

Towns County Herald

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Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Academic Bowl Team advances as league champs

News Special
Towns County Herald

For the second consecutive season, the Towns County High School Academic Bowl varsity team has received an invitation to play in the Questions Unlimited National Academic Bowl Championship in New Orleans.

The Indians qualified automatically by capturing the Appalachian Academic Bowl League Championship on March 4. They will travel to the Crescent City on May 26 to attempt to claim a much larger title for their hometown.

Towns finished the regular season 9-2 as the Western Conference runner-up to regular season Western champions, Lumpkin County. The Indians were clipped by Lumpkin 630 to 560 in their regular season match, doomed by an unlucky

draw consisting of a round of difficult chemistry questions.

Lumpkin's Luke Schofield set the single season league scoring record this season with 2250 points scored and was unstoppable on that day. However, the Indians finished strong and did not lose heart.

On March 4, Towns County took down Stephens County 300 to 190 after a slow start, with Dren Green and Mike Hires gaining momentum as the game went on.

After winning the quarterfinal match, they faced a David vs. Goliath match-up against Eastern champions, Habersham Central, who went 10-1 in regular season. With only 307 students, Towns took the fight to the AAAAA school with a population of more than 2,000 students.

The Indians raced to a 90-point lead behind a barrage of geography-themed questions and several math questions that Green and Will McConnell answered. However, down the stretch, Towns watched their lead evaporate and ended regulation tied at 240.

It would take eight tie-breaker questions for TCHS to finally send the Raiders packing. Green successfully identified Joseph Stalin as the Georgian world leader who, as a student, rejected seminary teachings for Marxist philosophy and socialism.

After the dramatic finish and a Coke machine break, the Indians returned to hear the shocking news that the Fannin County Rebels had defeated the Lumpkin County Indians

See Academic Bowl, Page 8A



Congratulations to the Indians Academic Bowl Team, which placed first in the Appalachian Academic Bowl League Championship on March 4.

MECHS avoids closure with passage of HB 87



Georgia lawmakers at the close of a recent legislative session in which it is customary to throw working papers in celebration of adjournment. Photo/Facebook

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

The entire staff and countless supporters of Mountain Education Charter High School are celebrating after a bill drafted to save the school from closing cleared a crucial hurdle with passage on the last day of the Georgia General Assembly's 2023 Legislative Session March 29.

House Bill 87, aka the Nontraditional Special Schools Act, repeals and replaces detrimental aspects of a 2021 Georgia law enacted by legislators to correct a state-level overfunding issue at MECHS, which alone would not have hampered the school's ability to educate students.

Unfortunately, the 2021 law also changed the way the second-chance school system acquires charter authorization, putting the burden back on local school systems whose students enroll in MECHS in-

stead of the state.

This proved unworkable when none of MECHS' partnering districts signed on as "authorizing local school systems" over the last two years due to the many unknowns around what such a relationship would entail for funding, accountability and governance.

And with no authorizing local school systems and no other way to secure its charter, MECHS was facing closure after June 30 this year. But the passage of HB 87 will allow the system to continue operations over the 2023-24 school year and beyond.

Essentially, HB 87 permits MECHS to reorganize as a "completion special school," a new category of school that will let MECHS and the two other State Special Charter Schools in Georgia retain their state charter while enabling funding through local school districts.

The bill initially passed

the Georgia House of Representatives in February before going to the Georgia Senate, which advanced it with a few beneficial modifications. The bill then went back to the House for a third consecutive unanimous vote on "Sine Die," the last day of the session.

"Up until (March 29), for a lot of people, there was always that nagging feeling in the back of their head, 'Well, what if something happens and we don't get this passed? Then there is no future for us,'" said Roger Fitzpatrick, MECHS Director of Community Outreach. "Now that we have this passed by both chambers, we are in good shape, and it's really a sigh of relief." Fitzpatrick added, noting that the big winners of the legislative victory are the current and future at-risk students whose lives will be impacted by the self-paced evening high school.

As long as Gov. Brian See House Bill 87, Page 6A

Student speakers shine in Top of GA Speaking Contest

By Brittany Holbrooks
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – Bullying, body farms, and the benefits of travel nursing – these were just some of the many topics discussed at the 2023 Top of Georgia Speaking Contest.

On Tuesday, March 21, and Thursday, March 23, the Glenn-McGinnis Hall and Clegg Fine Arts Building at Young Harris College hosted 17 middle school and eight high school contestants from Union, Towns and Clay County, North Carolina, to deliver finely crafted speeches.

This year was unprecedented with the number of applicants and speakers; even when one or two speakers were

unable to attend, with 21 students scheduled to present, the event had to be split over evenings.

Before each day's "main event," there was an opening speech by Young Harris College President Dr. Drew Van Horn.

"The art of speaking and communicating – it's influencing," Van Horn said. "It's the ability to help shape thought. It's the ability to help others learn, to motivate, and, sometimes, for them to be called to action."

Van Horn shared his hopes that the competition would only be "the first time of many" opportunities in which the students chose to exercise their ability to captivate an audience.

"It's extremely important that your voice is developed now, for you are the future leaders of our country," he urged. "We need folks who have a passion and can express that passion particularly to folks who need to hear the message and who wish to follow those who are willing to lead."

Tuesday saw the opening of the event with middle school speakers introducing a wide variety of topics, including local up-and-coming entrepreneur Margaret Evans talking about her own private business.

In First Place was eighth-grader Sophia Gobin of Union County Middle School, talking about the landmark Supreme Court case of *Miranda v. Arizona* concerning the rights of

See Top of GA, Page 8A



The Top Three finishers for the High School Division of the 2023 Top of Georgia Speaking Contest were Abby Pate, Caleb Sheffield and Loftin Turpin, pictured here with one of the contest's lead organizers Gerry Chotiner. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

North Carolina couple charged with drugs, child cruelty

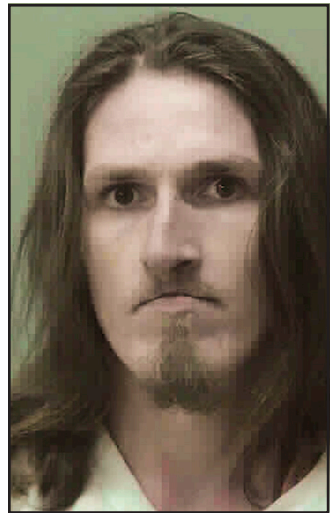
News Special
Towns County Herald

On the evening of Thursday, March 23, during a routine safety check in the Gumlog area, a Towns County Sheriff's K-9 alerted on a vehicle, resulting in a probable cause search and the confiscation of methamphetamine that field-tested positive for fentanyl and marijuana.

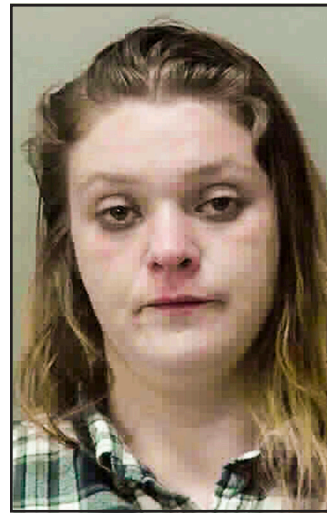
Also in the car was an unrestrained 6-month-old child who was turned over to family members on the scene.

Amber Lynn Rogers, 27, and Brett Andrew McCray,

See Drug Arrests, Page 8A



Brett Andrew McCray



Amber Lynn Rogers

Homeless man with local ties found dead at Lake Nottely

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

BLAIRSVILLE – A homeless man with ties to Hiawassee was found deceased in a tent next to Deavers Boat Ramp on Lake Nottely Wednesday, March 29.

Fred White, 44, had apparently been living in the tent, though the Union County Sheriff's Office is unsure how long he had been staying in the area, UCSO Inv. Rachel Mann said. It is believed that he passed away early Wednesday morning.

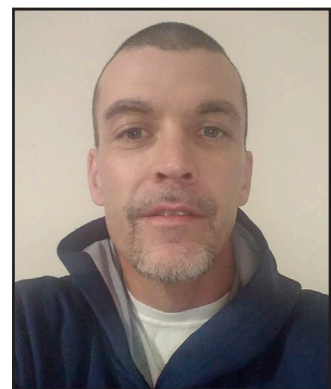
White was alone, and there were no apparent signs of foul play or injury, no drugs or weapons located at the scene, and no indications that he had

committed suicide, Mann said, noting that an official cause of death is pending an autopsy.

Around 11:30 a.m. that Wednesday, a visitor to the public ramp area off Deavers Road in the north end of the county spotted the nearby tent pitched in the woodline just up from the lake. He walked over to check on the tent, saw a man lying inside, and called 911, Mann said.

When authorities arrived, they found a shirtless White deceased inside the tent. Mann said they identified him from some papers he had with him and were able to look up his driver's license, which helped them to locate family members to notify in Hiawassee.

After processing the



Fred White

scene, the Coroner's Office took possession of White's body and the Sheriff's Office collected his personal belongings and packed up the campsite.

See Homeless Man, Page 8A

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Lake Levels

Blue Ridge 1,679.57
Chatuge 1,920.96
Nottely 1,767.23

BASEBALL

2/4 3&5 (DH)
Towns @ Union

GA Legislative Updates

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Plant Affair on the Square

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Easter Egg Hunt April 8

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House Bill 87 ...from Page 1A

Kemp signs the bill before the end of June, MECHS will continue to operate with behind-the-scenes changes that are not expected to affect students' educations, Fitzpatrick said.

And Fitzpatrick has every reason to believe the governor will sign the bill, as Kemp has been supportive of the effort to keep MECHS alive every step of the way.

"I don't think there's any possibility at all that he will not sign it, much less veto it," Fitzpatrick said.

Important details remain to be settled, such as the signing of memorandums of understanding with every partner school system, but MECHS will have a year to implement all the provisions in HB 87,

and there's always the chance to further tweak the legislation if need be.

"As we come across things that maybe were unforeseen, unintended consequences or maybe just difficulties, the main sponsor (of HB 87) has indicated he would be open to hearing suggestions," Fitzpatrick said previously. "Not that there's a guarantee that changes would be made, but he would at least be open to listening."

Fitzpatrick would like to thank the education committees of both legislative chambers, particularly Rep. Chris Erwin, who was the primary sponsor of HB 87, and all the other lawmakers who signed on to the bill and helped to

guide it through to unanimous passage.

He also thanks Gov. Kemp and his staff who "really worked to get this thing taken care of," and he commends MECHS staff members and people in the North Georgia Mountains community for writing legislators and helping get the word out about the effort to save the school.

MECHS began in 1993 with a unified site for Union, Towns and Fannin counties, and it has grown tremendously over the last 30 years, today serving the educational needs of students across 18 sites in 22 North Georgia counties.

The school offers students a unique educational experience based on mastery learning and scheduling flexibility, so pupils who would otherwise drop out are instead

afforded the chance to work at their own pace and attend as needed in the evenings to accommodate other obligations such as work or family care.

It is incredibly important for at-risk students to have access to second-chance opportunities like those provided by MECHS, as the attainment of a high school diploma is well

established as a key factor in a young person's success, and by extension, the success of whole communities.

There's even a silver lining to this whole dramatic process having transpired in the first place, as HB 87 contains seed money funding to encourage the establishment of similar second-chance schools

around the state.

Ultimately, MECHS could one-day serve as a model for success for the rest of the nation if more Georgia school districts adopt the approach and the benefits become apparent enough to convince neighboring states to similarly expand their own options to help struggling students.

The Georgia Mountain Writers Club March 1st meeting



The Georgia Mountain Writers Club

Submitted by James F. Davis

The Georgia Mountain Writers Club met on the first Wednesday of March at North Georgia Technical College at 10 AM as they do on the first Wednesday of every month. If you wish to read or listen as others give their 5-8-minute essays from their memoirs or fiction, you are welcome to attend. Prompts are given at the end of each meeting for the next month's meeting, but there is no requirement to write on one. You can ask for feedback of your reading if you wish.

David Hourdequin led off with an amusing yet poignant story about an abused dog he adopted and its amazing resilient personality.

Pat Miner read a wry story of her second marriage and the hazards of jumping into it too quickly.

Jim Minor, Pat's present husband, followed with a humorous story about his father's lifelong quest to find an enjoyable hobby.

Chris Brown played a beautiful, romantic, and professional recording of a country song he wrote, 'Her Love is So Strong', about a man (himself) who is incredulous

at his good fortune in finding a wonderful woman who actually loves him.

Ginny Valletti told us a story of betrayal and how a group of elderly women were manipulated into making pitiful choices.

Joan Drake reminisced about childhood days gone by, the simpler times in Stratford, CT in the 1960's, and the happiness a child can find in a beautiful back yard.

Dan Smallwood gave a humorous memoir about his first massage by "an unattractive female drill sergeant" which reminded him of being in a dentist's chair. It had a surprising, instructive ending.

David White read a delightful story about how a very 'shocking' event while working as an electrician influenced him to study and earn his electrical engineering degree.

Franklin Boulineau, on his 87th birthday, wrote on the prompt 'What the Dogs Knew' with photos of his deceased wife and dogs, telling about wonderful activities the dogs 'knew' they could enjoy doing with the loving approval of their masters.

Rick Sapp related a ma-

cho but tender 'Bunkhouse Easter' fictional account of a drought that overcame the prairie and the cowboys who had to adapt. Jake sips from his canteen, pours most of the balance of the water in a 10-gallon hat for his horse and saves the balance for a secret hope.

Idell Shook read a beautiful lyrical poem from her chat book 'Song of Spring.'

Ted Furlipa read 'Scenes from a Bus Stop,' the contrasting reactions to soldiers by passersby.

Nadine Justice told about an elegant, petite, irreplaceable woman in her 90s, and thirty years her senior, who took a trip with her through the Canadian Rockies.

James Davis memoir piece was about taking his five-year-old daughter to the office, her hilarious observations on his work, and his pride of her at lunch handling with aplomb linguine without staining her dress to a mesmerized crowd of adult onlookers.

April 5th is our next meeting. Topics suggested are: 'I Don't Think We are Going to Make It,' 'The Most Impressive Person I Ever Met,' and 'Why Didn't I Listen.'

Pulitzer Nominated Journalist to speak at Moss Memorial Library Wednesday, April 12th

Gary Corsair, nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in Journalism and 70 state, regional and national awards, will discuss his exciting and illustrious career as an investigative reporter, editor and sportswriter. Now a resident of Andrews and a sports contributor for Clay County Progress, he has come back full circle to his roots.

Gary Corsair won these many awards during a career in newspaper, magazine, and television in Indiana, Florida and North Carolina. He said his longest stint—19 and a half years—occurred in The Villages, Florida, where he transformed a weekly shopper into a 7-day daily. The newspaper he birthed, The Villages Daily Sun, is now the 23rd largest newspaper in the nation.

After being replaced as managing editor, Corsair became an investigative reporter known for finding amazing, previously untold stories. Corsair won first-place awards for In-Depth Reporting from the Florida Press Association in 2003, the Florida Press Club in 2004, the Society of Professional Journalists in 2005 and 2010, and the Florida Magazine Association in 2015.

His newspaper nominated Gary for the Pulitzer Prize for his expose about American soldiers being used as guinea pigs by the U.S. Army during secret chemical weapons tests



Gary Corsair

in rural Florida during World War II. Alas, he did not win.

Corsair also received first place awards for sports-writing and sports reporting in 2004, 2005, 2011, 2013.

Gary's biggest claim to fame came after he stumbled upon the tragic story of four African-Americans accused of rape in 1949. Gary spent four years researching the infamous case and writing his first book, Legal Lynching: The Sad Saga of the Groveland Four, which made a convincing case that the accused and convicted were innocent. It also sparked a call for justice 50 years after the tragedy that culminated in 2019 when Florida Governor Ron DeSantis validated Gary's book by exonerating The Groveland Four. Gary brings a 17 minute documentary (DVD) to the meeting and is open for questions.

After spending a year as a magazine editor, Gary moved to Robbinsville and served as publisher and editor of The Graham Star for nearly four years.

Today Gary is semi-retired, living in Andrews and putting the finishing touches on his second non-fiction book Cats With 12 Lives. He also covers sports for the Clay County Progress, which brings him full circle to how he began his career at 16 way back in 1976.

Gary enjoys reading, travel, collecting rare 78 records, and flea marketing. He and his wife of 43 years, Gwen, are parents of 4 wonderful adult children and a 17-year old wonder dog, Boo Radley.

Gary's presentation will take place Wednesday, April 12, at 10:30 in the Moss Memorial Library in Hayesville, NC. The event is free and open to the public. An open mike will follow the presentation. Bring a poem or short prose piece of about three minutes to participate. Coffee With the Poets and Writers is sponsored by North Carolina Writers' Network West which also includes writers in Towns, Union, Fannin and Rabun Counties in Georgia.

We will meet every second Wednesday at 10:30 from March to December 2023. Masks are optional.

Peacock Performing Arts Center to host "Satisfaction" The Rolling Stones International Tribute Show

Satisfaction is coming to the stage at the Peacock Performing Arts Center at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 8, 2023. The International Rolling Stones tribute show will be bringing their Billboard highly ranked production to Hayesville for one night only as a part of their 2023 tour.

With over 22 years of combined touring experience and over 4,000 performances worldwide under its belt, Satisfaction has grown into the foremost touring Stones tribute performance around. They have played in some of America's top casinos, performing arts centers, concert hall, fairs, festivals, and corporate events. The cast faithfully portray original Rolling Stones greats like Mick Jagger & Keith Richard's while rolling through all the classic eras of the iconic band and laying down authentic, high-energy versions of the Stones' well-loved music.

Many fans of The Roll-



"Satisfaction" The Rolling Stones International Tribute Show


ing Stones are eager to see this tribute show and relive some of the band's most famous hits.

The event is expected to draw attendees from all walks of life, from lifelong fans of The Rolling Stones to younger generations who have been introduced to their music through popular culture.

Tickets for "Satisfac-


tion" The Rolling Stones International Tribute Show are now available for purchase on the Peacock Performing Arts Center's website, www.The-PeacockNC.org or by calling 828-389-ARTS(2787).

Don't miss your chance to witness an unforgettable tribute to one of the greatest bands in rock and roll history. April 8th at 7:30 PM.



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Top of GA...from Page 1A

individuals accused of crimes. Second Place went to fellow UCMS eighth-grader Adalyn Collins, who spoke on bullying.

Finally, Joanna Kay — also in the eighth grade at Union County Middle — took home Third Place after discussing how sugar affects the body.

On Thursday, the high school contenders had their chance in the spotlight, with discussions ranging from real-life Robin Hood and Australian outlaw Ned Kelly to the environmental importance of public transportation.

Towns County High sophomore Loftin Turpin took home Third Place with his presentation on the corruption of agriculture as it relates to the meat industry, inspiring questions of morality with his explanation on how “3D-printed beef” is allegedly made with the cells of fetal calves.

Second Place went to Union County High School freshman Caleb Sheffield, whose moving speech about devoted and fair leadership came from a place of personal experience in his own military training, and from historical accounts of famous leaders like President George Washington.

After her well-received preview in front of the Mountain Movers and Shakers last month, Towns County High senior Abby Pate won First Place with her informative presentation on body farms and forensic anthropology. Dark humor and a visible passion for the subject took her far.

Contest judges Dr. John Van Vliet, Dr. Jennifer Hal-



2023 Top of Georgia Middle School Division competitors on stage at Young Harris College last month.

Photo/Facebook

lett, and Rick Andres, Esq. did their due diligence in selecting the winners each evening, and special thanks were offered to

2023's Development Team of mentors who assisted students in the leadup six-week training course.

Mentors included Helen Seymour; Jeff Langley, Esq.; Kathy Merritt, Col. USAF, Ret.; Michael Merritt, Col.

USAF, Ret.; Madison Urquiolá; Marsha Hyer; Steve Harper, Esq.; Betsy Young; and Dr. Gerald Chotiner.

Academic Bowl...from Page 1A

in the other Final Four match.

For Lumpkin, it would end four consecutive years of championships. Over that span, they were nearly invincible, with a 49-4 overall record.

While Towns certainly respected Fannin's abilities, a surge of confidence was inevitable, as the Indians had won their regular season match-up with the Rebels.

After the first five questions, Towns got into the zone and never trailed again. Green, Merritt, McConnell, Harris and Hires all mounted a balanced effort and never looked back. Rattling off factorials, African countries, cell biology facts, and even obscure translations into German, Towns raced to a 410 to 360 victory, a 12-2 final record, and the league championship.

Lauren Parker summarized the sentiment of the team well: “It feels great to be on a team representing TCHS with a First Place trophy. I have great teammates who work hard, and the successes we have had together this year feel really rewarding.”

When asked how he felt about winning, Sean Harris replied, “Epic. Pog. Yay-yuh!”

Coach Ken Camp remarked, “Winning the league championship was such a joy and a relief. For most of our six years in the league, we have been very close, but we finally got over the hump. It's rare for a David to beat a Goliath in school competitions, but that speaks to how hard our kids have worked over the years and to the quality of the education they are getting at TCHS.”

Captain Dren Green, the 2021 league scoring champion, did not win the scoring title this season, but didn't care: “I think most people would obviously say that winning a title matters a lot more than an individual award. For us seniors, playing for a championship is a great way to end your high school career.”

Looking forward to the trip ahead, Alyssa Speck noted: “Academic Bowl has not only been a fun and competitive experience, it has also let us all travel and experience new things. I'm really excited to go

to New Orleans to compete because I've never been there.”

The Indians Academic Bowl Team will depart for New Orleans on May 25 and compete from May 26-28. They will face at least six different schools from all over the USA in competition on the 26th and 27th.

Should they win four or more matches in their round-robin group, they will have the chance to play a single elimination final on May 28 to be crowned champion in the New Orleans tournament. From there, they would face the winner of a Northern Chicago tournament virtually for the US championship.

When the team is not competing, they will take advantage of the educational experiences and cuisine of the Crawfish City. Between rounds, they will likely have time to experience the Audubon Aquarium and Zoo, the World War II Museum, airboat rides, and a haunted vampire and voodoo tour that documents the history of New Orleans. They will also get to

stuff themselves with jambalaya, gumbo, po-boys, beignets, and king cake.

Recalling last year's tournament, Dhriti Patel remarked: “This season, you could tell we really improved as the season went on, and we gained confidence about going to nationals. We know what to expect. We believe in our-

selves.”

In the meantime, the team is working on funding their trip to New Orleans. All told, it will cost the Indians between \$4,500 and \$5,000 for transportation, lodging, and registration fees. Players will be responsible for their own dining and entertainment costs.

Many donors have al-

ready given generously to

defray these costs. Should any community business or individual wish to contribute toward the expenses, it would be tremendously appreciated. If you wish to give, you can reach Coach Ken Camp at kcamp@townscountyschools.org or call the high school at 706-896-4131.

Drug Arrests...from Page 1A



The Sheriff's Office confiscated fentanyl-laced meth and other illicit items in a routine safety check last month.

Photo/Facebook

32, both of Hayesville, North Carolina, were arrested and charged with the following:

Misdemeanor possession and use of drug-related objects; felony possession of

meth; felony possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; misdemeanor possession of marijuana; and felony cruelty to children in the first degree.

Sheriff Henderson has stated in the past and will continue to drive home the importance of keeping the citizens of Towns County safe and this county drug-free.

Georgia DOL GA Regional Commissions see mostly lower February Unemployment Rates

Georgia Labor Commissioner Bruce Thompson said that all Regional Commissions reported drops in unemployment rates except for the Atlanta Regional Commission, Coastal Georgia Regional Commission, Northeast Georgia Regional Commission, and Southwest

Georgia Regional Commission which reported unchanged unemployment rates.

“Pro-growth policies that foster innovation and drive success are why Georgia remains the No. 1 state for business and a perennial powerhouse in talent development,” said Commissioner

Bruce Thompson. “Even with a slowing nationwide economy, communities across Georgia continue to thrive with low unemployment and high job growth.”

The labor force rose in all Regional Commissions except the Heart of Georgia Regional Commission.

Employment was up in all Regional Commissions.

Historically, claims increase every January due to temporary seasonal manufacturing shutdowns and the retail sector shedding workers hired for the holiday season. In February, initial unemployment claims decreased in all Regional Commissions, dropping back to normal levels.

Please see a synopsis of each regional commission below: o-t-m – over the month; o-t-y – over the year.

Georgia Mountains Regional Commission - Banks, Dawson, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Lumpkin, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White counties.

The unemployment rate was down one-tenth to 2.8 percent o-t-m, the rate was 2.8 percent one year ago.

The labor force was up 1,347 o-t-m and up 3,916 o-t-y, to 244,792, an all-time high.

The number of employed was up 1,582 o-t-m and up 3,657 o-t-y, to 237,855, an all-time high.

Initial claims were down 634 (-48%) o-t-m, and up 133 (24%) o-t-y, to 681.

Homeless Man...from Page 1A



Fred White's campsite during the investigation into his March 29 death next to Deavers Boat Ramp on Lake Nottely.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

According to his multiple Facebook profiles, White was an outgoing individual who grew up in Casa Grande, Arizona, worked in various restaurants in life and lived in multiple

locations around Georgia over the last couple of years, including Gumlog in May 2020. He also listed Tennessee as a place of residency as recently as May 2022.