

Jimmy...from Page 1

service, he went twice with his dad to take kids shopping.

"This is the most special one for us," Jared Wright said. "This is his legacy. His passion was taking care of the city, the county that he loved so much, and all the kids in it. So being here to honor that legacy is something truly special for us."

"He would have wanted us to carry on," 29-year-old Jared Wright said. "One of the things that dad was working on with (Towns County Fire Chief) Harold Copeland and (Family Connection Director) Amy Gibby Rosser was, instead of it being Shop With a Cop, they were going to change it to Shop With a Hero, to be able to fully involve and honor all of the men and women in uniform. Whether it be in service to the city, the county, the community, the state, or even in the nation. Being in the military, I'm honored to be here and stand in — can't replace him, but we're here to show our support.

"One thing that Brittany and I and the family all agreed on was, for the funeral arrangements, instead of flowers we wanted people to make donations to this cause right here. I'm planning on, after I coordinate everything with Harold and Amy, we're going to set up a GoFundMe, which is an online fundraising organization that allows us to bring in funds from external sources. A lot of people on my ship, and a lot of people that I've met in all the different trainings that I've been



Law enforcement officers from throughout Northeast Georgia came to pay their last respects to Hiawassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

to — I've got fraternity brothers and sorority sisters that have reached out and want to help in any way they can. I'm going to talk to them about a goal, and we're going to set something like that up so we can keep this legacy going, and help it be the biggest it can possibly be next year and for every year to come after that."

Jared Wright was overwhelmed by the outpouring of support.

"The outpouring of support for my family and me over the last week has been an absolute blessing," he said.

"It has really reminded me that this is home," he said.

"It was overwhelming but much appreciated, the love and support and prayers that we've gotten from everybody," he said.

"We cannot thank this town enough for everything

they've done for us," Jared Wright said.

"There are a lot of little kids — they're nephews and cousins and stuff like that, that might as well be his babies or grandbabies all on their own. That was one of the coolest things about him — he would pick on kids until they were just steaming mad and screaming at him, but they loved him all the more for it," Jared Wright said. "I can't remember ever passing a kid somewhere when we were out eating or whatever, and him not reaching into his wallet and pulling out a dollar and handing it to a kid. And if he saw another one standing there, it didn't matter how old, how young, it didn't matter, he was going to give them a dollar. That's why, it's like I said, this is his legacy, it's his passion, just because he's always cared about the kids of this county."

Adopt...from Page 1

— and the team goes into each establishment on its list bearing gifts of love made through community sponsorships for nursing home and assisted living residents.

"Any individual can sponsor a gift for \$15, or a local business," said Ford. "They can sponsor however many gifts they want, and it consists of a hand cream and a winter accessory. It's wrapped with a handwritten tag from the sponsor.

"And yes, the hand cream is a Mary Kay product, but it's fragrance free so it won't affect anybody. It can be used for male or female, we don't have to cross any lines — how many males, how many females — we don't ask those questions. Everybody is blessed with a gift. We have the honor of going room to room and visiting them."

Many residents of both counties were served that Saturday, including 150 from Union County Nursing Home, 14 from Lazy-R and 112 from Chatuge

Regional Nursing Home, for a total of 276 gifts.

"Every year we've grown one facility, so next year we're hoping to grow one or two facilities more," said Ford. "We have a good time. Just to see their faces and their smiles as we're coming into their rooms — that's an honor in itself."

The largest sponsor of Adopt-a-Grandparent has been Paris Nails of Blairsville, donating an entire day of revenue toward the program, giving nearly \$800 this year alone. Other big sponsors include Union General Hospital Inc. and United Community Bank, and many individuals donated this year.

Ford was just made aware by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce that her business will be the next recipient of the Business of the Quarter award, and she will take her time during the celebration in January to talk about Adopt-a-Grandparent with other local businesses.

"For me and Kristy, Mary

Kay is not a J-O-B," said Ford. "It literally is a job that we enjoy, and it mingles with ministry. Everything that we do is uplifting somebody, gifting somebody, making them feel better about themselves."

A third member of Ford and Wallace's Mary Kay team couldn't make it Saturday, Alicia Rogers of Hiawassee, due to a family emergency.

"That's one of Mary Kay's foundational standards in the business, is God first, family second, career third, and that's the first thing I said to her, no problem," said Ford.

Chelsey Phillips is activity director for Chatuge Regional Nursing Home, and she said volunteers and visitors are always wanted.

"We have so many of those, especially around Christmas time," said Phillips. "We've had not just them, but we've had church groups that brought shoebox gifts in, and all kinds of stuff. It's just great, and the residents love it."

Historical...from Page 1

was a time when homes did not revolve around TV, radio, Facebook, computers, and all that stuff. Yet there was indeed an entertainment center in every house, from the Little House on the Prairie to Fodder Creek, Towns County, Georgia. It centered around the reed organ," he said.

"The reed organ was invented in America in the 1830s. And if you're wondering what a reed is, a reed is a little strip of brass in a frame in a compartment in there that when you pump the air it goes through the reed and it vibrates. You probably grew up having them in your grandparents' and great grandparents' house, and they were probably called pump organs. But the official name is the reed organ," he said.

Accompanying him were three vocalists: Pamela Leslie, Angela Holloway and Joy Breedlove. In addition, Jason Edwards introduced several songs on a similar instrument called a cob organ.

"The roller organ plays reeds, just the same as the reed organ. But instead of a keyboard, it plays a roll. A

roll looks like someone's been gnawing on corn on the cob. That's why this organ is most of the time nicknamed the cob organ. This one's 1847," said Taylor.

Songs included "Up on the Housetop," "Deck the Halls," "Have a Holly Jolly Christmas," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," and the favorite, "Frosty the Snowman."

Taylor paused to inform those gathered who had gathered that "Frosty" was written by the famous singing cowboy, Gene Autry.

"He was just out of high school. He tried to earn some money by working in the telegraph office in Oklahoma, and working the night shift he amused himself by picking the guitar and singing. One night a stranger happened in and waited until Autry finished his song and then said, 'Young fellow, you're wasting your time here.' It was Will Rogers. And the rest is, as they say, history," he said.

"Autry recorded 'Frosty the Snowman' in 1951, and the song proved to be a big seller.

It's no wonder that Frosty is a familiar character without whom a child's Christmas can never be quite complete," he said.

Taylor said that he was drawn to the music of the reed organ because the sound is something unlike any other instrument.

"It sounds so ethereal. It's just the wind blowing through the reeds just makes that nice sound. They've not been made since the 1950's. They're obsolete because of electrical instruments and modern technology," he said.

"In the old days, they didn't have TVs and all these entertainment centers and stuff, but they did, and it was called the reed organ. Everybody joined in and made their own entertainment. Music was kind of like the center of the family, and everybody had one. Those things were made to be economical and in everybody's house, so everybody had one back then, just like they have a TV now. That was just the entertainment of the day," he said.

(That Cigarette)' by Tex Williams, and 'Hot Rod Lincoln.' It's on and on. I honestly didn't create anything new. I certainly have my own twist on it, but if you look at the history of Country Music, it's always been there, really," he said.

"Now, do I sound like George Strait? Absolutely not. Carrie Underwood don't sound like Dolly Parton to me either, or Loretta Lynn. It's okay. Music changes," he said.

To Ford, what makes or breaks a Country song is the thematic content of the record.

"Listen to the content of my record. If you think that I ain't Country, then we're from way different types of Country, because everything I talk about is God, family, friends,

America, hard work, country values, country morals — that's who I am. I'm not pretending, I'm just singing songs about my life and what I know. That's what it is to me," he said.

Though Ford has recently experienced a surge of commercial success, he doesn't believe it affects his onstage performance.

"Honestly, there is no difference for me. I play the same way. I don't care if there's 50 people, 500 people, 1,000, or 50,000. I've played every one of those situations and they're all the same to me, honestly. I play as hard as I can for whoever's there. It doesn't make any difference to me. I play for the ones that are there, and the fans that are there to have fun. And I give it everything I've got," he said.

Station 2...from Page 1

Clint Hobbs, Chairman of the Towns County Fire Corps.

"This property belonged to my father, who served back in the '60s and '70s as the commissioner and probate judge of the county. I remember him owning that property as far back as I can remember. I was born in the '50s, so I'm pretty sure he owned that before I was born," said Corn.

"This field lays very good for the project that the county wants. Even though I own the property around this, it's a good move for the county. This is one of the best-laying pieces that we have. I hate to let it go. There's a lot of history in the family in this property, but it's for a good purpose," he said.

Marty Roberts, director of 911 Mapping for the county, explained that the location of the new property presented a number of advantages.

"One of the things we looked at when we were talking about the station was trying to move the station into an area

that would cover more houses and businesses that are outside of the five-mile area," he said.

On a map of Towns County, he pointed to a green area indicating the current area covered by Station Two.

"Coverage stops right around Rustic Ridge and Todd Shook Road here. On Gum Log, it stops right at Jack Road, and it stops just in the Woodlake area where Woodlake Subdivision is off Duncan Road," he said.

In contrast, the new station will cover a greater area.

"This area on 66, it covers everybody to the North Carolina line, all of Crooked Creek, Woodlake, it all now will be in the 5-mile service area. All the houses on Truelove Mountain are now within the 5-mile area, and then there's a couple houses in a subdivision off of Ivy Log that are now in a 5-mile area. It's right around 317 houses or businesses that it will be including in the 5-mile area," he said.

The location of the new station also makes maneuvering in and out easier for the big fire trucks.

"It has a real good ground entrance. It has excellent visibility pulling out of the property. If you're pulling out and you're looking back toward Young Harris, south on Highway 66, you've got a good long straightaway to be able to pull fire trucks out and not have any problem. Looking north on 66, you have plenty of time to get out and not have a problem with cars coming at you," he said.

Hobbs said that currently Fire Station Two is housed in the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC building.

"While the facility itself is sufficient as a firehouse, the location is certainly not as ideal as the one we'll be able to go to ultimately, and as far as we know they are actively trying to sell their old facility, so we have a little bit of an issue there," he said.

Shop...from Page 1



In fact, Lt. Osborn hired Chief Wright back in 1994 to be an officer with the City of Hiawassee. Before then, Wright had worked with the Towns County Sheriff's Office starting in 1990.

On top of the Union County Sheriff's Office, members of the Blairsville Police Department came to help in the effort that day, and Towns County volunteers showed up in force to honor Chief Wright's memory and help the many children to Shop With a Cop.

Representatives of Towns County Fire & Rescue, including firefighters and EMS workers, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, ISRCH with Mary Davenport and Canine Rescue Dog Sister, as well as the entire Hiawassee Police Department under Acting Chief Arvel Walls were all on hand for Chief Wright's memorial Shop With a Cop.

"We're continuing what Chief Wright started, so that's the good part of it," said Acting Chief Walls. "And the kids get to come and get their Christmas again this year, so continuing that was important. We appreciate all the support that the community gives us during this project for the kids. Without their support we couldn't do it,

and we appreciate it."

Chief Wright's funeral took place on Thursday, Dec. 17, the day before he was to take Towns County school children shopping. In lieu of flowers, the chief's family asked that donations be made to Hiawassee Shop With a Cop.

"The community has really just rallied behind this effort in his honor and memory," said Amy Gibby Rosser of Family Connection, who has worked closely with Chief Wright over the years as the liaison between the chief and Towns County Schools. "I think he would be smiling down right now. I know he's so happy right now, I really do."

"It was just such a big event for him, and even after the event, he would call me and just make sure, saying, 'I'm just checking, I'm making sure everybody's taken care of, I want to make sure everybody is served.' He was just that guy, so I know he's smiling down. I know that he's happy about this today."

Earlier this year, Chief Wright reached out to several community leaders to talk about using the program to place a greater emphasis on all public safety workers of the

county starting next year, which would increase the outreach to children and help to guarantee more Christmases to kids in Towns County.

"Chief Wright came to me two or three months ago, wanting the fire department to get involved with this," said Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland. "He wanted to change the name of it from Shop With a Cop to Shop With a Hero, which is what it will be going forward. He wanted to involve the fire department and other agencies with it, which I think is awesome."

"This is my first time being here, and I think I'm more excited than the kids are, really. We'll carry on Jimmy's tradition in perpetuity, forever, as long as I'm around. It doesn't get any better than this — these kids are happy."

As is custom with Hiawassee Shop With a Cop, the children shopped at Walmart on the last day of school before Christmas break, which was a half day, before returning to Hiawassee to eat at a local establishment, the Georgia Mountain Restaurant.

All children spent the day smiling, being treated extra special — just the way Chief Wright would have wanted.

Reward...from Page 1

Employees who have been with the system 10 to 19 years will get an extra day, which means they will be entitled to up to four days of personal leave, and then employees who have been in our system for 20 or more years will be entitled to five personal days if they need to use those," he said.

The board also got updates from its school principals.

"December began as we always do each year with our kindergarten performing at the Young Harris tree lighting. Then last week the second graders performed their musical along with the fourth and fifth grade chorus students. Their performance of 'Silent Night' was just perfection," said Elementary School Principal Dr. Sandy Page.

Last week was the week of robotics and engineering across the entire school system, including the elementary school.

"We participated in an international computer science activity. Each day, our students were involved in activities from dressing up to answering computer science questions. Each class kept a tally of who was participating. The most impressive activity to me was the parents were invited to come in and sit with their child and participate in coding. We had a fairly good turnout for that," said Dr. Page.

Dr. Page shared how happy she was to have a mobile dental service travel to the school.

"Today we had the mobile dental lab come, and we had 36 students who had their teeth examined as well as treated. I hope they come back again, because that's an excellent way to serve our students. I wish we could get a medical doctor to come as well, that would be good," she said.

Also at the elementary school, a plan almost a year in the making came to fruition when the young students planted 16 trees for shade.

"We applied for a grant with the Georgia Forestry Commission and got the Making the Shade Grant. We started this last winter, because of course winter is when we plant trees, and we planted 16 trees today in the rain, and the only good thing about that is we don't have to water them. So you can see where these trees are planted on our playground. And they're not little tiny trees, either. They're huge trees. So within three to five years they should be putting forth some excellent shade," said Dr. Page.

Assistant Principal Jim Melton addressed the board for the middle school.

"Our teachers have been scrambling around this week, getting their grades and report cards out. Progress reports are

going to come out Jan 7. You approved a fundraiser for the middle school on Fridays, and we raised enough money that Mrs. (Erica) Chastain put out the presents we were able to raise money for to help some needy kids at our school. We've done Toys for Tots on the high school side, but Mrs. Chastain was using this to go directly to the middle school kids who need some help," said Melton.

Finally, Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs addressed academics at Towns County High School.

"The ASVAB was taken last week by all of our junior classmen. Students have completed their Climate Surveys, and the math teachers carried them into the labs last week and had every student complete that survey for CCRPI. Also, while they were in there doing the survey, we did a two-for-one, and they did their Hour of Code, so last week all the systems were involved in coding activities," she said.

"We were asked by the (Towns County) Sheriff's Office to help them with their Empty Stocking Fund. So I want to thank our teachers who gave incentives in all their classes for students to bring in toys for extra credit. Hundreds of toys. Sheriff (Chris) Clinton was very appreciative and said he had never gotten such a response," she added.

Colt...from Page 1

we can't afford them. We do want younger people to come to our venue and our events. It's just difficult to get them here to Hiawassee," said Thomason.

Colt Ford, born Jason Farris Brown, has a musical style that some consider unique. Many of his songs are showpiece lyrics that are reminiscent of Hip Hop or Rap.

However, Ford is adamant that he isn't doing anything new; he sees himself as upholding tradition.

"What do you think 'Devil Went Down to Georgia' was? The history of Country Music, that kind of style has been around since before Rap was ever even invented. Songs like 'Smoke! Smoke! Smoke!