

## **GATLINBURG - Anthony Chitwood, a wildlife officer with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, is now on duty as Gatlinburg's bear control officer.**

By: CANDICE GRIMM, Staff Writer

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Chitwood replaces TWRA Officer David Brandenburg, who was promoted within TWRA. The position of bear control officer for the city is funded jointly by TWRA, the city and Great Smoky Mountains National Park and was created in response to a large number of bears becoming habituated to eating garbage within the city. The situation was seen by city, state and federal officials as one that posed a potential threat to residents and visitors to the city.

Chitwood, 30, is a 2003 graduate of the University of Tennessee. He grew up in Kentucky, but said his parents are natives of East Tennessee.

"Since I was a kid I knew I wanted to go to UT and I wanted to be a wildlife officer. I decided that after meeting a wildlife officer who was a friend of my father's. When I found out what he did for a living I was blown away," said Chitwood.

Chitwood's dream was derailed for 10 years, however, after he was advised that he should study music, which he did. He also raced bicycles for a few years before realizing that he needed to go back to school and decided that he wanted to pursue a degree to do what he really wanted to do - become a wildlife officer.

"I love it," said Chitwood. "I never imagined that I would be working in Gatlinburg. It's a place I've always enjoyed coming to on vacations."

Chitwood said his "main focus is the bears in Gatlinburg" but he will also be checking those who are fishing the waters in Gatlinburg and checking bear and deer hunters throughout Sevier County.

"The bear population in Gatlinburg has been reduced, but bears are wide-ranging and if we don't do something about the accessibility of garbage, that void in the population will be filled. If we have a bad mast year, the bears will be back," said Chitwood.

Chitwood has been getting acquainted with the county, as well as the locations of Dumpsters around Gatlinburg, and talking with business owners and managers wherever problems exist with garbage being available to bears.

"When I've asked business owners or managers to help me solve a problem, they've done whatever I asked," said Chitwood, adding that he does not want to write tickets and take people to court.

He explained that there will be an emphasis on working together with businesses and residents to solve problems before next spring.

Chitwood and his wife Holley are living in the Seymour area.

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