

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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EMC board thanks employees, talks long-term planning

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

YOUNG HARRIS – Winter Storm Earned its place in the record books on Dec. 8, 2017, after covering the region in nearly a foot of snow and resulting in the largest number of individual device outages in the history of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC. The EMC delivers power to more than 52,000 electric meters in its Georgia and North Carolina member areas, and Benji caused greater than 800 outage events that affected nearly 30,000 meters. Those are astonishing figures – one powerful winter storm dropped enough snow to trigger power outages to more than half of the system.

Despite the daunting challenges presented by nearly a foot of snow and tens of thousands of outages, the response from EMC employees was nothing short of remarkable. EMC line workers and staff braved long shifts and dangerous conditions to ensure that members got their power back as quickly as possible. And the BRMEMC Board of Directors signed a resolution in recognition of the employees in the Jan. 9 board meeting, thanking them for their hard work and steadfast efforts. "The Blue Ridge Mountain EMC's dedicated and competent workforce leaped into action repairing the damage and responding

to the membership initially at a rate of 500 meters restored per hour, and completed restoration of all services within 80 hours," per the resolution, which subsequently praised the dedication, skill and professionalism of EMC employees. Such rapid turnaround times, in the face of so many outages, speaks volumes for the training and skill of EMC employees, as well as signals a technological break from the past. "When I was growing up in North Georgia, we would lose power in a thunderstorm, and sometimes just a rain event," said EMC Board Chair Mickey Cummings. "Our system now is much more efficient than it was in the past.



BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms

"Nobody likes to lose power, and I hate it when somebody else loses power. But at the same time, we've



BRMEMC Board Chair Mickey Cummings

got a top-notch workforce out there that restores it rather quickly." Continued Cummings:

"I just want everybody to know what a great workforce we have at the EMC, outstanding men and women that do a great job for us, and we owe them a lot." Also in the Jan. 9 meeting, the board discussed and approved a couple of plans meant to cover the next 12 years of EMC development. Every four to six years, the EMC develops a Construction Work Plan that operates as the immediate and short-term rollout of the EMC's Long-Range Plan, which in turn serves to accommodate trends like population growth and future power needs. "We have a substation at Young Cave, a substation in Blairsville, and we have a See EMC, Page 2A

Saroney works to highlight chamber member services

By Shawn Jarrard
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Dawn Saroney wants local business owners to know that the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce is ready and available to meet their developmental needs. Since coming aboard as the chamber's new Member Services Coordinator in mid-November 2017, Saroney has been working to codify more clearly what the chamber has to offer members. Ultimately, the chamber wants to better showcase what it can do for both new and established businesses by making its services more accessible and easily understood to members and potential members alike. "For the short time that I have been on board with the chamber, it seems to me that a lot of the members aren't utilizing their benefits," said Saroney. "We've identified



Dawn Saroney, Member Services Coordinator for the Blairsville Union-County Chamber of Commerce. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

six specific areas of benefits for our chamber members, and we're trying to ensure that all of the events that we have on our annual calendar go in line with those six specific targeted areas."

The six specific areas of member benefits identified by Saroney and the chamber are Visibility, Networking, Discounts and Community.

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Local farm needs votes for national grant money

By Lily Avery
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Since 2015, national produce distributor PRO*ACT has offered grant money to farmers all across the country for use in improved sustainability efforts. Each year, dozens of farmers compete for these funds via the Cultivating Change grant program, which is designed to help famers upgrade their operations, invest in food safety, implement new sustainable technology, and continue to grow the best produce possible. This year, local farmers Sarah and Alex Cookfair of Big Branch Valley Farm are among the more than 100 applicants vying for these funds from more than 30 states. Winners of the See Grant, Page 2A



Alex Cookfair on his family farm called Big Branch Valley Farm in Blairsville. Photo/Facebook

Sen. Gooch named to 'Most Influential Georgians' list

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Assistant Editor

Georgia Trend Magazine has named District 51 State Sen. Steve Gooch to its annual "100 Most Influential Georgians" list. "It is an honor to be recognized among this distinguished list of leaders in our great state," said Sen. Gooch. "I look forward to working with my colleagues and local community leaders to keep Georgia moving in the right direction. Over the past several years, we have seen numerous businesses moving to Georgia, leading to additional economic growth and job creation. We will work hard during this upcoming session to continue

this progress for our state." Georgia Trend has been honoring influential individuals around the state for the last 20 years, and the senator is in good company on this year's list, with Gov. Nathan Deal, Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, and plenty of other politicians and leaders in business, education and beyond. "Since 2010, Gooch, a Republican, has represented the largely rural 51st District – focusing on public schools, job creation, immigration, tax reform and the right to bear arms," per Georgia Trend. Gooch has been recognized before as a Georgia Trend Notable Georgian, but this is the first time he's made the big 100 list. "It's a humbling



State Sen. Steve Gooch

experience any time you get recognized by your peers, or by the media or the public, for your involvement and your commitment to the state and See Gooch, Page 2A

Union County fifth graders graduate C.H.A.M.P.S.

By Lily Avery
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More than 200 Union County Elementary School fifth-graders walked across the stage of the Union County Schools Fine Arts Center to accept their C.H.A.M.P.S. certificates of completion on Friday, Jan. 12. Children today face dangers and life choices that older generations never dreamed of, especially at such a young age. However, the best way to make certain that children face these life choices with positive, mindful attitudes, and in turn make the right decisions, is to start early with See C.H.A.M.P.S., Page 2A



Union County Sheriff's Lt. Darren Jones, a School Resource Officer with Union County Schools, with Capt. Doug Loyd. Photo/Lily Avery

Navy Seabees hold first meeting of the New Year

By Lily Avery
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The Navy Seabees of Island X-3 gathered for the organization's first meeting of the year on Friday, Jan. 12, to discuss housekeeping items, yearly events and all that the group hopes to accomplish in the New Year. Each year, the Navy Seabees celebrate the anniversary of the beloved Naval Construction Battalion with an annual military ball, inviting all in the community and the surrounding area to join in on the festivities and patriotism. Last year, the ball was held at the Union County

Community Center, where the event filled the venue with dozens of civilians, veterans, retired and current servicemen and women from all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and all walks of life. Due to the outstanding attendance last year, the Navy Seabees 76th Anniversary Military Ball will be held at the North Georgia Technical College on Saturday, March 3. "It's going to be a really good event," said Island X-3 Vice Commander Bart Hoibraten. "Hopefully, we'll have even better attendance than we did last year. It was good last year, and I think it can be equally as good this



Bart Hoibraten of Navy Seabees Island X-3. Photo/Lily Avery

Catering for the event will once again be provided See Seabees, Page 3A

Rep. Gurtler to continue voting his principles, conscience

By Shawn Jarrard
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The 2018 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly convened on Monday, Jan. 8, and District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler said he was ready to get back to work. This is the freshman lawmaker's second year of his first term, and he has communicated to constituents that, in 2018, he will maintain the limited government platform upon which he was elected. "My constituents can look forward to me being principled and consistent, always representing them and

their values," said Gurtler. "We have the most conservative district in Georgia, and one of the most conservative districts in the United States. "That's right in line with how I vote. I was named the Most Conservative Legislator by the Georgia Republican Assembly, and I got an award for that a few months ago, the Centennial Freedom Award. "So, they can expect me to be the same person that I am, and be consistent and principled, just representing the values and beliefs that I ran my campaign on. That's what I will continue to do, and I'll continue to push for my bills as well." Particularly, Gurtler



District 8 State Rep. Matt Gurtler is excited to be fighting for two bills he sponsored last session that were introduced See Gurtler, Page 3A

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