

# Miss GMF Pageant features ‘Blooming Beauties’

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

On Saturday, June 14, eight regional “Blooming Beauties” took to the stage inside the Anderson Music Hall of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to compete for the title of 2025 Miss Georgia Mountain Fair.

The annual beauty pageant was held early this year for two reasons: 1) the usual August date makes participation tough for contestants enrolled in college, and 2) in deference to the giant 75th Anniversary event being planned for the Georgia Mountain Fair later this summer.

Usually, the pageant takes place the night before the Georgia Mountain Fair kicks off, but this year, the 75th anniversary party will be occurring instead, to start at 7 p.m. on Aug. 14, and the free-to-attend party is sure to be exceptional.

Guests will enjoy clogging, fiddling, a live band, speaker Bob Anderson, an updated History Book available for purchase, special anniversary shirts, cupcakes and fireworks at the end, plus 75-cent carnival rides and a special display of memories from the fair.

The party will also feature all the former queens from the Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant, including 2025 winner Amelia Kenlee Shook of Towns County.

At the 2025 pageant, the eight ‘Blooming Beauties’ showcased their achievements, style, poise and grace during the longstanding tradition.

Contestants range in age from 17 to 24 years old and are judged on their personal interviews with the judges, active wear, evening wear, questions answered on stage and overall presentation.

The winner is not only crowned the Queen of the Fair but also receives \$1,500 and merchandise prizes. It is quite the honor.

Contestant achievements varied from athletic to artistic, from interest in the corporate world to show business.

Kaylie Ann Pickelsimer from Union County started college at age 16. She is a senior in high school dual enrolling in North Georgia Technical College in pursuit of a business degree. Outside of the classroom she is all about artistic expression. She even runs her own art business.

Carly Jean Barnett is a senior at Union County High School and wants to pursue a career in cosmetology. She is also an athlete and was an All-American cheerleader. Her favorite way to relax is spending time at the lake.

Deanna Faye Crowe from Towns County loves dance and drama. She has been on four billboards in Times Square. She is currently studying theatre at Young Harris College. She graduated magna cum laude earning 12 accomplishment cords.

Breeze Hinton from Cherokee County, North Carolina, is a natural athlete, has

*See Blooming Beauties, Page 12*

Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Rylee Kitchens crowning a new Queen of the Fair for 2025, Amelia Kenlee Shook of Towns County. Also pictured, America’s Ideal Miss Southern States Junior Princess Adaline Turpin.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

# Council conducts bevy of business in June meetings



Hiwassee City Council Members Scott Benton, Nancy Noblet, Amy Barrett, Patsy Owens and Jonathan Wilson in their June 16 work session at City Hall.

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

Hiwassee City Council members had a packed agenda for their June 16 work session. One of the items under consideration was the possibility of a minor water rate increase to keep pace with cost of living and inflation.

The meeting began with the formal introduction of Lily Ponitz, the new Economic Development Director who signed on with the city earlier this month to replace outgoing director Denise McKay.

During his monthly report to the public and council, Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. said the new SPLOST-funded police car approved in the June 3 regular meeting had arrived and that most of what goes into the car had been ordered, though it will take a little time to get it up and running.

“We have finished our hydrant flushing,” Chastain continued. “We’ve flushed every hydrant in the city using 1,453,400 gallons of water, so some of the 53% water loss was captured here. We’ve also fixed two hydrants, one near Huddle House and one over on Bugscuffle Road.

“The (Paris Business Center) benefactors’ event is now in the books. It was very successful. I wish Denise was here so we could thank her again for getting this together for us. (PBC Coordinator Christine Osborn) worked very hard to pull this together.

“I could not have done this without their help and the donors ... we’ll have the Donors’ Wall completed very soon.”

Chastain also touched on voting business that will appear in the upcoming regular city meeting on July 1 at 6 p.m. inside City Hall.

“We’re delaying the vote on the council pay raise because the law requires we publicize in the paper for three weeks prior to a vote, so that’s why it’s back on the agenda today,” Chastain said. “We will vote on that in July.

*See City Council, Page 12*

# TCSO traffic stop leads to drug arrest for fentanyl

**News Special**

On Monday, June 16, Towns County Sheriff’s Office Drug Investigators, along with Drug K-9 Dargo, were conducting concentrated patrols in known drug areas of the county.

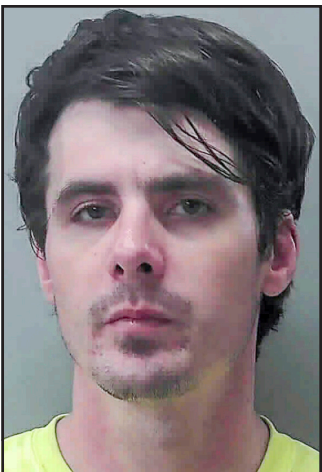
During the patrol, a traffic stop was conducted, and probable cause was developed to search the stopped vehicle. During the search, a container was located with an amount of fentanyl that field-tested positive, and the container was confiscated.

Thomas Brandon Wooten, 35, of Hiwassee, was arrested and charged with felony possession of a Schedule II controlled substance, misdemeanor driving while license suspended or revoked, and misdemeanor taillights required.

Sheriff Ken Henderson stated that concentrated patrols by the Sheriff’s Office will continue.

“Getting fentanyl, a very dangerous drug, out of our community is very important,” Sheriff Henderson said. “We will continue to keep our community safe.”

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



Thomas Brandon Wooten

# ‘Golden Eagle’ coming to Made in Georgia Festival

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

YOUNG HARRIS – Now in its seventh year, the popular Made in Georgia Festival is all set to return this weekend on Saturday, June 28, and Sunday, June 29, at the Towns County Recreation & Conference Center at 150 Foster Park Road.

Running from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, the family-friendly annual festival highlights the creations of crafty folks from all over Georgia while offering an opportunity for regional residents to just get out and have some summer fun.

Everything from a variety of food and drink to clothing is on display.

*See Made in GA Festival, Page 6*



This Golden Eagle named Majesty will be present for fascinated onlookers at the Made in Georgia Festival this weekend.

# Nichols provides public with overview of Rec Dept.

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

Towns County Recreation Director Stuart Nichols visited the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, June 20, to talk about what the Rec Department has been up to during his time in the position.

Long before Nichols took on the rec director title in 2021, he owned his own business welding and building boat docks. But the economic recession of 2008 compelled him to go into insurance, and about nine years later, he began doing home inspections – and still does so today.

Following the resignation of former Rec Director Matt Youngblood, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw asked Nichols if he was interested in the position. After careful consideration and prayer, he accepted the offer. And four years later, he still enjoys the job.

The Georgia Parks and Recreation Association classifies Towns County Rec as a “Class C” department. The rating has nothing to do with quality but is instead population-based, and Class C is the smallest ranking. Even then, Towns is among the “smallest of the small” in terms of size.

Small-town recreation departments come with their own unique advantages and challenges, Nichols explained, joking that knowing every coach, player and parent is a challenge.

*See Movers and Shakers, Page 9*



Stuart Nichols  
Rec Director

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United Community

# Blairsville Rodeo gives Gerald Patterson tribute

**By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Sports Editor**

The Blairsville Pro Rodeo began as a summer attraction more than a decade ago, only to become a beloved local tradition that draws thousands of visitors to Union County every year, most recently over the weekend of June 20-21.

“This year’s rodeo was one of the best,” said Union County Saddle Club Secretary and Rodeo Committee Chair Kayla Murphy. “A little over 2,500 people came through the gates to watch cowboys and cowgirls from all over the Southeast, including several from our local area.”

Now in its 14th year, the event unites the community for two fast-paced nights filled with dust, excitement, and family-friendly entertainment at the Union County Saddle Club Arena.

The 2025 event began not with the roar of the crowd but with a somber tribute in memory of Gerald Patterson, a Saddle Club mainstay who passed away on June 14 following an extended illness. The rodeo commenced with a

riderless horse led by his wife of 45 years, Beth Patterson.

With boots turned backward in the stirrups, the empty horse served as a heartfelt homage to the beloved local figure – a touching recognition of a man whose legacy will resonate within the Union County Saddle Club for generations.

As for the action itself, the rodeo showcased bronco riding, barrel racing, steer wrestling, ladies’ breakaway roping and calf roping, both individually and in teams, concluding with ever-popular bull riding, sanctioned by the International Professional Rodeo Association and the National Cowboy Association.

The event saw local competitors from Blairsville and Blue Ridge; Hayesville and Murphy in North Carolina; and Turtletown, Tennessee.

Among the local contestants in barrel racing were Annabell Lillard, Reba Burke, Tallie Fortner, Lindsey Tincher, Alyssa McFarland, Karyn Woody, Hannah Allison, Emma Allison, Dea Kramer, Piper Tatro, Indiana Groom, Marley Conner and Susan

Anderson.

Mason Bohannon participated in bronco riding; Kenzie Bohannon took part in breakaway roping; and Garrett Davis and Micky Davis competed in team roping.

The rodeo provided an exciting opportunity for adult rodeo fans to throw their hats into the ring as well, particularly through the steer-dressing competition. In this event, three-person teams attempted to dress a steer in shorts, a shirt and a hat to the delight of audience members.

Additionally, there was a horseshoe toss with a chance to win \$5,000 for throwing a “ringer,” and the rodeo included activities designed for kids such as a calf scramble, mechanical bull and more.

Presented by Beds Etc., Circle N Rodeo Productions Inc., Hedrick Rodeo Company and the Union County Saddle Club, the Blairsville Pro Rodeo provided fans with an opportunity to meet Addison Williams, Georgia’s Miss Teen Rodeo.

Furthermore, Hedrick Rodeo trick rider Emily Moss showcased a variety of crowd-pleasing stunts.



**Gerald Patterson, a giant of the Union County Saddle Club, passed away a week before the Blairsville Pro Rodeo. His wife Beth led a riderless horse in his honor on both nights of the 2025 event.**  
Photo by Todd Forrest

Concessions and vendors circled the outside of the arena, with food, drinks, entertainment and other goods provided by Circle R Western Store, Chick-fil-A, Chill & Fill, Heyman Kettle Corn, J&P Concessions, Jim’s Smokin’ Q, Nana & Pops Ice Cream, Party Harbor with the bounce house and

mechanical bull, Peppermint Pony Rides, the Union County Saddle Club and the Union County Shriners with hot dogs.

“Our main sponsor, Beds Etc., was great and showcased top-notch Amish-made furniture,” Murphy said. “All of our sponsors are local to Blairsville and are always

willing to support Union County Saddle Club as well as the Blairsville Pro Rodeo.”

A full list of sponsors is available at [www.BlairsvilleProRodeo.com](http://www.BlairsvilleProRodeo.com): “Without them, we couldn’t put on such a great event. Sponsor spots are available for 2026,” Murphy said.



**The Blairsville Pro Rodeo featured tons of bull-riding action on Friday, June 20, and Saturday, June 21.**  
Photo by Todd Forrest



**Calf-roping takes a tremendous amount of skill and dexterity, with a competitor’s focus on both riding their horse and roping a moving target.**  
Photo by Todd Forrest

## Veteran Richard Haigler honored with Quilt of Valor

Marine Corps Veteran, Richard Harold Haigler, joined the United States Marines at the age of 17. July 21, 1960 - July 20, 1964.

He was Active Duty and two years Reserves to 1966. First 2 years in Newfoundland, Canada as top secret clearance, was caught in Cuban crisis in October 22, 1962, he landed in Cuba then to Viejas Puerto Rico as Military Police until the end of his tour.

While in Puerto Rico, when Kennedy got killed, his duty was to put the U.S. Flag up and then down at half-mast every day for 30 days. He then met his wife Willene Dyer Haigler in Hiawassee and they have been married for 59 years. He worked at the GM plant in Atlanta until he retired.

Richard was presented with the Quilt of Valor by The Quilts of Valor Foundation.

“We wish to recognize you for your service to our nation. We consider it is our privilege to do so. Though we may never know the extent of your sacrifice to protect and defend the United States of America, we award you with this Quilt of Valor as an expression of gratitude from a grateful nation.”



**Richard Harold Haigler**

## Made in GA Festival...from Page 1



**Julie Payne and Mary Ann Miller of the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce are excited for another year bringing the Made in Georgia Festival to the community.**  
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

ing, handmade décor of all types, soaps and even knives will once again be on display thanks to over 90 vendors attending.

The first 125 visitors will receive a shopping bag sponsored by Realtor Jo Ellen Thornton and Young Harris, but there’ll be more to see than just the items one can buy.

New in 2025 from Buster Brown and his birds of prey with Georgia Mountain Falconry is an 11-pound Golden Eagle named Majesty, who features a truly majestic 7-foot wingspan. As the only one of her species licensed for falconry purposes in the state, she’s an even more special rarity.

Golden eagles are the most widely distributed species of eagle in the U.S. and have a centuries-long history of use in hunting. The birds are so large that some are capable of carrying off coyotes or deer, though their primary diet consists of rabbits and small rodents.

The Towns County Historical Society will be providing refreshments in the form of hot dogs and hamburgers, selling the grilled goods for their own fundraiser. To provide more options, EJ’s North Georgia Cooking & Catering will be available alongside Southern Sips Lemonade.

As always, the Lake

Chatuge Chamber of Commerce has organized the Made in Georgia Festival, which Chamber President Julie Payne touts as “a great place to find one-of-a-kind gifts and items that are not normally found in our immediate area.”

“Please support our Georgia growers and crafters by attending this event,” implored Payne, who hopes that folks will come out to see Majesty and do some shopping for pottery, honey, woodwork, leather, jewelry, shrubs, pecans, pickles and more – all made in Georgia.

Adult admission to the festival is just \$5, and children 16 and under get in for free.

## Young Harris College theatre students attend Stratford Festival



Theatre students from Young Harris College had the opportunity to travel to Ontario, Canada, recently to attend the Stratford Festival, a repertory theatre event hosted each year in the city of Stratford.

Theatre students from Young Harris College had the opportunity to travel to Ontario, Canada, recently to attend the Stratford Festival, a repertory theatre event hosted each year in the city of Stratford.

“The Stratford Festival is an incredible event for theatre students,” said Anne Towns, Associate Professor of Theatre. Towns organized and planned the trip with Dr. Jennifer Schroeder. “They got to see six different plays at the festival, and then we traveled to Toronto to Second City.”

The students saw productions ranging from Macbeth to Dirty Rotten Scoundrels before traveling to see the legendary comedy improvisation at Second City.

The students who traveled to Canada were: Avery Lester, Robert Webb, Henley Green, Jordan Sharp, McCormick Anderson, Vasia London, Kristyn Foran, Katie Strickland and Nadia Mason.

“Canada was absolutely incredible,” said Jordan Sharp, a senior at YHC, majoring in

Music. “The shows we saw at the Stratford Theatre Festival were as good or better than anything I’ve seen on Broadway. Toronto was spectacular; I can’t wait to go back one day. I went because I had never been out of the country before this trip, and Canada was definitely a great place to start.”

Stratford operates the annual festival from April to October. It was founded by a local journalist, Tom Patterson, in 1952, and initially focused on the works of Shakespeare. The festival was one of the first arts festivals in Canada and continues to be one of its most prominent.

Trips like this are a great way to expose YHC students to different cultures and countries, lending to the liberal arts focus of the College.

“Our goal at YHC with a liberal arts foundation is to promote intellectual curiosity and a holistic development of the students,” Towns said. “Not only did our students get to travel to Canada, but the festival provided them an opportunity to see theatrical

productions in other venues, with actors and directors with a different perspective from their own.”

“The Study Away program is an active one at YHC, with students traveling to various areas of the world every year. While these students were visiting Canada, another group from the Natural Sciences explored Peru,” Schroeder added. “We are so excited to provide students a wide range of opportunities to expand their worldview. I am grateful to the faculty who take on this added responsibility to facilitate such transformative learning opportunities beyond the classroom walls and national borders.”

Schroeder also pointed out that the students on the theatre program appreciated that their trip was made more financially accessible, thanks to generous donations to Friends of the Arts.

Many YHC students who study abroad benefit from similar donations and scholarships provided by alumni and friends of the College.

## Movers and Shakers...from Page 1

a prominent double-edged sword.

“It’s a unique experience for your job,” said Nichols, who ultimately finds it rewarding to see how Towns County’s youth change and grow from one sports season to the next. “That’s what makes this job special – we’re not just a department that operates behind a desk.”

The Recreation Department prides itself on fostering connections between people of all ages, and there’s proof that Nichols has done a good job organizing that. From 2023 to 2025, rec sports participation across the county has seen a jump of 25%, though not necessarily just because of rising population.

Introducing flag football has made a big difference, especially considering that “nothing is growing faster than girls flag football.” Last year saw the reintroduction of tackle football in Towns County along with the development of a golf clinic and adult co-ed basketball.

Other recent additions include a soccer camp and the Resolution Run, a 5K held each Jan. 1 to tackle fitness resolutions early. Meanwhile, the National Park Service’s Land & Water Conservation Fund Grant was instrumental in establishing the new Splash Pad at the Towns County Beach.

Regarding the parks and facilities aspect of the job, Field 2 down at the Rec Center in Foster Park was made accessible a few years ago and recently converted into a dirt in-field useful for baseball and softball games.

“In essence, we’ve gained a field,” Nichols explained, adding that a section

of land near Foster Park is currently being cleared to be made into another new avenue for public fitness. That said, plans to turn the land into a pet-friendly walking trail should not be confused with a dog park.

“It’s not a dog park, OK?” Nichols said. “But it will be a pet-friendly walking trail and be under the shade with water down there so they can drink water and do whatever they need to do.”

It’s important to remember that the scope of the Rec Department includes more than just sports. For example, the annual Easter Egg Hunt has continued to be a big hit, with this year seeing the greatest participation of local churches and businesses since Nichols has been director.

Looking forward, the Rec Department will be rolling out Family Fun Day and Homerun Derby at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds on July 4. Those who hit it big might just go home having earned a trophy, too.

“We have a homerun derby that morning, and then immediately after the homerun derby, we’ve got sack races, cornhole and a community kickball game,” Nichols said, adding that the activities will take place before the 3 p.m. events set up for Fourth of July festivities at the Fairgrounds.

“Each of these projects was designed not just to provide amenities but to build community pride and connections, one game, one trail and one splash at a time,” Nichols summarized before going into some challenges the department has faced.

The biggest obstacles

come in the form of budget constraints. Although happy with the recent growth of the county, Nichols has received commentary from the public regarding the number, size and quality of Towns County’s recreational features.

“We do the best we can with what we have because we recognize that every dollar we spend is taxpayer money, and we take that responsibility seriously,” Nichols said.

That said, one pressing need is for an expansion to the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center itself. The weight room in particular is in need of greater space to allow for more equipment and a larger number of folks to come work out.

A future project Nichols would like to see is the inclusion of a space where parents can allow their children to play while they check off their own fitness goals, but he admits it’s probably a long way down the road and has not been brought up much.

In the meantime, folks can support the Recreation Department by taking part in local sports or coming to watch games. Even purchasing food from the beach concession stand helps fund the organization, as it is now owned and operated by them.

“Budget realities force us to think creatively and operate efficiently, but that doesn’t stop us,” Nichols said. “We’ve just got to get inventive about it.”

The Mountain Movers and Shakers will welcome Fran Parks of Enotah CASA for Children as the featured speaker in this week’s regular meeting on Friday, June 27, at 8 a.m. inside Sundance Grill.



## July Garden Chores from your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - Water trees to keep them alive during the dry summer months. Water the ground at the base of the trunk and out as far as the limb canopy reaches.

Trees and shrubs may need to be lightly trimmed in the summer months to maintain a desired shape but save all major pruning jobs for the late winter. Avoid wetting the foliage of roses when watering them as this encourages leaf disease. For better health of your creeping juniper, prune out old, dead foliage underneath the plants.

Vegetables - If you have not planted your tomatoes, corn, beans and okra, do so by mid July to allow time for them to mature before cool weather.

Water early in the day or late in the evening for best results. Much of the water will evaporate if you water in the middle of the day. For more efficient watering, water at the root zone with soaker hoses.

Cut back by half herbs like basil and oregano to promote leaves and to prevent them from producing seed. Look for and remove hornworms (big green caterpillars camouflaged among the stems) on your tomato and pepper plants. Mulch your garden to retain moisture, lower the temperature, reduce the number of weeds and prevent the soil surface from compacting.

Japanese beetles are hard to control. Hand pick if you can but you may need an insecticide. Always follow label directions. Remove vegetable plants from your garden once they have finished bearing to prevent disease/insect

buildup. Plant pumpkin seeds now for pumpkins in October.

Remove tomato suckers (a shoot growing between the main stem and a branch) and root them for new plants. Select 5 – 6” long suckers and root in water and then plant in your garden.

Pick squash, cucumbers and okra regularly to keep the plants producing. A big rotten spot on the end of a ripe tomato means it has blossom end rot. Purchase a product from your garden center that specifically treats this and apply lime to your garden soil in the fall to decrease susceptibility next growing season.

Extreme heat can cause tomatoes and peppers to stop setting fruit. This is a temporary condition and they will continue to set fruit once temperatures drop.

Dig Irish potatoes and harvest garlic when the leaves turn yellow and shrivel up. Remove water-robbing weeds from your garden. One weed that goes to seed this year makes many weeds next year.

Flowerbeds - If your annuals and perennials need to be rejuvenated, cut one-third of the existing growth, water and fertilize. In about ten days, your annuals will bloom again with a fuller, healthier appearance and in September, your perennials will be more compact and less likely to topple over or split in high winds.

It is not too late to sow seeds of quick growing annuals such as marigolds and zinnias. Cut back dahlias to half their height after they bloom for fall flowers. Divide crowded bearded iris clumps making sure each root has a

healthy fan of leaves. In addition to summer annuals, coleus and caladium, two plants with beautiful foliage color, can be planted for long-lasting summer color.

Cut back tall overgrown chrysanthemums in early July for compact growth. Then allow the plant to grow for fall blooms. Cut purple coneflower and black-eyed Susan for a nice bouquet. This will help the plants continue to bloom for a longer period and give you much pleasure.

Hanging baskets continually exposed to sun, wind and high temperatures may need to be watered every day. Stake tall plants. Remove faded flowers from annuals and perennials to encourage more blooms.

Houseplants - Remove standing water from flowerpot saucers and watering cans where mosquitoes can breed.

Treat mealy bugs on coleus and African violets with a cotton swab saturated with rubbing alcohol.

Miscellaneous - Fireflies are fun to watch and are beneficial. The larvae eat mites, snails, slugs and other soft-bodied insects.

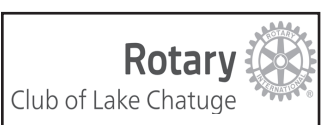
To help keep your compost pile from drying out, make the top of your pile concave so rainfall is directed to the center.

Make sure your mower blades are sharp. A ragged cut causes grass to use more water. Keep shovel blades sharp with a file or grinder. A sharp blade makes digging hard soil easier.

Jo Anne Allen,  
Master Gardener Extension  
Volunteer, 706-400-8139

NT(Jun25,Z8)CA

## Rotary Club Of Lake Chatuge Welcomes Union County Sheriff’s Office, Sgt. Bob Calamari



The Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge recently welcomed Union County Sheriff’s Office (UCSO) Sgt. Bob Calamari who made a presentation concerning the prevalence of scams and frauds committed against the elderly in Towns, Clay and Union counties.

Sgt. Calamari is engaged in the prevention and detection of these frauds which continue to exploit the elderly in our area. The State of Georgia is ranked 9th nationally among those victimized in frauds and scams, and those crimes amount to losses of nearly 79 million dollars to date. In the last six months, he has investigated the loss to victims of scams and frauds of \$313,000 and has successfully recovered, saved or prevented the loss of \$180,000.

Generally, certain signs exist to suggest that a scam is being offered or already underway: scammers pretend to be from an organization; they present the potential victim with a problem requiring resolution or a prize to claim; they



Sgt. Bob Calamari

apply pressure to act immediately; and they tell the potential victim to pay in a specific way.

These scams often fall into a number of types scams to include: sweepstakes and lottery scams; imposter scams wherein the caller pretends to represent a governmental organization such as the IRS, SSA or Medicare; tech support

scams; utility scams; grandparent scams; order confirmation and fraudulent transaction scams; romance scams; investment scams; medical alert and home security scams; charitable giving scams; and home repair and improvement scams.

Sgt. Calamari also discussed a number of ways to avoid being the victim of a scam. He advised that potential victims should: block unwanted calls and text messages; not provide personal or financial information in response to a request that they did not expect; be cautious if the scammer directs you to pay in an unusual or non-traditional manner; and, stop in order to discuss the matter with someone you trust.

A National Elder Fraud Hotline of 1-833-372-8311 is a readily available resource for someone suspicious of a scam, or report the situation to the local police or county sheriff’s office immediately. T(June25,M2)JH



## Casa Coordinator Fran Parks Speaks with the Movers & Shakers

CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children. Their purpose is to ensure that children who find themselves in the Foster Care System have someone in their corner as they go through the system. They truly do God’s Work.

So, please welcome to the excellent Sundance Grill this Friday, June 27 at 8 AM, Ms. Fran Parks, Outreach Coordinator for Enotah CASA as she talks about the many children reunited with their parents, the others that have either been adopted or placed in permanent guardianship. Every child deserves a safe, nurturing environment so they



Fran Parks

can thrive. Get there early to get a good seat to hear more about this truly Blessed Organization and how you can get involved. T(June25,A4)JH

# Blooming Beauties...from Page 1

ing earned varsity letters in cross country, basketball and soccer. She is pursuing her studies at Southwestern with plans to become a nurse. She is a proud member of the Beta Club and the National Honors Society.

Amelia Shook of Towns County has an interesting legacy. She was born on her great-grandfather's 100th birthday, and he was born on his great-grandfather's 100th birthday.

Ellie Cook from Fannin County earned scholarships in both basketball and golf at Oglethorpe University, and she helps coach boys' basketball.

Maddie Halligan of White County is ranked in the top 10% of her class and is a proud member of the Beta Club. She will pursue a career as a physical therapist where she can use her skills to make

a difference in the lives of others.

Lilly Cannon, a recent graduate of Towns County High School, is an athlete, and her favorite flower is a lily. She plans to pursue a career as a neo-natal intensive care nurse and hopes to give her life to helping children.

Pageant Director Corrina Luckenbach and Host Mark Ward extended special thanks to sponsors Red Rooster Realty, Lake Chatuge Lodge and an anonymous donor. They also gave special recognition to Fairgrounds staff and volunteers, sound technicians and General Manager Hilda Thomason.

Carly Barnett was voted Miss Congeniality by her peers, and Maddie Halligan, who was the winner of the talent award, was also selected as Second Runner-Up. This

year's First Runner-Up was Deanna Crowe to round out the Queen's Court.

After the final walk of the 2024 Pageant Queen Miss Rylee Kitchens, Shook was crowned Queen for 2025.

With the help of young Adaline Turpin, who is currently the holder of America's Ideal Miss Southern States Junior Princess, Kitchens crowned Shook and showered her with flowers and congratulations. Young Miss Turpin stunned the crowd with her rendition of "Jesus Loves Me."

This was the first event in a series of planned activities to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Georgia Mountain Fair. For more information on the upcoming fair and carnival Aug. 15-23, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/localevents/fair>.



2025 Miss GMF Pageant contestants sporting their best evening wear. Photo by Shelly Knight

## NGTC Recognizes Local Graduates

North Georgia Technical College (NGTC) recently recognized 183 students who completed their degree or diploma programs during the 2025 spring semester. Commencement ceremonies were held Tuesday, May 6, 2025, at Level Grove Baptist Church in Cornelia, GA.

Young Harris graduates include: Makayla Bouchard, Cosmetology; Melissa-Lynn Caldwell, Registered Nursing; Austin Fairless, Welding

Technology.

Hiawassee graduates include: Elisha Arrowood, Early Childhood Care & Education; Samantha Matheson, AS Degree in General Studies; Zachary Mullins, Automotive Technology; and Kyle Smyth, Environmental Technology.

Blairsville graduates include: Lindsay Barber, Cosmetology; Tessah Collins, Cosmetology; Quinn Donahue, Cosmetology; Jaceyallen Elliott, AS Degree in Gen-

eral Studies; Robert Harden, Networking Specialist; Evan Hargus, Welding Technology; Zade Houghlin, AS Degree in General Studies; Chandler Kraft, Registered Nursing; Samuel Logan, Welding Technology; Samuel Page, Air Conditioning Technology; Madison Park, Horticulture; Jessica Peardon, AS Degree in General Studies; and April Seabolt, Business Management; Christy Sinclair, Accounting; and Sierra Soakie, EMS Professions.

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"The trackhoe purchase for the Water Department is something we've needed since last year. The amount is \$73,500, and it is in our budget. The one we currently have will also remain in use.

"Our speed detection permit is due to be updated. I'm working with GDOT getting this done and just wanted you all to know it's in the process of being fixed."

Next up for discussion from the work session agenda was fire protection for City Hall.

"We have none," Chastain said. "There is a system that was here in 2013 when we first moved in. I did not know that this system is not functional until I got to poking around. They got a price roughly two years ago for a replacement that was around \$15,000.

"We are going to have to get prices and have this repaired or replaced. There are no sprinklers, no alarm system. We're going to have to address this. We will put out (a request for proposal) for bids."

Turning to water rates, Chastain said that, two years ago, the council voted to have a water rate increase every year based on the cost of living.

"Last year we did not have a rate increase because we were having the Capital Improvement Plan done," Chastain said. "It's time for an increase. Current base rate is \$26.13, and anything over 1,000 (gallons) you pay \$7.20 for every 1,000.

"We're looking at \$26.79 base rate and \$7.28 for anything over a 1,000. It's not an enormous increase, but it is something we need to look at."

Councilwoman Amy Barrett suggested holding off on the increase until after the city's Aug. 23 planning retreat so that all changes can be enacted simultaneously, and Councilman Scott Benton agreed.

Switching gears, Chastain said a salary survey with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, as requested by the council, would cost \$9,985.

"This is a salary survey for each and every employee of the city," Chastain said. "This is the same thing the University of Georgia does."

GMRC did a pay study for the city in recent years, but Chastain said they are recommended to be done every three

to five years and that inflation has caused a dramatic increase in prices for everyday items since the last study was conducted.

A discussion about applying window tinting to the Paris Business Center ensued, but the council agreed to exhaust fixes with the builder for better temperature control in the facility before taking that action.

The council also agreed that the city's website needs a facelift and a more user-friendly interface. Lily Pontiz and Christine Osborn will be researching that.

There was some discussion around the idea of limiting comments on Facebook for council meetings. It is possible that the city might use another platform such as YouTube.

Clint Royce of the Water Treatment Plant is asking for a new building, but after concerns expressed by Councilman Jonathon Wilson and resident Noel Turner about the amount of money the council has been spending recently, that discussion was tabled and the suggestion made to be incorporated in next year's budget.

Also last month, the council unanimously approved next year's budget, noting that the biggest change was an across-the-board increase of 3.5% due to inflation costs. This occurred in the June 3 regular city meeting.

In other June 3 business, the council approved the LMIG paving project on Presley Road. Councilwoman Nancy Noblet abstained from the vote on the grounds that it might be construed as a conflict of interest.

"Well, I live on that street, and we've been waiting for several years for this, so I felt it best that I abstain from voting," Noblet said.

Councilwoman Amy Barrett made a motion to discuss the purchase of the Waterworth Software program, which was on the agenda for approval that evening.

"My problem with this is this company is in Canada," she said. "There are several U.S. companies that offer the same features that this company does.

"My concern is that their auditing might not offer the same (Governmental Accounting Standards Board)

compliance across the municipal departments and the risk of one jurisdiction single-sector management focus.

"They do have a good visual model, but I think we should do an RFP. I think we should consider using a U.S. company like OpenGov, Tyler Industries, HDL. It was concerning to me when I did my research that this company had only been in existence for 15 years.

"I'm not saying they are not a good company. I just feel that when it comes to data sovereignty and security, their privacy standards may be different than ours. I don't know if they're keeping our information over in Canada or here.

"I can't vote on something that I don't know what the value is. I don't know that they're giving us a good value. I've never bought a software package like this. I do think this is something we desperately need. I just think we need to do an RFP and open it up."

A motion was made to table the matter, but Councilman Scott Benton cautioned, "The only thing I hope we would look at too is the amount of customer support and back-end service they provide."

"With this company, 50% of what they provide is software and the rest is customer support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week," Benton continued. "I don't know that these other companies will do the same thing. I will vote in favor of tabling the discussion as long as we're looking at the full package and not just the software."

Among other June 3 business, council members unanimously approved increasing the mayor's authorized spending limit from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per month, and they approved the emergency repairs to the Water Treatment Plant tank monitoring system not to exceed \$85,000.

Councilwoman Amy Barrett voted against the salary increase for councilmembers, but the motion was approved by a vote of 4-1 to increase salaries from \$200 to \$300 per month with a \$50 payment for certain special called meetings.

As noted by Chastain above, however, due to the legal organ publication requirement, the council pay increase is expected to reappear before the council for another vote in the July regular meeting.