

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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County gets \$465,000 grant from GDOT

By Charles Duncan
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Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris was all smiles last week as he got another one of those big checks.

No, he didn't win the lottery, Union County taxpayers did as the Georgia Department of Transportation brought a check for \$465,880.90 to the Union County Community Center for local road projects.

The grant is similar to the old L.A.R.P funding for local road upgrades.

The county can spend the money on its worst roads, Commissioner Paris said.

"It's a new grant program for GDOT and we're real excited about it," Paris said. "The county has an opportunity to have a lot more flexibility with the money it uses on its



Commissioner Lamar Paris and county workers get one of those big checks from GDOT. Photo/Charles Duncan

roads. "We give the state a list of our 10 worst roads and they come up with funding to help offset the cost of fixing some of those roads," Paris said. "The new program gives

us flexibility. Where as we've submitted some of our worst roads, if something happens over the course of the winter and a different road becomes the worst in the county and demands attention, we can use

these funds toward that project."

The county also can use the funds for intersection improvements, where it couldn't before under the old GDOT guidelines.

"We're excited about the flexibility the new program gives us in terms of where we need to use the money the most," Paris said. "It also puts more pressure on the county. We have to do all the ground work that goes with spending the money for local projects. The state used to do all that for us."

Paris said that GDOT has gotten a lot of bad press over the years related to how it budgets down the road for road projects.

"Much of that is undeserved," Paris said. "GDOT has always been a good or-

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Mattie's Call victim found dead at Spiva Cove

By Charles Duncan
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An 87-year-old Cleveland man, known to have dementia and was the subject of a Mattie's Call out of White County, was found dead in a laurel thicket near a creek on Spiva Cove, Union County sheriff's spokesman C.J. Worden said.

Allan Richard Arnold, a long-time White County businessman and veteran of World War II, was found dead Tuesday afternoon, Dec. 18th, Worden said.

Arnold was last accounted for Monday around 3 p.m. when he was seen at the Best Buy store on Dawsonville Highway in Gainesville, Worden said.

He had purchased a



Allan R. Arnold

printer during that shopping trip, Worden said.

A Mattie's Call was issued when Arnold failed to return to his home Monday night.

"We got a call that a white Jeep Liberty, matching

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Track Rock Gap gains national attention for Mayan speculation

By Charles Duncan
and Joe Collins
North Georgia News

Richard Thornton, who lives in Dahlonega, has a theory about the area that surrounds ancient Track Rock Gap in Union County.

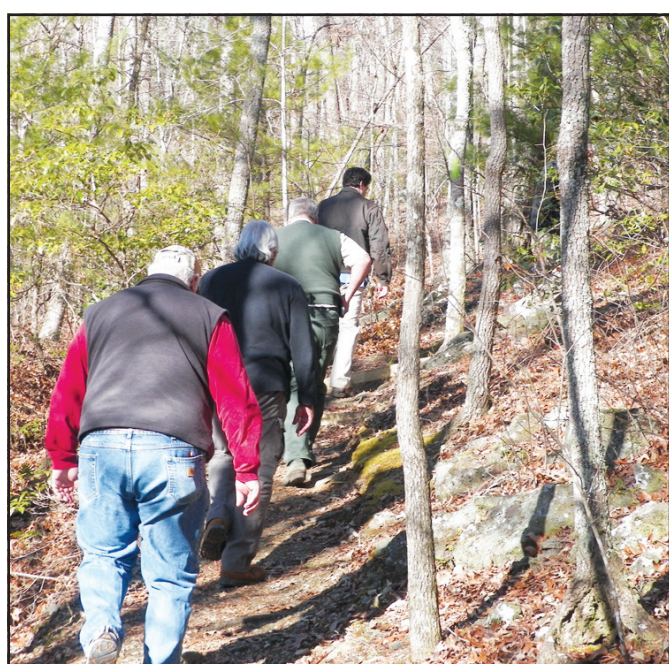
He not only believes that there is a Mayan connection to the most historic archeological site in Union County, he believes the Mayans immigrated here from Mexico and became the Creek Indians.

Scott Wolters, host and investigator for The History Channel's *America Unearthed*, agrees with Thornton, a self-proclaimed expert of the Muscogee Creek Indians and amateur archeologist.

The two teamed up for *America Unearthed's* season premier on Friday night, trying to bring to light the Georgia-Mayan connection from a Track Rock Gap perspective.

The popular television show wasn't greeted with open arms in North Georgia.

The U.S. Forest Service denied The History Channel's request to hike in, explore and film what Thornton speculates is a lost Mayan city, known locally as Track Rock because of the petroglyphs found



The hike to the stone landscapes near Buzzard Roost at Track Rock Gap was not an easy hike. Photo/Joe Collins

on the historic rock art site from whence the area gets its name.

The Forest Service also prohibited the *North Georgia News* from photographing the historic site during a guided expedition up the mountain-side last week.

However, not to be outdone, Thornton provided Wolters with video footage

he had personally shot at the Track Rock location.

The two speculate that Georgia is the missing link to the lost Maya civilization. Thornton believes the site may be the fabled Mayan city of Yupaha.

The Maya were a highly advanced Mesoamerican civilization known for its cultural advances, especially from 250

A.D. to around 900 A.D. History tells us that the Maya didn't invent writing, epigraphy and the calendar, but did fully develop the technology for their own personal use.

Thornton believes that when the Maya civilization began to crumble in Mexico, its people migrated to North Georgia and became the Creek Indian Nation.

The Internet speculation and the media buzz surrounding Thornton's theory has created increased traffic to Track Rock Gap, an historic archeological area that is highly sensitive to erosion and vandalism, said U.S. Forest Service Archeologist James Wettstaed.

"It is a very sensitive area," Wettstaed said. "If a whole bunch of people start thinking they're going to see stone buildings and so forth by hiking in to have a look, then they are going to be extremely disappointed."

"The area being falsely portrayed on the Web and in the media is a significant place to the Creek and the Cherokee because of the spiritual aspects, but it really is just a bunch of little rock piles spread out over a very large area and there is

not much to see," Wettstaed said. "We found positive evidence among the rocks that the Creek and Cherokee, not the Mayans, used this area, but nobody really knows what they used it for. It was probably ceremonial or spiritual, but you can find these kinds of places all over Appalachia if you get out and look."

"Unfortunately the area was logged several years ago and a lot of ground was disturbed," Wettstaed said. "The

remnants that remain are just some of what was here before conservation laws were enacted."

While the rock art site on Track Rock has been well documented for ages, the stone landscapes that lead up the mountainside have been known to the Forest Service and documented for about 12 years, Wettstaed said.

"It dates back to 800

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The petroglyphs at the Track Rock art site are truly impressive. Photo/Joe Collins

City Sewer key to economy

By Charles Duncan
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One of the greatest economic development tools is running on all cylinders in the City of Blairsville.

The City of Blairsville's Waste Water Treatment plant, with a capacity max of treating 1 million gallons of wastewater per day, is only using one quarter of its capacity.

Sewer capacity is the calling card for businesses. Knowing that, Mayor Jim Conley and the Blairsville City Council have had the foresight to prepare the city for future growth.

The city has spent more than \$5 million upgrading and preparing for growth related to sewer capacity and will soon spend \$1.6 million more to upgrade lines down Pat Haralson Drive, and up Deep South Road.

The lines in those areas are outdated, some even being wood lines and outdated PVC piping.

Ken Smith, the city's wastewater treatment plant manager, says the city's wastewater treatment facilities are as top notch as any in the state.

"We've come a long way from what the treatment plant used to look like and the way it was operated," Smith said. "We've come from the



Blairsville City employee Matt Wilcox gets ready to conduct another test at the city's wastewater treatment facility. Photo/Charles Duncan

Dark Ages and into the 21st century. We're on the verge of a model plant.

"That's what I'm shooting for, I want it to be the most efficient operating plant in North Georgia," Smith said. "I want it to be something that everybody talks about in a positive light. My employees and I put 110 percent effort into this plant. Ottis (Franklin) has made a big difference with all his help, the Mayor, the Council, everybody has

chipped in to make this plant a top notch facility."

Most folks would expect a horrible odor during a visit to the upgraded wastewater treatment facility. Actually, there's no odor at all.

"That's the way a properly run facility is supposed to smell," Smith said. "This equipment is clean enough to eat off of, and that's the way it's supposed to look. And ev-

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Open House at BRMEMC new digs

By Libby Shook
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Young Harris - Blue Ridge Mountain Electric Membership Corporation held its grand opening of the newly constructed state-of-the-art facility off Georgia 515 in Young Harris.

Cooperative members were given a guided tour which included the main lobby, customer service, payment lobby, office services area, member services area, training rooms, broadband call center, conference rooms, dispatch services, auditorium/crew room, foreman cubicle area, mapping room, and the engineer office area.

Senior Project Architect Mylan Anderson and Robin Millard of the architectural firm of Millard, Inc., were on hand to answer questions during the tour.

The company has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the BRMEMC for more than 20 years according to Millard.

They were involved with some of the renovation and the garage building at the former site.

"We appreciate the opportunity to work with the BRMEMC again on this project," said Millard.

"It was and still is, our desire to provide the co-op



BRMEMC headquarters are open for business. Photo/Libby Shook

and its members a facility they can be proud of," said Millard.

"We were inspired by the mountain location and we and the BRMEMC wanted the new facility to express the character of the co-op's North Georgia roots by creating a working environment that is aesthetically inviting and functional," said Millard.

Millard said that although the project is nearing completion, "Millard, Inc. looks forward to maintaining the relationship for many

years to come."

Anderson said he was thankful for being assigned to this project.

"I have been with Millard, Inc. for more than 12 years now and this is one of the most memorable projects I have worked on. It has been a pleasure working with the employees of the EMC throughout the entire process. There were numerous challenges to work through and we all worked together as a team to

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HAPPY NEW YEAR