

# HRWC...from Page 1

means excess in algae growth, which can cause havoc for the lake's fragile ecosystem.

"We're trying to prevent excess algae growth from excess nutrients, and we're trying to prevent our waters from being barred for swimming, because we want to keep them open for recreation," she said.

"So sources of nutrients and pathogens, there's a lot of variety. Livestock with direct access to streams is a big one, and other sources are leaking and failing septic systems, and geese," she continued.

Additionally, removal of vegetation removes a natural "filter," which catches nutrients before they run into the water.

"One of the big sources of excess nutrients getting into our lakes is this lack of filter," said Moore.

She said that a big source of excess nutrients is the wastewater treatment plants.

"Even when it's in compliance, it's still a source of excess nutrients," she said.

"Chatuge in the '90s was good. It was scored very highly on a Tennessee Valley Authority scale that rates their reservoirs compared to each other in the system. So it was one of the best water quality lakes. In the early 2000s the ecological health rating started to plummet for Lake Chatuge, and by 2001 it was poor," she said.

The culprit? Excess nutrients.

"Excess nutrients are the reason why the ecological health rating plummeted. The lake is most sensitive to phosphorus. The increased temperature and excess sediment were related

concerns, because sediment carries nutrients too," she said.

"We're not against having a discharge in Lake Chatuge. We're not against having development. We're not against having cattle. What we are after and what the plan does is it recommends practices to protect water quality while we do all these things on the land. So one of the major recommendations was to add nutrient reduction to the city of Hiwassee's wastewater treatment plant," she said.

She added that it would be cheaper to take steps now to reduce the influx of excess nutrients than to have to deal with it several years down the road.

The City is currently in the process of installing a new treatment system to help reduce the buildup of phosphorus and nitrogen, and to reduce pathogens.

# Veterans...from Page 1

their service during the war, and everyone is invited to witness the historic and special event.

"The Vietnam Veterans, very seldom are they ever honored by anybody," said Pat Phillips of Blairsville, who served three tours in Vietnam as part of the U.S. Army, and who is currently a member of the State Veterans Service Board that will be assisting in the presentations. "They got a bad reputation in Vietnam. People like Jane Fonda gave us a bad reputation.

"We didn't start the war, but we fought it. We had four people that lost their lives in Vietnam from Union County, and the total nationwide was 58,000 plus. We appreciate the governor doing this, because this is the first time that's ever happened."

Wednesday's event will be the culmination of work done at the federal, state and local levels, according to Jon Suggs, public information director for the GDVS.

"At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Defense started a 50th anniversary commemoration for the Vietnam War, I believe it was three years ago, and essentially they're observing the 50th anniversary from when the war started until all the way through 2025, which will be 50 years after the end, so just observing those events as they move through these about 15 years," said Suggs.

"They have a program through which other entities can partner with that program, so the state of Georgia is an official commemorative partner in the 50th anniversary commemorations. On the state level, as part of that, we decided to develop the Certificates of Honor program to give to all of Georgia's approximately 234,000 Vietnam Veterans."

The very first Certificates of Honor were given out on March 30, 2015, when the statewide program launched.

"We had a ceremony at the capitol with Gov. Nathan Deal and the director of the Department of Defense's Office of Commemorations were both there to launch this Certificate of Honor, and we gave out the first ones to representatives from the various state veterans service organizations - American Legion, VFW, Military Order of the Purple Heart," said Suggs.

"There were about 15 altogether, each of which put forward one representative for their organization to receive the certificate directly from the governor. And then afterward, we had a longer ceremony for everybody else who was able to come and receive those."

Since then, the Georgia Department of Veterans Services has been involved in 112 ceremonies like the one that is coming to Blairsville, and more than 8,200 certificates and 6,800 pins have been awarded since March of last year.

"We're trying to give them to as many Georgia Vietnam Veterans as we can, as we can get to come out, and programs like the one that we've got coming up in Blairsville help us to reach more of those veterans," said Suggs.

Feedback for the certificate program has been overwhelmingly positive, said Suggs.

"What we hear from so many Vietnam Veterans is how much they appreciate this public thank you," said Suggs. "You're talking about a group of veterans that, unfortunately, most of them never heard that. In fact, many of them heard quite the opposite when they

came home from service at the time, in the 1960s and 1970s, when the war was going on and was very unpopular.

"As a country, we've gotten a lot better with how we treat our servicemen and women, how we distinguish between those who set the policy and those who actually go and do the fighting - that we appreciate those who fight on our behalf, whether we appreciate why they're doing it or not.

"That's something that we're always trying to do better by Vietnam Veterans, and make up for that time when we weren't there and we didn't say thank you. So this is the state of Georgia, as the state, trying to make up for lost time."

Any Vietnam Veteran reading this on Tuesday, Feb. 16, who would like to participate in the program but have not signed up to receive a certificate should know that there's still time to make it into the Feb. 17 presentation.

"For this program, we'll be taking names through the end of the business day on Tuesday (Feb. 16)," said Suggs. "Anybody who is eligible, which is any honorably discharged Vietnam Veteran, they can contact our office through the end of the day Tuesday.

"There are two ways to do that - we need a copy of their DD-214 to verify their service, and they can fax that to (404) 656-7006, or scan and email it to certificates@vs.state.ga.us, marked Blairsville Vietnam Veterans Ceremony."

Along with Commissioner Roby, a representative of U.S. Congressman Doug Collins' office will be in attendance Wednesday, and Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley will present a proclamation on behalf of the city.

# UV...from Page 1

however, reduce excess nutrients dumped into the lake. The buildup of nitrogen and phosphorus in the lake is contributing to the presence of algae, which is harmful overall. In order to reduce excess nutrients, the city is using different methods.

"There's a separate building with equipment in there, and it will be pumping chemicals into our tank to make nitrogen and phosphorous adhere and coagulate and come together and fall out as a solid, and instead of that now, even though we are within permitted amounts, this will take it even further below for the protection of the lake. And the whole purpose of nitrogen and phosphorous reduction is to prevent algae growth," said City Manager Rick Stancil.

He said that his personal goal would be to reduce the current level of nutrients in the lake by at least half, but that it's hard to determine the exact reduction because the nutrient levels are so low.

"I think we're only about

25 percent of the problem, but then again, I'm just guessing," said Stancil. "When they did the original study, it was a year ago. But it also involved another sewer system in North Carolina that was discharging, which is no longer discharging, and I think that one was a bigger problem than ours, but that's been fixed.

"After we do our nitrogen and phosphorous removal, it really is going to be hard to project without new studies. But we feel pretty comfortable that it's within the city's abilities to at least control our discharge of nitrogen and phosphorous, and our goal internally is to reduce it by 50 percent."

The city currently produces less than the permitted amounts of nutrients, and produces less than the amounts of nutrients that can be detected by current testing, so it will have to upgrade its testing and monitoring equipment.

"Our levels are so low right now that they don't record on the testing that the Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition do, so it's hard to

measure something when it's below detectable amounts," said Stancil. "What I hope to do in the future is to increase the sensitivity of the HRWC testing so that we can actually start reading flows and have accurate information, but right now the discharge levels of nutrient nitrogen and phosphorous are so low that they're not detectable by the equipment they use, so what we're going to have to do is get more sensitive equipment."

He's optimistic about the city's ability to improve water quality.

"I think we'll have an immediate effect this year," said Stancil. "Reducing the nitrogen and the phosphorous is going to have a benefit, but we're not the majority of the problem. We can cut it by 50 percent, but if we're only 25 percent of the issue, then we're going to have an improvement. There's other things that are going to be required. That's why the HRWC is so important, because the day to day things they do on a regular basis are intended to improve the lake quality."

Also on the agenda was to discuss and approve the Council on Alcohol and Drugs, Inc. contract in the amount of \$19,240.

"That is a contract amount that we get every single year, and if we wait till March that's just one more month we have to wait to get the money. This is something we do every single year, so there's nothing new in this. The Council on Alcohol and Drugs and the Towns County Board of Education always go into a contract. That's with Family Connection. And what they do is they use that program in the afterschool program for drugs and alcohol, and there's just a few things they have to do, some survey and those types of things, and in return they get a grant of \$19,240," said Berrong.

# School...from Page 1

we get that grant every year or is it a one year thing? We're very concerned about giving any type of percentage pay raise, because we don't know if that's going to be funded from here on out. But we're very confident with giving the two days back and putting us back on the typical 190 day schedule," he said.

That was the most important change, but several other changes were made to the calendar.

Next year, the school will run through December 20, releasing for Christmas Break. It will still have the entire week of Thanksgiving off. The school has also removed the emergency days built into the schedule in case of snow.

"We now are on the IE2

program where we have a lot more flexibility in making those days up, so those days we didn't feel are needed. And by doing so, we can now end the school year on May 19. So by being a little strategic with our calendar, we're now going to be able to finish school next year an entire week early, given that we don't have a whole lot of snow that we have to make up," said Berrong.

Additional changes are small.

"There were a few early release days in March. There were two on there. I did change that. I didn't feel like there was a need to have two early release days in one month, so now there's only one early release day on March 31," said Berrong.

# UGH...from Page 1



Board and key employees hold a called meeting on Friday, Feb. 12, to discuss hospital happenings in the wake of CEO's arrest

the event that any information comes to our attention that needs to be communicated with our staff and the community, then we will do so."

Bond conditions of those arrested on Feb. 4 prohibit them from reaching out to any of the board members or anyone affiliated directly with the hospital, so Williams and Efirid have not spoken with Gowder or Dr. Heaton since their arrests.

There have been several called board meetings since the Feb. 4 arrests, in which Efirid and Williams have updated the board concerning the goings-on of the hospital, as the two have been on the ground playing an active role in making sure Union General Inc. maintains course.

"We are working, as we speak, on a communication plan that will be ongoing as a means to better communicate internally, as well as with the community," said Williams. "Keep in mind the fact that we have a health care system that operates 24/7, 365, and has multiple facilities. We are constantly looking at

better means and vehicles to communicate with them."

In a called meeting on Friday, Feb. 12, Williams and Efirid met with the remaining board members to bring them up to speed and talk about plans moving forward - Paris and Rowe were unable to attend in person, but conferenced in with a phone call.

Two compliance organizations, the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and DNV GL, have been looking into hospital affairs, and DNV's report came back favorable, while the GDCA report is expected in a couple of weeks.

The board has also retained Morris, Manning & Martin out of Atlanta to help them navigate through the legal concerns stemming from the recent occurrences, and the board has also hired Bill Crane of CSI Crane to assist them in public relations matters.

Furthermore, the board is in the process of creating a committee called the Operational Improvement Team.

"They will be meeting on

a regular basis to come up with suggestions in areas where we need to maybe have enhanced communication, areas where we need to improve upon, so they can give the board further directions in things that we need to do going forward," said Williams.

Other committees in the works will be dealing with personnel, finance and compliance.

Board meetings are open to the public, and regular meetings are always the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m., in conference room adjacent to the cafeteria inside Union General Hospital. Members of public in attendance who wish to speak in the meetings must be added to the agenda ahead of time.

"At regular board meetings, we get reports from the chief nursing officer, from (UGH Chief Financial Officer) Tim Henry on the financials - we get reports from several employees," said Efirid, citing examples of what one might find in a typical meeting.

# Quilts...from Page 1



Clinton Bond Strough, 93 year old WWII Veteran

in honor of their service to America.

Quilts of Valor Coordinator Susan Young announced each veteran, and they were asked to step front and center to receive their quilts as she read a brief history of their service.

Each quilt was colored red, white, blue and gold, and had been individually stitched by a member of the guild.

"Each case also comes with what we call our 'presentation case,' which can also be used as a pillow case," Young said. "Each veteran is presented with a copy of a poem and the three-part message (that was read aloud by guild member Lula Williams), and a special individual 'Thank You' note."

The first quilt was presented to U.S. Army Veteran Charles King, who served in Korea and currently resides in Young Harris.

The next quilt was given to Long, who is a resident of Blue Ridge and served in the Coast Guard during the Vietnam War.

Following Long, Segars received his quilt. Segars lives in Hiwassee and served in the Air Force during Vietnam.

Up next was Lunsford, who joined the U.S. Army in 1967, was a veteran of Vietnam, and is a resident of Blairsville.

The fifth and sixth quilts were presented to Davis along with Larry King, both of whom are Vietnam Veterans and reside in Blairsville. King served in the Army while Davis was a member of the Air Force.

Of the nine quilts presented that day, only one went to a World War II veteran, and that was Strough.

Originally from Middletown, Indiana, the 93-year-old Strough served in the Army during World War II, and is currently a resident of Hayesville, North Carolina.

The next quilt was presented to Barrett, an Army veteran of the Vietnam War and a resident of Hiwassee.

Last but not least, the final quilt was presented to Lester, a resident of Blairsville

who served in the Army during the Korean War.

Prior to handing out the quilts, Anna Stone read a poem titled "Quilts of Valor" by Katie Valentine - the poem was presented to each veteran along with their quilt.

According to guild member Bonnie Garrett, Quilts of Valor is a national grassroots organization comprised of thousands of quilters in every state in the Union.

Since 2003, more than 132,000 quilts have been presented both at home and overseas, to combat veterans of current and past wars including World War II, Korea, Vietnam, both Iraq wars and Afghanistan. Quilts have been sent overseas.

"We honor veterans who have been touched by war with a Quilt of Valor," Garrett said, providing background information on the Quilts of Valor program. "We know the debt we owe our military is beyond repayment, but we've come here today to honor these nine veterans for their wonderful service."

# Veterans aid triad formed in Towns and Union

It is a linking of three great organizations with the goal of assisting disabled veterans in need. The three members of the triad are Vietnam Veterans of America chapter 1101, Rotary Club of Union County, and Corporate Building Supply Company.

The goal of the triad is to provide Ramps to veterans within Union and Towns county that need them, cannot afford them, or are mired in the bog that should supply them called the VA.

Our triad will, after being notified of a veteran, qualify the veteran and discuss their needs. The services provided will be free entry/exit ramps to the home, widening of inside doorways to allow for wheelchair access, and possibly the minor remodeling

of bathrooms and kitchens to meet the need of a wheelchair bound Veteran.

The service will be totally free, but has a few restrictions. The Veteran or their spouse must own, and be living full time in, the home being addressed. The Veteran must not be able to afford the modifications. And the Veteran must live in Union or Towns county.

The process is simple. Notify a member of VVA chapter 1101, or Union Rotary Club. As much as possible, all information will be kept confidential. After a short vetting period, Rotary will provide a design and a bill of materials to the supply company. VVA will make the request for funds from the supply company who will in turn request funding from its corporate offices.

Once funding is approved workers from Rotary, VVA and the supply company will complete the job.

If you are, or know of a veteran in need of our services, please contact the Chamber of Commerce and ask for the number of Rotary or VVA in Blairsville.

Lastly, if you are a building supply company, a construction company, or just someone with building skills please contact VVA or Rotary via the chamber and we will be glad to add you to the list of resources.

There should be no Veteran without means for self-help in these two counties that will not get this assistance. Submitted by: Mike Privern, President, VVA GA chapter #1101