

Woody Gap...from Page 1A

there for 24 years, including all high school math courses and a local studies class. She said that Gooch is one of the most responsible students she's had the privilege to teach, and that her leadership skills and drive to succeed should carry her

far in life.

Gooch is president of her senior class, as well as president of the Beta Club. She served as president of Student Council last year, and maintains an advisor role to the current Student Council



Woody Gap Senior Payton Gooch, 2017 STAR Student

president.

For a couple of years now, Gooch has been spending mornings with younger children in the classroom, earning credit through a work-based learning program.

Thanks to the time she has spent at Woody Gap, both as a student and as a leader in various capacities, including assisting with kindergarten and first-grade students as an upperclassman, Gooch has decided that she wants to obtain a degree in early childhood education.

She'll be starting school down at Augusta State University in the fall, and hasn't ruled out returning to teach in her hometown down the road.

Skateboarding...from Page 1A

petition here, it's only 34 signatures."

While the council and Mayor Conley appreciated Wosyluk's contribution, the council explained that the ordinance is in place for safety measures and will remain such due to Blairsville's terrain and lack of proper skateboarding amenities.

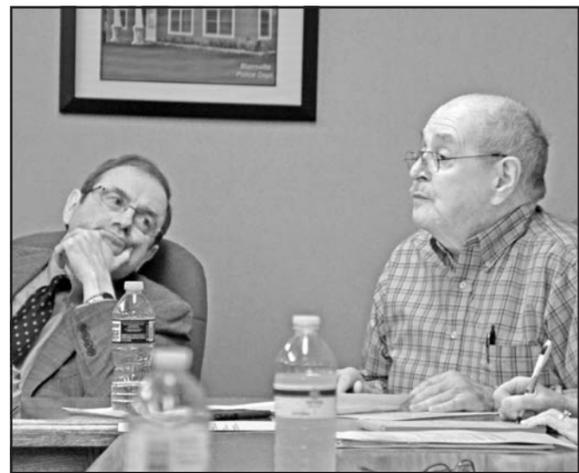
On behalf of the Blairsville Police Department, Officer Shawn Dyer further explained the importance of the ordinance, and why the police department fully supports enforcing the laws against such transportation.

"With our sidewalks and some of the conditions with our sidewalks and the traffic, we have a lot of trouble with people not skateboarding responsibly," said Officer Dyer. "When the skateboarders dart out into traffic, it causes a hazard to the drivers as well as the people riding the skateboards."

"We have crosswalks here on the square now, but back when the ordinance was written, there weren't any crosswalks. It's simply a safety issue, for both the people on the skateboards and the people driving."

Mayor Conley explained that, in regards to the sidewalk, it was not a call to be made by the city since Meeks Park lies outside the city limits and is county property.

In other council meeting news, Mayor Conley



Blairsville Mayor Jim Conley and City Attorney David Barret Feb. 7, 2017. Photo/Lily Avery

presented a proposal to the council concerning a piece of commercial property of approximately 14 acres for sale on Haralson Drive that currently does not have access to sewer.

According to Mayor Conley, this property would be a prime candidate for the city to step in and provide meters and meter equipment for the grounds. Mayor Conley said that the developer of the property could bring the sewer to the city through Notla Water Authority, provided that the water through Notla Water Authority is offered at a reduced rate.

As of right now, the rate for such a proposal is unknown, however, Mayor Conley is actively researching estimates for the proposal.

The council decided to table the proposal to be discussed during the March council meeting, when all details of the Haralson property sewer and water exchange have been determined.

Also during the meeting, the council unanimously approved Judy Jolly, owner of Cabin Coffee, to become an official board member of the Blairsville Downtown Development Authority. Jolly will begin serving on the board immediately.

Penny...from Page 1A

them were killed. Georgia ended 2016 ranking fourth in the nation in line of duty deaths.

Even more unusual this year are the occurrences of officers being ambushed simply because they are the police. Of the 65 killed by gunmen last year, 21 of the officers were ambushed. This is the first time in my career that I can ever remember officers being shot as they sat in their cars or fired upon when they arrived on the scene of a bogus call. This is genuinely unprecedented in our history, and everyone in our profession is on edge and worried as never before.

As a sheriff, my single biggest difficulty has been the inability to hire and retain qualified officers. This is not unique to Putnam County, but a systemic problem throughout Georgia law enforcement.

Our very best officers almost always leave local law enforcement agencies after a few years and go on to better pay and benefits with state and federal agencies. The Georgia Sheriffs' Association did a survey last November with 76 of the 159 sheriffs reporting that they had lost more than 500 of their deputies to state law enforcement agencies over the last 10 years.

I remind you those figures came from less than half of the sheriffs and didn't include the number of officers who left city agencies for state jobs. City and county law enforcement agencies have truly become nothing more than the training grounds for our state law enforcement agencies. The constant cost associated with this turnover and training can hardly be quantified, and it is patently unfair for the local taxpayers to repeatedly foot this bill.

Our plight of hiring and retaining personnel was exponentially exacerbated last September when Governor Deal announced that all state law enforcement personnel would be receiving a 20 percent increase in pay. Let me be very clear here, I absolutely support those officers getting a raise and think they deserve it. On the other hand, if the state officers deserve a 20 percent increase, local city and county officers deserve the same increase if not more.

With these new increases in pay, a Georgia State Patrol Officer after completing his/her basic training now makes \$46,422 per year. I remind you that this is their beginning pay level.

There are three pay levels of "Trooper" that go up to \$61,825 per year before even being promoted to the rank of corporal.

The average compensation of a Georgia deputy sheriff after completing basic training is only \$29,900 per year. These state officers are being paid by you the taxpayer, and we need to be able to explain to your local law enforcement officers just why they are worth so much less. These state agencies are support agencies and virtually all of them close their offices at 5 p.m. every day and very few of them regularly work on weekends, holidays or nights.

The dangers of the job and such disparities in pay have led to the crisis situation local law enforcement agencies find themselves in today. We simply have no way to compete with the state, not to mention federal agencies, anymore, and we absolutely cannot afford to lose anymore of our personnel.

Georgia sheriffs are going to be seeking the enactment of legislation this year which will mandate that any full-time, certified peace officer be paid at least the beginning salary of a Georgia State Patrol officer. Critics of this effort are going to shout loudly that this is simply a local matter and shouldn't be addressed with a state law. Sheriffs will first counter that by saying that even though local taxpayers are the ones who foot the bill for our own salaries, it's state law that mandates the minimum salary for all sheriffs in Georgia.

Many years ago our General Assembly recognized that our local school systems had a similar problem acquiring and retaining qualified teachers. To cure that problem they enacted

legislation that mandated a statewide minimum pay scale, insurance, and retirement system commensurate with education and experience for all of our local educators. Had those laws not been passed, the disparities in education from one county to another would be profound today. Surely our deputies and city officers, the men and women who go headlong into harm's way every day, deserve to be treated similarly as our teachers have been.

The pay increases we are proposing will need some sort of tax increase for funding, and we believe it to be blatantly unfair to place the burden of it on the property-owning taxpayer. I certainly don't enjoy paying taxes, and all law enforcement officers pay taxes just like you do. We believe the only way funding for the increases we are proposing can be equitably accomplished is through an additional penny of sales tax which would be solely dedicated and restricted to fund only local city and county law enforcement officers' salaries and benefits.

Did you know that you are paying the rent of convicts who are released from prison for three months (<http://www.dca.state.ga.us/housing/specialneeds/programs/rph.asp>)? Did you also know that you

were giving tax credit incentives to hire convicted felons (<http://www.georgia.org/competitive-advantages/tax-credits/work-opportunity-tax-credits/> - <http://georgiaopportunity.org/assets/2014/10/GCO-Report-workforce-web.pdf>)? It seems to me that we are making great efforts to help criminals, and it seems we could in turn provide a minimum salary to those who are risking their lives every day to apprehend them.

It has become incredibly hard to hire an officer, and if this crisis isn't addressed in some manner very soon, there will be dire results to the safety of the public. We never close, and when you call 911 it's a local deputy or city officer who will be responding to your call.

I am asking you to write, email, or call your state senators and representatives and tell them to support and vote for legislation that will require your local officers be paid at least the starting pay of a state trooper. If you don't know who or how to contact your legislators, please contact me and I will personally provide you with their contact information.

Your local officers need your help and support now more than ever, and I implore you help them in the same manner your state officers have been helped.