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Transparency top of mind for new BRMEMC board

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In its latest efforts toward transparency, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors held a Town Hall Meeting at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

Dozens of EMC members attended the meeting, and several of the EMC staff

sat on the sidelines, ready to lend their technical expertise during the Q&A portion of the meeting.

“We appreciate everyone being out tonight,” said Board President Steven Phillips, calling the meeting to order. “This is really our second meeting – we had one last night in Hayesville, North Carolina, and it went pretty smooth.”

And for the most part, the meeting in Blairsville went the same.

After an invocation led by Board Member Ray Cook of Cherokee County, and the Pledge of Allegiance led by Board Member Larry Williams of Fannin County, the board gave several reports to those gathered before jumping into the member Q&A.

Board Vice President

Mickey Cummings, who chairs the board’s policy committee, informed the members of some of the policy changes he and the board have been busy making.

Cummings said that last fall, he and the board decided to update the EMC’s policy manual.

“You can see this manual,” said Cummings, holding up a black binder,

several inches thick. “I don’t know how long it’s going to take us to get completely through. We had to start in some different places, and we have about seven different things that we’d like to share with you that we’ve tried to update so far.”

Policy revisions and additions shared that Tuesday include: a requirement that the EMC attorney immediately bring to the board any known violation of EMC policies; potential whistleblowers were given more flexibility in reporting; and several policies were put in place to allow for greater communication between the board, EMC management and EMC employees, and also with the membership, with periodic Town Hall Meetings.

Two other policies have been put into place recently, reported Cummings: one policy requiring finance committee board members “to approve any deviations” in EMC policies; and another policy requiring “directors and key employees to annually complete a disclosure 990 statement for the retention by our auditor.”



Steven Phillips

A Form 990 is a tax form filed annually by nonprofits, featuring detailed financial information, and is used to justify continued tax exemption status to the IRS.

Chris Logan, chairman of the board’s finance committee, gave an update of the numbers, with a net revenue for the EMC of \$1,585,272 out of total electric revenue of \$40,423,456 after power costs, operating/maintenance expenses and interest.

As for debt, Logan reported that the EMC’s outstanding debt was

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BRMEMC Board members Ray Cook, Charles Jenkins, Mickey Cummings, Chairman Steven Phillips, Roy Perren, Chris Logan, Greg Owenby and Larry Williams; not pictured Ronnie Burch

Editor pulls through surgery, recovering nicely

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Charles Duncan went under the knife in the midmorning hours of Wednesday, Jan. 27, for a life-saving triple bypass, his second open-heart surgery in the Ronnie Green Heart Center at Northeast Georgia Medical Center since 2009.

The surgery last week was the culmination of a series of medical issues Duncan has experienced since September, including an arterial bypass for an aneurysm in his right knee and its subsequent complications.

Back in 2009, Duncan underwent emergency aortic valve replacement surgery necessitated by a staph infection in his right knee and its subsequent complications.

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operated on Duncan both last week and in 2009, believed the recent aneurysm to have been caused by an embolism dating back to the initial staph infection seven years ago.

Now, Duncan is on the road to recovery, and he said that he is extremely appreciative of the people who have kept him in their thoughts and prayers during his downtime. He hopes to return to his role as editor of both the North Georgia News and the Towns County Herald in the next six to eight weeks.

A lifetime newspaper man, Duncan caught the writing bug early – after turning in several writing assignments, his sixth-grade English teacher pulled him aside to tell him he had a gift.

“I’d always realized



Charles Duncan

that I was the sixth out of six kids, and everyone above me seemed to be smarter,” Duncan said, recalling his youth. “That was the first time anybody had told me I had a gift, and I took it to heart.”

Duncan used his formative years to sharpen his writing abilities, excelling

throughout high school, where he graduated from Union County High in 1978, before proceeding on to college.

He took a few classes at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland before switching over to Tri-County Community College in Murphy, North Carolina.

“I didn’t focus on writing then, but I did have some creative writing classes at Tri-County, and had some classes that definitely gave me the opportunity to hone my skills a little bit,” Duncan said.

After graduating from Tri-County in 1981, he was accepted into North Georgia College, but finding himself in need of practical work, he took a job at TRW, a ball bearing manufacturing plant

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FEMA rep brings hope for reimbursement



Commissioner Kendall pointing out damage on Bell Mountain with Roads Superintendent Clyde Shook

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Due to flooding, a state of emergency in Towns County was declared on Dec. 29, finally coming to an end on Thursday, Jan. 28.

In response, a Georgia Emergency Management Agency meeting was held on Monday, Jan. 25.

Federal Emergency Management Agency representative Michael Mendenhall of the Emergency Management Program Specialists Region IV Recovery Division came to Towns County to gather information such as pictures and documentation of costs.

“We had some budget figures and things we went over, and pictures,” said Towns County Sole Commissioner Bill Kendall at the meeting. “They went out and looked at different places in the county. They said it would be about 30 days. They wanted to see what we had turned in firsthand to inspect it.”

“They went to Bald Mountain Park, they went up to Hall Creek where the dam is flooding. They just want to come and, when we say we’ve got a state of emergency, they want to confirm it.”

One of the areas to sustain major damage was a concrete pipe near Bell Creek.

“We’re going to go ahead and fix the places like that, we can’t wait. But if we’re approved we’re going to get reimbursed for it,” Commissioner Kendall said.

He explained that the county would fix the damage to county roads, and the only question was whether or not the county might receive federal reimbursement.

“The main thing is that, regardless of whether we get funded or not, we’re going to repair these roads, and hopefully we’ll get the road department budget reimbursed for some of it,” he said.

Deputy Attorney General Andrew

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2016 Queen Jaden Cruz gets her crown during Homecoming Game

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

At the rescheduled Basketball Homecoming Game on Saturday, Jan. 30, the 2016 Towns County Basketball Homecoming Queen was crowned.

That honor went to senior Jaden Cruz.

At half time in the boy’s game, the previous Homecoming Queen, Ashley Abrahamson, presented Cruz with her crown and sash.

The format of Towns County Basketball Homecoming is unique among the nearby counties. For one thing, most counties only have a Football Homecoming, and not a Homecoming for

basketball.

“We’re actually one of the very few, and that’s because we had basketball before we ever had football,” said Towns County High School Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs. “So it’s more of a tradition than it’s football Homecoming here. As far as I know, among the surrounding counties, there are very few.”

In addition to the Homecoming Queen and King, a Homecoming “Prince” and “Princess” are nominated from each class.

The Homecoming Queen Runner-Up was senior Rachel Garner, and the 2016 Homecoming Princesses were freshman Kristin Byers, sophomore Madison McClure

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Homecoming Queen Jaden Cruz / Photo by Lowell Nicholson

TCHS gets driver's education car



L-R: Roy Perren, Jon Fullerton and Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong in front of new driver's ed car

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Parents of young teenagers can rest a little easier, as Towns County High School students now have a brand new 2016 Chevrolet Impala to use in their driver’s education program.

Roy Perren, who is federal programs director for the school system, obtained funding for the car in a grant request submitted to the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety.

“The state will only allow you to keep a driver’s ed vehicle for so many model years, and the old vehicle was out of date and starting to have some mechanical issues as well,” said

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Rep. Allison to retire; will not seek re-election

After a great deal of consideration and prayer, and after many conversations with my family and loved ones, I am announcing that I will not seek re-election to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2016.

The greatest honor of my life has been to serve as your state representative these past eight years, and I have been privileged to serve as your voice in Atlanta. Throughout my years in public service, I have had the opportunity to meet and get to know so many of my neighbors and work on problems that face our community. I have also had the privilege to work with so many wonderful public servants who are tireless in their drive to make our community a great place to call home.

Regina and I want to thank



the people of Rabun, Union, Towns and White counties for their continual support and friendship. We were blessed to have so many people who worked with us, encouraged us and prayed for us, through four elections and eight years of public service. The people in these mountains are special, and they will forever have a place in our hearts.”

-Rep. Stephen Allison

<p>14 pages</p> <p>Lake Levels</p> <p>Blue Ridge 1,671.94</p> <p>Chatuge 1,919.56</p> <p>Nottely 1,764.34</p>	<p>Inside</p> <p>Arrests 2</p> <p>Chamber 8</p> <p>Church 6</p> <p>Classifieds 12</p> <p>Opinion 4</p> <p>Legals 13</p> <p>Obits 7</p> <p>Sports 9</p>	<p>Parent Meeting for Juniors and Seniors</p> <p>See page 5</p>	<p>Josh Turner Anderson Music Hall March 5th</p>	<p>Love and Romance at Historical Society Meeting</p> <p>See page 5</p>	<p>SPORTS BASKETBALL</p> <p>Tues Feb. 2 vs. Hebron 6 & 7:30 PM</p> <p>Fri. Feb 5 vs. Tallulah Falls 6 & 7:30 PM</p>
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