

Senior achievement rewarded ahead of graduation

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County High School Class of 2025 will take part in the tassel-turning tradition of graduation on Friday, May 23, at 8 p.m. inside Frank McClure Memorial Stadium.

In advance of the momentous occasion, TCHS showered the soon-to-be graduates with academic honors and awards at a touching and memorable Senior Honors Day ceremony last Friday, May 16.

There were a number of seniors who received multiple awards, and a plethora of scholarships handed out. In point of fact, a high school student in Towns County could well end up earning a free ride all through college, without being the next Carson Beck.

Through the numerous churches, service organizations and even individuals in the county, thousands of dollars in scholarships were awarded.

While athletic scholarships were a part of the event, other scholarships highlighted community service, citizenship, academics and going above and beyond normal graduation requirements.

Drew Livingston was named Valedictorian for the Class of 2025, taking top academic honors as the senior with the highest grade-point average.

"This is something I've wanted since I started high school; I've strived to earn this," Livingston said before providing some sibling humor. "I have two sisters – one got Historian and one got Fifth

Place, so I was hoping for this so that I could be the best sister!"

"I will be giving a speech at graduation centered around the future. I'll have to get started on that right away. I was not expecting to get Athlete of the Year, either. I feel like I can finally rest after four years of hard work and be proud of myself."

Livingston will be attending the University of Georgia and endeavors to become a published author.

"I'm very excited and hopeful about next year," she said. "I think I will thrive and flourish in a college environment."

Ansleigh Hardin was awarded Second Place honors for class GPA: Salutatorian.

"I feel great," Hardin said. "I'm happy I got the hon-

or of being Salutatorian for my class and getting all of these scholarships. All of my hard work that I've put in over my high school career was worth it. I've always really focused on my grades, and I'm happy to see this as the result."

Hardin looks forward to attending University of North Georgia to study science before eventually going off to medical school.

"I know a lot of people are sad about graduation, but I'm excited about it," Hardin said. "I'm ready to close my high school chapter and open up my college one and the life that's ahead of me."

Jada Reynolds earned the title of Historian to round out the Top Three academic spots for the Class of 2025.

"I am really excited that

See Senior Honors Day, Page 6



(L-R) TCHS Class of 2025 Valedictorian Drew Livingston, Salutatorian Ansleigh Hardin and Historian Jada Reynolds on Senior Honors Day May 16. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Residents, business owners voice concerns over lake

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, May 13, the Tennessee Valley Authority hosted its second in-person open house to elicit comments and answer questions about the proposed work to fix the spillway vulnerability identified at Chatuge Dam.

The Towns County Recreation & Conference Center served as the venue, again featuring TVA spokespersons on dam safety, engineering and environmental impacts.

Many of the 225 attendees were full-time residents and local business owners concerned about the project, and they had a lot to say about the proposed construction designs that are calling for anywhere from four to eight years of dramatic lake drawdown in terms



The Towns County Recreation & Conference Center served as the venue for TVA's second in-person open house that took place last week.

of upper time estimates. A clear pattern emerged in the feedback to TVA that night; overwhelmingly, people agreed that dam safety is

See Lake Concerns, Page 6

State officials weigh in on TVA spillway repair plans

By Lt. Gov. Burt Jones and State Sen. Bo Hatchett
Guest Contributors

The Chatuge Dam was constructed in the 1940s during World War II. The original purpose of the development was for "the dependence of military preparedness upon aircraft, of aircraft upon aluminum, and of aluminum upon electric power," but this critical asset has progressed into so much more for Towns County, the surrounding communities, and all of northeast Georgia.

Chatuge Lake has become a major tourist attraction for the area, with activities like fishing, boating and whitewater rafting drawing in visitors from around the country. The lake and surrounding areas offer breathtaking views and walking paths, bike trails, and picnic and swimming areas.

A recent study found



Burt Jones
Lieutenant Governor



Bo Hatchett
District 50 State Senator

that Towns County "derives \$95 million in tourism revenue annually, generating \$6.1 million in state and local taxes." Along with bringing visitors to the area, the Dam supports businesses, including restaurants, marinas, shops and the real estate market, which benefit from tourism revenues.

Additionally, the Dam continues to generate clean and low-cost power, while

See TVA Repair Plans, Page 2

Former Police Chief Smith returns to lead Hiawassee PD

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

A familiar face will be heading up the Hiawassee Police Department after departing about two and a half years ago, as former Police Chief Paul Smith got his old job back by unanimous vote of the Hiawassee City Council in a special called meeting on Wednesday, May 14.

Smith is replacing outgoing Police Chief Jeremy Parker, who announced last month he would be leaving to pursue another opportunity. Parker's last day is May 25, and Smith will re-helm the position ASAP to enable a smooth transition.

"I was very pleased by the number of applications and responses we received, but Paul was far and away the best candidate for the job," Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. said last Wednesday.

Smith graduated Towns County High School in 2003



Returning Police Chief Paul Smith with Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. on May 14. Photo by Shelly Knight

and went on to study criminal justice at Kennesaw State University.

While in Kennesaw, he joined the Cobb County Police Department in 2006, finishing top of his class at the police academy there.

He stayed with Cobb County for three years before moving back to Towns County in 2009 to be closer to home, since he was looking to start a family.

Upon his arrival, Smith went to work as a deputy at the Towns County Sheriff's Of

See Smith Returns, Page 6

Annual Memorial Day service scheduled for Monday, May 26



Remember the fallen on Memorial Day. Pictured here: the Towns County Memorial Day Service in 2019.


By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

As per the usual custom of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 7807, the annual Memorial Day Ceremony will take place on Monday, May 26, at 11 a.m. at the Veterans Memorial Park located in front of Towns County Schools at 1400 US 76 in Hiawassee.

Memorial Day has its roots in the Civil War, which still holds the ghastly record for the number of American lives lost in a single conflict – more than 600,000.

Union Army Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman once said, "War is Hell," and then he proved it by scorching the cities of Atlanta, Georgia, and

See Memorial Day, Page 5

2 Sections, 20 Pages	Vol. 96 No. 30	Lake Levels	TCHS Graduation Special Section <i>See Inside</i>
	Arrests - 2 Chamber - 5 Church - 8 Classifieds - 11	Blue Ridge 1,687.58 Chatuge 1,926.23 Nottely 1,777.37	Farmers Market Opens on May 24 <i>See Page 6</i>
			Early Voting Starts Tuesday, May 27 <i>See Page 7</i>



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United Community Advisors

TVA Repair Plans...from Page 1

providing a reliable water supply for businesses and homes in the surrounding communities.

Recently, the Tennessee Valley Authority announced that the Chatuge Dam would likely need to undergo renovations to ensure its long-term stability. As part of its announcement, TVA has put forward a series of proposals, which range from stepped up safety monitoring to significant repairs to the Dam, that could result in drawdowns of the reservoir for anywhere from four to eight years.

In our opinion, the proposed timeline is unacceptable, and we will work with the Trump Administration, Corps of Engineers, and all stakeholders involved to re-

determine a more streamlined and effective timeframe.

A four-to-eight-year proposal is simply government getting in the way of itself. We believe there is a more efficient and effective way to get the necessary repairs and improvements done for a critical asset like this, which is a bloodline not only for tourism and businesses, but all residents residing in Towns County.

We encourage everyone in Towns County and surrounding areas to let your voices be heard on this issue. While improvements to the existing infrastructure may ultimately be needed, a prolonged, multi-year drawdown of the surrounding reservoir contemplated by some of the

proposals put forward by TVA may cause serious disruptions to life in Towns County and the surrounding region.

We urge the TVA to take public concerns about its proposals seriously and to weigh those concerns when determining the path forward.

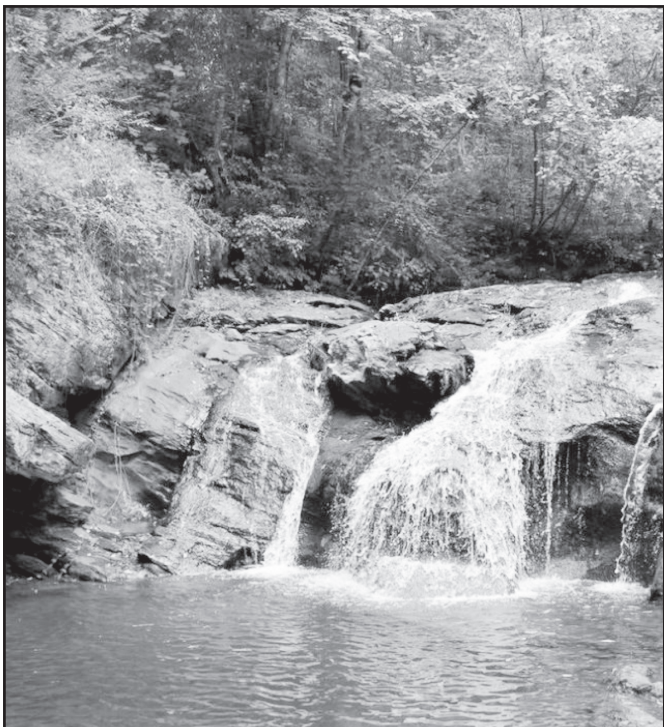
Critical infrastructure like the Chatuge Dam forms the backbone of a state that is committed to growth, prosperity and the joy of the outdoors.

The importance of the Dam for Towns County and the surrounding community was expressed best by Mike

Richards, Tennessee Valley Authority plant manager, who said, “Chatuge Dam was built for the people, and the people feel a connection to it. The dam reservation gets a lot of public use, especially the walking path over the dam. The public is invested in the dam; they keep an eye out for it.”

We agree with Mr. Richards. This Dam was built for the people; they rely on it; and it must be restored and improved in a manner that provides the least disruption possible to the surrounding community.

Cupid Falls Celebration June 19th

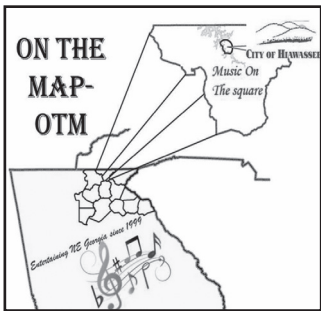


Cupid Falls

On Thursday, June 19, 2025, at 5:30 PM, join community members at the Cupid Falls Park pavilion for fun and free ice cream! This is an informal event to celebrate the park. Master gardeners will begin tours at 6 PM for those interested, and the Enotah Garden Club will be selling plants and baskets. There will also be some giveaways in celebration of the city’s 130th Anniversary! The event is free and open to the public.

Music on the Square in Hiawassee

Back by popular demand, Sweet Charity’s Rock-in’ Replay ignites the stage once again on Saturday May 24th from 6:30- 8 PM, performing your favorite Top 10 Classic Rock, Southern Rock, British and Country favorites from the 60’s thru the 90’s!



Sing-along, dance or boogey in place, this is an evening you definitely don’t want to miss! Rock on! And true to their name, Sweet Charity will be donating their fee to the Towns County Food Pantry.

Great family fun! Bring your chair or a blanket. Well behaved pets are welcome (with cleanup). Come early (6 PM) to enjoy the best grilled hot dogs and more from our VFW Auxiliary Food truck.

Thanks to you for your support each week and our Sponsors who help us continue this entertainment into our 26th year! Sorry, in the event of rain at concert time, this concert will be cancelled.

SNHU President’s List

Jeremy Hyatt of Young Harris has been named to Southern New Hampshire University’s (SNHU) Spring 2025 President’s List. The spring terms run from January to May.

Full-time undergraduate students who have earned a minimum grade-point average of 3.7 and above for the reporting term are named to the President’s List. Full-time status is achieved by earning 12 credits over each 16-week term or paired 8-week terms grouped in fall, winter/spring, and summer.

Arrest and Fire Reports

Local law enforcement provides the following information for publication. Names are spelled as they were when received from the law enforcement agencies. It is important to remember that the following individuals have been charged only and are presumed innocent until such time as they are found guilty by a court or enter a guilty plea. Addresses of persons under arrest are no longer available from Sheriff’s Office.

ARREST REPORT

Towns County Jail
Sheriff Ken Henderson

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 05/17/25 | Scott Larson Jones, age 77, Hayesville, NC
Probation violation (when probation terms are altered) for fingerprintable charge |
| 05/15/25 | Aysia Nicole Mitchell, age 30, Hiawassee, GA
Aggravated stalking |
| 05/18/25 | Timothy Isaac Mitchell, Jr., age 34, Hiawassee, GA
Probation violation (when probation terms are altered) for fingerprintable charge (3) |
| 05/17/25 | David Alan Rudnicki, age 60, Young Harris, GA
Public indecency- 1st or 2nd offense-misdemeanor |
| 05/12/25 | Joshua Ryan Spain, age 39, Hayesville, NC
Simple battery-family violence, terroristic threats and acts-felony |
| 05/17/25 | Aaron Joshua Whitener, age 35, Murphy, NC
Failure to appear for fingerprintable charge-misdemeanor |
| 05/12/25 | William Christopher Caseldine, age 45, New Market, TN
Failure to appear for fingerprintable charge-felony |
| 05/14/25 | Gary Wayne King, age 54, Hiawassee, GA
Driving while license is suspended or revoked (misdemeanor), open container in vehicle |
| 05/11/25 | Ronald Jason Ruble, Jr., age 39, Hiawassee, GA
Aggravated assault (family violence), cruelty to children- 2nd degree (felony) (2) |

FIRE DEPARTMENT

RESPONSE REPORT
From: Fire Chief Harold Copeland

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 05/09/25 | Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3)
Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS
Authorized controlled burning |
| 05/10/25 | Medical assist, assist EMS crew (5) |
| 05/11/25 | Medical assist, assist EMS crew (2) |
| 05/12/25 | Dispatched and cancelled en route
Medical assist, assist EMS crew (4) |
| 05/13/25 | Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3) |
| 05/14/25 | Air or gas rupture of pressure or process vessel
Gas leak (natural gas or LPG)
Medical assist, assist EMS crew (2)
Dispatched and cancelled en route (2)
Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS (2) |
| 05/15/25 | Medical assist, assist EMS crew (5)
Dispatched and cancelled en route
Setting up LZ for Air Evac/EMS (3)
Motor vehicle accident with injuries |
| 05/16/25 | Medical assist, assist EMS crew (3)
Dispatched and cancelled en route (2) |
| 05/17/25 | Motor vehicle accident with no injuries
Medical assist, assist EMS crew (4)
False alarm or false call, other |



Boating Safety with Paul Anderson at the Mountain Movers & Shakers



Paul Anderson with his pup

Lake Chatuge, Lake Nottley, Lake Burton, Lake Blue Ridge, our wonderful lakes offer a spectacular variety of water sports. From bass boats to jet skis to party pontoons, every kind of craft fill our waters. Our beaches are filled with laughing splashing children.

As we want everyone to remain safe while they enjoy our lakes, we welcome Water Safety Expert Paul Anderson.

Get to the fabulous Sundance Grill early this Friday, May 23 at 8 AM to get a good seat and learn how you can help keep yourself, your loved ones, and our lake guests safe.

Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people who share their experience, strength and hope that they may solve their common problem and help others recover from alcoholism. There are three regular weekly AA meetings in Hiawassee every week. They are:

Wednesday 12 Noon.
Mountain Serenity Group, Hiawassee United Methodist

Church, 1139 Highway 76, Hiawassee; Thursday 7 PM. Hiawassee Group, Red Cross Building, 1298 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris; Sunday 7 PM. Hiawassee Group, Red Cross Building, 1298 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris.

For more information you can contact aamountain-intergroup@gmail.com or aamountainintergroup.org or 706-400-5531.

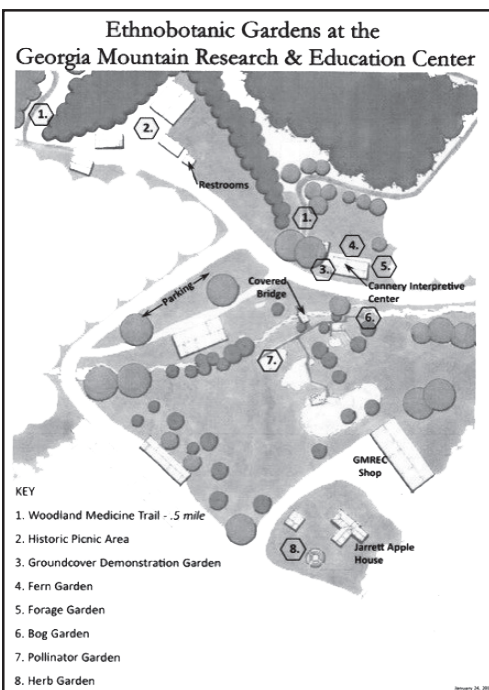
Come see the Ethnobotanical Gardens at the Georgia Mountain Research and Education Center

The Gardens are located on grounds of the University of Georgia - Mountain Research and Education Center (GMREC), and are a demonstration exhibition of native and naturalized plants used by Native Americans and early settlers for food, medicine, dyes and fiber.

The Ethnobotanic Garden is managed by the Community Council of the GMREC Preservation Committee, and its volunteers, to further their mission of preserving and educating about local plants. The area demonstrates seven micro ecological areas including: bald stream, bog, sunny hill, shady hill, ephemeral stream, damp forests with spring pond and dry ridges. There are over 300 labeled species out of the thousands of plants in the local area. We are located in zone 7a which encompasses the southern end of the northern mountain plants and those unique to the “Balds”.

The Gardens are open to the public Monday-Friday from 8 AM - 4 PM with guided tours every Monday (except for holidays) from May to September from 9 AM - 12 PM. On June 6th at 10 AM there will be a presentation by Holly Campbell, with the UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources on foraging and wild harvesting. The presentation will be held in the auditorium at the GMREC with tours of the gardens following immediately after.

The University of Georgia Mountain Re-



search and Education Center is located three miles south of Blairsville on Hwy 19/129 at 195 Georgia Mountain Experiment Station Road, Blairsville, GA 30512.

Welcome to our Newest Members!

Mountain Beautification & Revitalization, Inc. (MBRA)- MBRA volunteers build, repair and remodel structures for governmental and other non-profit entities in Towns, Union and Clay Counties, and the four cites within these counties. Phone: 941-416-3553 Email: mbra8054@gmail.com Facebook: MBRA-Tri County

8360 Ivy Log – Mary Lynn Lambert, Owner – 8360 IvyLog Gap Road, Young Harris, GA 30582. Experience Georgia’s newest wedding venue nestled atop 70 acres in the heart of the North Georgia Mountains. * Now Booking 2025 dates* Phone: 762-294-1751 Email: info@8360ivylog.com Website: www.8360ivylog.com

Cabin Cross Stitch & Crafts- Robin Jones, Owner- ****Opening Soon**** 544 Bell Creek Road, Hiawassee GA (Across from McDonald’s). Discover the timeless art of cross stitching—a perfect blend of creativity and relaxation! Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned crafter, cross stitching offers endless possibilities to create stunning, personalized designs. Phone: 943-267-9822 Email: info@cabincrossstitch.com Website: www.cabincrossstitch.com

Chamber Events & Programs

New Business Ribbon Cutting: On Saturday, May 3, Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting at Martin Docks at their newly opened business located at 1994 Hwy 76 West, Hiawassee, GA. They held an Open House & lunch for their customers. Welcome to Hiawassee!



NGTC Celebrates First GED Graduate after the Reopening of the Towns County Program

North Georgia Technical College (NGTC) proudly marked a milestone this spring as it celebrated its first GED graduate since reopening the Towns County Adult Education program in Fall 2024.

Kiley Shaffer, a dedicated student from Hiawassee, became the first NGTC learner to complete her coursework at the new location and pass all four GED tests on April 23, 2025. Her achievement was made possible in part by the HOPE scholarship, which covered the full cost of the required exams and can also be applied toward future college-level coursework.

“I am so proud of Kiley,” said Deanne Oppermann, NGTC GED instructor. “Not only did she get her GED, but she is now studying to be a CNA, which will offer her a better career path with higher earnings.”

The program’s reopening has brought much-needed educational opportunities back to Towns County. Free GED classes are available to any



Deanne Oppermann, Towns County GED instructor, with Kiley Shaffer the first Towns County GED graduate since NGTC reopened

adult seeking to improve their education and career prospects.

Interested students are encouraged to register and begin classes any time between 2 PM and 7:30 PM on Tuesdays or Wednesdays at the Towns

County Recreation Center, located at 900 N. Main Street, Hiawassee.

For more information, contact Deanne Oppermann at deanne.oppermann@northgatech.edu or call 706-970-3101.

Towns County Lions Club lands another new member



The Towns County Lions met May 13 at the Anderson Music Hall and welcomed another new member into the 80 plus club after another bodacious and bountiful buffet catered by Brenda Swanson.

Art McCann is our newest Lion and he’s the third new member in the last month as Towns County leads the way in district club growth. Lion Art’s sponsor is his wife, Vickie McCann, and club President Danny Meeks took care of the official induction.

Food Pantry Food Distribution

The Food Pantry hours are Monday – Thursday 9 AM– 12 PM with the exception of distribution day. The Distribution is every other Wednesday 11 AM – 2 PM.

Any questions or concerns, please contact Richard Thomas at towns.pantry@ndocsbg.org or (706) 896-4783.

Craft Together

Every last Thursday of each month at the Town County Public Library, located at 99 S. Berrong Street in Hiawassee, GA from 10 AM to 5 PM we’ll meet in the back room overlooking Lake Chatuge. No fees: bring your own scrapbooking and/or cardmaking supplies for fun and fellowship with others. Contact Nancy at 7678-618-8735 for additional information.

New Location Ribbon Cutting: On Tuesday, April 29, Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting for the Towns County Democratic Party at their new headquarters on Main Street in Hiawassee. Congratulations!



Want to stay up to date on the Chatuge Dam Safety Study? Subscribe to the updates using the link below on the TVA website. Also follow SaveLakeChatuge.org for more information. Important dates: May 13- Towns County Information session 5pm- TC Recreation & Conference Center at Foster Park, Young Harris, GA. <https://www.tva.com/newsroom/regional-mountain-dams-safety-initiative/chatuge-dam-safety-study>

Save the Date: Made in Georgia 2025- June 28 & 29, 2025- TC Recreation & Conference Center. \$5 admission; kids FREE.

Follow us: Facebook & Instagram: Visit Lake Chatuge & Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce Thanks to all our members for their continued support! Additionally, we’d like to thank these Platinum and Gold Members:

PLATINUM MEMBERS: Blue Ridge Mountain EMC; Century 21 Black Bear Realty; Hiawassee Holiday KOA, Lake Chatuge Lodge; Mountain Realty; Peach State Federal Credit Union; SouthState Bank, N.A.; The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge; United Community Bank; Windstream Communications.

GOLD MEMBERS: Bennett Equipment; Brasstown Manor; Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa; Brother’s Restaurant at Willow Ranch; Chatuge Regional Hospital; Chick-fil-A of Blairsville; Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital; Holiday Inn Express & Suites-Hiawassee;; Hughes Accounting; K. Boyer Photography; Little Bear Rentals & Property Management; MainStreet Grill; Men on The Move; NeuroSport Physical Therapy LLC; Phoenix Roofing Systems, LLC; Ridgeline Exteriors & Roofing; ServiceMaster Restoration; Tri-County Office Supply, and Young Harris College.

For information on becoming a member of the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, visit www.golakechatuge.com or call Mary Ann at (706) 896-4966 or email her at LCChamber2021@gmail.com.

Mary Broadrick and John Moffitt awarded YHC Medallion

Young Harris College Trustee Mary Broadrick and her husband John Moffitt received Young Harris College’s highest award, the YHC Medallion, during its 2025 Commencement ceremony on May 10.

For the daughter of George H. Broadrick, Class of 1941 and WWII veteran as well as 1996 recipient of the YHC Medallion, serving the college was never in doubt for Mary. When asked, “Why YHC?” Mary and John lovingly point to their favorite quote from her father.

“Don’t invest in brick and mortar. Invest in these kids,” George said to Mary, while driving his daughter Mary around the campus many years ago.

John and Mary became friends while working for the Charlotte Police Department in North Carolina. They got married shortly after John retired in 1999.

John held many positions in the police department, from field supervisor to polygraph examiner. Mary also found herself working for the police department in many roles, ending with human resources. Mary retired in 2003 after 28 years with the department. While her beloved father kept returning to his office until he was in his 80s, she retired relatively young because “life’s too short!”

“We love this college,”



President John Wells, from left, with John Moffitt and Mary Broadrick, and Board of Trustees Chair Bill Johnston

Broadrick said at the Commencement. “It’s all about the students. We wish you God’s blessings on your journey through life.”

“We have been delighted to be able to contribute to Young Harris College,” Moffitt added. “You all have bright futures ahead and a chance to make the world yours. Congratulations!”

Their generosity to the College is overwhelming. Even though neither Mary nor John attended YHC, they love the school as if they did. They established a scholarship in 2016 that provides a student with a full ride.

That same year, former College president Cathy Cox and the Board of Trustees asked

Mary to join the Board. She was hesitant but said yes because she knew it would make her father proud. She has been a Board member ever since and serves on the Development and Endowment Committees. The couple is heavily involved in YH Athletics and treasures getting to know their scholarship recipients. While they’re too humble to admit it, their generosity is all over campus.

While they reside in North Carolina, their loyalty lies with Young Harris College. They wear their YHC gear and promote the College to anyone who will listen. A YHC golf bag even traveled to Scotland three times! Mary and John bleed purple through and through.

Memorial Day ...from Page 1

Columbia, South Carolina.

In the aftermath of the war, a group of women laid flowers on the grave sites of their loved ones as they mourned their men. The year was 1868.

Inspired by this, Gen. John A. Logan designated May 30 as Decoration Day. Some say the tradition started in Columbia, Mississippi, and others in Waterloo, New York. In 1966, President Lyndon Johnson established the federal holiday recognizing the patriotic tradition observed today.

At this year’s local observance, the keynote speaker will be retired Army Sgt. Ronny Bruce of the 3rd Battalion, 509th Parachute Infantry Division.

Bruce joined the Marine Corps and served from 1994-1998 before attending Kenesaw State University and trying his hand at teaching for a time, which ultimately didn’t suit him.

He then re-enlisted for a tour in the U.S. Army and served from 2008-2012, seeing combat during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan from 2009-2010.

During his service, he was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge and the Army Commendation Medal with Valor. Since his service, he has kept busy and authored a book entitled “The Grunts of Wrath.” Sgt. Bruce, like so

many combat veterans, suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Thanks to his uncle, Vietnam Veteran Butch Underwood, he has joined the Hiawassee VFW, where he receives support and encouragement from fellow veterans. No civilian can understand the trauma of war like a veteran, and these men and women take care of one another in life just as they did on the battlefield.

“We are honored to show our respect and to honor all of those who have served in the military, especially those who lost their lives serving our country,” said event organizer Mel Halfon, a VFW member who also leads local American Legion Post 23. “We encourage all of our veterans to show up so we can honor them.

“I served in Vietnam in 1970 and 1971 – it was pretty rough over there. I was a teenager. I lost some of my buddies there. Memorial Day is a very emotional time for me because I remember those that I served with.

“It’s an honor to serve your country but it’s awful hard sometimes. I don’t think people understand what we go through and the sacrifices that we make. And then we came home after risking our lives and people hated us. We felt terrible. It was a very difficult time for us.”

Veteran Butch Under-

wood said that Memorial Day “means everything” to him.

“I was only in Vietnam for eight months, but I was wounded two times in two days,” he said. “My best friend on my tank lost his legs. I was the only one that was really saved. I believe that Memorial Day means so much because there are still people dying from Agent Orange. It changes you.

“Ronny served and was medically discharged after his tour in Afghanistan. I stressed to him that the future of the VFW rests upon the younger Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans. It has helped me so much to be part of the VFW, and I want that for Ronny. Getting him involved is so important.”

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bradshaw wants to remind people that Memorial Day is more than “just another holiday.”

“This day is in honor of those who paid in life and blood; those whose moms never saw them again, whose dads wept in private, whose wives raised kids alone, and whose kids only remembered them from pictures,” Bradshaw said. “This is a day to remember that others paid for every free breath you ever take.”

Be sure to come out to the Veterans Memorial Park to thank a veteran and honor the fallen on Monday.

Senior Honors Day ...from Page 1



TCHS High Honor Graduates were celebrated for academic success at Friday's senior awards.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Elementary School students cheered on their older counterparts during the Senior Walk on the way to the Honors Day program last week.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

More than 300 receive Degrees at Piedmont

On Friday, May 9, in two ceremonies, Piedmont conferred undergraduate degrees to more than 205 students, including 148 first-generation students, and 164 graduate students, including master's, EdS, and doctorate degrees. The ceremonies were held at the Johnny Mize Ath-

letic Center on the Demorest campus.

The graduates included: Monica Gilbert of Young Harris, GA, who earned a Education Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction Ini Cert.

Christen Henson of Hiawassee, GA, who earned a Master of Arts in Teaching

Elementary Education.

"Congratulations to all our graduates and their families, friends, and supporters. Graduation is a life-changing milestone. We are proud to welcome you to the Piedmont alumni family," said President Marshall M. Criser, III.

"Our entire existence revolves around the lake and the docks. If there is no lake and no docks to work on, why are we here? We're not going to employ people in this area because they won't have anything to do. We're probably talking about a dozen jobs."

"This lake alone can probably generate \$1.5 to \$2 million in revenue annually. Based on the lake being at the level they are talking about, most of the docks will be on the ground. All of that revenue coming into the county from taxes and a lot of the local businesses just won't exist anymore."

Frank Kulbertis, who owns Lake Chatuge Living Magazine, said his biggest concern was likewise the economic health of the area.

"This isn't about not caring about the safety of the residents who live below the dam," Kulbertis said. "Obviously, we want the dam safe. We want the dam fixed. But while we don't want people to be at risk, we also can't put our entire community at risk."

"Both sides of the lake rely so heavily on the lake itself and all that it brings to the area — the tourism. The work needs to be a shorter duration, or an off-season-only project, or some other alternative that will allow the lake to still continue to be at or near full pool during the summer season. It doesn't seem unreasonable to expect that."

Lake Chatuge Marine owner Dwayne Phillips said a concern he shares with many is that TVA "is not going to do what makes sense and just draw the lake down during one winter season, put a coffer dam in during construction and leave the lake up."

"If they do that, we'll be in good shape," Phillips said. "If they don't do that, we will be decimated. We just spent close to a million dollars to build a whole new dealership on the lake. Not only will this affect our business, but it's going to affect everybody."

"Property taxes will go up. Everybody is looking at an additional \$1,200 to \$1,400 in additional property tax. You

I got this award," Reynolds said. "I was not expecting to because it was really competitive this year. I get to write a speech for graduation. I am really happy to be honored like this today."

"I'm so grateful for the scholarships I've gotten this year. I've always had kind of a financial struggle, so being able to fall back on these is huge. I've worked really hard these last four years, and to see it all come to fruition is a really happy moment."

"But this is also bittersweet because I have to leave. I've been in this school system since pre-school."

Reynolds will be attending the University of Georgia to major in biology and will pursue a nursing career.

Several other senior names were called repeatedly, like Alex Awtrey, Justin Cantrell and Loftin Turpin, all winning numerous scholarships and getting a head start on their futures.

Students of Towns

County should take notice of this life lesson: when you put your nose to the grindstone and work hard, it pays off. And Towns Countians should be proud of the seniors' generous spirits and hope for the future."

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TOWNS COUNTY Farmers Market

Locally Grown

Towns County Farmers Market opens on Saturday, May 24th

We're looking forward to seeing all our regular vendors along with some new ones in the upcoming summer months. The Market will be open from 9 AM to noon each Saturday from the 24th of May until October and there is no charge for vendors.

These are local vendors, so it is early for locally grown produce, but they will grow fast once the weather warms. In the meantime, we have vendors with local raw honey, hand-made log benches, decorated gourds, bird and bat houses, birds & local scenes in watercolor, native plants of all

sizes, and many other items. Each year brings something new, so mark your calendars. Our area Master Gardeners (TUMGA) will have a table and answer your questions on growing local flora and summer vegetables.

The T. C. Farmers Market is located on Hwy. 76, West of Hiawassee, at the Towns County Beach entrance directly across from the entrance to GA Mountain Fairgrounds. We have plenty of parking. Also look for us on Facebook. Call Joan Crothers at 706-896-6240 if you need more information (leave a message).

Lake Concerns...from Page 1

critical and did not offer objections to the idea of fixing the spillway, but concerns were repeatedly voiced regarding the construction and drawdown timeline TVA has proposed.

Among the people interviewed by the newspaper, the major sentiment was that the timeline is unreasonable and will lead to catastrophic economic, social and cultural impacts to the areas that rely on Lake Chatuge.

"Well, obviously we are concerned," said Glenn Martin, owner of Martin Docks. "Even though we have been up here for decades, we just recently put up a brick-and-mortar store here in service to the community. Now they're going to take the lake out from under us."

"Our entire existence revolves around the lake and the docks. If there is no lake and no docks to work on, why are we here? We're not going to employ people in this area because they won't have anything to do. We're probably talking about a dozen jobs."

"This lake alone can probably generate \$1.5 to \$2 million in revenue annually. Based on the lake being at the level they are talking about, most of the docks will be on the ground. All of that revenue coming into the county from taxes and a lot of the local businesses just won't exist anymore."

Frank Kulbertis, who owns Lake Chatuge Living Magazine, said his biggest concern was likewise the economic health of the area.

"This isn't about not caring about the safety of the residents who live below the dam," Kulbertis said. "Obviously, we want the dam safe. We want the dam fixed. But while we don't want people to be at risk, we also can't put our entire community at risk."

"Both sides of the lake rely so heavily on the lake itself and all that it brings to the area — the tourism. The work needs to be a shorter duration, or an off-season-only project, or some other alternative that will allow the lake to still continue to be at or near full pool during the summer season. It doesn't seem unreasonable to expect that."

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"Property taxes will go up. Everybody is looking at an additional \$1,200 to \$1,400 in additional property tax. You

will see all the restaurants, hotels and campgrounds trickle down and slowly close. Jobs are going to be lost. It's going to be the whole community. It's not just us. We all thrive together."

"The message from the TVA changes. We've had two meetings with them, and in our private meetings with them, they actually say the coffer dam approach and building a new spillway is a viable option and it could negate a drawdown. They have told us they are exploring that as a viable option. We're not sure why they are telling us that and the public something else."

Bill Pierson owns RE/MAX Hiawassee Realty and Hiawassee Hometown Pharmaceuticals, and he attended out of fear that the TVA plans offered to date would decimate the local economy, "our community and our personal income stream."

"It has already affected us," Pierson said. "People are scared to buy here. It's not just me; I've got 17 employees who will be affected by the loss of income. I don't understand how the Army Corps of Engineers can rebuild larger dams in six months but repairing a spillway can take years. That seems unreasonable."

Debbie Phillips and her family own EZ Store It Boat & RV, which is located on Lower Bell Creek Road, and she said the alternatives she has seen will certainly impact their business.

"If the lake is not here for that length of time or even a year or two, it could be the end of our business," Phillips said. "No one is going to store their boat for years and not be able to use it on the lake. People come to this lake because they love it and say it is one of the cleanest, best lakes around. They eat at our restaurants, shop at our stores, stay in our hotels. That will all stop."

"No one is against safety. That is not the objection. We would never want a catastrophe, especially seeing what happened to North Carolina with Helene. This is about what happens to the counties of North Georgia and western North Carolina if they lower the lake to unusable levels for years. There has got to be an alternative."

Kim McCracken, who is in the process of building a home on Sunnyside Road, said there "is no reason for this to take as long as they say it's going to take."

"Hoover Dam was built in five years in 1931, and they didn't have the technology or equipment that we do today," McCracken said.

Mike McCracken, Kim's husband, commented that building a home like they are doing provides local jobs and increases the tax base — but only if there is work to be found.

"There was already a supply chain issue left over from COVID," McCracken

said, "but the problem we're going to have now is that this will be a dying community, and all the skilled labor will abandon this area to go where the work is."

"Realtors are already talking about how just the rumor is affecting the home sales. The restaurants in Hiawassee are just now recovering from COVID, and now those workers are going to get jobs in other places, too. Once it starts, it's going to be a snowball effect. Essentially what they're going to do is kill Mayberry."

"We just bought a new boat and have it at Boundary Waters. That dock will be in the dirt. That is a third-generation business that these people could kill in a year. That's unacceptable. They have to think about things like that. I understand safety. I agree with that. But there is a solution. It takes one off-season to get it done."

Bill and Linda Casey own Creekside General Store, and, like many in attendance that evening, are very concerned about the ramifications of a multiyear drawdown of Lake Chatuge to a record-low 10 feet below winter pool, or 1908 feet in elevation.

"It's going to kill our business," Linda said. "Even if they draw it down for one or two years, it's going to hurt us. We've been in business for 15 years and we rely almost entirely on tourism. Unless they find an alternative, it will destroy our economy for the whole town."

The other most frequently heard sentiment from TVA and attendees alike was that now is the time for people to make their voices heard. Importantly, TVA is a long way from settling on a construction design, so there are still chances to make a difference in the outcome.

TVA is taking official public comments on the project now through May 28 and is actively seeking community input before determining an ultimate course of action. Comments can be left by visiting <https://www.tva.com/chatuge>.

Many attendees completed comment cards during the event, and others said they would actively participate in the second virtual meeting that took place May 15.

The environmental impact study that is now receiving public comments will take economic and social impacts into account, and that report will be available for additional input when completed, estimated to be closer to the beginning of next year.

Grassroots organization SaveLakeChatuge.org, which came into being to successfully address the lake's parrot-feather infestation, is making commenting easy. They are providing official comment verbiage and contact information for both North Carolina and Georgia lawmakers.

Smith Returns...from Page 1

office, and in 2010, he came on board with Hiawassee PD under Chief Jimmy Wright.

Smith quickly moved up in rank, first under Chief Wright, who promoted him to corporal, then sergeant, and then under Chief Arvel Walls, who promoted him to lieutenant.

Walls took over as chief after Wright's untimely death in 2015, and he retired for

health reasons in 2017, paving the way for Smith to achieve his goal of eventually serving as the city's police chief.

Smith left the department in December 2022, noting his desire to spend more time with family and explore other career opportunities, at least for the time being. He received an emotional goodbye from the City Council when he left, and everyone at City Hall is excited for his return.

"I've known Paul for many years, and he is a man of integrity. He was previously our chief and did a great job. I'm very glad to welcome him back," said Chastain, with the City Council concurring.

Smith owns and operates Chatuge Woodsmith Company LLC, and though he has kept busy with that enterprise over the last few years, he said he is not too busy to return as Top Cop of Hiawassee.