

Egg Hunt...from Page 1A

between the ages of 4 and 9 efficiently picked up the thousands of pastel plastic eggs, which were put out earlier that morning by Hooper, his assistant Sheena Kendall, and part-time Rec Department employee Katie Bludworth.

And for the second year in a row, the Hiwassee Baptist Association, made up of several Baptist churches in the area, provided extra accommodations for children and parents, including refreshments, adult-friendly Easter baskets, an activities table, and free Bibles to those interested in brushing up on the main reason for the Easter season, the story of the risen Christ.

"Anything I can do to spread the Gospel, I'm for it," said Donnie Jarrard of Enotah Baptist Church, and Pastor Harold Ledford of

Macedonia Baptist Church said he considered it "a blessing to be a part of the community, where we're able to fellowship with the people in the community."

All told, the churches involved in the Towns County Rec Egg Hunt were Enotah Baptist Church, Macedonia Baptist Church, Old Union Baptist Church, Woods Grove Baptist Church and McConnell Memorial Baptist Church.

Danny Byers, associate pastor of McConnell Memorial, said that he and the other pastors and parishioners decided that, instead of doing something separate from the country tradition, they wanted to incorporate into what the community was already doing, which is how they originally came to be involved.

"The biggest thing is, we get to interact with people

that you see every day at the grocery store - to love on them, and just watch them have fun with their kids," said Byers.

Rachel Cosner of Blairsville brought her three children, twins Aaron and Eli, 6, and 4-year-old Leah, to the hunt, and she especially appreciated the churches for bringing their Christ-centered message to the Easter egg hunt.

Joey Floyd attended the hunt with four of his kids, and they have been coming to the hunt for 11 years, since his oldest was 4.

"This is awesome," said Floyd, reflecting on the tradition. "I'm glad the Rec Department and the churches all come together and do it. It's a really good thing for the kids, and as you can tell by the crowd, it's a really good thing. The family enjoys coming every year."

Yoakam...from Page 1A

numerous albums since kicking this music into gear in 2000, and also last year, his band opened up for iconic Rock group Heart, which proved to be yet another milestone in his and his bandmates careers.

"It's the kind of level of performing that you dream of when you start out," said Whipkey on touring with Yoakam and playing with Heart. "It's inspiring, and it's awesome to work with them, because they're great people to work with, but also, once you step foot in that world and you see it firsthand, you don't want to leave, so you work harder to get there yourself. You want to be the boss in that situation."

Refreshingly, 16 years in and Whipkey is still concerned with the integrity of his art, this music, and he's cultivated an aesthetic he likens to "Midwestern Rock."

"Coming from Omaha, we're in the middle, and we don't have to please The Suits anywhere," said Whipkey. "When we were getting started, it wasn't about trying to get on



Dwight Yoakam

this big label or impress this big magazine. We just made this music because we were compelled to, and we wanted to make it and play it for our friends and our other friends that made music.

"It was winter, it was cold, it was in the middle of the country, and we drew from all the sounds around us, and it kind of comes together as our own sound. There's definitely that aesthetic, and there's a hard work ethic here. We've put out nine or 10 albums at

this point. Some people might give up after not hitting it after the second one, but that was never our intention, never my intention - it was always to keep writing the best songs that I could write, and challenging myself to make a better album the next time."

Tickets for the April 2, 7 p.m. show are \$46, and can be purchased online at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds website, or at the show as supplies last.

Windstream...from Page 1A

Windstream subscribers in Northeast Georgia, what percentage are being used to upgrade infrastructure in the same area as those subscribers reside?

"4. In 2014, Windstream was granted by the Internal Revenue Service Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) status. Based on media reports at the time, Windstream's tax savings from this change in status was estimated to cut your company debt by \$3.2 billion and produce \$115 million annually in free cash flow. What is your estimated tax savings to date from REIT status, and what percentage of that estimated savings have you invested in broadband upgrades, both nationally and specifically in Georgia?"

In his response to the Feb. 11 letter, Thomas said that one of the ways in which he planned to deliver "a much improved service experience" would be to appoint a president of Georgia operations, "to ensure a single point of accountability as we work to deliver on our commitment to excellence."

Windstream fulfilled this commitment with its March

21 announcement of Jarrod "J" Berkshire, of Ringgold, as the new president of Georgia operations.

"In his new role, Berkshire will be based in Dalton, and oversee the nearly 450 managers and technicians who operate Windstream's voice and broadband network in the state," according to the March 21 press statement. "There are about 620,000 households as well as thousands of businesses in Windstream's Georgia service areas."

"Windstream is committed to a network-first strategy that will give our customers the advanced communications services they expect and deserve, and Jarrod Berkshire is the right person to lead that important effort in Georgia," said CEO Thomas in the statement. "He has a deep technical understanding of our statewide network and a real passion for serving our customers."

Berkshire was previously director of outside plant engineering for Windstream's seven-state southeast region, according to the statement, and he has a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from

Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Alabama, and has been with Windstream or its predecessor company since July 2000.

"Every customer matters, and every member of Windstream's Georgia team is dedicated to getting it right for the people who trust us to provide critical communications services," Berkshire said in the statement. "We know our communities because we live and work there, and we take a great deal of pride in serving our friends and neighbors."

While Congressman Collins wasn't pleased with Windstream's response to his initial public inquiry from Feb. 11, calling it "more of the same," Thomas doubled down on his previous letter, making the following statement in the March 21 release:

"Berkshire's appointment is further evidence of Windstream's strong commitment to Georgia. Since 2014, Windstream has invested more than \$80 million in its broadband infrastructure throughout Georgia and expects to invest an additional \$38 million in 2016 to provide faster speeds, improve reliability and 'future-proof' the core network."

Bastian said that, ordinarily, she would not have entered the contest, but her teacher, Shannon Floyd, recommended that she do so. The prompt was "My Vision for America."

"In the paper, I wrote about lowering the national debt and using alternative sources for energy, and different ways to make America a better place," said Bastian. "Though it's not perfect and we can't make it perfect, there are some ways that we can improve."

She considers herself more of a general writer than politically focused, but she couldn't resist the challenge to write about something new and interesting.

"It's not really the kind of stuff I write about, but I thought that since the teacher wanted us to do it then I should give it my best shot," said Bastian, adding that competing in the Voice of Democracy essay contest helped her to think in different terms about her writing.

"It was interesting thinking about different ways to improve the country, and thinking of ideas to write about," said Bastian. "I'm just very thankful that this happened."

To read more about eighth-grader Goeltz and her Patriot's Pen essay, turn to Scott Drummond's column inside, "The Veterans' Corner."

Downtown...from Page 1A

More than 70 people attended that initial meeting, and Ordiales said that eventually, leadership of the group would fall to the businesses, and she would remain involved as a city representative.

Ordiales prepared a presentation for those who came to the meeting, in which she shared some of the feedback she'd heard the previous fall while campaigning for her seat on the Hiwassee City Council.

During her door-to-door campaign last year, she heard from businesses and residents alike that they'd like to focus on three main things: beautifying the area, beautifying the square, and better decorations for the city.

"So I figured, the only way to tackle that is to get these business people together, and let them come up with plans to do that - they are the downtown area," said Ordiales. "Then, I also heard about creating more jobs in the area, and they felt like the city didn't work very well with them, working with the business owners."

One of the key points of Ordiales' presentation to business owners and

community stakeholders that day was that, in order to fulfill all of those goals, the effort would have to be cooperative in nature.

"We went into, this is a cooperative effort with a bunch of different groups, the first one being the Towns County Chamber of Commerce," said Ordiales.

Ordiales shared that Chamber President Candace Lee would be a powerful ally for the Downtown Development Group, as would Erik Brinke, economic development director for Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

Furthermore, said Ordiales, the group would do well to utilize the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, the Georgia Municipal Association, the UGA Extension Office, the Towns-Union Master Gardeners Association, the Hiwassee Ambassadors, and the Hiwassee Garden Club, all community partners that are ready and waiting to jump on board.

As for next steps, Ordiales identified several to get the Hiwassee Downtown Development Group up and

running: set up organization and leadership, develop marketing to promote the downtown area, work on quick beautification with help from local businesses (cleaning up store fronts, etc.), consider an economic development plan from the GMRC and develop a timeline for that plan, and develop a mission/vision for the city.

Once the Downtown Development Group is more organizationally sound, said Ordiales, it will be important to develop that unifying theme for the city.

"Somebody sent me one that said, 'Hiwassee - A Lake Runs Through It,' instead of 'A River Runs Through It.' Also, the Enchanted Valley," said Ordiales.

Another suggestion came in the way of exploring the possibility of creating a culinary co-op with North Georgia Technical College, where students would have a venue to cook, and residents and tourists alike could eat tasty meals for discounted prices.

"I think that's a great idea," said Ordiales. "You talk to people and you get all kinds of great ideas - you really do."

FBLA...from Page 1A

TCHS was very successful, with 15 competitors finishing in the Top 10 in their event. Of those 15 students, seven competitors will represent Georgia at the upcoming National Leadership Conference in Atlanta between June 28 and July 3.

In Friday night's opening ceremony, senior member Alyson Nelson was awarded the FBLA Outstanding Member Scholarship, presented by Monty Rhodes, executive director of Georgia FBLA.

Towns County FBLA alumni Derek Walls received the Georgia FBLA Businessperson of the Year Award for his continued support of FBLA at the local, state and national levels.

Towns County FBLA also received the Gold Seal Chapter Award and the Superior Chapter Award.

The awards ceremony was the pinnacle of the conference, and featured the following Top 10 Winners from Towns County High School:

Sara Beth Hobbs in Word Processing, Taralee

Arrowood in Word Processing, Hannah Whitehead in Word Processing, Alyson Nelson in Computer Applications, Nick McConnell in Spreadsheet Applications, Adam Penland in Public Speaking II, Jackson Taylor in Database Design and Applications, Kyra Tallent in Principles and Procedures, Zach Davenport in Principles and Procedures, Andy Chambers in Principles and Procedures, Chase Rogers in Intro to Business Communications, Kendall Floyd in Intro to Parliamentary Procedures, Chase Williams in Intro to Parliamentary Procedures, and the team of Shea Underwood and Nick Shook in Entrepreneurship.

Other competitors that advanced from region to state competition were: Nick Shook in Business Communications; the team of Cadence Nichols and Makenzie Carroll in Business Ethics; Chase Williams and Miranda White in Business Law; Audrey Tyner in Economics; Zandra Churchill and Lacey Abrahamson in Principles and Procedures; Marshall Ledford

in Healthcare Administration; Sarah Bastian in Intro to Business Communications; Corbin Henderson, Cara Galloway and Emily Davis in Introduction to Business Procedures; and Caden Prylik, Wesley Calhoun in Intro to Parliamentary Procedures.

Towns County High and Georgia FBLA will be represented favorably at the national level, as seven TCHS students prepare to compete this summer against other finalists from across the nation, DODDSEur, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Canal Zone.

The following students will represent Georgia FBLA at the 2016 FBLA National Leadership Conference in Atlanta: Jackson Taylor in Database Design and Applications, Nick McConnell in Spreadsheet Applications, Sara Beth Hobbs in Word Processing, Alyson Nelson in Computer Applications, Kyra Tallent in Principles and Procedures, and the team of Shea Underwood and Nick Shook in Entrepreneurship.

Congratulations to Towns County FBLA, and good luck at national competitions.

VFW...from Page 1A



Members of the VFW association gathered to congratulate the winner of the Voice of Democracy contest, Sarah Bastian.

the local, district and state levels. If contestants win at the state level, they then go on to the national contest.

"Voice of democracy wins a \$30,000 scholarship and a trip to Washington, D.C., being there with 50 of their peers from all over the United States," said Hack.

Hack said that the contest promotes patriotism by encouraging students to express what they feel best exemplifies the year's theme. This year's theme for Patriot's Pen was "What Freedom Means to Me." The theme for Voice of Democracy was "My Vision for America."

Next year, the theme for Patriot's Pen is going to be "The America I Believe In." The theme for Voice of Democracy will be "My Responsibility to America."

Eighth-grader Audrey Goeltz won the 2016 Patriot's Pen contest locally and went on to place second in the district, while high school sophomore Sarah Bastian won locally for the Voice of Democracy contest.

Nearly 40,000 high school students enter the Voice of Democracy contest each year, and Hack said that the requirements for an entry in Voice of Democracy are strict.

"What you do is write your essay out, and then you speak it, and you can put it on a CD or a flash drive, and that's how you present it," said Hack. "And every word that's on the paper has to be exactly what you said or vice versa. No music in the background and there can be nothing that references that person in particular. The instructions are very explicit."

E-SPLOST...from Page 1A

County included, there are only three counties in the state that do not have an E-SPLOST.

"The majority of the counties that do have the 8 percent sales tax is because of a transportation sales tax that Towns County does not have," said Dr. Berrong.

Of course, Towns County is one of the few counties in the state that has a permanent penny built into the sales tax for education purposes, and if the E-SPLOST passes in May, Towns County Schools would get 2 cents of the new 8 cent sales tax once it goes into effect.

"The difference in that is that you're not handcuffed with the ELOST," said Dr. Berrong, speaking of the permanent penny. "The ELOST can be used for any general fund usage, which is one of the reasons Towns County Schools' millage rate is the lowest in the entire state."

"When you look at our millage rate, which is this year 7.964, the second lowest is Bulloch County at 9.8, so we're the lowest by 2 mills. And if you look at a 1 cent sales tax, that is the equivalent of roughly 2 mills. So if we did not have that ELOST, more than likely the millage rate would be around 9.8, 9.9 right now."

Another costly but crucial

update would be to the school system's textbook inventory, costing about \$500,000. As it stands, there aren't enough books for students to have their own copies during the school year, so they can't take their textbooks home with them to study.

"The great thing is, our test scores have been so great over all these years - our teachers are doing so much with limited technology and limited resources, that we just have tremendous teachers doing the best they can with what they have," said Dr. Berrong.

Some people might look at the Towns County School System, with its total student population of 1,030 kids, and ask why it needs the many millions of dollars it is asking taxpayers to vote for at the polls in May.

Looking closer at the current funding formula, which is in the process of undergoing an overhaul, the state only funds about 30 percent of the cost of educating Towns County's schoolchildren, factoring in a heavier burden to local taxpayers because of high property values around the county, even though the school system is small compared to other counties.

"We're a very small school, and if you take a 5-A

school and compare it to a 1-A school, we have to have the exact same things they do," said Dr. Berrong. "We still have to have a football field, we still have to have a basketball gym, we still have to have a baseball field."

"We have to spend the exact same money on those programs that they have to spend on them, except they're a 5-A school and generate so much more money than we do. So it's actually a negative for us to be so small, because we have all these costs that they have, except we're not getting as much money as they're getting."

"We're wanting our kids to have the same opportunities than if they went to any other school in the state of Georgia, and unfortunately, that costs money, and we don't want kids to be negatively affected by their education just because they live in a small county."

Furthermore, Dr. Berrong said that the system will maintain its practice of not bonding into debt in order to complete SPLOST projects early.

"We're not in debt at all - we have zero debt, we have the lowest millage rate, and we don't have an E-SPLOST currently," said Dr. Berrong. "So if you look at the numbers, we're probably managing money better than any other school system in the state of Georgia."

YHC Division of Fine Arts presents Acapalooza

The Young Harris College Division of Fine Arts will present the wildly entertaining Acapalooza on Friday, April 1, at 7 p.m. and Sunday, April 3, at 3 p.m. in Susan B. Harris Chapel on the YHC campus. Admission is \$5 for adults and free for students and children 12 and under.

The two-day concert featuring a capella pop song arrangements will highlight female and male groups within the YHC Chamber Choir. Friday, April 1, will feature women's trios, quartets, quintets and ensembles including the all-female a cappella group Southern Harmony as well as the YHC Concert Choir.

Sunday, April 3, will feature the men's groups including The Compulsive Lyres as well as performances by a barbershop chorus and the Mountain Community Chorus.



Acapalooza performance

The student-led vocal group Altitudes will also perform.

Senior music education major Sarah Stogsdill of Shalimar, FL, and junior music major Jordan Bishop of Suwanee, GA, will be featured student conductors during the concert.

All YHC ensembles are directed by Professor of Music, Director of Choral and Vocal Activities, and Musical Theatre Program Co-coordinator Jeff Bauman.

For more information, call YHC's Division of Fine Arts at (706) 379-5182.