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Deputies, kids alike enjoy Shop With the Sheriff

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE — Everyone near Walmart the morning of Saturday, Dec. 7, had the opportunity to witness a beautiful tradition courtesy of the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

The air was filled with excitement as children and deputies were introduced to one another, located a shopping cart and headed for the toy section for the annual Shop With the Sheriff Christmas extravaganza.

To start the event, Sheriff Ken Henderson and his deputies lined up by the entrance and waited for Administrative Supervisor Vicki Edwards-Ellis to connect them with their shoppers.

And this year, 38 children from Towns had the chance to "shop till they dropped," choosing everything from bicycles and skateboards to Play-Doh and Barbies.

Each year, the Sheriff's Office takes well-deserving families with children on a shopping trip for Christmas, funded by donations from the community that TCSO is able to raise thanks to the generosity of Towns Countians who understand that the need is very real.

"You would be shocked at how many people in our county actually need help. And some of the stories the teachers tell me just break your heart," said Sheriff Henderson, who derives great joy in assisting local families at Christmastime.

This year, each child received \$400 to use as he or she wanted, and many chose to buy presents for their parents or siblings in the process. And as the deputies interacted with the children, there was a real sense of camaraderie and friendship.

"It's fantastic. I'm glad to be here and helping out the kids. It's fun to see them so excited about all the gifts," Deputy Keanu Nguyen said.

The event is organized and coordinated by Edwards-Ellis, who noted how overwhelming it is "when you see how excited our deputies and our volunteers get."

In addition to TCSO deputies, volunteer chaperones from several area first responder agencies and local See Shop With the Sheriff, Page 6



Sheriff Ken Henderson, right, was excited to see the big day arrive for Shop With the Sheriff on Saturday, Dec. 7 - as were all the children. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Bradshaw approves new public safety equipment

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw approved two significant expenditures in a called meeting on Nov. 25, one for the Sheriff's Office and one for the Fire Department.

Also attending the meeting were Sheriff Ken Henderson, Chief Deputy Gene Moss, Fire Chief Harold Copeland, County Clerk Brenda McKinney and Finance Director Andrea Anderson.

"Our new business includes two items, the first being signing the contract with Axon for new body cameras and TASERS," Bradshaw said. "The reason for the called meeting is that we are in a time crunch. We can't wait until the regular meeting (in December) because the current body camera contract is going to expire. We don't want that. We just want to roll it over."

"The body cameras are obsolete. If one breaks, they don't make the parts to fix it anymore, so you'll just have to

throw it away.

"The TASERS are outdated. They don't shoot as many in the magazines, and they don't shoot as far as what we are getting. We're getting the latest technology that is out there. They shoot a lot farther, 45 yards, and they hold multiple magazines. So, the Sheriff's Department will be completely up to date.

"Included in this agreement is training for the Sheriff's Department and his employees and ongoing service for the TASERS and cameras. This company also keeps all of the backups for the body cameras as well. That way if we have to go to court or the District Attorney, they are responsible for all of that."

Sheriff Ken Henderson noted in the meeting that "we have no choice" regarding the replacements, saying that "every department across the state of Georgia is facing the same thing."

"We either have to change them out or the ones we have can no longer be used," Henderson said. "They will not stand behind them in



Cliff Bradshaw
Sole Commissioner

a courtroom. You either do without them or you have to change them."

Added Moss, "And from a liability standpoint, once you pull the TASER out of the holster, the camera rolls. That protects the officer."

Bradshaw pointed out that Axon is the only company that makes this equipment, "so we did not put out a request for proposal."

"The new contract will See Public Safety, Page 6

Young Harris delights with Christmas tradition



As expected, Santa Claus was a huge hit with the dozens of youngsters who showed up for the annual Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting on Friday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Santa Claus came to town for the decades-old tradition of the Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting on Friday, Dec. 6, and it's safe to say there was no need to watch out, cry or pout - all the kid-

dos in attendance were on the Nice List.

As students of different ages performed song and dance to ring in the season, the turnout was mighty at the pavilion in front of City Hall, and the "vibes" were warm and fuzzy.

Organized by the Eno-

tah Garden Club and City of Young Harris, the Tree Lighting is the main annual Christmas celebration of the city and caters to young children, though folks of all ages are welcome to attend and partake in the cookies, coffee, hot cocoa and seasonal socializing. See Young Harris Lighting, Page 6

Residents re-arrested on drug, obstruction charges

News Special

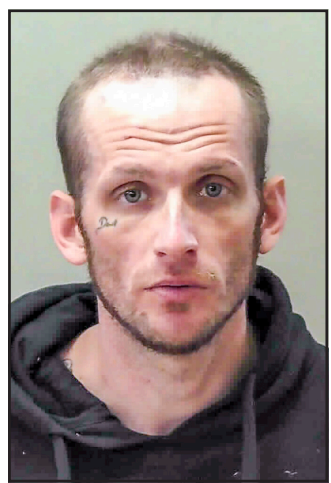


On Dec. 1, the Towns County Sheriff's Office received a call at 728 Twin Mountain Road in reference to threats against a 14-year-old victim.

Once on the scene, uniform patrol observed a vehicle located on the property with a male and female inside. When approached by uniform patrol, they detected a strong odor of marijuana coming from inside the vehicle.

Identified in the vehicle was Ronald Shane Lowery, who became irate and resisted deputies and arrest. Probable cause was determined, and a search of the vehicle resulted in the confiscation of an amount of marijuana.

Lowery, 38, of Hiawas-



Ronald Shane Lowery

see, was arrested and charged with two counts willful obstruction of law enforcement officers and possession of marijuana, less than an ounce.

He had previously been arrested on Nov. 22 for felony possession of methamphetamine and drug-related objects and released on Dec. 1 with a \$5,000 bond set by the Magistrate.

Lowery is a member of the Ghost Face Gangsters, which is known for violent criminal activity.

Also identified in the vehicle was Christine Lynn Car-



Christine Lynn Cardona

dona, who had previously been arrested on Nov. 22 for drug-related objects and released on Nov. 24 with a \$1,000 bond set by the Magistrate.

Cardona, 49, of Hiawassee, was arrested again on Dec. 1 and charged with willful obstruction of law enforcement officers and possession of marijuana, less than an ounce.

Both are currently being held at the Towns County Detention Center with no bond.

All subjects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

TCSO investigation ends in two drug arrests

News Special

After a week-long investigation, the Towns County Sheriff's Office conducted a traffic stop on US 76 East at Bugscuffle Road on Wednesday, Dec. 4.

During the stop, deputies developed probable cause and searched the vehicle. A trafficking amount of methamphetamine was confiscated along with opioid/fentanyl and an amount of cash. The suspect's vehicle was also seized.

The following individuals were arrested and charged:

Cody Michael Crane, 37, of Hiawassee, was arrested and charged with felony trafficking in methamphetamine; felony possession of meth; felony possession of meth with intent to distribute; felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance; felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance with intent to distribute; fleeing and eluding; and a taillight/tag light violation.

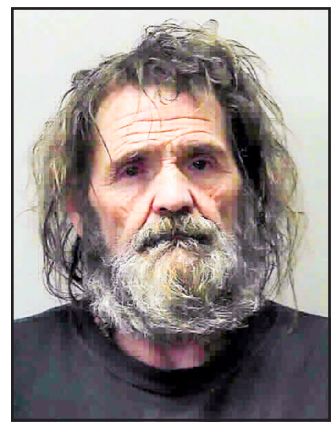
Crane was previously arrested on Nov. 7 for possession of drug-related objects and was released the following



Cody Michael Crane

day with a \$1,000 bond set by the Probate Judge.

Charles Edwin Robinson, 62, of Hayesville, North Carolina, was also arrested and charged with felony trafficking in methamphetamine; felony possession of meth; felony possession of meth with intent to distribute; felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance; felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance with intent to distribute; felony tampering with evidence; felony failure to appear; and fleeing and eluding.



Charles Edwin Robinson

Robinson's failure to appear charge stems from an August 2020 drug arrest.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the hard work and commitment of drug investigators and road patrol deputies in intercepting these drugs that were headed to the Towns County and Clay County communities.

Both suspects are currently being held without bond in the Towns County Detention Center.

All individuals are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

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Shop With the Sheriff...from Page 1



Santa made a surprise appearance at this year's Shop With the Sheriff, visiting with children taking part in the TCSO Christmas outreach on Saturday. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

groups joined in the fun, and the Sheriff's Office is thankful for the time and dedication they give every year to such a worthy cause.

"I've been doing this in some shape or form for over 20 years, and the thrill of it never gets old," Edwards-Ellis said. "The children are so excited. We have extreme needs in this community. What we

have here today is about 40 kids, but we know there are so many more out there.

"You can be standing right next to a child and never guess that they have no food to eat or that their shoes are too small and their clothes don't fit. Poverty puts a target on their back to be ostracized. I just can't stand the thought of anybody going without."

Participating mother Tracey Stegall said her family had nine children, "and four of them are still living at home."

"Our boys range in age from 4 to 13," Stegall said. "They are picking out Transformers and clothes. They got hoodies. Every little bit helps. And they will be waiting for Christmas to open these presents."

Resident Courtney Cline shed tears of gratitude for the opportunity. This was her third year participating, and while shopping for her boys she was told to shop for her 10-month-old daughter as well.

"These guys are such a blessing," Cline said. "They told me to go shopping for her, too, which was such a surprise. It's overwhelming."

For her part, Edwards-Ellis said she understands that the event is not really about the presents, "but it is about the magic."

"Every child deserves a Christmas," she said. "Every child deserves to wake up on Christmas morning and have everything they need. That's why we do this."

Public Safety...from Page 1

remain in effect for the next five years," said Bradshaw, to which Anderson added, "And this purchase includes a warranty so that if something happens to the equipment in the line of duty, they take care of it at no cost."

Henderson highlighted the fact that the new equipment is being paid for with SPLOST proceeds, saving money for property owners.

"I'm not bragging or anything, but I talked the company down because we're paying for all of it up front, and we saved \$22,000 on the price," Henderson said. "The total is \$329,484.62 for 30 body cameras and 32 tasers. That covers our jail employees as well."

Next on the agenda was a contract for the purchase of a new fire truck.

"Harold found this truck and it's in high demand and it's the same type of thing – we have to do this immediately or we'll lose the truck," Bradshaw said.

Chief Copeland said he found the truck in Texas and was "lucky to find it."

"We'll have it trans-

ported here," Copeland said. "These days it sometimes takes three or four years to order a new fire truck. This is stock. It's got 2,000 gallons with a 1,000-pound GPM pump. Water is our bullets."

"It'll be the biggest truck in our fleet. It'll be a great upgrade and will protect our firefighters and the citizens of our county. It gives us double the capacity when we roll up."

The cost of the truck is \$399,065.00, also paid for with SPLOST.

"However, we will also be using the \$100,000 in reserves Harold has saved up over the last several years," Anderson said.

Bradshaw spoke on the importance of making sure that public safety agencies have quality, functioning equipment to protect more people than ever, as "Towns County has grown exponentially."

"The last census put us at a population of 12,800, and I'd say we're at least 14,000 and double that in the summer-time," Bradshaw said. "Ten years ago, during the winter you saw very little traffic in

Hiawassee, but today we see the same amount of traffic in the winter that we used to see only in the summer."

With the population increase comes more calls for service, which have "grown tremendously for all of us – Sheriff, EMS, Fire Department and so on," Henderson said.

"We've got an elderly population here, and that adds to our calls," Henderson continued. "Cardiac arrests, falls, motor vehicle accidents, welfare checks, and all of these calls require immediate assistance."

The bottom line for the county is that public safety is a 24-hour a day, 7 day a week business. "Service calls range from welfare checks to stabblings," Bradshaw said. "A fire alarm goes off, they have to respond. Somebody is trying to make it out of the bathroom and falls, they have to respond."

"Then everything from robberies to fights to drugs to all of that kind of stuff. They respond to all of that. They are doing a wonderful, wonderful job. EMS, 911 Dispatch, the Sheriff's Department, the Fire Department – it all works together like spokes in a wheel."

Young Harris Lighting...from Page 1



Towns County Elementary School students gave an entertainingly memorable performance at the Dec. 6 Tree Lighting in Young Harris. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

"This is my favorite night of the year," Mayor Andrea Gibby stated before the crowd, welcoming one and all to the festivities.

David Tinsley, retired pastor of Sharp Memorial United Methodist Church, offered a prayer over the event to open the evening up shortly after sundown.

Music Director Jordan Trotman took over from there with Towns County kindergartners eager to spread some Christmas cheer. Trotman expertly led the little ones through the concert, and they followed her lead with hand motion choreography as they sang cute and silly songs.

A group of Elementary School friends provided more entertainment in the form of holiday-themed dances, with the group of four perfectly in sync to tunes like "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree." Afterward, another elementary schooler performed a brave solo carol.

Santa himself arrived shortly thereafter, taking a seat

in a cozy armchair beside one of two Christmas trees.

Speaking of the trees, they were lit up after a countdown and made for a dazzling display as parents and older kids headed off to grab coffee, hot chocolate with marshmallows and cookies.

Meanwhile, the little guys and gals were entertained by Santa reading "The Night Before Christmas." The jolly old elf was available afterward for photos, but many kids hung around in his lap for brief conversations, jokes and warm hugs.

Some children built up such a rapport that they brought St. Nick bags of homemade cookies from the nearby Enotah Garden Club tables, and he rewarded them with candy canes.

"Remember to leave carrots out for the reindeer," he advised one child in hushed tones. "They can't have broccoli; it gives Donner the toots."

A few fun-loving adults even sat on Santa's lap for pictures with the family, especial-

ly dads looking to crack jokes. Notably, one man put in for construction equipment shortly after his son asked for toy vehicles, proving the candy apple might not fall far from the Christmas tree.

Lavon Watson brought his 5-year-old daughter, Aurora, to come see Santa and take in the view of the pretty lights. They recently moved to Towns County and were glad to come out and meet the community at such a charming event. He reckons they'll return next year, too.

"Right now, we're straightening up the tree," Watson said, talking about Christmas traditions for the family. For her part, Aurora's favorite aspect of Christmas is getting to enjoy her toys. This year, she shyly asked for a yo-yo.

The celebration was not a very long one, lasting for just an hour or so. Volunteers attribute the quick turnaround to the chilly weather, but there was certainly no lack of smiles on faces young and old for the time they spent out there.