

Allison...from Page 1A

Rep. Stephen Allison.

The couple met in her home state of Virginia, when she was attending Radford University and he was a student of the Virginia Military Institute. She moved to Stephen's hometown of

Lawrenceville after graduating college in 1995, and they married the very next year.

Allison moved to Blairsville not long after, in May of 1997, after she and Stephen fell in love with the area.

Once settled, she began working with Fred Roberts out of the Roberts Insurance

Agency as Stephen got his law practice up and running.

When the first of their two children was born, Allison left the workplace to focus on being a mom, and she spent the next several years at home caring for her two young boys, Nathanael and Thomas.

Just before Nathanael entered kindergarten, Allison decided to embrace a new challenge by jumping into the banking industry. She took a position with Cadence Bank, where she worked for nearly eight years before transitioning to United Community Bank as Cadence pulled its business out of town.

Since 2014, Allison has been with the loan operations department of United Community Bank, building on the already considerable connections she has made in the business community.

And while she has been happy in her current position, Allison said that after much prayer and careful consideration, she decided to apply for the chamber president job in order to maximize her ability to serve the community she loves.

"My heart's desire is to help people – to always help them with whatever they need," said Allison. "That's

why I felt like I did well in both areas, in banking and in insurance, because any customer of mine would tell you that I would go above and beyond to do whatever I could to help them. If I could see something that would benefit them, that's what I would try to do.

"With the chamber, I'm going to apply that same philosophy that I'm here for the members of the chamber – that's my job, to do whatever I can for them. And if there's something that they need, if there's something that they feel like the chamber could also provide to benefit them, then yes, let's look at it, let's see what we can do to help them.

"So my heart is to help this community and to help the businesses in this community,

because as the businesses do well, that's much better for our community, it's better for the chamber. We're all in this together."

This is a year of big changes for the Allison family – both of the Allison boys will be in high school come August, one a freshman, the other a sophomore, and her husband, Stephen, will not be seeking reelection to the Georgia House of Representatives, where he has served the residents of his district for eight years.

"We're excited about the challenge," said Allison. "I know it's a huge learning curve that I have ahead of me. Cindy did a phenomenal job with the chamber and built a super strong foundation here, and the staff there – Tobie Chandler, Yvette Estevez-Hansen, Linda

Lawrence and Sheila Freeman – they have done an amazing job. So I'm looking forward to just building on what they've already started, and just taking the ball and running with it."

As Allison gets ready to bring her fresh new perspective to the chamber come March 16 – which is also her 20th wedding anniversary – she knows she has the full confidence of the chamber's board of directors.

"The search committee diligently conducted the entire search process with the idea of doing what is best for our community and the chamber," said Chamber Chair Joey Swanson. "We are confident that Regina Allison will continue the legacy of excellence here at the chamber."

Hedrick...from Page 1A

countless hours preparing just the right accommodations for his martins. He grows his own gourds on a hillside near the nests, and when they are large enough he sets them aside for the lengthy drying process before hollowing them out and getting them ready as birdhouses.

"I watch the gourds all summer when they're growing," said Hedrick. "They keep getting bigger, and you've got to wait as long as you can in the fall to pull them from the vine, because they have to mature before you pull them.

"I put mine in the barn where it's dry, and it takes about two years for them to dry where you can work on them. There's a special sized hole you have to cut in them, and you have to get in there and dig those seeds and the innards from out of that hole."

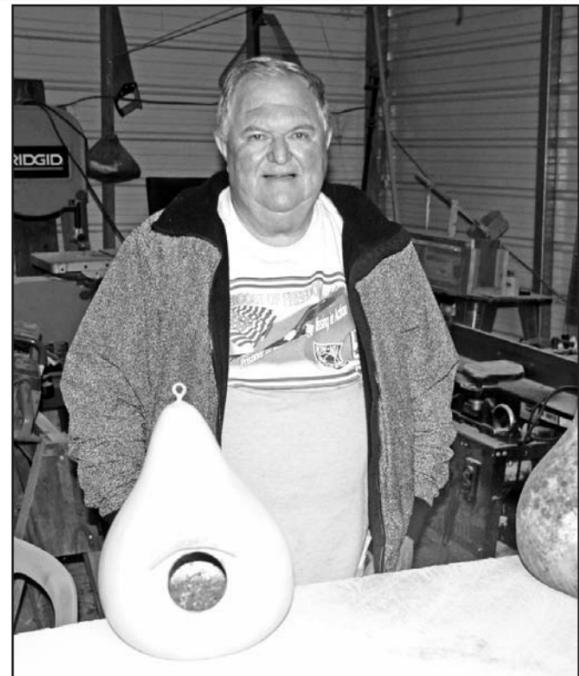
Man-made birdhouses can be used eventually, once the martins get used to their nesting grounds and natural gourd homes. The benefits of a fabricated birdhouse is that it weathers the outdoors much better than the natural ones, and is easy to clean between seasons.

Hedrick custom built his martin apartments, and he is able to raise them high into the air on a pole using a winch and pulley. One of the key attractors for martins is that homes be placed a good ways away from trees and other structures, and be situated high in the air.

Martins feed on flying insects, so having them in a relatively open field, isolated from trees and structures, gives the birds the best feeding grounds.

"The martins fly high in the sky when they eat," said Hedrick. "They fly with their mouths open, catching every bug they can. They are so beautiful and exciting to watch."

According to material from the University of Georgia



Hedrick explains the curing and preparation of gourds into the perfect martin apartment, a process that can take up to two years.

Extension Office, it wasn't long ago that "every farmhouse had boxes, gourds or other housing to attract purple martins, and Native Americans hung empty gourds for the birds."

And while martin apartments are not as common as they once were, people like Hedrick, who are sensitive to the environmental concerns of the martins, are helping to bring them back to the mountains of North Georgia.

Martins, which typically travel to South America in the fall, have traditionally nested in abandoned woodpecker holes, which is "still common in the Rockies, but in the East, martins rely heavily on human-supplied housing," according to UGA extension.

Hedrick has plenty of gourd seeds and advice for would-be martin enthusiasts,

and he would like to see a greater community interest in the building of birdhouses for these birds that are so special to him, perhaps even a network of enthusiasts that can stay connected over the years.

"The day before they leave (in the fall), it seems like they pitch a little party, a get-together," said Hedrick. "They're getting ready, and they make so pretty a sound. And then the day after that, they will be gone to go back overseas to warmer climates."

Residents interested in becoming involved in creating permanent, year-after-year birdhouses for purple martins can contact Hedrick at (706) 897-6914. He is excited and eager to share his knowledge and passion about this playful species of bird.

AARP Smart Driver™ Class

AARP Smart Driver™ – the new and enhanced driving refresher course from AARP Driver Safety will be offered at the North Georgia Technical College Conference Center in Blairsville. The college is located at 121 Meeks Avenue (off Highway 515). The class will be from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday, March 17. The class will be taught by certified volunteer instructor John Daniel.

Since 1979, AARP Driver Safety has helped over 15 million older drivers stay safe, educated and confident behind the wheel. AARP Smart Driver Course participants will learn: valuable defensive driving skills; proven safety strategies; how to stay current with the latest driving technologies; the current rules of the road, specific to your community, and how to manage and accommodate common age-related changes in vision, hearing and reaction time.

Participants are encouraged to check with their insurance agent to see if they are eligible for an insurance discount. There are no tests required to pass the course.

The course is open to drivers of all ages and costs \$15 for AARP members and \$20 for non-members. Lunch will be on your own.

Participants need to preregister as class size is limited. Call John Daniel at 706-400-2755.

Blairsville PTO meeting

The Blairsville PTO meeting will be held Monday, March 14, 2016. The meeting is held the second Monday at the UCMS. The meeting will be held at 6 p.m.