

Audit report in for City of Hiawassee

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

At the Hiawassee City Council Meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 5, the city got a visit from City Auditor Ed Burton. He gave a general overview, focusing on government-wide financial statements. Burton explained to the City Council that both assets and liabilities were down. "If you look at the government-wide assets, the overall assets went down this year. The reason they went down was because of about three or four different things. The liabilities last year were a lot more. If you look at accounts payable at the end of this year, they aren't as high as they were last year. So the city has taken that money and paid off the liabilities. So that's the major part," he said. "Then also you have depreciation of the government-wide assets, of all the water systems and buildings and everything. And that also

reduced the assets because you have a lot of depreciation. So that's why the assets went down. Along with them going down, the liabilities went down even more, which is good. That's because payables were down, notes and bonds were down, and these things are good, because you know that they're going down," he said. After the meeting, City Manager Rick Stancil explained that although Burton presented a mostly clean audit, his findings revealed some confusion in the city finances. "He has to report certain things to the state. One thing is the internal control issue. That's a finding with pretty much all cities. Since we don't have a CPA or business person on staff that could do the day to day upkeep of information, we have to bundle all of our materials out of the city to the CPAs, and because of that, you'll notice that this meeting in January, we just approved the financial statements from October, so we run several months behind in getting information from business decisions. What

that means is they've got to report that because we may be making decisions without the full picture of finance," said Stancil. "With all that said, Barbara and I review the accounts every week, two or three times a week, one of us is on there taking a look at where we are. But all of that is in house, not objectively analyzed. So we're going to have that finding unless we decided to hire an extra position," he added. "Then, basically, we had some co-mingling of SPLOST money. Part of the collection on motor vehicles and other things, we receive a check from the county commissioner's office. One check for everything. On a monthly basis, \$20 or \$27, that comes from and should have been spent in the SPLOST fund that they just deposited in the general fund. Now that we've caught that, we're going to have to go back and move that money to the SPLOST fund, because those funds have to be segregated," said Stancil.

Ordiales has plans for Merchant Committee

By Mason Mitcham
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Liz Ordiales, newly elected Hiawassee City Council member, has big plans for the future of Hiawassee. At the City Council meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 5, she gave a presentation on a proposed City Merchant Committee that she hopes will help revitalize the downtown area of Hiawassee.



Liz Ordiales gives presentation on Merchant's Association

"It seemed to go over pretty well, so I'm going to pursue it. What I'd like to do is put together like an association of all of our City of Hiawassee Businesses," she explained after the meeting. "I went down to the City Hall today and I got a list of who they were, it was 146 on the report. What I'd like to do is contact all these people and set up a meeting so we can get together as a group effort with the Chamber, the City, the Hiawassee Ambassador's Program, and really the county and anybody who wants to participate, and come up with ideas to really revitalize our downtown area," she said. "This committee would give input on how to make the city more attractive to people passing through in order that they might stay and shop. "The number one thing that I heard when I did door to door calls during the election is that they would like to

clean up the downtown area and make it more attractive, to make it look inviting for people to stay. We'll clean it up and put some flowers out and make it nice, so maybe people will come, and do a little shopping in the area," said Ordiales. "There are some things that are going to be easy, like to put flowers out and make it look pretty, that's not too difficult. But then there's others like where you have those buildings that are all rundown and you've got trees growing inside of them, that's going to be a little more difficult because it's more personal property, but I believe we'll have an ordinance that says clean it up or you're going to get fined. And in time it'll get cleaned up," she said. Ordiales hopes that the positive effects of the Merchant Committee will be far-reaching.

"This isn't going to be a quick one or two meeting thing. What I'd like to do is establish it and have it go on. This can be something that goes forever. As you move into town and you're opening a business, you join the Association, and you come to meetings and bring your ideas," she said. "The end goal would be to somehow attract more people here to stay at our hotels and visit our shops and use the lake and that kind of stuff. But I think that the important part is to get these local businesses involved and get their ideas on how to make that happen. And again, working with the chamber. You've got to work with the chamber. That's their job, and they're more than willing to work with us. It's just a matter of getting the right feedback from the right people to make that happen," she added.

Bell Mtn...from Page 1

Our plans are to do pavement up to about two tenths of a mile and make a parking lot there and let people walk on up. The trail's similar to the one we have up on Bald Mountain Park. Hopefully we can have that trail wide enough so we can have some kind of vehicles to take handicapped people at certain times on up to the mountain. Once we get up there we plan to build a scenic overlook platform," he said. He reminded those assembled that even though it may be a challenge to make the changes to the mountain, Towns County was up to the task. "When I first came into office, one of the platforms I ran on was to try to stop Interstate 3. We were told at the time that it's no use to oppose that, that when Washington wants something, the voices of people cannot do anything about it, that we were wasting our time. But we got organized," he said.

"Just think if you had that four-lane road coming through this mountain. And it was designed for the transfer trucks coming out of Savannah and going through Towns County and on north for Tennessee. You might have had one or two places in Towns County where the traffic could get off. But think of the noise pollution and the air pollution. And think, once you're up on Bell Mountain, what you'd be looking down on instead of what we have," he added. Callie Moore, Executive Director of the Hiawasse River Watershed Coalition, voiced her support for the preservation and upkeep of Bell Mountain. "We're very excited about this beautiful location where we're going to have such an amazing vista of Lake Chatuge and our mountains and the Hiawasse River Watershed is in public ownership and will be accessible for people to be able to get out there,"

she said. "The Coalition is going to do all it can to help with the fixing of the road and the erosion problems and working with Towns County and the US Forest Service to ensure that water quality is protected as the park is developed and maintained over the years," she said. Towns County Deputy Clerk Andrea Anderson read from the ordinance. "Therefore, be it ordained that the 18-acre summit of Bell Mountain shall hereafter be Bell Mountain County Park and Historical Site, with an observation deck designated as the Hal Herrin Scenic Overlook from whence citizens and future generations can drink in the beauty of God's creation of Lake Chatuge glistening in the sunlight far below, and where every important Appalachian Mountain Peak in Georgia, North Carolina, and even Tennessee can be seen," she read.

Seabees to host March 5 gala event



Richard Hoibraten, left, and Ed Crenshaw go over the details of the March 5 Seabee Ball

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

The Navy Seabee Veterans of America Island X-3 held their first meeting of the New Year on Friday, Jan. 8, and the major topic at hand was the first ever Seabee Ball of the North Georgia Mountains.

The Seabee Ball, slated

for March 5 at the Union County Community Center, will celebrate the 74th anniversary of the implementation of the U.S. Navy Seabees.

"This is a pret ty big deal, because usually you might have three around the entire United States of America, maybe four," said Richard Hoibraten, commander of Island X-3. "But

for a Ball to be up here in the North Georgia Mountains, this is a huge deal, because most of them are in well-populated areas, like Central Missouri or Port Hueneme, California, on the coast, or Virginia, someplace like that.

"This being a small-town area, to have a Seabee Ball up here to bring the people out of the other towns like Atlanta, this will be a big event."

Georgia is home to three Navy Seabee Islands - Island X-1 is based out of Atlanta, Island X-2 is based out of Macon, and Island X-3, right here in the North Georgia Mountains.

Tickets to the Seabee Ball will be \$45, with limited seating available at 150 tickets. Being a Ball, the event will be formal attire only, and Amazing Grace Catering will prepare the food

History...from Page 1

a Christmas present about two weeks ago when Bill Kendall called me and explained what was about to happen and asked me to get up some history on Bell Mountain, so I'm very excited," he said. The biggest obstacle to a complete understanding of the history of the mountain is that a number of records were destroyed in a fire at the Union County Courthouse. "Jason Edwards and I have been busy researching what we could on available records on Bell Mountain. Prior to Towns County's formation in March 1856, this area was Union County, Georgia. And one major handicap in searching the records and establishing the ownership of Bell Mountain is that the original Union County Courthouse burned in May 1856," said Taylor. "Towns County was created in March 1856, the

Union County Courthouse burns in May 1856, resulting in the loss of all the urban records that would be included in Towns County, including the deeds records and tax records. Nevertheless, we've compiled a history," he said. The history, nine pages long, includes quotes from a number of sources, some dating back 150 years, and photographs old and new. "The area that's now Bell Mountain was Union County originally. Unfortunately, the records are somewhat nonexistent from the early days. But we do know that in the 1832 Georgia Land Lottery, the lot was drawn by William Taylor," explained Edwards. A land lottery was common in those days, but since people in southern Georgia rarely wanted to make the journey up to the Blue Ridge Mountains, it was likely

that Taylor probably bought the land sight unseen. "The way that worked was that people down in Georgia drew the land lot and they almost never came up here. Our research, I think we found only one person who actually relocated to this area on the land that they wanted to own. But William Taylor probably bought it without actually seeing the land itself," explained Edwards. Since then, the history of Bell Mountain has been one of private ownership, until gifted by the Hal Herrin Estate to Towns County. "This was put into private hands in 1832 through a lottery. But I guess before then, the Indians owned it and they were driven out. But I think of how lucky we are that it was in private hands for 154 years and there's still no houses on Bell Mountain," said Commissioner Kendall.

Mitchell...from Page 1

are there are afraid that they're going to disappear, and they're probably right unless something happens, so we're going to work on that." Mitchell also reported that the hours of the City Council meetings have been changed to 5:30 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month. However, there was no shortage of community involvement at last week's meeting, regardless of the time or the date. "We're really pleased to have the meetings set at a time when people can easily come, although the number of people (approximately 75) that were there on Tuesday night

was the most heartwarming thing that has ever happened," Mitchell said. "It was absolutely wonderful. We felt supported in our efforts." At each meeting, Mitchell would also like to open with the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer. "We need to realize who we are and where we come from on a national level, and then we need to acknowledge that we need all of the help that we can get," she said. Moving forward, Mitchell is confident that the current City Council has the determination to get the job done for the constituents that selected them

for the job. "I've been a city council member for approximately 60 hours, so I don't know much more than I did before, but I do know that we've got a big job ahead of us, and I think we've got the energy, the enthusiasm, and the dedication to do it," she said. The Mountain Movers and Shakers is a Nonpartisan Conservative Group, dedicated to meeting the needs of Towns County and the region. The Mountain Movers and Shakers meet on Friday mornings at 8 a.m. at Mary's Southern Grill, for those interested in more information, conversation and breakfast. Also for further information, contact Sam Fullerton (706) 994-4658.

Hiawassee...from Page 1

4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. "Four o'clock is not really good. We've got three working members on this council now. Chris and me and Liz. I had to leave work early today. Don't you think that a later time would be better? I would like for us to meet at 6:30 p.m.," said Council Member Mitchell. Other members said that 6:30 would be too late and that the meetings would run too long. A compromise was reached. Future City Council meetings will be at 5:30 p.m. Mayor Barbara Mathis asked for a moment of silence in memory of Police Chief Jimmy Wright. Afterward, she announced that she had an update on the City of Hiawassee Police Department. "Due to the death of our police chief, I have made several changes in the Hiawassee Police Department. At this time I have named Arvel Walls as acting Police Chief. It is my intention to submit him to the council in June 2016 to confirm him as Police Chief and Department Head. Arvel has served the City faithfully for many years

as Jimmy's next in line for command. Additionally as next in line of command, I have named Paul Smith to the position of Lieutenant," she said. Eric Hasley, of Hasley Recreation, Inc., made a presentation on his company and his desire to work with the City on the Mayor's Park project. Council Member Ordiales made presentations on a new City Merchant Committee and discussed the past lighting of the square, thanking those responsible. City Auditor, Ed Burton, presented the council with the audit of the fiscal year 2014-15 update. Council Member Stephen Smith continued his past efforts with the Hiawassee City Clean-Up with another presentation regarding several new ideas to clean up the city streets, possibly with the help of prisoners and detainees. City Engineer Don Baker presented the council with the City Engineer's report. He said that the city was hoping to upgrade the crosswalk near

Ingles and that other projects are proceeding. City Manager Rick Stancil gave his report, which included updates on the water and sewer systems. The city is preparing to decide on a proposal on a Sewer Plant Nutrient Reduction and Storage Building. There is approximately \$200,000 in reserves for UV lighting, nutrient reduction, and plant rehabilitation. Stancil also addressed the status of the upcoming Carl Vincent Institute report, which will analyze the salaries of city employees. "They were to begin in January 2016, so they are beginning this month. As they move forward, we'll have additional updates. It begins on that. The mayor and I will be keeping you all apprised as we're apprised. They're doing preliminary work," he said. The Council unanimously approved to purchase and install the Mayor's Park pavilion and building for an amount not to exceed \$75,000 from the SPLOST fund. Finally, the council voted to name Council Member Stephen Smith as Mayor Pro Tem.

BRMEMC...from Page 1

Members fielding questions. That's what we were elected to do, and so that's what's going to happen." Cummings, who manages the Union County Farmers Market, also announced during the meeting that Union County will begin holding a Public Speaking Competition at the Farmers Market in October,

modeled after the Mountain Movers and Shakers' own annual speech contest. "We're going to invite students from the surrounding counties," said Cummings. "Every county that the Farmers Market draws from will be invited. That will include Towns, Union, Fannin, White and Lumpkin counties, along

with Clay and Cherokee counties (in North Carolina)." For the first year, Cummings requests that speech content be about the importance of small farms in the local area. "About 99.6 percent of the farms in our county are all small farms," said Cummings. "Locally owned, family-type farms."

Young Harris...from Page 1

Reid Dyer. Mayor Gibby added that an ongoing project, the bridge replacement on Highway 66, has created a situation where utilities will have to be moved. She plans to meet with the Department of Transportation to discuss the plant entrance to the road. According to an update from Chris Poje, everything is on schedule for the Wastewater Plant Extension construction.

Two new businesses, Majestic Mountain Getaways and The Lunch Wagon, have come to Young Harris. The City voted to approve the business licenses of both. Attorney Cary Cox conducted the first reading of the new amendment to the 2012 Alcohol Ordinance to reflect changes made on the 2015 election. Other projects are underway. Mayor Gibby said

that the City has an extension until the end of January from the Department of Natural Resources to complete work at Cupid Falls. Weather has made it difficult to complete. The council approved a new bid from Chandler's Carpentry for \$11,520 with \$10,000 more for gravel. The City Council also voted to approve the employee wage increases that had been discussed at previous city council meetings.

for the Ball. "This is a gala event for all military - it's the Seabee Ball, for all military to join in with us on March 5," said Hoibraten. "Further information will be disseminated at a later date." Members of Island X-3 will release informational flyers by mid-February, and tickets will need to be purchased by February 20 in order to get an accurate count for catering. Island X-3 was founded in April of last year, and the members first began talking about putting on a Seabee Ball in October. "They hold a Ball every year, primarily on your bases where active duty Seabees are stationed," said Ed Crenshaw, secretary for Island X-3 and driving force behind organizing the March 5 Ball. "And there's nothing up here, so I said, maybe we can give it a shot, see if we can

get any people up here. For us, a small Island, it's a pretty big deal, and we're going to try to draw a lot of people." In the meeting, John Lemley brought in an antique steamer trunk from the World War II era, which would have been owned by a senior officer in a Seabee battalion - enlisted men made do with duffel bags or footlockers. "The hangers in the steamer trunk are to hang up dress uniforms and basic uniforms," said Lemley. "When you're in a battalion out in an airstrip somewhere, that's your closet." Lemley recently purchased the trunk at an estate sale, and he is donating the trunk to Island X-3 to be used in a silent auction at the Seabee Ball. The Seabees came online in 1942, during World War II, so the antique steamer trunk is

a real piece of history. "You don't see these often," said Lemley, recalling the estate sale. "I knew it was a steamer trunk, and when I opened it up, it had the Seabee stickers all in it. It's a once in a lifetime - there are not that many around anymore, and if there are, they're in a museum somewhere." Any Navy Seabee veterans in the area are invited to attend the monthly meetings of Island X-3, which take place every second Friday at 1 p.m., in the Major Leon Davenport Veterans Center in Blairsville. "Looking for all Seabees and anyone who served with the Seabees to join us in a newly established Island," reads the notice posted at the Veterans Center. "We are looking for Seabees from North Georgia, Western North Carolina and East Tennessee to join with us for fun and friendship."