snow said. "We do appreciate those ladies and what they do. They have continued to help us through this season, and we are thankful for that."

People who would like to donate may do so to the Love Light Scholarship, P.O. Box 986, Hiawassee GA 30546. Be sure to include the name of the individual in whose memory or honor the donation is being made.

Friends of the Libraries continues honor system book sale

FOLTC's book sale will continue on Mondays and Thursdays at Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris through December 17th. The hours are 11 AM - 5 PM. Even if the library is closed on those days, the bookstore will remain

open and all books are discounted. There are a few "rules" for shoppers. Please wear a mask so everyone can stay healthy. If you don't have a mask, we will have one for you. If you can't wear a mask due to health reasons, please wear a face shield or wait until there are no other shoppers in the store before you enter. There is a limit of 10 people in the bookstore at a time. PLEASE help us keep everyone healthy! Many of our Friends are at high risk for the virus.

This is an "Honor System" book sale. There are no volunteers available to figure out your total, take your money, or make change. There are price lists posted around the store and at the checkout table near the entrance. Once you have figured out your total owed, please leave cash or a check in the red Money Box next to the checkout table. You are also welcome to become a Friend or renew your membership by filling out a membership form and leaving it with your money in the Money Box.

The first week of the sale was very successful, and the Friends hope this continues. This sale is a great place to do your Christmas shopping safely. (Children's books are 25 cents each! Young adult books are 50 cents.) There are boxes and bags available to help you tote your treasures to your car.

All proceeds of this sale benefit Mountain Regional Library and Towns County Public Library. Please help support your libraries! NT(Dec9,F2)SH

Hope House

Hope House is a faith-based, non-profit benevolence center to help Union County residents and homeless in times of critical need. Hours of operation: Monday 9 a.m.-12 p.m. & Thursday 1 p.m.-4 p.m., located at 215 Blue Ridge Street, Suite E, Blairsville, (706)781-3090. NT(Dec9,Z1)CA

Humane Society's Mountain Shelter has been blessed by another Angel!



Stephen and Kathy King

kittens in and spayed as fast as we can. Even though we have had many adoption events, discounting them 50%, they are still keeping us full.

Tri-State S/N Clinic has partnered with us for the months of November and December offering free exams and reduced pricing on all vaccinations on any animal adopted from the shelter during those two months! This is a great savings during these rough times!

Come and adopt your Christmas angel this year and get a free blanket, discounts on vet care and a wonderful friend for life.

The King's donation will provide food, treats and toys for those angels in our care and make this 2020 Holiday Season a special one for so many of our local orphaned animals! NT(Dec9,Z4)CA

Kitten season has been extremely difficult this year and we are still getting new

Runoff Election...from Page 1A

Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee.

There will be no in-person voting Christmas Eve, Christmas Day or New Year's Day, as county facilities will be closed for those weekday holidays, and there will be no Saturday voting this election.

Last week, the Towns County Board of Elections joined the rest of the state in completing a final recount of the presidential contest between Donald Trump and Joe Biden, coming up with the same total of ballots for the third time in a row, including Election Day.

Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger certified the statewide results of the election on Friday, Nov. 20, an act that officially pledged Georgia's 16 presidential electors to Biden.

Following certification of the Nov. 3 General Election race, due to Biden's 0.26% margin of victory over Trump, the president was able to request a machine recount, which occurred locally on Monday, Nov. 30.

The Towns Elections Board attempted to undertake the machine recount on Nov. 24, but the scanning equipment needed servicing, so the recount was postponed to Nov. 30, when a Dominion Voting Systems supervisor could come up to work on the machine.

It was the second statewide presidential race recount since the General Election, the first being a by-hand audit that ran Nov. 13-18, with all counts reflecting a Biden win in Georgia.

Trump is still waging multiple legal battles in several states, including Georgia, and it remains to be seen whether he will be successful in overturning Biden's apparent national victory prior to the Electoral College meeting Dec. 14 to decide who will be the next president.

In addition to the

contested presidential election, much ballyhoo has been made about the upcoming Senate runoff, which many people believe will decide the political trajectory of the country for at least the next four years.

Elections Board officials are reporting high interest in mail-in ballots for the Jan. 5 runoff, having already received many applications, with more coming in every day.

Historically, turnout has been low for runoff elections, but with increasing registrations even since the Nov. 3 election and continuing demand for absentee-by-mail ballots, it's likely the Jan. 5, 2021, runoffs could prove the exception to the rule.

It should be noted that none of the unsolicited mail-in ballot applications people are receiving in their mailboxes are being sent by the Elections Board, which only sends them upon request. People receiving multiple applications need only return one to receive a mailed ballot.

Absentee ballots are being automatically mailed to voters who informed the Board Office they were elderly or disabled on a previous application, though all others need to apply to get their mail-in absentee ballot for

the runoffs.

People may request mail-in absentee ballots by visiting <https://ballotrequest.sos.ga.gov>, calling the local Board Office at 706-896-4353 or swinging by the office at Lakeview Circle.

After requesting an absentee ballot, voters can easily track the progress of their ballot - before and after voting - by signing up at <https://georgia.ballottrax.net/voter/>.

Completed absentee ballots/applications may be mailed or dropped off in person either with Board Office personnel or using the security-monitored drop box located against the building outside the left main entrance.

Voters can also access the My Voter Page at mvp.sos.ga.gov ahead of the election for information on voter registration status, mail-in application and ballot status, poll location, registration information on file with the county office, sample ballots and more.

Registered voters who will be at least 18 years of age by Election Day are eligible to vote during early voting, though Dec. 7 was the registration deadline for residents looking to participate in the Jan. 5 election.

Mountain Home Music Theater has saved the best show for last

Mountain Home Music Theater will present their final annual Big Christmas Show on Saturday, December 12 at 7 PM. The Mountain Home Music Staff Band with The Berrongs w/ Crew, Jimmy Hooper, Billy Nicholson and Dr. Michael Gottsman from Northeast Georgia Medical Center will entertain you with some mighty fine music! This will be the final

show at Mountain Home Music Theater and their best Christmas Show ever so don't miss it! Tickets are \$8 each with children under 10 admitted free.

Mountain Home Music Theater is located 2.5 miles west of Hiawassee on Hwy. 76. Look for the red building and flashing sign. For more info call 706-896-3624 or 706-781-7866. NT(Dec9,F2)SH