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ilities that it occupies today. The main administrative building was built in 1955 when the EMC had 7,800 members and only 32 employees.

Fast forward to today and the EMC has more than 43,000 members and 195 employees.

"We also have over 120 operations and engineering employees doing their best to efficiently work out of an old sewing plant building that was originally constructed back in the 1930s," Akins said. "Our office employees are doubling up in cubicles designed for a single employee. And we have exceeded our capacity to efficiently store equipment, inventory and customer files."

"Our current facility also lacks adequate parking for our employees," he said.

Akins added that contractors of the new facility were given incentives to hire local sub-contractors to generate jobs for local construction crews in times of economic duress.

"Contractors will be purchasing materials and supplies locally and construction personnel will be eating and shopping locally," Akins said. "The project

was divided into three phases in an effort to promote local participation. Language was included in those contracts to encourage bidders to use local sub-contractors, laborers and suppliers.

"We also required the bidders to include a list of local sub-contractors and suppliers that they intended to contract with," Akins said.

Akins also touched on the North Georgia Network Project, the development of a high speed broadband network through \$33 million in funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Completion of the project is expected by November 2012, Akins said.

"Blue Ridge Mountain EMC is also engineering and constructing segments of the fiber-optic network inside our service territory," Akins said.

The EMC, Akins said, has continued working to replace all 49,000 of its electric meters with new Smart Meters.

"Our old electric meters utilized RF (Radio Frequency) transmitters to broadcast readings to our

meter readers as they drove near the meter," Akins said. "The new Smart Meters will communicate over power lines to our office, eliminating the expense of having meter readers drive around each month to collect the readings."

"We have replaced approximately 30,000 meters and hope to have the rest replaced by the end of the year," Akins said.

EMC customer Sonia Sanchez, of Hiawassee, asked if final installation of the Smart Meters will lead to a reduction in the \$14.69 customer charge currently in place on each member's EMC bill.

Akins said that will happen over time once the project is complete.

Larry Sorgen, general counsel for the EMC, said a reduction of the customer charge won't happen overnight.

"It won't happen in a year," Sorgen said.

In other business, the members reelected board members Elois Anderson of Clay County, NC, Terry Taylor of Towns County, and Lenny Parks of Union County.

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Rick Stancil, Eddi Minche, Ricky Mathis, Jimmy Wright, Tim McArthur, Donna Howell, Ken Nicholson, Wes Hooper, Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, Debbie Phillips, Janet Allen, and Brenda Jackson.

Lee has agreed to serve as the vice chair of the community's Appalachian Trail Community advisory board.

Local governments and businesses will partner in developing city/county maps for hikers to find supplies and food; inexpensive or free transportation from the AT to Hiawassee and or Young Harris; they'll work together to do trail maintenance; a logo, signage, and Web site development in addition to putting informational articles in the local newspaper.

Already in place locally is an educational Outreach Program within Towns County Schools, where students, under the supervision of Eddi Minche, go out to the AT with Appalachian Trail Conservancy volunteers to experience the trail firsthand.

Carnes said that not many people know it, but the Hiawassee Budget Inn has a shuttle service already in place to aid hikers who need a ride from the Trail into town.

"They go out pick up the hikers for free and the hikers stay at their lodge," Carnes said. "When they get out in town and do all their business, Hiawassee Inn takes them back to the trail for free."

"Our library is already named a Trail Friendly Library," Carnes said. "It's time to let hikers know they can come here and get lots of help."

Lumpkin and Union counties also share the distinction of being Appalachian Trail communities.

Movie...continued from page 1

Chatuge were perfect for filming the movie scenes because the book's main characters are secluded on a deserted island as part of an annual hazing incident at the camp.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall said that Thorup became interested in the possibility of filming in Towns County because of its beach, lake and beautiful mountains.

"Kai came to my office and said the company he worked for was interested in filming a movie here in Towns County," Commissioner Kendall said. "They were looking at a lake in another county. They couldn't find a place on that lake where there wasn't lights or development."

"I got together with Hilda Thomason and Hilda began to talk with some other people in the county, the Chamber of Commerce and everything came together by people working together," Commissioner Kendall said. "It will be a boost to our county and give us some recognition. I think it will help land values that are now needing some help."

Initially, it was believed that the film crew would

"Communities along the Appalachian Trail corridor are an asset," said Bob Almand, chairman of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy Board of Directors. "These towns act as good friends and good neighbors to the trail. Over the last 20 years, Hiawassee has become a vibrant community. There's a lot of development that wasn't here when I first started coming up here."

"The goal of the Appalachian Trail Community Program is to partner with these communities to benefit both the AT and the communities," Almand said. "Being a trail community encourages visitors of the AT to spend time in your community. They'll eat in your restaurants, stay in your hotels and shop in your stores."

"This designation is a way of thanking the communities along the AT for their decades of service to hikers," Almand said. "Hiawassee has a long, long history of serving hikers."

The Appalachian Trail is 2,179 miles long between Springer Mountain in Gilmer County and Mount Katahdin in Maine.

The AT as it is called by the many that frequent it, was explicitly designed to be hiked. Along the trail there are resources made available to aid hikers during their trek. That's what an AT Community is all about, being hiker-friendly.

Shelley Rose, president of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, said designated AT communities are very important to hikers along the trail.

"A lot of people aren't even aware of the AT being here and the resource that it is for us in Georgia as well as the economic impact it can bring to a community," Rose said. "There are a lot of people that come

to the mountains to hike.

"I know that whenever our club has a hike, we need somewhere for breakfast, I always stop somewhere afterwards for an ice cream," she said. "Hikers bring business into the community. I think it's a mutual relationship between the communities and the Appalachian Trail."

Carnes, an avid hiker and member of the Georgia Appalachian Trail Club, has long believed that the portion of the AT that goes through Towns County could become an economic asset to the local community.

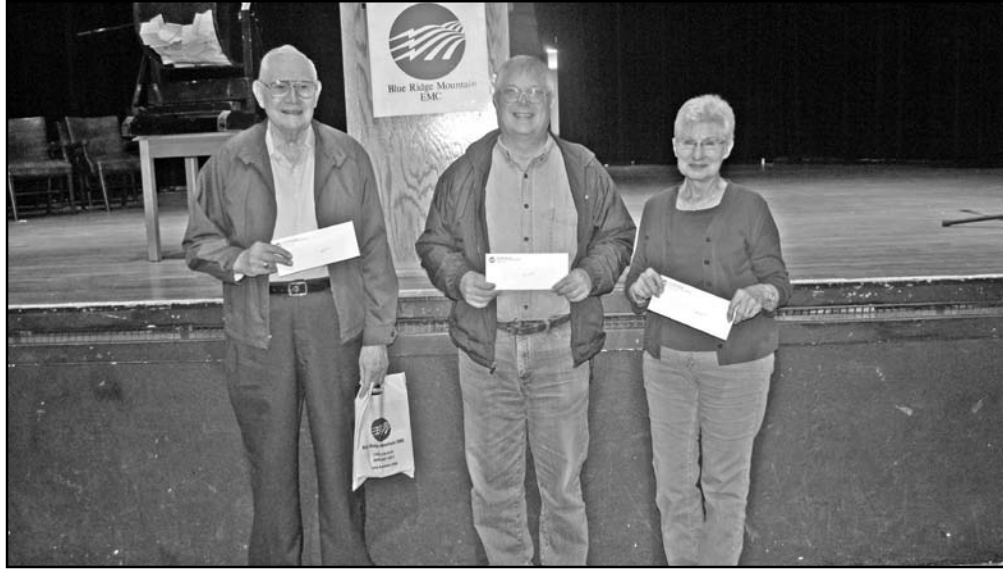
With the mindset that hikers aren't an intrusion, rather, they're somebody that should be welcomed into the community, Carnes began the process of helping Towns County and its communities learn to become hiker-friendly.

He met with community leaders, talked with local businesses and eventually connected them with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy.

Carnes estimates that about 500 or so AT hikers come through Towns County each spring to resupply, stay in hotels and rest up from their hike before continuing their jaunt. Between 25 and 30 miles of the AT is in Towns County.

Commissioner Kendall, Mayor Mathis and Young Harris City Council member Dr. John Kelley were humbled to have their communities bestowed with the designation of being an Appalachian Trail Community.

"Maintenance and protection of our natural resources is crucial to our economic development and also the quality of life of the people who live here," Commissioner Kendall said. "We have a great responsibility to take care of what has been left for us to protect."



Above, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Band picks for the crowd. Below, the Rev. Bethel Buchanan, Richard Gehring and Barbara Woolfolk are all smiles after winning the \$100 prizes at the 77th Annual EMC Meeting at Anderson Music Hall in Hiawassee. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

FFA Feeds Towns County

By Sabrina Garrett
Special to Towns County Herald

Living to Serve.

This is what Towns County Middle and High School FFA Chapters are doing this year in order to give back to the community.

These students have been working diligently to carry out this line from the FFA motto for months.

The first task taken on by Towns County FFA was to help feed the community.

Back in the spring, the Middle School Chapter, along with advisor Todd Flanagan, planted an entire acre of potatoes.

Earlier this month, High School FFA members,

advisor Sabrina Garrett, and FFA Alumni members, Frank Riley and Jerry Hamilton, came along to dig and pick up all of the potatoes that were planted by the middle school students earlier in the year.

After a hard afternoon of work, approximately 1,800 pounds of Irish, gold, and red potatoes were harvested.

The FFA Chapters donated 600 pounds of potatoes each to the Towns County Food Pantry and also to the House of Prayer in Blairsville in hopes of making a difference in the community.

The remaining 600 pounds of potatoes were

used as a fundraiser for Towns County FFA to help students be able to attend future trips, including North FFA Region Rally in Covington and National FFA Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana in October, and also pay for materials used in contests, such as tractor driving, floral design, and livestock judging.

The FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through Agricultural Education. Please support your local Middle School and High School FFA Chapters.



Towns County FFA students and their advisors show off the fruits of their labors.

Unicoi Turnpike Day is Nov. 12

Towns County Historical Society has set Saturday, November 12, as **Unicoi Turnpike Day** in Towns County.

At his September 15th Commissioner's meeting, Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall signed a proclamation setting November 12th as Unicoi Turnpike Day. "This is a wonderful opportunity for hikers to see the longest remnant of the old turnpike in Towns County," said Carey Waldrip, chairman of the Society's Unicoi Turnpike Committee.

Society members and members of the community will meet at the Unicoi Gap parking lot near where the Appalachian Trail crosses GA 17/75 South (Hiawassee to Helen highway) from 9 a.m. until noon for turnpike information and hiking directions. "We do not plan to have

guided tours. We will provide turnpike information and hiking directions only," said Waldrip. "Each individual or group is responsible of their own safety and length of travel as they hike along the old turnpike."

This remnant of the old Unicoi Turnpike is located on USFS land, and is a rough, sunken road starting at the gap and stretching two miles north down into Towns County.

"The trek is rather steep and strenuous. You should be healthy and in good shape. Wear hiking clothes and boots. Brightly colored (hot pink or orange) hat and/or orange vest are recommended for safety since hunting season will be open," Waldrip emphasized.

Another event for Nov. 12th: If you would like to learn the fundamentals of

geocaching, meet at the Unicoi Gap parking lot at 9 AM for a one-hour briefing by Dr. Paul Arnold of Young Harris College. Bring a handheld GPS unit if you can (very helpful, but not required).

"After the **Geocaching Mini-Workshop**, you will still have plenty time to make the trek down along the nearby remnant of the turnpike," Waldrip said.

Unicoi Turnpike, chartered in 1813, took six years of backbreaking human and animal power to complete. It was the first vehicular route to connect North Georgia with Tennessee through the high mountains, and it provided a thoroughfare from the upper Savannah River to the Little Tennessee River