



Towns County Herald

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County, cities meet LOST renegotiation deadline

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Earlier this month, the governments of Towns County, Hiwassee and Young Harris finally reached an agreement on how to distribute Local Option Sales Tax collections between them, putting to bed a months-long dispute over percentages.

Enacted in 1975 by the Georgia General Assembly, the primary purpose of LOST is to provide residents with property tax relief while enabling local governments to maintain public services like police, fire, E-911, road maintenance, etc.

Nearly every municipality in the state receives LOST revenues as part of total sales tax collections. Once collected, LOST monies are split between

a county and its incorporated cities, with distribution agreements lasting 10 years.

And it's a lot of money; most recent LOST revenues came in around \$3 million for the year, and since LOST is a 1% sales tax on the purchase of eligible local goods, tourists and residents alike contribute to collections.

The old agreement was hammered out in 2012 for the years 2013-2022 and had the cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris splitting 20.5% of LOST collections – 11% for Hiwassee and 9.5% for Young Harris – with the lion's share going to the county at 79.5%.

Under the new agreement, the cities will be receiving a modest increase in collection percentages, with

Hiwassee bumping to 13.5% and Young Harris to 11.5%. The county will take a 4.5% cut to its share, giving it 75% over the next 10 years between 2023 and 2032.

Per state law, within two years of every new census-taking, counties and cities must come to terms on LOST percentages, and the last census was taken in 2020.

"The reason (LOST negotiations) follow the census is to see if population has changed (in the cities and county)," Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said.

Population is one of multiple criteria that goes into negotiations, as are service delivery responsibilities and points of sale for generating the tax.

Oftentimes, like in neigh-

boring Union County, negotiations result in a simple continuation of previous distribution terms. It's not uncommon, however, for municipalities to want to negotiate new LOST shares when the time comes.

When an agreement can't be reached directly between negotiating parties, like what happened in Towns County this year, outside mediation is required.

During initial communications that started over the summer, the cities expressed a desire to up their combined percentage from 20.5% to 40% for the next decade, thereby dropping the county from 79.5% to 60%. This was later revised to a 70/30 requested split after the county said no.

See LOST Renegotiated, Page 6A



Commissioner Bradshaw reading from a resolution regarding the recently reached LOST Distribution Agreement between Towns, Hiwassee and Young Harris in a Dec. 8 meeting at the Temporary Courthouse Offices. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

'Shop With The Sheriff' a success for local children



The Towns County Sheriff's Office took kids Christmas shopping after school on Tuesday, Dec. 13, for the annual Shop With The Sheriff. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE—For the second year running, the Towns County Sheriff's Office invited Towns County schoolchildren to Walmart for the Shop With The Sheriff Christmas Program on Tuesday, Dec. 13.

Nearly 40 youngsters ranging from kindergarten through fifth grade received a \$300 shopping spree to put presents under their families' Christmas trees. The children were selected to the program

with assistance from Towns County Elementary School.

The program is especially helpful in these tougher than usual economic times, when folks often have to choose between paying bills and affording presents, and it all comes together thanks to monetary donations made by members of the community.

"We love doing this and helping our kids, and it's just perfect," Sheriff Ken Henderson said. "All of our volunteers, officers, auxiliary people and everybody gets involved and pulls together to make this

happen. It's truly a heartwarming day for us, so we're really excited and very thankful that we're able to do it.

"Donations we take throughout the year help to make this event possible. People are so gracious in coming forward and stepping up; people in Towns County are wonderful, so we appreciate all of them.

"Without question, this is the most enjoyable time of the year for me, when we have the Sheriff's Parade that kind of kicks off Christmas, and then

See Shop With The Sheriff, Page 3A

Towns County students get to 'Shop With A Hero'

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Not all heroes wear capes, but plenty wear uniforms, as demonstrated by Shop With A Hero at Walmart on Friday, Dec. 16.

After school let out early for Christmas break, 38 students from Towns County Middle

School and High School pulled up in two buses, and about 10 chaperones were there to keep an eye on them.

As is the norm with the program, these volunteers came from the Hiwassee Police Department and other local first responders, although a couple of Blairsville's law enforcement officers were sighted also.

"It's a good program, and if we can help another agency, I appreciate Hiwassee inviting us to go with them," Blairsville Police Chief Michael "Bear" Baxter said. "We're glad to help them anytime. We've done it in years past, and we'll continue to do it for as long as we can."

Regardless of their jurisdiction, the officers were

See Shop With A Hero, Page 7A



(L-R) Towns County Fire Lt. Jeremy Parker, Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith and Hiwassee Police Ofc. Bill Conway during the 2022 Shop With A Hero at Walmart in Blairsville. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Historical Society carols, announces new leadership



2023 Historical Society Officers: President Tyler Osborn, Treasurer Patti Wilson, Secretary Brandy Cox and Vice President Jerry Taylor. Not pictured: Membership Secretary Mary Ann Miller. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Monday, Dec. 12, the Towns County Historical Society held its last monthly meeting of the year inside the Civic Center, where it was basically

a "see you after the holidays" Christmas party.

The get-together featured everyone joining to sing classic Christmas songs as Vice President Jerry Taylor played his famous antique reed organ and French organ.

Before the caroling, the

society went through the business portion of the meeting, focusing on the results of who would lead the Historical Society in 2023.

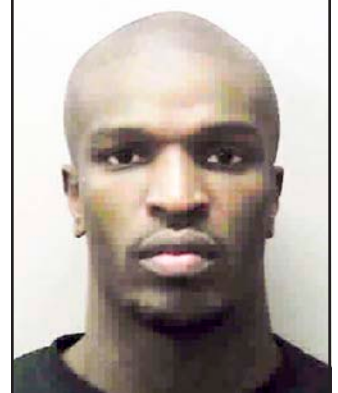
Leadership will include both new and returning faces. Mary Ann Miller will be back

See Historical Society, Page 5A

TCSO investigating crime ring connected to stolen equipment



Keshawn James Means



Juwan Quintis Cabbell



Umeko Ann Walker

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office made three more arrests last week in what appeared to be ongoing activity by an organized crime ring based in the Atlanta area.

Information was received in reference to an excavator stolen from a Calhoun business that three individuals from Decatur were attempting to sell to a Towns County resident on Wednesday, Dec. 14.

The stolen property was

located at the Dollar General in Young Harris, and Towns County Sheriff's Investigators and Deputies, along with Young Harris College Police, converged on the location where the suspects were beginning to unload the equipment.

A Young Harris police vehicle was rammed as the subjects attempted to escape, but investigators, deputies, and Young Harris Police were able to make a felony stop, and the three suspects were taken into custody without incident or injuries.

"The commitment and determination of our investigators along with the quick apprehension and takedown of the individuals without anyone being injured is outstanding work," Sheriff Ken Henderson said.

As noted above, this appears to be organized criminal activity working in North Georgia and elsewhere, and investigations will continue, with Towns County working with other jurisdictions experiencing similar activity.

See Crime Ring, Page 5A

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,668.78

Chatuge 1,917.47

Nottely 1,760.22

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Sports	2B

SPORTS

BASKETBALL

BATTLE OF THE STATES

DEC. 28-30 @ TCHS

TOWNS COUNTY HERALD will be CLOSED Friday, Dec. 23. The DEADLINE for ads and other submissions for publication next week is 4 PM THURSDAY, DEC. 22.

Towns County High School Students Excel at Exams



Students who completed CTAE pathways in Ag Mechanics, Horticulture, Forestry, Wildlife Management, Electrical Systems or Metal Fabrication took Certification exams in their field or fields of study.

Pictured are students with their certification awards. Some students took and passed several certification exams. Congratulations!



Grant Ingram and Dillion McGaha



(L-R): front: Cody Ashe, Caleb Berrong, Andrew Wells, Riley Nichols, Caleb Nelson, Rheanna Deaton, LJ Mounger. (2nd row): Cameron Lively and Gabe Eller. Back row: Ian Arrowood and Chris Bechtol



(L-R): Kemp Walker, Austin McGaha, Brock Murray, and Hailey Gibson

T(Dec21.A4)JH

Top of Georgia Speaking Contest 2023

A good speech could earn a student more than just bragging rights in the Top of Georgia annual public speaking competition this spring! The top four speakers in each of the two divisions (high school and middle school) can win up to \$400 in cash prizes.

The speech contest is open to 6 - 12th grade public, private, or home-schooled students living in Towns, Union, and Clay counties. Students will compete in the middle school (grades 6-8) or high school (grades 9-12) division.

Beginning January 19, 2023, and running through February 23, 2023, students will attend six training sessions held on Thursdays from 4:30 to 6 PM at The Senior Center in Hiwassee, GA. Students will learn to construct a speech and how to deliver it with conviction, poise, and expertise. Students will be expected to perform an inspiring 4-6-minute speech on the final contest day in March. (Time and date to be announced later.)

To apply as a student speaker, scan the QR code in this article, fill in the information and submit.

We are pleased to announce the sponsors for this year include Towns County, Union County, The City of Hiwassee, The City of Young Harris and numerous businesses and individuals.

Jeff Langley, Gerry Chotiner, Marsha Hyer, Madison Urquiola, Steven Harper, Col. Kathy Merritt (USAF ret), Col Mike Merritt (USAF ret), Betsy Young, and Helen Seymore will be serving as instructors and mentors.

We are accepting donations for additional student prize monies. Checks may be made out to Top of Georgia Student Development and mailed to P.O. Box 36, Hiwassee, GA 30546. Any amount will be accepted, and all donors' names will be listed in the contest program. To

inquire about being a mentor, email name and contact information to togspeakingcontest@gmail.com or call Gerry Chotiner at 910-697-6938.

The 2022 first-place finishers were: A.J. Edwards in the high school division, speaking on "How influencers influence our youth"; and Sophia Gobin speaking on "Typhoid Mary (Mary Mallon)."

Don't miss this opportunity to hone your public speaking skills, gain confidence, and may- be win some cash! NT(Dec21.Z12)CA



Shop With The Sheriff...from Page 1A



Kids had a blast shopping with the Sheriff's Office last week for presents to put under their Christmas trees. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

being able to have our kids come in here and shop and get the toys and other things they want. It's just so rewarding - there is no way to explain it until you get involved. It's just such a great time to get together and help give back.

"But again, I'll add that this is all made possible by the good citizens of Towns County, and without a doubt we want to do this every year. We all look forward to this every year, and the kids are having a ball, so it's certainly one of my top favorite perks of my job."

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw was also there to get in on the

present-to-buggy action, and he expressed his gratitude for everyone involved and the inspired meaning behind it all.

"As commissioner, I'm just very thankful for Sheriff Ken Henderson and his staff for doing all they are for these kids, and for the volunteers who give so much to make a Christmas for those who might not have one," he said.

Continuing, "Always, Christmastime, along with Easter, is my favorite season, and part of it is the giving hearts of our citizens. It's just a warm feeling to be with family and friends and watch our community come together to give to help other people.

"It's a wonderful time and makes us realize how lucky and thankful we are to have what we have and to live where we do."

TCSO Chief Deputy Gene Moss shared a few emotional thoughts, saying his favorite part of the experience was "not just seeing the kids happy with getting things that they want, but seeing how selfless they are by wanting to spend their money on the family and other loved ones as well."

"That's what it's all about," Moss said, "just being happy and surrounded close by those we love and care about."

FOLTC Celebrated their 26th Anniversary



On December 12, 2022, 29 people gathered at Sharp Memorial UMC's fellowship hall to celebrate the 26th anniversary of Friends of the Libraries of Towns County (FOLTC). Special VIP guests included: Cliff Bradshaw, County Commissioner; past MRLS library directors Teresa Haymore and Donna Howell; past FOLTC presidents Doris Tilly (founding president), Janice Cochran (and spouse), Marilyn Pierce, Barbara Hale, Suzanne Carter, and Elaine Roberts (past presidents Jan and John Roberts were unable to attend); and Towns County Library Branch Managers Marlene Cannon and Debbie Phillips (retired). The remaining guests included current FOLTC board members (and spouses) and Friends of the Libraries.

Current president Mary Welken welcomed everyone and introduced Doris Tilly who shared a brief history of



Doris Tilly Founding President of FOLTC

FOLTC which began in 1996 and is going strong to this date. The group has grown from 20 members to 163 members. Welken then introduced the Sharp Tones, a musical group from the church, directed by Pam Leslie, who entertained the audience with some lively Christmas songs and jokes before lunch was served. The delicious luncheon buffet was catered by Janice Taylor.

After lunch a short business meeting was held, and officers were elected for 2023, which include: Mary Welken, President; Rose Mary Crook, Vice President; Judith Lee, Cor-

responding Secretary; Kathy Day, Recording Secretary; and Jim Reynolds, Treasurer.

As a fundraising non-profit organization, FOLTC has raised and contributed approximately \$220,620.00 (directly and indirectly) to Mountain Regional Library and Towns County Public Library since 1996. Funds are raised with yearly membership fees, book sales, bake sales, and 2 permanent bookstores (one at each library) that sell used, donated books and other items. All of the funds that are raised by the organization go to benefit Mountain Regional Library, Young Harris, and Towns County Public Library, Hiwassee.

Please check in periodically on the website at www.foltc.com and follow on Facebook to find out when events will be held (book sales, meetings, monthly book club, dates to donate books, etc.) and other pertinent information. Membership forms are also available on the website. We'd love for you to join us and help advocate for our local public libraries and all libraries! T(Dec21.F1)JH

Masonic Meeting

Unicoy Lodge #259 F & AM meets every 2nd Monday, 7:30 PM. Meals @ 6:30 PM. 60 N. Main Street, Hiwassee, GA 30546. All qualified Brothers urged to attend. T(Dec21.A1)JH

Historical Society ...from Page 1A



The Historical Society really packed them in for its annual Christmas Party on Monday, Dec. 12. Photo by Jeremy Foster

as the Membership Secretary. Patti Wilson will be the Treasurer. Brandi Cox will be the Secretary. Jerry Taylor will remain Vice President. And Tyler Osborn will be the new President.

The event was hosted in conjunction with Towns County Deputy Historian Jason Edwards, who recited brief facts about each song being sung, with slideshow assistance from Jake Bradshaw, the great-nephew of outgoing Historical Society President Sandra Green.

"(This is) for all of us to enjoy and lay back for a good time singing in Christmas," Taylor said.

Among the songs sung and played were "Frosty the Snowman," "Jingle Bells," "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Deck the Halls," "A Holly Jolly Christmas," "Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town," "Joy to the World," "O Come, All Ye Faithful" and many more.

When the singing ended, those gathered adjourned for refreshments and conversation,

but not before Green could address everyone about her tenure at the top of the club's leadership.

"I have enjoyed being president of the Historical Society. It has been good for me, and I hope I have been good for it. And now I get to sit in the audience and kind of roll my eyes," she said, joking. "But I know it will be great, so I look forward to that."

"I am not deserting the Historical Society, because I got started by being interested in and passionate about history. I appreciate the opportunity and I hope I've done a good job, and y'all take care."

Formerly the group's secretary of four years and new President Osborn offered some words to mark the occasion.

"I am very excited and looking forward to what we can accomplish," he said. "It was never really in the plan for me to become president one day when I first started, I just wanted to go with the flow and just be involved with preserving the county's history."

"I'm a sixth generation

here, so this is my history, too, and I just want to preserve it for future generations."

As for plans in the works, Osborn said, "We're just trying to finish up what we started with the Old Burch Cemetery, and once we get that done, we'll start working on new plans and continue going like we always have."

"I think tonight was a perfect Christmas program," Osborn continued. "It brought the Christmas Spirit with it and gave everyone a little holiday cheer."

"Christmas is my No. 1 favorite time and holiday of the year, and the best thing about it is just the joyfulness of being with family and friends and the overall happiness that comes with this time of year."

The Historical Society will meet again on Monday, Jan. 9, at 6 p.m., and the presentation for the evening will be "The Bridges of Towns County and Other Memorials." People should check the Towns County Historical Society Facebook page closer to time for venue information.

Crime Ring ...from Page 1A

The following individuals were arrested and charged:

Keshaun James Means, 22: felony aggravated assault against a law enforcement officer when engaged in official duty; felony fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; felony interference with government property; purchase, possession, manufacture, distribution or sale of marijuana.

Juwan Quintis Cabbell, 26: felony theft by conversion; obstruction of an officer.

Umeko Ann Walker, 31: felony theft by conversion.

Exactly one week earlier, four Atlanta-based individuals were arrested for attempting the exact same alleged crime of selling stolen construction equip-

over about a half-mile from the location of last week's arrests.

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

ment on Wednesday, Dec. 7. Incidentally, they were pulled

\$1500 Matching Grant for Façade Improvement Awarded

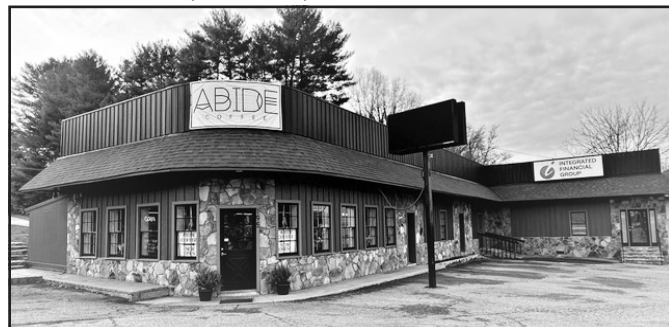
The Hiwassee Downtown Development Authority (DDA) presented Ryan Hood a check for \$1,500 for façade improvements made to 195 N. Main Street, home of Integrated Financial and Abide Coffee Hiwassee. The grant is a component of the Hiwassee Main Street Program and provides matching funds (up to \$1,500) for the restoration, renovation, or repair of commercial properties.

The money can be used for exterior painting, basic façade improvements (excluding roofs and landscaping), canopies and awnings, gutters and downspouts, exterior door and window repair/replacement, and decorative exterior architectural features, for example.

"The updated buildings look great and we appreciate the investment our business owners make in downtown," said Denise McKay, director of economic development for the cities of Hiwassee and Young



195 N. Main Street, Hiwassee, GA - Before Photo



195 N. Main Street, Hiwassee, GA - After Photo

Harris and Towns County. "A charming and attractive downtown is a vital element of a successful community."

To apply for a grant or for more information please visit www.downtownhiwassee.com/facade-grant. TDec21.Z13/CA

MM Quilters Guild donates to local Senior Living Homes



Stonehenge Senior Living, Blairsville Bonnie Phillips, Activities Director; quilters Shirley Deasy, Robin Jones, & Kathy Traylor

By Kathleen Traylor

The Misty Mountain Quilters Guild recently donated more than 250 handmade items, including quilts, fidget pads, wheelchair bags, walker bags and adult bibs to seven different senior living homes and assisted living facilities in Georgia and North Carolina. More than 50 members of the guild's "Heart 2 Heart" outreach group stitched and quilted throughout the year to provide this holiday cheer to the homes' residents. The quilts are usually about 40" by 50", which is appropriate for a wheelchair-using adult to keep their lap warm. Wheelchair and walker bags attach to the device's handles, and provide the user with a place to store their cell phone, iPad, tissues, or other small items. Fidget pads provide memory-impaired people with zippers, snaps, ribbons and beads with which to "fidget" when their hands need activity, and the adult bibs provide a colorful, cheerful way to keep clothes clean.



Union County Nursing Home and Rehab, Sarah Ensley, Activities Director (center), and quilters Shirley Deasy and Robin Jones.

The next General Meeting of the Guild will be on Tuesday, January 25, at the First United Methodist Church, 938 GA-515 W, Blairsville. Social hour begins at 12:30 PM, with the meeting and program at 1 PM.

The Misty Mountain Quilters Guild has over 150 members from Georgia, North

Carolina, Tennessee and Florida, and their mission is to educate, share, promote and keep alive the art and traditions of quilt making. New members are always welcome! For more information, please visit the Guild website at <https://www.mistymountainquiltguild.org>, or email mmqinfo@gmail.com. NTDec21.Z15/CA

Towns County Parks and Recreation: Nichols completes training and designation as CYSA

Towns County Recreation Director, Stuart Nichols, has completed his training and designation as CYSA (Certified Youth Sports Administrator) through the National Alliance for Youth Sports. CYSA's are an elite group of professionals that have earned certification in the field of youth sports. They have successfully completed the Academy for Youth Sports Administrators; they have demonstrated that professional development is essential to the delivery of quality sports programs; and they are committed to raising the professionalism in youth sports!

Assistant Director, Will Banister, has completed League Director for NAYS (National Alliance for Youth Sports). NAYS League Director training completes the NAYS Code of Ethics for League Directors and clinic topics include: Vol-



Stuart Nichols and Will Banister volunteer Coach Management, Participants/Kids, Officials, and Parents. Both of these programs are vital to the success of our youth sports program development and congratulations for continuing to improve our Youth Sports in Towns County! TDec21, A5JH

Young Harris College December 2022 Graduates



Young Harris College December 2022 Graduates

Young Harris College congratulates its December 2022 graduates: Alexander Creed (BS in Management); Hunter Davis (BS in Sport & Recreation Studies); Katherine Davis (BA in English); Jasper Garrett (BA in History); Christian Gentry (BA in History); Matthew George (BA in Communication Studies); Emma Hambrick (BS in Psychology, Minor in Communication Studies); Natisha John (BS in Chemistry); Aaron King (BA in English); Grace Kruse (BA in History, Minor in Psychology); Benjamin Mackay (BS in Psychology); James Mardell (BS in Biology, Minor in Chemistry); Markas Marston (BS in Psychology, Minor in Biology); Morganna Oberdorfer (BS in Psychology, Minor in Spanish); Logan Pate (BS in Management); Kenyaly

Quevedo (BS in Psychology); Edoardo Righetti (BA in Business Administration); Ryleigh Roberts (BA in English, Minor in Philosophy); Jackson Taylor (BA in English); Juana Tercero (BS in Management, Minor in Spanish); Christopher Thronson (BS in Sport & Recreation Studies); Henrik Tingren (BS in Psychology, Minor in Sport Studies); and William Tison (BS in History).

These students were celebrated at a reception this month in Hatcher Dining Room on the Young Harris College campus. They enjoyed a meal with faculty and staff of their choice, and they were awarded their diplomas. YHC President Dr. Drew Van Horn and YHC Academic Provost Dr. Jason Pierce personally congratulated each student and wished them well

in future endeavors.

"Our December 2022 graduates have demonstrated tremendous grit during their time in the Enchanted Valley," said Pierce. "They navigated the pandemic, took classes online and in de-densified classrooms, and faced challenges that few of their predecessors ever had to face. They have proven themselves both highly capable and immensely determined, and I cannot wait to see what they do next."

"These graduates were some of the most involved and influential students on campus," echoed Van Horn. "We are proud of what they have accomplished at YHC and look forward to following their continued success."

Congratulations and good luck, Mountain Lions.

LOST Renegotiated...from Page 1A

Bradshaw rejected both of the above proposed distribution schemes, noting, among other things, his office's responsibility for providing emergency and other public services to the majority of county residents, including those inside both cities' boundaries.

But with 221 businesses operating in Hiawasse, Mayor Liz Ordiales made the case that the city could take credit for generating around 70% of total LOST revenues, thereby justifying Hiawasse's belief that it deserved a considerably larger piece of the pie.

Thus, the three local governments reached an impasse, with the clock ticking.

Qualifying counties in Georgia have until Dec. 30, 2022, to successfully renegotiate LOST Certificates of Distribution or face the end of collections altogether until a new local referendum can be passed in counties that lose LOST.

As LOST collections offset property taxes, it is likely that local millage rates would be increased to replace LOST revenues, and this fact proved to be what eventually brought all parties to a mutual understanding.

After two informal

meetings, government leaders met for an official mediation session Nov. 18, followed by more discussions and a meeting on Thursday, Dec. 8, to approve the new distribution – just in time to transmit the agreement to the Georgia Department of Revenue.

The governing councils for both cities agreed to the 2022 distribution in their respective Dec. 6 regular meetings, and Commissioner Bradshaw joined with the cities two days later to sign a county resolution and new joint certificate.

Ultimately, the county and cities compromised on their starting positions for the good of their various constituents, with the county relinquishing part of its share secured in the 2012 agreement, and the cities accepting smaller percentages than originally requested.

For her part, Mayor Ordiales said "the city can live with it," as Hiawasse was unwilling to completely forgo LOST revenues over failure to negotiate a higher percentage – a scenario she noted would be "a very poor business decision."

"Is it what we want? No," she said. "We believe that the city should have gotten 18% (with Young Har-

ris getting 12%). I think we proved with numbers that we could have gotten that easily. But we couldn't agree to it, and we can live with the 75/25 split."

Speaking on behalf of the City of Young Harris on Dec. 8, Attorney Marvin Harkins said that Mayor Andrea Gibby and Council Members were "happy that negotiations were resolved."

"Everybody gave a little ground for the good of the taxpayers," Bradshaw said. "The reason we had to go to mediation, (Mayor Ordiales) says that they feel like they've proved their point that they should get more, and we feel like we've proved our point that they shouldn't."

"She believes in what she believes, and I believe in what we believe, but we were able to work it out for the good of the taxpayers. We're just glad it's over so we can move forward."

Sales tax collections have been going strong since the initial shock of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020, buoyed by people fleeing highly populated areas for the wide-open spaces of the North Georgia Mountains, and local government leadership is hopeful this trend will continue.

Love Light Scholarship Donations

The Chatuge Regional Hospital and Nursing Home Auxiliary is requesting donations to fund our Love Light Scholarship Program. While we accept donations in memory or honor of individuals throughout the year, this is the time when we receive the most donations. The scholarships are awarded to deserving

Towns County High School Seniors who will be entering the medical field. We also award to Chatuge Hospital/Nursing Home employees working to further their education.

Please return this form with your donation to: Love Light Scholarship, P O Box 986, Hiawasse, GA 30546. TDec21, Z17JH

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 Address: _____

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 Given in HONOR of: _____
 Acknowledgement to be sent to:
 Name: _____
 Address: _____

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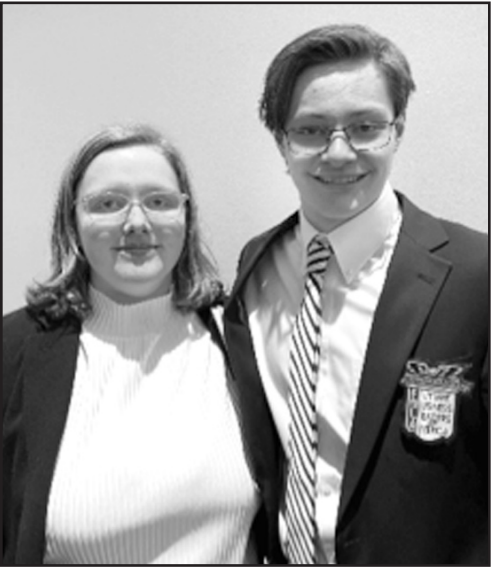


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Towns County FBLA Students advance to State Competition

Towns County High School's FBLA chapter is proud to celebrate the following students for their achievements:
Will McConnell, Haley Merritt, Eli Phillips, Jaedyn Hancock, Emmylou Venable, Dren Green and CeCe Pizarro. These students will be advancing to the FBLA State Competition in March!

lips, Jaedyn Hancock, Emmylou Venable, Dren Green and CeCe Pizarro. These students will be advancing to the FBLA State Competition in March!



Business Ethics:
Haley Merritt and Will McConnell



Social Media Strategies:
CeCe Pizarro and Dren Green



Business Ethics:
Emmylou Venable and Jaedyn Hancock



Impromptu Speaking:
Eli Phillips

North Georgia Technical College Foundation receives Habersham EMC Scholarship Donation



(L-R): Rob Rowland, NGTC Electrical Lineworker Instructor; Michelle Oglesby, NGTC Dean of Academic Affairs; Tommy Thurmond, Habersham EMC Vice President of Member and Community Relations; Mary Beth Horton, Habersham EMC Community Relations Ambassador; John Wilkinson, NGTC President; Bryan Ferguson, Habersham EMC President and CEO; Mindy Glander, NGTC Vice President of Academic Affairs; Amy Hulsey, NGTC Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Marketing and Executive Director of the NGTC Foundation; and (back) NGTC electrical lineworker students.

North Georgia Technical College (NGTC) Foundation recently received a \$5,000 donation from Habersham Electric Membership Corporation (EMC) for the electrical lineworker program.

HEMC's donation will benefit NGTC students by providing scholarships to prospective or current students attending the Blairsville or Clarkesville campus electrical lineworker program. Students may apply for the scholarships on the NGTC Foundation Scholarships page at northgatech.edu/foundation/foundation-scholarships. The application deadline for summer semester scholarships is Apr. 27, 2023.

"North Georgia Technical College is pleased to have

an outstanding relationship with Habersham EMC," said NGTC President John Wilkinson. "We greatly appreciate the support they provide our electrical line students and faculty, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with them for years to come."

"We are so grateful to Habersham EMC for their continued support of our electrical lineworker students and faculty," said Mindy Glander, NGTC Vice President of Academic Affairs. "Our faculty recognize the value that corporate partnerships provide to their students both in and out of the classroom, and we look forward to continuing to build those relationships in the future."

"The NGTC Foundation

is very appreciative to Habersham EMC for their generous donation in support of our electrical lineworker students," said Amy Hulsey, NGTC Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Marketing and Executive Director of the NGTC Foundation. "Each donation we receive makes a significant impact in the lives of our students and makes an education possible for so many."

The electrical lineworker program is available at the Clarkesville and Blairsville campuses. Spring semester classes begin Jan. 9, 2023. For more information regarding the electrical lineworker program or other NGTC programs, visit northgatech.edu or call 706-754-7700.

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution, celebrate final event of the year

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution (SAR), celebrated the final event for the year with a low-key get-together in which camaraderie was preeminent.

Members mingled, and tidbits of historical facts about the American Revolution were shared. Plans for future chapter activities were discussed, especially for celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 2026, just a little over three years from now. The camaraderie was enhanced by serving Chatham Artillery Punch. The punch was served at a grand ball hosted by the City of Savannah during President George Washington's visit in 1791. Savannah's Chatham Artillery Unit was tasked with providing the punch. The recipe for the punch has been lost in time; however, many close approximations are available.

The only agenda item for the meeting was the presentation of the Sockdolager Award. The chapter president selects the Sockdolager Award winner annually to a member who exudes enthusiasm and service to the chapter who is not serving in a leadership position. This year's awardee is David An-



(L-R) Awardee - David Anderson, President Elect - Stephen Weaver, Past Awardee - Jerry Taylor

derson. David received a certificate and a sock soaked with Chatham Artillery Punch. The Sockdolager Award derives its name from the seldom-used word sockdolager. Sockdolager, an Americanism, is defined as (1) a decisive blow or punch that settles matters and (2) something outstanding or exceptional.

The Blue Ridge Mountains Chapter, SAR meets five times yearly; the next meeting starts at 5:45 p.m. on January 10, 2023, at Brother's Restaurant in Young Harris. The public is invited; however, reservations are requested to en-

sure enough food is prepared. Membership in the SAR is available to male descendants of patriots who either served or supported the American Revolutionary War. The Society's goals are preserving our constitutional foundations and liberties, sharing that historical knowledge along with the civic duties implied, and honoring and celebrating contemporary acts of patriotism and courage.

For additional information, please phone or email Sid Turner, President, at (706) 745-3410 or email him at skunkflats@windstream.net.

Shop With A Hero...from Page 1A

diction, officers can participate in Shop With A Hero on a day off so they can dedicate their time to helping their assigned children.

Amy Gibby Rosser – referred to by Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith as a "rockstar superhero" – does most of the organizing. As head of Towns County Family Connection, Rosser serves as the intermediary between the officers and the school, helping to select students to the program.

"Our job is to improve the lives of families and children in Towns County," explained Rosser, saying that she hoped the event lightened the hearts of students and adults alike.

"The girls, they always like the clothes and shoes and jewelry. Guys more usually gravitate toward electronics – not always, but a lot of times," Rosser said, while adding that many kids "want to shop for their siblings or their parents, and that's their choice."

Indeed, several children filled their shopping carts with jackets and shoes or other practical gifts for loved ones, though others lingered around the toys and electronics to fuel their own holiday joy.

Hiwassee Police Officer Jose Carvajal kept an eye on his three charges as they excitedly milled about on the lookout for video games and Pokémon cards. It was his first Shop With A Hero after transferring from the Union County Sheriff's Office and something he had wanted to be a part of for a long time.

"This is my first time doing it; it's fun," he said. "It's wonderful that not only the community but other organizations donate money in order to provide for some of these kids that may not be able to get Christmas (otherwise)."

In addition to witnessing the pure-hearted innocence that comes with holiday anticipation, Carvajal believes that the Shop With A Hero Christmas shopping event provides a valuable opportunity to repair widespread negative perceptions of police.

"It's great that officers and first responders band together and do this with the kids, especially in this day and age where the badge has been vilified," Carvajal said. "We need to humanize our badge and show people that we're

just people, too. We're just doing our job, and we're here to help the community, and this is perfect."

To Chief Smith, the day had a bit of a different feel, but not necessarily a bad one. Although emotional at the prospect of his "final" Shop With A Hero, the chief, who tendered his resignation earlier this month, had plans to continue playing a part in some way.

"I hope it's not my last," Smith admitted. "I hope that I'm able to participate in future ones if I'm not the one planning and organizing, so I'm holding onto hope that this is not my last."

The event has meant a lot to Smith over the years, not just for what it stands for, but because of the simple fact

that it's "one of the highlights of the year" with its merry and bright atmosphere.

He credits the program's yearly success to Rosser and her hard work organizing local groups as well as the school system and even some churches to work together to pull off important events like Shop With A Hero.

There's also something to be said of the volunteers who take time out of their off days to participate, and Smith believes they deserve credit, too.

And it was hard not to give credit where it was due that day, considering the number of volunteers who helped load the kids back onto buses while helping to carry plastic bags full of Christmas gifts.



Amy Gibby Rosser of Towns County Family Connection works especially hard this time of year helping to connect underprivileged kids with organizations wishing to take them shopping for Christmas presents. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks



Jose Carvajal joined the Hiwassee Police Department just in time to participate in Shop With A Hero as a member of the force. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Remembering Reece: The Poet's Contribution to North Georgia History

Many don't realize the impact that Byron Herbert Reece, a young writer in Southern Appalachia, particularly in the Choestoe Valley of Union County in the mid-20th century, had on the history, geography, agriculture and the fine arts in North Georgia.

There are several museums throughout North Georgia featuring Byron Herbert Reece, two of which are at the Reece Farm and Heritage Center in the Welcome Center and one in the Original Old Barn.

The Byron Herbert Reece Museum at the Union County Historical Courthouse is in the Paris Room.

One is located in the Special Collections Section of Young Harris College's Zell and Shirley Miller Library, and there's one at the University of Georgia's Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

These museums are in addition to the great treasure trove of information housed at the Georgia Historical Society in Savannah, Georgia.

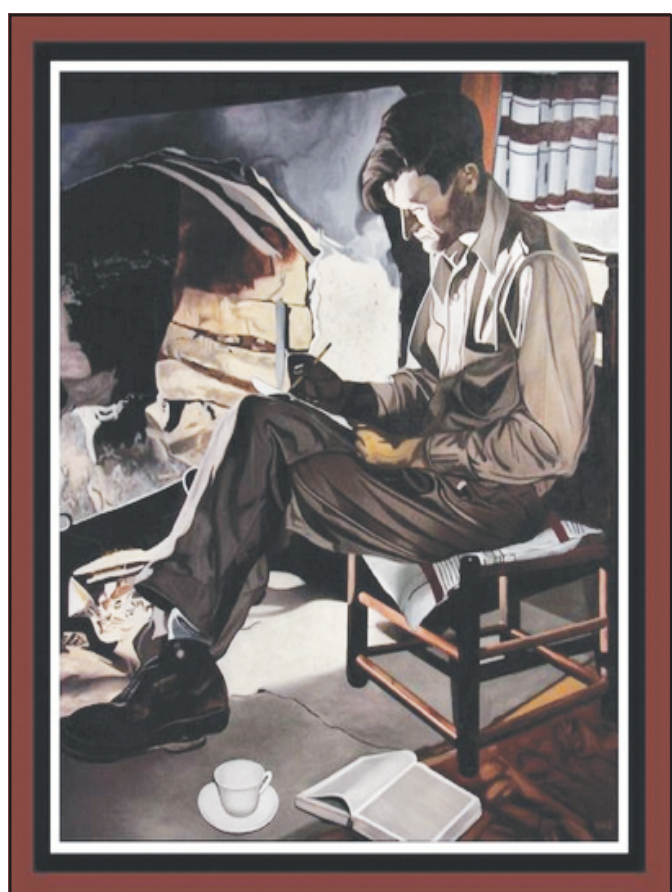
A stretch of US Highway 129 from Neel's Gap to the city limits of Blairsville is officially named the "Byron Herbert Reece Memorial Highway." The Appalachian Trailhead is officially named "The Byron Herbert Reece Memorial Trailhead". A hiking trail in Vogel State Park that joins the park to Reece's home is named in Reece's memory.

The "Reach of Song," a biographical play depicting Byron Herbert Reece's life, was named as Georgia's official drama in 1990. This play ran for 14 consecutive years and sold over 250,000 tickets.

The Byron Herbert Reece Farm is designated as one of Georgia's Historical Sites.

As the shortest day of the year approaches, Reece enthusiasts reflect on his poems of winter, "A Fire of Boughs."

"A Fire of Boughs"
By Byron Herbert Reece
At onset of December
When the cold comes to stay
I bring boughs, leafed in May,
To feed the cheerful ember
And warm the wintry night.
Folded into his fur,
The cat disdains to stir
But dreams by firelight.
And I should follow suit
Except that boughs in turning
Shapeless in the burning



This oil painting by Al Garnto of Byron Herbert Reece composing by firelight is on display at the Zell and Shirley Miller Library at the Young Harris College campus.

*Alarms the more than brute
Caged within my being
That often plays at blind
But stirs and shakes my mind
With grave misgiving, seeing
Wood fall from coal to ash,
Its substance burned to nothing,
Its luminescent clothing,
Its shine, its flash,
Expended, one with night—
And is not comforted
That such translation shed
Both warmth and light.*

***The purpose of the Byron Herbert Reece Society is to preserve, perpetuate and promote the literary and cultural legacy of the Georgia mountain poet/novelist, Byron Herbert Reece. In addition to enhancing

both knowledge of and appreciation for his writings, efforts will be made to honor his way of life, with particular emphasis on his love of the land and farming.

The society sends you greetings and wishes for a happy, safe and blessed Christmas season.

Reece's books are available at the Welcome Center at the Reece Farm from mid-April through mid-November and at the Union County Historical Society at the Historical Union County Courthouse on the Blairsville Square throughout the year.

Jerri Duncan Gill, Chairman

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