

Area veterans honored with Quilts of Valor ahead of Veterans Day



The Misty Mountain Quilters' Guild handstitched and presented Quilts of Valor to the following veterans on Saturday, Nov. 4: Stephen Gerstman, Jerry Chastain, Tommy Dyer, Lou Lawson Jr., Richard McGinnis and Sam Davis. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard
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Six local veterans received Quilts of Valor in a special presentation by the Misty Mountain Quilters' Guild inside the Old Union County Courthouse on Saturday, Nov. 4, just in time for Veterans Day.

The Quilts of Valor quilters from the Misty Mountain Quilters' Guild have made more than 470 quilts for area veterans over the years, adding to the greater than 170,000 total quilts that have been presented to veterans in all 50 states, as well as overseas.

In the Nov. 4 presentation, quilters draped each of the six veterans with quilts, and offered every one of them hugs of gratitude.

"First, we want to honor you for your service," said one volunteer on Saturday, reading from the Quilts of Valor three-part message. "We honor you for your willingness to go halfway around the world and stand in harm's way in a time of crisis, to serve the cause of freedom.

"Second, our quilters know that freedom is not free. The cost of our freedom is the dedication that military men and women demonstrate, and our quilts are meant to say thank you for your many sacrifices. Each stitch is a thank you and a prayer, in hope of healing the wounds of war.

"And finally, this quilt is meant to offer comfort to you – to offer you the warmth and comfort that memories of home and family can bring through a simple quilt in red, white and blue fabrics. This quilt is not a medal to be put in a box on a shelf. It is meant to be used and loved."

In turn, all quilt recipients expressed their own thanks for the honor of receiving their Quilts of Valor, and three of the recipients were from Union County, including Tommy Dyer, who said he would be keeping his quilt handy on his bed.

Dyer, a veteran of the U.S. Army, served in Vietnam from 1967 to 1968 in the areas of Chu Lai, Qui Nhon and Da

Nang, and he's been married to his wife, Donna, for 48 years. Career Air Force veteran Lou Lawson Jr., also of Union County, received 23 Air

Medals for flights in Vietnam, where he served from 1964 to 1965.

"This is a big honor," said Lawson, who attended the

presentation with his wife of 61 years. "I just returned from Washington, D.C. on an Honor Flight in October, so this is like cream on top of all that."

Blairsville resident Richard McGinnis is also a veteran of the Air Force, and he served in Japan in the early 1950s, shortly after the end of World War II, but before Japan had fully stabilized on the world stage.

McGinnis has been married to his wife Shirley for 64 years, and he's a longtime member of the Union County Historical Society. He was thankful to have been presented his quilt inside the historic courthouse, near an antique witness stand he had donated years before in memory of his friend Hugh Collins.

David Coker of Blairsville could not be present for the presentation, but he, too, received a Quilt of Valor as part of the Nov. 4 event.

Coker, an Army veteran, deployed to Vietnam in September of 1967 and served there through September of 1968.

U.S. Marine Corps and Vietnam Veteran Stephen Gerstman of Marble, North Carolina, received a Quilt of

Valor that day, as did Army Veteran Jerry Chastain of Epworth, who also served in Vietnam.

Army Veteran Sam Davis was the last to receive a quilt and hugs as part of the presentation, and he served in Germany during the Cold War.

"The mission of the Quilts of Valor Foundation

is to honor service members and veterans who have been touched by war with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor," according to QOV literature.

Everyone at the *North Georgia News* would like to thank each of these men – and all veterans – for their service to the United States of America.

Making history: Indians football headed to first round of state playoffs

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer



For the first time in Towns County High School history, the Indians football team has earned a spot in the GHSA Class A Public State Football Championship Playoffs.

They will enter the playoffs as the 23rd ranked team in Class A Public football, and they will face off against 10th ranked Pelham High School on Friday, Nov. 10, in Mitchell County near the Georgia/Florida line.

Game kickoff time was

not available by press time, but readers can monitor the GHSA webpage for more information and a finalized schedule.

And for more Indians football coverage, including details about the Friday, Nov. 3, victory against Providence Christian Academy, turn to the Sports Section of this edition of the Towns County Herald.

Go Indians!



Vietnam Veteran Tommy Dyer receiving his quilt and hugs on Saturday, Nov. 4, inside the Old Union County Courthouse. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Veteran Richard McGinnis, who served in Japan not long after the end of World War II, in the Quilts of Valor program. Photo/Shawn Jarrard



Vietnam Veteran Lou Lawson with his quilt. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

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fees, instead saying that the language of the ordinance "contemplates 'acceptance' by the BRMEMC of the ordinance, and lacking such acceptance, it does not become effective."

Furthermore, Tharpe said that the EMC was aware of case law that spelled out the proper protocol to require the EMC to pay the franchise fees, though he believed that the ordinance as passed did not include the necessary language "for the ordinance to be applicable to BRMEMC."

"In summary, BRMEMC will absolutely comply with any valid franchise ordinance adopted by the City of Hiwassee or any other municipality in its service area," Tharpe said. "However, it will not voluntarily enter into a franchise agreement which is a cost to its members, and will not collect fees predicated upon an ordinance it believes to be unenforceable."

Responding to Tharpe's letter on Oct. 30, Mitchell said that he disagreed with the EMC attorney's interpretation that the ordinance requires the EMC's acceptance before being enforceable, noting the use of the word "shall" in the ordinance to characterize the manner in which the EMC was to have filed its written acceptance.

"Your letter does not articulate any specific objections to the ordinance, so I do not understand what the BRMEMC desires in the way of changes," wrote Mitchell in his latest response. "In other words, what changes is

of revenue for municipalities nationwide, and garnered support for her position in the meeting.

However, some residents in attendance objected to the city putting in place what they felt to be a new tax on the people of Hiwassee.

The city hopes to use revenues gained from the collection of franchise fees, estimated by the EMC to be upward of \$140,000 per year, to make improvements around the city.

Also in the Oct. 30 work session, Randy Logan of the Georgia Municipal Association gave a report on the retirement benefits for City of Hiwassee employees.

Discussion of the benefits centered on changing from a defined benefit plan – usually referred to as a pension – to what's called a defined contribution plan, like a 401(k).

In essence, the city would save thousands of dollars every year by sharing the cost of paying for retirement plans with city employees, according to city hall.

During the discussion, members of the public spoke up both for and against proposed changes to retirement benefits for city employees, and Hiwassee Mayor Pro Tem Anne Mitchell said after the meeting that the topic "definitely needs more discussion and input from everyone involved."

Based on feedback in the work session, Mitchell said that any proposed changes to city employee retirement benefits will be tabled until further notice.

the BRMEMC requesting in an ordinance it has had since August, or is it simply refusing to be agreeable, requiring additional consumption of time and resources?"

Starting in 2018, the city's franchise fee ordinance is set to impose a franchise fee of 4 percent on gross sales of electricity within city limits, as well as 5 percent franchise fees on gross sales of cable and fiber services within the city.

According to EMC estimates based on recently reviewed billing and consumption information for Hiwassee customers, enforcing the franchise fee ordinance will increase the average residential consumer's electric bill by \$55 a year, though much larger consumers, such as churches and businesses, will face significantly higher franchise fees because they have higher power bills.

And customers with fiber and cable services through the EMC will have to pay separate franchise fees for each of those services delivered by the EMC.

As previously reported, the franchise fees will be collected from all residential, commercial and industrial accounts in Hiwassee, and will be listed as line items on every EMC utility bill.

The city was not in receipt of an EMC response to Mitchell's most recent letter as of press time.

Hiwassee City Councilmember Rayette Ross pointed out during the Oct. 30 work session how common franchise fees are as a source