

Fire claims two lives...continued from page 1A

Chief Floyd said Wright was very familiar with the family and knew that a car in the driveway meant someone was home.

"He made the assumption that they were inside," Chief Floyd said. "The house was about 25 percent involved when Chief Wright got there. There was heavy involvement in the living room area.

"He tried to make entry, he was able to get just a few feet inside the door," Chief Floyd said. "It was just too hot and too smoky and he had to back out of there."

In the end, the home was about a 50 percent loss, but the loss of two lives made the blaze more than a fiery misfortune. It was certifiably a community tragedy, Chief Floyd said.

"This truly is a com-

munity tragedy," he said. "Our hearts go out to the Burrell family; they've had a tough year. This is the first loss of life we've experienced from this type of fire in three or four years. You hate it any time something like this happens."

The recent drop in temperatures gives Chief Floyd reason for pause.

As the Northeast Georgia Mountains enter the colder months residents need to use extreme caution with electric heaters, any kind of space heaters to avert future tragedy, Chief Floyd said.

"If they're using wood-burning stoves they need to have the chimneys cleaned by a professional," he said. "They also need to make sure they keep their heating equip-



Towns County firefighters work to extinguish the blaze that claimed the lives of a mother and her son. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

ment maintained." Chief Floyd advised that residents also should make sure that they keep bedding and curtains and those kinds of cloth linens are kept away from any type of heaters.

"Last year, we had about three or four fires that were caused by electric

heaters being too close to either bedding or curtains," he said. "I don't know if that's the case here, but we just need to get the word out for people to exercise extreme caution. People need to use smoke detectors. For an investment of less than \$10, you might save a life."

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home on his hands and knees.

"I kicked the back door in," he said. "I started crawling through the bedrooms and checking the beds. No one was in there, so I crawled on through to the next room. Smoke, fire and heat was so intense I couldn't get any further."

He made his way toward the living room. The heat from the blaze became increasingly intense.

"I couldn't get any further, the flames basically were just right there in my face," he said. "It was just too far gone. It was a terrible, terrible situation. I've known these folks all my life."

He checked the bedroom again as he backed out of the building, but no one

was there.

"It's a bad situation for the whole family," he said. "There was another son that lived there, but he was gone to South Georgia deer hunting. There was a sister that kept check on them while he was gone."

"It was just a terrible, tragic situation," he said, the day ending with him still shaking his head.

It's the second tragedy this year for the Burrell family. In July, the Rev. Ricky Burrell was killed by a fallen tree.

"I was the first responder on that one," he said. "It's been a tough, tough year for the Burrell family. I just wish I could have done more (on Monday)."

Kristi Cornwell lead unfolds...continued from page 1A

of the vehicle and as he approached the woman, another car drove up and the man left.

As the man drove by, the woman, who was not seriously injured, saw his profile since the driver's side window was rolled down. She also noticed that the vehicle was a silver, late model SUV. The North Carolina State Patrol was notified and interviewed the woman, but no report was filed.

After media reports of Cornwell's disappearance included that a white or light colored SUV was seen in that area of Union County the evening of Aug. 11, the woman called the tip line to report what had happened to her.

With the assistance from the Cherokee County, NC Sheriff's Office and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, GBI agents have been pursuing the lead provided by the woman in the Ranger community.

GBI Forensic Artist Marla Lawson completed a sketch of the Ranger suspect based on the woman's description. She indicated that he is a white male in

his mid-20s with dark hair.

The woman also told agents that the vehicle was a silver, late model Nissan Xterra with tinted windows and with a brush guard on the front.

Using the sketch and vehicle description, authorities conducted numerous neighborhood dragnets in Cherokee County but were unsuccessful in developing solid leads. It was also determined that between 400 and 500 vehicles matching the suspect vehicle are registered in that region of North Carolina.

Ayers told members of the media gathered in Cleveland on Monday that the timing of the incident and the vehicle's description provide a possible link to Cornwell's abrupt disappearance.

"There are a great deal of similarities involved," Ayers said. "Both incidents occurred about (9 p.m.); both involve a pedestrian walking down the road. Does that mean the two are related? We don't know, but they could be, and that is good information for us to follow up



Kristi Cornwell pictured here with her son in 2007. Photo/Kristi Cornwell.com

on in this investigation."

Kristi Cornwell continues to be on the minds of law enforcement officers throughout the country. Her story has been featured on America's Most Wanted and has garnered nationwide attention from early morning shows on all the major networks.

Investigators are now asking anyone with information on the possible identity of the man in the sketch or the identity of the owner of the Nissan Xterra to please call the GBI Tip Line at (800) 597-TIPS (8477).

To date, GBI agents

have conducted 1,168 individual, documented investigative acts as part of the ongoing investigation. That doesn't include 11 days of active searching for Cornwell during August in Union County by countless local, state and federal agencies. Six hundred and sixty-four tips were phoned into the tip line and investigated by law enforcement. The dragnet included interviews at 450 houses in the area.

Ayers says the GBI case file is now 32 volumes thick and continues to expand as additional information is developed and thoroughly investigated.

KOM glory arrives for Barnes...continued from page 1A

tively. They missed a share of third place by four points.

The Indians also saw Tim Collier, Zach Stroud and Tyler Keyes walk away with silver medals.

Mat Hogsed drew a tough seed and had to battle back from a second round defeat to claim the 160-pound bronze medal. In four years of KOM battles, Hogsed has one gold, two silvers and a bronze to show for his wrestling efforts.

Collier, last year's champion at 112 pounds, who lost to Todd Berry of Lumpkin County in the 125-pound championship finals, said he just didn't have the strength to finish the job.

"I have all the technique in the world, but I'm weak as water," Collier said. "I just don't have the strength to match up with it. I really have to hit the weight room and get stronger if

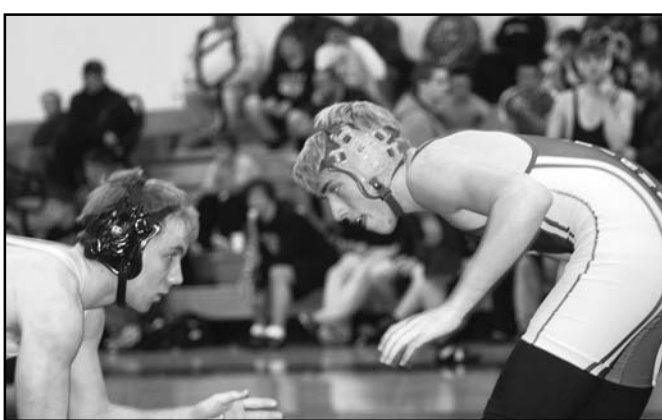
I'm going to compete against tougher competition."

Stroud, the silver medalist at 140 pounds, lost in the finals to Eian Perry of Dawson County. Like Collier, Stroud said he ran out of gas to the much stronger Perry, whose brother Joe Perry was a Class AA state champion at 130 pounds last year.

"It was a great experience getting to the finals," Stroud said. "I'm disappointed that I couldn't finish the job. He was a good bit stronger than I was and I figure he knew a good bit more than me. I couldn't keep him down. I've got to hit the weight room."

Head Coach Jeff Stowers didn't disagree with his wrestlers.

"We were third heading into the finals," Stowers said. "If we win two of those four finals matches, we finish third. We couldn't



Towns County Indians' wrestler Zach Stroud prepares to inflict some pain on his 140-pound opponent during Saturday's King of the Mountain wrestling tournament. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

and we didn't.

"We had a good showing," he said. "We had four in the finals and four in the consolations."

"I'll tell you who I'm really proud of is Wesley Bloodworth," Stowers said. "Here's a kid who has never wrestled before and he

wrestles his way through some stiff competition at 215 pounds and finishes fourth. I can't say enough about him. He's got the heart of a champion."

Max Updike also finished fourth at 171 pounds and Jaythen Burrell finished fifth at 189 pounds.



A Towns County firefighter tries to put a knockdown on the blaze that claimed the lives of Ivalee Burrell and her son Ernest Burrell. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Development...continued from page 1A

ting on Towns County.

"We were sold on this location, and the fact that we had been promising folks in the area that we'd be coming to the mountains rather than expecting them to come to Atlanta," Willis said, explaining the selection of Towns County as the site selection.

"This location was ideal, it met all of our criteria for infrastructure, community activities and shopping," Willis said, adding that the entertainment provided by the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds was a major draw.

Willis added that Lake Chatuge, advanced medical facilities and activities for seniors also played a major factor in the decision-making process.

"We had to have ad-

equated infrastructure and Hiwassee has a unique atmosphere that attracts people in their retirement years," she said.

"There were countless amenities that we needed to make this project a go and Hiwassee had it all. There are so many things for people to do."

The facility will be comprised of 120 free-standing dwellings that will be built in clusters of three and four independent-living homes. The organization also has retirement communities in Decatur and Palmetto.

"Our specific area of ministry is housing for adults 50 years of age and older," Willis said. "Our communities are attractive, modern and affordable with an emphasis on Christian environment."



Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis poses with the leadership of Baptist Retirement Communities of Georgia. Left to right, Laura Willis, Peggy Beckett and Dottie Aiken. Photo/Charles Duncan

Lawmakers talk money, schools and water...from page 1A

three years from now.

"We deserve to have the water that's here and we deserve to be a part of current and future discussions regarding Lake Lanier," Sen. Butterworth said. "We should know our water-planning rights."

Sen. Butterworth mentioned a small version of the water proposal, one that takes water from the Tennessee River. Another proposal transfers 100 million gallons of water a day from Lake Hartwell to Atlanta as possible future water resources in Georgia.

"It's an extremely important ongoing discussion that should be on the front-burner of issues. Water equates to jobs which equates to a way of life," he said stressing his concerns and efforts he will bring to the General Assembly's attention.

Growing concern for Georgia's budget was also discussed. There is just a little more than \$200 million dollars left in Georgia's budget reserves. That surplus, which is including those from previous years, is diminishing and by this time next year the state will be working with almost no budget surplus.

"Every department in the

state has been cut as far as it can possibly be cut," Sen. Butterworth explained. "And more money needs to be tied to the HOPE Scholarship. Initially, the Georgia Lottery was setup to pay 35 percent toward HOPE. Since 1992, that has only happened one time. At this point last year, money generated from the lottery to HOPE was only 23 percent."

Trauma Care Networks in rural parts of Georgia, such as Towns and Union counties, also were discussed. Improvements in Trauma Care Networks in rural parts of Georgia can lead to better treatment services, planning, and educating in the trauma fields to more effectively save lives in immediate traumatic accidents.

"Trauma care is something I feel very strongly about, especially in this part of Georgia," Sen. Butterworth said.

Also touching on the budget, State Rep. Allison gave the crowd his well-known blunt, microphone-free approach at the meeting, bringing up a program known as Zero-Based Budgeting. It is an idea that 25 percent of every expense must be accounted for,



State Rep. Stephen Allison and State Sen. Jim Butterworth

from things such as salaries to school supplies, so that the state knows how much was spent in which departments.

"When you come down to issues, everything you see that will be addressed will be budget related," State Rep. Allison said. "Everybody wants smaller government when it's not their program being cut. We don't know where the waste is if we don't justify what we're spending our money on. Zero-Based Budgeting is the one thing I would pass this year. It's key as far as I'm concerned."

State Rep. Allison also spoke about education and

the budget.

"Fifty-six percent of every dollar raised in Georgia goes to public education. It's one of the hardest things to cut because it has the highest political ramifications. Everyone wants better schools and everybody knows teachers should be paid," he said.

Before closing the evening, Walt Scott of the Unicoi Detachment of the Marine Corpse League gave thanks for the generous donations to Towns County's annual Toy's For Tots program, also hosted at Daniel's Steakhouse that evening.