



In Our 137th Year

Serving Oconee County



The Oconee Enterprise

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THE HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER OF Jane Amos

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Irma Guest turns 101

Woman celebrates with her daughter. Lifestyles, **B3**



PACS wins fifth game in a row

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We'll report on the TSPLOST referendum.

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Local retired NASCAR driver remembered for his big heart

John Wes Townley killed in altercation in Athens

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

When John Wes Townley, the son of Zaxby's co-founder Tony Townley, won the Rhino Linings 350 NASCAR Camping World Truck Series race in 2015, the first thing he did when he got home was pay a visit to his grandfather, Harold, with trophy in hand.

"Tears were flowing," said close friend Jeff Hood, who has known the professional racer since he was racing go-karts at the age of 9

"For 17 years, I accompanied John Wes Townley to race tracks throughout the United States and Canada," said Hood. "Behind the scenes, [he] was a caring, tender-hearted, compassionate person. That's how I'll always remember him."

On Saturday, Townley, 31, was shot and killed by Zachary Anderson, 32, after Townley entered the home of his ex-wife, Laura, in Five Points, Athens, and came at Anderson with a hatchet, according to the police report.

Laura was also struck by gunfire and was hospitalized with serious but non-life threatening injuries. Athens-Clarke County Police have characterized her injuries as accidental.

"We have not come to a final conclusion about anything yet, as the investigation is still active and ongoing," said Lt. Shaun Barnett of the Athens-Clarke County Police Department Public Information Office. "With that said, we have not ruled out that this could potentially

be an act of self-defense, but the investigation is still ongoing."

Townley was living in Oconee County at the time of his death.

In 2019, Townley pled guilty to disorderly conduct after having been arrested for misdemeanor family violence.

Townley raced for nearly a decade and had two major victories in the ARCA series in Daytona in 2013 and 2016. He specialized in the NASCAR truck series and earned 24 top 10 finishes.

"You would not find a better human being," said former NASCAR driver Terry Cook, who described a memory he cherishes of Townley helping a homeless person. "He was a good, kind-hearted man."

SEE TOWNLEY PAGE A2



Former NASCAR driver John Wes Townley won numerous races throughout his career. [Submitted photo]

A class act



North Oconee High School language arts teacher Cynthia Moore was named District Teacher of the Year last week. The Oconee County High Schools Alumni Association partnered with Oconee County Schools to hold an awards banquet. A story on Moore is on A7 of this week's issue as part of our series about Teachers of the Year. [Photo by Anisa Sullivan Jimenez]

Fall Festival to attract thousands

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The 47th annual Oconee Chamber Fall Festival will have over 200 vendors, said Director of Special Events Chamber Julia Estess.

Those booths, including several new vendors, will be inside Watkinsville's Rocket Field Saturday, Oct. 16 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. A brochure with a map can be downloaded on the Chamber website at oconeechamber.org.

This year, School Street will be transformed into a food alley with the sweet aroma of funnel cakes, corndogs and kettle corn. Families can also get some Kona Ice and sit down with their meal at picnic tables.

Brella Studio offers a pop-up art studio for children. Oconee Music is bringing musical instruments for kids to play with, and two booths are dedicated to face painting. Girls can take pictures with Disney princesses thanks to Brightstone Productions and a vendor is creating custom superhero capes. Another couple of booths will sell homemade wooden toys.

During festival hours, pets are not allowed on Rocket Field.

Church parking is free but donations are accepted. Parking options are as follows:

- Ashford Memorial Methodist



The Oconee Fall Festival will have over 200 booths and attracts thousands of visitors on Saturday Oct. 16. [File photo]

Church, 1 N. Main Street

■ Bethel Baptist Church, 59 N. Main Street

■ Back parking lot of First Christian Church of Watkinsville, 4 N. Main Street

■ Behind the Oconee County Courthouse, 23 N. Main Street.

On the day of festival, the Oconee Farmers Market will have a number of vendors in front of the Oconee County Courthouse and many downtown businesses will stay open.

The Eagle Tavern museum will be open for tours. On the front lawn, the Oconee Tourism Bureau will hold candle making demonstrations, a meet and greet with tour guide Jeff Clarke and Tracy Adkins, author of the book "Ghosts of Athens."

Georgia Bushcraft will also be on the front lawn offering coffee

and hot chocolate, Rhonda Reno with Cross & Thistle is slated to offer handcrafted apothecary items.

The Oconee Chamber Fall Festival, which started in 1974, attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year, making it the largest arts and crafts venue in the area.

In other Watkinsville news, the city is encouraging residents and businesses to show their community spirit and decorate their homes and storefronts with pumpkins, scarecrows, gourds, wooden baskets, hay bales, fall flowers and battery lanterns.

Also, the second Watkinsville Community Workout is this Saturday at 10 a.m. at Rocket Field. Last month, about 40 people participated in the workout led by Core Blend Training and Wellness.

Bishop citizens give input on Watkinsville bypass proposition

No route selected

BY MICHAEL PROCHASKA

The Georgia Department of Transportation does not yet have an alignment in mind for a Watkinsville bypass that would get truck traffic off Greensboro Highway and onto Macon Highway.

At a Madison Athens-Clarke Oconee Regional Transportation Study drop-in meeting last week, a number of Bishop residents said they don't want a Watkinsville bypass to cause more truck traffic in Bishop.

Mayor Johnny Pritchett said he is fearful of traffic getting bottlenecked on the two-lane stretch of Macon Highway that is exempt from a lengthy widening project both north and south of downtown.

Downtown Bishop is largely comprised of private residences, antique stores and the Post Office. Bar G. Farm and the University of Georgia Equestrian Center can be accessed from Astondale Road, which intersects with both Macon and Greensboro highways.

Father Gregory Tipton of Saint Aelred Catholic Church, which meets at the Bishop Community Center, said parents have a responsibility to keep their children safe as they walk downtown.

"We definitely don't want more trucks," he said. "I understand Watkinsville has congestion that has to be alleviated, but you can't fix that problem by doing something unjust to someone else."

Tipton said he doesn't have a particular route in mind but urged government officials not to bring it through Bishop.

Outgoing Bishop council woman Nedra Johnson shared the same sentiment, suggesting that instead of Astondale Road (which is the only road that presently connects Greensboro Highway to Macon Highway), the connection could derive from Flat Rock Road. Although that would affect farm owners, a bypass can't be built without impacting some private-property owners, she said.

At a joint Board of Commissioners/Board of Education meeting last week, BOC Chairman John Daniell said GDOT will study Flat Rock Road as a possible route.

MACORTS planner Sherry McDuffie said that although the bypass will begin south of Watkinsville, whether the connection to Macon Highway be south or north of Bishop is yet to be determined.

"There are no alignments on the



MACORTS planner Sherry McDuffie said no alignment has been chosen. [Photo by Michael Prochaska]

table right now, whatsoever," she told citizens. "If they find out there are land mines, they will know what to avoid."

During the meeting, people were provided a form to write their opinions, which will go back to the MACORTS policy committee before GDOT moves forward on the scoping study for possible routes.

"We are trying to get ahead of this one," said McDuffie, "by getting an idea of what people want and don't want."

Watkinsville Mayor Brian Brodrick did not give a preference on the location of the bypass and said he appreciates the challenges of getting around Bishop.

Pritchett said he still wants a bypass that benefits the town of Bishop, which McDuffie referred to as a "shelved project" due, in large part, to opposition from the University of Georgia and local farmers.

At the meeting, McDuffie encouraged citizens to provide feedback now, because "further down the line, the less they (GDOT officials) are going to listen to you."

The scoping study to figure out alignments has an earmark of \$500,000—\$400,000 of which is federal dollars and the remaining \$100,000 comes from the state.

McDuffie said there will be many more meetings before a final plan is adopted.

"GDOT projects do not move fast when they involve federal dollars," she said.

This issue was mailed Wednesday, Oct. 6, from Watkinsville and Athens, GA. Please inform your post office if it arrives late.

