

# Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, August 28, 2013

## Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thu: Storms	86 62
Fri: Storms	87 61
Sat: Storms	84 61
Sun: Storms	81 60
Mon: Storms	81 59
Tues: Sunny	81 59
Wed: Sunny	79 59



Upstream Elevation Predicted 08/28/13	
Lake Chatuge	1,923.83
Lake Nottely	1,772.63
Blue Ridge	1,682.91

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## SPORTS Page 10A



**Football**  
Fri. Aug. 30th  
@ Union County  
7:30 p.m.

**Softball**  
Thurs. Aug. 27th  
vs. Athens Christian  
4:45 p.m.  
Wed. Aug. 28th  
vs. Rabun County  
5:30 p.m.



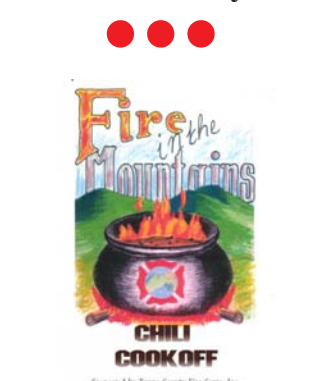
Arts & Crafts  
Celebrate Autumn Arts & Crafts Show  
Sept. 21-22, 2013  
See page 7A

## TOWNS COUNTY Farmers Market

Locally Grown  
Fridays 5:30-7:30 p.m.  
Saturdays 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.



Free Food Distribution  
Tuesday  
Sept. 3rd  
Towns County Food Pantry



Sept. 7th  
10 a.m.  
on the Square  
See Page 8A

## TCMS a Georgia School of Excellence

By Charles Duncan  
Towns County Herald  
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Speechless. That's how one would describe Dr. Darren Berrong after he found out that Towns County Middle School was the top performing school in the 9th Congressional District in 2012.

Simply put, that means TCMS is a Georgia School of Excellence.

"It's rare air," Dr. Berrong said. "I don't even know if I can explain how I feel, or how my teachers feel, or if the students understand what they've even accomplished. I was absolutely stunned when I got the phone call."

"I e-mailed all the teachers immediately," he said. "They are absolutely excited too. Just to be in the same categories with the other schools is a humbling feeling for Towns County. There is not another county school on this list."

"It's a huge accomplishment for our students and our community," Dr. Berrong said. State School Superinten-



Dr. Darren Berrong is speechless after Towns County Middle School is named a Georgia School of Excellence. It's like winning multiple state championships, Dr. Berrong said. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

dent Dr. John Barge sent word to Dr. Berrong that TCMS was among the 28 schools statewide that were named 2012 Georgia Schools of Excellence in Student Achievement.

The honor means TCMS students are among those who have shown the highest performance or highest progress across the state.

"These schools are the

epitome of excellence," Superintendent Barge said. "It took us a while to name the 2012 Schools of Excellence, but we wanted to measure them based on our College and Career Ready Performance Index rather than the old measure."

"With our new, more rigorous accountability system,

See Excellence, Page 12A

## Firewise continues to save lives in Towns

By Heather Poole  
Towns County Herald  
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When it comes to fire, the question is not "If," but "When."

That is why Towns County Fire and Rescue, as well as the Firewise program and the volunteer firefighters want Towns County citizens to be aware of the multiple ways in which they can prevent a fire from taking everything they hold dear.

While we are all familiar with Smokey the Bear warning us that, "Only you can prevent forest fires," Mitch Floyd, Towns County Fire Chief, Tony Harkins, Fire Management, and Frank Riley, head of the Firewise program, might agree that we can prevent more than just that. We can also actively prevent structure fires, and controlled burns from getting out of hand.

Part of the problem is the idea that it cannot happen to us. Many people accept the



Frank Riley

notion that devastating fires only happen out West, but as recently as March of this year, Pigeon Forge, located about three hours from Hiawassee, witnessed a fire so terrible that it cost them upwards of \$12 to \$24 million dollars in damages.

Floyd, Harkins and Riley are asking for more controlled burns and assessments so that a disaster like that does not

See Firewise, Page 12A

## JDA approves Young Harris College bonds

By Charles Duncan  
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The Sole Commissioners from Union and Towns counties say the recent approval of tax-exempt bonds for financing Young Harris College's residential hall, The Towers, by the Joint Development Authority of Fannin, Towns and Union counties, was an easy decision.

Commissioners Lamar Paris and Bill Kendall both say that the college is an economic development driver throughout the region.

"It was really a no-brainer," Commissioner Kendall said. "The counties involved have no liabilities whatsoever, and the new residential hall will more than pay for itself. Young Harris College is a big part of Towns County, and the region



The Joint Development Authority of Fannin, Towns and Union counties have approved bond financing for YHC's new residence hall, The Towers. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

for that matter.

"The taxpayers of Fannin, Union and Towns counties are not responsible for this bond venture," Commissioner Kendall said. "It's just a for-

mality to go through the Joint Development Authority and get this done. The advantage is that Young Harris College won't have to pay taxes on the

See Bonds, Page 12A

## Sen. Wilkinson speaks to the Shakers

By Heather Poole  
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Young Harris – District 50 State Sen. John Wilkinson, R-Toccoa, paid a visit last week to Mary Southern Grill to speak to the Mountain Movers and Shakers.

Movers and Shakers co-founder Sam Fullerton, had only good things to say about Sen. Wilkinson as he introduced him to the morning crowd.

"The good Senator is a true friend of Towns County," Fullerton said. "He spearheaded money for the expansion of the library in Hiawassee, which



Sen. John Wilkinson was the guest at Mary's Southern Grill last week. The man responsible for making \$900,000 in state funding brought in \$900,000. See Wilkinson, Page 12A

## Tomato Festival a hit at Crane Creek

By Mason Mitcham  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Young Harris – The end of summer is an exciting season for those with a taste for wine, tomatoes, or both. Saturday saw locals – and a few tourists, who had traveled hours specifically for the occasion, flocking to Crane Creek Vineyards for its annual Tomato Festival.

The Tomato Fest is a tradition that has grown in popularity over its six years of existence.

Twenty dollars gets you a meal ticket and a wine glass good for all the wine they can taste.

During a quick walk-through of the grounds, one can hear the clink of wine bottles over the sounds of easy conver-



Cornbread Ted and the Butterbeans at the Tomato Festival at Crane Creek Vineyards last weekend. Photo/Mason Mitcham

sation and laughter, while local band Cornbread Ted and the Butterbeans played on a small stage on the front of the lawn.

Owned by Eric Seifarth and his wife, Dr. Deanne Livingston, the Crane Creek Vine-

See Tomato Fest, Page 12A

## Public Speaking Contest just around the corner

By Heather Poole  
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Towns County Republican Party Chairman Mark Wolchko is excited about the upcoming Towns County Public Speaking Competition.

With support of the Mountain Movers and Shakers, the competition is open to all Towns County students.

This includes the local high school, home schooled children, and those that attend faith-based learning programs such as Eastgate Life Academy.

Wolchko has worked hard to provide tremendous incentive for the competitors, awarding \$2,000 in scholarships.

The first place winner receives \$1,000, second place earns \$600, and the third place winner will walk away with \$400.

Wolchko was quick to point out that the participants will finish with more than just money, as they all will have more confidence than they did before their presentation.

Not only that, but all of the speakers will be more aware of what is happening

politically, as the topics require much research.

To help them get started, the students are provided with a list of topics.

There is a little something for everyone, from agriculture for FFA students, to in depth government issues for FBLA participants.

The GOP's belief is that the sooner young people get comfortable speaking in front of people, the better their self confidence will be later in life.

Wolchko also believes being a confident speaker is See Speech, Page 12A

## Chili Cook-Off banner hangs high in Downtown

By Heather Poole  
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There were a couple Fools on the Downtown Square in Hiawassee last week, Fraternal Order of Leatherheads Society that is.

FOOLS is an organization that was organized in 1995 by a group of Central Florida Firemen. "Leatherhead" is a term used in reference to a firefighter who uses the leather helmet for protection.

The Leather Helmet also serves as a symbol for firefighters, bravery, integrity, honor and pride.

Also hanging out on the Downtown Square were members of Towns County Fire & Rescue, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, folks from the Towns County Sheriff's Office, Surface Rescue, and other emergency responders.

There was no emergency in Hiawassee, but the group did come together for a very important reason, they had to hang the banner advertising the upcoming Fire in the Mountains Chili Cook-Off.

The Cook-Off, scheduled for Sept. 7th, is an event many



The Fire in the Mountains Chili Cook-Off returns to Hiawassee Sept. 7th. Photo/Heather Poole

are looking forward to, especially Perry Bush with Towns County Fire & Rescue.

Bush was proud to announce that there are already 16 chefs scheduled to make chili, and the panel of judges is almost complete.

The panel includes chefs from Brasstown Valley Resort and Enrico's, just to name a few.

The group was the picture of teamwork, as it took roughly four men to hang the banner, after two men brought

See Chili, Page 12A

## Sheriff Clinton makes new hires at TCSO

By Heather Poole  
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Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton is hard at work making improvements at the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

As a way of taking pressure off of full-time detention officers, Sheriff Clinton has hired three part-time officers to avoid anyone having to work overtime.

While it is certainly cost efficient, Sheriff Clinton explained that it also helps with training time.

While all officers can have six months of on the job training, they do have to go to the Police Academy to complete it. Therefore, the part-time hires can fill in for them while they are away. This allows for regular pay, but also prevents anyone from getting worn out.

The new detention officer hires include Josh Barnes, James Murray, and Colton Stroud.

Both Barnes and Stroud are Towns County High School graduates.

Sheriff Clinton said he is not only proud when he can hire locals, but also that a majority of the law enforcement in Towns County is local, including himself.

"We have a duty to hire the most qualified applicants," Sheriff Clinton said.

He added that the most qualified usually wind up being local.

Barnes, Murray and Stroud all hope this will be the first step for them in a lifelong career of law enforcement.

Should this be a stepping stone for the young men, it is no small one.



Sheriff Chris Clinton

As detention officers, they have numerous jobs. It is their constitutional duty to maintain the county jail, they also book inmates upon arrival, fingerprint and classify them by offending rank (minimum risk, medium risk, maximum risk), and work inside the jail with the inmates.

"We run a very structured environment," Sheriff Clinton explained. "They are responsible for meal times, four scheduled head counts, random head counts, and checking on the inmates."

They also make sure the prisoners are safe, and assist them in getting ready for court, should they be summoned.

"Basically, these are the guys with the boots on the ground as far as that leg of the Sheriff's Department goes," Clinton said. "We are very proud of all of them."

Also on the list of exciting changes is Copper, a blood-

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TOWNS COUNTY HERALD

