

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, July 26, 2023

Elections Board welcomes new members, staff

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Board of Elections & Registration has undergone some big changes recently, bringing in completely new office staff and a new board chair.

Diandra Southern has been hired as the new Elections Supervisor, and Brooke Henderson will serve as the new Registrar over voter registration. Both began June 5 and have completed their certifications with the state, and they are continuing to train in their positions.

The two are replacing Rachel Edwards, who for several years worked as both the elections supervisor and registrar. Edwards took a job this

year with the Union County Board of Registrars, and the Towns County Elections Board remains thankful for her years of service.

Henderson and Southern are local ladies who are happy to be in their new roles. Henderson is coming over from being a pharmacy technician for 15 years, and Southern has done "a little bit of everything," including doctor's office work and employment at Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

Both graduated from Towns County High School – Class of '08 for Henderson and Class of 2011 for Southern – and in fact, both were students under retired TCHS Principal Roy Perren, who was sworn in this month and elected Board Chair during a special called

meeting July 5.

After retiring from the school system at the end of the 2022-23 year, Perren was looking to stay active in the community. One way he has answered that call is by serving as Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw's appointment to the Elections Board.

The chair position came open recently when longtime Board Chair Janet Oliva decided to retire after serving on the board since about 2012, nearly all of that time as chairperson.

"I have been honored to serve as the appointed board member of two esteemed commissioners, Mr. Bill Kendall and Mr. Cliff Bradshaw," Oliva said. "During my time with the Elections Office, we trans-

See Elections Board, Page 5A



L-R: Towns County Elections Board Member John Bennett, Board Chair Roy Perren, Elections Supervisor Diandra Southern and Voter Registrar Brooke Henderson are all new to the Elections Office in 2023. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Makenna Cook returns home to parade, local fanfare

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Welcome home, Makenna Rae Cook!

Makenna returned home from physical rehabilitation in Atlanta on Friday, July 21, receiving a hero's welcome from family and friends who lined the Blairsville Square to cheer on a parade in her honor.

She is, after all, a hometown hero to many for showcasing the power of prayer, courage, hard work and terrific medical care after miraculously surviving a devastating brain aneurysm Jan. 8 from which she was not expected to live.

The 24-year-old young woman was arriving home from an extended stay at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, a Top 10 medical facility that

specializes in rehab for injuries of the brain, spine and other life-altering traumas. And by all accounts, she has made a tremendous recovery so far.

Shortly after 5:30 p.m. on Friday, Makenna rode around the square in Downtown Blairsville in a parade led by the Union County Sheriff's Office and joined by representatives of the U.S. Forest Service, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Blairsville Police Department and others.

Loved ones waved signs and shouted support for Makenna, who waved and smiled in return from the passenger seat of a car driven by her father, Chad Cook, before the family made its way to their Young Harris residence to continue her recovery at home.

See Makenna at Home, Page 8A



Makenna Cook in a recent photo during her extended stay in Atlanta for physical rehabilitation. Photo/Facebook

Proposed dragon statue gets push-back in Hiawassee

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Controversy has broken out over a property owner wishing to install a massive dragon statue inside Hiawassee City Limits that many residents believe possesses demonic features and will be an "eyesore" in the community as it overlooks the town.

The statue, which Hiawassee City Hall says has received all the proper permitting, will be part of a larger medieval aesthetic on the property, appearing alongside a small castle that property owner Mike Parish described in the June 27

See Dragon Statue, Page 5A



This mockup image circulated on social media last week demonstrating what the proposed dragon statue will look like once completed atop Whiskey Mountain in Hiawassee. Photo/Facebook

2023 Home & Garden Show a success ninth year running

By Natalie Mintz
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – This past weekend, the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center hosted the Northeast Georgia and Western North Carolina Home & Garden Show for two days, with thousands of guests in attendance.

The annual event is in its ninth year and welcomes local home improvement businesses to connect with area customers, bringing attention to goods

See Home & Garden, Page 8A



Home & Garden Shows are a great way for local businesses to get in front of people from all over the area to further the "Buy Local" movement. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Memorial Service planned for Marine found near Trail

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Sept. 26, 2022, a Clay County, North Carolina, hunter stumbled across what he initially believed to be an abandoned campsite in the Shooting Creek community near the Appalachian Trail.

As it turned out, the campsite had belonged to U.S. Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Sean M. Willey, whose skeletal remains were found in the area thanks to cadaver dogs and a pair of boots – one of which was laced with Willey's dog tags.

In March of 2022, Willey departed from Springer Mountain near Blue Ridge to begin his journey on the Appalachian

Trail. He was supposed to check into a hostel on April 7 but never made it. His final post on social media was from April 4.

DNA testing results arrived in February 2023 and confirmed Willey's proper identification. Medical examiners ruled out foul play or suicide – a rusted AR-15 found at the campsite had a full 30-round clip.

Authorities believe Willey fell or otherwise met a natural death, but the true cause remains unknown due to the state of the remains and environmental factors.

Willey was a 21-year-old husband, father and a member of the U.S. Marine Corps, though he was honorably discharged on

See Honoring Marine, Page 8A



Sean Willey
USMC Lance Corporal

Young Harris man arrested for Sexual Exploitation of Children

News Special
Towns County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – On Wednesday, July 19, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes (CEACC) Unit arrested and charged Dawson Denmark, 21, of Towns County, with nine counts of Sexual Exploitation of Children.

The GBI CEACC Unit began an investigation into Denmark's online activity after receiving a Cyber Tipline Report from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) regarding the possible online possession and distribution of child sexual abuse material.

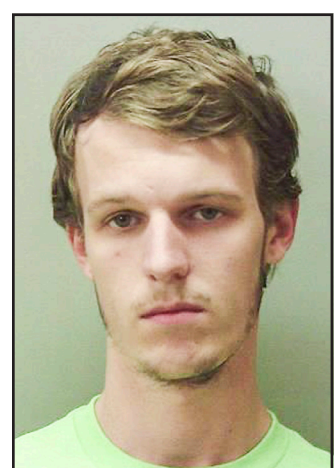
This investigation led to a search warrant of Denmark's home and his subsequent ar-

rest. The GBI CEACC unit was aided in the execution of this search warrant by the Towns County Sheriff's Office, the Appalachian Regional Drug Enforcement Office, U.S. Homeland Security Investigations, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Denmark was taken to the Towns County Jail upon his arrest.

This investigation is part of the ongoing effort by the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, housed within the GBI's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit, to identify those involved in the trade of child sexual abuse material.

The ICAC Program, created by the U. S. Department of Justice, was developed in re-



Dawson Wade Denmark

sponse to the increasing number of children and teenagers using the internet, the proliferation of child sexual abuse mate-

See Denmark Arrest, Page 5A

Towns County Schools look forward to first day back Aug. 4

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The first day of the 2023-24 school year is just around the corner on Friday, Aug. 4, and the administrators of Towns County Schools are ready for another exciting year of learning for local students.

Joining the Mountain Movers & Shakers on Friday, July 21, to talk about some of what people can expect this year were Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and new Towns County High School Principal Bryan Thomason.

"We've got some great things happening," Berrong said, focusing on the vocational and trade aspects of the high school. Of course, the upcoming

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Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and TCHS Principal Bryan Thomason joined the Mountain Movers & Shakers Friday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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Lake Levels

70th Anniversary of Korean Armistice

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Blue Ridge 1,686.03
Chatuge 1,924.98
Nottely 1,775.19

Road Safety Talk @ Movers & Shakers

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Music & Moonshine Festival July 28-30

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Back to School...from Page 1A

ing Agriculture Facility factored into the conversation, and Berrong encouraged folks to take a copy of the latest blueprints that morning.

"In this facility, we're going to have HVAC and welding (instruction)," Berrong said. "We're going to have a single construction area on its own ... plumbing, electrical, wiring, technology, animal science; we're going to have a full kitchen."

"We're going to have canning vats where the public can come in and do canning if they want to; we're going to teach our students how to do canning," Berrong listed, adding that students would also have the chance to help the community when it comes to

public cannery use.

Not only that, but another subject was added to the building with the inclusion of a hanging cooler – meat processing. It may not bode well for some of the animals to be kept in the barn planned for construction at a later date, but the discipline will offer students the chance to see where their food comes from and have a hand in making it.

"You know, we've got Taylor Osborn who has created an absolute booming business doing just that, so there are jobs for (those) types of things," Berrong said. "And the further I get to the end of my career, the more I realize these students doing these types of things can walk right out of high school

and make as much – if not more – money than those kids who are going into debt going into college for four years and racking up student loans."

That said, Berrong clarified that the schools will maintain their focus on scholastic subjects also, and he believes "we're doing great in academics." With so many different paths for Towns County kids to study, a good deal of funding must be secured to ensure the success of each one.

Here, Berrong outlined the decision to once again pursue a referendum for ESPLOST, or Educational Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax. The last ESPLOST was in place from 2016 to 2020, and the additional 1% sales tax will make a return to countywide ballots Nov. 7.

"I feel like we have done a great job with grant money; we've done a great job with taxpayers' money keeping what we've got going, but there are times we want to have what everybody else has, right? We want to be able to give our students everything that all the other counties have," Berrong explained, mapping out the reasoning behind the potential tax increase.

Switching gears, Principal Thomason spoke next, first paying tribute to former TCHS Principal Roy Perren, with whom Thomason worked as assistant principal before Perren retired at the end of last school year.

"I will tell you, it was a pleasure and an honor to come in and work with him for a year," Thomason said. "You will find no better man than Roy Perren, as you all know, and it was really a blessing to be able to come in and work with him."

Thomason first fell in love with the mountains during his college years at Western Carolina University. He and his wife planned on retiring to Appalachia after years in their home county of Gwinnett, but when the opportunity to apply for a new position at TCHS arose, Thomason took a risk for great reward.

Coming up on a year of living in Towns County, Thomason has integrated into the community and proved his knowledge and care by informing the audience about the great milestones he's already witnessed.

Last year saw 67 seniors graduate with \$350,000 in scholarships to help them into college, with tremendous success on the field as well, as baseball, boys'/girls' basketball and boys'/girls' soccer headed to state playoffs, and baseball and women's basketball made it to the Elite 8.

"The baseball team – it had been I think back to the '90s since we had been able to do something anywhere like that. We got to host some playoff games for baseball; that was really exciting," said Thomason, adding that girls' soccer earned runners-up in the 2023 State Championship.

"It's going to take some work to get us where we want to go, but we're going to look back in a couple years and see that we accomplished some great things in a relatively short amount of time, and that's what I am truly excited about to see – where we go and what we do," Thomason added, hopeful for the future.

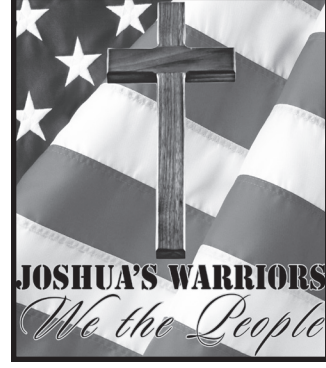
The Mountain Movers & Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee. They invite important local figures and community leaders, and often, a Q&A session follows the presentations.

Food Pantry Food Distribution

The Food Pantry hours are Monday – Thursday 9 AM– 12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM – 2 PM.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomas at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.

Your Patriot Reflection



The Nearness Of God
The Founders repeatedly acknowledged and proclaimed the nearness of God in every facet of the struggle they encountered in becoming a free nation!

To name just one: George Washington. Historian Charles Bracelen Flood, in his research on Revolutionary War discovered that there were 67 desperate moments when Washington acknowledged that he would have suffered disaster had the hand of God not intervened on behalf of the struggle for independence. In his first inaugural speech he said: "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand which conducts the affairs of men, more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

The Founders believed in a Creator who is both intelligent and benevolent and therefore eager and able to respond to people's petitions. God has not changed today, so it must be us who needs to draw near to Him, personally and nationally.

A Patriot Reflection is presented weekly by www.joshuawarriors.org.

Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff's Office.



ARREST REPORT

Towns County Jail
Sheriff Ken Henderson

- 07/20/23 Mark Raymond Coffelt, age 45, Hayesville, NC Probation violation (when probation terms are altered) for fingerprintable charge
- 07/21/23 Justin O'Neal Collins, age 30, Homeless Driving with no headlights when required, driving while license suspended or revoked (misdemeanor), giving false name, address, or birthdate to law enforcement officer, knowingly driving motor vehicle on suspended, canceled, or revoked registration, knowingly making a false statement pertaining to motor vehicle insurance required
- 07/19/23 Dawson Wade Denmark, age 21, Young Harris, GA Possess or control any material depicting minor sexually explicit conduct (F) (7), possess or control any material depicting minor sexually explicit conduct (M), purchase, possession, manufacture, distribution, or sale of marijuana (3)
- 07/19/23 Demone Trivek Haynes, age 47, Lexington, SC Failure to appear for fingerprintable charge-felony
- 07/18/23 Duane Alan Stamps, age 27, Hiawassee, GA Possession and use of drug related objects, possession of a schedule II controlled substance
- 07/17/23 Jody Richard Anderson, age 43, Blairsville, GA Weekender-serving sentence
- 07/18/23 Jody Richard Anderson, age 43, Blairsville, GA Weekender-serving sentence
- 07/21/23 Hayley Mae Benson, age 23, Gastonia, NC Disorderly conduct, public drunkenness
- 07/19/23 Dustin Floyd Bowers, age 36, Maulding, SC Driving while license suspended or revoked (misdemeanor), expired vehicle tag or decal, no insurance, restrictions on use of blue lights on vehicles, windshields and windshield wipers
- 07/22/23 Andrew Charles Conrag, age 20, Young Harris, GA Criminal trespass (3)
- 07/17/23 Elizabeth Suzanne Denton, age 64, Hiawassee, GA Driving under the influence, possession of a schedule I controlled substance
- 07/20/23 Molly Caitlan Edwards, age 25, Blairsville, GA DUI-driving under the influence of alcohol, failure to drive within single lance
- 07/18/23 Rebeka Renee Eichholz, age 28, Blairsville, GA Interference with government property-felony, possession and use of drug related objects, possession of methamphetamine, willful obstruction of law enforcement officers-misdemeanor
- 07/20/23 Katelynn Leeanna Gore, age 26, Hiawassee, GA Serve 24 hours
- 07/21/23 Ben Cleveland Parks, age 23, Gastonia, NC Battery, simple battery
- 07/22/23 Nicholas David Neal Salard, age 24, Young Harris, GA DUI-driving under the influence of alcohol, improper tag display, laying drags, obstruction of law enforcement officers when engaged on official duty, open container in vehicle, willful obstruction of law enforcement officers- misdemeanor



Music on the Hiawassee Square Presents Obe and Amber Brown



Obe and Amber Brown

Obe and Amber Brown singer/songwriters who have been married for 20 years and love making music together. Music has been their career for the last 17 years and they have had the privilege to work with incredible artists such as Kristian Bush (from Sugarland), Casey J, and Israel Houghton to name a few. Songwriting is a big focus that has led to Grammy award recognition and many other exciting opportunities. They love to entertain and bring joy to those around them and look forward to many years of making music together.

Bring your lawn chair, your family and friends and family pet if you wish (on a leash and with cleanup equipment). In case of rain, the performance will be held in the Civic Center, across from the east side of the Courthouse in Hiawassee.

Come early, 6 PM to enjoy the VFW Auxiliary Food Tent, Sister's Specialty Desserts and a few surprises. Thanks to you, the City of Hiawassee and this year's Corporate Sponsors. See you on the Square!

Apply Now to Add Veterans' Names to Monument

Criteria: 1-Exclusively dedicated to friends and families of Honorably Discharged Towns County Veterans who have passed away after January 1, 2012. 2-Towns County Veteran must have served in: A-US Army; B-US Navy; C-US Marine Corps; D-US Air Force; E-US Coast Guard; F-USSF. 3-The sponsor, i.e., family member or appropriate sponsor must appear in person before our committee and present proof of Honorable Discharge and/or DD-214. In the case of Veterans who served prior to issuance of DD-214 certificate, please bring the appropriate form. 4-Proof of Towns County residency at time of passing (tax records, notarized records, driving license, etc.) 5-Death certificate, reflecting residency in Towns County at time of passing.

Please take note: A-If your loved one's name is already inscribed upon any of the Memorial walls in our small but beautiful Memorial Park, said Veteran's name will not be re-inscribed. B-Each year we create a waiting list for those who may not qualify under item #1 above. Thus far this has not been an issue. C-Inscription will be the Veteran's name and military branch, only. D-Veteran must have no record of criminal activity.

Our first of four meetings with family members in 2023 will be at the Civic Center, 67 Lakeview Circle, adjacent to polling HQ, and Courthouse. We will meet with sponsors, family members Thursday, June 8, 2023 10 AM-2 PM. Three alternate meetings are planned for July 13; August 10; and lastly September 14, same time frame.

Thanks and God Bless America and those who have served this great nation.



“Drive to Stay Alive” the Topic with Jeff Pierot at Movers and Shakers

You know, it gets crazy on these mountain roads sometimes. Tourists and travelers are likely to make sudden...anything. Stop. Make an unexpected turn without signal. Brake on every curve.

We have all experienced similar road events and hazards. But our mountain economy depends upon all those guests and visitors.

“Drive to Stay Alive” is the topic this Friday, July 28 at 8 AM at the Sundance Grill as we welcome back Retired Lieutenant Sheriff Jeff Pierot. With a list of credentials too long to list here, Jeff comes to us to discuss subjects such as defensive driving techniques, vehicle operation and technology and how not to get a DUI.



Jeff Pierot

Get there early to get a good seat to learn more about protecting your car, yourself and your family as we share the road this summer.

Annual Photography Contest at the August Georgia Mountain Fair



The opening of the Annual Photography Contest at the August 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee, GA, begins on Tuesday, August 22 at 11 AM and lasts during the remainder of the Fair, August 26, Saturday.

There is no entrance fee but money-prizes are given in several categories, covering 31 winning photos. This year, prize money totals \$1,075. Most of the exhibitors and many winners over the years have not been professionals, although professional photographers are welcomed to participate. Leaders of the contest are always looking for new talent, so new exhibitors are highly welcomed.

Those who wish to exhibit their pictures are requested to sign up by Friday, August 18 by filling out a registration form, which can be obtained (with the rules) at the main office of the Fairgrounds in Hiawassee on U.S. Highway 76. Or, participants can print them from the web site: <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/pageserver/applications/fair/fair forms and applications/fair forms/Photography Show Application 2023>.

Some new rules for exhibiting photos are in place for this year. Judges will strictly follow the new Exhibiting Rules, so please be sure to refer to the instructions on the Application form. Setting up photos is only from 9 AM to 1 PM on Monday, August 21.

Judging starts promptly at 1 PM on Monday afternoon and may last all afternoon. Therefore, participants can learn about the winning pictures after 5 PM that same day. Prize money is awarded on the final day of the contest. Judges' names are not revealed but each one is an experienced photographer who comes to the fair from several cities and states. Photos may not be removed early and will remain in the exhibition hall until the end of the last day of the Fair.

The photo exhibit opens to the public at 11 AM on Tuesday morning, August 22. After reading the registration form and the rules, participants may have questions answered by directly contacting the Contest Director, Janet Cosby through email only at janetcosby@gmail.com. Please do not call the office at the Georgia Mountain Fair for answers to contest questions.

Dragon Statue...from Page 1A

City Council work session.

Parrish is a builder from Asheville, North Carolina, where he has previously erected fanciful structures, including a “Hobbit home,” with his Airbnb business Earth & Sky Dwellings. And now, he wants to build a dragon and castle for personal use in Hiawassee.

He purchased his residential land lot in Hiawassee in 2008 after coming to the area and enjoying the “small-town atmosphere” and welcoming people, and he recently started planning to build a dragon on the parcel atop Whiskey Mountain.

In the June 27 meeting, Parrish showed the council photos of a 10-foot prototype of the dragon he wants to build on his 2-acre property, noting that the actual statue will have a wingspan of 160 feet once completed, which he hopes will “hit the Guinness Book of World Records.”

The statue will be more than 30 feet high and feature lighting at night, and Parrish noted, “If everybody says, ‘Oh my gosh, turn those lights off,’ I will – I’ll try to accommodate most people.”

Joint Development Director Denise McKay pointed out that the city is looking to develop a “Dark Sky Ordinance” and asked Parrish to keep that in mind, and he responded that the lighting will be “toned down.”

“I just wanted to do something cool,” Parrish said, keeping the mood light before referencing an upcoming affordable housing initiative that is being developed separately in Hiawassee. “It’s not helping anybody; I’m not doing housing – I just wanted to do something cool up there.”

Parrish is working with an architect to build a castle to go with the enormous statue, saying, “A dragon without a castle just doesn’t work.” He estimated that the castle, to be used as a home by him and his wife, will take up a footprint of around 1,200 square feet.

“You’ll be able to see it from Main Street, you’ll be able to see it from the lake.

And if you don’t like dragons, I’m sorry, I’m sorry – but under the heading of ‘you can’t please everybody,’ I’m just here to please myself,” Parrish said to laughter from those in attendance.

He went on to describe the design of the dragon as not being “quite as friendly” as Puff the Magic Dragon, and “more like a Smaug” from the famous J.R.R. Tolkien book “The Hobbit,” who is “a pretty rough-looking dragon.”

“I always try to love my neighbors and treat everybody with respect, and I hope to be a good neighbor to Hiawassee with my dragon,” Parrish said, promising he would be back to offer a progress report.

“If you google ‘large structures in America,’ people are out there with all kind of goofy things that, to me, are pretty goofy,” Parrish added. “But I think the dragon’s pretty cool.”

Apparently, not everyone thinks the dragon is “pretty cool.” An online petition began circulating last week “to stop the construction of a very large dragon on top of Whiskey Mountain.”

“The project developer also has plans of lights on the dragon,” the petition language continues. “This will be an eyesore to the community, as it will be visible from many homes and roadways.

“There are several homes and land lots in the area whose property values could be jeopardized. The graphic is also controversial. It is offensive and disturbing to many people. It detracts from the natural, scenic beauty of our mountains. Let’s keep our mountains beautiful!”

By press time Monday, the “Defeat the Dragon!” petition had already garnered more than 1,300 signers, with many leaving comments citing their issues with the statue, ranging from concerns over Biblical depictions of dragons as evil to people simply wishing to preserve the natural setting.

In the runup to the July 24 work session of the Hia-

wassee City Council, which occurred after press time, an email had been circulated widely inviting people to attend the Monday meeting to voice their concerns in person.

Questions have been posed by several residents challenging whether the proper permitting has been obtained, including permitting under the Mountain Protection Act, which sets stricter development standards for properties located above a certain elevation.

City Hall has reiterated that all proper permitting has been acquired. And as the property is located within city limits, people should be aware that the permitting process has gone through the City of Hiawassee, with no responsibility by or affiliation with Towns County Government.

Mayor Liz Ordiales said zoning could have prevented the dragon, and while she has pressed for zoning for the past seven years, the council as a whole has been against it to more fully preserve private property rights, so the city’s hands are tied currently.

The Towns County Herald will follow up on developments from the July 24 work session in next week’s edition of the newspaper.

Denmark Arrest...from Page 1A

rial, and the heightened online activity by predators searching for unsupervised contact with underage victims.

Anyone with information about other cases of child exploitation is asked to contact the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Child Exploitation Unit at 404-270-8870 or report via the National Center for Miss-

ing and Exploited Children Cyber Tipline at CyberTipline.org.

Anonymous tips can also be submitted by calling 1-800-597-TIPS (8477), online at <https://gbi.georgia.gov/submit-tips-online>, or by downloading the See Something, Send Something mobile app.

Elections Board...from Page 1A

sitioned from board members who were certified election officials and managed/conducted all elections to the hiring and training of an elections supervisor to oversee county elections.

“We also transitioned from the old Diebold elections equipment to the new Dominion equipment and conducted some of the most challenging elections in my lifetime – especially during the COVID pandemic.

“I will always be grateful to our elections team – elections supervisor, poll workers, etc. – who worked so tirelessly to ensure that Towns County elections were delivered with the utmost integrity and transparency.

“For now, I am anxious to return to writing, consulting, and mental health counseling, a field where I can help others who are suffering and in need of services.”

Also joining the board recently was John Bennett, the appointment from the Towns County Democrats to fill the seat vacated after the unfortunate passing in March of Board Member Loretta Youngblood, whose service on the board and to the county is greatly appreciated.

Together with Board Members Betsy Young, David Plunkett and Vice Chair Jeff Pierot, the Elections Office looks forward to hosting the Hiawassee Municipal Elections and the countywide Special Election for the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum by Towns County Schools on Nov. 7.

The board held a regular meeting on Wednesday, July 12, to conduct a variety of business and get everyone on the same page for the first regular meeting featuring all the new members and staff together and in their proper

Come join us at our

Resource Fair

S.A.F.E. Inc. will be hosting a Community Resource Fair on Friday, August 25th at the Union County Civic Center located at 165 Wellborn Street, Blairsville from 10 AM - 3 PM.

This is a wonderful opportunity for the community to learn about the many avail-

able resources within our local areas. Most resources are offered for either free, or at a reduced rate based on income.

Over 20 local organizations will be represented at this event. For more information, please contact Vicki Franklin at 706-379-1901, or email vfranklin@safeservices.org

Faith and Finances
Bible-Based Responses to Financial Questions
Rev. Bob Louder

Worry About The Future?

Question: I find that as I get older, I worry more and more about the future. I’m worried about how I could earn a living if I lost my job and what will happen if I can’t afford to retire. It seems to me that I’m paralyzed by fear of the future. I know it’s wrong, but how can I change?

Response: It’s been correctly said that worry is taking on the responsibility that belongs to God, and that includes being preoccupied with the future. The Lord said, “So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly

Father knows that you need them” (Matthew 6:31-32).

Worry about your future and about your finances is not your problem; it’s a symptom—it’s an outside indicator of an inside spiritual problem. Most of our worries are based on future possible problems, not current circumstance. It’s the “what if’s” that cause us the most grief. Most people can handle the current situation, even a bad one, but they go into depression when they think about the future.

So, how might you begin to handle worry? Stop, confess that you have assumed God’s responsibility, and turn that area of your life over to Him. Then take responsibility for whatever you can do something about.

For an example, to rework your budget or have an open dialogue with your spouse about finances, etc., visit www.christianfinancialministries.org.

2023 Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant

The Georgia Mountain Fair is looking for young ladies 17-24 to participate in the 2023 Miss GMF Pageant.

The Pageant will be held Thursday, August 17 in the Anderson Music Hall at the fairgrounds in Hiawassee.

Entry forms and Pageant rules are available on the Georgia Mountain Fair website. Deadline to enter is August 3. Great experience and cash prizes!

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Makenna at Home...from Page 1A

“Today is going to be a very special day,” Chad said on Facebook, hours before their local arrival on Friday. “It is the day that so many of you have prayed so hard for. Six months and thirteen days after Makenna’s aneurysm, we are getting to go home and stay full time.”

“This has been an unbelievably tough journey, and there is no way that we could have made it through it without all of your prayers. So many of you have taken time out of your busy lives to join us on the journey.”

“You have been right there with us from the very beginning, when we were praying for Makenna to simply be able to move her fingers

or wiggle her toes all the way to watching her being able to walk and sing.

“The doctors said that none of this was possible, but God heard your prayers, and through him all things are possible. Our God has been so good to us and he is not finished.”

Chad also thanked people for “taking the time each day to read my posts,” as the glowing father has used Facebook to keep the North Georgia and Western North Carolina communities that hold Makenna dear up to date on her progress.

“You really made it a very special day for her,” Chad wrote the day after the parade. “She cried tears of joy most of the way along the parade route

and said that she could not believe that so many people loved her so much.

“It is so wonderful to live in such a wonderful community full of such wonderful people. You didn’t only make it a special day for Makenna, you made it a special day for our whole family.”

“Yesterday was a wonderful celebration of answered prayers and God’s miracles. Thank you for your prayers, love and support. We love you dearly!”

People wishing to continue cheering on Makenna and monitoring her progress, now at Union General Rehab, may do so by following Chad Cook’s Facebook page for “Makenna’s Miracle Updates.”



Multiple area law enforcement agencies joined the parade for Makenna Cook on July 21, helping to welcome her home in style. Photo by Shawn Jarrard



Dozens of supporters lined the Blairsville Square Friday to cheer on Makenna Cook as she made her way home. The family is thankful for all the love and prayers that continue to be directed their way. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Home & Garden...from Page 1A



Live cooking using products available for sale was just one of the many demonstrations performed at the Home & Garden Show in Young Harris July 22-23. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

and services available nearby, as well as providing ideas to people looking to do home renovations.

Showcased July 22-23 were items such as kitchenware, cleaning products, spices and canned goods, gutter guards, hot tubs, and mattresses.

Services involving roofing, shower and bath installations, home insulation, travel planning, window and door installations, wireless internet installation, and home inspections were offered as well.

Local realtors also had booths set up for anyone looking to buy a home in the area.

Alongside ways to improve their homes, attendees could find ways of improving their everyday wellbeing. Skincare and other wellness goods, such as massagers and natural balance bracelets, were featured at the event.

Area nonprofits like the Lion’s Club, the Appalachian Veterans Memorial and Habitat for Humanity also had booths at the expo, and the National Fire Protection Association Wildfire and Firewise program had a booth educating people on how to keep their homes safe from fires.

Julie Sakal, an event organizer, explained that Home & Garden Shows are a “one-stop shop” for people renovating or buying a home. This way people can “touch, see and feel the products” and “meet the people they are going to be working with” before making decisions, she said.

“The turnout has been great,” she added. “A lot of people like dealing with local people” instead of chain home renovation companies.

Ron Lambricht runs the Hometown Sleep Center in Hiawassee. The store sells major mattress brands, along with pillows and bedding sets. He came to the event to “let everyone know about the local store.”

Lambricht pointed out how people will often drive by a local store on their way to Gainesville or Atlanta to buy a mattress without ever realizing that they can find the products they are looking for right here in the area.

“To me it’s all about letting people know to buy local,” Lambricht said.

Soliana Cortez of Leaf Filter Gutter Protection was one of several gutter protection

companies at the showcase. Steve Bruno, also at the event representing gutter protection services, referred to the industry as “competitive.”

Cortez explained how customers are “often looking for this type of product” at home shows. She added that the product is more likely to be needed in places like Northeast Georgia due to the large volume of trees in the heavily forested area.

For anyone looking to get away from home instead, Samantha Ott was there representing Judy Bruce Cruise Planners, which is a “full-service travel agency,” according to Ott.

Cruise Planners no longer has a permanent office but attends the Home & Garden Show every year. The “top seller” right now, Ott explained, is a cruise to Alaska. Other popular locations are the Caribbean, Ireland and Scotland.

The Home & Garden Expo takes place every July in Towns County, with a showcase in April held in Blairsville. Any business looking to get involved with one of the annual shows can apply at <https://expomanagementinc.com/northeast-georgia/>.

Honoring Marine...from Page 1A

Jan. 31, 2022, after refusing to take the COVID-19 vaccination.

He lived in Ilion, New York, to which his remains will be escorted this week across the Eastern United States by local patriots.

This Thursday, July 27, a ceremony to honor Willey and his service to the country will begin at 10 a.m. in the parking lot of the Clay County Sheriff’s Office in Hayesville, North Carolina.

Local Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 members will be present to remember their fallen brother alongside the Clay County Sheriff’s Office and American Legion Post #532.

“Ceremony proceedings are expected to commence in front of the main office, weather permitting,” Clay County Sheriff Mark Buchanan said. “In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will be moved to the multi-purpose room inside the (Clay County Courthouse).”

Following the service, MCL Unicoi Detachment #783 Comdt. Alton “Doc” Coleman of Blairsville will make the trek

with Clay County Sheriff’s Chief Deputy Todd Wingate – himself a Marine veteran – to present Willey’s urn and footlocker to his widow and 3-year-old son.

Motorcade participants will include multiple chapters of the American Legion Riders, the Patriot Guard, the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association and various law enforcement agencies.

The multi-state caravan will pass through North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, and finally Pennsylvania before arriving at Willey’s home in New York.

At least 50 to 100 motorcycles are anticipated to join the convoy, and different detachments and police departments will be adding shoulder patches and other mementos into the footlocker “to tell the story.”

Ash Todd, a Towns County member of Unicoi Detachment 783 and former Marine corporal, handcrafted Willey’s cremation urn and footlocker. Todd was originally contacted by Post 23 American Legion Riders of Hiawassee because of his status as a past commandant.

“He was a Marine,” stated Todd regarding his motivations, admitting he was distraught over Willey having passed alone. “He’s one of ours. He was a Marine, and we’ll bend over backwards for him.”

As a part of the Marine brotherhood, Todd views Willey as family, saying, “I’m 80 years old and he was 21 years old, and he was a Marine and I was a Marine, and that’s all it takes.”

Todd is also donating a 3-inch by 5-inch Marine Corps flag to accompany Willey’s remains.

People may watch a live broadcast of the July 27 Memorial Service at the Clay County NC Sheriff’s Office Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069234728940>.

The urn delivery is expected to take approximately two days, with the motorcade heading out on the morning of Friday, July 28, and reaching New York sometime in the evening on Saturday, July 29.

Semper Fi, Sean Willey. Thank you for your service, and welcome home.