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Fourth of July fireworks lights up night sky at Fairgrounds

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Red, white and blue covered the mountainside as the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds hosted its annual Independence Day celebration on Tuesday, July 4 and thank goodness, Mother Nature cooperated.

Cars lined the campgrounds and parking lots side-to-side and bumper-to-bumper as people flocked to see the fireworks; eager to catch the brilliant bursts of color flash across the sky.

Previous concerns that the event would be rained out proved unfounded. Despite a brief early afternoon storm, the clouds passed and left the skies open for fireworks.

In any case, Hilda Thomason, Fairgrounds general manager, was determined to give the people a show.

"This year's fireworks went great," said Thomason. "We had a great fireworks show and really good attendance. Everybody had a really good time and the rain held off so we could have it, which is something we were all thankful for. Lots of people had a good time."

A local favorite, Raven and Red, serenaded patrons throughout the evening before the fireworks began at dusk, offering a wide variety of tunes for all listeners.

Along with the Fairgrounds, North Mt Zion Church of God sponsored games, activities and more for the evening with what the church calls the "Freedom Celebration" to coincide with the fireworks.

"We're just trying to provide this for the community," said Ryan Williams, North Mt. Zion Church of God Associate Pastor. "This is our fourth year participating in the Fairgrounds fireworks. We want to thank Hilda (Thomason) and the Fairgrounds for giving us this opportunity. We're always looking for any chance to work with the community."

From face painting to cotton candy to jumbo jenga to bouncing houses, there were plenty of opportunities for children of all ages and interests to play games and enjoy the evening, and there was even a little something for the adults as well. As part of the festivities, winners were given the chance to enter to win a Samsung Galaxy Tablet, with a winner being chosen at

the end of the night.

While celebrating America's freedom comes high on the list for North Mt Zion, according to Williams, the church's participation in the revelry is centered on the desire to give back to the community through an act of loving compassion.

"We just want to reach out into the community," said Williams. "Our theme for this year is 'reaching up, reaching in and reaching out' and this is one of the things that we do to reach out. There's no charge for any of this, it's all funded by the church."

"This is just something that we like to do to show the community that we're here and that we care about them and just to give back and invest in the community."

As residents and visitors flocked to the Fairgrounds, enjoying the Freedom Celebration, music and preparation for the fireworks, an array of festive attire permeated the grounds. Dozens upon dozens showed up for the festivities, decked out in the nines in red and white stripes, blue shirts and stars, wearing the nation's stars proudly in honor of the holiday.

Ruth Patterson of
See *Fireworks*, Page 6A



Patriotic spectators viewing fireworks at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Ka-BOOM! Happy Independence Day! Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Towns County Grand Jury indicts Mike Gowder on 32 counts

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
Editor

April 1, 2015, was a huge break for federal, state and local investigators.

That's when Blairsville's Dr. David Gowder was arrested in Blue Ridge on charges of first-degree forgery and obtaining dangerous drugs by fraud following his arrest by the Zell Miller Drug Task Force.

It opened the door to a regional and multi-state investigation of prescription fraud and forgery. Other arrests would follow, and more Gowder family members were alleged to have been part of an elaborate scheme to obtain several thousand prescriptions by using fraudulent prescriptions.



Jeff Langley,
Enotah Judicial Circuit
District Attorney
Another doctor, James Heaton, was linked to the alleged scheme.
Last week, on Page 1A in the July 5th editions of

the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald*, a story indicating arrest warrants four years or older were drying up in the system in the Mike Gowder, Dr. James Heaton cases in Union, Towns and White counties, was inaccurate.

A Towns County Grand Jury handed up a 32-count indictment against former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder on July 5.

More indictments are expected this week, and possibly even more down the road.

To clarify inaccurate elements in last week's story, O.C.G.A. 17-3-1 provides that felonies of 3-1 or older cannot be prosecuted with the exceptions of murder, armed robbery, kidnapping, rape, aggravated sodomy, aggravated

child molestation, and aggravated sexual battery.

Applying this statute to these felony prescription drug cases, some of the arrest warrants date back to crimes allegedly committed in 2012, or greater than four years ago, even though no arrests were made until Dr. David Gowder in 2015.

However, O.C.G.A. 17-3-2, subsection 2, provides other exceptions that include if crimes are unknown to law enforcement. The alleged crimes were unknown to law enforcement when allegedly committed, and as such, it wasn't until the time of discovery – starting in 2015 – that the clock began to tick. Thus, the arrest warrants are well within the four-year
See *Gowder*, Page 6A

Bradshaw gives update to Movers and Shakers

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw talked county projects, the county budget and continuing his campaign promises at the Mountain Movers and Shakers weekly meeting at Sundance Grill on Friday, July 7.

Beginning with a general overview of the county budget, Commissioner Bradshaw explained that the county recently completed its audit for the 2016 fiscal year, an audit that proved to be big thumbs up for the county on all accounts.
"The auditors just



Towns County
Sole Commissioner
Cliff Bradshaw
See *Bradshaw*, Page 6A

T. Graham Brown, Fortune, Wills give fans their money's worth

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
Editor

The July 1st concert at Athens Music Hall was three concerts in one.

T. Graham Brown, Jimmy Fortune, and a special guest, Blue Ridge's own Mark Wills, kept the audience of more than 2,000 people on their feet throughout the evening.

Fortune sent a thrill through the crowd when he crooned his No. 1 hit Elizabeth, recorded with the Statler Brothers. He also delighted the hundreds of veterans in attendance with the group's No. 1 hit, More Than A Name On A Wall. Fortune wrote both songs.

The latter is a 1989 song about a mother visiting the Vietnam War in Washington, D.C., to see her son's name. With a crowd of Vietnam veterans in attendance, Fortune struck a chord with the group.

The former was recorded in 1984 by the Statler Brothers with Fortune singing lead. The song prompted many a mother to name their newborn daughters Elizabeth.

Fortune added his repertoire of Gospel music, How Great Thou Art, Rock Of Ages and Old Rugged Cross.

He then introduced the Pride of Arabi, Georgia, T. Graham Brown.

T. Graham led off with one of his greatest hits, I Tell



T. Graham Brown, Jimmy Fortune and Mark Wills singing "God Bless America." Photo/Lowell Nicholson

It Like It Used To Be, warming the crowd up for an evening of Country Music.

T. Graham talked about growing up in Arabi, a small town of about 300 residents, a town with a small gas station similar to Wally's Station on the *Andy Griffith Show*.

He said Ronnie Passmore was like the Gooner or Gomer Pyle of Arabi. He said when a stranger stopped to ask for directions, Passmore obliged. When asked where the stranger was from, Passmore replied: "It were one of them Florida Yankees."

T. Graham eventually moved north of Arabi, settling in the Commerce area. He

became a legend in the Athens area, and eventually started topping the Billboard Hot 100 chart.

He took a song that had been offered to more than 20 Country Music stars to No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100.

I Wish That I Could Hurt That Way Again was first recorded in 1978 by Kenny Rogers, but was never released as a single. T. Graham said he was thankful for leftovers as he took that song to No. 3 when no one else could.

He wound up his show with his 1998 smash single Wine Into Water, a song that provided a revelation of T.

See *Brown*, Page 6A

Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In returns to Hiawassee

By Charles Duncan
North Georgia News
Editor

Ladies and gentlemen, rev your engines and clear your weekend schedule – the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In is coming back to town.

The Ninth Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In will be rolling into the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds in Hiawassee this week, featuring plenty of classic cars and countless other festivities.

Enjoy three fun-filled days of good old mountain hillbilly fun. See a Pioneer Village, real moonshine still in the works, mountain crafts, and

plenty of hot classic cars, trucks, bikes, rat rods and more.

"This gets bigger and better every year," said Cruiz-In organizer Rakes Parrish.

Running from Thursday, July 13, through Saturday, July 15, the Cruiz-In promises a weekend of fun for the entire family.

"This is really bringing some people to town off places to the Towns County community that probably would never have come here," said Parrish. "I have plenty of people from Texas, Illinois, Ohio and other states that are driving away. One couple is driving all the way from Phoenix, Arizona.

"So, it's bringing a lot of long distance people," said Parrish, who spent his childhood growing up in the Owl Creek community. "It's good that we're reaching out that far to bring people into the Towns County community."

While many vendors and spectators will be coming in on Wednesday, July 12, to bring their cars and accessories, the festivities will not officially begin until Thursday morning, when the first cruise of the weekend, a beautiful 60-mile scenic view of the mountains, will pull out of the Fairgrounds at 9 a.m.

From about noon
See *Moonshine*, Page 6A



Get ready for the Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In, at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds July 13 through July 15.

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Barcode: 04979193150

19th Annual Butternut Creek Festival
July 15th and 16th
Meeks Park

Summer Lake Home Showcase Tour
July 15th
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Hiawassee City Hall 'Taking Care of Business'
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