

## Mathis...from Page 1A

coming to the city council meetings for 30 years, and Mayor Mathis's entire career, and that she will truly be missed at city hall.

"I've only worked with Barbara for a year and a half," said Mitchell. "But, I've been coming to council meetings for a long time now."

"We're going to really miss Barbara but Liz has a lot of energy and I think she's going to do a good job moving forward."

As for Mayor Mathis, while she is excited for retirement, she said that she would still do anything that she can to help the city in any way possible.

"It's been a hard day but I am excited," said Mayor Mathis. "I just want everyone to know that I love each and every one of them. The people in this city have been so good to me throughout the years."

"I'm going to enjoy retirement, but I'm still going to try and help the city as much as I can. I love this place and the people and I can never say 'thank you' enough to everyone."

"These years I've been with the city have been absolutely wonderful and I wouldn't have traded them for anything. I love the people of this county and this city and I love Hiawassee."



Mathis with Liz Ordiales, who will be running the city as acting mayor until a new mayor is elected in November.



Dozens of Mayor Mathis' family and friends attended her retirement reception on Thursday, April 20.

## Indictments...from Page 1A

charged with four counts of forgery, where he had forged the name of another doctor to obtain narcotic medication," said Langley.

Jamie Lee Harkins was charged with Dr. Gowder as a co-defendant on four additional counts, according to Langley, and Harkins "in at least two instances was involved in retrieving the medications that were being fraudulently obtained."

In related but separate cases, Gail Gowder and Virginia Lou Harkins were each individually indicted on counts involving the retrieval of fraudulently obtained medications, according to Langley.

The court documents spelling out the exact nature of the indictments were not available in the Union County Superior Court Clerk's Office by press time Monday.

"In addition, there remains pending investigations regarding Mike Gowder and Dr. (James) Heaton," said Langley. "We expect those to be later presented to grand juries, either in this county or in White and Towns counties, because that case involves allegations in all three counties."

According to Langley, the cases will likely be presented to grand juries "in one or more of those counties within the next three months."

The indictments of Dr. Gowder, Gail Gowder, Lou Harkins and Jamie Lee Harkins come more than a year after their Feb. 4, 2016, arrests following a multiagency investigation into fraudulent

prescription drug practices.

"It's a very complex case, covering activities over a span of time and involving actions in several different counties," said Langley. "The actions of Mike Gowder involved several states. The charges that were brought against David Gowder are primarily here in Union County. There are other charges that have already been charged in Fannin County."

The Union County Sheriff's Office opened its initial investigation more than two years ago, following Dr. Gowder's April 1, 2015, arrest in Blue Ridge by the Zell Miller Mountain Drug Task Force, for attempting to fill fraudulent prescriptions, according to authorities at the time.

Dr. Gowder was arrested later in 2015 in Union County on similar charges, according to authorities, and he had been emergency room director at Union General Hospital up until one of his 2015 arrests.

The investigation that followed Dr. Gowder's Fannin arrest was a joint operation between the Union County Sheriff's Office and several other agencies from the federal, state and local levels, including the DEA Tactical Diversion Squad, the DEA Digital Forensics Lab, the Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, and the Cherokee County NC Sheriff's Office.

Along with Dr. James Heaton, five Gowder relatives were arrested on Feb. 4, 2016, as a result of that initial investigation: Mike Gowder, who at the time was CEO of Union General Hospital Inc.;

Dr. David Gowder, Mike's brother; Gail Gowder, Mike's wife; Virginia Lou Harkins, Mike and David's sister; and Jamie Lee Harkins, daughter of Lou Harkins and niece of David and Mike.

The Union County Sheriff's Office served two search warrants that Feb. 4, one at Union General Hospital and the other at Dr. Heaton's office, in order to obtain both physical and digital files and patient records to further their investigation, according to authorities.

Initial charges for the six individuals arrested on Feb. 4, 2016, included:

Mike Gowder, three counts fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

Dr. James Heaton, 41 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substance.

Gail Gowder, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance.

Dr. David Gowder, seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substance, 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance.

Virginia Lou Harkins, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

Jamie Lee Harkins, two counts of fraudulently obtaining controlled substance and one count of conspiracy to distribute controlled substance.

## Mayor...from Page 1A

an election due to time and financial expenses.

"The reason we're not having a special election is because the election is going to be happening in November anyway," said Ordiales. "The only two months out of the year where we can have an election is June and September."

"Well, we've missed the June deadline and it wouldn't make sense to have the city spend around \$9,500 to have an election in September then have another election in November."

"So, we voted as a council to maintain the mayor pro tem until the election rolls around."

Per the city's charter, Ordiales will be assuming all roles and responsibilities of the mayor, including regular office hours at Hiawassee City Hall and conducting Hiawassee City Council meetings each month.

"The mayor pro tem is responsible for any and everything the mayor did before," said Ordiales. "It is 100 percent of her responsibilities, her being accountable for everything that goes on, all of the official memos. Everything that she did is transferring over to me."

Although Ordiales will be assuming her role as mayor pro tem, she will maintain her seat on the Hiawassee City Council as well. This will continue until the November election.

While Ordiales officially assumed the role of mayor last Thursday, she has been working in city hall alongside Mayor Mathis for well over a month. And, now that Ordiales has taken the reins, she is ready to hit the ground running to continue to make Hiawassee a wonderful place to live.

Of the many things Ordiales has been focusing on since she began working from city hall, a primary concern for her has been the issue of misread water meters throughout the city.

Several months ago, the city installed new water meters that were meant to decrease the number of misread meters that had become a problem. However, upon further inspection, it was learned that the new meters required different equipment to function properly and, until now, the equipment has not been used, rendering numerous misreads throughout the city.

Since syncing the correct

equipment with the meters, the error in readings has been slowly decreasing, something Ordiales hopes to see continue until everything is functioning as it should.

"We're still in the process of fixing our billing for our water meters," said Ordiales. "We're down to only a 3 percent margin of error, which is fantastic coming from a 15 percent margin of error."

"It's going to be an ongoing, monthly improvement. As we fix things this month, hopefully next month will be better until we're right on track."

Although Mayor Mathis will be dearly missed, Ordiales assures that she will proceed with the best interest of the city and the residents and looks forward to the coming months working in city hall.

"As for the city itself, things are going great," said Ordiales. "We've established a lot of processes. We've come up with inventories so we know what kind of equipment we have, what needs to be replaced."

"We've come up with a lot of different fixes to problems that we've had. We're doing very, very well."

## Prayer...from Page 1A

signed it into law in 1952.

It was President Ronald Reagan, in 1988, who designated the first Thursday of May as the official day of observance for the National Day of Prayer.

And those observances were brought locally in 2014, when Kay Yandell felt called to organize a day of prayer event closer to home.

Since then, the event has grown year after year, and there will be some key changes made to this year's observance.

May 4 will be the National Day of Prayer, and people around the region will be turning to their church pastors for leadership during the special event.

Those wishing to attend the Towns County event, which will also include residents of Clay County, North Carolina, should mark their calendars for May 4 at 7:30 a.m., which is when the doors of the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center will open to the public.

The conference center is located at 150 Foster Park Rd. in Young Harris, and the program will officially start at 8 a.m., though the Yandells said that people may come and go as needed based on their work and school schedules.

An important difference

in this year's Towns County observance of the National Day of Prayer is that there is no charge or ticket to enter the event — people can just show up, enter and pray.

Organizers have in years past had tickets available to purchase in order to attend the event, usually to cover breakfast costs for those in attendance, or travel costs of guest speakers.

This year, the Yandells just ask that everyone attend for the sake of prayer and to enjoy the fellowship of one another.

"It's about praying," said John Yandell. "It's going to be fairly simple. It's going to be a welcome to everybody. There's no charge. And the program will be to have coffee, donuts, fellowship, music and prayer, with prayer highlighted."

Added Yandell: "This is an opportunity to reinforce, from a national standpoint, to try to get the whole nation at one time to recognize the purpose and value of prayer."

In addition to remarks by Sen. Wilkinson, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw will be delivering the invocation for the event, according to Yandell, followed by the presentation of the colors by the North Georgia Honor

Guard. Various clergy and community members will be offering prayers over the country, the different levels of government, the military, families and more.

Former Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall was instrumental in helping the prayer breakfast to grow, according to Yandell, and that support has continued with Commissioner Bradshaw.

"The commissioner is such a fine Christian and supporter," said Yandell on working with Bradshaw. "He wanted to make sure that we would have a National Day of Prayer. Commissioner Bradshaw called us a couple of weeks ago and said, hey, what can we do for the National Day of Prayer?"

From there, the 2017 National Day of Prayer committee was formed from the Yandells, Commissioner Bradshaw, Alisa Richards in the commissioner's office, and Al Fickle.

"We got this together and decided there was no charge," said John Yandell. "What monies we had left over from the previous Days of Prayer we are using to get the donuts and supplies that we might need."

## Baseball...from Page 1A

Towns is currently in 21st with a rating of 8.98. The 22nd place team, Pelham, has a rating of 8.85, 23rd place Marion County is at 8.71, while Manchester and Pataula Charter are tied for the final spot with a power rating of 8.56.

Georgia Military College is in 20th place with a 9.18 power rating.

If the Indians finish 21st, they would visit 12th place Telfair County (16-9, 11.55).

If they jump to 20th, Towns would travel to 13th place Treutlen (15-11, 11.45).

Should the Indians fall between 22nd and 24th places, potential first round locations would be Bowdon, Irwin County or Taylor County.

The state tournament consists of best-of-three series play in each round.

The games would be played this weekend (Thursday through Saturday), but nothing can be set in stone until Tuesday

afternoon when Coach Floyd is made aware of his first-round matchup.

The complete GHSA Public Power Rankings, as well as Indians' game reports from last week, can be found on the *Towns County Herald* Sports page.

Also turn to the Sports page for coverage on Towns County Lady Indians Soccer, which headed to state playoffs this week.



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