

Meeting...from Page 1

"I want to tell you, shame on the board for charging that poor woman \$50 to get her power cut back on," Heimanson said.

"Oh, and one more thing, when I asked Mr. Akins why they had to build the headquarters so grand, he commented to me that it was to be in conformity with Brasstown Valley, that tourists who come by and want to see the EMC," she said.

"When people go on vacation, I don't think the EMC is their destination.

"I hope today, that we get three new board members," she said.

Heimanson got her wish; there are three new board members, Charles Jenkins, Steven Phillips, and Chris Logan. And her speech drew a rousing round of applause.

Though Heimanson was a tough act to follow, Karen Kelley, wife of former EMC Operations Director Chris Kelley, who was demoted for alerting Board of Directors about the long-term debt of former EMC Board of Directors' President Terry Taylor, had some choice words for the Board.

"The reason you're having all the problems you're having is not because Chris Kelley blew the whistle on a director," Karen Kelley said. "It's because someone who used to sit on that stage wouldn't pay their bill."

Former EMC Director of Operations Chris Kelley according to the \$30,000 opinion of EMC Attorney Steven Minor first reported the long overdue debt of Taylor and Taylor Construction to board member Greg Owenby.

Chris Kelley's reward was a demotion, a significant pay cut and personnel reprimands that included being cited for insubordination, the *North Georgia News* and *Towns County Herald* have learned.

Chris Kelley resigned this position at BRMEMC in late August.

The membership crowd screamed for Chris Kelley's reinstatement.

Earlier in the meeting, Akins, who knew about Taylor's outstanding debt when he took over as EMC general manager in 2010 and knew about it when the bill was paid off July 2011 and then grew again to

more than \$48,000, asked the membership for forgiveness.

"I will work hard to regain the trust of the membership," Akins said. "The Board of Directors has worked hard to get to the bottom of this, and get back on track."

Akins concluded by thanking the membership for supporting the cooperative.

Director Jerry Nichols also apologized on behalf of the board of directors.

"We make mistakes, some were made over the last few years," Nichols said. "It became a problem as soon as we found out about it (April 8, 2014).

"There's a lot of information out there," he said. "Bad news is what people look at. We're regretful of how this has played out. We regret that it happened; your cooperative is going to change because of this. Please, have an open mind."

Some members called for term limits, and others urged Akins and the board to resign.

EMC Member Mary Jean Boyette, of Towns County, said some things are unforgivable.

"Matthew Akins knew this was going on when he took over," she said. "He should have the grace to resign. The Board should have the grace to resign."

EMC Member Richard Botting concurred with Boyette's assessment.

"Don't believe that we have fallen off the proverbial turnip truck," Botting told the board. "Matthew Akins' actions are incomprehensible. The Board of Directors should be held equally responsible for incompetency."

The meeting concluded with the election of three new board members: Jenkins, Phillips and Logan. The membership left with a feeling of satisfaction and empowerment.

The other six EMC board members must now wait to see if a circulating petition seeking their recall from the EMC Board of Directors is successful.

Without a doubt, the 75th annual meeting of Blue Ridge Mountain EMC was one for the record books, as Jenkins, Phillips and Logan became the first petitioning candidates to successfully gain seats on the board of directors.

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run for these seats. And that's a bunch of bull."

Phillips added that the monthly and annual meetings of the Board of Directors should have large crowds on hand.

"People need to be involved in the monthly meetings," he said. "Anderson Music Hall seats 2,900 people. Next year's annual meeting, I'd love to see 2,900 people here."

Phillips said he hopes the clean sweep of directors' seats sends a message to the remaining members of the Board of Directors.

"We've got to work with the existing members of this board of directors," Phillips said. "One of my highest priorities is to look out for the 191 employees of the EMC. They do the job, they put their lives on the line, and they shouldn't be in fear for their jobs.

"I think they should be



Barbara Heimanson gives the EMC board an earful at the Annual Meeting in Hiawassee on Saturday. Photos/Lowell Nicholson

able to talk to board members and not feel their jobs are threatened," Phillips said. "I'm on the board and I should be one of the ones that they should call. You don't know what is going on unless someone tells you. This ordeal with Terry Taylor could

have been resolved years ago if people didn't feel like their jobs were in jeopardy."

As for Logan, he defeated Trout with 69.5 percent of the vote compared to Trout's 27 percent.

"I guess I'll have to dust

off my suit and tie now," Logan said regarding his election to the Board of Directors. "I think the biggest thing that comes from this election is transparency.

"Once things become more transparent to the membership, a lot of this stuff will take care of itself," Logan said. "A lot of the issues have already started being addressed. There are some more things that need to be addressed."

Logan said that the membership sent a strong message with the election results. However, he said he still had the utmost respect for his defeated opponent.

"I'd like to say this, Brian Trout is a fine fellow," Logan said. "Brian was on the board just a few months. I think he lost this election more by circumstance than his character.

"It's time for the healing process to begin within the EMC," Logan said.

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football fields, and didn't have any other major projects in the works.

And even with raising the millage rate now, Towns County taxpayers are saving money, as a cycle of SPLOST funding generates about \$10 million in revenue.

"By law, the state is supposed to pay for over half

of the expenditures," said Dr. Behrens.

But the state of Georgia only covers about 28 percent of Towns County's school expenditures in a measure of equalization based on the higher property values assessed here, which is considered a rich county compared to others. That

leaves a heavier burden on local taxpayers to make up the difference in funding.

The Georgia Department of Revenue rejected the initial printing of the notice of public hearings because it said the notice needed to be larger in the Towns County Herald.

Because of this, all pre-

viously published dates have been moved up one week, and public hearings will occur on Thursday, Sept. 25, at 12 p.m. and 6 p.m.

The BOE will hold a meeting to set the millage rate at the Towns County Board of Education Office on Thursday, Oct. 2, at 9 a.m.

Water...from Page 1

the Georgia Environmental Finance Authority to be spread over the next 20 years, and they've been very, very good to us over the years," said Stancil.

The water tank is an extremely important addition for the community, and has been part of a comprehensive plan dating back several years.

"We realized that if anything happened to the plant pumps or the water line leading to the school that we had limited ability to supply water to the schools," said Stancil. "We were also concerned about having water for fire protection at the school."

And the water intake

the city just replaced was put in about 25 years ago, but was only meant to last two years and needed frequent repairs.

"The operation of the water intake does several things," Stancil said. "It drought proofs us, because we're able to adjust as the water goes down. And the important thing is that operating costs should be significantly reduced. The operating cost in years past is driven by the quality of the water."

Water quality with the old intake was nowhere near as good as with the new intake, as it could only draw water from a couple of feet below the surface. The new intake can draw water from as far down as 15 feet.

"By being able to go down deeper with our new pumps, we get a better quality of water, which reduces the addition of chemicals," said Stancil. "It gets us below algae blooms, which is an issue nationally right now."

Funding these projects with state and federal assistance was not only a boon to taxpayers - it was a necessity to get the jobs done.

"We can't make improvements just because they need to be made - we have to make improvements when we can afford to make improvements," said Stancil. "And so many cities in the past have put off improvements or repairs,

and this city council, for the last five years, has been very aggressive in addressing issues."

Mayor Barbara Mathis is known for her fiscally conservative nature and ability to make money last. She, the city council, Stancil and engineers in the employ of the city have worked hard over the years to cultivate the sort of relationships that bring this kind of funding to the table.

"We've not had to borrow any additional money, and for these times and conditions, not many cities can say that," said Stancil. "So, we've made, I think, significant progress at a very, very difficult time."

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body's heart."

The Abrahams hold deep ties with fire departments.

"I had two uncles who were fire chiefs," said Peggy. "My son was a fireman. And now my grandson is with the fire department and taking his paramedic exam. So, we are very close with the fire department."

Stubby and Peggy got to know their local firemen well, and Stubby never wasted an opportunity to give back to them.

"Every Thanksgiving and Christmas, he took dinner for all the shifts," said Peggy. "He'd take ham and turkey for them to have - that's the kind of person he was."

The boat will be a tremendous asset to the Towns County Fire Department. It comes equipped with a Hummingbird depth finder and Garmin GPS. A closed cockpit area will help in winter operations on the lake, and a viewing platform above the cockpit will give greater visibility. It even comes with a chemical toilet, which will allow firemen to

conduct longer searches.

"I'm just so pleased to have a good cause," said Peggy, who said she would have sunk the boat before selling it.

The donation came at a time of great remembering, both of Stubby and Sept. 11th, the day America will never forget.

"Getting this boat on 9/11 - I think this day and getting a donation of this magnitude is pretty cool," said Towns County Assistant Fire Chief Harold Copeland, who helped coordinate the donation.

And Stubby wouldn't have had it any other way.

"He'd be the one to do it, too, if he was here," said Peggy.

Towns County Fire & Rescue has two boats in addition to the Sun Tracker currently in use for search and rescue and the dive team. The Sun Tracker, being the best of the three, will replace one of the boats, which will be sold.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart from the whole fire department," said Copeland.

Dr. Berrong speaks to Movers and Shakers

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer



Josie Bradley, Dr. Darren Berrong, and Adam Penland spoke to the Mountain Movers and Shakers last week at Mary's Southern Grill.

Towns County Middle School Principal Dr. Darren Berrong spoke Friday at the Mountain Movers and Shakers weekly meeting at Mary's Southern Grill.

Topics ranged from middle school scholastic performance to the open superintendent position of Towns County Schools.

"Currently, I have not sent my application in," said Dr. Berrong in response to a question about what he would bring to the role. "I do have my application prepared and ready to send in, but it's something I'm still speaking with my wife about and my kids, just to make sure that at this time that's something that's right for my family to do."

The middle school principal spoke candidly about the possibility of his superintendent candidacy.

"More than likely, I am going to send my application in," said Dr. Berrong. "But as far as what can I bring? If that happened - I think we lose focus sometimes, and the thing that I focus on is student achievement, and that would be my focus."

Dr. Berrong highlighted his relationships with the deans of education for both North Georgia College and Young Harris.

"If I was in that position, I feel like there are things I could bring to our school that are going to open up opportunities for our high achieving students to get more college

credits in high school," said Dr. Berrong.

He elaborated on this statement by giving an example of a program currently at the middle school that allows eighth-graders to obtain high school credits, and said that he would like to take the program further with more high schoolers getting college credits.

Dr. Berrong's message focused on performance of Towns County Schools, however, and he only spoke on the superintendent position when directly asked toward the end of the meeting.

"What I'm going to talk about today is mainly the middle school and how successful we've been," said Dr. Berrong, who then went on to list achievements over the past four years.

"We all know how great the athletic programs are when we see a team win a state championship. We all celebrate that, how awesome that team was,"

Dr. Berrong. "What you don't hear very much is what state championships we win in academic programs. For some reason, that's not celebrated nearly as much as an athletic accomplishment."

According to test scores, Towns County Middle School held four number one spots for subjects in the state for the 2011 school year. And students produced even better scores in 2012.

"Out of the 15 scores that you can get, 13 of those were in the top 15 systems in the entire state of Georgia," said Dr. Berrong. "That is a huge accomplishment."

Also in 2012, Towns County Schools received the School of Excellence Award, which is a prestigious honor bestowed upon only the top systems in the state.

"I publicize that as much as humanly possible," said Dr. Berrong. "There is no other award that is greater than get-

ting named a School of Excellence in Georgia."

And test scores improved from 2013 to 2014.

"Four years in a row, we had at least one subject that was the top school in the state of Georgia," said Dr. Berrong, who was clearly proud of his students and faculty.

Present at the meeting were special guests and recent Movers and Shakers speech contest winners Adam Penland and Josie Bradley.

"I just want to let everyone to know to congratulate Josie, because she is the middle school FFA president as a seventh-grader," said Adam Penland, who is the high school FFA president.

Josie delivered a stirring speech on the importance of farming and her concern over the dying breed.

"Farming is one thing that we can never let go of. It is something that a machine could never take the place of. It is up to us, the youth of America, to continue farming, and provide food for not only ourselves, but for the rest of the world," said Bradley. "A farmer has the toughest job on Earth, but he also has the most important one."

Sam Fullerton, co-founder of the Movers and Shakers, enumerates the three priorities of the organization.

"Student success, political awareness, and community needs," said Fullerton.

The Movers and Shakers line students up each week to speak publicly at different venues within the community, the goal of which is to prepare them for college and future careers in leadership.

Talley at Odom Springs Vineyards

Blairsville - Odom Springs Vineyard plays host to a Saturday of musical enjoyment from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

The event features the Box Tops' Gary Talley, a celebrated guitarist, singer, songwriter, and author.

Talley began his musical career in the 1960s as lead guitarist for the Grammy-nominated group The Box Tops, who were famous for hits like *The Letter* and *Cry Like a Baby*.

Today, Talley continues touring as a solo artist and has recorded with celebrated artists that include Willie Nelson, Tammy Wynette, and Waylon Jennings.

As a songwriter, he has written songs for Country Music legend Keith Whitley, The Box Tops, James Cotton, and

T.G. Shepard.

Talley has played events with acts that include Billy Preston, Sam Moore, Pam Tillis, Brenda Lee, Tim McGraw, Bobby Bare and many others. In 1999, he created the instructional video *Guitar Playing for Songwriters* and he has instructed students, including Pam Tillis, Sherrie Austin, and Rory Bourke.

The event also includes Moses Cotton, a Georgia songwriter, who plays regularly on the Nashville writers' circuit. Moses Cotton's songs, which include *Junkie Friend* and *Ten Cent Redemption*, are true Americana. Moses Cotton has been featured on television and radio for his unique songwriting ability and outside the box style of music.

NGTC Board of Directors Chair Chan Caudell passes reins to Martha Reabold

Completing his two-year term as Chairman of the North Georgia Technical College Board of Directors, Judge Chan Caudell has passed the reins into the capable hands of Martha Reabold who has served as Vice Chair since 2012.

"We have been so honored to have Chan serve as our Board Chair," said NGTC President Dr. Gail Thaxton. "His knowledge and leadership have guided us through a time of extensive changes and improvements these past few years."

During his tenure as Board Chair, the college received full accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Commission on Colleges (SACS/COC). The college also navigated difficult budgetary constraints which required a reduction in force and the closing of some programs which had to be balanced against the constant

improvements required to carry the college into the future. New programs including the Associate of Science in Nursing, Early Childhood Care and Education, and Engineering Technology were added. Several facilities expansion projects were managed including the Welding Building, Currahee Campus Health Wing, and the Parker Nellis Renovation, and more projects have been started.

Internally, there were changes to NGTC executive personnel including two new vice presidents, a new executive assistant and a new president.

In July, 2013, the NGTC Board of Directors earned certification by the Technical College Directors Association (TCDA) when the two newest members completed their training. Judge Caudell was elected to serve on the TCDA board for the State of Georgia.

At the August Board meeting, Dr. Thaxton presented him with a token of appreciation sporting the NGTC logo. "Thank you, Chan; you have served us so well," she said. "And thank you, Martha Reabold, for stepping up to this additional responsibility. We are delighted to have you, and appreciate the continuity of leadership that you bring to the board."

Ms. Reabold, an executive for South State Bank, has an extensive background in strategic management. She serves on the boards of several regional institutions and is an active member in local community organizations. She will be supported by Rebecca King who has accepted the role of NGTC Board Vice Chair.

The NGTC Board of Directors meets the third Wednesday of every month and is responsible for overseeing the

President Dr. Gail Thaxton presents outgoing Board Chair Chan Caudell with a gift in appreciation for his service - a chair!

strategic direction of the college.

For more information on programs of study at North Georgia Technical College, contact 706-754-7700



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