

Board of Ed...from Page 1A

The second hearing on the school budget will be held at the board office on Monday, May 7, at 6:30 p.m.

Following the budget hearing, the board held its monthly work session, during which the topic of school safety once more came up.

"We've had several things going on at the schools for the past months," said Dr. Berrong. "We had that bleeding control training, which was excellent

training. We have 36 kits that me and Mr. (Roy) Perren are going to be getting together to determine where those kits are going to be placed."

Dr. Berrong expressed his concerns on other precautions that could be taken to make the school safer.

"I think the important thing for us is not to make fast, quick decisions without thinking things all the way through," said Dr. Berrong.

BRMEMC...from Page 1A

subject to a criminal background check, and they must be considered members in good standing, i.e. not be in a state of suspension with the EMC.

All candidate forms must be in to the EMC's Nominating Committee no later than June 25.

Members of the Nominating Committee will meet on May 10 for an informational session. They will meet again, tentatively on June 26, and that meeting will serve as the final day nominees will be recommended by committee.

The Credentials and Elections Committee is scheduled to meet tentatively on July 26, some 10 days after the July 16 deadline for petition nominations.

Elections are expected to open on Aug. 3, and automatically mailed paper ballots will return this year.

Once more, board members will rely on the independent election management company (Survey & Ballot Systems (SBS)) to run their elections.

The EMC has used SBS for several years, and Nelms said in the April board meeting that utilizing a third-party allows the EMC to maintain credibility throughout the process and also takes the burden of election logistics off EMC staff.

Last year, the board decided to save money by forgoing the automatic mailing of paper ballots, instead implementing online and annual meeting in-person voting only.

The EMC did save money – more than \$30,000 considering postage and the cost of printing and mailing paper ballots – but voter turnout dropped more than 10 percent between 2016 and 2017.

"Based on the results that we got, the juice was not worth the squeeze," said Nelms in the April 10 meeting.

Online voting will close on Sept. 6 in preparation for the annual meeting, and in-person voting will take place during the annual meeting on Sept. 8 inside the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

Director seats up for grabs this year are one each in Union, Fannin and Towns County, and current directors who decide to run for re-election to the board will be subject to the same nominating requirements as new candidates.

The board is still determining whether or not it will hold a town hall forum to introduce the candidates prior to the start of the election this year.

In other business, the board approved a change to a policy that previously allowed for EMC employees to earn an extra vacation day for having no accidents in a year.

After examining the policy, the Policy Committee determined that EMC employees should get the extra day without the accident-free requirement, as promoting such incentives could potentially lead to accidents going unreported.

The policy change also embraces best workplace safety practices as espoused by the Occupational Health & Safety Administration, which has determined in the past that "if employees do not feel free to report injuries or illnesses, the employer's entire workforce is put at risk."

Also in the April 10 meeting, the board approved the 2018-2022 Revised Work Plan.

"We need to discuss this at least two more meetings, and we may be discussing it more.

"The options of what we need to do, No. 1, is our school safe enough? No. 2, is there anything we could do to make the school safer?"

Superintendent Berrong also spoke about the possibility of adding a second school resource officer to the system who would work alongside SRO Donnie Jarrard on campus, noting again that more discussion was needed.

Every four to six years, the EMC develops a Construction Work Plan that operates as the immediate and short-term rollout of the EMC's Long-Range Plan, which in turn serves to accommodate trends like population growth and future power needs.

Following a bitter cold January, during which the EMC set a new peak demand record for the most power used in a given hour at 229 megawatts, the EMC determined that it needed to revise parts of its most recent work plan.

Specifically, the EMC has decided that upgrades to the Nottely substation are in order, to safeguard power delivery capabilities in those areas even during worst case weather scenarios.

All told, the budget impact of the newly suggested upgrades on the four-year work plan will be about \$3.1 million, bringing the total cost of system improvements in the work plan to about \$30.5 million.

As part of its work plan and long-range plan, the EMC will be adding substations in the Murphy and Shooting Creek areas of North Carolina in the coming years.

The board welcomed EMC foremen Kevin Moss and Brad Wilson to their April meeting to discuss the overwhelmingly positive impact of a leadership training course they participated in last month.

Moss, Wilson and 27 other members of BRMEMC's management and supervising staff took part in the training, which challenged them to work together to make a difference.

The training was a first of its kind for EMC employees, and Moss commented in the meeting that it helped to bring everyone together and made them feel "part of a family."

Collins...from Page 1A

the abilities to come back into society and not recidivate," said Rep. Collins, "and not go back into jail, and have those tools that they need to be profitable members of a community in society.

"It really just goes back to a God-given belief. I believe that all people have value and infinite worth, and we need to be able to at least provide the opportunity – not that we can force anybody to do so – but provide the opportunity to cut the rates of recidivism down so that we're spending money wisely and not just housing people."

The congressman's bill, which enjoys tremendous bipartisan support, would direct the Department of Justice to develop a "Post-Sentencing Risk and Needs Assessment System" for use by the Bureau of Prisons.

This new system would be designed to "assess prisoner recidivism risk; guide housing, grouping and program assignments; and incentivize and reward participation in and completion of recidivism reduction programs and productive activities," according

to Congress.gov.

"We're hoping to have markup in the House Judiciary Committee (this week)," said Congressman Collins. "The president is supportive. Jared Kushner, his policy advisor, we've been talking a great deal in coordination with the White House and the Department of Justice.

"So, we feel very good about coming forward in the House Judiciary Committee and getting it over to the Senate and seeing where it can go."

On the recent omnibus spending bill, which President Donald Trump signed and later signaled he'd like to make rescissions to, the congressman said, "He's like all of us, we'd love to have seen some things different, we always would."

"But I think at this point in time, we've done the things that we needed to do," said Rep. Collins, "which was rebuild our military, put money toward a border wall – 100 miles of border wall will be built with \$1.6 billion within this bill. So, there's some things in it that the president was wanting and that we were wanting, the biggest of which

being the military."

When it came to his friend Paul Ryan's retirement, Collins said he will be missed in the United States Congress.

"I want to thank the Speaker for his leadership and his friendship," said Collins in a statement following Ryan's announcement. "He has led and will continue to lead our majority until the end of this Congress, and I look forward to working with him to complete our agenda.

"As he leaves the House of Representatives after 20 years, I believe we as a nation are better off for his service."

Of course, someone will step in to fill Ryan's shoes as party leader when he leaves the House of Representatives, and Collins said that, on that note, time will surely tell.

"Everybody is focused on how this is going to play out," said Collins. "It's still new for a lot of us. I think Paul did a very admirable thing in what he did, but it has left a little bit of a vacuum on what's next.

"Kevin McCarthy is a good leader ... it just depends on what the conference itself wants to do. Give it a little more time and we'll see how it plays out here in the next week or so."

Hiawassee...from Page 1A

Ordiales discussed the findings with City Attorney Thomas Mitchell, who advised her that the city could retroactively collect three years' worth of taxes on the properties.

The mayor decided that collecting three years of back taxes would be excessive, but in the interest of fairness to other city taxpayers, she has signaled her desire to pursue taxes owed the city for 2017.

She recently contacted Towns County Tax Assessor Sonya Young, who has corrected the tax coding for the parcels identified by the mayor.

"Everything that was

on the list that we could verify has been switched over," said Young. "I let her know that there were a couple on there that she would need to get more information on, because we weren't able to verify them as being completely within the city limits."

The parcels in question have been in existence for many years, and Young said it's not surprising that some of them may have escaped notice on the city's tax rolls, since assessors of yesteryear didn't have access to technology like aerial mapping.

"My best guess, and that's what it would be, is that, back before that mapping, it

was just a judgment call of whoever was assigning that parcel," said Young. "It really is difficult, especially if they're right there on the cusp of being in or outside the city, just to make that judgment call if you don't have the right tool to do it."

Ordiales has reached out to Tax Commissioner Bruce Rogers to let him know that she intends to have him collect 2017 taxes on the parcels in question, and his office is working with city hall on next steps toward collection.

Moving forward, the owners of the code corrected parcels – including Ordiales – will be responsible for paying city taxes on top of their other property taxes, i.e. county, school and fire protection.

Charges...from Page 1A

prescription pain medications outside the usual course of professional medical practice and for no legitimate medical purpose," per a news release from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

"These defendants allegedly abused their positions as medical professionals to obtain illegitimately thousands of doses of prescription pain medications and now face serious federal charges," said U.S. Attorney Byung J. "BJay" Pak that April 6. "The Department of Justice is committed to fighting the opioid epidemic through the aggressive investigation and prosecution of licensed medical practitioners who abuse their positions of trust to engage in

illegal conduct."

Operation SCOPE stands for "Strategically Combatting Opioids through Prosecution and Enforcement," according to the U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta.

The operation is cited as being an initiative "combining our efforts (criminal, civil, and educational) with those of our law enforcement partners' to create one unified front in the battle against the opioid/heroin epidemic. One important aspect of Operation SCOPE is to prosecute those who are illegally prescribing, or distributing, pain killers."

The Drug Enforcement Administration is investigating the case with assistance from the Union County Sheriff's

Office, Cherokee County (North Carolina) Sheriff's Office, Georgia Drugs and Narcotics Agency, and Zell Miller Mountain Parkway Drug Task Force.

As previously reported, Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley's office presented evidence last year for the local indictment of Mike Gowder, Dr. David Gowder and Dr. James Heaton, and the district attorney has been in contact with U.S. Attorney Pak.

"We're going to work closely with the federal prosecutors as they work their case and we work our cases," said Langley on April 6. "They are not mutually exclusive. Both cases can be prosecuted. But certainly, we're going to coordinate our work with the federal prosecutors."

Daffodil...from Page 1A



Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Here is Grace Howard during the dedication of the Daffodil Garden at Hamilton Gardens, a memorial to the children lost during the Holocaust.

suffer from humanitarian crises all over the world today.

Am Yisrael Chai, which means "the nation of Israel lives" in English, is an organization that educates and brings awareness about the crimes committed in the Holocaust.

It was this important organization that created the Daffodil Project as a way of calling attention to the unthinkable acts of evil done to so many children.

The mission of the Daffodil Project is to build a living memorial out of the daffodils, thereby creating an eternal remembrance of the 1.5 million children who perished in the Holocaust.

The organization plans to plant a single daffodil for each child killed, and it has currently overseen the planting of nearly 300,000 bulbs to date.

New Narcotics Anonymous group

Narcotics Anonymous has a new home in Blairsville! The "Hardcore Hope" group meets on Tuesday and Friday at 6 p.m., Lanier Lane, Blairsville, GA.

If you think that drugs are a problem in your life, come see if we can help! For further questions about Narcotics Anonymous please call the NA Help Line at 1-888-947-7262.

"Hamilton Gardens has become part of a worldwide process to build the Living Children's Memorial," said Mike Weinroth, a speaker and member of Am Yisrael Chai.

The reason daffodils are the chosen flower is because the shape and color represent the yellow Star of David badges Jews were forced to wear during the Nazi era.

With yellow being the color of remembrance, the daffodils help represent a poignant hope for the future.

Daffodils are resilient flowers that return every spring with a burst of color that signifies hope, renewal and beauty, and the flowers also honor those who survived the Holocaust and went on to build new lives.

Hamilton Gardens got the inspiration from other gardens in the local area and across the world, and they have wanted to plant this memorial garden for the last several years.

Hamilton Gardens is honored to be able to join this project, and volunteers have already planted 600 daffodil bulbs in the memory of the children.

The Children's Daffodil Garden is located in the existing Memorial Garden and serves as a powerful new addition to the site.

"There is no better place to recognize the things these

children suffered through," said Grace Howard, president of Hamilton Gardens at Lake Chatuge. "Their place is right here in the Memorial Garden."

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw opened the ceremony by welcoming those in attendance, and he spoke on the purpose and hard work of the volunteers at the Hamilton Gardens.

"When it is about children that were victims, what can you say?" said Bradshaw. "It was a terrible tragedy that happened in our history, and we don't ever want to forget that."

Each of the programs given to the attendees of the memorial contained a different story of one of the children who suffered through the agonizing time period.

Both the Hamilton Gardens and Am Yisrael Chai encourage individuals to plant daffodils in their own gardens as a way to memorialize the tragedy and to never forget the children who could have been.

The ceremony concluded with music from the local group High Country Harmonizers.

For information about the Hamilton Gardens and upcoming events, visit their website at HamiltonGardens.org.

For more information on the Daffodil Project, visit DaffodilProject.net.

Britt...from Page 1A



Photo by Mark Novak

Britt discussing Mountain Education Charter High School with those in attendance that day.

a G.E.D. program. You earn an accredited high school diploma, you have to go through all the courses mandated by the state, and you have to take all the End of Course Tests. It's a self-paced program, but you still have to meet all the standards.

"Second, Mountain Ed is not an alternative high school. Our kids cannot come to this school if they have any tribunal or disciplinary procedures in their background or ongoing."

Unforeseen circumstances sometimes arise in a student's life, said Britt, and Mountain Ed offers those students a second chance to obtain a high school diploma in a classroom setting.

"Our kids are good kids looking for a second chance, and some of it's the environment," said Britt. "It's a different environment at Mountain Ed, where they can succeed. On our website, MyMEC.org, there are videos of students who explain why they have dropped out.

"Because of being bullied, maybe they learn at a slower rate, they have a little bit of a disability learning English or math. Some need day jobs to support their families, and in one case, there's a student on there that talks about getting thrown out of the house by his drug-addicted parents, and now, he's on his own trying to make a living and support himself."

MECHS is an evening school available to children in Towns County where students can join at any time and start right where they left off learning.

"We just provide a better option for another segment," said Britt. "For wounded and at-risk children that have very few options, we are a safety net for them. Mountain Ed is tuition free. We're a public high school if you're a full-time student, and the school runs year-round."

Added Britt: "Our

Superintendent Dr. Wayne Lovell reminds us that Mountain Ed doesn't change lives – it saves lives."

Mountain Education Charter High School serves over 2,000 students, with 16 locations in 15 north Georgia counties, and many public school full-time teachers work to teach the students.

"We want to start getting the word out about who we are because of the misperceptions that are out there," said Britt.

Students looking for a second chance to earn their high school diplomas are encouraged to visit MyMEC.org to learn more about the school, which could help them in their pursuit of careers or postsecondary educations.

Also in the meeting that Friday the 13th, local student Samantha Church delivered a speech on the importance of instilling in children the value of saving and investing money at a youthful age.