

EMC...from Page 1A

quickly.”

Continued Cummings: “I just want everybody to know what a great workforce we have at the EMC, outstanding men and women that do a great job for us, and we owe them a lot.”

Also in the Jan. 9 meeting, the board discussed and approved a couple of plans meant to cover the next 12 years of EMC development.

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.

“We have a substation at Young Cane, a substation in Blairsville, and we have a substation out in the Waldroup Road area,” said Cummings. “Years ago, everybody in Fannin County that’s on our system, the Dial area, the Suches area, they were all on one substation, and that was in

Blairsville.”

Continued Cummings: “Somebody had to develop a plan that said we expect population growth in these areas, so let’s do something to alleviate some of the problems that we might have in delivering electricity to those folks. And that’s why we have a substation at Blairsville, at Young Cane, and at Waldroup Road.”

Places the EMC anticipates adding substations in the coming years include the Shooting Creek and Murphy areas of North Carolina, among others.

EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms discussed in the meeting that the Tennessee Valley Authority will be implementing a fixed-cost recovery wholesale rate change later this year in October.

The change will move a small portion of the energy charge to a fixed-cost rate similar to the EMC customer charge, according to Nelms. “Those details have not

been worked out yet,” said Nelms of the TVA rate change. “I was really just bringing it to the board at that point to give them a preliminary heads-up so nobody got surprised this summer when I did bring the final details.”

Per BRMEMC.com: “The Tennessee Valley Authority is a corporate agency of the United States that provides electricity for business customers and local power distributors serving 9 million people in parts of seven Southeastern states. TVA receives no taxpayer funding, deriving virtually all of its revenues from sales of electricity.”

Nelms also said in the Jan. 9 board meeting that he and his staff are looking into the possibility of allowing people to report power outages via text message.

The next board meeting will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 13, at 6 p.m. inside the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Headquarters in Young Harris.

Wilkinson...from Page 1A

that more affordable to give companies an incentive to provide the service in rural areas, maybe through grants or tax breaks, or those kinds of things.”

In his State of the State Address, Gov. Deal highlighted the growing recognition of Georgia as one of the best states in the nation to conduct business.

“When we think about economic development, the most important factor in economic development is education,” said Wilkinson. “One of the things in particular that we have in Georgia that’s been very helpful with our workforce development, we have a great technical college system in our state.

“Unfortunately, sometimes young people in high school feel like they can’t be a success if they don’t have a four-year college degree. I’m

not minimizing the importance of a college degree, but if you look at job projections for the next 20 years, the projections are that 75 percent of the jobs are not going to require a four-year college degree, but they will require additional technical training, credentialing and those kinds of things.

“So, I think we’ve got to continue to invest in our technical college system. In a lot of those areas – welding, truck driving ... (areas) where they’re really looking for people to work today – young people can go to the technical colleges and get that training basically for free.

“We’ve got to do a good job marketing our technical colleges and to continue investing in them, because I think career and technical education is important now, and I think it’s going to be

increasingly important in the days ahead.”

And while Georgia senators and representatives stay busy and experience hectic schedules during the three full months of the legislative session each year, Sen. Wilkinson said his constituents should feel free to reach out for whatever reason.

“It really helps me if they’ll let me know how they’d like for me to vote before we take the vote,” said Wilkinson. “Sometimes, people call me and they’re mad because I voted a certain way, but I had no idea how they felt about the issues.

“So, I would just encourage people, if they’re interested in something, call me and get in touch with me ahead of time, because I can’t do much about it after I’ve already cast a vote. My office number is (404) 463-5257.”

Robotics...from Page 1A

By Lily Avery
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

All things robotics highlighted the Towns County Board of Education meeting on Monday, Jan. 8, inside the Anne Oliver Mitchell Auditorium, as the board heard from the Towns County Middle School Robotics Team.

During the first weekend of the New Year, the team traveled to a competition in Blairsville, where they walked away with two First Place finishes, one for robot design and another for their project.

This is not the first time that the students of TCMS robotics have wowed judges with their engineering skills, and it certainly would not be the last, as the team traveled to Chattanooga, Tennessee, on Saturday, Jan. 13, to compete in the Tennessee Valley Authority Super Saturday competition.

“We are very proud of these kids and all that they have done for several years,” said Middle School Principal Erica Chastain.

To practice for this regional event, the team presented their handcrafted and 3D-printed water filtration system to the BOE last Monday, explaining how the system works.

Powered by solar panels, the filtration systems are lightweight, with each kit coming in at only two pounds.

They’re easy to use and, most importantly, can filtrate up to 100 times, all completely off the grid.

Not only can the system be made easily accessible in secluded areas, the production cost for the filtration kit is only \$16.97.

After countless hours of hard work, research, determination and a lot of trial and error, the team was able to construct a functional,



Board Member Dr. Kilee Smith goes through a filtration kit in the Jan. 8 meeting. Photo/Lily Avery

utilitarian device that continues to bring the team members success wherever they go.

And, because of its remote capabilities, the team has even been advised to seek a patent for the device, especially since the need for lightweight, accessible water filtration systems is a constant concern in underdeveloped locations around the world.

“One of the key points of their water filter is that it can be used off the grid,” said Chastain. “Because water is so heavy and difficult to transport, it would be a lot easier to ship out these kits rather than have to position water in different locations, so it was suggested that the kids look into getting a provisional patent.”

The students are currently working on reducing the weight of the kit even more to increase the kit’s off-the-grid usability.

The Towns County Elementary School Robotics Team also competed in the competition in Blairsville, bringing home First Place for robot design.

Members of the elementary school team traveled to Chattanooga on

Saturday to compete in the TVA competition alongside their middle school counterparts, though the elementary team could not be present at the Jan. 8 BOE meeting to present its project.

During the elementary school report, TCES Principal Dr. Sandy Page shared how incredibly proud she was of both the elementary school and the middle school teams for their continued successes, and for consistently making Towns County a leader in robotics.

“These guys were the elementary school robotics team last year, so I feel like they’re mine too,” said Dr. Page of the middle school team. “They’re good. This is a really big deal because they can keep up with Atlanta teams. It’s so huge to me.

“These kids have only gotten better as they’ve gotten older. I’m so incredibly proud of both our teams for all that they’ve done and for all that they’ve continued to do. I know that these kids are going to do great things.”

Results from the TVA competition were not available by press time.

Gurtler...from Page 1A

License optional, “meaning anyone who is legally eligible to possess a firearm is legally able to carry it, open or concealed,” according to MattGurtler.com

“I did get a hearing last year for Constitutional Carry, I did not get a vote, though, in subcommittee,” said Rep. Gurtler. “I heard that I might be getting a vote in subcommittee this year, and so it would go to full committee ... Some good stuff’s going on with the bills, and I’m really happy about that.”

Gurtler raised a few eyebrows last year when he voted no to a number of legislative items that otherwise received full support from his colleagues, like the state budget.

“The budget’s always a big hot topic for us, every single year,” said Gurtler. “That’s the only thing we’re constitutionally obligated to do, is to pass a budget, and Georgia is a balanced budget state. That’s going to be a big deal.”

Continued Gurtler: “I

had another freshman come to me on Monday (Jan. 8) and say that they really were thinking about the budget and the budget votes, and there might be some more opposition this year against the budget.”

By voting no to the budget during the 2017 session, Gurtler said he was simply doing what he was elected to do – sticking to his principles and voting his conscience by saying no to what he felt were hundreds of millions of dollars in wasteful subsidies and government overreach into the free market.

And while his unpopular dissent certainly rankled the leadership in 2017, Gurtler said he has continued to build relationships with fellow lawmakers.

“It’s amazing to see that, just by my lone dissent, and by leading by example, that others are starting to follow suit to say that we can do a better budget than this,” said Gurtler. “So, I think we’ll see a little more

opposition this year to the budget, which is exciting.

“The more opposition it gets, the better we can be as legislators, and we can have a better budget for the state of Georgia and for all Georgians, really. So, that’s exciting. There’s a lot of things happening.”

Of course, 2018 is a massive election year in Georgia, with seats open at the highest levels of state government.

“I predict a lot of political rhetoric is going to be happening, a lot more so because it’s an election year, and maybe a lot of grandstanding,” said Gurtler. “That’s going to be interesting. Being my freshman year, I get to see this, so that’s kind of unique.”

Be sure to check out Rep. Gurtler’s regular column in the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* newspapers.

Farm...from Page 1A

Cultivating Change grant monies are chosen via peer voting and deliberation through a grant review committee.

To show support for a local farm and help the Cookfairs secure grant funding, visit CultivatingChange.org, click “Vote Now!” then enter Blairsville into the subsequent search field to pull up Big Valley Branch Farm, Union County’s very own certified organic farm.

“This grant will allow us to significantly increase our yields,” said Sarah Cookfair. “Nearly one third of our acreage suitable for vegetable production sits in a drain. This seriously restricts not only what we can grow in these areas, but also drastically reduces the yields of what we do grow there.

“By giving us the funds to redirect our drains to the creek in an extremely efficient and noninvasive way, we would see yields in those areas doubling, and possibly even tripling.”

A total of \$75,000 in grant funds will be awarded to many lucky farmers from coast to coast, ranging from \$3,000 grants to \$10,000 grants, all with the purpose of promoting and encouraging sustainable, organic growing practices.

Organic and sustainable farming often requires more attention and time than conventional farming due to a heavier reliance on natural cycles for health and crop performance.

This usually means slower, smaller crop yields, and subsequently higher prices.

Conventional farming, on the other hand, typically uses added synthetic chemicals and scientific alterations to produce maximum crop yields in less time, which is why non-organic or sustainable produce is often less expensive.

Because of this, the Cookfairs are certain that, should they receive the grant money to increase their land usage, they will be able to maintain reasonable prices and still provide customers with high quality organic produce.

“Organic production requires a minimum of a four-year crop rotation,” said Cookfair. “Otherwise, you will face disease and pest pressures that, as an organic grower, you simply cannot contend with.

“Consequently, organic farming requires significantly more land than conventional farming. Maximizing our land and yields would allow us to keep pricing down for our customers.”

The Cookfairs moved to



A spread of delicious vegetables grown by Big Branch Valley Farm, on sale at the Union County Farmers Market during open season. Photo/Facebook

Union County just over a year ago, traveling down the coast from New Jersey in search of an Appalachian town to call home.

Alex is originally from Fayette County and was familiar with the area, and after searching from Charlottesville, Virginia, on down, the couple decided that no place quite compared to Blairsville.

And so, the Cookfairs and their son moved south, bringing with them their love of farming and all things sustainable and organic.

“We went into farming because we love spending time in the outdoors, and we hope to pass that love down to our son,” said Cookfair. “It is essential that we take care of our land and our environment. As we age, we want our land to grow richer, more vibrant and

more diverse – not to become degraded and overused.

“Furthermore, we feed our family off what we grow, so it seems only natural to grow the healthiest produce that we can.”

Continued Cookfair: “We’d just like to take a moment to thank Union County for its warm welcome. When we moved our farm here, we had no idea what to expect, and went into last season extremely nervous that we might not be able to sell our produce.

“We were blown away by the support we received last season, and are really looking forward to this upcoming season.”

The Cookfairs can be found at the Union County Farmers Market during open season, and via the farm website at BigBranchVF.com.

Extras needed for Christian Music video shoot in Hiawassee



Christian music band 3R1 is asking for interested members of the community to appear in their upcoming music video.

By News Special
Towns County Herald

National music label iSOUND Music, with offices in Atlanta and Los Angeles, will be locally filming a music video featuring Hiawassee based Christian Rock group 3R1.

The music label held an open casting call on Jan. 6 with a good response

On Jan. 20 from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., they will be having an open call for extras of all ages to be in the video.

No experience is necessary to be cast as an extra, just bring energy

and a smile.

The extras will be registered during this call that will be held at Ministries of Grace Church in Hiawassee.

The filming of the video is scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 27, and will be filmed in several locations around Towns County.

The church is located at 1732 Hwy 76 East in Hiawassee, diagonally across from the Towns County Schools.

3R1 has been working with the iSOUND Music label since May of last year, and just finished

production of their first EP Album with the label.

The video will be for the band’s new hit single, “I’m Not Waiting,” off their upcoming album “A New Beginning,” which will be released this month.

Once the music video is completed, it will be sent to the major Christian and local television stations for review and possible nationwide TV airplay. For more information, visit the band’s website at www.3R1.ROCKS, email the band at info@3r1.ROCKS, or call (706) 970-9058.

Winter is the season for colds

Winter is the season to come down with colds. Awful, sniffing, sneezing, muscle-achy colds.

Why is winter the common-cold season? It’s a common perception that when the weather gets colder, we tend to get sick more. This is why we bundle up in warm clothes before facing the elements: We want to protect ourselves against frigid weather because we don’t want to catch colds.

When the weather turns cold we all run indoors, where air is recycled and we’re often in close quarters with other people and viruses. We all sneeze on top of each other.

This is why the cold season is the same -- though maybe not as severe -- in warmer climates as it is in colder ones. Dry and cold conditions are probably more high-risk situations for viruses because of dry mucosa, the mucosa, is what lines your trachea, the back of your throat and your sinuses. Viruses invade the mucosa and start growing, causing your cold.

And that’s viruses -- as in, plural. The common cold isn’t just one type of virus: When you say “I’ve got a cold,” that could mean you have one of many bugs.

There are a variety of different cold viruses so it makes sense that there is no one therapy to treat a cold.

The strength of our own immune system also plays a big part in how susceptible we are to colds, and how severe they might be.

We’re all susceptible, but what may be a 24-hour cold for one person may be a week (of illness) for somebody else. NT(Jan18.Z4)gg