

Wright...from Page 1A

great," said Rosser. "We had wonderful volunteers. Everyone really stepped up to the plate, and all the organizations involved were just wonderful. Everything went great. All the kids seemed happy, and it was just a really good day, I think.

"Walmart is always just so kind to help us and be there for us and the kids. We just had another successful year."

In true Shop With A Hero tradition, the children shopped on the last day of school before the Christmas break, which was a half-day, before returning to Hiwassee to take home their newly acquired Christmas presents.

All 29 children spent the afternoon smiling, laughing and having a good time, just the way Chief Wright would have wanted.



The adults who take the kids shopping get almost as much out of the experience as the children, who get to walk away with lots of presents. Photo/Lily Avery

Sworn In...from Page 1A

great." Outgoing Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall, his wife Jean and grandson Kendall Floyd also attended the ceremony, showing full support for the commissioner-elect.

Commissioner Kendall has spent a great deal of time with Bradshaw in the last few weeks during their transition period, and he shared with the crowd his thoughts that Bradshaw was ready for the job.

"Almost 12 years ago, I was up there being sworn in by David Barrett," said Commissioner Kendall. "It seems like yesterday, and I don't know where those 12 years went. Cliff, you have a big responsibility, but I know that you'll do a good job."

After raising his right hand, swearing on the Bible and promising to uphold the law, Bradshaw stepped in front of the podium to address those who took the time to witness a significant moment in his life.

Clearly an emotional moment for him, the commissioner-elect shared his deepest gratitude for those who supported him through all that comes with an election campaign, and for being there on that day.

"I never dreamed that I would be commissioner of Towns County," said Bradshaw. "God has brought me here. I'm very thankful, and I think I was put here for a reason. We're going to work very hard to do what's best for the people of Towns County."

"I want to thank my wife, my family, my friends and all of you. We're ready to go to work."

"I also want to thank Commissioner Kendall for working with me and being patient with me and answering all the questions that I had."

According to Bradshaw, he never imagined what that day would be like until he was in one of his first training classes for commissioner at the University of Georgia. He said that, during the campaign, his primary focus



After being sworn in, Bradshaw celebrated the occasion with family, seen here embracing his mother. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

was to make sure he was out in the community, meeting the people and making sure to just put one foot in front of the other as the election drew closer.

"To be honest, I never thought about this day," said Bradshaw. "I was so focused on the campaign. Of course, you're that focused because you want to get to this day, but I didn't even think about it. I was just trying to make sure I talked to people and stayed true to my platform and stayed true to what I believe in."

"I never wavered from that because it came from the heart. I didn't realize that this day was coming, actually, until I went to the first week of training because I was so involved with the campaign."

While the residents of Towns County have been supportive, Bradshaw's family has been just the same. The Bradshaw Family has embraced the new role they will play in protecting and preserving the county and look forward to the years that come.

"My family is very excited," said Bradshaw. "I'm very excited for them. They're so supportive. I have a large family and they've all been behind me and trying to make sure that

they help me in any way they can. It's a wonderful feeling to have the support of your family like that."

As Bradshaw looks to the future and what he hopes to bring to Towns County, his primary focus is unity. Bradshaw said that he wants to continue to improve the first responder departments and create a strong, unified front with all departments working together to keep Towns County residents from harm's way.

"I'm humbled to have the citizens put their trust in me like this," said Bradshaw. "I don't even have words to describe how thankful I am. It really puts a fire in me to work and try as hard as I can to do my best and give my best to the people of this county. I don't want to let anyone down."

The following were also sworn in to Towns County office last week: Harold Copeland, County Coroner; Chris Clinton, Towns County Sheriff; David Rogers, Magistrate/Probate Judge; Bruce Rogers, Tax Commissioner; Cecil Dye, Clerk of Superior Court; Dr. Kilee Smith, Board of Education; and Laura Banister, Board of Education.

that dogs bring to the table, Sheriff Clinton said he couldn't imagine his department working without K-9s.

"A K-9 is an invaluable tool in the fight against drugs," said Sheriff Clinton. "K-9 handlers will tell you, they're really good partners for them, because it's fun for the dog, it's a game to them, pretty much."

"But they're very protective of their handler, they're trained in police protection and apprehension. When you're out here dealing with drug traffickers, if you've got a K-9, they can let you know it's there. That's just an important tool."

Sheriff Clinton, with the help of his K-9s on the force, has been able to put a better squeeze on criminal drug activity within the county.

"It's out there, there's no question about that," said Sheriff Clinton on the drug trade. "Our lowest year of drug arrests since I've been sheriff was like double the highest year prior to that, so we're very active in that."

"But I don't say that to paint it out as a bad thing. It's actually a good thing that we're being productive, and with the ARDEO, it has expanded our reach."

And while the sheriff is concentrating on getting as many drugs out of the county as possible, K-9 units get a special reward for their hard work, in social interactions within the community, such as with kids and others who may be fans of the furry crimefighters.

"We'll come up and sometimes just do things with the kids in the schools and the preschools," said Sheriff Clinton. "Our Citizen Law Enforcement Academy, we always do demonstrations with the dogs, and we've done it for the Boy Scouts."

"I learned a long time ago, once the dog shows up, he upstages everybody, so just sit back and watch, because everybody loves the K-9s."

Drug Court...from Page 1A

addictions that had taken control of their lives.

Enotah Judicial Circuit Superior Court Judge Stanley Gunter oversaw the ceremony, signing graduation certificates for participants and awarding them each a special coin to carry around in their pocket, a physical reminder of what they'd overcome and the investment they'd made in themselves.

District Attorney Jeff Langley signed orders for two of the graduates to dismiss their charges upon successful completion of the program.

Lamar Paris, sole commissioner of Union County, spoke on how proud he was of each graduate, and announced that the installation of the new modular units that will house the drug court offices would soon be completed.

Friends and family members spoke on behalf of the graduates, and many messages of hope were shared with attendees who were themselves going through the program and looking forward to their own graduation ceremonies down the road.

In closing, Judge Gunter offered his unique perspective on the changing face of the criminal justice system.

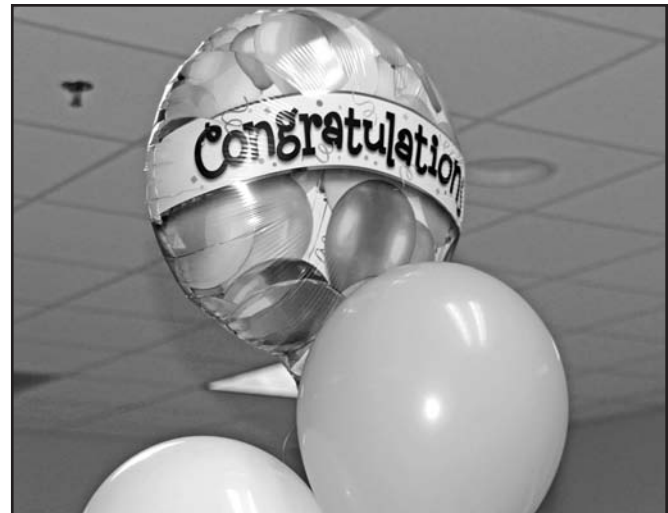
"From 1972 to 1992, my father served as superior court judge in the Mountain Judicial Circuit, which included this county," said Judge Gunter. "He would come home after dealing with persons that had addiction problems, and would be frustrated because they would come back time and time again."

"He could not fix them, and he knew the prison system couldn't fix them either, but that's all he had. There was a drug court in existence back then, but it wasn't well known - that was down in Miami, Florida. That program has grown, and now it's nationwide."

Judge Gunter imparted his belief that accountability courts will help to shape the future of the criminal court system in America, with all kinds of programs becoming available to address problems of mental health, those who have



North Enotah Drug Court Coordinator Barbara Honaker with Case Manager Rebecca Fowler



In order to safeguard the accomplishments and privacy of those who have completed the drug court accountability program, the Towns County Herald has chosen not to publish the identities of the five graduates from Union and Towns counties.

gotten DUIs and more.

"It's a tool that I'm grateful to have and I wish my father had had," said Judge Gunter of the drug court program. "It's been my honor and pleasure to serve as the drug court judge here in North Enotah, and to get to know the people that come through here."

The success rate of the program has been remarkably high, right at 89 percent, considering successful participants as being graduates who do not go on to repeat their past offenses.

"There always has been and there always will be some addiction problems, but this program can minimize it, this

program can give people hope and a chance at success," said District Attorney Langley. "It's not going to work for everyone, but it can give a lot of people a chance at success they didn't have before."

The Fellowship of the Hills Church assisted the program in providing refreshments for after the graduation, and friends and family members gathered with graduates to enjoy the reception that followed.

Barbara Honaker is drug court coordinator for the North Enotah Drug Court, and she makes a difference in people's lives every day with the help of other compassionate individuals associated with administering the program.

Kendall...from Page 1A

\$9,438,934 in expenditures over the course of 2017.

This revenue/expenditure balance will result in a tentative ending balance of \$3.12 million for the 2017 fiscal year, or roughly \$20,000 more than the beginning balance for the year.

The millage rate has also gone down since last year, from 5.495 to 5.375.

"This is the seventh year in a row we've been able to lower the millage rate," said Commissioner Kendall. "Not only did the mills go down, but the actual taxes in dollars went down as well."

Earlier in the year, Commissioner Kendall had publicized that he wanted to give all county employees a salary increase, something he felt the people who worked throughout the county rightfully deserved. Keeping to his word, Commissioner Kendall included the raise in the 2017 Budget, allotting for all county employees to receive a 50-cent raise across the board.

Also in the coming year's

budget, Commissioner Kendall has allocated \$100,000 for the EMS to purchase a new ambulance, an addition the county has needed for some time.

The last time the county bought a new ambulance was in 2015, and according to Commissioner Kendall, the upcoming new ambulance purchase will make sure that the county is well equipped in that department for the next few years.

During the meeting, Commissioner Kendall also approved an amendment to the 2016 Budget, transferring \$10,000 from the county's Patrol Fuel Account over to the county's Jail Salary Account. This was per a request from the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

After the fund's reassignment, the Patrol Fuel Account totals to \$72,000 and the Jail Salary Account comes to a total of \$505,000.

Throughout his years of holding public office, both as sole commissioner of Towns

County and his years spent as superintendent of Towns County Schools, Commissioner Kendall has adopted seemingly countless budgets.

The December meeting was Commissioner Kendall's last time approving a budget, and he has also set his last millage rate.

"This is a good budget," said Commissioner Kendall. "There's not a lot of fat in it, but everything that the county needs is here."

Commissioner Kendall will be holding one final meeting before the new year as Towns County sole commissioner to meet with Commissioner-elect Cliff Bradshaw to finalize all paperwork to make the transition easier for Bradshaw and those working in the commissioner's office.

The Towns County Herald would like to thank Commissioner Kendall for his hard work and dedication to the county over these last many years, both as commissioner and as superintendent of schools. Our publisher, editors, writers and staff wish Bill and Jean the very best in his retirement.

Hunter...from Page 1A

against the illegal drug trade. Hunter has also assisted the Appalachian Regional Drug Enforcement Office, as well as Hiwassee Police Department in their efforts. So far, Hunter has assisted in the seizures of illegal drugs and two vehicles."

Deputy McCarter and Hunter recently completed training together in Arkansas before returning to Towns County around Thanksgiving. "The handler and the dog, they're a team, so they train and certify together as a team," said Sheriff Clinton.

Hunter takes the place of retired K-9 Deputy Niko, who had racked up a few too many dog years to continue to be effective on the force, though he did give about six years to the service of the Towns County Sheriff's Office before retiring.

The sheriff's office in Towns County has a rich history with K-9 units, and Sheriff Clinton can clearly remember Rocky, who was in service when he first entered office nearly a

decade ago. "Since I've been in office, this is our seventh K-9," said Sheriff Clinton. "At various times, we'll have a couple of dogs work."

"We've also got Copper the Bloodhound, and his primary deal is tracking, manhunting, finding lost children, folks with Alzheimer's. Anything like that, if we need to find a person, Copper's your go-to dog on that. Hunter can track as well, and he's also trained in narcotics detection."

Copper has been on the force for a couple of years, and he, too, is handled by Deputy McCarter.

"We got him as a puppy," said Sheriff Clinton of Copper. "He was a really cute puppy, he was all ears. He's a big dog now."

Of course, with such a history of law enforcement working alongside man's best friend in Towns County, and with the amount of utility in detection

Correction

In the Dec. 21 edition of the Towns County Herald, the newspaper twice misquoted incoming District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler in a story concerning his visit with constituents during a meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers at Mary's Southern Grill in Young Harris on Friday, Dec. 16.

1) In the meeting, Rep. Gurtler told constituents that in the upcoming legislative session he intends to attempt a repeal of the \$5 nightly hotel/motel fee that's currently being assessed in the state. The Towns County Herald reported Rep. Gurtler as saying that such a repeal would bring \$168,000 back into the private sector. What he actually said was that it would bring \$168 million back into the private sector.

2) In that same Dec. 16 meeting, Rep. Gurtler announced

his plans to vote against the upcoming state budget to fight back against spending he views as having gone way too far outside the proper role of government. Wasteful and inappropriate government spending, especially corporate welfare and handouts, said Rep. Gurtler, is something that runs counter to his limited government conservative principles.

In considering his upcoming vote against the 2018 state budget, Rep. Gurtler stated that:

"I do think I'm going to be alone in this, but as John Adams said, you have to stand on your principles, even if you stand alone."

The newspaper previously reported Rep. Gurtler's quote incorrectly as beginning with "I don't think..."

Fairgrounds...from Page 1A

Christmas. We had 289 people go through that night who paid because they weren't a Towns County citizen, besides all the people who got in for free. We had a lot of people turn out."

Along with the free admission, all those who came to the light show on Thursday night were treated to a free Gospel concert featuring local favorites the Chris Rumpf Family, who performed with the Davenport Brothers in Anderson Music Hall.

The patrons who gathered in the music hall to listen to the traditional Christmas classics and Gospel tunes were also entertained with a heartwarming video of children from the community reciting the story of Christmas, displayed on the screen behind the stage in the music hall.

Just the day before, on Wednesday, Dec. 21, the fairgrounds offered another special day for patrons who would prefer to drive through the light show rather than the regular walking tour.

"We're not usually open on Wednesday nights but we were last week," said Thomason. "We did a drive through for people who couldn't get out of their car and get on the golf carts. We had some elderly and disabled people and some hospice patients who wanted to come. So, when we had the drive through, we had over 300 cars come through that night and it was free also."

According to Thomason, the light show has been a bigger success than anyone could have



The "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!" will continue through the end of December

imagined, bringing in more than 7,000 visitors both local and from out of town thus far, something Thomason calls remarkable for the limited open days and times.

Although the show still has several more days before it closes for the season, Thomason and the commissioner's office have already been working toward securing a grant from the state to expand next year's show.

"We have applied for some money from the One Georgia Authority," said Thomason. "We've applied for \$100,000 from them and the commissioner has already agreed to give us an additional \$50,000. So, if we get the money from the state, then we want to start with Phase Two and make it grow."

"People really enjoyed coming to the light show, and we needed something like that out here in the North Georgia Mountains for people to enjoy."

For the coming years, Thomason hopes to grow the light show both in the number of lights and with the attractions available for patrons. While Thomason says that at this point in time it is only brainstorming and coming up with different ideas, she foresees the show continuing to grow, and fast, in the next five to 10 years.

"Mountain Country Christmas in Lights!" will open this week on Thursday, Dec. 29, running through New Year's Eve on Saturday, Dec. 31, from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. The show will not be open on New Year's Day. Tickets are \$5 per person, and children aged 12 and younger get in for free.