

Torch...from Page 1A

elect. "It is my pleasure to transfer these funds over to our commissioner-elect, who on Jan. 1 will be Towns County's new sole commissioner," said Commissioner Kendall.

Added Commissioner Kendall: "During my tenure as commissioner, as you all know, we've had the greatest recession since the Great Depression some years ago. And I pointed out through a note in our employees' last check that the Towns County tax digest decreased by \$250 million during that time. That's only 40 percent of the fair market value, so you multiply that by 100 percent and you get a lot more than that.

"So, that's how hard we got hit by this recession. Of course, not only did the tax digest go down and the funds received by property tax, but the sales tax went down also, and other revenue sources. We had some lean times - we reduced staff through attrition, we had furlough days, and everyone had to tighten the belt.

"We got through it without hurting the taxpayers, and I just appreciate everybody that's worked with me. Thank you for letting me serve, and Cliff, I wish you good luck."

At that point, Margie Lovingood, who works accounts payable out of the commissioner's office, presented Commissioner Kendall with a scrapbook his office staff and others had put together. The book contained news articles detailing some of the hard work he's put in since he took office more than 11 years ago.

"This is kind of a bittersweet day," said Commissioner Kendall. "I'm looking forward to retirement. I know there are some things I'm going to miss, especially working with you all, seeing you on a daily basis."

Commissioner Kendall asked Jean, his wife, to stand in the audience, and he thanked her and told everyone that he and Jean felt that his retiring was the right decision.

"When we leave here today, I've got another big decision to make," said Commissioner Kendall. "Whether to go to Andrews and see my grandson play ball, or go up (to the high school) to the Battle of the States."

G a r y K e n d a l l ,



Bill Kendall and Cliff Bradshaw made sole commissioner transition official on Friday, Dec. 30, 2016.



In his last official meeting as sole commissioner, Bill Kendall received a scrapbook of news articles relating to many of his 11 years in office as commissioner. Margie Lovingood, who handles accounts payable for the county, presented him with the gift.



Here, Commissioner Kendall thanks his staff for their hard work with him throughout the years.

Commissioner Kendall's son, attended his father's last meeting in elected office. Prior to his three elected terms as sole commissioner, Bill Kendall served as the elected superintendent of Towns County Schools for 26 years, and all the while Gary was in school. He, too, said the timing was right, however bittersweet the occasion may have been.

"He doesn't want to let the people down by stopping his work, he feels bad about that sometimes, but he's ready to move on and enjoy retirement," said Gary.

Dec. 31, 2016, was the last day of Commissioner Kendall's administration. Cliff Bradshaw became Towns County Sole Commissioner on Sunday, Jan. 1.

Riley...from Page 1A

to the board and the duties it must perform in the coming months and years. I work too far away to be able to be at the courthouse in a timely manner when I am needed beyond the once a month meeting.

"I also feel that I will be neglecting my duties at my office by having to be out of the county, where I am employed, for the meetings and planning sessions, etc., that will be required due to the upcoming reviews.

"I appreciate all that you have done for the county and your trust in me by allowing me to remain on the board of assessors. I feel that by stepping off the board, this will allow someone who is closer in proximity to step into my place, and it will be much more effective for the office overall."

When Commissioner Kendall received this letter, he knew right away that Riley would be the person for the job given Riley's background

and willingness to act in the best interest of the residents of Towns County.

Riley actually had to resign as an alternate from the Towns County Board of Equalization in order to be appointed tax assessor by the commissioner, before being sworn in by Dye.

The board of assessors utilizes the tax code to oversee the work coming out of the tax assessor's office, the goal of which is to appraise the value of property within the county for the purposes of producing an annual property tax digest.

The board of equalization, on which Riley had been an alternate previously via grand jury appointment, deals in appeals that residents may make concerning their assessed property values and the like.

Riley is a property owner in Towns County and a realtor, and has more than four decades of experience as a forester dealing with timber

and land values.

Many know Riley as the executive director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council, and for having administered the nationally renowned Firewise program, which no doubt raised fire danger awareness during last year's series of wildfires in the Southeast.

For his part, Riley said he looks forward to fulfilling his new duties as tax assessor by being fair and impartial from day one.

"I want everybody to have a fair shake," said Riley. "We want to keep the county going. We want to make everybody as happy as we can to where they'll stay, pay taxes and live here."

Of course, Riley said always done whatever he could for Towns County, which is something of a family tradition, that particular willingness to serve others.

"My grandfather was the first County Agent in 1914, and I want to carry his legacy on," said Riley.

4-H...from Page 1A



Towns County's 4-H'ers did some traveling in 2016, including to the University of Georgia's Wahsega 4-H Center in Dahlonega.

holiday, students in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades nominated and voted on homeroom class officials. These students will be participating in the Atlanta-bound field trip, and Smith hopes to send interested sixth-grade students to become pages for the Georgia legislature.

"Each class has a president, vice president, secretary and reporter," said Smith. "I plan on gathering all those kids together one evening, just them, and have an officers training to teach them what it means to be a leader. I really want to have them grow and do leadership projects and participate in group activities.

"In February, we're going to start this as an annual trip, but I'm taking the sixth-grade officers to the state capitol in Atlanta so they can experience democracy at work. The House of Representatives and the Senate will both be in session, and we'll be able to

observe both of those."

With the revamp of the program, many competing teams that were once unavailable for students are now in full swing, such as the Air Rifle Team, the BB Team and the newly added Archery Team.

"Returning is the Air Rifle Team and the BB Team," said Smith. "The BB Team is fourth through eighth grade. Air Rifle is ninth through 12th grade. Both teams are competitive shooting teams that meet weekly and go to competitions throughout the semester.

"A new team we're starting this year is an Archery Team. This will be available for sixth through 12th grade. It's going to be open to any student in the community who wants to be involved.

"We're hoping to get that started up, and we've already had a few companies

in the area that are looking at sponsoring the start of the program so we can get that up and running. We're looking forward to it."

While the program is geared for students and is developed in the classroom curriculum, community involvement is much appreciated. According to Smith, creating a positive discourse between the students and members of the community is a huge aspect of 4-H, something he wishes to see continue to grow in the coming years.

If interested in volunteering and becoming involved with the Towns County 4-H program, residents can visit the Towns County 4-H office at 67 Lakeview Circle in Hiawassee, located beside the Towns County Board of Education office, or call (706) 896-2024.

TCSO...from Page 1A

"Nine years ago, when I started out I had a vision for the sheriff's office, and the people of Towns County agreed," said Sheriff Clinton. "Four times now, they've chosen to give me that opportunity to serve as sheriff."

"That's why all of you are here today, going forward with the opportunity to continue to be a part of that team. So, I just wanted to share a little bit with you, a little bit of encouragement, a little bit of what I think we need to be looking at over the next four years."

Continued Sheriff Clinton: "I think we would all agree that we've come a long way in nine years. Thanks to every one of you for being a part of that. We're state accredited, we're one of only 21 sheriff's offices in the whole state that can say that. That's something I think you should feel good about that reflects on our employees."

Sheriff Clinton encouraged everyone present to remain vigilant in their duties, and to always remember what it is they are trying to accomplish together.

"When you get up in the morning, when you put on your badge, when you put on the sheriff's uniform, you get in the sheriff's patrol car and you answer the sheriff's phone, you're representing the sheriff's office - you're representing yourself, but you're representing me," said Sheriff Clinton. "I want to ask, and I expect, that you do that in a way that the people of this county be very proud of."

The sheriff added that he looks forward to continuing to improve his office over the next four years, together with the help of his deputies, jailers and civilian staff, and with Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, who attended the oath-taking ceremony in the courthouse.

Sheriff Clinton announced that he would be re-appointing Col. Terry Conner as his chief deputy sheriff, and Commissioner Bradshaw said a few words concerning his upcoming involvement.

"I look forward to working with the sheriff, and working for all of you and



Then-Towns County Sole Commissioner-elect Cliff Bradshaw attended the swearing in ceremony, even sharing a few words with the sheriff and his employees.



Towns County Chief Deputy Terry Conner collected all the oaths last Thursday and Friday that were signed by those employed by the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

with you," said Commissioner Bradshaw to those gathered. "Again, the main thing I've got to say is, thank you for representing our county in the professional manner that you do.

"We pray for your safety every day, and we take it very seriously. Public safety

Georgia Watercolor Society's 2017 Signature Exhibition

"Nature's Symphony", a watercolor by Ann Thompson of Hiawassee, GA has been accepted into the Georgia Watercolor Society's 2017 Signature Members' Exhibition to be held at the Bowen Center for the Arts in Dawsonville, GA. The exhibition will be open from January 13th through February 24th. The public is invited to visit the center and view the thirty-two selected water media paintings.

Ann is an active participant and exhibitor in a number of area art galleries including ArtWorks in Hiawassee, a gallery owned by the Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild, Inc.; the North Georgia Arts Guild, based in Clayton, GA; the Valley River Arts Guild at the MAC in Murphy, NC; and The Blue Ridge Mountain Arts Association in Blue Ridge, GA.

Her paintings have won numerous awards in both local and national exhibitions, the most recent being the American Pen Women's Exhibition held at the Quinlan Arts Center in Gainesville, GA in 2015. Her work has been published in the Georgia Heritage Center's "Experience Art" and International Artists Magazine's publication "How did You Paint That".

Ann's most recent endeavors include commissioned pet portraits from photographs



Nature's Symphony by Ann Thompson of Hiawassee, GA

and abstract paintings, a departure from her usual representational paintings. She says, "Exploration with a wide variety of processes and materials is presently my focus

and my greatest interest in my paintings. I am striving to move beyond the more traditional methods in water media and oils and move into experimental painting techniques."

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