

# Firewise...from Page 1A

with their neighbors, and these collective actions can lead to national recognition as a Fire Adapted Community.”

Towns County is a recognized “Fire Adapted Community,” and has been since the county was chosen to be one of eight pilot communities because of the area’s “diversity of geographic, cultural and ecological contexts among U.S. communities at-risk to wildfire.”

This area is only one of the eight located east of the Mississippi because the Southeastern U.S. consistently experiences more wildfires per year than any other region.

More than 100 million acres of land have a moderate to extreme potential for wildfire.

Davis further explained these statistics. Most people think of the wildfires that blaze in the western United States when the topic arises, but, as Davis explained, “the Southeastern U.S. has the distinction of having smaller, but more numerous wildfires.”

Proving Davis’ statement regarding this area as a “wildfire zone” is the fact that as of Sunday, Nov. 10, there is only one current wildfire listed and currently burning in the U.S., and that is in Halls Top, Tenn., about 10 miles south of Newport, Tenn., according to The National Interagency Fire Center, and at the present time this fire has burned around 340 acres and is 15 percent contained.

As a “Fire Adapted Community,” Towns County is part of the FAC Learning Network and as such is expected to “convene and facilitate learning across the local community and

branch out to other communities.”

“As a way to bring neighbors closer together,” Davis said.

This type of community fosters the awareness that individuals must play an essential role in preparing their homes and communities from the threat of wildfire.

Towns County Fire Chief Mitch Floyd also addressed the audience about the importance of wildfire prevention furthering Davis’ points by bringing the need even closer to home.

Chief Floyd stressed that Towns County has four full time firefighters, so education on preventative strategies is paramount.

Although, Chief Floyd made sure to say that “without a doubt, our area’s fire department would not be as effective without the 50-plus certified and trained local area volunteers.”

Chief Floyd’s best advice, or fire motto, is “prevention first because it is safer than suppression,” and statistically speaking, preparing for wildfires can help to minimize their impact, and this is what Towns County is doing as a “Fire Adapted Community.”

According to Chief Floyd, “a fire adapted community accepts the inevitability of fire as a part of their natural surroundings, so they learn to understand the risks, taking action before a wildfire occurs.”

For more details regarding this multi-agency cooperative, you can contact any of the guest speakers listed, or go to fireadapted.org, or firewise.org.

# 30 Years...from Page 1A

a lifetime achievement award from the Mothers Against Drunk Drivers organization, a rare award that is only given to those who have done truly excellent work to make the roads safer.

Immediately following the awards ceremony, Hiwassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright promoted Sgt. Walls to the rank of lieutenant. The promotion came with a treat – an engraved, Generation IV Glock 22.

The gathering of friends and well-wishers were eager to share their memories of Lt. Walls. Anecdotes ranged from the humorous to the tearful. A few thoughts were held in common – Lt. Walls is an outstanding officer and an outstanding individual. For someone to have served as devotedly as Lt.

Walls for 30 years is a remarkable and rare achievement that deserves recognition.

Of course, Lt. Walls doesn’t do it for the recognition.

“I like the job,” he said. “I mean, it has its ups and down like any other job, but when you help somebody in some way, to better their life, it’s rewarding.”

Not a man given to extraneous displays of emotion, Lt. Walls did admit that he was proud of his employers and proud of the people who turned out to honor him. Having given himself completely to his job, after 30 years of service, does he have any plans to retire anytime soon?

“Maybe after 30 more,” Lt. Walls said.

# Not Guilty...from Page 1A



**Brittany Elizabeth Ledford**

opened June 17th, following extensive interrogations by Towns County sheriff’s investigators and GBI agents, according to the Towns County Sheriff’s Office.

Ledford and Stokes were already inmates at the Towns County Detention Center at the time of their confessions, sheriff’s reports show.



**Rebecca Ann Stokes**

Prior to the murder charges, Ledford was being held on charges that include first-degree forgery, eight counts of deposit account fraud, and criminal trespass, Towns County arrest warrants show. Stokes was being held on an obstruction charge, Towns County arrest warrants show.

# Al-Anon meetings/times

Blairsville: Mountain Presbyterian Church, 2945 Young Harris Hwy. 76, Wednesday 8 p.m. Al-Anon Family Group Discussion, open meeting, Saint Clare’s Episcopal Church, Friday 12 noon Al-anon Group Discussion, open meeting.

Young Harris: Sharp Memorial Methodist Church, Tuesday 12 noon Al-Anon Family Group discussion, open meeting.

Hiwassee: Chatuge Re-

gional Hospital, 110 South Main Street, Sunday 7 p.m. Al-Anon Family Group Discussion, open meeting, Christ the King Church, Monday 7 p.m. Al-Anon Family Group Discussion, open meeting.

Al-Anon is open to anyone who has been affected by another person’s drinking. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or a friend.

Call 706-835-5827, 706-897-0628 or 828-389-8981. for more information.

# X-Country...from Page 1A

a slow chill crept into the air, the Class A schools took the starting line. Ledford’s boys ran first. The girls ran shortly afterward. Together, the races that Ledford had trained her team all year for in the case of her seniors, many years, took barely an hour.

When the dust from many running shoes cleared, the Towns County girls’ Cross Country team was the winner of their second consecutive State Championship.

Ledford’s reaction to the news was immediate and honest.

She broke into tears. Tears turned into laughter, however, as her teams quickly encircled her in a giant group hug. Together, they shouted and jumped up and down and celebrated.

The good news was twofold: not only did the girls’ team win, but the boys’ team also placed, coming in sixth.

“Those boys, we kept saying if you come in sixth it is like winning a state championship, because of how strong it is,” said Ledford later. “To make it out of Area is just a feat in itself.”

The girls’ First Place finish was by as narrow a margin as possible.

With both teams tied with a score of 60, it came down to a tiebreaker between Towns and Trion.

In the event of a tie, the top five girls of each team have exactly the same number of points, so the officials include the sixth runner for each team.

Towns County’s sixth runner was the freshman Kenzi Jenkins, with a time of 26:12.59, almost 6 seconds faster than Trion’s sixth runner, Erica Madison.

“It is literally as close as a state championship can get,” said Ledford.

Returning state champion Ansley Vardeman came in second with a time of 23:21. She led the race until the final few moments. At the very end, she was passed by Gordon Lee’s Sarah Meadows, a freshman, who finished just seconds ahead.

However, it was Caitlin Sheffield who thrilled everybody. For most of the first two miles, she and Vardeman were neck and neck, running within a yard of one another. This is impressive, considering Sheffield has only run three meets the entire season.

# Elections...from Page 1A

council seat, defeating Steve Clark in the race.

She fills the vacant seat of retired Post 5 Councilman David Sellers.

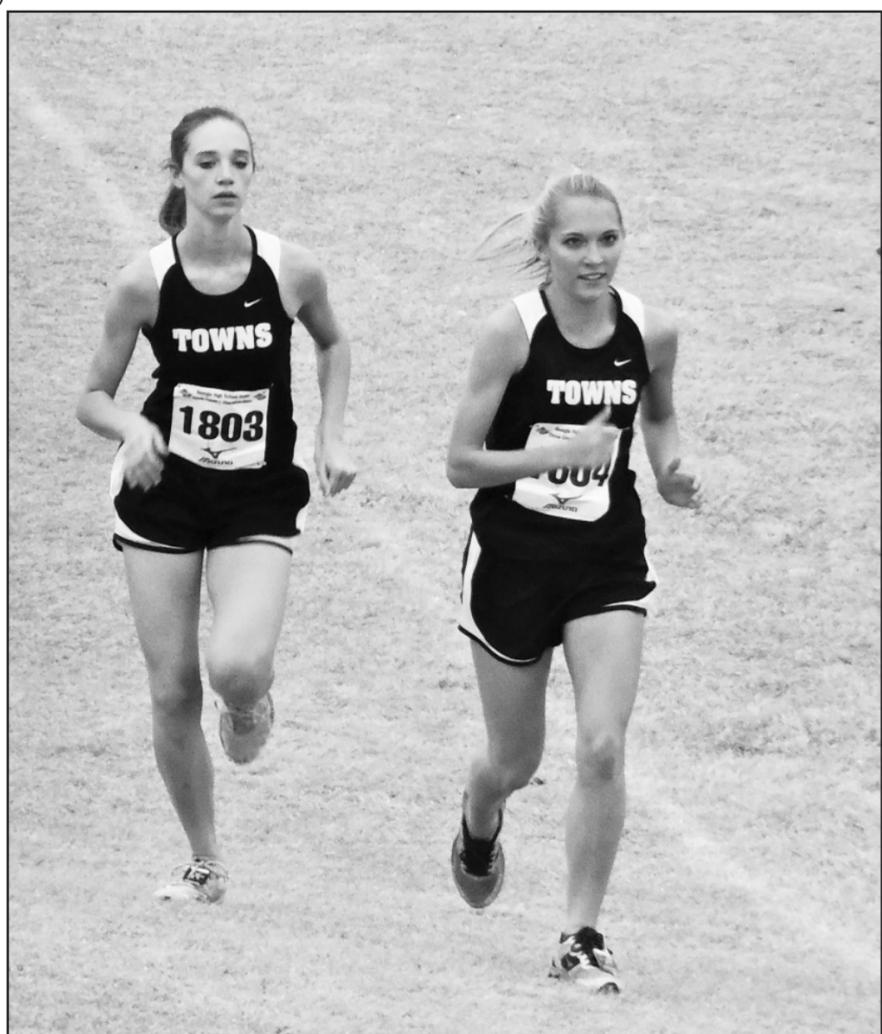
“It’s so beautiful and I really enjoy the small town life,” she said. “I think it’s a really great way to give back to my community and really be able to make a difference here.”

Sam Leslie agreed. He ran for Post 4 seat, once held by long time Councilman Donald Keys. He defeated Keys in the Nov. 5th race.

“I live and work in the city of Young Harris, so I have a vested interest in seeing the community thrive,” he said. “So I figure I can sit back and wish for things to happen, or I can get out there and actually put my name in the hat and give it a go.”

Leslie emphasized that he’s new to city politics, but is eager to pick it up and learn as he goes along.

“I’ve spoken with members of the community and students directly, but I’m not very experienced in the whole thing, I’m just learning to be



Above, Ansley Vardeman and Caitlin Sheffield set the pace; below, Cross Country seniors Lindy Holligshead, Ansley Vardeman, Caitlin Sheffield, Cesar Bustamante, and Taylor Vardeman.

Immediately after the first meet of the year, she suffered a stress fracture in her foot and was out on doctors’ orders for the entire season. The area meet was her first time running in almost two months. Despite the injury, Sheffield moved on from Area to medal in the state championship. She finished third with a time of 23:51.

Another top runner, Ally Settles, also suffered an injury

just before Area. She tore a muscle and is expecting to undergo surgery soon. Despite the pain of the injury, she made the decision to run at State.

“She was excited to run because she wanted to help everybody win,” said Betsy Settles, Ally’s mother. “We had faith that she was would do well, and she did. She finished strong.” In a race that close, Towns needed every ounce of

support it could get. Ledford is now the proud owner of two championship cups, but takes none of the credit for herself.

“All I can really say is that I have an incredible bunch of kids that did the unbelievable,” she said. “They don’t roll over and give up, and that’s what winners are made of. They refused to quit. And that is why they are the way they are.”

# Veterans...from Page 1A

wanted all people, but especially the “young people” to realize that those Patriots who have served, or are currently serving, did not think selfishly about themselves and the possible dangers they might face.

These true Patriots wanted to join together for a united purpose by stepping up and making a commitment to preserve the original ideas and freedoms this country was built upon.

Rep. Collins’ has his own impressive service history beginning with his father who served before him.

Learning from this example, Rep. Collins served in the United States Air Force, and since 2002 he has served as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force reserves. It was extremely an honor to listen to Rep. Collins speak emphatically and passionately for such a proud tradition.

Following his address, Rep. Collins presented an

American flag in recognition for all the veterans of Towns County; the flag he presented once flew over the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D. C.

Following Rep. Collins’ speech, Judy King read a poem entitled “Duty.”

This poem was written by Jim Kramer while he was in Vietnam serving as part of the 44th Medical Brigade. It was a poem full of symbolic and literal thoughts and feelings about one’s “duty” to their country. It was inspiring, heartfelt and delivered expertly by King.

After the poetry reading, the “Laying of the Wreaths” commenced and were provided and presented by VFW Post 7807, VFW Post 7807 Ladies Auxiliary, American Legion Post 23, Sons of the American Legion Squadron 23, American Legion Ladies Auxiliary 23, Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment, and the Army-Navy Squadron No. 66.

After the presentation of



**Hilary Martin**

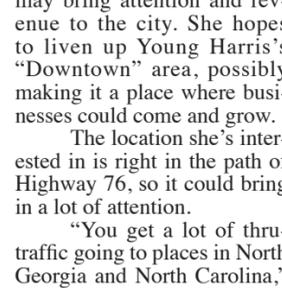
a politician,” he said modestly. “One way or the other, I’ll have a story to tell from the whole thing.”

Martin has already been in conversation about potential changes and improvements for the community.

Taking the first steps toward being a leader of the community, she’s spoken with fellow Councilman Stuart Miller about what her job requires.

“I’ve been able to talk to him about what it means to be on City Council, and talking to him is kind of like what peaked my interest a little bit,” she said.

She added that her plans



**Sam Leslie**

may bring attention and revenue to the city. She hopes to live up Young Harris’s “Downtown” area, possibly making it a place where businesses could come and grow.

The location she’s interested in is right in the path of Highway 76, so it could bring in a lot of attention.

“You get a lot of thru-traffic going to places in North Georgia and North Carolina,” she said. “People will stop and just kind of bring a fresh life and excitement to the city.”

She also expressed an interest in a largely underrepresented Young Harris demo-

graphic – the students of Young Harris College.

“The students are a part of the census, the city uses them in calculating population. They’ve become such a large part of this culture and this area,” she said. “I want to be the voice for the students, and I’m here for them.”

Voter turnout among the students may be one reason why Leslie and Martin met with such success. When the election ended and the votes were tallied late Tuesday night, both won their respective posts.

Mayor Andrea Gibby, ran unopposed, as did Councilman John Kelley, who ran unopposed to retain his Post 6 seat.

Only Leslie and Martin faced opposition. However, students could be seen in the voting booths until the last moments of the election, when the polls closed at 7 p.m. It’s likely that the student demographic swayed the election to fall firmly in favor of Leslie and Martin.

In any case, the political future is bright for these two new candidates.



The Laying of the Wreaths at Veterans Park in Hiwassee on Monday. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

the wreaths the Towns County High School Band played *God Bless America*, and immediately afterward, Keira McKinney played *TAPS*, which was followed by a “dismissal blessing” by Max Flaig, VFW Chaplain.

Oct. 8, 1954, President

Dwight D. Eisenhower issued the first “Veterans Day Proclamation” which read: “In order to insure proper and widespread observance of this anniversary, all veterans, all veterans’ organizations, and the entire citizenry will wish to join hands in the common purpose.”