

Review...from Page 1

Deal, Speaker of the House David Ralston and Christian Taylor serving as Grand Marshals of the Georgia Mountain Fair Parade in July. So, pull up a chair, unfold

your newspaper and take a look back with us as we rewind what made 2013 a special year in Towns County. You'll be glad you did.

Excellence...from Page 1

dedication and diligence." Dr. Barge is proud of TCMS as well. "It took us a while to name the 2012 Schools of Excellence, but we wanted to measure them based on our College and Career Ready Performance

Index rather than the old measure," he said. "With our new, more rigorous accountability system, these schools really shine. Their focus on areas that impact student success is evident across the board."

Coach...from Page 1

to make it 7-0 Indians. With time expiring in the first quarter, Underwood connected on a field goal to put the Indians on top 10-0. The second quarter was another good one for the Indians as senior hybrid quarterback/running back Jackson Noblet added two touchdown scores to give the Indians a commanding 24-0 lead. The Lions finally found the end zone late in the half, as the two teams hit the locker room with the Indians on top 24-6. Senior Brett Barrett added a touchdown late in the third quarter as the Indians took a 30-6 lead. Underwood connected on the extra point to make it 31-6 good guys.

Hebron scored a late third quarter touchdown to pull to within 31-13. They added another score in the fourth quarter to tighten the gap to 31-19, after they missed the extra point. With 2:19 left, the Indians' Underwood connected on a 36-yard field goal to put the game away, as the Indians never looked back and laid claim to a 34-19 win over the Lions. The win gave the Indians a 4-1 second half, after dropping the season's first five games. Congratulations to Coach Harrison and the 2013 Towns County Indians. We look forward to a successful second season under Coach Harrison.

Parade...from Page 1

was just pulling out of the Park Sterling Bank parking lot. Excited parade watchers sat knee-to-knee as the parade procession cascaded through Main Street. Gov. Deal, the Grand Marshal was impressed. "They were sure lined up watching this parade," the Governor said. "It was an event to remember."

Speaker Ralston was ecstatic about his experience. It was his first ride in a horseless carriage. "I've had a great time," Speaker Ralston said. "It's good to get up here and see a lot of old friends. There are so many people here today and everybody's having a great time. It's been a little warm, but nobody seemed to mind."

Gov. Deal and Georgia's First Lady Sandra Deal were excited to be a part of the parade and thrilled to be in the North Georgia Mountains. "It's always a beautiful place to come to," Gov. Deal said. "To be a part of this fair, and this parade, Sandra and I are just honored to be a part of it today. I'm glad to see the weather cooperated, there was a great crowd along the parade route, it was a great day for North Georgia." It was like the old days of the Georgia Mountain Fair, when visitors came to Hiawassee, no one got in a hurry, and traffic was backed up as far as the eye could see. Gov. Deal said the crowd was an encouraging sign that economic recovery was emerging in the North Georgia Mountains. "We hope so," he said. "The numbers are out for the 2013 Fiscal Year for the state, and we came in ahead of our projections, with the exception of our sales tax, which was down just very slightly. "We did our best this past year to give folks some additional sales tax breaks," Gov. Deal said. "We've added a considerable amount of money to our Rainy Day Fund and that's always good." Gov. Deal said it was humbling to be asked to be the Grand Marshal of such an historic event. "Sandra and I always enjoy being able to see people," Gov. Deal said. "Given the privilege of being the Grand Marshal is indeed a great honor for both of us. It's great to see that people still come out and celebrate events such as this, and celebrate the fact that we are in one of the most beautiful parts in these United States. All of those things make for a good parade."

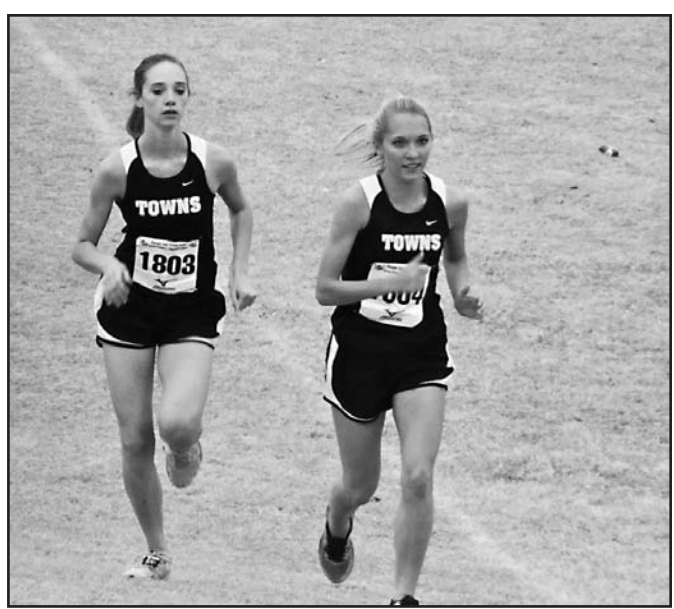
The mountains are home to me," Speaker Ralston said. "The mountains are a part of me. I take these mountains wherever I go. Once the mountains get in your blood, and get in your entire being, they're always a part of you. "That's the great thing about the parade and the fair, it's a way that we celebrate our mountain heritage," he said. "Those of us who are fortunate enough to be born and raised in the mountains, we celebrate our way of life, year round. This week, we get to share our mountain heritage with people from other places. That's what makes the Georgia Mountain Fair so special." Following the guests of honor, an assortment of amazing parade attractions that sped by at a snail's pace so everyone could get a good look. Sheriff Clinton and his crew kept the parade moving along the route that took them from the center of Hiawassee to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes, plus a little extra time for some. It was a family event that did Hiawassee proud just like it does every year. House District 8 State Rep. Stephen Allison walked the entire parade route, as he does every year. "It's such a blessing to be up here," Rep. Allison said. "The people are so warm and friendly, we always have a great time. Today was no different. That's the best parade we've been in. "It's great to see the Governor and the Speaker here," he said. "I think it's great to have the Speaker of the House from Blue Ridge, the Governor from Gainesville, and the Lt. Governor from Gainesville. It's great to see Nathan and David coming up here and showing support for our mountains."



Georgia Speaker of the House David Ralston said the Georgia Mountain Fair is as treasured a tradition as there is in the North Georgia Mountains. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Top Story...from Page 1

Country team was the winner of their second consecutive State Championship. Ledford's reaction to the news was immediate and honest. She broke into tears. Tears turned into laughter, however, as her teams quickly encircled her in a giant group hug. Together, they shouted and jumped up and down and celebrated.

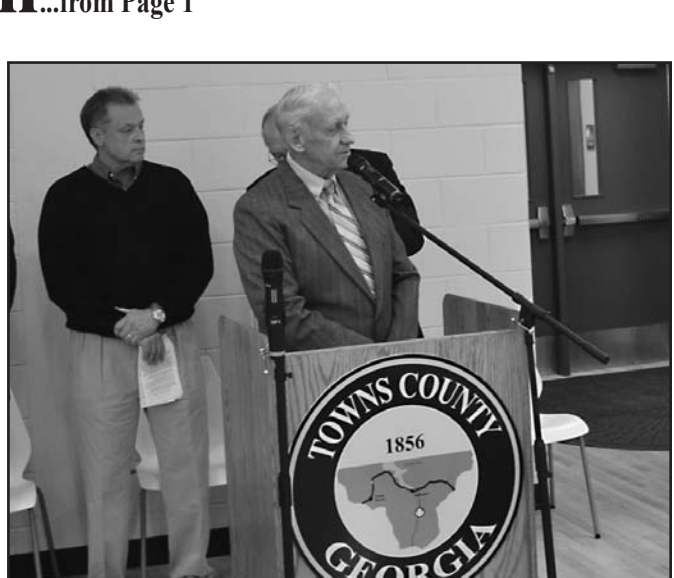


The good news was two-fold: not only did the girls' team win, but the boys' team also placed, coming in sixth. "Those boys, we kept saying if you come in sixth it is like winning a state championship, because of how strong it is," said Ledford later. "To make it out of Area is just a feat in itself." The girls' First Place finish was by as narrow a margin as possible. With both teams tied with a score of 60, it came down to a tiebreaker between Towns and Trion. In the event of a tie, the top five girls of each team have exactly the same number of points, so the officials include the sixth runner for each team. Towns County's sixth runner was the freshman Kenzi Jenkins, with a time of 26:12.59, almost 6 seconds faster than Trion's sixth runner, Erica Madison. "It is literally as close as a state championship can get," said Ledford. Returning state champion Ansley Vardeman came in second with a time of 23:21. She led the race until the final few moments. At the very end, she was passed by Gordon Lee's Sarah Meadows, a freshman, who finished just seconds ahead. However, it was Caitlin Sheffield who thrilled everybody. For most of the first two miles, she and Vardeman were neck and neck, running within a yard of one another. This is impressive, considering Sheffield has only run three meets the entire season. Immediately after the first meet of the year, she suffered a stress fracture in her foot and was out on doctors' orders for the entire season. The area meet was her first time running in almost two months. Despite the injury, Sheffield moved on from Area to medal in the state championship. She finished third with a time of 23:51. Another top runner, Ally Settles, also suffered an injury just before Area. She tore a muscle and is expecting to undergo surgery soon. Despite the pain of the injury, she made the decision to run at State. "She was excited to run because she wanted to help everybody win," said Betsy Settles, Ally's mother. "We had faith that she was would do well, and she did. She finished strong." In a race that close, Towns needed every ounce of support it could get. Ledford is now the proud owner of two championship cups, but takes none of the credit for herself. "All I can really say is that I have an incredible bunch of kids that did the unbelievable," she said. "They don't roll over and give up, and that's what winners are made of. They refused to quit. And that is why they are the way they are."

Amy Vardeman and Caitlin Sheffield pace the Lady Indians at state. runner was the freshman Kenzi Jenkins, with a time of 26:12.59, almost 6 seconds faster than Trion's sixth runner, Erica Madison. "It is literally as close as a state championship can get," said Ledford. Returning state champion Ansley Vardeman came in second with a time of 23:21. She led the race until the final few moments. At the very end, she was passed by Gordon Lee's Sarah Meadows, a freshman, who finished just seconds ahead. However, it was Caitlin Sheffield who thrilled everybody. For most of the first two miles, she and Vardeman were neck and neck, running within a yard of one another. This is impressive, considering Sheffield has only run three meets the entire season. Immediately after the first meet of the year, she suffered a stress fracture in her foot and was out on doctors' orders for the entire season. The area meet was her first time running in almost two months. Despite the injury, Sheffield moved on from Area to medal in the state championship. She finished third with a time of 23:51. Another top runner, Ally Settles, also suffered an injury just before Area. She tore a muscle and is expecting to undergo surgery soon. Despite the pain of the injury, she made the decision to run at State. "She was excited to run because she wanted to help everybody win," said Betsy Settles, Ally's mother. "We had faith that she was would do well, and she did. She finished strong." In a race that close, Towns needed every ounce of support it could get. Ledford is now the proud owner of two championship cups, but takes none of the credit for herself. "All I can really say is that I have an incredible bunch of kids that did the unbelievable," she said. "They don't roll over and give up, and that's what winners are made of. They refused to quit. And that is why they are the way they are."

Recreation...from Page 1

cutting, Kendall asked the Rev. Jimmy Rogers to lead an invocation. Rev. Rogers read from Psalm 121, but added a personal touch. "I've had a good time in Towns County," he told the assembly. "I wouldn't trade this place for anywhere in the world. I thank God for people like Bill Kendall and all the rest of the folks in Towns County who sure have been a blessing to me," he said.



Rev. Rogers is right; Towns County certainly has a reason to be proud. The new recreation center wouldn't have been possible without a little bit of help from the entire community. Shirley Stallings, a self-proclaimed "community advocate," is a big believer in the power of communal engagement. She was excited about this new addition to Hiawassee. "This is all about the people of Towns County and their desire to want their county to be the best," she said.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall dedicated the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on Dec. 14. Photo/Lowell Nicholson. Stallings is certainly right about the power of small efforts adding up to create something grand. Plans for the recreation center began at the suggestion of Commissioner Kendall in 2005, and was funded by a 1-cent Special Purpose Local Option sales tax. The SPLOST referendum was passed by a nearly unanimous 90 percent "yes" vote. The tax also funded other important infrastructure, such as a new fire truck, a new ambulance, and new fire hydrants. "I am absolutely proud and thrilled to death," said Stallings. "It's a state of the art facility." The attention to detail in the architecture reflects the

mountainous surroundings, as well as containing enough space for a gymnasium, fitness center, walking track, and a conference and community room. That's not to say that the project hasn't faced some obstacles. Multiple times, the job had to be postponed because of seemingly never-ending rain. But on the day of the opening, Kendall could only be positive. "We've had some setbacks and delays," he admitted, but also added that in spite of the hardships, the construction crews worked hard and fast. "I think it's 14 months since we had the ground breaking," he said. That's fast work, considering the recreation center is big enough to hold not just one, but two basketball courts. "This is what it's all about, a community together making their community better," said Stallings. "We change the world not by dictating lets change the world, but by one heart at a time doing the right thing. And this is the right thing to do."

Farewells...from Page 1

family man with inspiring scripture and consoling words to the family. The Georgia Army National Guard provided military honors and the Hall County Sheriff's Office Honor Guard provided the Three-Volley, 21 Gun Salute followed by the traditional playing of Taps in honor of Towns County's fallen hero who had left this earth way too soon. As the flag was removed from his coffin and folded in the traditional military-style triangle and presented to Brian Wilson's wife Emily, the tragic reality of this devastating loss to family, friends, and all of Towns County began to soak in. Fellow peace officers and friends, who had come to show their respect and to honor this well-deserving defender of freedom and community, lined up to extend their condolences to Lt. Wilson's family. A very moving and emotional part of the graveside service was when the family paid their final tribute to this beloved man as one-by-one, they placed pink carnations on his coffin. The men of the family removed the pink shirts they had worn in remembrance and honor of their loved one and draped them over Lt. Wilson's coffin. A family member explained that "pink was his favorite color. He wore it all the time." Eighteen days later, Sheriff Chris Clinton, Chief Deputy Jeff Edge, and the Towns County Sheriff's Office were saying "goodbye" again. This time to Towns County Sheriff's Deputy Amy Burch. Burch passed away at Northeast Georgia Medical



Above, the flag-draped coffin of Lt. Brian Wilson enters Burch Cemetery; below, honor guard members remove the flag from Deputy Amy Burch's coffin as she reaches her final resting place.

Center's Ronnie Green Heart Center in Gainesville on Tuesday May 21 after suffering cardiac arrest at her home on Saturday May 18. Deputy Burch was a beloved member of the Sheriff's Office staff who made everyone around her smile. She graduated from Union County High School, where she was a standout basketball player, went on to play for Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, and later earned

her Bachelor's Degree in Education. Deputy Burch worked in the Towns County Detention Center for three years. She was a vital part of the detention staff, and also performed administrative duties whenever needed. Her demeanor and willingness to perform any task made her a favorite with her co-workers and supervisors. Amy and her husband, Bruce, have a son, Cody, and a daughter, Michaela, and a

granddaughter, McKenna. Her interests included, "watching sports, reading, and playing the piano." She was responsible for booking and processing of inmates, as well as overall supervision of the inmate population, and overseeing daily operations. Towns County Sheriff's Lt. James Baldwin said "Amy had a can-do attitude and worked very well with her co-workers. She was willing to do anything that is asked of her."