

## Clinton...from Page 1A

followed by the state, "the above required qualifications shown above in (D), (E), (F), (H), (I), and (J) shall be deemed to have been met by any person who is currently serving as a duly qualified and elected Sheriff of one of the several counties of this state."

The most important part of the affidavit that was signed is subsection (F), "I have not been convicted of a felony offense or any offense involving moral turpitude contrary to the laws of this state, any other state, or the United States; provided, however, that a plea of nolo contendere to a felony offense or any offense involving moral turpitude contrary to the laws of this state shall have the same effect as a plea

of guilty, thereby disqualifying such a person from holding the office of Sheriff."

Sheriff Clinton said the crime he pleaded guilty to is not a crime of moral turpitude.

"I have never lied," Sheriff Clinton said. "I've had my fingerprints done at the direction of the probate judge every time I've run for sheriff. I've never lied. I was a teenager once 30 years ago. I got me some traffic tickets; I even got arrested one time. That is not a felony or crime of moral turpitude. They (Elections Board) know that, and they didn't say it because they wanted off the hook. And this thing is going to drag out through the primary."

"She (Linda Curtis) has nothing to run on, and so it's real interesting to me, that this thing comes up on the Friday before early voting begins," Sheriff Clinton said. "And now, rather than say what they (Elections Board) should have said in there, they tiptoed around it and said, 'Well, yeah, the sheriff's qualified, but we'll kick it to the district attorney about this other, whether he lied or not.' Well, if I'm qualified, then I didn't lie. That was getting off the hook, and I'm offended at that."

"That being said, this whole dog and pony show has been set up to cast a doubt over the sheriff through the primary," Sheriff Clinton said.

## Prayer...from Page 1A

police force. We're going to be in prayer for our media, our communities, our children. All of this is about prayer. All of this is about God."

Voices rose all across the gymnasium as those in attendance joined Alan Kendall in singing "Blessed Assurance" to kick off the celebration.

Pastor Harold Ledford of Macedonia Baptist Church said a prayer for veterans, police officers, firefighters, and all those who work diligently to keep our communities safe, asking for a sense of safety for those under their jurisdictions, as well as protection for these men and women as they serve our country and communities.

Pastor Samuel Hamby of Hiwassee United Methodist Church prayed for those working in the government, local business owners, and those working in the media, asking for a sense of accountability and spiritual recognition. He extended this prayer to the entire congregation, focusing on the ability for everyone to share news with today's technology.

Pastor Steven Taylor of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church led prayer for families, churches and the communities of those in the crowd, calling for each table to pray for and with one another.

Dr. Henry Blackaby took the time to pray words of healing and blessings over the prayer requests of those in attendance. Dr. Blackaby is the founder and president emeritus of Blackaby Ministries International.

"Here today, we ask for Your holy guidance to know what we need to turn from and what we need to turn to," said Dr. Blackaby, asking those gathered to pray for each other.



"I pray that Your spirit touch the lives of each and every one of these requests."

All 26 high school seniors present were asked to stand as their fellow classmate, Shea Underwood, spoke on their behalves. Underwood is known locally for his achievements both in the classroom and on the playing field.

"I am a Christian," said Underwood, telling the audience how important he felt prayer was to his successes as a student and member of the community. "I fully believe that growing up in the church has helped develop me into the person I am today. Today, I cannot think of a better person to have as a partner than Jesus Christ."

Pastor Israel Rogers of Meadow Grove Baptist Church followed Underwood by praying for students both onstage and in the congregation, as well as for the educators who allowed those students to leave school to participate in the event.

"God loves you. He always has and He always will,"

expressed Rogers.

The room buzzed with fellowship as the Towns and Clay County Youth Choir joined in song. Everyone from World War II Veterans to small children sitting with their parents stood and raised their hands in prayer as they sang along to "I Believe" and the national anthem.

Pastor Chris Rumpfelt of First Free Will Baptist Church led prayer for the nation, expressing his concern for the state of this country, saying that he was afraid that "if we don't start praying, God is going to send something that's going to make this country fall to its knees as an entire nation."

Pastor Greg Carroll of New Life Church led the closing prayer outside as all those present watched the aerial flyover, then released red, white and blue balloons into the air.

"We thank you for being here today," said Carroll. "For taking time away from your jobs and from school and from the things you were doing to stop and pray."

## Aaron...from Page 1A

stadium to be named in honor of Gov. Miller, who both played and coached baseball here at Young Harris before entering public service. Henry Aaron not only gave generously to that project, but also assisted with raising funds."

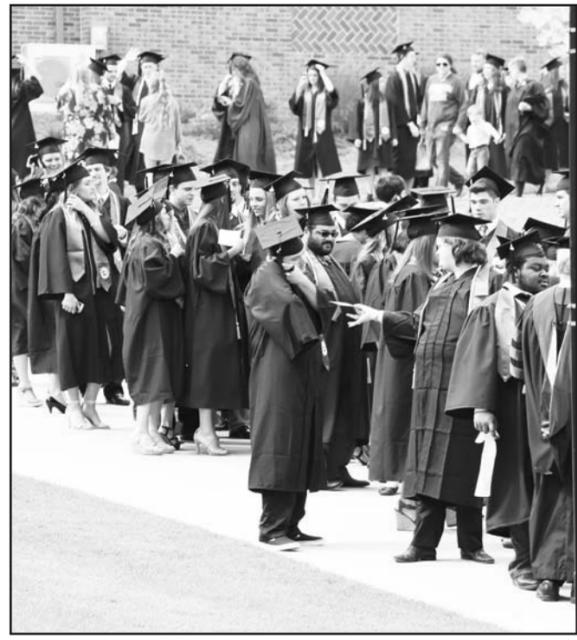
Aaron, a noted Civil Rights Activist and legend in the storied world of baseball, would go on to hit 755 homers before retiring, and while his record has since been passed, many still hail him as the home run king.

"Like many of you, I really miss my good friend Gov. Zell Miller," said Aaron, alluding to Gov. Miller's absence that day due to an injury sustained from a fall during a YHC basketball game earlier in the year. "I wish he could have been with us. You know Zell has been a big baseball fan all of his life. Some years ago I had the privilege of taking him to the Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, and he was like a kid in a candy store."

"When the baseball facility here at Young Harris was being developed, Zell brought me up here several times to see the progress. I guess you might say that I caught the Mountain Lion spirit, because I became a supporter of that project and a fan of everything about Young Harris."

Aaron offered his congratulations to graduates, their teachers, parents and friends, paying special attention to the fact that the Class of 2016 was the biggest graduating class in the history of Young Harris College.

"A graduation ceremony on a beautiful spring morn-



Young Harris College students outside on the campus grounds as they anticipate graduation. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

ing like this makes me think of opening day of baseball season," said Aaron. "For a ballplayer, especially a young player who just made the roster, there's no other day like it. It's all blue sky and green grass. Everything seems possible. There's excitement in the air. How will the game unfold?"

"The question of this morning is, as you graduate from Young Harris, how will your game unfold once you've left this place? Today I give you the same answer to that question that I would give to a rookie in Spring Training."

## Early...from Page 1A

tween 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. at the Old Rock Jail, which is the headquarters for the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration.

Hours for early voting during the week, which will continue weekdays through next Friday, May 20, are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Old Rock Jail.

There are benefits to voting early.

So far during early voting, the Old Rock Jail has been seeing an average of 100 voters per day.

Now imagine standing in line on Election Day, May 24 - there are at least 8,800 registered voters in Towns County.

If even half of those voters turn up on Election Day at their respective polling places, residents who waited until May 24 will have somewhere in the neighborhood of a 10 times longer wait than if they had voted during the early voting period at the Old Rock Jail.

"It saves a lot of time," said Board of Elections Co-Chair Mark Dehler. "It saves the public a tremendous amount of time. They're in and out of here in however long it takes to vote. The longest line I've seen in the last couple of

days has been maybe three or four minutes. It saves them tremendous time."

And Board Chair Janet Oliva could not agree more with Dehler.

"It's convenient in that they have a total of three weeks plus a Saturday," said Oliva. "Instead of one isolated day, they can pick a day of three weeks plus one Saturday - the convenience is incredible."

Another draw of early voting is a centralized polling place - everyone knows the Old Rock Jail behind Hiwassee City Hall and adjacent to the Towns County Courthouse, and all early voting takes place there, at the Old Rock Jail.

But on Election Day, voters will have to worry about making it to their respective polling places, of which there are four total precincts: Hiwassee, Macedonia, Young Harris and Tate City.

And for early voting? Just show up at the Old Rock Jail during early voting hours.

"There's no confusion - you come to the Old Rock Jail," said Dehler.

Added Oliva: "On early voting, it's so seamless

"Two things are going to determine how you perform. The first thing is the preparation you bring. The second thing is your dedication to keep growing, to keep learning and to keep pushing yourself to get better."

On behalf of the college, President Cox bestowed upon Aaron an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, and also participating in the ceremony were representatives from the Class of 1966, in celebration of their 50th anniversary since their graduation.

## Joshua Dream Ranch therapeutic



Joshua Dream Ranch had its groundbreaking on April 30th. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

**Blairsville** - Building Champions - that's the name of the game for Joshua Dream Ranch, which held its Grand Opening and Ribbon Cutting with friends, guests and the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce on Saturday, April 30.

Situated in an idyllic cleft of the North Georgia Mountains just a few miles from Downtown Blairsville, Joshua Dream Ranch is a one-of-a-kind entity for the region.

Through the guidance of owner Gino Zalunardo and his many dedicated supporters, the Ranch specializes in animal-assisted therapy, with a stated goal of "providing an atmosphere and resources to promote healing, courage and hope."

Zalunardo named the Ranch for his son Joshua, who

passed away eight years ago at Egleston Children's Hospital in Atlanta.

"He was out playing soccer, fishing, hunting - just a normal child," said Zalunardo. "He was really tired one day, so I took him in to get a physical and they found a tumor in his neck. They told me that night that my son would have a year to live."

At just 14 years of age, Joshua was diagnosed with a brainstem glioma, a cancer that spreads throughout the nervous system. Before he died, Joshua planted a seed in his father's mind, a seed that would grow and become the inspiration for Joshua Dream Ranch.

"He had chemo and radiation, so he was sitting there, lethargic in the hospital," said Zalunardo. "They brought a dog in, a Great Pyrenees. The dog jumped up on the bed and started licking Joshua, and I realized that there was a connection between the human and the animals. That dog

brought joy and life to him.

"While I was in Egleston, I realized how many sick kids there were in America - Down syndrome, autistic, leukemia, cancer for children. So I wanted to use animals to bring hope and joy to children."

Enter Joshua Dream Ranch, an outdoor experience like no other, with an emphasis on children from all walks and regions of life. There, kids who have motor impairment, for example, can learn the joys of riding horseback in a safe, controlled environment.

And there are myriad other animals for children to embrace, such as goats, bunnies, chickens, a Shetland pony, an enormous Belgian horse, ranch dogs, Mr. and Mrs. Piggie, Jack the Donkey, Roscoe the Gentle Cow and more.

Animal-assisted therapy, also known as pet therapy, has been shown to reduce

## Rabies...from Page 1A

sulting in the necessity of rabies vaccines for 10 total employees who had been exposed to the cat in the office, including Dr. Vardeman.

Dr. Vardeman also said that there have been an increased number of reports of raccoons that have died or were believed to have died from rabies in Towns County.

"Rabies is a public health threat, so that's the purpose of most of the counties in Georgia and other states for the rabies vaccines, is to protect us," said Dr. Vardeman. "The most common way that we're going to get rabies is usually from our pets, because they're around us all the time. They go out in the woods, and if they're unvaccinated and they get bit by something, they come back in the house and they get rabies."

Case in point, the pet cat that bit one of Dr. Vardeman's employees is the only

confirmed bite of a human by an animal with rabies in recent memory, at least in Towns County.

Along with rabies, clinic patrons were also offered the chance to get their pets vaccinated against distemper and parvo at \$14 per shot, with rabies shots coming in at \$10 apiece. This is an exceptional savings, considering that a vet visit typically runs around \$40, and that fee is waived in order to encourage residents to get their pets vaccinated.

Plus, Hiwassee Animal Hospital will be donating \$500 to the Towns County 4-H Program for its assistance in the Towns County 4-H Rabies Clinics, held at Dr. Vardeman's office and the high school.

Junior 4-H'ers Jessie Holbrook and Skylar Miller, both Teen Leaders within the organization, helped Dr. Vardeman register animals for their shots Saturday, and they were

glad to be of assistance.

Not only is the rabies clinic an excellent fundraiser for 4-H students, it is also a service project that the kids can get credit for within 4-H.

Among the hundreds of pets vaccinated that Saturday, two very special German Shepherds named Bella and Jax received their shots, and their owner, who attends the clinic every year, had nothing but praise to offer for the good work going on in Towns County.

"You get the 4-H'ers involved, the kids are out here, and it's just a good thing," said Jim Melton, who is assistant principal of both the Towns County High School and Middle School, as well as high school athletic director. "It's community awareness to make sure everybody gets their dogs rabies shots on a yearly basis."

Zalunardo is also looking to expand the Ranch's capabilities by bringing in a wheelchair lift, a specialized saddle for individuals with disabilities, and various other items to enhance the experiences of those who attend, all of which will need to be purchased with assistance from partnering sponsors and donations.

To learn more about getting involved, either through volunteerism or monetary support, or to ask about making a visit to the Ranch, call (706) 333-5363. Also, check out Joshua Dream Ranch on Facebook and on the web.

stress and anxiety, and help to elevate mood and energy levels, according to Zalunardo.

"Humans naturally judge, but animals, they don't care if a kid has Down syndrome or is autistic - they just love, and that's what we do, we give back that way," said Zalunardo.

So far, the Ranch has played host to a number of school children with special needs in the area, including Towns and Union counties, as well as kids from Murphy, North Carolina, and beyond, and the reach of the Ranch extends even beyond children, to veterans of wars, for instance, or to anyone with a disability who could benefit from the

Ranch.

Of course, running the nonprofit Joshua Dream Ranch takes a lot of support, as the children and families who attend the ranch for its restorative purposes are not charged for their visits.

Community and corporate sponsors, or partners, are invited to contribute toward making sure Joshua Dream Ranch builds upon its initial success.

Donations go to fulfill monthly maintenance and operation costs for the Ranch, which are \$3,000 and take into account insurance, feed, hay and bedding for all animals, shoes for the horses, veterinary bills, etc.