

Towns County Herald

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HOPE champion Miller honored in dedication

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – History was made Nov. 1 when the Georgia Historical Society and Georgia Lottery Corporation unveiled a new local marker recognizing the impact the lottery has had in educating Georgia students – and, by proxy, honoring the man who helped make the program possible: Zell Miller.

The historical marker on Main Street at Young Harris College is dedicated to the legacy of the late Gov. Miller, whose vision and steadfast support of Georgia students resulted in the creation of the HOPE Scholarship Program,

which stands for Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally.

Miller's is a familiar name in the state, and that's especially true in his hometown of Young Harris. The native son is well known for having honorably served as a U.S. Marine, lieutenant governor, governor and U.S. Senator.

His many successes have meant a great deal to his small mountain community and beyond, with his work having broadened the horizons of countless students who might not have otherwise had a chance for success themselves.

In 1991, the General Assembly adopted Miller's

promise of instituting a state lottery to fund college tuition for Georgia's hardworking students, and it became official in the fall of '92 with a ratification vote by the people.

Between 1993 and 2023, proceeds from the Georgia Lottery covered HOPE Scholarships for over 2.1 million students and allowed two million 4-year-olds access to pre-kindergarten programs. That accounts for some \$28 billion in profits.

In the words of Gretchen Corbin, President and CEO of the Georgia Lottery Corporation, "It's impossible to reflect on the Georgia Lottery without recognizing and acknowledging

See Zell Miller Honored, Page 6



Shirley Miller and others applauding the unveiling of the new Georgia Lottery Corporation Historical Marker, which is dedicated in the memory of Young Harris' own Zell Miller for creating the HOPE Scholarship. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Public invited to Nov. 11 Veterans Day Service

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Veterans Day is an important national holiday that serves as a public demonstration of thanks to honor all the patriotic Americans who served their country honorably in the military, whether in wartime or during peace.

Towns County never misses a chance to recognize veterans in this way, and in 2024, the community is invited to attend the annual Veterans Day Ceremony at Towns County Veterans Memorial Park on Monday, Nov. 11, at 11 a.m.

This year's event has been organized by The American Legion Post 23 with assistance from the American Legion Auxiliary, Sons of the American Legion, American Legion Riders, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807 and the VFW Auxiliary.

"We want to encourage all veterans to attend our ceremony," American Legion Post 23 Cmdr. Mel Halfon said. "Veterans Day is to thank the veterans for putting their lives



Luin Mitchell posing with the Female Veterans Monument that he purchased and had installed at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park in May. Mitchell, who had a deep respect for female veterans, passed away in July. Photo by Kim Pardue

on the line to protect the personal freedoms of every man, woman and child in America.

"And we want to recognize them and thank them for

being a veteran."

The ceremony will feature patriotic music by the Towns County High School

See Veterans Day, Page 12

'Fangtastic Halloween' boasts major turnout



The Wilson Family won the group prize in the "Fangtastic Halloween" costume contest for their "Men in Black" theme. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hundreds of families gathered at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds last Thursday evening to celebrate the annual candy-filled extravaganza known as "Fangtastic Halloween."

Delightful weather added to the jocularity of the

event, and the costumes were incredibly creative. One family arrived as every character in "Beetlejuice"; "Deadpool" rode a unicorn around the fairgrounds; and nobody could miss the new "Barbie" in her doll box.

Elsewhere in the packed venue, a couple portrayed Jurassic Park owner John Hammond and his wife, who ac-

tually hatched a raptor as the crowd watched. There was no shortage of inflatable dinosaurs and skeletons, either.

Vendor booths were bursting with local businesses eager to hand out goodies to everyone, and things really started to rock when Michael Jackson's "Thriller" began playing as bubbles filled the

See Fangtastic Halloween, Page 12

First responders delight kids with TCSO 'Trunk or Treat'



Back by popular demand, the First Responder Trunk or Treat brought in hundreds of trick-or-treaters to the Towns County Recreation Center last month. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County's First Responders gathered at the Recreation Center on Oct. 26

to add delicious goodies to the bags of excited ghosts, goblins and minions for the Halloween season.

"This is called Trunk or Treat, and we do it every

year," said local Firefighter Dominick Barbanera said.

Led by the Towns County Sheriff's Office, Trunk or Treat is a team-up with the

See Trunk or Treat, Page 6

Annual ceremony remembers victims of domestic violence

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – In Georgia alone, 130 men, women and children lost their lives due to domestic violence last year.

Local nonprofit Support in Abusive Family Emergencies Inc., aka S.A.F.E., ensures that these victims of violence are not forgotten, and thanks to the annual Remember My Name ceremony, held in 2024 on Tuesday, Oct. 22, their plight is kept at the forefront of the community.

Every fall, a gathering of organizers and volunteers meet on the bridge at the Union County Farmers Market, usually at dusk. The autumn chill is piercing, but not as much as the program itself.

See Remember My Name, Page 2



In the annual Remember My Name Ceremony last month, S.A.F.E. Board Chair Travis Adams rang a bell for each victim of domestic violence in Georgia last year. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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United Community

Sons of the Pioneers help raise money for literacy

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – The fabled Sons of the Pioneers performed for a sizable audience on Sunday, Oct. 27, at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center, showcasing many old-time Country Western favorites and several tunes from their first new gospel album in 60 years.

It was the band's third annual benefit concert in support of Ferst Readers of Union County to raise money and awareness for early childhood literacy.

This year, the group is celebrating 90 years of melodious harmonies and fabulous musical instrumentation. The Sons enjoy a towering reputation as American icons, having helped shape popular culture over their many decades in existence.

When they played "Red River Valley" and "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" that Sunday, the audience happily joined in, and the camaraderie between the band members was obvious as they joked about the age of their leader, Tommy Nallie, who joined the Sons of the Pioneers in 1983.

Anyone who thinks playing the violin is more difficult than playing the fiddle probably hasn't heard Paul Elliott play, and John Fullerton, Chuck Ervin and Ken Lattimore round out the incredibly talented band.

During intermission, Ferst Readers volunteer Janice Cochran introduced young musician Moriah Owenby,

of John Cochran and the Cowhands local fame, to draw the winning raffle ticket for a special piece of artwork.

"An artist by the name of Mike Carter came to our first concert and was so impressed by Ferst Readers that he wanted to do something for us," Cochran said. "So, he donated a beautiful pen and ink drawing of 'Trigger' to us, which we have raffled off this afternoon."

Trigger was Sons founding member Roy Rogers' famous palomino featured in his television show.

"We've had quite a number of people today, and the people are all enjoying the concert," Ferst volunteer Pam Jordan said. "The crowd today is a little smaller than last year, but we think that it's because of the hurricane."

"The people that would normally give to this are giving their money to the people of Western North Carolina. Many are probably working up there as well."

Audience member Gary Meier agreed that the crowd was having a terrific time soaking up the music and the memories.

"I grew up loving Roy Rogers," Meier said. "I had my six shooters and everything. We lived in a little house in Ohio. I had a spot in the attic where I put up lots and lots of pictures of him."

"Fifty years later I visited the house I grew up in, and there were those pictures still stuck up there. Guess everybody still loves him. And that's why I'm here today, because I love Roy."

Baritone singer and



The Sons of the Pioneers returned last month to perform their annual literacy benefit concert for Ferst Readers of Union County. Photo by Shelly Knight

rhythm guitarist John Fullerton expressed his gratitude for people coming out to enjoy the show, especially in light of the Ferst Readers mission to put quality, age-appropriate books into the hands of local youngsters – for free to families.

"It's such a great cause, and it's a great afternoon with a chance to spend some time with some American icons," Fullerton said. "It just doesn't get any better than that."

Remember My Name...from Page 1



S.A.F.E. has many local supporters who recognize the importance of remembering and honoring victims of domestic violence. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Alongside the goals of remembrance and prevention, the event serves to shine a light on the brave survivors who have escaped and rebuilt their lives.

This year's ceremony was different in several ways.

For one, candles usually line the banisters of the bridge over Butternut Creek, corresponding to each life lost in the state. Weather can make keeping them lit a chore, and in past years, the wind has blown out a few.

For 2024, there was a new way to illustrate the toll. S.A.F.E. Board of Directors Chair Pastor Travis Adams rang a triangle instrument for each name called off the list to poignantly punctuate the otherwise still evening air.

Not every victim has a name that can be read aloud. Some are left anonymous to protect the loved ones who remain in this world, and other names simply remain unknown to those wishing to honor them.

This year, too, the ages of the victims weren't shared, only the dates of their deaths, the counties in which they lived and their names – or a moniker of "unknown" or "unavailable."

It was enough. Tears were shed between remembering the individual lives and the sharing of a poem. Each year, a poem is recited in their honor. For 2024, it was "I Got Flowers Today," penned by Paulette Kelly in 1992.

The poem tells the story of a woman who receives flowers from a manipulative husband. After every argument, and eventually after every physical altercation, he offers her flowers in apology. When her abuser takes her life in the end, her family and friends leave flowers in her honor at her funeral.

Enotah Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorney Lacy Ashworth delivered remarks instead of District Attorney Jeff Langley this year. Ashworth primarily pros-

ecutes cases in Union and Towns counties and occasionally in Lumpkin.

That Tuesday, Ashworth shared the story of a local instance of intimate partner violence that resulted in the accused receiving a life sentence.

"There were victim advocates doing a lot of good things in that case. We got to see also victims getting to hear from other victims and getting their stories validated," noted Ashworth, commending S.A.F.E. for providing support to those navigating similar flights to freedom.

Despite the trauma experienced at the hands of the abuser, his past victims were able to find comfort with each other, Ashworth said. The trial revealed overlapping truths about each relationship, bringing to light a history of hate.

"The victims in this case, just alone, hearing the stories of each other, they were able to validate each other – that they weren't crazy, like the abuser and his family had told them that they were," Ashworth said. "The abuser had the issue."

Attendee Shelley Grace Gockel knows suffering, but she's even more familiar with hope. She proved her strength, too, by using it to escape an abusive relationship that spanned a decade.

Originally, Gockel wasn't going to speak at the event but was moved to do so. She cut a brave figure to represent those who could not join her on the bridge.

Dressed in purple – the color of domestic violence awareness – and with striking violet contact lenses and symbolically torn leggings, she relayed some of the darkest moments of her life and how she was able to turn them around.

Like many women caught in the throes of domestic violence, Gockel found herself making excuses for a man who didn't really love her. When her daughter witnessed one of the dangerous physical altercations, she knew she had to get out. Today, she is pursuing an education in criminal justice.

After the ceremony, Gockel insisted, "I don't tell my story for people to feel sorry for me. I tell my story so that others know there's hope. Get out before it's too late. I will never be a victim. I'm a survivor. I'm a warrior."

S.A.F.E. is a domestic violence and sexual assault program with a designated service area of both Towns County and Union County. If you or someone you love is experiencing domestic violence, please call S.A.F.E.'s crisis hotline at 706-379-3000.

Trunk or Treat...from Page 1

Fire Department, Young Harris College Police, Georgia State Patrol, Mulkey's Wrecker Service, the Emergency Management Agency and 911 Dispatch.

"Normally, the Hiawassee Police Department are here too, but they were tied up on something this year," Barbera said. "We do a drive-thru, and people stop at each station to get candy. The kids are all dressed up, of course. They just drive through and hold out a bag.

"They like to talk, and they are more than welcome to get out of their cars to take pictures by the fire trucks or the police cars. There's no rush. People might leave here and be going to another one.

"We've been doing this the last two years, and we really enjoy it. We live in a rural area, so it's harder for the kids (to collect candy), and this way, they can fill up their buckets. We'll be at the Fairgrounds on Halloween, too."

The "trunk or treat" tradition appears to have started in the 1990s when church groups decided to offer a fun, safe alternative to trick or treating door to door. Over time, the idea caught on with many community groups.

People often decorate their vehicles and wear costumes as they hand out treats, so it's essentially a twist on tradition and a fun way for the

whole family to celebrate Halloween.

"I do this for the kids; that's what it's all about," Sheriff Ken Henderson said. "And I think, too, that now more than ever law enforcement needs to be out here.

"We need to be involved with our younger folks where they see us in the light of being good guys so that we can build that respect and rapport with our community and the people here. And I love it. I love this and our Shop with a Cop, and these are things that we need to be doing."

There was a steady line of traffic for the popular event at Foster Park, and everyone hopes the tradition will continue to grow year after year.



The Towns County Sheriff's Office organized the Trunk or Treat again this year to the extreme delight of local children. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Zell Miller Honored...from Page 1



L-R: Georgia Historical Society President Dr. W. Todd Groce, Shirley Miller, YHC President Dr. Drew Van Horn, and Georgia Lottery Corporation President Gretchen Corbin. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

ing the incredible foresight of Gov. Zell Miller."

It was fitting, then, that alongside the podium set aside for dedication speakers stood students currently benefiting from the scholarships funded by lottery returns. One of these students, Towns County's own Liam King, is a Zell Miller Scholar and senior at Young Harris College.

King has overcome a great deal of tragedy but still strives for success. A few years after his mother passed away from cancer, King also lost his father. Despite that, King is graduating with degrees in marketing, accounting and finance and is a member of the Young Harris Cross Country Team.

"The common theme

is we're all chasing time," King said as part of his address to the audience, adding that, "You have given me the ability to use my time well ... to be able to actually obtain a college education that I didn't think was going to be possible after losing my parents."

Shirley Miller, former First Lady of Georgia and widow of Miller, had her turn at the podium as well. King's success and that of so many other students is the result of a vision that began long ago with her husband's prompting, and she was grateful to hear how the program has benefited Georgia's youth.

She was also thankful to the Georgia Historical Society for helping chronicle her husband's legacy, the Georgia

Lottery for keeping it going, and Young Harris College for giving the monument – a sizable plaque detailing how the lottery came to be – a home.

"Many people, now over more than 30 years, created the numbers on this monument ... We honor the dreamer that visualized HOPE and pre-K. I risked his political career to make it happen, and got them started," Miller said. "All of our family says thanks to you all. Thank you."

Following Miller's expression of gratitude, there was a brief photoshoot in front of the monument, which is located at the Alumni House on campus, signifying Zell Miller's status as a Young Harris alum himself who went on to accomplish great things.

Fangtastic Halloween...from Page 1



Trick-or-treaters and candy-handers alike enjoyed their time dressing up for the 2024 Fangtastic Halloween at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

air. Brandon Grimsley of United Community Bank brought his minions, otherwise known as the Junior Board of Directors, to hand out treats. “We love this. There is always a big line. We come every year and have a great time,” Grimsley said. Julie Payne of the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce was excited at the turnout for the free community event, expressing her sincere hope that “everyone has a great time here tonight.” “We have a costume contest that will get underway here shortly and prizes for the contest, and we have lots of categories,” Payne said. “Blazin Scoops Ice Cream Shop, Fieldstone 6 Cinemas, Young Harris College, Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce and Towns County School Store sponsored the costume contest. “There is lots of parking and lots of good things going on. All the booths are filled, so it looks like it will be great night.” Payne made a point to thank everyone participating in this year’s “Fangtastic Halloween,” including the City of Hiawassee, Towns County

Fire, Towns County EMS, Towns County Sheriff’s Office, Fairgrounds Manager Hilda Thomason, the Hiawassee Police Department, “and all of the businesses who are here tonight.” “We have a safe place to trick or treat and people who love participating,” Payne said. Henry Jones who portrayed “Elvis” won a prize in the age 3 & under division; Lilly Diaz won with her “Granny” portrayal in the 4-6 division; and Eliegh Cross won as a “Whoopie Cushion” in the age 11 and up division. The Group/Family/Duo prize was captured by the Wilson Family for their “Men in Black” portrayal. Hiawassee and Young Harris being rural areas, it is a fabulous tradition for the fairgrounds to provide a safe environment for kids to celebrate. Halloween’s origins date back 2,000 years when the Scots, aka the Celts, held a festival that marked the end of the summer and the harvest. They also believed that on Oct. 31, the boundary between the living and the dead became blurred, allowing ghosts of the dead to return. Over time, while Hal-

loween still features ghosts and goblins, costume choices have grown to depict characters from movies and cartoons that children love. The ancient custom of trick or treating has also evolved into such activities as Fangtastic Halloween and Trunk or Treat. Either way, people can be sure Towns County knows how to celebrate. **Whiskers Project Pumpkin Roll Fundraiser!** To order your delicious, homemade pumpkin roll, please visit whiskersproject.org or call 1-888-872-9330. The roll serves 8 and can be delivered in Union and Towns County. Last order date and delivery date is November 15th. These fresh rolls are \$25 and will help fund our spay/neuter program for feral cats. For 21 years, Whiskers Project has spayed and neutered over 3,000 cats. We would not be able to do what we do without your donations! Please spay and neuter your pets and let's stop litters and homeless animals.

Veterans Day...from Page 1

Band, plus two dedications, one by American Legion Post 23 Chaplain Scott Drummond spotlighting the 2024 engravings on the Towns County Veterans Memorial Wall inside the park. For years, Drummond has led the Veterans Memorial Wall Committee to work with families in honoring local veterans who have passed away, and the Memorial Wall tradition continues this year with the inclusion of six new veteran names representing four branches of service. The other Veterans Day dedication will be for the recently installed Female Veterans Monument, the purpose of which, according to the monument itself, is “to let the generations know that the women in uniform also guaranteed their freedom.” “Women are the fastest growing group within the veteran population ... (and they’ve) never got recognition for being in the military,” Halfon said. “The Vietnam Veterans, of course, we got the Vietnam Wall and all that recognition when we came home. “But the female veterans, they were nurses and stuff when I was in Nam, but they never really got the ‘thank you’ and the appreciation that they deserved. So, hopefully by dedicating this Female Veterans Monument, we can give them the credit they deserve.” VFW Post 7807 Adjutant Beverley Schoeffler will lead the dedication for the new monument, a three-sided sculpture made of black marble that weighs approximately 8,000 pounds. Schoeffler would like to thank Luin “Louie” Mitchell for his passion for female veterans, which inspired him to purchase and install the local monument honoring women’s value as veterans and military members. Mitchell was slated to attend the dedication but died in July at the age of 78. The monument is a declaration that women not only belong in the military but deserve the same recognition as men for serving their country, highlighting a societal shift that has occurred in recent decades as women have forged new paths in the military, according to Schoeffler. Not that long ago, women in uniform regularly received hostile treatment from their male counterparts and rarely, if ever, received recognition for their contributions.

Schoeffler, who served 28 years between the Army and Air Force, experienced some of this treatment herself. Today, attitudes have largely changed. Women still face challenges, but their presence in military roles has been normalized and accepted to a greater degree, as evidenced by the ascension of high-ranking female officers and a lifting of the ban on women serving in combat. For Schoeffler, this is all to the good, but much work remains in terms of recruiting more women into the military, to include the building of a “female military family,” or support group, so that women can experience solidarity around issues that only “a fellow female would understand.” In the meantime, she is grateful for expressions of appreciation for women specifically, like the monument in Towns County, that raise awareness about the patriotic sacrifices and service of women in the military, which could, in turn, motivate more young women to serve. “A lot of things have always been dedicated to the males,” Schoeffler said. “This is only the second monument I’ve ever seen that is strictly for the female military veterans, and I think it’s a great honor that Louie bought it for us.” Another of Schoeffler’s aims in volunteering as a veteran is to inspire other female veterans, who are “not as open as the males are” regarding their service. And she hopes additional female veterans will start to come forward to be more active in their communities generally. “We don’t want to only be there for fellow veterans – we want to be there for the whole community,” Schoeffler said. “Every time any of us deployed, it was our family and community back home that supported us and sent their love, their letters and their boxes, and kept us going. “So, community is very important to us also, and that’s why we want to give back to the community all the time.” The Towns County Veterans Memorial Park is located directly in front of Towns County High School at 1400 US-76 in Hiawassee. In case of inclement weather, the ceremony will be moved a short distance away to the VFW Post Building at 1329 Sunnyside Road.

Towns County Community Calendar	
First Monday of each month:	
School Board... HS/MS Media Center	6:45 pm
Every Tuesday:	
Storytime for Children... TC Library	10:30 am
First Tuesday of each month:	
Hiaw. City Council... City Hall	6 pm
YH City Council... YH City Hall	6:30 pm
Second Wednesday of each month:	
Board of Elections... Elections Office	4 pm
Third Monday of each month:	
Planning Commission... Temporary Courthouse	6 pm
Third Tuesday of each month:	
Commissioner’s Mtg... Courthouse	5:30 pm
City of Young Harris Planning Commission...	
Meeting Room in City Hall	5 pm
TC Water Authority Board Meeting	6 pm