

Commissioners...from Page 1A



Commissioner Bradshaw with five of the other seven Georgia commissioners in U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue's office.

Commissioners met with U.S. Reps. Doug Collins and Tom Graves, both from Georgia, and also visited former Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, who is now the Secretary of Agriculture in the Trump administration.

Unfortunately, the men did not get to meet or see the president, but they did see Vice President Mike Pence up close and personal, as he was a featured speaker in a scheduled meeting for Georgia commissioners.

U.S. Sen. David Perdue, another legislator from Georgia, also spoke to their group, and the sole commissioners enjoyed hearing from a wide panel of Trump administration officials and department heads that gladly shared their contact information.

"It makes me feel good to know there's people we can call, and they know who we are when we need help or we expect them to do something for us," said Bradshaw. "We'll put them to the test in time as needed."

Continued Bradshaw: "It was a very, very good learning experience for me, very good contacts that I've made and friends that I've made, that I've got their phone numbers and I can call them at any time."

"If there's something that comes up that you kind of scratch your head and say, well, I'm really not sure how to handle this, I can call somebody who's been there before. And it doesn't mean we're going to do what they say or what they recommend, but we get more options that way."

Bradshaw was elected in 2016, and is about to complete his first full year as sole commissioner of Towns County. Paris has been commissioner since 2000, and is one year into his fifth term as sole commissioner of Union County.

Despite their differences in experience, Paris and Bradshaw understand the other's job better than others could, including most Georgia commissioners, simply because there are only eight people doing what they do.

"What made it nice that the sole commissioners went together, No. 1, we've got a unique governing system



Bradshaw with Sonny Perdue during his recent trip to the nation's capital.



The commissioner inside the White House.

that's a great system that works wonderfully," said Paris. "The counties that have it love it, and nobody seems to want to change it."

"At the same time, we have a different job description than anybody else in Georgia,

because we are the commission board and the county manager, all rolled into one. That's why, when we get together and talk, we have different issues than everybody else does. It's a big job, but we all love it."

Lee...from Page 1A

the regular meeting. "We can electronically send you a copy, and we're going to post it."

Bradshaw went over some key budget figures in the Dec. 19 meeting, informing residents that the 2018 budget was strikingly similar to the 2017 budget – both balanced to maintain county reserves at \$3.4 million.

"We're almost exactly where we were last year," said Bradshaw. "We've increased the budget a little bit, and we've found means to pay for that without raising our millage rate. Our workers' comp and general liability insurances went up quite a bit, but we've been able to make this work and move stuff around."

"I feel very good about it, we're excited about it, and hopefully the economy will keep growing and bringing money in the county so that we can keep our taxes as low as possible."

Continued Bradshaw: "Those are the big-ticket items we know that we need, and we just pray that we don't have any hurricanes, tornadoes, or things to blow roofs off. You just never know."

The commissioner intends to adopt the 2018 budget in a called meeting on Friday, Dec. 29, at 10 a.m. in the Towns County Courthouse.

Commissioner Bradshaw welcomed Towns County Chamber President Candace Lee to the December



Towns County Chamber of Commerce President Candace Lee gave a presentation in the Dec. 19 county meeting. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

regular meeting, and she spoke on a number of upcoming events that will bring significant investment to the county in the form of tourism dollars.

"The chamber, with a suggestion from the commissioner, has planned an outdoor expo," said Lee, noting that the expo will showcase a variety of activities like fishing, hunting, hiking, boating and more in April 2018.

Continued Lee: "It's going to be not only a great place to go and visit with folks that offer guide services, camping, RVs, boats, things like that, but also to learn something while you're there, and it'll be a good experience for children."

Lee also touched on the chamber's Made In Georgia event, which, as the name suggests, will feature products made only in Georgia. That will take place the weekend before Independence Day 2018, and the Georgia Department of Agriculture plans to sponsor the event.

"The Bassmaster Angler of the Year tournament is huge for Lake Chatuge," said



Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw on Dec. 19. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Lee, moving on, "and they are promoting it as the first tournament held south of the Mason-Dixon line."

"This is the first time the Angler of the Year tournament has been held in the South. It's a new lake for them. There's only two new lakes on their whole B.A.S.S. Elite Series this year, and Lake Chatuge is one of them."

Continued Lee: "The dates are Sept. 18-20 of 2018, and it is the 50 top anglers in the United States. The tournament is big because the purse, or the amount of money they give away total, is \$1 million. So, we are going to have a lot of fancy folks in Hiawassee for a while."

For more information on upcoming chamber activities, check out www.GoLakeChatuge.com.

Also in the meeting, the commissioner thanked 8-year-old Brody Barrett for giving the invocation at the start, and thanked Isiah Viera, 11, for leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Both boys are Cub Scouts.

VFW...from Page 1A

students competed locally in this competition, with three entrants coming out on top with some prize money: Vanessa Floyd, First Place, \$200; Laura Gleaton, Second Place, \$100; and Liam King, Third Place, \$50.

"America's future – these words strike many as bleak because of our division, greed, self-serving (natures) and our declining values," said Floyd, reading her speech in the banquet. "We as a nation are more politically divided now than ever before."

"This division is causing stress and turmoil across the country. Also, America's youth have no boundaries on what is morally right and wrong. Therefore, this leads to selfishness, which is a huge problem in more ways than we know."

"With these issues, the future of America is doomed, but I believe that there is hope for our future."

Floyd, a freshman at Towns County High School, said that one way toward a better America rests in the hope that Americans can learn to come together not just in times of national tragedy, but in everyday life.

"There is hope for our future," said Floyd. "With people becoming more open-minded, we can avoid getting caught up in divisive arguments, and we will be able to make advances that were not possible before."

Middle school-aged students competed in their own VFW competition known as the Patriot's Pen, which this year featured the theme, "America's Gift to My Generation."

Of the 18 local participants in that competition, Rylie Livingston came in First Place and received \$200; Alison Markham placed second and received \$100; and Austin Fairless came in third and received \$50.

"America has greatly gifted my generation with freedom of speech, press, free worship, and equal education and job opportunities," said Livingston, delivering her winning essay in the banquet.



Rylie Livingston delivering her First Place Patriot's Pen audio-essay to those gathered for the banquet. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Towns County educators Kim McClure of Towns County Elementary, Lawanda Lynn of Eastgate Life Academy and Shannon Floyd of Towns County High. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"These freedoms will help us to shape a better and brighter future. After all, we will be the next leaders of America."

The VFW Auxiliary prepared and served a spaghetti dinner that evening, and provided dessert.

VFW Adjutant Ashford Todd organized the awards program, which Cmdr. Bart Rodgers and Quartermaster Brandy Creel conducted following dinner.

Also recognized that evening and awarded prize money for their contributions in the classroom were teachers Shannon Floyd of Towns County High School, Kim McClure of Towns County Elementary School and Lawanda Lynn of Eastgate

Life Academy.

Towns County first responders received recognition and prize money in the banquet, too: Lt. John McCoy of the Towns County Sheriff's Office; Sgt. Tracy James of the Hiawassee Police Department; Capt. Jeffrey Scott of Towns County Fire & Rescue; and Paramedic Jim Barnes of Towns County EMS.

The banquet was well attended by civic leaders and local elected officials. Furthermore, the VFW awarded the *Towns County Herald* a \$100 prize for its contributions in the community, which Publisher Kenneth West subsequently pledged to a local charity.



Towns County first responders Jim Barnes with Towns County EMS, John McCoy of the Towns County Sheriff's Office and Jeffrey Scott with Towns County Fire. Sgt. Tracy James of the Hiawassee Police Department was also honored in the banquet, though he could not attend. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

COPS...from Page 1A

maximize their support for the men and women who bravely protect our communities and neighborhoods."

State Sens. Tyler Harper, Jack Hill, John Wilkinson, Steve Gooch and Tonya Anderson served on the task force chaired by Lt. Gov. Cagle and co-chaired by Sen. Kirk.

Local officials selected by the Georgia Sheriffs' Association (GSA), the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police (GACP), the Association of Georgia (ACCG) and the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) joined them.

The task force recommended proposing new legislation to amend the Department of Community Affairs requirements for Qualified Local Government Status to require local governments to perform wage and compensation evaluations of their own and surrounding counties at least every five years.

It also recommended adopting and maintaining a compensation pay scale for their local law enforcement officers consisting of pay grades and pay steps with appropriate ranges of salaries for each category based on merit, training, longevity and local demographics. Reporting of this information to DCA will be required of local governments.

The task force recommended that if a government or agency refuses or fails to implement pay scales or perform compensation studies, they would lose Qualified Local Government status and therefore no longer

be eligible to receive state or federal grants, loans, or reimbursement for training, education and travel.

The group also recommended the appropriation of a minimum of \$7 million in state funds (to be increased if greater need is established) to be available for grants to assist local governments and sheriffs' offices with increased officer compensation.

In doing so, procedures shall be put in place to ensure that grant funding shall be used solely for compensation and shall not be supplanted.

Also, DCA shall establish grant regulations to ensure that funds are prioritized for full service law enforcement agencies that demonstrate financial need due to a lack of local government revenue or tax base, and demonstrate an effort to maximize the effectiveness of available resources.

The group also recommended the study of the fiscal impact of potential tax exemptions or credits for local law enforcement officers in the state in order to increase compensation, as well as calling for the Georgia Municipal Association and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia to study the impact of allowing local governments to channel a percentage of revenue received from local option sales taxes to law enforcement agencies, or provide more flexibility with existing insurance premium revenue collected by local governments.

"Every day, officers across our state accept each call they receive with humility

and a selfless commitment to the communities they serve," said Peach County Sheriff Terry Deese. "Lt. Gov. Cagle should be applauded for his leadership on this issue – and I look forward to the continued work of the COPS Task Force as we unite behind these recommendations and remain engaged until we fully compensate the individuals who put their lives on the line defending their fellow Georgians."

"When you start each morning putting on a badge, you recommit yourself in service to your fellow Georgians," said Lt. Gov. Cagle. "There are no exceptions – every single community depends on our law enforcement to keep them safe, and in our most vulnerable moments we rely on these men and women."

"Simply put, these individuals deserve our support. By acting on the recommendations from the COPS Task Force, we will be better positioned to compensate the officers who keep our communities safe."

Sen. Kirk echoed those sentiments.

"Our state is blessed with the best law enforcement officers in the nation," said Sen. Kirk. "We must do everything within our power to make sure they are properly compensated for their dedication to the citizens of Georgia."

"This task force is a great asset for our local communities as we examine compensation and benefits for the individuals who proudly protect Georgia."