

# Towns County Herald

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## Beloved local veteran Bud Johnson dies Jan. 1

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Retired U.S. Navy Chief Quartermaster Clarence "Bud" Johnson of Hiawassee passed away on Friday, Jan. 1, following a brief illness.

Johnson, 98, was a true patriot who served his country honorably for more than three decades. He enlisted at the age of 17 in the leadup to World War II and later participated in the famed Battle of Iwo Jima.

He was a devout Christian and strong advocate for veterans, lending tremendous support over the years to local veteran groups and causes. A lover of history, Johnson also compiled books on Pearl Harbor and Iwo Jima, and he spent much time working on his extensive autobiography.

The World War II veteran appeared recently at the 245th Birthday Party for the U.S. Marine Corps held at Daniel's Steakhouse Nov. 10, wherein he gifted the local Marine Corps League a book of his wartime experiences and a replica statue depicting the iconic Iwo Jima flag-raising.

"I think the biggest honor I ever had in my life was making Chief Petty Officer in the United States Navy," Johnson said that evening. "I was 22 years old, the youngest chief in the old, at the time."

"I have had the opportunity and many years to serve with Marines, not only in Iwo Jima and on my ship, and I was there, I witnessed it. I want to thank you for all you do as Marines. If I was not in the Navy, I would have been a Marine."

Johnson took it upon himself to organize the area Iwo Jima remembrance that occurs every February, and he was a key player in securing the Iwo Jima Memorial at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center in Foster Park.

Having served in the Navy for 36 years, four months and four days, Johnson spent much of his life aboard ships.

During his World War II service, he witnessed the raising of both flags at Iwo Jima and survived the detonation of a German mine off the U.S. East Coast on the YMS-21, a

minesweeper ship.

"God has been with me," Johnson told the Towns County Herald in 2014. "God has blessed me and has given me the years he has, because I've been kamikazed, I've been torpedoed, mines, gunshot – a survivor."

With humility and grace for having been a survivor, Johnson took up a call to arms in serving veterans in his community while commemorating those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

"As long as God gives me breath, I will honor these precious people out there who sacrificed for our freedom," Johnson once said. "They paid the full price."

Always a passionate defender of freedom precisely because he understood its price, Johnson took care to do his absolute best in honoring the memories of those who paid the high cost for others.

"I want to remember them and not forget how they served and sacrificed their lives for us, for our freedom, today," Johnson said in early

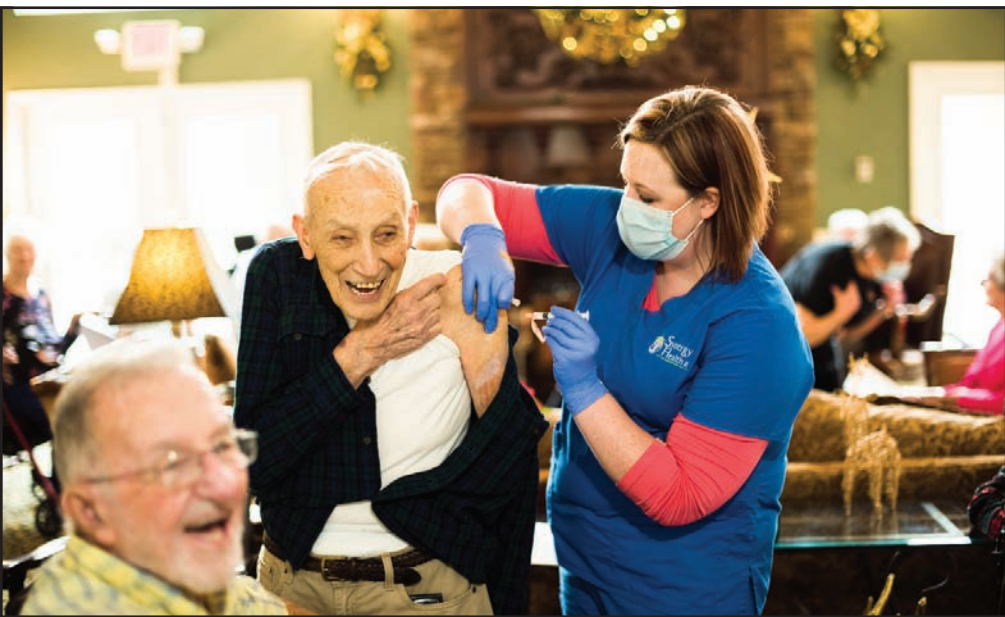
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Bud Johnson saluting in the 2012 Veterans Day Ceremony at the Towns County Veterans Park in Hiawassee. Photo by Libby Duncan

## Vaccine eligibility to cover people 65 and up Jan. 11

Access to vaccine subject to availability



A Synergy Health employee vaccinates a Brasstown Manor resident on Dec. 30. Residents heralds a return to normalcy in the near future. Photo by Larson Church

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Beginning Jan. 11, people aged 65 and older will become eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine based on availability, per the Georgia Department of Public Health.

Four in five Americans who have died with COVID-19 are 65 years or older, so an early vaccination effort prioritizing this demographic is likely to have the greatest impact on saving lives.

Specifics regarding vaccine rollout for this age demographic were unavailable by press time, though District 2 Public Health has asked people to "please watch for announcements for instructions

on where and how to get vaccinated."

People can check back in with District 2 Public Health for further announcements regarding how to get in line for vaccination at <http://phdistrict2.org>.

Currently, early vaccination efforts are focused on medical workers who face greater risk of exposure, and on long-term care residents/staff. But starting Jan. 11, in addition to everyone 65 years of age and older, law enforcement and fire personnel will also be eligible for vaccination.

This news comes after Gov. Brian Kemp and Public Health Commissioner Dr. Kathleen Toomey said in a Dec. 30 press release that "the

expanded administration of vaccine is expected to begin within the next two weeks provided there is adequate vaccine supply available."

Eventually, there will be enough vaccine available for all who want it, but until such a time, the state is working to finalize the various elements of a vaccine distribution plan that implements a phased allocation due to limited initial supply.

Vaccination has continued by health care providers who applied to receive the vaccine for early rollout, which started locally the week of Dec. 21 with the arrival of the first shipments of Moderna vaccine doses.

This includes Union

See *Vaccine*, Page 6A

## Crane suffers fatal accident Dec. 26 on icy Upper Bell

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

William Mark Crane, 56, of Hiawassee, passed away Saturday, Dec. 26, after sustaining injuries in a single-vehicle accident caused by black ice.

Crane was driving on Upper Bell Road around 1:30 p.m. Dec. 26 when he hit an icy patch of road, resulting in his vehicle going over an embankment near Bell Scene Church Road and striking a tree on the driver side, according to authorities.

The temperature had remained below freezing since the Dec. 24 snowstorm that brought up to 3 inches of snow,

causing icy conditions in many parts of the county that lasted into Dec. 26.

Shortly after the accident, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw was driving through the area and stopped to assist. He helped Towns County EMS and Fire Department carry Crane, who was conscious at the time, up the embankment on a stretcher.

First responders quickly made the call to have Crane life-flighted to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville, where he passed away. Bradshaw was shocked and dismayed to hear later that Crane had succumbed to his injuries.

"When we get snow and



Mark Crane

ice, we ask our citizens to please stay home," Bradshaw

See *Crane*, Page 6A

## GMF rings in New Year with fireworks, cruise-in

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

After a rain delay from New Year's Eve, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds hosted its first-ever New Year's Celebration and Fireworks Show on Saturday, Jan. 2.

The free-to-attend event featured food, craft vendors and a cruise-in thanks to special guests the Blairsville Cruisers, who welcomed car enthusiasts for a family-friendly event before the start of the fireworks.

Cruiser Marcus Tuschel said he found the event to be enjoyable and the fairgrounds to be a fine venue to hold a New Year's

See *GMF New Year*, Page 6A



This year marks a good first for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds – a New Year's Fireworks show, delayed from Dec. 31 to Jan. 2 due to concerns over rain. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

## Shake Rag Road residents express park safety concerns

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

A small group of residents attended Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw's most recent regular meeting to express their continued concerns over the safety of Shake Rag Road on the way up to the popular tourist attraction Bell Mountain Park.

The two-way road is incredibly narrow and in need of repairs and widening, and while Bradshaw has committed to addressing these issues, many of the specifics remain unknown at present, causing consternation among some of the residents living there.

Bradshaw said that safety on Shake Rag is his No. 1 priority, both for residents and the thousands of visitors to Bell Mountain Park each year.

That's why, last summer, he hired engineering, consulting



Shake Rag Road resident Catherine Luckenbach appeared in the December 2020 county meeting to address Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and guests once again regarding safety on the road leading to Bell Mountain Park. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

and construction firm KCI Technologies out of Duluth to evaluate Shake Rag for improvements. Bradshaw trusts the company, having worked

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## Young Harris man commits suicide at county line, UCSO says

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE – A Young Harris man was discovered hanging by his belt on Monday, Jan. 4, next to the bridge crossing Brass-town Creek on US 76 near the Towns/Union County line, Union County Sheriff's Lt. Daren Osborn said.

Brandon Wise, 29, was reported missing by his family on Jan. 1, Osborn said, after which the young man appar-

ently hung himself two days later, on Jan. 3.

Alcohol was located on Wise's person, and no foul play was suspected, Osborn said, noting the Sheriff's Office had learned that Wise had attempted suicide before.

The person who found Wise was an artist who had stopped to take pictures of the creek before lunchtime Monday, spotting the young man lying on the ground above the creek with his belt connected to the Brasstown Creek sign-

post, Osborn said.

Wise was not visible from the road, Osborn said. Additional details were unavailable at press time.

Responding to the scene were the Union County Sheriff's Office and Fire Department, Union General EMS, as well as Towns County Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue and EMS.

Osborn said that anyone experiencing suicidal thoughts should call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-TALK or (800) SUICIDE.

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,670.22
Chatuge	1,917.98
Nottely	1,761.30

**SPORTS BASKETBALL**

1/8 vs. Washington Wilkes 7PM

1/9 @ Rabun 5 PM

**ELECTION RESULTS**

available Jan. 6th

on Facebook: Towns County Herald and at [www.townscountyherald.net](http://www.townscountyherald.net)