

EMC...from Page 1

Parks has been an appointed Union County director for the past 11 years, and has been elected by his peers on the EMC Board of Directors to serve as Vice-President for the past five years.

His opponents include former State House District 8

State Rep. Charles Jenkins, of Blairsville, and Mike Patton, also of Blairsville, the owner of Patton Excavating, who has served on the Board of Directors for the Union County Board of Health, and Coosa Water Authority.

Back to School...from Page 1

their writing skills," said Williams. Superintendent Williams has already begun taking the steps necessary to ensure that the transition in testing this year happens as efficiently as possible.

"We tried to get in front of the curve, and at the end of the school this past year, had someone come in from DOE to work with our teachers," she said.

Using online materials from the DOE, Williams and teachers have attempted to get a better idea of what to expect in this new open-ended format. The hope is that teachers will be able to better prepare students from the very first day of class.

"And so a lot of our teachers are already incorporating questions and assignments that will allow our students to become more comfortable with this different type of testing format," she said.

As for prepping the teachers for the challenges of a new school year, Williams and Towns County Schools have come up with a sort of tradition that takes place during pre-planning, just before students arrive.

They make and view a "success video," showcasing the highlights and moments that mattered from the previous year. Elements and stories from all walks of education - from Kindergarten to high school graduation—remind faculty and staff why they do what they do.

"Seeing all that popped up on a screen in front of everybody is pretty impressive. We think we have a lot to be happy and proud of, and I'm sure the community does, too," said Williams. "And that was what we did, we celebrated our successes to kind of get us pepped up for going into this new year with some of the uncertainties that we're facing this year."

Optimistic and upbeat, Towns County Schools have hit the ground running, primed and ready for anything and everything the new year may bring.

"If you've never worked anywhere else, I guess you don't realize what a good system we have up here," said Williams. "I am used to a smooth start in school, and this year certainly was no different."



Probe...from Page 1

the terms, the EMC Board of Directors has secured legal avenues to collect the debt, according to details released by the EMC last week.

According to the documents obtained by the newspapers, the only board member who knew about Taylor's debt was Taylor himself. We now know differently, with as many as three board members knowing about the debt in March 2013. According to documents obtained by the newspapers, BRMEMC's administration knew about the debt and kept it secret from the board of directors.

Nine days before the North Georgia News and Towns County Herald first published the story of Taylor's debt, the EMC Board of Direc-

tors reprimanded BRMEMC General Manager Matthew Akins. However, Akins remains as GM of the cooperative because board members acknowledged that he had inherited the debt situation from the previous administration, according to the documents.

However, there's another debt, according to documents obtained by the newspapers. BRMEMC denies that it loaned Taylor money to pay for equipment designed to lower his electric usage. Documents obtained by the newspaper show that BRMEMC discussed the loan in executive session in April.

Also, a bill dated June 10, 2014 shows Taylor owes \$62,354 in additional debt. That leaves a balance of \$107,998.43 owed to the cooperative, ac-

ording to the documents, which includes 1.5 percent interest on a monthly basis.

A regular member who owes for an unpaid electric bill pays 5 percent interest on any uncollected money owed the EMC.

Also according to the agreement reached with Taylor, he must keep his current electric usage paid up to date, the document shows.

Taylor resigned as president of the Board of Directors on April 17. The EMC Board appointed Julie Payne to serve Taylor's unexpired term on the board of directors for Towns County.

BRMEMC Board Vice President, Lenny Parks of Suches, is the acting board chair for the nine-member board.

The BRMEMC Board hired attorney Steve Minor of Tisinger Vance, PC to determine how the debt happened in the first place. That investigation, which will cost the membership up to \$30,000, is concluded and expected to be made public in the weeks ahead.

It's unclear how long Taylor's bill has been overdue, overlooked and gone unpaid. That information should come from Minor's report on the history of the debt.

The utility company has more than 43,000 customers with more than 49,000 electric meters serving a five-county area that includes Union, Towns, and Fannin counties in Georgia and Clay and Cherokee counties in North Carolina.

Cruiz-In...from Page 1

Moonshine Distillery south of Blairsville to see Mimm's moonshine museum.

From there, the Cruiz travelled to the Dillard House in Dillard to stop for lunch.

"We had 258 people that ate there at that restaurant," said Rakes Parrish of Flip Flop Promotions, who organized the event and spent summers in Towns County's Owl Creek as a young boy.

"They had a huge field, they had it cleaned and ready for them. And they parked, all the cars fit out there, and people went in and ate, came and hung out around the horse stable. They took care of them," he said.

Cruiz-In participants finished up Thursday evening next door to the Fairgrounds at the Lake Chatuge Lodge, enjoying games and live music, as well as food from *The Chop House of Hiwassee*.

"It was packed. The mayor was out there, the commissioner, and everybody came out. It was a good party," said Parrish.

Friday opened up to rain, and only 651 of an anticipated 1,200 or more cars registered. But the numbers didn't tell the full story.

"It was not a terrible show, it was actually one of our best. People came in their regular cars instead of bringing their classic cars, so we still brought the people to town. We didn't have as many cars, but we had more participants than we've ever had," said Parrish.

All in all, 36 states were represented as registered participants at the Moonshine Cruiz-In, and cars came from far and wide to be a part of the Towns County event.

"We had two cars that came from California, and that was a long way to come for our show," said Parrish. "Three cars drove down from Nebraska, and two cars also drove from Ontario, Canada."



Turnout demographics proved a bit surprising, but the South in general represented the biggest number of entries in the Cruiz-In.

"We had the most people here from Louisiana, and you think Georgia would be the biggest, but it was not. Then, Georgia and Florida were the next two. Florida was huge as well," said Parrish.

Saturday brought the awards and end of festivities, as well as a tremendous show of spectator support.

"We had a good turnout Saturday. It was jammed. Every space out at the Fairgrounds was full, including the camp grounds. But we managed to get everyone in and everyone parked, and everything went great," said Parrish.

To go with the moonshine

and classic car theme, 83 vendors showcased their automotive goods, including new parts like wheels, chrome bumpers, glass and interior parts. Many vendors participated in the Swap Meet, where people could find and buy parts to restore their classic vehicles.

Also on display were 21 craft booths that specialized in jewelry, handbags and other handmade wares.

Cars were judged by sponsors of the Moonshine Cruiz-In. A couple of the awards handed out included the The Long Distance Award that went to a registrant who traveled from California, and the Hardship Award, given to a participant whose vehicle was totaled in an accident after going for a mountain drive.

The moonshine part of

the Moonshine Cruiz-In featured demonstrations of stills used by moonshiners back in the day, highlighting a unique era of American mountain history.

"We have a guy that set up our still and showed people how a still worked, and how it was operated, and Jimmy Cannoy was that guy," said Parrish.

Cannoy registered a black 1940 Ford, which was chosen by the crowd as the overall winner of the show with his Original Moonshine Car. This was Cannoy's second year in a row winning the title of crowd favorite.

"Over 6,000 spectators throughout the show came in," said Parrish. "It was our largest event that we've ever had."

Grant...from Page 1

\$240,000. The biggest grant to date was issued in 2014, with a total award of \$310,000 for five years of funding.

According to Stowers, there are four goals for programs funded with the grant money.

"Increase student achievement, promote student parent and community involvement, college readiness, and student behavior," she said.

Stowers and her army of teachers and volunteers deliver results on these four goals by interacting with students in a multitude of ways.

"I do not like worksheets. There are so many ways to learn math and to engage students. Kids are used to touch screens and TV," said Stowers.

Engagement with the students is key, and part of that comes with a smaller student to teacher ratio.

"One adult for every 10 kids," said Stowers. "Now we're serving pre-K and seniors, 120 different students a day."

But they say it takes a village to raise a child, and the community of Towns County gets involved when it comes time to teaching the youth a thing or two. Master Gardeners

of Hiwassee, for example, have worked with the children to help with the program, teaching students where their food comes from.

"Hard working ladies and kids getting their hands in the dirt," said Stowers. "This grant requires a lot of community partners and it takes a while, takes time to get all of those people."

Back in the classroom, children have even more options to learn and strengthen their regular schooling needs.

"We do a lot of card games, Math War, Dice," said Stowers. "Use your hands to start with just one hand all the ways to get to 10, addition, subtraction, and the quickest answering wins. Multiplication and divisions and percentages."

The program runs from the first week of school through four weeks during the summer, in June, with a break in the program for July. And thanks to the grant, children can look forward to picking back up each August with their supplemental learning over the coming years.

"Every kid has different needs," said Stowers. "It provides some extra needed support for teachers, too."

Wilkinson...from Page 1

off with his impassioned, award-winning speech on the Separation of Church and State.

"I believe that it is never too late for change," exclaimed Owens. "If Christians stand up and fight where we had laid down before, we can finally bring the truth back to our Nation."

"I want to commend you on the great job on what you did," said Sen. Wilkinson in regards to Owens' speech.

"When I listen to that, that's something I take very seriously and I think I ought to respond to some of those comments. I would agree on what you say. You can ask people what they would do in a hypothetical situation and they'll tell you what they would do, but if you really want to know what they would probably do, ask them how they would handle that when faced with that."

Sen. Wilkinson spoke of his own personal religious experiences, being very telling of a specific date; August 12, 1963.

"I go to a small country church and all my lifetime we've had revivals the second Sunday in August. I was saved at that revival in '63 when I was 8 years old," he said. "I still teach a Sunday School class every Sunday, and one thing I mention to our Sunday School class is, we think about our religious liberties and that's very important to me."

Sen. Wilkinson spoke of an important issue that is not always easy to bring up in a crowd, politician or not.

"Even the ones who say they're Christians, about 20 percent of us will show up at church. I think that also carries over through our political process. If you look at 10 million Georgians, and then we have an election and less than a million of them turn out and vote," Wilkinson continued.

"I do think that maybe we ought to look at the elections that we've just come through and see what they have to say to us. I

looked at the election results this morning and I was interested to see Towns County's turnout. In the Republican Primary Runoff there were two elections statewide; the United States Senate and the State School Superintendent. I did notice that Towns County voted for the winning candidate in both cases, so that ought to be good in the long run for Towns County."

Sen. Wilkinson then posed an important question.

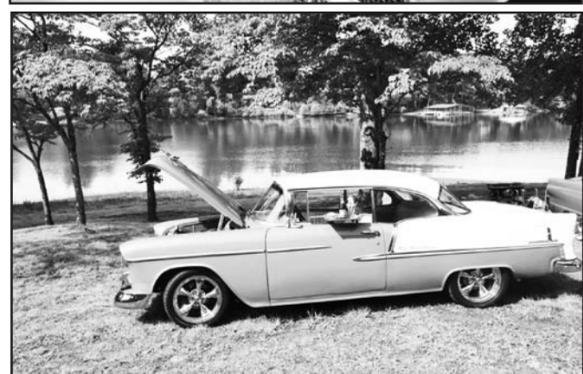
"How many more people voted in the Senate race, and left the school Superintendent's race blank? More than 80,000 people, statewide, voted for the Senate candidate in the Republican Primary Runoff and didn't vote for anybody in the School Superintendent race."

The answer to his follow-up question was just as eye-opening.

"Does anybody know the victory in the State Superintendent race was statewide? About 700 votes. If you look at the Senate race, the Senate race was decided by 7,000 votes, statewide. The reason I bring that up, is because so many times we hear people say, 'Well, my vote really doesn't make a difference.' But I think that really drives a point home," he said. "The State School Superintendent nominee picked up a third of his margin of victory in Towns County. If you win the election by 700 votes and 350 votes change, that changes the election."

Sen. Wilkinson said the General Election would come down to which candidate energizes their voter base.

"I think it's going to come down to who can energize their base and who will turn out to vote," he said. "The point I'm trying to make is that it's going to be very important for people like you, who share the values that you've heard talked about this morning, to turn out and vote in that General Election and to encourage your family and friends who aren't here today to turn out and vote."



Photos by Lowell Nicholson