

# BRMEMC...from Page 1A



L-R: William "Scotty" Scott, Roy Perren, Jeremy Nelms and Michael Borkman. Scott and Borkman share hosting duties for the Mountain Movers and Shakers.

good standing' and what that definition is, we're going to make sure that gets codified in the bylaws so everybody's clear on that."

Added Nelms: "Also, we'll have another bylaw amendment in there that's a request from a member ... about district voting."

Nelms said one of the main items the membership needs to consider with district voting - which would restrict members to voting only for candidates within their district - is that it would limit each district's overall representation within the EMC.

"Fannin County has one director, Cherokee County (NC) has one director, Towns County has two directors," said Nelms. "Next year, there won't be any Towns County representation up for re-election. So, next year, nobody in Towns County will be voting for a director. That's how that district voting is going to work."

Right now, all directors are elected at large, so every member actually has nine representatives for which they can vote.

If district voting passes, members in Fannin County, for example, will only be able to vote for one director every three years.

Either way, Nelms said this job will be to report to the nine-member EMC board "regardless of how they get elected."

Another subject broached by Nelms at the July 20 meeting was the upcoming EMC Town Hall Meeting to discuss the bylaw amendments.

That Town Hall will take place at 6 p.m. on Aug. 7,

inside the main lobby of the BRMEMC headquarters in Young Harris.

EMC Director Roy Perren of Towns County also attended the Movers and Shakers meeting on July 20, and he said he envisions the Town Hall Meeting as an opportunity for the board to have a conversation with the membership.

"Personally, I want this to be where people feel like they can come in, and they can ask questions and get answers," said Perren. "And if we don't know the answers, that we can have the resource get in touch with that person so we can get them an answer."

"I like the open meeting format, but in truth, people just get to come and there's no interaction. So, the Town Hall Meeting (will allow for) the interaction between the board and the members."

Nelms also addressed the expected wholesale power rate increase that will be coming down from the Tennessee Valley Authority in August.

"That's never a popular topic to talk about," said Nelms. "There's been quite a bit of pushback from the local power companies, such as Blue Ridge Mountain EMC and the others here in the Southeast District. But TVA persists."

Added Nelms: "Myself and other utility managers are pushing back on TVA and saying, we think you've got enough money now, your record revenues, record incomes. But ultimately, it comes down to, they want to pay down the debt and they want to lower their debt service."

As far as the EMC's fiber

optic internet plans, Nelms said they are definitely looking into expanding in the near term.

"For the last two years, we've been trying to backfill some of the existing infrastructure, and that's worked really well for us," said Nelms. "We've upped our take-rate quite a bit. Our broadband business is very business right now, the margins are very healthy."

"The margins are actually helping to keep the rates for the electric members from having to go up, because we're able to take those margins and put them toward our bottom line, and it all works together as one business."

"So, really proud that we got into that business 17 years ago. That was very forward-thinking on Joe Satterfield's part and Erik Brinke's part."

Also in the meeting, Terry Rathmann spoke with the Movers and Shakers about the March For Jesus that's happening on Aug. 25.

The march will begin inside the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and will feature a 2.7-mile round-trip march down U.S. 76 to Cedar Cliff Road and back.

Those interested in attending should mark down Aug. 25 in their calendars. Festivities that day will begin at 9 a.m. at Anderson Music Hall, and there will be fellowship and music throughout the event.

This Friday, July 27, the Mountain Movers and Shakers will welcome Enotah Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court Judge Jeremy Clough to speak at 8 a.m. inside the Sundance Grill in Hiwassee.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

# Search...from Page 1A

office.

Once it was determined that the group would not be making it back before dark, area first responders were called out to assist in the search for them, according to the sheriff's office.

A command post was established at the intersection of Georgia 180 and SR 180 Spur, according to the sheriff's office.

The searchers consisted of personnel from the following agencies:

Towns County Fire and Rescue, Towns County EMS, Towns County Sheriff's Office, Georgia State Patrol, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, Georgia Wildlife Resources Division,

Georgia State Patrol Aviation Unit, Georgia Department of Corrections, Blairsville Police Department, Union County Fire and Rescue, and Union County Sheriff's Office.

The group had separated in the forest due to one of its members experiencing some medical difficulties while walking out, according to the sheriff's office.

During the early morning hours, two members of the group made it back and reunited with first responders, according to the sheriff's office.

After daylight on Sunday morning, the other members were located, and the member experiencing medical difficulties was airlifted by

a GSP Rescue Chopper to a landing zone established on Georgia 180, according to the sheriff's office.

That same member was then taken for further evaluation, according to the sheriff's office.

At this time, the name of the group member with the medical difficulties is being withheld until family members are notified, though the medical difficulties do not appear to be life threatening, according to the sheriff's office.

The Towns County Sheriff's Office and the Enotah Judicial Circuit District Attorney's Office would like to thank everyone involved in searching throughout the night for those who were lost in the Chattahoochee National Forest.

# Signs...from Page 1A

do not want billboards lining the roads and spoiling the views that make Towns County beautiful, though he made clear he also doesn't want businesses to think Towns County is anti-advertising.

Currently, the Georgia Department of Transportation website shows Towns County wide open for off-premises signage, said Bradshaw, which is something he wants to remedy.

There will be no more sign permits issued until he, the county attorney and the planning commission have had a chance to review and strengthen the county sign ordinance, said Bradshaw.

The moratorium applies everywhere in Towns County except for within the city limits of Hiwassee and Young Harris, which have their own sign ordinances.

In other business, the commissioner opened two bids in the meeting for the construction of a metal building out on Georgia 66 in Young Harris that will house the new Young Harris Fire Station.

The bids were from Chattahoochee Group Inc. in the amount of \$109,919, and Laney Construction Company Inc. in the amount of \$105,270.

Bradshaw stressed that these bids were for the building only, and that the county would be doing the rest of the work on the fire station to save money.

As for next steps, Bradshaw said he would be contacting the bidders' references and physically inspecting other buildings the two companies had completed. He has 10 days from July 17 to make a decision, which he will announce publicly.

Also in the meeting, the commissioner discussed both good and bad news regarding county insurance.

Bradshaw said that, after making some adjustments, the county's liability insurance would cost less this year than



Commissioner Bradshaw opening bids for the construction of the new Young Harris Fire Department building during the July 17 regular meeting.

last year.

However, because of some serious claims last year against the county health policy, those premiums have shot up in the upper 30 percent range, said Bradshaw.

The county will absorb that cost because, as Bradshaw put it, it wouldn't be right to take it out of the pay of employees who only make \$9 or \$10 per hour, as that would present a true hardship for them.

Towns County is switching phone service providers from Windstream to ETC, which will save the county about \$21,000 per year. This will include a much-improved phone system with extensions between departments as well as direct phone lines.

The county audit has been completed and will be official by the August meeting. Auditor Andrew Bangs of Alexander, Almand and Bangs, LLC told Bradshaw that, of the 159 counties in Georgia, Towns County ranked in the top 20 for financial stability in his opinion.

Bradshaw remarked that it has been a busy summer this year with the many festivals and conferences. He said there have been an estimated 14,000 people attracted to Towns County, and a few have contacted realtors to

buy property.

The commissioner also said he is finished with all the required Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) classes as a new commissioner, and that he is now certified in his position.

Continuing education is a requirement, though, and he is scheduled for a class with the Georgia Academy for Economic Development, for which he will receive continuing education credit with ACCG.

Also in the July 17 meeting, Margie Winkler was appointed to the Towns County Division of Family and Children Services Board.

Sylvia Chassner was appointed to represent Towns County on the Avita Community Partners Board of Directors.

David Stovall was appointed to represent Towns County on the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission.

Towns County resident Liza Strud voiced concerns at the end of the meeting regarding liquor sales in Towns County, animal control, and what she perceives as problems with trash at some residences.

The commissioner advised her to call him at his office to discuss these issues further.

# BOE...from Page 1A



The Towns County Board of Education needed these hardhats during a tour of school construction following the July 19 called meeting.

including consideration of a policy that would potentially allow for the arming of school personnel or the keeping of firearms on campus grounds.

"We've talked about numerous things with school

**Alcoholics Anonymous meetings/times**

Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope, in order to solve their common problem and help others to recover from Alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

Blairsville: Mountain Presbyterian Church, 2945 Hwy 76, Monday 8 PM, open meeting Wednesday 7 PM, open meeting, Saturday 8 AM, open meeting St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Hwy 76 next to Presbyterian Church, Tuesday 7 PM, Ladies Meeting, Wednesday noon, open meeting.

Young Harris: Sharp Memorial Methodist Church on College Campus, Tuesday 7 PM, Men's Meeting, Thursday 7 PM, open meeting.

For more meeting info, call 828-837-4440.

safety," said Berrong. "One of the things we've discussed and now have approved is that additional SRO. We have also discussed a little bit the carry policy that some of the schools have been passing."

Added Berrong: "All of the (carry) policies are the same. It's not the policy that changes, but it's the board's decisions on the restrictions within that policy that really is the difference in the schools."

Berrong pointed out that, for safety reasons, Georgia law exempts records pertaining to the implementation of the carry policy from being reproduced under the Open Records Act.

"If this is a policy that we are going to look at down the road, how much of our conversation about those restrictions that we would want to put in place has to be public?" said Berrong, noting that he had put in a call to the system's attorney regarding that very same question.

Berrong said he'd spoken with Sheriff Clinton prior to the called meeting, and that the sheriff had offered his support in whatever the board decided to do to keep the kids safe.

Also in the meeting, Berrong updated everyone on the construction at the school, including the new roofing

and HVAC systems, saying everything was on schedule to be completed in time.

"The baseball field, if you've driven around through there, you'll see there's not an outfield," said Berrong. "We've taken every bit of the dirt and grass out of the outfield. They're supposed to start with the new irrigation system Monday, I believe, and they said that would take about two or three days."

"And then, we'll start hauling the dirt in to fill back in overtop. What we've decided to do, we were going to go with a pure sand. We got concerned that there weren't enough nutrients for sod overtop of pure sand to drain through, so we've changed direction on that."

"We're getting a topsoil-sand mix coming out of Ellijay that will still allow for real good drainage, but to ensure that the sod that we put down is going to stay healthy and grow. All of that should be completed by the end of July."

The superintendent also said that he and the board office will be setting the millage rate as soon as they get their hands on the county tax digest, and that it's likely they'll just be accepting the rollback rate this year, meaning he doesn't expect the school portion of property taxes to go up.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

# Cook...from Page 1A

according to the sheriff's office.

"We've been actively looking in the area," said UCSO Lt. Daren Osborn. "We'd heard he was here, in Towns County, in Clay County, North Carolina, in Cherokee County, Georgia. And then, we got word that he was trying to make his way to Mexico."

According to UCSO Staff Sgt. Lamar Dyer, who headed up the investigation, authorities learned recently that Cook had been hiding out for a while at a residence that was later involved in a drug bust out on Copperhead Road.

The sheriff's office has also tied his time in hiding to Sam Hedden, 63, of Hiwassee, who was arrested earlier this year with illegal drugs worth \$7,000 in street value, according to the sheriff's office.

And now that Cook has been arrested, the sheriff's office is in the process of extraditing him from Texas.

Cook's alleged accomplice in the Jan. 11 burglaries is a man named Jared Adair, 37, of Blairsville, according to the sheriff's office.

Adair was arrested in January and charged with three counts of burglary in the first degree, two felony counts of theft by taking and two misdemeanor counts of theft by taking, according to the sheriff's office.

As previously reported, three of the Jan. 11 burglaries connected to Cook and Adair occurred in the Town Creek School Road area, and the other happened off Old Blue Ridge Highway, according to the sheriff's office.

"One of the burglaries was off Old Bald Mountain Road, and one of the caretakers of the residence caught the suspects as they were leaving," said Lt. Osborn at the time. "He followed the vehicle and

called 911."

The caretaker turned Good Samaritan kept on the trail of the burglars, but before deputies could arrive, the burglars pulled into a residence on Trackrock Church Road and switched vehicles.

At this point, the Good Samaritan alerted the deputies to the vehicle change and decided to end his pursuit.

"He didn't follow them after that because he felt it was too dangerous, which was smart," said Lt. Osborn. "So, we put a lookout on the second vehicle, and we found that vehicle across the road from another burglary that occurred later on that afternoon, the fourth that day."

Both vehicles used during the commission of the burglaries were impounded, and search warrants turned up evidence from the scenes of all four burglaries.

"We have recovered all stolen items except for two firearms," said Lt. Osborn, adding that a stolen camper was recovered from the residence where the vehicle swap occurred on Trackrock Church Road. "That residence belonged to a Tracy Lynn Cook."

Added Lt. Osborn: "The other vehicle that they left in at the Old Bald Mountain Road residence was a Jeep Liberty pulling a trailer, and it was full of stolen stuff."

The suspects were caught on security footage at one of the residences on Jan. 11, according to Lt. Osborn.



## Meet Me at The Market

**Mickey Cummings & Kristy Peney**

The last Saturday of July is always the date of our annual Green Bean Day at the Union County Farmers Market. This year is no exception. As usual our day will kick off at 7 a.m. We will announce the winners of our Canning Contest and the Canning Plant will have these on display beginning at 9 a.m.

We will host a frying pan toss beginning at 10 a.m. Registration will begin at 9:30 and the event will pit people of similar ages in a competition to determine who can toss a frying pan the farthest distance. Ladies will be tossing frying pans and men will toss a large pipe wrench.

A Green Bean recipe contest will be held at 10:30

a.m. Please bring to the Canning Plant Office your favorite Green Bean Dish. These will be judged based upon the best tasting dish. Items which we are looking for include green bean casseroles, leather britches, or any other dish contains green beans. Please have all the dishes at the Canning Plant Office by 10:15 a.m.

Finally, we will conclude the day's contests with the Green Bean Pizza Eating Contest in the Pavilion at 12 noon. This pizza is made with green beans, cheese and bread as ingredients. So, please come hungry to enter this fun contest at the Farmers Market.

We look forward to Meeting each of you at the Market! NU025Z19/CA