

Millage Rate...from Page 1A

the 2019 Tax Digest and Five-Year History.

The board will officially set the millage rate in a Sept. 9 meeting at the school auditorium.

Also in the Aug. 12 meeting, board members approved an upcoming influenza vaccine clinic to administer shots for any students or employees of Towns County Schools who elect to have one.

A date for the clinic will be set as soon as this year's flu vaccines arrive, and the Towns County Health Department will work the clinic at the school to help administer the flu vaccine.

Transportation Director Scott Hamilton attended the school board meeting last week, and he informed board members that if school buses "were rolling tonight, we would be ready to roll."

Hamilton also made sure to give credit to his staff and drivers after he and the school system recently received a Georgia School Bus Safety Blue Ribbon Award for excellence in transportation.

"That's a team effort," Hamilton said.

Newly-appointed board member Stephanie McConnell received a warm welcome before Dr. Sandy Page, Dr. Connie Hobbs and Jim Melton presented their school reports.

Elementary School Principal Page reported elementary school enrollment totals of 387 students for the current school year.

"That's the lowest it's



The Thomases were just one of many families that made the trip together for the first day back to school last Thursday.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

been in quite some time," Page said. "Kindergarten's enrollment is at 70, so I am pleased with that."

High School Assistant Principal and Athletic Director Melton also reported a slight decrease in enrollment.

"The high school enrollment for this year is 278, which is eight students less than we had last year, and that's including 26 new students," Melton said.

Over at the middle school, Principal Hobbs said enrollment increased from 230 to 251 since last year.

The current janitorial staff received high praise from each of the principals, who

spoke about the fantastic job the janitors did helping the teachers throughout the summer with various projects.

Closing the meeting, Berrong shared a video that was made showing all the renovations over the past two years that have been completed at the school. The video is available on the Towns County Schools Facebook page.

The board will meet again on Monday, Sept. 2, at 7 p.m. at the board office for its monthly work session. Board members will hold their regular meeting in the school's auditorium on Monday, Sept. 9, at 7 p.m.

Leader of TVA wants to hold electric rates flat for next 10 years

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Editor

New Tennessee Valley Authority CEO Jeffrey Lyash said in a public meeting earlier this month that he'd be recommending electric rates be held flat for the next 10 years in the upcoming TVA Board meeting on Aug. 22.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms reported this news in the Aug. 12 meeting of the BRMEMC Board of Directors in Young Harris, noting that he and other EMC staff had attended the meeting in which Lyash made his comments.

The comments are notable in that they: one, remain consistent with remarks Lyash made earlier this year; and two, they signal a potential departure from a 10-year planned series of TVA rate increases aimed at reducing the federal corporation's fuel costs, operating costs and debt service.

TVA began seeking annual 1.5% wholesale rate increases as part of its 2013 long-range financial plan, with last year's increase, for example, having been forecasted to raise about \$200 million in additional revenues from all over the Valley.

A TVA representative attended the August 2018 BRMEMC Board meeting and said that the TVA would likely only seek one more rate increase – to be effective Oct. 1, 2019 – before abandoning the remainder of its increases planned through 2023.

But that was before TVA CEO Bill Johnson retired earlier this year, with new CEO Lyash indicating his willingness to deviate from the planned 2019 increase after coming aboard in April.

Ultimately, the decision to nix the planned 2019 TVA wholesale power increase will be up to the TVA Board, which will meet this week, on Aug. 22, to decide the issue, among other things.

By June of each year, the TVA requires the EMC to notify the authority how it plans to implement its expected rate increase at the local level.

As in years past, the EMC Board voted in May to pass the

increase directly on to member bills instead of absorbing it internally in order to avoid going further into debt.

Incorporated into the vote directing the TVA increase to member bills was a corresponding rate adjustment that would be revenue-neutral for average users, or people who use about 907 kilowatt-hours per month.

The same rate adjustment has been conducted in each of the last two years and is aimed at creating a fairer distribution of fixed costs across the membership, as it moves fixed costs that have historically been built into the variable energy rate to the non-variable customer charge on member bills.

Should the TVA Board decide to take Lyash's recommendation not to impose a TVA rate increase in 2019, the only action that will occur on Oct. 1 will be the EMC's revenue-neutral rate adjustment.

This adjustment will result in average-use members seeing zero change in their monthly bills, below-average users experiencing a slight increase, and above-average users seeing a slight decrease in power charges every month.

Starting with October bills, all residential and GSA1 member accounts will see an additional \$1.54 in customer charges and a corresponding decrease in their variable energy charges, which will be greater offset for customers who use more power than those who use less.

In the Aug. 12 EMC Board meeting, Director Cory Payne said that, based on feedback from a member, he would like the board to revisit its decision to enact the 2019 rate adjustment and consider other options.

The board's decision to implement the rate adjustment still stands, however, and the EMC will be advertising the adjustment in area newspapers in the coming weeks.

In other news, online voting in the annual EMC Board of Director elections will be opening up this Friday and will end at midnight on Sept. 24.

Only three people



TVA CEO Jeff Lyash



Jeremy Nelms

submitted paperwork for nomination as candidates in this year's election, those being incumbents Gene Mason of Union County, Cory Payne of Clay County, North Carolina, and Ray Cook of Cherokee County, North Carolina.

The annual meeting and election will take place on Thursday, Sept. 26, at the EMC Headquarters in Young Harris, with business set to begin at 3 p.m.

New this year, all member voters will be entered to win one of three cash prizes that will be awarded on Monday, Sept. 30.

"This year marks the 81st Annual Meeting," according to a recent EMC news release. "General Manager Jeremy Nelms will welcome members, present the executive summary for the 2018 calendar year and share any upcoming news and events."

Georgia Politics...from Page 1A



State Sens. John Wilkinson and Steve Gooch with Towns County High School student and local musician Summer Rahn at the Aug. 15 Towns GOP meeting.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

didn't back away from them in the General Election, and he didn't back away from them after he was sworn in.

"He kept his word, and he made the promises and he kept them. And support from the Republican-controlled House and the Senate made it a lot easier for him to be able to do that."

The District 51 senator said that the bill he was most proud of was the Heartbeat Bill, which passed the General Assembly in 2019 and was signed by Kemp earlier this year.

As previously reported, the Heartbeat Bill prohibits abortion beyond any point that a fetal heartbeat is detected by a doctor, which usually occurs around six weeks of pregnancy.

Under current law, abortions can be performed up to 20 weeks of pregnancy, and the same exceptions will apply under the new law, namely for health of the mother, as well as in cases where it is medically determined that a baby cannot survive outside the womb, and in the event of incest and/or rape.

Barring a successful legal challenge, the Heartbeat Bill is set to become law on Jan. 1, 2020.

Gooch touched on the passing of several other bills in the meeting, including the medical marijuana bill allowing for regulated cultivation of the plant for use by patients on the Low THC Oil Registry, and his own broadband legislation that clears the path for electric membership corporations to provide high-speed internet in underserved rural areas.

Switching gears, Gooch urged those present to whip up the public vote for conservative candidates and causes between now and the 2020 General Election.

"We've lost ground," Gooch said of the Georgia General Assembly. "In the last two to four years, we've lost some Republican districts, and mostly in the urban areas around Atlanta."

Added Gooch, "We're at 35 Republicans (in the Senate). We have to have 29 votes to pass a bill. If we get down to 29 or 30, and we have an important piece of legislation on the floor, if one or two of those senators are out sick or at a funeral, have to leave town for a wedding, we would lose that vote."

Gooch said it was important to keep a Republican majority for several reasons, including for the political reapportionment process that will occur after the 2020 census is taken, and to continue championing conservatism around the state.

Another topic broached by Gooch that evening was Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger's recent decision regarding the purchase of new voting machines to be used in every county in next year's big election cycle.

The machines will feature a printed paper ballot that can be verified by voters before being electronically scanned.

Sen. Gooch spoke favorably of the new machines that will constitute a \$100 million investment by the state when all is said and done, which is actually a savings over the \$150 million that was previously budgeted to replace the old machines.

During his remarks, Sen. John Wilkinson concurred with Gooch's talking points, adding what he felt were laudable conservative accomplishments at the state level.

"We're a state that has a balanced budget, \$2.5 billion in the reserve fund, and a AAA bond rating," Wilkinson said. "And also, (Sen. Gooch) talked

about exemptions for our senior citizens – 90% of our citizens over the age of 65 do not pay any state income tax."

Wilkinson also boasted on the state's status as "the top state in America to do business for the past six years," saying that a lot of that success has stemmed from excellent educational systems in Georgia that continue to produce a well-trained workforce.

The Aug. 15 Towns County GOP meeting was led by local GOP Chair Betsy Young, who welcomed many special guests.

These guests included students Gabriel Moody, 12, of Eastgate Life Academy, who offered a speech on gratitude for God, America and freedom, and he led the Pledge of Allegiance; and Summer Rahn, 15, of Towns County High, who sang the national anthem and entertained those present with country music hits.

Samantha Church, 17, who attends home school and is dual enrolled at North Georgia Technical College and Young Harris College, introduced Sen. Gooch in the meeting.

Crissy Figg of Towns County 4-H spoke of the various benefits of the 4-H program, including project achievement, which fosters kids' interests in specialized subjects and promotes public speaking skills.

Towns County Sole Commissioner Cliff Bradshaw led the meeting off with an invocation. He also delivered highly positive remarks about the local economy, and he thanked everyone for coming at the end.

Rebecca Yardley, chairperson of Georgia's 9th District Republican Party, also attended that evening and offered her take on the importance of campaigning for conservative causes.

Barnes...from Page 1A

A medical helicopter flew Barnes to Northeast Georgia Medical Center that Tuesday, and the Towns County Coroner's Office received a call the next morning regarding Barnes' passing, the Coroner's Office said.

No one else was injured as a result of the accident, the GSP said.

Funeral services for Barnes were held on Saturday, Aug. 17, at Banister Funeral Home of Hiawassee, with Rev. Glenville Nichols officiating.

Barnes was what most would call a "salt of the earth man," according to his obituary.

"You rarely saw him without his cowboy boots, hat, cellphone and his sunglasses," his obituary continued. "He loved his family, including his dog Ella."

"He and his wife Lorene were happily married for 39 years, raised two children who then blessed them with grandchildren. He loved being a grandfather, was fun, and lived to entertain his grandchildren and all children, really."

"Randy was a

hardworking man who was devoted to his work and loved his coworkers at Southwire like family. He was a social butterfly, never met a stranger and made friends everywhere.

"In fact, most mornings, he would meet a few coworkers at Main Street Grill for a biscuit, and if he was not going to be there, he would call and let them know they didn't need to make his biscuit that day."

"When he was not enjoying his normal biscuit, you could find him at the hospital cafeteria complimenting the cooks on their cooking, especially their biscuits and gravy."

"He loved to ride his motorcycle, hunt, fish and watch sports, whether it was the Atlanta Braves, Georgia Bulldogs or his grandkids playing."

"Randy was a happy man as long as his family was happy. He and Lorene enjoyed just sitting on their porch listening to country or gospel music until Lorene told him to put on his earphones."

Barnes is preceded in

death by his father Van Barnes and his brother Jeff Barnes.

He is survived by his wife Lorene, mother Lula Bell, son Randy, daughter and son-in-law Nikisha and Bradley Clampitt of Hayesville, North Carolina, and several siblings, grandkids, nieces and nephews.

"Also surviving are many friends that will dearly miss him," according to his obituary.

GWRRR meetings

Chapter J of the Gold Wing Road Riders Association (GWRRR) meets on the third Saturday of each month (excluding December) at Daniels Steakhouse, Hiawassee. Fellowship/food at 11 a.m. with the meeting at noon. We welcome riders of all motorcycle brands located in the north Georgia area. We focus on friends, fun, riding safety, and knowledge. Check our website for ride schedule. For further information, you may contact Dave or Judy Hurd at 828-369-5918. www.chapterj.gwrrr-ga.com. NT(Aug21.22)CA

Marsha Elliott...from Page 1A

to be reckoned with.

"She worked very, very hard with the education piece of our strategy and did anything

that needed to be done."

Following the dedication, attendees gathered at the pavilion for food and

fellowship, where they enjoyed sharing stories and reminiscing on all that Marsha Elliott has done for the area.