

ACCG, Georgia's County Association celebrates 100 years



The ACCG Board of Managers joined Governor Nathan Deal on the steps of the Capitol to mark the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Georgia's county association

Gov. Nathan Deal and the Georgia General Assembly helped launch the centennial anniversary of Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, Georgia's county association, during the organization's annual Capitol Connection Conference held at the Atlanta Marriott Marquis.

Gov. Deal presented a proclamation recognizing a milestone anniversary to ACCG President and Dawson County Commission Chair Mike Berg and praised the association for its efforts to build partnerships between and with other elected officials at the federal, state and local level.

ACCG leaders also were recognized by the Georgia General Assembly with resolutions passed by the House and Senate.

"ACCG has built a solid reputation for working on behalf of counties, and it is an exciting time in the life of our association," Berg said. "Counties depend on ACCG to track public policy, identify statewide trends, provide continuing education, and help us operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. Reaching a milestone such as a centennial anniversary is a significant achievement and I look forward to an exciting year."

ACCG began in 1914 as an organization of commissioners of roads and highways who gathered for a common

purpose of improving Georgia's road system, supporting the establishment of the state's first Department of Transportation and working together to provide county bond funding to match federal funding for roads.

From these early roots, ACCG has grown to become the state's leading advocacy organization for counties while also providing leadership development and certification programs, community and civic engagement initiatives, technical assistance, and other programs such as insurance programs, retirement services, and financing designed to provide group discounts and cost savings for counties.

"Our programs and services have changed over the years to adapt to the needs of counties and their communities," said ACCG Executive Director Ross King. "As we celebrate 100 years of service, we build upon the foundation of our predecessors and continue to focus on the important work of advancing Georgia's counties. Many of the initiatives we have planned throughout the year will help educate Georgians about the significance of county government and emphasize the importance of civic engagement."

ACCG has planned a year-long celebration to commemorate this significant occasion. Some of the planned initiatives include the release of the

Courthouses of Georgia photography book in Fall 2014, a special feature and supplement in *Georgia Trend* magazine explain how counties help to foster business development, the announcement of the permanent placement of the association's archives and the launch of a new educational campaign and website designed to help Georgia residents better understand county government.

Many businesses and organizations have come together in support of ACCG's centennial anniversary by providing funding to support special initiatives or the ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation.

These supporters include: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia; The Coca-Cola Company; Douglas C. Lane & Associates; Yancey Bros. Co; CBIZ; Gas South; Georgia Power; Georgia Transmission Corporation; UBS; Verizon; Fairpointe Capital; Gardner, Willis, Sweat & Handelman; Georgia Humanities Council; Hall Booth Smith, P.C.; Mauldin & Jenkins; the National Association of Counties; Seix Investment Advisors LLP; Springsted; TGM Advertising; U.S. Communities; the Atlanta Regional Commission; the Georgia Municipal Association and the Georgia School Boards Association.

For more details on ACCG, go to www.accg.org.

Good Fire / Bad Fire - Prescribed Burning

For most of the past year, I have been preaching about protecting our property from wildfire by doing whatever we can to prevent fires, but this week, I will do a complete flip and tell you how foresters intentionally set fires in the forest to prevent wildfires. That doesn't seem to make sense... we set a fire to prevent a fire? Using good fire under controlled conditions for fuel reduction is called prescribed fire. "Prescribed burning means the controlled application of fire to existing vegetative fuels under specific environmental conditions and following appropriate precautionary measures, which causes the fire to be confined to a pre-determined area and accomplishes one or more planned land management objectives, or to mitigate catastrophic wildfires."

Georgia Prescribed Burning Act, 1992. Prescribed fire has many benefits, including helping our forest wildlife by removing brush, briars, and undesirable vegetation that they can't eat and creating an open forest floor where grasses and small plants can grow for them. Prescribed fire can also improve our water resources by reducing leaf litter and that can prevent rain water from filtering into the soil. Prescribed fire also helps reduce the threat of insects and diseases in the trees. All of these effects of prescribed fire will improve the health of our forests, wildlife, and reduce the chance of losing the trees and property to an uncontrolled fire.

Prescribed fire is a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure ecosystem health and reduce wildfire risk. Healthy forests provide clean air and water, and diverse wildlife populations for Georgia's

residents and visitors.

The Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) and other cooperators work with the Georgia Prescribed Fire Council (GAPFC) to encourage the exchange of information, techniques and experiences among practitioners of prescribed burning in Georgia. On average, Georgia prescribe burns about 1.5 million acres of forest lands each year. GAPFC advocates prescribed burning as one of the most environmentally and economically feasible methods for managing the state's valuable forest resources.

Professional foresters and other land managers throughout the state use prescribed burning for reforestation, aesthetics, and forest access. As a land management tool, prescribed fire is essential for managing wildlife species such as bobwhite quail, eastern wild turkey, white-tailed deer, many songbirds, the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and many other fire-dependent species.

Prescribed burning is the only known forest management method which perpetuates the longleaf/wiregrass ecosystem, Georgia's most diverse flora and fauna ecosystem. Frequent fires, set by lightning strikes and Native Americans, have shaped Georgia's ecosystems for thousands of years. Our forest ecosystems evolved with fire and continue to need the strategic application of fire that mimics this natural cycle. The plants and animals of the pine woods are accustomed to frequent fires and depend on these fires for their survival. Fire is as natural as sunshine, rain and wind in many plant communities including upland pine, pine flatwoods, marshes and wet prairies. Fire also benefits many of the rare ani-



Executive Director of RC&D
Frank Riley

mal species in our state that are declining. Some of these declines are caused almost totally by fire exclusion.

Smoke from prescribed fires is a sign that certain lands are being cared for properly. Great care is taken by prescribed fire managers to minimize any temporary inconveniences created by smoke. Smoke management plans for prescribed burns are designed so that smoke-sensitive areas like roads and residences, etc. are not negatively affected by the burn.

Smoke from prescribed fires does not contribute appreciably to air quality issues since the practice typically avoids times of stagnant summer air. However, uncontrolled wildfires usually occur during the summer when there is already a bad urban air quality problem. We can reduce the risk of wildfires and the resulting smoke or air quality problems with well-timed prescribed fires. No other tool can so effectively remove the hazardous buildup of woodland fuels.

For more information about Prescribed Fire, visit www.garxfire.com or the Georgia Forestry Commission, at www.GaTrees.org.

Frank Riley is Executive Director of the *Chestateel Chattahoochee RC&D Council*. For more information on RC&D programs email www.frank.ccrd@gmail.com.

Commissioner Black to speak to Shakers

Georgia Agriculture Commissioner Gary Black will come to Towns County weather permitting on Friday morning at 8 a.m.

His purpose, to talk with the Mountain Movers and Shakers at Mary's Southern Grill in Young Harris.

Commissioner Black, a friend to Towns County, is no stranger to the Mountain Movers and Shakers and Towns County.

Commissioner Black is an active supporter of local agricultural programs that expand opportunities for young people. Agriculture supplies Geor-



Gary Black

gia with more than 400,000 jobs each year.

Agriculture contributes more than \$71 billion to the state's economy each year.

Commissioner Black will be joined by Towns County Public Speaking Champion Adam Penland.

Penland, like Black, is an avid supporter of FFA. Black was Georgia's FFA President in 1975-1976.

Sam Fullerton says if you'd like to come hear what Commissioner Black has to say, give him a call at (706) 994-4658.

Storm...from Page 1A

said. "People are starting to get anxious. Folks are buying up a lot of groceries, which is wise, and if they get stocked up and stay in, we'll get through this."

"The best message I can tell folks is to stay off the roads unless they just have to be out," he said. "If they need us, they can call us, and we'll get to them just as soon as we can."

Shook said this is the worst winter he can remember happening in many moons.

"This has been the roughest January and February that I've seen in a long time," Shook said. "We've been fighting this winter pretty hard."

The county has four salt trucks and those vehicles have stayed very busy this year, Shook said.

"We've kept those trucks moving pretty steady this year," he said. "Keeping the mountain roads clear has been the toughest challenge."

Shook said that as of Monday evening, the road department had not done any pretreatment of roadways.



Clyde Shook's road department is now stranger to snow. They dealt with this weather scene in 2013.

"It's raining a bit, and the salt will just melt away if you put it down before the snow comes," he said. "It's just a waste to use the salt up that way."

The storm system is projected to arrive after midnight as Monday turns to Tuesday,

Shook said.

"We'll get some snow then, but, from what we're hearing, Wednesday is going to be the real event," Shook said. "It could stick around until Thursday. I've got my fingers crossed that it doesn't."

Tourney...from Page 1A

George Walton was a 46-43 winner over the Lady Indians in overtime in Monroe last month in their only game against each other in regular season play, in the region semi-finals on Friday.

The winner of that game will continue on to the Region Championship game on Saturday while the loser will play in

the consolation game for third place.

The region is under a winter storm warning, with snow and ice predicted through Thursday.

The mountain region is expected to be covered with double-digit inches of heavy, wet, snow.

Ice is projected to be iso-

lated to the Metro Atlanta area during the course of the storm.

Gov. Nathan Deal has declared a state of emergency for 14 Georgia counties including Towns and Union counties.

Gov. Deal said he would expand his state of emergency order to additional counties as conditions warrant.

Rates...from Page 1A

the college.

However, according to City Councilman John Kelly, the college is "already paying half of what other customers pay" because the council has been "adhering to good will by providing such a discount."

In addition to pointing out that the lower rate the college currently receives for water and sewer services, Kelly expressed to the council his views while asking the college representatives to stipulate that "the cost of the college's tuition has increased phenomenally over the last 30 years" to keep up with the rising costs of living; no argument was made regarding this point.

Furthermore, Kelly continued his stance pointing out that as the college has had to raise their rates to keep up with rising costs, so does the community's wastewater services in order to continue to provide services which meet all regulatory standards, and the cost of meeting those standards continues to rise.

During a previous council meeting, City Engineer Chris Poje explained to the council that the rates were devised through a comprehensive assessment of past rates and rates comparable to surrounding areas.

This type of review is

necessary to determining appropriate rate structures according to the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA).

According to Poje, the City of Young Harris has continuously had one of the lowest residential and business water rates, and unfortunately this is causing the city to lose revenues.

This loss of revenues is consistent with GEFA's 2013 utilities survey of current statewide rate structures, *Water and Sewer Rates and Rate Structures in Georgia 2013*, which indicates that the "pressure to maintain low or relatively low rates has the potential to force utilities to run a deficit or avoid making necessary operational and capital expenditures."

Furthermore, GEFA indicates that "some utilities with low rates do not generate sufficient revenue to properly maintain their systems assets, thereby reducing short-term investments that are likely to have long-term adverse costs and service impacts."

According to the city's financial report, the water fund is currently running a negative balance, and this, according to Kelly, "shows the urgency with which this committee, and all involved should have in regards to setting these water

rates."

Stroman too agrees that this issue regarding the water and sewer rates needs to be settled quickly, but fairly and suggested an additional meeting be scheduled to continue their dialogue regarding rates.

Stroman continued expressing the college's willingness to negotiate the water and sewer rates as long as the college is provided with a rate that is fair and consistent with the rates of other residential and commercial customers.

Stroman says they need to "run the numbers again and see what that comes out to be."

Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby agreed that additional talks will be necessary and instructed the council and the college representatives to determine a future date for discussions, and she also reminded the council that a "new rate table will have to be introduced" during that meeting in the anticipation of a possible agreement.

The follow up meeting is set to include representatives from the college, the city council, and the Water Committee members.

Tentatively the date will be Tuesday, Feb. 25, at 6:15 p.m. at City Hall in Young Harris.

Chief Wright saves councilman's barn

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

At the Hiwassee City Council meeting on Thursday, Councilman Jay Chastain, Jr wished to extend his heartfelt gratitude to Hiwassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright, who helped save Chastain's barn from a fire on Sunday.

Wright wasn't in attendance, but that didn't stop Councilman Chastain from commending him on his quick work.

"If Jimmy hadn't have gotten on that quick, I'd have lost the barn, cows, everything," Chastain said.

Before the fire department could arrive, Chief Wright helped to save the barn "almost by himself."

Fortunately, the fire, which Councilman Chastain believes to have been caused by a heat lamp shorting out or being knocked over by one of his calves, was contained before it could consume the barn.

"If anybody sees him, I want to thank him," Chastain said. "He done a really, really



Chief Jimmy Wright

good job."

Meanwhile, the Council covered regular business items with efficiency during the short meeting.

They adopted and approved November 2013 financial statements, approved the City Auditor's report, and finally the City Manager's report.

The meeting also included an overview of the City Manager's report, which included updates on the USDA project Longview, the water lines and water intake at the school, the installation of water

turbidimeters at the water treatment plant, and the Cedar Cliff water line problem.

In addition, it included updates on the Hiwassee Sidewalks, the nutrient removal at the sewage plant, and the Mayors Park/boat launch project.

For those who may be interested in these matters, the City Manager's report is available to the public at City Hall.

On the agenda was a motion to adopt and approve the 2014 schedule of projects financed with Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, or SPLOST, but as the schedule needs more work, the motion was pushed back to next month.

Though this meeting may have been business as usual, change is on the horizon, however slight.

Hiwassee Mayor Barbara Mathis will hire a new lawn care service for the city streets, Town Square, and City Hall.

While the price may change for lawn care service, Mayor Mathis added that if the city is not happy with the prices or quality of service, others are free to bid for the contract.