

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

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75 Cents

Publication Number 635540 Volume 90 Number 18

Wednesday, March 6, 2019

Roquemore to be new football coach; board office weighing field options

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The Towns County Indians have a new head football coach in Jason Roquemore, who will be coming over from Johnson High School in Gainesville.

Roquemore has spent the last seven seasons coaching the Knights, and Towns County High School is certainly glad to have him.

"Jason Roquemore was our finalist from the committee that was put together to choose a head football coach," said Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong. "For me personally, he was heads and tails the top candidate."

"It was unanimous by the committee that he was the guy we felt like fit in Towns County. He came with great references –

we can't find anyone at Johnson High School that says anything negatively about him.

"His main goal as a football coach is not to win football games, but it's to build character with the players, and we felt that was something that fit at Towns County."

Roquemore – who will be taking over from former Head Coach John Cornett – had yet to be officially hired by press time, though the school board was expected to hire him in the March 4 work session based on recommendations from the Football Coach Hiring Committee at the High School.

In other sports-related news, Berrong said the schools have identified a growing problem at the soccer/football field.

As previously reported, the field in Frank McClure Memorial Stadium has had

some drainage issues, causing the field to become mushy at times, especially in the spring.

The issue is similar to last year's incredibly soggy outfield at the baseball diamond above the football field, which kept the football team from playing a single home game last season.

Fortunately, the schools were able to install a new drainage system that appears to be holding up wonderfully at the baseball field, and the Indians have already played a home game with great success.

"We thought part of the football field and soccer field issue was from that up (at the baseball field)," said Berrong. "So, we thought if we got all that drained off, that that might actually fix the soccer and football field."

"This fall, when football played, the field was in great shape, so we thought maybe

it actually had fixed it. Then we roll into springtime here, and the baseball field is still draining good and is in great shape now, but the football field is doing exactly what it did last year and starting to look like what the baseball field looked like last year.

"We don't know why it's doing what it's doing. The only thing I can think is, there's been so many years that we've not been aerating this field or topdressing it, and so we think everything is rootbound underneath and the water just can't get through this topsoil to get to the drains that are under the football field. So, this water's just sitting here on the top with this grass and just turning to mush."

The field was aerated and topped last year, but prior to that, Berrong said it was likely a financial issue as to why those field management practices



Jason Roquemore coaching the Johnson Knights. Roquemore will start the 2019-2020 season as the new Indians head football coach. Photo by Scott Rogers/The Gainesville Times

were not undertaken. "I not even know if that's what the issue is, but we're going to continue to do that because it can only help it," said Berrong. "I'm not sure."

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New Union General CEO Bierschenk ready to lead hospital system

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Kevin Bierschenk started in his position as the new CEO of Union General Hospital on Feb. 25, and he's eager to meet as many members of the community as possible.

Residents are invited to attend a special welcome reception for Bierschenk on Thursday, March 14, hosted by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce.

The reception will take place in the upper community room of the Union County Community Center starting at 5 p.m., and everyone is encouraged to attend, with refreshments to be provided.

Bierschenk arrives at Union General Hospital with many years of experience in the hospital industry, having served most recently as the CEO of Dodge County Hospital since 2007.

Prior to that, he served as CEO of Southwest Alabama Medical Center, and his experience in other hospitals dates back to 1997.

Bierschenk has stepped into the role of retired Union General CEO Lewis Kelley, whose last day was on March 1.

"If you do any research on



Kevin Bierschenk

this hospital, it's known as a top-notch quality hospital with great finances and great leadership," said Bierschenk. "I've worked with Lewis in the past through different associations and have known that he was going to retire, so Lewis knew that I was interested."

The Board of Directors for Union General Hospital initiated the search to find Kelley's replacement after he signaled that he was ready to retire in June 2018, and Bierschenk was excited to learn that he'd made the final cut as

Kelley's successor.

"I've been wanting to come up to this area," said Bierschenk. "I'm the chairman-elect for the Georgia Hospital Association, and so I do a lot with Georgia hospitals."

"Any time you talk about premier systems, this system's name is always in the top of the list. This is a great community in which to live, and everybody needs to know that Union General is well known in the hospital circuit."

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Terrifying 911 call recounts last moments of Terry Silvers' life

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Heather Segars is having a hard time sleeping at night.

She suffers from recurrent nightmares involving the grisly death of Terry Silvers, who was killed when the firewood he was hauling flew in through the rear window of his truck during a Feb. 23 car crash in Hayesville, North Carolina.

Both being native to the area, Segars had known Silvers for many years, and she also knew the woman who was driving the car that Silvers had crashed into.

The woman and her accompanying granddaughter survived the accident with non-life threatening injuries, but sadly, the same could not be said for Silvers.

Segars is having such a hard time coping with the events of that tragic evening, in fact, that she already looked into acquiring local psychiatric help, though she worries about her mental health moving forward because she can't afford the sessions.

The reason Segars is struggling so much with what happened on Feb. 23 is because it also happened to her, in a way.

She not only witnessed the accident but also followed



Terry Silvers

behind Silvers in her own vehicle for more than 10 minutes prior to the crash, interacting with him briefly before his death, and watching helplessly as he swerved into oncoming lanes of traffic and ran drivers off the road.

During those terrifying 10 minutes leading up to his death, she begged a Towns County E-911 dispatcher to send someone to stop Silvers' out-of-control vehicle before it was too late.

It all started when Segars was nearly run off the road herself shortly after 7 p.m. on Feb. 23 as she made her way up US 76.

"I'm passing the theater going toward Young Harris

following right behind a white, small Toyota truck, and he's just all over the road, he's run off the road – he's going to hurt somebody," Segars tells 911 at the very beginning of the Feb. 23 emergency call. "I'm trying to get him to stop."

The white truck turns into the Cornerstone BP at the Junction right as the sound of a siren from a deputy cruiser is heard over the 911 call.

Segars asks the dispatcher about the passing deputy, and the dispatcher replies that "they're going to a call."

She then relays the truck's license plate at the dispatcher's request, and as the sound of the cruiser's siren appears in the distance, the man gets out of his truck to go into the store. That's when Segars recognizes the driver as Terry Silvers.

When he returns to his vehicle less than a minute later, Silvers drops a pack of cigarettes on the ground, and Segars tells the dispatcher that "he can't stand up straight, this man does not need to be driving."

She asks the dispatcher if she should approach Silvers to talk him out of driving, and though the dispatcher has already advised her not to engage the subject, she asks

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Langley talks budgets, criminal justice reform with Movers and Shakers

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley addressed members of the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday, March 1, at the Sundance Grill in Hiwassee.

Langley spoke first about how he budgets his office and manages to retain a high caliber staff on a shoestring.

Twenty-six people work under Langley throughout the four-county Enotah Judicial Circuit, with about 25 percent of his staff being paid through federal grant money.

"Those are primarily the people in my office who work



Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley speaking in the March 1 meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers. Photo by Mark Smith

Local man killed in tragic cycling accident on Swanson Mountain

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – A local man died shortly after being struck by a truck while riding his bicycle on Swanson Mountain on Wednesday, Feb. 27.

Stan Lee, 66, of Young Harris, was riding his bicycle west on US 76 toward the city when he came upon a large accident on the road shoulder, according to authorities who

responded to the scene.

He apparently swerved around the branch and into the right-hand lane of the road, where he was struck by the side of a passing Dodge Ram 1500 truck, according to authorities.

Lee was transported by EMS to the landing zone at Fire Station No. 2 in Young Harris, though he died before the medical helicopter could take him away from the scene, according to authorities.

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Stan Lee

Dave Hering awarded Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award



Dave Hering of Towns County, center, receiving the 2019 Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award in the 11th Annual Watershed Gala on Feb. 28. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – The Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition hosted its 11th Annual Watershed Gala on Thursday, Feb. 28, at the Charles Suber Banquet Hall at Young Harris College.

The purpose of the gala was to celebrate the progress the organization made last year and award a member who has dedicated a lot of time and energy into the organization the Holman Water Quality Stewardship Award.

Coalition Executive Director Callie Moore opened the program by thanking all the guests for attending and supporting the gala and organization.

"The primary purpose of tonight's gala is to celebrate," said Moore. "We also want to honor a person or group who has done a lot to further the organization."

Before announcing the nominees for the award, Moore explained the reason that the gala and award is named after Bill Holman.

"Throughout his

career in the environmental field, Bill Holman has demonstrated persistent constructive leadership in legislative, administrative and education roles," said Moore. "His accomplishments have facilitated water quality improvement throughout North Carolina, and his personal commitment to the environment and clean water is clear."

The three nominees for the award were Brenda Hull, Dave Hering, and the Chattahoochee-Nantahala Chapter 692 Trout Unlimited.

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