

STEM...from Page 1

as well as some of the activities and science experiments available in lesson plans around the room.

"These are just some simple examples of what you're going to be learning inside of the STEM Lab to connect science, technology, engineering and mathematics to real world principles and what you're going to be learning hopefully for the rest of your schooling, and maybe even the workforce," said Manto.

One of Manto's goals for the evening was to allow

for parents and their children to become better acquainted with the STEM Lab, which will be seeing use starting the first week in February.

"I really wanted people to know what their kids were going to be getting involved in and what it was going to be, because if they were going to have a new class in the elementary school in general, they would have to educate the parents on what they were going to do anyway," said Manto. "So, I wanted an opportunity for people to come in, ask ques-

tions, and get to be familiar with the project."

The event also served as a way to drum up excitement among the children of the school.

"You're building blocks," explained Manto. "This is the foundation for middle school and high school, so seeing that this is what you get to do if you're in high school, and then this is what you're going to do if you're in middle school, and then this is what you're going to do in here - and then it all comes together so you can do that."

"They're all wanting to be able to drive the big robot,

and we're telling them, this is what you're going to learn and this is what you're going to be able to do," continued Manto. "And just seeing their faces light up, and wanting to try it and wanting to learn more, that's what this is about."

Taylor Underwood, an 11th-grader and another of Manto's teammates on the robotics team, plans to go into engineering as a career. In the meantime, she will carry on Manto's legacy by spending her Work-Based Learning period in the STEM Lab twice a week.

"Older kids, like those in high school, I'd really like to get them involved in stuff like this,"

said Underwood. "It's really good if you like to engineer. It's not for everyone, honestly, but I enjoy it."

At one point during the evening, Towns County Elementary School Assistant Principal Dr. Connie Hobbs presented Manto with a surprise.

"Any student who has a senior project that does something for the elementary school, we want to remember that this is because of you, because of your dream and because of your idea, that you started this," said Dr. Hobbs, holding a personalized plaque to be affixed outside of the lab. "This will be on the door as long as

the school will be here."

The plaque read: "You never really leave a place without leaving a part of yourself behind," and designated the project as being completed by Manto and Jo Ray Vanvliet, her mentor.

"I'm excited that these kids will be able to be in here and look at the wall and say, hey, Ms. Mia and Jo Ray started this whole thing for us, and know that we care about them," said Manto. "I care about the kids in my community, and I want them to have what the kids before them didn't have so they can hopefully be successful individuals in society."

Chatuge...from Page 1

"All we are allowing Chatuge is to go back to its normal winter average," said Travis Bricker with TVA Public Relations. "We don't typically allow the tributary reservoirs, which Chatuge is one of them, to fill for summer recreation, which we try to get there by the first of June - we typically

start that, on average around the system, in mid-March. So, we are still a good month and a half, two months away from that."

Currently, the lake is still a few feet below normal winter levels of around 1,917-1,918 feet above sea level. Come

Director...from Page 1

though the applicant will take the job.

"We haven't heard anything back from him negative," said Ed Reed, chair of the Union County Public Library Board of Trustees. "He sent a follow-up email thanking us for the interview."

Should the candidate accept the position, the evaluation periods will serve as a means of judging job performance and how well the applicant adjusts to the demands of the director position.

"At the three-month point, we would get together and say, okay, you're doing great at this, but maybe you need to work a little more in this area, just to provide feedback to him as to how he's doing at that three-month mark," said Moore. "And the six-month is kind of that point where we say, okay, this is working or it isn't, and we'll make him aware of that stipulation to his acceptance of the job."

One particular trait that impressed the search committee and board of trustees about this candidate was his apparent ability to fit in wherever he goes.

"He's been involved in his church in his community there, which is important to people of this area," said Moore. "This person will be representing the Mountain Regional Library System, and it's important that they be the face of the library within the community, because we've got three counties here."

"We've had great success," Moore continued. "We've

had the addition here, the renovation at the library in Hiwassee. The next one, which will be happening this year within the next few months, will be the renovation at Mountain Regional Library."

The board of trustees will keep a particularly close eye on how this applicant performs in regards to Fannin County Public Library.

"Right now, the only library in our system that hasn't experienced the positive growth is Fannin County, and they've had some challenges because they have a multi-person commission, and in Union and Towns County, we have sole commissioners," said Moore. "And we felt as a group that, with his personality, he would be capable of representing the library in a very positive way to those people in the political arena in Fannin County."

"We hope that they will have a library there," Moore continued. "Right now, it's in their courthouse, and we want them to experience the same success that we've had in Union and Towns County. And I think that he is capable of doing that for us. That's one of the things, as the search committee, we were looking for that quality in whoever we got, and I think he's capable of that."

As things stand, the board is very confident in its decision.

"I think he'll be a good fit for the job," said Reed. "He's an outgoing, friendly person. I think he's easy to get to know, so I think he'll fit in well."

Shakers hear from three speakers

By Shawn Jarrard
Towns County Herald
Staff Writer

Towns County Sheriff Chris Clinton, Frank Riley of Firewise and newly elected President of the Towns County Historical Society Shylan Wood spoke recently at Mountain Movers and Shakers meetings at Mary's Southern Grill.

Sheriff Clinton highlighted some of the duties of the office of the sheriff in the meeting on Friday, Jan. 23.

"The office of sheriff is actually the oldest elected office in the history of the human race," said Sheriff Clinton.

"It's the only elected office of any kind that has a specific duty to keep you safe. My job, and it says right on the back of my ID card, is to preserve the peace, protect the lives, persons, property, health and morals of the community. And that's our job."

He also spent some time on the relationship between county government and the office of the sheriff.

"County governments, a lot of people misunderstand what that is," said Sheriff Clinton. "We talk about our constitution, I think part of preserving our constitution is understanding how government should function."

"A county government is a political subdivision of the state of Georgia, and they exist to perform mandated functions on behalf of the state, just as a sheriff performs mandated peace-keeping functions."

Citing the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia, Sheriff Clinton said that two specific functions of county government are to provide for the office of the sheriff and to provide for the county jail.

"Of the other eight, six of them actually require the sheriff's office to get it done," said Sheriff Clinton. "And so, we stay pretty busy at the sheriff's office. Thomas Jefferson said in 'The Value of Constitutions' that - and this is him - he said the office of sheriff is the most important of the county offices.

I think the reason he said that is because, to me, and why I believe in the office of sheriff so much, is it's so essential to our county government."

Riley spoke on the latest efforts of Firewise in Towns County and abroad in the meeting on Friday, Jan. 30.

"A little update on the Firewise program here, we've now got 14 communities," said Riley. "The state's got 70, we've got 14 of them. We're very proud of them. We've got six in the works, so soon we'll have 20. And it's all due to the coalition I put together that Billy Snipes is the chair of. And he just won't quit."

The ultimate goal of the Firewise initiative is to spread the fire safety program from one community to the next, enlisting as many neighborhoods in the community as possible.

"The numbers prove - Fannin County had 57 fires, Union had 33, we had six," said Riley. "You can't dispute the numbers. We're protecting your houses, your lives and your property by doing that."

Firewise of Towns County has already received national attention as a model for other communities around the country.

Riley has also led the charge in White County.

"We're trying to build that, and then Lumpkin County is next, and then Habersham," said Riley. "Union County is getting started, so it's kind of growing like a fire, actually, is what we're trying to do."

Wood, who was elected earlier in January as president of the Historical Society, spoke in the same meeting on Jan. 30.

"We've got a lot we're going to try to do this year," said Wood. "What we want to see is more people at our meetings. Our meetings are the second Monday of every month, and we try to get started at 5:30. We are located at the old Rec Department."

A major initiative of the Historical Society this year will be to inform the public on the true names of the mountains around Towns County, Wood said.

Tax Dollars...from Page 1

the exact number of mobile homes that are in this county," said Rogers. "The mobile home taxes, the digest, the tax bills do not go out when the real property tax bills go out. They're normally mailed in January, which they don't have a due date until May 1st. So, it's totally different. But all the rest, the real and personal and marine, they all go out at the same time."

The tax commissioner's office is responsible for motor vehicle registration as well, and collecting taxes due when someone renews their tag or registers a vehicle.

"Motor vehicle is a steady flow of tax," said Rogers. "It's based on birthdays as far as renewals go, so it's a year-long process collecting the motor vehicle tax."

But what happens when property tax bills are paid late?

"The system automati-

cally generates an interest charge of 1 percent per month, and after Jan. 10, there was a 1 percent interest fee computed and added to the bill," said Rogers. "And this increases with each month that they are delinquent."

This interest rate does not compound, and the 1 percent per month goes only toward the base tax bill.

"We're busy year-round with collections of delinquent taxes that people don't pay," said Rogers. "We have just come off of a tax sale, where people had not paid in several years, and it's our responsibility to get those taxes paid. So, we started last April, I think it was, with the process of collecting delinquent taxes, and it took from April until Dec. 2, was when we had the tax sale. It's just a never-ending process of collections."

A tax sale occurs when someone is delinquent three

years or more on their tax bill. The tax commissioner attempts to notify the property owner one or two times per year after the due date.

If the property owner still does not respond after several years, then their property enters into a process in which it can be auctioned off in front of the courthouse in order to collect the taxes due on it.

"The tax sale that we just have finished Dec. 2, I think we started out with well over 100 parcels that were delinquent in April, notifying people," said Rogers. "And when it came down to time of the sale, these had all paid except, I believe it was nine parcels that went to sale. And that's not bad."

"The majority of that are people that have passed away with no families," continued Rogers. "There's just no one left to pay the taxes, and we have no choice but to

sell it on the courthouse steps to collect these taxes that are delinquent. It's not an enjoyable part of this job, but it's a necessary part."

One part of the job that is enjoyable to Rogers, he said, is working with people who are struggling to pay their taxes. He and his staff are more than willing to sit down with anyone who needs to work out a payment plan.

The tax commissioner's office is made up of Rogers, clerks Denise Nicholson and Amy Silvey, and Deputy Tax Commissioner Elizabeth Dillard.

"I like dealing with the people," said Rogers. "Just everyday contact with people. I like the fact that we, and this may just be my opinion, but I feel like we run an efficient office here with the girls being very helpful and being knowledgeable about their job. Rarely do I hear any complaints."

Berrong...from Page 1

rary basis to advise Dr. Berrong should the need arise. Dr. Behrens served as interim superintendent during the search to replace Melissa Williams at the start of the school year.

"I've called him on some policy issues that I wasn't sure how to handle, because he has been through those steps before," said Dr. Berrong, noting only three or four times he's had to call out of the whole month he's been on board.

"He's been fantastic when I've called him," said Dr. Berrong. "But nothing of any major issues that I've had to call about."

For Dr. Berrong, the initial challenge was simply settling in to the day-to-day routine at the board of education office, which took no time at all.

"I felt like after the first week of falling into it, that's kind of fallen into place," said Dr. Berrong. "I already knew all the people working down here at the board office, so I already knew kind of what their positions were, so I didn't have to go through that transition trying to figure out who does this and who does that. I've been able to just go right to those people and work right with them. That is pretty much it. I don't feel like there's been a huge complication with the



transition."

Already, Dr. Berrong has noticed a change in the level of administration.

"The difference here is, I feel like you have more time to sit and to think through the issues that come up or decisions that have to be made," said Dr. Berrong. "As the principal, there may be a parent walk in, and you have to come up with a solution or work something out immediately. And down here, you actually have some time, an hour or two hours, to call the principal and talk to them and work out what the issue may be."

One thing Dr. Berrong has never been short on is community involvement, and his

duties as superintendent have kept him about as busy after school as before.

"This job entails a lot of time, but both of my children are playing athletics, both of them are involved in basketball," said Dr. Berrong. "So, I was already spending a lot of time outside of the workday going to sporting events and things like that. It's not really been a huge issue where now I'm not at home a lot, because in reality, we weren't home a lot anyway because we were already at a lot of these events with our kids."

The good thing is that so far, Dr. Berrong loves his job.

"Things are running smoothly, and I couldn't be

happier with the position," said Dr. Berrong. "It helps so much to have such great people around you. The principals are great, the staff down here is great. It's really going well."

Just prior to the start of Dr. Berrong's tenure as superintendent, the board of education and Dr. Behrens tackled the unsavory task of raising the school's millage rate.

And Dr. Berrong is looking on the bright side there, too.

"I'm hoping with that millage increase that we won't have any budget issues for the next couple of years, and everything will run and we'll have money to fund what we need to fund," said Dr. Berrong.

Gold Dome...from Page 1

again next year," said Tallent.

Once elected, student council meets monthly to decide on initiatives or talk about the next meeting. Their goal is to help the community, which means anything from recycling to creating cards for residents of area nursing homes. These young council people also work in tandem with other organizations, such as the Leo Club of the high school in coordinating food drives.

Deena Weaver, a second-grade paraprofessional, and parent Jennifer Hogsed, who teaches Spanish at the high school, accompanied Tallent as chaperones of the field trip to the Capitol.

The students received the opportunity to meet Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle and Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp.

They also met the Coca-Cola Polar Bear.

The children ate lunch at a cafe in the World of Coca-Cola before heading in to see a 4-D movie, which was especially thrilling because the seats moved and viewers actually got sprayed with water.

"And then of course, you get to try out the Cokes, so that was an experience," said Tallent. "Nobody got sick on the way home, so that's good. And we warned them ahead of time, please don't mix them, don't try to drink a whole lot, we've got a two-hour ride home."

"They had a good time, they really did," continued Tallent. "They were super excited to go. You could tell that morning, they were so excited. And on the way home they were talking about how we met the Coca-Cola Bear



and got our picture with him. We had a good time."

Each child also received a souvenir from the World of Coke thanks to a \$100 donation from the local Mountain Movers and Shakers group.

All in all, everyone had

fun, and some children may find themselves back at the capitol sooner rather than later.

"A lot of these kids are interested in government," said Tallent. "They want to be senators and they want to

be involved in government. So, even this young, they've already decided that's what they want to do, which could change, but I think it was really good for those kids to see, that's what I could do."