

Phillips...from Page 1A

everything to me," Phillips said after he learned he had been elected to the board of directors. "I think it's time for change, and obviously so did the membership."

Phillips, former House District 8 State Rep. Charles Jenkins, and North Carolina forester Chris Logan, all three petition candidates in 2014, each ousted an incumbent to earn a seat on the BRMEMC board of directors.

A year later, the petition trend continued as three more petition candidates emerged victorious.

In 2014, 3,657 members cast ballots, or 9 percent of the membership. In 2015, 9,045 members cast ballots, or 22.14 percent of the membership.

The three petition candidates that joined the board in 2015 were Mickey Cummings, Roy Perren, and Larry Williams. Cherokee

County, North Carolina Board Member Kenneth Lance resigned after the 2015 meeting.

In 2016, two new directors emerged from the EMC annual meeting of the membership - Gene Mason of Union County and Cory Payne of Clay County, plus the return of Director Ray Cook of Cherokee County, the first board member appointed by the new board of directors.

Thanks to the work of the people elected during the last two election cycles, there was no need for any potential candidate to raise petitions to become nominated this go round.

Thanks to Phillips' leading the petition charge in 2014, the entire board of directors turned over, as Board Member Greg Owenby, who did not seek reelection, went off the board following the

2016 meeting.

And as Phillips said when he was elected in 2014, it was time for a change and time for transparency. The membership remembered Phillips' fight in 2014 to promote change.

With the election of Mason, Payne and Cook, combined with the past two election cycles, the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC now has a completely new board of directors compared to just four years ago, when the EMC faced turmoil over unpaid power bills of former EMC President, Director Terry Taylor and his company.

As the board turns another page, Phillips was not available for comment regarding his resignation for personal reasons.

On Monday night, the board vetted candidates nominated for the September 2017 election cycle. A complete list of candidates will be made available later this week, Cummings said.

Eclipse...from Page 1A

weather day and we could just get overrun with cars.

"So, I wanted to call this meeting to get together and share ideas to make sure that we're ready and doing our very best for public safety."

On Monday, Aug. 21, all of North America will be treated to a total eclipse of the sun.

In Hiwassee and Young Harris, totality will last approximately two minutes and 20 seconds beginning at 2:35 p.m. with the partial phase lasting until approximately 4 p.m.

One of the biggest concerns that Commissioner Bradshaw expressed during the meeting was the traffic around and on Bell Mountain, due to it being a main attraction for the area.

Towns County Fire Chief Harold Copeland suggested a limit for how many cars can go up to Bell Mountain, and only keeping the gates open during certain times, with road blocks along the road to avoid any accidents or traffic jams on the mountain.

"In regards to Bell Mountain, I think we have 46 or 48 dedicated spots up there," said Chief Copeland. "I think we might also have a couple more spots elsewhere that we can park cars on the Bell. During normal patrols, the gates are opened up at certain times, so we'll coordinate that specifically for the day of the eclipse."

"As the parking lots fill up, we'll shut the yellow gates and keep a person at the gate. Then we'll drop down and create a barricade there so that as the traffic comes toward us, we can ask if they're either a resident of the mountain or are going to see the eclipse and direct them accordingly."

For those who do not make it to Bell Mountain before it reaches capacity, Chief Copeland suggests attending the event at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds where parking will be less of an issue.

Camping on top of Bell Mountain will be prohibited during the eclipse as well, so those interested in watching the eclipse from the mountain can plan to arrive as the gates



Towns County officials in the EMA eclipse meeting. Photo/Lily Avery

open at 8 a.m.

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton will also be providing extra support throughout the county to manage traffic to and from the Fairgrounds, Bell Mountain and monitoring the basic flow of traffic throughout the county during the time when population density is expected to more than double.

"I'm going to reach out to some of the sheriffs from larger agencies outside of the total eclipse area to see if anyone can aid in the county," said Sheriff Clinton. "I know a lot of other counties are going to be in the same boat as we are, but we're going to help each other as much as we can."

Another point of concern brought to light during the meeting regarded Towns County Schools schedule for that day and whether students should remain on campus during the eclipse.

Previously, Towns County School Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong stated that the students would be kept at the schools to watch the eclipse from the football field. However, after recent discussion with the Towns County Board of Education, it has been decided to release the students at noon, as well as all faculties and staff.

"Now, looking at when the max eclipse is going to occur, our concern now is what is traffic going to look like when we're releasing

kids," said Dr. Berrong. "Are buses going to be stuck in traffic, how dark is it going to be, that sort of thing. The issue is, we don't know. So, that's why we decided to release at noon so we can have all of the kids home by 1 p.m."

"So the only issue we may have now is, are there going to be a ton of people coming to the parking lot of the school, which I don't have an issue with, but we don't know what kind of situation that may be."

To address the issue of a possible influx of spectators into the parking lots during the eclipse, Dr. Berrong is going to work toward having someone at the schools to help maintain order throughout the evening.

Along with the fire department and the sheriff's department, the Young Harris College Police will be on duty in Young Harris and the Department of Natural Resources will also be on standby throughout the region to aid both on Lake Chatuge and otherwise.

"We want to keep this county safe, that's our main concern," said Commissioner Bradshaw. "We don't want people to say that Towns County wasn't ready, that we weren't prepared. We're going to do everything that we can to do it right."

Towns County officials will meet again on Tuesday, Aug. 8, to further discuss eclipse safety once more before the eclipse on Aug. 21.

Recreation...from Page 1A

Bradshaw also noted that there is currently a walking trail on the property and he's aware that some residents use it, but he only wants to improve upon what is already there. Additionally, the county will not be purchasing the property and it will remain under the ownership of the Forestry Commission, but the county will maintain the park with labor already on loan from Blairsville's Carlton Colwell Probation Detention Center.

In new business, Andrea Anderson read the first reading of a recent resolution that amends Chapter 4 of the Code of Ordinances of Towns County. To put it in layman's terms: the Commissioner's Office will begin charging a fee for any changes to a current alcohol license; including approved transfers to another qualified licensee or changes to the license. The amount of the fee will be announced at the next Towns County Commission meeting.

"What this is, is the beer and wine ordinance that Commissioner Kendall put in, and all we're doing is bringing the ordinance up-to-date with what we've already been doing, so nothing has changed as far as that," Bradshaw said. "The one change we are making, (here is) why we made it: We had one restaurant owner come in and change their license seven times in one year because they changed the name of their restaurant. We're bogged down having to do all of this paperwork and we're charging nothing to do it. But we will charge from here forward and we feel like a small fee is not too much to ask to cover the time and expense of the employees to do the work."

Also on the agenda, Youngblood reported on his first four months as director



County Recreation Director Matt Youngblood. Photo/Todd Forrest

and provided an update on the recent addition of youth soccer to the list of programs offered by the TCRD.

According to Youngblood, the rec department is teaming up with United Football Academy (UFA), who is in the process of beginning a mountain soccer league that includes Pickens, Lumpkin, Dawson, Fannin, and Towns counties.

"The only surrounding county not (participating) is Union County, they are still a part of MUSA (Mountain United Soccer Association)," Youngblood said. "They (UFA) are keeping all of its rates in-line with MUSA's prices and setting up the website for us, so anyone interested can go on there to register their child. They will be supplied with a jersey, shorts, and socks but are responsible for shin guards and a ball. They want every kid to have their own ball, and they should."

Registration runs through the end of July for ages running from under-4 all the way up to 19, and according to Youngblood, the older age groups have the most sign ups thus far. "If you know anyone that hasn't heard about



County Finance Director Andrea Anderson. Photo/Todd Forrest

the program, please spread the word," he added. "It's going to take a little time to get going."

"The fields at the Fairgrounds will be used temporarily with the possibility of playing games at the new recreation department field," he added. "The younger age groups will play 3-on-3 and 5-on-5, eventually going to 11-on-11, full field when they get older and know all of the rules."

Youngblood also provided a positive report on the beach and the recreation department's day camp while announcing that improvements are taking place at the weight room.

In other new business, David Stovall was reappointed as the Private Sector Representative on the Georgia Mountain Regional Commission Council.

Bradshaw also accepted Betsy Young as the Republican nominee to replace Rob Murray on the Towns County Board of Election and Registration.

Finally, a resolution was approved that authorizes the Towns County Group Insurance account to be opened.

Fair...from Page 1A

Thomason, Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds General Manager. "Our attendance was up from last year. I think last year that it rained the first day so we were up several thousand dollars from last year."

"Then, on Saturday, it was really another good day. We were up again in attendance versus last year. We're off to a real good start and we're hoping to continue with it."

Every year, the Fair is the talk of the town, as thousands flock to the Fairgrounds to take part in one of the biggest events of the season. From carnival rides to live music, to arts and crafts to old timey culture sprung to life, the Fair has a little something for everyone, tourists and locals alike.

"We have several new arts and crafts vendors this year," said Thomason. "We have a new glassblower that's doing a demonstration every day. He's drawing a huge crowd with his demonstrations and people really seem to like him."

"People are really drawn to the demonstrations. That's the part of the Pioneer Village that everyone seems to like so well."

The glassblower in question, Devan Cole, is spending his first season at the Fairgrounds atop the hill of the pioneer village, in booth 61. With 10- to 15-minute demonstrations every hour, Cole has been entertaining visitors with classic glassblowing techniques to form bowls and cups, which he also has for sale at his booth.

Cole has been practicing the art of glassblowing for a little over 14 years now and teaches at various studios, including his current position as a beginner glass blowing instructor at Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus.

"I was first introduced to glassblowing when I took a class at Rochester Institute of Technology," said Cole. "I fell in love with the process of it and eventually decided I wanted to get a degree in glassblowing. So, I looked into all of the different colleges that offered a glassblowing program and applied to as many as I could."

"I was fortunate enough to go to a school that is considered one of the top glass programs in the U.S., which is the Rochester Institute of Technology's School of American Crafts."



Porch Pickin' in Pioneer Village. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

Senators...from Page 1A



L-R: Cliff Bradshaw, Liz Ordiales, Kris Berrong, Cecil Sanders Jr., Adam Penland, John Wilkinson and Steve Gooch. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

had that same requirement. They don't, but they need to.

"But we have a great system down there; it can be better. We look for ways to improve it every day, and we look for input from you all to make it better."

Gooch pointed out that the state budget has grown substantially since he first entered office in 2011, a surefire sign that the economy has been on the upswing since the recession back in 2009.

"Jobs are coming back to Georgia," said Gooch. "We've been named the No. 1 state to do business four years in a row. We hope to have that designation again this year. If we get that, we'll be the only state in the nation that's ever gotten that five years in a row."

"I think a lot of that has to do with the fact that we're in the South. We are a very pro-business part of the country."

Continued Gooch: "We have good tax policies that help attract industries, and we have the No. 1 busiest airport in the world. We've had that

designation for many years now, Hartsfield Airport is the No. 1 airport in the world."

The senator also pointed out that Georgia has the fastest growing port in the nation, currently third in size on the East Coast, at Savannah Port and Brunswick Port.

"We export more goods out of Georgia than we import, which is a good thing," said Gooch. "Ports are very important for our commerce. We're bringing a lot of our goods and services through that port, and we are expanding that port as we speak."

Gooch also spoke a bit about education, how the state is working hard to tackle employability of students coming out of Georgia schools.

"We have failing schools in Georgia," said Gooch. "We have children that are in high school in Georgia that can't read on the third-grade level. We have a workforce problem right now in Georgia."

"We can't produce the available workforce that a lot of these companies are looking for,

and so we have to do better. We have the No. 1 technical college system in the country, and they're producing great graduates, but we've got to continue to look for ways to make our workforce more employable."

TCHS Class of 2016 alumnus Adam Penland, who now attends Mercer University, introduced Wilkinson in the meeting.

Mountain Movers and Shakers Co-Founder Sam Fullerton impressed upon those in attendance some statistics he'd recently compiled.

According to the latest data, from 2015, tourism generated some \$25.5 million in direct spending in Union County and \$44.8 million in Towns County.

Fullerton also reported that home purchases in the area are in the hundreds of homes already sold this year, according to statistics from local real estate companies, which is a terrific indicator of a strong regional economy.