

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

www.townscountyherald.net

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 93 Number 41

Wednesday, August 10, 2022

Students, teachers excited for new school year

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The first day of the new year for Towns County Schools was Aug. 4, and students as well as teachers fell back into the routine last week after a satisfying summer break.

To help parents navigate traffic at the start of the 2022-23 school year, a few helpers set up outside of each school to direct the morning and afternoon flow of car riders before and after the busy day.

According to Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, there are roughly 1,000 students in the system currently, a slight increase over last year's 960. That said, school staff were

already well-prepared to assist the new arrivals and welcome back more familiar faces.

"Today went fantastic," Elementary School Teacher Lisa West said. "It went as smooth as I could possibly ask. My kids are great; they're respectful, they listened to me. We got a lot done. After the first day, I already know which kids have siblings, which kids have pets, and their hobbies."

Like West, many teachers focused on the importance of introductions no matter the age of their students, striving for mutual respect that, at one point, manifested when a gaggle of elementary students quickly quieted upon hearing clap cues to listen up for their bus driver's name.

And the friendly environment of Towns County Schools helps students acclimate, even more so for those moving up into a new school.

Middle School Social Studies teacher Sheena Kendall said her sixth-graders were "really nervous and had lots of questions," but were generally eager to learn about their new surroundings as much as their advanced curriculum.

"They seemed really excited to be in the Middle School," Kendall said. "Maybe not so much at school, but the Middle School (specifically), because you have more freedom."

"First day is always hectic, especially when they're



Towns County students looking for their buses after the first day of the new school year. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

GA Mountain Fair returns for 71st year Aug. 19-27



The Amusements of America carnival experience is back for the second year in a row, having been listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the "largest traveling amusement park in the world." Photo/georgiamountainfairgrounds.com

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Everyone's favorite time of year is just around the corner, as the 71st Annual Georgia Mountain Fair kicks off early on Thursday, Aug. 18, with free admission to all, rides starting

at 4 p.m. and the ever-popular Fair talent at 7 p.m.

The Fair proper will run nine full days Aug. 19-27, featuring all of the amazing family friendly activities residents and visitors have grown to love over the last seven decades, from first-rate music performances to

arts & crafts, unique attractions, and plenty of North Georgia Mountains history.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason is incredibly excited for this year's offerings as the Fairgrounds continues to host community-driven activities amid great

First Friday Market boasts successful return in August

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Despite the weather fears of rain, August's Hiawasse Night Market was not cancelled due to rain like the outing in July, even though the evening ultimately ended a touch early for precipitation, which didn't make the event any less fun.

In addition to the food trucks and vendors who had set up their tents on the Town Square, the Downtown Development Authority displayed a graphic next to the pavilion showcasing the Paris Buildings' financial progress, and DDA members were happy to answer folks' questions.

The Crazy 8 Snacks Shack and The Ark food truck were there to offer savory delights for dinner, and for sweeter side, there was plenty to be found if they stopped by Just a Cupcake or picked up a funnel cake.

As popular as the food was the drink, with Bacchus



An impromptu dance party formed on the Hiawasse Town Square during the Aug. 5 Night Market. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

on the Lake offering wine, and many guests took their cups and sat in front of the stage for that evening's musical performance.

This time, the Grace Band entertained with a medley of classic rock, blues and country music. Grace

Worley took up the lead vocals while Glenn Faast and John Foltz respectively supplied drums and bass to songs like "I Will Always Love You," "Dreams" and "Rocket Man."

This wasn't Amanda Seddon's first Night Market. See Friday Market, Page 8A

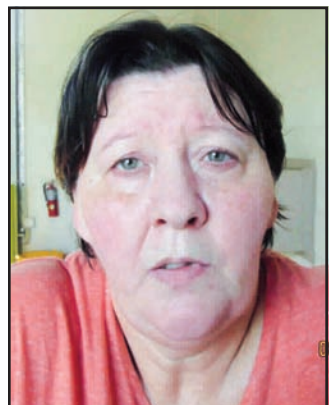
Sheriff's Office drug bust nets four arrests at local inn

News Special
Towns County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – Towns County Sheriff's Office Drug Investigators, K-9 Unit and Deputies raided a drug location at Mountain Country Inn, 1434 State Hwy. 66.

Citizen complaints of drug activity led to a two-week-long investigation resulting in the arrest of four individuals on Tuesday, Aug. 2.

Arrest warrants for sale of methamphetamine were issued.



Candie Sue Merritt



Adam Louis Milton Hataway

Young Harris man found guilty of possessing child porn

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

After a three-day trial, a Towns County jury found a Young Harris man guilty of possessing child pornography on Wednesday, Aug. 3.

As a result, Jamie Paul Burnette, 50, was sentenced to serve 15 years behind bars plus an additional year on probation.

Burnette was arrested on Jan. 14, 2021, following an investigation by Special Agent Brooke Cleveland of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Child Exploitation and Computer Crimes Unit.

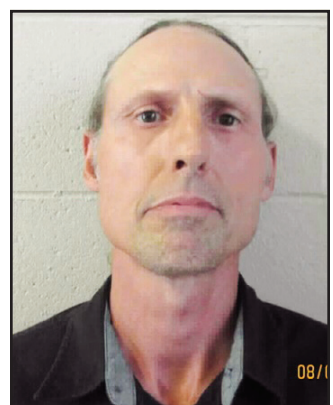
"Multiple reports were

received from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Online pertaining to the same online user who was uploading child sexual exploitation material to the internet," the GBI said at the time of Burnette's arrest.

"The GBI CEACC Unit initiated an investigation into this online user, which led to the identification of Burnette."

"A search warrant was executed by the GBI and the Towns County Sheriff's Office, leading to evidence related to the crime of sexual exploitation of children, and later the arrest of Burnette, who was transported to the Towns County Jail upon his arrest."

Burnette posted bond



Jamie Paul Burnette

on Jan. 15, 2021, though he was taken into custody last week following his trial to be remanded into the state prison

See Guilty Verdict, Page 3A

Gov. Brian Kemp visits with North Georgia constituents

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE – Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp made a special trip to Union County on Thursday, Aug. 4, to meet with enthusiastic constituents and share his optimistic vision to continue improving opportunity and quality of life in the state.

The event, organized by longtime friend of Kemp and local businessman Jim Williams, served as both an informational meet-and-greet and a grassroots fundraiser for the governor's re-election campaign.

More than 300 people filed into the Community Center for the standing-room-only gathering, which featured attendance by local elected officials, business community stakeholders, the Union County GOP and everyday residents interested in the goings-on of the state.

Kemp touted his record both before and after the onset of COVID-19, the latter of which saw him rise as an early national leader in lifting onerous restrictions that closed many businesses.

During the pandemic, his office has also facilitated a reliable stream of information from the Georgia Department of Public Health, taking an approach of largely trusting people to make their own health decisions in consultation with family doctors over compulsion via government decree.

These actions helped keep Georgia's economy not just afloat but growing as those of other states faltered, resulting in a positive financial environment in the Peach State



Brian Kemp
Georgia Governor

after COVID fears and mitigations initially depressed economic and other activity by the public.

Due to this business-friendly approach and conservative budgetary practices in uncertain economic times, revenues have continued to flow into Georgia at a phenomenal rate over the last couple of years.

In turn, the remarkable economic success of Georgia has contributed to a state budgetary surplus, which Kemp worked with the Georgia Legislature to return to residents in May in the form of one-time \$500 tax refund checks to assist households struggling with rampant inflation.

And Kemp was quick to give credit where it was due, noting Georgians' incredible resilience in weathering the pandemic, civil unrest and a contentious presidential election since the initial nationwide COVID shutdowns of March

2020, all while contributing to the success of the state.

He also touted his office's announcement last week of yet another extension of the state's temporary gas tax suspension, which he first enacted in March to secure some of the lowest gas prices in the nation during an ongoing period of sky-high inflation and fuel costs.

Indeed, those in attendance seemed to appreciate being able to pocket more of their hard-earned money, especially as the country enters a recession amid 40-year-high inflation, likely soon-to-be increased federal taxes and spending, and plenty more economic uncertainty ahead.

The governor touched on many other topics during his visit, including: the lives of children that will be saved by Georgia's Heartbeat Bill; his healthy respect for police and adequately funding their crime-fighting efforts; the Election Integrity Act of 2021 as short-

See Kemp Visit, Page 3A

2 Sections 16 Pages
Lake Levels
Blue Ridge 1,683.01
Chatuge 1,923.89
Nottely 1,772.47

Inside
Arrests 2A
Chamber 6A
Church 4B
Classifieds 6B
Opinion 4A
Legals 6B
Obits 5B
Sports 2B

SPORTS
Softball
Aug. 9 vs. North Murray 4 PM
Aug. 11 @ Loganville 5:30 PM

GA Gas Tax Suspension Extended
See page 7A

Maters & Music Festival Returns Aug. 13
See page 1B

RODEO
Hiawasse Pro Rodeo Labor Day Weekend
See page 8B

Kemp Visit...from Page 1A



Several hundred residents attended Gov. Brian Kemp's campaign stop in Union County last week at the Community Center. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

ing up election security; being beholden to residents and not a national agenda, the legacy media or "woke corporations"; the importance of safeguarding values and promoting opportunities vital to Georgia families; making sure churches stay open

in the state, regardless of political pressure, as has been seen during the pandemic; improving education for all Georgia children; and the many differences between himself and his gubernatorial opponent.

After delivering his

well-received remarks and imploring people to encourage everyone they know to vote in the upcoming election, Kemp took photos with constituents and spoke with folks about their hopes and concerns for the state.

GA Mtn. Fair Returns...from Page 1A

weather and beautiful mountain views, with dozens of vendor booths and delicious food options at the Fair.

Plus, two brand new attractions are sure to prove crowd-pleasing in 2022: a new daredevil show from Majestik Spectacular, and an amusing display called the Banana Derby featuring monkeys riding dogs.

"Along with everything, something new we are having this year is the Majestik Spectacular that will have two shows Monday through Friday and three shows on Saturday and Sunday," Thomason said. "And we have a brand-new Ferris wheel coming."

"We hope everybody comes out to enjoy all of the entertainment and food, and the Pioneer Village will be hosting authentic mountain demonstrations and other exhibits. Jerry Taylor will be playing organs as well."

And folks will want to be sure to attend the historic Georgia Mountain Fair Parade that

will be riding through Downton Hiawassee on Saturday, Aug. 20, starting at 11 a.m., with \$10,000 in prize money available for winners of the float design contest.

District 8 State Rep. Stan Gunter will be serving as the Grand Marshal for this year's parade, which will augment the already electric atmosphere of the Fair coming to town.

"Last year, we had 33,000 people total come for all nine days, and we are certainly expecting to have more this year," Thomason said. "We want to keep bringing more events and people here to enjoy everything together."

A vast array of musical talent will be available each of the nine days of the Fair, with performances by acts like Lorrie Morgan, Wyatt Espalin and the Riverstones, The Inspirations, The Primitives, Neal McCoy, Country River Band and many, many more.

Attendance for the Fair is \$12 per person each day, with

kids under 12 entering free.

Music shows are included in the price of admission, Thomason said, "except on Aug. 20, when I have Mark Chesnutt and Tracy Byrd - that is a hard ticket for that concert, in which we have sold about 1,900 tickets for that so far."

People may purchase a three-day Fair Pass for \$33, and entry into the carnival is a separate fee. The Midway opens at 2 p.m. daily, and all music shows in Anderson Music Hall will be taking place at 7 p.m., except for Sunday, which will see performances starting at 2 p.m.

Arts & Crafts will be available 10 a.m. through 8 p.m. each day other than Sunday, which will run 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For more information, including on special deal days for the carnival and a complete listing of music and other activities, visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com, where tickets may also be purchased in advance for these rain-or-shine events.

VFW

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

VFW Bingo

The VFW in Hiawassee is starting bingo every Saturday at our post at 1329 Sunnyside Rd. Doors open at 5:30 PM, games start at 6:30 PM. Food and drinks will be available. Come join us.

VFW Fish Fry

Due to the rising cost of fish and all other goods that we have at the fish fry, we are sad to say we are having to raise our prices to \$12 and \$15, all you can eat. The nights of the fish fry is still the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month. Remember, no tax and no tip. We hope to see you there! NT(Aug10,11)JH

Veterans Thrift Store Volunteers

Veterans Thrift Store, a product of Club 66, 2641 Hwy. 66, Young Harris, GA is open from 10 AM to 4 PM, Wednesday thru Saturday, helping local veterans in our community. We are looking for volunteers to help with the thrift store.

We are accepting gently used items: furniture, appliances, toys, clothes, etc. For details call 706-379-3774. NT(Aug10,22)CA

Towns County Community Calendar

	First Monday of each month:	HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
School Board			
	First Tuesday of each month:	City Hall	6 pm
Hiaw. City Council			
Young Harris City Council		YH City Hall	7 pm
	Second Tuesday of each month:		
Conventions & Visitors Board		Civic Center	8 am
	Second Wednesday every other month:		
Board of Elections		Elections Office	4 pm
	Third Monday of each month:		
Planning Commission		Civic Center	6 pm
Water Board		Water Office	6 pm
	Third Tuesday of each month:		
Commissioner's Mtg.		Courthouse	5:30 pm

TCSO Drug Bust...from Page 1A

sued for Candie Sue Merritt, 48, of Young Harris, and Christina Sueann Canterbury, 48, who is homeless.

During this raid, two more arrests were made for possession of methamphetamine and possession of drug-related objects, with further charges pending test results for other suspected narcotics: Jordan Tyler Patterson, 20, of Blairsville, and Adam Louis Milton Hatway, 20, of Blue Ridge.

The investigation into these activities remains active and ongoing.

Sheriff Ken Henderson commends the hard work of his deputies, saying he would also



Christina Sueann Canterbury like to thank the residents for their support and information regarding drug activity.

"The citizens and com-



Jordan Tyler Patterson munity working together can make a difference and are key to keeping our community safe," Sheriff Henderson said.

Guilty Verdict...from Page 1A

system.

He reportedly had over 600 instances of alleged child pornography downloaded to his computer but was charged with possession of just four images in which the childhood status of the victims pictured was not in question, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said.

"Two of the children appear to be approximately 6 years old, one appears to be about 3 years old, and one is an infant," Langley said. "We did not prosecute him for images that anyone could look at and think, in any sense, that these were adults."

"And the concern is, there would not be an industry creating these images (if not for offenders like Burnette). This is documentation that these children were molested - you can see on these images that these children are being

molested.

"Therefore, when you download these images, you are, in a sense, supporting the people who are molesting these children. And that's why we take possession of these types of images very seriously."

None of the images were of local children, but 112 of them were of victims who had been identified by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Langley said.

"Our evidence indicated the defendant downloaded them sometime between 2016 and the seizure of the computer in 2019," Langley said, noting that GBI computer experts were working through a backlog of evidence, so Burnette's computer was not completely processed until October 2020, resulting in his January 2021 arrest.

Langley would like to commend the efforts of his

lead prosecutor in the trial, Assistant District Attorney Buster Landreau, as well as Assistant District Attorney Kelly Holloway, who assisted Landreau in the courtroom.

"They did a great job making a very technical case - a very disturbing case in terms of these images - clear to the jury in the most respectful way possible," Langley said. "They handled it with great care and great professionalism, and I want to thank them for doing so."

Immediately following the conclusion of Burnette's trial, Holloway successfully prosecuted a separate misdemeanor driving under the influence case that resulted in the offender being sentenced to two years of probation and four days in jail.

"My misdemeanor attorneys are doing a good job aggressively prosecuting those DUI cases," Langley said.

NGTC offers one-stop shop Tech Express for fall enrollment

North Georgia Technical College is offering special dates and times for one-stop shop assistance for students interested in enrolling fall semester 2022. The convenient one-stop experience, Tech Express, will be offered Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Aug. 9-10 and 16-17, with extended business hours from 7:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. at the Clarkesville, Blairsville and Currahee campuses.

Tech Express offers representatives to be available from all departments to assist students with questions regarding applications, financial aid, program of studies and registration. Students are encouraged to bring their high school and/or college transcripts and 2020 tax documents to apply

and receive financial assistance.

Students who apply during Tech Express are eligible to apply for free for fall semester.

Students eligible for the HOPE Tuition Grant may also be eligible for additional financial assistance from Georgia's HOPE Career Grant to cover the entire cost of tuition for attending NGTC in one of many tuition-free programs offered including Advanced Manufacturing, Air Conditioning Technology, Automotive Technology and Repair, Business Technology, Precision Machining and Manufacturing (CNC), Early Childhood Care and Education, Electrical Systems Technology, Emergency Medical Systems Profession-

als, Networking Specialists, Medical Assisting, Paramedicine, Pharmacy Technology, Practical Nursing, Web Application Development, and Welding Technology.

Many tuition-free certificates in various programs are also available beginning fall semester. For a complete guide to NGTC's tuition-free programs, visit northgatech.edu/academic-programs/tuition-free-programs/.

NGTC offers on-campus housing for the Clarkesville campus, as well as Student Success Coaches and a Student Affairs Counselor to assist students on all three campuses.

For more information regarding Tech Express or applying to NGTC, call 706-754-7700 or visit northgatech.edu.

First Day of School...from Page 1A



Students at the Elementary School waiting patiently to be dismissed for their bus rides home on Thursday, Aug. 4.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

coming from the Elementary School, just learning new rules and where everything is.”

A few changes greeted everyone, like the new tables in the Elementary and Middle-High School cafeterias, an extension to the Middle School weight room, and safer access to the elementary playground.

“Now we have a walkway straight across the parking lot that’s lined out with cones,” said Connie Marshall, an elementary teacher who was pleased with the development.

The biggest hope for the new school year, put simply, is to maintain in-person classes after two years in a row of on-line options due to concerns over COVID-19.

Extended periods of virtual classes slow down semester planning; many students do not thrive in a virtual environment; and most kids need the in-person support that being in the classroom provides.

“Really, I just want to make it through a school year without worrying about COVID,” said West, with Kendall adding, “I definitely think that it’s going to be a better year as far as all that goes. It’s going to be nice not having students online and having all students at school.”

The decision of whether

to move to virtual classes this year will hinge on the number of COVID cases in the school system. Infection rates continue to be monitored closely for the safety of all, and the stage is all set for a full return to the classroom proper for 2022-23.

“If we can keep those numbers down and actually have what one would consider a normal year, that would be fantastic,” Berrong said.

Certainly, the hallways were already bustling with kids in close proximity to one another, but nobody seemed stressed, even if there were some who weren’t thrilled for summer to be over.

Greyson Tallent, 14, seemed to be already missing summer break, but as a newly fledged ninth-grader, his first day back had admittedly left a positive impression.

“It was pretty good, I reckon – it wasn’t too bad,” Tallent said. “(My teachers) are pretty cool. I got Algebra I, Science, Agriculture and Social Studies.”

Of course, he was happy to see his friends after returning home from a vacation out to the Grand Canyon, and he wasn’t the only one. Even Superintendent Berrong was able to sense the relief students felt about coming back.

“I know all the kids want to see their friends, so they’re just smiling from ear to ear when they get off the bus or come in the building,” he said.

“They were all smiles,” agreed West. “Every kid in my class was happy to be here today. They’re usually ready to come back, too. They may not all say it, but I think they do, way deep down, desire that structure.”

Truly, how the kids felt was not so different from how West and her fellow educators felt upon their own return.

“I was just ready to get back in a routine, you know? I like to feel needed,” she said.

Concurring, Kendall said she “always hates to see summer go” but that she was overall happy to be back at a job that she loves.

“It’s going to be a good year,” Kendall said, confident that she and her colleagues can build proper rapport with not just their students but also the parents the children go home to every evening.

“I feel honored that all of these parents share their kids with me,” said West, and Berrong, for his part, said, “We thank the community for their faith in our school system and allowing us to teach their kids.”

Friday Market...from Page 1A

but she still had “a really good time,” confined to her tent as she may have been. Seddon’s business, named Retold, carries home décor and jewelry with themes celebrating literature, classic quotes, and the creativity inherent in words.

“When I’m at a craft fair like this, I don’t leave my area,” she said, surrounded by her own meticulously crafted bracelets containing clippings of Shakespeare sonnets. “Everyone’s got such amazing (crafts). I know I’d want to buy them all, (so) I stay rooted here.”

For seven years, Seddon only sold literary-themed shoes and wallets on Etsy, but she decided to branch out recently.

“I was getting kind of burned out, then the pandemic hit and we were having supply issues,” explained Seddon. “So, I decided to find something different that excited me a little bit more.”

Robert and Angie Hice set up their tent right down the way from Seddon, touting homemade yard ornaments and brilliant potted plants already in bloom. The public is often invited to visit their 18-acre farm, which has been hailed by some as “The Hamilton Gardens of

Blairsville.”

“We’ve been here several times,” said Angie, explaining that their metal art was created by a friend living in Birmingham. And though she and her husband usually sell plants taken from “post-sale growers,” they’ve set out on something new this year.

“He’s just started growing them from seed,” Angie said, referring to Robert. Soon, they’ll be growing and selling their own plants. It’s a great next step for their business, considering their popularity is growing and they’re even starting to gain repeat customers.

Near the Paris Buildings infographic inside the gazebo, a crowd played Giant Jenga together as the sun went down. One group consisted of friends from Georgia and Florida who had decided to meet up in a new tradition.

“We enjoyed it so much last year that we brought another friend with us, so we’ve decided to make (the Night Market) an annual girls’ trip,” said Sandra Pennington of Atlanta.

Gwen Keith, from Lake Butler in Florida, said she and her friends were looking for a way to get out and relax after

lockdown last year, and she was eager to recommend North Georgia.

Keith’s favorite part of the market that evening was the music, but Pennington was drawn to the vendors with their creative crafts.

“The mountain view and the people are just so loving; they invite you in,” added Leomia Broughton, who was particularly fond of the atmosphere and social aspect.

Guests noticed the first drops of rain around the middle of evening, with the shower quickly settling into a sprinkle after a few seconds. The real hurdle, however, was trying to pack up and move out after the storm began.

Thunder and lightning heralded what was practically an opening in the sky, and as the rain fell harder and harder, guests began to leave out around 8:30 p.m. rather than the usual 9 p.m.

To plan a trip to the next Hiawassee Night Market, keep in mind that it occurs on the first Friday of every month from May to October. Everything is set up on the Town Square, and the event runs from 5-9 p.m. Admission is free.



The Grace Rock Band took the stage on the square to entertain guests of the First Friday Night Market last week.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks