

Water Problems...from Page 1A

General Manager Jennifer Maier said. “We had our wells going full-time, and we were well prepared for all this and had everyone on standby.

“What we didn’t anticipate – and this is something I’ve not seen in my 20 years here, and some of the guys working at Notla Water that have been here for over 35 years have never seen it like this – but the biggest issue was all the breaks at customers’ homes.

“As things started to thaw out, all the customers’ homes (with breaks) were being flooded, and all their supply lines going from the meter to the house, so that’s what was draining all of our storage across the board.

“And that’s pretty much what most of the water systems in the area were having issues with, too.”

Exacerbating the issue, Maier said, was the volume of customers running water inside newer, properly insulated homes that “had no need to run their water.”

“Everybody was so freaked out they were running water like crazy,” Maier said. “Homes like trailers with insufficient insulation around their underpinning and older homes definitely need to run their water, but these new homes – they should not have had any issues with that.

“Outside spigots, yard hydrants and such that are exposed very close to the surface, where the waterline is going to it, you can work on covering up and insulating it during extreme weather, but the biggest portion of the issue here was the fact that we went so long with these cold temperatures.

“As far as our water system, everything went like clockwork. We just had to reach out to our customers and say, ‘Hey, take a look at your waterline from the meter to the house and underneath your homes, and look for these leaks that are just draining everything we’ve got.’”

Maier said that one of the biggest things that will help to mitigate similar situations in the future is for property owners who are going out of town in winter to shut their water meters off before traveling. “Otherwise, they could just be flooding their homes and not even know it.”

“This was a strange situation,” Maier said. “Most of North Georgia ended up having these issues. The Environmental Protection Division that oversees water systems sent out a bulletin saying that, look, we are aware that most of our water systems are in some serious trouble with pipes freezing.

“They reached out and said that the governor had declared a state of emergency, so there would be some help if available. So, it wasn’t just our little area here; most of North Georgia felt that freeze, so they were having difficulties.”

Over in Towns County, where the City of Hiawassee

treats water for thousands of customers, including some people in North Carolina and those who receive water through the Towns County Water Authority, water issues affected the system and storage levels all last week.

The city had to implement rolling service interruptions to help identify leaks, and approximately 50 homes went without water from Christmas Eve until about midnight on Dec. 29.

“The tanks are still not full, but most of the customers have had at least some water since midnight,” City Clerk Bonnie Kendrick said Friday, Dec. 30. “We are continuing to refill the tanks as quickly as possible, but it will likely be several days of 24-hour operations at the Water Treatment Facility before all the tanks here and in the county are at full capacity again.”

Added Kendrick, “We are so appreciative of people who checked on neighbors’ homes and called to alert us if they saw water. We had all hands on deck, but those extra eyes really helped. I would like to personally thank all those who have worked to restore water to all our customers. You have gone above and beyond.

“We need to hear from people if they see water where there normally is no water. Please call City Hall at 706-896-2202 and report it. We would rather respond and check them to be sure than to miss something.”

At the end of last week, Coosa Water Authority in Union was reporting that everything was basically under control after having to do some short, controlled service disruptions as well, mostly on Wednesday, Dec. 28.

“We are running pretty much back to normal as of yesterday afternoon,” Coosa General Manager Cole Sullivan said Friday. “A lot of customers have second homes, so they’re not full-time residents, and a lot of them do not turn their water off when they leave to go back home.

“And a lot of them are rentals, so they don’t turn (their meters) off every time somebody comes in and out. So, we had a lot of them freezing and busting on the customer side. We actually read meters twice this week to try to find all of them that had busted.”

Sullivan has been at Coosa for about 16 years, and like Notla, he has never seen it quite this bad in terms of system water loss; Coosa’s three tanks are full at around 18 feet, and two of them dropped as low as 3-4 feet at times, putting major pressure on the authority’s ability to meet demand.

Fortunately, “not a whole lot of (Coosa) customers were affected by outages,” he said.

“It was touch and go there for a little while, but as far as us running out of water for customers, we really did not have that happen,” Sullivan

said, noting the exception of a frozen booster pump that kept some customers out of water for “a couple of hours until we were able to get it fixed.”

Also impacted by the arctic blast was Blairsville City Water, though not to the same extent as some of the other providers.

“We’re OK – we’ve got plenty of water,” Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley said Thursday. “Nottely River is where we get our fresh water from, so we’ve got the plant producing water every day even though we’re losing water every day to leaks that we haven’t found yet.”

Added Conley, “As soon as leaks are discovered, we take measures to fix them. As long as it stays warm, we’re going to find more leaks – it’s going to take it a while to get (completely) resolved.

“We just ask people to report any signs of any water leak, or if you have a pipe that’s busted and you discover it, whatever water company that you’re on, you need to contact that company immediately.”

Least affected was the City of Young Harris, which experienced zero pressure issues, no significant drops in tank reserves, and suffered only two leaks as of Thursday afternoon.

“I will give a shout out to the city public works department,” Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby said. “They have been diligent in prepping for cold weather, checking all the equipment, and even taking care of some equipment by hand, because the extreme cold weather makes it impossible to use automation.”

And while it’s impossible to say whether the same conditions will be repeated over the coming winter months, people can rest assured that area water maintenance crews and plumbers who dealt with the

Free GED Classes

Are you ready to earn your high school equivalency diploma? North Georgia Technical College’s Adult Education program is offering free day and evening courses. Classes are held in Blairsville at the Shirley Miller Building (behind the public library). Call 706-439-6342 to schedule your registration appointment. Our next enrollment date is January 8th & 23rd. NT(Jan4-22)

Beginners Clogging Lessons

Beginners Clogging Lessons will be offered starting Monday, January 9, 2023. Classes are held every Monday from 5:30 to 6 PM in the Keith House at the John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, NC. Ages 6+, no experience required. Hard soled shoes are preferable.

For further information, please call 828-837-8090 or 828-557-5223. NT(Jan4-22)



January Garden Chores from your Master Gardener Extension Volunteers

Trees and Shrubs - For winter interest in your landscape, birch trees, crape myrtle, deciduous magnolia, coral bark maple, kousa and redtwig dogwood, Stewartia, and trident maple all have interesting bark.

For winter blooms, plant flowering quince, witch hazel, and leatherleaf mahonia.

Prune trees and shrubs while they are dormant with the exception of those that bloom in the spring. They should be pruned just after they bloom. Evergreen shrubs can also be pruned late this month.

Be sure to water evergreens before the soil freezes if severe weather is forecast, because the roots are not able to take up water when the soil is frozen.

When pruning, make sure that your tools are sharp. For large branches, first cut through the bark on the underside of the limb to be pruned to keep it from tearing the bark. Next, cut from the top, close but not flush with the trunk. The swelling at the base of each branch is the branch collar and this should not be cut.

Plant ornamental trees and shrubs this month if the soil is not frozen.

Watch for borers, overwintering insects, and scale on broadleaf evergreen trees, fruit trees, shrubs, roses, and perennials. Apply dormant oil spray when these pests are detected, always following label directions.

Water trees and shrubs during dry periods.

Prune nandinas any time between now and early spring by cutting out one third of the oldest canes.

Shrubs such as forsythia, spirea, and kerria can be divided now.

Flowerbeds - Watch for poison ivy when working outdoors. Even though the vine is leafless this time of the year, the branches can still cause a powerful reaction if accidentally touched.

If you have Helleborus orientalis (Lenten rose) planted in your garden – look for blooms beginning now to mid-spring.

To encourage new blooms, deadhead pansies (remove spent blossoms) and fertilize monthly with fertilizer that contains nitrate nitrogen (best for plants growing in cold soils).

Water outside containers planted with pansies and evergreens regularly.

Vegetables - If you have not already done so, prepare your vegetable garden area for spring planting when the ground is frost free and not soggy. Apply lime if your soil test indicates that you should. Contact your County Extension office for soil test directions.

The New Year is an exciting time to reevaluate your life and your garden. Cold days are great for sitting by a fire and planning your spring landscape changes and vegetable garden.

Request mail-order seed and plant catalogs and order seeds for starting indoors.

If the ground is dry, till soil in your vegetable garden to help eliminate insects and weeds and incorporate manure or compost to get the soil in good shape for spring plantings.

Houseplants - Remove amaryllis stems with the faded blooms. Keep it indoors with your houseplants then plant it outdoors in May.

Use water at room temperature when watering houseplants. Spray houseplants with insecticidal soap if you detect spider mites, mealy bugs, or scale on the leaves, always following label directions.

Give houseplants a half turn every month so they do not become misshapen.

Repot houseplants as needed and fertilize using a water-soluble fertilizer at eight-week intervals at half the recommended strength.

Miscellaneous - Now is a good time to install edgings around flowerbeds and construct walls, terraces, and walkways, when weather permits.

Instead of salt, use sand on icy walks and driveways. Salt can damage plants and lawns.

Have your lawnmower serviced so it will be ready when you are for spring grass cutting.

Inventory your garden tools and replace or repair as necessary. Sharpen your tools and clean rust from them with steel wool. Coat blades with a light oil and rub linseed oil on wooden handles to help preserve them.

Chop unwanted bamboo and English ivy to the ground. Follow up with weed killer on the leaves in April. More than one application of weed killer may be necessary, always follow label directions.

Jo Anne Allen
Master Gardener
Extension Volunteer
706-400-8139

recent freeze will be ready to resolve those issues if the time comes.

The Christmas weekend weather caused electricity and heating issues as well, as the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC had to comply with a Tennessee Valley Authority order to implement rolling blackouts amid single digit temps that created record-breaking power demands.

Looking on the bright side, it is possible the arctic blast that ushered in “super-cold temperatures and frozen ground was likely really good for killing off invasive aquatic weeds, especially Brazilian elodea, which is native to the Amazon River Watershed,” according to Callie Moore of conservation nonprofit MountainTrue.

Two invasive aquatic

weeds – Brazilian elodea and parrot’s-feather – were found to be a growing issue in Lake Chatuge over the summer, and

hopefully their return with full pool in Summer 2023 will be limited due to the winter weather.

GMF Fireworks...from Page 1A

happiness. "Life's too short to not be happy. (I'd like to) take care of my family, and all that kind of stuff," Sozack said. Food vendors were in attendance, too, with mini donuts being a popular snack as well as soft-baked pretzels, which some folks were rushing to grab even as the fireworks began at about 8:45 that night. Although the fog had rolled in something heavy after rain earlier in the day, the gleaming show was visible above the tree line, and if nothing else, the lingering

precipitation created a haze of color that flashed and crackled overhead. When it all started, distant cries of "Happy New Year" and applause heralded the holiday's (early) arrival and the meaning behind it. Somewhere in the lowest parking lots, a vehicle blasted a rock rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." The fireworks continued even as the first headlights began to file out of the Fairgrounds, and plenty of families stuck around to watch the show in its entirety from the rises of the hills surrounding

the property. A profound sense of togetherness brought to mind another one of Garrison's quotes, some advice for those who may be concerned going forward: "In the New Year, go in optimistic. Don't worry about what it may bring. Be optimistic about what you may be able to do." Keep an eye out for future events like concerts and the springtime Mile-Long Yard Sale by checking www.georgiamountainfairgrounds.com or calling the office at 706-896-4191.



Foggy conditions New Year's Eve night didn't stop the fun at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, where families enjoyed a vendor's flying whirligig toys called "Whistlepops." Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

Ticket Quota...from Page 1A

but cannot require a certain amount of tickets be written, and explained the legal issues that would arise from that. "In October, the mayor showed me the latest financial reports and told me that the PD needed to write enough tickets to cover the salaries of the officers. I was told that if we could not do this that she would be forced to eliminate a position within the department. "I told her that asking for a certain quantity or value of tickets was an illegal ticket quota. I told her that I would not ask that of the officers. She said that she would sit down with the officers and show them the budget, and I told her that that was a bad idea. "That day, I spoke to Councilman (Jay Chastain Jr.) about the incident. I also spoke to (City Attorney Thomas Mitchell) following the October work session about the request made by the mayor. "Of the applicants for the chief's position that I have spoken with, all have told me that the mayor has spoken about ticket revenue. One applicant, who has held the position elsewhere, told her that a department is not allowed to pay for itself through ticket revenue. He later told me that if a chief were to do what she is asking, that they would end up in jail. Another applicant said that she stated, 'I don't care what the law says,' when discussing ticket quotas. "I do not know who has made it known, but local media is calling me and have asked about ticket quotas. I have simply stated that Hiawassee has never had a ticket quota while I have been employed here. I do not believe there is any intention of the media running this

story, but I believe it is only going to grow and grow. "There has already been talk about contacting the Capitol regarding the mayor. I believe that her actions are unethical and immoral, if not illegal. It is no secret in the front office of City Hall that she is insistent on the department covering its expenses. I was told that she has created spreadsheets and charts showing how many tickets would be needed by each officer to pay for their salaries. "My concern is only for the City of Hiawassee and the officers. I did not want any of you to hear this first from the newspaper or radio or as rumors on the street. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me." The Towns County Herald contacted Smith, who respectfully declined to comment for publication. In researching the matter, the newspaper was unable to find any Georgia statutes or case law expressly prohibiting ticket quotas. The state did enact a law in 2015 governing speed traps that could result in a police department losing its speed detection permit, but there is no criminal penalty. During a brief phone call around the close of business on the last day before the Christmas holiday, Mayor Ordiales denied saying she would disband the police department "if it were her choice." The Herald reached out to City Attorney Mitchell to ask about the legality of quotas and by what process a city might disband its police department. Mitchell responded that his law firm "has a policy of not discussing on-going client matters with third parties including the media."



Liz Ordiales Hiawassee Mayor

And while the newspaper has yet to learn if a ticket quota would indeed be illegal, it is reasonable to wonder – assuming the core allegation is true – whether city residents and business owners would view a quota designed to cover officer salaries as being in the best interest of protecting and serving the community, even if such a quota were completely legal. After all, one major concern with quotas is that they have the potential to increase the risk of creating perverse incentives for officers to conduct unconstitutional stops in order to meet a specific number of citations. Pertaining to the financial concerns outlined above, the Hiawassee Police Department operates at an annual deficit, with an expected budgetary shortfall of \$326,128 for Fiscal Year 2022-23. In terms of revenues, municipal court fines have been budgeted at \$133,000 for the year, with annual salary costs projected at \$240,778, not including employee benefits like health care and retirement contributions.

Thoughts on 2023...from Page 1A

John, who retired and moved here from Cartersville five years ago with his wife. He has been enjoying his time in Towns greatly, with a love of "the mountains and seeing the lakes, and it just being peaceful and calm." "For me, 2022 was really not that bad," John said. "It seemed a lot more positive. Negatively, we have what's going on in politics, the partisanship of everything, but in terms of my life, it's been pretty good. "Moving forward, I would like to see voting rights firm up and health insurance set up so that everybody can get it. I'm a Democrat, so I may be in the minority up here. "My goals are just that I want to be able to live and enjoy my life, wife, family, and try to be happy and more health-conscious and active by walking and running more, and maybe kayaking, and live a more overall well-balanced life mentally, physically and emotionally." Over at the Tilted Café, another man named John and his wife were having lunch. The couple moved to Towns County four years ago from

Florida. When asked about what he would like 2023 to bring, he said, "Well, how about the cure for cancer?" In general, though, John had simple desires of "wanting to see the economic and housing markets, wages and inflation get better, and close the border." "I would also like to see the mainstream media get back to giving the unbiased facts on everything and stop with the propaganda to steer social agendas," he said. As for better things coming out of 2022, John said that "people are finally waking up to the truth about COVID and doing away with all of it." "I've never worn a mask ever and I never will – you can't put one on me," he said. "I call it the 'scandemic' on purpose. I'm not a conspiracy theorist, I'm an occupational theorist. I used to work for the government; I know how corrupt they are, then they change their minds." Tilted patron Barry, who lives in Tampa, Florida, and owns a cabin in Hiawassee that he visits a few times a year on family outings, was play-

ing arcade-style video games with his son and daughter on Wednesday, Dec. 28. "As far as resolutions, I try not to make those," Barry said, looking ahead to New Year's. "I figure if I just keep doing what I'm supposed to be doing, I don't need to. I just take care of myself and family all the time. I don't need to make promises to myself; I set goals every day. "There were challenges with the schools and lockdowns and other protocols and all that stuff, and local businesses suffered during COVID, but I think it turned out better and things are moving at a faster pace than ever in some ways. "We can all get more things done digitally like Zoom meetings, for example, and other mobile connections, and more people are working from home. So, overall, I see things are in a good direction. "For 2023, I want to see changes in the legitimacy of vote counting and with immigration and the Border Patrol. There are obviously problems there. All you have to do is turn on the TV and see what's happening."

CROP Walk celebrates 2022 and thanks local sponsors

In this season of giving, CROP Walk 2022 thanks those who have already given. Especially, we thank our local sponsors whose financial donations have once again made this annual fundraiser for fighting hunger such a success. Our heartfelt gratitude goes to the following: In Blairsville, GA – Cone & Associates CPAs, LLC, Coosa Methodist Church, Foodland, Friendship Class of First UMC of Union County, General Supply, Inc., Harmony Grove Baptist Church, House of Prayer, Ingle's, Leon's Floors, Mike's Seafood Market & Grill, Mountain Building Supply, Rich Furniture & Cabinet Shop Inc., Sawmill Restaurant, Scott Carter Enterprises, Strickland and Associates, P.C., Sunrise Grocery, The Vacuum Store, Walmart; In Gainesville, GA – Aldersgate Class of Gainesville First UMC, J. Geyer Advertising; In Hayesville, NC – Goldhagen Art Glass Studio, Jackie Jones Chrysler/Dodge/Jeep, Moore Insurance Services, Inc.; In Helen, GA – Alpine Mini-golf; In Hiawassee, GA – Asiamo, Monte Alban Mexican Restaurant. In Suches, GA – The Church Without Walls; In Young Harris, GA – Brasstown Valley Resort, Chris Servis, LLC, Employees of YH City Hall, Enrico's Italian Restaurant, Friends of YHC, Heavenly Bake Shop, Mary's Southern Grill, Sharp Memorial UMC. In addition to outright



"Jar Quilt" raffle winner Tommy Brown of Young Harris, GA

financial sponsorship, CROP Walk 2022 also raised significant funds through the sale of dozens of "Suches Life" tee shirts, and through two raffles, one for a Goldhagen Art Studio creation and the other for a "jar quilt" (see the photo) expertly stitched by a resident of Blairsville. The raffles took place December 17 at the Christmas candlelight service of the Church Without Walls (Rev. Fred Whitley, officiating). Out of over 5,000 tickets, Tommy Brown of Young Harris, GA, won the quilt and Brenda Platzer of Lexington, SC, won the Goldhagen objet d'art. Many, many thanks to all who supported this year's CROP Walk (the 32nd annual walk), allowing CROP Walk to continue fulfilling its mission by "fighting hunger one step at a time."



Brenda Platzer of Lexington, SC, won the Goldhagen objet d'art