

Tourism...from Page 1A

growth in nearly every community across the state," said Gov. Deal in a press release from the GDECD. "Each year, the industry attracts visitors from around the world and directly benefits thousands of Georgia households by sustaining more than 411,000 jobs, making up 10.2 percent of the state's workforce."

With numbers like that, it's no wonder Georgia has a couple of days set aside to celebrate Tourism, Hospitality and Art.

"Our whole purpose for being in business is to promote tourism here in Towns County," said Thomason. "Some of the things that went on in 2013 were concerts and motorcycle rallies, like the Harley Davidson Rally was here - the fair, fall festival, the car show, the EggFest."

This year will mark the Fifth Annual Georgia Mountain EggFest on May 15th and 16th.

"That's where we have all the cooks come in and do all

the cooking on the big green eggs, and people buy a taster's ticket and go through and taste the food all day long," said Thomason. "The cooks come from all over the United States as well as Canada and cook on the eggs. We have 125 cooks already registered for this year."

And that's just the beginning of what the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds has to offer this year.

"We've gotten offers in on some concerts, but we don't have them confirmed," said Thomason. "The first weekend

in May is the BMW Motorcycle Rally. This is their 25th anniversary for that. I talked to them today, they'll be here May 1st and 2nd. Then, June the 5th and 6th is the Greater Atlanta British Motorcycle Association, and June 12th and 13th is the Appalachian Wine and Jazz Festival.

"June the 14 through the 20th is the Christian Motorcycle Association, and they were here three years ago," said Thomason. "There's 2,500 of them, and they were here for a week, and they're coming back this year, and they'll be here for a week

again. It's the Eastern National Rally."

And area residents can count on the ever faithful events known to occur year after year at the fairgrounds.

"We have the fireworks on July 4th, and then we have the Georgia Mountain Fair July the 17th through the 25th," said Thomason.

"And then we have the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In, it'll be the weekend after the fair. They're changing the dates on that this year, it's going to be like July the 30th, 31st and Aug. 1. October the

9th through the 17th, we have the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival, which is another nine days. And then we have an Airstream camping club coming Oct. 23 and 24," she said.

Neighboring Rabun County is expecting to host Nik Wallenda's commemorative crossing of Tallulah Gorge by tightrope this summer, with early attendance estimates at 30,000 people.

"It's a lot to be going on, and hopefully we'll be able to add some concerts to that as well," said Thomason of the year's events.

Director...from Page 1A

you're a branch manager here, running a branch library on top of doing that, it's a lot of long hours. Somewhere down the road, I might want to do that, but I am extremely happy and content where I'm at."



Susie Brendle
employees of the MRLS, Stone can look forward to a smooth transition into the director's chair.

"I'm hoping that I did a decent job, and that I did Donna credit," said Brendle. "She's helped behind the scenes getting me stuff that I needed to keep everything going. Even though she is retired, she still has a vast knowledge that I've turned to quite a bit. But, I am relieved to be able to get back to the job I've been doing for the last 17 years."

Over the years, Brendle has become very much attached to her current library, as she played a crucial role in the look and feel of Union County Public Library during its major renovation in 2011.

"Everything in here I had a hand on helping to decide, so I'm very content here, and I'd like to stay content," said Brendle. "I'd like to actually be able to sleep at night and not be up half the night doing the two different jobs."

Had plans gone according to schedule, a new director would have started at the MRLS Jan. 1, and Brendle would have only needed to serve as interim director for the month of December.

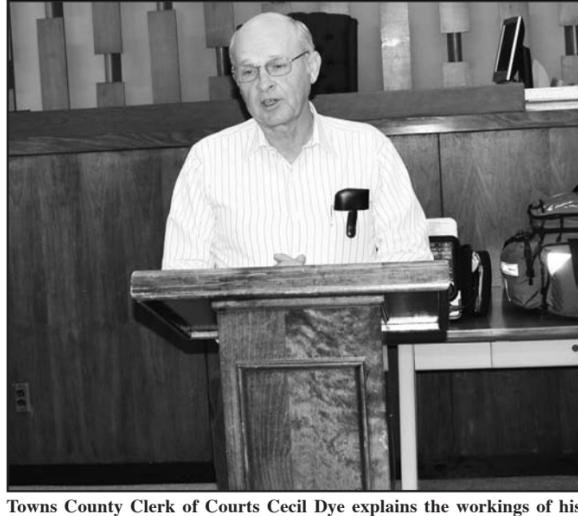
But thanks to Brendle's hard work, as well as the work put in by all of the other em-

Close Up...from Page 1A

them to see the library and the local government to know that that's where some of our taxes go," said Sutton.

Sutton and the three other third grade teachers - Lisa Penland, Ruth Taylor and Hilary Tallent - coordinated the event with Dye, Kendall, Library Branch Manager Debbie Phillips and Towns County Probate Judge David Rogers.

"Judge Rogers explained to them how the local court system works," said Sutton. "He explained what his office does, the different kinds of things that they deal with. Like, he talked about the traffic citations and about hearings, and about tickets and minor misdemeanors, that type of thing. He talked about guardianships and wills and probate. He just basically explained what kind of a judge he is and what his office does, and just a little bit



Towns County Clerk of Courts Cecil Dye explains the workings of his Constitutional Office to Towns County third graders. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

about our local court system in general."

Commissioner Kendall said that schoolchildren have

been by the courthouse in the past, but that this year offered more in the way of interaction.

"They have been by here

a lot, just to go into the offices and talk about the offices," said Commissioner Kendall. "We didn't put anything together like that in there. But I just got to thinking, well, what am I going to tell them that they'd be interested in? These kids would be more interested in something like that, and it'd be more practical and of use to them where they could save a life. And it has happened. Kids that age have saved their parent's life by knowing how to respond to 911."

When all was said and done, the children heard from the fire department, EMS, the rec department, 911 mapping, 911 dispatch, the road department, the clerk of court, the commissioner, probate judge and the library.

"We just all felt that it was just a really good trip, and really important for the kids," said Sutton.

Election...from Page 1A

It's still too early to tell who may choose to run for these seats.

because she's seen the good days, the difficult days, the transition. But, putting budgets together every year, working with the CPAs, working with the accountants, working with the auditors, you start getting a better feel for the day to day demands upon the city."

And while the day to day demands fall primarily within the mayor and city manager's domain, city council serves a vital role in determining the direction of the city long-term.

"The main thing the council does is set policy," said Stancil. "They don't become involved in the day to day, but they set the overall decisions - here's the priorities, here's what we're going to work on - and then it's up to Barbara, me and the department heads to implement it."

Typically, rumors start to circulate about who may or may not be running as early as February or March, according to Stancil.

"You really don't know until a couple of weeks before qualifications, you have a good feel," said Stancil. "And then certainly, by the end of qualifications, then we know. This one, we're going to have to do a lot more planning than usual as far as the conducting of the election. If it is contested, then there's greater expense to the city, and we just need to be prepared, as far as the budget, for that."

"We're just going to have to wait and see," said City Manager Rick Stancil. "We've been very fortunate in the last several elections, because nobody has run against the incumbents, so we were able to cancel the elections and save the potential expense of those elections."

Seats come available on city council every two years - three seats during one election cycle, and in the following cycle, the mayor and other two council seats come up for election.

"These folks would have been together for at least four full years," said Stancil on the current city council. "It's a four-year term, nonpartisan election. They don't run as Democrat or Republican."

Stancil believes that it's always good to have stability, which is a quality the city has enjoyed for the past few years.

"It takes many years to learn the intricacy of the council position," said Stancil. "They're still learning budget, budget issues, long-term plans, and it's hard just to step in without an understanding or a background, either in finance, business - those things are all important."

"We've been very stable, mainly because of Barbara," said Stancil. "Her longevity here has been very beneficial,

that's starting back up."

McConnell is thankful for the people in his life, the ones who helped to mold him into the man and player he is today.

"First, I want to thank my parents for pushing me to play," said McConnell. "I want to thank the other players for encouraging me to keep playing, to keep at it. I want to thank God for giving me the ability and the opportunity to do it, and the body to be able to play with."

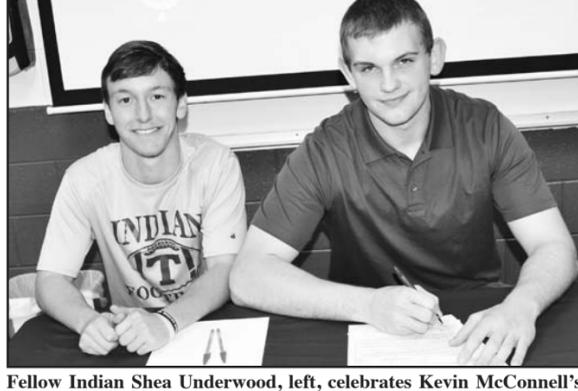
"And my coaches, who encouraged me and taught me and got me better - teachers, for encouraging me in the classroom. I want to thank pretty much everyone I've come in contact with in regards to football, because without all of these people, I probably wouldn't be where I am. And thanks to ETSU, of course, for the scholarship," said McConnell.

As McConnell graduates this spring and moves on to the next phase in his young life, he says he will never forget the days he spent playing ball in Towns County.

"I will certainly miss high school football," said McConnell. "You can go to college or pros, and it is thrilling, but in a different way than this. High school - it's a lot simpler here."

Signing...from Page 1A

It's rare when a Towns County High School senior signs an athletic scholarship for football, and what's fascinating about McConnell's case is that he didn't even start playing the game until the 10th grade.



Fellow Indian Shea Underwood, left, celebrates Kevin McConnell's big signing day. McConnell got a full ride with East Tennessee State. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

"Even then, I didn't really play. I kind of just was on the team," said McConnell. "I practiced with them, learned how to do it. I only played during a few games. It wasn't until my junior year that I actually began to play. And this year, of course, I played every game both ways."

McConnell is an honor roll student at the high school, so he also looks to keep his grades where they need to be. Tentatively, he plans to focus on sports medicine.

"I'm not entirely sure, but I want to do something along the lines of exercise science and athletic training, physical therapy," said McConnell.

Of course, a career in football would be more than welcome.

"I'm going to work my tail off," said McConnell. "It just depends on how well I perform in college. I plan on performing as good as humanly possible."

His parents back him wholeheartedly, and are proud

of the decisions he's made to date.

"I told him, I said, you know, pro football is a huge pie in the sky, but getting this college education, that's great," said Terry, McConnell's father. "And if he makes the pros, that's just the icing on the cake."

And cake is just what McConnell got, proudly emblazoned with his new team's logo and colors, at the signing ceremony held at the high school that Wednesday.

The event was attended by McConnell's family and a few friends, as well as the coaches who have made a difference in his life.

"Kevin, on behalf of our

school and our community, I can't tell you how thrilled we are for you, and what a wonderful accomplishment this is," said TCHS Principal Jonathan Gibson.

Football Head Coach Billy Barnhart echoed the sentiments expressed by Principal Gibson.

"He's a great young man," said Coach Barnhart. "He was always one of our hardest workers in the weight room and on the practice field. Game night, he played both ways for us, and just did a phenomenal job for us this year. I'm just proud of the kid and proud for him, that he gets this opportunity to go to a program

Growlers...from Page 1A



Ed Kountz and his wife Linda Pallone, of Bacchus Wine Shoppe, show off a pair of growlers.

different way of providing access to fresh beer to folks who want to take it home and enjoy it at home. This is not something that we would be pouring into glasses in the shop - this is strictly off prem."

Kountz and Pallone's Bacchus Wine Shoppe will be celebrating its fourth anniversary in Hiwassee in September, and the husband and wife team are excited about what the future will bring for their business.

When growlers find approval with city council, Bacchus plans to sell a variety of beers, "much like the bottled selection," said Pallone.

"You'll have a nice selection from stouts to wheats to ales to hard cider, and to non-alcoholic as well."

Bacchus Wine Shoppe specializes in fine wines, premium beers and cigars. Patrons and potential patrons alike can find more information on these trendsetters at www.bacchus-wineshoppe.com.

"It's a great new product for your customers," said Pallone on growlers. "You can buy it in a bottle, but you can also get it fresh, draught poured. It's different having a beer on draught than it is out of the bottle."

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

What do tennis, badminton and Ping-Pong have in common?

Pickleball, of course, and it's a game played by people of all ages.

"The most current research in brain activity shows that what really makes a difference in keeping people young and functioning, both in terms of brain activity as well as heart activity, is aerobics," said retired neurologist and USA Pickleball Association Ambassador David Block of the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club.

Block and his pickleball-playing cohorts formed the GMPC in 2014 in order to lend cohesion to the group. The club features about 150 players from various mountain communities, including Hiwassee, Blairsville and Hayesville, NC.

The GMPC plays at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the rec center in Hayesville and the state-of-the-art Towns County Recreation and Conference Center.

USAPA. "The rules are simple and the game is easy for beginners to learn, but can develop into a quick, fast-paced, competitive game for experienced players."

The sport is played both indoors and outdoors, where tennis courts can be easily modified to accommodate the dimensions of the game.

Specially made pickleball paddles are typically cheaper to purchase than tennis racquets, and are smaller than tennis racquets but larger than Ping-Pong paddles. They can be made of wood or aluminum and graphite, and the actual pickleball itself is a plastic wiffle-type ball.

Members of the GMPC play locally Monday through Friday, beginning at 9 a.m. on indoor courts at the Towns County rec center, and eight dedicated outdoor pickleball courts are currently being constructed there.

One reason pickleball has taken such a stronghold amid sports enthusiasts is the universal appeal of the game.

"If you look at the international ratings from the International Federation, the ratings say nothing at all about age, they say nothing at all about sex," said Block. "In this game, Dick Fleisher, who's 79, can hold his own against a 20-year-old. And Tammy Lentini, a woman, can hold her own against any man out here."

Fleisher and Lentini are two prominent players of the GMPC, and the ages of GMPC players range from men and women in their 30s and up.

The GMPC travels to compete against other pickleball groups, and its association with the USAPA ensures that all rules and regulations are followed by the book to create a standard level of play.

"Pickleball was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, a short ferry ride from Seattle, Wash.," according to the USAPA website, usapa.org. "Three dads - Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum - whose kids were bored with their usual summertime activities are credited for creating game."

The game, which combines elements of tennis, badminton and Ping-Pong, is fast becoming an international phenomenon, touting roster totals of more than 100,000 active players in the US alone.

Pickleball is "a paddle sport created for all ages and skill levels," according to the



A major goal of Block and the GMPC is to expand the reach of pickleball within the community.

"Even though you see this in retirement-type communities, we really want to bring this to the secondary school level, because you can play indoors, you can play 12 months a year," said Block, who will be teaching a pickleball class at Young Harris College in the near future.

And the health benefits are remarkably apparent, especially for Block, who spent his career practicing medicine.

"For people our age - I'm 69 - you don't see people out here falling," said Block. "So for me as a neurologist, I saw a bazillion people my age who, you fall, you break a hip, and unfortunately, that is a terminal event in a lot of older people."

In conjunction with Towns County Rec Department Director Wes Hooper and Assistant Director Alan Rogers, the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club will be hosting its first Georgia Mountain Pickleball Classic on Friday, Sept. 18, and Saturday, Sept. 19. The tournament will be held at the new outdoor courts that are cur-

rently under construction at the rec center.

The Top 100 players locally and throughout the Southeast will be competing, and guests and spectators are invited to the event. There will be an informal supper sponsored by Jim's Smokin' Que of Blairsville.

"When people from Canton and people from Hoschtan and from Franklin found out that we were going to have a tournament, all of a sudden we got phone calls, like, yeah, we'll send a dozen people," said Block.

Other communities, such as Lake Arrowhead near Waleska, and nationally ranked pickleball players from Chattanooga and Nashville, Tenn., will be heading to the tournament in September.

"They all want to come to the mountains, they all want to see what the Georgia Mountains are about," said Block, who also noted support from the Towns County Chamber of Commerce. "The game really brings people together in a way that otherwise you wouldn't see developing."

Interested residents can check out the GMPC on Facebook or its website, gmountainpickleball.weebly.com.