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school last Friday, TCMS Athletic Director Ken Hamilton handed out championship rings while Middle School Principal Erica Chastain awarded the players a trophy and cupcakes.

"All of the boys on the middle school basketball team are a great group of athletes as well as students," said Principal Chastain. "They've been very fun to watch, and it took all of them to be successful."

"Each individual brought something to the team that made it a successful season. They also had a super coach that helped reach this goal. I'm excited to watch as they continue to be successful in the high school."

Baseball practice began on Monday, and while half of the basketball team will be joining Coach Taylor on the field, he understands that without dedicated parents, neither his basketball nor his baseball rosters could be filled.

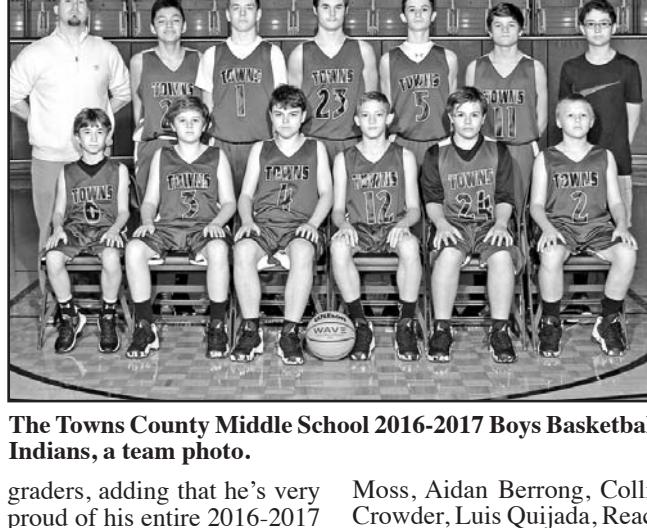
"The parents are a key part of having any type of successful program," said Coach Taylor. "We have good parents. Kids were always where they needed to be, they provided snack bags for the kids for away games. So, when you have good parents, that's huge for a program."

"We always had a pretty good crowd, we had good community support. So, good community, good parent support, and good support from the school – those are keys to success."

Coach Taylor said he'll miss his basketball eighth-



The celebration included posing for a few pictures, and Middle School Principal Erica Chastain shared words of congratulations and encouragement.



The Towns County Middle School 2016-2017 Boys Basketball Indians, a team photo.

graders, adding that he's very proud of his entire 2016-2017 team: Cabe Poston, Hayden McClure, Kyle Oakes, Carson Williams, Liam King, Kolby

Moss, Aidan Berrong, Collin Crowder, Luis Quijada, Reace Hampton, Peyton Barrett and John Watts.

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Florida." A few of the differences Nelms noted between working in the North Georgia Mountains and his former EMC in Florida were the mountainous terrain, frequently windy climate, and occasional bouts of snow.

And for their response during the snowy weather in January, Nelms offered nothing but praise for his staff and employees, men and women who work around the clock to keep the 50,000 plus metered accounts up and running in the EMC's five-county area.

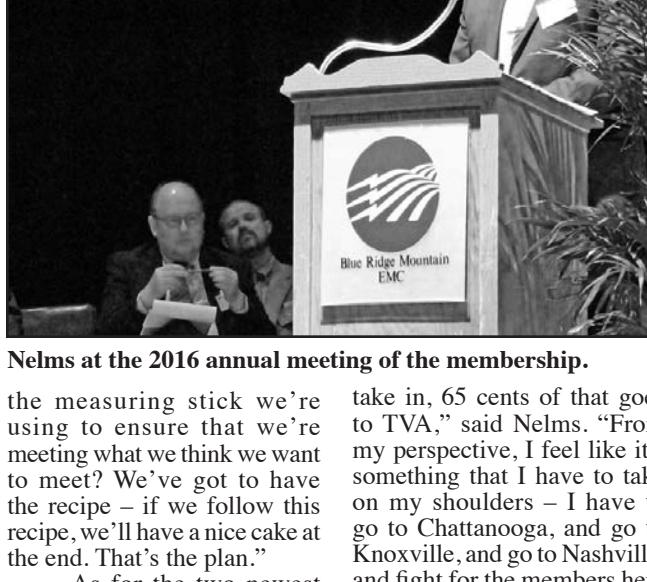
"I was a little nervous, I was like a cocked gun, just waiting that whole Friday night, but woke up Saturday morning and didn't hardly have one outage," said Nelms of the Jan. 6 snowstorm. "To me, that's a testament to how our operations staff, our engineering staff, and just all of our support staff there at the EMC have built a system that can be resilient enough to handle 6 inches of snow laying down on it."

"It was encouraging for me to see that we didn't have the world crashing down. They've been doing something right keeping those poles and wires up, and I'm glad to see it could ride through it. And not just the snow, but the wind up here."

Currently, Nelms is working with EMC employees and its board of directors to flesh out the future of the EMC.

"Right now, the biggest thing we're working on is the development of our strategic plan to help myself, my board, and all of our employees to all have a clearer understanding of the direction we're going to be going in the short-term as well as the long-term," said Nelms.

Continued Nelms: "What are our particular items of focus, how do we show that we're meeting our goals, what are our measurements, what's



Nelms at the 2016 annual meeting of the membership.

the measuring stick we're using to ensure that we're meeting what we think we want to meet? We've got to have the recipe – if we follow this recipe, we'll have a nice cake at the end. That's the plan."

As for the two newest board members elected in last year's annual meeting, Cory Payne of Clay County, North Carolina, and Gene Mason of Union County, both Nelms and Cummings agree that they have become integral parts of a board that "clicks."

"Both of them have contributed a lot, and they're fitting in well with the board, helping us make decisions that affect the future of the EMC," said Cummings.

A hot button issue for Nelms is the planned annual rate hikes proposed by the Tennessee Valley Authority, which by the time they are through being implemented will result in a greater than 10 percent increase in electric bills by 2023.

One of these proposed increases, about 1.5 percent on the retail side of electric costs, occurred in October of 2016, and there will be similar yearly increases through 2023.

"For every dollar we

take in, 65 cents of that goes to TVA," said Nelms. "From my perspective, I feel like it's something that I have to take on my shoulders – I have to go to Chattanooga, and go to Knoxville, and go to Nashville, and fight for the members here in this five-county territory."

TVA is expected to do similar rate increases until the year 2023. And the way I see it, I'm asking for cost justification. I'm asking for,

what is your justification to not just the 50,000 members that Blue Ridge Mountain EMC serves, but all nine million customers that the local power companies serve that buy their power from TVA."

And with President Donald Trump in the White House, Nelms foresees potential changes down the road for the more than 150 power companies that rely on TVA for electricity.

"With the new administration, there will be some vacancies on the TVA board, and those are all political appointees," said Nelms. "We'll see how that shakes out. Only time will really tell with how President Trump will view TVA and TVA's board."

"But I'm beating the drum on behalf of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and getting the audience with TVA. Not to say I have a great deal of influence, but if nothing else, they're at least going to hear me – they're going to know who Blue Ridge Mountain EMC is, because I've got to make sure I'm doing what I can for this membership here."

"Passing 1.25 percent or 1.5 percent rate increases every year is going the opposite direction from where I would like to go."

Building on last year's successful town hall meetings and the overall goal of transparency with the membership, Nelms, Cummings and the rest of the EMC board of directors will be holding another round of town hall meetings soon in Union and Towns counties.

For members with questions for the EMC leadership, the Union County meeting will be held at North Georgia Technical College on March 23 at 6 p.m.

The Towns County town hall will be held at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center on April 13 at 6 p.m.

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list, group leader Cyndi Daves of Re/Max Town and Country, hopes to readjust the emphasis to include gathering more momentum for local industry. Daves suggested that the group move toward becoming more of a merchant's association rather than functioning similarly to a chamber of commerce.

"Our main focus is bringing in commerce and bringing in business for all of us," said Daves. "Along with that, we want to make our town look nice. If we can make our town look nice, then people will want to come here and walk around and spend money. If they're here spending money, then we can do more."

"There will be a blurred line between fundraising efforts that we do as a group to try to raise money to do a project. Fundraising efforts bring more people into the town, to do things that beautify the town and will bring in more business for all of us."

"It's going to take time. This is not going to happen overnight."

Members spent the evening mulling over ideas for fundraising opportunities, city projects and community involvement. Many of the topics discussed concerned the Hiawassee Square and ways to bring events to the square that would, in turn, promote business in the downtown area. Such events would include Music on the Square and cookouts.

The group will begin building and finalizing its 2017 calendar during this month's meeting on Monday, Feb. 13.

Also during the meeting, Hiawassee Councilwoman Liz Ordiales shared news of recent ordinances that will be



John Harmon is an active member of the Hiawassee Business Group.

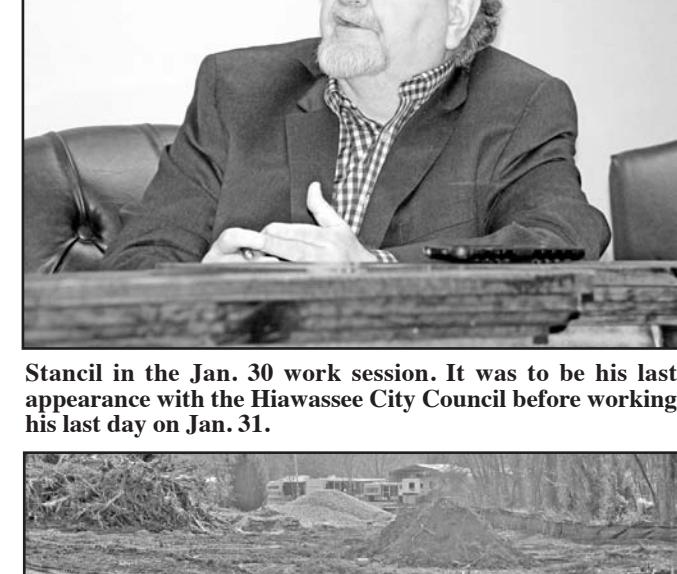
approved at the Hiawassee City Council meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 7. Many of these ordinances coincide with the group's efforts to improve Hiawassee both economically and physically.

"We're going to pass five ordinances," said Ordiales. "The first one, the alcohol ordinance, is for sales on Sunday of both wine and beer as well as spirits at a restaurant. Then, Monday through Saturday, spirits can be sold at a restaurant."

"The main reason for having the alcohol ordinance is not to create 21 bars in Hiawassee, it's to attract nicer restaurants that sell liquor that wouldn't come here before."

Another ordinance that was of interest to the business group was the derelict and blighted building ordinance that requires owners of abandoned and neglected buildings to either maintain the property or have the structure demolished, depending on the individual building.

"Anyone can file



Stancil in the Jan. 30 work session. It was to be his last appearance with the Hiawassee City Council before working his last day on Jan. 31.



DNR has been busy grading and preparing this area of Hiawassee Mayor's Park for the incoming boat launch and boat dock. Stancil has worked extensively with Mayor Barbara Mathis to make her dream of a Mayor's Park come true.

advice and assistance.

"He helped with everything," said Mayor Mathis. "With grants, with anything that we needed him for. He was here for legal advice, and he was here just helping us on an everyday basis."

Added Mayor Mathis: "I don't think the people really know how bad we're going to miss him until after he's gone, because he was a big input, he brought in a lot of money to this area, and he's just been involved in so many things."

Stancil said that Mayor Mathis has been a pleasure to work with, along with past councils, adding that he's proud of her record as having never raised the city millage rate over her more than two decades in office.

He's not sure exactly what he'll do next, he said, but he's been submitting applications and keeping his options open.

Stancil, who is raising two small children here in the North Georgia Mountains, hails from Dahlonega originally.

And though he graduated law school in Alabama, then lived in Atlanta for many years while working for the office of Gov. Joe Frank Harris from 1983 to 1991, Stancil said he always knew he wanted to return to a place like Hiawassee, a place like his roots.

For better or worse, Hiawassee City Hall will certainly be a different place without Stancil, who recently shared his guiding philosophy with the *Towns County Herald*.

"You have to be held to the highest standards as an elected official or as staff," said Stancil. "We do not break the law, we do not violate the law, we follow the law. And that's the beginning and end point as far as I'm concerned."