

Memorial Day puts cost of freedom at forefront

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Memorial Day on Monday, May 26, marked the unofficial start of summer, which comes with lots of barbecuing and swimming, fireworks and county fairs, hiking and camping and fishing; all the things that Americans enjoy doing while making memories with loved ones.

Things America can do because of what they did – members of the United States armed forces.

More importantly, Memorial Day commemorates the ultimate sacrifice that thou-

sands of men and women have made since the birth of this nation. Men and women who did what Jesus did when they laid down their lives for their brothers – when they stood tall with unfailing courage and died because they loved America and all that she stands for.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807 and Auxiliary, American Legion Post 23 and Auxiliary, the Sons of the American Legion Squadron 23, the American Legion Riders and the Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783 gathered at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park that Monday to show

their undying gratitude and loyalty.

No one wants war less than a soldier, because he or she knows the true price.

For instance, keynote speaker Ronny Bruce told of the price he has paid. Bruce served in the Marine Corps from 1994-1998 and then joined the Army from 2008-2012. He saw combat in Afghanistan during Operation Freedom and spoke on what the “sacred” occasion means to him.

“For years I avoided events like this for no good reason other than being sad,

Combat Veteran Ronny Bruce served as the keynote speaker for the 2025 Memorial Day Service sponsored by Towns County veterans.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Mountain Education 2025 grads celebrate milestone

The Scots are coming this weekend, June 7 & 8!

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – The Mountain Education Union Campus Class of 2025 had its time to shine on Tuesday, May 27, when graduates gathered at the Union County Fine Arts Center for scholarships and awards, but most importantly, to walk across the stage to receive their diplomas and turn their tassels.

With 19 total graduates attending from Union and Towns counties, four students earned Honor Graduate status and one earned Campus High Honor Graduate, namely Cayleigh Kenner, who led the class processional carrying the traditional cromach staff of Mountain Education com-

See *Mountain Education*, Page 6

By Kimberly Miller
Guest Contributor

For years now the Scots have gathered in the North Georgia Mountains, bringing Highland dancers, Highland Games athletes, family clans, bagpipers, drummers, and traditional musicians who come to celebrate their heritage.

This year brings an exciting chapter to the Festival with a name change, to encompass all of the North Georgia region and a much larger facility with lots more parking. The Festival’s history is filled with wonderful memories, and many thanks to those who have been a part of it over the years.

The Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games will be held at

See *Scottish Festival*, Page 11

Mountain Education High School Class of 2025 Graduate Kaitlyn Dolby receiving her diploma from Union Campus Principal Jennifer Ludlum.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

The Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games will feature an expanded variety of athletic competitions and so much more when it kicks off this weekend.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Bradshaw welcomes Moore for parrot-feather update

TVA public comment period ends with 1,700+ comments

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw included an update on the invasive parrot-feather weed in Lake Chatuge and a historical proclamation for the Towns County Lions Club in his most recent regular monthly meeting on May 20.

“We haven’t given a report on parrot-feather since we combated it, and so I asked Callie Moore from Mountain-True to come and give us an update,” said Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw.

Moore works for the conservation nonprofit MountainTrue, and she said the

Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and County Clerk Brenda McKinney in the May county meeting.

Photo by Shelly Knight

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The official public commenting period regarding the Tennessee Valley Authority’s initial release of proposed construction plans to fix the spillway vulnerability at Chatuge Dam wrapped up last week. Next steps include another public commenting period at a later date.

More than 1,700 comments were left on TVA’s Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement as required under the National Environmental Policy Act, with comments being accepted from April 22 through May 28.

See *Lake Chatuge*, Page 14

The intake tower of Chatuge Dam.

Photo/tva.com

New Splash Pad now open; Farmers Market on Saturdays

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Saturday, May 24, marked an eventful day at the Towns County Beach. It was the grand opening of the new Splash Pad for kids, and it was also the 2025 season opener of the Farmers Market located at the beach entrance.

“The lake is fun and great for older people and kids, but for younger kids the lake can be a bit scary because you can’t see the bottom,” said Recreation Director Stuart Nichols. “For a person who can’t swim, it can be a dangerous situation for parents.

“So, we wanted to build the Splash Pad so that the younger kids can come out and enjoy the lake with the whole family. Maybe the older siblings are swimming in the lake

and the younger ones can be on the Splash Pad.

“Children up to 12 years can come out and have a good time on the pad. This is a freshwater system. The water comes straight from the City of Hiawassee, and once it flows down it actually flows into the lake. The (Tennessee Valley Authority) requested that we use a freshwater system because of the worry of treated water getting into the lake.

“Towns County funded the project with the help of a Land Water Conservation Fund grant, which is federally funded by the National Park Service. It was a 50/50 matching grant. The total cost of the Splash Pad was approximately \$140,000, of which Towns County paid half.

“A lot of the cost is

based on size and the types of features you include. We took bids, and Smith Aquatics gave us a very good price and did a great job as far as I’m concerned.”


People will notice that the Splash Pad has a surface of concrete.

“We talked about other surfaces, and it is my understanding that most of the splash pads use concrete,” Nichols said. “The reason for that is that once you put that rubberized paint over the top of it, it is actually slicker than the concrete.

“It’s also a maintenance nightmare over time, trying to keep it clean and needing to refinish it frequently. Whereas with concrete, you pressure wash it once a year and it’s done.”

The Towns County Splash Pad is a great new attraction for area families at the Towns County Beach off US 76 in Hiawassee.

Photo by Meghan Jarrard

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City of Hiawassee being proactive on water issues



Adam Bracken of Waterworth remotely led a presentation for the Hiawassee City Council and Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. on May 27.

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

In their May 27 work session, the Hiawassee City Council and Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. discussed the possibility of purchasing a software program to help with financial forecasting, long-range planning and utility rate analysis.

The council welcomed Adam Bracken from the software development company Waterworth, which offers a continuous utility rate management solution.

Waterworth works with municipalities to solve, among other things, financial woes related to infrastructure issues – something Hiawassee has been dealing with for years with more than half its treated water being lost somewhere in the distribution system.

Bracken made an online presentation communicating the various ways the software would allow the city to successfully fund future capital improvement projects to upgrade aging infrastructure

while protecting customer affordability, equability and ensure financial transparency.

The cost of the software/consultancy services depends on the length of the contract but starts at approximately \$10,500 for one year.

Explaining further, City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick added, “This is a tool to see projections – what will happen if we do this, what will happen if we don’t do this. It’s forecast modeling.”

“With this model, if (Water Treatment Superintendent Andrew Sims) has to backwash 15 times, we can put those numbers into the system and we can determine how much water we’re losing,” Chastain said. “And then how much chemical we’ll need when it’s pumped back into the lake after it’s been dechlorinated. I can really see the value of this tool.”

Questions on the Tennessee Valley Authority’s proposed work at Chatuge Dam arose as council members wondered about the future cost

of treatment chemicals in the event of a dramatically drawn-down lake.

“Right now, we don’t have any idea about the chemical prices,” Chastain said. “Our engineers and TVA’s engineers are going to meet again in July, and then maybe we’ll know a little more. Are we going to get water or are we going to get silt? I’m doing everything I can to make sure we’ve got clean drinking water.”

The mayor met with TVA engineers last month as they toured the Water Treatment Plant to understand how it operates, what likely issues would arise if the lake level dropped and remain at the level of 10 feet below winter pool, and what measures could be taken to lessen the impact.

Chastain noted in his Mayor’s Report that the city was able to fix 17 water leaks in the month of May “and did work on shrubbery and planted flowers on the square this month; we’re going to mulch, but with this rain, everything is delayed.”

“We will be looking to ratify the LMIG paving project on Presley Road and the FY 25-26 budget next week,” Chastain said, looking ahead to the June 3 regular meeting that occurred after press time. A budget public hearing immediately prior to the work session featured no public comment.

“The council pay increase from \$200 a month to \$300 a month plus a \$50 payment for any special called meeting will also be on the agenda (in the regular meeting),” Chastain continued. “I’m also asking to increase the mayor’s authorized spending limit from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a month.

“Everything is going up. I’m going to have to end up calling a special called meeting every time I need to make a purchase over the limit. If you all don’t want to, that’s fine, but it may cause delays in repairs.”

Water Supervisor Sims discussed an emergency issue the plant has been having with the equipment that monitors the water levels in several city storage tanks. The equipment is beyond end of life and requires \$80,000 to repair the mechanism that feeds the water levels in the tanks.

“I’ve done all I can do to repair things, but one time the sensor will say 12 feet but it really has 3 feet of water, and another time just the opposite, so we’ve got to upgrade,” Sims said. “There have been times we go up there and water is pouring out of the tank.

“These sensors haven’t been upgraded for 10 or 15 years, so it’s some pretty old technology. I recommend upgrading all of it.”

Returning Police Chief Paul Smith reported that his first day on the job was a great success and he’s got everything under control.

Economic Development Director Denise McKay announced that she is retiring June 8 and leaving the area. She thanked everyone at the

city for all their support and encouragement.

“It has been my privilege to work with you all,” McKay said before receiving a

standing ovation for her work.

The City Council and Mayor Chastain hold their regular business meetings the first Tuesday of each month at

6 p.m. inside City Hall. Work sessions take place the Monday of the week before regular meetings, also at 6 p.m. in City Hall.

Mountain Education...from Page 1



The Mountain Education Class of 2025 has plenty to look forward to after graduating on May 27.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

mencement exercises.

“Symbolically, the cromach represents the power of preserving good through fidelity and truth,” explained Campus Principal Brandon Bradburn.

Led by Co-Principal Jennifer Ludlum, scholarships were awarded from local organizations like the Allegheny Masonic Lodge, Blairsville Kiwanis, the Union County Lions and other entities, including Unity Church, Mike’s Seafood and Woodmen of the World.

Several graduates received financial assistance via scholarships in honor of the departed, such as the North Georgia Technical College Dr. Ivester Memorial, Jacob Lynch Memorial, Martha Elliot Memorial and the Teena Atkins Memorial.

“I want to express how grateful I am for this moment and everyone here who could attend this special day,” said Honor Graduate Kaitlyn Dolby. “No matter what we face, no matter what labels society may place on us, each and every single one of us are scholars ... with the determination and perseverance to achieve success in what we want to be and to do in our life.”

Destiny Eskew delivered the Graduate Speech, bravely sharing the story of how she found herself attending Mountain Education and what the public high school

did to change her life.

“Exposed to things I should have been sheltered from at a young age,” Eskew described her upbringing as a difficult one.

Although she admitted she made some wrong turns, the path to her future was ultimately changed when she decided to fight for herself and take a chance that would result in the betterment of not just her life, but that of her daughter.

“I started focusing on finding me ... but I still regretted not finishing school,” Eskew said. “In August of 2023, I enrolled in (Mountain Education) in Blairsville.”

And so, she stood before her fellow graduates after successfully completing a customized education plan that involved taking courses at home and testing on campus so she could continue to work in support of her family.

Triumphant in her endeavors and enjoying a new lease on life, she praised Mountain Education for offering her – and countless others over the years – a second chance.

“In May of 2024, I watched my daughter graduate from kindergarten,” Eskew said. “While this graduation may seem small to some people ... this really opened my eyes to me graduating.

“I wanted to finish for myself, but I also wanted to show her that I could do it

despite being a teen mom. I wanted to prove all of those who doubted me wrong, and I wanted to show the kid in me that we did it. And guess what? I did it.”

Among the crowd and staff alike, tears were shed at Eskew’s emotional testimony. She vouched for her classmates and the importance of Mountain Education as an alternative to traditional education, describing how those beset by trauma like herself can find a way to overcome life’s challenges.

Following the ceremony, everyone was invited to the Union County High School cafeteria for refreshments and socializing, proving that while the journey may look different for some graduates, there’s still a victory worth celebrating at its end.

The Mountain Education Union Campus Class of 2025 is Sebastian Astorga, Honor Graduate Rayven Chastain, Colton Czarnecke, Aubree Davis, Honor Graduate Kaitlyn Dolby, Destiny Eskew, Garrett Glisson, Brianna Grave, Arie Hayston, Indigo Hull Hatchett, Jolie Johnson, Campus High Honor Graduate Cayleigh Kenner, Honor Graduate Braden Kinderknecht, Honor Graduate Chevale Kinderknecht, Marissa Lund, Jordyn Mason, Chloe Phillips, Ethan Pickelsimer, Naliana Ray, Jason Savage and Zachary Wenrich.

Memorial Day...from Page 1



Sid Turner, Mel Halfon and Mark Harbison – all Vietnam Veterans – on Memorial Day, posing here with “The Georgia 50” plaque recognizing Peach State sons who have yet to receive their “Welcome Home” from Vietnam.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

angry and depressed,” Bruce said. “So, I want to give a special thanks to Vietnam Veteran Mr. Butch Underwood for helping me break out of my shell and get involved in the veteran community.

“I think about the people I served with daily. On this day I think about a battle buddy I lost named Julian Berisford from West Virginia. He died on Nov. 4, 2009, when our platoon was ambushed in the Paktika Province in Afghanistan.

“I don’t want to get too into the weeds about the events that day, but we were sent on an ill-advised mission, and Julian paid the ultimate price. We were outnumbered, surrounded on three sides by the enemy who was in the high ground.

“Julian’s vehicle was struck by an RPG-7, killing him instantly. Over half of my platoon was wounded on missions as life-threatening as this one. Julian was supposed to fly home on R&R but instead flew home in a flag-draped coffin. He never had the chance to celebrate his daughter’s first birthday.

“I think of you, Julian. And Lance Carpenter, Brandon Cox, William Greenleaf, Jeramie Seaker, Toby Stinson, and Joshua Weymers – men I knew personally, casualties of the war even after they returned home, as they died by their own hands or from pure recklessness.

“They, too, suffered with sadness, anger and depression. I witnessed firsthand



A father teaching his son about the cost of freedom at the Towns County Veterans Park on Memorial Day 2025.

Photo by Shelly Knight

their courage and bravery on the battlefield. They were men of honor.

“Today, while we have our cookouts and eat some fine American foods, let’s reflect on what this day is all about: all of the brave American soldiers from every prior conflict who sacrificed everything so we can live freely in this awesome nation. Freedom isn’t free.”

Sadly, suicide is not uncommon for returning service members. Statistics through 2022 indicate there were 131 suicides per day among U.S. adults, and 17 per day were veterans. Sadness, anger and depression can become insurmountable but for the steadfastness of other veterans who

encourage their brothers and sisters to reach out and find support.

Also during the ceremony, the North Georgia Honor Guard and Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter Sons of the American Revolution gifted a beautifully hand-carved wooden plaque to the Hiawassee VFW displaying the names of 50 Vietnam Veterans from Georgia who have yet to come home.

The words at the top of the plaque read, “They fought with honor. Their fate is unknown. Fifty families with no answers. The citizens of the state of Georgia will not forget them. They will live in our hearts forever, until the last one comes home.”

Scottish Festival...from Page 1

the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee, beginning with a free Ceilidh or party with food trucks opening at 5 p.m. and the party starting at 6 p.m. on June 6 at the beautiful Hamilton Gardens inside the fairgrounds.

The Festival itself runs 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, June 7th and 8th. A truly amazing sight to see is the Opening Ceremony at 12 noon on Saturday, with the massed highland bands and parade of tartans and athletes.

Admission is \$20 on Saturday and \$10 on Sunday, or \$25 for both days. Children 7-12 are \$5, and children 6 and under get in free. Everything other than food and souvenirs is included in the admission price. Parking continues to be free. This is a bargain compared to other Scottish Festivals of comparable size!

Even if you don't know your family's lineage or have little or no Scottish ties, you're invited to come experience Scotland without the need of a passport or international flight across the ocean. Forty-four clans (family units) will be waiting for you to bring your family names to find your lineage and tie you to the land of the Scots.

A first for the Festival: two pubs, Rusty Kilt and St. Andrews, will have a variety of offerings, and Hightower Vineyard will be supplying Mead inside the fairgrounds for purchase.

For the first time in 20 years, Athletics will have the space to bring a full competition, with nine events at the Highland Games, including the caber toss (telephone pole), heavy and light hammer throw, open stone and Braemar stone throw. Seventy-five athletes who train year-round will be tossing the caber and putting the stones beginning at 9 a.m. both Saturday and Sunday. Men and women athletes come to earn points to rise to the top!

From the Scottish athletes to two different types of Scottish dancing, four Celtic

bands to a pipe-band contest at 2 p.m. on Saturday, there is sure to be something to excite everyone in the family!

The Highland ponies will be coming to the Festival for the first time. Returning are traditional sheep-herding with the Border Collies, Highland coos (cows) and birds of prey used for hunting along with the black faced sheep. The 11 demonstrators also include a fierce bowyer who makes longbows, to two sturdy blacksmiths in the forge. Historical re-enactors Clann Nan Con will be camped on the lake while the Spinners & Weavers will be in the Pioneer Village.

Wee lads and lassies are encouraged to attend as well! Special activities for the children include the "Passport to the Clans" activity, where children visit clan tents and learn about each different family's history. Once their Passport is full, they can return to the Children's Area to select a prize!

There is also face-painting, mini-golf, a coloring station, and a bouncy-castle (all activities included in admission). Adventurous kids can even try out some of the Highland Games, scaled down to child-size.

The "real" Scottish princess Merida from the Pixar film "Brave," provided by Enchanted Events, will be greeting children from 1-3 p.m. on both days of the festival.

As you're planning your family trip, please remember that children in the Children's Area are required to be supervised by a family member at all times. Unaccompanied children will be given a caffeine rich Irn-Bru soda and a caber to toss!

For our most wee of wee bairns (and for the comfort of their mothers), also available in the Children's Area is a "Quiet Tent" with a changing table. This comfortable spot is ideal for parents with infants if any privacy is needed for nursing, napping or diapering.

What is a Festival without shopping? Many favorite vendors with traditional

Scottish wares, clothing and food are returning, plus new merchants who are making their first trek to the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games. There will be jewelry, sporrans, kilts, T-shirts, musical instruments, home decor and many more Scottish items available for purchase.

The Scottish Festival's new home allows 15 different food vendors to offer delicious Scottish food including scotch eggs, Shepherd's pie, fish & chips, whiskey brisket, traditional and vegetarian haggis, and the traditional meat pies and bakery items. For those with less adventurous taste buds, we have American food such as barbecue, hamburgers, chicken tenders, funnel cakes, etc.

Kicking off the weekend we are having a free traditional Scottish Ceilidh or party on Friday, with the food trucks opening at 5 p.m. and the party starting at 6 p.m. While it is hard to spell, it's easy to say - kay-lee - and it will offer Celtic entertainment, pipes and drums, a sing-along, an athletic presentation, poetry reading, and traditional Celtic storytelling, all free at Hamilton Gardens in Hiawassee on June 6.

Transportation for those less mobile will be available inside the park, and the trolley will be running in the car park (parking lot).

Come join in the fun at the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games! There are still volunteer positions available for Sunday in three-hour shifts. Volunteers receive free admission to the Festival!

Heed the call of the pipes and the drums, grab your kilt, come to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on June 6th, 7th and 8th, and try being Scottish for a weekend!

Find out more at <https://gamtnscottishfestival.org>. Follow the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival & Highland Games on Facebook and on Instagram @gamountainsscottishfestival.

Parrot-Feather...from Page 1

homeowners should report any sighting of parrot-feather they have."

About \$7,500 remains of the treatment funding allocated by the Georgia General Assembly last year, and Moore said plans are in the works to use the money "to have the area that was treated last year surveyed, probably in mid-June, unless we have a documented sighting before then."

"These surveys will be conducted by Southeast Consulting, a very reputable company," Moore said. "If treatments are required again, the dates will be posted on www.SaveLakeChatuge.org and www.MountainTrue.org, and we will do our best to get the word out like we did last year."

Moore said the General Assembly funds paid for the treatment in its entirety, and that "we are still currently holding over \$382,500 in parrot-feather money that was raised by the county, the city and all of the private donations when it looked like the state was not going to help us combat the problem."

"The bulk of the funds is in an interest-bearing account, and that money is going right back into the fund," Moore said. "Some suggestions have arisen that we might possibly allocate some of the funding for the other project currently being discussed about Lake Chatuge."

"I hate to even bring it up, however, this fund is designated by IRS guidelines for the purposes that people gave the money for, and that is to battle parrot-feather and other invasive aquatic weeds in Lake Chatuge. We will likely need it in the years to come."

Next, Julie Payne read the Towns County Lions Club 85th Anniversary Proclamation, and Bradshaw thanked the Lions "for all that you do in service to our community,"

Thomason recognized at UNG awards event

University of North Georgia (UNG) students who showed promise, demonstrated creativity, displayed excellence, served others and exceeded all expectations had their moment in the spotlight during the annual Student Awards on their campuses this spring. About 300 student awards were announced. Bryan Thomason of Hiawassee earned the Outstanding Educational Leadership Student at the Dahlonega Campus.

with County Historian Jerry Taylor added an interesting tidbit.

"Chartered in 1940, they've always done community service projects," Taylor said. "My first pair of glasses and eye examination was done by the Lions Club. When the lake was filled in May of 1942, their project for May was stocking the new lake with fish."

In new business, Bradshaw signed an agreement with the University of Georgia Board of Regents regarding funding for Towns County 4-H, which instructs local children in all sorts of disciplines and skills like public speaking.

"We sign this agreement every year," Bradshaw said. "It's increased a little bit this year by about \$400, but they do a wonderful job over there, so we're going to sign this."

Next, Bradshaw renewed the Georgia Department of Transportation contract for the Towns County Transit Service, which largely benefits "our elderly folks in the county."

"It's a 50/50 partnership, and our share is \$85,270," Bradshaw said. "We're very thankful to have this service. It's needed by a lot of people to go to doctor's appointments and so on, and they stay very busy."

For more information on the service, visit <http://www.townscountyga.org/transit.html>.

Bradshaw then signed a contract with the Georgia Department of Corrections for detainees to conduct regular maintenance at the various county-owned facilities.

"We use them a lot to cut grass and use weed eaters, paint, and there's always some skilled labor," Bradshaw said. "One year we had an electrician. It's a tremendous savings to the taxpayers in the county."

"This year's contract has increased as well, like everything else, and it is \$54,249.80. However, we only pay when they come. We're thankful to have them because they do a lot of work."

The commissioner was happy to renew the county contract with Air Methods to provide life-flight medical helicopter transports free to residents.

"Mr. (Bill) Kendall, the former commissioner, started this, and this is one of the best things he did," Bradshaw said. "The bottom line is that if you're a resident of Towns County and you have to be flown out and you use this

company, you don't have to pay anything out of your pocket.

"They collect what they can from your insurance, but it doesn't come out of your pocket. Since this has been incorporated, 110 residents have been airlifted by Air Methods with no out-of-pocket expense."

"The cost of \$22,117.41 is based on population, which you know has increased some in our area. The flat rate of \$800 per person has not increased. This is a terrific benefit to our community and saves our citizens a lot of money."

"Last, we are appointing Diane Rogers to the Towns County Board of Health," Bradshaw continued. "Mary Lynn Kimsey has served on the board for many years, and I want to thank her for all of her years of service. She has stepped down, so I have to appoint someone new. We are excited to appoint Diane Rogers to the board."

During his Commissioner's Comments, Bradshaw distributed the Save Lake Chatuge public call to action document asking everyone to make their voices heard about the possibility of having the lake drawn down anywhere from four to eight years for a necessary dam spillway repair.

"We want a safe dam and spillway, let me make that clear," Bradshaw said. "But I feel like, with today's technology and all the engineers, they can do that if they have the want to in a shorter amount of time."

"I'm headed to Tennessee July 9-11 to meet with some TVA people again. We're going to keep pounding away at this and keep talking. I want to thank the Save Lake Chatuge group for all the work you did with parrot-feather and all the work you're doing now to save the lake."

"I'm contacting everyone I know to contact and will continue to do so. I feel confident that TVA will explore other options, but not confident enough that we don't stay on it."

The regular commission meeting occurs the third Tuesday of each month starting at 5:30 p.m. inside the Towns County Courthouse, and the public is encouraged to attend.

Food Pantry

The Food Pantry hours are Monday - Thursday 9 AM- 12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM - 2 PM. Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomason at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.

TCSO arrests two for meth after monthlong investigation

News Special

Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug Investigators recently conducted a monthlong investigation into an individual at a residence on Bugsuffle Road that ultimately resulted in drug arrests.

On May 21, investigators obtained a search warrant for the residence. During the execution of the search, an amount of methamphetamine that field-tested positive was confiscated along with multiple types of pills.

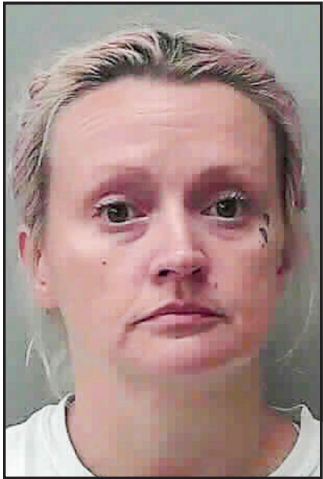
The two individuals who were the target of the drug investigation were not at the residence at the time of the search.

Laurel Taylor Lambert, 40, of Hayesville, North Carolina, was arrested on May 27 regarding a warrant issued May 21 for felony possession of meth.

Also on May 21, arrest warrants were issued for Jason Levon Garrett, 51, of Hiawassee, for felony possession of meth; felony possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; three counts



Jason Levon Garrett



Laurel Taylor Lambert

felony possession of a controlled substance; and misdemeanor possession and use of drug-related objects.

After initially being listed as wanted, Garrett turned himself in at the Towns County Sheriff's Office on the morning of May 29.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that during the investigation information was revealed that the suspect, Garrett, had been dealing drugs

from his residence for at least three months.

The sheriff commends the drug investigators and uniform patrol deputies for their hard work on a monthlong investigation into individuals who were selling drugs in this community. Further, he pledged that "our war on drugs continues."

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

Enchanted Music on the Hiawassee Square June 7th

Saturday, June 7, 2025, 6:30 PM - 8 PM. North Georgia's favorite Southern Rock/Country Band, Southern Vantage, covers a variety of your favorite Modern Classic Country and Modern Classic Rock hits from artists like: Skynyrd, CCR, Petty, Cash, Haggard, Eagles, Steve Miller Band, Stapleton, Garth Brooks, Brooks and Dunn, and plenty more!

The band hails from Blairsville Georgia and will have you singing (and maybe dancing) all night long!

Great family fun! Bring your chair or a blanket. Well behaved pets are welcome (with cleanup). Special thanks to you for your weekly support, to our Sponsors, to the DDA and the City of Hiawassee who keep our concerts



Southern Vantage

going! Come early (6 PM) to enjoy the best grilled hot dogs and more from our VFW Auxiliary food truck. Free concert,

donations appreciated.

Sorry, in the event of rain at concert time, this concert will be cancelled.

Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment #783 installs 2025 Officers on May 17th



(L-R) behind podium: Pat Seals, John Entwisle, Alton "Doc" Coleman and Tammy Coleman; front of the podium: Ashford Todd

On Saturday, May 17th members of the Marine Corps League's Unicoi Detachment 783, attended their monthly detachment meeting at the Major Leon Davenport Veterans Building in Hiawassee. During the regularly scheduled business meeting the newly elected and appointed detachment officers were sworn in by Past Commandant Ashford Todd III of Young Harris, GA.

This year's elected officers are represented by Commandant John Entwisle (Blairsville), Sr. Vice Commandant Pat Seals (Hiawassee), Judge Advocate Chuck Frisk (Hiawassee) and Jr. Past

Commandant Alton "Doc" Coleman (Blairsville). The elected officers will serve a one (1) year term, with the option of running for a consecutive second term if they so choose.

Also sworn in were the detachment's appointed officers. Tammy Coleman - Adjutant/Paymaster (Blairsville), Calvin "Gunny" Triplett - Sergeant-At-Arms (Blairsville), Claudia Entwisle - Detachment Service Officer (Blairsville) and Richard Hoibraten - Chaplain (Young Harris). Appointed officers are selected by the incoming Commandant.

Unicoi Detachment 783 meets on the third Saturday of each month at the Major Leon Davenport Building in Blairsville, GA. Coffee/Donut Mess kicks off at 9 a.m. and the business meeting begins at 10 a.m. Members of the detachment also meet every Monday morning at 10 a.m. at Blairsville Restaurant - Grits & Greens for coffee, chow and camaraderie. Veterans are welcomed. You do NOT have to be a Marine to join us at the table.

You can visit the detachment's Facebook page or its website at www.unicoi783mc.org to learn more.

Native Plant Sale Planned at the Union County Farmers Market on Sat., June 7



Homeowners who want to attract more butterflies and birds to their gardens will find a wide variety of affordably priced native plants for sale on opening day of the Union County Farmers Market, Saturday, June 7.

The Georgia Native Plant Society (GNPS) North Georgia Mountains chapter's annual plant sale will be held in Pavilion C of the farmers market from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. GNPS will offer a selection of native plants for garden and landscape projects including milkweed, ferns, coneflower, and many more. Plants will be available that thrive in sunny locations, shady spots,

dry soil, and damp areas. All plants are grown locally and are specifically appropriate to our local region.

Volunteers will be on hand to offer advice on planting, care, and maintenance. GNPS encourages homeowners to replace invasive plants like English Ivy, Chinese privet, Japanese honeysuckle and Multiflora rose with native plants that provide food and shelter for our local birds and pollinators.

The Union County Farmers Market is located at 290 Farmers Market Way in Blairsville. All sales are cash or check only and shoppers are encouraged to bring their own boxes or bags to carry plants home.

The Georgia Native Plant Society North Georgia Mountains chapter holds monthly meetings in Blairsville, conducts field trips, organizes native plant rescue programs, and offers habitat certifications.

For more information about native plants for our region or to get involved, visit gnps.org.

Western Carolina University Chancellor's List

Western Carolina University congratulates more than 2,900 students named to the Chancellor's List for Spring 2025. To qualify for this honor, students must achieve a GPA of 3.8 or higher. Students named to the Chancellor's list are also named to the Dean's List.

Local students included: Abigail Pate and Corynn Brock of Young Harris.

Splash Pad...from Page 1

Currently, there is no charge for children to use the Splash Pad, which is open seven days a week until the end of July. In August, the new water attraction will be open just on the weekends until Labor Day. “The high school and college kids who run the Snack Shack go back to school in August, so we finish up then,” Stuart said. “We have drinks, snacks and ice cream. We don’t have it yet, but I’m working on getting milkshakes as well. “The community pavilion at the Pickleball Courts is also a part of this grant because this whole area is considered

one park. So, the Splash Pad and the new restrooms and the new signage were all a part of the grant. We’re pretty excited about it.” And at the other end of the park, the Farmers Market opened up, and some hearty souls were out shopping for treasures. “Farmers Market is important because we have such a good time, the people who work here, the visitors who come to shop here – we’re all like family,” said Joan Crothers, who coordinates the endeavor. “We do this every Saturday from 9 a.m. until noon.

This is the first time we’ve started the market this early in the year, and it was a little cool this morning, but hopefully next Saturday will be nice and warm. “The market runs through October. Though it hasn’t been warm enough for the fresh vegetables we usually have, we’ve got delicious baked goods, jams and jellies and raw honey. There are arts and crafts on sale, bird and owl houses, lots of greens. “We have 26 vendors already signed up to join in, and it is a first-come, first-served basis with no charge. Vendors and items vary week by week, so come out often for the best selections.”

Lake Chatuge...from Page 1


“TVA anticipates publishing a Scoping Report in Fall 2025,” the federally owned corporation said Thursday. “The Scoping Report will summarize public and agency comments and TVA’s planned scope. “TVA expects to release the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in late 2025. Once available, the public will have 45 days to provide comments on the document content and findings. “Additional public open house meetings will be scheduled after publication of the Draft EIS. Open house dates, times and locations will be posted on the project website and promoted through area media outlets and TVA social media accounts.” With the Draft EIS, “the public can give us comments on our analysis, whether they agree with it or if they disagree with it and they think we need to do more studies,” TVA NEPA Specialist Erica McLamb told the newspaper last month. “In a nutshell, NEPA requires us to take a good hard

look at environmental and social impacts, health and safety, utilities, and impacts to emergency services,” McLamb said. “It is comprehensive.” In May, TVA hosted public gatherings and virtual meetings to solicit input on its construction proposals, which come with multiyear draw-downs of Lake Chatuge to record-low levels to prevent the need to use the spillway during construction, ensuring safe conditions for workers doing the repair. “TVA has engaged with individuals, businesses and organizations who may be impacted by any dam safety modifications at Chatuge,” TVA said last week. “Public meetings were held in Hayesville, North Carolina, and Young Harris, Georgia, with nearly 500 participants. “More than 1,200 individuals took part in two virtual open houses held in May. More than 200 questions were submitted, and the public has provided more than 1,700 comments as part of the National Environmental Policy Act.”

A common refrain of public feedback has been that TVA needs to design an alternative that strikes a much better balance between ensuring dam safety for present and future generations and completing the repair in a timelier manner for the sake of the area’s tourism-based local economies that rely on the lake. Primarily, people are worried about the economic devastation associated with drawing down the lake to 10 feet below winter pool for between four and eight years, though TVA has said those are upper-bound estimates it would be aiming to shorten during construction. TVA has started the process of selecting a construction alternative, and public comments are playing a crucial role. However, additional steps remain before TVA chooses an alternative, with construction estimated at about three years away. In addition to individual members of the public, multiple heavy hitters have come out against the construction timelines presented to date, including the grassroots local organization SaveLakeChatuge.org, conservation nonprofit MountainTrue, U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde, U.S. Rep. Chuck Edwards, Georgia Lt. Gov. Burt Jones, State Sen. Bo Hatchett, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Hiawassee Mayor Jay Chastain Jr., as well as elected officials in Clay County, North Carolina. For more information, visit <https://www.tva.com/chatuge>.



The new Splash Pad is conveniently located just off the beach at Lake Chatuge. Photo by Meghan Jarrard



VFW
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

VFW Karaoke

Karaoke on Wednesdays from 4PM until 8PM at the VFW Post on Sunnyside Rd in Hiawassee. Come join us for some fun! It is open to the public.

VFW Fish Fry

Come join us for the new season of Fish Fry at the VFW post in Hiawassee. We have fish, coleslaw, beans, hushpuppies, fries, and a drink, and remember no tax and no tip all for \$12 and \$15 for all you can eat.

Starting April 11, 4:30 to 7 PM and every 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month.