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TCHS recognizes greatness with 'Evening with the Stars'

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County High School hosted its first-ever "Evening with the Stars" event celebrating student and teacher accomplishments on Wednesday, April 28, at the Towns County Civic Center.

Several high achievers received honors that evening, including but not limited to the STAR Student and Teacher.

"Everybody has worked so hard to get us through this year," TCHS Principal Roy Perren said, referencing the school's overwhelming success amid COVID-19. "I just thought it would be great to recognize others besides the STAR Student and Teacher.

"I was at Union County's (Evening with the Stars event) a couple of years ago, and I thought it was great, and I decided I wanted to do that."

Receiving the first accolade of the evening was freshman Connor Chastain, presented with the Rising Star Award for his work being an exemplary student and a helpful peer to many.

"Connor is one of the most positive students I have ever dealt with," Perren said. "He always has a smile for everyone as he goes through his day. He is a straight-A student and a leader in the classroom. He is an athlete and a leader both on and off the field. We are looking forward to great things from Connor."

Chastain was thankful for the award and hopes to continue his success in the next three years of high school.

"It is really an honor," Chastain said. "I didn't expect it. It is a blessing, and I appreciate it. I go to a great school. I have a great family behind me, and the great staff at the school."

Other students recognized that evening were Hailey Bechtol, receiving the Community Service Award, and Camren Owenby, who got the CTAE Star Award.

Caroleen Woods, a member of the Board of Education Member and Parent Teacher Student Organization, was given the Friend of TCHS Award in recognition of her dedication to the school system.

"I enjoy every minute that I spend at this school doing what I do, and I enjoy the people," Woods said.

Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong received the Alumni Award for his support of the schools spanning at least the last two decades.

"It is an honor and blessing to be able to work where you grew up and where you graduated from," Berrong said. "It has been great to see the changes.

"Mr. Perren and I have been working together for many, many years. We have got a lot accomplished, and it is nice to see the facilities the way they are compared to when I was in school."

Other faculty and staff awards went to Brande King, who received the Stellar Staff Award that evening, saying, "I love being a lunch lady," and English Teacher Brooke Whitt, who got the much-deserved Shining Star Award.

Perren also announced the Teacher of the Year for the 2021-22 school year, with the title going to English Teacher Rachel Surles.

"I work in a great place, and I work in a great

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TCHS Principal Roy Perren announced last Wednesday that English Teacher Rachel Surles had been chosen as Teacher of the Year. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Local Day of Prayer observance to air May 6 on Facebook

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

With the National Day of Prayer fast approaching, local churches and groups have prepared a streaming event that will be uploaded to Facebook for the community to enjoy on May 6.

To tune into the National Day of Prayer broadcast, visit the "2021 Towns County National Day of Prayer" Facebook page starting 7 p.m. Thursday.

While the event is typically held in person, organizers are doing a pre-recorded observance like in 2020 so that people can watch from home and not have to worry about attending a large gathering as COVID-19 continues to recede.

Megan Eyrich of Hiawassee Park Senior Living Community, with Baptist Retirement Communities of Georgia, has worked for a couple of weeks diligently getting the event ready.

"It will be just as last year's stream," Eyrich said. "We definitely want all communities to know that they are welcome, and we want them to be involved in this. It is not just Baptist or anything like that. All communities, residents, churches and anyone can join the stream."

The event will feature guest speakers from local churches and groups to lead prayer while those at home join

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Fine Arts students show off hard work for parents, guests

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In celebration of their achievements as a group and the hard work they have committed during an especially stressful year, the Towns County Band hosted an outdoor concert at the High School April 29.

It was the last public performance before the semester wraps up in a few weeks, and Band Director Allison Judd was happy to put on the event for students, feeling that it was a good thing to do to give performers some recognition.

"It has not been an easy year," Judd said. "It has been different, but we have done what we can with what we have. I have a young group,

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Towns County Band students put their skills on display during their first – and last – public concert of the year on April 29. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Classic Car Show welcomes enthusiasts from all over

Memory Lane Classic Car Museum in Young Harris hosted an unforgettable car show over the weekend in partnership with the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As the calendar flipped from April to May last weekend, car enthusiasts of all ages descended upon Hiawassee to soak up the perfect spring weather and pore over a diverse collection of classic automobiles and muscle cars at Memory Lane Classic Car Show.

Kicking off Friday, April 30, at the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum, then moving over to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on Saturday, May 1, nearly 400 cars, trucks, motorcycles and SUVs were on display both days, attracting thousands of spectators to the shores of Lake Chatuge.

Even the Fairgrounds' multi-level parking area had difficulty accommodating the scores of visitors who were eager to shake off winter's chill and pop the clutch on summertime.

On Friday night, Curt Freeman of Douglasville made the trip to Northeast Georgia in his 1971 Chevrolet Nova after recently completing its

See *Car Show, Page* 1B

Riley wins Smokey Bear Award for fire prevention efforts

Frank Riley, right, posing with Smokey Bear at the Anna Ruby Falls Visitor Center in Helen. The Smokey Bear display featured here was sponsored by the Chest-Chatt RC&D Council. Photo/Submitted

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Local fire prevention advocate Frank Riley is one of only two people in the nation to win a 2021 Silver Smokey Bear Award by the U.S. Forest Service, and he is "blown away" by the honor.

Since 1957, the prestigious Smokey Bear Award Program has recognized organizations and individuals for outstanding service in wildfire prevention at the national, multistate, and statewide levels, or gold, silver and bronze respectively, per the Forest Service.

No one received a national gold award in 2021, and three people got bronze awards this year. The awards are sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, the National Association of State Foresters and the Ad Council.

"These Smokey Bear Award winners are being honored for the dedication, innovation and energy they bring to wildfire prevention," USDA Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen said. "Throughout the many years of these awards, it's people like these who show up with the passion and desire to make a difference."

Riley is the executive director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council, which provides educational and other resources to farmers and students in 13 Northeast Georgia counties, including Union and Towns.

He is also the state liaison for Firewise USA covering all of Georgia; the founder of the Appalachian RC&D Fire Adapted Communities Coalition, comprising 63 counties between Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia; and immediate past chair of the Georgia Prescribed Fire Council.

Locally, Riley is a volunteer firefighter for the Towns County Fire Department, and he spearheaded the Firewise program in North Georgia following an 800-acre wildfire in Young Harris in 2008.

Receiving the award is an incredible honor for Riley, who was grateful to have gotten the news from his longtime friend and 2014 silver award recipient Mike Davis, the Fire Management Officer for the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests.

Although Riley may be the leader in the endeavors that won him the award, he credits his team with the successes that led to him receiving it, including his Chest-Chatt RC&D Executive Assistant Kim McCollum, the other RC&Ds in the Appalachian coalition, and the many community partners who have made Firewise and other initiatives possible.

Those community partners are too numerous to name but include fire professionals with the Forest Service, Georgia Forestry Commission and at the local level; the National Resources Conservation Service; Georgia Soil and Water Conservation Commission; individuals stepping up in their communities to adopt Firewise practices for safer homes; school districts getting students involved; and volunteer organizations across Northeast

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Heaton granted another delay as Gowder reports to prison

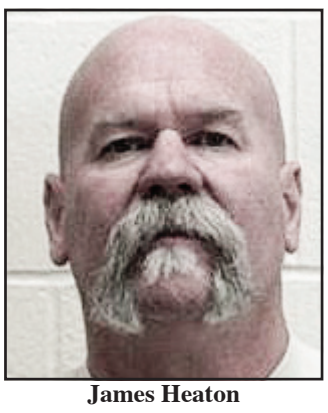
By Linda Erbele
Town County Herald

U.S. District Judge Richard W. Story has given former Blairsville physician James Heaton an extra 30 days before beginning his six-year prison term for prescription drug crimes.

The judge has amended Heaton's reporting date to June 8, 2021, in response to Heaton's request for additional time to get the COVID-19 vaccine. This is the second such delay granted to Heaton by Judge Story.

Heaton was sentenced last summer and originally given until Jan. 2, 2021, to report to prison to allow for development and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine.

In December 2020, however, Story granted Heaton and his codefendant in the case, former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder, extensions to at least May 1, 2021, to enable them to get vaccinated before beginning their prison terms.



James Heaton

Mike Gowder

The Blairsville men were convicted of multiple counts of prescription fraud in an October 2019 federal trial. Their initial sentencing hearing was delayed until June 2020 due to the coronavirus, and for the same

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Blue Ridge	1,687.60
Chatuge	1,924.47
Nottely	1,777.06

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VS. ATKINSON CO. 5 PM

GIRLS
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@ SCREVEN CO. 5 PM

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