

# Towns County Herald

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## Top of GA student speech training starts Jan. 19

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Planning Committee for the Annual Top of Georgia Speaking Contest met for a workshop session last week to discuss and finalize details for the upcoming student speech training that will begin next week.

Top of Georgia is unique in that it serves to instruct kids in public speaking – an important skill that will benefit the students throughout their lives – while doubling as a contest to let the children showcase what they've learned at the end of the training.

The top four speakers in both the High School and Middle School Divisions will have the chance to win cash

prizes, with eligibility open to sixth-12th graders attending public, private or home schools in Towns and Union counties in Georgia, and Clay County in North Carolina.

Training will take place over six Thursdays beginning Jan. 19 through Feb. 23 from 5:30-7 p.m. at the Senior Center in Hiawasse.

"Students will learn to construct a speech and how to deliver it with conviction, poise, and expertise," according to program literature. "Students will be expected to perform an inspiring four to six-minute speech on the final contest day in March."

The Planning Committee is comprised of retired physician Gerry Chotiner, retired U.S. Air Force veterans Mike and Kathy Merritt, Enotah District Attor-

ney Jeff Langley, retired educators Marsha Hyer and Helen Seymore, Young Harris College Assistant Athletic Director for External Operations Madison Urquiola, retired educator and school director Betsy Young, and Hiawasse Downtown Development Authority Program Manager Steven Harper.

Everyone involved is volunteering his or her time, and all are thrilled to be participating in a tradition that has served for years now to strengthen the skillsets and confidence of young people in the North Georgia Mountains.

"I've been involved with this program as a mentor for about five or six years and a coordinator for the last two, and every year it's such a joy to be involved and have a hand

See Top of Georgia, Page 6A



Speech trainers for the regional 2023 Top of Georgia Speaking Contest gathered last week for an organizational meeting. Photo by Jeremy Foster

## Mayor Ordiales responds to ticket quota allegations

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

On Friday, Jan. 6, Hiawasse Mayor Liz Ordiales emailed City Council members and local media organizations with a response to allegations that she pressured former Police Chief Paul Smith into putting in place a ticket-writing quota for the Hiawasse Police Department.

"I never imposed a quota for citations, nor have I ever asked the police chief to determine a quota number to implement," she wrote, contradicting accounts by Smith, who resigned last month for seemingly unconnected reasons.

As previously reported, a leaked email to council members from outgoing Police Chief Smith during his final week on



Liz Ordiales  
Hiawasse Mayor

the job alleged that the mayor had for years attempted to enact a ticket quota inside city limits to address budgetary shortfalls in the police department.

The mayor was initially unable to offer detailed comments on the matter due to be-

ing out of town for the Christmas and New Year's holidays, so last week's article introducing the allegations focused on the chief's accusations and the potential impact of quotas.

However, Ordiales returned to Hiawasse late last week and submitted the following response for publication, reproduced in full below:

"Paul Smith advised me of his resignation on Nov. 28 at 3 p.m. and stated that he would remain for a month or two until we found his replacement. Ten office-days later he announced his last day would be Dec. 23.

"At that time I had only interviewed one candidate, whom he recommended. I felt that Jeremy Parker, again, a candidate that he recommended, was a good choice. In order

See Ticket Quota, Page 6A

## Union General welcomes First Baby of New Year



Will and Grace Patterson were thrilled to officially meet their son Hank when he was born on Jan. 2. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Will and Grace Patterson of Blue Ridge welcomed their son, Henry Allen Patterson, into the world at 6:37 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 2, earning the newborn the crown as Union General Hospital's First Baby of 2023.

With their big day falling on Jan. 2, the Pattersons assumed they had missed the

mark to deliver the new year's first local baby. It turned out they still had a chance, as that day, they were the first couple in labor in 2023, at least until later that afternoon when another set of parents arrived.

From there, both families took part in a friendly competition that spread to the waiting room among soon-to-be grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other loved ones of the two contenders. Will and Grace's

fathers "got way too into it," but it was all in good fun and things remained civil.

In total, the Pattersons spent nine hours in the delivery room after inducing labor, where they enjoyed a more casual setting, being free to watch television, listen to music, or even exercise to feel more at home.

Fortunately for Grace, giving birth didn't play out the

See New Year Baby 2023, Page 6A

## Young Harris changes meeting time, talks finances



Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, City Attorney Marvin Harkins and Finance Officer Ana Hess in the first City Council meeting of the year on Jan. 3. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Young Harris City Council started 2023 off with a Jan. 3 regular meeting at 7 p.m. inside City Hall, giving council members and Mayor Andrea Gibby a chance to address first-of-the-year housekeeping issues.

While there were no modifications to city adminis-

trative positions, there was a slight adjustment to the long-standing regular meeting time.

Councilman John Kelley proposed changing the start of meetings to begin earlier, largely due to wintertime darkness. Discussions landed on 6:30 p.m. as the new meeting time, and a unanimous vote made the change official.

This is the first change in time for the regular monthly meeting in anyone's recol-

lection, but it's not a major change; council meetings are still set for every first Tuesday of the month, now just a half-hour earlier.

Turning to the latest financials from November, City Finance Officer Ana Hess said that the city was doing "everything we're expected to be doing" after consulting with an auditor.

As a result of speaking See Young Harris, Page 6A

## Rev. Taylor joins ranks of Georgia Baptist Convention

By Jeremy Foster  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

In furtherance of his mission to serve the church and answer God's calling, McConnell Memorial Baptist Church Lead Pastor Steven Taylor was chosen by his fellow Baptists as the Third Vice President of the Georgia Baptist Convention during the organization's recent annual meeting.

From Nov. 13-15, 2022, at Warren Baptist Church in Augusta, attendees conducted convention business, heard guest speakers and celebrated

the 200th anniversary of the GBC.

Rev. Taylor was grateful to be able to represent the Hiawasse Baptist Association and the North Georgia Mountains at the event.

The election is an honor for Taylor, whose new duties will augment the obligations he has taken on closer to home, as, in addition to being a local pastor, he is a part of the GBC Church Membership Committee and serves as the Hiawasse Baptist's representative on the GBC Executive Committee.

See Rev. Taylor, Page 3A



Rev. Steven Taylor

## Sheriff's Office arrests man in \$15,000 camper theft



Chad Lefate Patterson

News Special  
Towns County Herald

On Dec. 10, 2022, Towns County Sheriff's Office Investigators identified a suspect in the theft of a camper valued at \$15,000. The camper was located and returned to the victim.

A warrant was issued for Chad Lefate Patterson, 45, of Columbia, Tennessee, for theft by taking.

On Jan. 1, investigators located the suspect at the Dollar General store in Young Harris, and Patterson was taken into custody.

Drugs, which field-tested positive for methamphet-

amine laced with fentanyl, were also confiscated during the arrest.

Patterson has been charged with felony theft by taking; felony possession of methamphetamine; felony possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute; purchase, possession, manufacture, distribution, or sale of marijuana; and probation violation.

In a separate incident on Jan. 2, 2023, during the Towns County Sheriff's Office concentrated patrol initiatives, a deputy conducted a traffic stop at the intersection of US 76 and Georgia 288.

K-9 Dakota alerted on

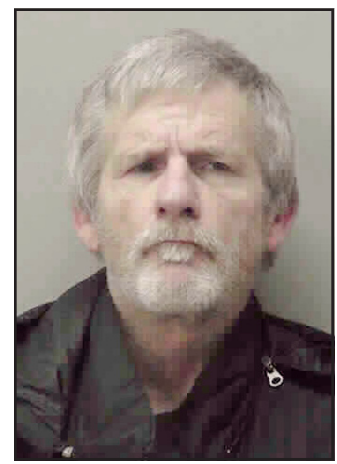
the vehicle, a search of which resulted in drugs being located. The drugs field-tested positive for cocaine.

Dana Michelle Henson, 43, of Hiawasse, was arrested and charged with felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance and possession of drug-related objects.

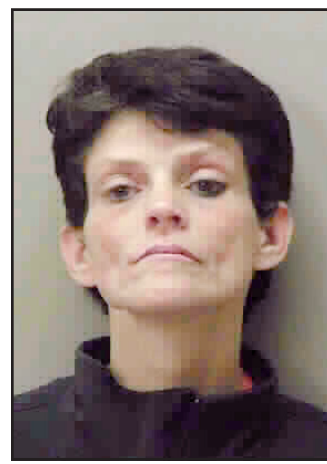
Robert Edwin Jones, 53, of Hiawasse, was charged with possession of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that concentrated patrols are very effective in combating drug and criminal activity.

All subjects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



Robert Edwin Jones



Dana Michelle Henson

2 Sections 12 Pages

Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,669.06
Chatuge	1,917.85
Nottely	1,762.26

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**SPORTS**

**BASKETBALL**

1/13 vs. Lake Oconee  
6 PM

1/14 @ Washington Wilkes  
6 PM

**Civic Association Membership Meeting Jan. 19**

See page 2A

**FREE Pet Microchip Event Jan. 14**

See page 6B

**Food Pantry Distribution Schedule**

See page 2A

## Union County to Knock Cancer Off The Board in 2023



According to the Union County Georgia American Cancer Society Volunteer Leadership Team for 2023 this will be another record setting event for all of Northeast Georgia, Western North Carolina and Eastern Tennessee. "Yes we are excited to invite our neighbors all around to join our continuing efforts to fight cancers of all kinds!", stated Mia Crowe of Blairsville.

"Our local dedicated volunteers selected our "theme" that will serve to bring church teams, small and large business teams, family teams, youth teams or even neighborhood teams together as we celebrate survivors, remember our fighters and continue to advocate, research and educate as our support to fight all cancers," she added.

Joining us this year will be our many local sponsors and organizations to kick off this annual event on Thursday, January 19, 2023 at 5:30 pm in the fellowship hall of the Mountain Presbyterian Church off

Highway 515 (Young Harris Highway) just east of Blairsville.

Information on this event can be found with internet or by simply calling the American Cancer Society's toll free at 1-800-ACS-2345 or www.cancer.org.

Feel free to also contact Allyson McGraw, long-time volunteer here in Union County at 706-835-8384. Mrs. McGraw also reminded interested volunteers are especially needed to join the leadership team! If you or someone in your family are interested in other opportunities to join our fight against all cancers, there are needs for committee chairs for speakers, Daffodil Days Flower of Hope events, survivor recognitions and support as well as team contacts, marketing projects, etc.

The annual Relay For Life Fight Against Cancer (that began nearly 30 years ago) has grown globally and has adjusted to the various community resources to become one of the world's largest and oldest volunteer grassroots charitable organizations. Our donations have supported valuable research efforts and educational programs and community's resources around the world.

Please consider making Relay For Life your new year's resolution that will truly make a difference in our communities in 2023. Join us on Thursday, January 19, at 5:30 pm for fellowship and inspiration as our teams of volunteers kick off Kick Cancer Off The Board!

Please let us know about your interest in attending the kickoff by calling Allyson at 706-835-8384 or Mia at 706/897-4519.

The date for the annual event will be on Saturday, May 20, 2023 at the Union County Farmers Market location in Blairsville, Georgia from 4-10 PM. Save the date! NT(Jan11,23)CA

## YHC's O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium presents January events

Young Harris College invites the community to January shows at the O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium. The Planetarium is housed in the Maxwell Center for Mathematics and Sciences on the YHC campus, which is located at 1 College Street, Young Harris, Georgia.

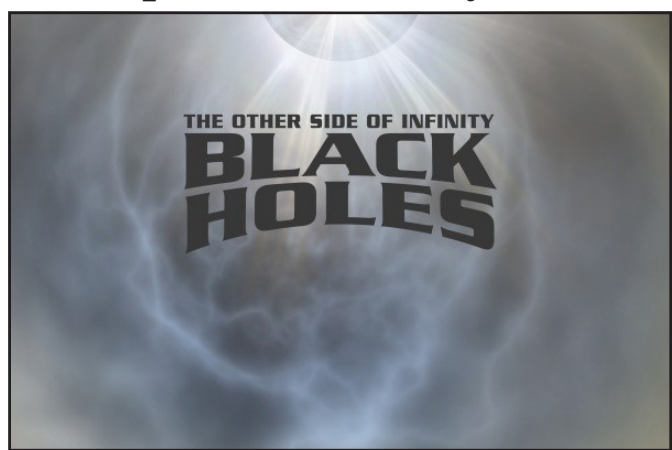
The Planetarium will host "Black Holes: The Other Side of Infinity" on Friday, January 20 at 8 p.m. and Friday, January 27 at 8 p.m.

This show explains the place from which nothing escapes, not even light—where time and space literally come to an end. It is at this point, inside this fantastic riddle, that black holes exert their sway over the cosmos and our imaginations. This exciting full-dome production, narrated by Academy-Award nominated actor Liam Neeson, brings the current science of black holes to the dome screen. Zip through wormholes, witness the collision of galaxies, and experience a simulated flight to a supermassive black hole lurking at the center of our own Milky Way Galaxy. Cutting-edge science and Einstein's theories answer questions along the way, providing the most complete picture yet of this mysterious phenomenon.

Admission to each of these shows is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children 4 years and older, and free for children under 4 years old and for YHC students and employees.

Planetarium tickets can be purchased in advance at yhc.edu/planetarium. From there, select the link to "Public Shows" for a listing of upcoming show dates and times. Each show listing has an option to purchase tickets. Click the show date you'd like to attend to buy tickets through the corresponding Eventbrite page. Remaining tickets, if any, can be purchased at the door on the night of each show.

For more information about the O. Wayne Rollins Planetarium and the YHC Observatory, please call Planetarium Director Lauren Albin at (706) 379-5195. NT(Jan11,23)



## Peacock Performing Arts Center Presents Lies and Pies January 28

As the first performance of the Scribes on Stage 2023 series the Peacock Performing Arts Center in Hayesville, NC, presents LIES and PIES at 7:30 PM on Saturday, January 28, 2023.

The event with stories and music is a revival of community and family fun that was a Labor Day tradition in Clay County from 1999 to 2006. LIES and PIES was a weekend festival in Clay County and was the brain child of the Clay County Community Revitalization Association (CCCRA) to raise money for local projects that included at the time the renovation of the exterior of the historic Clay County courthouse and helping build the hiking and biking trails at Jack Rabbit Recreation Area. In 1999 the CCCRA was a new civic-driven organization of like-minded folks coming together and working to make their mountain community a better place to live and work.

The liar's contest was the center of a Clay County, NC Labor Day festival. Other activities included a competition for the tastiest pie in a baking contest. The festival also included



Clay County neighborhoods competing to take home the coveted Pride of Clay County award and a variety of ribbon-winning contests as best yodeler, best yo-yo tricks, best clogger(s), funniest hat, most unusual pet, ugliest dog, funniest laugh, fast runner in the 5K run and more.

The festival was topped off as Bob and Judy Grove auctioned off the winning pies to the highest bidder. Rob Tiger's band, Irons in the Fire, and others performed at the gazebo. The evenings ended with music and street dancing on the square around the courthouse in historic downtown Hayesville.

The January 28 performance will feature Clay Logan,

Brenda Kay Ledford, Rob Tiger and Tim Ryan. Newcomers are Sandy Benson, Melanie Knauff, Mike Whitney and Denise Mount. Storyteller Kanute Rarey will host the evening at the Peacock as the audience tries to sort out the truth from the outrageous. There will be a pie-baking contest with judges lead by Hayesville's bakery, Jo Jo's Dessert and Bake Shop owner, Jody Atkins, followed by an auction of the award winning pies led by five time liar's contest winner, Tim Ryan.

Tickets and information are available at the Peacock box office, 301 Church St. Hayesville, NC 28904 or 828-389-2787 or www.thepeacocknc.org.

## Record setting Georgia Society Sons of the American Revolution Flag Certificate presented by Patriot Ron Hill



On November 6, 2022 Patriot Ron Hill, (left) a US Army veteran of the Korean War, Vietnam War and Gulf War, a member of the Chattahoochee Christian Church and a member of the Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Georgia Society, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) presents his 142nd Flag Certificate for year 2022, a Georgia Society record, to Chattahoochee Christian Church, Pastor Frank Zimmerman (center) and Dan Johnson accepting for the church. The church was originally established as Chattahoochee Methodist Church in 1860 and recently reformed as the Chattahoochee Christian Church. The SAR Flag Certificate is presented to an individual, organizations and businesses, in recognition of their "Exemplary Patriotism in displaying the Flag of the United States of America".

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter was chartered April 1, 2000 as a chapter of the Georgia SAR Society representing Union, Towns, Fan-



Ron Hill, Pastor Frank Zimmerman and Dan Johnson accepting award.

ning Union, Towns, Fan- ning and Gilmer Counties of Georgia; Clay and Cherokee Counties of North Carolina. The Sons of the American Revolution is a national patriotic, historical and educational non-profit organization whose members are male lineal descendants of the patriots who fought in, or supported the

### Dementia Caregivers Support Group

If you are caring for a person with dementia, join us for our monthly meeting for conversation, education, and support. The Towns County Support Group meets the first Tuesday every month at 1:30 at McConnell Memorial Baptist Church in Hiawassee. For more details call Alzheimer's Association at 800-273-3900 or email Shannon Larsen at shannon.larsen@homestead-hospice.net. NT(Jan11,23)

American Revolution. Anyone with an interest in genealogy and whose patriot ancestor(s) fought or aided in the American Revolution between the years 1774-1783 is encouraged to join us. For more information please call Sid Turner 706-745-3410. NT(Jan11,23)

### Overeaters Anonymous

The Saturday Morning Murphy meeting of Overeaters Anonymous is from 9 AM - 10 AM at Free Methodist Church, 422 Valley River Avenue, Murphy, NC 28906.

Overeaters Anonymous' purpose is a fellowship for those who have a desire to stop eating compulsively in order to achieve or maintain a healthy body weight. There are no dues or fees, donations only. Service area includes western North Carolina and northeast Georgia. Contact Caroline Swan at 224-436-1738 for more information. All are welcome. NT(Jan11,21)

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# New Year Baby 2023...from Page 1A



At 6:37 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 2, Henry "Hank" Allen Patterson became the first baby born in the Union General Hospital Labor & Delivery Unit for 2023. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

same way it often does in the movies.

"It wasn't bad; as far as labor goes, I cannot complain," admitted first-time mother Grace. "It's painful for a minute, and then it goes away and you're back to normal for a minute."

Lo and behold, Little Henry – or Hank as his parents call him – came into the world at 6:37 that evening, weighing 6 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 19 inches long. Not long after, Hank's "birthday mate" arrived at about 7:10.

Regarding the baby's name, "We just liked it," Grace and Will said jointly, with Grace adding that "Allen" had been passed down among the men in her family ever since her grandfather's first name was bestowed upon her own father as a middle name.

Dr. Benjamin Harris attended Grace from the start and monitored the rest of her pregnancy until the day came for the newest member of the Patterson family to arrive, and Harris was present to help bring him into the world.

Luckily, the birth went smoothly with no complications, and the Pattersons were quick to commend the delivery team. They were especially thankful for Hannah, a nurse who stayed at their side for seven hours and remained after the end of her shift to ensure Hank's safe arrival.

Hank is Will and Grace's firstborn, and while the Pattersons plan to have more, they're unsure how many. Until then,

they care for a small farm at home and manage their own veterinary practice, Cohutta Animal Clinic.

"All of our clients have been so excited," Will said. "(They've been) messaging our Facebook page if Grace has had the baby. It's cool."

In fact, it was during the pursuit of their degrees that the proud parents first met. Both were students at the University of Georgia, and as Grace says, "It was love at first laugh," and the pair was inseparable after immediately clicking.

While Grace was from Charleston, South Carolina, Will was a native of Blue Ridge, and when he came back to North Georgia to get hands-on experience in the field, Grace came with him. For a time, they worked at Lake Chatuge Animal Hospital in Towns County before a lucky opportunity fell into their laps.

"Dr. (Karen) Ortley was the vet at Cohutta, and I was friends with her," Will said. "She was retiring and said, 'Hey, we're going to sell the practice. Do you guys want to buy it? We've always wanted to have our own practice, especially Blue Ridge ... We bought it, and it's been great.'"

There's no great push for Hank to one day inherit the business, but the new parents agree that if he follows in their footsteps, they wouldn't have a problem in making Cohutta a family practice.

Ultimately, they hope their son will be able to pursue any occupation he's interested in, with both saying that they

are "excited" to see how his personality – and indeed, his future – pans out.

Of course, as proud "Dawgs," Hank's parents want to see him graduate from UGA no matter what field he goes into.

Admittedly, he's well-prepared.

Grace said that "a lot of the fun was in getting ready" to bring Baby Hank home, where they put together a dedicated room for him along with "a little corner in every room of the house." That said, the family even had help from Union General.

For claiming the highly coveted status of New Year Baby, the Pattersons received a gift basket filled with baby supplies and a small bag of books from First Readers to give Hank a good head start with his academic pursuits.

Although first-time parents, the Pattersons have some experience in childcare. With a 2-year-old niece and an 8-week-old nephew, they both have ample know-how in changing diapers and quieting crying, which came in handy when Will changed Hank's first diaper as Grace recovered from labor.

And so far, there have been no complaints, and the future is bright after a complication-free delivery and a healthy baby.

Only a few days old, it's impossible to tell what the future holds for Hank, but he's been largely quiet and calm, and the Pattersons are content for the blessing of watching their son's life unfold.

# Young Harris...from Page 1A

with the auditor, the city made several revenue reversals for balances that should not have been carried forward from previous years, giving the impression that the city had less money than it should.

"The adjustment entries were just accounting," Gibby said. "They didn't affect our cash amount ... Ana came into this past year with a lot of mess on the books and a really messy last audit."

Since there were no appearances from the public that night, Gibby led the council straight into an organizational meeting to conduct the yearly appointing of official positions and committee assignments.

First off was the position of mayor pro tempore, which Councilman Matt Miller continued as usual. As mayor pro tem, Miller will step in to run the city should Mayor Gibby become incapacitated or otherwise unavailable to carry out city business.

In fact, there were no changes to any of the current liaison positions or committee assignments among councilmembers and other city representatives, which remained as follows:

Administrative Committee: all council members.

Water/Sewer Committee: Councilmen John Kelley, Steve

Clark and Terry Ingram.

Tree Board/Street Committee: Councilmen Terry Ingram, Donald Keys and Matt Miller.

Planning Commission Liaison: Councilman Steve Clark.

Library Board appointment from Young Harris: Shirley Miller and Clint Hobbs.

Ethics Commission: Shirley Miller and Clint Hobbs. Superintendent of Elections: City Clerk Nicolette Wade.

During the Engineering Report, Clark gave the update that the Timberline booster pump repairs are being scheduled. The design stage has been completed, meaning the project is moving on to the construction phase, estimated to begin sometime in February "when the weather gets better."

City Public Works Supervisor Dean Stanley shared that the water meter rehaul was underway after a month of waiting for replacements to ship. Previously, the city had ordered new water meters to replace damaged meters and outdated technology.

The total number of water meters in the city is going down as new meters gradually arrive to replace the old.

Stanley also reported that the federal government had

recognized the Young Harris Water System for 12 consecutive months of exemplary water fluoridation quality.

City Attorney Marvin Harkins reviewed health insurance options from the Georgia Municipal Association regarding plans set to go into effect March 1, and the council held a first reading of the Ordinance to Provide Employee Health Insurance.

The new ordinance establishes health insurance for city employees and is comparable in cost to the "Health Reimbursement Arrangement" the city has previously had in effect. GMA requires an ordinance be enacted for municipalities wishing to enroll in its health insurance program.

A second reading of the ordinance is expected next month.

Also in the meeting, qualifying fees for mayor and council were set at \$252 and \$72 respectively; and the council voted to move the July 4 meeting to July 11 and the Sept. 5 meeting to Sept. 12.

The Young Harris City Council meets on the first Tuesday of every month at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, located at 50 Irene Berry Drive, barring delays or rescheduling for holidays. These meetings are open to the public, and the community is encouraged to attend.

# Rev. Taylor...from Page 1A

"Wade Lott, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, brought forth my nomination for Vice President to the floor among four other candidates," Taylor said, explaining that the title 'Third Vice President' merely indicates the number of votes received from the convention in order.

"I felt that the responsibilities were similar to what I do (at McConnell) and felt it was something I could do," he continued. "It's a one-year term, so as far as any political ambitions, I don't have any aspirations."

"My No. 1 job is to be the pastor of McConnell – that's my main responsibility. Second to that is to serve our association in whatever way I can. But I am honored to be asked to serve in this way, and I just always remain open to what God wants me to do."

Taylor, who has been in ministry full-time for 35 years,

believes a pastor's most essential functions are to shepherd God's flock to the church "and to equip the church to do the work of ministry from here locally to the ends of the Earth."

"Anything I do outside of that is only parallel to my primary vision, which is to know Christ and make Him known, and to help people find and follow Jesus," he said.

Additionally, the Hiawassee-based pastor was asked if he would be willing to serve if nominated for the GBC Vice President position by newly elected Convention President Josh Saefkow, who is the senior pastor of Flat Creek Baptist Church in Fayetteville and a past GBC Vice President.

"It's a position that really is more honorary," Taylor said of his executive role. "I will be carrying out the convention's meetings and reading some devotionals (in 2023)."

"More so, I believe they

were looking for someone who would represent the northern part of Georgia well and someone they believed would work well with the new incoming convention president if he was elected to the position.

"I was really astounded to be approached to serve in that position because the majority of my ministry was spent serving in North Carolina, so I really didn't think I was that well known, but I said, if I'm needed, I'm more than willing to serve and represent the church."

For more information on McConnell Memorial and its many ministries, visit [www.mcconnellchurch.org](http://www.mcconnellchurch.org).

There, people may find the fascinating roots of McConnell Baptist Church in the history of Towns County, including the church's founding in 1882 as the Baptist Church of Christ at Hiawassee, the story of its name change, and the deep ties to the local school system.

The church is located at 84 Church Street.

# Top of Georgia...from Page 1A

in helping our community's future grow," Chotiner said at the workshop session on Thursday, Jan. 5.

"I'd like to teach them the art of delivery, because there is a mechanics side of giving a speech, but then there's the actual art of delivering it, and that's huge," Kathy said. "You've got to learn how to do that, so that's what I'm hop-

ing to pass on to these youngsters."

"I'm just excited about giving back to the community; we've only lived here 2.5 years, but I'm all-in," Seymore said.

"I'm looking forward to helping impact these students in any way and be a part of the community and have our college helping with more in the community as well," Urquiola

said. In addition to cash prizes, students will be competing for \$2,000 in total scholarship money for college tuition, so local youths and families have multiple reasons to participate.

Enrollment is free but limited to 40 students, and those interested in signing up or getting involved may call Chotiner at 910-697-6938 or email [togspeakingcontest@gmail.com](mailto:togspeakingcontest@gmail.com).

# Ticket Quota...from Page 1A

to validate my thought, I engaged several experienced police chiefs/personnel that are either retired or have many years of experience, and they felt that Jeremy was a fine choice for the job.

"I felt very comfortable in offering Mr. Parker the position. He accepted and became the interim Police Chief until his official start date of Jan. 3, 2023.

"I was not copied on the 'leaked' email from the former police chief Paul Smith to the council and our city attorney. I feel compelled to address several issues.

"The safety and well-being of the citizens of Hiawassee is top priority for me, and to achieve this, the police department is critical. When I became mayor, one of the very first things I did was increase the police force from four officers to five. This was to assist with providing the essential purpose of the police department to protect and serve the community.

"I hear monthly that we should eliminate the police department, but that is something I am not willing to do. The No. 1 request from our citizens is to live in a place where they feel safe. I have made strides to generate additional revenue streams to cover the expenses for the city. The significant portion of those increases have helped fund the police deficit. It is absurd to think that the police could be self-funding as there is a deficit of over \$325,000 annually.

"I never imposed a quota for citations, nor have I ever asked the police chief to determine a quota number to implement. I have in the past spoken to the prior chief about better managing productivity for our officers – traffic enforcement,

code enforcement, community policing, etc. We have had several large accidents in town that might have been prevented if we would have been more vigilant with traffic enforcement.

"After our incident with Sheriff (Ken) Henderson in June of 2022, I asked Paul to bring in a third party to review our department. In September, Police Chief Billy Grogan of Dunwoody spent a day in our office reviewing our operation. His report showed no need for major improvements but did make this statement regarding productivity: 'I then reviewed the number of citations issued by the Hiawassee Police Department in 2021. Officers issued 459 citations and 149 warnings. I found that number to be unremarkable. I was somewhat surprised that more citations were not issued, given the traffic volume on Hiawassee's streets.'

"I asked for reports to show activity during 2021 and 2022. I was appalled to see the lack of productivity for those years for the department. On a weekly basis I hear from our businesses and citizens about the rapid speed of cars going through town. During 2021, the entire police department consisting of five full-time officers for 12 months, wrote 15 speeding violations. In 2022, that number was increased to 37, 20 of which were written by one officer. In my eyes, that is not acceptable. I have consulted with experienced law enforcement personnel and shown these reports to them, and they also felt this productivity was unacceptable.

"Since then, I have met with the entire police team including Chief Parker and reviewed these reports as well as

how to better improve the department. I was informed that they do not keep daily activity logs showing productivity. I was also informed that they have never had staff meetings to discuss how to better run the department, nor have they taken advantage of our officer that is fully available to provide training to the team.

"Perhaps I should have been more directly involved with the day-to-day operations of the police department, but I felt those responsibilities belonged to the police chief. The city sent Paul to Leadership Chatuge to assist with his development, as management is not an easy task. I am disappointed that the opportunity was not utilized to the fullest. I have met with Chief Parker and I will be attending monthly staff meetings with the entire team.

"I do not believe that it is immoral, unethical or illegal to ask city employees to do their jobs, make them accountable, and to make proper use of the public resources that they are provided."

Reached for comment on the mayor's response, Smith stuck by his contention that Ordiales had asked him to implement a quota when telling him that "the PD needed to write enough tickets to cover the salaries of the officers" lest she be "forced to eliminate a position within the department," as he recounted in his email to the council.

Further, he denied claims that he never held staff meetings or utilized the in-house training officer, saying he convened meetings with all officers after monthly municipal court sessions, which included training assignments using both the department's instructor and online training tools.