

EMC holds 'drive-in' annual meeting; Director Henson wins contested election



The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors, L-R: Gene Mason, Ray Cook, Roy Perren, Danny Henson, Jack Lance, Gayland Trull, Jeff Ledford, Bert Rogers and Cory Payne. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

News Special Township County Herald

YOUNG HARRIS – The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC held its 82nd Annual Meeting on Thursday, Sept. 24, at co-op headquarters in Young Harris. Modifications were made due to COVID-19 precautions, and the meeting was held using a drive-in style. Of the 5,960 members who voted in this year's EMC elections, 78% returned paper ballots, 21% voted online and 36 people voted in person at the Annual Meeting. Director Danny Henson defended his Union County seat on the Board of Directors, which was the only contested seat in 2020. Henson won 55% of the vote and was thankful for everyone who

cast a ballot. "Over the next three years, one of our main focuses will be internet expansion," Henson said following his win Thursday. "With more and more people working from home and students doing their work from home, the expansion of the internet is vital to our community." Board Members Jeff Ledford of Clay County, North Carolina, and Bert Rogers from Towns County ran unopposed for their seats this year. Also, on the ballot was the by-law amendment for directors to remain in their elected position for no more than five consecutive three-year terms from the time of their respective election at a meeting of the members. The by-

law amendment passed 77% in favor to 23% not in favor. Members and guests who attended entered through the gated operations entrance and drove through the warehouse to register, enter for door prizes and vote in person before proceeding to the designated parking space in front of the truck shed where the business meeting took place. Attendees remained in their vehicles at all times and tuned their FM radio to a station on which they could listen to the business meeting. Board President Ray Cook welcomed members and guests, and read a resolution created for former BRMEMC Board Director Charles Jenkins, who passed away earlier this year. Cook presented

the resolution to Jenkins' wife Bonnie and son Rick. Outgoing General Manager Jeremy Nelms gave a farewell message thanking the membership, employees and Board of Directors for their support during his time at the co-op, sharing successes he experienced during his four-year tenure. Nelms introduced Interim General Manager Erik C. Brinke. Brinke, an 18-year employee of BRMEMC, shared a brief biography before delivering an executive summary from this

past year. He was pleased to share that BRMEMC maintained a strong financial position in terms of equity and paying down long-term debt, and that electric rates held steady over the past year. Brinke also announced that BRMEMC will be passing through to its members a temporary rate reduction from the Tennessee Valley Authority beginning Oct. 1, 2020. The average residential electric customer will see a reduction of around 1.4% for their kilowatt-hour usage, to be in effect from Oct. 1, 2020, to Sept. 20, 2021. In continuing the executive summary, Brinke highlighted the unprecedented growth the service area continues to see. BRMEMC now maintains 54,537 members, 47,000 members, 6,200 miles of electric lines, and over 10,000 broadband customers. He gave an example from this past July and August that spoke of the growth this area is experiencing. In these two months, BRMEMC added a net total of 400 new members; the customer service department took 24,000 calls and served 1,200 walk-ins; and 571 work orders were completed. All this occurred while continuing to maintain the co-op's five-county power grid and working safely through the COVID-19 pandemic. The interim general manager also shared through partnerships with TVA and CoBank, BRMEMC was able to secure \$30,000 in

monetary funds to the five counties local food banks. Furthermore, BRMEMC installed its first electric vehicle charging station at the Blairsville-Union Chamber of Commerce to promote and further adopt electric vehicles in our service area. This was completed in partnership with the Blairsville-Union Chamber. In closing, Brinke assured the membership that the co-op will continue serving its members with the best reliable energy, continue expanding broadband and providing exceptional customer service. During the business portion of the meeting, Board Secretary Roy Perren shared the determination of a quorum, read the notice of the meeting, and the membership made the motion to approve the minutes. Legal Counsel Charles Autry gave a report of the Nominating Committee and the report of the nominations by petition, and Cook asked the membership if there was any unfinished business before moving into new business. No unfinished or new business was discussed. Cook adjourned the Annual Meeting at 5:50 p.m. and thanked those in attendance as well as the employees for their continuous hard work in making this year's Annual Meeting a success. The 83rd Annual Meeting is scheduled for September 2021. For more information on the Annual Meeting, visit brmemc.com/annualmeeting.

Shop with a Hero...from Page 1A

here that don't have a happy Christmas," Smith said. "The Shop with a Hero gives us the chance to take them on a shopping spree and make their Christmas brighter.

"In addition to that, it gives them a positive interaction with not only the police department but the fire department and EMS, everybody that helps out every year. It used to be Shop with a Cop, but we changed it to Shop with a Hero because we wanted to include all those different agencies.

"There are so many heroes out there, and this is a way for us to give back to the community that so graciously gives so much to us. We are very fortunate to live and work in this area."

With activities such as the dunk tank – which Chief Smith, Mayor Ordiales and Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw all took a turn in – the Fire Department's firehose setup for kids, and the classic cars organized by the Blairsville Cruisers, the event brought in people from all over the area.

"I look around and see all these people here, and they might be here to look at nice cars and everything, but ultimately, they are here to show support," Smith said. "Our community is so wonderful.

"We come together for any cause, and it is great knowing that we have a community where we are appreciated and safe. It is just a great place to live and work."

Another individual supporting the event was Financial Representative Lynn Buck, who was there sharing information about the WoodmenLife Impact



Mayor Liz Ordiales turning the firehose on Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw, who took a turn in the dunk tank during the Sept. 26 Shop with a Hero fundraiser. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

campaign to support Shop with a Hero.

"Woodmen has always been about giving back to our communities," Buck said. "It is just part of who we are as a nonprofit life insurance company.

"The Impact campaign was created a year or two ago to really get dollars into our communities where maybe they didn't know there was a Woodmen situation. It allows people to donate (to local causes) electronically.

"WoodmenLife pays all the administrative costs for that, they do everything to help promote it, but it makes it easy for people to donate (at the local level), especially during this contact-free time we are living in now."

People wanting to donate to Shop with a Hero from the comfort of their own homes can visit <https://woodmenlifeimpact.org/projects/81>.

"Even though children are encouraged to purchase gifts for themselves, they always put others first and purchase gifts for their loved ones," Chief Smith said on the fundraising page. "The Shop with a Hero program builds positive relationships between our first responders and the students in our community and gives these students and their families the opportunity to have a better Christmas."

Children participating in the program each receive \$200 to spend during Shop with a Hero, which again hopes to take over 40 children shopping this year, "plus enjoy a pizza party afterwards."

"Donate now to help a student feel a sense of accomplishment that they are able to provide their loved ones with a Christmas gift," the fundraising page said.

For more information, call Hiwassee City Hall at 706-896-2202.

Yard Sale...from Page 1A



Tom Scissom of Blairsville was just one of many vendors at the Mile Long Yard Sale over the weekend, where he sold his wood art. Photo Jarrett Whitener

"It was really, really good, and I am so thankful. We have had people calling from Florida and South Carolina and everywhere wanting booths to get in it. It is not just the locals that have gotten booths.

"People are buying, and I saw them go out with different items and all. It has been really good, and we definitely want to do it again next year."

Seeing the overwhelming community response for the Mile Long Yard Sale has given Thomason hope that the rest of the fairgrounds' agenda for the year will feature plenty more support to help make up for some of the losses caused by COVID-19.

"People are wanting to get out so bad that they are ready to go do something," Thomason said. "This is outside, and they feel safe and can social distance.

"It does make me feel good seeing all these people, because we have got the Mustang Show next weekend and the crafts the following weekend, and then the beer festival. I'm very hopeful and happy to see crowds coming out."

For more information on upcoming events, visit GeorgiaMountainFairgrounds.com.

Homecoming...from Page 1A



2020 Homecoming Court, L-R: Taylor Thompson, Cheyanne Shook, Vanessa Floyd, Kolby Moss, Allie Dills, Lelia Barnard, Ellee King, Sarah Shook, Bria Chastain and Josie Poston. Photo by Lowell Nicholson

are grateful that we were able to have Homecoming." Both Moss and Floyd

expressed appreciation for the community, school system and their parents for working on

making the year as smooth as possible.

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