

Ronnie Milsap...continued from page 1A

musical hero that put Milsap on the road to a musical career.

"While I was at Young Harris, a friend and I had the chance to go see Ray Charles perform in Atlanta," Milsap said. "Somehow, we got back stage.

"I was introduced to Ray Charles and I said, 'Mr. Ray Charles, you're my hero. You're the man I look up to. I emulate your music, but I'm faced with a dilemma. I'd love to be in the music business, but all my advisors tell me I have to have an academic life. So I'm going on to study law and become a lawyer.'

"There was a piano in the dressing room, and Ray

said, 'Well, play me something.' So I played him three songs, and Charles said, 'Well, son, you can be a lawyer if you want to, but there's a lot of music in your heart. If I were you, I'd follow what my heart tells me to do.'"

Milsap went on to become the pianist for Elvis Presley in the late 1960s and by the 1970s, he was topping the charts with hits of his own.

Ronnie Milsap and his band played their hearts out for the crowd at Anderson Music Hall on Saturday night.

Milsap started off with a medley of his 40 No. 1 hits, and then a vast array of his

longtime favorites that have earned him six Grammys and a dozen Country Music Association Awards, including four turns as Male Vocalist of the Year.

He even talked about his latest project, an album to be released July 26, "Country Again."

Milsap amused the crowd with stories about the road, his days growing up in Graham and Clay counties in North Carolina. And his fond memories of being a student at Young Harris College.

"I'm proud to have been a part of the storied history of Young Harris College," he said. "It put me on the road to where I am today."

Hemlocks...continued from page 1A

"There are some trees here that have never been treated and it's obvious they are in stress.

"With the treatment they have received, they will respond really well," he said.

Hemlock woolly adelgid was first introduced into the United States in the 1950s in Virginia. It was first discovered in Georgia in 2003 near the Ellicott Rock area of Rabun County. The Georgia Forestry Commission does annual surveys to determine infested areas. The 2007 GFC survey revealed the Asian invader is in Rabun, Habersham, Towns, Union, Stephens, White, Lumpkin and Fannin counties.

The adelgid is dispersed by wind, birds and human activity and is spreading at an alarming rate, according to the Georgia Forestry Commission.

Recently, Georgia of Adel Rid, a hemlock tree

treatment company that covers Northern Georgia and Western Carolina, came to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to treat hemlocks that have suffered serious infestation by adelgid.

It's all part of the Legacy Tree Project, an effort by Valent USA and Adel Rid to protect Georgia's hemlocks from adelgid and raise public awareness of the problem.

The five-year project aims to treat hemlocks at no charge to municipalities in an effort to save high-profile trees.

The adelgid has no natural predator. The insect is female, no males exist, and can lay eggs almost as soon as they hatch themselves, George said.

"They stay on the tree, lay two egg sacs a year until the tree can't support its life," George said. "Then the population of the bug drops and the tree is extremely sick."

In North Georgia, Jann George is the only predator that the adelgid has to fear.

"In other parts of the world where hemlocks grow, there are natural predators of this insect," he said. "Unfortunately, here, there are no natural predators."

Adel Rid's partner, Valent USA, manufacturer of Safari Insecticide, have teamed together to fight the adelgid and keep it from spreading. The partners have committed five years of material and treatment in the effort to save the hemlocks.

Valent USA and Adel Rid are getting help from the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, as well as the Chestatee Chattahoochee RC&D.

"We're working to roll this project out to all the municipalities," George said.

For more details on how to save the hemlocks, call (706) 318-4458.

Shriners...continued from page 1A

meant a lot to this community the three days they were here."

Restaurants were full, there were heads in every bed in the local hotels and the local merchants were smiling like they haven't smiled in quite some time.

"This economic recession has hurt our local businesses something fierce," Commissioner Kendall said. "Having the Shriners in town for three days meant the world to them this weekend."

Skiles said he was excited about the three-year commitment that the Shriners have made in Towns County.

"We have spent the last 22-plus years in Helen and Helen is a great little city," he said. "We thought Hiawassee could offer us a whole lot more so we made a three-year commitment.

"I'll tell you what, the city of Hiawassee and Towns County couldn't have been more accommodating," he said. "We bring a crowd, they come in all shapes and sizes, but in the end, we all work very, very diligently in support of our hospitals.

"Hiawassee has given us the opportunity of a new beginning," he said. "And that's what it's all about. We have not heard anything negative about this convention, everything has been positive."

Part of the convention included 53 candidates for Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, which came off beautifully, Skiles said.

"We can't thank Hiawassee and Towns County enough for what they've done for us," Skiles said. "Absolutely no one has had a negative thing to say about this wonderful community."

Yaarab Shrine Chief Rabban Chuck Rager said the Towns County event was spectacular.

"We had like 250 pieces of equipment in that parade," Rager said. "That is like a record. A lot of the Nobility was here, I think probably the most clubs and units I've seen in a long time. The parade was a great success and the whole weekend has been tremendous.

"Yesterday (Friday) we had three big venues going on at the same time: a golf tournament, which was a huge success, the Poker Run on the lake, another huge success, and a motorcycle ride, yet another huge success," Rager said. "What more could we ask of the town and the county?"

"Hiawassee and Towns County have been spectacular," Rager said. "This didn't happen overnight, it took a lot of ground work, Chuck Pittman, did most of that ground work. He's the one who led this brigade into Towns County."

Pittman, Yaarab Shrine's Assistant Rabban, who lives here, said that the Shriners are committed to Towns County through 2013. Should everything continue to click over the next two conventions, Towns County may be a long-term host for the Yaarab Shriners.

"It's a vision and dream that I've had for five years," Pittman said. "We're bringing our huge family event to a venue where we could have fun and fellowship in new surroundings."

After looking at many different venues, the final round of team support was for Towns County.

"We decided as a team that we wanted to bring it to Towns County because of the lake, the atmosphere and the reception we got from the Towns County Tourism Board and the Chamber of Commerce," Pittman said. "I cannot say enough about Hilda Thomason, Commissioner Kendall and Mayor Mathis. We have not asked for anything at all that they have not delivered."

Skiles said having evaluated the first year in Towns County, there are things that they can do better in the future as a club.

"As far as taking this event away from here - not a chance," Skiles said.



Western North Carolina native and Young Harris College graduate Ronnie Milsap dazzled the hometown crowd Saturday night at Anderson Music Hall in Hiawassee. Photos by James Reese.

CMA Rally ... continued from page 1A

ership team from across the United States. Each afternoon will feature seminars, vendors and rides.

On Thursday morning, featured speakers from sister ministries: Open Doors, Missionary Ventures and The JESUS Film. Thursday evening will be celebrating the efforts of the top fund raisers in CMA's Run for the Son held the first Saturday in May each year.

CMA is a non-profit, interdenominational organization, dedicated to reaching people for Christ in the highways and byways through motorcycling.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall said he was expecting another exciting week in Hiawassee and Towns County.

"Just like we did with the Shriners, we want to put

our best foot forward and welcome the Christian Motorcycle Association to our hospitable community," Commissioner Kendall said. "Everyone involved in the Shriners Convention had a good time and we expect the same with the CMA Rally. They are a fine organization and we're proud to have them here in Towns County. We look to have them back again next year as well."

Taxpayers...continued from page 1A

been placed upon the property owners by these Commissioners without the debt first being authorized by approval in a referendum of the voters, as originally required and intended by the Constitution of the State of Georgia," Commissioner Kendall said. "Commissioners circumvent this constitutional requirement of voter approval by using a gimmick known as Lease Purchase Agreements with lending institutions.

"This plan allows county commissioners to enter into an agreement with a lending institution to construct elaborate multi-million dollar government buildings without voter approval," he said.

According to Commissioner Kendall a lending institution, or other financing entity, will actually purchase and take title to the property and the county will lease the

building on a year-to-year basis with a buyout provision for the government to take title at the end of the lease term, thereby getting around the Constitutional requirement of voter approval for long-term debt.

"Technically, since the county does not own the building and only leases it on a year-to-year term, the county is not borrowing money for more than one year," Commissioner Kendall said. "Theoretically, the voters could elect future Commissioners committed to not renew the lease. However, the commissioners incurring the debt without voter approval disband their present buildings by dismantling, selling or using for something else, thereby making it virtually impossible or impractical for future commissioners to not

keep renewing the lease year-to-year with the taxpayers funding and also with a higher interest rate than if the taxpayers had approved the debt in a referendum for long-term debt as required by the Constitution."

"These procedures and practices establish the potential for fiscal irresponsibility and to place the taxpayers and property owners of a county responsible for a tremendous long-term debt load without their approval through a referendum," Commissioner Kendall said.

Towns County will not enter into certificates of participation programs or lease purchase agreements, which seek to circumvent the limitations and provisions for voter approval on long-term county debt without a referendum in favor of that debt, Commissioner Kendall said.

Butterworth honored again

District 50 State Sen. Jim Butterworth is back in the news.

Sen. Butterworth is the recipient of the Environmental Leadership Award from the Georgia Conservation Voters. He achieved the award for his demonstrated support of Georgia's natural resources.

"Along with job creation and economic growth, creating sustainable environmental policies has consistently remained at the top of the Senate agenda," Sen. Butterworth said. "I am honored by this award from Georgia Conservation Voters and hope to continue working together to protect Georgia's natural resources."

"Senator Butterworth stood up for Georgia's families this year, and actively worked to promote an understanding among his colleagues of the need to protect Georgia's environment as an integral part of preserving our way of life," said Rob Teilhet, Executive Director of Georgia Conservation Voters.

"Thanks to Senator Butterworth's leadership, Georgia's conservation values had a voice at our state



State Sen. Jim Butterworth

capitol," continued Teilhet.

Georgia Conservation Voters works with environmental and sportsmen's organizations across the state to develop shared legislative priorities each year. Legislators re-

ceive Environmental Leadership Awards based upon their votes and leadership on the common agenda. Sen. Butterworth was one of forty-six members of the Georgia General Assembly to receive a 2011 Environmental Leadership Award.

Georgia Conservation Voters is a 501(c)(4) non-partisan organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing the quality of life of all Georgians by making conservation issues a top priority with Georgia's elected officials, political candidates and voters.

2011-12 Officers for Mountain Area Performing Arts Association



As of July 1, 2011 - June 30, 2012 the officers are (L-R): Susan Vardeman, Secretary; Bonny Herman, President; Karen Borchers, Vice President, Bob Dalsemer, Treasurer. See mapaa.org for listings of performances coming up. NTU0622ZICA



Even Shriners like to watch Shriners' Parades. Shriners and their family members lined the streets of Downtown Hiawassee in support of the city's first Shriners' Parade. Photo/James Reese