

# Towns County Herald

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## Shooting survivor speaks out, thanks community for help

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The Chatuge Regional Hospital Rehabilitation & Wellness Center in Hiawassee was the scene of a nightmare last week, as Charles Jason Matheson reportedly walked into the facility and started firing a 9 mm handgun, according to the Hiawassee Police Department. Matheson's target? His estranged wife Crystal Matheson, who works there as a rehab technician. In what should have been a normal day on the job, at around 2:15 p.m. on Jan. 26, Crystal found herself being shot eight times at her work place, after which Matheson fled in his pickup truck.

Fortunately, two experienced nurses employed in the same facility immediately came to Crystal's aid, Hiawassee Police Chief Paul Smith said, and she subsequently made it through emergency surgery and was on a road to recovery by press time. "I have been overwhelmed by the love that has been directed my way," Crystal said Saturday, addressing supporters on Facebook. "I am blessed beyond measure is the simplest way I know to put it. I have felt your prayers, and please keep them coming, because I need them." At the time of the shooting, Crystal had been issued a Domestic Violence Protection Order against her husband, who has been charged with felony aggravated stalking for violating that order.



Crystal Matheson  
Photo/Facebook

Additionally, Matheson, 41, has been charged with aggravated assault and criminal attempt to commit murder, both felonies, with other charges

likely once the Georgia Bureau of Investigation turns its case over to the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office for prosecution.

The shooting sparked a multi-agency hunt for Matheson that Tuesday, which didn't last long, as the Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office found his truck outside his father's house in Hayesville less than an hour after the shooting, Clay County Sheriff Bobby Deese said.

"Due to the circumstances surrounding the shooting," Deese said, "we wanted to do everything we could to keep the public and that community safe."

"Once his vehicle was located and confirmed he was inside that residence, deputies

set a perimeter to keep visual on him. If he was able to flee in a vehicle, we wanted to keep him contained as much as possible to minimize the threat to the public."

Deese requested assistance from State Highway Patrol, a hostage negotiator with the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office, and SWAT assistance from the Macon and Jackson County sheriff's offices, all of North Carolina.

"When SWAT arrived, a formal plan was put in place and a search warrant was executed at the residence, where Matheson surrendered to deputies without incident," Deese said. "He was taken into custody (at 8:17 p.m. on Jan. 26) and transported to the Clay County Detention

Center."

At press time, Matheson remained in custody in North Carolina on a \$1 million secured bond, pending transfer to Georgia. He made his first appearance in Clay County District Court on Jan. 28, during which he declined to waive extradition for transport to face his Georgia charges.

"Georgia officials have begun the process to apply for a Governor's Warrant while Matheson awaits his next court date in Clay County on Feb. 15, when arguments against extradition can be heard," the Clay County Sheriff's Office said.

Matheson has been charged only and is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a  
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## Volunteers assist COVID vaccination efforts in Towns



Dr. Samuel Le Church of Synergy Health would like to thank all his volunteers on the COVID-19 Vaccine Team for making the Jan. 27 clinic possible.  
Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS — Synergy Health of Hiawassee and 35 COVID-19 Vaccine Team volunteers partnered with the Towns County Recreation

and Conference Center to host a community vaccine clinic on Wednesday, Jan. 27.

Due to ongoing vaccine supply issues, the clinic featured just 100 vaccinations for residents aged 65 or older from Union and Towns counties

who had signed up via ngvax.com, though organizers used the occasion as a trial run for a much larger clinic.

Logistically, everything ran smoothly on Wednesday, with patients being vaccinated  
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## TCSO launches tip line for drugs, criminal activity

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor



Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson and his staff have launched a brand-new Drugs and Criminal Activity Tip Line at 706-896-3697.

"If you have any information concerning drug activity or any other criminal activity happening in Towns County, we can use your

help," Sheriff Henderson said. "When you call the tip line, your information will be kept strictly confidential."

Tipsters may remain anonymous if they wish by leaving a message with the location and type of criminal activity being alleged, though the information "will be better served if one of our investigators can call and speak with you directly," the Sheriff's Office said.

"We are here to serve our communities and citizens in Towns County, and any information will be investigated," Henderson said. "The entire Towns County Sheriff's Office appreciates your help in making this county the best place to live in Georgia."

People calling in to the

tip line at 706-896-3697 will hear the following message:

"You have reached the Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug and Criminal Activity Tip Line. Your call is kept strictly confidential. You can leave your name, phone number and best time to call back. If you want to remain anonymous, please leave your tip, including location and type of activity you are reporting."

"We certainly appreciate all information involving drug and criminal activity in Towns County, and again, your information is kept strictly confidential. Thank you for helping us make Towns County a great place to live. Have a great day."

The tip line is a  
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## Ordiales reviews progress, gives look ahead for city

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales offered a COVID update, good audit news, a 2020 Year in Review and a look ahead at things to come in the Jan. 25 City Council work session.

Ordiales started the Facebook Livestreamed meeting with a COVID-19 report for the city, showing a reduction in numbers from earlier in January.

"For Towns County, the seven-day total ... coming from CDC data, we had 47 new cases in the last week," Ordiales said. "Which is good, because it is 35% less than we had two weeks before that."

"Our percent of positive



Liz Ordiales is 24.7% positive on the testing, which is higher than it was in the last two weeks."

The city had its 2020 financial audit completed

recently and was excited to receive a good report, despite a few financial losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Always great to have a clean audit, it makes us very happy," Ordiales said. "We are looking pretty good, and the team is fantastic; they come in here and turn our world upside down for weeks."

"But they just come up with great ideas to make everything faster and better and more efficient. We love having them here. I know that is kind of weird that we love auditors, but we do."

A new program coming to the city soon is CodeRED, which is already in use by the county and will assist the city in alerting residents of

See Hiawassee, Page 2A

## Recreation Center goes extra mile for community health

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The American Red Cross honored the Towns County Recreation Department recently for contributing its facilities at Foster Park multiple times over the course of the pandemic for highly successful blood drives.

"This award recognizes you as an extraordinary Blood Program Leader who stood with the American Red Cross during the COVID-19 pandemic this past year," the award reads. "Your dedicated support and commitment were essential in our mission to help save lives through blood donation. On behalf of patients and their families, we sincerely thank you for your service."

Recreation Department Director Matt Youngblood said it has been his department's pleasure to help, and that he'll continue to assist the organization in any way he



Matt Youngblood

can. "I'm just glad that we are able to help," Youngblood said, "especially during this time of COVID and everything going on, having a facility that has been able to stay open as much as we can."

"I know the trouble of giving blood right now with the hospitals shut down or limited. They have to have a place to do it, and just being able to be

a part of that is essential. People need it."

The Rec Department is all about people active and healthy generally, and Youngblood has been able to further that mission by allowing the use of the facility for other community health purposes besides sports and workouts.

Last week, Youngblood welcomed Synergy Health and nearly three dozen community volunteers for a COVID-19 mass vaccine clinic at the Recreation and Conference Center, and he'll be doing the same moving forward for other COVID vaccination efforts.

"We have an open door for anything that we can help," Youngblood said. "That is the same for these COVID vaccines."

"It puts a little bit of a damper on people coming up and doing their normal routine, but I think in the long run it is

See Rec Center, Page 2A

## Ninth District Opportunity assists with lodging, utilities



By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Ninth District Opportunity is anticipating funding coming available in March to help families that may be struggling with rent or utilities.

Ann Sullivan with Ninth District of Union County is grateful for the support the food pantry enjoys thanks to efforts by the community and various programs. Sullivan can

be reached at 706-745-6596.

"It is the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program," Sullivan said. "Things are going well at the pantry. My pantry has been blessed with donations and with food, but people have gotten a lot of money from food stamps, so they haven't been using us like usual."

"We have not seen a lot of our senior citizens because they are all scared of this COVID stuff. We are here, though,

and have programs and things that people can do here to help them out."

Such opportunities as the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program are meant for people to take advantage of and utilize when they find themselves in tight spots financially.

"We can either use it to pay on rent that is past due or past due electric bills, or if their propane tank is empty, we can do a minimum fill on that kind of thing," Sullivan said. "It is a great program."

"You make the people accountable for what they should be doing to get themselves in line. I won't say they have to prove they need the assistance, but they have to

See Ninth District, Page 2A

## Memory Hearts return to help feed homebound seniors

By Jarrett Whitener  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Memory Hearts are returning to the Towns County Senior Center, giving local people and businesses a chance to honor the memory of a loved one while supporting homebound seniors right here in the community.

Senior Center Director Gail Bradley-Parker is looking forward to the fundraiser this year, hoping to see the same level of support the community usually shows.

"We do this every year, and it is a fundraiser for Meals on Wheels," Bradley-Parker said. "They cost \$4 a heart, and they can call the Senior Center and come by."

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Purchasing a Memory Heart in the Towns County Senior Center's Fourth Annual Share the Love of a Meal with a Senior will benefit the local Meals on Wheels Program.  
Photo/Facebook

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