

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Transparency top of mind for new BRMEMC board

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

In its latest efforts toward transparency, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors held a Town Hall Meeting at the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center on Tuesday, Jan. 26.

Dozens of EMC members attended the meeting, and several of the EMC staff sat on the sidelines, ready to lend their technical expertise during the Q&A portion of the meeting.

"We appreciate everybody coming out tonight,"



Steven Phillips

said Board President Steven Phillips, calling the meeting to order. "This is really our second meeting - we had one last night in Hayesville, North Carolina, and it went pretty smooth."

And for the most part, the meeting in Blairsville went the same.

After an invocation led by Board Member Ray Cook of Cherokee County, and the Pledge of Allegiance led by Board Member Larry Williams of Fannin County, the board gave several reports to those gathered before jumping into the member Q&A.

Board Vice President Mickey Cummings, who chairs the board's policy committee, informed the members of some of the policy changes he and the board have been busy making.

Cummings said that last fall, he and the board decided to update the EMC's policy manual.

"You can see this manual," he said, holding up a black binder several inches thick. "I don't know how long it's going to take to get it completely



L-R: BRMEMC Board members: Ray Cook, Charles Jenkins, Mickey Cummings, Chairman Steven Phillips, Roy Perren, Chris Logan, Greg Owenby and Larry Williams; not pictured Ronnie Burch

through. We had to start in some different places, and we have about seven different things that we'd like to share with you that we've tried to update so far."

Policy revisions and additions shared that Tuesday include: a requirement that the EMC attorney immediately bring to the board any known violation of EMC policies; potential whistleblowers were

given more flexibility in reporting; and several policies were put in place to allow for greater communication between the board, EMC management and EMC employees, and also with the membership, with periodic Town Hall Meetings.

Two other policies have been put into place recently, reported Cummings: one policy requiring finance

committee board members "to approve any deviations from payment guidelines" in EMC policies; and another policy requiring "directors and key employees to annually complete a disclosure 990 statement for the retention by our auditor."

A Form 990 is a tax form filed annually by nonprofits, featuring detailed financial information, and is used to

justify continued tax exemption status to the IRS.

Chris Logan, chairman of the board's finance committee, gave an update of the numbers, with a net revenue of the EMC of \$1,585,272 out of total electric revenue of \$40,423,456

As for debt, Logan reported that the EMC's

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Editor pulls through surgery, recovering nicely

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Charles Duncan went under the knife in the midmorning hours of Wednesday, Jan. 27, for a life-saving triple bypass, his second open-heart surgery in the Ronnie Green Heart Center at Northeast Georgia Medical Center since 2009.

The surgery last week was the culmination of a series of medical issues Duncan has experienced since September, including an arterial bypass for an aneurysm in his right knee and its subsequent complications.

Back in 2009, Duncan underwent emergency aortic valve replacement surgery necessitated by a staph infection gone haywire.

Duncan's heart surgeon, Dr. Daniel Winston, who

operated on Duncan both last week and in 2009, believed the recent aneurysm to have been caused by an embolism dating back to the initial staph infection seven years ago.

Now, Duncan is on the road to recovery, and he said that he is extremely appreciative of the people who have kept him in their thoughts and prayers during his downtime. He hopes to return to his role as editor of both the *North Georgia News* and the *Towns County Herald* in the next six to eight weeks.

A lifetime newspaper man, Duncan caught the writing bug early - after turning in several writing assignments, his sixth-grade English teacher pulled him aside to tell him he had a gift.

"I'd always realized that I was the sixth out of six kids,



Charles Duncan

and everyone above me seemed to be smarter," Duncan said, recalling his youth. "That was the first time anybody had told me I had a gift, and I took it to heart."

Duncan used his formative years to sharpen his writing abilities, excelling throughout high school, where

he graduated from Union County High in 1978, before proceeding on to college.

He took a few classes at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland before switching over to Tri-County Community College in Murphy, North Carolina.

"I didn't focus on writing then, but I did have some creative writing classes at Tri-County, and had some classes that definitely gave me the opportunity to hone my skills a little bit," Duncan said.

After graduating from Tri-County in 1981, he was accepted into North Georgia College, but finding himself in need of practical work, he took a job at TRW, a ball bearing manufacturing plant in Flowery Branch.

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Rep. Allison to retire; will not seek re-election

After a great deal of consideration and prayer, and after many conversations with my family and loved ones, I am announcing that I will not seek re-election to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2016.

The greatest honor of my life has been to serve as your state representative these past eight years, and I have been privileged to serve as your voice in Atlanta. Throughout my years in public service, I have had the opportunity to meet and get to know so many of my neighbors and work on problems that face our community. I have also had the privilege to work with so many wonderful public servants who are tireless in their drive to make our community a great place to call home.

Regina and I want to thank



the people of Rabun, Union, Towns and White counties for their continual support and friendship. We were blessed to have so many people who worked with us, encouraged us and prayed for us, through four elections and eight years of public service. The people in these mountains are special, and they will forever have a place in our hearts".
-Rep. Stephen Allison

Band of Steel brings Valentine's Day early

By Todd Forrest
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Woody Gap Schools' Steel Drum Band, aka: "Band of Steel," will bring their groundbreaking style of music to Blairsville next weekend with a performance at the Community Room at Butternut Creek Golf Course on Friday, Feb. 12.

The First Annual Steel n' Love Gala is raising money for a trip to New York City in April, where the band will receive the opportunity to take part in a Broadway workshop.

The program, which is titled "Steel in Love" will



Woody Gap's Band of Steel

feature covers of love songs dating from the 1960s to today.

According to Woody Gap Music Director Doug

Roberts, the program will include a Wonderful World" from 1967, and Otis Redding's "(Sitting On) The Dock of the

Bay" from 1968, to go along with a few contemporary hits by Katy Perry and Adele.

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Blairsville woman charged in NC woman's death

By Staff Reports
North Georgia News
editor@nganews.com

Cynthia Marie Smith, 39, of Blairsville, has been arrested and charged with homicide by a motor vehicle in the first degree, according to the Union County Sheriff's Office.

The charge dates to the May 28, 2015, death of Joni Lynn Clark, 51, of Murphy, NC.

"Georgia State Patrol's Specialized Collision Reconstruction Team, which



Cynthia Marie Smith

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FFA Pig Jig fun for whole family



AG Students from six counties compete in showmanship and for best market hog at Pig Jig

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Union County Middle and High School students competed with five other

schools in the Fifth Annual Pig Jig of the Union County FFA on Friday, Jan. 29.

All told, 63 students from six counties arrived at the FFA Ag Barn to showcase

a total of 72 market hogs, with Union, Gilmer, Murray, Rabun, White and Whitfield counties competing.

Each student took part

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GBI investigating restaurant robbery

By Shawn Jarrard
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The No. 1 Chinese Restaurant in the Food City Shopping Center was robbed around 10 a.m. on Sunday, Jan. 31, and one of the restaurant owners received minor injuries, according to the Blairsville Police Department Facebook page.

According to both the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and Blairsville PD, the incident is actively under investigation, so information available to the public is limited at this time in order to protect the integrity of the investigation.

No arrests have been made as of press time Monday, according to the GBI, but authorities said that they do



not believe the community at large to be in danger.

"As the Blairsville PD's Facebook page says, this is an isolated incident," said GBI Region 8 Special Agent in Charge Kim Williams. "Obviously there are suspects that are out there, but I

don't feel that anyone in the community is going to be at risk. I think it is specific to the restaurant."

The lead is being taken over as the GBI investigating agency, and was contacted after

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