

Towns County Herald

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Students are heading back to school Thursday

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Say farewell to the sweet days of summer, students, because school is back in session this week.

Come Thursday, Aug. 4, homeroom bells throughout Towns County Schools will be beckoning all students to dust off their binders, gather their backpacks and head back through those big double doors.

Open House for all Towns County Schools will be Tuesday, Aug. 2, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Thursday morning will be full of emotions – excitement from returning students, and slight uncertainty from youngsters stepping into school for the first time.

Diving into the 2016-2017 school year, Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong and the entire school faculty and staff are ready for another great year of learning and growing.

“Everybody is more than ready,” said Dr. Berrong. “All of the administration has been back and working the entire month of July, so I think

everybody is ready to go, the schedules are all created, and I think the students will all have a place to go when they get here.

“Scott Hamilton, the bus director, has been working on the buses, so they’re all ready to roll.

“We have a lot of new technology that is being installed currently, so we’re looking forward to that hopefully being all installed by the first day of school. We’re definitely ready for school to start.

“We just got test comparisons back about a week ago and we did extremely well.

We want to continue focusing on the academic success that we’ve been working for in the last couple of years, so we’re just ready for school to start.”

To further the academics at Towns County Schools, the school system has teamed up with Young Harris College to offer synchronous learning at the Towns County High School campus.

Basically, high school students – juniors and seniors for now – will have the opportunity to take college level courses to receive credit before graduating high

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Towns County Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong

Treatment Facility dedication highlights commitment to Lake Chatuge

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In conjunction with the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition and Towns County, the City of Hiwassee recently installed a nutrient reduction system at the Hiwassee Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the system received official dedication on Thursday, July 21.

The concern for a nutrient reduction system was first brought to the city’s attention in 2007, when the Watershed Coalition published a Lake Chatuge Watershed Action Plan.

This plan was designed to further protect Lake Chatuge by way of a more thorough disinfecting and purifying of the water that is being deposited back into the lake after treatment, by way of



Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis joined Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall on Thursday, July 21, for the dedication of the nutrient reduction system at the Hiwassee Wastewater Treatment Facility. Photo/Lily Avery

decreasing levels of bacteria and phosphorous byproducts of wastewater.

Phosphorous is bad for the lake because it is a key nutrient in a process called eutrophication, which is when surface waters become

enriched by inorganic plant nutrients. This can lead to algae blooms and growth of other aquatic plant species, as well as oxygen depletion of lake waters.

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Towns County welcomes new 4-H leader

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

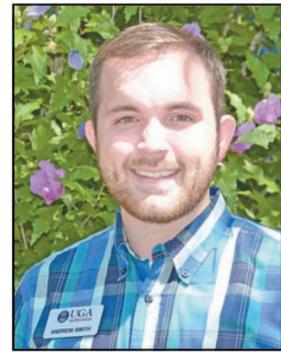
Andrew Smith – Towns County’s new Georgia 4-H extension associate – is no stranger to the ins and outs of the 4-H program.

Having been part of the 4-H program over in Union County since 2004, Smith said he is excited and ready to share his knowledge and enthusiasm with the people of Towns County.

“4-H changed my life, really,” said Smith, 22. “I’m happy to be here now, giving back to the organization that gave so much to me.”

Smith, a Blairsville native, graduated from Union County High School in 2012. All throughout his academic career, Smith has participated in a plethora of extracurricular activities, the biggest of them all being the 4-H program.

After high school, Smith briefly pursued vocal studies



Andrew Smith is the new UGA 4-H extension associate for Towns County. Photo/Lily Avery

at Young Harris College before jumping headfirst into the working world. Smith recently worked as a teller at United Community Bank before pursuing his dream job with the extension office.

“I’ve had a couple of different jobs these last few years, just going through the

motions trying to find where I fit in and got,” said Smith. “My ears belong,” said Smith. “I’ve heard that the previous employee was leaving.”

Added Smith: “Deep down inside, I really felt like it was the job for me. I love kids, I love working with kids – I’m a big kid myself. So going from working with people and just making their checks and making deposits for them to doing this, where I can impact a kid’s life, there’s no way I could be peaceful with myself if I had passed the opportunity up.”

Smith began his position with the extension office at the beginning of July with the understanding that his job would be a combination of two part-time positions, due to the size of the extension office.

The first aspect of the job is the responsibilities of office manager. Along with

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GMRC executive director Lewis retires

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – Danny Lewis presided over his last monthly meeting as executive director of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission on Thursday, July 28, inside the Union County Community Center Ballroom.

While the purpose of the meeting was to discuss business, finances and upcoming projects, the primary focus shifted to honoring Lewis, who announced his retirement earlier in July after working for more than four decades in government.

Heather Feldman presented a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted Lewis’ achievements throughout his career with GMRC. Feldman will be the stand-in executive director for GMRC pending further discussion on who will



Danny Lewis has retired as the executive director of the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, embarking old friend and former GMRC chairman Sen. Steve Gooch

permanently fill the position.

“Thank you, on behalf of all staff of GMRC, for your leadership and your support and your guidance,” said Feldman. “You’ve propelled this organization to new heights, and for that we thank you. Congratulations to you, your wife and your family. May you always have work

for your hands to do. May your pockets always hold a coin or two. May the hand of a friend always be near you, and may all your wishes come true.”

Lewis began working for GMRC 11 years ago in 2005 when Steve Gooch, now a Georgia senator, served

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Smith wins BOE Post 5; Gurtler takes District 8 seat

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Dr. Kilee Smith defeated Nathan Noblet in the Tuesday, July 26, Nonpartisan Runoff Election, and will assume Post 5 on the Towns County Board of Education in January 2017.

Smith won 678 votes, or 52.4 percent of the 1,294 ballots cast, to Noblet’s 616 votes, a difference of 62 votes.

In the May 24 Nonpartisan Primary, Smith received the most number of votes, garnering 38.1 percent of ballots cast in a three-person race. No one had a majority of the votes in the primary, however, which necessitated the July 26 runoff race between Smith and the second highest vote getter, Noblet.

And in the July 26 Republican Primary Runoff Election, Matt Gurtler won



Kilee Smith

against rival Kent Woerner with 726 votes to Woerner’s 448 votes in Towns County.

Gurtler also won in Union County, with 1,471 votes to 493, and Gurtler won in the District 8 portion of White County, with 154 votes to Woerner’s 109.

Woerner bested Gurtler in Rabun County, taking 1,186 votes to Gurtler’s 1,125, but overall, Gurtler won the election with 60.85 percent of the votes in the district,



Matt Gurtler

having earned 3,476 votes to Woerner’s 2,236 votes.

Gurtler will not be facing any Democratic or Independent challengers in November, and will assume his role as Georgia’s District 8 State Representative in January, a seat held for eight years by Rep. Stephen Allison of Blairsville, who announced earlier this year in February that he would not seek re-election.

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County meeting showcases teamwork

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Residents and public officials of Towns County and the cities of Hiwassee and Young Harris attended a public hearing on Thursday, July 21, concerning the development of the joint Towns County, Hiwassee and Young Harris Comprehensive Plan that will help guide development and capital projects over the next five years.

The hearing was intended to inform the community about the purpose of the plan, the planning process and the development schedule, as well as to provide an explanation of the public participation process to be followed by the county and cities during the preparation of the plan.

“The (Comprehensive) plan is basically a road map for what counties and cities do all throughout Georgia,” said Georgia Mountains Regional Commission Regional Planner Joe Rothwell. “The goal of



Joe Rothwell with the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission gives a presentation on the 2016 Comprehensive Plan in the July County Commission Meeting. The plan aims to be a collaborative vision between Towns County and its two cities, Hiwassee and Young Harris. Photo/Todd Forrest

this Comprehensive Plan is to make our counties and cities a better place.

“It helps the community grow better with wiser management of resources and smart investments in utilities. It also includes strategies for

managing land use and supports economic development.”

Just prior to the five-year plan overview, Towns County Deputy Clerk Andrea Anderson reviewed the county’s capital projects from the last five

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Moonshine Cruiz-In thrills car fans

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Eighth Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-in attracted car enthusiasts from across the country with classic cars galore, along with automotive vendors, live music, swap meets, exhibits, and more during the three-day celebration of North Georgia’s notorious history of bootlegging.

During the prohibition era of the 1920s and ‘30s, the illegal moonshine business kept food on the table for many poor mountain families. To prevent the Revenue Men – government agents employed to act against the illegal production of alcohol – from confiscating their bounties, moonshiners built souped-up hot rods, so that whenever they saw a police car with flashing lights, it would only grow smaller and smaller in their rearview mirrors.



This classic truck is a perfect example of what the old Moonshiners used to run in back in the day. The Eighth Annual Georgia Mountain Moonshine Cruiz-In took place at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, the Hiwassee Square, The Ridges Resort & Marina, and other places around the North Georgia Mountains. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Eventually, these good ol’ boys began meeting up after church on Sundays to race their cars on the highways before someone decided to turn their cow pasture into a race track, and that is how

NASCAR was born.

For three days last week, the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds were filled with car lovers of all ages

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GEORGIA MOUNTAIN FAIR
Ronnie Milsap
in Concert
Thursday, August 11

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Friday Night
Football!
Scrimmage vs.
Washington Wilkes