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Winter Storm Benji dumps 11+ inches of snow in county

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Conditions were bad almost immediately – in the span of an hour – on the morning of Friday, Dec. 8, Winter Storm Benji suddenly dropped several inches of snow on Towns County.

And it was only beginning.

When all was said and done, Benji dumped more than 11 inches of snow in many places around the county, causing traffic accidents, downing more than a hundred trees and killing power to thousands of homes across the region.

Towns County Schools and all government offices, both city and county, shut down that Friday due to the snowy conditions, and many regional events were canceled over the weekend.

Thankfully, Towns County has excellent public safety employees who worked the long hours to get as many roads cleared of trees and snow as possible over the weekend.

First responders all over the county did their best to improve road conditions during the winter storm, even when the snow stopped falling but stayed stubbornly stuck to everything in sight.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw went out with the County Road Department on Saturday, Dec. 9, and he couldn't be happier with the work done by the county employees.

Of course, Bradshaw commended all first responders, including Towns County EMS, the fire department, the Emergency Management Agency, the Sheriff's Office and others.

"It's amazing the

dedication these people have," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "These people do everything they can to get the roads clean and clear, the trees down for public safety, in case somebody has to call 911, so they can get to them."

Bradshaw was also thankful to the American Red Cross, which coordinated with the Towns County EMA and McConnell Memorial Baptist Church to set up an emergency shelter over the weekend.

Elsewhere in the county, crews from the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC worked around the clock to restore power during a storm that brought upwards of a foot of snow in many locales.

The wet and heavy nature of the snow toppled trees and limbs left and right, and snow clung greedily to power lines. When the snow finally started

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The Hiwassee Town Square looked particularly festive with its new lights and snow during Winter Storm Benji. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

UCSO Lt. James of Towns County recovering after crash

By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE—Towns County resident Leon James, a lieutenant with the Union County Sheriff's Office, was listed in serious condition at Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville, following an accident on Georgia 515 en route to Hiwassee, authorities said.

Though many details were unavailable at press time, the accident occurred Sunday morning near Bowling Gap, Union County Sheriff's Lt. Daren Osborn said, adding that road conditions were apparently dry at the time of the accident.

"I don't have all the details of the accident," Lt. Osborn said. "I know that the accident occurred right there at Bowling Gap, the (Ford F-150) left the roadway and flipped three or four times."

"He was in his personal



UCSO Lt. Leon James

vehicle," Lt. Osborn said. "He was flown to Gainesville (Northeast Georgia Medical Center), and of course, he is in serious condition. He has broken ribs and other injuries."

"His injuries are not life threatening, and he should make it," Lt. Osborn said. "However, it's going to be a long road to recovery."

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said Lt. James had an angel looking over his shoulder.

"If you look at that truck and realize that he came out of the wreck alive, you'd say it was a miracle," Sheriff Mason said. "That truck was torn to pieces."

Lt. James is the head of police for the Sheriff's Office at the Union County Courthouse.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris reached out on social media Sunday afternoon, asking for prayer for Lt. James.

"Please say a prayer for Leon," Commissioner Paris wrote on Facebook. "He is a great guy who we all have the utmost respect and admiration for."

Additional details about the crash and Lt. James' condition were unavailable at press time.

Towns County couple worked together to rob Save-A-Lot

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Two suspects have been taken into custody and charged with armed robbery of the Hiwassee Save-A-Lot – the store's assistant manager and her boyfriend, according to the Hiwassee Police Department.

"Following an extensive investigation, an arrest warrant was issued on Dec. 4 for Chelsea Alferink, the assistant manager at Save-A-Lot, for the offense of False Statements and Writings," per an HPD press release.

Continued in the release: "She was taken into custody without incident. The following day, arrest warrants for the offense of Armed Robbery were issued for Alferink and her boyfriend, Daniel Walls."

The press release was issued the morning of Thursday, Dec. 7, and at that



Chelsea Alferink



Daniel Walls

time, Walls had not yet been apprehended.

Walls ended up turning himself in to the Towns County Jail later in the day on Thursday, Dec. 7, according to police.

Alferink is a Towns County resident, and her boyfriend, Walls, is a Towns County native, though he has been known to stay with

relatives in both Towns and Union counties, according to police.

As previously reported, the armed robbery occurred on Wednesday, Nov. 22, the night before Thanksgiving, according to police.

Hiwassee Police Sgt. Tracy James and Officer Tony

See Save-A-Lot, Page 6A

Christmas Program brings joy to foster kids during holiday

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

One of the best things about spending time with family, a luxury that foster children don't have.

Fortunately, the Towns & Union Foster Children's Enrichment Program has been hard at work for 18 years gathering donations made by giving individuals to provide rewarding and positive Christmas experiences for

children who are currently caught in the legal system.

The program, a nonprofit entity, is carried out by former and current CASA volunteers – that's Court Appointed Special Advocates for children – and their efforts are possible thanks to donations and involvement by generous residents of Towns and Union counties.

Because the identities of children in foster care are kept secret for their own protection, people who decide to sponsor a foster child never know the name of the kid they are

helping.

On the other hand, the child gets to fill out their very own wish list to be used by a sponsor for shopping, so it's almost as if each sponsor is Santa Claus for a special child in need.

The process begins a couple of months before Christmas, as program co-founder Pat Elliott begins rounding up a master list of children who will benefit from the yearly "Foster Children's Christmas Program."

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Volunteers with the "Foster Children's Christmas Program," during the 2016 Christmas season. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

Chatuge Regional continues tradition of the Love Light Tree

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

For decades, the Chatuge Regional Hospital Auxiliary has brought holiday cheer to the hospital by hosting an annual tree lighting known as the Love Light Celebration.

This year's Love Light Celebration took place in the front lobby of the Chatuge Regional Hospital on Monday, Dec. 4.

While the celebration of the Love Light Tree is a means to bring a festive spirit to the hospital, it also serves as a way to highlight the auxiliary's scholarship drive, which is made possible through the donations made in memory of or in honor of loved ones.

Each year, the auxiliary awards scholarship money, known as the Love Light Scholarship Program, to Towns County High School students who are wishing to pursue a



Chatuge Regional Hospital Assistant Administrator thanking the Hospital Auxiliary for their volunteerism, at the annual Love Light Tree Lighting on Monday, Dec. 4. Photo/Lily Avery

profession in the medical field after graduation.

"During the year, we have people to make donations or in memory of someone or in memory of them," said

Brenda Hitchcock, Love Light Chairperson. "What we do with the money that is collected is we give to scholarships for our Towns County students who are

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Fairgrounds to welcome Towns County residents to free show

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Calling all Towns County residents to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds for the Second Annual "Towns County Citizens Day" at the Mountain County Christmas in Lights on Thursday, Dec. 14.

This upcoming Thursday, all citizens of Towns County will have the opportunity to come and enjoy all that the Fairgrounds has to offer during the holiday season with free admission to the yearly lightshow.

Last year, Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason introduced the idea of hosting a day during the holiday light show that was specifically for the residents of Towns County to show how much the Fairgrounds appreciates their continued support and patronage, and to give a little something back to the locals for the yuletide



Mountain Country Christmas! in Lights at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

season. Since the day was such a success last year, Thomason decided to host it again this year.

"We're not asking for an I.D. or anything like that,"

said Thomason. "They can just tell us that they're a resident of Towns County when they come up to the gate and they can go in for free. We did this last year."

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge	1,667.68
Chatuge	1,917.54
Nottely	1,761.05

Basketball

Fri. Dec 15 vs. Riverside
(Boys only) 6 PM

Sat. Dec. 16 @ Fannin County
4 PM

Share the gift of Food with a Senior this holiday season

See page 7A

Empty Stocking Toy Drive Drop Off Location is the Antique Mall

See page 7A

FREE Food Distribution

N. Mt. Zion Church

Dec. 21st

See page 5B