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Students return for first day of class Thursday, Aug. 5

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

After successfully navigating 2020-21 amid COVID-19, Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong is excited to be taking the system back to a standard format for the new school year as students return Thursday, Aug. 5.

“At this point, we feel like we can be back in school 100%,” Berrong said. “People questioned our decisions last year. We were one of the only schools that I know of that went to school five days a week from the very beginning, and we never closed a single day.”

“We feel like we were

able to look at the data, make decisions that were good for our community and our school system, and it worked out for us. We were able to give the kids that we wanted to come to school a great in-person year of school that we didn't think we would have.

“The concern that we do have is that this Delta variant is now transmitting more amongst the teenaged kids. So, that's something we're going to really keep an eye on.

“We're keeping a lot of the cleaning practices in place because we feel like that helped not only with this coronavirus, but with all health issues within the school.

“And so, even though

we're starting back on Day 1 in person 100%, we will continue to look at the data. If we have issues arise, we have the systems in place to where we can make different decisions as we go along through the school year.”

Continuing, Berrong said last year started off with only about 60% of students coming to classes and about 40% attending online. But by the end of the year, the percentage of students coming to class had increased to about 85%.

Online learning, said Berrong, had an overall negative effect on students, not because they couldn't comprehend the materials, but because many

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The new sign at the entrance to Towns County Schools is well on its way to completion, replacing the 40-year-old sign that had been around since the campus was built. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Towns County FBLA student Walls finishes first in nation

News Special
Towns County Herald

Four Towns County High School Future Business Leaders of America students competed at national level competition this summer after advancing from state competitions.

The FBLA National Leadership Conference took place virtually between June 29 and July 2.

Representing Towns County in the category of Word Processing were students Eden Hill, Kenzie Livingston and Maci Walls, with Will McConnell competing in Spreadsheet Applications.

Walls finished first in the nation in her competition.

“Competing in FBLA has given me so many great opportunities to build a successful future,” Walls said. “Whether it was traveling to conferences or developing leadership skills, my

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Congratulations to Towns County's own Maci Walls for competing at a high enough level to become an FBLA national champion. Photo/Submitted

Blairsville woman dies from injuries sustained in beating

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

HAYESVILLE, N.C. – A Blairsville woman is dead and a local man is behind bars following an alleged domestic-related assault that occurred just over the Georgia/North Carolina line on Sunday, July 25.

Sarai Sanoma Hatchett, 43, later succumbed to injuries sustained in the assault, which took place in the early morning hours of July 25, according to Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff Bobby Deese.

Darrell Dywayne Williams, 47, of Blairsville, has been arrested in connection with the crime, and he remains in custody at the Clay County Detention Center on a \$2 million bond.

Around 3:25 a.m. that Sunday, authorities responded to a 911 call alerting them to “an unconscious 43-year-old female” located inside a travel trailer at a

campground off Gilberts Way on NC 175 southeast of Hayesville, Deese said.

Information pertaining to the identity of the 911 caller was not available at press time, though Williams, who was standing outside the trailer when first responders arrived, was the only other person present aside from Hatchett, Deese said.

It was not immediately known how long the pair had been staying at the campground near Clay County's border with Towns County, but Deese did describe Williams and Hatchett as having been in a relationship at the time of the assault.

Authorities found Hatchett inside the trailer, unconscious and visibly injured from “blunt force trauma,” Deese said.

She did not regain consciousness prior to being transported for treatment at Northeast Georgia Medical, Deese said, and she passed away nearly 18 hours later at 9:07 p.m.



Sarai Hatchett in Gainesville.

Based on evidence obtained at the scene, Williams was taken into custody that morning, without incident, on a charge of assault inflicting serious bodily injury against Hatchett, Deese said.

In the wake of Hatchett's

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First Memory Lane Auction & Car Show one to remember

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – A myriad of American muscle cars, classics, trucks, hot rods and customs rolled into the old Blue Ridge Mountain EMC HQ over the weekend for the Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show, the first of many future fundraisers by Jerry Smith to benefit local giving.

Smith, who owns the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum next to Fieldstone Cinemas Six, has been in the business of collecting and selling classic cars for decades, having opened his first classic car museum in Lake Oconee.

After visiting the area, Smith said he wanted to bring a

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The Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show gave people the opportunity to simultaneously see classic cars and bid to take one home. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Herschel Walker invited to lead 70th Annual Fair Parade

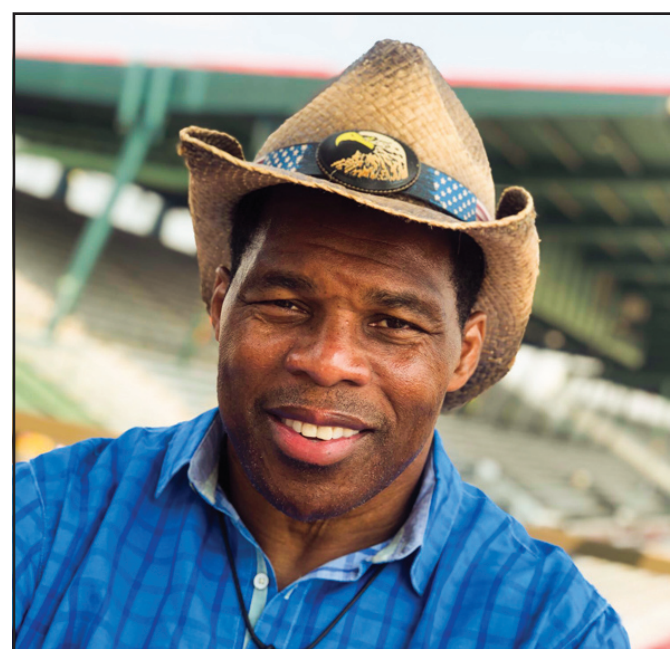
By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Augusta native and past Heisman Trophy winner as a University of Georgia student athlete Herschel Walker has been invited to lead the 70th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade on Saturday, Aug. 14, and he's working hard to fit it into his busy schedule.

For 70 years, thousands of people have flocked to Towns County each summer to experience the Georgia Mountain Fair, running this year Aug. 13-21.

The Georgia Mountain Fair is a one-of-a-kind event with all the hallmarks of a “classic county fair” – rides, games, live music and other entertainment – only done mountain style showcasing the tremendous history and hospitality of the area.

There's also the ever-popular town parade and float-building contest, which features major prizes for those who



Herschel Walker Photo/Twitter

decorate winning floats. After canceling the 2020 parade due to COVID, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said she started talks with the Parade

Committee and Jerry Smith, owner of Memory Lane Classic Car Museum, about what to do to celebrate the 70th parade. With Smith being in the

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Sheriff's Auxiliary takes shape in 2021 with volunteers

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary Planning Committee met with Sheriff Ken Henderson and Young Harris College Police Chief Robbie Rich at the Civic Center on Monday, July 26.

Chief Rich was there to explore how the Sheriff's Auxiliary might assist his campus police force with college events.

The meeting also covered clarification of auxiliary policies and procedures and the designation of liaisons between the auxiliary and facilities such as the college and Anderson Music Hall that utilize the

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Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary Members Anna Denton and David Marrella discussing policies and procedures in their July 26 group meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

Peggy Bogle crowned 2021 'Miss Brasstown Manor'

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The inaugural Brasstown Manor Beauty Pageant was held in the main lobby of Brasstown Manor Senior Living on Friday, July 30, featuring a bevy of smiling independent and assisted-living residents as contestants and spectators.

All 19 contestants were residents from the assisted living community, the brave ones who took the plunge and decided to make their way across the rose petal covered floor and compete in front of other residents and guests.

Two ladies from the independent community and an employee from Regency Hospice served as judges for the event.

The pageant was the brainchild of receptionist Gail

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Peggy Bogle is Miss Brasstown Manor 2021. Bogle has been a resident of Brasstown Manor Senior Living since 2018. Photo by Mark Smith

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Hatchett...from Page 1A

passing, that charge is expected to be upgraded when a local grand jury convenes after press time on Wednesday, Aug. 4, Deese said. Williams has been charged only and is presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation assisted the Clay County Sheriff's Office with obtaining evidence in the case, GBI Region 8 Special Agent in Charge Kim Williams said.

Hatchett's sister Rachel Lindley made a social media post July 27 detailing the family's heartbreak over the tragedy.

"Our baby sister, Sarai Hatchett, has unexpectedly been taken from this life," Lindley said on Facebook. "She was strong and stubborn and mean, yet she had the biggest heart you can imagine. Even as a young girl, she provided shelter, food, and love to all people and creatures she found in need. This love was extended to so many throughout her life.

"During a domestic dispute, Sarai suffered major head trauma which resulted in brain hemorrhaging and a massive stroke, cutting off all oxygen to her brain. Sarai was pronounced brain dead at Northeast Georgia Medical Center on Sunday, July 25, 2021. Sarai's partner, Darrell Williams, remains in custody with Clay County NC Sheriff's Department.

"Sarai's departure leaves

an immense void. We may see an abundance of missed opportunities, but I ask instead that each of us focuses on and celebrates the beautiful moments shared with her. I pray that we each find comfort in sweet memories, the love of our family and friends, and in our Heavenly Father who knows all things and has a plan for us all.

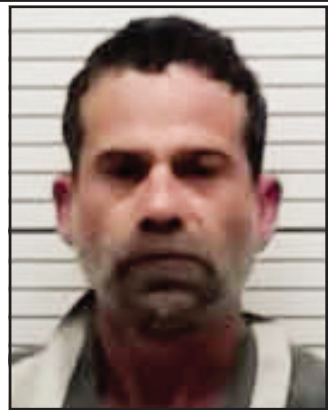
"If you have information that might assist law enforcement's investigation, please reach out to Lt. Heath Woodard with Clay County NC Sheriff's Office (828) 644-4217 and to Special Agent Derek Glasco of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (706) 348-4866.

"At this time, we ask that the family's privacy be respected. We welcome your love and prayers and offer ours in return."

The post engendered hundreds of reactions, comments and shares in support of the family, and others memorialized Hatchett on Facebook as well.

"Sarai Hatchett was the very first licensed bartender in Union County and was the face of Copperhead Lodge for more than five years," the Lodge posted July 27. "I know that those of you who have been around a while will remember her for her beautiful smile and tenacity for taking care of people.

"The Copperhead family is hurting in sharing this news.



Darrell Dywayne Williams

Please keep the Hatchett family in your thoughts and prayers. RIP Sarai, you'll always be in our hearts."

A memorial service for Hatchett will be held on Friday, Aug. 6, from 6-8 p.m. in the Mountain View Chapel of Mountain View Funeral Home. In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that donations be made to the Bellview Methodist Church Cemetery fund in her memory.

"Sarai was an avid animal lover and welcomed into her home and her heart any in need," her obituary reads. "Her vast love carried over to her family and friends.

"Never one to meet a stranger, Sarai was well-known and adored throughout the North Georgia community in which she lived. She was most content on any body of water with a line in the water, a special person at her side, and a beloved four-legged friend splashing nearby."

Back to School...from Page 1A

weren't able to keep up with a structured schedule at home.

Some, he said, thrived in the online learning environment, though the number of students who did not thrive far outnumbered those who did, the upshot being that many students fell behind.

So, one big goal this year will be to clearly identify and get those students caught up while continuing to challenge the students who were able to maintain course, Berrong said.

The superintendent also mentioned testing as a goal, saying that scores "haven't been put out there" because the state had decided not to compare schools as various communities adapted to the challenges of COVID.

"One thing that we take the most pride in here is we're one of the highest achieving schools in the state of Georgia academically," Berrong said. "My assumption is that this year these test scores will start counting again.

"My goal is, at the end of the year, to once again show everybody what a great school system we have and what smart students we've got. Our goal is to get back into educating our kids."

Elementary School Principal Shannon Moss and Assistant Principal LaTisha Usher are also excited for school to be returning, with faculty and staff ready to embrace a "Safari to Success" theme for students.

"The data from the end-of-grade (test) results has been analyzed and will be used to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of our students and go forward," Moss said, noting expected challenges for students who had gone without formal school for an extended period.

"They received online learning, but it's just not the same," added Usher, stating further that identifying strengths and weaknesses would be paramount to enabling teachers to take their students on a "Safari to Success" as they

become ready for it.

Middle School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs said she and her staff are all prepared and excited for a whole new school year.

"We're just looking forward to getting back to as much normalcy as possible, hoping that people are getting their vaccinations and that we won't have to quarantine or have students quarantined," Hobbs said.

High School Principal Roy Perren said everyone will be aiming this year to achieve the same success they did last year in keeping schools open.

"We haven't measured yet what kind of learning loss there may have been during the COVID (pandemic)," Perren said. "We need to measure and see what kind of gaps we may have and then work with each individual student to meet their needs.

"That's really my goal. It's really my goal every year as far as meeting the needs of individual students."

Fair Parade...from Page 1A

classic car trade for most of his adult life, he has developed friendships with other classic car enthusiasts, including football legend Herschel Walker, who helped lead the Georgia Bulldogs to national championship glory as part of the 1980 team.

Having former NFL star and Georgia native Walker as this year's Parade Grand Marshal would be perhaps the best way to bring back the parade after having to cancel the beloved tradition last year, Thomason said.

Currently, Walker is expected to be in San Antonio, Texas, the day before the parade, and Thomason said Walker and Smith are working hard on a plan to fly him into the Blairsville airport on Saturday, Aug. 14, to get him in town with enough time to lead the parade.

This year's parade theme is "Reelin' in the Years," to celebrate the 70 years of Towns County's most near and dear event, the Georgia Mountain Fair.

Thomason said the Top Three floats will have a chance to win a share of \$10,000 in prize money donated by Bob Cloer and Alvin Gibson. First Place will win \$4,000, Second place \$2,500, and the Third Place float will take home \$1,500.

Already, more than 35

parade float applications have been submitted, and Thomason said the Fairgrounds Office is taking more every week.

The parade will start behind South State Bank just across the street from the Hiwassee Town Square, rolling out at 10:55 a.m. west down Main Street and into the Fairgrounds, where Georgia Mountain Fair Parade Committee members will cast their votes for Top Three.

Also, the Towns County High School Indian Raider Marching Band will be performing as they walk through town with the parade.

And no doubt, with Smith and hopefully Walker participating in this year's parade, Thomason said the Aug. 14 spectacle will feature plenty of classic cars and hot rods for spectators to marvel over.

Not only is the 2021 parade going to be bigger than ever, Thomason said the nine days of the Georgia Mountain Fair will also be different this year, with a new carnival company bringing bigger and better rides.

There's even a brand new to the Fair show called "A Grizzly Experience", which is an educational Grizzly Bear show and exhibit.

"Get an up close and personal look into the life of North America's most prestigious predator, the

Alaskan Grizzly Bear," per georgiamountainfairgrounds.com. "Yogi, a 7-year-old, 600-pound Grizzly Bear and two juveniles, Dottie and Lea, delight crowds of all ages with their impressive sizes and amazing behaviors."

Plus, people can enjoy examples of bygone mountain living in the Pioneer Village and check out the many "Old Ways" demonstrations to see how the area's progenitors made moonshine, corn, shakes, cider, pork skins, quilts, soap, hominy and more, not to mention real-life blacksmithing and glass blowing demos.

All the craft booths have been completely booked, and live musical entertainment has been scheduled for each day of the Fair, with two shows each day inside Anderson Music Hall, one early in the afternoon and the other later each evening.

One-day passes cost \$12, with children 12 and under getting in free. A three-day pass costs \$33 and will save people a few bucks, with the biggest savings available for the Fun Fair Pass at \$90, which covers all nine days of the Fair. Music shows are included in ticket prices.

Carnival rides are an additional charge of \$25 for wristbands or \$20 if purchased in advance, with free parking inside the Fairgrounds for all Georgia Mountain Fair attendees, though no pets are allowed.

Clarification:

An article from last week's newspaper titled "EMC meetings open to members; fiber optic availability to expand" contained an incomplete explanation regarding Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's Neighborhood Networking program.

It was stated in the article that at least four neighboring homeowners are needed to get fiber to a neighborhood, which is true of some, but not all, neighborhoods. The actual number of neighbors needed to enable a fiber build is determined by BRMEMC, through a feasibility study conducted on each individual line, and takes into account such issues as customer density, percentage of overhead

versus underground, and required directional drilling costs.

BRMEMC is always expanding its fiber optic network. Through this Neighborhood Networking program, 37 fiber

expansions have been identified for this new fiscal year with additional expansions being reviewed each day.

For more information on fiber internet service and expansion areas, visit brmemc.com/fiber.

Miss Brasstown...from Page 1A



L-R: The runners-up for Miss Brasstown Manor 2021 were Marion Darling, Florence Johnson and Rachel Windsor. Photo by Mark Smith

Plott, who is fondly referred to as "the air traffic controller" by the staff because she juggles her time coordinating resident activity and business operations at the front desk.

"I had heard about this from other people," Plott said, "and I had planned this for about a year and a half or two years, and then COVID shut us down, so we didn't get to do it."

Brasstown Manor Executive Director Bobbie Rohr gave the go ahead to have the pageant when the facility recently reopened, and Plott knew she had to act.

"I said, 'I'm not letting COVID get us again, so I'm going to do it as fast as I can.' And that's how it came about," Plott said. "All these little ladies here are so special, and so I feel like they need something done for them."

The entire day staff, some of the night crew and the outside maintenance workers were there to assist and seemed to be having as much fun as the residents and contestants, while the kitchen prepared various fruits, snacks and, for those who wanted it, half flutes of champagne.

Acting as emcee for the event, Caregiver Mikayla King explained that contestants were to be judged on dress as well as personality, "because they each have their own special little quirks," and how they answered a few questions.

As each contestant walked across the floor and stood in front of the judges, King, with microphone in hand, queried them about their favorite colors, what they most enjoyed doing, and for some, what they remembered best about growing up.

Ms. Peggy Bogle, a resident since 2018, won the Miss Brasstown Manor 2021 title, a dozen roses, a sash and a crown.

Runners-up were Ms. Marion Darling of the Dogwood wing, Ms. Rachel Windsor of the Camellia wing, and Ms. Florence Johnson of the Gardens wing. Each runner-up received a half dozen roses, a sash and a crown, and King said everyone hoped to "make this an annual thing."

Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales was there to watch and mingle with the residents, staff and contestants and to congratulate the lucky winners, and all in all, it was a great afternoon for everybody who attended.

For more information on the Hiwassee-based facility, visit <https://brasstownmanor.com>.

FBLA Students...from Page 1A



L-R: Kenzie Livingston, Maci Walls, Will McConnell and Eden Hill showing off their state-level awards earlier in the year. Photo/Submitted

advisors (Mrs. Taylor and Mrs. McConnell) always pushed me to succeed. I would never have been able to experience this national win without them!"

Competitions for the 2020-21 school year were moved online due to COVID-19 health concerns.

"We are especially proud of our students' efforts as these competitors continued to work during challenging times," FBLA Advisor Ruth Taylor said. "These young people have represented our school and community well. Congratulations to all!"

Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda, Inc. is the largest career student business organization in the world. Each year, FBLA-PBL helps over 230,000 members in 47 states prepare for careers in business, according to fbla-pbl.org.

Memory Lane...from Page 1A

car museum to the mountains, so he opened the local destination about a year ago to much fanfare, and he's been giving back to the community ever since with proceeds from the museum, and now, his car auctions and shows.

Approximately 100 cars were scheduled for auction between July 30 and 31, and people can anticipate repeat events down the road, Smith said, as he and his wife June look to continue the car show and auction annually in hopes that the event becomes bigger and better each year.

As the 2021 Auction & Show proceeded throughout the weekend, hundreds of car enthusiasts poured in to get a glimpse of their favorite classic, and many put good money on the line for the chance to take home a classic car of their own, either for the first time or to add to a collection.

Richard Kaiser, for example, is a classic car fanatic who drove up from South Florida to attend the event, and he was excited about the car show and auction coming to Towns County.

"For several years, my family and I have been driving to Pigeon Forge in May for the Ford F-100 truck show," Kaiser said. "I was here visiting family and saw the signs for the car show."

"Next year, maybe I will purchase one of these classic cars that I have dreamed about since I was a young boy."

The Memory Lane Car Auction & Show also featured food trucks, prizes for guests, tons of arts and crafts, as well as live music over both days for people to enjoy as they marveled at all of the classic car goodness on display.

Students from Towns County High School, along with High School History Teacher and Head Baseball Coach Shannon Floyd, volunteered and sold tickets for a 50/50 drawing,



Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's old headquarters served as the base of operations for the two-day Memory Lane Car Show. Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Jerry Smith, Ronnie Phillips and Cliff Bradshaw had a terrific time at Towns County's first ever Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show Saturday, July 31. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

with the proceeds also going to charity.

"I was very pleased with the turnout, and I want to thank everyone who helped in making this possible," Smith said. And with the first year in the books, Smith added he is already starting to plan the next event.

People who missed the inaugural Memory Lane Classic Car Auction & Show can always visit the Memory Lane Classic Car Museum, which houses a rotating selection of the many classic cars Smith has been

collecting throughout his life.

The Auction & Show was sponsored by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Jacky Jones Ford and the Towns County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Auctioning the cars both days was award-winning auctioneer and Towns Countian Taylor Osborn from Southeast Auction Company.

Charity proceeds for the weekend festivities were not available by press time Monday.

Auxiliary...from Page 1A

auxiliary's services.

Auxiliary Director Anna Denton conducted the meeting, and she said the all-volunteer auxiliary existed to help people and give back to the community.

"We have absolutely no law enforcement authority; we are the eyes and ears of law enforcement," Denton said. "We answer questions, we direct people to (restrooms)."

"If somebody becomes ill, we jump into action, get help for them," she said, adding that they have also assisted with lost children, unruly pets and locating seats at performance events.

Furthermore, auxiliary members assist with security within strict parameters as outlined by the Sheriff's Office and the auxiliary guidelines, as auxiliary members are not sworn law enforcement officers and cannot act in that capacity.

Formerly known as the Citizens Law Enforcement Academy, the Sheriff's Auxiliary is "a self-run organization that works under the authority of

the elected sheriff," according to current guidelines.

The auxiliary was originally formed in about 2014 with volunteers to help with Music Hall security.

Denton said that many people joined the auxiliary initially so they could get into concerts for free and, consequently, never volunteered to help with any other events. But that's not what the Auxiliary is about, she said.

"We're here to help people," Denton said. "If a member gets to see a part of a show, that's icing on the cake, but they must keep vigilant and help in or communicate any situations that might arise."

Today, the auxiliary does that and much more, assisting with in-town events like parades, car shows and at other venues where large crowds congregate. And now, the auxiliary will assist with events at Young Harris College.

Volunteer applicants are required to attend a 10-week training course meant to familiarize members

with general laws and the responsibilities and resources of the Sheriff's Office, as well as the expectations and limitations of auxiliary member duties.

Once completed, members may purchase a Sheriff's Auxiliary shirt, which may only be worn while on duty. All new members are required to be on a one-year probationary period.

If an applicant is a current or former law enforcement member, EMT, firefighter or military officer, the training is waived.

There are currently 41 members in the Sheriff's Auxiliary, and Denton said more are needed, especially when there are two or more events on the same day or weekend.

For more information on the Towns County Sheriff's Auxiliary or to request an application, contact Anna Denton at tcsauxiliarydirector@gmail.com.

Residents may also check out <https://www.townscountysheriff.org/> to obtain all kinds of useful information provided by the Towns County Sheriff's Office.