

# Towns County Herald

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## County to receive FEMA funds

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On Friday, Feb. 26, President Barack Obama approved Gov. Nathan Deal's request for a major disaster declaration for the state of Georgia, ordering federal aid to supplement the cost of damages that resulted from severe winter weather experienced between Dec. 22 and Jan. 13.

The declaration makes funding for disaster relief available to Towns County and other counties in Georgia.

"We will be eligible for reimbursement of 80 to 85 percent for damages that we incurred during the storms from FEMA," said Towns County EMA/EMS Director Rickey Mathis.

"We've had some damages, so we're probably looking at \$500,000, is generally what I'm thinking. To be eligible for this federal declaration statewide, the state had to come up with \$13 million or \$14 million (in total damages)."

In addition to reimbursement, the declaration provides Hazard Mitigation Grant Program Assistance to prevent or reduce long-term



Rickey Mathis

risk to life and property from natural hazards.

"That could mean a whole lot more money than even what we're getting reimbursed for from the disaster," said Mathis. "I know we've had some issues and don't know what exactly will be eligible to submit, but that grant will be, for Towns County, will be on a 50/50 basis. The county would have to come up with half of whatever project they submit."

Mathis said that he knew

that could benefit from the grant.

"There's a road on Hall Creek, and it's a very expensive project - there are 11 homes up there," said Mathis. "It pretty much covers with water every time it rains. I think in the last flood they had to use a canoe to get in and out for 11 or 12 days. That road has got to be raised up 15 or 20 feet or so."

"It's a tremendous amount, and I don't know whether that would be a submittable item for hazard mitigation or not, but in my opinion that's an area that the county really needs to look at, and there are some other projects that need to be looked at as well."

Mathis said that Towns County is never entirely exempt from disaster, and that the Hazard Mitigation Grant could go a long way toward helping keep the county safe.

"Probably the most devastating one that we have never had would be a tornado, and we're approaching that season," said Mathis. "Severe thunderstorms and those types of events can be very devastating. Winter storms - we're in March, and we're not excluded from that. The biggest

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## City discusses Special Election



The Hiwassee City Council met at its regularly scheduled time on Tuesday, March 1, to discuss and vote on city business

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

On Tuesday, March 1, the Hiwassee City Council met to discuss issues surrounding the upcoming special election and renovations and additions to the city.

A lawyer specializing in alcohol law, David Syfan, gave a presentation on the alcohol laws that must be followed to have an alcohol referendum.

"The statutes on alcohol beverages are a sort of a

hodgepodge that's developed over time. And of course the General Assembly tweaks it every year, so every year it can kind of change," he said.

He recommended that the referendum hold the alcohol referendum on Nov. 8, at the same time as the special election is held to fill Stephen Smith's vacant seat. A Nov. 8 election is ideal because it will give the people in the city enough time to sign the required petition in order to get package sales on the ballot.

"It would give the

people who want to do the package sales more additional time to get that petition in. I would say that they probably need to get it into you at least by the middle of September, in order to give the election superintendent enough time to verify the signatures on the petition, and then that would give you enough time for the superintendent to issue the call," he said.

Currently, it seems as though the City is set to have referendums on Sunday sales. See Election, Page 10A

## City approves Square Improvements

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer



Anne Mitchell

At the Hiwassee City Council Meeting on Tuesday, March 1, some city council members brought up the idea of giving the Hiwassee Square a renovation.

Council member Anne Mitchell is looking to follow through on that idea.

"The square has always been a very beautiful part of the town. And it's been here

forever. When I was a child, I played on the square, and that was forever ago. So it's a special place. And it has just gotten kind of shabby-looking. The trees have been dying. And it just hasn't looked really good," she said.

Although the garden clubs and other organizations work at keeping up the square, there hasn't been a concentrated effort on the scale needed to really give the square an overhaul, which Mitchell said is sorely needed.

"We need to cut down that big pine. Then we've lost two more trees. The Christmas tree is dead. There was transplant over on the opposite corner from where the Christmas tree is. It's not had a lot coordinated care," she said.

Mitchell is looking into monetary options.

"I got a call from a local resident today who told me about a grant. It's a roadside beautification grant. If you're on a main highway, you can apply for money to improve the looks of things. I thought that sounded like a good idea, especially with the recent

demise of the Christmas tree. So when this offer for money came through, it sounded like something that would be a good idea to pursue. And I still think it is. I think our square could be really beautiful and a highlight of the town. It just needs some help," she said.

The grant is from the Department of Transportation Roadside Enhancement and Beautification Council. If the application is accepted, then the Department of Transportation may reimburse the costs of removing dead trees on the square.

Mitchell says that the tree removals are overdue and necessary. Not only are the dead trees an eyesore, but they also block other efforts at putting in different vegetation that might lend the square a more aesthetic presence. Currently, the results of attempted beautification of the square have been erratic at best.

"The Garden Club and some other people had planted a memorial garden for victims of domestic abuse over on the

See Square, Page 10A

## Council hears wastewater update



The Young Harris City Council met at its regularly scheduled time on Tuesday, March 1, to discuss additions to the wastewater treatment plant

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

At the Young Harris City Council meeting on Tuesday, March 1, the City Council addressed issues with the growing Young Harris wastewater treatment plant.

The City has invested in two parts of the wastewater project. The first is to expand the sewer lines through the city. The other part is to

expand the plant itself.

City Engineer Patsy Poje explained that the construction of the water lines has run into some setbacks, which will require some change orders. One of those change orders could result in water lines being laid in a new direction.

"We had a water main break. Then where the old lines are, they really lay the new lines over it because of regulations. Then also they

found out that there is a lot of rock on that side so it would be a lot more expensive to continue the lines on that side," said Mayor Andrea Gibbs.

"Chris is supposed to come back with some cost analysis next month to give us some idea of what we can and can't do and what the money's going to be for the council to make a decision," she said.

See Wastewater, Page 3A

## Windstream's response to Rep. Collins

Dear Congressman:

Thank you for inquiring about Windstream's service in the Ninth Congressional District of Georgia. I commit to you and your constituents that I am personally engaged and fully committed to connecting your constituents to homes and offices with high-speed Internet.

I appreciate your concern and take them seriously. As you know, Windstream also employs 380 talented professionals in the Ninth District, all of whom take immense pride in



Tony Thomas, President and CEO of Windstream

servicing our customers and are determined to address these

See Thomas, Page 10A

## Congressman Collins: "Windstream response is more of the same"

Washington, D.C. - Today, Congressman Collins received a letter from Windstream President and CEO Tony Thomas in response to his letter demanding answers on behalf of his constituents in Northeast Georgia.

"I appreciate Windstream's response, but unfortunately it is more of the same. I appreciate the establishment of a 'rapid response team' in Cornelia, but this isn't simply an issue of poor



Rep. Doug Collins

See Collins, Page 10A

## Trump and Clinton winners in Towns County

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Towns County voters have voted - Donald Trump is the candidate most favored by Republicans, and Hillary Clinton the favorite among Democrats, with those results being mirrored at the state level.

More than 45 percent of the county's 7,839 registered voters cast ballots toward the Georgia Presidential Preference Primary.

The four precincts in

Towns - Hiwassee, Young Harris, Macedonia and Tate City - saw 2,401 people turn up at the polls to cast votes the day of the primary on Tuesday, March 1.

Another 1,062 people voted early in person at the Old Rock Jail in the weeks leading up to the primary. Adding in the 74 mailed-in absentee ballots, along with the 31 provisional ballots counted Friday, March 4, brings the total of votes cast by county residents in the PPP to 3,568 votes.

See Primary, Page 10A

## Gowder and Heaton indicted

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Murphy, NC - Former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder and former Blainville physician Dr. James Heaton have been indicted by a Cherokee County, NC, grand jury, both for five counts of trafficking in Opium or Heroin, and five counts of obtaining a controlled substance by forgery, according to Cherokee County, NC, Sheriff Derrick Palmer.

Gowder and Dr. Heaton were arrested Wednesday, March 2, Sheriff Palmer said.

Gowder is free on \$500,000 bond; Dr. Heaton was still in custody (at press



Mike Gowder (right), his bond set at \$500,000 also, Sheriff Palmer said.

Both are required to appear at an April 4th Superior Court hearing in Cherokee



James Heaton (left), Superior Court, Sheriff Palmer said.

Gowder was placed on paid administrative leave at

See Indicted, Page 10A

## Kelley CEO at UGH

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

Lewis Kelley has been named CEO of Union General Hospital, Patsy Efrid, board chair of Union General Inc. said on Friday.

The hiring of Kelley on Friday, March 4, by the Union General Inc. Board of Directors resulted in the termination of CEO Mike Gowder following his indictment and subsequent arrest for drug trafficking in North Carolina, according to Efrid.

"You can't have two CEOs," Efrid said. "Mike Gowder was still CEO, while

Lewis Kelley was the interim CEO.

"Lewis Kelley is now the CEO of Union General Hospital, not the interim CEO," Efrid said. "Painfully, we had to move on."

Kelley has most recently served as interim CEO, and previously as administrator at Chatuge Regional Hospital, and has more than two decades of experience in the Union General/Chatuge health care system.

Kelley, working closely with the leadership and board of Union General Inc., has been in charge of operations of both hospitals and all related



Lewis Kelley, CEO of Union General Hospital, medical facilities since Feb. 5, the day following the arrest. See Kelley, Page 10A

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MARCH 13, 2016  
DON'T FORGET TO  
SPRING FORWARD  
REMEMBER TO SET YOUR  
CLOCKS AHEAD 1 HOUR  
SATURDAY NIGHT

CASTING  
CROWNS  
AT THE  
ANDERSON  
MUSIC  
HALL

Up Coming  
BLOOD  
DRIVES  
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SPORTS  
BASEBALL  
Fri. Mar 11 @ George Walton 4:30 PM (DH)  
SOCCER  
Wed. Mar 9 vs. Highlands, NC 6 PM  
Mon. Mar 14 vs. Union 5 & 7 PM