

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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December 31, 2014

2014 was a year for change, especially for BRMEMC

By Charles Duncan
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2014 was a year to remember in Union County.

Gas prices fell to a seven-year low, freeing up disposable income for things that mattered most – necessary purchases and of course, food.

Record crowds attended the annual Sorghum and Scottish festivals, and once again, record crowds made their way to the phenomena known as the Union County Farmers Market.

Change was a big word, especially when it came to Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

That sums up the September election of directors for Blue Ridge Mountain EMC in Union and Towns counties in Georgia, and Clay County in North Carolina.

Former Georgia District 8 State Rep. Charles Jenkins, local radio personality Steven Phillips, and North Carolina Forester Chris Logan each earned a seat on the BRMEMC Board of Directors.

Jenkins outlasted Mike Patton and Incumbent Lenny Parks to take the Union County seat on the board of directors. Parks, of Suches, the incumbent, and vice chairman on the EMC board, could only muster 17.6 percent of the 3,657 ballots cast in the election; 42.9 percent voted for Jenkins, of Blairsville, while 37.6 percent voted for Patton, also of Blairsville.

"This election means a lot," Jenkins said. "We have



fought for what is right. I believe in doing what is right. There needs to be more trans-

parency on the Board of Directors. "The EMC is a non-

profit cooperative, but you can argue that it's a regional monopoly. It's supposed to



Terry Taylor

be about the members, but it hasn't been about the members in a long time," Jenkins said. "This is the first step to making it about the membership.

"And it's supposed to be about the membership," he said. "I believe 3,600 members cast ballots and their voices were heard loud and clear."

Phillips bested Incumbent Julie Payne with 69.1 percent of the vote to Payne's 28.1 percent.

"This election meant everything to me," Phillips said. "I think it's time for change and obviously so did the membership. People are upset; they are boiling over about the Board of Directors voting to have the membership pay for a superior health insurance plan for themselves and the EMC attorney.

"That insurance plan needs to be gone, absolutely," Phillips said. "The membership is paying good money for health insurance for the Board and the attorney when half the people in the membership don't have health insurance

themselves.

"That is pure arrogance on behalf of the board," Phillips said. "With health insurance involved, you'll never get that board to vote for term limits. It's money in their pockets because health insurance is expensive."

Phillips said the fact that the Board is self-perpetuating, meaning it nominates its own members for director posts, is something else that must change.

"That nominating committee must go," he said. "We (petitioning candidates) had to work our rear ends off to get enough signatures to be in this election. If you're a member of the EMC and you want to run for the Board of Directors, you should be able to do that.

"People shouldn't have to go through an act of Congress to be able to run for the Board of Directors," Phillips said. "The nominating committee wouldn't nominate us to run for these seats. And that's a bunch of bull."

Phillips added that the monthly and annual meetings of the Board of Directors should have large crowds on hand.

"People need to be involved in the monthly meetings," he said. "Anderson Music Hall seats 2,900 people. Next year's annual meeting, I'd love to see 2,900 people here."

Phillips said he hopes the clean sweep of directors' seats sends a message to the remaining members of the

See Year, 3A

Dyer will try to fill Worden's shoes at UCFD

By Charles Duncan
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You can strike interim from Union County Fire Chief David Dyer's title.

On Thursday, Jan. 1, Dyer becomes Chief Dyer, replacing Chief Charles Worden, who stepped back because of health issues.

"Please don't envy me, I've got some huge shoes to fill," Chief Dyer said. "Charles Worden is the master, he wrote the book on Emergency Management. He's done a lot for this county, not only as fire chief, but also on the emergency management side. He's overseen every fire, storm and disaster that happened in Union County over the past 20-plus years.

"I've learned what I know from Charles Worden, and I wouldn't be in this



Chief David Dyer

business without him," Chief Dyer said. "He's the best of the best. To fill those shoes is a big challenge.

"I've learned a lot from Charles over the years, and I'm still learning from him," Chief Dyer said. "Like Charles, I've

lived in Union County all my life, it's my home. I've had a lot of opportunities to leave here, but I've always wanted to stay in Union County.

"To be the new fire chief is exciting, I feel like I can make a difference," Chief Dyer said.

Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris and Chief Worden selected Chief Dyer for his new position.

"The decision to make a change was because of Charles Worden's health," Commissioner Paris said. "Charles came to me a few months back and indicated that he was having some pretty serious health issues. He felt like he could still work some, but he didn't feel it was fair to the department for him to not be there as much. He's going through chemotherapy and radiation

treatments.

"He felt it was time to bring a new fire chief on board," Paris said.

Chief Worden will continue to serve Union County as 911 director and Emergency Management Agency director, Commissioner Paris said.

Paris and Worden discussed the fire chief's position. Chief Dyer's greatest attributes include compassion, understanding, coordination and being able to see the big picture, Commissioner Paris said.

"We went over all the people involved in the fire department," Paris said. "Charles and I together came up with the choice to name David Dyer as our next fire

See Dyer, 2A

Worden drops a hat at UCFD; on the mend

By Charles Duncan
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Union County Fire Chief and 911 Director/Emergency Management Director Charles Worden is leaving one of his hats for newly appointed Fire Chief David Dyer.

Worden, who is winning a brave battle with bone cancer, will continue to serve as Union County's 911 director and Emergency Management director, Union County Sole Commissioner Lamar Paris said on Monday.

"Charles has worn a lot of hats here in Union County," Paris said. "There is nothing about Emergency Management that Charles doesn't know. Fire and rescue, he knows it all.



Chief Charles Worden

"I am so blessed as a commissioner to have him as a go-to guy any time we had an issue," Paris said. "His heart is in the right place always – he's 100 percent for

See Worden, 2A

Plea: Payne sentenced to 35, do 15

By Charles Duncan
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A 53-year-old Union County man has reached a plea agreement with the Enotah Circuit District Attorney's Office.

Gary Dean Payne has pleaded guilty and has been sentenced to 35 years in prison, and must serve the first 15 years of that sentence, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.

Enotah Circuit District Attorney Jeff Langley said Payne pled guilty to a number of counts, including three counts of distribution of methamphetamine, and trafficking methamphetamine.

"The latter charge means he will serve a significant portion of that 15-year prison sentence," Langley said.

Payne also was ordered to pay \$300,000 in fines, Langley said.

Payne was arrested July 25 as investigators seized more than 1 pound of methamphet-



Gary Dean Payne

amine following an executed search warrant at his residence, jail records show.

The street value of the methamphetamine is approximately \$65,000, Sheriff Mason said.

The investigation and bust led by Union County sheriff's Sgt. Tyler Miller and Lt. Chad Deyton, of the Union County Narcotics Division, led to the seizure of 1 pound, 2 ounces of methamphetamine, weapons, vehicles and almost \$11,000 in cash, Sheriff Mason said.

When the case was settled, the courts awarded the Union County Sheriff's Office \$183,500 in cash and property from the bust, Sheriff Mason said.

Court-awarded cash and property seized over the last two years now exceeds \$400,000. Ninety percent of those funds go to the Union County Sheriff's Office. Ten percent of those funds go to the Enotah Circuit District Attorney's Office.

Payne was included on charges that included three counts distribution of methamphetamine; trafficking methamphetamine or amphetamine; two counts possession of a controlled substance in violation of Georgia's Controlled Substance Act; two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; theft by receiving stolen property; seven counts possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

His charges on file at the Union County Jail post plea agreement include trafficking methamphetamine, two

counts distribution of a controlled substance, two counts possession of a controlled substance, and felony probation violation.

Detectives Miller and Deyton worked countless hours on the case, and with the use of a confidential informant, concluded the investigation with Payne's arrest, Sheriff Mason said.

"We would like to thank Assistant District Attorney Cathy Cox-Brakefield for helping navigate through this process," Sheriff Mason said. "She did an excellent job in the civil seizure process. She did an excellent job in the criminal prosecution, which ended in a plea deal. Hopefully, Mr. Payne isn't going to be selling any drugs any time soon."

Langley also praised Cox-Brakefield.

"I can't say enough about the great job Cathy and our staff did on this case," Langley said.

See Payne, 2A

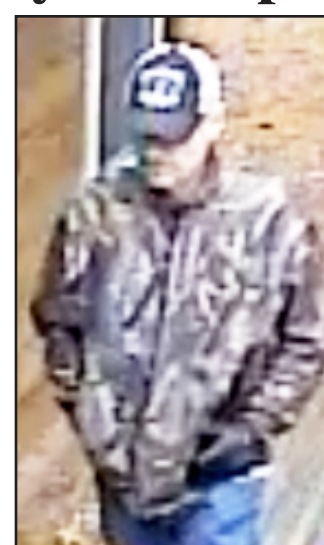
UCSO needs your help



Suspects wanted for questioning by the Union County Sheriff's Office's Criminal Investigation Division. Photos/Union County Sheriff's Office

By Charles Duncan
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Union County Sheriff's Office detectives need your help in identifying two suspects caught on surveillance video while burglarizing a home at Notla Vista, Union County Sheriff Mack Mason said.



The burglary happened at 8:30 a.m. on Dec. 23, according to surveillance video. The film caught two good pictures of the suspects in question. According to the video, they're driving a black Honda Accord.

The homeowner returned to his residence on

See Burglary, 2A

Vol. 106 No. 1 Inside

2 Sections, 18 Pages

Weather

Thurs: Sunny Hi 47 Lo 29

Fri: Rain Hi 46 Lo 39

Sat: Rain Hi 52 Lo 48

Arrests 6A

Church 9A

Classifieds 2B

Opinion 4A

Legals 3B

Obits 10A

Sports 12A

8 0 4 8 7 9 1 9 3 1 4 2

2015

Happy New Year

From the staff of the North Georgia News and West Printing Company

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UCHS Basketball

BATTLE OF THE STATES FINALS!!

TUESDAY @ TOWNS CO.