

Towns County Herald

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Towns County Courthouse renovations wow guests

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

After about a year and a half of construction, it's finally finished – the fully renovated Towns County Courthouse stands tall and proud once more and is ready to continue serving the public for years to come.

Prior to its official opening next week, Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw was happy to welcome the public for special Open House tours on June 4 and 6.

Originally built in 1964, the courthouse features two completely revamped stories and a whole new wing, with so many updates that the phrase "new and improved" almost feels like an understatement when touring the facility.

It is immediately clear that security was of the utmost importance in designing the remodeled space; the doors feature magnetic locks, and advanced technology requires electronic fobs and identification for access to most of the rooms.

Along with that, when people enter any of the three courtrooms, they may notice that the judge's quarters are completely sectioned off by half-walls, and the judge can only enter and exit through a door directly behind the seat.

At the very back of the first floor, individual holding cells for males, females and juveniles ensure that inmates preparing for trial aren't going anywhere.

All that's really left to do

is add more parking in the fall and allow time for everyone to fully move in, but there's still ample space left.

As a matter of fact, several rooms have been set aside simply for the safe storage of documents, and at least one has been filled with construction supplies if a new office should be added onto the second floor.

Rather than leading individual tours, Sheriff's Department Auxiliary members stationed themselves around the building to answer questions about certain rooms or the changes that have occurred.

The public also got glimpses of photos taken during construction, as they were displayed on television screens in the two courtrooms on the

See *Renovations Complete*, Page 6



Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, centered in the back row, posing with guests from the public excited to get a preview of the brand-new Towns County Courthouse June 4.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Monument honors women for military contributions



Louie Mitchell posing with the new monument dedicated to women veterans that was installed at Veterans Memorial Park last month.

Photo by Kim Pardue

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

When Luin "Louie" Mitchell heard about the dismissal that many female veterans face, he knew he had to do something to rally the equal respect they deserve. Now, there's a place locally where they can be honored at any time by anyone.

Last month, a monument dedicated to women soldiers was erected at the Towns County Veterans Memorial Park. The three-sided sculpture is made of black marble and weighs approximately 8,000 pounds – so sturdy it had to be moved by a crane, piece by piece.

"To me, it looked so easy, but I know that was heavy," Mitchell said. He first reached out to manufacturers last June for an order costing more than \$38,000. And when the laser-etched monument finally arrived in late May, Mitchell was not disappointed with the regal tribute.

Everything right down to the visual design holds meaning. It sits atop three white marble steps that represent family, faith and courage, and its triangular faces stand for God, country and service.

The sharp point at the top

See *Women Veterans*, Page 3

Ordiales to leave office June 14; city passes budget



The June 4 regular meeting was the last to be led by Mayor Liz Ordiales, who will officially resign from her position at the end of this week.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales will be leaving her post this Friday, June 14, a date she revealed in the regular city meeting on Tuesday, June 4.

At the public budget hearing earlier that day, Ordiales declared her intent to resign officially on June 7, but she said City Attorney Thomas Mitchell needed "a little more time to transition things, so June 14's

fine with me – one more week is no big deal."

In an emotional farewell at the end of the meeting, Councilwoman Patsy Owens said, "I have enjoyed all seven years being on the council with you. You've done a lot for this city, and you've changed all of our lives."

Ordiales is resigning with about a year and a half remaining in her second consecutive term as mayor. Mayor Pro Tempore Jay Chastain Jr., a

longtime city councilman, will run the city until a new mayor can be elected in November to fill Ordiales' unexpired term through 2025.

Her resignation comes as the result of a mediation agreement she reached with the City Council earlier this year to settle a dispute in which she violated the City Charter by signing at least two contracts without City Council approval.

One of the disputed con-

See *City Council*, Page 5

Chief Parker talks modern policing in civic meeting

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Hiawassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker joined the Mountain Movers and Shakers recently to discuss his philosophy around modern policing.

"Policing has changed," Parker said in the May 31 breakfast meeting at Sundance Grill. "Anybody in this room that's done time in law enforcement can tell you that policing now is not the same as it used to be.

"We still have laws, and we still have rules and regulations and things that we have to follow, but there's so many eyes on us now."

Parker touched on accountability enhancing technology, like the proliferation of cameras in society as well as body-worn cameras for law enforcement, the latter of which protect both the public and officers by providing a more reliable record of police interactions.

"We're living in a world where we're always under a



Police Chief Jeremy Parker brings more than 20 years of public service experience to his position as Top Cop of the City of Hiawassee.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

microscope, and everywhere you go, you're on a camera," Parker said. "A lot of people don't like that. I feel like it's great."

Citing a major benefit of cameras in law enforcement,

Parker discussed the arrest of Hiawassee resident James Leech, who was taken into custody last month for out-of-town burglaries. Some of the evidence against Leech came

See *Movers & Shakers*, Page 3

TCSO makes marijuana find, warns of counterfeit bills

News Special

On Monday, May 27, the Towns County Sheriff's Office received a call in reference to marijuana that had been found under a tarp in a wooded area behind the Sand Bar on Dogwood Lane.

The drugs were in a tote with a lid and appeared to be marijuana. Inside the tote were multiple containers and multiple plastic packets seeming packaged and ready for sale.

Based on the packaging and the amount of drugs, the tote was used as a portable drug operation that could be moved from place to place.

While the investigation remains ongoing, Sheriff Ken Henderson is pleased that the drugs were intercepted prior to being distributed throughout the community, thereby interrupting the drug trade.

In other news, the Sheriff's Office issued a "Counterfeit Money Alert" last week after a deputy received a report of a counterfeit \$20 bill a resident received as change from a local store on June 6.



A marijuana stash that was recently discovered in an outdoors tarp enclosure remains under investigation.

Photo/Facebook

Sheriff Ken Henderson would like to share the following information to assist residents in recognizing counterfeit bills:

Evaluate the feel of the

paper. Generally, fake money does not have the crisp money feeling and the raised feeling of the black on the front of the bills.

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Chatuge 1,925.86
Nottely 1,777.19+

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Summer Heat Family Fun Day June 15

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Georgia Fiddlers Convention June 15

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Movers & Shakers...from Page 1

via license-plate recognition cameras installed on roadways.

In addition to being used in other municipalities, the City of Hiawassee has license-plate recognition cameras of its own that alert the police when known lawbreakers enter the city limits, and such technology can track vehicles in the vicinity of crimes committed locally.

Parker promised that the information gathered with these cameras is never used "to see where you're going and how many times you come into town to go to the grocery store," but instead explicitly aids criminal investigations.

Switching gears, the chief highlighted another important aspect of modern policing with a term that has been updated for the 21st century: community policing.

"We want to be involved in the community," Parker said. "I'll say it now and I'll say it forever: we are not tax collectors, and we are not ticket writers. We enforce the laws in the state of Georgia, we promote public safety, and we answer the calls of the citizens of Hiawassee."

Due to that mandate, Parker said it is his aim to foster healthy relationships between the Police Department and the public by promoting professionalism and courtesy among his officers. But community policing goes beyond that to put a spotlight on relationship-building with the public.

"It's nothing new," Parker said of outreach efforts. "We've always been out in the community. The officers pull up beside a group of kids playing basketball and get out and

support them and play basketball with them, but now everybody wants to see you take a picture with these kids.

"It's what law enforcement has been doing the whole time; they've been out in these communities. They've been taking meals to people who can't get out or changing tires on the side of the road. All that stuff's been going on forever, as long as the profession's been there.

"But now, again, they want to call it 'community policing,' and they want to put a name on it and want you to take pictures every time you go out and do something, which is fine; we enjoy that."

Returning to body-worn cameras, Parker acknowledged that they remove some level of officer discretion, and that the technology even inspires "mixed feelings" among law enforcement, but he stressed their importance in keeping both officers and the public in line.

Another hallmark of modern policing is an emphasis on information sharing, which "is huge in this business." After all, if it wasn't for a culture of information sharing between neighboring and distant departments, Hiawassee PD would not be able to make arrests like in the Leech case.

In closing, Parker advised those in attendance to contact the Hiawassee Police Department if they see any activity that concerns them in public or in their neighborhoods. Hiawassee PD can be reached at 706-896-2888.

"If you see something, or if you know of something that's going on ... give me a call," Parker said. "Let us



Civil Air Patrol Airman Erin Beggs has nothing but good things to say about the youth development organization in which she has become a leader.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

know these things, because we in law enforcement cannot do our jobs without the community's support."

Keep an eye out for an upcoming public outreach effort by Hiawassee PD when Chief Parker sends out surveys seeking feedback on "what we can do to better protect our community."

Also in the meeting, Civil Air Patrol Airman Erin Beggs of the 152nd North Georgia Composite Squadron attended to talk about the benefits of the program for young people.

About to be a junior at Union County High School, Beggs shared that the Civil Air Patrol has helped her to grow from a shy youngster to a confident leader in the year she has been with the organization.

She admitted that it was intimidating at first being a girl in a military-type program, but thanks to her involvement, Beggs said she now feels pre-

pared for nearly anything that comes her way.

For more information on the local Civil Air Patrol, including on how to become a cadet, visit <https://ga152.cap.gov/>.

The Mountain Movers & Shakers meet every Friday at 8 a.m. inside Sundance Grill in Hiawassee. Everyone is invited to attend the hour-long meetings that feature guest speakers, community announcements and more.

Sheriff's Office...from Page 1



This counterfeit \$20 bill was handed to a local resident as change last week, and the Sheriff's Office is warning residents to be on the lookout for fake cash.

Photo/Facebook

Study the watermark on the right side of the bill. On some bills, it's a replica of the face on the bill, and on others, it can be an oval spot. Hold the bill up to the light. The watermark should be visible on the right side of the bill. If there is no watermark, or if the watermark can be seen without holding the bill to the light, then the bill is probably counterfeit.

Look for raised printing.

Run a fingernail slowly and carefully down the note to feel resistance from the note and some vibrations on the nail from the ridges of the raised printing. A good location to check is the coat of the president.

Look for the fibers. Paper money is actually made of cotton and linen. Look for red and blue fibers that are embedded in the paper. Lines should not be printed or drawn on the

bill. Look for the plastic strip inside the bill. The strip goes from the top to the bottom of the bill. This does not apply to \$1 and \$2 bills.

The Sheriff's Office asks to be contacted at 706-896-4444 if anyone suspects they have received a counterfeit bill. Place the bill in an envelope and handle it as little as possible.

Women Veterans...from Page 1

signifies the female soldier's crowning achievements, and the curves and height echo a woman's bodily frame.

"Let the generations know that the women in uniform also guaranteed their freedom," U.S. Army Nurse Corps 1st Lt. Anne Sosh Brehm once said after serving in World War II. Her words are immortalized on one of the faces of the monument at the very top.

Mitchell himself was drafted into the military on Jan. 6, 1966. Despite suffering from heart problems since a child-

hood bout with rheumatic fever, he "woke up the next day in Fort Knox saying, 'Yes, sir,' and saluting."

"As time went by, I (saw) so much segregation of the military ladies. I mean, you always heard about the Green Berets and the Marine Corps and this and that, but nobody ever said anything about the ladies, and the ladies are what kept the thing running," Mitchell observed, noting that, compared to their male counterparts, women more often than not "got a raw deal" when it came to being taken seriously or remembered at ceremonies.

While this was the driving force of his motivation, Mitchell also has a bit of a personal stake in the issue.

"I've got a lady friend that I've been dating now for about nine years, and she done 24 years in the military - four in the Air Force and 20 in the Army," Mitchell said. "We have a great relationship."

With the inspiration present, the idea for the project came after Mitchell began snowbirding to Florida. Down south, he heard of a women-

led veterans' group and saw a monument dedicated to female armed forces members at the Inverness Courthouse.

"That's basically where the dedication comes from," Mitchell stated. "I'd like to see one of them monuments in every veteran cemetery in the United States."

But before he moved to Florida full-time, Mitchell lived in Hiawassee for 38 years and ran his own handyman business. He was involved in local veterans' affairs, and this monument isn't his first contribution to the Veterans Memorial Park; Mitchell is also responsible for organizing the installation of the historical cannon there.

The 35,000-pound 155 mm Howitzer previously sat in front of a record building in St. Louis, Missouri, and hadn't been moved since the end of the Vietnam War. Mitchell arranged for transportation and restoration; he himself picked up new tires for the cannon.

"It took ... three months, but we finally got it installed where it sits in 2017," Mitchell said.

Reflecting on the installation, Mitchell thinks about this latest project and gets emotional with pride, glad that he was able to do something to recognize the women that have given so much for the good of this country.

"It's impressive - at least, it is to me and everybody that sees it," Mitchell admitted. "Technically, it came out of my billfold, but it came out of my heart. It's something real precious to me."

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said that he and the county are "very thankful for citizens like him who want to give back."

GA Southern University's Dean's List

Georgia Southern University recently recognized approximately 3,460 students on the Spring 2024 Dean's List.

Elisha Denton of Hiawassee has been named to the list for excellence in academics. To be eligible for the Dean's List, a student must have at least a 3.5 grade point average and carry a minimum of 12 hours for the semester.

GA Southern University's President's List

Georgia Southern University recently recognized approximately 2,280 students for excellence in academics on the Spring 2024 President's List.

Bazya Smith of Hiawassee and Emily Frizzell of Young Harris have been named to the list for excellence in academics. To be eligible for the President's List, a student must have at least a 4.0 grade point average and carry a minimum of 12 hours for the semester.

Valdosta State University Dean's List

Valdosta State University congratulates Andrew Neal of Young Harris, GA, for earning a spot on the Spring 2024 Dean's List.

Dean's List honors are reserved for the highest achieving students at VSU. Neal is one of more than 1,600 distinguished and accomplished students recognized for exemplifying excellence in the attainment of their educational goals.

Get Ready, Summer Heat returns this Saturday, Come and enjoy the day with our First Responders



This event will be a Family Fun Day for everyone in the family. Entry is free, and we will have activities galore.

Our Towns County first responders are always looking out for others and often don't get the show of appreciation they deserve. These heroes show up every day to support the community. Being a first responder is hard work, and this event on Saturday is our way to demonstrate our immense gratitude and appreciation. So come to the Summer Heat fundraiser and help us support our purpose: to provide a safety net for all First Responders in Towns County to assist them should they be injured, etc. The funds will be used after the individual has exhausted all sick leave, short-term disability, long-term disability, etc.

We want to express our appreciation and support to the following agencies: the Towns County Sheriff's Office, the City of Hiwassee Police Department, the Young Harris College Police Department,

the Towns County Fire Department, the Towns County EMS, and the Towns County 911 Dispatch.

There will be craft vendors, fantastic food vendors, and more. In addition, there will be a great car show. The Blairsville Cruisers, All American Camaro/Firebird Association featuring Ironman and the Dragon Slayer. There will also be a dunk tank with local dignitaries on the hot seat.

A special event will be a kickball game between the Sheriff's Dept. and the Fire Department (Guns vs. Hoses). Also, weather permitting, the sheriff's office will have a live drone demonstration you want to attend. The drone is state-of-the-art and will significantly help fight crime. There will be fire trucks, police cars, ambulances, and other first responder equipment, along with a live 911 presentation.

In addition, this year's silent auction will feature several themed items on which to bid. Just a few to pique your interest: 4-hour Boat Rentals, Season Passes to the Marina Station Water Park, Cowboy Hats and Rodeo Tickets, Garden Lovers baskets, several baskets for "The Foodies," and many more. The Silent Auction will be inside the Rec center. The preferred payment

method is cash or check, but we will accept credit cards.

There will be live music by local bands. Come and see Roy Perren (Elvis), our retired High School Principal and popular local entertainer, along with Mark Henderson/ Scott Johnson (duo), Switchback, and Joe Kirkpatrick/ Kenny (duo), Quick Brown Fox.

We remembered the kids. There will be a lot of games and activities for their enjoyment—games like darts at balloons, floating ducks, ring toss, and many more— all with prizes. The kids and the Sheriff's Dept will have a BB gun contest.

We can achieve our goal with fundraising events, sponsors, and donations from our community. However, as mentioned, this is a fundraiser, and we need residents to help.

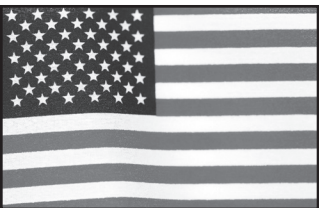
For more information, visit our website <https://www.summerheatoftownscounty.org-us> or Facebook, Summer Heat of Towns County.

Donations will be applied to the Summer Heat of Towns County First Responder Assistance Fund.

Saturday, June 15, Rain or shine. Noon – 4ish. Towns County Recreation Center. 150 Foster Park Rd, Young Harris.

Thank You for Your Support!

TCGOP Flag Day Celebration Friday, June 14th



Our flag represents our country and so many have died protecting it; we are free because of the brave!

Please plan to join us for the TCGOP Flag Day Celebration on Friday, June 14th at the TCGOP Headquarters parking lot, starting at 5:45 PM outside, weather permitting. We will have a Flag Folding Ceremony, live music by Levi Austen, an introduction about what our flag stands for by Caleb Taylor and the presentation of the American flag flown over the US Capitol at the request of Congressman Andrew Clyde. Congressman Clyde cannot attend because



Wall of Honor

of his duties in D.C. so Commissioner Bradshaw will do the honors.

All this will be followed by a celebration of Donald J. Trump's Birthday with birthday cake and ice cream! Please join us!

We will also be accepting photos of veterans to place

on our Wall of Honor. We want to fill all the open wall space with well-deserved recognition of our heroes, local and beyond.

If you need further information on this event, contact Betsy at 904-382-1912 or Nancy at 229-938-9349. We hope to see you there!

Enotah CASA's Murder Mystery Dinner Theater

Mark your calendars now and save Friday, August 9th to attend Enotah CASA's Murder Mystery Dinner Theater. The event will be held at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at 150 Foster Park Rd. at 6 pm. You will be transported to a 50's sock hop where fun, food, music and dancing thrive, however an untimely murder forces the dinner guests to solve this classic "who done it".

Funds raised by this event will support the work of Enotah CASA, a not-for-profit organization that provides trained community volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children caught up in

the foster care system due to no fault of their own. The volunteers are appointed by the juvenile judge to advise and recommend actions that will serve in the best interest of these vulnerable children. The organization serves Towns, Union, Lumpkin and White Counties.

A variety of sponsorship levels and advertising opportunities are available to support this event. You may purchase your ticket now by taking a picture of the QR code below. Tickets are \$75 per person and local ticket outlets will be available in Towns and Union Counties by mid-June. If you're inviting a crowd to help you solve the

mystery, you may purchase a table for \$700 and receive priority placement at the event. For more about becoming an event sponsor or purchasing tickets contact Enotah CASA, Inc at 706 864-0300 or visit www.enotahcasa.org.

Participants will find themselves even doubting their own innocence by the end of the night. You might also win a prize for the best costume so put on your saddle shoes, leather jackets and bobby socks and hop on down to The Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on August 9.



Second Annual Georgia State Fiddlers Convention Returns to Union County Fine Arts Center



We are excited to announce that the Georgia State Fiddlers Convention will return to the Union County Fine Arts Center in Blairsville, GA June 15. Admission is \$5.

The event will begin with registration at 8 AM and competition starting at 9 AM. There is no entry fee for contestants. In addition to junior

and senior fiddler, other categories include banjo, mandolin, flat picking guitar, finger style guitar, old time banjo, bluegrass band, dulcimer, dobro, 12 and under beginning fiddle, and 12 and under beginner musician other than fiddle. Over \$7,000 in prize money will be awarded. We expect many participants from around the southeastern region and the competition to be exciting and entertaining! In addition to the music competition there will also be crafts, silent auction, and food vendors.

The event's purpose is to showcase musical talent and preserve the rich cultural heri-

tage of the region while providing economic benefit to the community. As a tax exempt 501c3 the event is dependent on sponsorships for prize money and operating expenses. If you would like to make a tax deductible contribution it can be mailed to Georgia State Fiddlers Convention P.O. Box 370 Hiwassee, GA 30546. If you are interested in volunteering email Georgiastatefiddlersconvention@gmail.com.

For additional information including rules and judges as well as advance contestant registration visit: <https://georgiastatefiddlersconvention.org>.

City Council...from Page 1

tracts featured an unauthorized amendment to expand Paris Business Center construction, which ended up requiring about \$1 million in city-backed financing through the Downtown Development Authority due largely to pandemic-era economic stresses.

Per mediation, Ordiales agreed to leave the city on or before Dec. 31, 2024, once she had seen through certain business she wanted to complete, and her timeline effectively moved up with the cancellation of the Boardwalk Project to connect Lloyd's Landing and Mayors Park.

In other business, council members approved the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget after extensive discussion and an agreement to face amendments

at a later date as needed. Councilman Chastain mapped it out, revealing that the budget has gone up compared to the current FY24 Budget.

Budgetary increases have been attributed largely to inflation but also account for the fact that the budget must properly cover staff wages. For example, new funding has been allocated to the Police Department, and advancements in training mean that water workers must receive raises.

"The reason we're having to up a little bit more on the salaries is we were down one officer for six months, so we have to pay the county for that," Ordiales explained. "So, it's \$7,500 right off the bat for official administration."

The Utility Adjustment

Policy, first discussed at the May 28 work session, faced new changes addressing adjustments to residential and commercial meters – or lack thereof. Because it was considered unfinished by the time of the regular meeting, the council instead turned their attention to the reason behind the policy.

Last month, the sewer bill for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds came in at \$48,000 due to an undiscovered leak. A debate regarding adjustments for the cost, particularly penalties, followed, leading City Attorney Mitchell to suggest a policy to address large-scale water meter issues.

By June 4, the council approved an adjustment of \$39,500 in sewer charges for the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, eliminating the penalties that would have hiked the price.

Medicare Insurance Agent Jarrett recognized as Top National Performer

News Special

In an impressive achievement, Cathy Jarrett, a dedicated local Medicare insurance agent, has been honored as the No. 5 insurance agent nationally by National Contracting Center for 2023. This recognition highlights her relentless hard work, commitment to her clients, and unparalleled expertise in the Medicare field.

Cathy's success story is a testament to her dedication and the personalized approach she takes with each client. By investing time to understand the unique needs and concerns of every individual she assists, Cathy ensures that they are well-informed and comfortable with their Medicare choices.

Her client-centric philosophy has not only earned her a top spot among national peers but also the trust and gratitude of countless seniors in our community.

"Helping as many seniors as possible navigate the complexities of Medicare is my passion," Cathy said. "It's incredibly rewarding to see the relief on their faces when they understand their options and feel secure in their decisions."

Cathy's approach is not just about selling policies; it's about educating and empowering her clients. She breaks down complicated Medicare plans into understandable information, making sure that her clients

make informed decisions that best suit their healthcare needs.

This educational approach has set her apart in the industry and has contributed significantly to her success.

Her achievement as the

No. 5 national agent is not only a reflection of her sales performance but also of her genuine care and the quality of service she provides. Cathy's hard work and dedication have not gone unnoticed, and this accolade is a well-deserved recognition of her efforts.

Looking ahead to 2024, Cathy remains committed to her mission of helping even more seniors navigate Medicare

with ease. Her unwavering commitment to her clients ensures that she will continue to lead the industry and make a positive impact on the lives of many.

If you or someone you know is seeking Medicare assistance or simply has questions, Cathy Jarrett is the go-to expert. With no pressure and no obligation, Cathy is here to help. Just give her a

call at 706-781-7832 to set up a meeting in her Blairsville, Hiawassee or Clayton offices, and experience the exceptional service and care that have earned her national recognition.

Join us in applauding Cathy Jarrett for her incredible hard work and dedication. We look forward to seeing what more she will accomplish in the coming year!



Award-winning Insurance Agent Cathy Jarrett is available to help area residents with all their Medicare needs.

Barrett retires after 27 years with United Community Bank

News Special

After 27 years of loyal service to United Community and to the community of Towns County, Cheryl Barrett retired from United Community on May 31.

Cheryl is a lifelong resident of Towns County. She has been a valuable part of the United Community banking family and a valuable spokesperson for the community.

For 17 years, Cheryl was the leader of the Junior Board for high school seniors. During her career she was actively involved with many community organizations, such as the Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge, the Mountain Arts Association, the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, the TCHS Business Advisory Board, the Towns County PTSO, and the American Cancer Society Relay for Life.

She served customers with a smile and a warm greeting and made everyone feel welcome. Cheryl led her fel-



United Community Bank of Hiawassee wished Cheryl Barrett a very fond farewell with a retirement party on May 31.

low employees by example, tirelessly working to serve the bank and community.

"We will greatly miss

her," said United Community Hiawassee President Brandon Grimsley. "Congratulations on retirement!"

Renovations Complete...from Page 1



The new lobby of the Towns County Courthouse is unrecognizable after renovations to the original 1964 structure, pictured here amid guests conversing in the June 6 Open House.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

ground floor to demonstrate the dramatic transformation.

Among Towns County residents coming to take a look, many courthouse employees took the chance to get a more in-depth view of their new surroundings. Assistant District Attorney Buster Landreau, for one, was very pleased with the addition of an official District Attorney's wing.

"Before they did the renovations, we had two offices – one for the secretary, one for an attorney and a file room," Landreau said, pointing out that now, all five attorneys have their own office spaces along with a "spare" room that can be utilized as a meeting or break room.

Kristen Roberts, a probate clerk, can remember moving into the Temporary Courthouse – the old Towns County Recreation Department – in 2022, and she is admittedly ready and excited to come back to the official county seat.

"It was a nice facelift," Roberts said of the renovations. "Our county has been growing so much, so we definitely want our courthouse to reflect that."

"I'm very proud of (the remodeling)," agreed Probate Judge David Rogers. "I've not heard anything negative."

As guests poked around, Roberts pointed out a unique feature in his office that had been added to keep some of Towns County's oldest records safe from catastrophe.

"What's cool about our open records is that we actually have a fire system in it so that if the fire alarm goes off, you have 30 seconds for people to get out of the room before the door locks, and the room will then suck all the oxygen out of it to protect our documents," said Roberts, adding that some of the invaluable records date back to the 1800s.

As they explored the building, some residents remarked that the courthouse was "dramatically different than the old place," while others were pleasantly surprised at how comfortable the seating was.

Speaking of seating, Sheriff's Auxiliary Member Ash Todd was on hand in the

Probate Court to point out that all the benches in that particular room were historical remnants.

"These benches are the original benches from the other courthouse; we've refinished them (and) saved some money doing that," Todd said, marveling at the amount of foot traffic throughout the building. "People are really interested in what this county has done."

Meanwhile, Todd's wife, Brandy Creel, introduced folks to the new jury room, complete with a bathroom and a window with a view of the parking lot and nature beyond.

Down the hall, the "seam" where the new wing was added in is visible in the wall, covered up and decorated as just another aspect of the aesthetic.

Commissioner Bradshaw said that, along with utility and space, one of the driving forces of the new design was to reconnect the past with the present. Using the old benches illustrates that, as do pictures of each county commissioner lining the wall at the entrance of the building.

Also featured are historical photographs of Hiawassee dating back to the 1940s courtesy of the Towns County Historical Society, and vibrant

paintings by local artist Marty Hayden breathe life into the Towns County of yesteryear.

"The thought process was to make the building blend like it's always been here – that was the first goal. The second goal was not to overbuild, but build for the future, and I think we've accomplished that," said Bradshaw, revealing that the total cost of the voter-approved SPLOST project was about \$10.4 million.

Bradshaw added that the project came about largely in response to Towns County's growth, and while the building is certainly sufficient for the time being, it has been given room to provide extra space in the future.

Not only that, but a change was needed. Bradshaw recalls, "We had two ladies in the Commissioner's Office literally working in a closet. We had air conditioning units in windows. (Now) we have central heating and air. I mean, everything has been replaced, everything is new."

The Towns County Courthouse is located at 48 River Street in Hiawassee. Regular county business is expected to resume inside the renovated courthouse starting next week.



Official court proceedings will now take place in 21st century style, complete with security upgrades and more comfortable seating for everyone.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson