

Planning...from Page 1

contract," said White. "Schools are a business. Their goal is to get children at their school for the least amount of money out of their pocket as possible."

"We work to turn that around - get our children at these schools for the least amount of money out of the parents' pocket."

Loans are just one piece in the financial aid puzzle, and to maximize the use of loans, students and parents need to understand the bigger picture of how colleges calculate financial need.

"It starts with a formula that uses the cost of attendance," said White. "The cost of attendance is everything. It's tuition, room and board, books, fees, transportation - everything associated with the cost for one year at a school."

"Then you use the Expected Family Contribution, the EFC," said White. "That's a number that's calculated by the U.S. Department of Education. It takes into account the student's income, the parents' income, family assets, number of family members, number of students in school and so on. So, the cost of attendance minus the EFC equals need. That's a basic premise that you operate from."

The federal government, state government, college and universities, and private resources are the four main places students can look to draw funding for college, according to White, and funding from

private resources with scholarships accounts for only 2 to 3 percent of available funds for college.

"I see parents and students all the time spending a lot of time going after that money, and it's not really where you should be spending your time, in that space, because 2 to 3 percent only comes from the private sector," said White.

White stresses the importance of focusing on the EFC number, as that number determines how much need a family has for financial aid. Individual colleges offer to cover different percentages of need.

Some schools offer 100 percent coverage of this amount, while others may only cover 50 percent, for example. But if a student is going to get any assistance at all, from the federal government, state government or college, he or she must fill out a federal form.

"Get to know the FAFSA - that's the Free Application for Federal Student Aid," said White. "You need to really pay close attention to how you document things on this form, especially when it comes to your assets."

White and the College Planning Network are available to help students and families navigate this quagmire of extremely important financial decisions and the timelines within which these decisions must be made, as funds are available on a first come, first serve basis.

Book Characters...from Page 1

Julie Thompson started the program.

"The first book characters I did were in 1996, I believe, way back when we had the Quality Core Curriculum and all of the old standards where they just had to identify characters," said Thompson, who graduated from Towns County High School herself and began teaching at the middle school in 1992.

Back then, students performed in their classrooms for their peers. Now, eighth-graders go into the elementary school, from Pre-K to fifth-grade, and perform different children's books along with interacting with the younger students through activities that they plan out and create.

Georgia Performance Standards have changed over the years, and now, these middle school children must satisfy more requirements with the assignment under the Common Core.

"They have to be able to understand what makes a character tick and how a character is like a human," said Thompson. "How they are technically human beings in these stories, and they have the same emotions, fears, feelings, thoughts. So, when they bring these to life, hopefully they're seeing that characters are real people. It makes them understand the story better."

And these children are doing more than acting and playing with other children - they're gaining a vital skillset they will need to succeed in the world at large.

"It covers about 10 of the Common Core standards, between the speaking, the listening, the characterization, all the literature stuff," said Thompson. "And it's fun, the kids love it."

Elementary children gain from the experience as well, in that they have older children serving as role models to create excitement in the learning process.

"For the elementary kids, it's a fun day where they get to see all these characters," said Thompson. "Hopefully, they'll be interested and want to come to the library and find the book and read it about that character - it encourages reading and lets the kids have some fun while learning to read and getting to read."

One of the more rewarding aspects of Book Character Day is seeing the almost immediate response from children who may be shy or nervous in front of groups.

"The good thing is, as they go on and as they learn,

they change," said Thompson. "All day long, it's amazing how they change from the first presentation to the afternoon. They gain confidence - they're old pros by the afternoon."

Eighth grade students got to choose between 84 different book characters this year, including Peter Pan, Pinocchio and The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse. All costumes were handmade by the children presenting the characters, and many of the materials used were donated by area thrift stores.

Book Character Day is such a longstanding tradition that children who once took part in the festivities are now grown up and have kids of their own developing characters.

"The parents are so funny. One of them Facebooked me and said, I remember doing this and I absolutely loved it. And I'm like, okay, am I that old that I've got parents of kids who are now doing this?" said Thompson with a laugh.

But that demonstrates a larger point. Children grow, they learn, they begin to learn how to teach, and then, one day, they're responsible for a whole new crop of children.

Book Character Day helps kids develop the critical thinking and problem-solving skills to make that transition easier.

Thompson is thankful for the entire eighth-grade teaching staff for making Book Character Day possible, as it is an endeavor enjoyed by the entire faculty.

Parents, teachers and students were treated to a special encore performance that afternoon as the Book Character Parade rolled out in the auditorium.

"All of the characters go across stage and introduce themselves, and who they are and who their book character is," said Thompson. "Then the ones throughout the day who have done just exemplary, I will call them up on stage and they will talk and do their little presentations to the audience - they're awesome."

Thompson puts more than 100 hours of preparation into Book Character Day before the children even start making costumes, and then the two weeks leading up to the event are filled with costume making and character development, as well as work spent on making activities for the elementary children to enjoy.

Needless to say, the event is a handful to coordinate.

"I enjoy it, I love this day," said Thompson. "I'm glad to get the day over, but I love it. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Eagle Scout...from Page 1

really do appreciate it."

Building the path with the environment in mind, as well as the retaining wall and plants to help with erosion, Trevor qualifies for the William T. Hornaday Badge, which is granted to Scouts who make significant contributions toward conservation.

"We're hoping to get the monarch butterfly back because it's endangered right now, and we're hoping to bring in natural pollinators," said Trevor of the bushes.

The entire Bradley fam-

ily was instrumental in helping Trevor complete his project, with tremendous support from father Gregg and mother Tamie, as well as twin brothers Nicholas, who is also in Scouts and plays basketball. The brothers will be starting Towns County High School next year, where their sister, MegAnn, is currently a senior.

"It's just really impressive that as a 13-year-old he's going to qualify for his Eagle Award," said Tamie. "I'm really proud of all that he's put into this and the areas he's grown in while working on this project."

State...from Page 1

boys' race, each getting special recognition and a medal at the awards ceremony following the championship.

"The reason they were successful is that they had respect for the other teams, they had respect for the sport and they had respect for themselves," said Coach Ledford.

Going into the race, Coach Ledford and her Indians knew what they needed to do to win.

"The first thing we were looking at was we were focused on Trion," said Coach Ledford of the boys' team. "We had run the numbers and that was what we were looking at. All these people that are here, they're the elite. So, to be the best you've got to run with the best."

But Jenkins County came out of nowhere to win the championship, even if it was only by four points.

"To come silently and be victorious, good for them," said Coach Ledford. "But the thing I want everybody to focus on is, I know the girls did a three-peat, but these boys have fought for so many years just to make it in, and last year they made it in and they got sixth. And for them, it's harder, there's more teams, the competition is stiffer."

"Not undermining the girls, because you saw it today, they're here to battle. But for those boys, again, when you looked at them, to be an inexperienced mix - they don't even look like Cross Country runners, they look like little wrestlers. But to have such a determined spirit, to do what they did today - this is the first time in Towns County Boys Cross Country to be the state runner-up."

Both the boys' and girls' teams worked hard this year racing against larger schools, like Union and Rabun coun-



Tyler Grimsley, left, gets in position in Saturday's Class A Cross Country Championships in Carrollton. Grimsley finished ninth in the race and the Indians finished second overall. Photos/Shawn Jarrard



ties, and ran against the Smoky Mountain Conference as well.

Those races helped to prepare these Indians and Lady Indians for Saturday, when it all paid off.

"The one thing I want everybody to know, in that area that we come from up there, there is such rich strength in that area," said Coach Ledford. "And that's why we are successful, because in Cross Country, you fight each other, except



Hannah Whitehead has an armful of hardware from Saturday's Cross Country championships.



another will surely echo in their hearts for the rest of their lives.

"I love my kids - my kids do this," said Coach Ledford. "I'm just their guide. Every year I think my heart's full, and they just keep on one-upping it the next year. I have an exceptional bunch of kids. And the biggest thing is that they don't just come together haphazardly. I feel like God brought them together. God got them where they were today."

Firewise...from Page 1

spring rains yet. Now, we've got leaves that just fell, the humidity is down, we've got a good wind today - it's prime for a wildfire today."

Wildfire awareness and prevention is the tune of the Firewise Gospel, and Riley has been out in the community this past week to spread the good word.

Awareness activities included speaking at the Rotary Club, having Smokey Bear attend Towns County Schools, hosting chipper days in neighborhoods and bringing Towns County emergency personnel and equipment to the Hiawassee Square for residents to learn what goes into making their communities safer.

The U.S. Forest Service gave Smokey Bear a ride into town. Smokey turned 70 in August, and his wisdom goes wherever he does.

Smokey visited Kindergarten through the third grade, and Towns County Fire Department's own Tyler Keyes helped Smokey present information to the kids. Keyes and Smokey also spoke to Pre-K students, and finally ended up at the middle school for an assembly.



"We had the sixth, seventh and eighth grade in one assembly where we did a demonstration on what causes fire and how you put it out," said Riley. "Everybody loved Smokey. We got pictures of all the grades with Smokey. Even adults like Smokey, it's unbelievable."

Chipper Days happen when the fire department and those involved in Firewise go to various communities within Towns County to chip brush collected by neighborhoods us-

ing the county's wood chipper before taking it away.

"We had 14 people show up in one neighborhood to help, and that's the most I've ever had," said Riley, who is witnessing every day the growth of Firewise in Towns County.

Saturday's Fire Prevention Day on the square was a chance for Towns County residents to meet with the people who deal with emergency situations, from fires to medical emergencies.

"EMS was there, the sheriff's office was there," said Riley. "All six of our fire stations had representation, and we had Firewise there, the Fire Corps was there. Anything to do with emergency management in Towns County was on the square that day."

The Georgia Forestry Commission brought a bulldozer it uses to head wildfires off by digging perimeters around them, and fire trucks and ambulances were on display.

Towns County's search and rescue dive team answered questions, and the people behind Life Flight, which helicopters residents out of dangerous situations, showed up to volunteer information about what they do during emergencies.

"Saturday's event culminated a week dedicated to Fire Prevention," said Towns County Fire Corps President Liz Ordiales. "We are very fortunate in Towns County to have an outstanding Firewise effort with 10 communities enrolled and active in the program. The Fire Corps is excited about the opportunity to continue to support Towns County's finest."

Lights...from Page 1

throughout the country, such as Afterschool Alliance, and Stowers works closely with the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network.

"This is actually two afterschool programs that have come together today - the Towns County 21st Century Afterschool, and the Family Connections Young Harris Family Development Center Afterschool Program that meets in Young Harris," said Stowers.

McConnell Memorial Baptist Church prepared food for students, parents and guests of the event, and the offerings were delectable: savory chili dogs, fresh-popped popcorn and Halloween-themed cupcakes with little candy corn pieces on top.

Older afterschool program students led activities for the younger ones, such as games of cornhole, and monitored fun at a bounce house.

Parents and guests were also treated to a pumpkin parade, in which students showcased the end product of a lot of hard work.

Joan Crothers of the Hiawassee Garden Club and Towns/Union Master Gardeners' Association held a handful of thank you letters from afterschool participants.

"We helped them grow the pumpkins and raise bed gardens out of the school at the afterschool program, so they thanked us for all the pumpkin pie," said Crothers, whose chef friend helped turn many of the pumpkins into soups and pies for the children.

Stowers pointed out the



The Pumpkin Parade was a blast for the Towns County Elementary School children at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church. The adults had a blast as well, including Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

importance of the parade by highlighting just how much preparation went into the day, starting with the garden club coming out to the school in July, and ending with the pumpkin parade Thursday.

"They helped us plant, we grew them, we harvested, we did all kinds of activities with the pumpkins," said Stowers. "The kids in their groups decorated them like book characters, and we're going to enter them into the library's book character contest."

Towns County Library Branch Manager Debbie Phillips and Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby judged the pumpkin parade at the church Thurs-

day, which featured characters from Little Red Riding Hood, The Cat in the Hat, Winnie the Pooh and his friends, too, among others.

The pumpkin parade went off without a hitch, with Little Red Riding Hood winning first place, and several program participants - parents and students alike - expressed their appreciation for what afterschool has done for them and their families.

Towns County Schools Facilities Director Roy Perren was there to offer his support, and Sheriff Chris Clinton kept a watchful eye on the festivities while also having a good time with his family.

"Afterschool is important because it helps to lower the achievement gap between students and poverty," said Stowers. "And students who participate in afterschool programs across the nation and also locally tend to achieve higher on state-mandated testing and report cards."

"In fact, last year, in our own personal program, 93 percent of our students who attended afterschool passed the state-mandated testing in reading, language arts, and 75 percent of our students passed all the math state-mandated testing, which is higher than the state average."