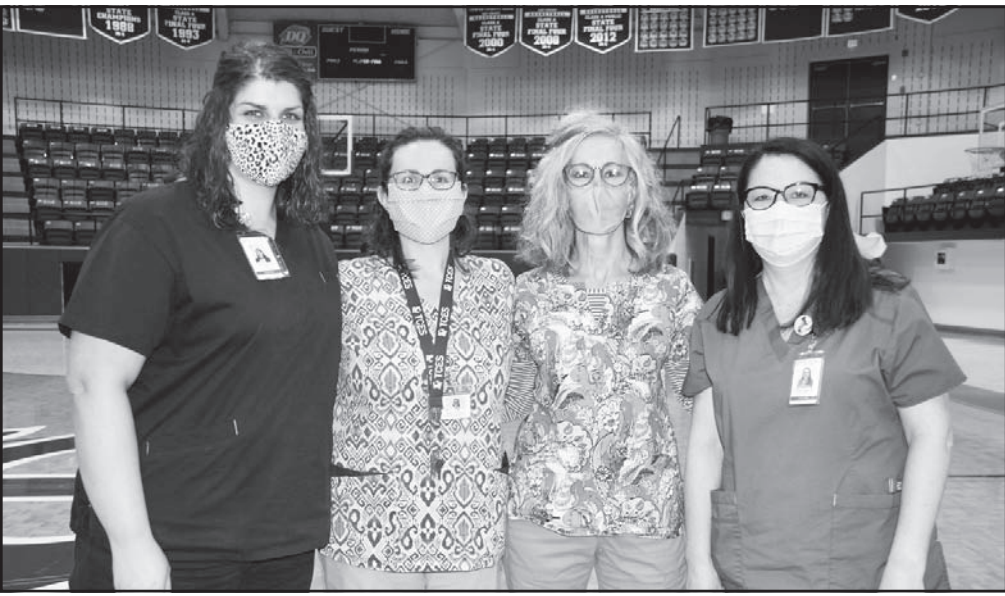


# Vaccine Efforts...from Page 1A



(L-R) Nurses Bethany Barrett, Rebecca Flanagan, Lisa Burks and Tosha Hughes administered vaccines to faculty and staff of Towns County Schools last week. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

assignments consistent between classes where possible.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said that, alongside significant local, state and national declines in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths, he's optimistic that the numbers will continue to go down now that the vaccine is reaching more corners of society.

"Over the past two weeks, it's almost like we don't even think about COVID in the schools anymore, because we had zero cases (this week and last week, and for the first time since August), so it's almost been a non-issue," Berrong said. "My hope is it really does become a non-issue, and by the time August rolls around, we're back in school normally with no issues."

Children have had the option to pursue online-only learning, but if COVID numbers remain favorable, Berrong said the Board Office will consider making in-person attendance compulsory again for most students next year, which would be another step toward a return to normal.

In terms of the vaccine clinic, Berrong got his J&J shot on Thursday. And even though he has already recovered from a light case of COVID-19 contracted earlier in the school year, he's still concerned about being a potential carrier of the virus, so he wants to help protect others.

"I didn't get it for me personally - I got it for the elderly and the people who are susceptible to this in the

county," Berrong said. "I would like more people to get it, just because the more people who get it, the less it's going to be spread, and then we get back to normal quicker."

Lisa Burks is the new County Nurse Manager at Towns County Health Department, having transferred about a month ago from the Health Department in Thomasville. She said supply has picked up, and that the Health Department is taking new appointments every day.

Appointments may be scheduled at phdistrict2.org or by calling 1-888-426-5073, with vaccinations for eligible people taking place Monday through Thursday at the Recreation Center at Foster Park, and at the Health Department on Fridays.

"And if they can't get through to the Call Center, just come on up to the Rec Center, and we'll just go ahead and work them up (as walk-ins)," Burks said.

Vaccine eligibility continues to expand, including to everyone aged 55 and older, people 16 and older with a wide variety of health conditions, as well as medical workers, first responders and others. Kemp said earlier this month he expects eligibility to expand to everyone by April.

For a list of vaccine eligibility criteria and other helpful COVID-19 resources, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov>. People may also call local pharmacies to inquire about vaccine availability, as Ingles and Walgreens are all offering

shots.

Head School Nurse Rebecca Flanagan assisted with vaccination efforts last Thursday, and she said the clinic was both convenient for school employees and a way to ensure the schools can continue to stay open.

Teachers were grateful for the chance to receive vaccination, like Science Teacher Brandon Rowland, who felt relieved to finally have the vaccine, and Band Director Allison Judd, who said staff and students alike are ready for the end of COVID and all its society-wide changes.

"With people getting vaccinated, I think we'll get a little bit closer to normalcy," Rowland said. "And I can't wait for the day that we get to take these masks off."

Added Judd, "In getting the vaccine, we're just part of the community trying to help out the rest of the community - it's about protecting others."

Synergy Health of Hiwassee employees and their volunteer COVID-19 Vaccine Team also held a mass vaccine clinic on Friday. Vaccine availability has expanded to the point that Synergy plans on holding just three more big clinics before returning to regular office duties.

People may sign up for a vaccine through Synergy Health at [ngvax.com](http://ngvax.com), with remaining vaccinations to be administered at the Rec Center on consecutive Fridays between now and April 16, skipping April 2 in observance of Good Friday.

# GMF Parade...from Page 1A

and have the Pioneer Village and ground entertainment.

"We have something for everybody, and we want people to come out and enjoy the Fair. There is something for the entire family to come out and enjoy, and we are excited."

The 2021 Fair runs Aug. 13-21, but there's plenty else going on at the Fairgrounds in the meantime, including Chris Janson live in concert April 17, the Memory Lane Classic Car Show April 30-May 1, and Josh Turner performing May 1 also.

"We are still working on booking other concerts,"

Thomason said. "We just put Riley Green on sale, and we have sold over a thousand tickets to that (May 14) concert. People are really excited to get back out."

"We are trying to do it in a safe way and have a lot of fun. We will be bringing the Hiwassee Pro Rodeo back May 28-29, and a lot of people are excited about that."

There's also the Big Green Eggfest May 15, the ever-popular Independence Day Fireworks, the Georgia Mountain Fall Festival Oct. 8-16, which also got canceled last year, and much more

in 2021, and volunteers are encouraged to help keep these activities going in the area.

"We need people to come out and volunteer and help us with all these community events we are going to have," Thomason said. "We are always looking for volunteers."

"Anybody looking to volunteer and give back to the community can give us a call, and we will find something they can do."

For more information on upcoming events or to volunteer, call 706-896-4191 and visit [GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com](http://GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com).

# Towns GOP ...from Page 1A



Several dozen people attended the Towns GOP meeting last Thursday at Daniel's Steak House, with positive vibes running throughout the meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

and Girls Basketball Teams in providing deputy escorts during their state tournament appearances recently.

"I talk to him not once a week, not once every (two or four) years - I talk to him every day, over some type of issue," Bradshaw continued. "He's new to the department, he's trying to get everything lined up, him and (Chief Deputy) Gene Moss, and they're doing a great job."

"If you want a sheriff that's out in the community and is being seen by the people, and who's returning phone calls and taking care of business, I'm going to introduce you to him, his name is Kenneth 'Ode' Henderson."

Taking to the microphone, the sheriff provided an update on what his department has accomplished since he took office in January.

"I want to make sure the citizens of Towns County know I'm honored to be your sheriff," Henderson said. "Thank you for all that you did for me to make this possible. I'm honored to be standing here tonight and calling myself your sheriff."

Since swearing in, Henderson has been actively working to mold the department into a more professional outfit, including re-wrapped and highly visible black and white patrol cars, uniform changes, a new website, revamped social media focusing on informing the public and more.

"I want to change the image," Henderson said. "That's not to be critical of anything, but that is to say, this sheriff wants to change the image of the Sheriff's Department in Towns County as to the way I see it and think it should be."

"At 40 years of experience, I don't know it all,

but I know that ... is a while to be in this business. So, I want to change the image of our Sheriff's Department to one that you will be proud of, one that, when you see us out there working, you'll say, hey, that's our Sheriff's Department - they do a good job."

The sheriff also pledged to continue Safety Road Checks to get would-be criminals off the streets, and he has assigned road deputies to work the county in zones, which will speed up law enforcement response times, as each zone will have its own dedicated officer patrolling nearby.

In his first two and a half months on the job, Henderson reported that his office had made "seven major drug busts in the county."

Additionally, Henderson is in the process of setting up a dedicated drug enforcement unit filled with "great guys, well trained and well qualified," to maintain his campaign promise to directly address the issue of drugs in Towns County.

Ongoing departmental training is a major goal of Henderson's, and he looks forward to working with multiple neighboring agencies - networking and sharing information - to further the preparedness of both his department and the region in terms of emergency response.

And he's excited to be utilizing the Citizens Law Enforcement Academy for public events, with new CLEA classes expected to be ramping up before too long to recruit additional volunteers.

Also that evening, the dozens of guests in attendance heard from legal scholar Jeff Pierot, who spoke on the importance of the Second Amendment and understanding

the ins and outs of the U.S. Constitution.

Henderson and Bradshaw teamed up in February to sign a resolution declaring Towns County a "Second Amendment Sanctuary."

"I'm sworn to uphold the Constitution, and I will do just that," Henderson said in the GOP meeting, referencing any potential legal challenges made to the Second Amendment.

GOP Chair Betsy Youngblood led the meeting as usual, and she asked Bradshaw and Henderson to join her for a special presentation to a very special member of the group - Betty Phillips.

Together, the three surprised Phillips with a nicely framed Certificate of Appreciation from the Republican Party of Towns County, "in recognition of a lifelong commitment to the betterment of mountain life in her beloved community."

"Betty's genuine compassion is consistently exhibited in a multitude of acts of kindness," the certificate continued. "She routinely commits her time and resources to assist neighbors. Without exception, she is poised to support when a need is clear."

"Betty Phillips is a community treasure! Towns County and the Hiwassee community are blessed by her. Betty is the epitome of how one person can shape a community and change lives... all for the better. God bless you and our great community."

Everyone in attendance cheered for Phillips, who graciously accepted the certificate, saying she was "truly, truly honored" to be considered for the award.



(L-R) Volunteers Mike Stewart, Kaila Reece and Jean Champion assisted with the March 19 mass vaccine clinic by Synergy Health of Hiwassee. These three are part of a larger volunteer force named the COVID-19 Vaccine Team. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

# Matheson...from Page 1A

with a 9 mm handgun, striking her eight times. The weapon used in the crime has not been recovered.

At the time, Crystal Matheson, the shooting victim in the case, had a protective order in place against her husband, who was arrested in July 2020 for assaulting her by strangulation in Clay County. He was arrested again in October last year for violating the order.

Miraculously, Crystal survived being shot eight

times. She is well on her way to recovery and undergoing physical therapy at her own place of employment, with plans to return to work soon as her stamina continues to increase.

District Attorney Langley, Senior Assistant District Attorney Buster Landreau and Victim Advocate Holly McCollum met with Crystal in Towns County on Friday, March 19, "making sure she knew exactly what our office was doing and how things

would follow."

The surrounding community has been incredibly supportive of Crystal during her recovery, helping her to raise funds to offset medical expenses and help pay bills as she gets well enough to go back to work.

A GoFundMe account set up by one of Crystal's friends is still active at <https://www.gofundme.com/t/recovery-for-crystal-matheson>.

# Indictments...from Page 1A

of marijuana, more than an ounce; failure to maintain lane.

Perry Allen Green, possession of methamphetamine; possession of drug-related objects; failure to maintain lane.

Kenneth Dee McClain, possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; possession of methamphetamine; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; possession of drug-related

objects; driving while license suspended; failure to maintain lane.

Nathan Andrew Martin, three counts violation of the Georgia Controlled Substances Act; two counts possession of methamphetamine; possession of a Schedule III controlled substance; possession of drug-related objects.

Michelle Lorene Barber, possession of a controlled substance; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce; possession of drug-related objects; drugs not in original container; operation of a vehicle without revalidation decal.

The above individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

# County Meeting...from Page 1A

kids' victory.

The parade traveled through town to Banister-Cooper Funeral Home, turning around there for the return journey to Towns County High, where the beloved champions were greeted by exuberant parents and other supporters as they came off the bus.

"I have never seen a parade like that in Towns County put together that quickly and with that much community support," Bradshaw said of the effort. And the recognition wouldn't end there.

As commissioner, Bradshaw wanted to continue the celebration in his March 16 regular meeting, to which he welcomed many of the young men for a presentation of certificates honoring their achievement and copies of the "State Champions!!" edition of the Towns County Herald.

It was a special moment for everyone, including the team's coaches who also received recognition, and Bradshaw highlighted his personal connection with the student-athletes, many of whom he coached alongside his own boys in youth football, baseball and basketball.

"I've known a lot of these kids since they were in diapers," Bradshaw said. "I coached rec ball here for 15 years, I've been around a lot of these kids, and the county is so

proud of you guys."

Continuing, "The way you guys play together is why you won the State Championship. We didn't have ball hogs, we didn't have attitudes, and you've made your school proud, you've made Towns County very proud of you."

Not all team members could attend that evening, as several had already transitioned to playing soccer or baseball after the championship win, but each player received a certificate of achievement.

Bradshaw presented certificates to Head Coach Rob Benson and Assistant Coaches Alan Rogers and Michael Anderson. Speaking for his coaching staff and team, Benson thanked Bradshaw and the community for their support throughout this amazing season.

"I know we're a representation of this community, and it's meant a lot to these boys, all the things that were done for them," Benson said. "(Sheriff Henderson), we can't thank you enough for the escorts out of town and the escorts into town."

"The other night, (Henry Chambers) met us at 2 in the morning up on the mountain. So, we can't thank (the community) enough. These kids are incredibly proud." Benson has said many

people deserve credit for the championship victory, from his outstanding student-athletes who took to the court this season, to teams of yesteryear made up of past players who cumulatively added to the strength of this year's first-ever basketball championship team.

Also in the March 16 meeting, Bradshaw gave a welcome update on COVID, reporting that, as of that Tuesday, there were zero COVID hospitalizations at Union General or Chatuge Regional hospitals and zero newly reported COVID positive tests, both firsts since May 2020.

Bradshaw was happy to report that COVID vaccinations were ongoing throughout the week via the Towns County Health Department at Foster Park, and that eligibility criteria were continuing to expand on a regular basis.

For eligibility status, visit <https://dph.georgia.gov/covid-vaccine>. Appointments can be made at [phdistrict2.org](http://phdistrict2.org) or by calling 1-888-426-5073.

Check back next week for additional coverage of the March county meeting, including a special presentation by the Towns County Historical Society and local artist Marty Hayden, as well as regular meeting business.