

Eclipse...from Page 1A

Pennsylvania, and Kelsey Bolender from Canada, took a leap of faith and made sure that the solar eclipse was a day they would never forget as the happy couple tied the knot in front of the beautiful scenery of the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge.

"We've been planning this trip for a while and we were already engaged," said Hibbs. "We got here and decided, why not, let's just go ahead and get married."

"We live in two different counties right now and didn't want to wait any longer. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to get married."

One of Bolender's friends performed the ceremony, while Hibbs' brother documented the happy union. The couple was married just an hour before totality, spending the remainder of the day enjoying the beauty of the Fairgrounds and the joint phenomenon and bliss of a new marriage during the solar eclipse.

While the Fairgrounds roared with excitement and anticipation leading up to the eclipse, the moment of totality struck a cord among many onlookers as the crowd cheered in excitement then fell silent for the darkest afternoon anyone present has ever seen,

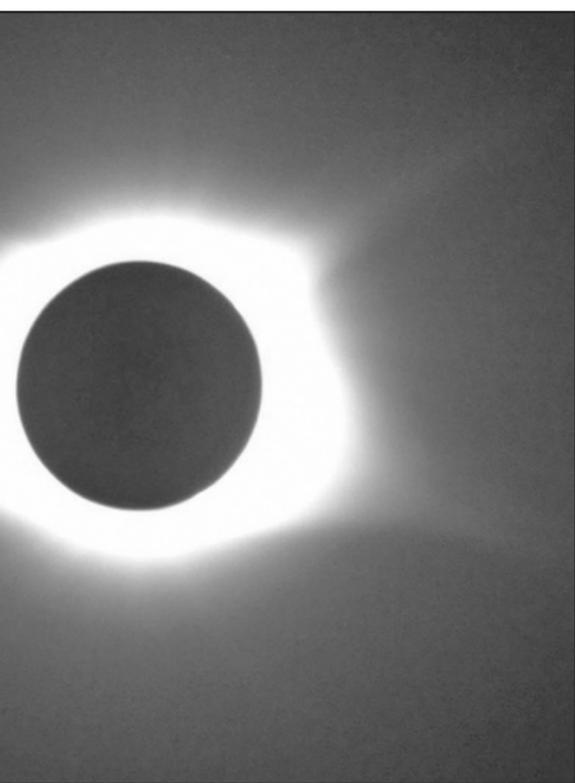


Trevorr Hibbs from Pennsylvania, and Kelsey Bolender from Canada, took a leap of faith and made sure that the total solar eclipse was a day they would never forget as the happy couple tied the knot in front of the beautiful scenery of the Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge. Photo/Lily Avery

or will ever see again.

"This is something that none of us will soon forget,"

said Covington. "To experience this cosmic event, it's truly something to be thankful for."



Towns County was in cover of darkness as the Great American Eclipse unfolded over the Top of Georgia. Hundreds looked on as the event took place at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds Tailgate Party on Monday, Aug. 21. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Drill...from Page 1A

Hall for an emergency drill, taking learning outside the classroom and into a real-world situation.

In the simulated emergency drill, a tornado had torn through the Hiwassee area while a major event was taking place at the Anderson Music Hall. During the drill, first responders were tasked with locating all casualties and determining the next course of action, if that person needed immediate medical attention and proceed accordingly based on those needs.

"The full scenario, there was an event, we said a concert, going on at the music hall," said Brandon Walls, Towns County EMA Deputy Director. "During the event, a tornado touched down across the music hall and caused a collapse of the building, injuring those people that were inside."

"The tornado continued on to the lake. There were some boaters out on the lake and their boat was pushed across the lake. One person fell off the boat and was found deceased, then there were two more found on or near the boat on the other side of the lake."

Towns County Cub Scouts Den #407, with scout leaders and other community volunteers, played the roles of the injured victims caught in the music hall during the tornado. Before the first responders arrived, each volunteer was given an injury and asked to act accordingly to best replicate what these first responders might encounter during an actual disaster.

According to Walls, an exercise of this scale is often required, and heavily recommended, for first responder agencies to conduct every couple of years. While those who work within those agencies receive multiple training classes throughout the year, nothing is more valuable than the firsthand experience that comes with a simulated, large-scale disaster drill.

"There hasn't been a full scale emergency drill in the county in a long time, so we needed to do one," said Walls. "The EMA, we're required to



A recent drill conducted by Towns County EMA at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds. Photo/Lily Avery

do one by the state every so often. The fire department, to my knowledge, has never had a full triage exercise where they have to go and do a live triage."

Several agencies were represented during the drill, including the Towns County EMA, Towns County Fire and Rescue, and Towns County EMS. While these entities normally work similar events and emergency situations at the same time, it is not very often that the agencies train together, which was an added bonus of the drill.

"Outside of real events, we don't have much chance to practice together," said Walls. "This teaches us how to work with one another. And we're in a real place in our community where something could happen."

"We're not in a training room or a classroom. We're somewhere that we very well could be doing this for real some day."

After Monday's drill, the EMA returned on Tuesday, Aug. 15, to participate in a second day of training, this time with members of the Towns County Coast Guard Auxiliary.

"The second day was an exercise for the EMA," said Walls. "We had volunteers from the coast guard auxiliary who we trained to do damage assessment and work with us through the damage assessment process after an emergency or disaster event, using a mobile friendly piece of software that we purchased recently that lets us send anyone to the field with minimal training, to help us with assessment activities."

"We also went deep enough for us, the EMA, to understand what we needed to accomplish the mission of assessment during a real event."

Due to a missing person emergency in the county last week, the second afternoon of the training was cut short, however, Walls plans to reschedule the rest of the exercise as soon as possible.

Regardless of the drill being shorter than anticipated, it proved to be a very beneficial training exercise for all entities involved and Walls hopes to see this type of drill become a regular part of all first-responder training.

"It's really good training," said Walls. "The way to learn is hands-on and get out here and do it. An hour's worth of practice out here is worth an infinite amount of time in the classroom."

"Out here, we're really learning how to save lives."

Ledford...from Page 1A

Macedonia Baptist.

"I just don't have words to thank everybody enough that worked so hard to prepare," said Viola Ledford, wife of Preacher Ledford. "It was just amazing, and all I can say is thank you for helping his legacy to live on."

When Preacher Ledford passed away earlier this year in February, his loss reverberated through the community he had served so well for decades.

Not only did Preacher Ledford leave an indelible mark upon the hearts of his extended church family, he touched the hearts of countless others, both friends and strangers, in the North Georgia Mountains and beyond.

Following Ledford's death, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw got together with Liz Ordiales of Hiwassee City Hall to discuss how best to memorialize Preacher Ledford.

And that's when it hit them – the city would dedicate the DNR Boat Landing at Hiwassee Mayors Park to the memory of Harold Ledford.

The gesture seemed perfectly suited to the task of remembering the humble man of Christ, who had, over his many years as preacher at Macedonia, baptized an untold number of parishioners in Lake Chatuge off Virginia Palmer's boat ramp.

And boaters have been using the new boat launch since it opened over the Fourth of July weekend, though Monday, Aug. 14, served as the official ribbon cutting for the site.

The new launch has proven to be extremely popular already, and was made possible due to the Georgia DNR's Boating Access Program, which thankfully allowed DNR to install the landing with primarily federal and state monies.

"Achieving access to our public waterways has always been a team sport," said DNR Commissioner Mark Williams in the dedication. "It could not be accomplished without partners. It takes a community to put a boat



Georgia DNR's Jeff Durniak, speaking, with Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, Liz Ordiales, DNR Commissioner Mark Williams and Fisheries Chief John Biagi. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

ramp project on the ground and operate it over time.

"The Mayors Park Boat Landing here at Lake Chatuge is a shining example of these partnerships. There are many people and agencies that have been a part of this process since this site was first selected."

Ordiales addressed those gathered as well, thanking her city employees for getting the park ready for the dedication.

Along with the new boat launch, parking area, and recently installed pavilion, looking ahead, the Mayors Park will feature a large dog park, full restroom facilities, a barbecue area, picnic tables and trash cans, though Ordiales was sure to focus on the positive economic tidings of the boat landing that day.

"This boat ramp is definitely the No. 1 asset since our lake is our No. 1 resource, so we're very proud and very happy to have it," said Ordiales. "Cliff and I had a conversation a couple of months back about dedicating the ramp to the great Harold Ledford, who was such a great pastor and such a great community leader."

After the unveiling of the dedication sign next to the new boat landing, which proclaimed Preacher Ledford to have been "A

Fisher of Men," Commissioner Bradshaw spoke on the legacy of the man of the hour.

"Everywhere you go, you mention the name Harold Ledford, and people smile," said the commissioner. "That says it all right there."

Added Bradshaw: "He was a faithful father, a faithful husband, a faithful pastor to our church for 30 years, and not only that, to the community."

Bradley Thomas, associate and youth pastor at Macedonia Baptist Church, closed the dedication in prayer, and officials present gathered with Ledford's family to perform the ribbon cutting and take pictures.

More than a dozen DNR officials, including law enforcement officers, were present that Monday, Aug. 14.

The boat landing includes a 26-foot wide concrete boat ramp, 24 parking spaces for trailered vehicles, plus 10 additional car spaces, according to DNR.

Both the city and DNR anticipate more than 10,000 users each year, and the area will be accessible to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week, which is especially good news for area anglers and boating enthusiasts alike.

Eller...from Page 1A

was leaving, only that he didn't feel well. His car (was) still at his work."

Foul play isn't suspected at this time, according to the Towns County Sheriff's Office, however, "the case is active and ongoing, pending the medical exam and further investigation."

Towns County's Water Rescue Recovery Team, Towns County Sheriff's Office deputies, Georgia Bureau of Investigation special agents, a Georgia State Patrol Aviation Unit, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, K-9 units from Cherokee and Fannin counties,

Citizens Law Enforcement Academy volunteers, and other volunteers assisted in the search for Eller, Chief Copeland said.

Eller is survived by his mother, Judy Ledford, and six brothers and sisters.

"Our hearts are breaking," his sister Elizabeth Dills said.

Brandon's sister Jessica Dills said she now had "a big hole in my heart."

"I was blessed to have him as my brother," Jessica wrote on Facebook. "This young man was so grounded, caring, smart, and responsible. He loved cooking and hiking."

"He wanted to be in law

enforcement," she said. "He carried his Bible around with him always. He was there for anyone and would listen and try to help people. I can only hope God accepts me, so that I can see him again. I know (Brandon) will watch over us."

Funeral services for Eller were held on Sunday, Aug. 20, in the Union Hill Baptist Church Cemetery with the Rev. Clark Moss officiating. A memorial service followed on Sunday at Shiloh Baptist Church.

Mountain View Funeral Home had charge of the arrangements.

Cagle...from Page 1A

Fraternity of Young Harris College posed for pictures, and the super talented Church siblings played classical music as We Three Strings inside the restaurant, opening for Cagle with "God Bless America."

Towns County High School freshman Peyton Barrett introduced the "future governor of Georgia Casey Cagle," who in turn couldn't wait to deliver his message to the standing-room only crowd.

"This community is one that obviously continues to see great promise," said Cagle, reacting to positive housing numbers relayed by Sam Fullerton. "When we look at our state, we see a state that is filled with so much opportunity."

Continued Cagle: "We're the eighth largest state in the nation, we're the capital of the South. When you look at the busiest airport and the fastest growing port, the Fortune 500 companies, the university systems here in our state – all of these things create something very, very special and unique."

"So, it's our job to ensure that we are building great economic prosperity for all, and we've got to be willing to build out that infrastructure to go under, to go over, to go around. We've got to put our financial resources where it is needed the most, and that's what I'm going to be focused on with a 10-year strategic plan as your next governor."

The lieutenant governor went over a few jobs figures, highlighting the fact that more and more jobs are requiring at least a two-year degree from a technical college or some sort of industry certification.

"The reality is, we have a public educational system that for too long has been predicated on setting a standard that sends everybody off to get a liberal arts degree," said Cagle. "And I believe in a public educational system that says we're going to have an academic floor for all students to reach."

"But within that floor



Cagle shaking hands with Bud Johnson, 95, a local Iwo Jima Veteran. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Local musical trio We Three Strings opened for Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle that Friday. L-R: Samantha Church, 15; Syler Church, 13; and Larson Church, 16. Check these siblings out and book a gig at <https://wethreestings.wixsite.com/mysite>.

there can be no cracks for students to drop between and drop out, and turn to a life of crime or turn to a life of dependence on government.

"Also in that school building, there's going to be no ceiling to hold any student back from going as far and as high as they want to go. We're going to need more eminent scholars, we're going to need more Rhodes Scholars as well."

"But we're also going to need more plumbers, more electricians, more individuals that can have the skills that are

necessary that we have. And there's nothing wrong with that – all work that is honest work is good work."

Those in attendance that morning included State Sens. John Wilkinson and Steve Gooch, State Rep. Matt Gurtler, Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton, Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, several representatives of Hiwassee City Hall, Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong, Hiwassee Police Chief Paul Smith, and plenty of residents.