

# Towns County Herald

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## Towns Countians remember 9/11, honor local heroes

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Many patriotic residents of Towns County met at the Hiawassee Town Square on Friday, Sept. 11, to commemorate the 2,977 innocent people murdered in the 9/11 terrorist attacks that changed the world.

Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales welcomed attendees as Master of Ceremonies for the occasion, which she organized in concert with the City of Young Harris and Towns County Government.

"Today, we are gathering here to pay tribute to the fallen of the most horrible tragedy of the United States," Ordiales

said. "I'm sure if you guys take three seconds to think about where you were 19 years ago, you would remember exactly where you were and exactly what you were doing."

Pastor Danny Byers of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church offered a prayer for the families of those who lost their lives and for his countrymen finding God in their hearts.

Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby asked that the community remember the heroes and challenge the fears brought on by the attacks to pursue a better future for the country.

"No matter where you were on that day 19 years ago, it is a day that you are never going

to forget," Gibby said. "It was a day filled with emotion, horror, terror, anger, fear, sadness. That one day changed our lives. It changed how we travel, how we view strangers, how we treat each other."

Added Gibby, "Even in that tragedy, we saw a glimpse of what we could and can still become. Strangers helped strangers. Strangers pulled together. Our humanity always gets in the way, doesn't it?"

"We continue to wrestle with fear and distrust. We continue to be suspicious of those who don't look like us or think like us or act like we want them to act. This past year has shed a light on all our insecurities, all our fears,

all our mistrust, of government information, of mistrust, in how we treat each other, mistrust of each other.

"This morning, let us take some time to reflect, yes, on what happened, but also on our own lives, our purpose here, our community, what we do for each other. Let's take some time to remember and honor the heroes of that day. Let's also challenge our fears and set aside our assumptions so we can build a better future."

Lt. Tyler Keyes with the Towns County Fire Department summarized the morning of the attacks and commented on the bravery and courage of first responders who gave their lives. See 9/11 Remembrance, Page 8A



In Friday's remembrance program, Towns County Fire Lt. Tyler Keyes performed a memorial bellringing for those who died on Sept. 11, 2001. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## New COVID cases in Hiawassee facility as Blairsville outbreak continues

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Nine residents have died in connection with the COVID-19 outbreak at Union County Nursing Home, with 44 new positive cases being reported there in the last two weeks, according to the latest data from the Department of Community Health.

And positive case numbers have increased at Chatuge Regional Nursing Home in Towns County over the past two weeks, going from two past positive residents to 12, from one past positive employee to nine.

Out of these positive resident cases in Towns, seven were initially hospitalized and six are now well enough to be back in the facility. So far, no COVID-related deaths have been reported at the nursing home in Hiawassee.

According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, an outbreak is



Chatuge Regional Nursing Home in Hiawassee is currently experiencing a COVID-19 outbreak, as defined by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Photo by Todd Forrest

defined as when "any new case arises in (a) facility," meaning Chatuge Regional is also dealing with an outbreak at this time.

Per CMS.gov, "For outbreak testing, all staff and residents should be tested, and all staff and residents that tested negative should be retested

every 3-7 days until testing identifies no new cases of COVID-19 infection among staff or residents for a period of at least 14 days since the most recent positive result."

Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said the recently updated federal See COVID Cases, Page 8A

## School board advertises rollback, adopts budget in meeting

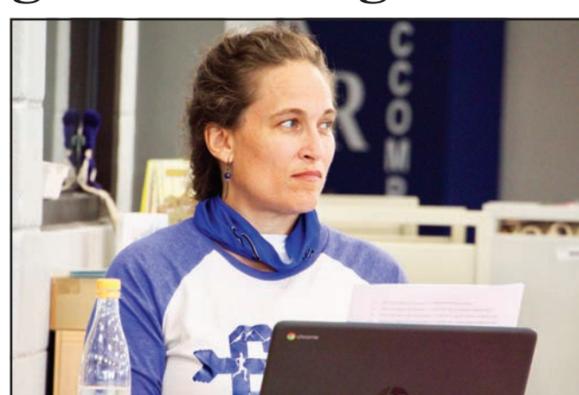
By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

For the sixth year in a row, the Towns County Board of Education will be accepting the rollback millage rate to be used in the calculation of local property tax bills.

The new rate of 7.346 mills will generate a total levy of \$6.22 million. Due primarily to growth in real and commercial property, the schools will be bringing in \$395,048 more than last year, even with a lower millage rate, which is down from the 2019 rate of 7.477 mills.

School board members voted unanimously in their Sept. 8 regular meeting to advertise the tax digest and five-year history of levy in the Towns County Herald, and they will set the rate in their next regular meeting on Oct. 5 at 7 p.m. inside the Middle/High School Media Center.

The last time the school



Towns County Board of Education Member Dr. Kilee Smith leads school board meetings as board chair. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

system increased the millage rate was in 2014, when board members faced the need to raise the rate by 1.5 mills to generate roughly \$1.1 million in additional revenues.

Also in the Sept. 8 meeting, board members accepted the Fiscal Year 2021 Final Budget, which balances \$18,407,318 in expenditures and revenues – the same as the 2019 budget minus state-reimbursed renovation projects.

As previously reported, due to the economic impacts of COVID-19, the state will be contributing significantly. See School Board, Page 8A

## Young Harris City Council discusses sewer rates, SPLOST project

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Young Harris City Council members met via Zoom for their September regular meeting, with Council Member Steve Clark kicking things off with a discussion about sewer department finances.

"When we met as a committee, I looked at 2019 sewer, and I also looked at the first two quarters of 2020," Clark said. "There are some bills that we pay that are really kind of oriented around certain times of the year."

"There is some insurance that we pay at the first of the year that we don't at the end of the year, so it is really not accurate to look at a particular quarter. I wanted to look at a year ... (so I reviewed) July 1, 2019, to the end of June 2020."

With these numbers, Clark found that there was a need for the city to increase sewer rates to cover expenses and remove the deficit.

"I have taken leachate



Young Harris City Councilman Steve Clark discussed the need to increase sewer rates during the September regular meeting streamed live over Zoom. Photo/Screenshot

(treatment) out of these numbers so we could just see how the plant operates," Clark said. "Over those 12 months, we lost \$95,920.50. That includes revenues of \$376,000, expenses of \$360,000, but it includes asset expenses of \$112,000, which is the principal amount we pay on those USDA loans

and such.

"We are running at about an \$8,000 a month deficit on the sewer department. Now, that expense number of \$360,000 includes \$32,000 and change in engineering that was associated with the bypass. We are not expecting that going forward."

See Young Harris, Page 8A

## Council continues livestreamed meetings, discusses Halloween further

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

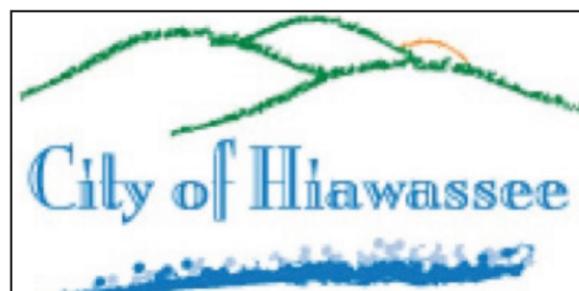
For another month running, the Hiawassee City Council Facebook Livestreamed for the public its regular meeting at City Hall as a precaution over indoor gatherings amid COVID-19.

Councilwoman Amy Barrett opened the Sept. 1 meeting with a prayer "for a cure for this virus, for protection for everyone, for peace across this world."

Following a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, Mayor Liz Ordiales introduced the usual cast of characters, including the entire council, City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick, Development Director Denise McKay and City Attorney Thomas Mitchell.

"We are all in the council chambers, and we are seated more than 6 feet away from each other," Ordiales said.

At Barrett's request, the council continued discussions for a potential Halloween event in Hiawassee, which council members have been



hesitant to move forward with due to COVID-19 and large gatherings.

"Remember (during the last Facebook Livestream), I threw it out that if anybody had a solution, to ... get in touch with us or let me know?" Barrett said. "Anyway, you know Crystal Wagner – she works for the chamber – she had done some research, and a lot of other small communities are doing this."

"It's called drive-thru trick-or-treating. Businesses drop off candy to the city. The city will bag up the candy and will hand out as each vehicle passes on the square.

Businesses can be listed on social media or a banner that they sponsored the event and still get recognition.

"So, I was just throwing it out there that that's what other communities are doing, and if we still wanted to do something, that would work."

Councilwoman Anne Mitchell lodged a couple objections, starting with the fact that neither Hayesville in North Carolina nor neighboring Blairsville in Union County would be holding any Halloween events in 2020.

"If we do, we're going to have 90 million people from the See Hiawassee, Page 8A

## Farmers Market vendors, visitors satisfied with year so far

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

With a month and a half left in the season, the Towns County Farmers Market continues to bring in customers curious to see what local farmers and crafters have to offer.

Vendors have been satisfied this year with the number of people who have attended so far, too, as well as the growth the market has experienced this season.

Craig Pietz has been a market vendor for around five years, supplying items from his garden, and he feels that this has been one of the best years for vendors.

"I grow a garden – I do plants, and garden art is basically what you call it," Pietz said. "I do stuff with driftwood, stumps and

anything natural. Everything I do is kind of local, I don't go out of the way to get it."

"I just appreciate the natural beauty of things; even if it is an old tree that is rotten, it has a look to it, too. I just thought I would bring that out into the world a little bit."

"I've been coming here for four or five years and have enjoyed the time here. This has been a pretty good year this year, and I have sold almost everything I have brought out here, including my corn and most of my vegetables. I think coronavirus had a lot to do with the market picking up."

New to the market this year are Wayne Jehan and Elaine Bacon, who sell boiled peanuts, pork skins and drinks in glass bottles.

"We offer three (kinds of)

boiled peanuts and a choice of three pork rinds and some drinks," Jehan said. "We cook these things fresh, and we have been doing this since about June. This is our first year here at the Farmers Market, and it has helped us expand our business. We have people stop in every week."

"We normally set up in town on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and some Sundays. We are here Saturday morning, then we move over to our spot in town and sell there. We have customers come in, and they are waiting for us to fry them because we like to keep them nice and fresh."

"We have people that come on Thursday mornings, and they are waiting on us to get there. It has been a good little small business, and people enjoy it."

Attendees such as Heather June are thankful for the market

being available and for locals continuing to sell their produce each year.

"I'm happy to see this Farmers Market doing well," June said. "I have come here off and on – we usually come up for vacation around September every year – and I like to visit here a few times. I think this year they have more vendors, and I love when things like this get to grow."

"The people here are nice, and that makes buying things and getting fruits a better experience. When I come here, I can talk to the people that grow and prepare these things, and I know everything about them. You can't really get that anywhere else."

The Towns County Farmers Market is open every Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon, so be sure to stop in to support local farmers, crafters and more.



Wayne Jehan and Elaine Bacon sell boiled peanuts, pork skins and cold drinks at the Farmers Market and in town. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

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Nottely	1,769.70

**SPORTS FOOTBALL**  
9/18 vs. Our Lady of Mercy  
7:30 PM  
**SOFTBALL**  
9/17 @ Commerce. 5:30 PM

City of Hiawassee  
**City of Hiawassee Tax Digest**  
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**Hiawassee Garden Club P.U.P. Yard Sale Sept. 18-20**  
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**S.A.F.E. Tupperware Fundraiser**  
See page 2A