

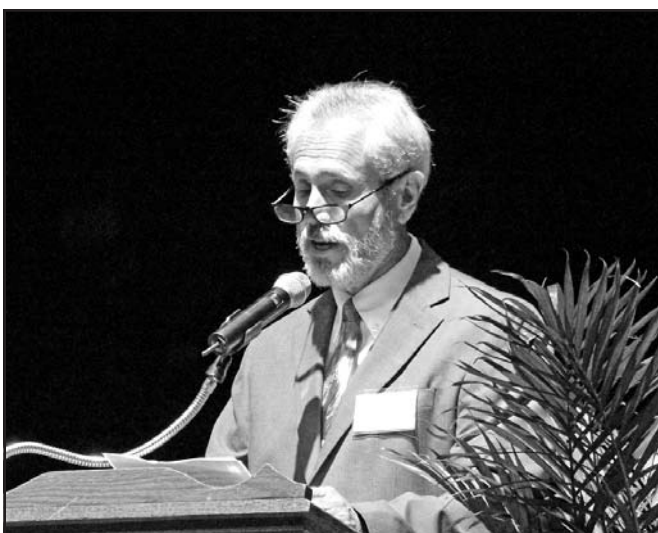
Cummings...from Page 1A

to give the members the best and most bang for their buck. We're working with Jeremy, and Jeremy is working with us to try and achieve that goal." Cummings, along with the rest of the board, is focusing on developing a strategic plan that will provide direction for the next five to 10 years. This idea of a strategic plan will help the EMC and the board assess the needs of both the company and the membership, assisting those in leadership to make the most informed decisions for the best interest of the membership.

"We're meeting with some different people to help us to develop a long-range plan for the board and for the EMC that we can use to guide the organization into the future. That's an ongoing process," said Cummings. "We're supposed to meet with some of those individuals in the not too distant future. We have those dates set and we look forward to getting the ball rolling."

In the same vein of the strategic plan, the board wants to also provide better opportunities for employees, specifically in the realm of retirement benefits. Employees of the EMC have been covered by the same plan for quite some time now, a targeted benefit plan. However, this insurance policy recently became outdated, prompting the board to look elsewhere for better coverage.

"We're trying to do things for our employees as far as improving benefits by initiating a new retirement program," said Cummings. "The one we have been using, the targeted benefit plan, is out of date. Not many people use those types of plans anymore."



Cummings at the 2016 annual meeting of the EMC membership

"It was becoming difficult to administer so we had to find something else. What we're going with is a defined contribution plan."

"This one, members put in so much and the organization matches part of that. It's a very good plan and it's affordable for the EMC as well as the members. It's a good plan all around."

A target benefit plan is a type of retirement plan that involves fixed contributions based on projected retirement benefits. However, these benefits are based on the performance of the investments and are not guaranteed.

The newly instated retirement plan, defined contribution plan, is somewhat similar to the old plan, but is more concrete. Each year, a certain amount or percentage of money is set aside to accumulate for the employee's retirement, with all investments guaranteed.

In the coming months, the board has planned several

meetings for both the public and the employees to attend to continue with the betterment of providing transparency, creating a stronger connection with the community and furthering the improvement of the company.

"We have set a couple of town hall meetings for springtime," said Cummings. "We've set a date for an employee listening session in the springtime because we've made that part of our policy now. We did that last year so we're continuing with it."

"We're continuing trying to update our policies. There are a lot of policies that we have found that are either out of date or that don't coincide with the way we run things anymore."

"We just want to make sure that everything continues to run smoothly, and that we're progressing and that we're doing it with the best interest of the company and the membership in mind."

Bradshaw...from Page 1A



Hiawasse City Council

going to work together. That's what I'm asking from each person who plays a part in this.

"We want to work together for the good of our county. Thank you, Mayor Mathis and city council, for allowing me to be here. I wanted to come tonight to let you know that as commissioner, I'm here to support you, I'm here to work with you."

"We want to do what is in the best interest for the taxpayers of our cities and our county. That is my goal, I made that promise when I was campaigning, and we're going to do exactly what we say we're going to do."

The commissioner remarked that, even though everyone may have similar goals in mind, he understands that the different parties involved may have different means of achieving those goals.

"When we have different opinions, any elected official, whether it's here in this room or across our county, if that elected official is there for the right reasons to do the right things for the county, we can have disagreements, and we'll smile and shake hands, and we'll keep going forward so that we can make progress," said Commissioner Bradshaw.

Added the commissioner: "To the citizens in Hiawasse, I look around and I know most of you, but those who I haven't met I look forward to meeting you. One of my policies is, if you need anything from the commissioner or you have a problem, you come to the courthouse, the door is open." In the meeting, the council decided to hold a series of public hearings on Thursday, Jan. 26, to start at 6 p.m. Topics to be discussed that evening will be the new alcohol ordinance, the upcoming sign ordinance, the new ethics ordinance, as well as the blighted and derelict building ordinance.

Moving forward, all regular city council meetings, work sessions and public hearings will take place at 6 p.m. on their regularly scheduled days, unless



Councilman Kris Berrong and Councilwoman Rayette Ross share a moment during the first regular council meeting of 2017.



As is usually the case, every chair in the room sat occupied as the council met to conduct city business.

otherwise posted.

Another interesting aside from the meeting was the council's objection to portions of the draft of the meeting minutes from the Dec. 6, 2016, regular meeting.

Several of the council said that portions of the minutes did not accurately reflect what had occurred, and Mayor Mathis suggested that the council have the new city attorney listen to the audio and make a determination for the council.

Councilwoman Anne Mitchell took some time out in the meeting to thank several people whom she said went above and beyond last year for the City of Hiawasse.

"We had some people who went out of their way to

do things for us this fall and winter, and so I would like to say thank you to Nancy Noblet for decorating the square, and for valiant efforts to keep those reindeer standing," said Mitchell.

Added Mitchell: "And we want to thank Pam (Fagan) for our new blue spruce Christmas tree that she bought and gave to us in memory of Chief Jimmy Wright."

Mitchell thanked those who helped to install the tree on the Hiawasse Square, and also thanked reporters of the *Towns County Herald* for their news coverage in 2016.

Finally, she thanked Councilwoman Liz Ordiales for consolidating the Hiawasse data out of the Joint Towns County Comprehensive Plan.

38 Special...from Page 1A

lead singer Donnie Van Zant retired in 2013 due to health conditions, Barnes has taken the reins as lead vocalist, and while Van Zant is missed, Barnes does not disappoint.

Before 38 Special hit the stage, fans were treated to not one but two opening acts, Georgia Clay from Panama City, Florida, and Atlanta-based tribute band The Stephen Lee Band. Both groups specialize in bringing the hits of Southern and Classic Rock 'n' Roll to life, highlighting musicians such as Aerosmith, Journey and the Eagles.

Stephen Lee, lead vocalist and pianist of The Stephen Lee Band, was more than honored to start things off for the renowned Rock group, and to be able to visit the stage of the Anderson Music Hall once more.

"We do a lot of private events and then concerts and festivals like this," said Lee. "We're thrilled to be here. 38 Special, that's the stuff I grew up on. We're all very excited about tonight."

"We did another event partnering with Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds and Anderson Music Hall last year. That one kind of fell in our laps at the last minute, which was great because I'd been wanting to play up here."

"Now that we've gotten a good relationship, we'll hopefully be working together for a long time. Hilda here at Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, she's great. The whole staff here is awesome."

Lee was not the only one excited about the experience. Fans traveled from far and wide to hear the band, and one group of friends traveled from Waynesville, North Carolina, to hear the music that shaped their youth.

"This was our band when



Danny Chauncey



Don Barnes



The Stephen Lee Band was one of two opening acts for 38 Special last Friday.

we were growing up," said Tina Evans. "My husband used to play in a band, and they used to do 38 Special covers. 'Hold On Loosely' is our favorite, so I really hope they play that song."

"We even had it played at the reception at our wedding and we all danced to it. That's how much we love 38 Special."

As the night wore on, the group performed hit after hit, showcasing the decades of

influential music the band has produced throughout the years. And just when fans thought the night had ended, the group revved up one last song for the encore, arguably saving the best for last with the hit 1982 single, "Caught Up in You," to round out a night that no one would forget.

"Thank you for making us a part of your lives for all these years," said Barnes. "We love you."

Protecting Children: How to Report Abuse or Neglect

The job of protecting children starts in the community. While certain people are required by law to report child mistreatment, anyone can make a report of suspected abuse. The sooner the authorities know about a child, the faster they can move to help.

Things to Look For: Children who are maltreated are:

- often left home alone
- in the neighborhood for long periods without supervision
- frequently hungry
- dressed inadequately for the weather
- absent from school frequently
- bruised or have other marks of physical violence
- withdrawn or overly aggressive
- not receiving needed medical attention

If a relative, friend or neighbor sees one or more of these signs or suspects that the children are in danger, the situation should be reported to the county Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS).

How to Report: If a child is in immediate danger (obviously being beaten or left alone overnight, for example), the police should be called immediately. In all other cases, reports should be made to the DFCS office in the county where the child lives.

People who call to report suspected abuse do not have to be sure maltreatment has occurred. They simply report what they have seen or heard. The authorities will investigate and confirm whether or not abuse has occurred. People who call are asked to give the name and location of the child and the name of the suspected perpetrator. Reports are confidential and those who call do not have to give their name. However, it is most helpful to the child in the long run if the reporter is willing to give his or her name and address and, if necessary, testify in court.

What Will Happen Next: If a child is under age 18 and appears to have been abused or neglected by a parent or

caretaker, DFCS will begin investigating immediately. If the child is not in imminent danger, a caseworker will visit the family within 5 days. If the person who makes the original report wants to know what DFCS did, he or she can call the department and find out whether the maltreatment was confirmed.

Who is Required to Report Suspected Abuse or Neglect: Georgia law requires people in certain professions to report. Mandated reporters include:

- physicians, nurses and hospital personnel
- school and day care personnel
- social workers and counselors
- dentists

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BOE...from Page 1A

years, and Hedden had been a member for 12 consecutive years.

Dr. Kilee Smith is a primary care physician at Serendipity Clinic in Hiawasse, and is serving on Post No. 5 "At Large" from January 2017 until December 2020.

Laura Banister works for United Community Bank and is serving Post No. 4 "At Large" from January 2017 until December 2020.

Smith and Banister's first meeting as official BOE members was short and sweet, due to inclement weather that prevented Towns County Schools' principals from attending the meeting to disclose monthly reports from their respective schools.

Nonetheless, business was conducted as usual, with many fundraisers and fieldtrips on the consent agenda to vote on for the upcoming semester.

While most of the agenda items enjoyed unanimous support, Dr. Smith took issue with children having to pay for additional snacks during the elementary school council Milestone End of Grade Kick Off Movie. According to Smith, these items should be free of charge and included in the event, and not only accessible to children with enough money to purchase the extra items.

"This is supposed to be an encouragement and praise for the children," said Smith. "If it's supposed to be an encouragement, don't charge them."

While Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong agreed with Smith, he noted that the money



School was canceled two days last week due to snow dropped by Winter Storm Helena. Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong explained in the meeting his reasoning for keeping kids home.

collected from the popcorn sales is to be used by the elementary school council as a fundraising activity.

In other BOE news, Dr. Berrong canceled classes two days last week because of the effects of winter storm Helena. Many students, faculty and staff could not travel the icy roads safely, and buses could not reach some homes. Dr. Berrong explained that he wanted to ensure that the safety of the children and employees of Towns County Schools came first and foremost.

"We didn't have the principals come tonight," said Dr. Berrong. "The main reason for this is I wanted to make sure we got everyone home safely and quickly as possible."

"The roads are still terrible. I've been riding around yesterday and today and there is very little change in the road conditions between the two days. I went up to Bald Mountain Park today, and it's one of the worst places that the

buses have to travel.

"The county trucks were trying to scrape the roads and put salt out, but it's so packed down and frozen that the trucks' blades just go over top. They really aren't able to get it off the roads at this time."

"It's just too dangerous for 16-year-old kids to be out there driving. It's just not safe for them right now."

Towns County Schools resumed classes on Wednesday, Jan. 11.

Mountain Sounds Dulcimer Club

We meet every 2nd & 4th Tuesday from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Senior Center. No matter if you just started playing the dulcimer or if you are experienced, come join us for a good time playing your favorite songs and learning new songs. For more information call Roxanne at 386-561-0593 or email roxanegill147@gmail.com. Hope to see you at our next meeting! (Jan 18, 2017)