

City of Hiawassee meets to discuss retirement plan

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Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis and city council held a called meeting on Wednesday, March 22, to discuss the current benefit retirement plan in place for city employees.

The majority of the meeting was taken up by executive session that included Hiawassee City Attorney Thomas Mitchell, concerning an addendum to the Georgia Municipal Employees Benefit System Defined Benefit Retirement Plan.

Under the current retirement plan, Mayor Mathis would not receive any of the benefits to which she is entitled once she retires due to an unintended omission in the plan, according to city hall.

This was not a known fact to either Mayor Mathis or the council until recently, and given the mayor's announcement that she's planning to retire soon, the city decided to call a meeting to address the matter.

A release issued by the city's attorney explains the proposed changes to the benefit retirement plan.

"Mayor Barbara Mathis has worked on behalf of the City of Hiawassee since the 1990s, first as a council member and then as mayor.

"She was elected mayor in a special election and took office in March of 1996.

"During her tenure, Mayor Mathis has worked a regular 40-hour week, and her compensation and benefits, including her participation in the city's retirement plan, have been determined in the same manner as the city's full-time employees.

"The city made contributions to the retirement plan for the mayor in the same manner as they did for city employees.

"The city recently learned that, although it had made regular contributions, the retirement plan documents had never been amended to include the mayor as a participant in the retirement plan.

"Although the city has made contributions and the plan has listed the mayor as a participant since the plan was adopted, the language of the plan needed to be corrected in order to reflect that reality.



Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis with Deputy City Clerk Teresa Kelley



Hiawassee City Councilman Jay Chastain Jr. and Mayor Pro Tem Liz Ordiales

"The Adoption Agreement and Addendum for which the city conducted a first reading on March 22, makes the needed corrections.

"The documents the city will approve to correct the retirement plan documents were drafted by legal counsel with the Georgia Municipal Association, the provider of the city's retirement plan.

"The corrected language merely brings the plan documents into alignment with the manner in which the city has operated and the benefit plan has treated the mayor for the past 20 years.

"There will be no financial consequence for either the city or the plan as a result of this correction.

"The correction is being made to avoid possibly depriving Mayor Mathis of the retirement benefits that she has earned and which both the city and the mayor believed she would receive upon retirement."

In the meeting, the council voted unanimously to hold the first reading of the addendum to the Georgia Municipal Employees Benefit System Defined Benefit Retirement Plan, which reflects the retirement allotment that has been contributed to by the mayor for years.

A second and final reading and adoption will be held for the addendum during the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Hiawassee City Council on Tuesday, April 4.

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and that Housley continuously pushes him to work diligently in everything that he does.

"She's my yearbook advisor," said Ledford. "She's very good at showing us how to work together as a group. She's a little obsessive sometimes, but that's what you have to do to make the yearbook perfect.

"She's really good at showing us how to work hard, and she definitely works hard herself, so she really leads by example in that way."

As much as Ledford thinks of Housley, she feels the same of her STAR Student, whom she says really puts in the extra effort in everything that he does.

This is Housley's second year teaching yearbook for Ledford, and she considers the opportunity to be STAR Teacher an incredible honor.

"This is definitely an honor," said Housley. "He's a great kid. He's very well-rounded, very creative, very hardworking."

As of right now, Ledford has been accepted into the University of San Francisco and the University of California, Los Angeles, but is still waiting to hear from several other schools before making his decision.

"I'm not entirely sure

yet, but I'm thinking of either going into biology and specializing in astrobiology or maybe linguistics," said Ledford. "I know the two don't have anything to do with each other, but I'm really interested in both of those subjects."

STAR is an acronym meaning Student Teacher Achievement Recognition. The Professional Association of Georgia Educators Foundation, Georgia Chamber of Commerce and the Georgia Department of Education sponsor the STAR program.

To be named a STAR Student, one must be a high school senior and obtain "the highest score on any single test date of the three-part SAT taken through the November test date of their senior year and be in the top 10 percent or top 10 students of their class based on grade point average," according to the foundation website.

Those who are nominated as STAR Students must achieve SAT scores equal to or higher than the latest available national average on the critical reading, math and writing sections. Each high school STAR Student is then asked to name his or her STAR Teacher.

Within each school system, individual high school STAR Students compete for

the system title and the student with the highest SAT score wins the overall title. If multiple students within the system have the same score, then the STAR Student will be selected based on overall grade point average.

After being nominated as systemwide STAR Students, those selected will then compete for the regionwide STAR Student in the 12 STAR regions across the state.

From the 12 regionwide STAR Students, one single STAR Student will be named the Statewide STAR Student.

All students who achieve the title as STAR Student will have the opportunity to garner various scholarships and awards to assist in furthering their education as they move forward from high school and into the collegiate realm.

Since its inception in 1958 by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, the STAR program has honored close to 26,000 high school seniors and their respective STAR teachers.

Typically, the Towns County Lions Club hosts a special dinner for the Towns County STAR Student and STAR Teacher. This year, rather than participate in a dinner, Ledford has requested to attend the regional STAR Student banquet in April.

Young Harris College hosts Third Annual Storytelling Festival showcasing Appalachian stories

Young Harris College will host the third annual Georgia Mountain Storytelling Festival (GMSF) Friday, March 31- Saturday, April 1. The festival showcases the art of Southern storytelling with a particular focus on Appalachian stories, both traditional and contemporary.

The GMSF offers storytelling and musical performances, children's events, and workshops so that community members, visitors, and students of all ages and from all disciplines will not only learn about the tradition and history of our region through storytelling, but also have the opportunity to become part of its preservation.

Thanks to a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, this year's festival will feature many notable performers including acclaimed folksinger

John McCutcheon; award-winning children's author Carmen Agra Deedy, whose tales are a delightful blend of her Cuban heritage and her upbringing in Georgia; Cherokee teller Lloyd Arneach; Sheila Arnold Jones, creator of History's Alive!; and master of the tall tale, the hilarious Bil Lepp.

This year, the festival will include a special presentation about local poet and novelist Byron Herbert Reece. It will also host the first-ever open mic event on Friday evening where the audience is invited to share a five-minute story of their own. The Marketplace will be open to shop for unique gifts and organic produce and children will have the opportunity to receive a free book from The Craddock Center's Storytelling Express Bus.

The festival begins at 9

a.m. on Friday with various storytelling workshops and performances in which students and community members will have the opportunity to learn how to realize, claim, and tell their own stories. A question and answer session with the featured storytellers will follow.

Purchasing tickets in advance is strongly recommended. You may purchase tickets in advance by mailing your ticket order and check to: Dr. Ruth Looper, Department of English, Young Harris College, 1 College Street, Young Harris, GA 30582. Make your check payable to Young Harris College. Please note "storytelling festival" in the subject line.

For more information, including the festival's schedule, visit www.yhc.edu/storytelling or contact storytelling@yhc.edu.