

## Copeland...from Page 1A

the Towns County Fire Corps, a volunteer organization that raises money for the fire department. He was also partly responsible for bringing the Firewise program to the county, forwarding the ideas that continue to make neighborhoods around Towns County safer from fire.

And Floyd's leadership style as fire chief centered on intense training, infusing the passion of volunteers with as much professionalism as possible.

"It is with mixed emo-



Chief Harold Copeland

tions that I advise you of my intent to retire from the Towns County Fire Rescue Department effective Feb. 1, 2015," wrote Floyd in a letter to all of the fire and rescue members. "The last 7 plus years have posed a number of challenges for our department, and you, the members, have stepped forward to meet them.

"Your commitment and dedication has enabled us to lower our ISO rating to one of the lowest in Northeast Georgia. We have established a Water Rescue Recover Team

that has a notable reputation in our region, and we have eight State Certified Fire Service Instructors on board, just to name a few."

Floyd asked that the members provide Copeland "the same level of support and dedication that you have shown me."

"I want to thank each and every one of you for your service and support that you have shown me during my tenure," wrote Floyd. "Be safe, and keep up the good service you provide to the citizens of Towns

County."

Clint Hobbs, chairman of the Towns County Fire Board, said that he appreciates everything that Floyd has done for the fire department.

The current incarnation of the fire board was established under Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall to act as a go-between for Commissioner Kendall and the fire department.

Hobbs, who is also the vice president for enrollment management and external relations at Young Harris College,

became a volunteer with the fire department more than 20 years ago. He has been chairman of the board since its inception about 10 years ago, and was instrumental in promoting Copeland to fire chief.

"Mitch is going to be missed," said Hobbs. "But Harold Copeland is somebody that I've known for almost 30 years, and I'm excited for him to have this opportunity. And I think that he can lead Towns County very capably as we move into a new era now."

## Wilkinson...from Page 1A

it is assigned to a Committee, depending on its topic. If the Committee gives the legislation a "do pass" recommendation, then the proposed law is sent to the Rules Committee for consideration. The appointed chairs will oversee the operation and order of Senate

committee meetings, including calling for action on bills, resolutions or other matters assigned to that committee.

The first term of the 153rd Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly convened Jan. 12, at the Georgia State Capitol.

## Manto...from Page 1A

with the help of friends and FTC teammates.

Older computers within the school were moved into the lab, and Manto found a projection system while cleaning the room out for the STEM Lab.

"I've had the wonderful help of my mentor and coach, Mrs. Jo Ray Van Vliet, who truly has a passion for education and robotics and STEM," said Manto.

Classes will start at the elementary school the first week in February, and will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays initially.

"We're having an Open House here on Jan. 27," said Manto. "It's open for the public, and it's going to be from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. And we're also going to have sponsorship opportunities for the public, because one thing that I really want is for the community to get on fire about this program."

For Manto, her STEM Lab is about building futures for the children of Towns County.

"A lot of these families have never had the chance to have their kids play with LEGOs, or even see a robot, or even think that that was going to be within the realm of possibilities for their children," said Manto. "That's what excites me, is that these kids are going to get to come in here and

learn and see how engineering is used in the real world.

"And then hopefully, they have the tools necessary to move on to middle school, high school and then go on to college and be in computing, engineering, civil engineering. There are so many things you can do with this kind of stuff that's held in this room, and I'm just really excited about the future for these kids."

Manto is extremely active in both the community and the school. She has cheered for football, plays golf, is vice president of both FBLA and the Leo Club, and is a Rotary Club Student of the Month. She is a member of Beta Club, FCA, and is chairman of United Community Bank's Junior Board of Directors and captain of FTC.

She is the current reigning Miss Georgia Mountain Fair and was on homecoming court for football. Manto has also maintained All A Honor Roll status.

"I plan to attend Clemson University and get a major in marketing with an emphasis in engineering and technology," said Manto. "I want to be more on the marketing and management side of engineering, but I still want to have the knowledge base, and I still want to have my hands in engineering for sure."

## CCRPI...from Page 1A

elementary school takes into account CRCT, or Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests, while high school scores use End of Course Tests.

Other factors accounting for achievement include post high school preparedness and graduation rates for the high school, or post elementary school readiness and predictors for high school graduation at the elementary school level.

In the Pioneer RESA, Towns County Elementary School placed third out of 14 surrounding counties in achievement, with a total of 52.7 points out of a possible 60.

"That is an excellent, excellent score, with Union being at the top, Lumpkin coming in at second, and then we're third," said Dr. Page. "That's excellent."

For progress, Towns County scored second in the Pioneer RESA with a score of 18 out of 25 possible.

The progress component measures "the percentage of students earning typical or high growth in performance on statewide assessments (CRCT/EOCT) relative to students with similar past achievement," according to the GADOE website.

In school achievement gap, the elementary school placed second in the RESA with 11 points.

"The Achievement Gap component compares the achievement of a school's bottom 25% of students with the state average on statewide standardized tests," according to the GADOE website. "This component includes two measures: Gap Size and Gap Change. Gap Size measures the difference in standardized test scores between the average performance of the bottom 25% of students in a school and the state average, while Gap Change measures the differ-

ence in the Gap Size measure between the current and previous year."

Overall, the elementary school score was 86.7 out of a possible 100, which put it second in the RESA for elementary schools.

Towns County Middle School also performed extremely, with a score of 56.3 in achievement, 18.4 in progress and 11 in achievement gap.

TCMS Principal David Turner explained that each school can be awarded extra points called challenge points, with a highest total of 10 possible.

Challenge points take into account the number of students in a school population that are economically disadvantaged, English learners and students with disabilities, as well as points for "Exceeding the Bar."

The middle school's overall score was 91.2, landing it in second place in the Pioneer RESA.

And the high school placed first in the Pioneer RESA, with a total score of 83.1, including the highest score in the RESA in achievement gap, the score that meant the most to Towns County High School Principal Jonathan Gibson.

"I want every kid that walks into this building – and I don't care where you come from, if it's a dirt floor, if it's a bamboo floor, I think you deserve the same opportunity, and that we should send you out our doors with the best chance or opportunity to be successful, whether that's college, technical school or the workforce," said Gibson.

The scores of all schools combined put Towns County Schools second in the RESA, and statewide, Towns County Schools compare favorably, with a district score of 86.6 to the state average of 72.

## Drugs seized in Towns County

On Friday, Jan. 16, an investigation conducted by the Towns County Sheriff's Office and the GBI North Georgia Regional Drug Enforcement Office, resulted in the arrest of 38-year-old Matthew Scott King and 36-year-old Amanda Claire Peluso, both of Hiawassee.

Agents and members of the Towns County S.O. executed

a search warrant at 206 Cypress Drive. The investigation resulted in the seizure of more than an ounce of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana, hydrocodone, alprazolam, and methadone.

King and Peluso face charges of trafficking methamphetamine and violations of the Georgia Controlled Substances Act. The investigation continues.

## BOE...from Page 1A

Billy Barnhart, who teaches business and is the head football coach at the high school, was approved in the BOE meeting to coach another sport – boys and girls tennis.

"Coach Barnhart loves kids and is very passionate," said Gibson. "You don't have to be around Coach Barnhart long to understand why he does what he does. He loves kids and he loves making a difference. Coach Barnhart treats kids the

way that I would want my own child treated, and that speaks volumes about him as a person, coach and teacher. And so our kids are very fortunate to have him as their tennis coach."

And Michael Anderson, who just came off of the board of education as a longstanding board member of many years, was approved in the January meeting to begin receiving compensation for his time as community coach for the high

school boys basketball team.

Because Anderson was a member of the board of education and receiving a supplement for that position, he could not receive a supplement within the school system for assisting with basketball.

So, he has simply volunteered his time over the years to help coach, and the only difference now is that he will be compensated for his time.

Separate from the meet-

ing, TCHS Girls Basketball Head Coach Jim Melton took over coaching duties of the high school boys team to start the New Year, as Head Coach Duncan Weekley left for health reasons.

"Coach Weekley was our basketball coach last year and for half of the year this year, and we're very grateful for what Coach Weekley brought to our program and what he has done for us and our school the last year and a half," said Gibson.

## Homecoming...from Page 1A

ing Court.

Colten Shook and Kirsten Ledford represented the sophomore class.

Chaiz Davenport and Taylor Underwood were the junior class representatives.

The 2015 Senior Boys Basketball Homecoming Court consisted of Moss, Grayson Carver, Kyle Davis, Cory Ellis and Efrén Figueroa.

Carver plans to attain a degree in psychology; Davis will attend either the University of North Georgia or Kennesaw State University to pursue a degree in athletic training; Ellis will be joining the United States Air Force; and Figueroa will attend Southern Polytechnic State University for a degree in civil engineering.

Representatives of the 2015 Senior Girls Homecoming Court were Abrahamson, Angel Benedict, Alana Calhoun, Misty Ann Lindemuth and Sara-Grace Elizabeth Scott.

Benedict plans to attend Young Harris College and ma-



ior in education; Calhoun will be joining Benedict at YHC, where she will major in business and public policy; Lindemuth will attend the University of North Georgia to pursue a degree in special education; and Scott plans to attend Savannah College of Art and Design for a career in graphic design.

Homecoming was a good night for Towns County basket-

ball, as the Lady Indians won 41-39 against Hebron Christian Academy, and the Indians defeated their counterparts 76-71.

"I've never been at a school that has two Homecomings, so it's been new to me," said Towns County High School Principal Jonathan Gibson. "It's a good tradition here. I think you see it in the smaller

schools a lot. It's something we would dare never change. The kids love it."

Basketball Homecoming consisted of a pep rally that Friday, and students voted for their choices of King and Queen that were announced during the Homecoming Game later that night.

"It's good to see these people come back and support this school and this system and these kids," said Gibson, commenting on the larger than average crowd, especially in the student section. "It's good to see those kiddos over there jumping up and down and screaming."

"I don't know that anywhere we've played this year has had a student section that looks like that one looks tonight. And I think that speaks volumes about your community, your school and what's going on when you have turnouts like this, especially with the number of students we have in this system."

## Turner talks CCRPI to Mountain Shakers

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer



David Turner

measure for measuring all of our schools called the CCRPI," said Turner.

"And what the CCRPI does is it takes a look at a lot of different things about the school so that you get a much broader measure of what's happening," said Turner. "It does look at English, language arts and math like AYP does, but it also looks at science and social studies, and looks at the vocational programs that are in there. Fine arts, graduation rates – a whole bunch of different things that help give a school its score."

"So, when we look at the scores that our schools receive, it's based on such a broad area of subjects to make sure that we're seeing a good picture of the whole system, not just three narrow measures."

And the CCRPI results that recently came in for the middle school's 2013-2014

school year are more than encouraging, especially when comparing them to state averages.

"The total score on the CCRPI for Towns County Middle School was 91.2," said Turner. "The state average of all schools was 73. That puts it in perspective, when you look at what the state average is and where we're at. When you look at each, the individual scores and the aggregate scores, our system stands out."

Furthermore, measured against 586 middle schools in the state, TCMS scores rank 40th of those 586 schools, according to Turner.

"I think that's incredible," said Turner. "That says a lot about our community, our teachers, Dr. Berrong and his leadership."

In English and language arts, "97.3 percent of our students meet or exceed the level they should be at," said Turner. "In reading, 98.4 percent meet or exceed the level they should be at. And then social studies, 97.6 percent."

Looking at the bigger picture, of the 159 counties in the state, there are 190 school systems, a number that takes into account city school systems as well. Of those 190 systems, Towns County came in ninth in the state.

"When you look at a lot of other school systems that are smaller, they don't have the

support, and they don't have the opportunities for their students that we have here in Towns County," said Turner. "And so, I'm very proud to be here in Towns County. I'm very proud to have the opportunity to be at the middle school, because I see so many great things happening, and I see the support that's there."

Towns County Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, who was principal of the middle school for these CCRPI results, also spoke at the meeting.

"We're pretty much the strongest group of counties in the state of Georgia," said Dr. Berrong. "Typically, this group, our RESA, is the highest scoring group. So, the fact that we've come in top three even is fantastic news."

Towns County is in the 14-county district called the Pioneer RESA, or Regional Educational Service Agency. RESAs act as support agencies for certain geographical locations of schools.

"The middle school did come in second," said Dr. Berrong. "Our high school, great news for them, they were the number one school in our RESA district for their CCRPI scores, and our elementary school was number two. So, all three of our schools in our system were in the top two of the Pioneer RESA district, and that's why our state score is so high for our system."

## Business After Hours visits Park Sterling Bank

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Towns County Chamber of Commerce hosted its monthly Business After Hours event at Park Sterling Bank in Hiawassee on Thursday, Jan. 15.

Members of the chamber gathered by the dozens to network and to learn about the local Park Sterling Bank.

Visitors signed in at the front, registering for door prizes provided by Park Sterling Bank and other local businesses, and refreshments were served.

After Hours meetings generally follow a model that allows the host business, which changes month to month, to say a few words about their business and the people who make the business a success.

Park Sterling Bank Branch Manager Melanie Hughes joined the Hiawassee branch last May.

"I've been in banking

30 years, in Western North Carolina and North Georgia," said Hughes. "This bank and predecessor banks have been members of the chamber for years and years and years, ever since there's been a chamber. So, we just hadn't done an After Hours in a while, and I said, this is a good time to do that."

"Park Sterling hasn't done one, so we just wanted to do that and kind of bring in the community. We've done some remodeling. We've added an office up front, so we wanted our customers to come see that, to make it a little more warm and convenient for our customers."

Recently, the Hiawassee and Blairsville branches each received one of four brand new ATMs in the company, machines that take deposits outside of the bank building.

"Hiawassee is the largest deposit office that Park Sterling has out of 53 branches," said Hughes. "So, this office means a lot to them – this community means a lot to Park Sterling."



Hughes introduced many members of her Hiawassee team, as well as Park Sterling employees from neighboring Union County and beyond, including corporate members from out of the state. She also elaborated on the various services offered by Park Sterling to the community.

"It's a joint effort by Park Sterling Bank and the chamber of commerce to do a Business After Hours," said Mark Dehler, chairman of the Towns County Chamber of Commerce. "It gives the bank a chance to bring their customers in and show them some things after hours, and

it gives our members a chance to get reacquainted with Park Sterling Bank."

And Towns County Chamber of Commerce President Candace Lee sees the event as "great networking for the businesses."

"It's terrific networking, it's after hours, so people can come and spend a few minutes before they go home for the evening," said Dehler. "In addition, it gives the chance to showcase a business. Whether it's a furniture store or a bank or whatever, it's just a great chance to get people into that business when they might not have otherwise."