

# Towns County Herald

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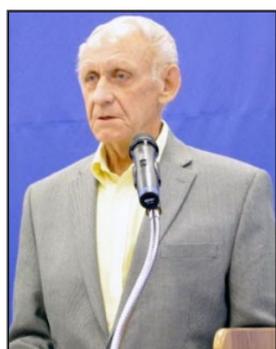
## Bill Kendall delivers State of County address

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On Friday, April 22, the monthly Towns County Meeting was held at the Towns County Recreation Center instead of its usual place in the Towns County Courthouse. At the well-attended meeting Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall gave the State of the County Address.

"Your county is in strong financial condition," Commissioner Kendall said to those assembled. "In fact, our auditors at our exit meeting said we were one of the five strongest counties in the state."

Commissioner Kendall's presentation touched on an overview of the county's financial information, property tax history, county debt, and ordinances to protect taxpayers and employees, and Special Local Option Sales Tax money. Within those subjects, the overlying focus was



Bill Kendall

on the financial state of the county and county taxpayers, as well as various protections granted to the surrounding mountains and Lake Chatuge.

"You have over \$3 million in reserve," he continued. "What that means, that's money that's not committed. There's more than that in the bank accounts now, but part of that is the 2015 taxes that you can't count as reserve because the 2015 taxes are used in the 2016 budget. That \$3.1

million operating in reserve, that's on a \$9.5 million budget, so that's 4 months reserve, which is very strong."

The county has cut property taxes for six consecutive years, to the benefit of property owners.

"You have the lowest property tax rate in the state of Georgia," Commissioner Kendall told those at the meeting. "We have cut taxes for six consecutive years, and if we hadn't cut them, that's putting over \$6 million back in your pocketbook that you would have been paying if I hadn't lowered those taxes."

According to Commissioner Kendall, the county has been conservative with the budget, coming in at \$273,625, or three percent, under budget in 2014 and \$200,000 in 2015.

Despite the conservative budget, the county maintains a well-funded sheriff's department in comparison to the surrounding counties.

"In the 2010 census,

which is what we go by, the sheriff's budget was \$2,146,425. That's what his budget was. That is levying tax against our people of \$204.99 for every man, woman, and child in this county," said Commissioner Kendall.

According to his presentation, Habersham, Union, Clay, and Fannin counties are all using a smaller percentage of tax money to fund their sheriff departments.

According to the current 2015 tax digest and 5-year history of levy, between 2010 and 2015, the Fair Market Value of the county has dropped \$628 million and the assessed value of the county dropped \$251 million.

"In 2010 there was \$982 million dollars. Look over to 2015, that dropped to \$747 million," said Commissioner Kendall. "That's a drop of about \$251 million. That's all tax assessed at 40 percent. You figure your fair

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## Early voting May 2

From Staff Reports  
Towns County Herald

Early voting for the May 24 General Primary/Nonpartisan Election will begin on Monday, May 2, at the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration in the Old Rock Jail.

Early voting will continue for three weeks starting that May 2, running Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. each of the three weeks, ending on Friday, May 20.

For those who are too busy to get out to vote on a weekday, there will be an opportunity to vote on Saturday, May 14, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

Those who decide to vote in person during early voting should bring an approved form of photo identification, including any from the following, according to the Secretary of State's office:

Any valid state or federal government issued photo ID, including a free ID Card issued by your county registrar's office or the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS); a Georgia driver's license, even if expired; valid employee photo ID from any branch, department, agency or entity of the U.S. Government, Georgia, or any county, municipality, board, authority or other entity of this state; valid U.S. passport ID; valid U.S. military photo ID; valid tribal photo ID.

"If you do not have one



Janet Oliva

of the six acceptable forms of photo ID, the state of Georgia offers a free ID card," according to sos.ga.gov. "An ID card can be issued at any county registrar's office or Department of Driver Services Office free of charge.

"To receive a voter identification card, the voter must provide: a photo identity document or approved non-photo identity document that includes full legal name and date of birth; documentation showing the voter's date of birth; evidence that the applicant is a registered voter; documentation showing the applicant's name and residential address."

Also, college students should check out the Secretary of State's website for which public school IDs are acceptable as proper photo identification at the polls.

## Move over law now includes utility crews

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Atlanta - District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch said supporting House Bill 767 was really a no-brainer.

"I carried that legislation to the State Senate, Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was thankful for that legislation," said Sen. Gooch, who has brought almost \$1 million to Union County in the last year.

The Senator said that with Gov. Nathan Deal's signature on the legislation, motorists must now move over one lane for utility vehicles in addition to emergency vehicles.

"In the lawyer world that we live in, if something isn't documented in the law books and somebody gets hurt, the first thing that lawyers do is start looking at what the law says," Sen. Gooch said. "You have to encourage people to do what is right and to do that,



Gov. Nathan Deal signs legislation that adds to the Spencer Pass Law. Pictured behind the legislative contingent, BRMEMC linemen Brad Wilson, Leslie Groves, Fred Gray, Travis Lunsford, Colton Payne and Eddy Partin, and over Gov. Deal's shoulder is our State Sen. Steve Gooch.

sometimes you have to put that in black and white."

Gov. Deal signed the legislation into law last week with several BRMEMC line-

men looking over one shoulder and Sen. Gooch looking over the other.

"I was proud to sign the Move Over for Linemen bill,"

said Gov. Deal. "This bill will help the selfless linemen and women in Georgia go home

See Move Over, Page 8A

## National Day of Prayer set for May 5

By Irma Flanagan  
Towns County Herald  
News Special

The 65th National Day of Prayer on May 5 calls Americans to unity in Christ once again, and for people of Towns and Clay counties, a prayer breakfast will take place between 7:30 a.m. and 9 a.m. at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center.

Keynote speakers during the breakfast will be Dr. Henry Blackaby and his grandson, Michael.

Dr. Blackaby is the author of the very popular Bible study, *Experiencing God*, which has sold more than seven million copies in 47 languages, as well as a host of other books including *Being Still with God* and *Anointed to Be God's Servants*.

Shea Underwood will



Marilynn and Dr. Henry Blackaby

also speak at the breakfast. Underwood is a Towns County High School senior, football standout and STAR Student.

A mass community Youth Choir will be led by Ryan and Julie Wilson of North Mount Zion Church of God in

Hiawassee. Churches are invited to include their youth in this group. If your group or child would like to participate you may do so by contacting Julie Wilson at jwilson060708@gmail.com, or Emily Phillips at semdephil@brmemc.net.

Tickets for the event may be secured for \$10 each by contacting the Towns or Clay County Chambers of Commerce.

Hearts crying out for prayer may be heard today from every governmental level and agency. Though one usually thinks only of elected officials, others also need Americans united in prayer - healthcare workers, firefighters, transportation workers, social services, schools, economic strategists, the military and the judiciary, among other groups. Theirs are cries for the wisdom and the intercession of God in solving problems they face on a daily basis and that often seem overwhelming.

United prayer is not a new idea in our nation.

Before the first Conti-

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## Hamilton Gardens changes hands

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Hamilton Gardens inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds are now in the care of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit authorized by the state, and will be known henceforth as the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge.

On Saturday, April 30, the Towns County Homeowners Association is sponsoring a benefit fundraiser at the Paris Pavilion at the Hamilton Gardens for a \$25 donation per attendee.

"Once we received the property to care for, the homeowners association came and said 'We want to do your very first fundraiser,'" said Grace Howard, president of the Hamilton Gardens at Lake



Chatuge. Proceeds will go to benefit the garden.

The Hamilton Gardens came about in the early 1980s, when Fred Hamilton donated his collection of over 1,000 rhododendrons and azaleas

to the county, to be planted on TVA land.

The gardens have always been maintained by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, but the Board of the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge now have an agreement with the

fairgrounds to operate and maintain the gardens.

The new board consists of Howard, Marsha Elliott, Anne Mitchell, Noel Turner, Theresa Stephens, Martha

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## Chastain appointed to Bradshaw's BOE post

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Stan Chastain of Hiawassee was appointed interim member of the Towns County Board of Education during the board's April monthly work session.

Chastain fills the seat vacated by Cliff Bradshaw, who began his BOE term in January of 2015 but resigned from the board in March after qualifying to run for Towns County Sole Commissioner.

"I was asked by several people and a couple of the board members if I'd be interested in filling in for Cliff



Stan Chastain

Bradshaw when he stepped down," said Chastain.

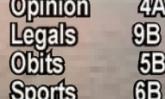
Chastain has a daughter who graduated from Towns County High several years ago.

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Lake Levels	
Blue Ridge	1,685.38
Chatuge	1,923.71
Nottely	1,772.04



SAMPLE  
PRIMARY  
BALLOTS

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Vendors  
needed for  
Farmers  
Market

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Watershed  
Coalition  
Annual Trout  
Dinner  
April 28th

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SPORTS

SOCCER

Girls - First Round  
State Tournament  
Friday, April 29  
@ Paideia