

The Catoosa County News

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Appeals court agrees out-of-state paper can't take over legal notices

Staff reports

The Georgia Court of Appeals has ruled in favor of The Catoosa County News in its fight to remain the county-designated publisher of legal notices.

The three-judge panel, in a 22-page decision Tuesday, March 5, said the out-of-state Chattanooga Times Free Press does not meet Georgia law requiring that a legal-organ newspaper be "published within the county." CCN Editor Don Stilwell said the ruling is "great news, not just for The Catoosa County News, but for newspapers across Georgia."

"It is also a win for Catoosa County," Stilwell said. "We have been serving Catoosa for 70 years. We reinvest the money we earn from legal notices. We put that revenue back into the community, for our readers both in print and online, in a lot of ways — the best county sports coverage around, community news, school news, church news, upcoming events, special sections and a lot more, that no other publication provides for county residents."

Chief Judge C.J. Dillard, in the court's decision, wrote, "The Chattanooga Times's 'home' is, without question, located in Chattanooga, Tennessee."

Under Georgia law, the legal organ newspaper must be published for at least two years within the county that it is to serve, unless there is no newspaper in the county already doing so.

The CCN, which is on Nashville Street near downtown Ringgold, Ga., and is open to the public five days a week, has been the county's legal organ — the designated publisher of legal notices — since 1949. It publishes its print edition each Wednesday and publishes daily on its website.

The CCN, as the county's legal organ, publishes all legal advertising, including sheriff's sales, probate court citations, bankruptcies, foreclosures and more. In addition to print, legal notices are also posted on the CCN website and on GeorgiaPublicNotice.com — an aggregate website for the legal-organ newspapers from each of Georgia's 159 counties. GeorgiaPublicNotice.com is hosted by the Georgia Press Association.

Three constitutional officers — sheriff, probate court judge, and Superior

SEE LEGAL, A3



Catoosa County's Board of Commissioners has publicized a project lists for road work it plans to do with funds from the TSPLOST, if it is approved during the March 19 special election. / Adam Cook

Voters push for details

County reveals TSPLOST project lists ahead of March 19 vote

By Adam Cook

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With early voting underway and the March 19 election day rapidly approaching, Catoosa County has published its lists for work it plans to do if voters approve the proposed one-percent transportation tax.

Late last year, Catoosa County and the cities of Fort Oglethorpe and Ringgold put the proposed Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST) on a March 19 referendum. The tax projects to bring in approximately \$60 million in revenue over the next five-year cycle and is supposed to be used for transportation-related roadwork.

In recent weeks, residents have shown

up to public meetings held by all three local governments voicing their opinion on the tax.

On Feb. 19, several residents spoke out against the TSPLOST during the Board of Commissioners meeting, and a lot of the concern revolved around not only the financial impact on locals, but also the lack of knowledge about what the plans were for the money.

"You don't have an exact plan for the money, so that makes me think it's going to get washed into some special projects or things that are not actually transportation-related," said resident Sam Martin. "If we had an exact plan of what the money was going to — 'we're going to do this bridge, we're going to do this road, we're going to do x, y, z'... — I would probably feel dif-

ferently about it. There has not been a clear plan for the money."

A week after that meeting, Catoosa County published lists for not only the county, but the cities of Fort Oglethorpe and Ringgold as well.

In a 30-page statement, the county explained how the revenue can be used and what type of projects it plans to work on.

In the funding policy statement, commissioners said, "TSPLOST dollars by law can be used to fund only the following: patching, leveling, milling widening, shoulder preparation, culvert repair, and other repairs necessary for the preservation of roads, streets, bridges, sidewalks and bicycle paths."

SEE TSPLOST, A3

THC oil bill 324 draws concerns from sheriffs

By Adam Cook

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Several North Georgia sheriffs held a press conference Monday, March 4, to voice their concerns about proposed legislation that would allow the growing of cannabis and sale of THC oil in the state.

Catoosa County Sheriff Gary Sisk organized the press conference at his department. The event featured support from sheriffs in neighboring Walker, Whitfield, Dade, Chattooga, and Gordon counties.

The proposed legislation, House Bill 324, was passed Tuesday, March 5, in Atlanta by the Georgia House allowing the cultivation and harvesting of cannabis and hemp products for the use in producing low THC oil. The bill will now move on to the Senate.

The bill, which was approved by a 123-40 vote, would permit the growing of medical marijuana, testing, manufacturing and distribution.

Since 2015, those suffering from cancer, seizures, and other illnesses have been able to use medical marijuana oil. The bill would essentially make the oil more accessible for those in need.

During press conference



Catoosa County Sheriff Gary Sisk, at podium, speaks about House Bill 324 during a special called press conference. Sisk and multiple other sheriffs from neighboring counties expressed concerns about the bill, which would allow for the cultivation and harvesting of medical marijuana oil. The Georgia House approved the bill by a 123-40 vote. The bill will now move on to the Senate. / Contributed

Sheriff Sisk said some of his biggest concerns pertained to how it would impact the underground or "black market," multiple manufacturers popping up in the community, and those with criminal history getting involved in the business.

"We've already seen from other states that've gone down this route that it does not do away with the black market. It only enhances the price of these products typically are fairly high, so then

people don't have a way to afford them and they start looking around to the black market," Sisk said.

Sisk added that the bill lacks certain limitations on who can be involved with the business.

"Another concern that's actually listed in the bill is that you can be a convicted felon," Sisk said. "As long as your conviction is older than 10 years, you can still be a part of one of these manufacturers or distributors."

Sisk gave an example of

someone serving a 10-year sentence and then being able to buy into one of these dispensaries the day after they're released.

With I-75 running through Catoosa County, Sisk said he's worried that new businesses involved in the trade will start popping up near the state line as a way of garnering customers for neighboring states similar to how methadone clinics have tried to operate in recent years.

SEE THC BILL, A3

Mullis-sponsored bill protecting monuments passes Senate

On Tuesday, March 5, Senate Bill 77, sponsored by Georgia Sen. Jeff Mullis of Chickamauga, passed the Senate.

"Last year my district, as well as several others around the state, had issues with gravestone desecration," Mullis said. "While current law provides protection to military monuments and memorials, Senate Bill 77 would extend this protection to all monuments."

"The issue is not a matter of the events people want to remember, rather, the events people must remember," he said. "All monuments are created for a purpose to remind us of certain events and lives that have played a

part in creating the great state we live in today. "In addition, the reason why this issue was brought to the Georgia Senate is that we don't have enough protection for the lives of people who can no longer stand up to honor and defend themselves."

"I was able to work with senators who stood in opposition to this bill and support two amendments on the Senate floor that may help ease tension from those opposed to the underlying debate. I look forward to seeing this bill move through the House and signed by the governor in the near future."

SEE MONUMENTS, A9

Sen. Jeff Mullis said, "While current law provides protection to military monuments and memorials, Senate Bill 77 would extend this protection to all monuments."



Georgia Senate

75 cents



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♦ Ringgold, Ga. ♦
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Back Alley is bringing 'Of Mice and Men' to stage in LaFayette. Story on page A11.

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Catoosa County high-schoolers attend a Rising Professionals seminar. Story on page B7.