

Fee...from Page 1A

would have been handled back in 2011 had he known about it.

"I would not have approved this," said Commissioner Kendall.

Moving forward, Commissioner Kendall has a decided course of action.

"Even though my office wasn't aware citizens were being charged these fees and were told the county required this, I take full responsibility — the buck stops at my office on county policy. I will take the following corrective action to rectify this and to ensure the citizens that it will not reoccur:

1. Ensure full transparency by informing citizens of what occurred and how it occurred.
2. I will reimburse the unauthorized fees charged to our citizens.
3. Reprimand the Building Inspector for charging unauthorized fees to citizens

for county policy that doesn't exist. My policy is in order to set a fee or tax on citizens, to inform them through the legal organ of the county and hold two public hearings on the proposed increase of financial burden on our citizens.

4. Require electronic transmission of all building permit applications and fees charged to the county financial department for review."

The number of residents affected by this policy was not available as of press time, as the commissioner and building inspector continue to sort through past building permit applications.

Commissioner Kendall expressed appreciation for Cliff Gibson and the "courteous assistance from the ladies in the BRMEMC office in helping to establish how Towns County citizens were incorrectly informed of a county policy that does not exist."

Cook Off...from Page 1A



ball caps, that kind of stuff."

Hiawassee's own Sally Varao represented leadership for the American Red Cross, selling hot dogs, chili dogs, chips and drinks with her Disaster Action Team, which started in Towns County in 1999.

"Our main goal is to help Towns County residents in times of disasters, like a house fire," said Varao.

And Towns County should be proud of its firefighters, as Towns County Fire and Rescue is the only fire department in the North Georgia that has a dive team, which goes as far as Rabun County and North Carolina to conduct searches and rescues.

Plenty of Towns County firefighters and EMS were in attendance Saturday, making sure there were no chili disasters, though mainly they just enjoyed themselves and the effort of so many people on their behalf.

"Couldn't be more thankful to the community for coming out and supporting us today," said firefighter Scott Shattles. Shattles is the husband of Fire Corps Vice President Cristy Shattles, who owns and operates Cristy's Salon, which contributed to the silent auction.

Firefighter Shattles, along with Ordiales and Fire Corps Board Member Judy Moss, prepared and loaded 80 Boston butts to be smoked for the Cookoff, all of which were pre-ordered before even making it to the square to be sold. Shattles also offered a special thank you to firefighter Tyler Keys, who coordinated the setup and breakdown of the square.

And a glorious setup it was. Kids reveled and flipped in the enormous Firedog bouncy house, putting all the energy of youth to good use. And Smokey Bear took a break from his hard work with the U.S. Forest Service to cast a watchful eye over the affair on the square Saturday. All in all, the family-friendly environment was abuzz with conversation, laughter and probably a few belches.

Husband and wife Sarge and Joyce Embree came out with bellies at the ready.

"I liked the one with the white chicken and white beans," said Mrs. Embree.

Mr. Embree, who commanded five tanks in Vietnam as part of the 2nd Platoon Delta Company 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, had the winning chili in his sights.

"I ate so many, but I have to go with Brothers," said Mr. Embree, speaking of the Brothers at Willow Ranch restaurant in Young Harris. "They had something extra in it that you rarely seldom see in chili — it's called basil."

And sitting with the Embrees, Bill Myers of Hiawassee seconded Sarge's conviction. "I only had the one, but it was my favorite — Brothers," said Myers. "And the girl who served it was beautiful."

Four awards were handed out this year for winners of the Chili Cookoff. Three judges

roamed with taste buds primed, picking first, second and third place winners, who got \$300, \$200 and \$100 prizes respectively. Each cooker had a fire boot in which patrons of the Cookoff casted votes for the prestigious People's Choice Award, an honor with no cash prize.

First place for tastiest chili was awarded to The Hoover Girls, not to be confused with Hooters Girls, they warned. Hoover Treated Wood Products sponsored the winning pair.

"It's great," said Zadie Peters, who cooked with sister Emmie Grimes. "We entered last year and won second place with the same recipe: beef, pork, and venison."

Second place and \$200 went to Carol Lin, owner of both the Wine Cottage and Here's the Scoop ice cream shop in Young Harris. Lin was surprised to have won since she keeps so busy with her businesses, and she donated her winnings straight back to the Fire Corps.

"There are very helpful, really nice people doing this job," said Lin. "We should continue to support the firefighters of Towns County."

Last year's grand chili champion came in third this year in the creative team of Scott "Cornbread" Drummond and Craig "KB" Gienger. But they also received the People's Choice Award, which is the first time a team has both placed and gotten crowd favorite.

A majority of folks preferred their "pigatorkin" chili, a word amalgamated from the ingredients so lovingly combined for maximum enjoyment: pig, gator and chicken.

"People wanted to know where we got the gator," said Gienger. "I told them straight out of the Chatuge Reservoir, so it's fresh."

Drummond and Gienger were proud to represent the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary.

Prettiest booth went to the River Rats, made by Towns County Fire and Rescue's own Fire Station 5. The silent auction was a big success, with many area businesses donating gifts ranging from Zaxby's food to an overnight stay at Brasstown Valley Resort with a round of golf, valued at \$300, and season tickets to men and women's basketball at Young Harris College.

The Rifle Raffle was popular, but the winner of the .22 caliber rifle is yet to be determined because of poor handwriting on the winning ticket. Final proceeds for the Fire in the Mountains Chili Cookoff were still being tabulated by press time Monday.

"It's a fundraiser, but it's more about bringing the community together. Get your kid to ride on the fire truck, jump in the bounce house, just come out here and have a nice family outing," said Ordiales. "It's a nice opportunity for folks to get nice things that you can't really afford and have fun with it. Look at all these little kids — you see how fun this is?"

EMC...from Page 1A

IRS Form 990, rather than facts about the matter. In the \$30,000 report paid for by the EMC membership, Sorgen said that Minor opined that General Manager Matthew Akins had violated his oath to the IRS.

"A tax counsel confirmed to the Board (EMC) that (Minor's opinion) was wrong," Sorgen told the crowd. "We're looking into whether those 990s need to be amended."

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.

The EMC will hold its annual meeting Sept. 13 at Anderson Music Hall in Hiawassee.

Among the items to address, the election of three members to the EMC Board of Directors.

Online voting is available at www.brmemc.com until Sept. 10 at 4 p.m. Login information (identification number and verification code) is provided on the front side of each member's bill.

There are three members nominated by the Cooperative's Board of Directors. Brian Trout of Clay County, NC, Julie Payne of Towns County, and Lenny Parks of Suches are seeking reelection to the Board of Directors.

There are four persons nominated by petition of the Membership. They are Chris Logan of Brasstown, NC, Steven Phillips, of Towns County, Charles Jenkins of Blairsville,



EMC Clay County, NC director candidate Chris Logan has no interest in spending \$30,000 to buy an EMC opinion. Photo/Charles Duncan

and Mike Patton of Blairsville.

Members from the five-county service area can vote for all three Board member seats.

Trout spoke to the Shakers group, telling them that he came aboard in April, just as the Taylor controversy came to light.

"That was a welcome to the Board moment," Trout said.

His opponent, Logan, currently is on the Board of Directors for the North Carolina Forestry Association, serving as Western Vice President of the North Carolina Forestry Association.

Logan told the Shakers' crowd that it might be time for a fresh face.

"I just want to be a fresh face moving forward," Logan said. "I think the people want a fresh face that knows how to run a business, that knows how

to turn a profit and that knows how to cut costs and to look at the bottom line."

As for the supposed \$30,000 internal report, Logan said the membership should not have had to pay for that.

"I think it's ridiculous," Logan said. "Especially when the cost of the debt was only \$48,000 and then they pay \$30,000 to get an opinion on how the \$48,000 debt accrued."

"They paid a lawyer who is still a part of the overall EMC family," Logan said. "They should have went outside the EMC to find someone to conduct a real investigation. This one looked pretty self-serving."

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC Board of Directors appointed Trout as a Clay County, NC director in April 2014. He filled the unexpired term of the

late Elois Anderson.

Payne was appointed by the EMC Board of Directors to fill the unexpired Towns County term of former Board of Directors' President Terry Taylor. Payne is a closing assistant for local attorney Cary Cox's office.

Payne told the crowd that she has always been an independent thinker and only has ties and devotion for her Towns County community.

She quickly shot down a rumor that she had previously been employed by Terry Taylor.

Payne said if elected to the Towns County post, she would proudly serve her community as she has always served her community.

Her opponent, Phillips, is the owner of Benny's Sanitation in Hiawassee, and also serves as a local radio personality in the Towns County area. He has served on the Board of Directors of Towns County FFA Alumni Board, and Towns County Food Pantry.

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.

Online voting ends Sept. 10 at 4 p.m.

Howell...from Page 1A

tiny little woman, but she was a dynamo."

Hicks appreciated the fact that Howell had read every book in the library, and any time the library received new books, Hicks would call the local store frequented by Howell and her family and say, "Any of the Williamses that are coming to town, I have books that Donna hasn't read."

"That was my window on the world, because honestly, we had nothing," said Howell.

As she grew older, Howell's love of the library took on a new drive. She didn't go to college straight out of high school because at that time, both her mother and father were disabled. She took care of them and began attending school at night.

"My first library job was as the bookmobile driver for the Nantahala Regional Library, and I absolutely fell in love with the job," said Howell.

Her library director at Nantahala was Martha Palmer, and she recognized Howell's potential, and encouraged her to get a library degree after finishing her bachelor's. She wrote letters of recommendation for Howell, who went on to attend Louisiana State University thanks to her continued interest in the library and the love and care of librarians who had become mentors of sorts.

"LSU made me an offer that I couldn't refuse," said Howell. "They paid all my tuition and fees, and paid me a salary to work at the library school while I was in graduate school."

Howell missed home, missed the mountains, and after graduating from LSU looked for jobs in public libraries in rural areas to no avail.

"But because I had also



Donna Howell, standing far right, with just a few of her longtime friends of the libraries. Howell will retire as director of the Mountain Regional Library System on Dec. 1.

worked in government documents while I was at LSU, I actually interviewed with The University of Georgia," said Howell. "They were looking for a government documents and data services librarian."

So, Howell became a Bulldog for a spell and enjoyed her work, but kept her eyes open for opportunities on the home front.

"I told my boss when I went to work that my heart was in public libraries, and if a job in rural public libraries came available, that I was going to be gone," said Howell.

A friend of Howell's mother had found the assistant director job posting with the Mountain Regional Library System in the newspaper 25 years ago, and the rest is history.

"I applied thinking, well, I've worked in academic libraries so long that I'll never have a chance," said Howell. "But

when I came and interviewed, it actually worked out very well. Teresa Haymore, who was the director here at that time, we just really hit it off."

And all these many years later, Howell has bittersweet feelings about leaving the library, as she retires to spend more time with family.

"It's going to be hard to walk away," said Howell. "You can retire your body — you don't ever retire your heart."

So, what's next, Donna?

"I'm interested in maybe teaching some classes at the senior center, computers or something like that," said Howell. "Maybe working some more with the Historical Society. I'd like to work over at the Reece Farm, do some things like that, some volunteer types of things, and just help out when I can."

In moments like these, there's always a give and take. Howell has given so much to

the community for so long, and has enjoyed the opportunity to grow with a long-term staff, who she considers family.

But she will also take many memories with her, treasured moments in the libraries that have left imprints on her life. From working with veterans to helping children discover new passions in books as she did as a child, Howell will cherish too many moments to count.

"One of my very favorites, though, is after the blizzard in '93, we had people here who were without power, literally, for almost a month," said Howell.

She and her staff turned the Mountain Regional Library into a safe haven, where people could come and be warm, eat and drink hot food and beverages, and enjoy each other's company out of the cold.

"It made me really realize how central we are to the community, and how connected all of our staff is to the people in the community," said Howell. "And it just was one of those moments when you realize that it's not just the books, it's not just the computers — it's the fact that you're physically here, and that there are people who work here who care that make it matter."

The MRLS is currently reviewing applications from around the country to fill Howell's position as director. And when the time comes, he or she will have decidedly big shoes to fill. Fortunately, Donna Howell will be just around the corner.

"I hope that once I'm retired and have some time off, that if somebody's sick or they need somebody to fill in once in a while, that I'll be able to come in and fill in at the circulation desk or something, just to kind of keep up with people," said Howell. "They're my family."

Mayor's Park in the cards for City of Hiawassee

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

The City of Hiawassee will very likely be getting a Mayor's Park.

"Mayor Barbara Mathis has wanted a Mayor's Park ever since she became mayor," said City Manager Rick Stancil. "We were limited, because within the city, there's not that much property that would be a suitable size in order to have a park. So, we turned to TVA, and TVA's been very good to us over the years."

The Tennessee Valley Authority, founded in 1933 by Congress, is a U.S. government-owned corporation that sells power to produce revenue instead of relying on tax dollars. TVA aids states within its region with various concerns, and the mandate concerning the City of Hiawassee is recreational in nature.

TVA will be present at the Hiawassee Council Regular Meeting Sept. 2, where residents can expect a presentation on TVA Parcel 52. Parcel 52 is the land lot the city hopes to turn into its Mayor's Park, and is located at Hiawassee city limits heading out towards the



Hiawassee Mayor Barbara Mathis is about to realize a dream.

high school, just over the land bridge of Highway 76 and down on the right.

"We couldn't fund this through the city budget in any shape or form," said Stancil. "We have to have partnerships. And I think we'll have good partnerships with TVA and DNR on this park."

Serious talks between TVA and Hiawassee have been ongoing for about a year. The relationship has developed so well, in fact, that the Department of Natural Resources took notice and approached the city about creating better lake access in Towns County.

"They came to us and basically said, if you get this, can y'all sublease to us?" said Stancil. "And the advantage of that is they're going to be putting in the parking, the lanes, the

boat launch, and the boat dock at their expense."

In a request for public comment that is active until Sept. 5, TVA succinctly summed up the joint enterprise between itself and the city.

"TVA is considering a request to grant a 30-year public recreation easement over about 6.1 acres to develop a public park on Chatuge Reservoir at Hiawassee River Mile 129.9 (right bank) in Towns County, Georgia," according to the statement released by Keri Chartrand with TVA.

Furthermore, the Mayor's Park is to include "walking trails, picnic tables, restrooms, children's playground, fishing pier, and boat-launching ramp with paved parking for vehicles and boat trailers," as well as a pavilion and benches, and

stretching equipment for those who are fitness-minded.

The 30-year easement is renewable, and partnerships with TVA and DNR would allow Hiawassee to spend as little taxpayer money as possible developing the park. Current estimates for costs to be incurred by the city are around \$125,000, which will come from six-year SPLOST funds approved by county voters in 2011.

As it stands, the Mayor's Park project is looking to come in three phases: one, DNR to fund and build parking, boat launch and boat dock; two, construction of the actual Mayor's Park; and three, somewhere down the line, connecting Parcel 52 via a floating sidewalk of sorts to Parcel 51, which is another piece of property just across the land bridge on which the City of Hiawassee has an easement as well.

"DNR hopefully could actually begin work in 2015 if we can get our lease with TVA this year and sublease with them," said Stancil. "Then, the timing may work out, budget may work out, that they could actually start turning ground in 2015."