# **Towns County Herald**

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# **Indians win second consecutive 'Battle of the States'**

### By Jeremy Foster **Towns County Herald** Staff Writer

The 27th Annual Battle of the States Christmas Basketball Tournament ran Dec. 28-30, culminating in the Towns County Indians claiming victory for their second consecutive tournament.

Last year's outing was canceled due to COVID-19, but the Indians were Battle of the States Champions for the 2019-2020 season as well.

Towns County High School hosted the three-day tourney that welcomed teams from multiple states in the northern region of the Southeast.

## DAY 1 – LADIES

The Lady Indians played first against the Pendleton, South Carolina, Bulldogs. Pendleton gained the first 3

points of the game from the tipoff, and shortly thereafter, junior Morgan Pierson got the first 2 points for Towns.

Sophomore Laura Mauldin, sophomore Halie Arrowood, junior Sarah Shook and freshman Kaleigh Beaver were the scorers throughout the game, though the ladies lost in the end by 56-37, knocking them into the consolation round for the next day's games

"We struggled offensively and turned the ball over way too much with bad habits trying to throw the ball through their hands," Girls Head Coach Shea Taylor said. "Going into the tournament, win or lose the first round, you have to be ready to play two more games, and the goal now is to get mentally focused to bounce back for the next one.'

See Indian Champs, Page 6A



Congratulations to the Towns County Indians for earning their second consecutive championship title at the annual Battle of the States Christmas Tournament Dec. 30. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

# Riley retires from Fire Dept. Fairgrounds makes New after 22 years of service Year's bright with firewo



L-R: Towns Fire Station No. 5 Capt. Royce Nicholson, retired Volunteer Firefighter Frank Riley and TCFD Batt. Chief Jerry Hamilton in last month's Fire Department Christmas Photo by Linda Riley Dinner and Awards Banquet at McConnell Baptist Church.

#### By Mark Smith **Towns County Herald** Staff Writer

Georgia-native Frank in Towns County, but his roots are here, as is his heart.

to inhabit his family home in teer firefighter with the Towns Towns, affectionately dubbed Mountain Scene.

Riley is the executive di-Conservation and Develop-

Florida, he ended up returning or so ago, Riley was a volun-County Fire Department for 22 years

To say that Riley is con-Riley may not have grown up rector of the nonprofit Chesta- cerned about the welfare and tee-Chattahoochee Resource preservation of the area's resources, and by extension, the Currently living at his ment Council. He also serves welfare and safety of its inhabancestral homeplace on the as the Georgia liaison for Fire- itants, would be an understate-Hiwassee River, Riley spent wise USA and as a member of ment, as Riley has taken things

# Year's bright with fireworks

**By Brittany Holbrooks Towns County Herald** Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds is known for brilliant displays of festive cheer no matter the season, and the final day of 2021 saw an especially fantastic spectacle of fireworks in celebration of New Year 2022.

Even before getting into the fairgrounds proper, animated waving nutcracker soldiers welcomed revelers toward free parking spaces, serving as a preview of the "Mountain Country Christmas in Lights" show featuring vendors for guests to enjoy that Dec. 31 evening

donuts was heavy at the gate, but a feast for the ears was also present in the form of live music with an '80s theme courtesy of local group Our Way Band.



A little rain didn't stop area New Year's Eve celebrations, including the fireworks show at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Walking around the vil- brellas and raincoats, which. The sweet smell of fresh lage itself was like experiencing something straight out of changes to the schedule, as the colors wrapped around tree trunks.

zly, with no shortage of um-

a fairytale, with lights of all Blairsville Cruisers Car Club was unable to make the event due to the risk the inclement The weather was driz- weather posed to the classic See Fairgrounds New Year, Page 6A

unfortunately, resulted in some

# **COVID-19 continues to** spread in new winter surge

By Shawn Jarrard **Towns County Herald** Editor

rus testing site at Union General has gone up dramatically in the last two weeks, resulting in



the summers of his youth the Appalachian RC&D Fire a step or two further than mere here helping on his grandpa's Adapted Communities Coali- concern. farm. And though his career took him all over Georgia and

tion.

And up until a month

"I wanted to give back.

See Riley, Page 6A

# **Brasstown Valley celebrates** with New Year's Eve Gala



Brasstown Valley Resort guests celebrated new beginnings with a "Winter Wonderland"themed gala New Year's Eve, pictured here during the midnight balloon drop.

#### By Jeremy Foster **Towns County Herald** Staff Writer

On the eve of 2022, Brasstown Valley Resort and Spa held its popular New Year's Eve Gala, an annual tradition since 1995 helping people from all over North Georgia and the surrounding area to bring in the New Year with style.

The theme of the evewas "Winter Wonderning land," and it was certainly a wonderful environment filled with excellent catering servic-

es, a slew of alcoholic beverage choices, amazing musical performances by the Atlanta Production Band, and people cutting loose after a stressful year, all in an elegant and exquisite atmosphere of suits and dresses.

General Manager Charles Burton has been with the resort since April of 2006 ing at home. We have our local and was surging with energy for the night's festivities that attracted all kinds of people wanting to get out and celebrate the dropping of balloons at midnight to usher in 2022.

Photo by Jeremy Foster

"I think everyone has a fair amount of COVID fatigue from the past two years, and everyone wants to just enjoy themselves and have a good time," Burton said. "The thing that has separated this year from others is that our attendance is up.

'People are tired of staycommunity and travelers from all over come out, and this (event) is the best way to end the year on a happy note.

"The reason we continue See Brasstown New Year, Page 6A

North Georgia is experiencing a new COVID-19 winter surge, potentially driven by the omicron variant that has been sweeping the U.S. and much of the globe.

No cases of the latest viral strain had been reported here by press time, and hospitalizations, while increasing, had yet to reach the same volume as the recent delta wave from August and September that saw record levels of inpatients admitted to Union General Hospital.

In addition to other seasonal respiratory viruses making the rounds alongside COVID, utilization of the state's free drive-thru coronavia more than 100% increase in people being tested of late.

At the state level, Georgia is reporting new record numbers of COVID cases compared to the previous record set during the last winter surge in January 2021, and nationally, the number of daily new cases shot past 300,000 for the first time ever last Thursday.

But glimmers of hope can be seen, as cases seem to be outpacing hospitalizations and deaths in many places relative to previous surges, potentially pointing to less severe illness overall after a year-long vaccination campaign and almost two years of people developing



**Dr. Samuel Le Church** Synergy Health

immunity through infection. The Georgia Department See COVID-19 Spread, Page 5A

# **More wintry precipitation** could be heading to Towns



A caravan of Florida residents stopped on the side of Swanson Mountain in Young Harris Monday morning to enjoy the snow. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

#### **By Shawn Jarrard Towns County Herald** Editor

Most Towns County residents woke up to a not-quite Winter Wonderland on Monday, as the season's first snowstorm dropped a little more than half an inch of the fluffy

white stuff by sunup.

Sub-freezing temperatures to start the week were certainly a change from what has been an unseasonably warm start to winter, with New Year's Day reaching more than 70 degrees less than 48 hours earlier.

But warm winter weath-

er is on its way out - for this week, at least - with forecasted highs dipping into the 40s, and lows consistently below freezing and potentially into the teens, plus chances for more wintry precipitation late Wednesday night, Thursday and early Friday.

See Wintry Weather, Page 6A



# COVID-19 Spread...from Page 1A

last week showing vaccination rates among the elderly to be above 80% in each county, with lower rates among younger members of the population who are less likely to develop severe illness from COVID-19.

At the local level, the Union General Health System, which serves many of the surrounding counties, including Union and Towns, started seeing an increase in COVID inpatients about a month ago after hospitalizations dropped precipitously following the delta surge.

Compared with the August/September wave, which set new records for local hospitalizations that put the Health System above its 45-bed capacity for COVID inpatients alone, beginning in December, the level of hospitalizations has hovered between 10 and 15 through last week.

Union General Chief Nursing Officer Julia Barnett said that the severity of sickness does not appear to be any worse than before, and while health care workers have been seeing some vaccinated patients admitted for COVID-19, most inpatients remain among the unvaccinated.

"I think we would call (the current situation) a surge just because there is an in-crease in positives," Barnett said, "but not resulting so far in the number of hospitalizations and severe illness that we have seen before.

"As far as the patients that actually end up in the hospital, (severity of illness) looks similar to what we were seeing back in the fall, but there are certainly less patients requiring hospitalization, it seems, compared to what there was with the last surge."

With state and national case rates continuing to climb, Barnett said it is too early to tell how things will look locally in the end, but again, she reiterated that, "so far, there are lots of positives, lots of people with mild symptoms, but much less resulting in hospitalizations and severe illness.

Of course, that does not mean COVID hospitalizations will remain at the relatively low current levels, especially since the winter surge of 2021 did not really get going until January.

During the last winter surge, the high for regional COVID inpatients at Union General Hospital was 31 in mid-January. For delta just a few months ago, that number reached 56, and everyone is hopeful that the current surge will remain lower before receding again as it has in the past.

Elective procedures are still being conducted, but as of last week, Union General was

of Public Health released data of hospital stays are varying structions for the spike protein much more widely than in previous surges, with about 80% of inpatients being admitted for non-COVID reasons.

> It has been a little more than a year since the first COVID vaccinations began going into arms in December 2020 in an ongoing effort Barnett credits with keeping the delta surge from being worse than it was, with still more initial vaccinations and boosters assisting in the current surge.

> In terms of how treatment has progressed since the onset of the pandemic, Barnett said things have certainly improved, but she recommends prevention through vaccination as the best way for most people to respond to COVID-19.

> "It's still a virus – there's still no cure for it, and we're mostly treating symptoms," Barnett said. "We do have remdesivir, which is still proven to be the most effective treatment for the inpatients that we have, and we continue to use that.

"In the outpatient setting, we continue to use the monoclonal antibodies; we have the three different ones that we are administering on a regular basis to anybody that needs those. For some reason, those seem to be a little bit less effective this go around, but thankfully, illness seems to be a little less severe.'

Dr. Samuel Le Church, who runs Synergy Health of Hiawassee and has admitting privileges at Union General Health System, Northeast Georgia Medical Center and elsewhere, agrees that the vaccines have been making a significant difference in these communities.

Vaccines are widely available to most Americans now, but back when they were being heavily rationed in the initial rollout last winter and early spring, Church hosted multiple vaccination clinics with assistance from several dozen community volunteers.

At his practice, Church said he started noticing a marked increase in new office visits for COVID the Monday before last, though fortunately, he has had very few patients in the last month or so require hospitalization.

"We are having a fair amount of cases - some of those are breakthrough cases in those who have been fully vaccinated and boosted," Church said. "I would say, overwhelmingly, those people are not getting very sick, especially the ones who have been vaccinated.

"But folks that are at high risk or progressing (in their illness), we have been giving them Regeneron monoclonal antibody treatments."

The currently available COVID-19 vaccines were deonce again above hospital-bed capacity, though the causes signed using the genetic in-

of the original strain of COVID, and there are concerns that they are less effective against the omicron variant that features dozens of alterations to the spike protein.

However, even if the current vaccines are not as effective against newer variants. public health professionals believe that vaccination continues to provide protection against severe illness, as evidenced by the disproportionately higher hospitalization rate for unvaccinated individuals.

"There are a lot of folks who have observed friends and family with a breakthrough case and using that as a rationale not to be vaccinated, that it does not work," Church said. "But the real issue is whether you're ending up in the hospital or getting significantly ill, and the vaccines seem to be extremely protective in that regard.'

From his observations, Church said that among the increased cases his office has been seeing are more breakthrough infections than before for fully vaccinated and boosted patients, but for the most part, their symptoms have been "very mild in the scheme of things."

'Less severe symptoms have been seen for everybody, including even the ones who haven't been vaccinated." Church added. "(We don't know if it's omicron), but looking at the patterns of things with some of these generally milder symptoms, it certainly makes you suspect that it's a different strain. It certainly feels like it's something different from what we were dealing with a year ago.'

Looking back over 2021 Church said he is grateful for the many community members who rallied to the cause of getting their neighbors and loved ones vaccinated.

"Health care workers were playing their role, but those things could not have happened without the assistance of the community vol-unteers," Church said. "And (there are many other instances) where the community has stepped up. "This has been a hard

couple of years for folks, and I think we were eager to serve. and I'm looking forward to getting back into that role for lots of people who have so much to give and tap into these resources for our community to make Towns and Union counties be even stronger.

'So, I'm optimistic about that, and I do think we're headed toward normalcy. We just need to trudge along with following the science and asking good questions."

The local school systems of Union and Towns counties did not observe a big uptick in COVID pre-Christmas break and will continue to monitor the situation among staff and students after classes resume this week Separately, professionals with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week updated COVID quarantine guidelines to be more feasible long-term, effectively shortening the amount of time people with COVID or with a known exposure need to isolate. Per the CDC, individu-with COVID-19 can now safely come out of isolation if, at the end of five days from onset of infection, they have no symptoms or their symptoms are resolving without fever for 24 hours. Masking for five days is recommended after leaving isolation. "The change is motivated by science demonstrating that the majority of SARS-CoV-2 transmission occurs early in the course of illness, generally in the 1-2 days prior to onset of symptoms and the 2-3 days after," the CDC said. COVID vaccines can be readily found at the Health Departments, Synergy Health of Hiawassee, and local pharmacies, and free testing is available Monday through Friday via the drive-thru site at Union General Hospital in Blairsville, with rapid testing available at area pharmacies.

## Pickleball Club starts athletic expense fund for kids



(L-R): Mary Lynn Miller, Jim Melton, Stuart Nichols, and Sara Cochran Rogers; not pictured: Tammy Coker, Amy Rosser

The Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club has designated \$2,000 to start a fund to help pay athletic expenses for children in Towns County unable to afford those expenses.

Expenses can be for registration fees, uniforms, equipment or travel costs to tournaments. A volunteer committee has been created to oversee approval of requested expenses. This committee consists of Sara Rogers, Tammy Coker and Mary Lynn Miller representing the Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club.

Requests can be made any of the following: Jim Melton, Athletic Director and Assistant Principal, Towns County High School, jmelton@townscountyschools.org, Stuart Nichols, Park and Recreation Director for Towns County, tcrecreation2600@gmail.com, Amy Gibbs Rosser, Executive Director, Family Connections, Towns County Schools argibby@townscountyschools.org.

All requests will be confidential and no individual's names will be shared with the committee or the club.

The Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club raised these funds by conducting an annual pickleball tournament. The club expects to continue to make contributions to this fund as monies are available and as requests are made. It is the purpose of the club to sup-

port pickleball and other sports in Towns County.

The Georgia Mountain Pickleball Club of Hiawassee appreciates the support of Towns County in building and maintaining the pickleball complex and will continue to give back to Towns County in various ways.

## **Board of** Health meeting

The Towns County Board of Health will hold its quarterly meeting on Thursday, January 20th, 2022 at 9:30 a.m. in the 911 Conference Room located at 1104 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris, GA 30582.

## **Remembering Reece:** Farmer and Poet content in mountain home

As one stands beside Wolf Creek listening to the rushing waters after a night of heavy rains, it's nice to imagine how grateful Hub Reece must have felt that he could hear the silence when the road was less busy. How contented he seems, in writing this poem, that his need was to not be pulled into the rushing world beyond, but to breathe the fresh mountain air as he looked upward and took in the splendor which surrounded him in his mountain home.

When Hub Reece traveled to Los Angeles to accept the position as Writer-in-Residence at UCLA, he took this photograph of his mother in front of their mountain home which was the location of the current Reece Farm and Heritage Center. After he had been at UCLA for a while, he was asked if he had written any poetry since he had been there. He answered, "Yes, I have written one poem about my mountain home." Not long after that, he chose to return home to his beautiful Choestoe Valley nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, where he remained. His writings were inspired by this lovely mountain home and farm. "Roads" By Byron Herbert Reece A pace or two beyond my door Are highways racing east and west, I hear their busy traffic roar, Fleet tourists bound on far behests And monstrous mastodons of freight Passing in droves before my gate. The roads would tow me far away to cities whose extended pull



Hub Reece's mother in front of their mountain home. They have no choice but to convey, I name them great and wonderful And marvels of device and speed, But all unsuited to my need.

Herbert Reece Society is to preserve, perpetuate and promote the literary and cultural legacy of the Georgia mountain poet/novelist. In addition to enhancing both knowledge of and appreciation for his writings, efforts will be made

## **American Legion affiliates** give to local children at Christmas





John Roming, Sons of the American Legion with Robin Halfon, American Legion Auxiliary (top photo) and Amy Rosser with Family Connections of Towns County Schools (bottom photo). We fulfilled ten children's wish lists for Christmas.

## Masonic Lodge meeting



Unicoy #259 Lodge meets every 2nd Monday, 7:30 p.m., meals at 6:30 p.m., 60 N. Main Street, Hiawassee, GA 30546. All qualified Brothers urged to attend.

My heart is native to the sky Where hills that are its only wall Stand up to judge its boundaries by, But where from roofs of iron fall Sheer perpendiculars of steel On streets that bruise the country heel. My heart's contracted to a stone. Therefore whatever roads repair To cities on the plain, my own Lead upward to the peaks and there I feel, pushing my ribs apart, The wide sky entering my heart. Thank you for reading and "Remembering Reece." The purpose of the Byron

erty of his country who tries most to promote its virtue, and who, so far as his power and influence extend, will not suffer a man to be chosen into any office of power and trust who is not a wise and virtuous man." It is fortunate that the United States produced, and had available leaders of this supreme quality to launch the first "noble experiment" for freedom in modern times.

Isn't it time that we took a hard look at those who govern us, and demand that they live lives of virtue and integrity, both privately and publicly. Maybe a better way to explain would be to quote Proverbs 29:2 "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan."

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

to honor his way of life, with particular emphasis on his love of nature and his attachment to farming. The Reece Society is grateful to the North Geor-gia News and Towns County Herald for the opportunity to

publish articles about Reece's life and legacy and to provide a medium by which those who have never read his works can know the genius who lived among us. The Reece Society wishes for you all a happy, healthy and safe 2022.

The Byron Herbert Reece Society, Jerri Duncan Gill, Chairman

## **Adult Education Program Course**



Are you ready to earn your high school equivalency diploma? North GA Technical College's Adult Education program is offering free day and evening courses. Classes are held in Blairsville at the Shirley Miller Building (be-hind the public library). Call 706-439-6342 to schedule your registration appointment.

Our next enrollment date is January 10th.

# Weekly Patriot Reflection



#### Virtuous and **Moral Leaders**

at the Founding Fathers and the standards they had in regard to how our nation should be led. They had principles, unlike today, that helped them identify the characteristics of leaders. They believed that "The most promising method of securing a virtuous and morally stable people is to elect virtuous leaders." I think you would agree with me that that has lost its meaning in our society today. Listen to what Samuel Adams had to say, "But neither the wisest constitution nor the wisest laws will secure the liberty and happiness of a people whose manners are universally corrupt. He therefore is the truest friend to the lib-

I am constantly amazed

# Indian Champs...from Page 1A

### DAY 1 - BOYS

Next, the boys opened their leg of the tournament against Pendleton with senior Kyle Oakes scoring the first 2 points of the game after the Indians gained possession from the tipoff.

Senior Collin Crowder, sophomore Connor Chastain, sophomore Tanner Cunningham, junior Lane Rouse and sophomore Zane Floyd were the scorers in this game that led to an Indians victory of 59-49 and advancement to the next round of the champion-

ship. "It was a tough Pendleton team tonight, but the goal of a tournament is to survive and advance, and that is just what we did," Boys Head Coach Brian Hunnicutt said. "We sort of played a sloppy game, but they just continued to fight, and that is what I love about this team, and we ended up getting the victory with that.

"Everything resets on Day 2, and we are going to have to prime ourselves to play our best in such an electric atmosphere."

#### DAY 2 – LADIES

In the first game of the consolation round, the Lady Indians were pitted against the Coosa High School Eagles.

Freshman Kaleigh Beaver, junior Sarah Shook, junior Tabitha Barnes and sophomore Halie Arrowood were the key scorers for this game, which led to the ladies being victorious over Coosa with 39-23 as the ending result, advancing them to the final consolation round.

"I feel like we came out flat in the first half, but in the second, we started playing as the team that we know we can play as," Coach Taylor said. "They came back, got some stops, knocked down to see the progress we have some big shots and were able made and where we need to throw some different de- to get better to play all four fenses at them, and now as quarters of a basketball game a team we just need to learn the same way." to play that way through an entire game.'

### DAY 2 – BOYS

The next test for the boys saw them up against the Murphy, North Carolina, Bulldogs, and Murphy scored the first 2 points following control from the tipoff.

with Senior Kyle Oakes, sophomore Tanner Cunningham, sophomore Zane Floyd, senior Collin Crowder, junior Lane Kyle Oakes and sophomore Rouse, junior Grant Ingram and sophomore Gage Rogers becoming the point scorers for the way through, the Indians the game and earning another victory with 63-49 and moving into the finals of the championship.

"One of our season goals was wanting to win the Battle of the States Championship, and now we have made it to the finals and are one step closer to achieving it, and we are excited about that," Coach Hunnicutt said. "We have a tough test tomorrow, and we are going to bring our best to bring home the trophy."

#### DAY 3 - LADIES

The consolation finals featured the Lady Indians up against the Polk County, Tennessee, Wildcats, with Polk earning the first 2 points of the

Junior Sarah Shook and freshman Kaleigh Beaver were the point scorers for the game, but in the end, Polk County won 51-22.

"I definitely see improvement in our ladies for bouncing back and getting into the consolation finals, and that was a very good Polk County team," Coach Taylor said. "This was a great game

Farmers of America all around

North Georgia. I've got grants

from the Natural Resources

Conservation Service, the U.S.

Forest Service, the Georgia For-

estry Commission, the Georgia

those people to do community

work. We're the community

outreach for all those federal

and state agencies. So, I'm

Riley stays incredibly

He spearheaded the Fire-

having too much fun to quit."

busy growing the Firewise Com-

munities Program, too, which

teaches homeowners how to

make their neighborhoods less

susceptible to wildfires through

wise program in North Georgia

education and grants.

We get money from all

Soil and Water Commission.

# Riley ... from Page 1A

I wanted to be a part of the community, not just live here. I wanted to be a part of what's going on and try to help," Riley said, adding that firefighting and driving a school bus got him "inside the community, not living on the outside."

Over the years, he has taken the initiative to learn about and become deeply involved with preserving the pristine beauty of the North Georgia Mountains, conserving the resources of the area, and being a liaison between nature and the people who come to live here.

In a nutshell, Riley has been that guardian standing in the urban interface where people meet Mother Nature.

For 22 years, Riley was a volunteer firefighter answering 30 or so emergency calls a under Riley's leadership, Geor- to do it, but it's what we must year to don personal protective gear and join his first responder brothers, usually in the middle of a frigid winter night, to extinguish the raging destruction of someone's home. But Riley said he has simply gotten too busy with the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D to continue volunteering with the Fire Department. "There just isn't time anymore," said Riley, noting that, at 72, he has no plans to retire from anything else. "I don't have any reason to retire; I'm having too much fun. We go all over the country and do presentations (as part of the RC&D). "I support the Future Communities

Control changed shortly

#### DAY 3 – BOYS

In the championship game, the final boss for the Indians were the Rabun County Wildcats. The Wildcats gained first possession of the ball from the tipoff. Momentum quickly reversed to the Indians, however, when sophomore Zane Floyd gained the first 3 points of the game.

Other point earners were senior Collin Crowder, senior Connor Chastain.

In a true nail-biter all pulled out all of the stops to hold on to control at the very end and win 63-61 to become the 2021 Battle of the States Tournament Champions.

'This was an unbelievable effort from these boys tonight," Coach Hunnicutt said. We just beat a team in AA that has a very good chance of winning state in their division, and we just played like a real collective unit and well-oiled machine.

'We achieved our first goal set out to win this tournament, and now we go on to region play. That is our second goal, is to win region, and we are very happy, but now the real work begins."

Both the Indians and Lady Indians are slated to face Washington-Wilkes High School in a pair of away games on Friday, Jan. 7.

For detailed Battle of the States coverage, including a play-by-play of the championship game, check out the Sports Section in this week's newspaper. And visit www.townscountyathletics. com for more scheduling information.

Towns County is home to 24 that is nearly 20% of all Firewise Communities in Georgia, right here in one of the smallest counties in the state.

In recognition of his many efforts over the years in promoting fire prevention, in 2021, Riley became one of only two people in the nation to win a Silver Smokey Bear Award by the U.S. Forest Service.

He was able to accomplish this feat and others by interacting with members of the community, and he advises others who wish to make a difference to "get involved, don't be one of the herd; be a leader."

"I can't stand to sit back and go along with the herd," Riley said. "Firefighters – it's hard to find people to do this. It takes a lot of training and a following an 800-acre wildfire lot of time. And it's just hard to nnd people dedicated enough do to make these communities stronger and safer.'

# Fairgrounds New Year...from Page 1A

Hiawassee-based Our Way Band entertained crowds at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds' Photo by Brittany Holbrooks New Year's Eve Fireworks.

vehicles. And while it wasn't quite frigid, it is supposed to be this week, and Color Street stylist and vendor Heidi Ramey's 16year-old son Lance offered hand

warmers to those in attendance. Ramey herself was excited to return to the fairgrounds, where much of 2021 had brought her fortune despite the medical issues she and her family faced.

'Something I'm happy about with 2021 is that Lance and I have really been able to get a lot of our medical needs taken care of, and then also with (the fairgrounds), when I have a surgery, he pretty much works the heavy stuff for me," she said. "When we come here, we're still able to make money and pay bills.'

Ramey was quick to help friends and fellow vendor Crazy 8, whose food truck is so popular that folks have waited two or three hours to order a meal during past festivals.

The company was

named for the fact that it's a family-owned business featuring two parents, Jon and Laura White, and their six children. Crazy 8 only began operating in July 2021, when Jon decided to take his passion for cookbeen a challenging yet rewarding time for the family.

'One minute you think everything's going to kind of go back to normal, and then there's talks of this restriction and that restriction," patriarch Jon White began, discussing the uncertainty that seems so prominent after the advent of COVID-19.

On the other hand, 2022 looks promising for small, family-owned businesses like the Crazy 8.

"We already have a lot of repeat customers," Laura White said, talking about how some diners come back time and again to their truck because it's often more reliable than visiting brick-and-mortar restaurants that may not have enough help to work efficiently.

At another booth just down the way, jeweler of 35 years Shay Byrd set up shop with just a tiny representation of her own business, Elysians, which means "Divinely Inspired."

With her talent for making to a professional level. It's ing rings in under two minutes, Byrd kept busy earning a profit while her young son was free to enjoy the fair fare. He was quite fond of the chicken strips, and he equally enjoyed the dazzling fireworks that began lighting up the sky around 8:45 p.m. in a variety of beautiful reds, blues and golds.

For about 20 minutes, cracks, booms, pops, and sizzles rent the air as pastelcolored smoke drifted among the unlit trees lining the edge of the fairgrounds. Cheers and applause were regular reactions, and it took a while for everyone to clear out even after the last bright colors fizzled into the mist.

Visit georgiamountainfairgrounds.com for a schedule of upcoming attractions.

## Weather ... from Page 1A Nintry

The National Weather Service out of Peachtree City, Georgia, which is the weather forecast office for Northeast Georgia, issued a "Winter Weather Advisory" Sunday calling for upward of 2 inches of snow accumulation overnight into Monday.

Later in the day, the weather service upgraded its advisory to a "Winter Storm Warning," likewise revising forecasted snow totals to between 2 and 4 inches in higher elevations.

And while Young Harris appeared to receive a little more snow than the rest of the county, much of Hiawassee and other parts of Towns experienced less than an inch.

Also part of the storm warning was the potential for wind gusts up to 30 mph, and the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center in Blairsville measured nearly 24 mph winds in the early hours of Jan. 3.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said that Towns County was "very fortunate," having made it through the



Frosty and his wife were glad to see a little snow Monday before Hiawassee takes its Christmas decorations down. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

what amounted to a handful of downed trees.

The Road Department stayed busy clearing trees and the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC worked to restore power to more than a hundred customers Monday morning, though evervone agreed that the situation could have been much worse.

Classes at Towns County Schools were set to return day. Accumulations are not from winter break after press expected at this time."

season's first snowstorm with time Jan. 4, and the school system said it would be making sure roads were good to go

> ahead of time. The weather service issued a "Hazardous Weather Outlook" on Monday, noting "a possibility for some mixed wintry precipitation in far North Georgia late Wednesday into early Thursday and again Thursday night into early Fri-

in Young Harris in 2008, and gia has become sixth in the nation for number of Firewise Communities, only a couple behind No. 5 Arizona.

"We are indeed fortunate to have Frank in our community," said Towns County Firewise Community Coordinator Michael Courey. "There aren't too many people in our community that act and behave with an attitude like Frank.

'So, we're fortunate to have him. He communicates. I've seen him communicate with federal authorities, state him bad-mouth anybody. I've authorities, and local level individuals.'

Of the 124 Firewise

Describing Riley as "probably one of the easiestgoing, kindest people I've ever been around," Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland said he will be sorely missed at the Fire Department.

"He's served the community and the county well, way before Firewise," Copeland said. "The word that comes to me when I hear his name is 'gentleman.' I've never heard never heard any negativity out of Frank. He's always been a great ambassador for the Fire statewide, Department and the county."

#### Brasstown N **ear**...from Page 1A ew



People from far and wide donned their best attire to bring in the New Year with style at the annual Brasstown Valley gala Dec. 31. Photo by Jeremy Foster

stay consistent year after year with our holiday buffet from our culinary staff. All the way to our beverage team and all staff members in general, everyone always compliments us on how friendly we are and the great service we provide to our guests.

"It is important for us to celebrate New Year's because we wrap up the year and celebrate those things that did not go so well and the things that did. And staying optimistic about the future, the positives will remain positive, and the negatives will just go away."

Local couple Richard and Monica Tate attended the on around us, but we can congala for the very first time and trol how we react to it."

to grow every year is that we were both overwhelmed by the positive atmosphere and carefree attitude.

'The experience here has been astronomical, and we are year than they were the last. definitely going to be making this a yearly tradition with us going forward," Richard said. "Most of what happens in between each year is out of our hands, but going into 2022, we are going to they are going through by beembrace everyday as a new day and keep a positive outlook for the next day.

Added Monica, "Everyday, moment, and year is what you make it. We may not be fun evening, and the party conable to control all of the circumstances in the world going

The couple both shared the same sentiment as far as New Year's Resolutions go, to try and be better people this

"We want to strive to be a light for everyone we encounter, show more love and spread more positivity, and relate to everyone's struggle ing less judgmental and creating the sense and realization that we are all in this together," Monica said.

All told, it was a festive tinued after the balloon drop at midnight, which was a special time of togetherness for everyone in attendance