



Chamber Chronicles

The official source of Towns County Chamber News

Wednesday, January 7, 2015

News from the Chamber

Business After Hours – Thursday, January 15 at Park Sterling Bank's Main Branch in downtown Hiwassee, 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Please drop by to meet manager, Melanie Hughes and her co-workers. Great chance to network and share information on your business and any upcoming event.

Ribbon Cutting – Friday, January 16, 1 p.m. at The Walker-Tison Agency, LLC in Young Harris, GA. Come meet new member Keats Walker at his office located at 1159 Main St. in Young Harris (former office of Michelle Hughes, Accountant just west of Young Harris College).

Cardboard Recycling – Don't throw that cardboard in the trash! Recycle! The Chamber of Commerce is working with Keep Our Mountains Beautiful to encourage folks to recycle cardboard during the holidays (and every day). The Transit Station has a recycling center for cardboard, newspaper, plastics and aluminum cans. Don't throw that cardboard box in with your regular trash; take it to the recycling center and dispose of it at no charge! You will be helping the environment and helping to reduce packaging prices in the future. For more information contact the Chamber at (706) 896-4966.

Effective Board Service – Non-profit boards are most effective when board members understand their role and responsibilities and use their collective resources for the benefit of those they serve. The Towns and Blairsville-Union Chambers are hosting a workshop

for non-profit board members on January 29 at the Union County Community Center – 9 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. This workshop is open to all non-profits and will cover board role & responsibilities, board governance, and, internal board operations – productive and effective meetings. There will be a small cost for non-profits that are current members of either Chamber - \$10 per person; non-members will be \$25 per person.

Winter Chautauqua 2015 Registration is Now Open! The Winter Chautauqua tourism conference will be held in Dalton on March 1-2, 2015. Visit the website at www.WinterChautauqua.com. This is a good opportunity to network with your industry peers and learn something new...all at an affordable price! It's especially good for small organizations and businesses who don't want to be out of the office or away from their livelihood for several days. Also, this year the Innkeepers Association of Georgia organizers are assisting with programming for Winter Chautauqua. As a separate session and fee, there will be an Aspiring Innkeepers workshop for those who has ever thought about owning a bed and breakfast; this is their opportunity to find out more and ask questions!

Rome and the Amalfi Coast – The Chamber is offering a trip to Rome and the Amalfi Coast in early November 2015. Highlights include Rome, Regional Wines with Dinner, Ravello, Villa Rufolo, Sorrento, Buffalo Milk Mozzarella Factory, Amalfi Coast, Paestum, Pompeii, Wine Tasting, Naples, Archaeological Museum and great tour guides! This trip is being offered through the oldest travel company in the U.S., Collette Travel. For more information, contact Candace at the Chamber at (706) 896-4966.

Upcoming Events:

January 14 – Monthly meeting of the North Georgia Mountains Travel Assoc.

January 15 – Business After Hours – Park Sterling Bank in downtown Hiwassee, 5:30 p.m.

January 16 – Ribbon Cutting at The Walker-Tison Agency, LLC

January 27 – Tourism, Hospitality & Arts Day at the Capitol

January 29 – Board Training for Non-Profits

March 1-2 – Winter Chautauqua

For a full list of community calendar items as well as events scheduled for the remainder of the year, visit www.mountaintopga.com and please Like us on Facebook. We also post a lot of information on our Facebook page that is not normally posted in newspaper articles.

Thanks to all our members for their continued support! Additionally, we'd like to thank these Platinum and Gold Members: PLATINUM MEMBERS: Blue Ridge Mountain EMC; Crane Creek Vineyards; Mountain Realty; United Community Bank; Windstream Communications. GOLD MEMBERS: Brasstown Valley Resort; Fieldstone Resort, Park Sterling Bank; Chatuge Regional Hospital; Georgia Mountain Fair; Holiday Inn Express; Northeast GA Medical Center; Lake Chatuge Lodge; Young Harris College; The Walker-Tison Agency, LLC. For information on becoming a member of the Towns County Chamber, visit www.mountaintopga.com or call Candace at (706) 896-4966.

EMC...from Page 1

membership has been damaged by a result of the actions of the six named Board of Directors and Akins.

The suit claims the directors named in the suit failed to discharge their duties in good faith and with the degree of diligence, care, and skill, which ordinarily prudent men would exercise under similar circumstances in like positions and are therefore liable to the membership for breach of fiduciary duty under O.C.G.A. Sections 46-3-303 and 46-3-303-1.

The suit stems from the disclosure that former BRMEMC President Terry Taylor was allowed to carry a significant debt, and retain electrical service to both his commercial operation and residential dwelling for a number of years.

The suit also alleges that Taylor, who first became BRMEMC president in 1997, was in conflict with the Board of Directors for having commercial contracts that allowed the president to benefit financially from the construction of the BRMEMC headquarters project.

The suit claims that more than one of the Board of Directors knew about the debt incurred by Taylor and Taylor Construction, and Terry Taylor's residential account, which also was in arrears.

The suit claims that Akins, in addition to allowing Taylor to continue the indebtedness to BRMEMC, perjured himself and damaged BRMEMC by filing false reports in 2011 and 2012 on IRS Form 990. The claim is that Akins had knowledge of a conflict of interest arising out of Taylor receiving compensation from BRMEMC at the same time that Taylor and Taylor Construction and Taylor personally, had an unpaid balance with BRMEMC; as well as Taylor and Taylor Construction doing work on the BRMEMC corporate headquarters project.

The happenings led to a change in three directors at the annual BRMEMC Meeting in September. Charles Jenkins, Steven Phillips, and Chris Logan unseated three incumbent directors by election of the membership.

Shakers...from Page 1

system.

"We have a Star Store, and this is what I'm working on immediately," said Dr. Page.

The Star Store features incentives for the reading program at the elementary school. Books and puzzles, toys and posters are exhibited during the school year in a repurposed trophy case, and children can earn the opportunity to purchase the items that they see as a reward for reading.

"Twice a year we have the store," said Dr. Page. "So, on their reading log, they cash in their Star Points. Every 10 minutes, they get a Star Dollar."

These Star Dollars enable the children to buy "some toy that they've earned, or a book – hopefully a book – that they've been looking at in that trophy case for three months," said Dr. Page.

But that Star Store needs more funding to properly stock it with interesting and desired incentives.

Further, Dr. Page would like to upgrade the children's playground, which was built in 2002-2003.

"We have a great playground, but it's needing some work," said Dr. Page. "It needs to be painted, the paint is fading. And we want to take away the mulch that's underneath."

Their historic elections (the first board members elected but not nominated by the BRMEMC Board of Directors) followed news that former longtime EMC President Terry Taylor was severely in arrears on his EMC commercial account. Taylor also had a history of not paying his residential account. The most recent debt was more than \$48,000, according to documents obtained by the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald*.

According to the suit, Attorney Sorgen failed to inform the Board of Directors of Taylor's debt after discovering the debt through a meeting with Akins in May or June 2013.

Sorgen's failure to inform the Board of Directors of Taylor and Taylor Construction's unpaid balances, and, correct the timing of the demotion of Director of Operations Chris Kelley, who, blew the whistle on the unpaid debt, indicates that it is in the best interest of BRMEMC to terminate Sorgen as BRMEMC's legal counsel, according to the suit.

Allen, who continues to serve as auditor for BRMEMC, allegedly failed to include Taylor's debt in audit reports submitted to BRMEMC, according to the suit. Allen's failure to include information of Taylor's debt in audit reports of BRMEMC's financial records indicates that it is in the best interest of BRMEMC to terminate Allen as BRMEMC's accountant and auditor, according to the suit.

Despite being made aware of the need to terminate Allen in a derivative action demand letter from the membership, the six named directors have failed to terminate Allen as BRMEMC's accountant and auditor.

In total, the plaintiffs ask the court for judgment for the benefit of the membership requiring the termination of Akins, Sorgen and Allen and for damages in an amount to be proven at trial to account for the six named directors' official misconduct, according to the suit.

For continued coverage of the suit and its outcome, follow the upcoming editions of the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald*.

The playground equipment itself is fine, and not all of the mulch would need to be removed. But where the barrier around the playground exists, Dr. Page is looking to "put down a more spongy-type," bouncy flooring.

"It's not that it's so hard, but it's just kind of messy now, and we'd like to dig all of that out and put a more 21st century-type flooring in there that's kind of springy on the children's feet when they're playing," said Dr. Page.

Lastly in that meeting, Dr. Page highlighted another initiative aimed at enriching the elementary school children's lives – Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala.

For the last couple of years, top-reading students have visited Space Camp, spending the night and having a great, educational time. But the school needs financial support from the community – not just the Mountain Movers and Shakers, who are pledging their support – to aid children in this quest for knowledge.

The next Mountain Movers and Shakers meeting will feature State Sen. John Wilkinson of District 50 and a constitutional scholar, at 8 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 9, at Mary's Southern Grill in Young Harris.

Directors...from Page 1

that gets power, they put a deposit down, and then it's just almost like you never get it back. It's never seen again.

"And so, we're in the process of coming up with a system, that the first thing we'll do is, anybody that shows that they're paying their bill in a timely manner and are in good standing, then you'll get that returned. This hasn't taken place yet, but it's in the works."

They are also looking into utilizing credit scores to determine whether or not a deposit is even applicable on a per customer basis.

"A lot of people have more than one meter, so if you've got another something, you add another meter, you have to put another deposit down," said Phillips. "But if you've been a member for 20 years, that's crazy."

Logan said that members can look forward to movement on the deposit issue in the next couple of months.

Speaking on transparency, Phillips noted that he has submitted minutes to the last couple of board meetings for publication in the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* "because we did bring to a motion to open the board up to the public and the members and the employees, and of course, they voted us down on that. I don't see a problem, and most of the boards that I've ever been to are open. And I think it'll come in time, I really do. I think it'll come in time."

In response to a question

about the next election cycle, Logan told those in attendance that it will be at the annual meeting in September.

"If they come up with something that we think is good, hey, we're supporting it," said Jenkins.

Jenkins' new colleagues echoed this sentiment.

"I don't want to trash the board that's there now, I really don't," said Phillips. "We're trying to work with them, and we have been. We've been working with them."

And Phillips fielded a question about the current petition that is circulating to remove the other six board members and Matthew Akins' leadership.

"I think everybody in the room, if you don't know by now, you're a hermit," said Phillips. "I've been accused of being behind it, but I'm not. I know about it, and I'm not signing the petition because I'm on the board. But yes, there is a petition going around, there absolutely is."

Logan talked about the reason why members do not receive capital credit, unlike other EMCs.

"You can go into all of this very elaborate answer, but there's an answer," said Logan. "We buy power from TVA and TVA alone. We buy power from nowhere else, and we do not generate power. And a lot of these other EMCs, they may even have a generating facility, where they actually generate their own power themselves."

"The TVA, in our contract, the EMC's contract with TVA,

it says – everybody's familiar with the TVA in here? They're actually government owned. They say that you cannot give back capital credits if you buy power from TVA."

So, what if there is "left-over money," as Logan puts it?

"You can either put it back into the infrastructure, pay down long-term debt or get your tier rating, the rating that the REA and other people go by to lower your rates," said Logan. "You've got three options to do that: infrastructure, lower rates or pay down long-term debt."

And the amount of debt currently held by the BRMEMC surprised Logan once he had gotten a look at the numbers.

"It is a tremendous debt load," said Logan. "And for us three members to get up here and make any changes, we've got our hands tied right now with all of this debt. So, what I would like to do is start focusing to get some good strong leadership in there, and start focusing on bringing down the operating costs."

"And then, at the end of the year, if there is any profit or – you can't really call it profit because we're a nonprofit, but if there's any leftover money, for lack of a better word, we've got to get that long-term debt down, get our tier rating down."

Before the meeting was adjourned, the new board members wanted to make sure that everyone knew who to blame for the BRMEMC's situation in recent years: upper management and the board of directors.

"I have one thing I'd like to say before we get out of here, and this is something that's really a problem we're having," said Phillips. "You've got the employees at the EMC over there. These guys and girls work hard every day, and they've got a job, that's what they do. They go over there in the morning, they clock in, they do their job and they go home."

"They're not the ones that y'all need to be jumping on. A lot of them take a lot of heat, and a lot of it's because they've got their EMC logo on their shirt. These are good people, and all they want to do is make a living, feed their families."

Also in the meeting Friday, Towns County resident Darrin Wright discussed his intentions to run for the office of Towns County Sheriff in 2016.

Wright began his law enforcement career in 1986, in Augusta.

"I've worked for city, county, state and federal agencies, so I have a broad range of experience to bring to the table," said Wright.

A family man, he and his wife of 29 years moved to Towns County in 2000, and Wright runs the family's longtime business of 32 years with his daughter.

"I have four core values that I'm going to stand on throughout this campaign," said Wright. "Trust, honor, integrity and loyalty. And that's what I've based my career on. I think those are important, and if I'm elected as sheriff, my deputies will have those same core values."

Langley...from Page 1

an overview of the work he and his staff have undertaken over the years.

"I ran the numbers at the end of the workday last week that we had worked on, in the last four years, 10,353 cases in my office in a four-year period," said Langley. "That gives you some idea of the workload we have and what we do. And my prayer, then, those won't just be numbers. That on every single individual case, we try to do the right thing. Do we always get the exact right thing done? Of course not."

"Our goal is substantial justice. That in most cases, most of the time, we get the best result that we can possibly accomplish. And that's what we work for every day. We can never reach perfection on that, but my staff works really hard every day to do the right thing, day after day."

Langley asked for those present to pray for his office and his staff over the next four years.

"So, if you would, I'd ask you to specifically pray that they not fall into some of the errors that prosecutors can easily fall into, and I lump them into three categories," said Langley. "We fall into the trap sometimes with personal-

izing our cases. And you can do recrimination and favoritism back and forth in an endless cycle. And our job as prosecutor is to never make our cases personal."

The job of the district attorney's office is to treat every case based on the evidence and criminal history involved, said Langley, and not the personalities of the individuals involved.

"Whether that be the personality of the defense attorney, the personality of the defendant, or our personality, that it not be personal," said Langley. "And pray that our staff will never make their cases personal."

Self-interest is the third pitfall that Langley said prosecutors must strive to avoid.

"It's very easy to make decisions on a case based upon what makes us look good or bad, or what is easiest, when you get just lazy and choose the easy route," said Langley. "But pray that we would not choose the easy route, and not choose to make a priority of how we look. That we will not be personal, we will not be self-interested, and finally that we would take a look at the big picture."

Pastor Marty Duncan of Blairsville's Fellowship of the Hills church delivered an

invocation, and Langley was sworn in as DA.

"I'm excited," said Langley in the reception following the ceremony. "Like I said, a little over 10,000 cases during the first four years. We'll do another 10,000 to 12,000 in the next four years, I'm sure."

Langley has 20 staff members who help him with that large caseload.

"This next year, I've got a good mix of some folks with a lot of experience," said Langley. "Cathy Brakefield has been prosecuting now for 20 plus years. I've got a couple other guys that have 10 and 15 years of experience. And then, I've got a good mix of some fresh new faces."

"I've got three recent law graduates that are in their first year of practicing law working with us that we're training right now. So, we've got a good mix of experience and fresh enthusiasm and energy."

And while Cathy Cox-Brakefield may be retiring at the end of this year, Langley said he's planning to talk her out of it.

"I may have to indict her and make a bond condition continued present employment," said Langley, joking.

The loss of Cox-Brake-

field will certainly be felt within the office.

"She's the only real specialist in our office," said Langley. "She specializes in complex drug offenses. For example, she just got through handling a case in White County that had more than 40 defendants and over 125 counts in the indictment – a very complicated RICO case. And she's the only one in our office that really has done that type case."

"It will create a hole in our office when she leaves, but luckily, because she's given me a significant warning period, I'm talking with some experienced attorneys to come in. I won't replace her with someone right out of law school. We'll bring in another experienced hand when the time comes."

And for at least four more years, Langley will continue to fight the good fight for substantial justice that he started nearly 17 years ago, when he began with the Enotah Judicial Circuit.

"When I took the job up here, I moved up from Cobb County, and I've raised my kids here in North Georgia," said Langley. "And it's been great for me and my family. I don't have any regrets of moving to North Georgia."

Deer Season...from Page 1

deer season with a consistent closing date, which would end separate season dates for the northern and southern zones.

However, there has been no consensus among hunters for what closing date makes the most sense.

Current information indicates that most hunters prefer a date other than Jan. 15.

The most popular options are: the first Sunday in January, the second Sunday in January and Jan. 15. The department is specifically interested in public input on this important issue.

Additionally, the department has received good feedback on the recent regulatory changes providing for buck-only days during the deer season.

For the past two years, these days have been Dec. 1-25 for most counties in Georgia.

However, public input suggests that most hunters prefer some other timing during the deer season for buck-only days and the current dates may not meet harvest reduction goals.

Again, there is no consensus on this issue. Potential options include: the first nine days of firearms deer season, the first 16 days of firearms deer season, Nov. 1 through the third Sunday, or a combination of days that achieve desired biological objectives.

The department is specifically seeking public input on this important issue.

All of the following public meetings will begin at 7 p.m.:

Jan. 5, Southern Crescent Technical College, Room B132, 1533 Hwy. 19, S, Thomaston;

Jan. 6, Coastal Electric Co-Op Auditorium, 1265 S. Coastal Highway, Midway, and Blue Ridge EMC Headquarters, 875 Main Street East, Young Harris;

Jan. 7 at Nathan Dean Center, 604 Goodyear Avenue, Rockmart; Pope Center, 48 Lexington Road, Washington; Southwest Georgia Technical College, 15689 U.S. Highway 19, Thomasville;

Jan. 8 at the Gwinnett County Justice and Administration Center, 75 Langley Drive, Lawrenceville; Dodge County Public Fishing Area – Group Building, 325 Dodge Lake Road, Eastman.

Anyone participating at a meeting may present data, make a statement or comment, or offer a viewpoint or argument, either orally or in writing.

Statements should be concise to permit everyone an opportunity to speak. Participants must register upon arrival and notify the registering official of their intent to give a statement. Those unable to attend a meeting may submit input either electronically or in written statement form. Input must be received by Jan. 14.

Written statements should be mailed to: GA DNR/Wildlife Resources Division/Game Management Section; Attn: Tina Brunjes; 2070 U.S. Highway 278, S.E.; Social Circle, Georgia 30025.