

Towns County Herald

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GOP honors Anderson with 'Most Prestigious' title

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Towns County GOP held their monthly meeting at Main Street Grill on Thursday, April 20, where they recognized Towns County Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson for his honorable new title of "Most Prestigious Local Elected Official."

Anderson, who was elected to his first term in November 2020, received the honor on April 14 in Flowery Branch with votes from the 13 and a half counties that make up Georgia's 9th Congressional District Republican Convention.

When he entered the meeting last week, he was met with widespread applause for his well-earned accolade.

"Through his concerted efforts, the Towns County Tax Commissioner's Office has collected \$1,160,000 in delinquent property taxes with approximately \$191,000 in interest and penalties," Towns GOP Chair Betsy Young said. "Mr. Anderson and his office held two property tax sales last year for delinquent properties; this was the first such sale since 2014."

Before Anderson took to the podium, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw spoke about how grateful he was to work with someone like Anderson.

"How wonderful it is when I need something, if I have a question or if another elected official has a question or a need... I call the Tax Commissioner Michael, and boom, it's there," Bradshaw said.

As for Anderson, he wanted to thank his constituents and recognize the strength of the GOP not just in Towns County, but in the mountains in general.

"I just want to thank you for your support," said Anderson, who was the first Republican ever elected to fill the local seat. "The enthusiasm and everything is just unbelievable sometimes, and it's humbling to have this support from you guys. It's humbling on this award."

Anderson made some important announcements while he had the ear of the public, especially regarding a property tax credit for people with homestead exemptions that Gov. Brian Kemp signed into law this year. Specifically, See *Anderson Honored*, Page 8A



Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson received a district-level GOP award in recognition of his achievements as an elected official, pictured here with Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Towns GOP Chair Betsy Young on April 20. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Tax commish, Air Methods headline county meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw welcomed several guests to his monthly meeting on Tuesday, April 18, including Tax Commissioner Michael Anderson.

Anderson was there to report on two admittedly complicated property tax issues, one involving a yearslong mistake his office caught regarding a certain portion of homestead exemptions, and another clarifying state-level tax relief signed by Gov. Brian Kemp this year.

Last fall when Anderson was preparing the tax digest, he discovered that, for the school portion of property tax bills, the 3% floating homestead exemption approved by local voters in 2008 was not being accounted for by the vendor preparing, printing and mailing the annual bills.

The floating homestead exemption caps the growth in assessed value of eligible homes at 3% annually, meaning that during years when growth in fair market values outpaces 3%, qualifying homeowners receive a benefit by being locked



Marcus Lindsey of Air Methods delivered useful information about the emergency life flight service in the April 18 county meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

in at a 3% assessment increase relative to the value of their home when the homestead was approved.

Anderson was able to catch the error primarily due to the dramatic increases in property values driven by Towns County becoming a go-to destination for new homebuyers over the first few years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While preparing the tax digest last year, "where the assessments went up so much," Anderson noticed an "extreme

difference" in the exemption amounts between the county and school portions of the digest, which, again, had been exacerbated by pandemic-era relocations.

Looking into the matter, he determined what happened and came up with a solution: affected property owners are eligible to receive a refund for overpayment of taxes that should have been exempted dating back three years, which is the statute of limitations on See *County Meeting*, Page 8A

CTAE Director Garrett talks ag education at TCHS



(L-R) Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, TCHS Ag Teacher Sabrina Garrett, Ag Students Loftin Turpin and Eli Phillips, School Superintendent Darren Berrong and TCHS Principal Roy Perren in the April 21 Movers & Shakers meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers and Shakers hosted Towns County High School Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education Director and Agriculture Teacher Sabrina Garrett as their latest speaker on the morning of April 21 at their usual haunt of the Sundance Grill in Hiawassee.

With about a third of the High School's student body enrolled in a CTAE class, Garrett has her hands full.

In a facility little more than the size of the Sundance dining room, it's an impressive setup; some equipment, like a car lift for welding classes, can't be moved. On the other hand, wiring, plumbing, construction, and other courses with smaller tools and machin-

ery experience quick moves.

"There's a lot of repeats," Garrett said, noting that some students dabble in more than one trade, building their resumes with overlapping skill-sets before they even graduate.

One interested shaker asked Garrett if she would ever be willing to offer classes for adults, which prompted an answer that several folks See *Ag Education*, Page 8A

'High-level supplier' arrested in major drug bust by TCSO

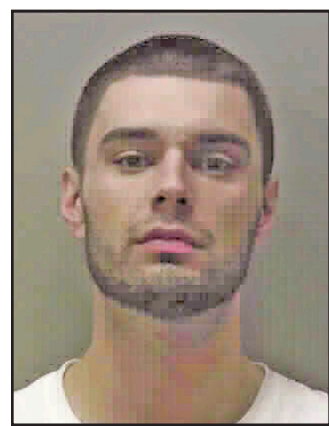
News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office conducted a traffic stop at the intersection of US 76 and Georgia 17 the evening of Friday, April 14, which ended up being a "major drug bust."

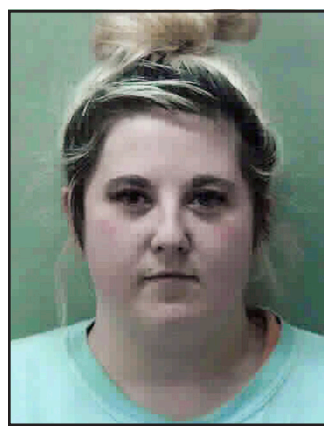
A search of the vehicle resulted in a substantial amount of methamphetamine being confiscated, which field-tested positive.

Further investigation revealed the driver was a high-level supplier who was delivering prepackaged methamphetamine designated for sale to local drug dealers in Towns County and Clay County, North Carolina.

These prepackaged bags of methamphetamine can be cut by local dealers who can



Anderson David Dowdy



Shannen Nichole Philbeck

then lace the methamphetamine with other dangerous drugs.

Anderson David Dowdy, 24, of Cleveland, Georgia, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony possession of methamphetamine with intent

to distribute, felony trafficking in methamphetamine, and felony possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime.

Shannen Nichole Philbeck, 24, of Cleveland, Georgia, was also arrested and See *Major Drug Bust*, Page 8A

Driver charged with DUI in Bell Creek Road crash

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

A Hayesville, North Carolina, man has been charged with driving under the influence of alcohol in a crash that sent him and three occupants from another vehicle to the hospital.

Austin Luke Bradley, 30, has also been charged with two felony counts of serious injury by vehicle and misdemeanor failure to drive within a single lane, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

See *Bell Creek Wreck*, Page 8A



Four people were transported to the hospital – two with serious injuries – after this wreck on Bell Creek Road April 13. Photo by Joey Hyatt

District Attorney's Office closes 20 cases in past week

News Special
Towns County Herald

Even though the Towns County Courthouse is under construction, the criminal justice system continues to work hard on the currently pending cases out of the temporary location at the Old Rec Gym.

On April 18, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley's Office closed 20 criminal cases, including 10 felony cases and 10 misdemeanor cases.

Brandon Davenport, for trafficking in methamphetamine, was sentenced to 20 years in prison, to serve 10 years, plus a \$200,000 fine.

Jimmy McCoy, for trafficking in methamphetamine,

was sentenced to 20 years in prison, to serve 10 years, plus a \$200,000 fine.

Brian Jones, for possession of methamphetamine, was sentenced to three years of probation plus a \$2,500 fine.

Deborah Miles, for possession of methamphetamine, was sentenced to three years of probation plus a \$2,500 fine.

Joseph Patterson, for trafficking in methamphetamine, was sentenced to 20 years in prison, to serve 10 years, plus a \$200,000 fine.

Wilson Moss, for trafficking in methamphetamine, was sentenced to 20 years in prison, to serve 10 years, plus a \$200,000 fine.

Kyle Snow, for posses-



Jeff Langley
District Attorney

sion of methamphetamine, was sentenced to three years of probation plus a \$2,500 fine.

Dwight Swanson, See *Cases Closed*, Page 8A

2 Sections 16 Pages

Vol. 94 No. 26

Arrests - 2A Legals - 7B
Church - 4B Obituaries - 5B
Classifieds - 6B Sports - 2B
Opinion - 4A



Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,683.42
Chatuge 1,923.19
Nottely 1,771.82

BASEBALL

4/27 vs. Mt. Zion-Carroll
4 PM (DH)

Chatuge Health Fair May 6 See page 3A

First Friday Market May 5 See page 1B

Home&Garden Shows Apr. 29-30 See page 8B



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Anderson Honored...from Page 1A

he said the credit is tied to local millage rates.

"Towns County, at the current mill rate, it will be a credit of like \$210.94 instead of \$500," Anderson said. "The TV's been telling everyone \$500, so I normally have people come up to me and say, 'Why is my tax bill not \$500 off?'"

"Well, we need to start

letting people know that now. So, we're getting penalized a little bit for being one of the lowest mill rates in the state, but hey, on the other hand, we've got one of the lowest mill rates in the state.

"I do not move to go up to 30 mills just so we can get \$500 (off our property tax bills). The big picture still is

we've got one of the lowest mill rates."

Anderson closed his address by saying that he does not consider himself a politician, but instead a public servant, "someone who was hired to do a job." According to his own values, he plans to continue doing the best he can in the position he's been granted.

Bell Creek Wreck...from Page 1A

The crash occurred around 4:53 p.m. on Thursday, April 13, on Bell Creek Road near Lakeshore Lane, resulting in the road being closed for several hours.

Bradley was traveling north on Bell Creek in his GMC Sierra truck as a Ford F-350 Super Duty made its way southbound carrying three senior citizens, two from Gloucester, North Carolina, and one from Hiawassee, according to the GSP Crash Report.

As the two vehicles were approaching each other, each negotiating a slight curve in the road, Bradley's truck reportedly failed to maintain its lane, traveling into the southbound lane and striking the F-350 on the "front left with its left front," per GSP.

Two passengers in the F-350 stated that they saw the Sierra travel into their lane, telling the investigating trooper

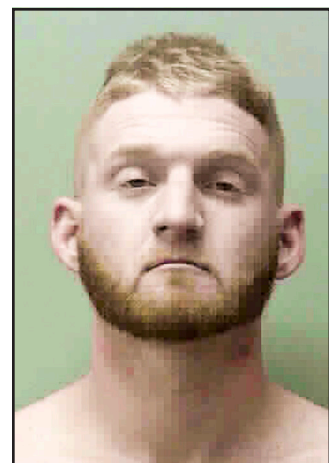
that the driver of their vehicle had "attempted to swerve off the right side of the road to avoid a collision."

Following the accident, Bradley stated he "did not know what happened," according to the trooper, who added in his report that "he was mostly not understandable but advised something to the effect of his dog distracted him."

Towns County EMS took the driver of the F-350 to Northeast Georgia Medical Center for suspected serious injuries. The two passengers were transported to Chatuge Regional Hospital, one for suspected serious injuries and the other for medical evaluation of possible injuries, per GSP.

Their medical conditions were not known by press time.

Bradley was taken to Chatuge Regional for possible injuries and given a blood test for alcohol, the results of which



Austin Luke Bradley

were pending at press time, per GSP. He was arrested and booked into the Towns County Jail later that evening with a total bond of \$12,000.

He has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

such refunds.

Importantly, Anderson corrected the error in time for last year's tax bills, so refunds will be coming to those impacted on their 2020 and 2021 bills.

His office has mailed roughly 2,500 refund applications regarding a countywide total of about \$267,000 in over-collected property taxes, with claimed amounts ultimately to be reimbursed by the Towns County School System.

A new vendor will be preparing tax bills moving forward, Anderson said. For homestead exemption eligibility and refund questions, call this office at 706-896-2267.

"I appreciate the Tax Commissioner for catching this," Bradshaw said. "It was a vendor mistake, but he caught it, and I appreciate you doing it."

Concerning the other topic Anderson spoke on at the April 18 meeting, he let people know that the devil was in the details regarding Gov. Kemp's \$500 tax break for property owners, as many media reports had not made it clear enough that the \$500 figure pertains to the state average.

In Towns County, homestead owners specifically will

only be receiving about \$210 off their next property tax bills because the relief amount is being calculated using local millage rates, which is much lower here than the average rate across Georgia.

"So, if you have a tax bill that's \$209 ... you won't get a tax bill this fall," Anderson said.

In other news, Bradshaw accepted the annual agreement with Air Methods to provide emergency life flight services for no out-of-pocket costs to county residents.

Air Methods operates an emergency medical transport helicopter out of Union General Hospital in Blairsville, but residents are actually covered for any Air Methods life flight they find themselves on throughout the U.S.

Marcus Lindsey, this region's Business Development Manager for Air Methods, attended to impart information about the service, which has been ongoing in Towns County since 2016 with a cost-sharing arrangement with Union General.

In 2022, Air Methods transported 103 Towns residents to nearby trauma centers - 61% of which were Medicare recipients - primarily via the

Blairsville-based helicopter air ambulance, and other Air Methods choppers are stationed in the region to help out when needed.

The Commissioner's Office pays a max of \$700 per transport, with a cap of \$32,182 total for the agreement. Towns is on track to come in more than \$10,000 under that cap this year given the pay-as-you-go model, which is less than the billable amount of most single-transport events.

Importantly, Lindsey pointed out that people do not need to sign up for the service; as long as they are a part-time or full-time resident of the county, people are fully covered for Air Methods life flights.

Additional reporting from the April 18 meeting will be available in an upcoming edition of the newspaper, to include fire safety information from Fire Chief Harold Copeland and updates on the SPLOST-funded renovation and addition project at the Towns County Courthouse.

Commissioner Bradshaw holds his regular meetings on the third Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. in the Temporary Courthouse location at the Old Rec Center in Hiawassee.

Ag Education...from Page 1A

may want to pay attention to if they're looking to advance their own education in the realm of craft or agriculture.

"I mean, if there's an interest in something, I can get a class together and shoot it out," she said, going on to express a special interest in canning. "I'd love to have a (cannery). We could take two or three weeks in July and do some canning, and everybody (can) get their stuff running."

Attending alongside Garrett was School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, who confirmed that "that was the plan" when it comes to utilizing an upcoming grant meant to supplement the CTAE program with a brand new, state-of-the-art agriculture facility on the main campus.

The hope is that, eventually, the High School will be

able to make a cannery available to the public "to have days on the weekends where we can have our students up there," having already been trained to handle the machines, to help out the community as well as learn.

Students can look forward to the new CTAE center being about four times the size of their current working space. It'll measure about 110-by-80 feet, and rather than having specific rooms or workshops, the building will be designed to have "sections" dedicated to certain crafts.

"We're still in some planning phases about what we can purchase with the grant money because, typically when you get money, it's only for the facility and it's not to actually fill it up with equipment," Berrong elaborated.

Young Harris College Students made Cupid Falls more beautiful

On April 18, 2023, 30 students from Joseph Pate's Outdoor Studies classes at YHC spent 4 hours clearing Chinese privet, multiflora roses, and other invasive plants from an area across Corn Creek, creating a very nice view of Cupid Falls and the park. This work is preparatory to extending the trail to a proposed bridge across Corn Creek to the fire pit area, later in 2023. The students also sustained several benches along the trail and brought deadfall to the trail for city disposal. This is the second project this year for YHC students, following the Athletic Department's work day on February 22nd.

Volunteers from Mountain Beautification and Revitalization Inc. (MBRA) had prepared for the work by cutting down dead trees and cutting up logs along the trail. MBRA volunteers will return

to the park soon to cut more Privet stumps so the city workers can mow the area.

MBRA was formed in December of 2021 to "beautify" and "revitalize" public areas in Towns and Union County GA, Clay County NC, and the cities of Hiawassee, Young Harris, Hayesville and Blairsville. So far they have completed about two dozen such projects in these areas and have several more projects under consideration.

MBRA is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization supported solely by donations, as they do not charge for labor in any of their projects. More volunteers are needed, and donations to cover administration expenses are greatly appreciated.

Contact MBRA at "mbra8054@gmail.com; PO Box 382, Young Harris GA 30582, or call 941-416-3553.

As pointed out in the meeting, Garrett's work and dedication as a teacher to her students is invaluable, and every day, she shapes lives and advances the possibilities of better futures by opening doorways some students may not have considered otherwise.

"Everything I know, I try to teach them as much as I can, and if something comes across that I have to fix, I try to involve them as much as possible," Garrett said, casting a glance to the students who had joined her that morning.

Berrong noted toward the end of the presentation that Garrett offers invaluable skillsets to Towns County's students; the trade industry is booming, and students can make a decent living even if they break out of the traditional "college mold" and choose to go straight into the workforce.

Not only that, but it's a good way for many students to avoid four years' worth of accrued loan debt.

Ultimately, Garrett wants her students to know as much as she does, and to build onto those skills and enhance the groundwork she teaches them, whether they do so as a career or to make their own personal lives easier.

"It's something we all need to know; you've got a house, and it's got to be made up," she said.

"Good people are like candles," observed Movers and Shakers Organizer William "Scotty" Scott, referring to Garrett. "They burn themselves up to give others light."

The Mountain Movers and Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. This Friday, the group will hear from guest speaker Dr. Gerry Chotiner on "his many decades of experience and knowledge (in discussing) the many transformations in the medical profession over his many years of service."

Major Drug Bust...from Page 1A



Methamphetamine packaged for sale to be cut by local drug dealers.

Photo/Facebook

charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony trafficking in methamphetamine, and felony possession of a firearm during the commission of a crime.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that he was pleased with this major bust that intercepted drugs packaged for sale in the community.

An investigation indicated that this supplier has been supplying drugs to local dealers for three years, and Sheriff Henderson would like to thank the Clay County Sheriff's Office for its assistance in the investigation, which remains

ongoing.

In a separate incident on Tuesday, April 18, a Towns County K-9 Unit made a traffic stop on US 76 West near Young Harris for a suspended tag. A free-air search of the vehicle resulted in K-9 Xena alerting on the vehicle.

A search was conducted, leading to the discovery of methamphetamine laced with fentanyl that field-tested positive. During a search at the Towns County Detention Center, additional methamphetamine was found on the suspect's person resulting in additional charges.

Bobby Dewayne Cantrell, 43, of Blairsville, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine, felony crossing guard lines with weapons/drugs/intoxicants, and possession and use of drug-related objects.

Sheriff Henderson commended his patrol deputies and their keen observation.

"Along with the additional resources of our K-9s, Towns County Sheriff's Office will continue our war on drugs in Towns County," Henderson said.

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

Cases Closed...from Page 1A

for battery, Family Violence, was sentenced to 12 months of probation plus a \$500 fine.

Christina Canterbury, for possession of drug-related objects, was sentenced to 12 months of probation.

Tommy Wright, for possession of methamphetamine, was sentenced to 10 years with time served.

Additional guilty pleas included:

Robert Parker Curtis, for driving while license suspended, possession of marijuana less than an ounce, and driving on improper registration, was sentenced to 24 months of probation, 30 days of confinement (deemed served), plus a \$1,700 fine.

Jose Alcantara, for driving while license suspended, was sentenced to 12 months of probation, 96 hours in confinement, plus a \$500 fine.

Easton Smith, for boating under the influence, was sentenced to 12 months of probation, to serve the first 24 hours in confinement (deemed served at the time of arrest), plus a \$600 fine.

Stanley Garland, for battery, was sentenced to 12 months of probation plus a \$500 fine.

Ion Villanueva, for fishing without a trout license and fishing without a valid license, received a \$500 fine to be paid by May 1.

Tiffany McNabb, for simple battery, was sentenced to 12 months of probation plus a \$500 fine.

Pre-trial diversion agreements included:

Beach Davis, for criminal trespass, received 12 months of pre-trial diversion plus a \$250 fine.

Michael Moss, for possession of marijuana less than an ounce, received 12 months of PTD plus a \$250 fine.

Gary McLain, for possession of marijuana less than an ounce, received 12 months of PTD plus a \$250 fine.

Natalie Guffey, for simple battery, received 12 months of PTD plus a \$250 fine.