

Towns County Herald

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Effects of winter storm last through weekend



The Hiwassee Town Square covered in snow that fell Jan. 6 and Jan. 7. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Winter Storm Helena moved Friday into the Saturday night and the Saturday, dropping her snow like a cold blanket over Towns County and the rest of the North Georgia Mountains.

It was a pretty snow at first, upward of 6 inches and powdery, perfect for making snow angels.

But temperatures stayed well below freezing through the weekend and into Monday, causing prolonged hazardous road conditions due to the snow that melted during the day only to refreeze overnight.

Thankfully, employees with the Towns County Road Department worked tirelessly around the clock to keep county roads as clear and treated as possible, all the

while the Georgia Department of Transportation maintained the main thoroughfares.

Some black ice was unavoidable, however, given the constant low temperatures, which ranged between single digits and into the 20s throughout the weekend, causing melted snow and ice to refreeze.

The temperature first went below freezing around 2 p.m. Friday afternoon, with the low point of the weekend hitting 0 degrees Fahrenheit around 8 a.m. Sunday, and the temp stayed below freezing until Monday afternoon.

Towns County Schools closed Monday for all students, staff and faculty, a decision Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong made after careful assessment of road conditions and considering the likelihood of hazardous travel due to black ice, adding that he didn't

want to put the lives of teenage drivers at risk.

County leaders took to social media on Friday before the storm to urge residents to stay indoors until conditions were safe, and many residents did stay home Saturday as the road department bladed snow for emergency services and for residents who decided to travel.

Several businesses around town opened their doors to customers on Saturday, though many waited until the sun had been up a few hours to do so.

Sunday was much the same as Saturday, with lower temps and still icy road conditions, and whatever snow had fallen upon Towns County largely remained throughout the weekend, growing crunchily from refreezing.

There was talk as early as
See Snow, Page 8A

TCSO deputies, jailers and staff take loyalty oaths

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton gathered his deputies, jailers, and the people on his civilian staff over two days recently to lead them in taking their loyalty oaths following his re-election in November.

The sheriff, who considers his office to be, in many ways, like one big family, stood before his employees as they took their oaths on Thursday, Dec. 29, and Friday, Dec. 30, in the Towns County Courthouse.

Sheriff Clinton split the occasion over two days to accommodate for the other half of his workforce doing their jobs.

The first loyalty oath was
See TCSO, Page 6A



Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton swore in his deputies, jailers and civilian staff over two days last week in the Towns County Courthouse.

Remembering local hero and paramedic Jim Barnes

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Jim Barnes of Blairsville was only 61 when he passed away a year ago on Jan. 5, but he lives on through the immeasurable impact he had on others during his time on earth.

He was a devoted husband and best friend to his wife Shirley, whom he called “Shirl” for short; he was an instructor to an untold number of policemen, firemen and medical workers through the Georgia Emergency Management Agency; he was a loving son, brother and uncle; a medical professional, a volunteer and a remarkable friend to many.

And Jim Barnes was a hero in life, as can be attested by the person who knew him best.

Barnes met the woman



James “Jim” Barnes, June 12, 1954-Jan. 5, 2016

who was to be his wife, then Shirley Anderson, more than two decades ago in paramedic school. They both worked in Gainesville at the time, and when he first asked her out she said no – she didn't want

a relationship to interfere with their jobs.

She finally relented after taking a position as a paramedic in nearby Banks County, and after dating a few years they

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Young Harris to be Firewise; Jarrard honored for service

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Frank Riley attended the Jan. 3 meeting of Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby and city council, and he brought a few friends with him.

Marsha Elliott, Ann Atchison and Michael Courey, on behalf of the Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition, joined Riley in speaking about the benefits of becoming a Firewise Community.

Riley informed the council that the Firewise program as developed in Towns County had been chosen to serve as a model for other communities nationwide, and

See Firewise, Page 6A



Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby honored City Clerk Shirley Jarrard during the Jan. 3 regular meeting, for her 25 years of service at Young Harris City Hall.

Heaton granted another continuance in North Carolina

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

MURPHY, NC – Blairsville physician Dr. James Heaton appeared before North Carolina Superior Court Judge William H. Coward in Murphy on Tuesday, Jan. 3.

Dr. Heaton received a continuance in his case to Feb. 27, which is the same continuance date previously granted to former Union General Hospital Inc. CEO Mike Gowder back in November, according to the Cherokee County (NC) Clerk of Courts Office.

Heaton and Gowder were arrested in North Carolina on Wednesday, March 2, 2016, following indictment by a Cherokee County, NC, grand

jury, both for five counts of trafficking in opium or heroin, and five counts of obtaining a controlled substance by forgery, according to Cherokee County, NC, Sheriff Derrick Palmer at that time.

Previously, Gowder and Dr. Heaton received 2016 continuances in their North Carolina cases from March 28 to April 11, then from April 4 to July 11, from July 11 to Nov. 7, and now each to a Feb. 27 administrative session.

Heaton and Gowder were arrested in Union County on Feb. 4, 2016. Gowder for three counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, one count of conspiracy; and Heaton for 40 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation



Dr. James Lanier Heaton

of controlled substances, one count of conspiracy.

Dr. David Gowder, Mike's brother, was also arrested for 36 counts of

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2016: Reviewing a year to remember, part two

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In continuing with part two of the 2016 year in review, the second half of 2016 brought just as many headlines as the first half.

To start July, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors unanimously hired Jeremy Nelms as general manager, to replace then-Interim General Manager Dan Brewer.

The EMC made more news in September, when in the annual meeting the membership voted Gene Mason of Union County and Cory Payne of Clay County, North Carolina, as new directors to

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This is just one of the many spectacular views atop Bell Mountain State Park, which opened in October 2016. The park will serve as a legacy of Bill Kendall's administration as Towns County sole commissioner.

January 2017 Term Grand Jury Indictments

News Special
Towns County Herald

The following were indicted during the January Term 2017 of the Towns County Grand Jury:

Robert James Holub, four counts felony murder; six counts violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act.

Daniel Lee Guffey, two counts statutory rape; aggravated child molestation; child molestation.

Gregory Andrew Guffey, aggravated child molestation; child molestation.

Aimee Fay Fannin, possession of a controlled substance; possession of methamphetamine; possession

of drug related objects.

Kimberly Dawn Garrett, possession of a controlled substance; possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug related objects; failure to carry license; failure to maintain brake lights in good working conditions.

Dexter Neldon Adams, two possession of methamphetamine; possession of cocaine; two counts possession of marijuana less than an ounce; two counts possession of drug related objects; tag light violation.

James Austin Whitman, terroristic threats; criminal trespass.

Brandon Owen Mount, possession of methamphetamine; possession of

amphetamine; possession of marijuana less than an ounce; possession of drug related objects; driving while license suspended; tag light violation.

Bruce Douglas Partin Jr., three counts burglary in the first degree; theft by receiving stolen property; theft by deception; burglary in the second degree; entering an automobile; possession of a knife during commission of a felony; possession of tools for the commission of crime; possession of illegal weapon; possession of marijuana less than an ounce; possession of drug related objects.

Bradley Shane Crawford, conversion of payments for real

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,667.70
Chatuge	1,917.97
Nottely	1,760.80

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Better Breathers Club Chatuge Regional Hospital

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Sock Hops at the Peacock

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Basketball

Tues. Jan 10 vs. Riverside 6 PM (boys)

Fri. Jan 13 @ Hebron 7 & 8:30 PM