

# Gurtler...from Page 1A

all funding to your district,' and repeated it once more. This all happened in front of other freshmen legislators."

Continued Gurtler's statement: "I am appalled by Mr. Riley's actions of intimidation and bullying tactics of an elected official. His actions were wrong and unethical, and this type of behavior goes against our system of separation of powers. Not only did Mr. Riley threaten me, he threatened my entire constituency, some 50,000 plus Georgians in the 8th District."

When reached for comment, Riley told the AJC that he never threatened Gurtler, but merely challenged him on his position, which he viewed as Gurtler voting against funding in his own district.

That story appeared in the Atlanta news market on Feb. 14, and the very next day, on Feb. 15, news broke about Gurtler's 2013 Lumpkin County arrest.

According to the University of North Georgia police report obtained by the AJC, Gurtler had been arrested in July of 2013 for obstruction of a law enforcement officer.

At that time, police were taking Gurtler's friend into custody for driving under

the influence, and Gurtler, a passenger in the car, ignored repeated orders to stay in the vehicle, according to the report.

One officer noted that Gurtler had been moving toward them in an "aggressive manner" while refusing to comply with orders, according to the report, and he was ultimately arrested.

In police video obtained by Channel 2, Gurtler can be heard swearing and threatening a lawsuit, as well as asking for the badge numbers of his arresting officers after telling them that he worked for a state representative.

At the time of his arrest, Gurtler was a legislative aide to then-Rep. Stephen Allison, who decided last year not to run for re-election.

When reached for comment by the *North Georgia News and Towns County Herald*, Gurtler responded with the following statement:

"This incident occurred four years ago. After requesting a jury trial to clear my name, the case was resolved through pre-trial diversion, and the district attorney dismissed the charge.

"I have great admiration for law enforcement and all individuals who dedicate their lives to public service and

safety.

"I felt I needed to exercise my constitutional rights. In hindsight, the incident could have been handled better on my part. For that, I apologize. My intention was never to escalate the situation, but only understand what was really going on.

"The timing of these attacks is quite interesting in light of recent events, such as the intimidation and bullying following my vote against the Amended 2017 Budget that increased the size, scope, and intrusiveness of government. The dots are easy to connect.

"This is the Atlanta liberal media and career politicians attacking our district because I vote for our shared values and principles, what I was elected to do.

"As we saw during the presidential election, this is the type of politics people hate.

"I can't express how much I appreciate the outpouring of support from my constituents, and I will continue to faithfully do my job for everyone."

As District 8 state representative, Gurtler represents Union County, Towns County, Rabun County and some of White County.

# Indians...from Page 1A

40 miles west of Albany and 75 miles south of Columbus in deep southwest Georgia. This game is scheduled to be played on Thursday, Feb. 23, at a time undetermined at press time with the winner of this game to face the winner of a Thursday game between Hawkinsville and Turner County on Wednesday, March 1.

This victory represents the first state tournament appearance by the Indians since 2005 and the first state

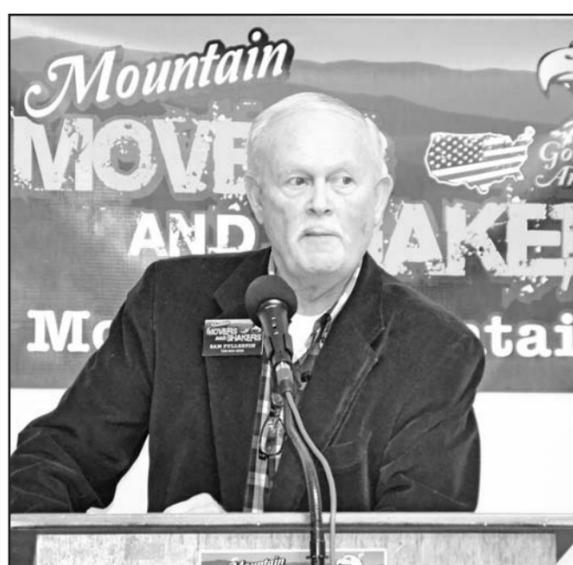
tournament win by the Indians since the 1974 squad defeated Echols County 62-58 in the Macon Coliseum with Ricky Welch, the grandfather of current Indian junior Zach Davenport, being a top flight senior starting forward on that team. With the victory, the Indians improved their record to 19-9 for the season.

All five Indian starters scored in double figures with Davenport leading with 21 and followed by senior Will

De Vries with 16, junior Logan Cowart with 11, followed by senior Major Moss and sophomore Will Travis with 10 each. Moss led in assists with 9 and was followed by Davenport with 4 and Cowart and Travis with 1 each, while Moss also led in rebounds with 10 and was followed by Cowart with 7, Travis with 5, De Vries with 4, Davenport with 2, and sophomore Trent Bradshaw with 1.

**See Sports page for additional coverage.**

# Perren...from Page 1A



**Sam Fullerton, Mountain Movers and Shakers Co-Founder**

Downtown Atlanta."

Perren is currently serving on the board of directors for the North Georgia Network as well. According to Perren, he saw that position as an opportunity to benefit the members of the EMC in this area in hopes of reaching an agreement to expand the fiber optic reach within the community.

"I want the North Georgia Network and the EMC to continue to expand the opportunities to tie into the fiber," said Perren. "Also, I want to use it as a tool to attract businesses to come up here."

Perren added that the BRMEMC is hoping to expand the reach of fiber optic internet in the near future, and will continue to work with North Georgia Network to move toward doing so.

In terms of transparency, many members in the past have felt isolated from the BRMEMC Board of Directors, which led to mistrust from the membership. According to Perren, however,

the board will once again be hosting town halls throughout the year to encourage open communication between the board and the members.

"One thing that we're doing is, we're going to have the town hall meetings again this year," said Perren. "We're going to go out in the community and have the meetings open for everyone who wants to come in."

Added Perren: "Here's the thing, if you act secretive, then people are going to think you have something to hide. But if you say, here it is, and lay it out, that's a whole lot better."

Specific dates and times for the town hall meetings will be publicized closer to each meeting's occurrence.

On the other end of the spectrum, Perren is a site administrator at the Mountain Education Charter High School, known by many as the "night school."

Although many are aware of the basic function of

the night school for students who are unable to attend any of the county schools, the raw facts of the school and the students are widely unknown.

According to Perren, many hear night school and automatically think this school is for those who are continuously in trouble and have behavioral issues.

"We serve about 150 students," said Perren. "Many of those students are from Towns County. This is a second chance school. Everyone has a reason to be there. Some students are there because they were homeschooled their whole lives and when they started public school they just weren't comfortable with that many kids.

"Some of them have to work in the daytime to help support their families. There are others who had dropped out of school and they need to come back, and they realize they want to graduate school."

"It's not an alternative school. It's not a school for troubled kids. It's a school for people who want to come and get a high school diploma. I'm proud to say that we have kids graduate almost every other week."

There are 15 sites for the Mountain Education Charter High School across the region that are available for those who wish to pursue a high school diploma. The location in Blairsville was the first of the 15, which was started by Wade Smith in 1993.

"We have almost 2,000 students enrolled across these 15 sites," said Perren. "These are 2,000 kids who, if they didn't have the opportunity, would be high school dropouts. This is making a huge impact on the education here in North Georgia."

"We're really proud of the Mountain Education Charter High School."

Perren is also facilities and federal programs director for Towns County Schools.

# BOE...from Page 1A

for the No Child Left Behind Act, and serve as an easy way for Georgia schools to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the students within the school system.

The CCRPI is ranked on a 100-point scale and divided into four categories to reach an accumulated score. Each school's final score serves as an accountability system to determine the school's standing in regards to state and federal education requirements.

The four categories for CCRPI are achievement points, progress points, achievement gap points and challenge points.

"The first 50 percent of that 100 points comes from achievement," said Towns County Elementary School Assistant Principal Shannon Moss. "This is based on how you did, how did each grade do from grades third through fifth on the four academic milestones.

"The last 50 percent is based on how much growth they show. The first 50 percent is broken down into indicators that will vary for both the elementary, middle school and high school."

Progress points account for 40 points of the total 100-point scale. This is based on students' percentile, from 1 to 99. From there, these students are measured on their accumulative progress from year to year.

Achievement gap points and challenge points account for the remaining 10 points on the scale.

"The bottom 25 percent of our students from the previous year are followed to see how much closer they get to where they should be as the



**Towns County Board of Education Members Dr. Kilee Smith and Laura Banister**

year progresses," said Moss. "They measure that gap to determine points.

"They also take our subgroups of economically disadvantaged, English language learners and students with disabilities and check their performance. This is what are known as performance flags."

TCES received an overall 81.4 out of the 100 points available, placing the school as fourth in the district. Towns County Middle School scored an 89.9 percent of the total 100, accounting for a No. 1 ranking in the district. Towns County High School totaled 72.7 for the CCRPI.

Also during the meeting, Towns County Schools Transportation Director Scott Hamilton paid the BOE a visit to thank the members and Dr. Berrong for their support and concern after the passing of beloved Rev. Harold Ledford.

"I appreciate you giving us this day off," said Hamilton. "It's a big loss for us, but

we have to continue on and continue serving our kids."

Ledford had driven a school bus for Towns County for 30 years, and in honor and remembrance of him, the BOE and Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong decided to cancel school on Monday, Feb. 13, so all faculty, staff and students could attend the funeral if they so wished.

"Canceling school because of something like this probably wouldn't be feasible in a bigger system," said Dr. Berrong. "We're all a very close, tight-knit community, though. I've heard many positive things about this decision, so I appreciate the board's willingness to do that and help us out so that everyone could be there for the funeral.

"It was the right thing to do. It was humbling to see how many people showed up to the service over the past two days. Preacher Ledford was a great man."

# Arbor Day...from Page 1A

**By Lily Avery  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer**

YOUNG HARRIS—Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby, Enotah Garden Club members, City Attorney Marvin Harkins, Deputy Clerk Nicolette Wade, along with Tony Harkins and Roy Fortenberry of the Georgia Forestry Commission, held an Arbor Day celebration at Cupid Falls Park last Thursday, Feb. 16.

Harkins presented Mayor Gibby and the garden club members with a Tree City flag to mark the city's continued efforts to promote the preservation of wildlife and flora throughout the area.

To achieve the status as a Tree City, the city must meet the Tree City USA program's four requirements of having a tree board or department, a tree care ordinance, an annual community forestry budget of at least \$2 per capita, and hold an Arbor Day observance and proclamation.

To begin the ceremony, Mayor Gibby read the proclamation, which is as follows:

"This holiday, called Arbor Day, was first observed with the planting of more than a million trees in Nebraska, and Arbor Day is observed throughout the nation and the world.

"Trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, cutting heat and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen and provide habitat for wildlife.

"Trees are a renewable resource giving us paper, wood for homes, fuel for our fires and beautifying our community, and trees in our city increase property values, enhance the economic vitality of business areas, and beautify our community.

"Trees, wherever they are planted, are a source of joy and spiritual renewal. Therefore, I, Andrea Gibby, mayor of this fine city, do hereby proclaim this as Arbor Day."

This year marks the 145th anniversary that Arbor Day has been celebrated, and the 22nd year for the City of Young Harris.

Arbor Day was established in 1872 in Nebraska City, Nebraska, and was brought about by J. Sterling Morton when he stood before the State Board



**Young Harris Mayor Andrea Gibby read aloud a proclamation in honor of the occasion.**



**For those who haven't seen it, here's the new walking trail at Cupid Falls Park.**

of Agriculture requesting such legislation be proclaimed in Nebraska.

By the 1920s, more than 45 states had joined Nebraska in the celebration of native trees and all that these plants offer to mankind.

Today, all 50 states partake in Arbor Day festivities, as well as many countries and cities around the world.

National Arbor Day is observed on the last Friday in April, and each state observes the holiday on a date that is reflective of planting season in each region.

"We've been doing this for 145 years," said Harkins. "I hope people see it and recognize all the good that comes out of it. I want to commend all of you for your work and effort, and Andrea for this walking park. This is going to be her legacy."

"I'm glad that this is your 22nd year taking part of this. You all are the second Tree City I've worked with. People talk about global warming and the ozone layers, and the answer is trees. They're beautiful, provide a renewable resource to us, and protect the environment."

This year, five redbud trees were planted at the beginning of the park's trailhead in honor of Marsha Elliott, to commemorate her four years of service as President of the Enotah Garden Club, spanning from 2009 until 2013. Three years ago, the Georgia Forestry Commission donated the redbuds as seedlings.

After the ceremony, Harkins and Fortenberry offered seedlings of Sawtooth Oak, redbuds and green ash trees to all who attended the event.