

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

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Publication Number 635540 Volume 89 Number 11

Wednesday, January 17, 2018

Hobbs crowned Homecoming Queen as tradition continues

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Assistant Editor

Towns County High School has celebrated a Basketball Homecoming for more than 50 years, and that tradition continued on Friday, Jan. 12, with the coronation of Sara Beth Hobbs as 2018 Basketball Homecoming Queen.

Hobbs is now high school royalty, though she captured her crown through democratic means by winning a majority of votes from her peers.

"I'm just grateful," said Hobbs, reacting to the support of her classmates. "I'm going to miss seeing my friends every day."

After she graduates in May, Hobbs plans to attend the University of Georgia to pursue a career in anesthesiology,

which she became interested in thanks to her experiences with the Health Occupations Students of America group in high school.

"I did clinicals for HOSA, and I went over to MURPHY Medical and watched them do a hip replacement one day," said Hobbs. "I got to anesthesiology and see what the surgeons did, and I really liked it."

Hobbs was surrounded by friends and family that evening, including her two brothers, her father, and Dr. Connie Hobbs, her mother and principal of the high school.

Dr. Hobbs usually takes a more active role in Homecoming festivities, but she turned those duties over this year to simply be a mother watching her daughter during Homecoming.

"It was a very special night having both my sons there to see their baby sister crowned Queen," said Dr. Hobbs. "All the girls looked beautiful and are a great representation of our school and their class. They are all very special young ladies. Each deserved to be Queen for the night."

Senior Hayley Stowers also went home with royal accolades that evening, having been selected as 2018 Towns County High School Basketball Homecoming Runner Up.

Stowers will be attending the University of North Georgia for a medical degree following graduation. She was escorted that evening by her father, Jeff Stowers, who is a teacher and coach at the high school.

"I'm happy and sad at the same time," said Coach Stowers. "I'm proud for her. See Homecoming, Page 8A



2018 Towns County High School Basketball Homecoming Queen Sara Beth Hobbs and Runner Up Hayley Stowers. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

EMC board thanks employees, talks long-term planning

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Assistant Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – Towns County Board of Directors earned its place in the record books on Dec. 8, 2017, after covering the region in nearly a foot of snow and resulting in the largest number of individual device outages in the history of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

The EMC delivers power to more than 52,000 electric meters in its North Carolina member areas, and Benji caused greater than 800 outage events that affected nearly 30,000 meters.

Those are astonishing

figures – one powerful winter storm dropped enough snow to trigger power outages to more than half of the system.

Despite the daunting challenges presented by nearly a foot of snow and tens of thousands of outages, the response from EMC employees was nothing short of remarkable.

EMC line workers and staff braved long shifts and dangerous conditions to ensure that members got their power back as quickly as possible.

And the BRMEMC Board of Directors signed a resolution in recognition of the employees in the Jan. 9 board

meeting, thanking them for their hard work and steadfast efforts.

"The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's dedicated and competent workforce leaped into action repairing the damage and responding to the membership initially at a rate of 500 meters restored per hour, and completed restoration of all services within 80 hours," per the resolution, which subsequently praised the dedication, skill and professionalism of EMC employees.

Such rapid turnaround times, in the face of so many outages, speaks volumes for

the training and skill of EMC employees, as well as signals a technological break from the past.

"When I was growing up in North Georgia, we would lose power in a thunderstorm, and sometimes just a rain event," said EMC Board Chair Mickey Cummings. "Our system now is much more efficient than it was in the past."

"Nobody likes to lose power, and I hate it when somebody does lose power. But at the same time, we've got a top-notch workforce out there that restores it rather

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BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms



BRMEMC Board Chair Mickey Cummings

Sen. Wilkinson to constituents: 'Feel free to call me'

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Assistant Editor

With the 2018 Legislative Session in full swing, District 50 State Sen. John Wilkinson is hard at work in the Georgia General Assembly.

After an interesting first week back, which included a visit to Atlanta by President Donald Trump for the College Football Playoff National Championship, and the annual State of the State Address by Gov. Nathan Deal, the senator said he's eager to get to work.

"When I talk to my constituents, I never have anybody tell me, 'I hope you can pass five or six bills this year,'" said Sen. Wilkinson. "If you look in our law books, plenty of rules and plenty of regulations."

"One of my priorities is always to see if we have some rules or regulations on the books that we can take off. I'm all about trying to make things

simpler to incentivize people to work, to give them incentives to start a new business and those kinds of things.

A conservative through and through, Wilkinson said he's against unnecessary barriers to business, which can be easily visualized as hoops placed in front of people for the purpose of making them jump.

"One of my goals would be to eliminate some of the regulations that we have, and just make it a little bit easier for people to start a business," said Wilkinson. "And to lower the tax burden and try to do what we can to put more money in people's pockets, try to stimulate the economy that way."

As far as issues near and dear to the hearts of many in District 50, Sen. Wilkinson will be looking to further a bill aimed at providing a reliable, affordable broadband service to the rural areas of North



Sen. John Wilkinson Georgia.

"Broadband isn't much of a challenge in the urban areas, or in the Metro Atlanta area," said Wilkinson. "But in districts like my district, with all the counties that I have, there are places that have basically no internet service right now."

"So, we're trying to work on some ways to make

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Rep. Gurtler to continue voting his principles, conscience

By Shawn Jarrard
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The 2018 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly convened on Monday, Jan. 8, and District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler said he was ready to get back to work.

This is the freshman lawmaker's second year of his first term, and he has communicated to constituents that, in 2018, he will maintain the limited government platform upon which he was elected.

"My constituents can look forward to me being principled and consistent, always representing them and their values," said Gurtler. "We have the most conservative district in Georgia, and one of the most conservative districts in the United States."

"That's right in line with how I vote. I was named the Most Conservative Legislator by the Georgia Republican

Assembly, and I got an award for that a few months ago, the Centennial Freedom Award.

"So, they can expect me to be the same person that I am, and be consistent and principled, just representing the values and beliefs that I ran my campaign on. That's what I will continue to do, and I'll continue to push for my bills as well."

Particularly, Gurtler is excited to be fighting for two bills he sponsored last session that were introduced and assigned to committees in 2017: the \$5 Hotel/Motel Tax Repeal, and his Georgia Constitutional Carry Act.

"The state hotel-motel fee is a \$5 per night fee on each calendar night a hotel room is rented until the rental becomes an 'extended stay rental,'" per the Georgia Department of Revenue. "An 'extended stay rental' is the rental of a hotel room for 31 or more consecutive days to the same customer."



District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler

Rep. Gurtler believes the hotel-motel fee to be unfair and especially bad for smaller businesses, and he said he looks forward to working with colleagues from both sides of the political aisle to see the repeal become a reality.

The Georgia Constitutional Carry Act would make the Georgia Weapons

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Local farm needs votes for national grant money

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Since 2015, national produce distributor PRO*ACT has offered grant money to farmers all across the country for use in improved sustainability efforts.

Each year, dozens of farmers compete for these funds via the Cultivating Change grant program, which is designed to help famers upgrade their operations, invest in food safety, implement new sustainable technology, and continue to grow the best produce possible.

This year, local farmers Sarah and Alex Cookfair of Big Branch Valley Farm are among the more than 100 applicants vying for these funds from more than 30 states.

Winners of the

See Farm, Page 5A



Alex Cookfair on his family farm called Big Branch Valley Farm in Blairsville. Photo/Facebook

TCMS Robotics Team shows off award-winning project



Towns County Middle School Robotics Team members demonstrated their unique water filtration device in the Jan. 8 meeting of the Towns County Board of Education. Photo/Lily Avery

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