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'Cost of Freedom Tribute' at Foster Park June 3-5

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – The Young Harris – The Traveling Freedom Tribute, also known as the Traveling Freedom Wall, the Traveling Wall Tribute, and the Traveling Freedom Tribute, will be displayed at Foster Park on Friday, June 3, and will remain on display there through Sunday, June 5.

The mission of the non-profit AVTT is educational in nature, designed specifically to “travel the United States of America showcasing the ... Cost of Freedom Tribute to Honor, Respect, and Remember those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.”

Originally formed in 1998, the veteran owned and operation AVTT was purchased

and reformed in 2005 by retired Army Lt. Col. Don Allen and his wife, Dr. Barb Allen. In 2019, Allen moved the company into its current location near Tyler, Texas, and expanded to “offer tributes from every major conflict from World War I until today.”

Local Veterans Service Organizations, including the Marine Corps League of Towns and Union Counties, the VFW, and the American Legion, came together on Friday, May 20, for a planning session at the Towns County Courthouse to iron out the details and logistics of the event.

Also represented at the planning meeting were the Towns County Commissioner's Office, the Towns County Sheriff's Office, the Towns County Recreation Department, and the Lake Chatuge Chamber of

Commerce.

“It's an honor and a blessing to have this Memorial Wall come into Towns County,” Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said. “We're very thankful for that. We're very thankful for all the people donating their time and all the labor to make this happen.”

“Our veterans are everything. That's what America is all about. We wouldn't be here without them, so we want to pay tribute to them.”

Bradshaw said an anonymous donor came to him last year and proposed bringing the American Veterans Traveling Tribute to Towns County, and because he thought it would be a fantastic benefit to the community, Bradshaw offered for Towns County to pay half the cost and do the legwork setting

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The “Cost of Freedom Tribute” honors America's war dead along with the victims of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Photo/Facebook

Pro Rodeo thrills thousands Memorial Day Weekend

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds held its Third Annual Hiawassee Pro Rodeo this past Memorial Day Weekend, and despite the threat of rain on opening night, the event went off without a hitch.

Thousands of spectators descended on the Fairgrounds May 27-29 to witness the traditional American pastime that included all the bull riding, bronc bucking, calf roping, barrel racing, steer wrestling, rodeo clowning and more that people could handle.

The opening ceremony saw a welcome from Sole Com-

missioner Cliff Bradshaw and Fairgrounds Manager Hilda Thomason, an appearance by Miss Rodeo USA Jessie Lynn Nichols riding with an American flag around the arena, and a performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” by local rising star Summer Rahn.

Fairgrounds Event Coordinator

See Pro Rodeo, Page 8A



The Hiawassee Pro Rodeo offered many hours of traditional American fun over Memorial Day Weekend. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Habitat for Humanity breaks ground on new home



Charlotte Randall of Habitat for Humanity with soon-to-be homeowner Brandy Snow and Modern Mountain LLC's Phil Freitag at the new Habitat home build site on Many Forks Road. Photo by Jeremy Foster

By Jeremy Foster
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – In a heartwarming tale, many readers will remember that the Towns/Union Counties Habitat for Humanity recently made its family selection for the next

home build, picking mother and father of Blairsville's Wyatt, 10, and Elijah, 8.

Ground was broken last month for the beginning stages of construction, with Habitat staff, volunteers, Snow and construction company Modern Mountain LLC of Blairsville

visiting the build site on Many Forks Road with shovels in hand to celebrate the official start of the project.

“This whole project is just gold, and it really melts our hearts every time we are able to do this for someone who deserves it within our wonder- See Habitat for Humanity, Page 2A

City Council talks finances, replacing Timberline pump

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

In the May meeting of the Young Harris City Council, part-time City Finance Officer Ana Hess offered an update on the progress she has made since starting her post in March.

The city has had issues retaining a longtime financial officer, so the last time the council received a financial report was in September of 2021.

Hess said that “reconciliations need to happen” when it comes to the financial records of 2021, reporting that she had already made progress up to most of November. She during the May 3 meeting, and offered

October's statement for review by the council.

“There's not anything of big concern,” Hess said. “There's just updating and getting the system to be as accurate as possible.”

To illustrate the need for such updating, the example of customer deposits was used.

“We have to have a separate account for customer deposits,” Mayor Andrea Gibby said. “For (about two years), the customers' deposits were being returned and paid back to them, but not being debited and credited from the correct bank account.”

While the council didn't have many concerns for Hess, she was happy to answer their

questions that Tuesday.

In short, there were no issues of fraud, no documents for 2020 would be changed, and once Hess completes her task to “make 2021 as clean as possible,” she wants to better streamline the payroll to be more efficient.

“In a couple of months, we'll be up to date,” said Hess, adding that the changes made to December 2021 would take only a week.

Gibby said she appreciates that Hess “wants to make sure we are clean,” and that in the event of an accusation of error in the future, the proper documents will be in order to provide concrete proof of all See Young Harris Council, Page 8A



Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, City Attorney Marvin Harkins and new City Finance Officer Ana Hess in the May 3 council meeting. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

MECHS graduates go forth with diplomas, wisdom



MECHS Class of 2022 graduates tossing their caps after graduating with diplomas in hand last week. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

BLAIRSVILLE – The Union Site of Mountain Education Charter High School celebrated Class of 2022 graduates during commencement exercises on Tuesday, May 24, with 17 students from Union and Towns counties receiving diplomas that evening.

MECHS' mission is “to provide a second chance opportunity for students across North Georgia to earn an accredited High School Diploma in a student-centered, self-

paced, evening public high school.”

Principal Casey Jones welcomed guests into the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center before the recognizable “Pomp and Circumstance” signaled the entrance of the small class as students, who filtered in from both sides of the auditorium.

Emma Catherine Beckham, Ethan Shaun Bruner, Kaitlyn Amanda Daves and Abbigayle Marie Owens graduated with Honors, while Abigail Taylor Duffey and Caylyn Faith West graduated with High Honors.

Duffey and West carried the Class of 2022's traditional “cromach,” which MECHS Graduation Coach Gina Young explained was a walking stick used by ancient Scottish chieftains as a source of balance and support for traversing the rocky, often unstable terrain of the Highlands.

Similarly, students seeking a more suitable environment than traditional high school for their education could count on MECHS.

“Symbolically, the cromach represented the power of preserving good through fidel- See MECHS Graduation, Page 8A

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Habitat for Humanity ...from Page 1A



The local Habitat for Humanity recently received a \$1,000 donation from United Community Bank for Financial Literacy Month. Pictured here: Jimmie Sue Easter, UCB Relationship Manager; Charlotte Randall, Habitat Executive Director; and Adam Born, UCB President.

Photo/Submitted

ful community,” local Habitat Executive Director Charlotte Randall said during the May 18 groundbreaking.

“We are projecting to have this house completed by the end of September, and I am hoping that this will be one of many more affordable housing options we are able to bring to the area, because that is what we are all about, and we want this community to keep thriving,” Randall said.

Phil Freitag began Modern Mountain in 2019, and the company is serving its first Habitat home build.

“Since we have all seen this population grow by leaps and bounds over the years,” Freitag said, “we have seen that there is a drastic need for affordable housing in this area due to the influx.

“We decided that we wanted to be a part of the growth of this community and the working class by building

homes underneath the median range of \$500,000, which most people cannot afford. I love this community and feel blessed to be able to help people with needs of shelter.”

Snow, who has been volunteering her time as required toward forwarding the Habitat mission, said that “from day one of the application process until standing here today, I am just completely overwhelmed with gratitude.”

“This is a huge step for us, because we will finally have a place to call home,” Snow said. “I firmly believe that I see this as God moving in our lives. I was raised on (adjoining) Gumlog, so this is no coincidence and pure divine intervention that my forever home would be placed right here where I feel at peace with a priceless view.

“I love this community so much and want to thank them for everything they have

done for me and my family, and one day I hope to give it all back.”

For people seeking assistance for themselves or loved ones, or to volunteer, donate or otherwise get involved, the Habitat ReStore is available for in-person consultation at 225 Wellborn Street in Blairsville, or they may call 706-745-7101 or email operations@townsunionhabitat.org.

“Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit housing organization working in local communities across all 50 states and in more than 70 countries around the world,” according to habitat.org. “Habitat’s vision is of a world where everyone has a decent place to live.

“Habitat works toward this vision by building and improving homes in partnership with individuals and families in need of a decent and affordable place to live.”

TCSO nets multiple recent arrests with ‘Operation Sting’

News Special
Towns County Herald

“Operation Sting” by the Towns County Sheriff’s Office continues to aggressively investigate drug dealers, resulting in multiple arrests in the last couple weeks.

The Towns County Sheriff’s Drug Investigation Unit, along with the Hiwassee Police Department, initiated a search at the Holiday Inn in Hiwassee on May 18, and methamphetamine was seized.

Michelle Lee Ledford, 45, of Hiwassee, was charged with possession of methamphetamine, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possession of a Schedule III controlled substance, possession of drug-related objects, and possession of a Schedule II controlled substance.

Ronald Eugene Ledford, 45, of Hayesville, North Carolina, was charged with possession of drug-related objects.

In another incident involving a three-month investigation, a search was executed during a probation warrant on May 22 at the Mountain Country Inn in Young Harris. Methamphetamine was seized.

Mark Woodrow Green, 54, of Young Harris, was charged with possession of methamphetamine, possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute, possession of drug-related objects, and possession of marijuana less than one ounce.

Sara Lou West, 36, of Young Harris, was charged with possession of methamphetamine.

In a separate incident, methamphetamine was seized at a Towns County residence May 24, and Shonna Denay Rogers, 40, of Young Harris, was charged with possession of methamphetamine, possession of a Schedule II controlled substance, possession of drug-related objects, and possession of a Schedule IV



Towns County Sheriff Ken Henderson with various drugs and paraphernalia confiscated in the most recent Operation Sting arrests.

Photo/Facebook

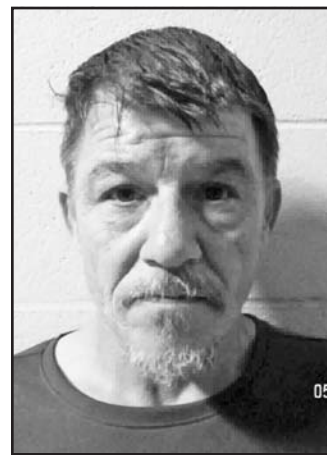
controlled substance.

Sheriff Ken Henderson wants to thank his Drug Investigations Unit and deputies for

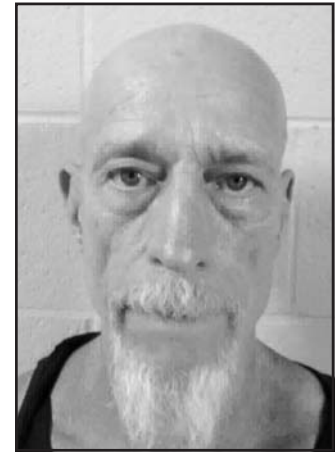
their commitment. The results are compelling and effective, and Operation Sting will remain ongoing.



Michelle Lee Ledford



Ronald Eugene Ledford



Mark Woodrow Green



Sara Lou West



Shonna Denay Rogers

Pro Rodeo...from Page 1A



Barrel racing was one of the many fast-paced events available for spectators of the 2022 Hiawassee Pro Rodeo. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

inator Shannon Baldwin-Nguyen shared her excitement for the record-breaking attendance, as the event welcomed people from all over the Southeast, including Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia and beyond.

“With one hour to go before showtime, we have already sold well over 500 tickets just at the gate, not including presales, and they are continuing to come in droves,” Baldwin-Nguyen said of opening night. “As we anticipated, this is our biggest one yet by far, with nearly 35 food, arts and crafts vendors to enjoy.”

“People are enjoying the mechanical bull, rock climbing/bungee jumping and bounce house activities as just a little bonus before the main event. Everyone has been so excited for this that today we even have residents from a local nursing home coming by buses.”

According to Nguyen, the goal of the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds “is to just bring the community together.”

“I believe the Fairgrounds and the lakes are the anchors to this community, and if you let that die, then you let the community die, so I am grateful for this community for wanting to

keep things alive for all of us to happily engage in together,” she said.

The Southern Rodeo Company out of Rockmart is the partnering organization hosting the annual showing of amazing physical feats of agility, true grit and mettle.

Father-and-son duo Robin and Josh Brooks founded the company in 2007 with the sanctioning body of the International Professional Rodeo Association, and they travel all over the Southeast to perform their art for live audiences.

“The IPRA sanctions over 450 rodeos across the United States, with nearly 3,500 members, so we see a lot of places and meet a lot of people, but this community and beautiful mountain scenery is near the top of our list of favorite places to come,” Robin said.

Added Josh, “We love to see families and people gathering to come here and watch us be able to entertain them for a while; community and togetherness are part of our core values.”

Bull rider Cody Parker is a Mount Airy native who decided in the last couple years to chase his childhood dream, and with just over a year of training and exhibitionism, he competed

in his second Pro Rodeo at the Fairgrounds, with his first ever contest being 2021’s local outing.

“I would always go to rodeos as a young child with my family, so I have essentially grown up around it my entire life,” Parker said. “The rodeo community is very friendly and inviting, with a ‘welcome one, welcome all’ attitude, so I definitely relate to the audience who loves to come and watch, because that is exactly how I felt when I was just a young spectator in the audience.”

“I love the passion and the energy and the entire spectacle, and that is what makes us all feel connected, from the performers to the people in the audience, with friends and loved ones when we are all here as a community.”

To keep up to date with the Southern Rodeo Company, visit www.southernrodeocompany.com.

And for information on all of the upcoming events, tickets, volunteer opportunities or to become a vendor at the Fairgrounds, visit www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com, call the office at 706-896-4191 or stop by in person at 1311 Music Hall Road.



2022 Miss Rodeo USA Jessie Lynn Nichols was a patriotic crowd pleaser during the 2022 Hiawassee Pro Rodeo. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Young Harris Council...from Page 1A

transactions.

Councilmen Steve Clark and John Kelley offered an update on the grant that would have been used to fund the canceled Cupid Falls ramp project, along with the repercussions – or lack thereof – that would come about from the nixed construction.

There had previously been concerns that the city would be ineligible for future grants because of that cancellation, considering all the permissions that had to be granted for the Cupid Falls blueprint. As it turns out, this wasn’t necessarily the case.

“Both Steve and I asked (Department of Natural Resources Grant Representative Lindsey Brown) if dropping

this grant would have any adverse impact on future grants, and he said, ‘Absolutely not,’” Kelley said.

Discussions surrounding the Timberline booster pump were then brought back to the table, with Clark providing an update.

“If we want to try to achieve 45 PSI (at the top of the hill) with a single pump, then we’re going to start pushing 252 PSI,” Clark said. “(The engineer is) saying that, depending upon what’s in the ground, they’ll most likely replace the water line with a new booster pump all the way up to about where the old booster pump is at.”

“The alternative to that is if we have a little less pressure up top, because I think we’ve only got about 31 PSI up there now. If we stay with that, then our head’s only somewhere in about 200 PSI.”

Breaking it down, there are two options. The pump will need either a singular lift station at a lower elevation to reduce stress, or two lift stations with alternating pumps at a high el-

evation to enhance power.

Before a concrete decision can be made, the pipelines running beneath and between the pumps need to be inspected. If applicable, due to supply issues, construction may have to wait on replacements for the old water lines before moving on to the pump.

“Everyone seems to be on the same page right now of just getting rid of the existing booster pump location,” Clark said.

The council also approved a revised zoning map to include the addition of the new Young Harris Fire Station inside city limits and putting in areas annexed more than 30 years ago that had not been included on previous zoning maps.

Gibby said that the North Georgia Highlands Seafood Festival would be taking place June 3-5 at Young Harris Mayor’s Park. Admission is \$5, with kids under 12 getting in free.

The Young Harris City Council meets on the first Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. inside City Hall.

MECHS Graduation...from Page 1A

ity to truth,” Young said. “Often, cromachs were adorned with medallions and engravings depicting conquered territory or extraordinary feats.”

“At each MECHS commencement ceremony, the High Honor Graduate from each site carries their site’s cromach and leads their graduating peers in procession.”

The two High Honor Graduates of the Class of 2022 had their chance then to address their peers and the proud family and friends in the audience.

“We’ve overcome many challenges, yet many challenges lie ahead for each of us,” West said. “We are all better equipped to deal with whatever life throws at us now. As Philippians 4:13 says, ‘I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.’ “Classmates, I hope you too find your strength, your destiny, and your purpose, and may God bless you as you all start your journey through life.”

Added Duffey, “So, fellow graduates, as we are gathered here today to honor each one of you and your hard work, I urge you to embrace the opportunity before you: Take what you have learned throughout the past 12 years ... and put it to good use in the next chapter of your life. While it may feel like this is the end, don’t fret; like they say, ‘Every end is a new beginning.’”

It was with humor that graduate Victor Devereaux began his speech, noting that “they skipped my part, by the way.”

Originally meant to deliver the ceremony’s greeting, Devereaux settled for an address that was slightly out of order. His message was no less poignant, however, and his purpose was to remind his classmates not to back down when facing uncertainty amid life’s challenges.



MECHS graduate Victor Devereaux triumphantly receiving his diploma on May 24 as Union Site Admin Brandon Bradburn proudly looks on. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

“I was afraid of failing when the whole time I was failing by not trying,” said Devereaux, describing the anxiety that came with running from intimidating but necessary tasks. “To everyone that is here graduating tonight, I want you to know that I am very proud of you guys.”

“We have all had setbacks and we have all seen our share of fear, but yet we overcame that and are here standing before everybody who helped us, mentored us, and believed in us, even when we didn’t believe in (ourselves).”

This tied in to all three students thanking MECHS staff and educators for their roles in making their lives, and indeed their futures, brighter with ample encouragement and the possibility of a different path.

Because of their small size, the Class of 2022 also received recognition of scholarships that night, and no small number were gifted funds from the Dr. Teena Atkins Memorial Scholarship. A seat for former Union Site Administrator Atkins, who passed away in March, was left empty in her memory during the ceremony.

Other prominent local organizations that awarded scholarships that evening were the United Community Bank, the Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation, North Georgia Technical College, Appalachian Shriners, and others.

Moving onto the conferring of diplomas, as Graduation Coach Angie Burns called out their names, graduates accepted their well-earned credentials from Principals Jones and Brandon Bradburn before turning their tassels to signify the end of one journey and the start of another.

But of course, the road to life after graduation is a long one, so MECHS administrators gave the Class of 2022 a much smaller journey to complete first – a very short trip to the lower parking lot for a special dinner.

Graduates were greeted with hot dogs, hamburgers, some homemade ice cream from Nana & Papa’s, and pieces of cake made by Melissa’s Custom Cakes featuring the MECHS logo and sprinkled with edible pearls.

Congratulations to the Union Site Class of 2022 graduates of Mountain Education Charter High School.

Cost of Freedom...from Page 1A

up the event.

The AVTT will be escorted into Towns County by motorcade on Thursday morning, June 2, around 9 a.m., and setup will take the rest of Thursday.

There will be an opening ceremony on Friday, June

3, at 10 a.m., including guest speaker retired Army Maj. Bob Bischoff, who is a highly decorated Vietnam veteran residing in Towns County. And Hiawassee’s own singing sensation Summer Rahn will perform a couple of patriotic songs.

The American Veterans

Traveling Tribute display will be open to the public on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, June 3, 4 and 5, at a ballfield of the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at 150 Foster Park Road. The display will be broken down on Monday, June 6.