

Young Harris considering package liquor vote

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The City of Young Harris is considering putting package liquor sales up for a vote in November.

Discussions opened briefly at the July 8 regular City Council meeting as a way to generate additional revenues for the city via excise taxes on such sales, which have been benefitting the neighboring City of Hiawassee since voters approved package liquor sales there in 2021.

City Attorney Marvin Harkins explained that selling liquor by the package within a municipality requires a referendum to let voters decide the question, which is all the council would be seeking. If the overall vote comes out against package liquor, then that would be the end of the matter.

“The first thing is that the City Council has to pass a resolution or ordinance ... calling for that special election,” Harkins said. “This does not have to be passed or voted on (by the council) today.”

Mayor Andrea Gibby said more information was needed before a potential referendum decision in the August regular meeting, “so between now and next month, we will get the information.”

The idea of asking Young Harris voters if they want package liquor sales occurred to City Hall after local property owner Brian McMurphy asked about what was possible in terms of businesses that sell alcohol.

McMurphy has purchased the old Blue Ridge Mountain EMC headquarters downtown and recently approached the city about commercial uses for the build-

ing. He was not asking about package sales, but the council landed on the possibility while considering his question.

“The overall picture or vision I have for the property is to have multi-use retail space,” McMurphy said in the July 8 meeting, adding that he was thinking of putting several different businesses in the main building, with the back area serving as an upscale restaurant.

He also expressed a desire to add on a vintage-themed bar or microbrewery, which, again, inspired the council’s discussion regarding alcohol, zoning and the potential for package sales.

“Once you get into alcohol and manufacturing, there’s a whole level of state regulations, and they have their own regulations about ... how much retail space you can have ver-

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Young Harris City Councilman John Kelley going over financial information with City Finance Officer Ana Hess in the July 8 regular council meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

BOE fills athletic director role after Melton’s passing



(L-R) School Board Members Roy Perren and David Phillips with Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in their July 7 monthly meeting. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Reporter

At their monthly meeting on Monday, July 7, Towns County Board of Education members addressed a series of updates for the upcoming school year, including plans to fill the void left by the tragic passing of longtime coach and High School Athletic Director Jim Melton.

Melton died of a heart attack on June 7, leaving the athletic department without

a director just months before the start of the 2025-26 school year.

In response, the board has announced that High School Principal Bryan Thomason will absorb the role with support from Basketball Coach Brian Hunnicutt.

The \$5,000 coaching supplement – an additional salary received by educators who take on such roles – will be split between the two this year, with Hunnicutt to receive \$4,000 in supplemental pay

compared to \$1,000 for Thomason, according to Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong.

Hunnicutt is also assuming a half-time assistant principal position at the High School this year in anticipation of becoming both the full-time assistant principal and athletic director next school year.

As these leadership transitions take place in the athletics department, the district is also grappling with the operational challenges related

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Ward represents hometown well at Georgia Girls State

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County youth Lily Ward had the opportunity of a lifetime this summer with her selection to attend American Legion Auxiliary Georgia Girls State, and thanks to the sponsorship of the local Auxiliary chapter, she was able to go and learn the ins and outs of government.

Every year, high school juniors participate in Boys State or Girls State; though it has done so in the past, Towns County did not have an attendee for Boys State in 2025 due to a lack of interest.

There were about 220 participants this summer who enjoyed a nearly week-long stay in the dorms at Valdosta State University June 8-13. The girls came from all over Georgia and were selected to participate based on high grades and good behavior.

“It’s a little mock city



TCHS rising senior Lily Ward was grateful to have attended 2025 Georgia Girls State June 8-13, courtesy the local American Legion Auxiliary. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

and they do their own mock government,” said Robin Halfon, First Vice President of the

See Georgia Girls State, Page 6

City continues planning for aging water infrastructure

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The City of Hiawassee’s aging water infrastructure once again reared its ugly head this month with a main break off US 76 in town, this time impacting water delivery to thousands of residents on the Fourth of July holiday.

Hiawassee Water has suffered dozens of breaks this year, and this latest main break was the second Fourth of July water issue in a row after the 2024 shortage from so many people being in town and using water.

And while stakeholders will continue coming together to restore water service when breaks occur, Mayor Jay Chastain Jr. said long-term fixes will require “a major loan” to replace the aging infrastructure, which is being investigated now in the city’s Capital Improvement Plan.

“We’re going to have issues – no water system goes without issues,” Chastain said. “But one that is this old is going to have issues more often.”

This most recent main break occurred in the early morning hours of July 4. Be-



The July 4 main break inside Hiawassee city limits required a major repair and extended water service disruption. Photo/Submitted

tween 5:30 and 6 a.m., the Water Treatment Plant notified distribution personnel with the Water Department that a significant amount of water was being lost in the system.

“They knew from how much water they had lost out of the different tanks that it was probably going to be a main busted somewhere, but

we didn’t really know where,” Chastain said.

After driving around searching in likely areas, the break was discovered at about 6:30 a.m., and it was indeed a major main break inside city limits off US 76 between Hiawassee Feed & Farm Store and TATA on Main.

See Water Infrastructure, Page 6

Bradshaw talks challenges, accomplishments in office

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In their weekly breakfast meeting on Friday, July 11, the Mountain Movers and Shakers hosted Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, who talked about some of the challenges his office has faced in recent years and what he and his staff are doing for the county today.

In the last year of his first term, Bradshaw joined elected officials around the nation in having to navigate a government response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which corresponded with “drastic measures.”

Commenting on the difficulty of the pandemic years, Bradshaw said, “I hope and pray that this country and this world never see anything like that again.”

The next big challenge Bradshaw recounted was the parrot-feather outbreak in Lake Chatuge, which was successfully treated last year after a public-private partnership



Commissioner Bradshaw was grateful to receive an appreciation plaque from the Towns County Civic Association at the Movers & Shakers meeting Friday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

was able to bring the appropriate resources to bear.

With the threat of negatively impacting ecology, tourism, real estate and recreation, Bradshaw pursued dialogue

with the Tennessee Valley Authority after the infestation became known.

“That lake is not our lake – that lake belongs to

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Movers & Shakers...from Page 1

the TVA,” Bradshaw stated, recalling the slew of calls he made to state and federal officials to find a route to getting rid of the invasive weed.

In the end, Bradshaw’s actions led to District 50 State Sen. Bo Hatchett securing \$400,000 to help combat the invasive plant, with great assistance from the grass-roots organization Save Lake Chatuge and conservation nonprofit MountainTrue.

Now, Towns County faces the required maintenance on the Chatuge Dam to repair the spillway. Initially estimated to take upwards of four to eight years of dramatic drawdowns to complete, Bradshaw was “in shock” and concerned for the impact it would have on the local economy.

Like the conversations he spearheaded to eradicate parrot-feather in the lake, Bradshaw once again reached out to Georgia’s leaders such as U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde and sent letters to the TVA.

Recently, TVA representatives informed Bradshaw the plans had been revised so that, once construction starts in a couple years, the draw-down will take no more than two off-seasons, when folks are less likely to be out on the water, which will minimize the economic and other impacts.

Moving on, Bradshaw detailed actions taken to improve various county departments. In particular, Towns County EMS has received some upgrades in the form of

two battery-operated stretchers worth \$58,000.

Towns County Child Development, the county-run daycare, has also received a much-needed remodeling. On the Parks and Recreation side, Bradshaw said his office pushed to complete Foster Park, including the ballfields, dugouts and stairs.

Speaking of ballfields, those at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds were remodeled as well, receiving new shingles. The building at the beach was remodeled twice to include a fresh coat of paint and new countertops, and the Splash Pad was built for the enjoyment of area children.

Other improvements include new equipment at the Transfer Station and upgrades to the recycling center, updating county entrance signs, the major remodeling of the courthouse and renewing free medical helicopter transports for residents, though there’s a possibility that a patient may receive a flight from an out-of-network company.

“We want to keep our stuff looking good,” Bradshaw said. “We do our best to keep everything up that we can.”

A future project Bradshaw hopes to tackle is completing the pavilion at the beach. The impetus behind the building was to replace the use of portable toilets and erect permanent bathrooms, but there’s been a lull in construction.

“The reason it’s taking so long is (because) we do it as

efficiently as possible to save money,” stated Bradshaw, voicing an appreciation for the public’s patience.

Following conversations with Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland, another potential project includes a new building next to Towns County High School to house two fire trucks. Doing so would boost Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings and reinforce public safety within a five-mile radius.

On top of ambitions and improvements across the board, Bradshaw is proud that the county is “financially sound” and has no debt. That said, he recognizes that all this work could not have been accomplished alone.

“When I say ‘me’ or ‘I,’ I mean our staff at the office. I’m not an ‘I’ person – we’re a team,” Bradshaw clarified when it came to talking the Movers and Shakers through the office’s accomplishments under his watch. “All these guys ... work really hard together.”

At the end of his talk, Bradshaw was surprised by the Towns County Civic Association, led by President John Clemens, presenting him with a proclamation thanking him for “all he is doing for the citizens, businesses, visitors and all those working (to serve) the county and municipalities.”

“We have learned that Cliff was the primary reason TVA changed their mind about what to do (with the Chatuge

spillway),” said Clemens, expressing his gratitude as a community member. As a gift, Clemens presented Bradshaw a plaque commemorating the proclamation.

“Thank y’all so much,” said Bradshaw, briefly struggling to find words to voice his own appreciation. “I’m addicted to this job, I’m addicted to y’all. Let me say, I love y’all very much, and I love our community.”

Rotating Art Display, Featured Artist Kimberly Tringali



The City of Young Harris, the Peach State Federal Credit Union, and the Mountain Regional Library support the work of local artists through the Rotating Art Display that is located at both the credit union and library. If you are an artist in the area and would like to participate, you may find the application on the City of Young Harris website under Our Community.

Everyone is invited to view the artwork at both locations, so when you are at the credit union or library, take a moment to enjoy the creative works.

The featured artist for July 2025 is Kimberly Tringali. Kimberly Tringali is a fused glass artist who grew up in New England where her love of nature and art began. As a young girl, she was al-



Kimberly Tringali

ways creating art through sewing, embroidery, painting, and drawing.

Kimberly’s mother encouraged her creative talents and signed her up for art classes at the local YMCA. Being a true nature lover, she sees the

beauty in the mountains, flowers, birds, and little critters that she incorporates into her designs.

Kimberly was introduced and received her training in fused glass while working for Arribas Brothers at Walt Disney World at the EPCOT Germany Showcase. Glass is a fun medium to work with, as it allows a rainbow of vibrant colors that are illuminated when natural light shines through.

Kimberly and her husband established Cabin Fused Glass in 2023 in Hiawassee, Georgia. They create art using colorful glass pieces, glass stringers & ribbons, and frit. Everything is hand cut, designed, and fired in their kiln.

You will find Kimberly’s work displayed at the Peach State Federal Credit Union, and you will see her and her husband at various local festivals and farmer’s markets throughout North Georgia.

CCCRA Concert This Friday: Hush Money Band

CCCRA’s free Friday Summer Concert Series is the place to be this summer. A record crowd of over 800 folks enjoyed a night on the Square with Run Katie Run at the last concert. The series continues this Friday at 7 PM with the southern rock group Hush Money.

Hush Money’s sound is deeply rooted in vintage rock, blues and outlaw country music. It’s been said that they are at the forefront of new music emerging from the southern region. Originating from Georgia, the band includes brothers Greg and Seth Weaver, cousin Nathaniel Newberry and lead guitarist Caleb Logan. They’ve performed in Canada, Mexico, Europe and Australia, and this marks their second gig on the gazebo stage.

Come early and come hungry – food and beverage service begin at 6 PM. Papa Kash Food Truck will roll into town with burgers and cheese steaks, Hayesville Q will serve Texas-style BBQ, and the American Legion Post 532 will be grilling delicious dogs and chicken skewers. Nocturnal Brewing will pour you a



Southern Rock Group Hush Money

cold brew or you can enjoy a tasting local wine from Shooting Creek Vines.

The 2025 Friday Summer Concert Series, hosted by the Clay County Communities Revitalization Association (CCCRA), are free concerts that are made possible through sponsorships of local businesses, the hard work of countless volunteers, and donations to the “red bucket” on concert nights.

This year’s key Sponsors Hwy 69 Storage (Tony Wiegold), Edward Jones – Financial Advisor Jodi Sul-

livan, and RE/MAX Town & Country – The Richard Kelley Group.

Find your favorite spot on the courthouse lawn to plant your camp chairs or blankets. You can plan on a rocking good time.

Free transportation is provided from area parking lots on the “Red Rider” by Historic Hayesville Inc. (HHI). In the event of inclement weather, please check the CCCRA website, <https://www.cccra-nc.org/>, or Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/cccranc> for updates.

75th Anniversary of the Historic GMF Photo Contest

75th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade

This year, the Annual Photography Contest will help celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Historic Georgia Mountain Fair in Hiawassee, GA The week-long Fair begins Friday, August 15 and the Photography Contest starts on Thursday August 21 at 11 a.m., lasting until the end of the Fair, August 23.

The Photography Contest is free to enter and over \$1500 in prizes will be awarded for winning photos in several categories. Most of the exhibitors and winners over the years have not been professionals, although professional photographers may enter. Leaders of the Contest are always looking for new talent,

so first-time exhibitors are eagerly welcomed.

Those who wish to exhibit their pictures in the Contest are requested to sign up by August 1st, Friday, by submitting a Registration Form, which can be obtained from the Fairgrounds Office -- or --go the web site: Georgia Mountain Fair and select Fair Forms and Applications; scroll down and print the 2025 Photography Application.

Judges will strictly follow the new Display Rules. Therefore, all Exhibitors need to pay close attention to all instructions found with the Registration Form. Also: Setting up photos is only from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, August 19 (not Monday). Judging starts promptly at 1 p.m. the same day. Participants may learn about winning photos

on Thursday, August 21, when the Contest Opens to the Public. Prize money is awarded on the final day of the Contest. Judges’ names are not revealed but each one is an experienced photographer who comes to the Fair from several cities and states. Photos must stay in the Exhibit until the end of the last day of the Fair, Saturday, August 23.

The photo exhibit opens to the Public at 11 AM on Thursday morning, August 21. After reading the Registration Form and the Rules, participants may have questions answered by directly contacting the Contest Director, Janet Cosby through Email only at janetcosby@gmail.com

Please do not call the Office at the Georgia Mountain Fair for answers to Contest questions.



Chamber Chronicles

The official source of Towns County Chamber News

Wednesday, July 16, 2025

Welcome to our Newest Members!

Cats on the Lake – Leslie Passero , Owner 2397 NC-175, Hayesville, NC Phone: (828) 278-8550 Website: www.catsonthelake.com Facebook: Cats on the Lake-Lake Chatuge. Powered Catamaran Rentals on Lake Chatuge -Feel the purr of a 30 HP motor powering you across Lake Chatuge as you take in beautiful views from your seat inches above the water in one of our 2-seat catamarans.

House Doctors of North Georgia- Amber Thomas, Owner- 401 Fannin Industrial Park, Ste 200, Blue Ridge, GA Phone: (706) 455-8092 Email: athomas@housedoctors.com Website: www.housedoctors.com/north-georgia Trusted Property Maintenance Services for Homes & Businesses. Keeping up with property maintenance—whether for a home or business—can quickly become overwhelming. From routine upkeep to large-scale improvements, finding the time, tools, and expertise to get it all done isn’t always easy. That’s where House Doctors of North Georgia steps in.

Chamber Events & Programs

Congratulations to the VFW Post #7807 and the American Legion Post #23 on their new building on Sunnyside Road, Hiawassee. Lake Chatuge Chamber held a ribbon cutting at their open house on Saturday July 5.



Congratulations to True Colors Studio & Supply on their ribbon cutting on July 8 at their studio located at 355 North Main Street, Unit 1, Hiawassee.



Follow us: Facebook & Instagram: Visit Lake Chatuge & Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce Thanks to all our members for their continued support!

Additionally, we’d like to thank these Platinum and Gold Members:

PLATINUM MEMBERS: Blue Ridge Mountain EMC; Century 21 Black Bear Realty; Hiawassee Holiday KOA, Lake Chatuge Lodge; Mountain Realty; Peach State Federal Credit Union; SouthState Bank, N.A.; The Ridges Resort on Lake Chatuge; United Community Bank; Windstream Communications.

GOLD MEMBERS: Bennett Equipment; Brasstown Manor; Brasstown Valley Resort & Spa; Brother’s Restaurant at Willow Ranch; Chatuge Regional Hospital; Chick-fil-A of Blairsville; Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital; Hughes Accounting; K. Boyer Photography; Little Bear Rentals & Property Management; MainStreet Grill; Men on The Move; NeuroSport Physical Therapy LLC; Phoenix Roofing Systems, LLC; Ridgeline Exteriors & Roofing; ServiceMaster Restoration; Tri-County Office Supply, and Young Harris College.

For information on becoming a member of the Lake Chatuge Chamber of Commerce, visit www.golakechatuge.com or call Mary Ann at (706) 896-4966 or email her at LCCChamber2021@gmail.com.

The Greatest Generation: True American Heroes

“The Greatest Generation” is a term created by Tom Brokaw to describe the generation who grew up in the United States during the Great Depression, and then went on to fight in World War II, as well as those whose productivity within the war’s home front made a decisive material contribution to the war effort.

Brokaw wrote, “it is, I believe, the greatest generation any society has ever produced.” He argued that these men and women fought not for fame and recognition, but because it was the “right thing to do.” Their remarkable actions, during times of war and peace, ultimately made the United States a better place in which to live. Born and raised in a tumultuous era marked by war and economic depression, Brokaw asserts, these men and women developed values of “personal responsibility, duty, honor and faith.” These characteristics helped them to defeat Hitler and the Japanese, build the American economy, and make advances in science and implement visionary programs.

Brokaw credits the Greatest Generation with much of the freedom and affluence that Americans enjoy today. “They have given the succeeding generations the opportunity to accumulate great economic wealth, political muscle, and the freedom from foreign oppression to make whatever choices they like.” Brokaw concludes, “It is a generation that, by and large, made no demands of homage from those who followed and prospered economically, politically, and culturally because of its sacrifices.

These are the true American Heroes and the ideals they represent should be an inspiration to all of us who now enjoy the freedoms that they fought and died for in faraway lands. Many were lost forever in battles in desolate forests or on isolated islands or lost forever in the depths of oceans. When a survivor of this Great Generation leaves this life, they take with them memories and experiences that are gone forever never to be told again. We need to spend time listening to the stories and tales so we can pass them on to our next generation. Many times I put off visiting one of these walking history books and unfortu-

nately these books were closed before I could make time to go and listen.

On September 29, 2015 we lost a member of the Greatest Generation who was my mentor, my teacher, my coach, my supervisor, my disciplinarian, my advisor, and my Friend. He was Frank Montfort Riley Sr., my Father. He always had something to say to me and his funeral was no exception. He spoke to me while I was at the grave site and this is what I plainly heard: “Danks (me), don’t cry for me, be happy! I had the best 93 years that anyone could ask for, I got to grow up on a farm in a middle Georgia, play ball, fish, hunt, and learn all about life there. I got to go to the University of Georgia and found the love of my life for 69 years and moved her back to live in the small town where I grew up. I got to join the Army Air Corps and became a B-17 pilot along with my brother, Harley Jr who was a bombardier on a B-17 that was lost on a bombing raid over the sea near the Netherlands in 1941. We went to war to defend our way of life along with many other brave men and women who left their homes to put themselves in harm’s way to defend the country we loved.

After the war I came back home and taught returning veterans how to farm and about agriculture, and I had a long career with the Georgia Department of Agriculture. I raised 4 children who made me proud and they gave me 9 grandchildren who I enjoyed more than I did their parents, and the boys were my hay crew until they found out about girls and I lost them.

I am in a much better place now with no pain or sickness and I can walk again, and I am still among you to guide and point out things that need doing - just listen. Tell Jaybo that I have a project for him and ask Brad-a-Lou where my chain is since he was the last peckerwood to have it!

As I told your mother, those last few months were a “deplorable situation” and now thankfully it’s over. I miss all of you, but I didn’t want you to see me like I was anymore. I told her to get my clothes because “I needed to get out of here” and I did. I have to go now because Har-



ley Jr and I are going to take Peggy (bird dog) out to see if we can find those coveys that I know are over by the clay pit”. Then he said “goodbye Danks, talk to you soon”.

I said, “Papa, wait, wait there is so much more I want to ask you”, but he was not there anymore! Those of you, who still have the opportunity, don’t delay, take the time to talk to your Greatest Generation heroes and listen to their stories before it is too late. They have a lot to tell us and we have a lot to learn from them, because “once they’re gone, it’s gone forever”.

This generation of “I want it now and I deserve it” should read (if they can) books on the Greatest Generation and realize that without the terrible sacrifices they made, this generation would not be able to talk about our country like they do, because Hitler and Hirohito would not allow it! Every day stop and thank a veteran for the way of life we have because of them.

Frank M Riley, Jr. is Executive Director Chestatee/ Chattahoochee RC&D Council and a proud son of the Greatest Generation.

Shorter University Dean’s List

Shorter University has announced students named to the dean’s list during the spring semester of 2025. To achieve this honor, students must have been enrolled full time and have earned at least a 3.5 grade point average for the term.

Mckenzie Livingston, of Hiawassee, GA, is among those named to the spring 2025 dean’s list. Livingston is majoring in Christian Studies.

Addiction Support

Refuge Recovery Meeting: Tuesdays 6:30 PM, 111 River Street, Hiawassee, GA; 706-970-7754. Sponsored by NMZ Church.

The Misty Mountain Quilters Guild’s July 22nd meeting

Our July program will have a special guest speaker, local author Patty Murphy. Patty will be talking about managing your fabric scraps while referencing her book titled Zero Waste Quilting. The reason Zero Waste Quilting is important is because we can take steps to minimize our environmental impact through our craft.

If you were ever interested in learning to quilt, or are an intermediate, or advanced quilter, this program will delight and inspire you.

Sign-in for the July meeting begins at 12 p.m. and the general meeting commences at 12:30. We will meet in the Fellowship Hall of First United Methodist Church, 938 GA-515, Blairsville, GA.

The Misty Mountain Quilters Guild has almost 200 members, hailing primarily from Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Florida. Our mission is to educate, share, promote and keep alive the craft and traditions of quilting.

We love new members. If you are interested in quilts

or want to learn more about quilting, come check us out! To learn more, visit our web-

site at <https://www.misty-mountainquiltguild.org> or email mmqginfo@gmail.com.

Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge

Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge welcomes Jerry Taylor, Towns County Historical Society

The Rotary Club of Lake Chatuge recently welcomed Mr. Jerry Taylor of the Towns County Historical Society who presented a program entitled “Men to Match the Mountains”. The program profiled some of the men, and their families, who helped settle or otherwise shape the development of Towns County, GA.

Jerry’s program was both detailed and entertaining, filled with background information and anecdotes about the accomplishments of these people who proved integral to the county as we now know it.



Jerry Taylor
Thank you Jerry for a fun and educational program.

Board of Education...from Page 1

to skyrocketing nutrition costs.

“The state gives us money (to feed students), but they don’t give us enough money to offset how much food costs,” said Finance Director Myra Underwood, who noted that the effects of inflation are “reflected in (our) schools.”

Although Underwood commented that money is “tight,” she still expects the system to meet its nutrition budget this fiscal year, thanks to collaboration with other districts and support from local vendors.

She also reported that the school system met the budget for property tax and TAVT and is projected to meet the budget for sales tax and SPLOST as well.

Additionally, Underwood noted that the schools have received \$1.6 million of a \$1.7 million grant for the agricultural department by meeting time.

The meeting also included the renewal of two key partnerships: the University of Georgia Cooperative Ex-

tension and the School Resource Officer Agreement.

Through its partnership with UGA, the board contributes just under \$21,000 toward the salaries of three employees at the Extension Office who provide Towns County Schools with services like the 4-H program.

The district also partners with the Towns County Sheriff’s Office for two full-time SROs to secure campus during school hours as well as for any off-duty officers who help with traffic control and security at sporting events.

According to Berrong, the schools cover 75% of SRO salaries for on-campus security. Additionally, officers earn \$25 per hour at away games, \$125 at home games and \$175 at double-header games. They receive \$20 each time they work traffic control.

As an additional part of efforts to maintain a safe and effective learning environment, the board has overseen the re-flooring of hallways in all three schools, the auditorium and the Elementary

School gym.

Berrong said these renovations have revealed asbestos in the glue beneath the flooring in the High School. However, he assures the public that cleanup efforts are underway and that the building should be asbestos-free before students return this August.

In other business, the board voted to accept the resignations of special education teacher Gloria Cartee and special education paraprofessional Brandy Parton. Stacy Russell was recommended and approved to fill Cartee’s position.

The board also approved annual service bids for MJ Propane, Arrow Exterminators and Allen Disposal, as well as the amended student handbooks with updated staff information.

Regular School Board meetings are held the first Monday of each month at 6:45 p.m. in the TCHS Media Center. Parents and community members are encouraged to attend to stay informed about local education.

Water Infrastructure...from Page 1



Red Holcomb of Holcomb Construction was a big help – and a big hit with passersby for his patriotic attire – during the July 4 main break repair off US 76 in Hiawassee.

Photo/Submitted

“We got down there, and this break had split several feet of 8-inch water main pipe that carries all the water to the City of Hiawassee and the entire county,” Chastain said. “It’s industrial strength PVC, but it’s just an aging water system.

“This is the same thing that happened at the big leak at (Sundance Grill in January) – the pipe just weakens and splits. This was not out in the road; this was beside the road on the feed store side, and the pipe ran under a creek.

“We had to get 80 feet of 8-inch iron ductile pipe from Coosa Water, and we’re going to pay them back for the pipe. That part is permanently fixed. It no longer runs under the creek; it runs across the creek so we can keep an eye on what it’s doing.”

The fix required all hands on deck, taking from around 6:30 in the morning to midnight for water service to be restored. Throughout the lengthy repair process, the city issued multiple CodeRED Alerts keeping people informed of the situation.

Chastain said the leak resulted in over half a million

gallons of water being lost. Many water customers inside the city who are served by the big million-gallon storage tank never lost water, but thousands of people in the county had their water disrupted during the holiday, including those who live above booster pumps that had to be shut off to prevent burning up.

“This part’s fixed, but when we fix one part and reinforce it, it just puts more pressure on old lines, so it’s by no means the end of our woes,” Chastain said. “We’re trying to get cost factors together in order to see exactly how much it’s going to cost this day and time.

“If you got a price two years ago, that price is not the same as it is today, so we’re getting current pricing together, current engineering. We’ve got our engineers looking at different ways to do this; water infrastructure is our engineers’ No. 1 priority right now.

“And we’re just taking it one day at a time to see exactly how much it’s going to cost for us to do it.”

The mayor said there were several people he wanted to thank for fixing the leak on Independence Day, including the following, which is not an exhaustive list.

“Water Treatment Plant Superintendent Andrew Sims came all the way from White County to help,” Chastain said. “And our Water Distribution crew, Ryan Osborn and Jarrett Milam. Clint Royce and Seth Grizzle from the Sewer Department came out because it took all of us to get it done.

“Carl Grizzle came out and provided a lot of valuable input on location of pipes, and Towns County Water & Sewer Authority crews were out there helping us, with Richard Green.

“And a big thank you to Holcomb Construction; Red Holcomb and a couple of his

guys gave up their Fourth of July, too, because our equipment was not big enough to get this job done. So, we had to outsource some equipment for digging.

“A big thank you to the workers from the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC. They gave up their Fourth. The water leak was so big and bad that it washed a power pedestal off. They relocated some lines for us so we could get it put back in.

“We even had some local guys that were camping up here that knew that none of us had eaten all day; Josh Hedden and Taylor Calloway brought food down there to everybody about 7:30 that night.”

Chastain recommends that everyone sign up for CodeRED Alerts to receive all kinds of relevant local emergency notifications. People may do so by visiting <http://www.townscountyga.org/emergency-alert-system.html>.

Georgia Girls State...from Page 1

do the Pledge (of Allegiance), they learn a lot of little things about the Constitution and just the way our government is supposed to work.”

Presented with the fictional scenario of running a 51st state, students are challenged with organizing their own government, including electing officials among themselves with the guidance of counselors. Just like in the real world, each position comes with its own responsibilities.

For example, two senators are given the chance to go on to Girls Nation, a wider program that hosts students from all over the United States in Washington, D.C. Ward may not have earned that particular role, but she did have a good time.

“I’m not a very political person,” Ward began, admitting that while she accepted the invitation to go to Girls State, it was an intimidating prospect. “I was thinking, ‘Oh my gosh, these girls probably know a lot more than me. I’m not going to really fit in there.’”

As it turned out, Ward didn’t just fit in – she excelled. Learning as she went, her views changed and her mind expanded. Although self-described as “timid,” Ward found

herself becoming more comfortable as she talked more with her fellows, and she even started enjoying herself despite the challenges that came with “coming out of her shell.”

“I think it’s a very, very good experience for people, especially in smaller towns,” said Ward, who was particularly interested in learning the views of others. “It’s really good for more people to learn about government and military in that way than just a plain old political science class.”

Ward found that a hands-on experience such as Girls State was more useful than standard textbook learning when it came to cementing patriotism and general education on the government.

Ultimately, comparing and contrasting her experiences and opinions – and learning to get out of her comfort zone – helped her to grow.

She was even appointed to a governmental role, and after talking to the “governor,” earned the title of Commissioner of Human Resources. As the eighth Towns County student to be sent to Girls State, Halfon wholeheartedly believes that Ward has done her community proud.

“We do live in a great

country that has a lot of problems, and I tell people my money is on the younger generation to help get us out of the hole we’re in and to make this an even better country,” Halfon said, commending Ward and others like her for their willingness to get out and learn by taking part in Girls State.

Ward agrees that the program was good for her and recommends that other students give it a try to learn some valuable insight not just about the inner machinations of government administration but also how to work well with others. Ward plans to help Halfon next year when it comes to drumming up interest and recruiting more participants.

After all, putting such an experience on a resume or job application shows a bold sense of initiative, and there’s nothing wrong with maintaining that drive.

Board of Health

The Towns County Board of Health will hold its quarterly meeting on Thursday, July 24, 2025 at 9:30 AM in the 911 Conference Room located at 1100 Jack Dayton Circle, Young Harris, GA 30582.

DDA Board changes, finances highlight meeting

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Reporter

The Hiawassee Down- town Development Author- ity marked the beginning of another chapter last Tuesday, July 8, when newly appointed Economic Development Di- rector Lily Ponitz led the board in approving the resignation of member Babette Dunn.

Dunn has been involved with the DDA Board for three years, focusing primarily on the Paris Business Center project that has come to fruition.

“I did what I set out to do,” Dunn said. “It’s been a very bumpy road ... but the whole DDA has overcome a whole lot of obstacles to bring a really great project to the city. I have spent over a thou- sand hours myself on this project, (and) I need to move on to something else at this point.”

Dunn plans to continue serving the small business community as a Service Corps of Retired Executives mentor after her DDA resignation.

More changes are un- derway as well, with the board seeking to fill two currently open seats, one vacated by Paul Smith when he returned to the Hiawassee Police De-

partment, and the other va- cated by Scott Benton when he ran for and won election to Hiawassee City Council this year.

According to DDA Board Co-Chair Tyler Osborn, two of six applicants have al- ready been interviewed. He hopes to introduce the full lineup during next month’s meeting.

Speaking of next month, three more DDA Board seats will come open, including Dunn’s position following her resignation plus those of Tamela Cooper and Peggy Gardner, whose terms are ex- piring. Yet another seat will need filling when Osborn’s term expires in December.

Amid these and other changes, the bank has re- quested that the DDA replace the names on its financial ac- counts. So, the board voted to replace former director De- nise McKay and former board member Benton with Ponitz and DDA/PBC Coordinator Christine Osborn.

Per organization re- quirements, the change can only take place after the board votes to approve it and the secretary has signed off on the minutes from the voting meet-

ing. For that reason, the DDA called a special meeting the following day, July 9, to ap- prove the July 8 minutes.

Additionally, the DDA is working to find three busi- ness-savvy individuals to serve on the board of the Paris Business Center. The PBC be- gan serving as a resource for local businesses and entrepre- neurs last fall, offering train- ing, networking opportunities and temporary office space at a discounted price.

According to Christine Osborn, several startups – in- cluding a therapy practice and a makeup studio – have shown interest in these re- sources since her last update in June. With business picking up, promptly filling the PBC board positions has become more critical.

“They will be very laser focused on small business,” said Dunn of the prospec- tive members. “The people that we’re looking for are less hands-on and more upper-lev- el executives or small-business people. We would (also) like an academic on the board.”

Those selected will be inducted into the PBC cor- poration as officers and hold equivalent authority to the



Hiawassee DDA Board Members Amy Barrett and Peggy Gardner discussing Paris Business Center updates in their regular meeting on July 8. Photo by Daysha Pandolph

chairpersons of the DDA. They will report to Ponitz, who will report directly to Hiawassee Mayor Jay Chastain Jr.

While much of that Tuesday’s meeting focused on internal turnover, the board also discussed finances.

Board Member Amy Barrett, who serves as the representative from the City Council, shared that the DDA has not spent the full \$1 mil- lion of its United Community Bank loan to finish the Paris Business Center, which has been completed.

However, it will con- tinue to be charged 5.58% in- terest on the full amount until it formally declines the re- mainder, said Barrett. In light of this information, the board voted to draft a letter stating it will no longer be pulling from the loan. According to Ponitz, the letter will be released im- mediately after a final sum is drawn.

Ponitz also shared that the DDA has finally spent the entirety of its USDA grant.

The board is gearing up to host its next First Fri- day Night Market on Aug. 1, which will feature various lo- cal vendors and a performance by the island soul band Dawn Loves Nash.

And this weekend, be sure to check out the DDA’s SUMMER FUN-DRAISER concert by A1A – The Official and Original Jimmy Buffett Tribute Show, on Saturday, July 19, at 6 p.m. inside An- derson Music Hall at the Geor- gia Mountain Fairgrounds.

Concert proceeds will

Isaiah 117 House grateful to receive community donation



Isaiah 117 House recently met with generous community members to receive a donation benefiting the local nonprofit. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Since opening last fall, the Isaiah 117 House has been making a difference for Towns and Union County kids taken into foster care. When initially seized by the Division of Fam- ily & Children Services, chil- dren have a chance for one of the most traumatic moments of their lives to be softened by the kindness of dedicated local volunteers.

“When children are re- moved from their homes and they’re waiting for placement in foster care, the DFCS work- ers take them here rather than taking them to an office,” ex- plained volunteer Sheila Loy, giving a tour of the facility. “This is the only house like it in Georgia.”

The children receive a warm welcome with gentle smiles and can take a shower if needed or eat a warm meal. Some arrive with only the clothes on their backs; most are shocked to find the shelves downstairs stocked with a va- riety of toys and books, not to mention brand-new clothes they can choose to be outfitted with. In fact, each child receives a suitcase with about five days’ worth of clothes when they leave, along with a set of pajamas.

Thanks to the efforts of a local trivia group, Isaiah 117 has a little bit of help con- tinuing what they do best – supporting some of the most vulnerable members of the

community. Donna Neal says her group came up with the idea to start raising money for a local charity back in Janu- ary, and the near-unanimous choice was Isaiah 117.

The group met up each Thursday, and everyone pitched in \$2 to play trivia. Averaging between 65 to 70 players each week, that money added up over the course of five months.

“To me, it was very fun just to get together each week and meet people that I didn’t know and really form bonds and friendships ... and to know that we were also raising mon- ey, \$2 at a time, for a great cause,” Neal said. “(Partici- pants) had the option of either taking a portion of what was donated that night or donating it back to Isaiah 117 House, and the majority was donated back to Isaiah 117.”

On June 29, Neal and others from the group met up with Isaiah 117 volunteers at the house to present a check for \$1,822. There were a few misty eyes among the bunch, especially from the apprecia- tive volunteers.

“That’s so cool. All I can say about that – that’s awesome,” said an emotional Frank Loy, husband of Sheila. The duo is currently in the process of becoming foster par- ents themselves, and they as- sured Neal and her friends that their fundraiser would “go a long way” in supporting Isaiah 117 and the children that find respite within its walls.

Speaking of which, oth- ers can help by signing up as foster parents; Loy noted a distinct lack of foster parents in Towns and Union Counties and said that local children are often taken as far as Cumming to find the care they need. Isa- iah 117 offers foster parent support and even “date nights” where volunteers watch foster kids for a while to offer some respite.

On that note, the or- ganization is also in need of volunteers, and it should be emphasized that one doesn’t even have to be interested in working directly with chil- dren. Loy detailed the impor- tance of having someone to cook meals for the kids and social workers, and even the smallest jobs – like straight- ening out inventory – can go a long way.

Check out www.fami- lies4families.cc or head over to the Family & Children Services Department at 420 Blue Ridge Highway to start the process of becoming a foster parent.

And contact Isaiah 117 Location Leader Audrey Gonet at audrey.gonet@isa- iah117house.com or 706-897- 1548 to become a volunteer of the nonprofit organization.

Finally, keep an eye out around Blairsville for lemon- ade stands, where volunteers for Isaiah 117 will be offering information and free lemon- ade to anyone curious about what the organization stands for.

Package Sales...from Page 1A

sus manufacturing,” clarified Harkins.

Councilman Steve Clark warned of difficulties between zoning categories and what they allow on certain proper- ties, meaning that putting in different types of businesses on one property could prove difficult on a legal level.

Harkins suggested that McMurphy could rezone the property he owns, allowing for different categories for differ- ent parcels.

Although McMurphy revealed he was at a stage where he could move tenants in within a month, Clark said that changing the zoning on an industrial piece of property takes time. Harkins suggested rezoning the area to a general business property or special use property.

In the end, McMurphy

filed two applications, one to rezone the property from in- dustrial to general business and another for special use regard- ing the microbrewery. Those will go on to the city’s Planning Commission, to be possibly voted on in September.

There were no updates on the Timberline booster pump, but Clark mentioned a project as part of the ongo- ing sewer line rehabilitation program that needed cleaning out due to significant blockage from roots and a rock protrud- ing into the pipe.

Clark has also been following the issue of water leaks, and one was discovered near the recreation center at Young Harris College before being repaired. Still, questions have arisen regarding whether that particular leak should have been repaired by the city.

“The question that came up about the larger meters and the backflow preventers and where does the city stop and where does the city start ... It’s always been the policy of the city that the city stops at the meter,” Clark said before mak- ing a motion to approve the purchase of three new meters to help with more accurately detecting leaks.

Councilman John Kel- ley, a retired cardiologist, offered an update on Coun- cilman Donald Keys, who underwent a heart valve replace- ment surgery that morning so was unable to attend the eve- ning meeting.

“He’ll have tough days ahead of him, but his progno- sis is good, considering the se- riousness of the illness,” said Kelley, who led a prayer for his wellbeing.