

Stewart tops 2010 class...from page 1A

pretty good worker," he said.

The Young Harris College-bound senior said he never set out to become valedictorian — it just happened.

"It was never a goal of mine," he said. "I've just always cared about my work and my grades. I've always tried real hard. This is just a compilation of years of hard work."

During his junior year, he realized he had a shot at becoming the top student in his class.

"I heard that I was up there in the running," he said. "I was either first or second last year and I knew I had to maintain my grades this year. I had an idea that I had a good chance to become valedictorian this year."

Stewart looks forward to his next academic adventure, four years at Young Harris College.

"I've already got a music scholarship there," he said. "Right now, I'm going to study music at the college, but I'm not exactly sure what the future holds for me. "It's real close to home. I didn't want to go to college very far away," he said. "It's an easier transition into college for me. I like the small school environment since I'm already from a small school."

Stewart, an avid musician, played the trombone in the high school band. He's been a band member since the sixth grade. He loves to

play the bass guitar. He credits TCHS band director Frank McKinney as his inspiration to succeed.

"He's been an inspiration for me personally," Stewart said. "He's thrown out some ideas for my future and I respect his opinion. He's helped me look at music in a different light and how I can use it in the future."

Perren said that the Salutatorian has not been named as of yet.

"Right now, that one is too close to call," he said. "We had to name the Valedictorian on May 7 because that was the deadline to send it into the Governor's Office."

"We'll have a Salutatorian very soon," he said.

New coach, same face...from page 1A

Bradshaw, the versatile Devin Henderson and super intense Corbin Gilfilian. Also returning is hot-shooting junior Brandon Henderson.

"Coach Hamilton has a lot of talent to work with for next season," Perren said.

Hamilton, who replaced the departed Head Coach Chet Kendall at mid-season, provided a spark to the Indians hardwood hopes in the season's second half.

As a player, Hamilton knew how to score, averaging between 17 and 25 points on any given night as the leading scorer for the Indians during his senior year. He was named to the All-Tournament Team for the 2000 Battle of The States basketball tournament at Towns County High School.

Much like the moments when he got the hot hand shooting during his playing days, Coach Hamilton rallied a young Indian team to play hard, aggressive basketball after

stepping up from his duties as assistant coach.

"We interviewed several people," Perren said. "As the interviews became more intense and deeper, Ken Hamilton remained poised and calm. He's got a game plan and he shared that with us."

"Eventually it became apparent that even though we had other candidates from other places interested in the job, we had the right person for the job sitting right here," Perren said. "Ken never once pointed a finger of blame regarding what was wrong with the program. Rather, he outlined a program for success. I'm very pleased to have Ken as our head boys' basketball coach."

Jerry Kendall, noted Towns County sports historian and basketball beat writer for the Towns County Herald, describes Hamilton as a young man dedicated to the sport of basketball.

According to Kendall,

following his playing days as an Indian, Hamilton remained active in basketball for five years while studying for his bachelor's degree and his master's degree at Piedmont College in Demorest. He stayed close to the sport through his affiliation with the Lions' basketball program.

"Ken came in and did a fine job finishing the season and the players regained their confidence. He brought enthusiasm to the program last year and the kids really enjoyed playing for him," Perren said. "We're looking for Ken to continue building the program and being able to compete."

"He's a young guy, but he's not too young," Perren said. "He's the same age Jim Melton was when he took over the girls' basketball program. He's got a great attitude and he wants to go out there and do the best job he can do for the boys and for Towns County."

YHC grads...continued from page 1A

most powerful positions afforded the Georgia General Assembly began at Young Harris College.

Encouraging the Class of 2010 to persevere through economic hardship, Ralston, who delivered the commencement address, urged the graduates to never give up, never surrender.

"Many of you are continuing your education or going into the workforce after today. I encourage you to stay positive," Ralston said. "I know this economic situation has made some people jaded, but many things have happened in my life that has allowed me to stay positive."

In a lighter moment, Ralston told the graduates that he loved to attend graduations.

"Even if I didn't have to speak, I probably would have come anyway," he said.

The House Speaker drew a laugh from the crowd as he drew a comparison of the various graduations he's encountered in his lifetime, mostly, those of his children.

"I cried at my children's Pre-K, elementary, middle and high School graduations. The high school graduation was the real tear jerker," Ralston said. "But I didn't cry during college graduation. That day, I got a pay raise."

Before he left the stage, Ralston received the school's first honorary Business and Public Policy degree.

His teeth and cheeks shimmered with the light of the stage as he took the degree from the hands of Young Harris College President Cathy Cox.

President Cox, dressed in traditional presidential attire, with purple lining and Young

Harris College emblems resting on the front, turned her attention to the YHC graduates, more than 150. Graduating in order of degree type, President Cox turned the tassels on their graduation caps to signify a moment of accomplishment.

The Rev. Tim Moore closed the commencement exercises with the Benediction. In his butterfly-print, white robe, he prayed for the students and guests attending the ceremony to be blessed in the future.

Leading the graduates out of the auditorium, the professors of YHC lined the sidewalk to cheer and shake the hands of their students.

The mortarboards lining the blue sky sent a message of hope to both graduates and guests alike. The day, like the ceremony, was a glimmer of hope amid economic turmoil.

Post Office...continued from page 1A

Dan Simpson and Alan Saylor did the honors just before Simpson gave Commissioner Bill Kendall the key to the historical post office.

Actually, Simpson and Saylor did the bulk of the work on the treasured landmark, using boards from the historic McKinney Feed Store building as well as some modern day wood work to preserve the precious link to Towns County's past. They also used boards from Lon Berrong's 150-year-old barn, which just happened to be the same size as the Presley Post Office.

Towns County High School FFA advisor Sabrina Garrett repaired the windows and got them back into shape. She also recommended using Plexiglas instead of glass in the repaired windows.

"That was an excellent idea," Simpson said.

Simpson also had high praise for Commissioner Kendall for his support in the preservation of Towns County's past.

"Bill arranged for the transport with the county road department," Simpson said. "Originally, we thought about putting this at the Fairgrounds, but Commissioner Kendall said 'why don't we put it down here on the square so everybody can see it?'"

"I thought that was a great idea because more people will get to see it than going to the Fair a couple of times a year," Simpson said. "It's working out just fine."

Simpson couldn't forget Clyde Shook and his intrepid road department crew for their excellent job relocating the post office to its current location.

"They did it without damaging a board," he said.

The building, moved to its current location in late August last year, got a well-deserved facelift at its new home, under the trees behind the Towns County Courthouse.

The Towns County Historical Society in concert with Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and the Georgia Department of Transportation coordinated the move from its rural roots in central Towns County to the Square in Downtown.

Simpson and Saylor put in many long, laborious hours to bring some luster back to the historic post office that went into service as the impact of the Great Depression began to take roots in the society of a small mountain community.

Kendall praised the Historical Society for their efforts to preserve yet another slice of Towns County history.

"This building, along with Pine Grove Elementary down at the Fairgrounds are the prize possessions that we have in terms of historical buildings," Kendall said. "Our landmarks are vanishing fast across the county."

"I have some fond memories about this building because when I was 5 years old, I walked about five miles round trip to the school (Macedonia) across

the road from this post office," he said. "I'm going to ask the Historical Society to put this on the forefront, in addition to preserving our heritage here, to preserve our beautiful mountains and lakes."

Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis agreed.

"Bill's right, we need to preserve our link to the past as best we can," she said. "We want to hand this beautiful county down to the next generation in pristine condition."

Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby concurred.

"What we do today is history," she said. "People will be able to look back and see what we did today. They'll decide whether they think we did a good job or not so good of a job."

"This obviously is a great job," she said. "We're preserving our past."

The post office, once a rural one-room facility on the headwaters of the Hiwassee River in central Towns County, has been a part of Towns County for many years. The post office served an area that included the Hiwassee River area, Macedonia, Lower Hightower and Fodder Creek.

Kendall said it was priceless to be able to bring an important part of everyday history back to life with-in proximity of the Downtown Square.

"Any time you have a chance to preserve history, you do it," Kendall said. "It's important to remember our past to keep us grounded as we progress into the future."

Park land...continued from page 1A

property will be delayed because the county doesn't have a 1 cent Special Local Option Sales Tax. However, work could be begun in increments using county equipment and employees similar to work on temporary fields at the Industrial Park.

"We must and will begin now by preserving this property for a much needed park and athletic fields," he said.

Kendall reiterated that any SPLOST referendum benefiting the county is on hold until the Towns County Board of Education's ELOST expires in June 2011.

"We can't put an 8 cent tax burden on our residents," Kendall said.

The need for land to develop into a county park arose after years of rejection by the Tennessee Valley Authority and U.S. Forest Service.

The TVA rejected a request by the late Towns County Sole Commissioner Jack Dayton to use TVA property for athletic fields. To date, TVA and the U.S. Forest Service have both denied a similar request by Kendall to utilize some of their property for athletic fields for local youth.

Some 70 percent of Towns County is owned by TVA and the U.S. Forest Ser-

vice. Geographical obstacles that include an incredible mountainous landscape leave few options for development of suitable recreation facilities, Kendall said.

"We need it," he said, referencing the property's purchase. "The young people here just don't have adequate facilities for athletics and the older generation doesn't have the walking trails that other communities around us have."

"We've got to have a park to build and grow our local athletic programs and have a place for the families in our community to enjoy," he said. "The children of this county deserve that much. The residents of Towns County deserve that much."

The bulk of the proceeds from the property's sale to the county by the Johnny Foster Trust go to Young Harris College for scholarships, Kendall said.

"The county money that we spend for that property will go toward future scholarships for our children and our grandchildren," Kendall said.

Kendall vowed not to let the property purchase impact local property taxes.

"There will be no property tax increase because of this

land purchase," he said.

Mining Gap Trail is centrally located within the county borders. Kendall will purchase the land from the county's operating reserve general funds.

In February, Kendall met with the Towns County Industrial Development Authority and agreed to lease unused property for a temporary fix for athletic fields.

He requisitioned the use of county equipment and employees to develop the temporary athletic fields.

Kendall envisions developing the new park with sky-friendly security lights and deed restrictions that include that the property must remain in perpetuity as a county recreation facility.

"This park and green space will be an asset for the county, our senior citizens, children, grandchildren and posterity," he said. "The alternative use for this property would be hundreds of condominiums and/or single family homes."

"Developers have offered a lot more than we would have to pay for it for the opportunity to build it out," he said. "The maximum best use for this property is as a park and recreation facility."

Food Pantry...from page 1A

a long way where we're concerned," said Food Pantry Volunteer Richard Botting.

The bank, a subsidiary of South Carolina Bank & Trust, headquartered in Orangeburg, SC, just wanted to make a difference in the community in which it serves.

CB&T has been making a difference in its communities for 110 years. The folks at SCBT say that CB&T will continue to remain a dedicated partner with the communities that they call home.

Botting was in awe of the fact that Strickland didn't just stop by and drop off a check. She toured the facility, getting acquainted with each facet of the Food Pantry's day-to-day operations.

The Food Pantry, which also received a \$500 donation last week from the Towns County Homeowners Association, serves more than 300 families each week. They served as many as 396 families in the winter months.

"I believe the numbers are dropping a bit because the weather is changing, getting warmer and more seasonal jobs are available," Botting said. "The bottom line is that we'll never go a week without serving families. The economy is still stagnant and families are still in need."

"It's just incredible that we've received \$1,000 in the last two weeks," he said. "That's great news for some really wonderful folks who are struggling right now."