

TCHS Prom...from Page 1A



Students danced the night away at the Rec Center Saturday, thrilled to have another opportunity to celebrate together as the Class of 2021 before graduation next month.

concerned they'd miss out on this formative event just as the class before them did. These concerns were not unwarranted, as the Homecoming Dance had to be called off earlier this year.

But everything went off without a hitch Saturday, with seniors taking the spotlight that evening and dancing the night away with friends and fellow classmates in the Class of 2021.

After hours of anticipation, it was announced that Lelia Barnard had been named Prom Queen for 2021 by her peers, which surprised her as classmates cheered while she was crowned.

For Barnard, it was important to have prom and be able to form more memorable high school moments in the last month that her graduating class will spend as one.

"It is pretty special because everything was missed out on this year, and we haven't really gotten to have anything," Barnard said. "It was just strictly school, and for everybody to be together was just fun."

"I am thankful for my class to vote for me, and I'm just excited. It really means a lot to me, and it has been a fun night."

Barnard looks forward to the next chapter in her life, during which she will attend the University of North Georgia in pursuit of a career teaching history.

The title of Prom King went to Robby Peacock, who was met with roaring applause during his coronation.

Kayla Peacock, Robby's sister, was happy to see the students of Towns County accept her brother and support him as a special education student.

"Robby is a very humble and kind person," Kayla said. "He is very quiet and reserved, but when he gets the opportunity to come out and make an appearance, he really amazes everybody with his ability to connect with people even with the little speech he does have. He has the best attitude and most positive presence."

To see Robby achieve such an important milestone in

high school means a lot to the family, whose members were overjoyed to see him delighting in prom and his bright moment in the spotlight.

"Our family couldn't be more thankful for the school and him being able to be here tonight," Kayla said. "We are just happy that this prom was even here for him to enjoy. We are just so thankful for the support he has received from his teachers, especially Miss Judy (Nichols)."

As is custom, the King and Queen shared a solo dance surrounded by their classmates before everyone joined in to end the night.

When all was said and done, seniors that evening enjoyed their special occasion with friends, making sure to take the time to appreciate moments that were not guaranteed at the beginning of the school year.

"We are living through a pandemic that other classes haven't really had to go through," Senior Garrett Oakes said. "It kind of makes you grateful for what you get to do."

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Brown...from Page 1A



Jensen Brown was joined by his teammates on the Towns County Indians Soccer Team to celebrate his signing to play for the Berry Vikings following graduation in May.

field and having your back – it's always given me a good feeling. I'd like to do that for the next generations of people coming up through high school."

In the gathering Thursday, High School Athletic Director Jim Melton described Brown as a totally "unselfish" student-athlete, and Indians Head Coach Rollie Thomas wholeheartedly agreed, saying that Brown, a team captain, "leads by example."

"On his soccer accomplishments, he's one of the most talented players that's ever come out of this school, and probably this entire region in terms of soccer skill and ability," Thomas said. "He's incredibly gifted, just his insight and awareness of the game on top of skill."

"I think he became such a great teammate off the field with this unselfishness, (for example) as a senior carrying a goal with a bunch of freshmen at practice, putting up equipment – that speaks volumes to the entire team."

"He shows up, he's there early, and he's doing whatever he can to make sure all hands are on deck at all times and that everyone around him is contributing. That maturity with him translates to the classroom. Academically, his grades are solid, and he's always on top of his work."

From Coach Thomas to his teammates, Brown said he is grateful to all who have helped him reach this point in his life.

"I'm going to miss the school, I'm going to miss the teachers, everyone that's pushed me to where I've gotten to," Brown said. "I'm going to miss them all, but hopefully I'll be back around to see some faces in the future."

Added Brown, "I'd like to thank all my coaches, my parents, and Coach Thomas for getting me to the next level. They pushed me hard, and it's paid off."

Berry College is his mother Kathy Brown's alma mater, where she played soccer

in the past and now coaches the women's team, so even though he'll be moving to Rome to pursue his postsecondary education, he will still be close to home.

For her part, Coach Brown is looking forward to watching her son's games in college and being near him as he takes these next steps in his journey.

"Jensen's been playing soccer his entire life," Coach Brown said. "We knew that his goal was to play in college, and this is one of those things that we knew he would always do."

"He loves it, and it's exciting to watch him get to that point in his life where he finally is where he's always wanted to be. We're proud of him – he's as good of a person as he is a soccer player, and he's a great player."

Brown has also competed at a high level in cross country, taking Fourth Place in state as an Indian in this year's big tournament, and he credits his experiences running cross country with helping to keep him in shape in the soccer offseason.

Cross Country Head Coach Tim Rosser attended the signing last week and spoke highly of Brown's efforts on the team, saying that he definitely could have run at the collegiate level if he had wanted.

Additionally, the ceremony was attended by Brown's three siblings, including his younger brother Brayden who is a freshman on the soccer team, his parents Barry and Kathy Brown, and his girlfriend Ava Bair from Pennsylvania.

Brown's teammates also joined him for cake and fellowship that Thursday, and all of Indians Soccer is looking forward to hosting the second round of the upcoming state tournament on April 27.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Welding Society...from Page 1A



Ag students inspecting and unloading the metal donation they received on April 15 at Towns County High.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

important to donate to the schools because he wants to see the welding profession continue to grow at the local and regional levels.

"Welding is my trade, and we want to keep this trade alive," Matricardi said. "If people have the materials to weld with, then it makes it easier to learn and get young people in our community involved with welding."

High School Instructor Sabrina Garrett, who is over all the agriculture programs, is thankful for the donation that she believes will take her classes a long way, allowing her students to do more projects and learn more about the trade.

"We use it for Ag Mechanic classes and Metal Fabrication classes," Garrett

said. "Basically, it gives students things they need. We only get so much funding for the year, and it is nice if we can get this type of stuff, then I can buy the metal for their projects."

Metal fabrication at Towns County High features students who have a passion for hands-on work, and Garrett is happy to help them succeed in their career pursuits or further welding education following high school.

"This is probably one of the most popular classes that I teach, and they love it," Garrett said. "I usually have two or three boys every year that go up to North Georgia Technical College for welding. I have two right now that are going to graduate as welders."

"For me, this is the best thing we can do to get them doing something hands-on that they can go and be successful at. It is one of my favorite things to teach, and I love it, and the students love being involved with it."

Donations like the one from the American Welding Society help local programs continue to thrive and even grow as more students get involved.

The community may also make donations of any clean metal or metal materials, which is always appreciated and allows students greater resources. For information on donating to the program, contact Towns County High School at 706-896-4131.

Plant Sale...from Page 1A



The Hiwassee Garden Club brightened up the Town Square over the weekend with its annual native plant sale.

Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Gardens Executive Director Grace Howard took the April 17 success as a particular sign the year will be better than 2020, with even more people showing up for programs and seeing the gardens.

"We always sell out, and we are looking forward to the year," Howard said. "We are so excited to see this many people come out, and it has been busy since we opened up this morning. We are letting in only a few people at a time and asking that they wear masks while inside (the greenhouse)."

"It has been great, and people are patient. People just love our flowers, and it makes me happy to see it. I hope the rest of the year will be the same."

Proceeds from the sale go back into Hamilton Gardens to be used to put on events for the year and sustain the gardens. With close to 600 plants for sale in 2021, this is one of the largest fundraising events put on by the gardens, and volunteers are thankful for such support.

And while many people

in the community love the gardens located inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the spectacle also attracts those from far away, such as Tammy Yuller visiting from Indiana.

"We were taking a trip to Florida, and we wanted to stop by because this is a place we enjoy visiting because it is just so beautiful here," Yuller said. "I didn't even know they had a plant sale today, but I thought it was the perfect opportunity to get some things for my friend's garden."

"I would love to have some for my own garden, but I live too far away. Not everywhere has a place like this, and it makes Hiwassee so special for me."

With the Blooming Affair opening the bloom season for Hamilton Gardens, the nonprofit has plans for a few events coming later this month and throughout the year.

"We have a benefit on the 29th of April, which will be our first (Moonlight Music) concert," Howard said. "We are also doing a wedding exhibit in the pavilion to show how the

pavilion could be decorated if you wanted to use it as a wedding venue."

For more information on upcoming events, visit HamiltonGardens.org.

Also Saturday, the Hiwassee Garden Club hosted a plant sale of its own on the Hiwassee Town Square, where just as many people lined up to look at the selection of native plants.

Garden Club President Joan Crothers was happy with the turnout and hopes that future Garden Club events will be just as successful as people demonstrate their continued eagerness to get out this year.

"The Garden Club digs up plants from our yard, and they are always perennials and low-priced and native to this area," Crothers said. "We have got a dead tree at our Garden Club that we hope this is going to pay for. It is very expensive to take out."

"We have had plenty of people come through, and we do this every year. It is always great."

Vaccinations...from Page 1A

More than 124,000 doses of J&J vaccine "have been safely administered in Georgia," with the local Health Departments having administered 221 doses in Union County and 50 doses in Towns County, including teacher and staff vaccination clinics at the school systems.

"Individuals who have received the J&J vaccine and develop severe headache, abdominal pain, leg pain or shortness of breath within three weeks after vaccination should contact their health care providers," DPH said.

Public health is urging all health care providers to be aware of the potential for these adverse events "and plan for appropriate treatment required with these types of blood clots."

"Vaccination remains one of our best tools for stopping the spread of COVID-19, along with basic prevention measures – wearing a mask, distancing from others, avoiding large gatherings, and frequent hand washing," DPH said, noting that it would continue to monitor the situation with J&J vaccines and provide additional information as it becomes available.

The Union County Health Department hosted a Pfizer vaccine clinic on Saturday, April 17, which

featured just 85 recipients out of 600 open appointments at the Sports Center. Low turnout at Union's first ever Saturday clinic may be a sign that demand for vaccination is slowing.

As of Sunday, Union still led nearly every county in the state in vaccination rates, with 31% of the community having received at least one dose and 27% being fully vaccinated. And with everyone aged 16 and up now eligible, only time will tell if interest is truly waning locally.

The Health Department continues to urge people to get vaccinated, saying there is now plenty of supply for everyone who wants one.

This will be the last week that the Health Department utilizes the Union County Sports Center for vaccinations, which will continue in-office starting April 26.

People may sign up for vaccinations at the Union County Health Department by visiting <http://phdistrict2.org> or calling 1-888-426-5073.

Beginning May 4, vaccination hours will be Tuesday from 8 a.m. to 5:45 p.m., Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., and Thursday from 8 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Walk-ins will be welcome.

And starting this week, the Towns County Health Department

is scheduling appointment-only COVID vaccinations for Wednesdays and only at the Health Department.

"We are no longer operating out of the Foster Park Recreation Center," Towns County Office Manager Laura Ide said. "We have made these changes to accommodate our regularly offered services to our public on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays."

People may call the Towns County Health Department at 706-896-2265 to make an appointment. Additionally, there are open spots still available in the special Saturday clinic running from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on April 24, and walk-ins will be welcome for this event.

Towns County was still leading the state in vaccination rates as of Sunday, with 35% of residents having already received at least one dose and 31% being fully vaccinated.

In addition to the Health Departments, many local pharmacies are administering the vaccine, and people need only call around to check availability.

Synergy Health of Hiwassee is still accepting new signups at ngvax.com, but due to improved vaccine availability in the community, last Friday was the office's last mass clinic at Foster Park. Moving forward, Synergy's vaccination efforts will take place on a smaller scale.

Soccer Champs...from Page 1A

6-A after finishing the year 8-5 overall and 4-1 in region play. After dropping the de facto 6-AA title game to Trion on March 22, Armuchee has rattled off four-straight wins to close the year, including a 7-0 win over 9-6 Calhoun from Class 5A.

As members of Class AA in 2018 and 2019, Armuchee picked up a win in each of its two tournaments, advancing to the Sweet 16 in 2019 after reaching the Elite 8 a year earlier.

Meanwhile, Crawford County finished the season 1-12 overall and 0-4 in a three-team Region 7-A. Following a 1-0 victory over Chattahoochee County in February, Crawford

dropped its final 10 matches – seven coming via the mercy rule.

The Indians' first road fixture of the tournament could potentially take place during the round of 8 on May 5.

If Region 2 champion Atkinson County survives a bracket that includes Region 4 runner-up Dublin and Region 3 fourth-seed Bryan County, they would face Towns County for a berth in the Class A Public Final Four on May 11.

According to the Georgia High School Association, a universal coin flip will take place after the second round has concluded to determine home-field advantage through the semifinals.