

## EMC...from Page 1A

an assault on their character, and a malicious charge of criminal conduct, which has damaged their families and businesses in an amount to be proven at trial; award reasonable expenses and attorney fees incurred in the case; and grant such relief that the court deems equitable and just.

Tom Daniel, of Daniel, Lawson, Tuggle & Jerles is representing the four directors.

Directors Ronald Burch and William Prather did not join the other directors in the counter claim.

The suit was filed Jan.

2 in Towns County Superior Court on behalf of BRMEMC members Krista L. Gooch, Larry Williams, Andrew Stephens, and Barbara Moss, on behalf of the BRMEMC membership. According to the 219-page lawsuit, they seek a jury trial to decide the case. No trial date had been set at press time.

They ask for a judgment in favor of the membership against General Manager Matthew Akins, and directors Burch, Prather, Ensley, Lance, Nichols and Owenby, according to the suit.

The suit also seeks the

dismissal of Akins, legal counsel Lawrence Sorgen, and auditor Gene Allen, according to the suit.

The suit also seeks a judgment in favor of the plaintiffs for the benefit of the membership against the six directors and Akins for breach of fiduciary duty in an amount to be proven at trial.

The suit claims that the 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 du-

ties 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 46-303 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 by the membership group 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.

## Master Gardeners...from Page 1A

In 2009, I met Jo Anne Allen, and she and I were driving all the way to Blue Ridge to go to a local meeting, and so I asked her, why don't we start our own local group here?"

Those who would become Master Gardeners must go through two months of training with the University of Georgia, in areas such as biol-

ogy and botany, which is more than 60 hours of classes. Those who graduate the program must complete 50 hours of volunteer time following training.

"The University of Georgia, because they're the agricultural college for this state, each agricultural college in each state sets their own day to have a Master Gardener Day, and ours is always the third Saturday in March," said Caines. "They ask everyone to do something at that time."

A large part of what the Master Gardeners do is geared toward educating the public as they beautify and take care of the land in the counties.

"What we do is, when we go out in a garden, we work it, and we take up dues and use that money to buy signs for the plants so that people will know how to identify them," said Caines. "In Union County, they have an Ask a Master Gardener booth that's at the fairgrounds every year, and

also at their weekly farmer's market."

Master Gardeners field all kinds of questions from a curious public, giving free advice like what grows best during different times of the year, or how to identify what may be wrong with a plant they've been growing.

TUMGA is currently undertaking a number of projects around the county, including the Hiwassee Square, Towns County Courthouse, Pioneer

Village and the Hamilton Gardens at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, both the Mountain Regional Library in Young Harris and the Towns County Public Library in Hiwassee, as well as the 21st Century After-school Program and Towns County Farmer's Market at the picnic area near the beach.

Caines has been president of TUMGA since the beginning of the organization, but this year, she plans to step into a different leadership role.

"We have elections in June, and I'm stepping down, finally - I'm running for treasurer this time, hopefully - to give some of the new people a chance," said Caines. "We've got a lot of new people, and I think it's about time for them to get involved and make some changes they think look good."

To learn more about TUMGA, visit the association's website at [www.perennialpals.com](http://www.perennialpals.com).

## Appreciation...from Page 1A

Georgia's continued growth requires dedication to excellence in our education system as well as a commitment to providing trained teachers and vital resources to all schools."

Gov. Deal continues in

a similar fashion throughout the proclamation, highlighting the spirit of cooperation and teamwork school boards must embody in order to successfully navigate the policy decisions within each school district.

The import of these pol-

icy decisions is never more apparent than when examining the level of accountability each board member must uphold in order to successfully serve their district.

"As constitutional officers of Georgia, school board

members are responsible for setting educational policies, employing school personnel, providing buildings and equipment, operating a transportation system and disbursing school funds," according to a press release issued by Dr. Berrong's

office. "As community leaders, school board members serve as advocates for the children in local public schools and must study, evaluate and decide what actions are in the best interest of those students."

The end goal for any

school board should always be the continued success of its district's student population, which is why the Towns County Board of Education is joining in on the statewide celebration of School Board Appreciation Week.

## Disasters...from Page 1A

The scenario took an hour to complete, but represented a 10-hour ordeal that continually brought new challenges to the table, such as a resident calling in with a cardiac incident, a structure fire beyond reach, residents wandering about, an injured fireman and a downturn in weather conditions.

Mike Davis of the U.S. Forest Service conducted the event with Shawn Alexander of the GFC, along with retired GFC employee Bill Woodyard, who has experience and qualifications in incident management.

The sand table exercise was organized in order to prepare emergency workers for a live, multi-agency field training exercise with residents, which will feature a different disaster scenario in need of a different response.

This live exercise is part of the Firewise Communities'



Ready, Set, Go! initiative, and is set to take place on May 2, which has been designated na-

tionally as Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, in the Lake Forest neighborhood.

"EMA, 911, Red Cross, the fire department - a lot of the local agencies had asked, could

you help us prepare for May 2 by some kind of scenario or some training under Incident Command System?" said Davis. "So, that's how this came about."

There are a number of goals associated with the May 2 exercise, including: helping to understand resource capacity; strengthening cooperators relationships and abilities through training; observing the use of ICS in a multi-agency operation; improving radio communication issues that now exist; educating the public (and other communities); offering a platform to seize additional opportunities for education/awareness programs; and showcasing existing collaborative efforts.

"They'll be on the radios, they'll be out in the field, under a simulated event," said Davis. "There will be inputs given, there will be coaches and evalu-

ators on the ground to observe what's going on and how folks are doing, how they're working together, how they're doing tactically. And then, safety will be a key point there, number one part of that, just to make sure everybody is training safely."

Davis has conducted many sand table exercises throughout his career, and he and his fellow fire professionals felt that it would be a good way to provide some on-the-job training to Towns County rescue workers leading up to the event in May.

"We want them to see that opportunity to work together, and how important that is to realize what resources you have in the county, and what might be available to you and how easily any agency can get overwhelmed in a large-scale incident like that, whether it be tornado, fire, floods - any kind of natural disaster," Davis said.

## TCES celebrates Read Across America with Dr. Seuss

By Shawn Jarrard  
Towns County Herald  
Staff Writer

Towns County Elementary School celebrated National Read Across America Day after school on Monday, March 2.

This day coincides with children's book author Dr. Seuss' birthday, and marks an occasion for children and teachers to dress up and attend an event designed to encourage reading.

"The National Education Association is building a nation of readers through its signature program, NEA's Read Across America," according to the NEA website. "Now in its 18th year, this year-round program focuses on motivating children and teens to read through events, partnerships and reading resources."

A quote from Dr. Seuss serves as the motto for the reading campaign: "You're never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read with a child."

Students at the school dressed up that Monday as their favorite Dr. Seuss characters, with several Things, both 1 and 2, running around, as well as cats in hats and others.

Different classrooms were designated as reading rooms, in which teachers and members of the community,



along with students, dressed to match the characters in an assortment of books that were read aloud.

The event was not limited to Dr. Seuss books, however. Titles like "Sand Witch," "A Bad Case of Stripes" and "The Wide-Mouthed Frog" made the rounds, and children could visit any classroom they wished until 6:30.

At 6:35, elementary school employees performed "Cinderella Bigfoot" as part

of the Readers Theatre in the lunchroom, a program meant to help children with fluency. And the children had a blast watching their teachers perform all dressed up.

Maranda Stone, a paraprofessional at the school, played the part of Cinderella, and her performance was backed by Patty Dayton as her Stepmother, Jessica Berrong as Whyny the Stepsister, Alex Chance as Weeny the Stepsister, Candice Thompson as

Mo the Stepsister, Lisa Cole as the Queen, Lisa West as Elsie the Godmother, Kyle Wood as Prince Smeldred and Quilla Bradley as the Narrator and Director.

"They have incentives to come in tonight - a homework pass, they get an extra 100 in reading and language arts if they come tonight," said Towns County Elementary School Principal Dr. Sandy Page. "It's part of our parent participation, as parents come tonight. We



have cookies downstairs, and popcorn."

Students who attend also get a free book, which is provided by donations from the Scholastic Corporation as well as the community.

"They just love to see their teachers dressed up, and they get to dress up," said Dr. Page.

Earlier in the school day, students were treated to a special Dr. Seuss lunch, featuring green eggs and ham.

Then, the children who dressed up as book characters - about 100 - participated in a costume parade.

Assistant Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs chose to dress up as a Thing, while Dr. Page doubled as a cat in the hat, and behind all of the joviality and costuming, the message was simple for the students: read, read, read, and make it fun for the whole family.

"It's a family literacy night," said Dr. Page.

## A message from Sen. Wilkinson at the State Capitol

Thursday, March 5, the Georgia State Senate passed two significant pieces of legislation. Senate Bill 133 will create Opportunity School Districts in Georgia and Senate Bill 129 ensures that Georgians can continue to express their religious beliefs without discrimination.

Let me provide some background for Senate Bill 133. Several years ago a bill was passed to measure a school's performance. In district 50 we are blessed with some of the most outstanding school systems in the state and historically they have received high marks. Unfortunately, some

schools in the state consistently do not perform up to standards. Recently, as Vice Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, I was invited to accompany Governor and Mrs. Deal along with a small group of legislators on a trip to view schools in New Orleans that had addressed a similar challenge successfully. We spent two days visiting with parents, teachers, community leaders, school board members, and administrators regarding the progress that had been made. This experience was helpful to me as the legislation was considered on the Senate floor. All of our children deserve the opportunity

for a good education and I believe this bill is a step in that direction.

SB 133 creates an Opportunity School District (OSD) to address low achieving schools in Georgia. The OSD will select up to 20 schools in a single academic year, but will not exceed a total of 100 schools. The schools will be chosen based on their performance over a three-year period, while taking various factors into consideration. The selection process will include a public hearing allowing for community and parent involvement. There is not a more important factor in a person's quality of life

than a good education. I believe this bill provides hope to all of our students for just that. I am pleased that the initial list under consideration does not include any schools in the 50th Senatorial district. This is a testimony to the educational opportunities in our district.

Religious freedom is a cornerstone in the foundation of our country. To ensure the citizens of Georgia can continue to express our religious beliefs without discrimination we passed Senate Bill 129, the Georgia Religious Freedom Restoration Act. SB 129 prohibits government from

burdening a person's exercise of religion unless the government admits a governmental interest. A person can claim a violation of this in defense and receive appropriate relief from the government. The protections set forth in SB129 do not apply to a situation in which a law is broken or safeties and securities are in danger.

Senate Bill 112 also passed this week. It is a revision in the law regarding the removal and storage of deer carcasses. In the future, you will be able to use an electronic device to tag your deer after harvesting it.

Contact Sen. Wilkinson at his office at any time to talk about pending legislation or address other concerns in our district. He looks forward to personally welcoming you to your Capitol.

Sen. John Wilkinson serves as the Chairman of the Agriculture and Consumer Affairs Committee. He represents the 50th Senate District which includes Banks, Franklin, Habersham, Rabun, Stephens and Towns counties and portions of Hall and Jackson counties. He can be reached by phone at 404.463.5257 or by email at [john.wilkinson@senate.ga.gov](mailto:john.wilkinson@senate.ga.gov).