

New Young Harris fire station plans underway

By Mark Smith
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

YOUNG HARRIS – The Towns County Fire Board is moving forward with plans for a new Young Harris fire station about 1.25 miles up Georgia 66.

The board met for its regular monthly meeting on Friday, May 11, and subsequent to that meeting, the board will be starting the formal bid process.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said in the meeting that the county plans to subcontract the slab and structure, plumbing, electrical and HVAC.

Once the county gets the building up and the electricity on, the commissioner said the fire department can occupy the building while the finishing



Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw

touches are being completed.

Subdividing the interior of the building into workspaces and bays will be done with detainee labor, which will save Towns County taxpayers money, said Bradshaw.

Crews with the Towns County Road Department have cleaned up the front of the property along Georgia 66, and

local surveyor Gary Kendall is working with the Georgia Department of Transportation to obtain permits for the two driveway entrances.

And Bradshaw was happy to report that no deceleration lane will be required to accommodate Towns County fire apparatus, which will allow the county to save even more money.

Kendall is also working to optimize the building's placement on the property to maximize drive space around the building. One of the great features of the station is that it will have two drive-through bays, eliminating the need for fire apparatus to back in.

The new station will be built with the idea of expansion in mind, said Bradshaw. That is, in the future, it could be reconfigured to be a manned



Photo by Mark Smith

A meeting of the Towns County Fire Board on Friday, May 11, at the 911 Mapping Center.

Sewer upgrades attract multimillion dollar development

By Mark Novak
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A developer will soon be investing \$6.5 million to build a senior living facility in Towns County, which will bring 36 new full-time jobs and 14 new part-time jobs to the area.

Dean Chen, president and owner of Magnolia Senior Living, has committed to building the multimillion dollar facility on four acres of land near the junction of US 76 and Georgia 17.

He reached out to Hiawassee Mayor Liz Ordiales last year, and she asked him to send her a commitment letter containing details about the facility, which will house 70 units with at least 80 licensed beds.

Although the development will be located in the county, the city will be providing water and sewer to the property, and Chen expressed concerns over the city's sewer capacity in his letter.

Not one to let opportunity pass her by, Ordiales saw a way forward to accomplish several things at once.

The city has been needing to upgrade its wastewater treatment plant, and the new development offered her a way of doing so while saving taxpayers money in the process.

All told, the city needs more than \$1.2 million to upgrade its wastewater treatment facility, and fortunately, Ordiales was able to use the new development to secure optimal funding for the project.

"They were not coming unless we were able to provide them water and sewer," said Ordiales of Magnolia Senior Living. "So, we were able to provide them water and sewer, and I asked them to write me



Photo by Mark Novak

Coming soon – Magnolia Senior Living, to the intersection of US 76 and Georgia 17.

a letter saying that they were coming.

"Because of that letter, I was forwarded to Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) to secure a loan, and we got a \$600,000 grant from Appalachian Regional Commission, which is great."

On May 8, GEFA notified Ordiales that the city had been awarded an \$800,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan at an interest rate of 1.63 percent over a 15-year term.

According to the notification, the loan will finance upgrades to the city's wastewater treatment equipment and expand the treatment capacity of the plant to 500,000 gallons per day, up from its current 300,000 gallons per day capacity.

"The federal water and sewer programs administered by GEFA assist local governments with improving their environmental infrastructure," said GEFA Executive Director Kevin Clark. "Through the Clean Water program, affordable financing helps cities and counties improve water quality."

Already, the design phase for the sewer upgrades has been

completed, and the city is in the process of bidding out the construction, with a January 2019 project completion date in mind to be finished with the upgrades.

There's a "Coming Soon" sign near the future site of Magnolia Senior Living, and people have been approaching Liz about getting on a waiting list for the facility.

The timeline on Chen's development, however, is not currently available, and Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw said the plans have yet to be submitted to the Building Department.

"I'm excited about it," said Bradshaw. "Liz called me in the early stages, when it was just a thought that they would come here."

"We were talking about it, we worked together, and I told her the county would help in every way we can to make it happen. I worked closely with Liz on this, and she's doing a great job."

Bradshaw and Ordiales both believe that utility upgrades like the ones soon to be underway at the Hiawassee Wastewater Treatment Plant will go a long way toward attracting other developers to the area.

station as the needs of the community grow.

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland said that, by situating the new station up Georgia 66, his department will be able to cover about 300 more homes in the area, which in turn will reduce the insurance rates of those homeowners.

The new station will also allow firefighters to respond from a more centralized location, as they will be answering any number of calls

originating out of Hiawassee, Young Harris or the area of Gum Log Road toward Warne, North Carolina.

Bradshaw said in the meeting that the county is grateful to the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, which has allowed the fire department to use its old headquarter facilities in Downtown Young Harris.

In other fire business, the chief reported that the department's emergency call volume was up 50 to 60 calls

over this time last year.

The chief also praised the Towns County Fire Corps, which recently purchased a mobile cascade air system for the fire department at a cost of about \$30,000.

This new piece of equipment, he said, will enable firefighters to fill up to 44 air tanks on scene, and can also be utilized by the dive team at emergency locations.

EMC...from Page 1A

said Nelms.

When Nelms first came on board as general manager of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, one of his stated goals was to find a way to increase the fiber take-rate among members who already live within reach of the service.

Nelms said at the time that, instead of taking on new debt to expand the fiber network, he wanted to increase the current take-rate to generate revenue to pay for future fiber expansion.

The fiber take-rate was right at 25 percent then, and it has grown since to between 35 and 40 percent current day, as the cooperative's broadband division continues to shine, said Nelms.

On how the EMC arrived at the \$500,000 expansion figure, Frizzell said in the board meeting that was what fit the budget, to which Nelms added, "without acquiring debt."

The EMC's original fiber system was paid for using federal monies designated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

In other budget news, Nelms reported in the May 8 meeting that negotiations on the EMC's underwater cable TV contract are well underway.

As previously reported, after Nelms took over as general manager in 2016, he discovered that the EMC had been losing as much as \$30,000 a month from its cable television offering.

"We're actively working to reach an agreement that, at the very least, ensures that the members aren't losing money each month," said Nelms.

Around 1,200 customers still utilize the EMC's cable TV service, which is housed under the cooperative's broadband division, though Nelms said in August 2017 that "we are no longer taking any new customers."

All told, the EMC operates on a roughly \$87 million annual budget, 65 percent of which goes directly to the Tennessee



Photo by Shelia Partin

Chase Hemphill competing in the 2018 Georgia Lineman's Rodeo on May 5 in Perry.

Valley Authority to cover electric costs.

"Blue Ridge Mountain has had five years without its own rate increase – any rate increase that's been passed through has been a TVA rate increase," said Nelms. "The actual salaries, benefits and things like that account for a rather small portion of the overall budget, with TVA being the biggest chunk."

"That's why you see me and other employees of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC being the members' advocates when it comes to the wholesale power supply level with TVA, because any transition that TVA does has a tremendous impact to our overall bottom line."

"So, we always want to be able to push back, because our members need some relief, and we try to get it for them."

Nelms' comments foreshadow an upcoming TVA rate change to be implemented in October, the details of which will be available in the coming months.

Also in the May 8 meeting, the board welcomed EMC Lineman Chase Hemphill, who competed recently in the 2018 Georgia Lineman's Rodeo, where he placed third in the Mystery Event # 2 of the Apprentice Events.

Hemphill performed an arm relocation in three minutes and 11 seconds to clench the Third Place trophy, and Board President Mickey Cummings bragged on Hemphill for being a former Union County 4-H'er.

The next meeting of the BRMEMC Board of Directors will be held on Thursday, June 21.

Annual Wildflower hike along Hiwassee River

The Hiwassee River Watershed Coalition will host its annual Wildflower Hike on Saturday, May 19th. Join us along the John Muir National Recreation Trail to witness all of the splendor spring has to offer.

This easy hike follows the beautiful Wild & Scenic section of the Hiwassee River in Tennessee, the same route taken by one of the early founders of the conservation movement, John Muir, during his "Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf." We will hike from the Childers Creek trailhead near Reliance, TN to Big Bend and back for a total of about six miles. It is possible to leave vehicles at Big Bend for those who would rather do a shorter 3-mile walk.

Participants will meet at 9 a.m. at the HRWC office in Murphy, located at 90 Tennessee Street, to carpool and caravan over to the trailhead in Tennessee. We anticipate returning around 4 p.m. This will be a full day outing, so be sure to bring food, water and proper attire as the weather can change throughout the day. If there is a strong chance of



Participants on last year's outing on the John Muir NRT in April: Brenda Hall, Nancy Troxler, Don Cordier and Jennifer Cordier smelling a native pinkster azalea bloom.

rain, the event will be rescheduled for Saturday, June 9.

Last year, in April the group identified 48 different wildflowers in bloom, so be sure to bring an ID book if you have one! If you are interested in attending please contact Administrative and Outreach Coordinator, Raleigh Keagan at admin@hrwc.net or 828-837-5414.

HRWC is a 23-year-old

private, nonprofit organization dedicated to sustaining good water quality in rivers, lakes and streams that are connected with the Hiwassee River. The Coalition works with local landowners, governments, schools and businesses to recognize and address threats to our water resources. For more information about HRWC or to join, visit the website at <https://hrwc.net>.

Local students named to NGTC Honor Roll and President's List

Clarkesville, GA - Dr. Mark Ivester, President of North Georgia Technical College, has announced the Honor Roll and President's List for Spring Semester 2018. The President's List recognizes full-time students with a 4.0 GPA. The Honor Roll recognizes full-time students with a 3.5 GPA. Full-time students are those taking at least 12 credit hours with no developmental courses. Approximately 142

students were named to the Honor Roll, and 170 students were named to the President's List.

Towns County residents named to the Honor Roll were: Mary Clark, Cosmetology; Kristen Kearney, Applied Business Technology; Stephanie Krokonko, Early Childhood Care & Education; Caden Ledford, Electrical Systems Technology; Sonya Nicholson, Technical Special-

ist; Bobby Patterson, Business Technology; Stacy Wallace, Interdisciplinary Studies.

Towns County residents named to the President's List were: Larson Church, Dual Enrolled; Kobe Denton, Welding Technology; Levi Long, Business Management; Justin McCray, Air Conditioning Technology; Troy Smith, Networking Specialist; Lauren Underwood, Interdisciplinary Studies.

Voting...from Page 1A

Abrams and Stacey Evans, both Democrat.

For Lieutenant Governor, Geoff Duncan, Rick Jeffares and David Shafer, all Republican; and Sarah Riggs Amico and Triana Arnold James, both Democrat.

For Secretary of State, David Belle Isle, Buzz Brockway, Josh McKoon and Brad Raffensperger, all Republican; and Josh Barrow, Dee Dawkins-Haigler and Rakeim "RJ" Hadley, all Democrat.

For Attorney General, Incumbent Chris Carr, Republican, and Charlie Bailey, Democrat.

For Commissioner of Agriculture, Incumbent Gary Black, Republican, and Fred Swann, Democrat.

For Commissioner of Insurance, Jim Beck, Jay Florence and Tracy Jordan, all Republican; and Janice Laws and Cindy Zeldin, both Democrat.

For State School Superintendent, Incumbent Richard Woods and John Barge, both Republican; and Sid Chapman, Sam Mosteller and Otha E. Thornton Jr., all

Democrat.

For Commissioner of Labor, Incumbent Mark Butler, Republican; and Richard Keatley and Fred Quinn, both Democrat.

For Public Service Commissioner District 3, Incumbent Chuck Eaton, Republican; and Lindy Miller, John Noel and Johnny C. White, all Democrat.

For Public Service Commissioner District 5, Incumbent Tricia Pridemore and John Hitchens III, both Republican; and Dawn A. Randolph and Doug Stoner, both Democrat.

For U.S. Representative in 116th Congress from the 9th Congressional District of Georgia, Incumbent Doug Collins, Republican; and Dave Cooper and Josh McCall, both Democrat.

For State Senator from the 50th District, Incumbent John Wilkinson, Republican.

For State Representative in the General Assembly from the 8th District, Incumbent Matt Gurtler and Mickey Cummings, both Republican.

For District Attorney of the Enotah Judicial Circuit,

Incumbent Jeff Langley, Republican.

Appearing on the Nonpartisan General Election Ballot:

For County Board of Education Post 1, Incumbent Robert C. Williams and Steve Green.

For County Board of Education Post 2, Tamie Bradley and Brandi Rutan.

For County Board of Education Post 3, Incumbent Stan Chastain.

For Justice, Supreme Court of Georgia, John Ellington and incumbents Michael P. Boggs, Britt Cagle Grant, Harold D. Melton and Nels Peterson are all running unopposed.

Incumbents Charlie Bethel, Stephen Dillard, Amanda H. Mercier, M. Yvette Miller, Clyde L. Reese III and Brian Rickman are all running unopposed for Judge, Court of Appeals Georgia.

Ken Hodges and Ken Shigley are running against one another for Judge, Court of Appeals Georgia, to succeed John Ellington.

Raymond E. George and N. Stanley Gunter are both running unopposed for Judge, Superior Court of the Enotah Judicial Circuit.