

# City...from Page 1A

property to sell, which would, in turn, be beneficial for the city as a whole.

"We're purchasing the water through Notla in order to satisfy our ordinance to where we can offer sewer to that location," said Mayor Conley. "Notla is agreeing to sell us water at a reduced rate. By doing this, the property will have a better chance of selling."

The only stipulation the Notla Water Authority Board addressed when speaking with City Attorney David Barrett was the desire for the city to only provide water and sewage services to the commercial properties. Essentially, no private or public entities aside from the Pat Haralson Drive property will have access to the new water hook-up as of right now.

"When I talked with the Notla board, they explained that it would only apply to businesses who asked for sewer in that area," said Barrett. "I have it so that we can expand or contract that area within the agreement if need be but as of right now it is only for that commercial area."

With all council members in favor of the agreement, Attorney Barrett is preparing an agreement with the city and Notla Water Authority that will begin promptly in the upcoming month.

In another water-related



Councilwomen Rhonda Mahan and Betty Easter in the Tuesday, March 7, regular meeting.

instance, a water line issue on Cook Street has been a priority of the council for quite some time. During the meeting, Mayor Conley proposed that City Engineer, Chip McGaughey of EMI, move forward with replacing the water line as soon as possible. The estimated cost for the construction of the project is \$85,000.

The council approved the project unanimously and bids for the project will be sent out promptly.

In other city council news, a public hearing was held for the first reading of an amendment to the city's current alcohol ordinance regarding brown bagging of alcoholic beverages at institutions that hold an alcohol license.

"There was a gap in

the ordinance about brown bagging," said Barrett. "There was no exclusion for brown bagging as there was in the county ordinance. As a result, a business here in town had brown bagging on Sunday. This is a way to make sure that doesn't happen again."

Before the amendment, the city did not have a law against brown bagging for businesses that already serve alcohol, however, the council felt that the revision was necessary for the safety of the citizens and reducing liability for business owners.

This amendment is another step toward mirroring the county's alcohol ordinance to keep with consistency for citizens throughout the city and county and minimize confusion.

# BRMEMC...from Page 1A

the last couple of years have changed the EMC Board of Directors over to newly elected members. Coupled with Nelms' arrival, it's safe to say that the leadership of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC has seen a complete overhaul.

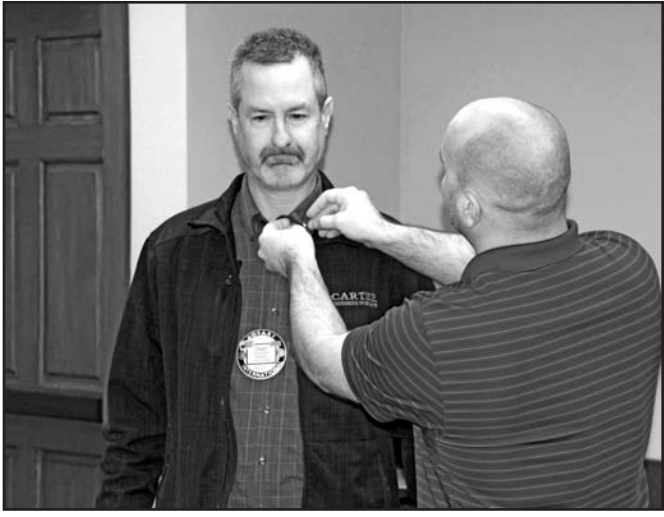
According to previous statements by the new board, transparency is the ultimate goal for those involved, and Nelms said last Thursday that the membership won't be seeing any cover-ups or abuses of power by their EMC leadership moving forward.

"You don't have to worry about that anymore," said Nelms. "I'm here, and you've got a great board, we have some awesome leadership there in the boardroom. They all want to do the right thing. They brought me in, and everything's aboveboard with me."

"Now, I'm trying to draw those employees out of the foxholes. We've had three years of opportunity cost lost because everybody's been so scared."

"It's a new day. The sun is shining. We need to get out there, we need to thump our chests again and say, hey, we're the EMC. We are your trusted energy advisor, we're here to provide great things to the North Georgia and Western North Carolina mountains."

Much of Nelms' message that Thursday was focused on what he and the board have been



Union County Rotary Club President Joseph Goble pins a Paul Harris Award to fellow Rotarian Scott Carter's shirt.

working on lately, including continued transparency, but also organizing the upcoming town hall meetings in Union and Towns counties.

The meetings are meant to give the membership direct access to EMC board members, to ask of them questions and to share with them concerns that people have about their membership.

In Union County, the town hall will take place on Thursday, March 23, at 6 p.m. North Georgia Technical College will host the meeting, which is located at 121 Meeks Ave. in Blairsville.

The Towns County town hall meeting will be held on Thursday, April 13, at 6 p.m., hosted at the Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at 150 Foster Park Road in Young Harris.

Nelms also announced a change of scenery for this year's annual meeting, the venue for which has changed from Anderson Music Hall at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds to the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center.

This spring, Nelms said the EMC will hold strategic planning sessions, where the board and EMC staff will gather to forge common goals.

Right now, engineering's working on one thing, operations is working on their thing, finance on theirs, and I'm working on some things," said Nelms. "But if we're not all singing off the same sheet of music, we're not combining forces - we're just all working on our own disparate things."

"I feel like we need to have a common focus, and I think that's where the strategic planning will come in and certainly help."

Fiber-optic internet was another topic of the meeting, and Nelms readily addressed concerns about access to the much-heralded internet delivery service.

"I don't know that many residents know, but we've got 1,100 miles of fiber already

installed," said Nelms. "Those 1,100 miles cross about 20,000 homes, and we've only got 6,000 people signed up."

"So, the issue I'm facing is, do I continue to grow and have a 30 percent take rate? Or do I figure out my marketing, and do I up that take rate to make sure I'm getting the full value of the infrastructure that I already have installed so that then I can have more revenue to build out?"

"And the latter is what I've chosen. We're working right now with North Georgia Network, our provider for our bandwidth, to try to develop a new marketing strategy so that we can sell things a little better."

Nelms also reiterated his commitment to challenging the Tennessee Valley Authority on incremental annual rate hikes that will increase electric bills by greater than 10 percent from current rates after all increases have gone into effect by 2023.

Joseph Goble, president of Union County Rotary, gave Nelms a warm introduction in the noon meeting, and lunch was prepared by Amazing Grace Catering.

"Union County Rotary welcomes men and women business owners and leaders to visit our club, which meets every week at Southern Bank & Trust on Thursday at 12 p.m. for lunch," said Goble following the meeting. "If you have a passion to serve both your community and internationally, our doors are open to you at Union County Rotary. We hope you will join us."

# Planning...from Page 1A

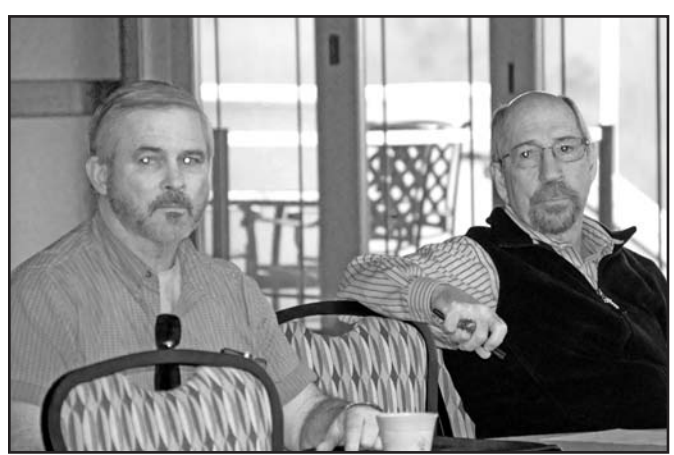
were given an opportunity to voice their concerns and desires for the futures of both Blairsville and Union County. Many residents stressed the need for widespread high-speed fiber optic Internet access as well as the wish to maintain the hometown feel of the area.

Adam Hazell, GMRC Planning Director, encouraged residents to complete a survey to provide stakeholders with documented evidence of what the community wants to see in the coming years. Hazell presented these results to the stakeholders on Monday.

"There's a reason why we have these surveys rather than simply holding public hearings and going from there," said Hazell. "This is information for us to use and then you guys are helping us create the unified direction of where to go with this."

"This is just a way for you to see and understand what people are concerned with and what's touching a nerve among residents."

The survey was split into various categories, such as cultural resources, housing needs and economics. As of right now, there have been 300 responses to the survey.



Sonny Mahan of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC with Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris.

Across the board, many echoed the concerns voiced during the last public hearing, emphasizing the need for all residents to have access to high-speed Internet as well as maintain the natural beauty of the area.

In terms of growth, while many in the community wish to see Blairsville expand economically, residents want that growth to be mindfully managed in a way that does not take away from the small, close-knit community that makes Blairsville unique.

In line with that same thought, while residents wanted

to see growth within the city, more growth and development throughout the county was undesirable, especially along the ridge tops, unless it is an emphasis on building more agricultural industry.

After assessment of the survey responses, Hazell constructed sample vision statements for both the city and the county that are possibilities for the revised comprehensive plan.

One of the drafted statements for the county is:

"Union County, Georgia is a hometown focused on its

people, putting families first by celebrating its friendly neighborly charm, providing a safe community and investing in facilities and services that will provide a quality of life and opportunities for prosperity desired by its citizens."

As for the city, Hazell suggested a vision statement of:

"The City of Blairsville is a proud, civic and commercial destination serving area residents, businesses and visitors with small town charm and southern hospitality. The City of Blairsville offers a historical downtown that is inviting to all and serves as a cultural center for the community, providing facilities and opportunities that honor local heritage, encourage traditional business growth and serves as a center for social events."

"The city will protect and enhance the small urban fabric as defining traits of the community's character and in a way that keeps the city unique."

These vision statements will be a portion of a four-part statement for both the county and the city when the comprehensive plan is completed.

The stakeholders will hold another meeting at the end of March to continue progress on the comprehensive plans and work toward completion in the coming months.

# LOCAL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

**Olive Tree Art Centre**  
 Art Gallery \* Pottery Studio \* Art Classes  
 563 Gainesville Hwy...1 mile south of town  
 Blairsville GA 30512  
 (706) 835-1257  
 www.OliveTreeArtCentre.com

**WAZOO! QUILTING**  
 Longarm Quilting  
 Commission Quilts  
 Quilt Restoration  
 Quick Turn Around  
 Located in Blairsville, GA  
 706-781-1423

**SHAWN'S HOME FURNISHINGS**  
 Mattresses, Porch Rockers & More!  
 "From the Front Porch to the Back Door We've Got You Covered!"  
 568 Blue Ridge St. • Blairsville, GA  
 FREE DELIVERY! 706-835-1209  
 Mon-Fri 9am-6pm • Sat 9am-4pm • Closed Sun

Declare your financial independence. Call today.  
 Flip Varney  
 Financial Advisor  
 178 Brackets Way Suite 2  
 Blairsville, GA 30512  
 706-835-1385  
 www.edwardjones.com  
 Edward Jones  
 MAKING SENSE OF INVESTING Member SIPC

**TOTAL RECOVERY**  
 PAINT & BODY  
 (706) 745-9703  
 391 BLUE RIDGE HWY  
 ALL INSURANCE ACCEPTED

**AS PAVING DIVISION INC.**  
 706-400-2988  
 DRIVEWAYS  
 PARKING LOTS  
 SUB DIVISIONS  
 TAR/GRAVEL  
 Commercial • Residential

**Southeast Geothermal & Spray Foam**  
 706-745-8685  
 1442 Blue Ridge Hwy.  
 www.segeothermal.com  
 www.sesprayfoam.com

**COPELAND'S**  
 BURGERS & SOUTHERN EATS  
 Winter Hours:  
 Monday - Saturday 11AM-9PM  
 Sunday 11AM-3PM  
 Downtown Blairsville, One Block from the Square, across from City Hall

**Horse Camp**  
 Spring Break at Trackrock Stables  
 April 3-7  
 April 10-14  
 Get up to \$50 off!  
 Complete hands-on experience with horses and riding. \*See website for discount details. Advance reservations required.  
 706-745-5252  
 www.Trackrock.com

Michelin BFG Uniroyal  
 Specializing In:  
 Alignment • Computer Balancing  
 Brakes • Auto Repair  
 Industrial Foam Fill  
 Oil Changes  
**Thomas Tire, Inc.**  
 Auto & Big Truck Service  
 Oscar Thomas - Owner 76 Shoe Factory Road  
 (706) 745-0264 Blairsville, Georgia 30512

**Budget Blinds**  
 The best in custom blinds and window coverings  
 Free In-Home Consultation!  
 Shutters • Wood Blinds • Honeycomb  
 Roller/Solar Shades • Roman Shades • Vertical Blinds  
 Woven Woods and Much More!  
 www.budgetblinds.com  
 Call Today! 706-745-0009

**We Make Loans.**  
 Personal Loans • Starter Loans • Consolidation Loans and more  
 www.1ffc.com  
 417 Blue Ridge Street, Suite 1  
 BLAIRSVILLE  
 706-745-6111  
 1st Franklin Financial  
 \*All loans subject to our liberal credit policy and limitations, if any. 1st Franklin Financial Corporation, NMLS#141654, Georgia Residential Mortgage License #5656.

**HEARING SOLUTIONS**  
 of North Georgia  
 Hearing Tests - Evaluations - Consults  
 Let us service your hearing devices in our state of the art hearing lab!  
 Call us today 706-835-9213  
 Hearing Solutions of North Georgia  
 63 Plott Street, Unit D, Blairsville, GA  
 (Located next to Chick-fil-A on Hwy. 515)  
 Proudly serving the community and tri-state area since 2000

**Impact Design, Inc.**  
 Owner, LuAnn Head  
 307C Cleveland Street • Blairsville, GA 30512  
 706-400-5674  
 Laser Engraving • Custom Apparel • Promotional Products  
 Website: impactdesigninc.co

**BRASSTOWN PHARMACY DRUG AND GUN**  
 A shot... above the rest  
 706-745-2303  
 LOCATED AT 23B MURPHY HWY BLAIRSVILLE GA

**at&t**  
 We now have a small business center in your local at&t store.  
 Come in and see Shannon Richards!  
 305 Murphy Highway, Suite 1  
 Blairsville, GA 30512  
 706-745-7272