

Towns County Herald

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Class of '24 embarks on post-graduation journey

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The members of Towns County High School Class of 2024 set out on their last adventure together on Friday, May 24, taking part in the time-honored tradition of graduation inside Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

Recognizing 72 students in total, the commencement exercises packed bleachers with family and friends wishing the graduates well and seeing them off to a new season in their lives.

Stone Chauncey once again lent his singing abilities to the class by performing the National Anthem, showcasing just a note of the talent and promise his class holds.

Directly afterward, Class President and Class of 2024 Historian Brant Young-

blood provided the opening statement and delivered his speech.

"To my fellow graduates, we have finally made it; this is the big moment we've all been working toward, and I would like to extend a congratulations for making it here," Youngblood said.

During his speech, Youngblood fittingly revisited the past of his class through a "history of success." From the moment they entered as nervous and hopeful freshmen, they conquered a myriad of challenges; in his own words, Youngblood noted "our achievements are countless."

"With all of this reminiscing on our history, though, I would like to take a second to come back to the present. This may be the last time that we're all together, and it is our last time being high schoolers,"

added Youngblood, encouraging his fellows to never forget where they came from and the friendships they forged among the community.

"No matter if you're in Dahlonega, Athens, Young Harris or wherever this world decides to spit you out, never forget your home here in Towns County," Youngblood said.

Salutatorian Eli Phillips briefly thanked parents and teachers for the role they played in helping the Class of 2024 reach the momentous occasion. To his fellow graduates, Phillips noted that he saw "not just classmates, but friends."

Citing Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me," Phillips suggested his classmates lean on faith when life

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Towns County High Class of 2024 members celebrated their major milestone Friday night by throwing graduation caps inside Frank McClure Memorial Stadium. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Courthouse renovation tours set for next week

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw revealed in his May 21 regular meeting that renovations at the Towns County Courthouse are nearly done. The first Open House showcasing the transformation for the public will be on June 4, with a second on June 6, both from 5-7 p.m.

"We plan on starting the move around June 14," said Bradshaw, referring to local officials transitioning their office spaces back into the courthouse. "And we will be in full swing in the (updated) courthouse working June 17."

The Sheriff's Auxiliary will help the county in setting up both Open House tours and will be stationed throughout the building to talk to guests and give them a rundown of how everything works and where to find it.

"I want the people to go through at their leisure; they can take their time," Bradshaw said. "That's kind of what to expect. We're excited about it; I think people are going to be very impressed. And we're very, very, very thankful about



The newly renovated Towns County Courthouse will fully open in the middle of June, to feature two public Open Houses next week. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

how it turned out."

The revamping was made possible by voter-approved SPLOST collections, and Bradshaw expressed his gratitude to the members of the SPLOST Committee that worked hard to educate voters on why the 1% sales tax would benefit the community,

crediting the committee as a large reason why the courthouse was able to receive such a massive update.

"I'm thankful for these people," Bradshaw said, sharing that a copy of the "thank you" letter he wrote to the committee will be framed and

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Henderson thanks voters for landslide victory

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson is incredibly grateful for the many voters who delivered him a landslide victory in last week's General Primary Election.

Winning the May 21 election guarantees Henderson another four-year term in office starting in 2025, as he will appear unopposed in the Nov. 5 General Election.

Above all, the sheriff wants to thank voters for placing faith in him for the job he and his Sheriff's Office have done since he first swore three and a half years ago to protect the residents and properties of Hiawassee, Young Harris and Towns County at large.

"I'm not going to let the citizens down," said Henderson, who ran a clean, positive campaign spelling out his accomplishments so far and what he hopes to achieve moving forward. "Every day, we're working to try to improve the Sheriff's Department and serve the citizens well."

Henderson's 2024 campaign focused on "promises kept" from his 2020 campaign,



Ken Henderson
Towns County Sheriff

and he has pledged to continue fulfilling the promises he has made to the residents of the county.

"My priorities were set when I ran the first time," Henderson said. "I told the people of this county what I was going to do, and I've done them and more, and we're going to

continue to do that."

Under Henderson's administration, the Sheriff's Office has made patrol cars highly visible to the public; transitioned to new professional uniforms; doubled minimum training requirements for deputies; implemented

See *Sheriff Henderson*, Page 3

Hiawassee Pro Rodeo packs seats at Fairgrounds



Saturday night boasted record attendance at the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo, which twice a year features the best bucking horses, bulls, calf-roping and world-class contestants from all over the United States and Canada. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

See *Pro Rodeo*, Page 3

Nurse Major to retire after 44 years in patient care

News Special

After 44 years of tireless dedication caring for patients as a Registered Nurse, Cindy Major will be retiring June 7 from the Emory Heart & Vascular Center in Hiawassee.

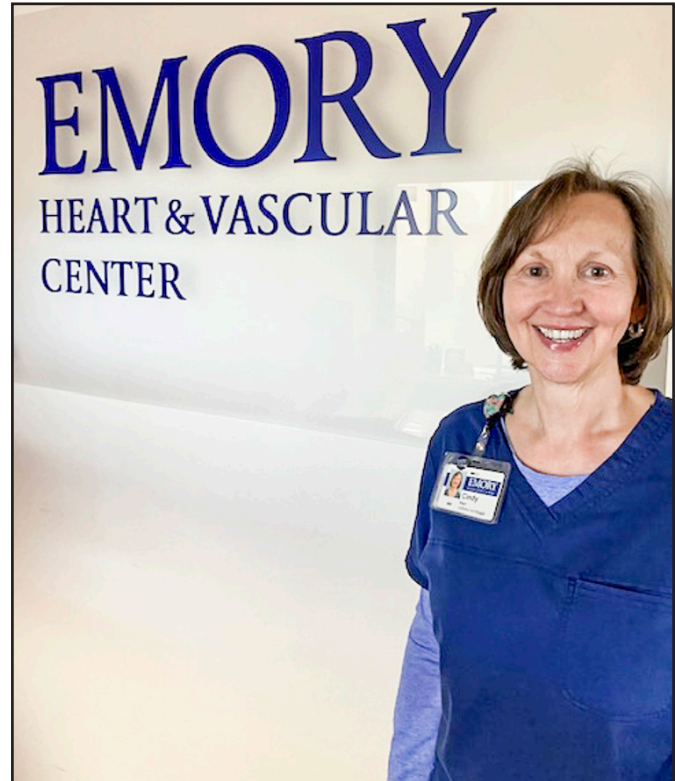
Cindy graduated as a Registered Nurse from Georgia Baptist Nursing School in Atlanta in 1980, after which she managed the Intensive Care Unit at Atlanta's South Fulton Hospital for 15 years.

In 1995, she moved to Hiawassee to work at Atlanta Cardiology. A year later, Cindy went to work at St. Joseph Cardiac Rehab in Blairsville for four years before transitioning to Emory Health Systems in 2000.

For the last 24 years, Cindy has managed the Emory Heart & Vascular Center, or EHVC, on the second floor of Chatuge Regional Hospital in Hiawassee. During her tenure, she has served as the only full-time RN.

In 2023, after 23 years in the Chatuge Hospital location,

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Registered Nurse Cindy Major will be retiring soon after decades of assisting patients in the North Georgia Mountains and beyond.

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Sheriff Henderson...from Page 1

regular patrols of businesses, churches and neighborhoods; conducted interagency road safety checks; begun a highly successful "war on drugs"; and more.

"We're going to continue to set our goal on keeping this county as clean as possible of drugs," Henderson said. "That's key; we've got to get up 24 hours a day and work to keep the drugs out of our county as best as we possibly can, protecting our schools, our kids, our community."

"That's a No. 1 priority for me, and it's going to continue to be a No. 1 priority ... we said we were going to hire drug agents, and we have. We said we were going to get K-9s, and we did."

The numbers don't lie. Since Henderson's first year in office, the Sheriff's Office has made 277 felony drug arrests, getting both dealers and drugs off the street. And that success has translated to less overall crime in the county.

"When you deal with drugs as we have, you're going

to have a reduction in crime; it's just that simple." Henderson said. "We've had like a 37% drop in crime with the drug arrests that we've made."

"With burglaries and thefts and all your crimes, really, you're always going to find that drugs are related. And if you keep drugs out of your county and drug-selling down, you're going to see a major difference."

Sheriff Henderson also pledges to build on the excellent working relations he has fostered with outside agencies that resulted in the Governor's Office of Highway Safety awarding Towns County both Sheriff of the Year and Sheriff's Office of the Year for 2021.

"We're going to work with everybody, and we have done that," Henderson said, listing agencies from all the surrounding counties as well as the Georgia State Patrol, Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and others.

"Shawn Dyer has been elected sheriff in Union County," Henderson continued. "Shawn and I are good friends, and we're going to work good together. Once he takes office, we're going to sit down and talk about some things that we can do together."

"So, you're going to see a lot of change coming with things of that nature, because we're going to be working very close with Union County, and all these other folks as well, but especially Union County - we've got plans of some things we want to do."

Henderson said he has been working well with the Hiawassee Police Department, too, backing up the city's officers with his own deputies anytime they are needed, despite past frosty relations over a jurisdictional dispute.

Now that the election is over and he has secured a second term, Sheriff Henderson said he has nothing but appreciation for "all the wonderful people that stood by me and worked so hard for me during

this campaign."

"I want to thank all of them and all the citizens that placed trust and faith in me," Henderson said, reiterating his gratitude. "I get up every day and work hard to make sure I'm not letting the folks down that put me here."

As Henderson said to his supporters once they realized he had earned re-election, "I didn't win this race; my department won this race. I've got very qualified, wonderful people working here, and that's what makes a difference."

"When you've got a good agency like I have - great officers, great detention center folks and all the wonderful people that work here with me - I can't say enough about it. They put me here. Those people put me here because of the wonderful job that they have done."

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Hiawassee Pro Rodeo...from Page 1A



Fans from across the region attended the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo over Memorial Day Weekend to see the fast-paced traditions of the Wild West come to life. Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Bull riding is arguably the most action-packed event of the rodeo, and this year did not disappoint as fans packed inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for the three-day event that will return Labor Day Weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

TCMS Honors' Programs highlight student achievement

TCMS Honors' Programs. Congratulations to Towns County Middle School 8th Graders for completing their MS coursework.

An Honors' Program was held for them on May 21st in the Anne "Oliver" Mitchell Auditorium. Parents and teachers celebrated their accomplishments and then watched an 8th Grade Video as a Tribute to their MS years. We will miss the 8th grade students as they transition to 9th Grade, but wish them all the best in the future!

6th and 7th Grade Honors were held in their classrooms on this same day.

8th Grade 23-24 All A Honor Roll: Jaidan Bates, Isaac Conrad, Katie Davis, Bailey Dyer, Zoe Harris, Chris Houser, Teagan Johns, Dylan Mason, Emeline Plourde, Baylor Rogers, Sam Sarafin, Jay Thomas, Ava Thompson, Caleb Vardo, AJ Vargas, Madilyn Walls, Will Walls, Grayson Ward, Emma Willson, & Faine Wood.

Perfect Attendance: Emeline Plourde; PTSO Citizenship Award: Ethen Rivera & Ava Thompson; REACH Scholars: Madilyn Walls & Tucker Wheeler; Indian Award: Ava Thompson & Madilyn Walls.

7th Grade 23-24 All A Honor Roll: Jayden Bagley, Caleb Bates, Reilyn Gonzalez, Maeleigh King, Naomi Molina, Thien Nguyen, Soham Patel, Della Puckett, Bristol Rogers, Hayden Stancil, James Stowers, Tristan Waldroup.

Perfect Attendance:



Indian Award-Madilyn Walls & Ava Thompson



Performing "The Climb"-Lilly Martin & Tucker Wheeler

Maelei Johnstone; PTSO Citizenship Award: Margaret Evans & Della Puckett.

6th Grade 23-24 All A Honor Roll: Khloe Adams, Jonah Baker, Chloe Baxter, Tinley Berrong, Marquis Blocker, Caroline Brannan, Reid Brown, Averie Byrd, Kylee Coggins, Leonor Escamilla, Rhett Floyd, Marshall

Hurley, Abbie Johnson, Charli Jones, Emily Krokono, Caleb Leech, Brennan Mason, Easton McNabb, Ella Mitchell, Conner Nelson, Harper Oliver, Bryson Stowers, JD Taylor, Owen Ward.

Perfect Attendance: Lakota Woodrum; PTSO Citizenship Award: Gabe Reece & Daniella Garcia-Gonzalez.

TCHS Graduation..from Page 1

inevitably gets tough. Proverbs 3:5-6 sends a similar message, and Phillips quoted the scripture in hopes that it would serve as a guiding light.

“While we may not know what the future holds, we can trust in God’s plan for us,” Phillips said. “As we bid farewell to Towns County High School, let us carry with us the memories we have created, the friendships we have made, and apply the lessons we have learned.”

Last but certainly not least, Valedictorian Dhriti Patel took to the podium to much applause, first giving a special shout-out to her family for their love and support. Though she thanked family and school staff for their involvement, she wanted to especially wish Shane Casey and Melissa McConnell a fond farewell.

“My fellow graduates, after today, we will officially be signing off as high school seniors. After today, you will be starting with a blank slate – a brand-new chapter with blank pages,” said Patel, offering a slightly modified quote from her favorite book, “Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief”: “If your life is going to mean anything, you have to live it yourself.”

Ultimately, Patel wanted her classmates to remember that while the prospect of going out into an “unknown world” may be frightening, they have the power to make something of themselves. Failure is a part of life, and mistakes can lead to learning.

“I challenge you to treat your future as an opportunity to chase every dream you’ve ever had,” Patel said. “Accept the challenges that you face along the way with determination and conviction; strive to do the best you can no matter what you choose to do; and most importantly, connect with the community you choose to live in.”

For his part, Principal Bryan Thomason admitted that the Class of 2024 would always hold a special place in his heart as his first graduating class in his new position, and he commended the graduates for their amazing accomplishments and resilience.

The Class of 2024 set a record, raising the bar on what it means to attend TCHS.



Valedictorian Dhriti Patel delivered a heartfelt message focused on embracing life to the fullest and chasing dreams in the May 24 Commencement Exercises. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

2024’s graduates earned 60 High Honor Graduates. Collectively, they completed 190 scholarships, amounting to the highest amount ever reported for the school at \$703,705.

Out of 72 students, 12 were Honor Graduates and 17 2024, and congratulations.



TCHS Principal Bryan Thomason leading ecstatic graduates to their seats at the start of Friday’s graduation ceremony.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Senior Stone Chauncey regaled everyone in attendance of Friday’s graduation with a stirring rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Courthouse Tours...from Page 1

hung up in the lobby of the renovated courthouse.

Following a five-year absence due to lack of interest, the county is collaborating with North Georgia Technical College to offer adult education classes. As introduced by Dean of Adult Education, Shelby Ward, the free courses can help students earn a High School Equivalency Diploma.

Open to anyone 16 and older, the program is also helpful for those seeking to learn English – even if they have degrees in their native language – and for those looking to develop basic skills, particularly workforce literacy.

Also present at the meeting was Marcus Lindsey with Air Methods to represent the company with the renewal of the Community Partnership Agreement to provide medically necessary air ambulance services to residents of the county.

With the closest medical

chopper base at Union General Hospital in Blairsville, Air Methods is the company that manages the Air Life Georgia helicopters used in local medical evacuations.

For eight years now, Air Methods has maintained an agreement with the county to ensure residents – insured or not – do not pay any out-of-pocket costs associated with transport by Air Life helicopters.

According to Lindsey, the goal of Air Methods is to provide quality care to rural residents, and with helicopters equipped with blood products, advanced anesthesiology equipment and more, there's no arguing their potential to make a life-saving difference.

Frank Riley, Executive Director of the Chestatee-Chattahoochee Resource Conservation and Development Council, shared a bit about his organization as a nonprofit

dedicated to fostering connections between communities and natural resources and enhancing and conserving the environment.

Riley's group will be present on June 1 at the Union County Farmers Market, spon-

soring the Georgia Beef Day event. Later, they will set up a table where curious visitors can get a more in-depth view of what the Chestatee-Chattahoochee RC&D Council does.

Information available will include tips on how to reduce the risk of wildfire damage, such as clearing leaves off roofs and pushing them away

from houses.

Other updates at the May 21 meeting included that the county entrance signs have been completed, all homestead exemption checks have been collected, Rachel Mathis was reappointed as the Towns County representative on the AVITA Board, and Richard Nichols was appointed to the

Towns County Fire Board.

Bradshaw holds his regular meetings every third Tuesday of each month starting at 5:30 p.m., with the June 18 meeting set to take place inside the newly renovated courthouse. Since construction began, the Old Rec Gym housed commission meetings and courthouse business.



Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw led his last regular meeting to take place at the Temporary Courthouse Offices at the Old Rec Gym May 21. County meetings will resume inside the Towns County Courthouse starting in June.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Major Retiring...from Page 1

EHVC relocated to a new, bigger space on Riverside Drive in Hiawassee, next to Chatuge Physical Therapy.

Relocating to the bigger space was a goal Cindy wanted to achieve before her retirement, and she is fully confident that the new facility will allow EHVC to provide more cardiac services for the community.

Cindy has enjoyed providing cardiac care for so many people in Hiawassee,

Towns County, and the surrounding areas. The patients have meant the world to her, and she will miss them.

After a 44-year career as a full-time Registered Nurse, Cindy is looking forward to retirement. She plans on traveling, spending more time with her grandchildren, and committing time at home to working in her yard and just having time to enjoy life.

Congratulations to Cindy, and enjoy your retirement.