

Budget...from Page 1A

The new county millage rate was set at 5.535 mills, resulting in a total property tax of \$3,973,252 being collected for the county portion of this year's property taxes.

This is a reduction of \$50,021 in county property taxes over last year.

Last year's millage rate was 5.622, and brought the county \$4,023,273 in property taxes.

Commissioner Kendall said that it was his pleasure to introduce another decrease in property taxes to taxpayers, "especially in times when many are still hurting financially from the worst recession since the Great Depression."

Further, the commissioner also said that he received "a strong mandate from our citizens at the ballot box to operate county government with low taxes through conservative spending, strict budget control and efficient management of their tax dollars."

Reviewing the five-year tax digest, Commissioner Kendall stated that he has kept his commitment "by cutting taxes for five straight years, 2010-2014, for a total reduction from the tax rate of 2009 over the five-year period of \$5,233,485."

Also in the meeting, Commissioner Kendall addressed concerns raised in a letter to the editor and by some present over funding for the Sheriff's Department, making a case that the Towns County Sheriff's Department is better funded than surrounding counties.

Commissioner Kendall reinforced the notion that revenues collected from the individual departments within county government must be allocated directly back to the county treasury, as mandated by state law.

Each year, the appropriate funds are allocated to each department in the next year's budget cycle.

EMC...from Page 1A

eration in the face of significant balances violated the intent of BRMEMC policies, according to the action response obtained by the *Towns County Herald*.

The action response, prepared by the membership group's legal counsel Gearhiser, Peters, Elliot & Cannon, PLLC, also alleges Akins violated BRMEMC policies by failing to timely communicate Taylor and his commercial operation's failure to pay BRMEMC to the EMC Board of Directors.

The membership group also alleges a violation of BRMEMC's whistleblower policies related to the demotion of Chris Kelley from the position Director of Operations on March 18, 2014. The date of the demotion, according to the membership group, is strong proof that Akins - with the knowledge and approval of the

six named directors - violated BRMEMC's whistleblower policies.

Kelley notified some of the EMC Directors of Taylor and his commercial operation's outstanding balance on at least three occasions, the last of which occurred on March 13, 2014, according to the action filed on behalf of the membership group.

"On March 18, 2014 - a scant five days later - Akins demoted Kelley. The timeline of these events is strong circumstantial proof that Akins ignored Policy Bulletin No. 606 designed to protect employees like Kelley 'from reprisals or victimization for filing reports (of improper or illegal conduct) in good faith.'

"Indeed, such reprisals and victimizations have continued even though Kelley is no longer an employee of BRMEMC. After Kelley left

BRMEMC to accept a position with another employer, Gene Coker - Kelley's replacement as Director of Operations - contacted Kelley's current employer to complain about the actions of Kelley's family members at BRMEMC's Annual Meeting in an obvious attempt to convince the employer to terminate Kelley," according to the action response from the membership group.

The action response also alleges that Akins should be terminated for sending inappropriate e-mails to all EMC employees.

The action response alleges that Sorgen should have advised the Board of Directors about Taylor and the Quarry's outstanding balance in May or June 2013 rather than merely telling Taylor to resolve the balances, as referenced in the \$30,000 Steven Minor report.

The action response includes a brief reference that Allen may have left important information out of BRMEMC's annual audit, and should be dismissed.

The action response warned that the membership group intends to file a derivative action on behalf of BRMEMC against Akins and the six named directors and seek all available remedies at law and equity, including reasonable expenses and reasonable fees of attorneys under O.C.G.A. Section 46-3-272.

Also, on Page 11A of this edition of the *Towns County Herald*, the minutes from the Sept. 29 EMC Board of Directors' meeting are included, brought to our readers as public service from the *North Georgia News*, *Towns County Herald* and *BRMEMC Director Steven Phillips*.

Allison...from Page 1A

I was in high school in the '80s, we rarely see one party control both the House, the Senate and the Oval Office at the same time, because oftentimes it's too much responsibility for one party," said Rep. Allison. "And they don't end up abiding by a simple rule, which is do what they say they're going to do."

Rep. Allison was just elected to his fourth term as State Representative, and has going on seven years of experience in politics.

"I think the big thing for all of us as citizens of this country is to not get caught up with whether it's an R or a D that's representing us in Washington, or representing the state," said Rep. Allison. "But more so that they are people of principle who are going to abide what they say they're going to abide by."

"Too often up there, they are 500 miles away from Young Harris, Ga., and they have to make an effort to understand what's going on here and why it's important that they vote certain ways up there. So, I'm very excited about what happened - I'm excited to see what the Republicans can do."

In closing on the subject, Rep. Allison said he was once asked what he would do if he were in Washington.

"I would advise the majority leader in the Senate and the speaker of the House to

sit down, put your egos aside - set aside a plan for the next 52 weeks," said Rep. Allison. "And if it were me, I would put a bill on the president's desk that was signed off by the House and the Senate that's something the American people agree on, every week, for the next 52 weeks."

Looking ahead to what Towns County and the rest of Georgia can expect in January, Rep. Allison turned back to state politics.

"There's been a lot of talk, and one of the toughest question I always have to answer is, what do we do next? What's going to be next year?" said Rep. Allison. "I gave a speech to the Union County Republican Party on Saturday, and I got up there, and I said, I'm going to save y'all the suspense - for the most part, I don't know."

"What I can tell you is, we are going to have somewhere in the vicinity of 25 new House members. So, we're going to have somewhere in the vicinity of 20 percent new people. With new blood comes new ideas."

Of course, Rep. Allison can't see the future, but he does expect transportation to be a hot topic on the floor of the general assembly when the 2015 Legislative Session begins on Monday, Jan. 12, at the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta.

Parade...from Page 1A

ible. It's a lot of fun to see and be a part of."

Spectators usually line up all the way from the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, where the parade begins at 5:30 p.m., straight down to McConnell Memorial Baptist Church and Park Sterling Bank near the square in Hiwassee.

This year's overarching theme is "Christmas on Main Street," and many groups have already signed up to design floats for the festivities.

"The different groups that enter, they'll do different things," said Sheriff Clinton. "I know the VFW is already planning on entering, and they'll usually have - of course, it's several groups that will be represented, with the American Legion and all those guys, and they'll have their floats represented. Several of the churches have participated, and we'll see everything from patriotic themes, nativity themes - a lot of different stuff."

Each year, a panel of judges selects its favorite floats from varying categories, and float builders are awarded a prize.

Anyone can donate a toy to the Empty Stocking Fund, which generally starts with the parade and runs straight through to Christmas, when



the Sheriff's Department helps Santa in his giving task.

"It's amazing - I've told people, it ends up looking like Santa's Toy Shop here in the squad room," said Sheriff Clinton. "You think sometimes that there's no way we're getting all these toys delivered between now and a couple of weeks, but it always works out and everybody comes together for it."

Residents can help sponsor older children by contacting Family Connection of Towns County Schools or Hiwassee Chief of Police Jimmy Wright, who heads up the Shop With a Cop initiative.

Several businesses have

stepped up as sponsors for this year's parade, including: Asiano, Slate Salon, NCI, VanKeith Insurance, Edward James Investments, Verizon Wireless, Hiwassee Realty, Baumgarten Cement, Country Cutaway, C&J Outfitters, Hiwassee River Retreat, Deb Collins and Rock Crusher Farms.

"They have all donated various amounts to sponsor the event," said Sheriff Clinton. "Those sponsorships go to buy toys for the Empty Stocking Drive."

The parade promises to be a fun family affair - a way for the community, and especially children of the com-

munity, to get involved with civic leaders and just enjoy the holiday spirit.

"Hey, it's Christmas-time," said Sheriff Clinton. "Is there anything more special than that, as a child especially? That's really the focus of the whole thing for us, is the kids."

Gloves, toboggans, scarves and heavy jackets are all appropriate for Saturday's event.

"Hot chocolate is very appropriate, and hot candy canes," said Sheriff Clinton. "And mostly just a good cheer - a cheerful spirit is very appropriate this time of year."

Kendall...from Page 1A

and it had nothing to do with the Sheriff's budget which is funded above that of adjoining county departments.

Commissioner Kendall also responded to a Letter to Editor in last week's *Towns County Herald* by Carolyn A. Brown, of Plott Town Road in Towns County.

The letter, Commissioner Kendall said, included false information. The commissioner said he had explained to Brown about her questions of concern at the October County meeting.

First, all money brought into the county from fees of all departments and offices are deposited in the county treasury as required by Georgia law.

Revenues are estimated for the budget using the collection and history of each revenue source.

Paid invoices show three new 2013 Ford Tauruses, each with 10 miles total, were purchased in 2013, not used cars as Brown stated in her Letter

to the Editor.

This added an additional \$75,000 to the Sheriff's Office budget, Commissioner Kendall said.

"Also there was additional funding in the Sheriff's budget for two more cars, however, he chose to spend these funds for something other than cars. Paid invoices for the purchased cars were passed out at the November meeting. Each year there is a line item amount for two cars in the Sheriff's budget, he can buy cars or spend the money as he chooses," Commissioner Kendall writes.

Also, "insurance reimbursement for the new 2013 vehicle that was crashed last year was received in 2013 and the Sheriff's 2013 budget was amended to include the \$13,604 of insurance money plus an additional \$63,000 of taxpayer money to cover the department's over budget spending of \$76,604."

Mistletoe Market thrives again at NGTC

By Todd Forrest
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The holiday season is upon us and the 14th annual Mistletoe Market kicked things off over the weekend at North Georgia Technical College - Blairsville Campus.

The Mistletoe Market, presented by the Mountain Regional Arts and Crafts Guild is the third and final show of the year, coming on the heels of the Celebrate Autumn show in September and the Mountain Fling in June.

Spaces quickly filled for the November show with more than 50 local artists putting their handiwork on display for the public.

The show featured handmade items ranging from pottery, paintings, woodworking, fiber arts, fabric art, jewelry, wreaths, soaps, sauces and rubs, skin care, floral, yard art, furniture and holiday gifts and decorations.

The Mistletoe Market was a huge success for Hiwassee's Artwork's Artisans Center's Children's Arts and Crafts Summer Program. The program, which begins when



school lets out for the summer, allows every participating child the opportunity to create and be exposed to different types of art.

Some of the classes from this past summer were "Dancing Houses" that allowed children to design and construct paper buildings. Another class was titled "What a Hoot!" where they can paint a hoot owl on a

stretched artist canvas using acrylic paint.

Those are just two of the more than 30 different opportunities presented by the Artisans Center's summer program. The program is open during the summer break and lasts until school resumes in August.

The guild gives back to the community by offering encouragement and support to

local artists through Artworks, shows and fairs. It provides an opportunity for artists to teach their art or craft. It offers discounted or free art classes for children to experience creating and appreciating art and offer affordable art classes for adults to experience creating and appreciating art.

It supports local traditional mountain crafts and culture through Artworks, shows, and fairs while offering scholarships.

It allows the community a venue to appreciate and purchase quality arts and handmade crafts through Artworks, shows, and fairs. The guild also contributes to economic development of the community by attracting tourists and new residents who appreciate local art and crafts.

Mountain Regional Arts & Crafts Guild meets monthly on the second Tuesday of every month at Daniel's Steakhouse in Hiwassee. The Board will meet at 4 p.m., and the Guild meeting begins at 6 p.m. Anyone interested in the Guild are invited to come to any monthly Guild meeting and are encouraged to bring a sample of your work. For more information, call Artworks at (706) 896-0932.

Nolen leads Indian Raider Band on a new adventure

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The Towns County High School Indian Raider Band has been busy this year, what with all the trophies they won in competitions last month.

And they've done it under the leadership of first-year teacher Derrick Nolen, who graduated from the University of Georgia last year with a bachelor's degree in music education.

"There were some first day jitters, but overall it's been going pretty well," said Nolen.

Nolen, who is from Conyers, immediately sought employment as a band director upon graduating college. The position in Towns County became available at the end of last school year, when former band director Frank McKinney retired.

"I can't get over the fact that as a first-year job, that I was able to come here and live in a vacation spot and have a bunch of motivated kids," said Nolen. "It's pretty cool, and I'm just proud of them."



Photo by Tava Bradshaw

So far, Nolen has fit right in, both with his high school and middle school students, and with the community.

"I grew up in a pretty metro area, and then I went to Athens, so this is a very different culture change for me, but it's a good one," said Nolen. "I've been welcomed by everyone."

Some of the greatest initial challenges have now become routine for the first-year teacher and his pupils.

"Just getting used to the grind of teaching every day, classroom discipline and all the changes that come with having a new guy," said Nolen. "But they've responded really well. And even the

seniors, who - I had a new director in my senior year in high school as well, and it was tough. But it's been a good year so far."

And the step into which Nolen and his students have fallen into together is all too apparent when observing what the group has accomplished in only the last few months.

"In the summer before the first day of school, we have a two-week camp where our leadership will come in first, and pretty soon we had the full group here," said Nolen. "And we start to work on the show that we're going to do for the fall."

This year's halftime show was called "Shades of Latin," and was performed during football games and at competitions.

"I picked that almost on purpose because I knew it was different than anything we had done recently, just a different style of music," said Nolen. "So, we prepared those two weeks, and then there's still a little bit of time, because when school starts early August, you still have some time between the first day of school and the first football game."

Nolen and the Indian Raider Band practiced after school twice a week for two hours each practice.

"Competition season usually hits around mid-October, so we had two of those as well that we prepped for," said Nolen.

The band as a whole placed second in Class A at the Lake Lanier Tournament of Bands at Chestatee High School with Excellent and Superior ratings.

Then, in the larger Golden River Marching Festival in Tallapoosa, Ga, Nolen and his kids placed third in Class A.

"That's always been a really, really well attended competition," said Nolen. "So for us to place like that, and I told them over and over, that's a pretty big deal, because not only is it a bigger competition but it has a name and a tradition. So, traditionally, a lot of really good groups go there."

Nolen realizes he is one of the many guiding hands in the futures of these bright young students, and he seems ready for the job.

"It's rewarding having kids - you know, you start them from the beginning, and you get to see them for several years, ideally," said Nolen. "See them from when they're in sixth grade to 12th grade so that's a pretty big chunk of their lives."