

Library...from Page 1A

of-the-art presentation and meeting space.

"We're really excited to have the community room and used bookstore area - that's all new," said Stone. "Even though the square footage was here, it wasn't really usable space. Now, patrons can come in and browse the used bookstore operated by the Friends of the Libraries of Towns County, and enjoy the mountain views while they read or study in the quiet area.

"This room also allows us to offer more programming such as clubs and movie nights, and it will serve as our main performance area for the Mountain Regional Puppet Company, which began last summer."

The ribbon cutting and



Former MRLS Director Donna Howell with Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall, Sen. John Wilkinson and Rep. Stephen Allison earlier this year in April, at the beginning of the renovation project

open house will take place on Nov. 5, though the library will not officially re-open to the

public until 9 a.m. on Monday, Nov. 7.

Fairgrounds...from Page 1A

in the mountains. We sold 300 tickets in advance, and we figure we'll have at least that many people come through the gates as well."

More than 20 craft breweries lined the fairgrounds' booths at the festival, offering patrons a wide variety of over 70 different brew choices from Georgia and North Carolina.

One crowd favorite, New Belgium Brewing Company from Asheville, North Carolina, served up classic brews such as Fat Tire, while offering beer enthusiasts fall flavors with their seasonal Pumpkick Ale.

"It has a wonderful aroma," said Sharon Pritchett, New Belgium volunteer. "It's not too bitter like a hoppy beer. It has all the neat spices, cranberries, but it's not sweet. It still has that smooth beer flavor."

What could be better with a craft brew on a cold day than homemade stews, barbeque or delicious pork fresh out of the smoker? After tasting the wide selection, patrons could grab a plate of grub, kick back, enjoy the tunes of local musicians and maybe even go back for seconds.

"All the beer has been good in their own way," said Joel James of Morganton. "They're all different. The great thing about microbreweries is that even though you're getting an IPA, they can be completely different in their tastes."

"That's what I love about stuff like this. Life is too short to drink bad beer."

The festival ran from 11 a.m. on up into the afternoon, rounding out the event for a perfect evening with a Brewfest Americana Jam, hosted by Hiwassee native Wyatt Espalin.

While the event may be new to the Fairgrounds, it certainly did not disappoint,



Twenty-one different breweries found representation in the Appalachian Brew, Stew and Que Festival, serving up dozens of craft brews all told



Joel James and Bruce Mote, both of Morganton, enjoyed throwing back a few craft brew tastings at the festival

bringing in hundreds of craft beer enthusiasts to enjoy the beauty of the mountains and the friendliness of the people. According to Thomason, this is just the beginning of the brew festival.

"This is perfect," said Thomason. "It's everything I thought it would be. The weather is wonderful, it's a little chilly, but that's just the way you want it for something like this. I think this is going to be an annual event for us. October is a great month to

have it." Thomason would also like to extend a thank you to all the volunteers that worked the event, as well as the following sponsors: Harrah's Cherokee Valley River Casino & Hotel, Windstream, Budweiser, Anderson Financial Services, Fannin Brewing Company, Lake Chatuge Lodge, Bacchus Beer & Growlers, Northeast Sales Distributing Inc., Raymond James, and Mike's Hard Lemonade.

Ballot...from Page 1A

accountability to fix failing schools through increasing community involvement."

Ballot Question: "Shall the Constitution of Georgia be amended to allow the state to intervene in chronically failing public schools in order to improve student performance?"

So, what does this actually mean? Amendment 1 is asking voters whether or not they support the state government stepping in and taking over public schools deemed "chronically failing."

The amendment is based on Senate Bill 133, which requires support from a majority of Georgia's voters in order to be enacted come Jan. 1, 2017. If passed, the state will be able to take control of "chronically failing schools," including all funding for such schools, meaning federal, state and local tax dollars.

The governor would appoint a superintendent to "fix" the schools as the head of something called an "Opportunity School District," or OSD, a proposed district made up only of schools around the state that are considered to be chronically failing by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement.

Such a superintendent would answer only to the governor, and would have authority over all personnel issues for those particular schools within the OSD, potentially making elected school boards and local superintendents obsolete for those schools.

For example, a school district may only have one school that is "chronically failing," at which point that school would fall under the care of the OSD and its superintendent, while the remaining schools would stay under local jurisdiction.

A school is considered chronically failing if it scores less than 60 on the College and Career Ready Performance Index for three consecutive years.

Under the requirements laid out in the amendment, 127 Georgia schools are considered chronically failing, out of more

than 2,200 in 181 school districts. Once a school enters the OSD, it must stay in it for a period of at least five years but no longer than 10 years.

Gov. Nathan Deal spearheaded the legislation, stating that he believed the "status quo isn't working" when it comes to failing schools, and District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch co-sponsored the legislation behind the amendment.

Not everyone is a fan of Amendment 1, however, including the Georgia Association of Educators, the Georgia School Boards Association, and the Georgia School Superintendents Association, among others.

Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong is against the amendment, even though Towns County Schools aren't even close to being considered "chronically failing."

"The state already has a system to where if a school is considered a failing school, they can already come into the school system and take that school over," said Dr. Berrong. "The thing with it is they don't take over the tax money."

"They can come in and change superintendents or change principals and that type of thing, and make positive changes toward schools, but none of the local control is taken away. There's still a local board of education."

"So, that's one thing that all the educational groups in the state are saying is, if you've already got a system to where you can come in from the state department and make changes, then why is there a need to make a constitutional amendment to where you're now going to take over all the local tax dollars."

Amendment 2 Ballot Title: "Authorizes penalties for sexual exploitation and assessments on adult entertainment to fund child victims' services."

The gist of Amendment 2 is that a "yes" vote shows support for "providing penalties for court cases involving certain

sex crimes in order to allocate the generated revenue for the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Fund," according to Ballotpedia, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that studies American politics.

This one is self-explanatory - vote yes to punish some sex crimes by imposing financial penalties meant to go specifically toward helping children who are victims of sex crimes.

Amendment 3 Ballot Title: "Reforms and re-establishes the Judicial Qualifications Commission and provides for its composition, governance and powers."

For this amendment, it is important to understand the function of the Judicial Qualifications Commission, or JQC.

According to gajqc.com, "The Judicial Qualifications Commission is a constitutionally created independent State Commission responsible for investigating complaints of judicial misconduct and/or judicial incapacity and for disciplining judges in the State of Georgia."

The JQC was created by constitutional amendment in 1972, and the current Amendment 3 proposes to replace the JQC with a new commission to be defined and then governed by the Georgia General Assembly.

Proponents of the amendment seem to feel that more internal accountability is needed within the JQC, while opponents, including the State Bar of Georgia and the Georgians for Judicial Integrity think that the JQC needs to remain independent commission free from direct influence from legislators.

Amendment 4 Ballot Title: "Dedicates revenue from existing taxes on fireworks to trauma care, fire services and public safety."

This amendment is worded in a straightforward manner.

The following resources were utilized for this report: gov.georgia.gov, gadoe.org, sos.ga.gov, gajqc.com and ballotpedia.org.

Voting...from Page 1A

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Early voting began on Monday, Oct. 17, and so far the turnout has been massive - by the end of last week, 1,564 of Towns County's 8,598 active registered voters had already cast their ballots ahead of Election Day on Tuesday, Nov. 8.

Every weekday between now and Friday, Nov. 4, during the hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., registered Towns County voters will be able to walk into the Towns County Board of Elections to cast their votes.

The board of elections is located within the Old Rock Jail next to the Towns County Courthouse in Hiwassee, and the board office will remain open to voters even during lunchtime hours.

There is one weekend day set aside for voters at the board of elections office, which will be Saturday, Oct. 29, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., for those who find themselves too busy to vote during the scheduled weekdays of voting.

Voters looking for absentee ballots will need to contact the Towns County Board of Elections at (706) 896-4353.

Tuesday, Oct. 11, was the voter registration deadline leading into the General Election, which is just around the corner.

The following candidates will appear on the ballot:

For President of the United States, Donald J. Trump, with his vice presidential running mate Michael R. Pence, Republican; Hillary Clinton, with her vice presidential running mate Tim Kaine, Democrat; and Gary Johnson, with his vice presidential running mate Bill Weld, Libertarian.

For U.S. Senate, Incumbent Johnny Isakson, Republican; Jim Barksdale, Democrat; and Allen Buckley, Libertarian.

For Public Service Commissioner, Incumbent Tim Echols, Republican, and Eric Hoskins, Libertarian.

For U.S. Representative in 115th Congress from the 9th Congressional District of Georgia, Incumbent Doug Collins, Republican.

For State Senator from 50th District, Incumbent John K. Wilkinson, Republican.

For State Representative in the General Assembly from 8th District, Matt Gurtler, Republican.

For Judge of the Probate Court, Incumbent David Rogers, Republican.

For Clerk of Superior Court, Incumbent Cecil Dye, Republican.

For Sheriff, Incumbent Christopher Clinton, Republican; Brandon Barrett, Independent; and Linda Curtis, Independent.

For Tax Commissioner, Incumbent Bruce Rogers, Democrat.

For Coroner, Harold Copeland, Republican.

For County Commissioner At Large, Cliff Bradshaw, Republican; Nathan Hughes, Democrat; and Henry Chambers, Independent.

Special Election for County Board of Education Post 2 (to fill the unexpired term of Cliff Bradshaw, resigned), Stan Chastain and Chad Houser.

The ballot will also feature four proposed state constitutional amendments asking for a "yes" or "no" vote each.

Also on Nov. 8, Hiwassee City Hall will be holding a special municipal election to fill a vacant city council seat, the candidates for which are John Holmes and Rayette Ross.

Hiwassee City Hall, located adjacent to the Hiwassee Town Square and across from the Towns County Courthouse, is holding early voting also on weekdays between now and Friday, Nov. 4.

Absentee ballots for the special municipal election will also be available at city hall.

Hiwassee voters will be deciding on several alcohol-related referendums as well, including: the selling of liquor by the drink, both during the week and on Sundays; and beer and wine Sunday sales in retail settings.

Jail...from Page 1A



This group of folks attended the Oct. 20 county meeting, posing for a photo afterward in front of the Old Rock Jail

ordinance that would allow the Historical Society to gain full custody of both establishments for the foreseeable future after this year's elections.

The Old Rock Jail was built in 1935 under the instruction of Grand Jury, Ordinary Dr. J.F. Johnson for a total cost of \$4,353.31. Materials from the former jail, such as jail cells patented in 1901, were then recycled for the construction of the jail.

In the early 1970s, the Old Rock Jail was replaced by a new infrastructure that would serve both Towns and Union County. By 1980, the Old Rock Jail was renovated and repurposed for other uses, such as the Board of Elections office, until now.

This month, the final reading of the ordinance was held, officially leaving the two buildings in the protective hands of the Historical Society to breathe life back into the historically rich structures.

After the reading of

the ordinance, Commissioner Kendall presented the original set of keys from the jail to Towns County Historical Society President Sandra Greene, deputizing her and the rest of the society to uphold the history and restoration of the structures.

"I'm so excited that this is going to be a reality," said Greene. "I'm ready to get moving. We're very excited and ready to get everything going and share it with the people of Towns County."

The Historical Society plans to include financial records, tax records, newspapers and more in one section of the jail that will be converted into a research and resource room. Eventually, the society wishes to include computers and microfilm holders for patrons to browse, search and enjoy.

In other county news, the 2017 Tentative Budget was presented to the public with only one change from the 2016

budget. Commissioner Kendall included a \$0.50 raise for all county employees.

"In the past few years, we've gone through the worst recession since the Great Depression," said Commissioner Kendall. "We're coming out of it now, but for a few years we didn't give a raise to any of our employees. However, since July of 2015, we've given \$0.25 raises across the board."

"Again, six months later in January, we gave another \$0.50 raise across the board, and another six months later we gave another \$0.50 raise across the board. And here we are, in this budget, doing the same thing another six months later."

"That comes out to \$1.75 across the board for everybody. That's not bad, and we're happy to do this."

This will not be adopted as the final budget until December.

Disaster...from Page 1A

affect power lines and towers, preventing service for local responders. This is where the ham radio operators would enter with their expertise and equipment to provide additional support to county officials.

"We want to let the ham operators see how they can provide communications to various agencies, first responders, law enforcers and everyone in the county in case of an incident," said Higgins. "Now FEMA, Federal Emergency Management Administration, defines an incident as anything nature made, such as a hurricane, or manmade, such as terrorism."

"This group would probably become involved and the ham radio operators would become involved to provide emergency communications. We want to be sure people are able to get the help they need if all other radio frequencies are down."

A ham radio, or amateur radio, is a means of communication that does not need a studio to be established. These radio forms can be set up in offices, homes or even in a field, making their use during natural disasters unparalleled.

"One of the things I will do as emergency coordinator is, I will assign a key operator and a backup operator for each of the six fire stations," said Higgins. "They would be very good communication centers



for residents to check in on if need be."

Part of the purpose of the meeting was to schedule for a Simulated Emergency Test or "SET" for some time in the following year. This simulation would evaluate the interoperability of the ham radio operators in conjunction with the county officials to make certain all disaster plans are adequate and efficient.

"It ties in with all of public safety," said Rickey Mathis, Towns County EMS/EMADirector. "By putting these people out in the community at these fire stations, that's going to be the only way we're going to know if someone needs help in one of these situations."

"If someone needs help in the community, they're going

to be instructed to go to the nearest fire station. From there, the ham operators can radio 911 and someone can be sent out to help."

This group plans to schedule another meeting in the coming weeks to determine the date of the SET as well as better finalize plans for community safety in case of such emergencies.

Also involved in the meeting were: Laura Stamey, 911 Director; Rickey Mathis, Towns County EMS Director; Harold Copeland, Towns County Fire and Rescue Chief; Marty Roberts, Towns County EMS Mapping Director; Curtis Walls, Towns County Paramedic; and Michael Lovingood, Towns County EMT.