



The Clayton Tribune
PRESENTS
EVERYDAY HEROES
PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

OCT. 27, 2016



TOP: Volunteer firefighters from Station 5 and Station 12 work together Oct. 19, 2015, to extinguish flames at the rear of Mama G's Italian Restaurant.
AT RIGHT: Rabun County Fire Chief James Reed drives one of the county's fire trucks.

Trevor McNaboe/The Clayton Tribune

*All men are created equal,
then a few become firemen.*
— Anonymous

RABUN COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

BY TREVOR MCNABOE ♦ STAFF WRITER

The Rabun County Fire Department is charged with providing safety coverage for more than 360 square miles of mountainous terrain. It's a feat accomplished on the backs of just six paid personnel and around 200 volunteers.

Volunteers are relied upon heavily to ensure Rabun County residents have a response for fires, potential fires and vehicle collisions.

Two of the county's paid firemen are Fire Chief James Reed and Assistant Chief Justin Upchurch. They handle the administrative duties for the 12-station fire department.

"We're here to supplement the volunteers," Reed said. "If we hear a call go out, we try to get somebody over to it."

The remaining four paid personnel are full-time firefighters who work 24-hour shifts consisting of one day on call and three days off.

"We all started as volunteers, so we know what it's like," Reed said.

In addition to their volunteer experience, Reed and Upchurch are both second generation firefighters. Reed began volunteering in 1982 at the age of 16. His father was a volunteer firefighter for the Satolah Fire Station (Station 8). Upchurch has been in the business of fighting fires for the past two decades in part because he saw his father do it.

"My dad was a firefighter, so I've always had that want but I didn't know it until I started volunteering," Upchurch said.

And volunteers are a resource for which the fire department always has a need.

"You don't always get all 200 on call. You only get who is available, especially during the day in the middle of the week you might only get five people," Reed said.

One example of the need for more volunteers is the unbalanced number of firefighters at each station.

"Usually the people that volunteer at a particular station live or work around that area, so you may have a slow station that has 25 members and a busy station that 10," Upchurch said. "There's really no way to adjust that."

While the need for more volunteer firefighters is always there, each volunteer must go through a process in order to be ready to serve Rabun County. That process begins with prospective volunteers filling out an application, going through a background check and then being voted in.

Reed said there are varying stages of serving as a volunteer firefighter, including explorers, support firefighter and registered volunteer. An explorer is between the ages of 14-18. They help with tasks around the fire station and are not allowed to assist in extinguishing fires. Support firefighters, similar to explorers, do not enter burning buildings to douse blazes. Support firefighters are required to complete a 32-hour course. From there, they can transition to registered volunteer with the completion of 84 hours of coursework and a live fire response.

A majority of the firefighters in Rabun County also have other occupations. When a call is received by 911, dispatch alerts the volunteers by the pager each firefighter

carries and through a smartphone application.

"Back in the day you could leave your job and they would still pay you for it, but that changed over the years," Reed said. "You used to go to the station, get a truck and fight a fire. If you don't get paid like it is now, you probably aren't going to leave your job."

Upchurch estimates the Rabun County Fire Department receives around 1,900-2,000 calls per year, although not all of them are for fires. While extinguishing fires is the main role of the fire department, it is also called upon to respond for medical support.

"Most of our calls are medical related calls so we encourage our people (volunteers) to be certified in emergency medical response, First Aid and CPR," Reed said.

Each of the fire department's stations is headed by a captain, except the Sky Valley/Scaly Mountain, North Carolina, Fire Station (Station 9) and the Tallulah Falls Fire Station (Station 7). Both of those stations are headed by chiefs and both are border stations that serve more than just Rabun County.

"(Captain) is an elected position," Upchurch said. "Each station elects their own officers."

With all the responsibility that comes with being a firefighter, Upchurch and Reed find it rewarding to keep Rabun safe.

"Being able to help somebody, to save lives and property is what we're here for," Reed said.



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RABUN COUNTY FIRE STATIONS



RABUN COUNTY FIRE CHIEF JAMES REED

Station 1 — Clayton
Pictured from left are David Ramey, Ryan Bramblett, Logan Carnes and Capt. Andy Beck. Not pictured are Robert Gardner, Joseph Deal and Chris Metrick.



Station 2 — Warwoman
Pictured from left are Johnny Cannon, Capt. Josh Bleckley, Bryan Bleckley, Kenny Watts, Dalton Freeman and Marty Franklin. Not pictured are Scott Bleckley, Terry Bleckley, Travis Bleckley, Darren Freeman, Brady Galloway, Greg Houck, Kelsey Singleton, Will Singleton, Brad Speed and Seth Speed.



Station 3 — Tallulah-Persimmon
Pictured from left are Tom Madison, Shayne Harvey, Jonathan Avery, Jeff Hooper, Capt. Chad Dixon, Lucas Bynum, Corey Beck and Eric Bradshaw. Not pictured are Josh Harvey, Michael Mazarky, Jesse Chamblee and Dennis Chamblee.

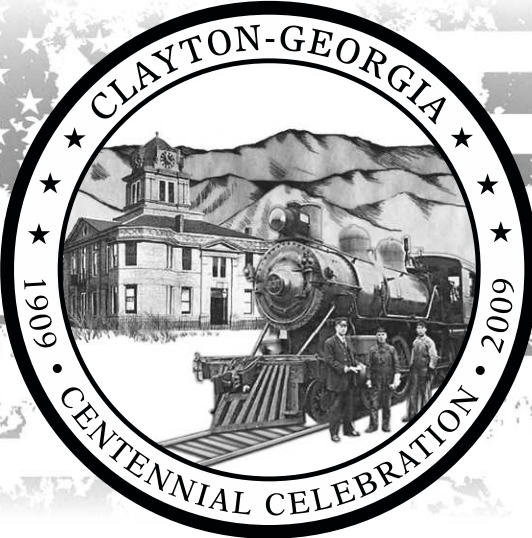
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RABUN COUNTY FIRE STATIONS



Station 4 — Lakemont-Wiley
Pictured back row from left are Doug Wayne, Kay Arrowood and Gordon Van Mol. Pictured front row from left are Matthew Harbin, Pocket Shirley and Zach Collins.



Station 5 — Valley
Pictured from left are Bobby Jenkins, Capt. Gordon Jenkins, Kelly Holland, Steve Rickey, Kenny Walker, Dusty Gaston, Justin English, Shane Wall and L.J. Craig.



Station 6 — Chechero
Pictured back row from left are McCord Johnson, Jason Roach, Justin Pate, Mike Hopkins, Jeremy Paul, Timothy Burrell, Dustin Henslee, Austin Kilby, Franklin Henslee, Issac Williams, Kenneth Queen and Zachary Allgary. Pictured front row from left are Devin Roach, Kristy Roach, Nicole Jennings, Jeanie Kilby, Dottie Clark, Kyle Shelton, Rita Henslee and Justin Buchanan. Pictured kneeling are Keenan Garrett and Kevin Garrett.

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RABUN COUNTY FIRE STATIONS



Station 7 — Tallulah Falls
From left to right, Dustin Rogers, Mike Early, Chrystal Nall, Matt Nall and Bill Goatcher. Not pictured is Chief Robby McCutcheon.



Station 8 — Satolah
From left: James Reed, Michael Vilardo, John Munger and Capt. Seth Schmitt. Volunteers not pictured include Wesley Billingsley, Kelly Dendy, Corbin Hawkins, Kyle Keener, Charles Reed, Robby Reed, Austin Reese, Jason Wilbanks, Terry Winn, Ben Zachary and Dillon Schmitt.



**Station 9 — Sky Valley/
Scaly Mountain, North Carolina**
Back from left: Jamie Chastain, Scott Houser, Greg Johnson, Isaac Cannon (former), Assistant Chief Lamar Billingsley and Chandler Ellenburg. Middle from left: Kenny Chastain (former), Neal Chastain, Chris Conway, Claudette Chastain, Tom Sherburn and Cindy Barloga. Front from left: Mark Gramlich, Chief Tommy James, Blair Hames (former), Mark Dryman, Robin Houser and Kay Sherburn. Not pictured: Jeremy Keener, Katie Keener, Chris Barden, Moody Barrick, Paul Bathmann, Capt. Michael Chastain, Gabrielle Conway, Alex Foltz, Ryan Houser, Tucker Johnson, Jesse Machuca and Tanner Tremblay.

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RABUN COUNTY FIRE STATIONS



Station 10 — Lakes

Back row from left: Je rey Lovell, Barry Wood, Matt Wood, Marvin Watts, Billy Carter and Jerry Burrell. Front row from left: Tate Nichols, Sophie Merkle and Michael Crowe. Not pictured are Kenney Watts, Hunter Hargrave, Kerri Wood, Steve York, Jess Watts, Bryce Shackleford, Dako- ta Freeman, Christa Ramey as well as Explorers Avery Merkel, Anna Belle Watts and Tanner Jarrard.



Station 11 — Wildcat

Wildcat station volunteers include Pat Thompson, Larry Turpin, Ranny Whitney, Jimmy Thompson, Larry Vaughan, Gaston Brawley, Brendan Thompson, Marcus Thompson and Sean Thompson. Not pictured are Johnny Adams, Cannon Rhoad, Billy Martin, Curt Koch and Milas Thompson.



Station 12 — Tiger

Capt. Boyce Speed, Thomas Ramey Jr., Tim Wall, David Jones, Fred Beck, Justin Coalley, Jerry Buice, Cody Whitmire, Brian Dickerson, Heath Burrell, Austin Carter, Ricky McCrackin, Keith Watts, Jess Watts, Dalton Blalock, Will McCracken, Travis Marsengill, Jesse Hooper, Logan Bettencova, Brandon Neely and Dwight Allgary.



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ABOVE: An aerial rescue platform is lifted off the ground in August 2014 at a Department of Natural Resources long line rescue exercise. The event was attended by members of multiple rescue organizations operating in the region. AT RIGHT: Capt. Steven Turner carefully pilots his aircraft into Tallulah Gorge during a long line rescue exercise in August 2014. Pilots and their crews train at least once a month and according to Brandon Pierce, aerial observer, the crews go up an average of about 25 hours per month.

Tribune File Photos



INTO THE DEPTHS TALLULAH GORGE RESCUE

BY TREVOR MCNABOE ♦ STAFF WRITER

Inside the Rabun County Search and Rescue Squad — a faction of the Rabun County Emergency Management Agency — is a division of life-savers known as Tallulah Gorge Rescue.

Working in conjunction with Habersham County, the main duties of this small squad is providing assistance to Tallulah Gorge hikers and rappelling into the depths of the gorge.

“Most of what we do is carry people out of the gorge that shouldn’t have been in there, whether it’s health related or not,” said Rescue Squad Chief Riley Owens, who is also a Rabun County Sheriff’s Office sergeant.

Essentially, the Tallulah Gorge Rescue squad is charged with completing any rescues which are not handled by the Rabun County Fire Department or the Habersham County Fire Department.

On average, Owens said, about 25 members of the team responded per call.

“The gorge, just the way the counties (Rabun and Habersham) have it set up, it falls under Habersham. We serve as mutual aid on every call with them,” Owens said.

Owens has been working with this department since 2001. In all that time, there is still one call he responded to that stands out in his memories. A climber in the gorge had fallen and suffered life-threatening injuries. The decision was made to fly the injured climber out by helicopter rather than carrying them out. There was no trail nearby, which forced the helicopter pilot into taking alternative action.

Standard protocol calls for the pilot to drop a line so rescuers can place the injured party into a basket to be pulled out to safety.

“This guy flew his helicopter to us and had one foot of the helicopter on the rock we were on and the other foot was hovering. We then lowered the injured person in the helicopter and he took off,” Owens said.

It was a necessary but dangerous course of action that most pilots would not have attempted because of the difficulty involved in hovering a helicopter in addition to the gale force winds generated under the helicopter’s blades.

“He was a military pilot and had been around the block. He didn’t want to do long-line and came to us,” Owens said.

One satisfying element of the job is the relief brought to the families of injured gorge visitors after the team completes a rescue, Owens said.

There’s also the rush that comes along with being thrust into what could easily be a life or death situation.

“The adrenaline rush of being 300 feet off the ground on a rope is one of the most fun things,” Owens said.

With the thrills comes the dangers. Owens said he tries not to dwell on the dangers involved with working in and around the gorge so as to not let it affect his mind during a rescue.

“Not at the time it

Please see **GORGE**, 14

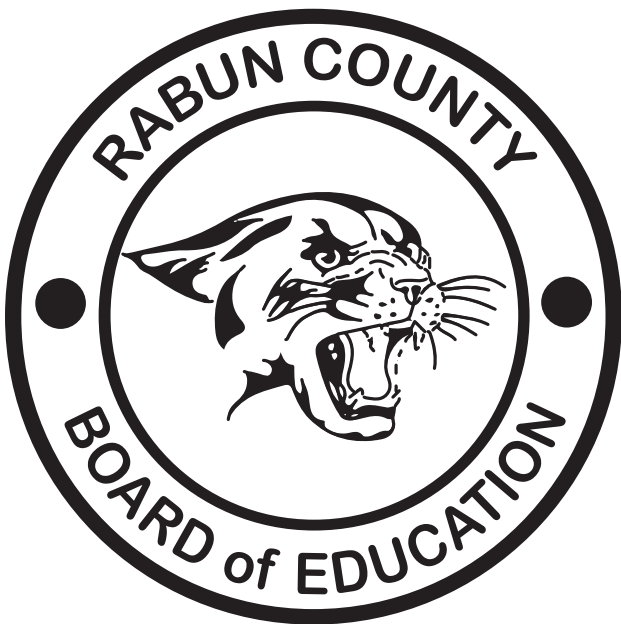


Tribune File Photo

A rescue team unloads an aerial rescue platform during a Department of Natural Resources training exercise in August 2014 in Tallulah Gorge State Park. A long line rescue involves a helicopter lowering an aerial rescue platform to the ground where a rescue team will strap the patient onto the platform, which resembles a metal basket. It is then reconnected to the long line and flown to a landing zone, where a team guides the platform into a gentle landing and the patient can be taken for aid. The rescue team are the first people that come in contact with a patient and are responsible for ensuring the patient is safely strapped to the platform before being lifted out.

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Bailiffs Anthony Welch, Steven Osborne and Calvin Webb are pictured at the Rabun County Courthouse. Bailiffs not pictured include Dick St. Clair and Mitch Evans. Part of keeping the courthouse safe involves making sure nobody carries weapons into the building. The bailiffs are responsible for making sure the courtroom is orderly as well.

RABUN COUNTY BAILIFFS

BY TOMMY CULKIN ♦ STAFF WRITER

Every day, they protect the epicenter of the Rabun County justice system — the courthouse. They are some of the most veteran officers in the Rabun County Sheriff’s Office. They are the bailiffs.

Rabun County employs four full-time bailiffs. They are tasked with ensuring the court process runs smoothly by securing the building, protecting the judges and witnesses and removing violent or disorderly people from the courtroom in a timely and safe manner.

“Some people might assume that the bailiffs have an easy job, but I assure you, they do not,” said Rabun County Sheriff Frank Andrews. “If you do not have a good bailiff, the court system can’t run effectively. That’s why you need to put some of your best officers, and most mature officers, at bailiff.”

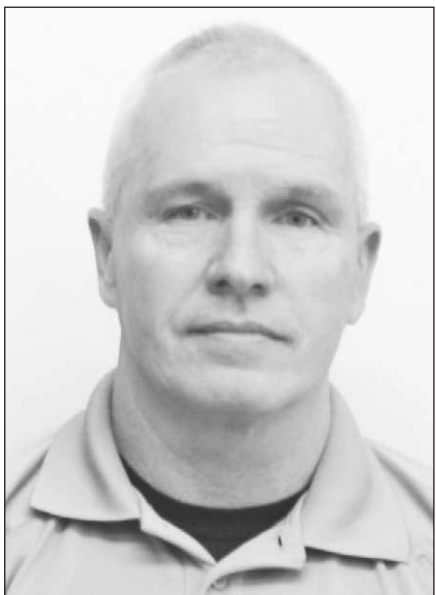
Securing the entirety of the premises is a difficult job, said Head Bailiff Sgt. Anthony “Bear” Welch, but the county’s bailiffs are professional and get the job done.

Welch said the bailiffs have a lot of experience because most of them served as road officers before tackling their current job, himself included.

“I worked the road for a number of years,” Welch said. “Unfortunately my body doesn’t heal as well as it used to, so I moved into the courthouse.”

Another challenging part of being a bailiff, Andrews said, is understanding the preferences and quirks of the various judges.

“Certain judges like things done certain ways, and (the bailiffs) need to work very closely with the judges to be aware of those



HEAD BAILIFF
SGT. ANTHONY ‘BEAR’ WELCH

things,” Andrews said. “Not every officer can do the job, which is why I like to put some of my more experienced guys at the position.”

Andrews said the job can be just as dangerous as any other job in law enforcement.

Bailiffs wear bulletproof vests, just like patrol officers, and they have had situations in which people became violent in the courtroom or tried to sneak a weapon inside.

“If a situation arises, it’s up to that bailiff to make sure everyone

in the courthouse is protected,” Andrews said. “It could mean the bailiff giving his life to make sure everyone in the courtroom is safe and protected.”

Because the bailiffs work so closely together, they have a tight-knit relationship that allows them to work in tandem with one another and do their job better.

“I’d definitely say we’re like brothers,” Welch said. “We all have each others’ backs. If the situation requires it, I’ll call my superior, but we generally like to handle our stuff ourselves.”

Although protecting the courthouse and ensuring everything runs smoothly is no small feat, Welch said the hardest part of the job is emotional rather than logistical.

Seeing people devastated by convictions are the memories that stick with Welch the longest.

“If you have any amount of human compassion, it can be difficult to see it,” Welch said. “You see these people, many of whom you might call your friend, pay for what sometimes is just one bad judgement. It can ruin a person’s life, families can be torn apart. It’s inescapable.”

However, Welch said he reminds himself that justice was served and the community was made a safer place. For him, that knowledge is the most rewarding part of the job.



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Chief Investigator Jack Tanksley, left, is pictured with Rabun County Sheriff's Office Investigators Marty Talley, second from left, Joe Silva, center, and Tony Free. Donna Claridad is a civilian employee assisting the investigators.

RABUN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE INVESTIGATORS

BY TOMMY CULKIN ♦ STAFF WRITER

“It takes a very special kind of officer to be able to do what they do,” says Rabun County Sheriff Frank Andrews of his office’s investigators.

The Rabun County Sheriff's Office investigators are a dedicated crew working tirelessly to get to the bottom of mysteries that aren't as simple as some open-and-shut cases. Their work includes solving burglaries, researching drug offenses and looking into violent crimes.

The process of conducting an investigation is long and meticulous, Andrews said. It often begins with an investigator scouring a crime scene for evidence or clues.

Another prominent aspect of investigations is conducting interviews to discern the truth. Investigator Joe Silva said a large part of the job is making phone calls and visiting locations to gain vital information.

“Not everybody’s going to want to tell the truth at first,” Silva said. “You have to be sharp and ask the right questions.”

Silva is in charge of handling cases that involve crimes against children. Those cases pose more of a challenge than just finding a solution, as noted by Todd G. Shipley and Art Bowker in their 2013 book “Investigating Internet Crimes.” Shipley and Bowker state that investigations of child abuse or pornography can be so stressful they cause mental health issues or concerns. They state that investigators should be aware of the problem and should pay attention to themselves



Investigator Joe Silva looks over a case file. Silva is in charge of crimes against children.

and co-workers to identify potential issues.

“Those crimes — even though you’ve seen it all before and you’re prepared for it — it can still be difficult to deal with,” Silva said. “So it feels really good when you do the job and make it a safer place to be.”

Another stressor, Silva said, is the large caseload investigators are tasked with working. Andrews said his office employs four investigators. At any given time, they can be working on as many as a dozen active cases. Dedicated as they are toward getting the job done, there have been times when investigators go days without sleep as they work a case, the sheriff said.

Stressful as it is, Silva said, the fact that he’s always busy is one of the most rewarding aspects

of his position.

At the helm of the investigative squad is Capt. Jack Tanksley, who has roughly 20 years of experience investigating crimes.

“If you need help with something, then you name it, (and) he has experience there and can help you,” Silva said.

Each of the county’s investigators are experienced, which Andrews credits as a key to their continued success. Tanksley, Investigator Marty Talley and Investigator Tony Free all have a number of years under their belt as investigators. In addition, Free previously served as Clayton’s chief of police. And Silva, who’s been an investigator for about four months, has been a law enforcement officer in Rabun County for nine years.

Investigators handle cases independently of one another, but, Silva said, they regularly work together.

“We like to pry each other’s brains, and besides, each of us has our own unique skill, so if someone needs help with something they aren’t great at, we’ll jump over and help each other out,” he said.

“Somebody like Marty Talley is really good at talking to people and reading body language and that sort of thing; Tony Free is good at doing property crimes; I’m really good at tracking people down and figuring out where to go.”

It’s not uncommon for investigations to sometimes last several months. Sometimes they are reopened more than a year later, particularly when new information or evidence comes to light. “The job definitely requires a great deal of patience,” Andrews said. “And they also have to keep good records and keep track of cases because there are times where something will come up and all of a sudden it’ll click and they’ll connect it to a case from a year ago.”

“I’ll be honest, this is one of the best investigative teams I’ve seen. They do great, great work and I honestly don’t think I could ask for a better investigative unit than what I have now.”

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RABUN COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT

RABUN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



The Rabun County Sheriff's Office is led by Sheriff Frank Andrews, left. Joining him are Deputy Jamie Gaston, Deputy Tracy Payne, Deputy Victoria Hopper, Kimberly Rodriguez, Deputy Ashleigh Free, Deputy Brandon Hyer, Deputy Tony Parrish, Sgt. Kyle Shook, Sgt. Riley Owens, Deputy Ian McDonald and Cpt. Kenneth Watts.

CLAYTON POLICE DEPT.



Clayton Police Chief Andy Strait, third from left, and Assistant Chief Ryan Hamilton, third from right, are joined by Chief Investigator Matthew Thomas, left, Clerk Kessiah Gipson, Officer Joe Munger, second from right, and Lt. John Grist. Other members of the force include Sgt. William Wall, Sgt. Mark Gerrells and Officers Richard Moncus, Travis Gibson, Michael Bennet, David Jackels, Mark Jones and Riley Owens.

SKY VALLEY POLICE DEPT.



Interim Police Chief Ron Baumes is one of two Sky Valley Police officers as the city currently searches for a new police chief.

MOUNTAIN CITY POLICE DEPT.



Mountain City's police force is headed up by Police Chief Tom Garrison, center. Joining him are Officer Cary Brown II, left, and Lt. Cary Brown.

TALLULAH FALLS POLICE DEPT.



Tallulah Fall's police force is headed up by Police Chief Bill Goatcher, right. Joining him is Officer Matt Nall.

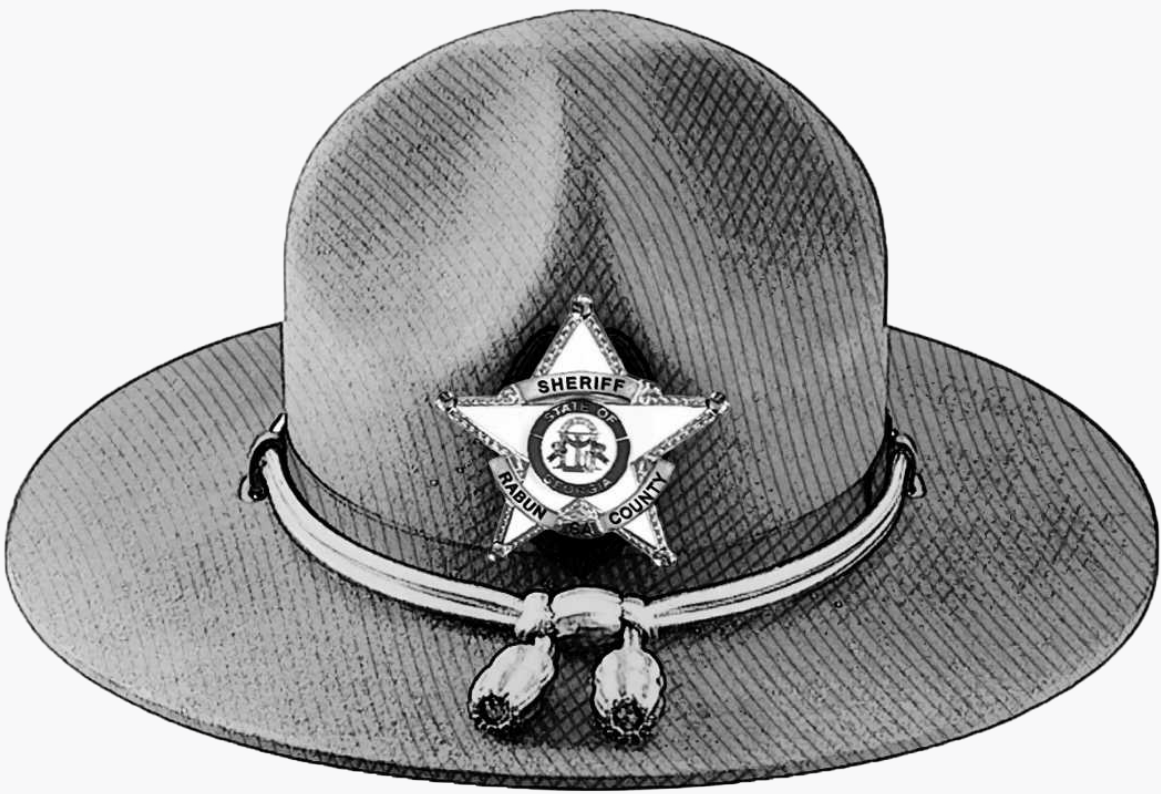
DILLARD POLICE DEPT.



Pictured is Dillard Police Chief Shane Watts. The force also includes Officer Michael Carnes and Officer Jeremy Welch.



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***Thank you** to the **citizens** of Rabun County
for entrusting me as your Sheriff.*

***Thank you** to the **Clayton Police Department**,
the **Dillard Police Department**,
the **Mountain City Police Department**,
the **Sky Valley Police Department**,
the **Tallulah Falls Police Department**,
& all other agencies and organizations we have worked
with during my tenure as Rabun County Sheriff.*



Sheriff Frank Andrews

RABUN COUNTY EMERGENCY SERVICES



Rabun County Emergency Services crews include Brian Panell, James Lawrence, Joseph Deal, Josh Harvey, Josh Hickox, Logan Carnes, Brad Hovis, Mack Palmer, Misty Houston, Mike Carnes. Not pictured is Trampes Stancil.

RABUN COUNTY SEARCH & RESCUE



Team members of Rabun County Search and Rescue include Mike Mazarky, Riley Owens, Ricky McCrackin, Keith Watts, Tony Whitener, Fred Beck, Matt Wood, Victor York, Meg Myers, Tom Madison, Hunter Hargrave, Tommy James, Mark Gramlich, Amber Bonagura, Brad Whitener, Michael Crowe, Andy Beck, Jeff Hooper, Tombo Ramey, Shaun York, George Custer, Issac Williams, McCord Johnson, Kerri Wood and Tate Nichols.

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Currently in Northeast

Contact the office at 706-886-1098 or email necas@windstream.net. More information is available and donations can be made through the program website: www.northeastgacasa.org.

As such, the basis of the plan was the response to one central question: What will it take to serve

- Strengthened Geor-

Highlights from year

In fiscal year 2016,
the number of chil-

CASA anticipates seeing more increases in children served and CASA volunteers at the end of year two of our growth plan, and announces that Georgia CASA has received a statewide growth renewal grant from National CASA for \$187,500 for year two.

SBSPs are especially important for children from low-income families because such children are less likely to receive dental care. These programs target schools

Sealants provided in school settings are effective. Recent studies found that dental sealants prevent 80 percent of cavities for two years after application and continue to protect against 5 percent of cavities for up to 4 years after placement. They can be retained in the mouth for as long as

Vital Signs is a report that appears as part of the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Vital Signs provides the latest data and information on key health indicators.

SOURCE: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, 2013

Note: Only age was used to determine child passenger restraint law coverage. Some states also have specific height and/or weight requirements.

Law covers children in car seats or booster seats through:

- Ages 0-5
- Ages 6-7
- Age 8

Membership to Tallulah Gorge Rescue is open to anyone, Owens said, although becoming a member requires a vote by active members. And with lives on the line, training is paramount. With Tallulah Gorge Rescue, there are different ways in for team members to

"I've had 300 calls and then I've had 50. It depends on tourism and the season," Owens said.

For teen driving tips, visit
TeenDriving.AAA.com

Elect

Molly Lima

*A devoted wife and mother
with Christian values*

I AM HERE TO SERVE YOU! I AM HERE FOR OUR KIDS!

“From our family to yours we want to extend our extreme gratitude for each and every one of the public servants in our community. We know that you work tirelessly and selflessly to ensure the safety and well-being of our children.

Your sacrifice has not gone unnoticed.
We see you. We appreciate you. Thank you!”

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