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Area residents invited to attend Iwo Jima anniversary event on Feb. 18

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

For more than seven decades, the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II has been described by veterans and historians alike as hell on earth, and for good reason.

Between Feb. 19 and March 26, 1945, nearly 7,000 Americans died in the black sands of Iwo Jima, an island consisting of eight square miles of volcanic rock in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

Iwo Jima is known for having been a major American victory in the Pacific Theater of the war, as the U.S. was able to take control of multiple airfields previously under Japanese control.

It's also famous for the morale-boosting, iconic American photograph of Marines raising the U.S. flag atop Mount Suribachi.

There is a renowned Iwo Jima War Memorial paying homage to this iconic image

near Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, and Towns County features its very own one-of-a-kind, 20-foot tall monument depicting the moment Marines raised the flag at Iwo Jima.

This monument was commissioned by former Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall, and area challenger Al Garnto took up the challenge, completing the monument in time for Veterans Day 2015.

The monument is located at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at Foster Park, which is where the U.S. Marine Corps League, Unicoi Detachment #783, will be presenting a program to honor the veterans of the Battle of Iwo Jima.

All area residents are invited to attend the celebration, which will be held at 10 a.m. on Feb. 18 in recognition of the 74th Anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima.

"This program is about men who served for the

freedom of America, those who sacrificed their lives at Iwo Jima," said retired U.S. Navy Chief Quartermaster Clarence E. "Bud" Johnson, himself an Iwo Jima Veteran.

The Iwo Jima 74th Anniversary Celebration Committee met to finalize its plans for this year's memorial event on Jan. 15 at Daniel's Steakhouse in Hiwassee.

Present for the meeting were the following committee members and veterans: Chairman Bud Johnson, U.S. Navy; Co-Chairman Charley Andrews, USN; Gary Wimsett, U.S. Marine Corps; Wayne Roshaven, USMC; Scott Drummond, U.S. Coast Guard; Richard Hoibraten, USN; and Brandy Creel, U.S. Air Force.

Committee members not present for the meeting were Skip Peters, U.S. Army; Henry Coyer, USN; and Walt Scott, USMC.

Also present for the meeting was Jim McKeral, retired U.S. Marine Corps, who



L-R: Charley Andrews, Brandy Creel, Jim McKeral, Wayne Roshaven, Bud Johnson, Gary Wimsett, Scott Drummond and Richard Hoibraten.

is not a committee member but will serve as the principal speaker at the Feb. 18 event.

The honored guest speaker for the event will be retired U.S. Marine Corps Lt. Col. Raul "Art" Sifuentes of

the Iwo Jima Association of America.

During the Jan. 15 Committee Meeting, it was announced that between five and seven Iwo Jima veterans from around the area were

expected to be in attendance for the Feb. 18 ceremony.

Johnson also invited President Donald Trump, who declined to attend because of his busy schedule but thanked the

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Plane crash survivor Whitener sees progress in goal to walk again

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Brittany Thomas Whitener still has a long way to go in her recovery, but she is in good spirits and working hard at the Shepherd Center for Spinal Cord & Brain Injury Rehabilitation in Atlanta.

She and her husband Junior have been keeping people updated on her progress at the "Brittany Whitener Updates" Facebook page, complete with descriptions of her various rehabilitation exercises alongside photos and videos chronicling her journey.

Whitener suffered a broken neck and back from the impact of a plane crash that occurred on Dec. 19, 2018, off Kings Road, less than one-half nautical mile from the Blairsville Municipal Airport.

She had to be cut out of the plane and airlifted to Northeast Georgia Medical Center that night, where she underwent several emergency surgeries before being transferred to the intensive care unit of the



Brittany Thomas Whitener making a victory pose as she recovers at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta. Photo/Facebook

hospital.

Whitener transitioned to Shepherd more than a week later, on Dec. 28, and she has been hard at work ever since to gain more strength and usage of her legs.

Her routine consists of regular workouts, including lifting weights, leg exercises, bicycling, stretching, getting out of and into her wheelchair from the floor and more.

She's even been using

special machines to help her stand and walk, and Whitener is making remarkable progress toward meeting her goal of walking on her own again.

In a recent interview with Channel 2 Action News, Whitener offered a glimpse into some of the circumstances surrounding the Dec. 19 plane crash.

The crash resulted in the death of three of Whitener's

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Board of Health offers flu season update in quarterly meeting

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Director of Georgia District 2 Public Health Dr. Pamela Logan said there have been six deaths and 737 hospitalizations reported in the state this flu season at the quarterly meeting of the Towns County Health Department on Thursday, Jan. 24.

Dr. Logan said this season's reporting began in October 2018 and will continue through the end of the flu season. The latest flu rates available, she said, were reported the week of Jan. 6 through Jan. 12.

Dr. Robert Stahlkuppe, the local practicing physician on the Towns County Board of Health, reported, through Dr. Logan, that Chatuge Regional Hospital has had two flu admissions and no deaths related to the flu so far this season. Dr. Stahlkuppe was not present at the meeting.

Towns County Board of Health Chairman and Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said that

he has observed a very low incidence of the flu at the school but has heard many of the staff and students have colds and bronchitis this flu season.

Berrong attributed the low flu rate at the school to a new cleaning system that was installed a few years ago that sprays a mist throughout the classrooms each day and is supposed to kill all the germs and bacteria.

"Seems to be working," he said.

In other health department news, all board officers were re-elected to their positions. Berrong will remain chairman, Lois Palmer will remain vice chairwoman, and Mary Lynne Kimsey will remain secretary.

All members of the board signed an "oath of office" document at the meeting.

Given the re-election, Dr. Logan gave an overview of the "Department of Public Health Guide to Serving on the County Board of Health" guidelines.

Dr. Logan covered several Georgia requirements for county Health Boards and



Dr. Pamela Logan is the director of District 2 Public Health. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

individual members.

Health Board management, individual responsibilities, meetings and records, key functions of the board, working with the District Health director, and compensation and liability were all covered as well.

Local Environmental Health Manager Tony Berrong

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Cornett outlines reasons for resigning as head football coach

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

It wasn't easy for John Cornett to resign as head coach of the Towns County High School Varsity Football Team.

After all, he'd taken the team to its first state playoff in school history during the 2017-2018 season, and he'd grown close to many of his Indians in this time at Towns County.

"I have loved the three years that I have coached football here," said Cornett. "I am so thankful to Connie Hobbs and Jim Melton for hiring me as head football coach. They gave me a chance when they gave other schools would have with what I had on my resume. So, that is just such a blessing for me and an honor for them to at least let me do that."

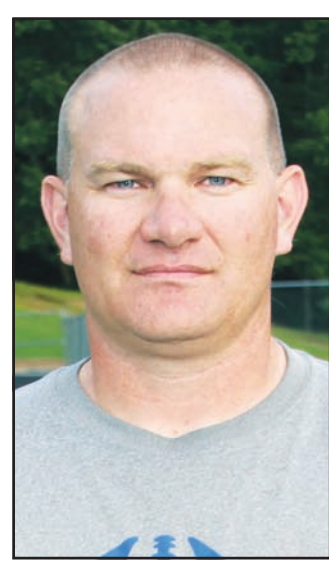
But Cornett said there were a number of reasons

he chose to resign from the position, one being the strain it put on his wife and six kids.

"It's tough to win here, and sometimes you can let football consume you," said Cornett. "I think this year, I didn't meet the goals that I wanted to, and it really beat me up. Not only did it beat me up, but my wife goes through the same pain that I do, and I'm sure my children feel it, too."

Another reason Cornett decided it was time to go was the numbers – since it's such a small school system, Towns County sometimes struggles to fill its sports rosters, which is bad for a team trying to compete in a tough Region schedule.

"We had one player sign up for rec football this year," said Cornett. "We have limited numbers of middle schoolers playing football. Next year, there are 14 players coming



Coach John Cornett

back, eighth-graders included. For football to continue to grow or succeed here, we cannot play in the Region we are.

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Civic Association welcomes Van Horn, Waggener of Young Harris College

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Civic Association, formerly the Towns County Homeowners Association, hosted Dr. Drew Van Horn, president of Young Harris College, and Stephen Waggener, head coach of the Young Harris Baseball Program, at their biannual meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 22.

"Higher education is changing," said Van Horn. "It's estimated that, this year, more than 30 colleges will close. Last year, there were 20. To be successful, you have to be innovative."

"Young Harris has always been innovative. It has always changed, it has always offered programs, it has always tried to help the people as best it can."

That change includes institutional change, which Van Horn said the college was

completely open to.

"We are recommitted, now, to our region," said Van Horn. "We get most of our students – almost 85 percent of our students – from the State of Georgia. And if you were to (graduate) by radius, I would guarantee you that almost 50 percent, if not 60, are within 100- and 150-mile radius from the institution."

"So, we're still serving that group of students, and we're trying to make a difference in their lives."

Most businesses these days don't understand what a liberal arts degree is, said Van Horn, adding that, not so long ago, businesses were willing to spend time and money training new people, though that's not necessarily the case anymore.

Young Harris College has a strong liberal arts core – math, science, literature, history, writing and speaking



Head Coach Stephen Waggener spoke in the Jan. 22 Towns County Civic Association Meeting. Photo by Mark Smith

– but is taking the next step by offering professional degrees like accounting, business management, finance, marketing

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Movers and Shakers host Ordiales, Towns County Clean Sweepers

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Mountain Movers and Shakers hosted Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales along with Chuck and Liza Strub, who head up the Towns County Clean Sweep initiative, on Friday, Jan. 25, at the Sundance Grill in Hiwassee.

Mayor Ordiales took the floor to talk about what's in store for Hiwassee.

"It was a pretty

transitional year, as you all know," said Ordiales. "We didn't have great processes for anything, and in every department, we've made strides and corrected things."

"For example, in the water treatment plant, we are now running less hours than we ran in the last five years. Now, that's good because we've become more efficient."

"We've used better chemicals, less electricity. Guess how much we pay in

power bills just at the water treatment plant – \$98,000 a year. And the sewer plant, \$105,000 a year. So, one of the initiatives we're looking at now is solar energy to see if we can cut that back somewhat."

"We finally got approval (to move forward with expansion of the sewer plant). The bids are out, and we should start construction on that in the next couple of months. The exact same bid we sent out to eight different contractors,

one came in at \$1.8 million, the other one came in at \$1.3 million, for the exact same work."

"So, needless to say, we're going to go with the \$1.3 million. So, that's what's going on in the sewer plant."

Ordiales said the city had to purchase a 2015 vehicle for the Police Department because one of them just gave out while in service.

There is a capital enhancement program now

in place where every year another vehicle will be replaced because "they're in pretty bad shape," said the mayor.

The Hiwassee Police Department has added a fifth officer, Pam Henderson, so the department is back to full force.

In 2018, Hiwassee was designated a PlanFirst Community by the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and also a City of

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Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales

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