

Towns County Herald

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Bradshaw sets millage rate, welcomes heroes & more

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In his Tuesday, Oct. 19, meeting, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw accepted the county rollback millage rate of 4.753 mills for the purposes of levying property taxes in 2021.

Even though the millage rate is decreasing slightly from 2020's rate of 5.003 mills, it will still generate \$179,071 in additional tax revenues in 2021 due to growth in the tax digest. The total 2021 levy at 100% collections is projected to be \$4,399,044.

"The millage rate, which is our property taxes, has not been raised in Towns County since 2008," Bradshaw said.

He also accepted the rollback rate for the county's separate fire millage to fund the Fire Department, which at 0.442 mills will result in revenues over \$16,862 in tax revenues over 2020, again, due to the increased property digest.

Property tax collections enable the commissioner to set an annual budget to maintain

county services.

"We're working on the budget," Bradshaw said. "We feel very, very confident that we're going to have the revenues to support the budget."

Towns County has been incredibly busy over the summer months, with increased pressure on county services and infrastructure, but Bradshaw noted that, despite this, the county was "doing well."

Moving along, Bradshaw held a second reading and adoption of a "Resolution to Amend Subdivision Regulations."

The amendment restricts the number of RVs/campers on private lots in Towns County to no more than two, regardless of whether they're on septic or sewer.

It also clarifies the minimum lot size by stating that "no land lot below the 33-contour within the required 20-foot setback shall be included in the 5-acre minimum."

Bradshaw reiterated that the reasoning behind the amendment was to avoid clutter on some of the properties.

In other county news,



L-R: Scott Kerlin, Capt. Tyler Keys, Battalion Chief Travis Gibson, Gregg Garrett, Derrick Moody, Fire Chief Harold Cope-land and Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw came together for a special recognition of heroes in the October county meeting.

Photo by Mark Smith

Bradshaw was happy to report that, by the time of the meeting, sales tax revenues were up by \$372,242.79 this year over last year, with 2021 sales tax income of \$1,660,020.70.

The annual audit is not

in yet and the delay may be related to the increase of COVID cases, Bradshaw said, noting he expects the audit to be delivered by early November.

Regarding the promised

updates at the Towns County Transfer Station, Bradshaw said the work would definitely be completed, "but finding people to actually come out and work is getting very hard to do."

The commissioner first discussed the Transfer Station expansion in the May county meeting, saying the goal would be to reduce traffic and wait times, with an added ben-

See County Meeting, Page 8A

Children to get multiple chances to scare up candy

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As the first chill winds of fall sweep over the tail-end of Appalachia, North Georgia is bracing itself for a holiday of ghosts, goblins, and other spooky – or silly – haunts.

And though preparations have begun in preparation all month, Union and Towns counties are planning specifically for several days' worth of Halloween celebrations and events sponsored by multiple local organizations.

In the leadup to Halloween, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC will host a Drive-Thru Trunk or Treat, to take place Thursday, Oct. 28, from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at EMC Headquarters in Young Harris.

Also in Young Harris will be the Young Harris Fall Fest set in the courtyard of Fest Young Harris College on Oct. 28 at 5 p.m. While this will be



Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce hosted drive-thru trick-or-treating following the 2020 cancellation of the usual Halloween affair in Hiwassee. This year, the big Towns County trick-or-treating event will take place at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

the main event, complete with trick-or-treat stands, the Rollins Planetarium will be hosting the "Ooky Spooky Lightshow" Oct. 29 at 8 p.m.

After a successful 2020 outing to give kids something

to do amid COVID cancellations, family marina and operated Nottely Marina in Union County will once again host three days of Halloween, Oct. 29-31 from 5:30-10 p.m.

See Halloween, Page 8A

Last week to vote early in city liquor referendum

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

With Election Day approaching on Tuesday, Nov. 2, this is the last week to participate in this in-person voting for the City of Hiwassee referendum to allow packaged liquor sales inside city limits.

The first full week of early voting netted 27 ballots from among of the city's 777 registered voters, and through Friday of last week, a total of 58 people had voted early, giving a tally of 31 additional ballots cast in the second week of advanced in-person voting.

And so far, four voters have been sent absentee ballots, with two returned for counting as of press time Monday. The deadline to request an absentee-by-mail ballot was Oct. 22.

Early voting continues



All voting in the Hiwassee Municipal Election, both early in-person and on Election Day, is taking place at the Board of Elections Office, in the same building as the Civic Center.

this week through Friday, Oct. 29, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration Office.

Election Day voting will take place Nov. 2 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at the Elections Board

Office. 2021 is an off year for countywide elections, and only Hiwassee residents are eligible to vote in this election.

As previously reported, See Early Voting, Page 8A

Biden appoints Powell to Southern States Energy Board

News Special
Towns County Herald

President Joe Biden has appointed Jim Powell of Hiwassee as the federal representative to the Southern States Energy Board.

With the appointment, Powell will serve as President Biden's official liaison to the board.

The Honorable Jim Powell will be responsible for providing an annual report to the president on the board's programs and activities. In addition, he will serve as an official liaison between the board, Congress, and all federal agencies. He also will assist the



Jim Powell

board in its work with the states and territories and in the devel-

opment of federal energy programs of interest to the Southern states.

"All of us at the Southern States Energy Board thank President Biden for selecting Jim Powell as our federal representative," said Ken Nemeth, the board's secretary and executive director.

"Jim's extensive experience and work ethic will be essential and critical to our success during the transition period to clean energy and the development of technology innovations to curb environmental pollution," he said.

Powell previously served See Powell, Page 8A

Trafficking charge downgraded after negative test for meth

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Sheriff's Office has confiscated substantial amounts of methamphetamine in 2021, including a record breaking 6-pound bust in June.

In a press release appearing in the Sept. 22 edition of the Towns County Herald, the Sheriff's Office announced it had made another major arrest involving approximately 4 pounds of meth seized after a month-long drug investigation concluded in a Sept. 15 traffic stop.

The cloudy white substance field-tested positive for methamphetamine, as did a

See Meth Bust, Page 8A



Subsequent to a drug arrest in September, the small bag on the left tested positive for meth at the GBI Crime Lab, whereas the large bag on the right did not.

Booster doses approved for all three vaccines against COVID-19



By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Georgia Department of Public Health announced Friday that local health departments would begin offering Moderna and Johnson & Johnson COVID vaccine booster doses to eligible vaccinees on Oct. 26, "pending guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention."

This is in addition to the

Pfizer-BioNTech boosters that were approved a month ago for certain individuals.

"These recommendations are another example of our fundamental commitment to protect as many people as possible from COVID-19," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle P. Walensky said last week. "The evidence shows that all three COVID-19 vaccines authorized in the United States are safe – as demonstrated by the over 400 million vaccine doses already given."

According to the CDC, COVID booster shots have become necessary for at-risk individuals because the efficacy of the vaccines against initial in-

fection appears to diminish over time, though the vaccines remain "highly effective in reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalization and death."

Currently, the CDC and its Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices are recommending COVID vaccine booster shots for millions of Americans who received a Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna primary series at least six months ago.

Per the CDC, individuals who received either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine are now eligible for a booster shot at six months or more following their initial series if they are 65 years and older.

Pfizer and Moderna boosters are also being recommended after six months for people 18 and up if they: live in a long-term care setting; have underlying medical conditions; or work/live in "high-risk settings," for example, as first responders, grocery employees or teachers.

"For the nearly 15 million people who got the Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine, booster shots are also recommended for those who are 18 and older and who were vaccinated two or more months ago," the CDC said Thursday.

With this major public health decision, there are now booster recommendations for

all three available COVID-19 vaccines in the United States, with "mix and match" dosing of booster shots being deemed acceptable by the CDC.

"Eligible individuals may choose which vaccine they receive as a booster dose," the CDC said. "Some people may have a preference for the vaccine type that they originally received, and others may prefer to get a different booster."

In light of the announcement, millions of people who have already been vaccinated are now newly eligible to receive a booster shot and will benefit from additional protection, per the CDC.

"Available data right

now show that all three of the COVID-19 vaccines approved or authorized in the United States continue to be highly effective in reducing risk of severe disease, hospitalization and death, even against the widely circulating delta variant," the CDC said.

"Vaccination remains the best way to protect yourself and reduce the spread of the virus and help prevent new variants from emerging," the CDC continued.

In addition to the Health Department, local pharmacies will also be providing free COVID-19 booster shots for the abovementioned newly eligible vaccinees.

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S.A.F.E. honors 103 victims of domestic violence



S.A.F.E. volunteers and others gathered Friday for the annual "Remember My Name" ceremony, held this year at the Union County Farmers Market. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On Friday, Oct. 22, Support in Abusive Family Emergencies Inc. held its yearly "Remember My Name" memorial ceremony to honor and remember the lives of those lost to domestic violence in Georgia over the past year.

This year saw 103 fatalities occur within a range from 4 months to 78 years old from various counties statewide, and S.A.F.E. Volunteer Coordinator Vicki Franklin said that, "luckily in our area of Towns and Union Counties, we have not had a fatality here within about three years."

The event took place on the covered bridge of the Union County Farmers Market and began with S.A.F.E. volunteers taking turns reading poems and reciting the list of victims' names during a candlelight vigil featuring 103 candles to represent each life lost.

"Remember My Name" is important for many reasons, not the least of which is to bring awareness to the issue of domestic violence, which is likely seriously underreported and is something most people find unpleasant to consider and discuss.

Franklin noted that domestic violence has increased

throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, "because people were so closed in."

Usually, couples and family members go to work and participate in other activities outside of the home, experiencing periods of regular separation from their home lives for most of the day.

People having to stay home with the financial and social stress of the pandemic "with so much fear of sickness and death and fear of the unknown, everything can just build up in the anxiety put on families," Franklin said.

"These are certainly trying times for our world," she said, "but we want people to know in their hearts that S.A.F.E. is here to help and be there for you."

"We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit domestic violence, sexual assault, and child advocacy program, and we want people to know there are avenues to get the help they need, and no one should hesitate to call us or 911 if they ever feel in danger."

Franklin said there are many ways members of the community can help, including volunteering at a S.A.F.E. Child Advocacy Center for forensic interviews, fundraising and working the 24-hour crisis line at 706-379-3000.

People may also volunteer at the emergency domes-

tic violence shelter and in the sexual assault program, help with transportation for clients, or take hours at either of the two S.A.F.E. Thrift Stores in Blairsville and Young Harris.

Susan Merck has been a S.A.F.E. volunteer for almost two and a half years, and she was honored to be part of the memorial ceremony Friday.

"I moved here from the Atlanta area about four years ago," Merck said. "I knew this was a great organization to be involved with, and I just wanted to give back to the community. I help with special events as well as volunteer two days a week at the Young Harris thrift store."

"And although I have never personally experienced domestic violence or known anyone close to me that went through it, I read so much about this group in the paper that I told myself I should really help, because at the end of the day, I am being an integral part of saving lives."

People experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual assault, or those with loved ones going through an abusive family situation, are encouraged to call 706-379-1901. Those wanting to volunteer and help with the mission of S.A.F.E. are also asked to contact the organization.

For more information, visit <https://www.safeservices.org/>.

County Meeting...from Page 1A

enefit of a more public friendly space to drop off household waste.

Construction will include a new road that leads to an additional dumping location for residential garbage, which will be a nicer experience for residents with dedicated 54-inch dumpsters for household trash.

"Hopefully this fall, residential and commercial garbage will be separated," Bradshaw said in May. "After you cross the scales and go up the hill, there will be signs pointing to a road that turns right just before you reach the very top. It will circle around the outside, allowing residents to drop off residential garbage at a different spot."

"Then, you can follow (the new road) out over near the recyclables building. It should greatly reduce the wait, especially on Saturdays. I know that's something everyone will appreciate, especially me."

Following his recognition of outgoing Parks and Recreation Director Matthew Youngblood, who was the director for four years and has recently taken on a change in career paths, Bradshaw introduced new Towns County Parks and Recreation Director Stewart Nichols.

The county has been working on a number of grants, including a broadband grant in concert with Blue Ridge Mountain EMC worth \$7 million.

"We should find out

whether we're getting the grant or not around Nov. 5, so we'll report back to you at the (county meeting in November)," Bradshaw said.

Additionally, the county will be applying for Governor Kemp's Public Safety Grant, from which all full-time public safety employees will receive a \$1,000 stipend, and volunteer firefighters will receive a \$300 stipend. The state has not yet released paperwork necessary to proceed.

Towns County Commissioner's Secretary Alisa Richards has also secured a \$4,000 non-matching Public Safety Grant for the Road Department through the Association County Commissioners of Georgia.

With that grant money, the county has been able to purchase safety vests, rain jackets, boots, road cones and other safety items for Road Department employees, Bradshaw said.

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland has a \$5,000 grant for the Fire Department in the works, and the commissioner said more details would be forthcoming on that at the November meeting.

In a heartfelt presentation, Copeland recognized several first responders and a good Samaritan for their heroic efforts that prevented a drowning on Lake Chatuge last month.

First responders Scott Kerlin and Derrick Moody and

Towns County resident Gregg Garrett were awarded plaques and recognized for their life-saving response to a capsized boater on Sept. 14. Also recognized were Fire Capt. Tyler Keys and Battalion Chief Travis Gibson.

Copeland honorably mentioned retiring volunteer fireman Frank M. Riley for 22 years of service to Towns County.

Riley is the Executive Director of the Chestatee-Chatahoochee RC&D Council and the leading Firewise Liaison for the Southeastern U.S. He is responsible for Towns County Firewise being a model program for the entire country.

Finally, Bradshaw announced that Towns County would be hosting the "Cost of Freedom Tribute" next year. The tribute is a traveling, five-day event, very much like the traveling Vietnam Wall, except it's a tribute to all contemporary American military veterans.

The event is scheduled for June 2-6, 2022, and Bradshaw said Towns County will pay for half of the \$9,500 cost.

"This is something that I am so excited about, I can't even put it in words," Bradshaw said. "A person that lives in this area came to me a month ago that wanted to bring this to Towns County. We will introduce her at another meeting."

For more information on the Cost of Freedom Tribute, call the Commissioner's Office at 706-896-2276.

Historical Society showcases Old Rock Jail in meeting

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In their regular monthly meeting on Oct. 11 the officers of the Towns County Historical Society celebrated the success of the Old Rock Jail in the community since it opened as a museum in 2018.

Officers speaking in the meeting were Society President Sandra Green, Vice President Jerry Taylor, Secretary Tyler Osborn, Treasurer Francis Shook, and Membership Secretary Mary Ann McCall Miller.

"It is so nice to see everyone at the two post-COVID monthly meetings we have had so far, and, well, we are kind of getting back to normal," Green said.

The meeting began with a welcome invocation and Pledge of Allegiance before an accounting of society finances in the Treasurer's Report, though the focus of the gathering centered on updating members regarding the treasured Old Rock Jail.

Usually, the Old Rock Jail enjoys a visitation season that spans summer and fall, but the recent uptick in COVID-19 community transmission has caused the society to announce that museum tours would be by appointment only for the time being.

Visitation appointments can be made by calling either 706-781-8611 or 706-994-0218.

Originally completed in 1936, the Old Rock Jail served as the county jail for many years, though its usage changed dramatically over time. When it was built, the jail was constructed for \$4,353.31, which translates to about \$87,000 in 2021 buying power.

The building functioned as a jail until the early 1970s, even housing local sheriffs and their families, and later, it was utilized as Hiawassee City Hall, the Board of Elections Office and for other purposes.

Restoration of the Old Rock Jail as a museum began at the end of 2016, after then-Towns County Sole Commis-



Visitors love touring the Old Rock Jail. Pictured here: a happy family of "inmates" during a July tour. Photo/Facebook

sioner Bill Kendall made it clear he wanted to preserve the site, and current Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw officially turned over the keys to the property to the Historical Society when he took office in 2017.

Renovating the Old Rock Jail took more than a year and a half, and the museum opened to the public on May 19, 2018.

Since then, the Historical Society has hosted numerous open and booked tours of the Old Rock Jail, with guests from all over the Southeast and even from abroad, and society members have turned the building into a Haunted Jail for Halloween and held special Christmas events as well.

The first floor of the historic jail contains the sheriff's quarters – a bedroom, kitchen, living area and bathroom – while the second floor houses the jail cells.

This upstairs space features a "bullpen" designed to hold four people in one caged section with no beds and one bathroom.

Thanks to donations and discoveries, many artifacts have made their way into the care of the society in the last few years, all of which can be seen at the Old Rock Jail Museum.

The Historical Society

has received everything from antique radios to television sets, cooking stoves, farm tools, wagon jacks, women's curling irons, movie projectors, a rope bed, and spikes from old railroads in Towns County that a lot of people never even knew existed.

And the society has received several new donations from Lonnie Nichols of Young Harris, which officers debuted in the Oct. 11 meeting: a buggy jack, barb-wire stretcher, bear trap, carving knife and crosscut saw.

Currently, the museum hosts areas dedicated to the jail's origins and many antiques therein, and it even showcases the progression of certain technologies over time and highlights local military history of people from Towns County.

A restoration gallery detailing the amount of work that went into bringing the building as close to its original condition as possible may be found online at townscounty-history.org.

The Towns County Historical Society meets every second Monday of each month at 6 p.m., currently inside the Civic Center, as the Old Rock Gym headquarters is in the process of undergoing renovations.

year.

Originally, the festivities were held on the square before moving to the Towns County Courthouse. In 2021, with more space and plenty of fresh air, Hiawassee will be boasting at least 32 trick-or-treat stops for kids to visit at the fairgrounds' booths from 5-7 p.m. on Halloween.

"The big players will be there," Ordiales said, noting the inclusion of local businesses and organizations like the Rotary Club and Historical Society, churches, and anyone else who may want to hand out candy.

And back by popular demand, First Baptist Church of Blairsville's always family-friendly Fall Festival will return the evening of Halloween, on Sunday, Oct. 31, from 4-6 p.m. With fun for all ages, the church will be offering food and games, as well as a car show.

Early Voting...from Page 1A

all incumbents for the 2021 Hiawassee Municipal Election qualified unopposed, so the sole ballot item is the referendum asking registered city voters to consider enabling the establishment of package stores in Hiawassee.

Should the referendum pass, a limited number of liquor stores will be allowed to set up shop within Hiawassee

City Limits, with restrictions based on proximity to schools, churches, etc.

Packaged liquor sales would contribute a significant amount of new tax revenues to the City of Hiawassee, generating local tax dollars that would otherwise be flowing to neighboring municipalities.

As noted above, the deadline to return absentee-by-

mail ballot applications for the November election was Oct. 22.

Absentee ballots that remain outstanding may be submitted via mail or turned in to the official drop box located inside the Elections Board Office main entrance during early voting hours.

Voters may also drop completed absentee ballots off at the Elections Board Office through Election Day.

Powell...from Page 1A

as the federal representative during the Obama administration from 2013 to 2016.

He has also served as a Georgia 9th Congressional District elected Biden delegate to the Democratic National Convention and as a volunteer member of the Biden-Harris Policy Committee.

"I am honored that President Biden has chosen me for

this appointment," Powell said. "I look forward to working with the Southern States Energy Board and its member states and territories on energy programs and to advance the president's Build Back Better initiative."

Currently, Powell is the owner and managing consultant at NORAVA Consulting, a position he has held since

2007.

Prior to forming his consulting firm, he served in various capacities at the U.S. Department of Energy from 1986 to 2007. His roles included national program manager, regional director for the Southeast, and associate deputy assistant secretary.

Powell also held several positions with the U.S. Department of the Navy from 1976 to 1986.

have been intended to fool an unsuspecting purchaser; it may have contained a very small percentage of meth."

Langley went on to explain that the GBI test is "more stringent and accurate than the field test."

"Arrests require only probable cause and are routinely based on the field tests that are usually accurate," Langley said. "But the DA's Office cannot use the field test result at trial, only the certified formal GBI Lab result to prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt."

Added Langley, "Based upon my experience, the field tests are more than 90% accurate. That they are not 99.9% accurate is why they are not admissible at trial."

Instances like this one are uncommon but do happen "occasionally," Langley said, wherein a substance tests positive at the scene of an arrest and negative later in the lab.

Unfortunately, this sometimes results in innocent people being arrested for drugs. In this case, English is still facing a meth possession charge backed up by a positive GBI Crime Lab test, and he is presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

Meth Bust...from Page 1A

substance in a much smaller bag, and Joseph Lee English, 58, of Hiawassee, was taken into custody and charged with trafficking meth due to the quantity in his possession.

Field tests are supposed to help officers establish probable cause for drug arrests. However, such tests do sometimes provide false positives, which is why, when the Towns County Grand Jury met earlier this month, English's trafficking charge had been replaced by a possession charge.

As it turned out, the large bag of what the Sheriff's Office believed to be methamphetamine at the time of English's

arrest yielded a negative result in a more accurate test conducted by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Crime Lab.

And though the GBI discovered the large bag did not contain meth, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said the Crime Lab did find less than 2 grams of the illegal substance inside the smaller bag in English's possession, hence the felony possession charge.

"(The substance in the larger bag) had the appearance of meth but was not," Langley said. "It could have simply been intended to be used as a 'cutting' substance or may

Towns County Community Calendar		
First Monday of each month:		
School Board	HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
First Tuesday of each month:		
Hiaw. City Council	City Hall	6 pm
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