

Chastain, Benton qualify unopposed for city seats

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

As the lone candidate to qualify for the vacant seat of Hiawassee Mayor last week, Jay Chastain Jr. is slated to be the next mayor for the City of Hiawassee.

Following a seven-day write-in period, Chastain will be sworn in to serve out the remainder of the term vacated by Liz Ordiales when she resigned last June. The unexpired term ends after Dec. 31 this year.

Candidate qualifying for the June 17 Hiawassee Special Election began on April 1 and ran through 4 p.m. on April 3.

To qualify, Chastain had to resign from his Post 3 seat on the Hiawassee City

Council, which he did April 3. Chastain announced early that he would be qualifying as a candidate for mayor, so the Post 3 seat was also opened to qualifying candidates last week.

And Scott Benton was the lone qualifier for the remainder of the unexpired Post 3 term, which runs through Dec. 31, 2027. People will know Benton from his work on the Whiskey Mountain Project and, separately, as chairperson of the Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority.

These races were to appear in a Special Municipal Election, but since each contest featured a single qualifier – and it is doubtful any candidates will have skipped regular qualifying only to write in

– city officials will know soon if they can cancel the Special Municipal Election in June.

There will still be a Special Primary Election on June 17, to feature statewide voting for Public Service Commission Districts 2 and 3, and the City of Hiawassee will be holding its usual municipal elections in November.

The Municipal General Election will feature the regularly scheduled elections of mayor as well as Council Posts 1 and 2, currently held by Amy Barrett and Patsy Owens, for four-year terms running Jan. 1, 2026, through Dec. 31, 2029.

Qualifying for the Nov. 4 Municipal General Election will take place Aug. 20-22 at Hiawassee City Hall.

Of course, Mayor-elect



Jay Chastain Jr.
1987. I am finally in a place in my life where I am able to only work one, and I now have the time necessary to commit to the city in the capacity as



Scott Benton
mayor.”
One of Chastain’s long-time priorities at City Hall has been to address Hiawassee’s
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Easter Hunt to welcome hundreds of kids Saturday



Children always have a great time visiting with the Easter Bunny during the local egg hunt, pictured here in 2022.

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Annual Easter Egg Hunt hosted by the Towns County Recreation Department is coming this weekend!

On Saturday, April 12, at 10 a.m. on the ballfields of

the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the Easter Bunny will welcome youngsters to hunt for treasures in the form of about 4,000 eggs.

“We have three age groups – toddler to 4 years old, 5 to 8 years old and 9 to 12 years old,” Recreation

Director Stuart Nichols said. “Basically, folks just show up before the event and we will get them broken into age groups.”

“When the time comes, we’ll have some of our staff march them to the different
See Easter Hunt, Page 14

Lions Club celebrates 85 years aiding community



Founded in 1940, the Towns County Lions Club held a well-attended gathering March 29 in honor of the volunteer group’s remarkable history serving the county and larger efforts abroad.

By Shelly Knight
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

On Saturday, March 31, the Towns County Lions Club commemorated 85 years of service to the community at a luncheon hosted by McConnell Baptist Church.

The guest list included a veritable who’s who of dis-

tinguished individuals, such as former Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal and Lions International Past Director Myers Bannister.

Lions International is the world’s largest service organization with over 1.3 million members. The club has an incredible history of providing humanitarian aid to people around the world facing every-

thing from natural disasters to hunger and the newest focus, mental health issues.

Lions provide support for the needs of children and their families affected by childhood cancer, and they work diligently to reduce the prevalence of diabetes and improve quality of life for those
See Lions Club Turns 85, Page 6

Banff Centre Film Festival enjoys mountain of success

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – On March 29, the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club’s annual screening of the Banff Centre Mountain Film Festival World Tour came to Blairsville for the first time, showcasing a love of the outdoors through masterful visuals and evocative storytelling.

Along with GATC, 23 partners set up tables in the

lobby of the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center that Saturday to showcase organizations and programs that benefit the natural spaces that surround the community and protect local trails and hiking opportunities.

When the doors opened at 1 p.m., guests had an hour to check out what exhibitors had to offer. Using displays and giving out items like brochures and stickers, they painted a picture of what the Southern

Appalachian Trail is like and how the communities dotted along its outskirts live.

The action started at 2 p.m. Film festivals typically play a series of short pictures rather than longer movies, and this year’s lineup included everything from five-minute shorts to a 44-minute documentary.

“Anytime – Switzerland” takes viewers on a breathtaking journey along
See Banff Centre, Page 14



The Banff Film Festival’s inaugural outing in Blairsville was such a success that there are already plans for it to return next year.
Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Boyd to serve life sentence in child molestation case

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

CLEVELAND, Ga. – On Monday, March 31, Tanner Boyd of Hiawassee pleaded guilty to aggravated child molestation in the White County Courthouse. He was sentenced to life in prison, to serve a mandatory 25 years behind bars.

Additionally, Boyd, 32, will have to register annually as a sex offender when he does get out of prison, and he is banned from the Enotah Circuit counties of Towns, White, Union and Lumpkin for the remainder of his life. He is also to have no further contact with his victim or her family.

The plea follows Boyd’s arrest on June 3, 2024, after investigators with the Towns County Sheriff’s Office received a child molestation complaint regarding a 13-year-old victim.

Investigators discovered that Boyd began molesting the child when she was 9 years old, with incidents in both Towns and White counties, which led to his arrest and

initial charges of rape and aggravated sodomy.

After the plea, Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson commended “the hard work, dedication, and training for the investigators who worked this sensitive case,” and he thanked them for “bringing the suspect to justice with a conviction.”

Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said Boyd pleaded guilty right before the trial started in White County last week, coinciding with the child victim flying in to be available for testimony: “Once the defendant saw the victim was present in court, he pled guilty.”

Assistant District Attorney Kelly Holloway worked hard on the White County case, as did Assistant District Attorney Buster Landreau on the Towns County case, according to Langley.

“Both cases were ready,” Langley said. “We had pre-trial hearings that admitted the evidence from the Towns County incidence in the White County trial, and that also contributed to the defendant having little choice but to admit



Tanner Boyd
guilt, since we had strong evidence against him.”

“And then, the victim flying in and being willing to testify in a very difficult situation – a young person flew here with her parents ready to face her accuser, and that caused him to plead guilty.”

In this situation, Boyd took advantage of a connection he had with the parents in the family, betraying their trust by molesting their child, said Langley, who added that the family was satisfied that Boyd
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United Community

Young Harris College hosts 102nd Annual Meeting for the Georgia Academy of Science Conference

Scientific minds from across the state recently met at Young Harris College for the 102nd annual Georgia Academy of Science conference hosted by YHC on March 7-8.

Around 200 professionals, instructors, and graduate students involved with the academic science community met for the two-day conference, which focused on all facets of scientific study, ranging from biology and chemistry to psychology and mathematics. The conference also provides students with opportunities to report on research they are conducting for peer review.

"The conference was very successful, from attendance to the quality of presentations and every facet of the event," said Paul Arnold, professor of Biology at YHC. Arnold and Dr. Jennifer Schroeder, professor of Biology, and Director of Study Away, chaired YHC efforts to organize the annual event.

"The support we received from YHC is what made this all possible. We couldn't have done it without the College's help," Schroeder added.

The Georgia Academy of Science is part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The event kicked off with a keynote lecture from Dr. Bonnie K. Baxter, a Professor of Biology and Director of Great Salt Lake Institute at Westminster University. Baxter spoke on the "Great Salt Lake: From Earth to Mars."

Baxter researches the lake's extreme microbiology, especially the foundation of the ecosystem - the algae and cyanobacteria that feed the brine shrimp and flies. She has published scientific articles on the lake's extreme biology, the first academic book on the biology of Great Salt Lake, and the first children's book about this lake.

The conference also included several presentations from students studying science at colleges and universities throughout Georgia. YHC had 8 students who presented their work over the two-day event. In addition to research presentations, posters were on display at the conference, held in the Maxwell Building and Rollins Campus Center at YHC.

The following students presented in the Biomedical Science Section: John Ray - research supervisor: Dr. Andrea



Emma Parks and Percy Ackerman

Kwiatkowski; Montana Owens - research supervisor: Dr. Linda Jones; Chloe Schmidhuber - research supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Schroeder; Victoria Shanahan - research supervisor: Dr. Jennifer Schroeder; and Elizabeth Hernandez: research supervisor: Dr. Paul Arnold.

"GAS was a great way to network and meet students from other schools in Georgia," Owens said about her experience. "I presented on the effects of zebrafish development from cannabinoid exposure. It was a great opportunity to finally present research I have been working on for the entirety of my senior year thus far. I presented to an audience of both familiar and unfamiliar faces, so it was a great way to connect with the community of YHC and other institutions."

Emma Parks and Percy Ackerman were recognized for most outstanding poster for the Psychological Sciences division (research supervisor: Dr. Benjamin Van Dyke), and Sara Helm was recognized for most outstanding talk for the Psychological Sciences division (research supervisor: Dr. Amy Boggan). It is the first time YHC psychology students have participated in the Georgia Academy of Science Annual Meeting.

"The conferences are great because they bring together all the colleges and universities in the state as well as pro-



Sara Helms

fessionals in the field to discuss scientific research," Schroeder said. "We've had representatives from the Department of Forestry and the Department of Natural Resources attend the event."

YHC previously hosted the conference in 2017, as the event rotates around the state each year. Next year's event will be at Georgia Gwinnett College.

"I can't say enough about the YHC community and how it stepped up to support this event," Arnold added. "From the facilities to the food to our own Faculty who played vital roles in the event. The team here at the College really helped to make this event successful."

Lions Club Turns 85...from Page 1



(L-R) Lions Club Past District Governor Chris Sullivan, Past International Director Kembra Smith and Towns County President Danny Meeks at the March 29 celebration in the Family Life Center of McConnell Baptist Church.

Photo/Facebook

stricken.

In 1925, Helen Keller famously challenged the Lions to become "knights of the blind in the crusade against darkness," initiating a century of work dedicated to improving the lives of the vision impaired.

And when a major catastrophe strikes, Lions are often among the first to respond and the last to leave.

Past International Director Kembra Smith was the keynote speaker for the anniversary luncheon, offering a message of gratitude for those serving, past and present, as well as delivering a challenge to keep the Towns County Lions Club thriving.

"This club is known throughout the state for all of the service you do," Smith said. "You are a dynamic group of people and represent a lot what those of us in smaller clubs would love to see."

"To see a membership in numbers that matches the number of years your club has been in existence is ideal. Thank you so much for keeping your community involved with the Lions organization."

"One of the things the Lions value most is teamwork, because none of what we do happens by me doing it, or you individually doing it. You are doing something as a result of being part of a team."

"Being a leader, as you are in your community, it's important to look for ways to help others be a part of your team. It means looking for new opportunities to serve and to enabling others to serve."

"Sometimes as leaders we want to take it all on by ourselves. But as a Lion we are all a part of a team. For example, with the government scaling back on many of the services it has provided is a perfect place for the Lions Club to step in and take up the slack."

"We want to look at the gifts that each member brings. Some of us are a little more organized than others, some of us a little more enthusiastic than others, but everyone has a place at Lions. We can find a place for you to serve. We never want to reject anyone's opportunity to serve."

Smith detailed Lions Club International's current mission to increase membership from 1.3 million to 1.5 million this year.

"We need to talk to community leaders and encourage them to join our cause," she said. "And they are also pushing our latest campaign, which is mental health and wellbeing."

"So, I encourage all of you to consider that when it comes to service activities, and to keep as active as this club has in the past."

Julie Payne, the Towns County Lions Club treasurer and a past president, organized the event and gave a brief overview of the local history.

"In late 1939, a group of men saw the need for a working service organization, and the Towns County Lions Club was chartered in Hiawassee in 1940," Payne said. "In early 1950, the members addressed the need for economic growth in the North Georgia Mountains."

"To promote this area, it was thought that the mountain area heritage should be shown to the outside world. A rustic agricultural fair displaying mountain products became what we know today as the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds."

"Hundreds of volunteer manhours are provided by the Lions and Lionesses. But there is so much more. Locally, the Lions Club sponsors the Towns County Star Student & High School Scholarships, Georgia Lions Lighthouse, Georgia Lions Camp for the Blind, eye exams for local people in need, Young Harris scholarship, FBILA, Give-A-Christmas, White Cane, Towns County Food Pantry, Towns County Fire Department and the Clay Dotson YHC Golf Tournament. We will continue our legacy of service far into the future."

Towns County Lions Club President Danny Meeks thanked all for attending, with a special shout-out to Brenda Swanson, who catered the luncheon, and the Mountain Home Band for the entertainment. Remember, where there is a need, there is a Lion!



Members of Towns County LEO Club, a group of amazing young people who love to serve.

Photo/Facebook

Scottish Festival set for June 7 & 8 at Fairgrounds



Scottish Festival Entertainment Chair Greg Beyer spoke with the Mountain Movers and Shakers last week.

Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

**By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer**

HIAWASSEE – Reflecting its change to a new venue this year, the Blairsville Scottish Festival has become the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival and Highland Games, as clarified by Festival Entertainment Chair Greg Beyer at the weekly meeting of the Mountain Movers and Shakers Friday, March 4.

Set for the weekend of June 7-8 in 2025, the festival traces its inception to a community service project initially undertaken in 2002, with the first festival and games held

Ultimately, the move will enable growth so the festival can reach its full potential, Beyer said. Of the nine recognized sports commonly practiced at Highland games, only five could be held at the former location. But in the roadside ballfield at the Fairgrounds, there will be plenty of space to hold a wider variety of activities.

So far, 60 athletes are slated to compete in the games, to include judging for both men and women’s categories. Featured will be heavy and light hammer toss, weight throw over bar, open stone throw, Braemer stone throw, light weight throw for distance, heavy weight for distance, sheaf throw and the ever-popular caber toss.

Animals have always been a part of the Scottish Festival, and that’s not going to change with the new venue. Beyer promised falconry displays will make a return, as well as traditional Scottish livestock such as the beloved Highland “coo.”

Clever border collies, too, have impressed guests for years with their herding abilities. They’ll be steering sheep in 2025, but there have also been talks of more fully embracing the role canines played among the ancient Scots via more breeds on display in the future.

And there will be room for more food vendors; only

five participated in years past, and Beyer revealed that this resulted in complaints about long lines. The Fairgrounds allow for 15 food vendors, and permanent booths get rid of the need for “disruptive” generators.

This goes for artisans as well, to be situated among the clans throughout the village portion of the Fairgrounds. To date, there are 34 clans registered, with more expected by the onset of summer, seeing as last year topped out at 42. Meanwhile, 38 vendors have signed up so far to attend.

This year, a cèilidh – pronounced “KAY-lee” – will serve as the opening ceremony and a sort of “meet and greet” for athletes and performers. Held at Hamilton Gardens inside the Fairgrounds on June 6 at 6 p.m., the Appalachian St. Andrew’s Pipes and Drums Band will offer a preview of their performances due for the upcoming weekend.

“It’s a folk party that they throw when they’re not throwing a full festival in Scotland,” Beyer explained after playfully inviting Movers and Shakers to pronounce the Gaelic word. Along with the pipes and drums, Beyer said two bands will take to the stage to provide additional entertainment.

Admission to the cèilidh is free, excluding meal prices. That said, admission to the Georgia Mountain Scottish Festival and Highland Games

people can purchase tickets at \$15 per person.

Events start at 9 a.m. on both days, and the opening ceremony of the massed bands and tartan parade will begin at noon on June 7.

Unopposed...from Page 1

aging infrastructure, which he plans to continue prioritizing in an even greater capacity as the duly elected mayor.

“We have main water lines that were installed in the ‘50s and ‘60s,” Chastain said. “Without strong infrastructure, the city cannot progress. You can have all the visions in the world, but without the infrastructure to support them, the vision is a moot point.

“My vision at this point is to get the infrastructure to a point where we can support the growth we are having. We need to replace main waterlines, install another clear well, and upgrade those areas where communities are still on galvanized lines. This just scratches the surface.

“The PBC is almost finished and is in the process of being rented out. We will have to come up with a plan to support this project if the rent does not pay the loan that was required to finish it.”

Another area Chastain will be focusing on heavily is the Tennessee Valley Authority’s plans to rebuild the spillway at Chatuge Dam, which will potentially require a yearslong drawdown of the lake to record-low levels – a major concern for the city, which treats lake water for drinking.

A recent meeting with TVA that Chastain attended alongside Water Department Manager Carl Grizzle marked the first time he had heard that the lake would have to be drawn down to such an extent, that is, 10 feet below winter pool to 1,908 feet in elevation.

“Our TVA district representative told me that the city had been consulted a few years ago, and that the TVA

was told the city would be fine with the lake being so low,” Chastain said. “I talked with the water plant superintendent after the meeting, and he told me that he spoke with the TVA two years ago and told them it would have to researched.

“So, I don’t know who with the city told them that we would be fine. I have reached out to the city engineer at EMI and discussed this in depth with him. The engineer is very concerned. I can go more in depth with this after I have more information from EMI.”

Chastain said the topic will be openly discussed at the next council work session, to start at 6 p.m. inside City Hall on April 28. The work session will feature info on a Capital Projects and Infrastructure Study by EMI, and a TVA representative will be in attendance to speak.

The work session should also feature a full council for the first time since last summer, thanks to Benton qualifying for the Post 3 seat previously filled by Chastain, who had to step away from his council duties mid-2024 to serve in his capacity as mayor pro tempore.

As to why Benton ran for City Council, he said he had been approached by several people and asked if he would consider qualifying for the open position.

“After consideration, I felt it was the right move to make,” Benton said. “My years of experience as a senior superintendent in the construction industry and as a developer bring valuable skillsets that are directly transferrable to the City Council.”

In terms of the agenda he will be pursuing on behalf

of the city, Benton will be drawing inspiration from his time as chairman of the DDA, which “has provided me with the opportunity of working closely with both the City Council and the Building and Planning Committee.”

“During this time, great strides have been made towards rebuilding strong partnerships between each arm of Hiawassee’s local government,” Benton said. “I look forward to being a vital team member as we continue to develop and implement a unified vision for our city based on the needs of its citizens.

“In addition, my wife Kelly and I are huge proponents for the City of Hiawassee. We believe in supporting and promoting our local businesses and maintaining our city’s history and charm through controlled growth and projects that will enhance the quality of life for everyone.”

Regarding his role on the Downtown Development Authority, Benton said he will be stepping down as chairman in light of his new position with the city but plans to stay involved “as much as possible.”

“The Paris Business Center will soon be opening, bringing Hiawassee a new, special restaurant as well as the opportunity for two new businesses to occupy its incubator spaces,” Benton said. “It is my plan to see that project through its completion.

“In addition, I will be working as a committee volunteer on the upcoming annual DDA fundraiser as well as other smaller projects as needed.”

When Benton’s private development work became more widely known last year,

he faced questions about potential conflicts of interest given his DDA role. The DDA clarified then that his development had nothing to do with the DDA’s business downtown, therefore no conflicts existed.

Now that Benton is about to be sworn in as a City Council member, however, there is a possibility that one of his personal business interests might come before city government in some capacity, and he has pledged to follow all appropriate protocols should this ever be the case.

“As with all city officials, should conflicts of interest arise, there are rules in the City Charter of the City of Hiawassee, GA, that are strictly adhered to,” Benton said.



Black Bear Sightings in the Springtime: Be Bearwise To Know What To Do

Springtime brings many species of wildlife, including black bears, back into public view. Being BearWise means knowing what to do when you see a bear, says the Georgia Department of Natural Resources’ Wildlife Resources Division (WRD).

“As expected, bears are going to be hungry when they emerge from their wintering locations, and that means getting easy-to-obtain food as soon as possible,” says Adam Hammond, WRD State Bear Biologist. “Don’t let your home become a bear buffet! Become familiar with the BearWise Basics to help keep bears away from homes and businesses, creating a healthier and safer living situation for everyone.”

The “At Home BearWise Basics” is a great place to get started:

Never feed or approach bears: Feeding bears (intentionally or unintentionally) trains them to approach homes and people for more food. Bears will defend themselves if a person gets too close, so don’t risk your safety and theirs!

Secure food, garbage and recycling: Food and food odors attract bears so don’t reward them with easily available food or garbage.

Remove bird feeders when bears are active: Birdseed

and other grains have a high calorie content making them very attractive to bears. The best way to avoid conflicts with bears is to remove feeders during active bear sightings.

Never leave pet food outdoors: Feed outdoor pets portion sizes that will be completely eaten during each meal and then remove leftover food and food bowl. Securely store these foods so nothing is available to bears.

Clean and store grills: After you use an outdoor grill, clean it thoroughly and make sure that all grease and fat is removed. Store cleaned grills and smokers in a secure area that keeps bears out.

“Bears that have access to human-provided foods often become dependent upon people, leading to destructive behavior and may lead to the bear’s demise,” says Hammond. “Ensuring your home and community are free of bear attractants, like pet food and bird seed, helps keep bears from remaining in the area and avoiding this cycle.”

Though now the most common bear in North America, the species was nearly eradicated from Georgia in the 1930s due to unregulated hunting, illegal harvest, and large-scale habitat loss. Sound wildlife management practices have



restored Georgia’s black bears to a thriving population estimated at 4,100 bears statewide.

BearWise is an education program developed by state bear biologists, anchored by the website www.bearwise.org, that offers citizens specific, detailed, and high-quality information, engaging education pieces and more.

Black bears may legally be taken during the bear hunting season, which occurs each fall in Georgia (GeorgiaWildlife.com/hunting/hunter-resources). Killing bears outside of the hunting season or illegally during hunting season should be reported to Law Enforcement at gadnrle.org/ranger-hotline.

For more information, visit Bearwise.org.

Banff Centre...from Page 1

the Lenzerheide Bike Park, where riders defy gravity in jaw-dropping stunts that carry them over ramp and hill without issue.

“Jamrock: The Birth of Jamaican Rock Climbing” follows the journey of 12-time national climbing champion Kai Lightner as he helps to establish rock climbing as a professional sport in the Caribbean island nation.

“Of a Lifetime” chronicles the De Le Rue family’s journey to Antarctica, where young Mila spends her 18th birthday following in the darling footsteps of her snowboarding father and uncle. While facing incredible fear, she learns just what it means to overcome challenge and how to make her own place in the world.

“The Smoke That Thunders,” at just five minutes long, was one of the shortest stories told at the festival, but it offered awe-inspiring shots of the underside of Victoria Falls as professional extreme whitewater kayaker Ben Marr braved the elements paddling

upstream.

“The Last Observers” is a heartwarming, bittersweet peek into the lives of the last two manual weather recorders in Sweden: Lennart Karlsson and Karin Persson. The couple met through a shared passion for nature – particularly birds – and also managed the Falsterbo Bird Observatory.

“Reel Rock: Jirishanca” tells the story of how alpinists Josh Wharton and Vince Anderson scaled a 19,993-foot Andean mountain in the heart of Peru. Both men have a history pursuing extreme sports, but now, with families to live for, they must temper the risk of their adventure with the deep love for the lives they have built.

“Sliding,” the shortest film of the collection with a four-minute runtime, follows one woman’s fun snow day out as she slips through the Swiss Alps headfirst on a sled through sunny, ice-packed tunnels a world away from the bustle of the surrounding town.

Each film was well-

received, with applause – and some cheering – following in the wake of every credit roll. About 350 people attended the festival, traveling from near and far to enjoy the experience. There are even plans for the festival to return next year, with the Fine Arts Center booked for March 28, 2026.

Craig Keyworth and Pat Decker are no strangers to film festivals, especially those by the Banff Centre – which they once attended in its namesake Canadian town – and they carry a passion for nature. Though they live in Atlanta, the couple owns a house in Blairsville, and they came up specifically to attend the film festival.

“I liked the films, but I also like that, ahead of time, you get to learn more about some of the things that are happening (locally),” said Decker, describing the exhibits as a chance to hear about “taking adventures here.” “There were some great different displays for areas around town that we knew a little bit about but not a lot about.”

Silu Tu felt a personal connection with the films presented at the festival that day. The one thing she hadn’t done

in her career of adventuring to that point, however, was visit a film festival. Admittedly, Tu didn’t have high hopes going in because she thought the films would be low-budget indie productions, but she found her own view of the world strengthened.

As a rock climber that recently visited Jamaica and a volunteer at GATC, Tu was invested in the stories told and the organization that helped bring them to the public eye. She was inspired, in fact, to visit Peru thanks to “Reel Rock: Jirishanca.”

“I really liked (the festival). Really, it changed my idea. I remember the last time a movie spoke to my heart, it was 10 years ago,” Tu said, explaining that Karin Persson’s view of supporting all life on Earth in “The Last Observers” really resonated with her.

“A lot of people talk about, ‘Oh, you’re on your own, you have to be an individual, you are your own person,’” Tu said. “But we all know that’s not true. You have to rely on society or the community or your neighbors or whoever is around you.”



GATC President Lynne Beeson offered remarks during the Banff Film Festival last month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Ticket purchases to the festival benefited the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club with its efforts to promote appreciation, management, maintenance and protection of the Appalachian Trail and other natural outdoor places, accord-

ing to GATC President Lynne Beeson said.

For more information on the GATC, visit <https://georgia-atclub.org/>. And for more info on the film festival and other programs, check out <https://www.banffcentre.ca/>.

Life Sentence...from Page 1

received a life sentence.

Last year, in a separate case that also involved a betrayal of trust and child molestation, Langley said parents and guardians should be hyper aware of “who you place your trust in.”

Parents should keep an eye out for adults who show an inordinate amount of attention to a child and push for alone time, as most molestations occur not by strangers but by people close to families, Langley said.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to tell who might be capable of child molestation.

“Anyone who thinks they can look over a crowd

and pick out a potential child molester is fooling themselves,” Langley said. “These people look just like you and me; they act just like you and me to other adults.

“It’s only when they’re alone with a child that this behavior comes out, and therefore it is very difficult (to tell who is going to do this).”

Langley wants people to know that if they, their church or community organization would like to receive training on protecting children from predators and how to respond if a child discloses abuse, they may contact his office at 706-439-6027, “and we can set up a training class for you.”

National Volunteer Week is April 20-26

National Volunteer Week (April 20-26) provides the opportunity to recognize the millions of Americans who provide volunteer service in their communities across the country.

At Traditions Health 600 specialized hospice volunteers support individuals living with a serious or life-limiting illness and their loved

ones. Volunteers are trained in a variety of areas: patient visits, pet therapy, administrative, and bereavement support.

If you would like to learn more about the volunteer program at Traditions Health, please let me know and I will connect you with Alice Shumate, Vice President of Hospice Quality and Performance.

Easter Hunt...from Page 1

fields where their eggs are at. Then I blow the siren, and they have at it.”

In addition to the 3,000 eggs provided by the Rec Department, a generous community member packed and donated 1,000 eggs, said Nichols, expressing his gratitude for the member of the public who asked to remain anonymous.

“I get to hide the eggs out on the field, and we try to be a little more creative hiding the eggs for the older kiddos,” Nichols said. “Based on past hunts, we’re expecting about 400 children.

“We have two golden eggs per age group. When a kid finds one of these special eggs, they bring it to the table to redeem a prize in the form of an Easter basket.

“On top of that, we have a few local churches that come and help us out, and they usually raffle off adult Easter baskets and have more goodies for the kids as well. We’ll have cotton candy and all kinds of stuff.”

The Hiawassee Baptist Association will have several churches in atten-

dance, and Mount Pleasant Church of God will also be there assisting with the event.

“This is a long-standing tradition for the Recreation Department,” Nichols said. “We had to take a hiatus during COVID but started it back up in 2022. It’s just a fun event for the community to kick off Easter Week, for people to just get out and enjoy each other.”

Holding the hunt the weekend before Easter allows more families to participate, as many people travel on Easter Weekend, and Nichols said the timing of the event at 10 a.m. is to accommodate the ability to move the hunt in case of bad weather.

“One year, the rain was just terrible, and rather than cancel it, we moved it inside to the rec gym,” Nichols said. “Basically, we just covered the floor with eggs and told the kids to go for it, although it’s a little more authentic in the fields.

“It doesn’t look like it’s going to be bad weather, but hopefully it will be before Blackberry Winter.”