

Policy changes, fiber optic highlight Clay County meeting



BREMC secretary Roy Perren and the BREMC Board of Directors

By Mason Mitcham
North Georgia News
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The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors held its first of two January Town Hall Meetings in the Clay County Courthouse in North Carolina on Monday, Jan. 25, in order to discuss policy changes and the EMC's future.

Policy Chair Mickey Cummings, from Union County, gave an account of the recent policy changes.

Some of the policies seemed aimed at ensuring the board is more accountable for violations than it has been in the past.

"We provided Policy 220 in Item 2F to require our EMC attorney to immediately bring to the board of directors any known, un-remedied violation of the Blue Ridge EMC policy," Cummings began.

"Policy 606 is our whistleblower policy. It was revised to allow more flexibility in reporting and possibly to engage independent third-party whistleblower reporting services," he said.

In addition, directors are no longer eligible to receive interest-free loans.

"Policy 416 had been revised to require the Finance Committee board members to approve any deviations from the payment guidelines in the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Policy," Cummings continued.

"Then our Policy 238 was revised to dovetail with the IRS 990 Form, which requires directors and key employees to annually complete a disclosure 990 statement for retention by our auditors," he said.

Other policies sought to strengthen cooperation between the board and its employees, as well as its customer members.

"We created Policy 252 requiring the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board to periodically conduct Town Hall Meetings in a couple of different places in the area. This month, its in Blairsville and the Hiwassee-Hayesville area," he said.

Members of the public were invited to write down or ask questions of the board. Most questions concerned whether or not the EMC would soon make high-speed fiber-optic Internet available to its customers. The consensus was that this technology could

bring business to the area.

Unfortunately, the board explained, it isn't a simple decision. Estimates place the cost to bring fiber Internet to the area at close to \$100,000,000.

"Any business whatsoever, if they take out a loan for \$100,000,000, it's going to be hard to stay in business with that much debt. So one thing that we are looking at - we have been given a federal grant that pertains to the Georgia counties, so we were able to expand some with that," said Financial Chair Chris Logan.

"But with that, our goal over the last several years is to fill in those customers that are on those main lines that we already have. And we're doing that at around 85 per month. We've got a little over 5,000 customers that are now on Internet," he said.

"We have looked at other financing options. The board's going to have to make the decision as to whether or not they want to go in debt to build the fiber optic facility. Otherwise it's going to go much slower," he said.

FFA...from Page 1

in two different divisions: one showcasing their showmanship, and the other their hog.

"They're being evaluated on how well their animal is prepared, and how well they exhibit their project," said FFA Advisor John Clark Pettit, who teaches agriculture at the high school. "Sometimes the judge will ask a few questions, just to see how knowledgeable they are about their project."

"And then they'll show in their market classes, where the animal is evaluated on structural composition, on muscling - on the market traits."

Market hog projects run about six months, during which time students will work on their showmanship skills and getting the pig ready for various area competitions, with the end result being a sale at the market.

"They get these animals when they're 25, 50 pounds, and raise them out until they're market weight," said Pettit, and market hogs can get well over 200 pounds. "They'll show here, they'll show at the Georgia Junior National Livestock Show and Rodeo down in Perry on Feb. 18."

"And then they'll come back home, we'll put them on a finishing ration for about two weeks, and they'll be ready for our market hog auction on March 11."

In order to compete well, students must spend quite a bit of time each school year taking care of their pigs, and Pettit said that comes with a variety of lessons.

"Responsibility, consistency - those are the important things to learn," said Pettit. "They learn a lot of animal science practices and methods, and principles of livestock production. But the big thing is the responsibility, dedication, the daily care of their animals. Putting in that



The competition was fierce at the Pig Jig

time, putting in the effort to be sure (their hogs) are getting what they need. And if they're not getting what they need, they're not going to gain like they ought to gain."

As many as eight students at a time brought their pigs into the ring during the showmanship portion of the Jig, trying to impress the judge, who was Jacob Holmes out of Carnesville.

The goal of the showmanship portion was to be a passionate and convincing pig handler, and students walked their pigs around, successfully directing them with as few hog whips as possible.

Holmes narrowed down the competitors he liked, and the number in the ring dwindled to just a few before he selected the winners.

"It's fun when you get to see all the people - showing your pig and letting everybody look at your pig," said Travis Kerr, a seventh-grade competitor from UCMS. "I like it because I like to be around animals a lot. I grew up on a farm, so I enjoy being around animals and lots of pigs."

Like many of the students, Kerr's entire family attended the Pig Jig to cheer him on, and he was thankful

for the opportunity to showcase his love of animals and one of the many ways people can have fun on the farm.

Donna Dyer, vice president of the Union County FFA Alumni, helps to raise money with other alumni in order to send Union County students to competitions and FFA events around the Southeast.

"This is very important, not only for the community, but for the kids," said Dyer. "They can show their animals, and the hard work they've put into it. You can't just overnight train a pig or a cow to walk beside you - it takes hours of work."

"So it's very important to have local shows, because these kids travel all the way to Perry for shows, but it's good to have something that the community can come out to see."

Union County market hogs on showcase during the Pig Jig will be available during the semi-annual Blue & Gold Auction, which will feature a small animal sale on March 11, and an equipment sale on March 12.

Also, Pettit hopes to be in the new Union County Schools Agricultural Center by May.

Smith...from Page 1

is their serious accident team, took charges based on the accident that occurred last year with the fatality on 129 at Davenport's Body Shop," said Lt. Craig Davenport of the Union County Sheriff's Office.

"Warrants were taken yesterday (Jan. 28), secured by the Trooper at the Magistrate's Office. I received them this morning (Friday, Jan. 29). Knowing where she was at, I went to the residence and took her into custody without incident."

Other charges against Smith include DUI-Less Safe and failure to maintain lane, according to the sheriff's office.

Clark died from injuries sustained in a two-vehicle head-on collision on U.S. 129 North, near the North Carolina line in Union County.

She passed away at the scene of the crash that occurred at approximately 4:49 p.m. on Thursday, May 28, according to the Georgia State Patrol.

Clark was a backseat passenger in a blue 2002 Jeep Grand Cherokee driven by Laurie Catherine Nicotra, 63, of Murphy, NC, according to State Patrol.

Nicotra's Jeep was struck by a black 1997 Subaru Legacy Outback, which was being driven by Smith.

According to the State Patrol, Smith was under the influence of medications/drugs/alcohol at the time of the crash.

According to the Patrol, Smith was traveling in the left southbound lane, headed toward Blairsville. Nicotra was traveling north in the single northbound lane headed toward Murphy.

While attempting to negotiate a right curve, Smith's Subaru traveled into the northbound lane, directly into the path of the Jeep Cherokee, according to State Patrol.

The left front of the Subaru struck the right front of the Jeep Cherokee, according to the State Patrol. A secondary impact occurred as the Subaru rotated clockwise and the Jeep Cherokee rotated counterclockwise, according to the GSP.

The left rear of the Subaru struck the right rear of the Cherokee. The double impact on the Jeep caused the vehicle to overturn on its passenger side and land on its top.

Clark, a backseat passenger, died at the scene; Smith was extricated from her Subaru by Union County Fire & Rescue and transported to Union General Hospital.

Nicotra was transported to Union General Hospital, as was her front-seat passenger,



First Responders at the scene of two car collision last May resulting in the death of a NC woman

Marilyn DiCastro, 60, of Murphy, NC.

Backseat passenger Paula Jean Murphy, 52, of Murphy, NC, was transported to Northeast Georgia Medical Center in Gainesville.

According to State Patrol, Smith's auto insurance was canceled on May 13.

The incident occurred on May 28, though Smith was arrested eight months later. According to State Patrol, this can happen for a number of reasons, including due to a potential backlog at the GBI Crime Lab when awaiting results of blood tests.

Woody Gap...from Page 1

"This concert will include a lot of Pop Music that (the students) know," Roberts said. "A lot of times we will play along with the real version of the songs, so a lot of them are very close to the original version."

Roberts, who began the Steel Drum Band when he took over the music program at Woody Gap Schools in summer of 2014, said that learning the steel drums provided quite an experience, not only for the students, but for himself, despite 17 years of experience teaching music.

"In our first year we were just trying to get started and the kids were just learning," Roberts said. "The class gives students the opportunity to learn hands-on. They aren't just learning about it, they are getting to experience it."

The band has recently performed at the Indian Summer Festival in Suches, Breakfast with Santa at the Community Room, the Blairsville Farmers Market, and the Blairsville Christmas Parade.

The concept for the Steel Drum Band began when Woody Gap principals David Murphy and Sheila Collins

approached Union County Schools Superintendent Gary Steppe regarding a music program at Woody Gap.

Both Murphy and Collins worked with Roberts at Union County Middle School, so they recommended him to Steppe, and the rest is history.

"There's no way that we could have a regular band program at Woody Gap because there's just not enough people or money," Roberts said. "So I knew we would need something very unique, something different that no one else has, and something that can cross all age levels. I thought that a steel drum ensemble would work very well, and before I knew it, they said, 'Okay, what do you need to start it.'"

The show begins at 5:30 p.m., and tickets are available through Woody Gap Schools at (706) 747-2401 or by email at droberts@ucschools.org. Individual tickets are \$30, and \$50 for a couple. A table of eight can be reserved for \$200. The event is black-tie optional with dinner provided by Amazing Grace Catering. More details are also available online at the Woody Gap Band of Steel Facebook page.

Robbery...from Page 1

Blairsville PD determined that a robbery had been committed.

"We had an officer on the scene within 30 seconds, and subsequently, it was confirmed that a robbery

did occur," said Blairsville Assistant Police Chief Michael Baxter. "During the course of the investigation, there was one minor injury that had occurred."

"We feel like it's an

isolated incident, and at this point, if I was a business owner or resident in Blairsville or Union County, I don't think this is a pattern that we're going to see."

Mountain Community Chorus begins 42nd season



Mountain Community Chorus, directed by Laura Stooksbury and assistant director, Jeff Bauman, will hold auditions for its upcoming fall season on Monday, February 8th. The 42 year old chorus represents the mountain communities of North Georgia, Western North Carolina, and Eastern Tennessee and strives to provide an opportunity for talented singers in our mountain communities to learn and

perform quality choral music.

This season, MCC will be performing concerts on April 29th and May 1st. The chorus usually has a membership in excess of 50 singers who travel as much as an hour for rehearsals each Monday night for 13 weeks prior to their performances.

Auditions for MCC are Monday, February 8th at 6 PM with rehearsal from 7 PM to 8:30 PM at the Clegg Recital

Hall, Young Harris College, Young Harris, GA. There is a membership fee of \$20 which is used to purchase music for the chorus. Tenors are in great demand. If you love to sing, the Mountain Community Chorus is the place for you to join others in a musical celebration. For more information, visit www.mountaincommunitychorus.org or call Laura Stooksbury at 706-897-4267 for details.

Peacock Performing Arts Center in Hayesville, NC is looking for actors

The Peacock Performing Arts Center in Hayesville announces auditions for the theatrical season opener, *The Odd Couple*. Artistic Director Laurel Adams is seeking 6 men and 2 women for this classic Neil Simon comedy about two men, recently divorced, who decide to share an apartment--much to the dismay of their poker buddies--and each other. Adams is looking for the two leads: one a total slob; the other a neat-nik and their four pals: Murray, a cop; Vinnie, a bit hen-pecked; Roy, an accountant; and Speed who's got a wise-crack about everything. The two women's roles are Gwendolyn and Cecily Pigeon, the attractive sisters who live upstairs. Scripts are available in the office from 10 - 2 p.m., Monday-Friday. There is a \$5 refundable deposit.

posted outside the theatre at 301 Church St., or for more

information, call the office 828-389-2787.

Iwo Jima Program at Rec Center

On February 19, 2016, on the grounds of Towns County Recreation and Conference Center at 10 a.m., a program about the Battle of Iwo Jima will be held. It will be a short program with comments from

three Iwo vets. Following the program, there will be a Dutch treat lunch at Daniel's Steak House. For more information call: Bud Johnson 706-970-0195 or Walt Scott 706-897-9610.

Computer Club discusses using technology to do genealogy research

On February 8th, at 6 PM, the Mountain Computer User Group (MCUG) is offering a presentation on using technology to do genealogy research. The program will be presented by Mr. Larry Van Horn, Genealogy Instructor & Lecturer and Syndicated Genealogy Newspaper Columnist. The theme of Larry's program will be a presentation on Using Technology to do Genealogy Research in the 21st Century. He will also conduct a general genealogy "Q&A" session following the presentation.

Parking is on the South side of the church on Bald Mountain Road.

The program starts at 6 PM, with the general "Q&A" session will follow the discussion. A brief meeting for announcements and door prizes will start at 7:45 PM. Everyone is welcome to share their technology questions, issues and successes. Bring your questions and we will try to get an answer for you. Attendance at the meeting is free and the public is welcome, so join us and bring a friend. No computer expertise is needed. For further information and directions, visit our website www.mcug.org or our Facebook page at "MCUG" to learn more about our group.

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