

BRMEMC...from Page 1A



Pictured L-R: BRMEMC Director of Economic Development Erik Brinke, Director of Member Services Sonny Mahan, Director of Information Systems Dwayne Long and Interim General Manager Dan Brewer at the June 6 Hiwassee Town Hall Meeting.

this year. "It was Joe Goodwin of the Goodwin Group is the search firm that we selected. There were over 100 contacts made to the search firm of interest in the position - narrowed it down to those qualified for the position, and the search committee reviewed the list, selected the candidates for interviews.

"The search committee held our initial interviews in May, and the board of directors interviewed just last week. We anticipate that we'll name the new general manager either later this month or early July, but the new general manager should be in place sometime in August of 2016."

Board Vice President Mickey Cummings updated those present on several of the policy changes that have taken effect over the last two years, including not allowing directors and the board attorney to have access to company health care, preventing directors

from receiving zero interest loans to purchase central heating units, the creation of a "Whistleblower Policy," a strengthening of the board's Conflict of Interest Policy, and more.

Director Chris Logan also gave an update on the company's financials year-to-date through April of 2016, featuring total revenue of \$27,490,136, total operation and maintenance costs of \$13,185,951, a net income of \$3,685,498, a total number of customers residential and commercial at 51,192, and an overall debt value of \$118,810,054, which is down about \$550,000 since last reported at the end of January.

Following a brief question and answer session with the few in attendance, addressing everything from the sale of the old headquarters - no one is biting yet - to when the board might allow open board meetings - the directors

are still looking into possibly live streaming the meetings - Board President Steven Phillips addressed the room.

"A lot of good things going on at the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC," said Phillips. "It seems like it's taking a long time, and the wheels are moving slow, but we really are making progress, and everybody on the board's working together for the good of the employees and the membership.

"When (Mickey) talked about some of the policies, he just talked about the ones that have kind of stood above the rest of them, but we're making policy changes, and it takes a long time to make sure you get it all right.

"We're doing that, the general manager search, the forensic audit. So everything that we said we were going to do we're doing, and like I said, it's a slow go, but we're making a lot of good headway."

Sewer...from Page 1A

and air lines. The facility is being expanded in order to increase the capacity of wastewater that can be treated, and to accommodate more of the City of Young Harris.

"Ten years ago this process started," said Mayor Gibby following the meeting. "The process was started because of some vision from the council at the time, looking at future growth in the city and knowing that eventually we were going to need more sewage capacity."

From that initial vision, it took close to 10 years to get the plans through a strict review process, including past the Georgia Environmental Protection Division, as the City of Young Harris is one of the few cities in the state on a primary trout stream, according to Mayor Gibby.

"This project started last year, the actual construction," said Mayor Gibby. "We're literally doubling the capacity of our sewage plant, the ability to process all the sewage that comes in. When (Young Harris College) is in session, we're almost out of capacity - during the summer it's not quite so bad.

"In the last 10 years, we've had quite a bit of growth. Not just the college, but definitely the college. So if we want to grow any



Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby

more, if we want other things besides the college - if we want development in business and commercial, then we have to have more sewage."

Now, the construction is 82 percent finished, and the mayor said the city is committed to having the project done by the end of the year, calling the plant "on time and on budget."

"They're supposed to be finished in September - with the change orders, it's probably going to be November, but we're still within the timeframe, so we're good," said Mayor Gibby.

Mayor Gibby and several councilmembers took the time during the regular meeting to

talk about the monumental success of the first ever North Georgia Highlands Seafood Festival in Young Harris from the weekend before.

"If you didn't get to the Seafood Festival, you missed it," said Mayor Gibby. "It was huge and fabulous and successful...I've wanted something for a very long time to bring our community together. A fun place where people can just hang out and talk, and it happened, and it was so, so fun to watch."

The council also approved a business license for an incoming Union General Hospital Health Clinic, to be located at 1155 Main Street in Young Harris.

Wine...from Page 1A

Attendance was down due to other local festivals taking place at the same time, most notably the Blairsville Scottish Festival & Highland Games.

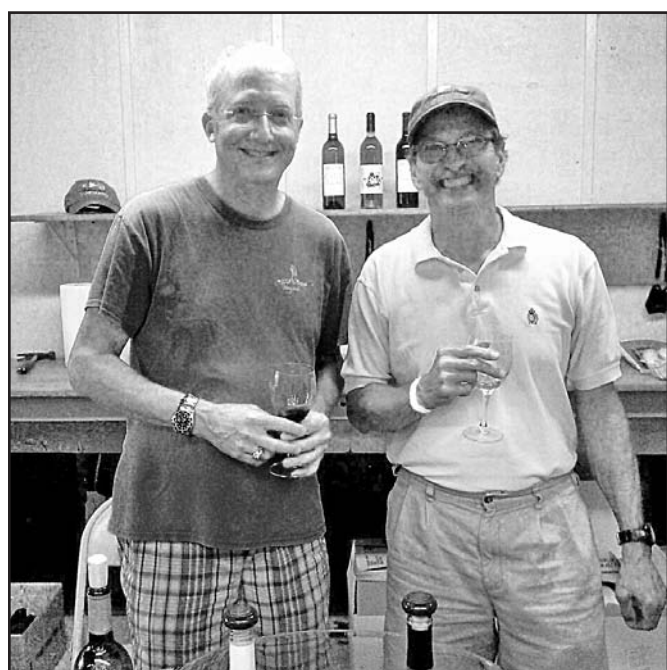
"It went really well, we were just a little slow on attendance but otherwise it's been great," said Fairgrounds General Manager Hilda Thomason. "We had 16 wineries here from North Georgia, 10 vendors selling arts and crafts. We also had three restaurants. Overall it's been a great experience, with a lot of new people that have never been here before."

The festival also provided local wineries an opportunity to promote their business and get their name in the game.

"This event has given us a lot of exposure," said Sharon Odom-Rohrbaugh of Odom Springs Vineyards in Blairsville. "A lot of people here didn't know that we existed. We're right in their backyard, so hopefully they'll come and see us."

The first two years of the festival were dominated by sweet wines, but this year more of an emphasis was placed on fine wines.

"This year we went to all fine wines and hopefully that didn't hurt our attendance," Thomason said. "There were just so many events taking place around the area. Dahlonega



Eric Seifarth, left, of Crane Creek Vineyards, and Sanford Green, of Hightower Creek Vineyards, enjoy a glass of wine together at the Third Annual Appalachian Wine, Music & Art Festival. Both vineyards are located within Towns County. Photo/Todd Forrest

had some things going on, you had the Scottish Festival in Blairsville, and Hayesville (NC) had something going on the square."

On Friday, June 17, the fairgrounds will be jam-packed with more than 3,200 Southern Rock fans, as Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductees Lynyrd Skynyrd will rock the Anderson Music Hall.

All seating inside the building is sold out, however,

general admission tickets are still on sale for the 7 p.m. show. The large garage doors will be opened around the music hall and standing room only tickets are available for outside the venue. Attendees watching the concert from outside are allowed to bring folding chairs to set up outside the doors.

More than 300 outdoor tickets were sold as of press time Monday.

Movers...from Page 1A

there is really about mindset," said Kay on Friday. "So humor me for a minute, I want to take you through your average day. Let's just look at our lives for a second and examine them.

"For all intents and purposes, we basically live in a box. You think about it, okay. So you live in a box, and then you wake up in the morning - for those of us who have somewhere to be there's a little box just beeping and it tells us to get up.

"And then we get into a box that has some water spraying out of it. We get scrubbed up and then we go and we get into a box with wheels, and then we go to another box where we usually work with a box to make money and do whatever we do.

"Then we take that back to our box with wheels, and then we drive to yet another box, and we take that money and we buy boxes. And then we put it in our box with wheels, and then we go back to our command post box, and we eat from those boxes while we look at a box and work on the box.

"And when it's all over, they put you in a box. So my message to you is: think outside the box, because we're all boxed in."

Kay said that humans are simple by nature, only needing water, shelter, fire and food.

"That's it," said Kay. "We tend to complicate it, and we've added a lot of layers to that, but it's water, shelter, fire and food. Now, mankind is the only thing in nature that cannot exist in their God-given environment. We have actually



Dyana Costello Banks

devolved to the point that we can't take our rightful place on the earth.

"We were designed to live here. If you look around at all the plants and everything that's here - there's medicine, there's food, there's abundance. It was designed by a creator for us to live on it. But we've done all these boxes, we've separated ourselves from it and from each other, community. There's no community anymore. There's no basic skills."

Also in the meeting Friday was Dyana Costello Banks, Mountain Regional Library System training and outreach coordinator, and she shared with those in attendance information about the Talking Book program through the Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services (GLASS).

"The Talking Book program is a national program, and they actually give preference to veterans," said

Costello Banks, adding that the program is free to anyone who qualifies.

Geared toward people who have a hard time seeing and those who are legally blind, the Talking Book program features a special tape player that plays cassette tapes.

The tapes themselves are a new, refreshed take on the cassette, with books that fit on single cassettes instead of 20 cassettes for a single book, as in the past.

Exchanging tapes for new books is easy, too, and does not cost the user postage. Simply flip over the card that came with the book in the mail, and it is ready to mail back.

Contact any of the Mountain Regional Library System libraries to get in touch with Costello Banks, and to find out more information about the Talking Book program and any of the library system's other free services.

Alcohol...from Page 1A

Syfan is an attorney with Hulsey, Oliver & Mahar LLP out of Gainesville, and he was hired by the City of Hiwassee to help it through the special election process.

The other resolution which city council passed in that meeting ensured that, come November, voters will be able to decide whether to allow beer and wine Sunday sales in retail settings, such as grocery and convenience stores.

Two more potential resolutions concerning the package sale of liquor require voter petitions in order to be placed on the ballot in November.

"At least insofar as package sales for distilled spirits, both during the normal week and on Sunday, you all cannot yet pass a resolution regarding that until such time as we get in a petition of 35 percent of the registered and qualified voters of the city, which I think we calculated last time was around 210," said Syfan to the council.

The city is looking to have the required number of signatures for the package sale petitions by mid-August at the latest, in order to give Hiwassee City Clerk and Elections Superintendent Cenlya Galloway enough time to verify that all names on the petitions are in fact registered voters, and in order



The Hiwassee City Council discusses the Wastewater Treatment Facility and its improvements over the last seven months.

to have plenty of time to get the referendums on the ballot.

At the point that the petition names are verified, resolutions calling for the referendums will need to be passed by the city council, as the initiatives will be considered voter-driven initiatives.

Also in the meeting, the council voted 3-1 - Liz Ordiales, Anne Mitchell and Kris Berrong for, Jay Chastain against - to impose term limits on the elected positions of city councilmembers and the mayor. Starting with the next elected city officials, those officials will be subject to a term limit of no more than two consecutive terms in city office.

Fletcher Holliday, who is the assistant vice president of Engineering Management Inc.,

reported favorable news for the City of Hiwassee Wastewater Treatment Facility.

Following staff turnover late last fall, EMI contracted with the city to take over running the sewer facility. Since then, quality has improved in every area of the treatment plant, and the company will be co-hosting with the city a dedication ceremony for the Nutrient Reduction Facility at the sewer plant on Thursday, July 21, at 2 p.m.

There will be a public meeting with the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government on Monday, June 20, at 4:30 p.m. at Hiwassee City Hall. The Carl Vinson Institute was hired by the city to report on employee classification and compensation.

Library...from Page 1A

Creativity and kids go hand in hand, and Stone hopes to use these puppets as a creative way to get kids excited about reading and coming to the libraries.

The troupe will be performing 30 to 45 minute shows, featuring shorter acts and one longer act, all of which will be drawn from stories and fables. "Tortoise and the Hare," "Mother Hubbard" and "Frog and Toad" are just a few of the many shows Stone hopes to have ready for the company's tour.

"While we're performing the show, the book goes on a big screen behind us," said Stone. "We talk about the author and how many books they've written, and give them a little background information."

The Friends of the Library of Union County donated \$1,000 to the puppet company, and the Georgia Public Library Service donated \$1,500, allowing the initial cost of the troupe to be fully funded, something for which Stone is very grateful.

Stone is coordinating the first puppet production with the Summer Reading Program at Towns County Public Library on June 16, one show at 11 a.m. and another at 1 p.m. Other tour date times and locations can be found on the new Mountain Regional Library System website at www.mountainregionallibrary.org.

In other Mountain Regional Library news, the System Board of Trustees



Union County Public Library Branch Manager Susie Brendle sits in on the Wednesday, June 8, board meeting in Young Harris. Photo/Lily Avery

held its quarterly meeting on Wednesday, June 8, at the temporary location of the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris.

Throughout the meeting, the board reviewed the financial report for the third fiscal quarter, as well as the proposed budget for the 2016-2017 fiscal year.

All libraries within the region shared updates for the quarter, specifically the programs that each library will be implementing throughout the summer.

Individual libraries hold

summer reading story times for children, all following the Georgia-wide theme, "On Your Mark, Get Set...Read!"

This year's theme promotes health and fitness in conjunction with reading, giving kids the opportunity to enjoy a good story while learning useful information on how to stay healthy.

Renovations are underway for the new Mountain Regional Library facility in Young Harris, and the board hopes to open the library to the public around mid-October.