

Brasstown Valley celebrates New Year with salute to troops

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Young Harris – Area residents and guests from Atlanta ushered the New Year in with style at Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa's Annual New Year's Eve Gala, themed this year "Salute to the Troops."

The resort has been hosting a New Year's gala since it opened in 1995, and last year's event featured a pirate theme.

"What's a little bit different over the last nine years is we've been doing a themed party," said Charles Burton, general manager of the resort and spa. "This year's theme is 'Salute to the Troops.' We've tried to recognize each of the branches of service with some of the decorations."

Brasstown Valley went beyond the call of duty with this year's decorations, implementing not only patriotic colors, but camouflage and lots of gold, and utilized seemingly every room off of the main ballroom.

Each of the rooms was themed, much like the ballroom, and one room, called the M*A*S*H Martini Bar, even had a real Army issue sleeping cot and other decorations.

Those who decide to ring in the New Year at Brasstown Valley do so because of its unique offerings as a New Year's destination – from the fine dining to the dancing, to the supreme musical live shows, this year featuring jazzy, multigenerational inspired Uptown Band from Atlanta, to the balloon drop at midnight.

"I think the themes are fun, guests are looking forward to what themes we do," said Burton. "We've done a Speakeasy theme, we did a Casino Royale theme, we did an Academy Award theme, we did a Fire and Ice theme. So the guests look forward to seeing what we do each year, which is something different."

Burton describes the Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa overnight experience as "a full-blown, New Year's gala party," which entails breakfast and football to kick off New Year's morning.



Uptown Band kept guests dancing well into the night at Brasstown Valley Resort



Jessica Berry, Joshua and Kristy Wallace ring in the New Year together at Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa Annual New Year's Eve Gala

"The neat thing, too, is that there are a number of people that don't necessarily look for a full-blown New Year's gala with a band for New Year's Eve, so we also have our dining room open with a nice menu for guests to come and families to come and have dinner, and that is also at about 200 guests," said Burton.

Between the gala and the more intimate dining experience, Brasstown Valley offers something for everyone to enjoy for New Year's celebrations.

After attending last year, Joshua and Kristy Wallace of Blairsville knew they would be back to Brasstown Valley to ring in 2016.

"It's just so much fun," said Kristy Wallace. "They change the theme every year so it's always a new party, and we just had such a good time last year that we wanted to come back. We do the package, so we do the room and breakfast the next morning and everything."

Just the whole night is a lot of fun. The band plays all night, then they have the balloon drop at midnight."

For Joshua and Kristy, who have two boys, 2015 was a great year, and the high school sweethearts look forward to celebrating their 14-year wedding anniversary.

"We always look forward to moving on and growing and being another year together," said Kristy. "Every year is growing and loving each other."

The Wallaces attended the gala with friends, and Jessica Berry, who runs Total Recovery of Blairsville, said she is extremely optimistic about the New Year, for a healthy family, healthy kids, and another great year like 2015.

"Every year is better than the last," said Berry. "To make 2016 better than 2015 – that's my resolution every year."

Commissioner amends 2015 budget



By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The office of the Towns County Sole Commissioner held an emergency called meeting on Thursday, Dec. 31 to address the 2015 final budget, sign the Financial Year 2017 Transit Application, and set the qualifying fees for local offices in the 2016 election.

Deputy Clerk Andrea Anderson explained that the budget has not undergone many significant changes, and in fact has not had any additions or deductions overall. The only changes occurred when money needed to be moved from department to department.

"This is the final budget amendment for the 2015 budget. We didn't add money to the budget, we just moved money around from some departments that had some excess funds and we moved it into areas that were in need of it," she said.

Next on the agenda was to sign the Transit Application addressing the Fiscal Year 2017 Operating Budget. The budget is asking for \$97,710.

"This is just our salaries and operating expenses that we expect to incur during the following year. This is from

July 1 of 2016 to June 30 of 2017," explained secretary Betty Greenwood.

"We provide transportation for people who need to go to grocery stores, doctor appointments, and various things throughout the county and into Union County. It's for anybody, if you need to go. We charge a fee for where we're taking you," added Anderson.

The transit program is for anyone who has to cover basic needs but might not have a car or anyone to drive them from place to place. It's especially helpful for those undergoing medical treatment.

"Our biggest customer base from what I understand is Avida and dialysis. Those go to Union County. They go to the Dialysis Center or the Cancer Center," said Anderson.

"They can be transported to any doctor's office here or grocery store," added Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall.

Greenwood said that the transit system runs every day.

"This is what we projected the county would spend to run the transit from July 1. Then they use this application and either approve it or change it, but we already have tentative approval. We

expect it to be approved, said Anderson.

"We expect to get \$43,969. Our fees will cover the balance. We've estimated the fees to be \$10,000. And if it comes in over that, it goes to knock off our portion, so say we get \$15,000, then our portion can be \$5,000 in fees and the rest in general fund money," she said.

Finally, the county set the qualifying fees for local offices.

"Whereas Official Code of Georgia Annotated section 21-2-131 provides for qualification fees for party and public offices be fixed by the governing authority and published as provided by law prior to Feb. 1 of any year in which a general primary, non-partisan election or general election is to be held," Anderson read.

The fees were fixed as follows.

\$1,407.54 for the County Commissioner; \$1,578.31 for the Probate Judge or Magistrate; \$1,229.04 for the Tax Commissioner; 1,229.04 for the Clerk of Court; \$1,407.54 for the Sheriff; \$160 for the Coroner, and \$36 for the Board of Education members.

and he also recognized the vehicle that she was caught in as the vehicle that was prowling around his house the day before his house was burglarized," said Lt. Osborn.

Thanks to her initial arrest in Clay County and the subsequent investigation by the Union County Sheriff's

Office, several burglaries have been cleared up in Clay County, two in Union County, and at least one in Towns County, according to Lt. Osborn.

Coffey currently resides in the Clay County Jail, where she is being held on \$25,000 bond and facing pending arrest by the Union County Sheriff's Office.

Burglary...from Page 1

in Towns County, and he alerted the Towns County Sheriff's Office of the items.

Coffey has since been charged with two felony counts of burglary in Union County, according to Lt. Osborn.

"One of my victims here did recognize some of the items that I found out of Coffey's house as being his,

Emergency...from Page 1

occurred during the flash floods, and several areas had to be evacuated during the ordeal.

Sally Varao with the Red Cross helped Towns County Fire and other first responders to house residents that had to be evacuated from an RV park in Hiawassee, putting them up in the Holiday Inn for an evening.

Residents from the Autumn Ridge community of Towns County made an appearance in the meeting, thanking the county for its hard work during the nearly weeklong flooding epidemic, and asking for any assistance whatsoever for a bridge collapse on the private road – and the only road – leading into

and out of their neighborhood. Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland made it a point to emphasize the importance of evacuating an area if an order to do so is given, and at the end of the meeting, Commissioner Kendall declared the county as being in a local state of emergency, with more details to follow after damage had been fully assessed.



Baby...from Page 1

three, but I didn't like them. I came up with two or three, she didn't like them, either. So I said, if you aren't going to tell me anything, I'm just going to call him Kammo.

"Well, two or three days went by, and she says, what do you think about the name Kampton? She said, I am not legally naming my son Kammo."

The compromise worked out – both Evan and Kembra liked "Kampton," and the name proved a proper gateway to "Kammo."

"K" names run in the family, too, as Evan's son from a previous marriage is named Kolby, along with wife Kembra and now young Kampton.

Kolby, 8, is excited to have a little brother, and looks forward to teaching him how to play guitar like his dad taught him, though Evan said, based on his fingers, it is likely Kampton will learn to play the banjo.

Kampton was born into a long line of Hughes men in Union County, and his middle name, McKinney, comes from his mother's maiden name.

Proud grandparents on both sides are Doug and Nancy Hughes, of Blairsville, as well as Carroll and Betty McKinney, of Hiawassee.

Kembra said that her pregnancy was smooth sailing from start to finish, and she and Evan both agreed that little



Evan Hughes wraps his son in a blanket, a skill he perfected on Kampton's older brother Kolby

Kampton has been a blessing from God.

The couple also shared more than a few kind words about Dr. Davis and his staff at Women's Health, as well as for Union General Hospital – from the CEO to the janitorial staff.

"What a blessing, everything about it," said Evan Hughes. "From the time we found out we were going to have a baby to the time (Kampton) got here, just perfect."

After having carried Kampton for 39 weeks, Kembra said that Kampton is nothing short of a miracle.

"It's exciting – I don't know how to explain it, it's amazing that this was inside of me," said Kembra Hughes, cradling her newborn son.

The Hughes family was

thankful for a gift basket for baby Kampton, provided by the Union General Hospital Auxiliary, which included many useful items such as handmade bonnets, bibs, blankets, baby wash and more in a baby bathtub.

Kampton joins a growing family, with Evan's sister Kelly Helton and her husband Jason, with their children Lily, 8, and Harley, 6; and Kembra's sister Anisa Roberts and her husband Jason, with their children Eli, 12, Lila, 10, and Tate, 9.

"Our families, both families, we're a really close family," said Evan Hughes. "When one member of the family hurts, everyone hurts. If one's happy, they're all happy. It's just like a well-oiled machine, the whole family, all the way around on both sides."

TVA...from Page 1

the area and is in the process of equalizing the water level.

"What's happening is TVA manages the rivers, and we do that out of Knoxville. It is our river forecast center, they monitor year-round. We have sensors throughout the valley, and every six hours we update our computer models. That tells us where we want to hold water and we make those decisions hour to hour and minute to minute because we've had 80 years of experience doing this," he said.

"Our winter pools have risen to their summer level. It means we draw down the reservoirs in the winter to prepare for any type of additional

water that comes in, like we've seen over the last month. To put it into perspective, the valley has seen about two times the normal rainfall than the average December. So it's a 200 percent increase. Then runoff is 262 percent of normal. So almost two and a half times the normal amount of runoff received in the last 30 days," he explained.

The runoff isn't as bad during the spring and summer because there is plenty of natural growth to absorb it. During the winter, however, the plants don't absorb the runoff so it dumps into the water supply.

"There is no vegetation to absorb it, so we're getting more runoff," said Fiedler.

"Right now we're holding water in the tributary and the reservoirs and bringing those up to our normal summer pool so we could hold water. Now we've started to draw those water levels down, so we'll be generating electricity. So folks may be seeing additional water flowing through the system for the next week," he said.

With no rain predicted for the coming week, the TVA is taking advantage of the dry weather to draw down the pools.

"We're looking at a dry forecast for the next seven days. This allows us to proactively manage the river and draw down the reservoirs back to the winter pools, so we can be prepared for the next rain event," he said.

Ford...from Page 1

wearing, he gave it to me. He's told me, 'I think you're picking up where I left off, Colt.' You listen to a lot of his songs, he's everything that I want to be. Not just as an artist but as a person, as a man. He does what he says, he supports his country, he gives back, he does charity stuff, he's not afraid to stand up for the flag and what he believes in and that's everything I want to be. He's 70 years old and still kicking," said Ford.

Those qualities, to Ford, are what Country Music is really

about. That's what he strives to put into lyrics.

"To me, it's about the lyrical content of the song. If you hear my stuff and think that it ain't, then I'm not sure what you think country is," he said.

Even in the face of massive success, Ford is adamant that he stays true to his roots.

"Certainly you get recognized and all that kind of stuff. I've been blessed by the fans to be able to make a better life for my family and do some things that I could never afford to do. But I don't live in

a gigantic million-dollar house with a gate and a Mercedes. My son just turned 16 and he's driving a Jeep and that's what he'll drive till he tears it up. I don't get into that fancy stuff. I don't have private planes and buses. You'll see me at Walmart and you'll see me at Waffle House and you can come up and say hello," he said.

"Certainly more people recognize you but that don't ever bother me. And most country fans are respectful of that anyway. It's kind of how they are so it never bothers me to take a picture. If not for them, I wouldn't be here," he said.

SPLOST...from Page 1

Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, the culvert under the bridge has fallen into disrepair.

"We talked about that bridge was falling in, structurally. Originally it was two metal culverts, and it was filled with concrete or something in between, but all of that had eroded away and then the bottom of the culvert, the metal has started rusting, and the road itself has started sinking. So over about a two-year period, we were trying to see if we could find money, we were looking at engineering and the best thing for it. That's why we made the decision to go in and do that particular thing," she said.

"We made the decision after a lot of research to go with what is called a bottomless

culvert. And there were a lot of reasons for that. It's better for the environment. Nothing can get hung under it. It should last for an immensely long time. And the costs were relative to other types of bridges. We looked at a lot of different kinds. And then in the end, it also looked pretty," she said.

The condition of the bridge, while not life-threatening, was growing significantly worse.

"We were really worried, because there was a significant difference from the road from even the previous year. So to the physical eye, it had started sinking. And we had exhausted all possibilities of getting funding from the state and emergency funds. We had written into SPLOST that part

of it was to work on roads, so we did that," she said.

After completion, the total amount expended on the bridge was \$184,230.

The other major project was the turn at the intersection of Highway 76 and Maple Street.

"We re-did that turn, basically. Before we redid it, it had been built at a really weird angle, so it was hard to turn in and it was just awkward, so we had it re-engineered, and there wasn't a ton of space, so it's not as though we had a ton of room, but we had it re-engineered to make it safer to turn in and out. So we just rehabbed that whole entrance to make it safer," said Mayor Gibby.

The cost to re-do the turn was \$218,131.