

Towns County Herald

Legal Organ of Towns County

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1928

50 Cents

www.townscountyherald.net

Publication Number 635540 Volume 85 Number 44

Wednesday, September 3, 2014

Local Weather and Lake Levels

Thu: T-Storms	87 65
Fri: T-Storms	83 64
Sat: T-Storms	87 64
Sun: T-Storms	86 63
Mon: T-Storms	82 62
Tue: Cloudy	82 63
Wed: Rain	83 61



Upstream Elevation Predicted 09/03/2014	
Lake Chatuge	1,922.04
Lake Nottely	1,770.20
Blue Ridge	1,680.35

INDEX

2 Sections, 16 Pages

Arrests	2A
Chamber Chronicles.....	4B
Church/Obits.....	6A,7A
Classifieds.....	2B
Editorial.....	4A
Letters.....	4A
Legals	3B

SPORTS

Page 8A

TOWNS CO. HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING To Feature Hooper Drug Store SEPT 8TH

See Page 2A



ADOPT-A-THON! Going On Now!!

See Page 12A



Towns County Chamber of Commerce CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

See Page 4B



Softball

Tues 9/2 @ Providence
4:45 PM
Wed 9/3 vs. Hart Co.
5:30 PM

Football

Sat 9/6 @ Mt. Vernon
1 PM

TCMS Football

Thurs 9/4 vs. Lakeview
5:30 PM

The \$62,354 question: it was a meter glitch; Minor was wrong in report

Attorney Sorgen: Minor Report erred when it determined Akins made false reports to Internal Revenue Service

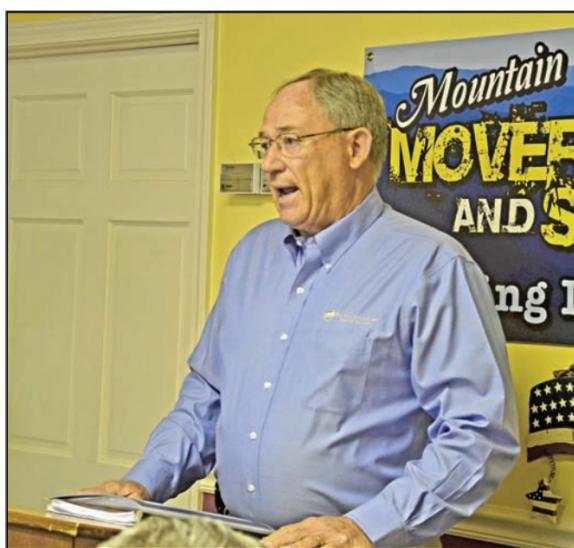
By Charles Duncan
Towns County Herald
cduncan.tch@windstream.net

Young Harris – A \$62,354 meter glitch and a \$30,000 internal opinion were the topics of conversation on Friday at Mary's Southern Grill as the Mountain Movers and Shakers played host to a group from Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

Included in the group that spoke to the crowd, were four of the seven candidates for the upcoming EMC Board of Directors elections.

Also, Towns County Board Member Jerry Nichols, who is not up for reelection this year, said that the bill for Taylor and Taylor Construction that was printed in the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald in the Aug. 13 editions, was not correct. The document, obtained by the newspapers showed a balance of \$107,998.43 owed by Taylor and Taylor. The EMC corrected \$62,354 of that balance, saying it was a meter glitch.

"What I can tell you is that the bill you've seen in the paper is incorrect, that is not a



BRMEMC Director Jerry Nichols talks to the Mountain Movers and Shakers on Friday at Mary's Southern Grill. Photo/Charles Duncan

bill," Nichols said. "There was a meter on the crusher that for some unknown reason read wrong. I mean we don't have any accounts anywhere on Blue Ridge EMC that uses \$60,000 worth of power a month.

"As soon as that came up, the correction was made,"

Nichols said. "Unfortunately, someone in our office, which is a problem, and it's a problem that y'all really need to be concerned about, is that somebody in that office put out information that is private. Because we are not a government organization, we are a private entity. It

just so happens that we're non-profit, but we don't fall under all the things that government organizations have.

"Someone inside our office made a snapshot of that, sent it out to someone that sent it to the paper, and the paper ran with it because it's a great story," Nichols said. "That \$62,000 is not a bill, it is certainly not a loan."

EMC Board members maintain that they knew nothing about the Taylor and Taylor Construction debt until April 2014.

Nichols said that a lot of things have been brought up about BRMEMC board members regarding compensation and perks.

According to a handout provided by Nichols, the total compensation for BRMEMC board members is \$61,650. General Manager Matthew Akins is paid \$115,139 annually, according to the Nichols handout. Akins' salary is the lowest among EMCs in North Georgia.

"Anything that you want to know about the co-op, if you will call, or come by the

office, go in and talk to anyone there, as long as it's not about personal accounts, then we'll do it," Nichols said.

Nichols also talked about the customer service charge, saying, "it's the cost of doing business."

"More than 63 percent of our total costs of doing business is buying power from TVA," Nichols said, adding that the customer service charge pays the bills. "The service charge is for everybody, everybody pays a flat fee."

Nichols added that the duties of the board of directors were to set policy and oversee operations.

"We are not into the day-to-day operations, we don't tell people who to hire or who to fire," Nichols said.

As Board Member Lenny Parks addressed the crowd, Wesley Hoppood asked about the Internal Revenue Service Form 990.

EMC Counsel Lawrence Sorgen interjected that EMC Attorney Steven Minor had stated his opinion about the

See EMC, Page 10A

Isakson: 'ISIS needs to know we have a strategy'

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Young Harris - U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson, R-Ga., met with area residents in a Town Hall meeting on the campus of Young Harris College last week.

Young Harris College President Cathy Cox introduced several special visitors in the audience. In attendance were Georgia State Sens. John Wilkinson, Steve Gooch and Frank Ginn, former Governor and U.S. Sen. Zell Miller and his wife, Shirley Miller, as well as Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

Cox spoke fondly of Sen. Isakson.

"He is a great friend of mine, and certainly a great friend of our college, and we are very glad to have (Sen. Isakson) back on our campus," said Cox.

Students of Young Harris College asked the first round of questions, on subjects ranging



U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson and former Georgia Governor and retired U.S. Sen. Zell Miller reminisce at Young Harris College last week. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

from the national debt to the recent Ebola outbreak.

"I'm here to hear what's

on your mind. I'll do the best I can," Isakson said.

See Isakson, Page 10A

Taco Bell coming - Live Mas in Hiawassee

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Hiawassee is about to get a little bit more south of the border, as Taco Bell becomes the latest major restaurant franchise to head to town since Zaxby's in 2006.

The new restaurant will be located next door to Zaxby's on the corner of Long View Drive and South Main Street/Highway 76. The site plan shows access to the proposed 1,961-square-foot restaurant from Long View. The building will have a seating capacity of 40 patrons with an option of 54 in total, and the parking lot will contain 25 spaces.

This particular plot of land has been on the market for quite some time, with its most recent owners having held it for two years.

Item number eight on the proposed agenda for the Sep. 2 Hiawassee Council Regular Meeting reads, "Mo-



Rick Stancil

tion to Approve and Adopt, Utility Agreement & Site Plan for Hiawassee Taco Bell," and residents are welcome to attend the meeting to learn more about the venture.

President Greg Blosser of Paragon Development, the company behind bringing Taco Bell to town, has been in contact with the Hiawassee City Council for about six months. It's too early to say when the

restaurant might open its doors, but the news is that it is definitely on its way.

Hiawassee City Manager Rick Stancil believes that Blosser chose Hiawassee because he is "attached to the beauty of the area, the low tax rates and opportunity for future growth."

And growth is likely to be mutual.

"Taco Bell will be an investment of about \$1 million and will employ up to 25 workers. That is significant to the city during this recession," said Stancil. "The new investment will result in additional property taxes, additional sales taxes and water/sewer revenue. We also believe several local contractors will benefit from construction employment."

According to records from the Water Department, Monte Alban came to Hiawassee in November of 1999, Dairy Queen in September of 2000, McDonalds in May 2001, and Zaxby's in September 2006.

Chili Cook-Off was on fire Saturday

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The third annual removed Fire in the Mountains Chili Cookoff spiced things up in Hiawassee Saturday, as area residents turned out in droves to support the Towns County Fire Department.

"The Towns County Fire Corps has been around seven years here in Towns County," said Fire Corps President Liz Ordiales. "Our sole purpose is to support the needs of the firefighters - their equipment, their training, whatever it is that they need to make them safe and to keep us safe in our community."

Eleven teams cooked and competed this year, and hungry people from all over the county bought tickets in order to have close encounters of the chili kind. President Ordiales



Last year's grand chili champion came in third this year with the creative team of Scott "Cornbread" Drummond and Craig "KB" Gienger. But they did win the People's Choice Award. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

has high hopes that more chili cookers will compete next year, since the chili ran out around 1:30 p.m. for an event scheduled until 3 p.m.

"Our target basically is

all about generating funds," said Ordiales, who organized the event with the Fire Corps. "So, the cookers, the silent auction, the rifle raffle, the T-shirts,

See Cook Off, Page 10A

Howell to retire from MRLS in December

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Donna Howell is a remarkable human being and lifetime lover of libraries.

When she retires as director of the Mountain Regional Library System Dec. 1, she will leave behind a legacy certain to be remembered for generations to come.

The MRLS comprises the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris, and public libraries in Towns County, Union County, and Fannin County. These libraries have benefited from Howell's leadership for 25 years, as she has served 15 years as assistant director, followed by the last 10 years as director.

"I've always loved libraries, since I was a little kid," said Howell. "I can't imagine my life without libraries, because I grew up very poor."

But Howell explains that things didn't start out that way. Her father, who had gone to college on the GI Bill, worked as a radiologist for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in a reservation hospital, and they lived on the edge of the Cherokee reservation.



Donna Howell

"He became disabled from injuries from WWII when I was about 4 years old, and we lost everything," said Howell. "Our home, our cars, everything. And we had to move in with my grandparents."

Her mother, a registered nurse, found employment at Andrews Hospital in Andrews, NC, and the family ended up building a house next door to Howell's grandparents.

"We had a Carnegie library in Andrews, and the librarian there was Polly Hicks," said Howell. "She was just a

See Howell, Page 10A

Kendall seeks to reimburse residents penalized by unauthorized inspection fee

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall is set to reimburse area residents for "unauthorized electrical inspection fees."

The origin of these fees can be traced back to October 2011, when it appears that an employee of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC contacted the Towns County Building Inspector, James Goodwin, and the two entered into a verbal agreement.

The agreement took the form of a recommendation from the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC employee that "any meter reconnected after 24 months of disconnection be required to pay a fee for an electrical inspection before reconnection," according to the commissioner's office.

"The Building Inspector agreed and has been charging citizens these unauthorized fees since 2011," Kendall said.

Neither Commissioner Kendall nor the BRMEMC Board of Directors gave approval for this new "policy," and the Building Inspector did not have the authority to implement such a policy in the first place.

So, how did this happen?

According to Building Inspector Goodwin, at the time, he felt the 24-month period seemed reasonable for safety reasons based his interpretation of county building codes, to ensure that, for example, rodents hadn't been chew-



Commissioner Bill Kendall

ing on wiring in the time of disconnection. The problem came when, having tried twice unsuccessfully to get in touch with Commissioner Kendall on the issue, Goodwin forgot about the whole thing.

"He was busy, I was busy, and it just left my mind," said Goodwin. "If there was any way of taking that back I'd do it in a heartbeat."

The matter over unauthorized fees recently came to light when resident Cliff Gibson made Commissioner Kendall aware that "BRMEMC informed Mr. Gibson that the county required building inspection fees to be paid for an electrical inspection before he could have electricity reconnected to his house," according to the Commissioner's office.

But the county required no such thing, having never held public hearings or even discussed the issue internally, and Commissioner Kendall was very clear on how this policy

See Fee, Page 10A

TOWNS COUNTY HERALD

