

Biden brings millions for Internet...from page 1A Shop with a cop...from page 1A

"New broadband access means more capacity and better reliability in rural areas and underserved urban communities around the country," Vice President Biden said. "Businesses will be able to improve their customer service and better compete around the world. This is what the Recovery Act is all about - sparking new growth, tapping into the ingenuity of the American people and giving folks the tools they need to help build a new economy in the 21st-century."

The project, which is intended to bring jobs, economic development and a connection to the global network to the region, also will serve as an additional resource for education and government functions in the region. In addition to the initial five counties, the line also will tie into existing fiber

optic capacity in Forsyth County and tie into systems in Fannin, Gilmer, Pickens and Cherokee counties.

The presence of a high capacity fiber trunk line system as proposed will attract new business throughout the partnership region, Sen. Butterworth said.

"This network is a potential catalyst for economic development and job growth," said Sen. Butterworth, who represents Towns County in Senate District 50. "These are your dollars working for you, and all of Northeast Georgia, to connect with the rest of the global community and bring jobs to the area."

More than \$42 million in funds from public and private sectors will be used to construct the ultra high-speed fiber optics line. Federal stimulus dollars will contribute \$33.5

million, the OneGeorgia Authority will give \$2.5 million, and local EMCs and governments are providing a combined \$6.5 million.

Sen. Butterworth, who is secretary of the State Senate's Economic Development Committee, said a key element in the NGN structure is the partnership with local Electrical Membership Corporations including Blue Ridge Mountain EMC based in Young Harris, and Habersham EMC based in Clarksville.

"This presents an extraordinary opportunity for the people of North Georgia and the region as a whole," said Joe Satterfield, general manager of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC.

"The NGN positions us to compete for new economic development prospects that we never before could have attracted, will create new jobs,

and allow us to provide our communities with a broader spectrum of advanced services.

"We can envision new data centers, telemedicine specialties, and other clean, IT-oriented opportunities becoming a reality," Satterfield said. "Blue Ridge Mountain EMC members will benefit from improved reliability of our existing broadband services, and will enjoy more competitive pricing for these services."

Additionally, Satterfield said that NGN will enable the networked region to provide a more comprehensive level of support for electric distribution systems, and create added stability and security for the region's power grid.

"We are very pleased to be a key partner helping drive the NGN project forward," Satterfield said.

with the girls.

"They're making excellent choices by getting jackets, sweaters, blankets. I'm very impressed," said Lumpkin County DEFACS attorney Stephanie Zaic.

Just a few aisles away her husband Michael calculated his quiet group of youngsters' modest expenditures on a notepad as they picked out fishing rods, lure and other tackle equipment.

The employees at the local Walmart were extremely helpful. Pamela Wade, a front end supervisor, patiently watched the group of 40 calm but excited kids through the front doors of what would probably be their biggest Christmas to date.

"We get to see a lot of happy faces lately. Just last

weekend Union County's Shop-With-A-Cop came and as they were checking out their purchases all of the registers froze up!" laughed Wade. "But what might have looked chaotic was actually a lot of good in the making."

While *Shop-With-A-Cop* gives kids a Christmas they wouldn't normally see otherwise, it accepts donations year-round, Hiawassee Police Chief Jimmy Wright said.

Afterward, the Chief and his officers and helpers treated the children to pizza to top off their holiday event.

"The main thing is the kids," said Wright. "We want them to have a ball, have a good time. That means everything in the world to us."

Santa brings Christmas Cheer...from page 1A

The event gave children an opportunity to sit with Santa and have their picture taken, some for the first time, as he sparked conversation and listened to Christmas wishes for the coming days. A Toys-For-Tots bin sat just a few feet away from the register where folks brought toys to Santa instead of the usual other way around. He stood with a quiet smile as children greeted him with excited yet nervous eyes.

"I don't know if you can call it scared, but some children are just a little bit unsure upon meeting me, not because they're scared, but simply because I'm a

stranger," Santa said. "I see that as a good thing because that means children are paying attention to who is around them in their surroundings. Some sit with questioning looks. Others yank on the beard for verification."

"It's Christmas. It's Santa. Everyone loves Santa. Times are hard all over but we've still got Christmas spirit here," said Shoney's general Manager Karen Cone. "We have one cook who wears an enormous red bow around her neck to prove it!"

And other Shoney's employees shared the same enthusiasm as they posed for pictures with Santa as well.

Some employees sported reindeer antlers as you could hear their necklace-adorned holiday bells jingling as they made their way from table to table.

Kevin Randall, the restaurant's assistant manager, noticed a slight difference in the business during the holidays.

"People seem to be happier, or maybe a bit more thankful," he said. "When it comes to out-of-towners and locals during the holidays, we get about half and half. But no matter where they're coming from we see a lot of families eating together around these times."

Santa even joined a

few customers at their table, having sat a spell as he humored the children.

"I tell them the minute they stop believing in me is when they stop getting the toys and start getting only socks, shirts, and pants, all those things we as adults have become accustomed to getting every year," Santa said.

Shoney's of Hiawassee will continue to spread warm, holiday cheer as they will be open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Christmas Day with a menu of traditional provisions as well as local favorites, including popcorn shrimp for their Christmas buffet.

Towns deputies staying busy

Towns County sheriff's deputies have been busy in the days leading up to Christmas.

On Dec. 10, sheriff's K-9 Deputy Mark Marshall made a narcotics arrest at a local motel, which lead to a 7-year-old boy being taken into state custody for his personal safety.

Following an investigation, Deputy Marshall, made two arrests for the offenses of possession of methamphetamine and prescription pills at a local motel in Hiawassee. During this arrest the 7-year-old child was taken into state custody at the request of Deputy Marshall. It was later suggested by the Department of Family and Children Services that if Deputy Marshall had not made the narcotics arrest which lead to the child's recovery, the child may not have not lived much longer.

According to Towns

County Sheriff Chris Clinton, this case is a great example that the efforts of law enforcement officers such as Deputy Marshall sometimes have satisfying rewards such as essentially saving the life of a 7-year-old child.

In an unrelated case, deputies and detectives executed a search warrant on Dec. 16 at a residence off King Cove Road. The end result: deputies and detectives seized a felony amount of marijuana, Towns County sheriff's reports show.

Law enforcement officers recovered six individual bags of suspected marijuana along with all the items needed to package, weigh, and sell marijuana. Two arrests were made and the Sheriff's Office seized the alleged drug dealer's vehicle and laptop, according to sheriff's reports.

Challenge helps children...from page 1A

The Student Leadership Council, HEROES (Having Equity Resources and Opportunities Equal), Rotaract, and the Chatuge Hiawassee Rotary Club and Clay County, N.C. all had a hand in the creative fundraising. Last Thursday, Barbara Brewton of the Chatuge Hiawassee Rotary Club met with Culpepper and Sheriff Clinton as she presented a check to Towns County's Empty Stocking Fund.

What once looked like a bleak Christmas year for newborn children up to 12 years old in Towns County is shaping up to be a rather nice holiday season. Sheriff Clinton was in awe on Monday as he surveyed the mass quantity of toys that have found their way to the Sheriff's Office.

The true benefits are putting a smile on a child's face at Christmas that might otherwise go without. Sheriff Clinton



Smiling Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton is proud of Larry Culpepper's new look and so are needy children in Towns County. Photo/Matthew Jarrard

got help from all over, including the Student Leadership Council at North Georgia Technical College, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Ladies Auxiliary as well as an anonymous donation or two.

Later this week the sheriff

and his helpers will put together bags of toys to give to local parents to distribute underneath their Christmas trees for some very good boys and girls.

"What can I say, it's all about the kids," Sheriff Clinton said. "Merry Christmas."

BMW Toy Rally



Once again Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton welcomed BMW Motorcycle Owners of Georgia to Hiawassee as they brought hundreds of toys to benefit the Sheriff's Empty Stocking Fund. The annual event began in 2001. The Sheriff's Office delivers to the families of more than 150 children each year during the Christmas season. "We really appreciate the BMW Club," Sheriff Clinton said. The club collected hundreds of toys that included trains, dolls and games.

Floodplain maps under revision by FEMA...from page 1A

tion is 1,933 feet which has faced several challenges over the years.

Commissioner Kendall was successful in getting FEMA to agree to a floodplain elevation level of 1,929 feet, the same as that listed in Clay County, NC.

In a letter written to Hastie, Commissioner Kendall urged FEMA to acknowledge the 1,929 elevation line.

"This is to confirm our agreement that you will include in the text of the Flood Insurance Study that the 100-year flood elevation of 1,929 provided by the TVA study is locally used for floodplain management on Lake Chatuge. With this statement, I feel the citizens of Towns County could be more likely to receive Letters of Map Amendment (LOMAs) from Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as long as their property is above 1,929 elevation and be better protected in correcting errors that may be included within the new flood maps.

"Since the adoption of the effective maps in 1998, numerous property owners along Lake Chatuge have been notified of the need to purchase flood insurance, even though their homes are well above the TVA easement line of 1,933. For many of these properties, and as recently as June of this year, FEMA has approved Letters of Map Amendment using the flood elevation of 1,929 provided by TVA so that these property owners are not required to purchase flood insurance unnecessarily. Not only has FEMA been issuing LOMAs based on the 1,929 elevation, but also the portion of the Lake that

lies within North Carolina is shown with BFE of 1,929 on Clay County Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRMs)."

For the most part, FEMA concurs with Kendall that a floodplain elevation level of 1,929 feet is sufficient.

Hastie, FEMA Outreach Specialist Lynne Keating and state Department of Natural Resources representative Ban Yousif met last week with Kendall and residents impacted by the proposed new floodplain maps drafted by FEMA.

Approximately 80 residents turned out to find out how they will be impacted by the revised floodplain map. The meeting was moved to the Towns County Senior Center because court was still in session in the Towns County Courthouse.

The presentation of the proposed map was to show the estimated flood patterns of a 100-year flood.

"It will show how high the flood waters might rise," Yousif said.

Prior to Monday's decision to rethink the map, the floodplain map was to become effective Sept. 30, 2010.

"If you act now, before the Sept. 30 deadline, you have the option of purchasing national flood insurance at a preferred rate at the lowest rate possible," Yousif said.

Towns County participates in the National Flood Insurance Program. The county has an ordinance that mirrors the federal floodplain map that sets the boundaries for commercial and residential development, spelling out the regulations of Lake Chatuge's flood zones.

Hastie told the crowd that the definition of a floodplain is the natural area used to manage the area potentially

impacted by flooding.

"Homes in this area with federally-backed mortgage loans must have flood insurance," Hastie said.

Some residents expressed concern that they didn't have a clue that the floodplain maps were even being revised. They learned that the process has been ongoing for a year. They had plenty of questions for the expert panel, mainly, how much time did they have to appeal any changes to the map.

The answer was 30 days from the Dec. 17 meeting. However, that has now changed with FEMA exploring additional changes to the proposed floodplain map. More than likely, they'll have up to 60 days or more to complete the challenge process.

Among the concerns by residents is whether or not they'll need flood insurance. Many complained that flood insurance isn't cheap and that the burden is on the property owner.

The Thursday meeting itself was to allow residents to explore a recently completed enhanced Digital Flood Insurance Rate Map (DFIRM) and Flood Insurance Study (FIS) for Towns County and all its municipalities including Hiawassee and Young Harris. The study included charts and a narrative report of local flooding to be used by permit officials for development in the floodplain.

The main impact on residents is if their property is in the floodplain and they have a federally backed mortgage loan, they would definitely receive a letter from their lender instructing them to purchase flood insurance.

Last week's meeting



EPD/DNR representative Ban Yousif tells a crowd of approximately 80 Towns County residents that FEMA is aware that it is using antiquated data in preparation of the revised floodplain maps for Lake Chatuge. She said the agency did the best it could with the level of federal funding available. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

allowed residents the opportunity to challenge changes to the maps that potentially could have put their property in the floodplain zone. Most were caught off guard about the federal process.

Yousif admitted that there is the potential for errors in the proposed map because it uses TVA data that is antiquated.

"We're aware that these studies are antiquated," Yousif said. "However, we did the best we could with the level of funding available."

Commissioner Kendall urged the crowd of residents to pay close attention to the maps.

"Look at the maps closely and try to get them corrected if they're wrong," Kendall said.

County Attorney Rob Kiker told the group that if they were not in the floodplain on the current map, but have been moved into the floodplain by the proposed maps, that they can purchase insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program for flood protection at a

preferred, lower rate.

Part of the federal revision process is the presentation of a revised county ordinance overseeing the floodplain zone for adequate restrictions on development and enforcement.

"Sometime between March and September a new ordinance will be presented," Commissioner Kendall said. "There will be two public hearings and two readings before the new ordinance is adopted."

Copies of maps proposed prior to FEMA's decision to rethink the floodplain are on display in Commissioner Kendall's office.

Commissioner Kendall reiterated the need for residents to attend the Jan. 21 meeting at the County Courthouse at 5:30 p.m.

Residents attending the meeting will have an opportunity to inspect and correct any error that FEMA mapping may have made, Commissioner Kendall said.

"It will be too late to make any changes in the maps prepared by FEMA after the process is complete," Kendall said.