

North Georgia News

Hometown newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Say 'Happy Birthday, USA' with boat parade, fireworks

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Editor

With the Fourth of July holiday a mere week away, it's time for folks to start squaring away their Independence Day plans.

Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to celebrate America's 242nd birthday up here in Union County, starting with the Nottely Marina Annual Fourth of July Boat Parade on Saturday, June 30.

Nottely Marina has been in business for more than a quarter of a century, and if anyone knows how to lead a boat parade, it's them.

Patriotic residents and visitors to the area are encouraged to join the Doucettes at Nottely Marina for the Fourth of July weekend, where they can decorate and enter any type of boat, jet ski,

pontoon, canoe, kayak "or whatever floats your boat."

The parade is free for all, participants and spectators alike, and those looking to participate should line up their boats at 11 a.m.

Of course, the marina – located at 86 Doucette Circle up Murphy Highway – will be giving out trophies again this year, as well as cash prizes to the best decorated boats.

Last year's First Prize winning boat theme was Sesame Street, and the following themes placed runner-up in the contest: Whoville, Red Solo Cup, Nottely Marina Replica, Emoji Boat, Happy Birthday USA, Classic Amphibious Car, Dancing USA Girls, Patriotic Boat 1 and Patriotic Boat 2.

Then on Wednesday, July 4, people won't want to miss the huge, massive, always thrilling Independence Day

Fireworks at Meeks Park.

The Meeks Park Fireworks Show is sponsored yearly by the Blairsville-Union County Chamber of Commerce, and people usually set up all over Meeks Park and across the street for the best views once it gets dark.

People looking for a different tradition with a similarly terrific view should check out the First United Methodist Church July Fourth Celebration, which overlooks the fireworks at Meeks Park off Georgia 515.

The church festivities begin at 6:30 p.m., with delicious barbecue from the local Boy Scouts of America, internationally renowned cookies and dessert from the local Girl Scouts of America, and live music from the ever-so talented FUMC contemporary

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A view from the 2016 Fourth of July Boat Parade at Nottely Marina.

Photo by Shawn Jarrard

Nelms: TVA rate hike coming in October

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
Editor

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC power bills will be going up again this year, after the Tennessee Valley Authority implements its latest rate increase in October.

In August 2017, the TVA Board of Directors voted to implement what amounted to a 2.4 percent wholesale rate increase on electric sales "designed to produce an additional \$195 million during TVA fiscal year 2018," which is being used to "cover operations and service debts."

The TVA Board has implemented similar rate increases over the past several years and is expected to approve another 2.4 percent increase in its wholesale power rates this August, said BRMEMC General Manager Jeremy

Nelms in the Thursday, June 21, regular board meeting.

And since the EMC buys power from TVA to sell to its cooperative membership, that means the EMC is facing unavoidable higher power prices starting in October despite not having raised its own rates in over five years.

This leaves the EMC with two options: one, it can absorb the cost of the rate hike and struggle to pay off its sizable long-term debts; or two, the members can pay the rate increase.

Nelms recommended in the June 21 board meeting that the rate hike be passed through to customer bills to keep the EMC "on its current path of financial stability, and to minimize the financial risk shifted to the cooperative from TVA."

Conflicted, the members



Jeremy Nelms

of the BRMEMC Board of Directors voted 5-3 that Thursday to pass the increase on to the membership.

In dollars, moderate power users can expect to pay roughly \$27 more annually after the increase goes into effect on Oct. 1, while larger households

with greater electric needs are likely to see their annual bills increase by as much as \$40.

The TVA is a corporate agency of the United States that provides power to more than nine million people in seven Southeastern states, and it contends that the annual rate increases are, in part, meant to cover maintenance costs.

In recent years, however, such maintenance costs have shifted away from the industrial sector and increasingly onto residential customers, according to a January 2018 report by Synapse Energy Economics Inc., a research and consulting firm specializing in energy, economic and environmental topics.

On top of this increased burden on residential customers, TVA has also faced criticism over its rate practices following several years of strong revenue

collections.

"Despite lower net power sales from extreme weather, reduced operating costs helped the Tennessee Valley Authority achieve its highest ever net income of \$1.2 billion for fiscal year ended Sept. 30, 2016, up \$122 million from 2015," according to TVA.gov.

And last year, TVA announced that it was able to contribute \$800 million to its retirement system, all the while reporting a net income of \$685 million for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2017.

Furthermore, the TVA rate schedule has drawn the ire of critics who point out that TVA President and CEO Bill Johnson is the highest paid federal employee in the country, making several times more than even President Donald Trump.

In November 2017, the TVA Board of Directors raised

Johnson's base salary to over \$1 million a year, and including retirement and other benefits, Johnson will reportedly make more than \$6 million a year in total compensation moving forward.

Johnson's pay is on par with average U.S. utility company CEOs, with the difference that TVA is a federally-owned agency of the USA.

At the 2018 annual conference of the Tennessee Valley Public Power Association Inc. in May, Nelms and other local power company representatives participated in a vote to recommend that the TVA decline to implement its upcoming rate hike.

That motion failed by a slim margin of 51.5 percent to 48.5 percent. And though it would not have been binding

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Storms cause damage, power outages in region

By Shawn Jarrard
North Georgia News
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A series of severe thunderstorms swept through the region on Saturday, June 23, and Sunday, June 24, toppling an untold number of trees and causing power outages to thousands of households in the North Georgia Mountains.

On Saturday, more than 10,000 members of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC lost power from the storms – nearly a fifth of the membership – though the excellent employees of the EMC worked around the clock to restore power to those homes.

The storms on Sunday caused about half that number of homes to lose electricity, and many telephone poles needed replacing over the long

weekend.

Also on Sunday afternoon, massive wind gusts blew down a big oak tree across Georgia 515 between Blairsville and Young Harris in Union County, right at the U.S. Forest Service Blue Ridge Ranger District Work Center.

A passing car was struck by the falling tree, which also took some power lines with it.

Fortunately, the driver was able to get free of the downed tree, and first responders with the Union County Fire Department and Union County Sheriff's Office safely cleared the scene.

In Hiawassee, the Sunday afternoon storm brought down a big oak tree that fell onto the fellowship hall of Friendship Baptist Church.

No one was injured in the incident, though the giant

tree caused extensive damage to the building.

Severe thunderstorms are officially defined as storms capable of producing wind gusts over 58 mph, according to the National Weather Service.

"Wind this strong is able to break off large branches, knock over trees or cause structural damage to trees," according to the weather service. "Thunderstorms also produce tornadoes and dangerous lightning; heavy rain can cause flash flooding."

And no place outside is safe when a thunderstorm is in the area, according to the weather service.

"Get inside as soon as you hear thunder," according to the weather service. "Run to a substantial building or hard-topped metal vehicle as fast as

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Union County firefighters and deputies clearing Georgia 515 after a big oak tree blew over in a storm on Sunday, June 24.

Photo by Lowell Nicholson

Birthday wish comes true for Lucas Cornwell

By Mark Smith
North Georgia News
Staff Writer

Lucas Cornwell turned 8 years old on June 25, and even at this early age, he already knows he wants to be a peace officer.

At the end of the 2017-2018 school year in May, Lucas' mother, Sabrina, was going through some of his school papers.

On one of them she found a note Lucas had written that said: "I want to be a cop when I grow up because you get to save pets and people."

When Janet Cornwell heard about this from her daughter-in-law, Sabrina, she sprang into action.

Janet is a volunteer with a local dog rescue, and through her work, she is acquainted with Union County Sheriff's Sgt. Jeff McConnell.

McConnell works as the local animal control officer, and when Janet called him to ask a favor, he immediately agreed, and a plan was hatched.

Sabrina would bring her son Lucas to the Union County Dog Park on Thursday, June 21, where he would get to meet McConnell and his K-9 Deputy Lacey, a female Bloodhound.

The Blairsville Police Department also learned of Lucas' desire to become a peace officer one day, and so it sent over Officer Keith Lockwood to greet Lucas as well.

And though he was a

bit shy that day, Lucas was nevertheless very excited to chum around with Sgt. McConnell as he got acquainted with Lacey the Bloodhound.

As soon as Sabrina, Lucas and his sister Ariel walked up, Lacey went over and sniffed and snuggled with Lucas.

Lockwood then beckoned Lucas over to his patrol car and told the boy to go ahead and get in, which Lucas did with a big smile.

The excitement in Lucas' eyes was evident as Lockwood gave him a crash course on how everything in the patrol car worked. He even let Lucas turn on the lights and siren.

McConnell then told See Cornwell, Page 2A



UCSO Sgt. Jeff McConnell, Future Peace Officer Lucas Cornwell and Blairsville Police Officer Keith Lockwood.

Photo by Mark Smith

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