

EMC...from Page 1A



Cory Payne of Clay County, North Carolina, Gene Mason of Union County, and Ray Cook of Cherokee County, North Carolina – all three won their races, announced at the annual meeting of the members on Saturday, Sept. 10.

honored longtime Director Ronnie Burch with a plaque and recognition for his 22 years of service on the board, as well as Greg Owenby, who went off the board at the conclusion of the meeting, for his term of service on the BRMEMC Board of Directors.

With the election of Mason, Payne and Cook, combined with the past two elections, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC now has a completely new board of directors compared to just three years ago, when the EMC faced turmoil over unpaid power bills of former director Terry Taylor and his company, and the subsequent cover-up by former general manager Matthew Akins.

During the Q&A portion of the meeting, a member asked about the unpaid balance of the Taylor & Taylor Construction Inc. bill.

The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was awarded a little more than \$47,000 in a consent judgment following a civil suit dating to May of 2014, and has been attempting to collect on that debt ever since, which has been partially paid down to about \$12,000 according to court documents out of Clay County, North Carolina.

Board Vice Chair Mickey Cummings addressed this debt in response to the member question that Saturday.

“Taylor & Taylor now owes Blue Ridge Mountain EMC \$12,343.06,” said Cummings. “The bill started out at \$47,850. We’ve done all we can do to collect what money is owed us at this point.”

EMC attorney Larry Ford spoke to the crowd, many of whom were shouting that Taylor & Taylor should finish paying the bill.

According to Ford, Taylor & Taylor Construction Inc. was a separate business account, which according to the membership agreement for businesses, kept Taylor from assuming any personal liability for the business account.

Taylor & Taylor Construction Inc. dissolved at the end of 2015 and no longer exists as a business entity, and Ford said that unless new assets are uncovered – and there’s currently no evidence that such assets exist – it is unlikely that the remaining \$12,343.06 will be recovered.

Furthermore, Cummings and Ford said that continued collection efforts could end up costing more than the EMC could hope to recover.

“I have personally recommended to the Policy Committee that the membership agreement for businesses be changed to make a principal of the business personally responsible for any accounts associated with that business, with the EMC. I think that’s sound business policy,” said Ford to applause.

During his Manager’s Report, new EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms, who comes with a decade of EMC experience and a background in electrical and wireless engineering, alerted the membership to an upcoming TVA rate hike.

“Shortly after arriving at the EMC five weeks ago, I was made aware of a small rate increase planned by the TVA, our wholesale power supplier,” said Nelms, adding that the average increase for a residential account would be about 1.25 percent beginning Oct. 1.

“I want to emphasize that none of the increase will be retained by Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and all of the increase will be sent to TVA to cover their increase in rates to us. If you have questions about this increase, please feel free to contact me later, and I’ll be happy to provide additional information.”

Next, Nelms went over this strategy for taking the EMC into the future, singling out

continuity and stability in his delivery.

“When I first addressed the workforce of our EMC, I explained to the group that I’m ripping down the rearview mirrors to ensure there’s no looking back,” said Nelms. “What is in the past is the past, and we must move forward.”

According to the June 2016 BRMEMC board minutes, Nelms was extended a salary offer of \$225,000 a year, with a \$25,000 discretionary bonus, plus a negotiable benefit package “that will include vacation, insurance, moving expenses, etc.”

Director and Board Secretary Roy Perren of Towns County once again went over the findings of the recently completed \$75,981.47 forensic audit, which went a long way toward clearing the air and finances of the EMC.

In an effort to highlight the new board’s commitment to transparency, Vice Chair Cummings went over a number of policies that have changed since the Steve Minor Report – a 2014 internal report that cost \$30,000 and studied the overdue debt of former director Terry Taylor.

Thanks to these policy changes, the directors no longer get health insurance through the EMC, a whistleblower policy has been revised, Town Hall Meetings have been established, and new policies have been created to make it easier to be nominated as a board candidate in future elections, among other changes.

As for the sole referendum on the ballot at the annual meeting this year, it passed by a margin of 66 percent, which will allow for notices of director’s meetings to be sent out via email instead of by actual mail.

Perren also read from the 2016 Annual Report, which is available on the BRMEMC website. Some figures from the financial report from Fiscal Year 2015 include: total current assets of \$12,108,905; long-term debt of \$116,588,384; total equities and liabilities of

\$191,708,361; total operating expense and interest of \$81,185,986; and net margins of \$5,622,123.

“Fiscal Year 2016 ended June 30, and those data are over with the auditor right now, and that report should come out probably in October,” said Perren.

One question from the membership dealt with why the EMC doesn’t pay capital credits to members every year, which came with an answer that the TVA contract, with origins from the 1930s New Deal, doesn’t allow for the paying of capital credits.

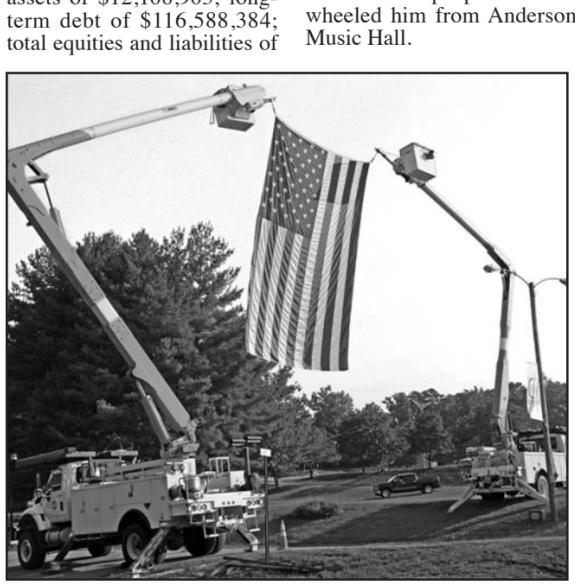
Another person asked about the ever-pressing “Customer Charge” from the bill, which new General Manager Nelms said was actually less expensive than other EMCs he was familiar with, and it went toward the fixed costs of the EMC, such as upkeep of the physical poles and lines that provide power.

As for fiber optic internet, the BRMEMC answer seems to be to just have patience, as it was made clear in the annual meeting that there is no clear timeline for total fiber saturation.

“We are currently pursuing financing that will allow us to expand our fiber network,” said EMC Director Chris Logan. “We are experiencing some problems with the legislation that prevents us from doing this in some ways, but we are currently working on trying to expand our fiber network as fast as we can.”

“And we realize it’s a big need in this community, and will be a big economic development for this community. That’s pretty much it – we’re looking at the finances to expand it.”

Just prior to the start of the business portion of the meeting, EMC Director Charles Jenkins of Union County was loaded onto a stretcher and taken away via ambulance. Jenkins was reportedly feeling nauseous, though he smiled and waved to people as EMTs wheeled him from Anderson Music Hall.



BRMEMC bucket trucks hoist a giant American flag ahead of Patriot’s Day and the 9/11 anniversary



New BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms said Saturday that, despite his being new to the job at five weeks in, he was prepared to take the EMC into the future with plenty of prior experience.

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to play a part in this act of remembering.

In conjunction with honoring the nearly 50,000 American soldiers who have since been effected by the attack in 2001, riders joined together to also show never-ending gratitude toward the public safety officers and first responders who continue to serve and protect communities around the country.

On the anniversary of that infamous day over the weekend, on Sunday, Sept. 11, more than 800 motorcyclists demonstrated their patriotism by participating in the annual Ride to Remember.

The ride began in Athens with the event’s lead sponsor, Cycle World of Athens, and continued up through seven North Georgia counties, ending the 100-mile ride in Blairsville.

As the bikers drove into the grounds of Copperhead Lodge, they were greeted with carloads of smiling locals, there to cheer on the big-hearted bikers who took the time to “Never Forget.”

One couple of the hundreds participating in the event, Steve and Helen Seabolt from Clarksville, made the day a family event, as they rode the long trek with their newly married son and daughter-in-law.

“We had a ball, it was great,” said Steve. “We love riding up from Athens to Copperhead Lodge up here in the mountains. All the people who come out for the ride are awfully good guys. That pretty much says it all right there.”

“We’ve been doing this

for a couple of years now and the whole family jumps in and rides up here together.

“This year it’s such a great ride, well organized, and it’s such a great cause. We can’t think of a better reason to ride than to support our troops and to help people remember what today really means.”

Mike Hulsey of Gainesville has been participating in the ride since its inception. Joining Hulsey this year on the ride was his wife and brother. While the three joked that the ride gave them something to do, Hulsey said he truly does ride to remember the day that changed so many lives across America.

“Everyone here is so wonderful,” said Hulsey. “I missed last year but I generally do this every year. It’s such an important thing, really. I know people in the military,

and stuff like this is important to them.

“People of America don’t need to forget what happen on this day so many years ago. It was such a tragedy for this nation, and I think it’s important for people to take the time to remember that.”

After the long ride across winding mountain roads, bikers were treated to an evening of live music and free barbeque, provided by Cycle World of Athens and their many partnering sponsors.

While the day was one full of laughter and joy, all involved knew that without those who continue to put their lives in harm’s way their carefree fun would not be possible. Freedom is never free, and everyone on Sunday rode to remember just that.



First responders played a big role in the ride, from policemen to firefighters and EMTs.



The Copperhead Lodge of Blairsville hosted the event’s finale, as it does year after year, with a free barbeque lunch

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seen everywhere in multiple counties, as concerned and worried residents took action and made up fliers to post around the nearby communities.

“Sunday afternoon (Sept. 4) we took an initial report that she had run away,” said Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton. “That’s when we started patrolling the area. The following day, there was a possibility that she’d been seen in Walmart in Union County. We got with those guys and ran all that down, though that turned out not to be the case.”

Sheriff Clinton knew that time was of the essence – he called in an impressive group of multijurisdictional agencies and to assist in the investigation and search for Cami.

To the effort he recruited the GBI, FBI, Georgia State Patrol Aviation Unit, the Union County Sheriff’s Office, Cherokee County NC Sheriff’s Office, Clay County NC Sheriff’s

Office, the Appalachian Drug Enforcement Office, Georgia Defense Force and the Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Unit.

An extensive ground search of the surrounding areas ensued, and that lasted several days and followed a variety of leads into multiple states, though in the end, the lucky break came from a Blue Ridge Mountain EMC crew that spotted Cami while they were working in the Brasstown Creek Road area on Wednesday, Sept. 7.

“The EMC crew happened to be in the right place at the right time, and one of their guys spotted her or thought he did, and called it in,” said Sheriff Clinton. “Myself and Special Agent Ryan Hilton with the GBI and a couple of deputies went zipping over there, and we were able to locate her close to where he’d seen her, and

she was all safe. A long, tiring three days, but with a good result at the end.”

As it turned out, Cami had found a barn to hole up in, which kept her out of the elements until she was discovered Wednesday, according to Sheriff Clinton.

During the search efforts that last day, McDonald’s of Hiawasse provided breakfast and lunch for the searchers, and the Red Cross provided drinks and snacks in the afternoon.

Sheriff Clinton would like to give a special “thank you” to the above-listed agencies, as well as to the following individuals:

“All our staff at the Towns County Sheriff’s Office, many of whom came in on their scheduled days off, stayed over, or simply went the extra mile to see this through, as well as all those who donated food and drinks for our ground crew, and all those who kept Cami and the effort to find her in their prayers.”

Navy Veteran Carl W. Johnson receives Quilt of Valor

On August 20, 2016, with his family and friends present, it was an honor for the Misty Mountain Quilts of Valor Outreach members to present a Quilt of Valor to Mr. Carl W. Johnson, a U.S. Navy Korean Veteran. Mr. Johnson was nominated for the Quilt of Valor by his wife Gloria Copley Johnson. Mr. Johnson was presented his quilt in a ceremony at the historic Courthouse, Blairsville, GA.

Carl Johnson joined the U.S. Navy on February 20, 1952 in Macon, GA. After completing Basic Training in San Diego, CA, he was assigned to the heavy cruiser USS Helena CA-75. The USS Helena patrolled the North Korean coast line. In December 1952, the USS Helena transported President Elect Eisenhower to Hawaii after his tour of Korea. The USS Helena also served as the flagship of the United States 7th Fleet. Radioman Second Class Carl Johnson was honorably discharged on February 19, 1960.

Medals and awards include: National Defense Ser-



Korean War Veteran Carl Johnson

served in combat zones. vice Medal, Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, United Nations Service Medal, Korean Service Medal, China Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation Ribbon, and Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation.

Quilts of Valor are presented to those veterans and active duty military who have

served in combat zones. The patriotic quilt presented to Mr. Johnson, represents a thank you to him for what he has done to defend and protect our nation. Each Quilt of Valor presented is registered with the National Archives.