

# Towns County Schools earn state recognition

**By Shelly Knight**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**

On Tuesday, April 22, Towns County Schools accepted several state-level awards for academic excellence exhibited during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Dr. April Aldridge, the Deputy Superintendent of Teaching & Learning for the Georgia Department of Education, arrived at the Media Center that day to commemorate the achievements with award banners and ribbons.

“Thank you for having me,” Aldridge said. “On behalf of (State School Superintendent Richard Woods), I am really glad to be here. My role is teaching and learning, so this is my jam, making sure that not only do we give you guys the support you need, but also so you can make sure our

students have the opportunities they need to succeed.”

Aldridge started with the high school, asking Principal Bryan Thomason to hold the banners as she explained the meaning of each ribbon that will adorn them.

“High School won the Master of Mathematics Award,” Aldridge said. “There are gromets here for more awards, because this is the beginning, not the end. This is not a one and done; what we hope to do is come back every year and give you some additional ribbons.”

“For this year, we are celebrating the fact that the high school has an outstanding grade for mathematics. You had a 21.5% growth rate, but that is not all. You also earned the distinguished honor of the Georgia’s Literacy Leaders award with a growth rate

of 8.9%. You are rocking two different awards at the high school.

“We know that success does not just start at the high school. It certainly happens long before those babies come into your building, so I hope you will celebrate as a district as well because certainly a strong foundation at that elementary level paves the way so that we can celebrate the high school.”

Next, Aldridge honored the middle school with recognitions of its own, presenting Principal Rollie Thomas with awards for achieving seventh-grade math growth at the rate of 38.1% and eighth-grade math growth at 7.7%.

“Of course, you also show high school growth because of the advanced algebra concepts and connections

*See School Achievement, Page 12*



(L-R) Towns County Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, Deputy State Superintendent Dr. April Aldridge, Curriculum Director Dr. Connie Hobbs, TCMS Principal Rollie Thomas, TCHS Principal Bryan Thomason, and School Board Members Carleen Woods and Brandon Grimsley.

Photo by Shelly Knight

## Movers & Shakers welcome Gunter, talk spillway issue



**District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter in the April 25 meeting of the Mountain Movers & Shakers.**

**By Shawn Jarrard**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Editor**

District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter joined the Mountain Movers & Shakers at Sundance Grill on Friday, April 25, to talk about the Georgia General Assembly’s 2025 Legislative Session, which

legislature into action.

Coming out of the General Assembly were Senate Bills 68 and 69, forming a package Kemp’s office described as “historic legislation delivering commonsense, meaningful tort reform” that the governor signed into law last week.

Tort reform is aimed at balancing the legal environment around injury claims, which proponents of the legislation say has been in dire need of re-alignment to strike a balance between targets of liability lawsuits and the victims bringing the lawsuits.

Lawmakers are hopeful the legislation will start to rein in consumer costs that have increased dramatically from insurance companies fleeing Georgia because they cannot make money due to the financially challenging conditions surrounding liability lawsuits.

Gunter said he’s “a little worried” about some provisions of the new law regarding premises liability that could make it harder to hold property owners responsible for accidents related to negligence, “but the rest of it is good legislation.”

“We’ve got next year,” Gunter said. “Most of the time,

*See Movers & Shakers, Page 12*

## New construction alternative urged in grassroots meeting



**Hundreds of residents attended the Save Lake Chatuge meeting last week in a major showing of concern over fallout for the communities that will be negatively impacted by TVA’s Chatuge Dam spillway repair plans.**

**By Shelly Knight**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**

On Tuesday, April 22, hundreds of residents from Towns County in Georgia and Clay County, North Carolina, attended a grassroots meeting at the Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge. SaveLakeChatuge.org organized the meeting, which was standing room only.

Over the last several weeks, residents have been reading about the repairs the Tennessee Valley Authority has proposed for the spillway

of Chatuge Dam, and given the potentially devastating economic consequences for the area, the crowd was eagerly anticipating additional information.

Boundary Waters Resort & Marina Owner Kevin Clem

*See Save Lake Chatuge, Page 6*

## National Day of Prayer event on Thursday, May 1

**By Brittany Holbrooks**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**

BLAIRSVILLE – Jack Schroeder worked on organizing the local National Day of Prayer service up until he went to his Lord on Tuesday, April 22, and it’s partially in his memory that the event will be held this Thursday, May 1, at 5:30 p.m. inside the usual First Baptist Church of Blairsville venue.



The 2025 theme is “Call Out to the God of Hope and Be Filled,” based on Romans 15:13.

“That has turned out to be so personal to me, with losing Jack,” said Pam Schroeder, who assisted her husband with planning during his illness and picked up preparations following his death last week.

But along with the personal touch, the theme is meant to instill hope in a people bombarded on all sides by tumultuous times.

“People have lost the

definition of civility,” Schroeder said. “A lot of what we do is attitude. That’s why these attitudes – this division of the country – really bother me.”

And it’s more important than ever to show those people love. One of the sayings Schroeder lives by is to “love the sinner, hate the sin,” leaving room to extend love to any variety of person one comes across.

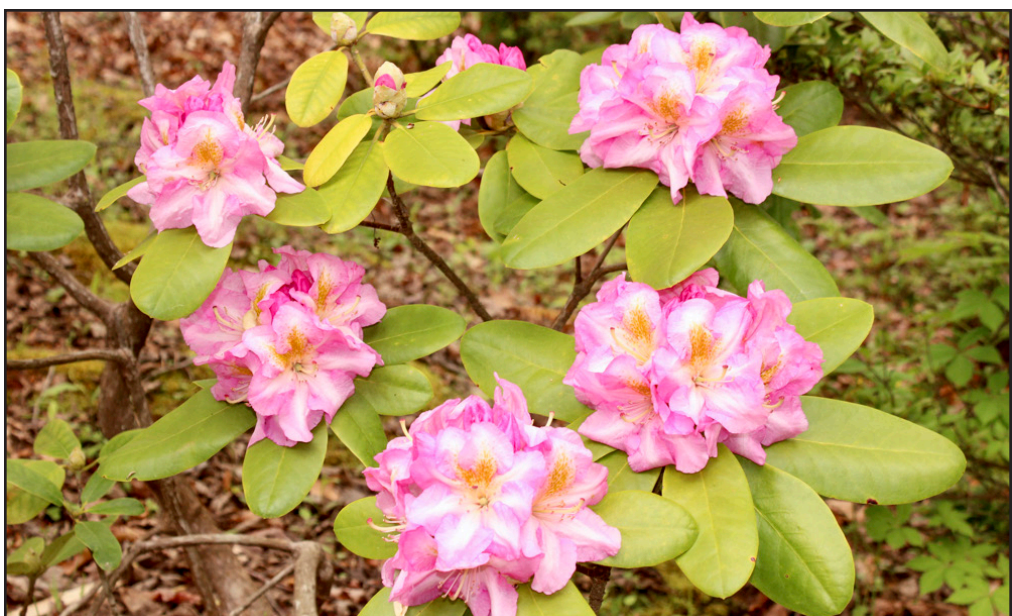
That said, there has always been a purpose behind the National Day of Prayer. Of course, there is the goal to unite all Christians and bring others to Christ, but the main takeaway, Schroeder says, is in the action itself.

“There is power in prayer, and in the spoken word,” Schroeder believes, adding that by invoking the name of Jesus, desire flows from the wishes of the people to Christ’s strength and power. “The reason we do National Day of Prayer is so our country can be covered in prayer.”

Certain prayers are offered for different facets of life during the annual event, which always falls on the first Thursday in May, and while there are some people Schroeder noted do tend to return and minister in the same categories, there are some changes and fresh faces this year.

*See Nat’l Day of Prayer, Page 12*

## Rhododendron Festival runs now through May 11



**The 2025 Rhododendron Festival is in full, gorgeous bloom at the Hamilton Gardens.**

**By Brittany Holbrooks**  
**Towns County Herald**  
**Staff Writer**


Referred to as a “hidden jewel” by one enchanted tourist, the Hamilton Gardens inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds stand as a refuge for anyone looking for a more secluded locale closer to nature – especially now, during the height of the Rhododendron Festival.

Spanning April 12 to May 11, the festival lasts just shy of a month and coincides with the annual blooming of local rhododendrons and azaleas. Of course, there are other species of flora in the gardens,

including irises and trillium, and even non-flowering plants like ferns, moss and ivy.

With trail loop options measuring in at one or two miles, there’s plenty to see, and even those with mobility issues can enjoy the view; golf carts are on hand to provide

*See Rhododendron Fest, Page 7*

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# Save Lake Chatuge...from Page 1



Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw has said the spillway construction options presented by TVA to date are unacceptable. Photo by Shelly Knight

opened the meeting, highlighting the intrinsic problems with the current TVA proposals.

“Currently, the TVA proposal defines our situation as a non-emergency,” Clem said. “The dam and spillway are safe to use. The spillway basically needs some rehabilitation. There are cracks that need repair, and the underdrain system is having problems as well.

“TVA has said that the only way the spillway would catastrophically fail would be if we have a rare weather event, like Hurricane Helene.

“Option A is to do nothing, which is what they are doing now except for a few minor repairs in the current spillway. Their other option is to rehabilitate the current spillway or build a new one. The time span for that option would necessitate a drawdown of a minimum of four years to a maximum of eight years.

“What we mean by a drawdown is this: our normal summer pool is 1,925 feet above sea level and our normal winter pool is 1,918 feet above sea level. The TVA wants to draw that down to 1,908 feet above sea level during the repair work.

“They are not talking about drawing it down in the winter and letting it fill back in during the summer, but about keeping it permanently drawn down until the work is completed. We don’t want that, but we also need to talk about what the TVA’s goals are.

“They have two primary goals for this. One is to protect the downstream community from a possible collapse of the spillway, and the other is to ensure we have a good, functional spillway for generations to come. In these two goals we are united.

“The whole question is how we accomplish our objectives. We need to preserve the communities above the dam as well as those below.

“One of the most frequently asked questions is why must the work take so long? We do know that Lake Oroville in California had a spillway collapse in 2017. It is a much, much larger spillway.

“But with that collapse they had a new temporary spillway in place within six months and the entire project done within two years. They did it in two off seasons, so they had a functioning spillway during the rainy season.

“The lead engineer for this project, Chris Saucier, has answered this question by saying the potential for loss of life on the Oroville project required immediate action whereas with Chatuge, there is a very low potential for loss of life.

“In my opinion, the TVA does not see this as a priority or an emergency, but I disagree.

“There was a comparison drawn by TVA between Boone Lake near Johnson City, Tennessee, and Chatuge. They recently completed a seven-year drawdown at Boone. Now, this was a much bigger project for them in that their dam was actively failing.

“They had a seepage problem. They also had a sinkhole under their dam. We do not have these problems. To be clear, our dam is currently safe for use. We are just addressing the spillway.

“One of the problems with comparing Boone Lake with Lake Chatuge is that Johnson City, Tennessee, is a much bigger city than Hiawassee, with over 300,000

residents. Towns and Clay counties have about 24,000 people.

“So, Johnson City can survive and even thrive without their lake because of all of the attractions and services they offer. But with Hiawassee and Hayesville, Lake Chatuge is the lifeblood of both cities. A multi-year drawdown would be devastating to the area.

“Potential economic impacts of the drawdown being suggested? We know TVA has done neither an economic nor an environmental study to date. They only filed Notice of Intent last week. But we are already seeing the effects of the environmental impacts, and they haven’t even studied it yet.

“The real estate market here is already at a standstill. Just discussing this is causing hesitation to invest in our community. Towns County does \$95 million in total visitor spending per year according to the latest data we have dating from 2023.

“That translates to \$6.1 million in state and local taxes. That is equivalent to \$1,125 savings in taxes for every household. To be clear, if we lose tax revenue, that turns into higher property taxes for every household in this county.

“We believe that drastic a drawdown would equate to a loss of tourism of 80% or more, which is easily devastating to the town. It only takes a few months for businesses to go out of business. Even ongoing events like the classic car show or the concerts – if we don’t have hotels and restaurants for those visitors, no one is coming here. This is not just lake events.”

Clem said U.S. Rep Andrew Clyde “has been fighting for us,” detailing an April 16 meeting with TVA at the dam that was attended by Clyde, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, 911/EMA Director Marty Roberts, and Lake Chatuge Marine Owner Dwayne Phillips.

“The congressman proposed an alternative solution using a cofferdam,” Clem said. “It is a temporary structure around the construction site of the new spillway. This allows them to block off the area to build a second spillway, pump the water out of that area, and it would allow them to work on and build this new spillway without interfering with normal lake levels.

“That is what we want. We want this project to take one off season in which they build that cofferdam and then allow the lake levels to come back up during our normal Memorial Day to Labor Day busy season for our towns.

“While they are working on the second spillway, we still have our current spillway which has not failed to act as an overflow. Once the new spillway is done, the secondary one can be rehabilitated as necessary, and we have two. That gives us the goal of protecting lives and having function for generations to come.”

Commissioner Bradshaw addressed the audience as well, saying his office started drafting letters as soon as he learned about the TVA’s plans.

“Towns County would not be what it is without Lake Chatuge,” Bradshaw said. “I’ve spoken with Andrew Clyde and (State Sen.) Bo Hatchett and everyone I can think of that has any influence. I’ve let them know that this current plan would cause

a great depression in this area.

“After some of the discussions we have had with Chris Saucier of the TVA, I feel they will listen to us. We need to stay on top of this. We don’t need to slow down or be quiet. I feel like with everybody’s help we can make them listen.

“And here is what I told that engineer, I said you’ve got to have the ‘want to.’ If you’ve got the ‘want to,’ you can do it. When they built that dam in 1941 it took less than one year. And this is 2025. You mean to tell me we can’t do better than that?” said Bradshaw, to heavy applause.

“What we have to do now is to influence and persuade the TVA to do this in such a way that protects our community and has minimal impact on the lake and on our towns,” added Clem. “We need the TVA to use our alternative solution.”

Bradshaw credited Dwayne Phillips with designing the flyer and yard signs being used to promote the cause and encouraged everyone to do their part “to make their voices heard.”

“Visit SaveLakeChatuge.org and post your comments,” Bradshaw continued. “It is the most important thing you can do. The comment period runs between April 22nd and May 28th, and we have got to stand together. I really feel like we can do this.”

As noted by Bradshaw, TVA is officially seeking public input on the proposed Chatuge Dam Safety Modifications now through May 28. Written comments should be sent to Erica McLamb, NEPA Compliance Specialist, 1101 Market Street BR 2C-C, Chatanooga, TN 37402.

Comments may also be submitted online at <https://www.TVA.com/Chatuge> or by email at [nepa@tva.gov](mailto:nepa@tva.gov).

Sample verbiage can be found at [SaveLakeChatuge.org](https://SaveLakeChatuge.org) for people to leave feedback during the TVA commenting period, and commenters are encouraged to recruit family members, friends, neighbors and others to convince TVA not to adopt plans that require a multi-year drawdown.

Upcoming virtual public meetings about the project will take place on May 6 and May 15 from 5:30-6:30 p.m. A link to register for the virtual meetings can be found at [TVA.com/Chatuge](https://TVA.com/Chatuge).

The first of two in-person public meetings is set for May 8 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. inside the Clay County Schools Cafeteria, located at 205 Yellow Jacket Drive in Hayesville, North Carolina. The cafeteria is behind the Hayesville Middle School Gym and adjacent to Hayesville High School.

This is a venue change, as TVA said the new location will allow for more attendance capacity than the original venue of the Clay County Community Services Building.

The second in-person meeting will be held on May 13 from 5-7 p.m. inside the Towns County Recreation Center at 150 Foster Park Road in Young Harris.

A TVA rep was supposed to attend the Hiawassee City Council work session April 28 to discuss the city’s water treatment concerns amid such a drastic drawdown, but Hiawassee Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. told the newspaper last week that TVA notified him they would be unable to attend.

## Tri-County British Car Club holds concert meeting April 27

On Sunday, April 27th, twenty eight members of the Tri County British Car Club, gathered together at the Sundance Grille in Hiawassee, GA.

It was a great day for the first Monthly Luncheon Meeting of the 2025 driving season.

Previously on April 5th, club members participated in their first driving tour and picnic of the year.

To help kick off the season right, member Theresa Gaffney brought her guitar, and gave a lunch-time concert

of original songs and country hits. Theresa sings professionally all over N.E. Georgia.

Everyone enjoyed having music with their lunches, and some sang along with familiar songs. It was fun seeing some old friends that hadn’t seen each other on the April 5th ride, and since last Fall.

The TCBC is in its 12th year. There are no dues. Anyone interested in British cars and joining the club fun, can contact them by email at [tricitybritishcarclub@yahoo.com](mailto:tricitybritishcarclub@yahoo.com).



Theresa Gaffney in “concert” for everyone to enjoy at the meeting.



Beautifully restored black ‘51 MG TD owned by Mike and Robin Messina



Gorgeous red Aston Martin Convertible with it’s owner Larry Salsman.



# Memory Lane Classic Car Show revs with success



New to the Memory Lane Classic Car Show in 2025 was the inclusion of NASCAR superstar Chase Elliott's vehicle, letting guests of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds get up close and personal with the car of a North Georgia racing legend.



April 25-26, the Memory Lane Classic Car Show proved every bit as popular as in years past, featuring fun for the whole family with music, food trucks, arts and crafts, a Swap Meet, an auction, prizes, a raffle and plenty of registered cars.



(L-R) Vocalist Summer Rahn, Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason kicked off the 2025 Memory Lane Classic Car Show the morning of Saturday, April 26, with Rahn performing the National Anthem.

## Towns County Lions Club Adds Another New Member



L-R President Danny Meeks, New Member Ginger Rogers, Membership Chair Janie McConnell

The Towns County Lions Club added Ginger Rogers during the April 22 meeting at the Georgia Mountain Fair Anderson Music Hall preceded by another delicious buffet style dinner catered by Brenda Swanson.

Newest Lion Ginger Rogers was sponsored by Brenda Micali and personally introduced by Membership Chair Janie McConnell who's encouraging the club members to look diligently throughout the county for new Lions to grow the club and make it stronger.

Retention of members is another lofty goal of every club and the Towns County Lions are pleased and proud to announce five Lions members who've recently attained significant membership year award levels: Matt Turpin—30 years, Kathy Carlson—25, Mike Bleckley—25, Ken Dean—15, Wayne Austin—10.

Next on the local Lions' list of significant achieve-

ments is the annual club contribution to the Georgia Lions Lighthouse For The Blind White Cane fund that pays for low income patients' vision surgeries each year. In 2024, over 300 Georgians were served and April is the month most Georgia Lions clubs raise funds for the White Cane project.

Club Service Chair Di- anne Williams just announced that over \$4,100 was collected during the April 25-26 White Cane Bucket Brigade effort 9 am to 3 PM at the two traditional US Hwy. 76 intersections. Many thanks to all the generous drive-by donors who filled the famous red buckets, and congratulations to the Lions "bucketeteers": David Barrett, Melanie Beighley, Kathy Carlson, Richard Klotzbier, Jim McConnell, Danny Meeks, Frank Morgan, Jeff Myers, Ginger Rogers, Dale and Susan Willrich, and Di- anne Williams.

All Towns County Lions who are interested are invited

to attend the club's Scholarship Committee meeting at the Georgia Mountain Fair office building May 6 at 5 PM.

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds welcomes the ever-popular Top of Georgia Plein Air Fine Arts Festival May 8-10.

May 10 sees the annually growing Hiawassee Highlands Wine Festival and country music legend Gary Allan performs in concert that night, May 10, 7 PM, at the 3,000 seat Anderson Music Hall.

May 8-29 welcome a return to the Hamilton Gardens concert pavilion of the much anticipated Acoustic Sunsets on Thursday evenings.

Please refer to the Fairgrounds' website for additional information and details on the upcoming event schedule as Fair Manager Hilda Thomason has planned a fun-filled season and special activities to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Fair!

See y'all there at the Fairgrounds!

# Rhododendron Fest...from Page 1



The ecological diversity of the Hamilton Gardens is truly remarkable, with majestic natural beauty to be found around every corner.

rides, but there are also plentiful benches that make for perfect rest stops.

Although open every day, guests looking for a little more than the garden walk itself will want to stop by on a Saturday or Sunday for the "full experience," which includes live music, a wine bar and a food court.

Featured in this year's festivities was the 5K run and walk known as the "Run for the Rhodos," which started bright and early at 8 a.m. on Saturday, April 26. According to Garden Curator Catherine Luckenbach, the run was open to athletes of all skill levels.

Runners and guests who chose a more leisurely stroll through the gardens were awestruck by the colorful blooms. Indeed, Hamilton Gardens boasts 3,000 total plants, with 400 different varieties of rhododendron, so it's no surprise the venue has been named the largest collection of rhododendrons and azaleas in the Southeastern United States.

"It's beyond words, honestly, first impressions," said Anita Porter, describing the gardens as "picturesque." She was walking the trail with friend Kathy Lynch, who suggested she see the gardens for the first time.

"I play around with flowers," Lynch revealed, having purchased some azaleas on her own experimental trip at last year's Rhododendron Festival. Even if she doesn't consider herself a bountiful botanist, she and Porter agree that the place is a treasure.

"I've been here before," said Mrs. Solis. "It's the perfect day (to attend) for us," she noted, thankful that an overcast sky took care of the growing spring heat.

Solis has known her friend and attending buddy Ann Foster since the latter was 5 months old. A repeat visitor to the gardens for years, Solis

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

wanted to introduce Foster to the beauty of the Rhododendron Festival, and Foster was not disappointed.

Hamilton Gardens is open every day from 8 a.m. to sunset, located above the fairgrounds' multiple parking rises at 96 Pavillion Road in Hiawassee.

The Rhododendron Festival will feature plant sales Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., and Friday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The remaining live music performers include Cody Marlowe May 3, Mark Miller May 4, Brock Lee May 10 and Tom Edwards May 11. The performances will run every Saturday and Sunday from 12-3 p.m. Refreshments are available every Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Parking is free, but a \$10 donation per entry is requested to help support the care of the Hamilton Gardens.



# Movers & Shakers...from Page 1

major bills like this do need some kind of tinkering. So, I actually do get to see bills that come through to kind of fill in gaps or repair where we've gone too far with it."

Added Gunter, "One of the provisions that I would have liked to have seen go in the bill was to limit lawyer advertising so that they don't advertise the amounts of money they've made in other cases, because that's kind of leading you to think, 'Well, that's what I can get in my case.'

"And that doesn't predict future results, so we need to stop that, and I'm hoping there will be a bill coming in the next year that will put that into law."

Gunter said the General Assembly adopted a statewide budget that included approximately \$862 million in South Georgia aid money to help offset costs associated with Hurricane Helene, which caused widespread devastation to properties and farming operations last September.

Shifting to a lighter topic, Gunter said lawmakers made cornbread the official bread for the State of Georgia: "When we debated it, they were asking whether it is white or yellow, and somebody suggested, 'Why don't we just change it to the biscuit?'"

Among other legislation, Gunter highlighted House Bill 582, which he sponsored to provide a legal pathway for

victims of domestic abuse to offer potentially exculpatory evidence in instances where they have been arrested or imprisoned for crimes.

Known as the Georgia Survivor Justice Act, HB 582 allows a defendant who has been the victim of abuse to introduce evidence of their abuse before the start of trial. This evidence could serve as a defense to result in charges being dismissed.

For those who have already faced a trial and been convicted, such evidence could be presented to reduce a sentence, even for people who are currently serving life sentences for murder.

Gunter read a heartfelt thank-you card from a female prisoner who "killed her abuser," holding up a picture of the woman and her child that was included with the card. This prisoner's life sentence could be reduced due to the new law, and Gunter has received many similar cards.

Importantly, Gunter said the new law, which passed with strong bipartisan support and is headed for the governor's signature, "is not a get out of jail free card" but a second chance at life for victims of domestic violence.

Additionally, Gunter announced the legislatively created Office of Safe Schools within the Georgia Emergency Management & Homeland Security Agency to bring additional resources to promot-

ing best safety practices within local school systems.

He enumerated other legislative accomplishments, including banning cellphones for kindergarten through eighth grade; passing in vitro fertilization protections; preventing boys from playing in girls' sports; prohibiting state purchases from foreign adversaries; advancing support for Next Generation 911; protecting small pharmacies; doubling the death benefit for officers killed in the line of duty; balancing salaries for state judges; provisioning additional money for the Department of Corrections; and more.

## TVA SPILLWAY DISCUSSION

The meeting also featured a discussion of the Tennessee Valley Authority's preliminary – and controversial – plans to drop Lake Chatuge to record-low levels for a period of years to fix a spillway vulnerability at the dam, expected to begin construction in about three years.

All four of the spillway fixes TVA has proposed to date call for lengthy drawdown times, with "reasonable upper bound" estimates ranging from four to eight years at an elevation of 1,908 feet, or 10 feet below winter pool.

Local concerns are many, primarily regarding the economic damage that would

result from long drawdowns to such a low level, and the City of Hiawassee has expressed serious reservations, too, about its ability to adequately treat drinking water for thousands of customers in the county.

TVA has said that the dramatic drawdown is necessary to ensure the safety of workers modifying the spillway, which must not face a situation of having to be used during construction.

On Friday, however, Movers & Shakers discussed a plan being championed by grassroots local group Save Lake Chatuge for TVA to build what is known as a "cofferdam," which would potentially enable the construction of a new spillway while maintaining normal lake levels.

After successfully tackling the invasive parrot-feather problem in the lake, SaveLakeChatuge.org teamed up once again with conservation nonprofit MountainTrue to address the TVA project, and residents are invited to the website to learn how to make their voices heard on the issue.

Sample verbiage can be found at SaveLakeChatuge.org for people to leave feedback during the TVA commenting period, and commenters are encouraged to recruit family members, friends, neighbors and others to convince TVA not to adopt plans that require a multi-year drawdown.

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Road in Young Harris.

Last week, several Movers & Shakers regulars attended a packed meeting hosted by Save Lake Chatuge.

The April 22 meeting detailed local organizational efforts so far, and though he was unable to attend that meeting, U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde was given thanks for his cooperation with local officials, groups and individuals in trying to save the lake and community.

# Nat'l Day of Prayer...from Page 1

For one, District Attorney Jeff Langley, who has prayed over government before, will offer a prayer toward education. The decision comes because he is the chair of the Appalachian Christian Leadership Council, a released-time program that has started up in Towns County Schools with hopes to expand to other districts in the coming years.

"(High schoolers) get released from their classes at school, and they come off-campus for this training, and then they go back on campus," explained Schroeder, describing the optional program as a way for students to learn leadership training based on scripture.

Filling the role of praying for leaders at all levels of government will be Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

"We're trying to get more people involved and

we want it to become more regional," said Schroeder, revealing a push to include broader geographical representation in the local program. To accomplish this, next year's goal will outline getting individual churches in on the idea.

The Schroeders, with their background in radio, planned on broadcasting the program via two local sister stations along with a station as far away as Idaho. Today's Christian Country on WUCG 89.9 in Blairsville and WCDG 88.7 in Dahlonega will be the local stations for those interested in tuning in.

But Schroeder is taking a step back. The decision had already been made that this would be their last year planning the local event, as Jack's health was quickly going downhill. Still, he chose to try to do what he could this year, including making phone calls and organizing contacts.

"This year, he took that

on, and he was going to do it; no matter what, he was going to do it," Schroeder said, describing her husband's fight against cancer and his work to keep going as a "Herculean effort."

With Jack's passing at 86, Jim Yohe will be taking up the mantle as official organizer, primarily spearheading all efforts to communicate and draw people together. Schroeder said she'll be there to advise and answer questions if needed, though, and she certainly plans on attending.

Speaking of attending, anyone who wants to join the 2025 National Day of Prayer in person can head to the First Baptist Church at 296 Blue Ridge Street in Blairsville this Thursday.

Schroeder believes the event does stand as a part of her husband's legacy, "his heart," and he would be proud to find it is so well anticipated and successful.

# School Achievement...from Page 1

tions course, and those students showed a growth rate of 8.3%," Aldridge said. "The blue ribbon here is an achievement award indicating that you had students who scored over the 90th percentile rank. Your score was 93.3%.

"There is only one ribbon you did not receive, and I'm going to challenge you all to see if you can make it next year. There is a white ribbon, and that indicates that 98% or more of your students score at that proficient range.

"But I think this is a pretty good start for recognizing the hard work of both the students and teachers in Towns County, and I just want to congratulate you all."

In closing, Aldridge said that the occasion served as

"a testament to the educators who get up every day and say I think I can make a difference in that student's life or make an impact on a colleague's life."

"And these banners are a reminder that we see you, and we are proud of all the work you are doing up here in North Georgia," Aldridge concluded.

Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong thanked Aldridge for coming and congratulating school administrators.

"We have a terrific school system, great teachers and great students," Berrong said. "It's just great to be rewarded for all the hard work you and our teachers do.

"This also shows how great our students are, and our

parents, because they really support the school system up here, and we feel like they've got our backs so that we can do the work we need to do. It's a testament to the whole picture coming together."

Possibly the most remarkable thing about last years' test scores is the growth factor showcasing improvement, because, as Berrong put it, "We're not just taking kids from where they are and keeping them there – we're pushing them forward and getting them ready for the next level."

Also attending the achievement recognition were Curriculum Director Dr. Connie Hobbs, School Board Vice Chair Brandon Grimsley and Board Member Caroleen Woods.

# Top of Georgia Plein Air Festival highlights Local Artists at the Hamilton Gardens May 8th thru 10th

Join us for the 3rd Annual Top of Georgia Plein Air Festival at Hamilton Gardens, situated at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. This free event takes place from May 8 to May 10.

On May 10 at 10 AM, award-winning artist Ed Cahill from Marietta, Georgia, will judge the paintings created during the festival. Ed has a love for representational art and plein air painting. Following the awards ceremony, the newly created signed and framed artworks will be available for purchase.

This family-friendly event is a fantastic opportunity to observe and engage with 40 artists as they capture the stunning beauty of Hamilton Gardens and Lake Chatuge. Visitors can stroll through the Gardens to see artists with their easels, paints, brushes, and canvases, each offering their unique interpretation of the landscape. It's a truly enchanting experience to witness artists at work in such a picturesque environment. Additionally, you can take a golf cart tour through the Gardens to enjoy the creative process!



Gabe Frascella

The schedule for the three days is as follows: on Thursday, May 8, and Friday, May 9, artists will be painting from 7 AM until sunset. Judging will commence on Saturday, May 10, at 10 AM, followed by the sale of the paintings at 11 AM in the Pavilion at Hamilton Gardens.

This event is proudly sponsored by The Grimes Family Foundation, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hamilton Gardens, City of Hiawassee, and Inka Inc, alongside the generous support of our community and volunteers.