

Towns County Herald

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School board appoints Brandon Grimsley as new member from Macedonia

By Chad Stack
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Members of the Towns County Board of Education appointed Brandon Grimsley of the Macedonia district to the board seat in their Monday, April 15, regular meeting.

Robert Williams resigned earlier this month as Macedonia district school board member after selling his home and moving out of the district.

Grimsley will remain in the position until a special election is called in March 2020, and he has already stated that he plans to run for the seat when the time comes.

People likely know Grimsley as the United Community Bank president

of the Hiwassee location, and he is a financial adviser with United Community Advisory Services.

He is also one of two founding coaches of the Towns County High School Bass Fishing team. Brandon and his wife, Liz Grimsley, have two children at Towns County Schools, and they have a son who graduated from Towns County who is currently attending the University of North Georgia as a cadet in the ROTC program.

"I am extremely excited to be selected as the newest board member for the Towns County Board of Education," said Grimsley. "I feel that education is one of the driving forces of a strong community."

Added Grimsley, "When

I heard that there was an open position on the board of education, I contacted Laura Banister and expressed my interest in serving the school and the community."

PE teacher Clay Livingston was approved to be the Towns County High School Varsity head softball coach during the April 15 meeting.

"I am very excited and honored to be the new head softball coach," said Livingston. "I feel very blessed to have the confidence and support of (school administrators)."

"Coach (Brandon) Rowland and Coach (Barry) Churchill's effort and dedication to the program is much appreciated, and we hope to build on the strong foundation they have laid."



Brandon Grimsley Livingston teaches weight training and served as an assistant football coach

under former head coach John Cornett.

He has coached high school football for over 10 years. His daughter, Kenzie Livingston, plays for the Lady Indians soccer and softball teams.

"I will help with football on a very limited basis, but football will be my main responsibility and concern," Livingston said.

Also in the meeting, new high school head football coach Jason Roquemore received a one-month contract to allow him to resign early at Johnson High School so he can start coaching here in June.

"Coach Roquemore would like to get up here before July and get to work with

our football program," said Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong.

In other news, a concerned parent addressed the board about an event that allegedly occurred on March 11 involving her fifth-grade daughter and a classmate who gave her a threatening note.

The parent stated that the classmate was suspended from school for five days and removed from her daughter's class, but that her daughter doesn't feel safe at school anymore.

Currently, Towns County does not have an alternative school for students in elementary school, so the parent addressed the board looking for a solution that would allow her daughter to feel safe at school again.

Bradshaw proclaims April 26 Confederate Memorial Day in county meeting



Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw welcoming members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Confederate Veterans in his April 18 meeting.

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

A Confederate Memorial Day Proclamation, several updates on the weather damage at Foster Park headlined the monthly Towns County Commission meeting on Thursday, April 18.

Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw signed a proclamation in the meeting declaring April 26, 2019, as Confederate Memorial Day. He made it official while

surrounded by members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Sons of Confederate Veterans.

In other business, Towns County signed an agreement with Legacy Link's Area Agency on Aging to match federal and state funding in the amount of \$11,450.

"You have to give money to get money," Commissioner Bradshaw said. "We pay our portion in order to receive matching grants from state and federal."

Legacy Link will also

receive \$112,052 from the county that will fund Meals on Wheels, wellness programs, transportation and other Senior Center affairs.

The amount is exactly the same as the previous year, said Bradshaw, and both agreements are paid to Legacy Link, which is responsible for operating the Senior Center.

"They've done a very good job and we've had no problems at all," Bradshaw said.

During his See Bradshaw, Page 8A

Zupko talks wildfire safety, community partnerships in Firewise Meeting

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County Firewise Citizens Coalition hosted a Community Membership Meeting and Public Forum at the Civic Center in Hiwassee on Tuesday, April 16.

Executive Director Mike Zupko of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council served as the keynote speaker for the event.

Joining Zupko that afternoon were Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Hiwassee Mayor Liz Ordiales, Fire Chief Harold Copeland, Georgia Firewise Liaison Frank Riley, Georgia Forestry Chief Ranger Tony Harkins, and U.S. Forest Fire Management Officer David Davis.

Master of ceremonies for the event was local Coalition board chair Michael Courey, who informed those gathered that the cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris would soon be certified as Firewise Communities.

Residents from Towns, Union and surrounding counties also attended the meeting. Zupko calls Monroe here in Georgia home, though his job with the Wildland Fire Leadership Council is in Washington, D.C.

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council is a 19-member intergovernmental committee consisting of entities

at all levels of government – federal, state, tribal, county and municipal – specializing in wildland fire issues.

At the national level, Zupko said the council aims to help individual states more effectively manage their specific and limited resources to help counties and municipalities combat wildfire.

"From the national level down, there's real dedication in making sure that the (local) partners are being heard loud and clear, and that those priorities are becoming joint priorities as opposed to just understanding what those priorities are," said Zupko.

He also highlighted an initiative called the Good Neighbor Authority, which has enabled the Georgia Forestry Commission to do work on Forest Service land as a contractor for the purposes of cooperative forest management. Historically, counties have been excluded from assisting with forest management practices on Forest Service land, but Congress recently expanded the Good Neighbor Authority to allow counties to work with the Forestry Commission.

And this is great news for counties like Union and Towns, which are located in forest interface areas that are prone to wildfire.

Zupko said the pieces of that plan are not all in place yet,



Mike Zupko

and that there's a lot of policy and administrative work still going on behind the scenes, but he stressed that it would be a new tool to further shared stewardship at the community level.

Another very important tool Zupko talked about was the use of prescribed fire, otherwise known as a controlled burn.

"We're doing some things at the national level to hopefully give some more flexibility at the local level to use prescribed fires," said Zupko. "That's something locally that can help with reducing some threat (of wildfires)."

Zupko said the Wildland Fire Leadership Council was working on other initiatives to help counties and municipalities mitigate wildfire risks, and that he would be sure to keep coalition members informed.

See Firewise, Page 6A

Sheriff's Office rounds up 37 suspects during 'Operation Trial Run'

News Special
Towns County Herald

The Towns County Sheriff's Office recently concluded a drug operation dubbed "Operation Trial Run," where undercover agents along with uniform patrol officers arrested suspects throughout the county on various drug and other related offenses.

The operation was actually a nine-month evaluation of the department using an in-house drug agent that began in May 2018 and ran through January 2019.

The Sheriff's Office reached out to Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason and his Drug Unit



Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton and Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley posing in front of a giant poster board highlighting the accomplishments of "Operation Trial Run."

See Trial Run, Page 6A

Carter arrested in Clay County, North Carolina, after 7 months on the run

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

After eluding authorities for more than seven months, Crystal LeAnne Carter of Hiwassee was taken into custody by the Clay County, North Carolina, Sheriff's Office on Tuesday, April 16.

Investigators with the Towns County Sheriff's Office and the Georgia Bureau of Investigation have since been to speak with Carter, who is currently awaiting extradition to Georgia, said Kim Williams, Special Agent in Charge of GBI Region 8.

Carter is wanted in connection with the Sept. 8, 2018, shooting of William Craig Henderson.

According to the victim's statement, the shooting took place in Union County but which is in Union County, which is Young Harris mailing address.

Within hours of Henderson arriving at Chatuge Regional Hospital in Hiwassee with a gunshot wound to the chest, the Towns County Sheriff's Office had filed warrants on Carter for aggravated assault and criminal attempt to commit murder.

The Sheriff's Office also requested GBI assistance at the time, which shortly thereafter became the lead agency investigating the case.

Further investigation revealed that the crime most likely occurred in Union County, and the GBI, after



Crystal LeAnne Carter

receiving assistance from the Union County Sheriff's Office, took out an aggravated assault

See Carter, Page 6A

Full-scale active shooter training exercise coming to town on May 3

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Residents should be on the lookout for an increased presence of emergency vehicles and first responder activity on Friday, May 3, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 1 p.m.

All local first responder agencies of Towns and Union counties will be participating in a full-scale active shooter exercise that day, from the local fire departments and emergency management agencies, to E-911 centers, emergency medical

services, police departments and sheriff's offices.

The main staging areas for the four-hour exercise will be Dr. Samuel Church's office in Hiwassee and the Union County Farmers Market in Blairsville.

First responders will be simulating an active shooter situation involving a notoriously violent white supremacist organization called the Ghostface Gangsters, which is a real gang that started in the Georgia prison system.

In the scenario, gang

members who have escaped from prison will be committing crimes in both Hiwassee and Blairsville, with plans to rendezvous in either Hiwassee or Hayesville, North Carolina.

According to the Situation Manual for the exercise, "The purpose is to review local and regional coordination in an effort to address preparedness gaps and identify areas for improvement in response to an active shooter scenario."

As such, the exercise will test 911 communications, response by local law

enforcement regarding threat detection and neutralization, emergency medical response by EMTs and fire rescue, and how well Union General and Chatuge Regional hospitals handle an influx of gunshot victims.

The exercise is being jointly directed by the Georgia Mountains Healthcare Coalition and the Northeast Georgia Health System, featuring coordination with Union General Hospital, Inc.

Dan Wickersham of Special Operations Group

wrote the exercise and has been working diligently to coordinate community partners in Towns and Union counties to participate in the May 3 exercise.

Wickersham is the former security supervisor of Union General Hospital, though now, he contracts with the hospital through his company to provide a number of security considerations, including weapons, training and certification preparation.

In terms of real active See Active Shooter, Page 6A



Dan Wickersham

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