

# School Board proposes millage rate... continued from page 1

millage rate by 1.24 mills to help generate \$4.4 million to pay for educating Towns County's 1,132 students.

Under Georgia's Quality-Based Education, the state takes the first 5 mills in taxes from each county. The amount returned to the local school boards is based on the value of the local tax digest. Because of the value of property throughout the county, the money the state keeps and sends to poorer school districts throughout the state is substantial.

In 2009-2010, the state will take an estimated \$7.13 million off the top of the local tax pie. Based on the value of the county's tax digest, the state will only return \$3.03 million for local education. That's a cost of \$4.1 million to local taxpayers to help pay for education needs in Georgia's poorer counties.

"We've tried to get the state to also weigh the personal incomes in that equation," Dr. Behrens said. "So far, we've been unsuccessful. State Rep. Steven Allison and State Sen. Jim Butterworth are well aware of our plight. They're working hard to change things.

"In the meantime, we have to find a way to pay for the educations of our children," he said.

The additional 1.24 mills generates the approximately \$1.19 million needed to offset state funding shortfalls and QBE costs. Even with the millage increase, Towns County would continue to have one of the lowest millage rates in the state.

If approved, the educational millage rate rises from 3.554 mills to 4.784 mills in an effort to offset state budget shortfalls and shortfalls in the local sales taxes.

The proposed budget for the next fiscal year is \$11.6 million, down from \$12.06 million in 2008-2009, Dr. Behrens said.

"We've trimmed the proposed budget down considerably," he said.

The proposed millage rate increase comes as the state continues to put the burden of education on the backs of local school systems. Constitutionally, the state is obligated to bear the burden of educating Georgia's students. In Towns County, that obligation

only amounts to 26 percent or \$3.03 million of the local education budget while local property taxes foot the bill for 38 percent or \$4.4 million.

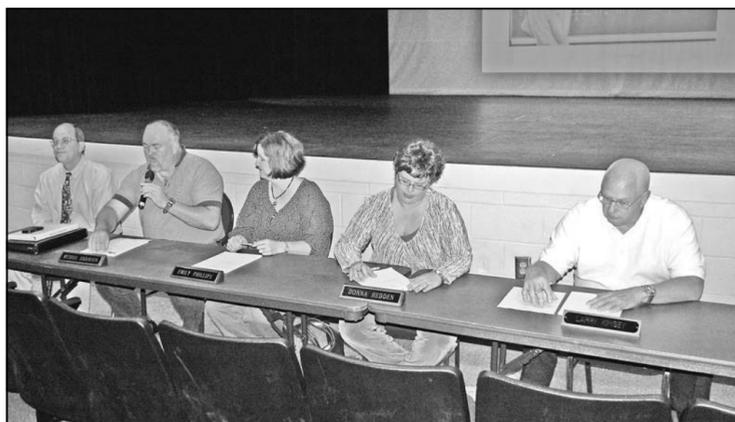
Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax funds can only be used for Capital Outlay projects such as building construction or maintenance, technology costs, buying textbooks or buying school buses.

"SPLOST funds cannot be used to pay for the day-to-day operations of our school system," Dr. Behrens said.

A shortfall of revenues combined with increased financial burdens imposed by state cutbacks, increased Local Fair Share obligations and mandated salary requirements for educators have impacted the 2010 millage rate proposed by the BOE.

The state recently cut funding to the local school system by \$125,617. The net loss to the school system is \$5,959,211 following the three days of unpaid leave.

As part of the state cutbacks, the school system lost half a day early in the school



Towns County Board of Education members discuss a proposed 1.24 mill property tax increase with local residents Thursday evening in the Towns County Schools Auditorium. Dr. Richard Behrens said a third meeting is scheduled for 8 a.m. on Thursday.

Photo/Lowell Nicholson

year, the first of the scheduled unpaid leaves for teachers and administrators. A full day of unpaid leave is scheduled for today and another half day is planned for Dec. 18. The final day of unpaid leave for teach-

ers and administrators is scheduled for Dec. 21.

The state cuts were due to a large decline in sales tax revenues, prompting Gov. Sonny Perdue to look at the educational side of the expenditure spectrum

for additional cuts.

"It's gotten to the point where we have to start balancing what is best for the children," Dr. Behrens said. "We're grappling with new issues every single school year."

## Angel's Chamber message

Dear Chamber Members: Is your business doing something special for the fall season? Do you have sales or specials going on?

Maybe you have a special event or information to share. If you are not certain the entire community is familiar with who you are and what great things you are up to, then please let us help. The Towns County Chamber of Commerce has a weekly article in the Towns County Herald and a weekly radio spot on WNGM. We also send out email blasts as well to get the word out about special events and offerings. Additionally, we have a member to member discount page on our website where we can post any specials you'd like to offer exclusively to other members. For our members offering lodging, we have an entire page of our website dedicated to lodging specials. We are offering all of these opportunities to you, our members, at no charge. All we need is your information. We are here to support you in your efforts to make your business successful. Please let us help, by letting us know what you are up to.

We are also getting ready to roll out several programs for very effective and affordable advertising opportunities available exclusively to our members. Please be on the lookout for that information and don't hesitate to call anytime if you have a question.

### Ribbon Cuttings!

Big Sky Apartments will be hosting an Open House and Ribbon Cutting at 11:00am on

Tuesday, October 13<sup>th</sup>. They will have refreshments, tours of the facility and a ribbon cutting. The entire community is invited to attend. This is a beautiful new facility with spacious one and two bedroom apartments and tons of amenities.

Mountain Parties will be hosting a Ribbon Cutting at 10:30am on Wednesday, Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>. Mountain Parties has just moved their store to a new 3,000 square foot space. They are now located on 129 North in Blairsville in the shopping center right behind KFC. We hope you can join us for the ribbon cutting.

### Member Spotlight

SERVPRO of Union, Towns, Fannin and Gilmer counties specializes in the cleanup and restoration of property after a fire, smoke, or water damage situation. They also mitigate mold and mildew situations, and offer services including deodorization and cleaning of carpets, upholstery, air ducts, hard floors, walls, and ceilings.

According to owners Keith and Carmie Wall, fires in the home can be among the most devastating events. They suggest that you visit the website of the National Fire Prevention Association (nfpa.org) for information on Fire Prevention Week, October 4-10, which focuses on burn awareness and prevention, as well as keeping homes safe from the leading causes of

home fires.

However, in the event of a small fire in your home, SERVPRO of Union, Towns, Fannin & Gilmer counties recommends that you consider these steps to help prevent additional damage until professional help arrives:

### DO:

1. Limit movement in the home to prevent soot particles from being embedded into upholstery and carpet.

2. Place dry, colorfast towels or old linens on rugs, upholstery and carpet traffic areas.

3. If electricity is off, empty freezer and refrigerator completely and prop doors open to help prevent odor.

4. Change HVAC filter but leave system off until a trained professional can check the system.

5. Tape double layers of cheesecloth over air registers to stop particles of soot from getting in or out of the HVAC system.

### DON'T:

6. Do not attempt to wash any walls or painted surfaces without first contacting a professional.

7. Do not attempt to shampoo carpet or upholstered furniture without first consulting a professional.

8. Do not attempt to clean any electrical appliances that may have been close to fire, heat or water without first consulting an authorized repair service.

9. Do not turn on ceiling fixtures if ceiling is wet. Wiring may be wet or damaged and cause electrical shock.

## Theatre Young Harris...continued from page 1



Young Harris College's Misty Barber steals the show as Gay Wellington in *You Can't Take It With You*. The Depression-era play was the debut of Theatre Young Harris.

Photo/Jessica Keaton

its audience into the zany world of the Sycamore family. Daughter Alice invites her boyfriend Tony and his parents over for dinner, hoping all the while that her eccentric relatives do not get in the way of the happy couple's marriage plans.

At first the Sycamores seem mad, but it is not long before the audience realizes that if they are mad, the rest of the world is madder. In contrast to these delightful people are the unhappy Kirbys. Tony, the attractive young son of the Kirbys, falls in love with Alice Sycamore and brings his parents to dine at the Sycamore home on the wrong evening. The shock sustained by the

Kirbys upon dining and socializing with Alice's crazy family leads Alice to believe that marriage to Tony is impossible. Tony refuses to give her up, and in the end, Mr. Kirby is converted to the happy madness of the Sycamores.

Meanwhile, no mention has yet been made of the strange activities of certain members of the household engaged in the manufacture of fireworks; nor of the printing press set up in the parlor; nor of Rheba the maid and her friend Donald; nor of Grandpa's interview with the tax collector when he tells him that he does not believe in the income tax. Fireworks and mad-

cap merriment delight in this Pulitzer Prize-winning masterpiece that has entertained audiences for generations.

The play went smooth and behind the scenes cannot be forgotten. The crew's quick scene changes and smooth management of back stage kept the show rolling, along with the direction of Eddie Collins.

Scenes such as the wrestling incident between Kolenkhov, played by Josiah Bridges, and Mr. Kirby, played by Austin Freeman, mixed with the sentimental happenings, such as Grandpa's prayer at the end of the play made for an evening filled with both laughter and warmth.

## Homestead exemption vote... continued from page 1

exempt homeowners from paying any tax on the home they lived in."

That \$2,000 is now obsolete and must be adjusted, Kendall said.

"That was my reasoning for asking for legislation to allow citizens to make this change," Kendall said. "The vote applies only to Towns County and is entirely in the hands of Towns County voters."

Kendall spoke during Thursday evening's Board of

Education Millage Rate Hearings.

It was Kendall who asked Towns County's legislative delegation to enact that allows residents of Towns County to vote for tax relief. Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Richard Behrens said the BOE has built the tax relief into its 2009-2010 budget just in case voters pass the legislation.

On Nov. 3, Voters will cast ballots in favor or against a revised Towns County Home-

stead Exemption that would guarantee local homeowners receive an additional \$8,000 exemption above the \$2,000 already in place.

"On Nov. 3 we get a chance to go to the polls and put back the \$8,000 that the state of Georgia took away," Kendall said. "If this passes, if you pay a homestead exemption in Towns County, you get that \$8,000 tax break to add to the \$2,000 exemption that already exists."

## Fall Festival begins...continued from page 1

cludes the crafts that make Northeast Georgia special along with another 2009 feature, the Great Bear Show.

"It's a chance for our visitors to experience the oldest and longest running animal educational show in the country," Thomason said.

And for those whose feet are literally killing them, event scooters are available this year.

"The event scooters will be available throughout the entire Fall Festival," Thomason said.

As for the music lovers, they'll Crystal Gayle and Aaron Tippin are just the tip of the iceberg.

Thomason said that the Fall Festival's music lineup could be the greatest of all time.

Earl Thomas Conley, Neal McCoy, Patty Loveless, Marty Stuart and LeeRoy Troy are



Patty Loveless

signed up to entertain the masses.

And on Oct. 16 and 17, the state Fiddler's Convention takes center stage at Anderson Music Hall, Thomason said.

The competition includes Senior Fiddler, Junior Fiddler, Bluegrass Band, Finger Style Guitar, Flat Pick Guitar,

Banjo, and Mandolin, Thomason said.

"This could be the most exciting Fall Festival ever," Thomason said.

"We're excited and looking forward to nine wonderful days of fun, food, crafts and musical entertainment," he said.

Tippin shares Thomason's enthusiasm for this year's event.

"Country Music and its artists have suffered over the last few years, not having any place to play," Tippin said.

"Maybe things are getting generated again and we can get back to enjoying some good Country Music."

"I'm glad to see the 'Old Hall' getting some music acts back in there and start letting Country Music roll again," he said.



Towns County Chamber of Commerce President Angel Long actually is in this photograph taken at Mountain Parties in Blairsville. Can you find Angel? Be the first to spot Angel and win a year's subscription to the Towns County Herald. Photo/Charles Duncan