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State Health Benefit Plan and public employees essentially began paying those costs.

As unemployment numbers have risen, the number of indigent care cases also has jumped and costs have increased considerably.

Then last year, when the new federal health care law started taking effect and forced coverage of dependents up to age 26 and eliminating some exclusions for pre-existing conditions and lifetime maximum benefits, the costs to the Department of Community Health again rose dramatically and were passed on to public employers and employees.

In addition to the employer costs, employees who elect coverage pay anywhere from about \$100 per month for single coverage up to about \$300 for family coverage.

That cost is expected to rise 5 percent beginning January 2013 – and in fact has increased each of the past few years. These staff members have not had raises in those years and have had to absorb these costs.

The lowest paid staff members makes \$7.25 per hour, and the highest paid (with 22 years of experience) makes \$15.30 per hour.

If the library system is forced to cut the number of hours they work per week, it will be a double hit.

This comes at a terrible time for libraries. Local funding agencies (counties and

cities) have already set their calendar year budgets for 2012 and probably will not be able to provide additional funding until January 2013, if at all.

If local funding agencies are not able to fund these increases, libraries will literally have no choice except to cut hours for those currently working. If that happens, the local libraries will have to cut the number of hours that they are open to the public.

In the past several years of budget shortfalls, libraries have cut many services and the library staff that provided them. Services eliminated include the bookmobile, cuts in regional staff providing children's services, technology services, regional reference, and materials processing.

The system has cut every area of the budget – the regional budget other than personnel is less than 60 percent of the amount it was just five years ago.

All four of the state-

paid librarians have taken pay cuts in the form of at least 12 furlough days each per year for the last three years, and will do so again in FY2013.

The library has made every effort to keep the cuts from impacting library users – many of whom are also suffering financial reverses in their own lives.

Library services are critical at this time for job searching, using internet services, checking out books and DVDs, and taking classes to become qualified for employment.

The library system is beyond the point where it can make additional cuts without significantly impacting users.

Union County Public Library is by far the busiest library in the Mountain Regional Library System and this summer, since moving back into the expanded building, usage has increased dramatically.

The number of people using the library

has increased almost 50 percent since last year. During the month of May 2012, library staff served 12,367 library users. That is almost as many as the system served during the entire April – June quarter in 2011.

Cuts to library hours will have a significant impact in terms of the number of people who are using the library at these levels, but there may be no other way to cut expenses. Mountain Regional Library System staff members have already contacted state elected representatives and senators to ask for their help. They will not know the exact impact of changes until after the regional budget meeting to adopt the FY2013 budget on Wednesday.

If you have concerns about the cuts to the local library, contact your elected officials and let them know how you feel, without their help, library funding for all areas of operation are in jeopardy.

The proof is in the garlic

By Janice Boling
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

When you see Roger Gerber at the Union County Farmers Market, look for Spanish Roja, White, Italian Late, Inchelium Red, Silver Rose, Seville Sunset, elephant, and late season garlic bulbs.

Gerber grows and sells a variety of garlic for every taste. Some are stronger than others; some are hotter. It even comes in different colors and sizes.

Gerber has a third of an acre planted in garlic. That's a big garlic patch. He uses lots of organic materials and natural fertilizers like leaves and compost to grow his garlic garden. "I plant in the fall and start harvesting the first week of May," Gerber said. He says that he dries the garlic for three weeks before packing it up in crates for the market. He has a large selection of individual garlic bulbs and big bunches of garlic braids to choose from.

Gerber says wife Ellen doesn't eat much garlic. "She doesn't really like the taste but I eat quite a bit of it," he said. "We also put it in our homemade dill pickles."

Roger Gerber's garlic crop is usually sold out by the middle of July. He said this year's batch is going faster than ever.

"There may not be any left by next month!" he said.

It's no wonder that Gerber's garlic crop is a hit with shoppers. The pungent bulbs are used for homemade tomato sauces, marinades, dressings, and other favorite treats like garlic bread. Garlic also is used in herbal medicine since it is a proven antibacterial, anti-viral, and anti-fungal plus it helps fight heart disease and cancer.



Roger Gerber could run out of his home grown garlic before the end of the month. Photo/Janice Boling

China is the world's largest producer of garlic with approximately 23 billion pounds grown annually. Garlic has been used as both food and medicine in many cultures for thousands of years, dating at least as far back as when the Giza pyramids were built. Garlic has been used to ward off the evil eye, to discourage vampires, as an aphrodisiac, and in fertility rites (but not in meditation where it stirs up excitable tendencies).

When this year's garlic crop is gone, Roger Gerber's homegrown tomatoes will be ripe for the harvest. He has

400 plants of heirloom tomatoes that will be ready in July – if all goes well. People can't wait for tomatoes in various colors, sizes, and shapes to arrive at the Market.

For the best tasting and most nutritious produce available, shop the Union County Farmers Market every Saturday morning from 7 a.m. to noon and Tuesday afternoon from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Don't forget to purchase some local garlic before it's gone. For more details about the Union County Farmers Market, visit the Web at ucfarmersmarket.com.

Bentley awarded Georgia Power Foundation scholarship

Morgan Bentley, who graduated from Union High School in Blairsville, is one of 21 Georgia students who have been awarded scholarships from the Georgia Power Foundation. Eligible students are dependent children of active, retired or deceased Georgia Power employees. The winners were selected based on their academic achievement, leadership, character, integrity and school and community activities. Each scholarship is worth \$2,500.

Morgan attends Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC where she is studying physics and engineering. She was financial vice president of Alpha Delta Pi Sorority in 2012,

a member of Sigma Pi Sigma (physics honor society) and on the Dean's List. She is active in Campus Outreach Ministry and plays on the women's golf team.

The Georgia Power Scholarship Program was created by former Georgia Power and Southern Company President and CEO Bill Dahlberg as a way to encourage and support our youth in obtaining a college degree.

"Since 1988, the Georgia Power Foundation has been helping students across Georgia realize their educational dreams through the Georgia Power Scholarship Program," said Georgia Power President and CEO Paul Bowers.

"We are pleased to be able to present scholarships to these outstanding students who will one day be our leaders. I also take pride in the fact that, through this program, we're taking care of members of the Georgia Power family."

Georgia Power is the



Morgan Bentley

largest subsidiary of Southern Company, one of the nation's largest generators of electricity. The company is an investor-owned, tax-paying utility, serving customers in 57,000 of the state's 59,000 square miles. Georgia Power's rates are below the national average and its 2.4 million customers are in all but four of Georgia's 159 counties. N(Jun27,2012)CA

Zydeco T at Peacock Playhouse

The Peacock Playhouse, in a never-ending effort to broaden the musical horizons of every single person in western North Carolina and North Georgia and beyond, once again is proud to present musical sensation, Zydeco T!

Read these comments made after Zydeco T's premiere performance last year: "These guys are great!", "I'd come back to see them again tomorrow night", "You gotta get these guys back!", "I couldn't sit still in my seat", "I love this music! It just makes you feel good!"

Now you can re-experience or experience for the first time, the uniquely special mu-

sic of Zydeco, born in southern Louisiana.

Zydeco T, comes back to the Peacock Playhouse by popular demand, Saturday, June 30th at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for adults and \$10 for students 13 and up.

Call the Peacock Playhouse office at 828-389-2787 for tickets or visit any of these ticket outlets: Phillips and Lloyd Book Store, or Cafe Touche in Hayesville, The Curiosity Shop in Murphy or Anderson's in Hiwassee. Zydeco T is being sponsored by Century 21 Scenic Realty, Rick Andrews.

Don't miss one of the best concerts of the year, Zydeco T!