

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thurs: Sunny	75 48
Fri: Sunny	76 53
Sat: Sunny	69 56
Sun: Clouds	63 52
Mon: Rain	61 50
Tue: Rain	56 47
Wed: Rain	58 44



Upstream Elevation Predicted 10/21/2015	
Lake Chatuge	1,919.83
Lake Nottely	1,765.10
Blue Ridge	1,676.68

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City of Hiwassee candidate forum Monday, October 26, 2015 6:30 pm New Towns County Senior Center

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Howl-O-Weenie Bash Oct. 31st Meeks Dog Pavilion Blairsville

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SEE SAMPLE BALLOTS FOR CITY OF HIAWASSEE AND CITY OF YOUNG HARRIS

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SPORTS FOOTBALL

Fri. Oct 23 VS. Commerce HOMECOMING!!

7:30 PM CROSS COUNTRY

OCT. 26 Indian Run XIII GA Mtn Fairgrounds 4:15 PM

TCHS to crown new Homecoming King and Queen

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Last week, the students of Towns County High School voted for their friends to take place on the 2015 Homecoming Court.

Homecoming is a special time of the year for students, a time meant to celebrate the coming home of former students to visit their family and friends.

Each year, the Homecoming Queen from the year before returns to crown the next Queen voted in by her peers, and the process repeats year after year in a passing of the torch down through the generations.

Kayla Davis, last year's Queen, will surely return to bestow the crown upon this year's winner at the

Homecoming football game on Friday, Oct. 23.

And it all starts with first being nominated to Homecoming Court.

"The seniors nominated their Top 10 male and female students for the court, and they have chosen those, so the court has been voted on. Then underclassmen voted on the king and the queen, and then the seniors will vote on the king and the queen," said High School Principal Connie Hobbs.

"They're working on their biographies that will be read during the football game. They kind of do a little report on themselves to introduce themselves. So we have the court, the court has been voted on and is set," she said.

Nominations for Homecoming King are Sterling Hedden, Dylan Roberts, Daulton Rogers, Andrew Watson, Chaiz



Davenport, Dalton Bradley, Adam Taylor, Shea Underwood, Adam Penland and William Lovelady.

For the Homecoming Queen: Tiffani Abrahamson, Rachel Barnard, Jocelyn Byers, Megan Corbin, LeAnn Dean,

Faythe Denton, Michelle Miller, Samantha Quijada, Kaelyn Smith and Taylor Underwood.

When the seniors have finished voting, the Homecoming King and Queen will be recognized this week.

"The queen will be

announced Friday night, Oct. 23, during halftime of the football game. The king will be recognized Thursday during the homecoming parade and bonfire at the high school," said Hobbs.

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School taxes lower this year

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Board of Education has set its yearly millage rate, and taxpayers on the whole will be saving \$21,605 in property taxes.

Set in a board work session on Oct. 5, the rate is down to 7.964 in 2015 from 7.995 in 2014.

Last year, the board faced a need to raise the rate by 1.5 mills from the 2013 rate, due to a depleted General Fund through years of relatively lower taxes. Raising the rate last year by 1.5 mills resulted in a tax increase of \$1,076,205 in 2014 over 2013.

This year, the county tax digest and rollback rate applied to the school system were such that the schools would have needed to raise taxes to bring in the same estimated amount as last year, following the millage increase of 2014.

"So, instead of increasing the taxes to bring that back, we decided to go ahead and accept that millage rate, which is a reduced millage rate," said Towns County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Darren Berrong.

Total school taxes levied for 2015 are \$5,681,848.

"We felt really good about where our finances came out at the end of last year," said Dr. Berrong, explaining why the board decided to accept the

loss this year rather than keep taxes steady from last year. "We lost a person at the central office who ended up going to work at a different school system, and we did not replace that person, so we were able to save a salary down at the central office without having to replace that individual.

"And we had a couple of teacher positions that we're able to pay out of some federal funds, so we've been able to cut a few positions and try to be a little bit more fiscally sound as far as how we're spending money. So, I feel like we've really made a push forward to starting to increase our fund balance instead of losing money every year."

Dr. Berrong hopes that Towns County Schools will be able to add to the fund balance regardless of the \$21,605 loss in taxes brought in by the schools for 2015, and he and the board will be keeping an eye on changes coming in January that could affect that.

"We have a couple of things that are happening in January," said Dr. Berrong. "The system's payout for the teacher retirement is going up. Also, the system's cost for the healthcare for some specific employees in the school system is going to go up as well, so we're going to wait and see what happens at the end of the year. Hopefully, we'll at least come out even. My hope is that we



Dr. Darren Berrong

will actually make a little bit of an increase, but those are things that are hard to predict.

"The state legislature passed a few things last session that are going to cost all systems in the state more money. We were having to pay 13 percent toward teacher retirement, and now we're going to have to pay 14.7, I believe, which is going to be a significant increase in cost when you're talking about how many employees we have. So, there are a few things going in that we're going to have to pay that we haven't had to pay in the past, and that's going to probably be an increase of anywhere from \$250,000 to \$300,000 that we didn't have as a cost to us last year."

Vietnam Veterans receive Quilts of Valor

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Blairsville - The Quilts of Valor Foundation, in conjunction with the Misty Mountain Quilters' Guild, presented 20

Vietnam Veterans with quilts in a ceremony at The Moving Wall in Meeks Park on Monday, Oct. 12.

Each Quilt of Valor honoree was first wrapped in their quilt, then given a hug and Welcome Home by QOV Area

Coordinator Linda Gorman and former QOV Executive Director Susan Gordon, as James Gorman read brief histories of military service.

"For all the veterans

See Veterans, Page 10



New Fiddle King reigns supreme

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

When 17-year-old Jacob Johnson of Lincoln, AL, first stepped onstage at Anderson Music Hall to participate in Georgia's Official State Fiddlers' Convention, he didn't know that he would soon be taking home the most coveted prize: the title of 2015 Georgia Mountain Fiddle King.

But that's exactly what he did, beating out Senior Fiddler Chuck Nation with a tune called "Don't Let the Deal Go Down."

Other categories included Beginning Fiddle, Harmonica, Buck Dancing, Dulcimer, Dobro, Old Time Banjo, Mandolin, Banjo, Flat Pick Guitar, Finger Style Guitar, and Bluegrass Band.

After all the other winners were announced, the winners of the Junior Fiddle and Senior Fiddler Categories went head-



Jacob Johnson, Fiddle King to-head with a single tune apiece.

"When I got up this morning, I really didn't expect this to happen, but it

has happened," said Johnson, accepting his award.

Despite his young age, See Fiddle, Page 10

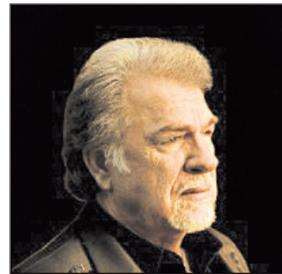
Gene Watson coming to Hiwassee October 24th

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Fall Festival at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds may have just concluded, but the entertainment at the fairgrounds will continue this weekend as Gene Watson graces Anderson Music Hall on Saturday, Oct. 24.

Watson, a Country Music Legend in every way possible, has remained in the business for more than 50 years having recorded greater than 50 albums by keeping a level head and always being a man of the people.

"I treat people like I like to be treated," said Watson.



Gene Watson

"I've always had a saying that I've tried to live up to, that I'm no better or worse than whoever I'm talking to. My career, what I do, depends on what people think of me."

See Watson, Page 10

Beatles tribute band to play The Hall on Halloween



By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The next best thing to the Fab Four is headed to Hiwassee, as The Return, a Beatles tribute band, performs its true to life show at Anderson Music Hall on Saturday, Oct. 31.

Patrons of the event are encouraged to dress in their Halloween best, as the Georgia

Mountain Fairgrounds will be hosting a costume contest onstage at the concert during the intermission, where best

See Beatles, Page 10

TOWNS COUNTY HERALD



Homecoming...from Page 1

"It's a good privilege for them. They're very excited because these are the kids that are really well liked in the high school. We have a mixture of the really, really popular people, with the athletes, and then we have the people that are just, everybody likes them because they're so friendly, and stuff like that," said Sarah Vardo, who teaches health and science at the high school and is also the Homecoming Sponsor.

"They're in that excitement now where the girls are just rushing to find a dress and they want to know everything that's going on. The boys could really care less. But it's just really exciting, it's a privilege and an honor to be doing this, and they love it. They just love it," she said. She said that, far from falling into the trap of cliches, the homecoming court does not only consist of athletes

and cheerleaders. Rather, the school voted to fill its court with individuals who share a certain character. "I think just friendly, they're very well-liked among everybody, they're willing to help people, and it's not just athletes. We may have three or four athletes out of ten girls and ten guys. So it's nothing about popularity by any means. I think it's just the friendliness

Library...from Page 1

he brought them back, it was a jaw-dropper. It's absolutely wonderful the amount of work he's done," said Phillips. In addition, the Hiwassee branch will be celebrating the anniversary of its \$1 million renovation on Oct. 20, and they invite everyone to drop by. Mountain Regional Library Branch Manager Sandi Vaughn also had good news to report to the board. "Our fiction and nonfiction was way up. It was 40 percent up. It went to our advantage as far as this year, but our nonfiction is really strong.

Our people that come in, older people, sometimes like to read the history and the nonfiction and things," she said. "Our young adult has gone up 6 percent because we've started adding more young adult books, because it's not just young adults who read it. The people that come in will see those books, and they have good-looking covers and things like that. And then they'll see that they're young adult books and they'll say, 'I shouldn't be reading these,' and then the girls say those are just as good as the adult books. And they've caught on so much that now we

circulate a lot of young adult," she added. Mountain Regional Library System Director Vince Stone said that he wanted to remind everyone of the big changes coming to the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris - it's getting a \$1 million renovation of its own. "I don't want everybody in the Towns Board to forget about Young Harris, because we're about to really go through something incredible over there. It's going to take a while. But we want a strong tie between Young Harris and the Towns Board," he said.

Fiddle...from Page 1

age, Johnson is anything but a newcomer to the world of fiddling. Bluegrass Music and the Georgia State Fiddlers' Convention. "This will be my fourth year coming to this contest. It was actually the first fiddle contest I ever placed in. It was four years ago I competed in the Beginning Fiddler and got second. You never really know how a contest is, and if you come not expecting much, when you get something, it's that much better," he said. "You know, contests are contests. Sometimes you go, sometimes you win, and sometimes you don't get anything. I really don't care how I place. It's nice to win, but I go just because I enjoy the music," he added.

used to hear him, and I just loved hearing the fiddle, and I wanted to learn it after I heard him. That was probably about six years ago. I practice a lot for that much, probably about six hours a day. I put a lot of time into it," he said. Johnson doesn't read musical notes. He doesn't need them. "I play strictly by ear. I never learned how to read notes, and so I'd just start listening to it and copying it," he said. So what's in the future for Johnson and his fiddle-playing talents? "I definitely want to keep music in my future. If I want to get some studio work in Nashville, maybe. We'll just have to see. I've taken on a few students, so I really love to teach and pass it on, so I'd love to see it continued," he said. Other big winners at the Fiddlers' Convention were: Beginning Fiddle (ages 15 and under): First Place to Ivy Phillips of Chapmansboro, TN, followed closely by Abby Warnke of Dawsonville, who took home Second Place. Harmonia: First Place, Johnny Roquemore of Mansfield; Second Place, Tommy Bounds of Sylacauga, AL; Third Place, Wally Gee of Dothan, AL. Buck Dancing: First Place, Ivy Phillips; Second Place, Charles Smith of Lawrenceville; Third Place, Gene Moore of Hayesville, NC. Dulcimer: First Place, Rob Percy of Smyrna, TN; Second Place, Tommy Bounds; Third Place, Ivy Phillips. Guitar Finger Style: First Place, Chris Hodge of

Hogansville; Second Place, Kyle Coomes of Comer; Third Place, Jacob Stone of Warrenton; Fourth Place, Eric McMurray of Gate City, VA. Bluegrass Band: First Place, Highway 60 of Blairsville; Second Place, Blue Road of Ball Ground; Third Place, Tennessee Traditions of Bumpus Mills, TN; Fourth Place, Davenport Brothers of Hayesville, NC. Junior Fiddler (ages 59 and under): First Place, Jacob Johnson; Second Place, Christopher Gray of Lexington, AL; Third Place, Lillian Rogers of Walhalla, SC; Fourth Place, Crystal Murphy of Blackshear. Senior Fiddler: First Place, Chuck Nation of Murrayville; Second Place, Tim Daniels of Lawrenceville, TN; Fourth Place, Mack Snoderly of Clyde, NC; Fourth Place, Perry Cooper of Knoxville, TN. Dobro: First Place, Rob Percy; Second Place, Josh Hollifield of Ball Ground; Third Place, Ivy Phillips. Old Time Banjo: First Place, Ivy Phillips; Second Place, Rob Percy; Third Place, Christopher Gray. Mandolin: First Place, Josh Hicks of Hartwell; Second Place, Chuck Nation; Third Place, Greg Fleming of Canton; Fourth Place, Jay Shuler of Blairsville. Banjo: First Place, Gregg Welty of Pittsburg, PA; Second Place, Josh Hicks; Third Place, Brett Cantrell of Cherry Log; Fourth Place, Chuck Nation. Guitar Flat Pick: First Place, Josh Hicks; Second Place, Rob Percy; Third Place, Jeff Partin of Blue Ridge; Fourth Place, Jay Shuler.

Veterans...from Page 1

present, and especially veterans of Vietnam, we say from our hearts, Welcome Home," said James Gorman. The following Vietnam Veterans received quilts that Monday: Alfred P. Bradley, U.S. Marine Corps; James Breedlove, U.S. Army; Marion Crawford of Union County, U.S. Army; Clifton Davis of Union County, U.S. Army; Richard Eggleston of Union County, U.S. Army; Don Gardner of Union County, USMC; James Hazen of Towns County, U.S. Army; Luther Hyatt, USMC; Roger Jones of Union County, U.S. Army; Charles Kittredge of Union County, U.S. Air Force; Bob Millage of Towns County, U.S. Army; Janie Miller of Union County, U.S. Army; Stanley Moore, USMC; Jack Norris of Union County, U.S. Army; Patrick Petrussee, U.S. Army; Peggy Ready of Union County, U.S. Army; Dale Sissell of Towns County, USAF; J.A. Swartz of Towns County, USAF; Robert Wentz of Union County, USMC; and Donald Wilson of Towns County, U.S. Army. Linda Gorman delivered a three-part message to those receiving quilts, highlighting the reason for the honor and why volunteer quilters do what they do. "We honor you for your service," said Gorman. "We highly respect that you left all you held dear and stood in harm's way in a time of crisis to protect our country. Secondly, our quilters understand that

freedom is not free. The cost of our freedom is the dedication of our service members, and our quilts are meant to say thank you for your service. Finally, this quilt you are about to receive is meant to offer comfort, and let you know that your quilt has been stitched with love, prayers and healing thoughts of home and family." Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris expressed his deep respect for the many names on the Vietnam Moving Wall, as well as for those fortunate enough to survive the horrors of battle and their subsequent ill treatment upon returning home. "Today, we are here to present special honors through the Quilts of Valor Program," said Commissioner Paris. "I have had the privilege to attend several of these ceremonies, and they are all touching and very special, but none more so than will be today. Like bringing the Vietnam Moving Wall to our community, any project of this magnitude requires many, many dedicated and hardworking volunteers. "We all know how special our mother's or our grandmother's quilt is to those of us who are fortunate enough to have them. Well, how about being able to receive a quilt from people who you may not even know, but who have poured their love and skill into making a special quilt just for you, Veterans who have served in the combat zone." Further, Commissioner

Paris acknowledged the many hardworking volunteers of the Misty Mountain Quilters' Guild, and thanked them for their service to their country, in honoring veterans with their Quilts of Valor. Like many of the Vietnam Veterans honored with quilts that day, Marion Crawford of Blairsville, who considered receiving her quilt an immense honor, took the time following the ceremony to speak with those who attended the special event. "It's a sad and yet it's a happy occasion," said Crawford of the QOV presentations. "It was probably the worst years of my life when I was over in Vietnam, but thank God none of my women were killed, thanks to the men surrounding our unit every time we came under attack." Misty Mountain membership includes quilters from Union, Towns, Fannin and Gilmer counties in Georgia, Clay and Cherokee counties in North Carolina, as well as one member from Pennsylvania and one from Tennessee. The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution acted as Color Guard for the ceremony, and Appalachian Saint Andrew's Pipes and Drums opened and closed the event with their Scottish brand of patriotism. Other speakers at the event were Vietnam Veterans of American Blairsville Chapter 1101 Chaplain Fred Freeman, Susan Gordon and Reverend Richard Hoibraten.

Watson...from Page 1

And people think quite a lot of Watson, who appreciates the accolades - Singer's Singer, Legend, Icon, etc. - but really just sees himself a people person. Case in point, after every show, Watson considers it the least he can do to stick around to shake hands and take pictures, to sign autographs and talk with fans who put up their hard-earned money to see him perform on stage. Watson's connection with the everyday working person likely goes back to his early career, when he spent many years doing auto body work before first going national, and then international with his Country Music. "I've still got a little shop down here in Houston," said Watson, who has owned the auto shop for 20 years. "I'm never

over there, but I built it just for a hobby shop where I could dabble around with cars - buy a wrecked pickup or something like that every once in a while, and fix it up. It was also a place for my older brother to work, and I just enjoy that. That's a second love of mine, is the car business." Looking back on his career, Watson doesn't necessarily have a favorite song that he's performed. "I've always had the freedom to pick and choose the songs I record, and so each one of them is sort of like my own child, you might say," said Watson, adding that "Farewell Party" is highly requested. "Whatever is the people's favorite, well, that's what I try to make my favorite. "Every time we step on

stage, it's a brand new show. We've got an audience, and they deserve to hear what they want to hear, so we try our best to do requests and the songs that we think they might enjoy." As far as what fans can expect to hear on Oct. 24, the field will be wide open. "They can expect everything I've got to offer," said Watson. "We'll be going back to the beginning of the contract, working our way right on up through to present, and trying our best to do the requests and everything." Look for Watson to talk about his new TV show on RFD-TV, featuring himself and Country Music Icon Moe Bandy, called The Gene and Moe Show. Tickets (\$24) are now on sale for the show, which starts at 7 p.m. with an opening act by Country River Band.

Beatles...from Page 1

costume will win \$200. Renowned for their exact Beatles performances - from the way they look and dress to their expensive, replica musical equipment - The Return has been all over the world with its one-of-a-kind tribute act. And for the first time ever, they'll be coming to Hiawassee. The Return formed 20 years ago in the land of Doc Holliday and Jessie Tuggle, better known as the Atlanta metropolitan area of Griffin, which is about halfway between Macon and Atlanta. "We were just playing our favorite Beatles songs behind closed doors," said Michael Fulop, who personifies George Harrison in the group. "Not a whole lot of people knew about it. Sometimes our friends would stop by, but we never intended to play live, it was just something to do for fun." All that changed, albeit reluctantly, when a friend of the group approached them about playing at his CD release party. "At first, we said we didn't intend to play live so we weren't going to do it," said

Fulop. "He kept asking and asking, and finally, we said, sure, we'll do it - it'll be fun to play one time. A couple of weeks before the show, we said, we should get some black suits and really do it up like it's the Beatles, not just a bunch of guys that are playing, but actually go up there and do John, Paul, George and Ringo. "We did it, and I would imagine it was really, really rough, and it would probably be difficult to listen to at this point, but what we got out of it was the crowd just went nuts. When we got done playing that night, we said we've got to do this again sometime. That's just kind of how it rolled the first few years, just one gig leading to another." The group has had some member changes since its inception, but all told, the current foursome - Richard Stelling as John Lennon, Shane Landers as Paul McCartney and Adam Thurston as Ringo Starr rounding out Fulop's Harrison - have performed at locales as storied as Abbey Road Studios in London, and they were the official band of the Hard Rock Cafe's 30th anniversary celebration. "We try to do things as they would have, because the Beatles, they only played live for a couple of years," said Fulop. "They quit touring in 1966 before Sgt. Pepper's came out. And when they did tour, they only played about 10 songs a night after Beatlemania and all that, after they were famous. We go back and watch the videos and the tapes of the concerts they did, but then as far as all the later material, you kind of have to say, what would they have done? And take it from there." As for why Fulop assumed the mantle of Harrison and not one of the other Beatles, he said it was just a natural progression of the group's dynamic. "When we first started, we all kind of fell into our spots," said Fulop. "I was the guitar player who wasn't the best singer in the band. The guy who is a great singer is Paul and whatnot. A lot of people ask if we took the parts because we look like them, but out of costume we don't really look anything like the Beatles." Tickets (\$34) for the 7 p.m. Halloween show are on sale now.



Fall Festival a success another year

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer All good things must come to an end, and that includes The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Fall Festival. On Saturday, Oct. 17, the festival ended at the close of Georgia's Official State Fiddlers' Convention. Fairgrounds Manager Hilda Thomason said that the weeklong event went as well as she'd hoped. "We've had a wonderful festival. It's been really good attendance and the weather's been wonderful. We had one day of rain, which was last Saturday when we had Mickey Gilley, but we still had 11 tour buses that came in that day and the auditorium was packed for the show, and it was just wonderful that they all came out and supported it even in the rain with their umbrellas and their raincoats," she said. Although the main attractions of the Fall Festival are the constant stage shows at Anderson Music Hall, two staples of the festival, the cuisine and the handmade art, also met with expectations. "All the food booths have done well and I think all

the crafters seem to be very pleased, and I think people just really enjoyed coming up to the mountains for the fall leaves and the foliage and visiting all the festivals in the area," Thomason said. The Fairgrounds also brought in entertainers from as far away as Canada, all of whom gave successful performances. "I think people really enjoyed the balloon show, I heard a lot of nice compliments on it. The guy did a good job. We had the helicopter rides today, and it got rained out last weekend with the helicopter, but this weekend he came and he's been busy with the helicopter today. It's a beautiful sight up there looking down at Lake Chatuge and the mountains. It really is," said Thomason. "Everything went good with the shows. Everybody was on time and all the people that performed - everything went very smooth with all that. The most popular entertainer we had was probably Mickey Gilley, I would think, and then Ricky Skaggs would be next," she added. Even though this festival was a success, Thomason is always looking for attractions and events to add to keep people

coming back. "We're adding new events. I met with the Harley Davidson people today. They were here. They had their committee here on the grounds, and visited the fair and took a lot of pictures and were going to hopefully get the Harley rally back next year. I had a meeting with them early today and they wanted to take a lot of pictures of the fair and the buildings and everything while it was in operation and all. So hopefully they'll be coming back," she said. In the future, Thomason hopes for more volunteers. "I just wanted to say a big thank you to all the people that volunteered during the festival to make it successful. Without our volunteers it would not be possible. We really encourage other people to continue to volunteer and get involved with the community and give back to the community. We needed a few more but we made it work," she said. "It's been a lot of hours but it's been very enjoyable and it makes me happy to see other people enjoying the stuff, and that's what we do is entertain, so it's been a great festival," she added.



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