

Young Harris man killed in home explosion

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The State Fire Marshal's Office is investigating the death of 67-year-old Thomas Lee Marcell, a Towns County resident believed to have been killed Sunday morning in a massive home explosion that echoed over a 10-mile radius from its epicenter near Downtown Young Harris.

Investigators are looking into the possibility of a gas explosion, with a preliminary analysis not being able to rule out the accidental ignition of a methane build-up inside the home as the likely cause, according to Deputy State Fire Commissioner Tony Pritchett.

Towns County Coroner

Tamela Cooper said there is no reason to believe the victim was anyone other than Marcell at this time, though given the extent of the damage, his body is being sent to the State Medical Examiner's Office for positive identification.

Next of kin notification was made Sunday evening with relatives who lived out of state, and Cooper has offered condolences to Marcell's family and friends in the tragic accident.

"Thomas Lee Marcell was a beloved member of the Young Harris community, known for his remarkable skill in repairing guitars, chainsaw motors and gas engines," Cooper told the newspaper. "His hands could restore the soul


of a beloved instrument and bring life back to worn-out machines.

"Thomas was also a world champion boatsman, achieving greatness in the Marcell boats he built alongside his father.

"Thomas was a kind-hearted and generous man, always willing to lend a helping hand to those in need. His presence will be deeply missed, but his legacy of craftsmanship and kindness will live on in the lives he touched."

Reportedly, Marcell hailed from New York originally and had been renting the property on Brown Circle as living quarters for the past six years. He was the lone oc

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Tragically, a man died Sunday in a home explosion that reverberated for miles in the mountains surrounding Young Harris.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Illegal immigrant faces deportation after arrest

Maj. Gen. Lozano helps commemorate Iwo Jima

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

On Jan. 23, the Towns County Sheriff's Office responded to a disturbance at a residence on Natures Way near Scataway Road, east of Hiawassee.

Faustina Diaz Perez, 33, an undocumented illegal immigrant, was taken into custody and charged with misdemeanor simple battery plus three felony counts of obstruction of law enforcement for resisting arrest.

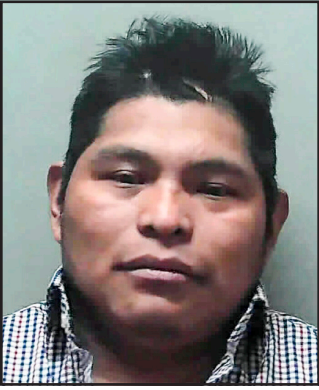
Due to his illegal presence in the United States, TCSO contacted U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which immediately placed a hold on him. ICE picked up Perez on Saturday, Feb. 15, from the Towns County Detention Center for deportation.

Perez' country of origin was not available at press time.

He was the first illegal immigrant arrested in Towns County this year, and the Sheriff's Office said it is relatively uncommon for deputies to come across illegal immigrants involved in criminal activity locally.

According to longstanding TCSO policy, when an illegal immigrant is arrested, the Sheriff's Office immediately contacts ICE, which has historically done what it did in this situation.

In 2024, the Sheriff's Office arrested and detained two illegal immigrants for ICE transport, one man for drugs in



Faustina Diaz Perez

February – this individual had previously been deported at the time of his arrest last year – and another man for driving under the influence in May.

All individuals are presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – In a remarkably poignant and powerful ceremony, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Frank J. Lozano brought tears to the eyes of many remembering the heroes of Iwo Jima on Monday, Feb 17.

Lozano served as the keynote speaker for the occasion commemorating the 80th year since that infamous battle took place, and this year, the recognition also happened to fall on President's Day.

The Marine Corps League Unicoi Detachment 783 Towns & Union County presented the ceremony at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center, a perfect location, as the incredible Iwo Jima Memorial guards the entrance.

MCL 783 Commandant Alton "Doc" Coleman opened by welcoming all the veteran service organizations, first responders, law enforcement and local dignitaries, with special recognition for Towns County resident and Battle of



Local Marine Corps League members welcomed the community to their solemn commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima on Feb. 17.

Photo by Shelly Knight

TCSO arrests Young Harris man for cruelty to animals

News Special

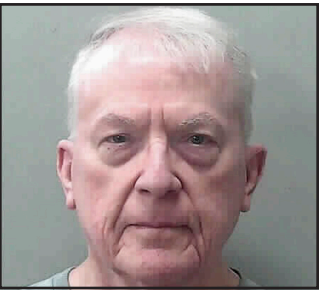
YOUNG HARRIS – On Jan. 6, the Towns County Sheriff's Office investigated a cruelty to animals complaint on Old Chicken Farm Road.

Investigation into the case revealed that there were several cats living in deplorable conditions. The cats were covered in feces and their hair was matted.

The cats were turned over to The Whiskers Project and The Mountain Shelter Humane Society.

Laneau Hayes, 75, of Young Harris, was arrested on Tuesday, Feb. 18, and charged with misdemeanor cruelty to animals.

All subjects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



Laneau Hayes

Almost There Ministry betters lives in community


By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Everyone is worthy of mercy, and one local organization that exemplifies that belief in abundance is Almost There Ministry.

As explained in the weekly meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers at Sundance Grill on Feb. 14, the occasion of Valentine's Day was fitting – show love to those who frequently don't know it.

Almost There got its start through weekly visits to the Union and Towns County jails. Malinda Grey and Elaine McEver ministered there, and McEver took the organization's first steps by inviting some of the newly released female inmates to her house and helping them get clean.

June 2017 saw Almost There's official beginning. As described by President Danny Meeks, the name was chosen



Elaine McEver is the loving "House Mom" for the Almost There Ministry.

because the offenders "are getting out of prison, they've got just a little bit more to go, but they've got a lot that they need to learn from the mistakes that they made."

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks


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Battle of Iwo Jima...from Page 1

the USS Silverstein when he witnessed the United States Flag being raised atop Mount Suribachi,” Coleman said.

“Immediately, Marines on the beach and the ships from the Navy’s 5th Fleet began blowing their horns and whistles repeatedly in celebration. This moment stayed with Johnson the rest of his life.

“Fast forward to 2015, former Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall, with invaluable input from Johnson, commissioned the monument here, which (area artist) Al Garnto credits as the most significant monument of his artistic career.

“It is significant because today there are only about four Iwo Jima veterans remaining. One day, there will be none. When that day comes, we will still speak their names and tell their stories. We will help our youth understand their sacrifices because, as all know, freedom is not free.

“Let our memorial here



U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Frank J. Lozano served as keynote speaker for the 80th Anniversary Ceremony marking the Battle of Iwo Jima last week.

Photo by Shelly Knight

in Young Harris remind us that when things are at their worst, we can be at our best. Oorah.”

MCL 783 Junior Past Commandant Ashford Todd

conducted the bell ceremony, declaring that “this solemn day, with its sad, sacred memories, has come once again.”

“We have dedicated this day to our departed Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen,” Todd said. “It gives us an appropriate occasion to dedicate ourselves to the preservation of the fruits of their victories and the sacred heritage that was purchased by their valor and sealed with their blood.

“We ring the Bell of Honor in remembrance of U.S. Navy Chief Clarence Johnson. It is right that those who sacrifice and die should be remembered and honored for the invaluable service that they rendered to their country and to humanity.

“Our impulse to set aside this day in remembrance of our departed Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen sprang from the fact that the six-week Battle of Iwo Jima saw over 26,000 casualties and resulted in 83 Medals of Honor being awarded.

“We cannot forget. We ring the Bell of Honor once for those who died fighting for our country on that tiny island 80 years ago.”

Keynote speaker Maj. Gen. Lozano is currently stationed at the Redstone Arsenal in Alabama as Executive Officer of Missiles and Space.

Missiles and Space is described as “on the cutting edge of the Army’s long-range precision fires, air and missile defense, hypersonic, directed energy, counter-unmanned aerial systems, integrated fires

mission command, and aviation and ground missiles modernization initiatives.”

Lozano opened by touching on the dual nature of the occasion as marking both the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima’s start on Feb. 19, 1945, and also President’s Day.

“Your presence here today perfectly captures the pride, honor and the respect we all share for each other as Americans and that which we share for our veterans,” Lozano said. “Today we celebrate the legacy of leadership that has guided our nation through triumph and adversity.

“In the spirit of President’s Day, let us come together as one nation, indivisible, and strive to build a future that honors the dreams of our founders. It’s a day to honor the profound legacy of those who have held the highest office in the land. It is a day to honor their vision, leadership and the values that have guided our democracy since its inception.

“President’s Day has its roots in the birth of George Washington, whose leadership during the Revolution and at the helm of our fledgling nation laid the foundation for the country that we know today. He set many of the precedents for the office, leading with integrity, humility and a clear commitment to the principles of liberty and justice.

“President’s Day is more than just a day to honor the men who have served in that office; it is a reminder of the values that define our country and the responsibilities that we all share in shaping its future. Whether through service, advocacy or community involvement, we all have a role to play in ensuring that America continues to live up to its promise.

“And so, we honor the sacrifice, indomitable spirit and the courage that defined the Battle of Iwo Jima – one of the most pivotal engagements in the Pacific Theatre of World War II, altered the course of the war and became a symbol of bravery and resili-

ence for generations to come. “The island was defended by over 20,000 Japanese soldiers who were determined to fight to the last man. From the moment the Americans landed on that island, they faced an unrelenting barrage of mortars, artillery and hidden machine gun nests.

“It was one of the bloodiest and most grueling battles in the history of warfare. The cost of victory was steep. More than 6,800 marines gave their lives on that island. We must remember that the victory was not just the result of military strategy or overwhelming firepower; it was also the result of the selflessness and courage of everyone who fought there.

“It is a reminder of the price of freedom and the strength it takes to preserve. The heroes that fought did not only secure an island – they secured the future for generations to come. Our fallen heroes represent the best of us. We offer a special salute to all of those who have served and paid the ultimate price.”



The 20-foot-tall, 36-foot-wide Iwo Jima Memorial by area sculptor Al Garnto at the Towns County Rec Center is a unique, patriotic treasure in the North Georgia Mountains.

Photo by Shelly Knight

Opting Out...from Page 1

of wealthy people would start buying up local properties, driving up values for homes owned by “the average citizen” to potentially tax them out of homeownership because of the high prices paid for adjacent properties.

“We need to keep our county with a diversified population of citizens of young parents with children and good schools, retired citizens of educators on a fixed income, and yes, the wealthy and very wealthy are a valuable part of our community,” Kendall said in 2008.

Then as now, voters in all Towns County’s taxing districts opted to support the homestead exemption. And then as now, concerns were raised about whether local governments would be able to generate “sufficient funds” to operate with such an assessment cap in place.

“My answer to that question is YES,” Kendall said back then. “The 3% and growth to the digest through new buildings and the ability under the law to raise the tax millage by the city, school or county is a safeguard that they can raise sufficient funds to operate.”

Kendall was well ahead of his time in securing a homestead assessment cap, as neighboring counties were hit particularly hard years later, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when new residents flocked to the rural mountains and drastically increased values for longtime property owners.

And it was clarification from City Attorney Marvin Harkins regarding the 2008 assessment cap on homesteads that convinced council members to decide last week that the new cap simply wasn’t necessary in Young Harris.

The HB 581 assessment cap is tied to the Consumer Price Index, a common measure of inflation that has been hovering near 3%. So, the rate deciding the new exemption could be more or less in any given year depending on the annual rate of inflation, but it would always be capped at 3% here because of the coexistent local exemption.

But even if the CPI was lower than 3%, the council intimated that the new exemption would not prove meaningful since property tax collections are always a very small revenue source for Young Harris, which has just 157 homesteaded properties.

Plus, Harkins said the Floating Local Option Sales Tax created by HB 581 to provide additional property tax relief would still be accessible here despite not all local governments opting in as required, as the similar 2008 cap would allow Young Harris to meet that requirement.

Added together, this is why, again, the City Council

decided to opt out.

“If we were a county or a city that did not have this already in place, I daresay we would all be opting in,” Councilman John Kelley said. “We’ve already got something in place that works fine, and we don’t disqualify ourselves for (FLOST) at all, so let’s leave it alone.”

Intriguingly, a scenario seems possible wherein local voters one day approve the newly created FLOST to bring about a millage rollback that zeroes out all city property taxes for several years while also significantly reducing such taxes for all property owners in the county.

No one from the public attended the second hearing last week, but Hiawassee City Councilwoman Amy Barrett attended the third and final hearing in Young Harris as she worked to shore up her own thinking on the issue in light of the same process playing out in Hiawassee.

The Hiawassee City Council was expected to decide whether to opt out in a called meeting that occurred after press time this week, but after two public hearings of their own last Thursday, Hiawassee council members appeared poised to join the City of Young Harris in opting out.

Also this month, Young Harris City Council held its regular meeting on Feb. 4. Among meeting business was a discussion of why the city does not have ice and snow clearing equipment for inclement winter weather. Multiple residents asked about this after the Jan. 10 snowstorm.

Public Works Supervisor Dean Stanley explained that it’s a simple matter of being cost prohibitive; a truck, spreader, storage building and the land for it, salt loader, and the salt/gravel mix itself would combine to cost over half a million dollars.

Towns County Government is responsible for taking care of county roads during winter weather, and the Georgia Department of Transportation keeps state highways clear, but the cities must take care of their own roads.

Councilman Kelley made a motion that the city did not need to purchase such equipment, citing the estimated costs as too much money

“for something to sit 99.9% of the time,” and the rest of the council in attendance agreed.

In other business, council members briefly discussed contracting with The Water Authority, Inc. to run the city’s Water Treatment Plant once they get the agreement back for review. Owned by State Sen. Steve Gooch, TWA has operated the city’s Wastewater Treatment Plant for years.

Speaking of the Water Treatment Plant, the council voted to start the process of annexing the water plant and part of Cupid Falls Park, which are owned by the city but fall outside city limits. Young Harris will be working with the Commissioner’s Office to get this done.

Water issues featured prominently in the regular city meeting, with Councilman Steve Clark expressing frustration with how long it has been taking the city’s contractor to complete the Timberline Booster Pump Project after the proposal was signed a year ago.

Clark suggested that, moving forward, the city include a completion timeline in construction contracts and maybe a way to recoup costs associated with such delays.

Additionally, Clark reported that he had seen water trucks hooked up to city hydrants, leading to a discussion about ensuring that the city’s hydrant meters were making their way into the hands of contractors using city water.

Mayor Andrea Gibby said the city had initiated an ongoing community outreach and educational campaign about what it is the city does in hopes of promoting civic engagement, informing people how local government runs, and potentially clearing up misconceptions by the public.

Toward the end of the Feb. 4 meeting, Gibby asked the council to be on the lookout for state-level tort reform, which Gov. Brian Kemp said he would be working on this year. Gibby said tort reform is important because cities do not have as much legal protection as, say, counties.

The City Council and Mayor Gibby meet the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. inside City Hall at 50 Irene Berry Drive. The public is encouraged to attend.

Home Explosion...from Page 1



An explosion devastated this home off Brown Circle Sunday, killing the lone occupant.

occupant of the old cinderblock building that previously served for decades as a garage shop.

No one else was hurt in the incident, but the explosion decimated the roughly 1,000-square-foot structure situated across the highway from Gibson's Drive-In Restaurant on US 76.

The tremendous blast and resultant fireball blew straight up through the building, charring treetops on the bank behind the home and scattering debris over the area.

Somehow, destruction and fire from the eruption were largely contained to the immediate vicinity of the building, with no major damage to incredibly close-by occupied homes.

E-911 Dispatch toned the emergency call out at 7:39 a.m. on Feb. 23, and Towns County Fire & Rescue responded with Tanker 1, Tanker 2, Engine 2 and Engine 3 to extinguish the blaze.

Fire Chief Harold Copeland said firefighters quickly learned that a man was in the home at the time of the explosion, and after putting out the flames, they transitioned to the difficult work of recovering this body.

At the Fire Department's request, the State Fire Marshal's Office sent three agents to the scene, and Chief Copeland said he also called an excavator company to help move debris at the site.

The fire chief expressed sympathy for the man who lost his life and his loved ones, and

he commended the response of his firefighters and all responding agencies, including the State Fire Marshals, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Towns EMS and the Coroner's Office.

On the cause of the explosion, Deputy Fire Commissioner Tony Pritchett, who serves directly under Georgia's Insurance and Safety Fire Commissioner John F. King, said the state office would publish a full press release once the investigation is closed.

"Preliminarily, there are absolutely no signs of any foul play, and at this point ... it's being investigated as a gas build-up inside the building," Pritchett said. "Right now, we can't rule out methane. It does not appear to be propane at this point."

As for an ignition source, Pritchett said they were working to nail down exactly what would have sparked such a blast.

"Any kind of electrical switching in any kind of appliance inside of the structure would be all it would take to ignite whatever kind of gas is in there," Pritchett said of the scenario being investigated.

And while it is too early to say that the following is what happened, Pritchett explained that sewer gases, like highly flammable methane, can quickly fill a structure if a septic or sewer drain line attached to a plumbing fixture goes dry, such as from non-use or damage.

Drains for fixtures like sinks, showers and toilets are

installed with a special fitting called a P-trap that holds a little bit of water to act as a barrier preventing gas from backing up into a building.

It is called a P-trap because the fitting makes the shape of a letter P on its side, designed to hold water in the bend. And a P-trap going dry increases the likelihood of gases like methane seeping into homes, potentially filling spaces to cause extremely hazardous conditions.

Speaking to public safety around the potential for explosions in situations of methane build-up, Pritchett said people need to make sure there is water in the P-trap portion of their drains "to keep that methane gas from coming back into the house."

This holds true especially for plumbing fixtures that are not used regularly. A precaution people can take in such cases is simply using a bucket to pour enough water into a drain to keep the P-trap filled and prevent a backflow of gas.

"When properly installed, the vent pipe that ventilates the plumbing out of the top of the house will help it a lot," Pritchett said. "But still, if you don't have the P-traps properly filled with water, you could still have an issue."

The deputy fire commissioner said people with this issue can sometimes notice the unpleasant smell of methane in their homes, but it can depend on how a building is laid out or what part of a home residents typically frequent.

"People get used to smells inside their homes as well and it gets to the point to where they don't even notice it," Pritchett said. "I don't know if that's the case in this situation."

"Also, it's possible that methane can come in overnight when somebody's sleeping, or it can happen pretty sporadic. And there's so much of that that's built up in septic tanks a lot of times that it doesn't take long at all to fill a structure up."

Pritchett said that if any-

one notices any kind of suspicious smell to call the Fire Department and have them come check it for potentially dangerous exposures, and "they'll want to get a plumber out there."

People with propane running to their homes should make sure everything is installed correctly by professionals who are qualified to do it, he said.

"And we really urge everybody to have a home multi-gas detector to pick up on anything like that," Pritchett said.

"That way, if you can't smell it, at least that detector's going to pick up on it."

Though relatively rare, Pritchett said that, sadly, there are usually four or five structure explosions across Georgia each year.

"Sometimes it's propane, sometimes it's methane – it just really depends on the situation," Pritchett said. "The majority of the time, if somebody's in the building, they are almost always fatal because of the blast, and it's hard for anybody to survive that."

Quilt of Valor awarded to Navy Hero Caleb Warren



(L-R): Caleb's father, Barry Warren, Caleb Warren, Emily Warren (his wife), and Debbie Warren, his mother.

By Susan L. Young

Caleb Warren joined the Navy in 2005, during Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom. He trained as a hospital corpsman/ medic, and he served aboard the USS Nimitz. After their Middle East deployment, sailors were doing maintenance on one of his ship's nuclear reactors, and there was a radiation accident including a fire at the reactor.

Being a hospital corpsman and always conscious of the patient's needs more than his own, he took action to try to save sailors severely burned in that accident. He was hospitalized himself for injuries received during the accident and was later transferred to shore duty in a pediatric unit, and subsequently to a pediatric ICU. He left the Navy in 2010.

The radiation exposure he endured during the Nimitz accident is why the doctors think he developed a brain tumor.

He had brain surgery in 2021 and continues to fight to get better each and every day.

He met his wife, Emily, who was in the same hospital as he was after his brain surgery, also recovering from a very serious head injury, and they are both so grateful to God for the gifts he has given them both. Caleb and Emily bless God for every day they have together.

In January 2010, while in the Persian Gulf, the USS Nimitz was awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation for back-to-back deployments in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008, while Caleb was a crew member. Additionally, Caleb received several Navy commendations, including the National Defense Service Medal, and the Navy Commendation Medal.

Anyone can nominate a veteran who has been touched

by war for a Quilt of Valor by going online to <http://www.qovf.org/>. Click on the words "NOMINATIONS AND AWARDS" on the red banner near the top of the page, and then look for instructions to fill in the "Online Nomination Form". More than 400,000 Quilts of Valor have been awarded to veterans touched by war since the QOV group began making them.

If you are a quilter and would like to help the Misty Mountain QOV group make these quilts for heroic American veterans, please go to the following website: <http://www.mistymountainquiltguild.org/>, click on the word "More" on the top right side of the home page, and then look for the Quilts of Valor group information.

QOV quilters make it our mission to support our local veterans with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor.

Enotah Garden Club Celebrates Arbor Day 2025

Young Harris has been a Tree City USA community for 30 years. Our neighboring city, Hiawassee, is also a tree City USA community. This program was started by the Arbor Day Foundation in 1976 and is intended to provide communities with a framework to maintain and grow their tree cover.

Trees are important because they aid in reducing erosion, reducing heating and cooling costs and supplying oxygen to our planet. To celebrate Arbor Day, the City of Young Harris along with the Enotah Garden Club will plant

a tree at Cupid Falls.

Last Thursday, Feb 20th, Lea Clark of the Georgia Forestry Commission, gave a presentation to the Enotah Garden Club about trees and climate change.

The presentation provided information about climate change and its effect on our trees. She showed us a map of trees in the United States from the 1920's, 1960's and present day that might make you ask, where did the trees go? As history shows us, forests were cut down for building houses and ships, for heating and cooking

fuel, and for fields to grow cotton.

Over the years, deforestation has caused changes in the growing season, water availability, tree migration and more. One example is, if you or your family were in zone 6b at a time in the past, you may now be in zone 7b. This pattern may slowly continue for years to come.

Dr. Coder, a Professor of Tree Biology & Health Care, has studied tree species migration due to rising temperatures. One observation is that trees on the southern edge



Sandra Collins, Jackie Taylor, Dot Lashley, Vickie Shows, Penny Spears Felicia Parker, Ann Lewis, Rosemary Royston and Tish Lashley

Almost There Ministry...from Page 1

environment for those in need, namely, for four women eligible to participate in the Enotah Judicial Circuit's Accountability Courts.

This includes residents from the Enotah Circuit's range of Union, Towns, White and Lumpkin Counties.

"Some of them really have not had a good family life – don't know much about what a family really is," said Meeks, adding that the fifth room is for Vice President and Director McEver to live with "her girls" and more readily be there for them.

"The goal really is to provide a Christian environment so that they can live and learn quite a bit (as) a family, sit around the table together, communicate and help each other out," Meeks added.

Along with the domestic and spiritual support they find in the program, some women are also eligible to receive aid for their smiles.

"They have bad teeth a lot of times, so they're insecure because they don't want to present themselves to the public," explained Janie McConnell, a member of Almost There Ministry and the head of the dental program.

Women who have been there for three months and who have no further infractions are eligible to be evaluated by Dr. Ketron Moss in Young Harris. The Ministry covers 75% of the cost, with the rest covered by the patient – who is usually working after that initial three-month period.

Still, McConnell said it's possible for the remaining 25% to be covered by a number of local churches as charity. Almost There works with many churches, as a matter of fact – when she could still drive, McEver took many women to their preferred places of worship.

As body and spirit heal, so too does Almost There seek to cleanse the mind. Mothers who have lost custody of their children often go through counseling to get them back, and Meeks said Almost There residents are encouraged to attend. Children may not be allowed to stay in "Ms. Elaine's House," but they can visit.

It's worth noting that the ministry has an 80% success rate, as calculated by McEver, and some of their success stories were put on display that morning with two women who are currently part of the program.

Sheila Larson freely admits she was at rock bottom after her arrest. Her case manager suggested she try Almost There, and it was then that she met McEver, whom Larson said brought change to her life.

"Over the next couple of weeks, this woman would pray with me ... and it was thanks

to her that I have gotten back in my life and started healing," Larson said. "I love the program at Almost There, but it's the House Mom's heart and love that really brings us out."

When she moved in, Larson had only fear, doubt and a pillowcase filled with her meager belongings, but she was welcomed so warmly that by the end of her first night, she had a closet full of clothes and the strength to better herself.

Tracy Teague – today one of the managers of Sundance Grill – has come far in her own recovery. Sharing a bit of her backstory, Teague is the self-described "product of two hippies" and was no stranger to drug abuse from a young age.

Teague said she eventually became a functional addict with three children, a mortgage, and a relationship spanning almost two decades. When the man she loved admitted to robbery and murder and went on the run, Teague's life fell apart.

She lost both of her parents shortly thereafter – along with her house and children – and tried to soothe the pain with heroin and meth.

"The best thing that ever happened to me was that I was arrested, and that's what landed me into the Drug Court program," Teague said. "I came in to Ms. Elaine's House reluctantly, (but) I've been clean and Saved now for 18 months."

"When I found out God loved me, that's when my life turned around," shared McEver, who has faced similar hardships. McEver said after the presentation that she struggled with alcohol for years, but finding faith was what she needed to make drastic change to then pay forward.

The Movers and Shakers were so moved by the ministry and the women it helps that they "passed the hat around" and donated an impressive \$490 that morning.

Meeks said the main way the public can help is to pray, but the organization is in desperate need of another house manager/program director. McEver was adamant she would remain in the lives of her girls somehow, but aging has rendered it difficult for her to do everything she used to.

Someone who can help take over things like house and yard work would be appreciated, but Meeks and McEver agree that the ideal candidate is another woman with a true servant's heart who can live with those staying at the ministry and provide support right alongside them.

"God has really blessed this ministry in the past eight years," Meeks said, adding that in a perfect world, Almost

There could grow to include more than one director so they could take turns living in the house and managing duties.

Interested parties may contact Meeks at 478-719-5207 or dannylmeeks@gmail.com. To anyone who wishes to make a monetary donation, find out more or believes Almost There could benefit their loved one, the line to call is 706-970-3661.

of the US are dying from increased heat but could migrate north in ideal situations, trees on the northern edge of the US are moving even further north to escape the heat. Part of the problem is the trees are dying faster in the south than the trees in the north are surviving.

Some ways we can help to save our forests and trees are

to keep planting trees wherever possible, perhaps replace dead trees with heat-adapted species of trees, maintain more mature trees that already thrive locally, provide more shading of hardscapes, monitor pest management and increase soil health. If we prepare now, it could help our trees in the future for things to come.

For more information on

this topic and/or see the slides from Lea Clark's presentation, please contact the Enotah Garden Club at enotahgardenclubyh@gmail.com .

You may also reach out to lmclark@gfc.state.ga.us. Our next meeting is March 20th at 10 AM at the Young Harris City Hall.

We will be talking about hydrangeas. Please join us!

TCREA Education Scholarships Available

Towns County Retired Educators Association (TCREA) is committed to excellence in education and is pleased to announce the availability of two scholarships for Towns County college students and teachers to help them further their academic careers and fulfill their potential.

College students who are legal residents of Towns County currently enrolled in an accredited education program who will be at least a college junior in the 2025 academic year and have at least a 3.0 GPA are eligible for the TCREA Emerging Educators Scholarship. The amount of the scholarship varies by year; for 2025 the scholarship is \$1,000.

Current teachers who hold a Georgia teaching certificate and are legal residents of Towns County or employed at a school in Towns County and are pursuing an advanced degree or additional subject endorsement are eligible for the TCREA Advanced Degree

Scholarship. Applicants must be enrolled in or accepted into an accredited advanced education degree program or an endorsement program for additional subject specialty during the year in which the scholarship is awarded. Currently enrolled applicants must have at least a 3.0 GPA and be in good academic standing with their college or university. The amount of the scholarship varies by year; for 2025 the scholarship is \$500.

For more information or to request an application for TCREA scholarships, please send an e-mail to TCREA.SC@gmail.com.

Applications will also be available at the Towns County Board of Education Office. Completed applications for scholarships should be e-mailed to TCREA.SC@gmail.com or mailed to the address on the application form.

Applications must be received by April 11, 2025, to be considered. Scholarships will be awarded at the annual TCREA banquet in May.