

Hero...from Page 1A

Towns County, and he participates in many events that benefit the children of the area during Christmastime.

"This is all about helping the kids, that's what we're here for," said Lt. Osborn, who like many, misses his friend Jimmy Wright. "This is a little different to me, because these are Towns County kids. I love Union County kids, but this is home."

After the shopping experience, all the kids loaded up with their loot on the school buses and headed to Papa's Pizza back home in Towns County.

It was a tremendous day for the youngsters, who only had to attend a half-day of school on Dec. 19, as Winter Break kicked off with the Shop with a Hero Christmas extravaganza.

And it was all thanks to the generous support of Towns County residents.

"We've got so many people in the community that have been generous and wanted this to happen," said Rosser, noting that her old pal Wright would be proud. "I've thought about Jimmy a lot over the past couple of weeks."

"This is his baby, he loved to do this, and he loved to give back to kids. We're just so pleased with Chief Paul Smith and how he has really embraced this."

Interested parties can



Towns County Schools Transportation Director Scott Hamilton got festive with his beard for Shop with a Hero. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Donnie Jarrard is the School Resource Officer from the Towns County Sheriff's Office. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

donate to Shop with a Hero all throughout the year in advance of Christmas, and donations can be made at Hiwassee City Hall.



Towns County first responders took local kids Christmas shopping at Walmart in Blairsville for Shop with a Hero on Tuesday, Dec. 19. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Movers and Shakers team up with 4-H for Speech Showcase



Mountain Movers & Shakers with Andrew Smith of Towns County 4-H. L-R: Ash Todd, Sam Fullerton, Gene Moss, Andrew Smith and Brandy Creel. Photo/Lily Avery

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Local civic organization, the Mountain Movers and Shakers, is partnering with the Towns County 4-H program to host its annual Speech Showcase in March.

The planning committee met on Tuesday, Dec. 19, to begin the initial process of planning how to market for the showcase and what changes will be made this year compared to previous years to make the speech showcase as successful as possible.

Unlike years past, the training program will not simply be a prerequisite for the contest, but will serve as means for students to learn proper public speaking etiquette, speech preparation and gain confidence standing in front of peers.

While the contest will still take place at the end of the nearly month-long training, it is not a requirement for students, opening the floor for more young people who simply want to learn how to speak in public.

"This provides communication skills for college, job interviews, interaction with your peers, which I think is very important," said Col. Gene Moss, Movers and Shakers Speech Showcase Chairman. "It also builds confidence and most of all, it builds leadership. In my five years of working with this program, the biggest thing I've seen is the dramatic difference in the first day and the last day.

"What they look like, how they act, how they carry themselves. It's amazing to see that kind of change in a young person. And you can really see that they're happier for it, which, in my opinion, is worth all the hours and hard work we put in it. It's worth every last second."

Last year Towns County 4-H Extension Associate Andrew Smith worked with the Movers and Shakers as a coach during the speech contest, but was not acting as a representative of the 4-H program at the time. This year, after much consideration, Smith made the decision to include the 4-H program with the showcase to encourage community support and engage all Towns County students in the program, not just those who attend Towns County public schools.

"The Towns County Movers and Shakers are partnering with the Towns County 4-H," said Moss. "It's a little bit different than what we've done in the past and we're proud that Andrew (Smith) has taken it upon himself to help us with this."

"The 4-H program provides such an educational opportunity for students and I think that this is really going to add to that and bring a lot to the table for our students who take part in the program."

After the first of the year, Smith, Moss and all those involved in the planning of the showcase will hit the ground running to encourage students to join the training program and, hopefully, the contest.

According to Smith, this

speech development program is not just about learning how to present a written speech for the classroom or future work setting, but it teaches solid foundations for everyday communication and will, in turn, be a life changing experience for those who decide to participate.

"My biggest soapbox when it comes to youth and speaking, is how they'll be able to communicate," said Smith. "There are people in this country getting up and burning buildings down, when all they have to do is get up and use their voice. I get emotional over that because I see kids who get up and do great things just by learning how to stand up and speak."

Training sessions for the speech development and showcase will begin on Thursday, Jan. 25, and will last until Thursday, Feb. 22. Each session will be held at the New Senior Center at 6:30 p.m.

The showcase will be held at the Towns County Recreation and Civic Center on Thursday, March 1. Prizes for the contest will be \$500 for first place, \$400 for second place, \$300 for third place and \$200 for fourth place, with \$100 cash prizes for each winner in the sixth, seventh and eighth grade.

Students from the sixth grade through the 12th grade are eligible to participate, including those who attend Towns County schools, Eastgate Life Academy and Towns County homeschool students.

Firewise Citizens Coalition throws Christmas Party



The Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition met with county officials for their 2017 Christmas Party on Tuesday, Dec. 19, at Sundance Grill. Photo/Lily Avery

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition met on Tuesday, Dec. 19 at Sundance Grill to review the organization's yearly impact, and enjoy the company of one another during the holiday season.

"I'm so thankful for everyone who is here today," said Marsha Elliot, Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition President. "All of you have worked endlessly and tirelessly to make this program work and to make Towns County a leader in the Firewise organization. "We wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for your valiant and persistent efforts. "And, of course, we would be nowhere at all without our fearless leader, Mr. Frank Riley. He brought this to Towns County, hit the ground running with it and has kept us moving in the right direction. So, thank you, for everything."

Elliot proceeded to individually thank each person present for their specific contributions to the coalition, and highlighted the organization's key events over the last year, such as the Wildfire Preparedness Day back in May where the group provided free information to the community on fire safety and awareness.

Joining the coalition last Tuesday for the holiday party were Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Georgia Forestry Commission Chief Ranger Tony Harkins and Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland, who each play equally instrumental roles in all that the coalition does and works toward.

Harkins began by expressing his gratitude for the organization and its positive effects on not only the community, but also the region as a whole, especially after last year's extensive drought and rampant wildfires.

"I just want to thank all of you for everything that you have done and that you continue to do," said Harkins. "And I want to thank you for your continued support and encouragement and persistence with spreading the word about the Firewise program. It's so important to the safety of our mountains and those who live here and I encourage you to keep up the good work."

Commissioner Bradshaw and Chief Copeland



Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland talking wildfire preparedness. Photo/Lily Avery



Georgia Forestry Commission Chief Ranger Tony Harkins. Photo/Lily Avery

added to these sentiments, conveying their deepest appreciation and admiration for the coalition, and the commitment that each of its members shows to the program, Firewise communities and to Towns County as a whole.

"Our community doesn't know how lucky they are," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "You do so much to keep this community safe and I am so very appreciative for it and all you do to make Towns County a model for the Firewise program."

The Firewise program is under the Fire Adapted umbrella and is a nationally promoted program through the National Fire Protection Organization in Denver, Colorado. Under this program, those who become Firewise certified learn how to maintain a home with fire prevention in mind, such as removing brush from around the house and porch and keeping debris off

the roof.

Towns County's participation in the Firewise program has gained substantial momentum over the years, resulting in the county leading in the state for the most Firewise communities in one given area. As of right now, there are 92 Firewise communities in the state of Georgia and 21 of those are found in Towns County.

This is something Riley, who is the Executive Director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council under which the Towns County Firewise program is operated, capitalized on during last week's gathering, saying that this is only the start for Towns County.

"We're putting Towns County on the map," said Riley. "I'm proud of what we've done here and I'm excited for all that we're going to be doing in the future."

"2018 is going to be a good year for Towns County."