



Towns County Herald

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Hiawassee Pro Rodeo rides back to town Sept. 2-3

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hold on to your hats, y'all – the rodeo's back in town. This Labor Day weekend, Sept. 2 and 3, the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo will return for the second time this year at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

While it's currently smaller than its May iteration, Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason said that's only because the Labor Day Rodeo hasn't been around as long, and this year, it's shaping up to start spreading out.

About 2,500 people will be able to find seats, and because this is only the Labor Day Rodeo's second year in operation, Thomason doesn't expect a crowd as large as the 4,500-strong spectators from May. That said, she's hoping

for outstanding attendance.

After all, there are many reasons to come out.

The gates open at 6 p.m., giving guests two hours to enjoy the "plenty of vendors" that will be at the Fairgrounds or stop by the Georgia Mountain Fair Booth, where event shirts will be for sale. Designs will be featured on short sleeve T-shirts, long sleeves, and lightweight hoodies.

As a family outing, there are also lots of activities and games for the kids to take part in. Bouncy houses and mechanical bulls will be available, and once the little guys are tucked out, folks can find all sorts of food to fill their bellies.

Thomason said there will be everything from hamburgers, hot dogs and BBQ to funnel cakes, ice cream and lemonade. And once everyone's

had something to eat, they can mosey down to the arena located at the ballfield, where they'll find that just as many contestants have entered the Labor Day Rodeo as the three-day Memorial Day Rodeo.

One big aspect of the rodeo's return is a \$5,000 sponsorship courtesy of John Megel Ford in Cleveland. The company has earned the title of Presenting Sponsor, and guests can keep an eye out for their trucks parked in the arena – or the T-shirts and hats they'll be throwing out to the audience.

"We found out there was a need to have two rodeos a year here at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds because families love coming to the rodeos from all over Georgia and North Carolina," Thomason said, expressing that since



The Hiawassee Pro Rodeo is back this Labor Day weekend for the second time in 2023. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2021

Two square off in Hiawassee; no Young Harris election



Jonathan Wilson
Hiawassee

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

Qualifying for the Nov. 7 Municipal General Elections ended after three days on Wednesday, Aug. 23, and in Hiawassee, two incumbents quali-



Elizabeth "Babette" Dunn
Hiawassee

fied unopposed and two new candidates qualified against each other.

Current Council Members Jay Chastain Jr. and Nancy Noblet were the only ones to qualify in their respective posts, and they will swear into new



Dana Cable
Young Harris

four-year terms in January.

Councilwoman Anne Mitchell decided not to run again this year, and qualifying to fill that post were Hiawassee residents Jonathan Wilson and Elizabeth "Babette" Dunn. See *Hiawassee Election, Page 6A*

Woman dies from cardiac arrest in crosswalk wreck

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

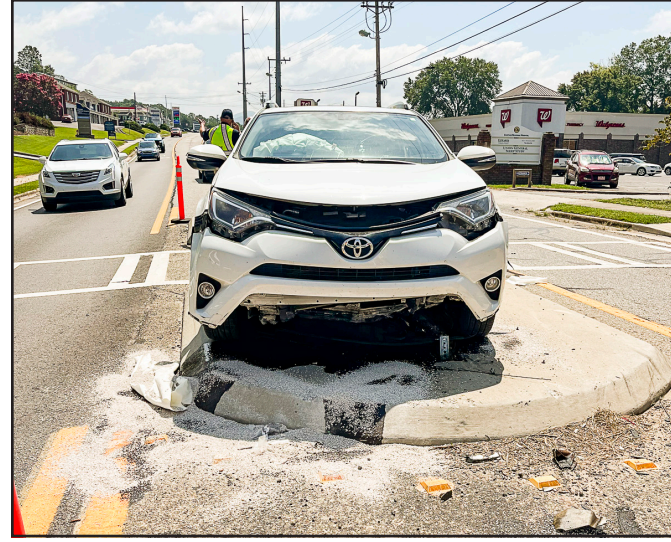
A Villa Rica woman died from an apparent heart attack on Wednesday, Aug. 23, after being involved in a single-vehicle accident at the crosswalk maintained by the Georgia Department of Transportation in front of Chateau Regional Hospital on Main Street in Hiawassee.

There is renewed local interest in the overall safety of the crosswalk for motorists after three collisions took place there in the span of two hours that day, though no injuries were reported in the previous two accidents that happened in the morning.

Talitha Pate, 76, perished "likely from the stress of the accident," according to Towns County Coroner Tame-la Cooper.

"Her daughter said she was terrified of riding with people and car accidents," Cooper said. "Sadly, older people experiencing that level of fear can suffer enough stress to go into cardiac arrest."

Pate was in the backseat, riding with three of her cousins in the vehicle that wrecked, a 2016 Toyota RAV4 headed for a thrift store near where



This accident at the hospital crosswalk on Main Street last week resulted in a passenger suffering a fatal cardiac arrest.

they were staying in a vacation rental off Berrong Street.

The four women were in town to attend the Georgia Mountain Fair and had been out shopping when the accident occurred shortly after noon.

Two occupants of the vehicle received minor injuries and were in good condition at press time, and a fourth occupant had to undergo leg surgery but was in stable condition, according to Cooper.

Georgia State Patrol re-

sponded to the accident, which remains under investigation by the state's Specialized Collision Reconstruction Team.

According to preliminary information, the RAV4 was traveling west in the center turning lane of SR 2/US 76 when it struck a raised curb in the lane. The curb was a cement median forming part of the crosswalk in front of the hospital.

After the first impact, the RAV4 continued traveling. See *Crosswalk Wrecks, Page 3A*

Nearly 28,000 people attend 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair

By Daysha Pandolph
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Concluding a vibrant nine-day spectacle, the 72nd Annual Georgia Mountain Fair reached its grand finale on Saturday, Aug. 26, drawing thousands of enthusiastic attendees from near and far to pack the parking lot and fill the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds.

The opening weekend drew an impressive crowd, engaging in a vast array of events and festivities such as the carnival, the many arts and crafts vendors, the Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant, and a phenomenal selection of live music. And the fun continued all last week.

"I'm having a blast," said vendor Ansley Rowland of The Plate Outdoors on Saturday. Rowland runs a unique apple emporium with menu items ranging from deep fried pies to cider. "This weekend



Every year, the Georgia Mountain Fair has something for everyone, from live comedic shows to live music and heritage demonstrations – not to mention all the vendors, the carnival, great food options and more!

was the busiest event I've ever done, so it's been fun."

Like Rowland, many new vendors experienced their first-ever week at the fair busy

with a steady stream of visitors, such as Heather Carleton, who has spent six years perfecting her dry shampoo powder

Photo by Lowell Nicholson
See *Fair Concludes, Page 3A*

Young Harris woman charged with DUI, meth possession

News Special
Towns County Herald

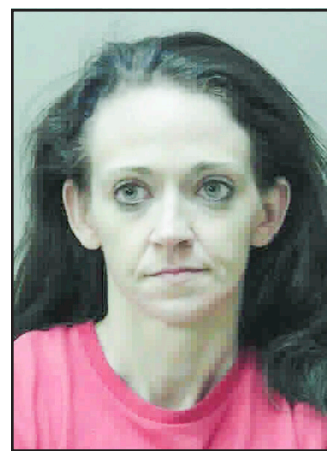
On the morning of Thursday, Aug. 24, Towns County Sheriff's Deputy Christine Moody was dispatched to a suspicious vehicle that was pulled off the roadway with headlights on and running.

Upon further investigation, it was discovered that the driver was highly intoxicated whereby a probable cause search of the vehicle was conducted and an amount of methamphetamine that field-tested positive on the scene was confiscated.

Kayla Renee Campbell, 32, of Young Harris, was arrested and charged with felony possession of methamphetamine; felony possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; misdemeanor possession and use of drug-related object; and misdemeanor DUI.

Sheriff Henderson would like to thank Deputy Moody and the Towns County Investigative Team for their quick response and arrest.

All subjects are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



Kayla Renee Campbell

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,682.46
Chatuge 1,923.72
Nottely 1,772.24

FOOTBALL

9/1 7:30 PM

@ Union County

First Friday Market Sept. 1 See page 6A

Heritage Festival Sept. 2-3 See page 1B

BHR Celebration Sept. 9 See page 5B



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Crosswalk Wrecks...from Page 1A

west, striking the crosswalk's second raised curb with the front of the car before coming to an uncontrolled rest on top of the second raised curb, according to GSP.

The driver of the vehicle said she "was driving in the center turning lane while looking for a road and did not see the raised curb prior to impact," per GSP. Additional details, including other contributing factors in the wreck, were unavailable at press time.

Pedestrian crossing signs sit on the shoulders of the highway leading up to the crosswalk, and flashing signs are located on the shoulders at the crosswalk. There is supposed to be signage on either end of the crosswalk itself, though recent accidents knocked down those signs.

The first accident from Aug. 23 was reported at 10:06 a.m., in which the east-facing sign alerting westbound traffic to the crosswalk median was run over and flattened, Hiawassee Police Chief Jeremy Parker said.

A Hiawassee Police Officer left that first accident at 10:21 a.m., and when a second wreck occurred in the same spot at 10:27 a.m., the officer returned to the scene by 10:32 a.m., and the downed sign had disappeared, Parker said.

Pate's accident was called in at 12:02 p.m., so the crosswalk sign was down for about two hours when the fatal wreck took place.

"The HPD officer asked Towns County Dispatch to notify GDOT and let them know the sign was down," Chief Parker said about the aftermath of the first accident from Aug. 23.

"After the third accident (that Wednesday)," he continued, "the City Water Department came out and put out cones on the perimeter corners without asking GDOT permission due to there being another accident."

"I contacted the City Water Department staff (the following morning) and asked that they add more cones in that area until GDOT was able to respond and replace the signs. The city responded immediately and put out six more cones in that area."

The west-facing crosswalk sign for eastbound traffic was taken out by an unreport-

ed accident the week before.

As previously reported, traffic in the city and county has gone way up in recent years, spurred by the influx of people moving to the mountains during the COVID-19 pandemic and greater tourism interest in the area.

As a result, the chances for motor vehicle accidents have increased as well, with a corresponding greater risk of death on local roads.

Demonstrating the high traffic volume, between 12:01 a.m. on Aug. 1 and 12:02 p.m. on Aug. 23, the automatic license plate readers located on each side of town had counted a combined 282,656 vehicle passes through Hiawassee.

Counting from Aug. 1 through midday Aug. 25, the number had jumped to 312,267 vehicles, meaning that nearly 30,000 more vehicle passes were captured following the fatal accident. And these figures do not include traffic that utilizes State Route 75 North at Bell Creek Road.

Generally, Chief Parker said speeding is not a major issue in the city, but he has seen "a serious problem with motorists violating the central turn lane laws and improperly using those lanes to merge into traffic or staying in those lanes in excess of the distance provided to make safe lefthand turns."

As of last week, 12 accidents had been reported at that crosswalk since GDOT finished installing it on July 8, 2020, Parker said. Before the Aug. 23 collision involving Pate, only one injury – a minor one – had been reported in the 11 other accidents, and four vehicles had to be towed.

City officials worked with GDOT for years to get the flashing crosswalk installed, citing local concerns over the safety of pedestrians crossing Main Street to and from the hospital. In 2019, GDOT officials determined that the need for a crosswalk met the threshold for installation.

"The median is totally out of my control, as Highway 76 is a state route governed by GDOT," Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales said. "The hospital had requested a crosswalk for many years to provide a safe crossing pattern from the hospital to their other medical facilities, Walgreens, etc.



Talitha Pate

"There was an incident years back when a doctor was hit crossing the street to get to the rehab center. It was a joint venture to install the crosswalk, which is very beneficial. The placement and design are governed and managed by GDOT, not by the city nor the hospital."

Following the Aug. 23 accidents, Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw contacted GDOT to request that the crosswalk be completely removed, and Coroner Cooper said she plans on asking the state to re-examine the safety of the crosswalk and its two cement medians.

"My heart's heavy, because these people were coming up here to be with their family and have a relaxing time, and they lost somebody in their family while they were here," Cooper said. "Hiawassee is supposed to be a nice, fun, safe place."

"We just keep having out-of-town people who don't know the area. The rest of us know that crosswalk is there because we've been dealing with it for well over three years now. But somebody from out of town, and there were no signs – I can see why this happened."

Importantly, motorists can exercise due diligence to make themselves safer even when the actions of other drivers remain unpredictable, with Cooper advising residents to slow down and pay attention to the roadway.

Cooper hopes that local drivers who are familiar with the terrain will pay extra attention while navigating roads that contain more and more drivers who are visiting the area, especially coming up on leaf-looker season this fall.

Fair Concludes...from Page 1A

recipe.

Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason was pleased with the results of this year's festival, estimating that they saw nearly 28,000 attendees over the nine days.

The Georgia Mountain Fair draws so much interest thanks to its abundance of activities. Many visitors find their way to the fair year after year to enjoy the local artistry displayed at the craft festival, while others seek the thrill of the carnival rides and games.

"It's a good crowd to be in, and it's very kid friendly," commented Keisha, a young woman who frequents the yearly festivals. "You can't find that at a lot of places, especially outdoor parks."

While lots of fairgoers attend for the fun times and lasting memories, many participants also see the importance of keeping these kinds of community traditions afloat.

Ashlynn Passmore, a 15-year-old Blairsville local, shared her opinion on the importance of supporting community efforts such as the Georgia Mountain Fair.

"A lot of people come around to see the fair because it's exciting and it gives a lot of people in the community something to do every year," Passmore said. "When it's not supported, they won't be able to carry on those traditions anymore."

And the impact of the annual fair on the community is made evident by the massive crowds it draws year after year, sometimes even inspiring tourists to make Towns County their permanent home.

A mother and daughter in attendance this past week shared that their experience in the community on a vacation to see the fair about three years ago was so moving, it persuaded them to relocate to the North Georgia Mountains.

"It's taken a huge team to make all this happen in our community, and people are leaving with lots of smiles," Thomason said. "The primary objective of the fair is to bring people to the county to help all the businesses and help the county."

"We're a nonprofit organization, and our whole purpose of being in business is to promote tourism."



T. Graham Brown was one of many stellar musical acts to grace the stage at Anderson Music Hall during the 2023 Georgia Mountain Fair.
Photo by Lowell Nicholson



Amusements of America brought a super-fun, family-friendly carnival to town for the second year in a row at the Georgia Mountain Fair, which ended on Saturday.
Photo by Daysha Pandolph

Gospel Festival a hit once more in second year

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Union County Schools Fine Arts Center was recently filled with happy whooping and hollering, applause and tears – all testaments to the unbound faith expressed during the weekend of the Union County Georgia Gospel Music Festival on Aug. 18 and 19.

Three concerts over the course of two days marked the entirety of the event, which also featured helpful tables set up on the way in to represent Hope House and Rebecca Brendle's Change in Our World.

Gospel giants The Kingsmen, Gerald Wolfe and many other artists gathered to perform beloved classics like the upbeat "Victory in Jesus" or bittersweet "Wish You Were Here" that didn't spare a dry eye in the house.

On Friday, Aug. 18, the show kicked off at 6:30 p.m. with international hit gospel group The Kingsmen Quartet, featuring Hiawassee's own Alan Kendall, followed by Brian Free and Assurance, The Perrys, Dixie Echoes and Josh and Ashley Franks.

The next day, Dixie Echoes returned to the stage along with Josh and Ashley Franks, while Legacy Five and Real Truth Revival had their chance to perform.

The night of Aug. 19 delivered one last hurrah as The Kingsmen returned to their dotting fans before performances by The Whisnats, Justified Quartet, and Greater Vision, all introduced by Rodney Baucom and a voice notoriously fitting for radio.

Unique to Saturday, however, was the presence of Mickey Bell. For the first time, the Union County Gospel Music Festival enjoyed the presence of a Christian comedian, and although there were plenty of laughs to go

around, his message was no less serious.

Bell seamlessly spun his testimony between jokes, revealing that after being fired from his position as pastor and excommunicated from his church, his life quickly spiraled. His faith shaken, Bell slipped into a depression so deep and dark that he struggled getting out of bed.

"I was begging God every day to take me out of here," Bell admitted in a moment of somber reality, adding, "You may have one person in the house that is sick, but it's going to affect the entire house, and that's what it did for my family."

It took becoming aware of his own family's struggles for Bell to seek help, and when he did, he found a psychologist and a physician who were fellow Christians. They guided him back to the Lord with not just the power of prayer, but medication, too.



Comedian Mickey Bell entertained attendees with secular and spiritual jokes alike at the 2023 Gospel Music Festival. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

"I figure if a diabetic can take shots so they can eat coconut cake, I ought to be able to take a little white pill so I don't kill you," Bell quipped. "Don't be ashamed. If people can take a pill for blood pressure, you can take a pill for your mind."

Overall, Bell's message was that despite how dark life may seem at any given moment, God still has a use for everyone. Perhaps people may feel like their happiness is forfeit, but if they could hold on just a moment longer, their story may lift others up from their own chasms.

Following a performance from Greater Vision featuring Gerald Wolfe on piano, the 2023 Gospel Music Festival concluded on Saturday by having each of that evening's musical performers get back up on stage together to perform Phil Cross and Poet Voices' "Champion of Love."

Closing out an amazing two days of fellowship and worship, Kingsmen baritone and event organizer Alan Kendall thanked the audience "for making this event incredible" along with those behind the scenes who helped make the festival happen, including Chris Adams, who serves as Union County Schools Theater Teacher and McConnell Baptist Church Music Minister.

Kendall revealed that the Gospel Festival would indeed make a comeback next year, and before dismissing everyone, Adams offered a quick prayer that people would do everything "with the joy of the Lord," whether it be "getting gas, getting food or getting lost in the mountains," so that "people can see that joy and wonder why we're so happy."

After all, plenty of folks have been led to Christ not just by a good word, but through good music.



The Kingsmen Quartet was one of many gospel acts to take the stage for the Union County Georgia Gospel Music Festival earlier this month. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Hiawassee Election...from Page 1A

Wilson and Dunn will face off in the upcoming Nov. 7 election to decide the contest.

Wilson is an EMT with Towns County EMS, where he has worked for years serving the public alongside Councilman Chastain. His family has deep ties to the area, and he graduated from Towns County Schools.

For close to 20 years, he has volunteered as a local firefighter at Towns County Fire & Rescue, with a focus on educating local children on fire safety.

"My adult life has been dedicated to service, helping those most in need," Wilson said. "We must support and defend our neighborhoods, businesses, our children, and our elderly."

"I will support local police to ensure you, your children, and your grandchildren can live in a safe, crime-free neighborhood."

"I also believe it is important for elected officials to be held to a higher standard. If elected, I pledge to serve as a council member with respect, integrity and full transparency."

"I am accountable only to the residents of Hiawassee. Our leaders must have a vision that voices the needs and concerns of the people of Hiawassee."

At the end of the day, Wilson said he wants to preserve the way of life people know and love about hometown Hiawassee, especially for up-and-coming generations like his own children.

Dunn comes from the Snellville area, having moved here with her husband Bill full-time in April 2018, though the couple owned a cabin on Fodder Creek dating back to 2004 that they later sold to move into the city.

She has worked as an independent contractor doing marketing/business consulting since 1989 but is not actively pursuing clients.

Last year, the Duns retired their joint consulting en-

gineering business, Preferred Engineering Solutions, so she has had more time to get involved in contributing to her community, for example, volunteering to serve on the Hiawassee Downtown Development Authority Board.

"When I heard that Anne Mitchell was stepping down from her council post, that is something also where I think I bring a little bit different skill-set to the table," Dunn said. "So, I'm really looking to be another voice in the discussion and learn as much as I can."

"I think I see it from both sides; I have friends who are 'local' locals, and I have friends who moved here and fell in love with Hiawassee. I'm not in both camps, but I understand what we have in common, and that's what I'm looking to try to build on."

Ultimately, Dunn hopes to interact with the community at council meetings and beyond to build on the consensus of people wanting to "protect and preserve" the small-town feel of Hiawassee while helping to make decisions surrounding "what direction we want to go into in the future."

"If we don't take care of our future, if we don't manage the growth that's coming, it's going to be managed for us, and we'll end up being stuck with what we get," Dunn said. "I don't want to see us lose our small-town values and our small-town sense of community."

Early voting will occur on weekdays for three weeks prior to Nov. 7 Election Day, starting Monday, Oct. 16, and ending on Friday, Nov. 3. There will be two days of weekend early voting on Saturday, Oct. 21, and Saturday, Oct. 27.

Only registered city residents may vote in the election, and all in-person voting will take place inside the Towns County Board of Elections & Registration Office at 67 Lakeview Circle, Suite A.

Over in Young Harris,

when the dust settled after qualifying ended on Aug. 23, incumbent Councilmen Matt Miller and Terry Ingram had qualified unopposed, so they will swear into new terms in January.

Councilman Steve Clark decided not to run again, leaving space for Dana Cable to qualify for that seat, also unopposed, so she will be joining Miller and Ingram on the council in January. As such, there will be no municipal election in Young Harris this year.

Cable moved with her two children from Paulding County to Young Harris about two and a half years ago, taking over her family's historic building downtown.

Her great-grandparents Tim and Patty Cable built Cable's and opened it as a gas station, service station and grocery store in 1952, eventually expanding to a shopping center. After the main building sat empty for decades, Dana decided to restore it and open her own art gallery there in 2021.

As to why she chose to qualify for City Council, Cable said she has already been very involved in Young Harris affairs, serving on various committees and helping with local events, so sitting on the council is a way to become even more active in her community.

"I want to keep the essence of our town what it's supposed to be – small, yet we need to definitely promote certain things, like parks and events, keep the college up and running with students having something to do," Cable said. "The community definitely needs more opportunities available, so that's my big goal in the whole thing, is helping the community."

In addition to the Hiawassee General Election, there will be a countywide special election Nov. 7 to decide the Education Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax referendum put on the ballot by the Towns County Board of Edu-

cation.

Hiawassee Pro Rodeo...from Page 1A

the Memorial Day Rodeo had grown into the three-day event it is today, it stood to reason that another rodeo needed to be planned.

"It's just a great opportunity to entertain everybody in the North Georgia Mountains," Thomason added, encouraging folks to "come on in" and find a seat when the sport begins at 8 p.m.

Nashville singer Destin Bennett will be returning to sing the National Anthem, filling the same role as he did during the Memorial Day Rodeo.

Contestants from America and Canada will ride bucking broncos and bulls, and according to the Fairgrounds' website, the night will include "top of the line specialty acts."

Free parking is available, but please leave pets at home. Admission is \$20 per person, although kids five and under can get in for free.

The Fairgrounds will continue to be busy throughout the month of September with Dailey & Vincent's American Made Music Festival to look forward to Sept.

14-16. Country, bluegrass and gospel will make up the three-day event. A 1-Day Reserved Pass can be purchased for \$75, while \$180 can buy a 3-Day Reserved Pass, and VIP tickets sell for \$225.

To find out more about the Hiawassee Pro Rodeo or check out the other fun events coming to the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, go to www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com or call the business line at 706-896-4191.

Help support Deputy Holtzclaw and Distressed Veterans, First Responders and their Families

The Military, Fire Fighter, and Cops (MFC) Motorcycle Club's Smoky Mountain and East Atlanta Chapters are hosting the Sixth Annual Charity Fundraiser and Mountain Ride at the Ridges Resort in Young Harris on Sept. 16, 2023!

This year's beneficiaries will be Deputy Patrick Neil Holtzclaw of the Hall County Sheriff's Office and Operation Rally Point in Monroe, Georgia. One hundred percent of the proceeds will go directly to these beneficiaries!

Deputy Holtzclaw lost his entire family in a tragic and heartbreaking vehicle accident on July 16, 2023.

Operation Rally Point is a Veteran-led nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity whose mission is to triage Veterans in crisis and provide immediate access to lodging and additional services to Veterans in need.

The Ridges Resort provides the perfect location situated on picturesque Lake Chatuge, and the curvy and



scenic north Georgia mountains will provide a magnificent backdrop for motorcyclists to enjoy a glorious ride escorted by the Towns County Sheriff's Office.

For those who are sitting this one out, no worries! The Ridges will provide an Oktoberfest-style beer tent to both celebrate the season and wait for returning riders. There will also be food, fun, music, vendors, a 50/50 drawing, and of course a charity auction!

Even if you don't ride, please come out and support our cause and enjoy the family-friendly festivities! This event will be held rain or shine!

Paramount to the event's success is the continued sup-

port of so many incredible local patrons and gracious businesses and donors. We promise your efforts are making a direct and positive impact on many Veterans and First Responders here in Georgia.

Thank you for your continued support; MFC could not do this without YOU! We love our small-town living and supporting our local heroes!

Please reach out to either Smoky Mountain President Steve Wentworth at 321-377-4386 or Deputy Jennifer Fitzgerald of Hall County at 706-768-9643 to support this event. All auction-related or monetary donations will be gladly accepted!

As always, please be mindful of your two-wheeled friends and take that extra look before pulling out or turning onto the road!

Registration will be at 9 a.m. with KSU up at 1030. Festivities will last all day... Everyone is welcome – people do not need to ride to attend – and we are family friendly!