

Early Voting...from Page 1A

November with Democratic nominee for governor Stacey Abrams, who won her primary election in May.

Also in the July 24 runoff race, Geoff Duncan and David Shafer each are vying for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor.

Statewide, Shafer received 48.91 percent of the vote to Duncan's 26.65 percent in the primary, necessitating a runoff election to decide the victor.

The winner of this race will face Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor Sarah Riggs Amico in November.

For Secretary of State, David Belle Isle is in a runoff election against Brad Raffensperger for the Republican nomination.

Statewide, Raffensperger received 34.96 percent of the vote to Belle Isle's 28.54 percent in May, which is why the two are in a runoff for the nomination.

BRMEMC...from Page 1A

Credentials and Elections Committee is scheduled to meet on July 24, after which time the slate of all director candidates will be finalized.

Election packets will be mailed to members this year, each containing a ballot and election notice, and elections are expected to open the week of Aug. 6 ahead of the big Sept. 8 annual meeting.

Also in the July 12 board meeting, the EMC heard from Austin Jett of Russ Blakely & Associates, an employee benefits advisor.

He advised the board that the EMC has been able to save \$160,000 year-to-date by switching from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to Cigna for health insurance and related benefits.

During the Member Comments portion of the meeting, Charlotte Harper of Hayesville, North Carolina, spoke about some trouble she'd experienced recently with the EMC.

Harper, 75, had her power cut for two days at the end of June because she'd failed to get her husband Robert's death certificate in to the EMC following a 90-day notice to change the name on the account.

The ordeal resulted in Harper going nearly 48 hours without power and her daughter calling in a wellness check through the Clay County Sheriff's Office when she proved unreachable.

Ultimately, EMC employee Jon Cook went out to her house at 6 a.m. on Saturday, June 30, to help her fill out the proper paperwork, after which he reconnected her power.

EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms announced in the July 12 board meeting that the EMC had altered its process for handling similar situations in light of Harper's experience.

Moving forward, as long as accounts remain paid, the EMC will no longer cut power

after a period of waiting to receive a death certificate.

Nelms also announced that Cass Larson, Vice President of Pricing and Contracts with the Tennessee Valley Authority, will appear in the Aug. 14 regular meeting of the BRMEMC Board of Directors.

Larson will make a presentation on the upcoming changes to the TVA wholesale rate and conduct a Q&A session with the board and staff.

Furthermore, the EMC is working to secure TVA CEO Bill Johnson's attendance at this year's EMC annual meeting in Union County.

TVA is facing criticism in the valley after proposing to raise its wholesale power rate for the sixth time since 2013, which will mean higher annual electric bills of about \$27 in passthrough charges for the average EMC power customer come Oct. 1.

The decision to increase the rate will be made in TVA's August board meeting.

And while the TVA has experienced stellar revenues over the past several years, it says the increases have helped to pay down debt and keep up with the costs of doing business.

"As you look at the long range financial plan, the one element of that plan that we have not yet achieved is getting to the point where we can pay down debt while continuing to invest in the system," said Jim Hopson, a spokesperson for TVA. "So, we're at a point where we have been doing very well financially, but all of that extra funding has been invested back into the system."

TVA's initial long range financial plan from 2013 called for annual increases through 2023, but Hopson said that the plan is always subject to change depending on financial determinations made by the board.

According to Hopson,

Whoever wins this race on July 24 will face Democratic nominee for secretary of state Josh Barrow on Nov. 6.

The only Democrats who will appear in the July 24 Democratic Primary Election Runoff are Sid Chapman and Otha E. Thornton Jr. for state school superintendent.

Statewide, Thornton received 43.87 percent of the vote to Chapman's 36.47 percent, and the winner of this runoff will face Republican Incumbent Richard Woods in November.

The TVA is not trying to raise rates to the point where all debt is paid, but to get on "a trajectory to where the debt is going down, which means that the cost of servicing that debt goes down."

"And that's what leads us to the point of having stable, low rates for a longer period of time," said Hopson. "That's one of the things that the board is going to be looking very closely at as they make any decisions in the August board meeting."

The proposed rate increase comes at a time when TVA is working to get a better grip on fixed costs associated with delivering power by lowering wholesale energy rates 0.5 cents per kWh and establishing a corresponding revenue neutral grid access charge.

In response to TVA's rate plans, Board President Cummings asked his fellow board members in their July 12 meeting for support in drafting a letter to TVA regarding the proposed rate increase and rate change.

The letter will list the board's concerns and ask for follow-up from TVA in addressing those concerns.

Additionally, Nelms and several other local power company managers hosted a dinner for TVA Board Member A.D. Frazier of Mineral Bluff on Tuesday, July 17, to discuss their continued concerns with the overall financial direction of TVA, including the upcoming TVA rate increase planned for the fall.

In other EMC news, operation and maintenance costs are up year-to-date due to expenses incurred from several major weather events in the last year, including the series of thunderstorms in June that resulted in 24 broken power poles, 347 device outages and 32,360 affected meters.

The October board meeting has been moved from its special meeting date of Oct. 23 back to its original date of Oct. 9.

Fair...from Page 1A

lineup during the Fair is sure to excite fans of tunes originally popularized in the region, including those from artists like the Bellamy Brothers, Joe Diffie, T. Graham Brown, Herman's Hermits, Jimmy Fortune, Jim Wood and the Georgia Mountain Fair Band, among others.

Residents will want to make sure to line the streets of Downtown Hiawassee as the 68th Annual Georgia Mountain Fair Parade rolls through town on Saturday, July 21, at 11 a.m.

Starting at South State Bank and ending at the fairgrounds, this year's parade will highlight community veterans to serve as the parade's grand marshals.

There will also be a float contest with \$4,500 in prize money going to floats judged to be in the Top 3, thanks to a generous donation by Bob Cloer.

"We've got a lot of different organizations, a lot of businesses, a lot of individuals (signed up for the parade)," said Thomas. "Ms. Senior Georgia is going to be in the parade. Commissioner Gary Black with the Georgia Department of Agriculture's coming."

"The Union County Farmer's Market is going to be in it. Just a lot of people in Towns County as well, so we're excited about the parade. We've got 25 applications turned in."

Georgia Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle will also be participating in the July 21 parade.

Plus, on Monday, July 23, the ever-popular Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Pageant will take place at 8 p.m. inside

Anderson Music Hall. Be sure to come out and cheer on all the local ladies participating in the pageant.

2017 Miss Georgia Mountain Fair Eryn Cochran will be in attendance to crown the new Miss Georgia Mountain Fair at the close of the pageant.

"It's still not too late to get in the pageant," said Thomason. "We're still taking applications. The deadline was supposed to be this (past) Sunday, though we may have to extend it a little bit to get a few more girls in the pageant, but it's coming together really well."

"We want to encourage the young girls from 17 to 24 to get in the pageant. It's a great experience for them, it's educational, plus the prize money that they receive and the gifts that they receive. And it's fun, it's good for the girls."

Admission to the Fair costs \$12 for a one-day pass, \$33 for a pass valid any three days, and \$90 for a Fun Fair Pass, which includes access for all nine days of the Fair.



A view from a past Georgia Mountain Fair Parade. Notice all the kids lined up to collect candy thrown by parade participants. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Music shows are included in ticket prices, and children 12 and under get in free.

Tuesday, July 24, is Military Day at the Fair, and all veterans or active-duty servicemembers get in free that day.

Parking is free, midway rides are an additional charge, and all tickets are available at the gates.

"We want everybody to come out and have a great time at the Georgia Mountain Fair," said Thomason. "A big thank you to all the volunteers that are helping organize all this and put it together. Without our volunteers, we wouldn't be able to do what we do."

Added Thomason: "The Georgia Mountain Fair is a nonprofit organization, and it's a project of the Towns County Lions Club. Our whole purpose for being in business is to promote tourism and bring people to the mountains."

"And hopefully, they'll buy homes, shop, eat at the restaurants, buy fuel at the gas stations, fill up the hotels, which creates more hotel/motel tax, and also helps increase sales tax (collections) here in our county."

Mayors...from Page 1A

things like social media, such as how to handle social media and what types of social media to engage in, said Ordiales. She added that whatever they need help with as members of local governments, GMA provides it.

Then there are district meetings, where they give local governments updates on what other cities in the district are doing, as well as throughout the state.

"It's all in one place for three days, and it's like drinking water from a fire hydrant," said Ordiales.

During the convention, both mayors met with several people specializing in downtown development authorities for the purpose of potentially establishing a joint authority.

The general consensus,

according to Ordiales, is that multiple small towns in a county each have a DDA or economic development board, and that trying to join them together is not a good idea.

The more practical way to approach that issue, she said, would be for the two cities to share one economic development officer split between Hiawassee and Young Harris.

"We're looking to see what the best way to pursue that is," said Ordiales.

Gibby, too, characterized their discussions as an exploration of ideas, and she went on to say that Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw would be welcome to "come on board with us as well."

"We would love to share one person amongst ourselves

until we all make a little more money and can (each) afford to hire a full-time person, which would be the ultimate goal," said Gibby. "Not just a grant writer or an event person, but somebody who's really looking at what each of the cities need, because we're different. We don't compete."

Much of their discussions have centered on the fact that both mayors feel confident there is much they can do jointly as partners to help both Young Harris and Hiawassee.

Of course, there are still many considerations to be dealt with in pursuing the idea of a joint DDA, said Ordiales, but they plan to follow up on it to see if they can make it happen.

When reached for comment, Bradshaw said that the mayors had spoken with him about a joint DDA, and that, though it's just an idea at this point, it is an idea worth further consideration.

Hiawassee...from Page 1A

two-year guarantee.

Barrett is the husband of Hiawassee City Councilwoman Amy Barrett, and she excused herself from the room during the July 10 vote to avoid a conflict of interest.

GIRMA is operated by the Georgia Municipal Association.

The next motion to carry in the July 10 meeting was the approval of a \$5,200 water infrastructure mapping project to be conducted by the Georgia Mountains Regional Commission, or GMRC.

"Currently, the city is using a map that was created over 40 years ago," said Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales. "We have added many more lines, and many of the lines that are there, we're not even sure that those are correct."

"So, GMRC has a group that is dedicated to doing mapping. They came up, and they offered me a few of their services, and one of them is the water map."

Added Ordiales: "I want to get that going, because that's going to be a great help to us."



Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales in the July 10 regular city council meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

All of our maps that we have are either spread out in 10 different maps, or they're just all wrong. So, that'll give us where the valves are, where our pipes go from 10-inch to 8-inch to 6-inch to 2-inch.

"It's a pretty comprehensive map, and I really want to start that project this summer if we can, depending

on (GMRC's) schedule."

Also in the meeting, the city council voted unanimously to adopt a Sunday brunch alcohol resolution to place a citywide referendum on the November General Election Ballot.

Right now, Sunday sales of alcohol by the drink inside Hiawassee City Limits don't start until 12:30 p.m.

However, thanks to a new bill passed by state legislators and signed by Gov. Nathan Deal earlier this year, Hiawassee residents will be able to decide in November if they want to accommodate earlier brunch sales of alcohol in local restaurants on Sundays.

The measure would move the start time of alcohol sales by the drink from 12:30 p.m. to 11 a.m. on Sundays, creating an extra hour and a half window for local restaurants to better serve their customers.

Putting the local referendum on the November ballot will allow the city to forgo many of the costs associated with holding a special election.

"Since we're going to have an election anyway - it's not a special election just to put that one thing on there - we thought we'd take advantage of it," said Ordiales. "The only cost to us will be the paper ballots for absentee ballots."

Piccola...from Page 1A

arterial bleeding from the color of the blood leaving Piccola, and he knew immediately that she needed urgent care from a fully-equipped trauma center.

Without hesitation, Chastain called for a medical helicopter transport, and the Air Methods chopper stationed at Union General Hospital in Blairsville responded.

Within 15 minutes of paramedics arriving on the scene, Piccola had been moved to a Towns County ambulance, stabilized in transit to a designated landing zone in Hiawassee, and loaded onto a medical helicopter for the 40-minute flight to Erlanger in Tennessee.

"I'm a training officer over here in Towns County," said Chastain. "I also work full-time in Cherokee County, North Carolina, and I do a lot of training over there. When we put somebody on a helicopter, it's because they're very, very sick."

"We're very blessed in this area with helicopters. We have one in Blairsville ... one in Andrews, and then we have one in Blue Ridge. So we have three helicopters that are within 16 to 20 minutes of us - and that's from the time we key the radio."

Fast forward to Tuesday, July 10. Piccola had recovered enough from her ordeal to journey back to the North Georgia Mountains, only this time, she intended to make a very special stop instead of the usual pass through.

Piccola was returning to reunite with the men who had saved her life that fateful day in Towns County, and she rewarded them by buying everyone's lunch at the Rib Country in Blairsville.

She and her three girlfriends joined Chastain and his wife, Annette, and son, Trey, who is also an EMT, along with Lovingood and Towns County EMA Director Ken Nicholson at the restaurant.

"I just had my 78th birthday, and I lived to talk about it," Piccola said at their encounter, laughing with joy. Indeed, everyone seemed happy to be getting acquainted under much better circumstances.

Chastain noted that people sometimes show their



Friends Patti Crane, Sandra Smith, Martha Piccola and Betty Wright on July 10. Photo by Mark Smith



Lovingood, left, with Chastain and his family, along with Piccola and her friends in an appreciation lunch for the first responders on July 10 in Blairsville. Photo by Mark Smith

appreciation, but in all his 32 years as a paramedic, he'd never experienced anyone traveling like Piccola to personally thank him and his partner for their assistance.

"She has gone above and beyond showing her appreciation," Chastain said, tears welling up simultaneously in his and Piccola's eyes.

"I'm glad you're a big guy and you could pick me up," said Piccola, to which Chastain responded, "I kind of just picked you up and put you where you needed to be."

Piccola then offered him a heartfelt "thank you," and they hugged.

"I don't smile a whole lot, but this has made my day," said Chastain. "This has made my year."

Emergencies happen every day here in the rural North Georgia Mountains, and situations like the one experienced by Martha Piccola are what local first responders train for on a daily basis.

If their patients are life-flighted, first responders like Chastain and Lovingood might get a phone call from the helicopter service saying they made it and what they had done, but that's it, said Chastain.

Sometimes, they'll get a call or a card from the patient or their family, and he said that they save the cards for when they have a really bad day, so they can pull them out and look at them.

"But somebody that goes to this amount of trouble, it blows me away," said Chastain, tears welling up once more.

Young Harris man arrested a second time on a drug charge

News Special
Towns County Herald

Towns County Sheriff's Office Investigators arrested Jeffery Dale Plott, 47, of Young Harris, a second time on Tuesday, July 10.

He has been charged with Violation of Georgia Controlled Substance Act, possession of marijuana.

Investigators arrested Plott after conducting a search of a residence on Meadow Lane in Young Harris that Tuesday afternoon.

Plott was out on bond at the time for a previous charge of Violation of Georgia Controlled Substance Act, possession of methamphetamine.

The investigation is active and ongoing, and additional charges may be forthcoming.



Jeffery Plott