

# Towns County Herald

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## Cornett named Indians head football coach

By Todd Forrest  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Last week, the Towns County Board of Education named John Cornett as Towns County High School's sixth head football coach in the last 15 years.

Cornett is currently the head coach of the Lady Indians soccer team, and he will not be holding spring football practice this year. However, Coach Cornett will choose to play two preseason scrimmage games in August.

The former Carson-Newman Eagle coach in Hiwassee after arriving in Florida, then at Chestatee High School in Hall County from 2005 to 2009, where he coached running backs and specialized in an option-style rushing attack. In 2006, Cornett was a part of the program's second trip to the State Tournament after finishing 7-3 on the season.

During his tenure at



**Coach John Cornett**

Chestatee, Coach Cornett's stable of running backs were among the best in North Georgia. Lane Vasser, a 2007 graduate, became the first War Eagle to rush for 1,000 yards in 2005, when he totaled 1,358 yards on the ground.

Vasser was followed by Jo Jo Sweet, who broke the team record with 241 rushing yards in a single game, and he also broke Vasser's previous season total record with 1,442 rushing yards in 2007.

Then came Ben Souther,

who broke nearly every school rushing record in the book during his 2008 and 2009 All-State seasons. Souther would attend the Air Force Academy for two years before finishing his college football career as a Georgia Bulldog.

With the Indians returning plenty of talent in the backfield this upcoming season, Cornett hopes to instill his run-oriented, option offense at Towns County during the summer.

According to Cornett, he came to Towns County expecting to be an assistant football coach with the possibility of becoming a head coach someday. But getting the head coaching gig during his first year on campus came completely out of the blue.

"I came to Towns County with the intentions of coaching football at some point, then eventually becoming a head coach, but I'm thankful that it happened sooner than expected," he said.

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## Fire department ready for anything

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

As a multi-hazard department, Towns County Fire & Rescue of course handles fires – but they also respond whenever disaster strikes, regardless of circumstance.

"Right after the first of the year on Allison Drive, firefighters were called out to a structure fire," said Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland, remarking that the house looked fine from the outside, both before and after the fire. "The homeowners had just laid down when they heard some popping – everybody always hears these popping noises. Tornadoes sound like a train, but with fires, people hear cracking, popping noises. And their first thought was that it was the wind."

It was a windy night, so that could have been the cause of the noise, but the homeowners noticed before too long a growing discoloration on the ceiling above one of their bedroom walls, coupled with an odor of smoke.

"They called 911 and



Precious the Cat, pictured above, was pulled lifeless from a home due to smoke inhalation caused by a January basement fire on Summerwood Lane in Young Harris. Sgt. Tyler Keyes and Sgt. Austin Denton applied a specialized self-contained breathing apparatus designed for use on household pets. The cat was administered oxygen, and DNR Officer David Webb rushed the cat to Hiwassee Animal Hospital. Precious survived the ordeal.

exited the house," said Chief Copeland. "Upon arrival, we

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## Gowder/Heaton court documents unsealed

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
editor@nganews.com

Sealed court documents related to the arrests of former Union General Hospital CEO Mike Gowder, Dr. James L. Heaton, and Dr. David Gowder are now unsealed.

Those documents, including affidavits for search warrants and an affidavit seeking to seize the contents of Dr. Heaton's bank accounts and safety deposit boxes, give details that led to the drug arrests of five members of the Gowder family, and Dr. Heaton.

Investigators found documents and records of payments from Union General Hospital to Dr. Heaton, checks that totaled at least \$210,000, according to the affidavits. Those documents are evidence of criminal violations of Georgia's Controlled Substance Act, according to

investigators.

Investigators have Dr. Heaton on video and audio, and Mike Gowder on audio, both taking investigators there that they had learned their lessons and that investigators would never hear from them again.

The affidavits show the alleged criminal violations to include: unlawful distribution of controlled substances, conspiracy to unlawfully prescribe, fill, distribute, dispense controlled substances, or cause the dispensing of controlled substances.

Furthermore, those alleged criminal violations include acquiring or obtaining possession of a controlled substance by misrepresentation, fraud, forgery, deception, subterfuge, or theft, the affidavits show.

Finally, those alleged criminal violations include conspiracy to acquire or obtain possession of a controlled

substance by misrepresentation, fraud, forgery, deception, subterfuge, or theft, the affidavits show.

Mike Gowder was arrested Feb. 4 in Union County with three counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance and one count of conspiracy; Dr. Heaton was also arrested and charged with 41 counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances, and one count of conspiracy.

Also charged in Union County, Mike Gowder's brother Dr. David Gowder, on 36 counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance, seven counts of unauthorized distribution and dispensation of controlled substances; Mike Gowder's wife Gail Gowder on two counts of fraudulently obtaining a controlled substance; his niece, Jamie Harkins, on two counts

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## Transit, mutual aid discussed in March commission meeting

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

At the March meeting of Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall on Thursday, March 17, the commissioner announced that the county had gotten a tremendous deal on a new transit bus.

According to Commissioner Kendall, the county was able to purchase a new bus to replace an old bus using an 80/10/10 match funding \$35,350.40, with funding of \$35,350.40 coming from the Federal Transit Administration, funding from the Georgia Department of Transportation in the amount of \$4,418.80, and the local county share being \$4,418.80, for a total of \$44,188 to purchase the new transit bus.



**Commissioner Bill Kendall**

This purchase ensures that the county maintains two buses for its transit program, and Commissioner Kendall called the agreement a "good deal for the county."

Squaring up the deal, the commissioner adopted

the supplemental agreement between GDOT and Towns County regarding the purchase of capital equipment for the Towns County Transit.

Another agenda item was the adoption of the Zero Tolerance Drug and Alcohol Testing Policy for Towns County Transit following the second reading of the policy.

"It pretty much says that if you're employed at the Transit in a safety division, you are required to have random drug tests," said Deputy Clerk Andrea Anderson. "They'll run a program on the computer with random employees, and two or three will pop up and they'll have to go and take a drug test right then with no warning whatsoever. And this is a zero tolerance drug test, which means if it comes back in a positive way, there's zero

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## Lions Club celebrates 50th anniversary



Members of nearly a dozen Lions Clubs from around the district join the Union County Lions Club in celebrating 50 years of community service on Saturday, March 19, 2016.

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Choestoe - The Union County Lions Club turned 50 this month, and to

commemorate the event, its members held a Renovated Choestoe School House on Saturday, March 19.

Joining the Union County club for its 50th

anniversary get-together were several neighboring clubs from District 18-I, including Towns County, Gainesville, Snellville, Jefferson, Winder

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## BOE to see three new members

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The March meeting of the Towns County Board of Education marked a bittersweet occasion for Towns County Schools, as discussion turned to the departure of three board members and a long time staff member.

"We are going to be replacing Cliff Bradshaw," said Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong. "He had to resign last week because he's running for the commissioner of the county, so we will be having to appoint someone for that position, and then there will be a special election in November to replace that position."

"We also have Mr. Bob Gibby and Donna Hedden, obviously, who will no longer be with us after this year. Donna has spent all the time that she can spend here, and



**Dr. Darren Berrong**

she has to step down, and Mr. Gibby, this is your second round of terms anyway.

"We're going to be missing three of our board members, so I'm glad that Mr. Jerry Taylor and Mr. Robert Williams are with us, and I'm hoping that we can get three more members involved that are just like the ones we have

now."

Some employee positions at the school are also undergoing turnover. Instructional Aid Barbara Shook is stepping down.

"Mrs. Shook has been working with us for 29 years, and so I have all kinds of memories with Barbara, and when she told me she was going to step down on Friday, I absolutely fell out of my chair and didn't believe it," said Dr. Berrong. "Barbara Shook has decided to step down from us. She has been a staple of our school system, obviously she wants to spend time at home."

Also resigning is high school math teacher Alan Morris, who has decided to look for employment in a different county.

Roy Perren presented the school's Five-Year Facilities

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## Penland places first

Towns County Herald  
News Special

Towns County High School FFA member Adam Penland recently won the Area II FFA Extemporaneous Public Speaking Career Development Event. The event was held at Oglethorpe High in Lexington, GA on March 16, 2016.

Adam will compete for state honors on Friday, April 29 at Macon Centreplex in Macon, GA. The state winner will advance to southeastern regional competition.

The Future Farmers of America Extemporaneous Public Speaking Career Development Event is designed to develop the ability of FFA members to express themselves on a given subject without having prepared or rehearsed its content in advance. After the selection of agricultural topics, participants have 30 minutes to prepare a 4-6 minute speech. After delivering the speech, participants are judged on content, organization of material, power of expression, voice, stage presence, general



**Adam Penland**

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## April 1 deadline for homestead tax exemption

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

April 1 is the final date for Towns County homeowners to complete a one-time sign-up for the county's generous homestead tax exemption.

"If you haven't done so, you've got till April 1 to sign up for your \$10,000 homestead exemption," said Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall. "We had some legislation passed a few years ago that gives Towns County \$10,000 exemption in homestead."

"Towns County is the only county in the state that does that. The others have \$2,000, but we have special legislation passed in Towns County that gives the homeowners a \$10,000 exemption."

He explained that any homeowner who pays property taxes can sign up for homestead tax exemption.

"Anybody that's got a home can go over and sign up for what's called homestead exemption," said Commissioner Kendall. "And that means you don't have to pay tax on the first \$2,000 of assessed value."



**Commissioner Bill Kendall**

Now they assess property at 40 percent of the fair market

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Blue Ridge	1,677.34	Classifieds	2B
Chatuge	1,919.72	Opinion	4A
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		Obits	7A
		Sports	10A

**Red Cross Blood Drive**  
April 12th  
See page 2A

**Easter Egg Hunt**  
March 26th  
Towns County Recreation Department

**Prom Closet is in need of donations for this year's Prom Season**  
See page 3A

**SPORTS BASEBALL**  
Fri. Mar 25 vs. Lakeview 5:30 PM  
Sat. Mar 26 vs. Mt. Vernon (DH) 1 & 3:30 PM  
**SOCCER**  
Tues. Mar 22 @ Lakeview 5 & 7 PM  
Fri. Mar 25 vs. Union Co 5 & 7 PM