

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Rollie Thomas promoted in School Board meeting

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Rollie Thomas was named the new Personnel/Curriculum Director for Towns County Schools by unanimous vote of School Board members in their March 3 regular meeting.

Thomas is moving up to the Board Office from his position as middle school principal to replace Dr. Connie Hobbs, who started in the position at the end of last semester but is having to resign to take care of her ailing mother down in St. Simons Island.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said he believes Thomas, who has experience

with curriculum in all the schools, will continue to be "an excellent asset for our system."

"Mr. Thomas has been a successful educator at all three of our schools as a successful teacher at the elementary, at the middle school, as a successful assistant principal at the high school for a year and a half, and now as a 30-day middle school principal," Berrong said.

Other recommendations for new hires included a middle school counselor, an athletic trainer, an elementary teacher, a custodian and a school nutrition substitute, and additional personnel decisions remain in the pipeline.

School Technology Director Trena Stroud took a few moments to update the board about current schoolwide cybersecurity measures.

"The No. 1 risk to a school network is phishing attacks," Stroud said. "So, what we're trying to do is make our staff much more aware of the dangers out there. We've done some phishing training with our staff."

"All of the applications used here at the school by students and staff are going into the two-step authentication process. We also have a cybersecurity network filtering system that helps teachers and students while using the network."

"We have a disaster recovery program in place. Serial Solutions is our network company that we use, and they monitor our network continuously and would alert us instantly in the event of a disaster."

In other business, Finance Director Myra reported on the fiscal health of the district.

"I will be advertising in the paper around March 19 our first budget meeting of the year, which will be at 5:30 p.m. on April 14 before the regularly scheduled board meeting," Underwood said. "Some of the things that we know already is (the Teachers
See Thomas Promoted, Page 6



School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong with Rollie Thomas, who will be taking over duties as the system's new Personnel/Curriculum Director. Photo by Shelly Knight

Former Gov. Nathan Deal meets with local children

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Last week, Towns County Elementary School celebrated Read Across America Week by taking students on a "figurative road trip across the United States."

Each grade level focused on a specific region, with children integrating their studies across various subjects using the unique thematic approach, according to TCES Media Specialist Julie Thompson.

A significant highlight of the week came on Thursday, March 6, with a visit from guest author Nathan Deal, who served as the 82nd Governor of Georgia from 2011 to 2019.

The former governor has published a delightful children's book titled "Veto, The Governor's Cat," which he shared with students. The book was inspired by his late wife Sandra, a former schoolteacher



Former Gov. Nathan Deal visited with Towns County Elementary School children during Read Across America Week on Thursday, March 6. Photo/Submitted

er and First Lady of Georgia, and is a tribute to her memory. She passed away in 2022.

A champion of literacy in Georgia, Sandra Deal was always the one to read to children – in all school dis-

tricts across the state, no less – and Mr. Deal is carrying on her legacy by doing so in her stead, all while raising money to fund childhood literacy with The Deal Foundation.

See Gov. Deal, Page 6

Loftin Turpin earns chance to be a State FFA Officer

News Special

Towns County High School senior Loftin Turpin has achieved an incredible milestone in his Future Farmers of America journey, earning the opportunity to advance in the selection process for Georgia FFA State Office.

Loftin's dedication, leadership and passion for agricultural education have earned him a spot in the next phase of the process, where he will undergo interviews and a written exam at Camp John Hope in Perry, Georgia, next month.

If selected, he will move forward as one of the final candidates vying for a state officer position, with the ultimate selection taking place at the Georgia FFA State Convention in Macon on April 23-26.

Loftin has been an active FFA member since sixth grade and has demonstrated outstanding leadership as both Reporter and President of the



Loftin Turpin – including Prepared Public Speaking, Floriculture, Nursery Landscaping, Forestry and Career Development Events
See Loftin Turpin, Page 6

Tamela Cooper informs public about the Coroner's Office

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers filled the Sundance Grill on Friday to hear the thoughts of their latest guest speaker, Towns County Coroner Tamela Cooper.

Cooper led an informational discussion about the Coroner's Office, relating first that the number of deaths her office responds to fluctuates from month to month.

"I think we totaled up to 11 in January and seven in February," Cooper said. "We
See Coroner's Office, Page 7



Tamela Cooper
Towns County Coroner

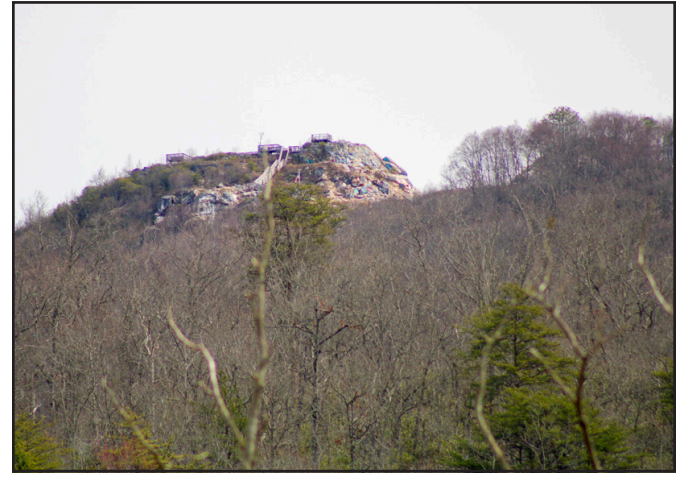
Deaths on Bell Mountain believed to be murder-suicide

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Authorities are investigating a potential murder-suicide at Bell Mountain Park involving twin brothers from Lawrenceville.

Hikers found the two men deceased at the top of Bell Mountain in Hiwassee around 11 a.m. on Saturday, March 8, prompting a call to Towns County E-911.

The men were identified as 19-year-old twins Qadir Malik Lewis and Naazir Rahim Lewis of Gwinnett County, according to the Georgia
See Bell Mountain Deaths, Page 14



Bell Mountain County Park can be found at the top of Bell Mountain in Hiwassee. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Hiwassee Garden Club celebrates 30th Anniversary Arbor Day

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Arbor Day in Georgia fell on Feb. 21 this year, and true to form, the Hiwassee Garden Club celebrated with a local tree planting to mark the city's 30th year celebrating the occasion.

The club set out a pink dogwood sapling in front of its headquarters behind the Towns County Courthouse. Arbor Day Committee Chair Joan Crothers was there along with several Garden Club members to commemorate the event.

Rangers from the Georgia Forestry Commission –

Chief Ranger Blake Melton, Frank Sanchez, Andy Jones, Scott Peters and Edward Berrong – showed up also to help dig a hole in the front yard of the England Hiwassee Garden Club Center.

Though there were initial concerns about the ground being frozen following bouts of cold weather, the soil was soft enough for the task to be completed, leaving the little sapling free to spread its roots.

The tree was supplied by Dennison Bros. Nursery, upholding a tradition nearly as old as the city's celebration of the holiday. Last year, the goal had been to supply a dogwood, but due to a lack of availability, a dwarf magnolia

was planted instead.

But this year, with dogwoods available, the variety with pink blossoms was chosen to one day cast shade over the front yard of the Garden Club. While it's not very tall right now, pink dogwoods grow to about 15 to 25 feet, and with luck, this Arbor Day's new addition will reach that expectation.

As noted above, 2025 marks three decades of Hiwassee celebrating the holiday, and Crothers shared that Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. plans to put up signs highlighting the city's status as a "Tree City" on either side of the city limits.

See Arbor Day 2025, Page 3



The Georgia Forestry Commission joined the Hiwassee Garden Club last month in celebrating Arbor Day 2025. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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Blue Ridge 1,674.44
Chatuge 1,918.42
Nottely 1,762.45

TCHS Student of the Week See Page 3

YHC President Wells to Speak 3/14 See Page 8



The support you need for your next big dream.
Talk to me today about your loan and line of credit options.

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© 2024 United Community Bank | NMLS #421841 | ucbi.com/borrowing
This is not a commitment to lend. Normal credit criteria apply.

United
Community

TCHS Beta Club help Hiawassee Park residents



Pictured are Jaden Crooks, Isaac Conrad, Carlie Gonzales, Christopher Houser, Chloe Crowe, Sawyer Cunningham, Jamie McCarter, Teagan Johns, and Faculty Adviser Rachel Surles.

TCHS Beta Club members teamed up again with Hiawassee Park to help residents with technology and digital devices last week. Students visited Hiawassee Park to offer their tech savvy services to residents. Students alongside residents worked together to download apps, navigate devices and programs, and make the technology world a little less daunting. Students that participated were rewarded with a sense of pride to be able to help their elders and engage in some great conversations with residents.

Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. announces Home Cooling help for the Elderly and Medically Homebound



Brenda Dalin, Program Director, Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. announces Home Cooling Help for the Elderly and Medically Homebound for Banks, Barrow, Clarke, Dawson, Elbert, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Jackson, Lumpkin, Madison, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White counties.

Households in which every member is age 65 and older -OR- is medically homebound due to health reasons may apply for assistance with their heating bills beginning on April 1, 2025. One-time payments will be made by check issued to the home energy suppliers.

Eligibility for the program is based on the income of all household members.

When applying for assistance, persons will present verification of age for everyone in the home, verification of all household income received within the past 30 days (check stubs, public assistance checks, unemployment checks, etc.); verification of Social Security numbers for everyone in the home, verification of citizenship (driver's license, state ID, etc.), and the most recent electric bill AND heating bill. Please bring all documentation as we can no longer obtain the information for you.

All eligible applicants are asked to contact Ninth District Opportunity, Inc.'s scheduling system April 1, 2025 beginning at 8:30 AM by telephone at 855-636-3108 or go online to <https://ndo.appointment.works/ea>.

Phone lines and website for scheduling will not be ac-

tive until the opening date of the program and no appointments will be made by telephone or online until this time. No walk-ins, please. Appointments will be scheduled until all funds are exhausted. Additional information will be made available online at www.ndo.org.

Only households 65 years of age and older or medically homebound may apply beginning April 1, 2025. Applicants that do not meet the required criteria will be denied.

The general public may apply on May 1, 2025 beginning at 8:30 AM.

Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. is an equal opportunity agency while providing services without regard to age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, or any other classification or category.

Arbor Day 2025...from Page 1

The Tree City USA Program goes hand-in-hand with Arbor Day, serving as a call to action for communities particularly conscious of environmental wellbeing.

To be named a Tree City, a city must follow four steps: maintain a tree board, adopt a tree ordinance, spend at least \$2 per capita on urban forestry and celebrate Arbor Day. Hiawassee has accomplished these things and more for 30 years now.

Crothers herself, as Committee Chair, has a big part to play in how the event is recognized on a local level. She divulged that the trees chosen to be set out as a community are planted after careful consideration; Crothers always asks around and finds out where there's a need for more trees.

Over the years, they've been planted all around Hiawassee - and, certainly, Towns County at large. Popular choices are public parks like Lloyd's Landing and Mayor's

Park, where schoolchildren have helped oversee planting in the past.

Just last year, the dwarf magnolia was placed out behind the newly-renovated Towns County Courthouse, and a second sapling - another dogwood - went in the Garden Club's backyard. The choice for a tree planted in the front yard of the Garden Club headquarters was ornamentation, but the exact spot was chosen so that it wouldn't overshadow the flowers growing at the edge.

Attendees received the chance to take home their own saplings to plant in celebration of Arbor Day. Sourced from various state nurseries, the saplings were bald cypress this year, and a few of them found new homes with Garden Club members, bound to be planted and given space to grow just like the dogwood in front of the Garden Club.

As for future plans, Crothers said she would like to

look into more parking for the Garden Club - ideally utilizing the lot across the street and then clearing up the old plant life to make way for new.

Citizens for a Better America Meeting March 20

The next regular monthly meeting of Citizens for a Better America [CBA] will be Thursday, March 20, 2025 at 315 Family Church Road, Murphy, in the building that was formerly a church.

We are pleased to have Sheriff Dustin Smith speak at the meeting. He will share about new initiatives the department is planning for 2025, and talk about ways community members can engage with our local law enforcement agencies to create thriving communities.

Community members will have an opportunity to break up into small groups and brainstorm objectives for the CBA task forces. This is a chance to give your input for making Cherokee County better. Come to the meeting and bring a friend!

Optional social and refreshment hour starts at 5 PM, and the meeting starts promptly at 6 PM and goes until 7:30. Let's work together to create change!

For more information: www.Citizensforabetteramerica.com or email contact@citizensforabetteramerica.com.

Pieceful Mountain Quilt Guild meeting

The Pieceful Mountain Quilt Guild meets each month on the third Thursday, at the Blue Ridge Methodist Church, located at 235 Orvin Lance Rd. The meeting begins at 6 PM, and you can arrive after 5:30 PM. The church is located behind the Blue Ridge Post Office. Call Jennie Priven 706-781-8495 for more information.

BINGO

Pat Haralson Civic Center
165 Wellborn Street
Blairsville, GA
Every Wednesday
Doors Open - 6 PM
Games Start - 7 PM
Benefits
Castoff Pet Rescue

Enotah CASA invites community to local Open House event on Wednesday, March 19

The Enotah Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program is pleased to announce an Open House event in Towns County, inviting community members to learn more about becoming a volunteer and making a difference in the lives of children in foster care.

The event will be held at the Towns County Civic Center, 67 Lakeview Circle, Unit C, on March 19, 2025, from 1-2 p.m.

The theme of this year's open house is "Come Ask Me Why." Attendees will have the opportunity to meet current volunteers, staff, and board members, and learn about the vital role that CASA volunteers play in the lives of children who have experienced abuse and neglect.

Volunteers serve as guardians ad litem, advocating for the best interests of children in court proceedings and ensuring that the children's voices are heard.

CASA volunteers undergo 30 hours of training, observe court proceedings, and are supervised locally. They have a robust support



I AM CASA

ASK ME WHY

OPEN HOUSE

MARCH 19TH, 2025

706-969-8837



network of fellow CASAs and author detailed reports for the juvenile judge, advocating for the best interest of the child. Volunteers maintain regular contact with the children they serve, visiting them and communicating with teachers, doctors, parents, foster parents, and others involved in the child's life.

By attending the Open House event, community members can learn more about how they can make a lasting

impact on the lives of vulnerable children. The Enotah CASA program is dedicated to ensuring that every child has a voice in court and a brighter future.

For more information, please visit the Enotah CASA website at <https://enotahcasa.org/> or contact the office directly at 706-864-0300.

Join us and discover why "Come Ask Me Why" is more than just a theme - it's a call to action.



TCHS Student of the Week



Erin Schuette and Dominick Britt

The TCHS Student of the Week is junior Dominick Britt. Teacher Erin Schuette states: "Dominick has evolved into one of the class leaders. He is always soft spoken with adults and peers, and loves to tell jokes! Dominick is a very strong auditory listener. I can count on him to know the answers to questions when we are having a class discussion. He is truly an asset to my classroom."

Dominick's favorite subject is history as he thinks it is interesting to learn from the past. After graduation, he hopes to be a mechanic as he enjoys working with vehicles, especially older vehicles. Outside of academics, he enjoys spending time outdoors hiking, fishing, and hunting. Out of all the TRIBE characteristics, he believes that he demonstrates respect the most as he treats people well and always tries to do the right thing. Two interesting facts about Dominick is that he collects knives and enjoys cooking for his family. His proudest accomplishment is that he helped a twelve year old friend before he made a serious mistake.

Gov. Deal...from Page 1

And students were captivated by the stories of felines Veto and his companion Bill during their time in the Governor's Mansion, as well as the numerous adventures that followed, Thompson said.

During his talk, Gov. Deal not only shared the entertaining escapades of Veto the Cat but also imparted moral lessons and values that students could connect with from each story contained within the book, Thompson said.

Some of the moral lessons from the book include being kind to others, the importance of making friends, and being "thankful for what you have."

Students from kindergarten through fifth grade were delighted with the stories; their enthusiastic response was a testament to Deal's positive influence on literacy, as many have expressed interest in reading the

copy he generously donated to the school library, Thompson said.

"We at Towns County Elementary School would like to thank former Gov. Deal for taking time to share his wonderful book with our students who are sure to love reading it for many years to come," Thompson concluded.

Deal followed up his visit at the Elementary School with a trip to the Towns County Public Library in Hiawassee, where he read to a small group of youngsters and imparted similar life lessons using the fanciful animal characters from his book, published last August.

"It's nice to have children react, and they do - they listen, and you can see that they're paying attention to what you're trying to tell them," Deal said. "Somebody said, 'This is sort of like being on the campaign trail, isn't it?'

I said, in some ways it is, but it's a whole lot more fun."

Life after politics has been busier than Deal expected, with the new book and reading tours keeping him happily occupied in addition to speaking engagements at different organizations from time to time.

"I didn't think I'd be this busy as retired, but it's been busy," Deal said.

Mountain Regional Library System Director Heath Lee said the former governor's visit to the library was "definitely an honor."

"He has touched a lot of things in the state, had a lot of influence during his governorship," Lee said. "To have him here taking part in an event at this level - it means a lot to have someone willing to share their time doing that."

Lee and Towns County Library Branch Manager Kevin Kirby said they are also grateful that Deal has pledged a portion of the proceeds from his book to be donated to The



Gov. Deal was happy to share his new children's book, "Veto, The Governor's Cat," with kids at the Towns County Library last week.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Deal Foundation in support of projects, initiatives and scholarships related to Sandra Deal's legacy.

One of those statewide initiatives is the Summer Reading Program enjoyed by

the children of Towns County.

"They provide mini grants to all the library systems in the state on an annual basis," Lee said. "We use those funds for the Summer Reading Program, program supplies,

prizes; so, it's a nice benefit that they provide."

Children and families during both visits purchased copies of Deal's book, contributing locally to benefit the program.

Hiawassee woman arrested again on new drug charges

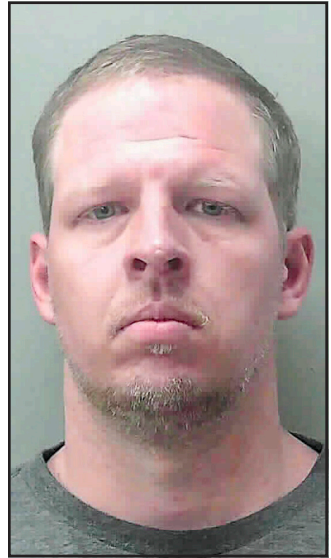
News Special

As previously reported, on Oct. 14, 2024, following a weeklong investigation by Towns County Sheriff's Office Investigators, Tiffany Nicole McNabb, 39, of Hiawassee, was arrested at a residence on Streak Hill Road.

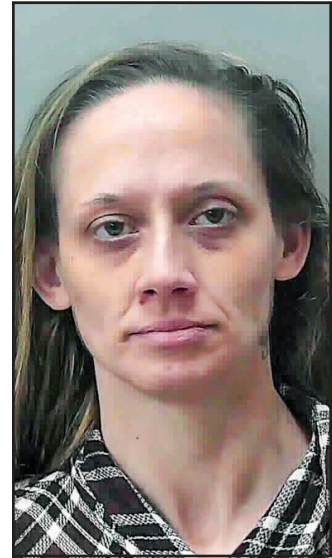
McNabb was charged with trafficking of methamphetamine, possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute, possession of methamphetamine, two counts possession of a controlled substance, possession of marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana - all felonies - as well as misdemeanor possession of drug-related objects.

A bond was set at \$50,000 by the Superior Court Judge, and she was out on bond.

On March 6, Sheriff's Office Drug Investigators received a community tip about drugs at a residence on Jim Watson Drive. Probable cause was developed, and a search warrant was issued for the residence, resulting in confiscation of an amount of a substance that field-tested



Cody Sorensen



Tiffany Nicole McNabb

positive for methamphetamine.

Cody Sorensen, 39, of Hiawassee, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine and misdemeanor possession and use of drug-related objects.

Tiffany McNabb, 39, of Hiawassee, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony possession of a Schedule IV controlled substance,

misdemeanor possession of dangerous drugs and misdemeanor possession and use of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the community for the drug tip, and he is grateful for the dedication of his drug agents, uniform patrol and K-9 for their hard work and keeping the community safe.

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

Thomas Promoted...from Page 1

Retirement System) is going up a small amount.

"And though the state is not increasing the overall salary schedule, we will have some teachers who have earned a step increase or any that have earned a higher degree. Right now, we don't have anything major going into the budget.

"The January financials include a February property tax payment of \$1.8 million.

We are still low compared to this time last year, but that is because the Tax Assessors Office was late getting things in gear. We should be catching up quickly over the next sev-

eral weeks.

"TAVT tax is \$92,000 in February compared to \$89,000 at this time last year. Sales tax was \$235,000 compared to \$228,000 at the same time last year. We have 54% of our budget unused, so we are under budget."

Berrong said he expects the property tax amount when it all comes in "will be almost the same as we got last year."

The superintendent also previewed School Board Appreciation week that runs March 10-14.

"In my position, the board makes or breaks this

position," Berrong said. "With the wrong board, my job is terrible. I have to say, you guys are absolutely amazing. You're able to give me feedback and have conversations without trying to micromanage the decisions we make."

"I really feel like we work good as a team. I really appreciate that you guys know what your role is and that we're working together to make our school system better. So, I really can't ask for a better board, and I thank you."

The next School Board meeting will be Monday, April 14, due to spring break.

Loftin Turpin...from Page 1

Farm Business Management - highlights his well-rounded skills and dedication to agricultural excellence.

Beyond competitions, Loftin has earned his Greenhand, Chapter and Georgia FFA State Degrees, accumulated over 1,600 hours as an Electrical Apprentice, and dedicates over 20 hours annu-

ally to community service. His commitment to learning and serving others embodies the mission of the FFA.

Sabrina Garrett, Loftin's FFA Advisor, expressed her confidence in his abilities, stating, "Loftin's leadership and dedication to FFA have made a lasting impact on our chapter. I have no

doubt that he will excel as a state officer and continue to positively influence Georgia FFA."

Congratulations, Loftin! Towns County is proud of your accomplishments, and we wish you the best as you take the next steps toward representing Georgia FFA at the state level.

Qualifying, election dates set for Special Election

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

In their March 4 regular meeting, Hiwassee City Council members voted to call a June 17 Special Election to fill the remaining terms of office for the currently vacant mayoral seat and a council seat that will soon be vacated.

Qualifying for the Special Election will take place April 1-3 from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. inside City Hall at 50 River Street, with an hour lunch break from 1-2 p.m. The qualifying fees are \$780 for Mayor and \$72 for Post 3 Councilmember.

As previously reported, since former mayor Liz Ordiales resigned last June, mayoral duties have been conducted by Mayor Pro Tempore Jay Chastain Jr., a longtime member of the Hiwassee City Council.

According to the city charter, however, in the event of a vacancy, a new mayor must be elected “unless such vacancy occurs within three months of the expiration of the term of that office,” in which case, a successor mayor may be appointed by the council.

But the currently unexpired mayoral term ends Dec. 31 of this year, well outside the three-month mark for appointment, so the city must call an election.

One of the reasons a special election has not already occurred is because the city has been working with the Towns County Board of Elections to arrive at a new agreement for the county to host municipal elections, including the regular city elections scheduled for November.

Last year, the Elections Board terminated the former intergovernmental agreement to negotiate a new, amended contract, with the biggest change being that the agreement will now automatically terminate each year.

“This way, the board and the city can make tweaks here and there from year to year as necessary in a better effort to maintain best practices and adapt to any changes in the election laws,” Towns County Elections Supervisor Rachel Edwards said.

Continuing, “The board is modifying their internal policies to ensure that the agreement is negotiated and approved by the end of February each year, just as this one has been, and trusts that the city will do the same.”

With council members’ affirmative vote on March 4, the contract has now been approved by both parties, cementing the municipal elections for later this year.

“The Board of Elections and Registration is looking forward to working with the City of Hiwassee for their upcoming elections in both June and November,” Edwards said.

As for the council seat up for grabs in June, that’s to fill the unexpired term of Councilman Chastain, who has publicly announced he will be stepping down from the council to run for mayor, as required by the state. Chastain’s Post 3 council term runs through Dec. 31, 2027.

The last day to register to vote for the June 17 Special Election is May 19.

Early voting will run May 27 to June 13 inside the



With assistance from former Ethics Board Member LaJean Turner, City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick swore in Michelle Bowden, Janet Oliva and Marvin Cooper as new members of the Hiwassee Board of Ethics last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Towns County Elections and Voter Registration Office at 67 Lakeview Drive, Suite A, in Hiwassee. Early voting hours will be 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., with Saturday voting to be held May 31 and June 7, same location and hours.

Regular absentee ballots by mail may be requested beginning on March 31 through June 6 at the Elections Office.

The Special Election will be in addition to the Municipal General Election on Nov. 4, which will see the regularly scheduled elections of mayor as well as Council Posts 1 and 2, currently held by Amy Barrett and Patsy Owens, for four-year terms running Jan. 1, 2026, through Dec. 31, 2029.

Qualifying for the Nov. 4 Municipal General Election will take place Aug. 20-22 at Hiwassee City Hall.

The State of Georgia is also running a Special Election this year for Public Service Commission Districts 2 and 3. The qualifying period, primary and election in these state races coincide with the same dates as the upcoming Hiwassee elections, which will result in a slight savings to the city.

Due to the coinciding state elections, “billing for the City of Hiwassee will be less for both June and November compared to previous elections that were held and billed for the city,” Elections Supervisor Edwards said.

“If no state elections were to be held in 2025, the city would have to cover the entire cost for each election,” Edwards said, noting that the city will be billed for advertising, the compensation of two poll workers for each of their elections – versus three without the state election – and any absentee-by-mail ballots that are printed along with postage for those mailed.

Among other March 4 regular business, City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick swore in three new members to two-year terms on the Hiwassee Ethics Board: Marvin Cooper, Janet Oliva and Michelle Bowden. All three are civic-minded Hiwassee residents.

The volunteer appointments – one by the mayor, one by the council, and a third appointed by the mayor and approved by council majority – were necessary, as the terms for previous board members

LaJean Turner, Pam Greene and Larry Sorgen had expired.

Ethics Board members are tasked with adjudicating ethics complaints against city officials.

They are empowered to “conduct investigations, to take evidence, and to hold hearings to address the subject matter of a complaint,” per the city charter.



Acting Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. is expected to resign soon from his role on the Hiwassee City Council to run for mayor in the June Special Election. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Bell Mountain Deaths...from Page 1

Bureau of Investigation. GBI assistance was requested by the Towns County Sheriff’s Office shortly after the discovery.

Both men were found with gunshot wounds, with the preliminary investigation revealing the deaths to be the result of murder-suicide, per the GBI. Autopsies are pending,

and the death investigation remains active and ongoing.

EDITOR’S NOTE – In the U.S., the national suicide and crisis lifeline is available by calling or texting 988. There is also an online chat at 988lifeline.org. The Georgia Crisis & Access Line is available as well 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 800-715-4225.