

Towns County Herald

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School taxes won't be going up this year, says Superintendent Berrong

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Despite an increased 2020 proposed budget, Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong said that he feels confident school property taxes will not be going up this year.

Berrong announced the budget in the April 8 work session of the Towns County Board of Education, which occurred at the Board Office.

He said that taxes will not be going up despite state-mandated pay raises of \$3,000 for all teachers and other qualifying school employees, plus a 2% pay raise for all state employees.

Including the pay raises, the school system's 2020 proposed budget will be roughly \$700,000. This is about \$175,000 higher than last year's budget.

Public hearings on the proposed budget will be advertised in the Towns County Herald the week of April 22, with the first occurring before the May 6 work session and the second in June.

Following two readings, the final budget is expected to be approved in the June 10 school board meeting.

Schools Finance Director Myra Underwood updated the board on the financial health of the system in the April 8 work session.

"The General Fund for the month of March was \$3,000 under budget, but compared to March of last year, we were actually up \$9,000," said Underwood. "For the year, for the (E-LOST fund), we have collected \$1.2 million, and it is up from budget \$214,000. From last year, it's still up \$80,000."

Added Underwood, "The

SPLI2 account year-to-date is \$1.2 million. The difference in budget compared to actual is \$206,000, and the difference from this year to last year is \$77,000.

"If we keep going as we are, unless something major happens to the economy, we should definitely meet and actually be over budget on our sales tax.

"Through April, we have collected \$5,763,069 (in property taxes). We budgeted \$5,753,240, so we have met budget. Everything going forward will be over, and compared to this time last year, our property tax was \$82,000 above.

"Our revenue is beginning to come in, so now you can see we have basically received 80%, because we have now received the majority of our property tax. And our expenditures are at 66% of the



The Towns County Board of Education and Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in their monthly meeting on Monday, April 8. Photo by Chad Stack

school year, and we have 39% unused, so we are still under budget."

The \$2 million Tax Anticipation Note, which is a

use to maintain school systems in See School Taxes, Page 6A

City unveils new Hiwassee Water Department rates for residential customers

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Due to old debt and negative operating revenues, the City of Hiwassee Water Department's residential customers will experience a rate increase for the first time in six years, starting with their June water bills.

Inside the city limits, the rate will be increasing from \$19.27 per 1,000 gallons to \$24.67 per 1,200 gallons, which is an increase in the base amount of water for all customers.

This new rate is in line with the current Towns County water utility rate of \$24/1,000 gallons.

Outside the city limits, the rate will go from \$22.16/1,000 gallons to \$25.48/1,200 gallons.

Residential customers who live in elevations that



A lakefront view of the Hiwassee Water Treatment Plant on Lake Chatuge. Photo/HiwasseeGA.gov

require water to be pumped up mountainside will see their rates increase from \$22.03 per 1,000 gallons to \$28.20 per 1,200 gallons inside city limits.

Similarly, residential customers who live in higher elevations outside the city limits will experience an increase from \$25.33/1,000 gallons to

See Water Rates, Page 6A

Old Rock Jail ready for new guests following April 13 Open House

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Old Rock Jail Museum, sponsored by the Towns County Historical Society, is now open for the season.

Historical Society members hosted an Open House for the jail on Saturday, April 13.

The Historical Society has spent the last few years restoring the Old Rock Jail and getting all the right touches in place, with the grand opening having taken place last year.

For the April 13 Open House, society members led guided tours of the museum and explained some of the memorabilia that has been donated to them. They also shared information on how they restored some of the areas of the building.



Towns County Historical Society President Sandra Green outside of the Old Rock Jail in Downtown Hiwassee during the April 13 jail season opener. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

"This building was built in 1936 to replace the first jail that the grand jury decided was not inhabitable," said Sandra Green, president of the Historical Society. "The

sheriff's family lived in the first living room and kitchen. "These two rooms were tried to furnish with items that See Old Rock Jail, Page 6A

Annual Easter Egg Hunt a huge success at Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds

By Jarrett Whitener
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Children and their parents gathered at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Baseball Fields for the annual Towns County Recreation Department Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday, April 13.

Local churches set up tables at the hunt for people to visit as they waited for the main event to begin, with Old Union Baptist Church, for example, offering cookies and beverages.

"We have a group of us that prepare the cookies," said Sara Rogers, an Old Union member. "It usually only takes me 30 minutes to do my batch, but with all the help we get, it makes it easier for us to make enough for the event. We've been doing it here for about

seven years, and we love it." For their part, members of McConnell Memorial Baptist Church set up an arts and crafts table for kids.

"We have a few crosses here that they can decorate while they wait," said Retta Byers. "It gives them something to do and keeps them busy enough until they get to go hunt the eggs. It's always great seeing all of them run around and get excited for it."

The kids were split into three different groups base on their age before each group made its way to the properly designated field. There, they were told about the special golden egg in each area that would win them a prize if they found it.

As if it were possible, the children seemed to grow even more excited at the news of the

special eggs, and when the hunt finally began, they made a mad dash to try and collect the most candy-filled eggs and find the special golden egg.

Some of the children picked up eggs quickly, treating the event as more of a competition, while the younger kids found the eggs fascinating and took their time admiring each one before moving on to the next egg.

After a few moments, when all of the eggs had been scooped up, the children gathered at the end of the field to count their baskets and see who had collected the most.

Those with the golden eggs received their special prize, and the other kids with the most eggs in their group received Easter baskets full of toys.

More Easter Pictures, Page 1B



As usual, the annual Towns County Recreation Department Easter Egg Hunt was tons of fun at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Ballfields. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Sheriff's Office awarded State Recertification Award by GSA president

News Special
Towns County Herald

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton accepted the State of Georgia Law Enforcement Recertification Award from Georgia Sheriffs' Association President Stacey Nicholson at the Towns County Courthouse on April 4.

Sheriff Clinton accepted the award on behalf of the Towns County Sheriff's Office in front of a courtroom full of supporters and Sheriff's Office staff.

The State of Georgia Law Enforcement State Certification Award is presented and awarded to law enforcement agencies that currently meet 139 approved standards.

Prior to earning the award, the agency seeking certification must welcome a specially trained team of assessors to conduct on-site



Georgia Sheriffs' Association President Stacey Nicholson and Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton.

evaluation assessments to ensure that the agency being evaluated has and continues to meet the 139 approved standards.

The on-site assessment

is usually a two-day event conducted by a team of three assessors.

Towns County Sheriff's Office is one of only 23 out See TCSO, Page 6A

County hires third-party vendor to save money mailing tax assessment notices

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw is at it again, doing what he can to save taxpayers money.

In a called meeting on Friday, April 12, Bradshaw signed an agreement with Harris Computer Systems to mail all of the property tax assessment notices generated by the Towns County Tax Assessor's Office.

Harris is a large software company with a division specializing in local government entities, and both the county and the Tax Assessor's Office utilize Harris for various other software needs.

Historically, the job of mailing assessment notices has been done in-house by Tax Assessor's Office employees, See Tax Notices, Page 6A



Chief Appraiser Sonya Young of the Towns County Tax Assessor's Office with Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw on Friday, April 12. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

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