

# Towns County Herald

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## Fourth of July a patriotic good time at Fairgrounds

By Natalie Mintz  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Area families gathered at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to celebrate Independence Day on Tuesday, July 4 – America’s 247th birthday.

A performance from the Vintage Vixens kept people entertained before the fireworks began, and kids enjoyed games like cornhole and bounce houses while parents shopped for locally made goods from the event’s vendors.

Local restaurants also provided food, and the day ended with the annual patriotic fireworks display put on by the Towns County Lions Club. And 2023’s fireworks were better than ever.

Three volunteers from the Towns County Lions Club attended a three-day course to become certified to launch

larger fireworks shells. The result was bigger, higher fireworks that could be seen from farther away.

Many people began gathering to watch the show hours beforehand, and families filled up the parking lot and campgrounds. Some even brought grills and cooked food while awaiting the big show.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason was excited about the turnout, which was, like the fireworks, “bigger than usual”; in fact, the fireworks were double the usual, with the fairgrounds spending \$10,000 and the event taking a year to plan.

Of course, the display could not happen each year without the financial support of donors in the community, and Thomason said she is very appreciative of the many sponsors who “have made all of

this possible.”

She also highlighted how the event has grown in recent years, undoubtedly thanks to its reputation as “good family fun.”

“More people are moving to the mountains after COVID, and the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds are a great place to be on July 4th,” she said.

Faye Thompson has been coming to the fireworks for over 40 years, bringing her son with her as he grew up. Like Thomason, she focused on the importance of having family-friendly offerings available for the public, saying she appreciated the “alcohol-free” opportunity to celebrate freedom.

New in 2023 was Calvary Baptist Church, which provided children’s activities

See *GMF Fireworks*, Page 8A



The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds offered the public a patriotic good time at the free annual fireworks display on America’s 247th birthday last week. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

## Dump truck crash kills one, sends five to hospital July 7



This fully loaded dump truck driving up from the direction of Helen crashed into two pickups before going over the side of the Unicoi Turnpike Friday. Photo/Facebook

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

One person died and five others were medically transported for “serious to critical injuries” after a 1997 Mack dump truck loaded with gravel apparently blew a tire and careened into oncoming traffic on the Unicoi Turnpike around 12:50 p.m. Friday, per law enforcement officials.

At the time of the accident, Mark Savage, 63, of Watkinsville, was driving home from a family trip to the area to celebrate his grandchild’s birthday, according to authorities.

About a quarter of a mile past Mauldin’s Garage, near Walls Mountain Road on Georgia 17, the driver of a northbound dump truck was negotiating a curve to the right when he lost control of his vehicle due to “a possible mechanical issue,” per the Georgia State Patrol.

The dump truck traveled into the southbound lane, crashing into Savage’s 2008 GMC Sierra 2500 and knocking it off the west shoulder of the roadway down a mountain-side embankment.

Savage was pronounced dead at the scene, Towns County Coroner Tamela Coo-

per said, and the three other occupants of the vehicle required airlifting to nearby trauma centers, including two boys in serious condition.

A local man heading south in a 2013 Ford F-150 – the only Towns County resident involved in the accident – was also knocked off the roadway by the dump truck, and he, too, had to be life-flighted for medical treatment.

After striking the two pickups, the dump truck went over the west shoulder and tumbled down the steep slope, landing upside down, and the driver was taken for evaluation

See *Fatal Accident*, Page 8A

## Rev. Rogers honored with memorial bridge dedication

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Rev. Jimmy Rogers of Young Harris joined his Heavenly Father on March 9, 2021, at the age of 86. And while it is true that he left behind many loved ones in family and countless friends, it should be emphasized that, really, he didn’t so much leave as go ahead to his eternal reward.

Originally from Clay County, North Carolina, Rogers moved his family to Young Harris in 1965, at which point he became the pastor of Old Union Baptist Church for several years.

Known as “the people’s pastor,” Rogers seemingly spent as much time ministering to anyone and everyone in their everyday walks of life as he did pastoring at area churches, of which there were many in his more than 60 years as a reverend.

His reach as a church leader was considerable, spanning many communities in the region since becoming ordained at Meadow Grove



Rev. Jimmy Rogers

Baptist Church of Hayesville, North Carolina, and starting his pastoral work at Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church of Warne, North Carolina, in 1955.

Rev. Rogers pastored to numerous Baptist congregations in his lifetime, including Old Union, Cornerstone, Old

Brasstown and Many Forks in Young Harris; Liberty and Mt. Zion in Blairsville; and in North Carolina, Tomotla in Marble; Shady Grove in Hayesville; and Pinelock in Brasstown. He finished his ministry from the pastoral office at

See *Rev. Jimmy Rogers*, Page 3A

## TCSO confiscates meth during two recent traffic stops

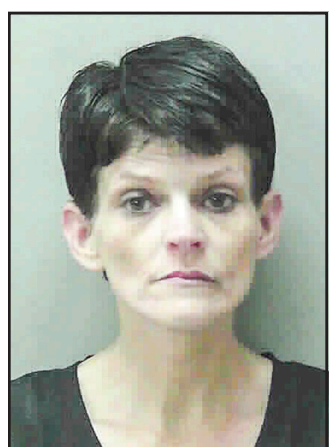
News Special  
Towns County Herald

On the evening of Wednesday, June 27, Towns County Sheriff’s Office Drug Investigators and patrol units conducted a traffic stop on Rice Street in the City of Hiawassee, and it was discovered that the passenger was wanted for failure to appear.

After further investigation and search, the subject, Dustin Shawn Bishop, 46, of Young Harris, was taken into custody and found to have on his person an amount of methamphetamine laced with fentanyl that field-tested positive on the scene.

Sheriff Ken Henderson applauds the investigators and patrol units for their sharp eye and diligence in keeping the community safe.

In a separate incident that same evening, a traffic stop was conducted on US 76 East by Sgt. Bryan Forsyth, Deputy Darringer Barrett deployed



Dana Michelle Henson



Dustin Shawn Bishop

K-9 Xena to conduct a free-air search of the vehicle, at which time K-9 Xena alerted on the vehicle.

Sgt. Forsyth discovered a hidden compartment on the vehicle that contained a white substance. A field test confirmed the substance to be methamphetamine.

Dana Michelle Henson, 43, of Hiawassee, was arrested

and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine and possession of marijuana.

Sheriff Henderson noted that Sgt. Forsyth used his training and expertise to locate the hidden compartment, and the sheriff commends Sgt. Forsyth for an outstanding job.

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

## Severe thunderstorm causes damage on Lake Chatuge



The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds experienced quite a bit of storm damage last week – the most since Hurricane Opal in 1995. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

The brunt of a recent severe thunderstorm was isolated to a small area of Towns County, causing the worst wind damage in several places around Lake Chatuge since Hurricane Opal in 1995.

Local leaders are unsure of the exact weather phenom-

enon that caused the damage, be it a small tornado, a “microburst” or something else, but all agree that the county was lucky the storm from Sunday, July 2, wasn’t deadly.

“It was one of the worst storms that I can remember,” Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said. “It hit Hidden Valley, Bell Creek, Cedar Cliff and the Georgia Mountain

Fairgrounds – that area of the county it hit very hard.”

Bradshaw was watching the new “Indiana Jones” movie at VIP Fieldstone 6 when the storm moved in between 7 p.m. and 7:30, causing the power to go out there and for thousands of other customers in the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC service area.

See *Storm Damage*, Page 3A

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,686.19  
Chatuge 1,925.05  
Nottely 1,775.69

Butternut Creek Festival July 15-16

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Towns Farmers Market Every Saturday

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Bow Shoot Fundraiser for Deklin Jones

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# Rev. Jimmy Rogers...from Page 1A



The family of the late Jimmy Rogers joined Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw and State Rep. Stan Gunter for a special bridge dedication in the most recent county meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Friendship Baptist Church in Hiwassee before the onset of COVID-19.

For his service to the county and region, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw was proud to welcome Rogers' family for a special tribute in the most recent county meeting on June 20, 2023.

Thanks to local efforts to honor Rogers, District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter and the Georgia General Assembly were able to pass a resolution dedicating the new bridge over Brasstown Creek at Georgia 66 in Young Harris as the "Reverend Jimmy Rogers Memorial Bridge."

"What he did for people in this community – he was everybody's pastor, he loved and cared about everybody," Bradshaw said. "That was very, very apparent."

"I'll try to hold this together, but when my dad died – (Jimmy) wasn't my preacher, I have a preacher – but he called me that night just a couple hours after he had passed away, and I won't say what he said,

but the kindest words that anybody could say, and I appreciate that so much.

"He did not just do that for me, he did it for hundreds and hundreds of people ... you're talking about a man of God, a man that loved his fellow man and loved his community and his folks. It was an honor for me to get to know him and his family, and I love you all very much."

Georgia Department of Transportation employees have already erected memorial signage at the bridge after being directed to do so by the following resolution of the Georgia General Assembly:

"The State of Georgia mourns the loss of one of its most distinguished citizens with the passing of Rev. Jimmy Rogers on March 9, 2021," Bradshaw read. "A man of deep and abiding faith, Rev. Rogers' presence filled the churches.

"Whole congregations would flock to hear him, and churches had to develop building programs just to hold the people.

"He dedicated his life to

the people of Young Harris Valley (and all over the county), serving as a civil servant, minister, community pastor and 'people's pastor,' as well as a friend and mentor.

"He was united in love and marriage to his wife Helen Adams and was blessed with six remarkable children.

"Rev. Rogers set an example for others by performing countless weddings and funerals throughout his career. (And he) served persons in all walks of life, no matter their creed or color or economic status – he spread God's Gospel to everyone he met.

"Rev. Rogers gave inspiration to many through his high ideals, morals and deep concern for his fellow citizens, and the devotion, patience and understanding he demonstrated to his family and friends were admired by others.

"A compassionate, generous man who demonstrated a commitment to witnessing Christ through word and deed, Rev. Rogers will long be remembered for his love of family, friendship, community, and

will continue to be missed by all who had the great fortune of knowing him."

The Rogers family joined Bradshaw at the front of the room for a photo commemorating the occasion, and he presented loved ones with keepsake signage matching the one standing at the bridge alongside a copy of the resolution brought by Rep. Gunter that evening.

David Rogers, who is Rev. Jimmy's son and also serves the community as Chief Magistrate and Probate Judge, said the family was excited about the honor bestowed upon his dad, with his mother Helen, 88, commenting, "Your daddy would have liked that."

"He did dedicate a lot of his time to the community, and I feel that he's earned it," David said of his father. "I appreciate that Mr. Bradshaw and Mr. Gunter had the foresight to pursue it and get it done. We're thrilled with (the dedication)."

Also in the meeting, Bradshaw honored the late Sheriff Jay Vernon Chastain Sr., as reported in last week's edition of the Towns County Herald.

# Storm Damage...from Page 1A



Several homes on Lake Chatuge received damage in the July 2 thunderstorm.

Photo by Tom Emge

Once the power came back on and the movie resumed, Bradshaw spent his time in the theater lobby handling phone calls about the storm.

More than 50 trees had to be cleared from county roadways, and the fairgrounds had over 25 downed trees as well, plus all the trees that blew over on nearby private properties, the multiple boats that flipped in the lake, and several docks that suffered damage.

Between public and private property, Bradshaw said he felt a fair estimate of storm damage – and perhaps a conservative one – was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"The biggest problems (county government had) were powerlines down and trees down," Bradshaw said. "The Road Department worked into the wee hours Sunday night into early Monday, then they were back up early Monday morning cutting again."

Only one person is known to have required medical treatment due to the storm, having cut his foot while trying to hold the canopy down on his

camper inside the fairgrounds.

But the situation could have been worse, especially considering that two trees fell on a camper occupied by four people in the fairgrounds and multiple trees fell on homes and went through people's roofs.

"We're very, very thankful it wasn't more serious," Bradshaw said, noting that it's unlikely the county will receive reimbursement aid for the damage. "And we're very fortunate it just hit one little section of the county. If it had been countywide, that would be different."

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason reiterated Bradshaw's statements about the severity of the storm.

"We had a lot of damage," Thomason said. "We had trees down on campers and on trucks, one that clipped a craft booth, two boats that overturned and sank in the water. It blew a boat trailer off the boat ramp into the lake, (and we had multiple crews working for days to clear trees)."

Added Thomason, "I'm not sure what it was, but it was just a really, really bad storm. It came up quick and did a lot of damage in a short time. But we're thankful and very blessed that nobody got badly hurt or killed, because it was a bad storm."

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC released an after-action report on Facebook summing up the extent of the storms that moved through the mountains over that weekend.

"After initial assessment between Saturday, July 1, and Sunday, July 2, the severe storms caused 191 different outages that resulted in 18,812 members to be without power," the EMC said. "We identified 17 broken poles throughout our system."

Towns County shared updates about the storm in real time, warning people with the CodeRED Emergency Alert System by issuing reports from the National Weather Service. Residents may sign up for CodeRED at <http://www.townscountyga.org/emergency-alert-system.html>.

# Iota Iota a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi June 20th meeting



(L-R): Kathy Ross, Tammy Hayden, Becky Dyer, Helen Teboe, Robin Zimmerman, Joan Anderson, Kelly Randell, Sally Shuck

Iota Iota a chapter of Beta Sigma Phi held their monthly meeting on June 20th at Branam Lodge.

President Helen Teboe called the meeting to order and led the members in the Opening Ritual and Pledge of Allegiance. Kathy Ross introduced Jan Abernathy who was visiting the chapter.

Our hostesses Robin Zimmerman and Helen Teboe went all out in decorating the tables with a 4th of July theme. The delicious food also represented July 4th. We had

several lucky winners for the hostess gifts. Red roses and a 4th of July planter were won by our guest Jan Abernathy, Joan Anderson won the bread basket and Kathy got the other 4th of July planter.

The business portion of the meeting included voting on the proposed By-Law changes and Traditions and Procedures. Sign-up sheets for committees, meeting hostesses and the monthly service birthday party at Branam Lodge were given to the members. Besides our month birthday party at

Branam Lodge the members brought in a total of 888 diapers that were of varying sizes for the Women's Enrichment Center. Becky Dyer and Kelly Randell were on hand to accept the donation.

A picnic hosted by Robin Zimmerman will be held on June 24th.

Iota Iota's next meeting will be July 18th, 5:30 PM at Branam Lodge. If you would like to find out more about Iota Iota chapter, contact Kathy Ross the Vice President at [Kfeross3@gmail.com](mailto:Kfeross3@gmail.com).



# GMF Fireworks...from Page 1A



Families had plenty to do in addition to fireworks at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for Independence Day 2023. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

and sold homemade cinnamon rolls to raise money for an upcoming mission trip, and attendees cooled off with ice cream and shaved ice, with many enjoying delicious barbecue and other food options.

Serving up all kinds of fried food, Courtney Douglass of Bones and Batter explained how the popularity of his food last year brought him back to this year's event. Now, he is working on finding a permanent location for the business

in the area.

Also in attendance for the second year in a row were Sandy and Bob Thursby of Florida. A friend of the Thursbys invited them to the area years ago, and now they rent a cabin every year. They chose to celebrate at the fairgrounds to get in on the beautiful views of the mountains.

Attending with other friends this year, they also agreed that they were enjoying the music provided by the Vin-

tage Vixens.

Thomason hopes that the Independence Day celebrations will continue to grow, with plans to include even more to see and do next year.

For more information on upcoming events, including the Georgia Mountain Fair Aug. 18-26 and the Acoustic Sunsets Summer Concert Series every Thursday at 6 p.m. between now and July 27, visit <https://georgiamountainfairgrounds.com/>.

# Fatal Accident...from Page 1A

at Chatuge Regional Hospital in Hiawasse, authorities said.

GA 17 was closed for hours on July 7 as first responders worked the scene, conducting an investigation and getting the vehicles back up to the road for towing.

"At this time, it is my understanding that both children and at least one adult remain hospitalized," Coroner Cooper said Saturday. "I ask

for prayers for healing and comfort for all involved."

Barrow County Firefighter Jeremy Dalton, the son-in-law of the deceased man, is one of the survivors of the accident, and his 11-year-old son Hinton is one of the two boys hospitalized from the wreck.

According to Fox 5, Hinton was placed in the ICU with a head injury, while Jeremy and Gabe, Hinton's

10-year-old cousin who was also in the wreck, "appear to be making a recovery."

GoFundMe pages have been set up to help defray medical expenses for the families of the two boys who received injuries, one at <https://gofund.me/5a221b00> and the other at <https://gofund.me/b5a53479>.

"The Towns County Coroner's Office would like to commend the men and women who worked diligently to get patients to hospitals for care," Cooper said.

Responding to the accident were the Georgia State Patrol, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Towns County Coroner's Office, Towns County EMS, Towns County Fire Rescue, and three air ambulance crews from the area.

The crash remains under investigation, and the Towns County Herald did not know at press time if charges would be filed.

# Citizens For A Better America meeting

Are you concerned about the path our great nation is taking? Come and meet with like-minded folks and let's work together to make a difference!

There is a meeting of Citizens For A Better America and you are invited. Thursday, July 20, at the Legends Steak House in the large private meeting room, 42 Tennessee St., Downtown Murphy, NC. Meal orders at 5:00, meeting

is 6:00-7:30. There will be a guest speaker and more. You do not want to miss it! This meeting is free & open to the public. Everyone is welcome and bring a friend. We promote freedom & constitutional rights! united we stand!

For more information: Website: <http://www.CitizensForABetterAmerica.com>; Email: [Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com](mailto:Contact@CitizensForABetterAmerica.com); Call: (828) 361-5422.