

# Towns County Herald

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## Music teacher Seis will be missed in retirement

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

For 20 years, Cathy Seis – often called “Cat” – has taught music at Towns County Elementary School. In fact, she practically founded the program after moving here from her previous home in Florida. And now, after two decades of teaching music locally, Seis will be retiring from her position at the end of the school year. Many people will know Seis from her involvement with the annual Young Harris Christmas Tree Lighting Program, in

which she has led adorable kindergarteners for rapt audiences of community members. And just like the youngsters at the Elementary School, Seis’ love of music began at an early age, with her brother often teasing her that she “sang herself to sleep.” Seis said that, while her lifelong passion for music always stuck with her on a personal level, she realized she wanted to share that enthusiasm through teaching only after she had started college with a completely different major. “I had a very strong word from God to praise Him through

His music, and I said, ‘OK.’ And doors just started opening – I got into music,” Seis said. She began her 35-year teaching career in northern Florida in a K-12 school, but her dream was always to specialize in working with elementary-aged children. “When I started teaching, I knew right away that I wanted to teach elementary. It was my forte,” Seis said. “I just like the age group better. There’s a little too much drama in middle and high school, and elementary is just an easier age.” Of course, going back that far in her career requires a mention of another prominent

part of Seis’ past that not many of her students, past or present, know about – the fact that she is a military veteran. “I had two careers going on at the same time. I started teaching in ‘87, but I joined the Air Force in ‘77,” Seis said, noting the difficulties that went into juggling being a teacher and an airman. As a reservist, she was called back into active duty following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Moving between her deep love of the North Georgia Mountains that she had originally developed on a vacation in the ‘90s.

When she retired from a military career that spanned 26 years, Seis was pleasantly surprised to find that while settling in wasn’t easy, it was a smooth process made better by the local Parent Teacher Student Organization. “I told them what I needed, and they supported me on every occasion,” she said, unable to keep from chuckling wistfully as she looked over the various instruments sitting idly in her classroom after school hours. “They support me in everything I do. I’m truly, truly blessed.” Although Seis adores



Cathy Seis  
TCES Music Teacher

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## Trooper airlifted after crash during pursuit of speeder

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Editor

A Georgia State Patrol Trooper was transported by medical helicopter for “serious injuries” after being involved in a two-car crash in the area of Haw-Cild BBQ and Anderson Bridge on March 24. The accident occurred at approximately 5:25 p.m. last Thursday after a trooper traveling in the westbound left lane of Georgia 2 checked an approaching vehicle speeding east along the same route, GSP said Friday.



The Towns County Sheriff’s Office secured the scene of the March 24 wreck involving a GSP Trooper that occurred just outside Hiawassee city limits. Photo/Facebook

“While attempting to perform a traffic stop on the speeding vehicle, the trooper’s patrol car was struck by another vehicle,” GSP said. “The trooper was airlifted to Northeast Georgia Medical Center. “The driver of the Ford F-150 was taken by a private vehicle to Chatuge Regional (Hospital) with minor injuries.” Other details, including who was considered at fault in the accident, were not available by press time Monday. Local authorities responded to the scene and worked to clear traffic, and the Georgia State Patrol said last week it was continuing to in-

vestigate the crash. After receiving numerous calls about the accident, the Towns County Sheriff’s Office created a Facebook post Saturday to let the public know what had happened. “On Thursday evening, the Towns County Sheriff’s Office received a call of an accident with injuries on Hwy. 76 at the Anderson Bridge,” the post reads. “The accident involved a Georgia State Trooper and a pick-up truck. “The trooper was transported to a local hospital with

injuries. The driver of the pick-up truck was not injured. “The Towns County Sheriff’s Office held the scene and notified the Georgia State Patrol out of Blue Ridge, GA to handle the accident, and upon their arrival the accident was turned over to them to investigate. “According to the Georgia State Patrol, the accident is still under investigation. The trooper is hospitalized but did not sustain any life-threatening injuries and is progressing well.”

## Young Harris nixes ramp project at Cupid Falls Park

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The March meeting of Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby and City Council featured a review of recent city accomplishments as well as unexpected friction about the future of a grant-funded Boardwalk and Ramp Project at Cupid Falls Park. In the March 1 meeting, Joint Economic Development Director Denise McKay showcased Young Harris’ contributions in her 2021 Annual Economic Development Report. She highlighted the local push to beautify and incorporate art more heavily into the community, giving examples such as the opening of Cable’s Art Gallery, the “Storybook Lane” mural at the Mountain Regional Library, and the installment of a new pavilion in Mayor’s Park.



Young Harris City Councilmen Donald Keys and Steve Clark in their March regular city meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

The most impactful item at the March city meeting was the decision to immediately stop the construction of the new ramp at Cupid Falls. This two-year-long project was to be funded primarily by a \$190,000 grant from the

Georgia Department of Natural Resources, which stated that construction would need to be finished by November 2022. Councilman John Kelley was first to voice his disapproval of the project, saying that he

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## ‘Operation Sting’ continues to produce results in community



Jolena Marvilia Nichols

Mellissa Joy O’Keefe

**News Special**  
Towns County Herald  
The Towns County Sheriff’s Office Drug Investigations Unit, along with K-9 and Patrol Deputies, is remaining vigilant in its pursuit of drug dealers in Towns County. Jolena Marvilia Nichols, 52, of Hiawassee, was arrested March 22 following a lengthy investigation that resulted in the search of a Hiawassee residence. Discovered in the residence were methamphetamine laced with fentanyl, which was packaged for sale; marijuana; and ecstasy, a Schedule I controlled substance. A considerable amount of cash was also recovered. Nichols was charged with two counts sale of meth, possession of meth, possession of meth with intent to distribute, possession of marijuana over an ounce, possession marijuana with intent to distribute, possession of MDMA, aka ecstasy, and possession of drug-related objects. Sheriff Ken Henderson said that methamphetamine laced with fentanyl and the danger it poses in this small community is of great concern to him and his law enforcement staff. In an unrelated incident on March 18, Mellissa Joy O’Keefe, 27, of Hiawassee, was arrested for possession of a controlled substance. Henderson stated that he is pleased with the results of “Operation Sting” thus far and that targeting drug operations in the community will continue to be a top priority for the Sheriff’s Office.



Sheriff Ken Henderson with the latest haul of drugs and cash confiscated during “Operation Sting.” Photo/Facebook

## Isaiah 117 House to support children in legal system



Kathryn Nelson of Isaiah 117 House, center, with Mountain Movers and Shakers emcees Michael Borkman and William “Scotty” Scott on March 25. Photo by Mark Smith

By Mark Smith  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer  
Kathryn Nelson, Expansion Coordinator for Isa-

iah 117 House in Blairsville, spoke to a gathering of about 40 people at the Mountain Movers and Shakers’ regular morning meeting on Friday, March 25, at the Sundance Grill.

Isaiah 117 House got its name from Isaiah Chapter 1, Verse 17, in the Christian Bible, which calls on people to “defend the cause of the fa-

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## Council talks road, sidewalk improvements; welcomes Lopez

By Brittany Holbrooks  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

The Hiawassee City Council met earlier this month to discuss impending fiscal and fiscal changes in the city and to welcome a new DDA Board member, all topics previously introduced during the Feb. 21 work session. Firstly, commuters can expect some changes in town, primarily at the Timberlake Plaza, which will be undergoing a rehaul because it does not fit the safety criteria of the Georgia Department of Transportation. All current entrances will be removed and replaced with curb-cuts and a one-way entrance in front of Tilted Cafe along with a one-way exit at AT&T. Also, the sidewalks are scheduled to undergo extensive



Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales and City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick in the regular city meeting earlier this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

repairs, and the parking lot will be painted to allow for parking at an angle. In other areas of the city, sidewalks must also be corrected to include inclines to meet

the needs of individuals with disabilities. Steve Harper was recently hired on as the Hiawassee Downtown Development Au-

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# Sheriff Henderson appoints new Student Advisory Board



Sheriff Ken Henderson and SRO Donnie Jarrard with the new Towns County Sheriff's Office Student Advisory Board during breakfast at Daniel's Restaurant last week. Photo/Facebook

## News Special Towns County Herald

The morning of Thursday, March 24, Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson, Chief Deputy Gene Moss, School Resource Officer Donnie Jarrard, and Community Relations Coordinator Jill Gittens met with the newly formed Student Advisory Board.

Six students from Towns County High School have been appointed to the board: seniors Macy Brinson, Collin Crowder and Bazya Smith; and juniors

AJ Edwards, Seth Gillis and Alana Stowers.

The first meeting was held over breakfast at Daniel's in Hiwassee before classes began for the day. This meeting was a chance for everyone to get to know each other, set up procedures and plan future meetings.

Discussions included issues the student body has, such as better relations with the Sheriff's Office and law enforcement in general, as well as curfew problems for student athletes having to travel late at

night after sporting events.

In the near future, the board will have the opportunity to meet the employees in the Towns County Sheriff's Office and Detention Center and learn about the duties of the Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff Henderson said he is looking forward to future meetings and events with the Student Advisory Board, adding that it is a great opportunity for his staff to get involved with local students.

The next meeting will be held in April.

# Young Harris...from Page 1A

could not in good faith accept the design.

"I think it will have an adverse impact on the environment," Kelley said. "I don't think it would be something that would edify the appearance of the existing Cupid Falls."

Added Kelley, "From a construction standpoint, I think it has significant challenges, and from a safety standpoint, you don't get much sunlight down there... You're going to have people sliding all over it when it gets mildew and moisture on it."

Working with criteria from the American Disabilities Act, Gibby said the idea approved by DNR was to install a safe ramp from the upper level of the falls to the lower trail to allow public access to everyone.

"We may only have two people in the whole county that's in a wheelchair," Gibby said, "but we have a lot of people who have varying abilities to climb steps or those rocks."

"We have mothers who have children in their carriages that this ramp would help, and we have grandparents who are raising children - their grandchildren - and you're not going to find a grandparent that's going to carry a grandchild down steps to the lower falls."

When Kelley said he had not previously seen the blueprints, Gibby collected meeting minutes from as far back as 2019 to cite approvals for the 300-foot ramp. Those approvals also went as far as Washington, D.C. and to tribal chiefs, all of whom granted permission for construction.

"It's not that we're for or

against it," Kelley said. "We're for a plan at Cupid Falls. The part of the plan I think that we have disunity on is the design."

Having visited the site earlier that day, fellow Councilman Donald Keys had similar issues with the blueprints, agreeing that once a wheelchair was pushed down the ramp, the 180-foot slope would likely be too steep to push a chair back up.

Keys also believed that \$190,000 would not be enough to fund the project and seconded an idea presented by Kelley to install a viewing area at the top of the falls.

Councilman Steve Clark apologized to the mayor but contributed his own opinion: "We're hellbent on creating a ramp to the bottom of the falls. Now we've created the view of a ramp and taken away the view of the falls."

Following that, the council voted unanimously to halt the project, which would have been sent to bid for construction had the project instead been approved.

"I have to honor this vote," said Gibby, but she continued holding to her belief that the lack of the ramp would be "a loss to the larger community."

The mayor and council held a follow-up called meeting on March 15 to discuss the possibility of modifying the project.

Kelley once more raised the possibility of using the grant funds to create a viewing area at the top of the falls with a pergola or pavilion, which would be cheaper to build than a ramp down to the bottom.

Gibby said that the goal of the project was to expand the current trail system and provide a landing space at the bottom of the falls with the inclusion of an ADA accessible ramp, and she did not believe such a design modification would meet the requirements of the grant.

Addressing whether the ramp would be safe for handicapped individuals as designed, Gibby said concerns in that regard were unfounded, as the plans were drawn up by engineers specifically with ADA compliance in mind.

A general sentiment in the called meeting was that, while the council may have been involved in past discussions about the project, members had not been brought in on the finer details until later in the timeline.

Gibby acknowledged that, on this particular project, her vision and that of the council simply did not line up, but that she would work on improving communication of such details moving forward.

Ultimately, Gibby said the city would talk with DNR about modifying the grant for an amended project but that the deadline to use the money was fast approaching, so she believes it unlikely that the state will allow a grant modification at this stage.

In future discussions, the council will look at possibly creating a viewing area at Cupid Falls, making handicap accessible areas elsewhere in the park and putting in a bridge across the creek in the park.

By the end of the meeting, all parties agreed that, despite their disagreements, everyone was working in good faith to achieve the best for the city.

# Hiwassee Meeting...from Page 1A

thority Program Manager, leaving an empty seat on the DDA Board.

First brought up in the Feb. 21 meeting and confirmed in the March 1 regular meeting, Efren Lopez will take Harper's place. He boasts an impressive record, having once been a police officer in Miami, Florida, while currently serving in the Coast Guard.

That being said, Lopez plans to retire from the Coast Guard in October, freeing up more time for him to focus on his new position at the DDA Board.

"I'm glad that I'll be here full time," Lopez said. "I just want to see if I can help in any way."

Lopez's wife, Allison, is a retired teacher and was present at the work session.

"We didn't want to come here and just 'be,'" she agreed. "We wanted to immerse ourselves... and really embrace our new city."

An interesting topic first brought up in the work session was the possibility of an ordinance to handle the problems that come with mining cryptocurrency. The process uses heavy-duty computers that require constant power and equally heavy-duty industrial fans to keep them cool.

Entire plots of land are dedicated to supporting cryptocurrency servers, and as

mentioned by Joint Economic Development Director Denise McKay, "They're in the middle of fields and don't employ anybody... and really just drive the quality of life down."

Many view this as detrimental to the environment, and the noise can be highly disruptive, with Harper comparing the sound of the fans to an airport.

To preempt the issue, Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw recently issued a moratorium on cryptocurrency mining facilities in the county, and in their March 1 regular meeting, City Council members held a first reading of an ordinance prohibiting cryptocurrency mining in Hiwassee.

The second reading and adoption of the ordinance is expected to occur in the April 5 regular city meeting.

In other business, due to COVID-19, employee health costs have risen. Currently, the City of Hiwassee works through Blue Cross Blue Shield, and while other options were considered, the current plan is still the most effective despite the 15% hike in price.

"(Mayor Liz Ordiales) and I have talked, and we just didn't know if it was worth it to double your deductible to save 3% of what the overall cost was," said Tim Barrett of Barrett Insurance during a presentation of rates from different companies in the February work session.

A rise in costs was inevi-

table but tolerable to the council after hearing Barrett's presentation, and the council decided March 1 to remain on the same plan at a cost of \$118 per month per enrolled employee. As Tim's wife, Councilwoman Amy Barrett abstained from voting.

"Our city investment of the year is going to be \$189,158, but it's good and it's important," Ordiales said.

In a bit of housekeeping on March 1, the council selected a new Mayor Pro Tempore from among its ranks to act in Mayor Ordiales' stead should she ever be unavailable or unable to perform her official duties.

"It's a real easy job if anybody wants it, because (Liz) has got this place working like clockwork up here," said Councilwoman Anne Mitchell, who served most recently as mayor pro tem.

The council unanimously agreed to appoint Councilwoman Barrett to the position.

Also this month, the Hiwassee City Council met for two special called meetings to hold a first reading on March 21 and a second reading and subsequent adoption on March 23 of an amendment to the Alcohol Ordinance to include tax on distilled spirits at local package stores.

The Hiwassee City Council meets the first Tuesday of each month for its regular business session inside City Hall at 6 p.m.

# Isaiah 117 House...from Page 1A

therless," and Nelson is in the process of raising money to create a local facility to serve the needs of abused and neglected children in this area.

The organization was founded in 2015 in Tennessee by Ronda Paulson, who as a new foster parent saw the need to care for children in the custody of the state awaiting foster placement.

Paulson's vision is for children, who have been removed from the custody of their parents or caregivers, to have a safe and welcoming place to go that will "help with what is inevitably a traumatic transition."

Thus began Isaiah 117 House, an organization that cares for children from infancy to age 17 who find themselves in the care of the state, directly addressing that limbo of awaiting placement with a foster home or parent.

"I want you to think about what images come to mind when you hear the words 'taken into custody, DFCS custody,' which is (Division) of Family & Children Services," Nelson said. "Or when you hear the words 'removal day' or 'foster care.'"

"Abused children," responded one woman.

Nelson then challenged her audience to think back to when they were children and to consider what it would have been like if they had been told they had to leave their home.

"You had to leave perhaps the only home you'd ever known," she said. "And because time is of the essence, you had to leave in a hurry. You didn't have time to grab your favorite blanket or your favorite stuffed animal, or a

favorite photo of you and your grandpa that meant so much to you. You had to leave. Fast.

"You're taken to an office space where you just sit and wait. There's nothing to do at this office space. You're hungry, but you hate to bother that nice lady that calls herself a case manager because she's busy on the computer and on the phone saying words that you don't really understand.

"Oftentimes, these same children are dirty, they're afraid; and while situations at home are tough, they still miss momma. They still wonder what's going on with momma," Nelson said, painting a very real picture of what happens to children who are removed from abusive or neglectful homes.

"Oftentimes, these children have to spend the night on the office floor of this case worker until placement is found. So, what if, instead, this same child could come to a house. A house where there are shelves of children's books and toys and puzzles. Fluffy couches and colorful pillows, affirming artwork hanging on the walls. A playground outside.

"A place where trained and loving volunteers would remind this child that 'you're not alone,' that 'this is not your fault.' And that is the first part of the Isaiah 117 mission: to meet the physical and emotional needs of children during a very traumatic time. So, we want to meet the needs of these children in those moments as they're waiting to be placed.

"Secondly, we want to provide help and encouragement for the case workers. That's a tough job, and they get a bad rap quite often.

They're painted in a very negative light, unfortunately. So, we want to help and encourage them in any way we can with the children; there will be an office space at the house for the case workers.

"Thirdly, we want to ease the transition for foster families, instead of a foster family being called at 2 or 3 (o'clock) in the morning, only to go the DFCS office and be greeted by a screaming, dirty, crying baby - we can help that situation ahead of time," Nelson said.

Nelson's territory encompasses the Enotah Judicial Circuit. The Isaiah 117 House in Blairsville, which is Nelson's mission, will be the first of its kind in Georgia. There are existing homes in Tennessee, Florida, Indiana and Texas, Nelson said, and they're growing.

"So, we are in the awareness phase. We're just trying to spread awareness. We're just trying to let everybody know what we're about," Nelson said, adding that they are following into their fundraising stage.

And thanks to the generosity of attendees of the Mountain Movers and Shakers meeting that morning, Isaiah 117 House got a good start on their fundraising, as folks donated a total of \$962 - the most money ever raised at a single Movers and Shakers meeting.

Isaiah 117 House is hosting a fundraising luncheon and dinner in April, at which Isaiah 117 House Founder and Executive Director Paulson and others will be speaking.

For more information on Isaiah 117 House fundraising efforts, or to donate or contact the main office, please visit [www.isaiah117house.com/unionluncheon](http://www.isaiah117house.com/unionluncheon).

# Seis Retiring...from Page 1A

her job, the death of her parents made a profound impact on how she looked at the rest of her life: "I really want to make the most of the time I have left."

In particular, she plans to join her fiancé who lives in Tennessee and drives to Georgia every weekend to see her. Additionally, Seis is sure she'll "get into something" involving music, whether that be volunteering for music or drama groups or becoming a substitute teacher.

That which stays at the forefront of her mind is, unsurprisingly, what she will miss the most.

Seis, who was unable to have children of her own, considers her students to be her kids, and when reflecting on her kids, emotion wells up at the thought of all the lives she has not only touched but bettered.

"When you can teach them something and see that lightbulb come on, and they've learned something and it's been from you - that is just something that I really, really like to do," Seis said.

Her teaching style incorporates the Orff Approach, which, according to the American Orff-Schulwerk Association, recognizes that children begin to learn "with what they do instinctively: play."

This style of teaching is meant to incorporate socialization, dance and self-expression in the learning process. For example, Seis has xylophones set up for curious children to experiment with through play.

She believes that the technique is excellent for fostering a passion for music in inclined students, no matter how young.

"These Orff instruments are nice because you can take the bars off so they can have a really positive experience, because if you take all the wrong notes off, they only play the right ones, right?" she said.

Tied to the Orff Approach is a program of Seis' own making called DRUM, standing for Discipline, Respect and Unity through Music.

After a couple of years on the job, the first principal

she worked under asked her to start a new kind of musical program. Initially, he promoted the use of steel drums. Seis had no experience with steel drums, so the pair compromised when Seis said she could use the Orff Approach to work with more familiar instruments.

DRUM is, like the winter chorus program, not part of the regular curriculum. It is instead a special group where children can learn about musical instruments, of which Seis has amassed a sizeable collection, including her own favored ukulele, the aforementioned xylophone and various types of drums.

Students typically practice music in three or four parts and learn "a little bit at a time" until Seis feels all their experiences have added up to something they can share in a public setting.

"I think it's important to connect with all those parts of the brain in a child," Seis said. "If they see it and they hear it and they move to it and play with it, then you're lighting up all those parts of the brain that help you learn. Some kids have to hear it. Some kids have to see it. Usually, it's a combination."

When the little musicians have peaked in their tal-

ent for the semester, Seis has a natural way of recognizing that their work is ready for prime-time: "Now, I always know if it's concert-worthy because the hair on my arms stands up. It's just always been that way."

Every semester earns its own specially designed shirt highlighting the progress made throughout the year, and every semester's tee is on display hanging outside of Seis' suitably cat-themed room.

There is still no official word on who will take up the musical mantle at the Elementary School once she's gone, but Seis has her hopes. The successor she has in mind is someone she knows would understand her creed and carry as much passion.

No matter what, Seis can own the satisfaction of knowing that she put her all into her work, and, in her own words, that she was "so, so blessed" by the support of a loving, open community.

"It took a lot of prayer and a lot of thinking to make this decision to retire," Seis said, "but I am looking forward to seeing this program grow with someone else - somebody that's younger and has a lot more energy and that could really carry on what I've done."

"That's my wish, that they take what I did and make it theirs and make it even better. This is my legacy."



**Question:** Are there things I should be aware of when buying used baby items at yard sales?

**Answer:** Before buying anything you want to do your research. Make sure the item you are considering does not have any safety issues. The website [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org) maintains a list of child-related recalls collected from the major federal agencies.

When considering used items always ask questions. For example, when looking at a car seat ask has it ever been in an accident. Also check to see the expiration date. Expiration dates on car seats will either be an actual sticker or imprinted in the plastic.

Yard Sales can be great places to find deals on children's clothing, but there are other ways you can save money and still get quality items.

At WEC Family Resources we provide our clients with new car seats and new baby beds for free. We also have highchairs, pack n plays, changing tables and other items to deck out a nursery. All used items undergo rigorous inspection by our team of volunteers.

If you would like to know more about our services, please contact us at 706-745-7518. We are open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 9 AM to 4 PM with extended hours by appointment only on Tuesdays.

# Towns County Easter Egg Hunt scheduled for April 9th



The Towns County Parks and Recreation Department is holding its annual Easter Egg Hunt on the Baseball Fields at The Georgia Mountain Fairground Saturday, April 9, at 10 a.m.

There will be three age groups: Toddler to 4 years old; 5 to 8 years old; and 9 to 12 years old. Among the regular 3,000 candy-filled eggs, each field will have "Golden Eggs" redeemable for prize Easter Baskets.

Hiwassee Baptist Association will be helping with putting out the eggs and organizing the groups.

